

MOUNT VERNON



Discover the Real George Washington

Exhibition Details from *Discover the Real George Washington: New Views from Mount Vernon*

Section I: Introduction

The exhibition opens with a portrait of George Washington by Gilbert Stuart, an introductory video produced by The History Channel, and a timeline that acquaints the audience with the significant events that are highlighted throughout the exhibition.

Section II: *An Ambitious Youth*

Washington was not born a leader, but he worked very hard to become one. As a young man, he possessed energy, ambition, a strong work ethic, and an adventuresome spirit. As with many self-made individuals, Washington's early life presented him with both hardships and possibilities. His strength lay in his determination to overcome difficulties, capitalize on opportunities, and learn from mistakes.

This section covers his childhood, youth, and early manhood. It presents his work as a surveyor through a life-size model of Washington as a teenager surrounded by woods – which include animals such as an animated squirrel – and surveying equipment. His career as a colonial officer in the French and Indian War is depicted by a model of Fort Mifflin, and his published journal recounting his experiences in the war.

Section III: *A Man of Firm Beliefs*

Washington was a deeply spiritual man and a life-long member of the Anglican Church, known as the Protestant Episcopal Church after the Revolution. As a young man in the French and Indian War, he pleaded with Colonial authorities to provide a chaplain for his soldiers and, along with his fellow officers, actually led Sunday services. During the Revolution, he encouraged his army to attend church. He strongly believed that political and religious freedom went hand in hand, and encouraged all to embrace religious tolerance, not just Christianity, for the new nation.

This section presents a full-size replica of George Washington's pew at Pohick Church, where visitors are able to sit and watch a video about his views on religion. The Washington family Bible is also featured in this section.

Section IV: *A Dauntless Warrior*

At the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia, June 15, 1775, Washington was unanimously elected Commander in Chief of the Continental Army. He led his army for eight

years, and against all odds eventually achieved victory over Great Britain, the world's most powerful military force at that time. Charisma, courage, determination, ingenuity, sacrifice, devotion to his men, a realistic understanding of human nature, and a wholehearted commitment to the Revolutionary cause helped to define Washington's leadership during one of the most remarkable come-from-behind victories in military history.

A full-size figure of George Washington on his horse, Blueskin, in a snow-covered forest at Valley Forge is a focal point of this section which also includes 18th-century weaponry, a selection of military manuals, personal objects, and a video on Washington's wartime espionage.

Section V: *The Mastermind of Mount Vernon*

As a farmer and businessman, Washington utilized Mount Vernon as a proving ground to accomplish two goals: to advance his own private business interests; and to experiment with methods that would also help the young nation grow and develop. He sought out and employed the latest technologies, introduced the mule to American agriculture, established a thriving fishing industry on the Potomac River, experimented with hundreds of crop rotations and fertilizers, opened a whiskey distillery, developed a treading barn for separating wheat from straw, and sold bushels of flour from his "high-tech" gristmill to markets as far away as the West Indies and Portugal.

Objects included in this section include models of Washington's innovative 16-sided treading barn and his state-of-the-art distillery, as well as a reproduction Washington still. A video filmed onsite at the Gristmill shows its ingenious operation.

Section VI: *A Troubled Slaveholder*

Washington, unlike some of his peers and fellow plantation owners, never envisioned slavery as an integral part of America's bright future, and his vision of the "peculiar institution" evolved over time. Although Washington made provisions to free his own slaves in his will, he was unable to free the Custis slaves brought to the marriage by Martha Dandridge Custis. By Virginia law, she had only a life-interest in these slaves, who were divided among her four grandchildren at her death in 1802. Because the two groups of slaves had intermarried, the emancipation proved to be bittersweet. Some family members were set free, while others remained in bondage.

This section of the exhibition features a video on slavery and objects used by the slaves at Mount Vernon including farm tools, gardening implements, kitchen objects, and personal artifacts from the archaeological excavations of the slave quarters.

Section VII: *"My Dearest"*

Martha Washington was a strong lady and skillful leader in her own right. Her enthusiastic and patriotic actions in support of the Revolutionary cause, as well as her wisdom and good sense in assuming the challenging role of our nation's first "First Lady," had a stabilizing effect on her husband, and behind closed doors her opinions possessed a power that should not be underestimated.

This section includes reproductions of her wedding dress and slippers, and original pieces of her jewelry. Original china, silver, and glassware illustrate her entertaining style.

Section XIII: *Uneasy in the Mouth*

A most extraordinary object, Washington's dentures, are featured in this section. The only surviving full set of dentures attributed to Washington, these false teeth are embedded in a lead base. Accompanying the dentures is a timeline demonstrating Washington's tooth loss and a History Channel video showing how the dentures would have been made.

Section IX: *The First President*

After successfully presiding over the Constitutional Convention in 1787, Washington was unanimously elected the first President of the United States in 1789. During his two terms he established important precedents and sought to rise above party politics to do what he thought would be in the country's long-term best interest.

The focal point of this section is the depiction of George Washington's inauguration, complete with life-size models of George Washington, Robert R. Livingston, and Samuel Otis conducting the official inaugural ceremony on the balcony of New York's Federal Hall. Presidential dining is represented by china, cutlery, and wine glasses on a silver plateau half, cleverly mirrored to simulate a full setting.

Section X: *Beloved Hero*

On December 12, 1799, Washington inspected his farms on horseback in inclement weather. Without changing his wet clothes, he sat down to dinner. The next morning, a cold, fever, and quinsy (a throat infection) overtook him, which ultimately caused his death on the evening of December 14 at the age of 67. His wife, Dr. James Craik, one of Washington's closest personal friends, and Tobias Lear, his personal secretary who recorded the account of Washington's death in his journal, were at his side.

Objects in this section illustrate the public's fascination with the death of Washington, expressed through beautiful decorative objects. A small silver sarcophagus and memorial china are included.

Section XI: *George Washington's Mount Vernon*

The final section of the exhibition presents a large-scale model of Mount Vernon that illustrates the Mansion, outbuildings, gardens, vistas, wharf, and views of the Potomac River. A sophisticated lighting technique illuminates key buildings and components of the estate. Surrounding the model is a series of large-format photographs that reveal the scale, symmetry and awe-inspiring beauty of Washington's carefully-planned estate.

In addition, a touchscreen interactive allows visitors to explore a map of the United States featuring cities, towns and other landmarks named after George Washington and his Mount Vernon home.

A panel in this section briefly relates the story of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, America's first national preservation organization, which rescued George Washington's estate from total destruction in the 1850s. Included are images of a deteriorating Mount Vernon and Ann Pamela Cunningham, who spearheaded efforts to save Mount Vernon by founding the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association in 1853.

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