

The Birth Place of George Washington

George Washington was born February 22, 1732 in an old-fashioned Virginia farm house, near the Potomac River, on what was known as Bridge's Creek Plantation. The house had four rooms on the ground floor, with an attic of long sloping roofs and an enormous brick chimney at each end. His father was a wealthy planter, owning more than 5000 acres of land in four counties, some of which were on the banks of the Rappahannock River, this latter location because he had money invested in iron-mines.

To this plantation the family removed when George was seven years old, the new home being nearly opposite the small village of Fredericksburg. George was sent to a field school and taught by a man named Hobby, a sexton of the church and tenant of the father of George. The taught subjects were reading, writing, and ciphering. It was not until later in life that George perfected his penmanship.

When George was eleven years old his father died, leaving to him the home where they lived on the Rappahannock, and to his brother Lawrence the great plantation on the Potomac afterward called "Mount Vernon". George received his home training from his mother. Fortunate, indeed, was he to have such a mother to teach him; for she was kind, firm, and had a strong practical sense. She loved her son, and he deeply appreciated her fond care of him. Some of George's youthful letters to his mother are full of interest. After the manner of the time he addressed her formally as "Honored Madam," and signed himself "Your dutiful son."

Lawrence also played an important part in shaping his character. As was the custom, the eldest son inherited the bulk of the estate of his father and was sent to a school in England to receive the training which would fit him to be a gentleman and a leader in social life. Thus, Lawrence returned from England as a cultured young man with fine manners and well fitted to be a

man of affairs to help influence his younger brother, now seven or eight years of age. Soon after the death of his father, the boy went to live with his brother Augustine on the "'Bridge Creek Plantation" which provided him the advantages of a good school.

Many of his copy-books and books of exercises, containing such legal forms as receipts, bills and deeds, as well as pictures of birds and faces, have been preserved. In these books there are, also, his rules of conduct, maxims which he kept before him as aids to good behavior. George heard many stories about wars with the Indians and about troubles between the English and the French colonies.

Meanwhile, his brother Lawrence served as a soldier in the West Indies in a war between England and Spain. This service inspired George to organize his boy friends into little military companies, and, acting as their commander, drilled, paraded, and led them in their sham battles in the school-yard. When he was sixteen years of age, George went to live with his brother Lawrence at "Mount Vernon" where he spent much of his time in surveying. This is where he became acquainted with Lord Fairfax of "Belvoir" plantation. This warm friendship soon had a practical turn. Lord Fairfax owned an immense tract of country in the Shenandoah Valley. Some said that this land comprized one-fifth the size of the present State of Virginia. Lord Fairfax decided to send George into this wild region of the Blue Ridge Mountains to report to him something about the lands there. Thus, during March of 1748, George Washington set out with the eldest son of the cousin of Lord Fairfax to travel on horseback through a forest of some of 100 miles before they reached the Shenandoah Valley. They carried guns in their hands, for until their return about a month later they would have to depend mainly upon hunting for their supply of food. After reaching the wild country they had to live in the most primitive fashion.

For instance, Washington tells of a night inside the cabin of a woodsman who had nothing but a mat of straw for his bed and a single blanket for

cover which was alive with vermin. He wrote in his diary: "I made a promise to sleep no more, choosing rather to sleep in the open air before the fire." Again, in a letter to a friend, he says: "I have not slept above three or four nights in a bed, but, after walking a good deal all day, I have lain down before the fire upon a little hay, straw, fodder, or a bear-skin, with man, wife and children, like dogs and cats; and happy is he who gets the berth nearest the fire." Once they fell in with a war-party of painted warriors who gathered about a huge fire built under the trees.

As the great logs blazed in the midst of the dark forest, the Indians joined in one of their wild, weird dances. They leaped to and fro, whooped and shrieked like mad beings, while one of their companions thumped upon a drum made by drawing a deer-skin across a pot filled with water, and another rattled a gourd containing shot and decorated with a horse's tail. It was a strange experience which these two youths had that month.

But Washington was well paid, earning from \$7 to \$21 a day. On the return of the young surveyor to Mount Vernon his employer, Lord Fairfax, was so much pleased with the report that he secured his appointment as public surveyor. For the next three years George lived the life of a surveyor, spending much of his time with Lord Fairfax at his wilderness home, "Greenway Court", near Winchester. Soon thereafter, Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia, appointed him to the rank of major in the State militia. Some two years afterward his brother Lawrence died and left the "Mount Vernon" estate to his daughter, with George Washington as guardian. And upon her death, a little later, Washington became owner of the immense plantation at Mount Vernon, and hence a wealthy man.