

# George Washington, Westerner



Washington as a Colonial Militia Officer (From the miniature by Peale)



Washington Raising the British Flag, Fort Duquesne (1758) From a painting by J.R. Chapin

By ELMO SCOTT WATSON  
Map by John C. Fitzpatrick, author of "George Washington, Colonial Traveler," courtesy the Bobbs-Merrill company, publishers.

WHEN you saw the title of this article did you find yourself saying: "George Washington a Westerner? Why, I thought he was born in Virginia, lived most of his life there and died there. And Virginia certainly is an Eastern state."

You're quite right, for he was and it is! But the point is—and it's one which few Americans, perhaps, realize—that some of the most important events in Washington's career took place in the West, that he was one of the most "Western-minded" men of his day and that he retained his interest in the West to the end of his life.

Washington's first experience in "the West" came when he was sixteen years old. In 1743 Lord Fairfax engaged the young Virginian to aid George W. Fairfax, his agent, in making surveys in the Shenandoah Valley beyond the Blue Ridge mountains. This trip lasted a month and brought him for the first time into contact with the red men who were to resist so savagely the westward push of the white men.

Five years later Washington set out upon another journey farther west which was more fraught with danger and much more important historically. The Ohio company, formed in 1748 by a London merchant and several prominent men in Virginia, had obtained a grant of 200,000 acres on the Ohio river. But when the company attempted to make good its claim to these lands, the French, who were determined to dominate the interior of North America, broke up their trading posts and carried their traders away to Canada as prisoners. Moreover, Marquis Duquesne, the new governor-general of Canada, ordered forts built in the Ohio country to hold it for the French. By 1753 they had established posts at Presque Isle (the present Erie, Pa.) and Le Boeuf (near Waterford, Pa.) and an outpost at Venango (at the junction of French creek and the Allegheny).

Late in the year Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia sent Washington to warn the French off of the lands claimed by the English. Washington engaged Christopher Gist, who had surveyed the Ohio company's lands in 1750, as his guide and four others as "servitors." Later they were joined by a party of friendly Indians who accompanied them to Venango.

The expedition, made in the dead of winter, was a perilous as well as a futile one. Both the French commanders at Venango and Le Boeuf were firm in their refusal to quit their posts until ordered to do so by the governor of Canada. So Washington started back to report to Dinwiddie.

During this trip Washington visited for the first time "the Forks of the Ohio" and recorded in his journal: "I spent some time in viewing the Rivers, and the Land in the Fork; which I think extremely well situated for a Fort."

Washington could not have realized at the time how important to his future career this spot was to be. For within a year Captain Trent with a party of backwoodsmen was building a fort at this "extremely well situated" place and Washington, as a lieutenant-colonel of Virginia militia, was marching with a small force of raw troops, under orders from Governor Dinwiddie, to garrison it. When he reached Wills Creek (now Cumberland, Md.) he learned that the French had swooped down, driven Trent's men away and were themselves building Fort Duquesne there.

Washington pushed on and a party of French under Jumonville came out from Duquesne "to repel force with force." On May 28, 1754, in

what is now Fayette county, Pennsylvania, "the two tiny forces met; the volleys they exchanged opened the war that was to be waged until 1763, on the battle fields of Europe, the plains of India, and around the islands of the sea, as well as in the woods of the New World."

Thus George Washington's first fight on the frontier made him an international figure. For Jumonville was killed in the encounter ("assassinated," the French declared), and after that the great conflict was inevitable. Washington fell back to the Great Meadows where he built a crude breastwork which he named Fort Necessity. There he was attacked by Coulon de Villiers, Jumonville's brother, and all day long his troops "weary, half-starved, soaked in the rain by the constant rain, and depleted by the musketry fire from the heights which commanded them, fought off their assailants." That night Washington was forced to capitulate.

A year later Washington again rode West, this time as an aide to Gen. Edward Braddock's fine British army which was certain to capture Fort Duquesne from the French. Then came the fatal July 9 on the Monongahela and a few days later Washington was writing to his brother, Augustine: "By the all powerful dispensations of Providence, I have been protected beyond human probability and expectation; for I had four bullets through my coat, and two horses shot under me, yet escaped unhurt, although death was leveling my companions on every side of me."

The next two years found Washington, now a colonel and commander-in-chief of all the militia in Virginia, guarding his frontier against the Indians who, encouraged by Braddock's defeat, repeatedly attacked the outlying settle-



Washington's Mission to the Ohio (From the painting by A. Chappel)

ments. Most of this time was spent at Fort Cumberland and Fort Loudoun (Winchester) with occasional trips to Williamsburg, to Alexandria and to Mount Vernon and longer journeys to Philadelphia, New York and Boston.

But at last in the fall of 1758 he set out for the West again. This time he was in command of Virginia troops accompanying the expedition of Gen. John Forbes against Fort Duquesne and on November 28 he wrote to Governor Fauquier:

"Fort Duquesne, or the ground rather on which it stood, was possessed by his majesty's troops on the 28th instant."

Victory, at last! So the career of George Washington as a frontier fighter ended. In January, 1760, he married the Widow Custis and prepared to settle down at Mount Vernon as a Virginia gentleman farmer. But his experience during the French and Indian war had given him an intimate knowledge of the land across the mountains and he realized fully its future importance and the opportunities which it would afford for a land speculator.



Washington at Braddock's Defeat

In 1754, when Governor Dinwiddie issued a proclamation giving 200,000 acres of western land to men who had served in the war, Washington, as a major, received 15,000 acres on the Ohio although he did not succeed in having it surveyed and patented until seven years later. By the Royal Proclamation of 1763, at the close of the French and Indian war, he received 5,000 acres more in his own right and from other officers and men who held their claims lightly he purchased 2,500 acres more.

In 1770, acting as agent and attorney to locate the western lands granted to officers of the First Virginia regiment by Governor Dinwiddie, Washington, himself, journeyed to Fort Pitt (the former Fort Duquesne). There he held conferences with George Croghan, Indian agent, and with the chiefs of the Six Nations and then, accompanied by Doctor Craik, his physician-friend, and three servants, started down the Ohio by boat. This expedition, which took him down to the mouth of the Kanawha river and up that stream for a considerable distance, was for pleasure as well as business and his diary is full of references to the hunting which he enjoyed in that region.

In addition to looking after the land interests of his brother officers he was also inspecting the lands which William Crawford had marked out for him, for Lund Washington and for his own brothers, Samuel and John Crawford. Washington was especially concerned with establishing his title to these lands.

One of the results of this journey is seen in an advertisement, signed by Washington, which appeared in the Maryland Journal and Baltimore Advertiser for August 22, 1773, and which offered for sale 20,000 acres of land on the Great Kanawha and the Ohio rivers. In this advertisement Washington states that "if the scheme for establishing a new government on the Ohio, in the manner talked of should ever be effected, these must be among the most valuable lands."

Eventually a new government was established there—but not the one, perhaps, which Washington had in mind. Soon after the struggle for liberty began, Washington's mind was occupied with a greater problem than that of his western lands and it kept his mind occupied for the next seven or eight years.

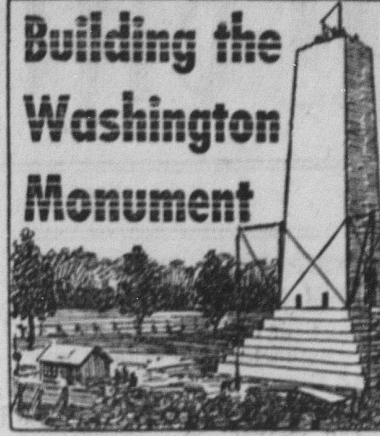
At the close of the Revolution Washington owned land in what is now New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, Ohio and Kentucky, even as far west as Louisville. Besides owning all this land, Washington was also interested in developing routes of communication and travel between the East and the West because he knew that the West could not be developed rapidly without them.

In 1784 he set out on another journey to the West "to obtain information of the nearest and best communication between the Eastern and Western waters." This information he secured by traveling on horseback across ten mountain ranges and covering a distance of 684 miles in 34 days. Upon his return he wrote: "I am well pleased with my journey, as it has been the means of my obtaining a knowledge of facts—coming at the temper and disposition of the Western inhabitants, and making reflections thereon which otherwise must have been as wild, incoherent, or perhaps as foreign from the truth as the inconsistency of the reports which I had received even from those to whom most credit seemed due, generally were."

One result of his journey was the founding of the Potomac company, incorporated in 1785 by the legislatures of both Maryland and Virginia for constructing a canal to connect the James and Potomac rivers with the Ohio. A part of the canal was dug but it was never carried to completion. Washington was given 50 shares in the Potomac company and he left these in his will to the founding of a university to be established in the District of Columbia.

When Washington died he owned more than 50,000 acres of land, valued at nearly half a million dollars. The greater part of this was in the West, or, at least, what was regarded as "the West" at that time. They included 27,486 acres in Virginia, 23,341 on the Great Kanawha river, 9,744 on the Ohio river, 5,000 on Rough creek in Kentucky, 3,051 on the Little Miami river in Ohio, 1,119 in Maryland, 1,000 on the Mohawk river in New York, and last, but not least, 234 in Pennsylvania. Not least, because these 234 acres included the Great Meadows, where a young frontier fighter had built Fort Necessity and embarked upon the military career (even though it was with a defeat) that made the name of George Washington forever famous!

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## Building the Washington Monument

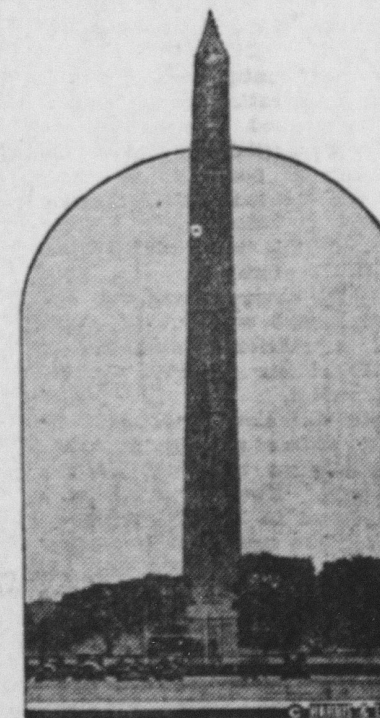
THE Washington monument was long a subject of discussion in and out of congress after the death of the Father of His Country in 1799 until its capstone was set in place December 6, 1884, a total of 85 years, says a National Geographic society bulletin.

On December 23, 1790, John Marshall, famous fellow-Virginian of George Washington, introduced a resolution in the United States house of representatives providing that "a marble monument be erected by the United States in the city of Washington and that the family of General Washington be requested to permit his body to be deposited under it." Martha Washington acceded to the provisions of the resolution, but nothing was done.

In 1816 and 1819 the memorial was again in the halls of congress and again in 1824 and 1825. And again nothing was done to carry out the provisions of the resolution. Displeased with the failure of congress to erect a memorial, influential citizens of Washington organized in 1833 to promote the project. That body became the Washington National Monument society, with Chief Justice John Marshall as its president. The society, which financed construction of the shaft until it rose 154 feet, invited American artists to submit designs for a \$1,000,000 edifice. Robert Mills won the competition, but his design was not accepted. It called for a circular colonnaded building from the center of which would rise a 500-foot obelisk.

In 1848 congress passed a resolution authorizing the Washington National Monument society to erect a monument and authorized the President of the United States and officials of the society to choose a suitable site. L'Enfant, in his plan of Washington, had provided for an equestrian statue of Washington, but the spot then was a marsh. Thus the present site, only a few hundred feet away, was chosen.

On Independence day, 1848, amid colorful ceremonies, the cornerstone,



The Washington National Monument in the Capital City.

filled with historical documents, was laid. Slowly for six years the obelisk rose skyward. Then dissection in the society and lack of funds caused construction to cease.

President Grant, in 1870, signed a bill which provided that the government take over and complete the erection of the shaft. Engineers discovered, after careful examination, that the foundations were not sufficient for so lofty an obelisk, the world's tallest, so they began what was called at that time "one of the outstanding engineering feats of the world"—rebuilding the monument's foundations without damage to the structure. Then, stone by stone, the shaft rose until the pyramidal capstone was placed on December 6, 1884.

The memorial was opened to the public October 9, 1888. Lining its inner walls were placed stones presented by states, cities, fraternities, fire companies, lodges and other organizations from all parts of the country. Stones from many foreign nations also have places in its walls.

The monument cost slightly more than \$1,000,000. It is 555 feet 5 1/4 inches high and stands on a base 35 feet square. The lower walls are of granite faced on the outside with marble. They are 15 feet thick up to about 500 feet; the upper walls, of marble only, are 18 inches thick. It is estimated that about 23,000 stones were used in the shaft's construction.

There are eight windows at the 504-foot level from which thousands of visitors annually view the Capital city and nearby Virginia and Maryland.

MARtha WASHINGTON, before her marriage to George Washington, was the daughter of Col. John Dandridge, planter of New Kent county, Virginia, and the widow of Daniel Parke Custis, a farmer of New Kent county.

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