

George Washington Birthplace

NATIONAL MONUMENT • VIRGINIA

[Washington's] was the singular destiny and merit, of leading the armies of his country successfully through an arduous war, for the establishment of its independence; of conducting its councils through the birth of a government, new in its forms and principles, until it had settled down into a quiet and orderly train; and of scrupulously obeying the laws through the whole of his career, civil and military, of which the history of the world furnishes no other example.

— THOMAS JEFFERSON

The first Washington ancestor of the first President to come to Virginia arrived in 1656 aboard the English ship, "Seahorse of London," which had come to the colonies for a cargo of tobacco. On February 28 the ship ran aground during a storm and foundered in the Potomac near the mouth of Mattox Creek. The second officer was John Washington, great-grandfather of George. Remaining in Virginia, he soon married Anne Pope, daughter of Col. Nathaniel Pope, a wealthy landowner living near Mattox Creek. For a wedding gift Colonel Pope gave the couple a nearby 700-acre tract. In 1664 John Washington moved to a new home on Bridges Creek, 4 miles east.

The three generations of Washingtons before George all led active and honorable careers as planters and civic leaders: John developed his tidewater plantation and met responsibilities to both King and colony; Lawrence, John's son and George's grandfather, in a short life of 38 years became a man of means and culture, attaining the highest political offices in Westmoreland County; and Augustine, Lawrence's son and George's father, acquired a degree of wealth and influence.

About 1726 Augustine Washington completed a house on land he had purchased along Pope's Creek, 1 mile southeast of his old Bridges Creek home. Three years later his wife, Jane Butler, died, leaving him with four children: Lawrence, Butler, Augustine, Jr., and Jane. On March 6, 1730, Augustine married again; his bride was Mary Ball, a daughter of Col. Joseph Ball of Lancaster County, Va. Their first child, George, was born at the Pope's Creek home on February 22, 1732. After George, five other children were born: Elizabeth, Samuel, Charles, John Augustine, and Mildred, who died in infancy.

George Washington spent the first 3 years of his life at Pope's Creek. In 1735 Augustine moved

his family to the Hunting Creek plantation now known as Mount Vernon. Four years later the family moved to the "Strother estate" on the Rappahannock River opposite Fredericksburg. Augustine died there in 1743 and his body was brought back to Bridges Creek to be buried beside his ancestors.

Upon the death of his father, the birthplace of George Washington (known as "Wakefield" in its last years) passed to Augustine, Jr., a half brother of George, who lived there until his death in 1762. An inventory of his personal property provides valuable evidence about the old home. The farm eventually passed to his son, William Augustine Washington, who was living in the birthplace house when it accidentally burned during the Revolutionary War, apparently on Christmas Day 1779. It was never rebuilt.

In 1882 Washington heirs and the State of Virginia donated to the United States the old Washington family burial ground and a small plot of land at the house site. A year later the Federal Government bought about 11 acres here. In 1923 the Wakefield National Memorial Association was organized to recover and restore the birthplace grounds. By 1931 the Association, aided by John D. Rockefeller, Jr., was able to transfer to the Government enough land to bring the holding to 394 acres.

The Association's extensive research failed to turn up reliable information about the appearance of the original house. The reconstructed memorial mansion therefore represents generally a Virginia plantation house of the 18th century. It is in no sense a restoration, for its design is based on tradition and surviving houses of the period. Reconstruction took place during 1931-32. The Federal Government paid part of the cost of building the house and landscaping the grounds.

The house had eight rooms (four downstairs and four in the half story upstairs), with a central hallway on each floor. The bricks were handmade from the clay of an adjoining field. A tilt-top table in the dining room is the only surviving piece of furniture reported to have been in the original house. The furnishings are designed to portray life in the early 18th century.

Near the land-front door are an old hackberry tree, fig trees, herbs, and flowers that may have come from plants that grew on the place when

Washington lived here as a boy. The boxwood, more than 100 years old, was brought from the home of Sarah Tayloe Washington (a daughter of the last owner of the birthplace home) and probably is descended from boxwood originally at Wakefield. In the garden near the house are found only those flowers, vines, herbs, and berries common to 18th-century Virginia gardens.

About 50 feet from the house is a frame kitchen, on the traditional site of the original kitchen, built and furnished in a typical colonial style. On display here are artifacts found on the plantation.

Today, Washington's birthplace is a memorial; but in its heyday it throbbed with life. During the various seasons, people worked to plant, cultivate, and harvest in a self-contained little world. The National Park Service is recreating, as far as possible, this picture of the past, bringing to the visitor the sights and sounds encountered by George Washington as a child.

The family burial plot and the site of the 1664 home of John Washington are about 1 mile northwest of the memorial mansion. Among the members of the Washington family buried here are Col. John Washington and his wife, Anne Pope; his brother, Lawrence; his sons, Maj. Lawrence and Capt. John Washington; Augustine Washington and his first wife, Jane Butler; and Augustine Washington, Jr., half brother of George. The enclosure contains about 32 burials. Two original gravestones remain, one dated 1690 and 1696, the other 1729. When George Washington died in 1799, his body was placed in a tomb at Mount Vernon.

ABOUT YOUR VISIT

George Washington Birthplace National Monument is on the Potomac River, 38 miles east of Fredericksburg. A 2-mile entrance road connects the monument to Va. 3. The monument is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily, except December 25. Picnic facilities are provided.

ADMINISTRATION

The monument, established January 23, 1930, is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. A management assistant, whose address is Washington's Birthplace, Va. 22575, is in immediate charge.

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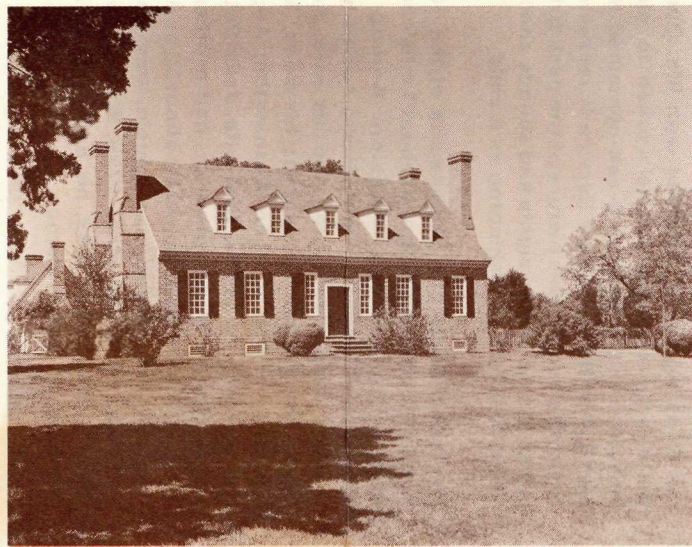
U. S. Department of the Interior

National Park Service





RECONSTRUCTED COLONIAL KITCHEN

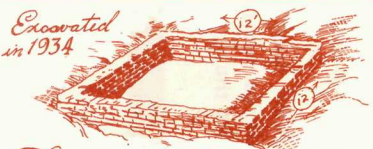


MEMORIAL MANSION



MEMORIAL MANSION DINING ROOM

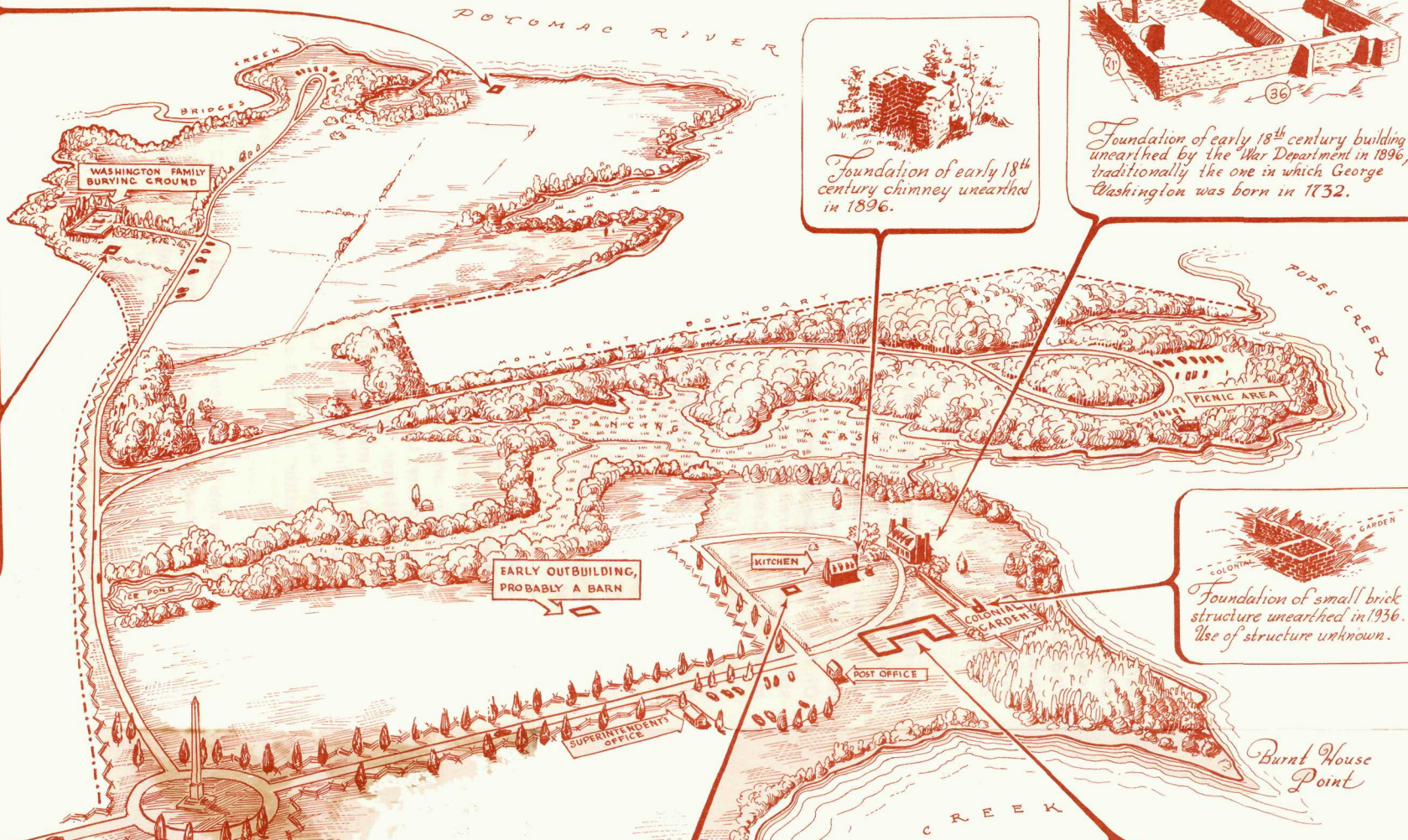
SOME EARLY FOUNDATIONS UNEARTHED at WASHINGTON'S BIRTHPLACE



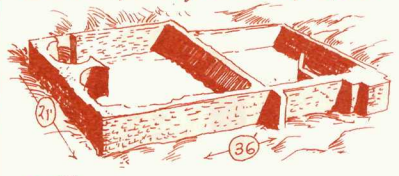
Excavated in 1934
Foundation of 17th century building located 1/4 mile northeast of the Washington family burying ground. Believed to be a building constructed by Henry Brooks, who patented the land in 1657.



Foundation of building unearthed 180 feet southeast of Washington family burying ground, Bridges Creek, 1930 and 34. The structure on land acquired in 1664 by John Washington (George's great-grandfather) was probably an outbuilding.



Source: From a Map Showing Foundation of the Wakefield Mansion - Where tradition affirms Washington was born. Map drawn by John Stewart, C.E., 1896



Foundation of early 18th century building unearthed by the War Department in 1896, traditionally the one in which George Washington was born in 1732.



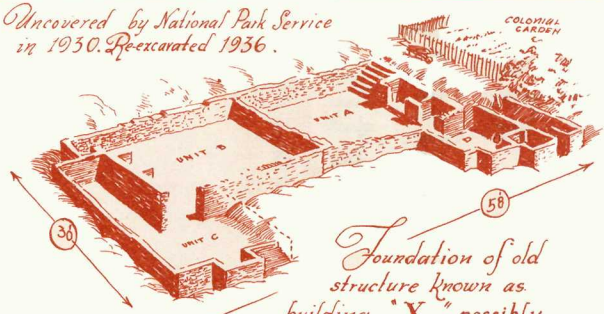
Foundation of early 18th century chimney unearthed in 1896.



Foundation of small brick structure unearthed in 1936. Use of structure unknown.



Foundation of early 18th century building (probably a smokehouse) unearthed by the National Park Service in 1936.



Uncovered by National Park Service in 1930. Re-excavated 1936.
Foundation of old structure known as building "X", possibly the ruins of the birthplace house.

KEY

- PARKING AREA
- COLONIAL TYPE FENCE
- PARK BOUNDARY
- EXCAVATIONS
- MARSH LAND