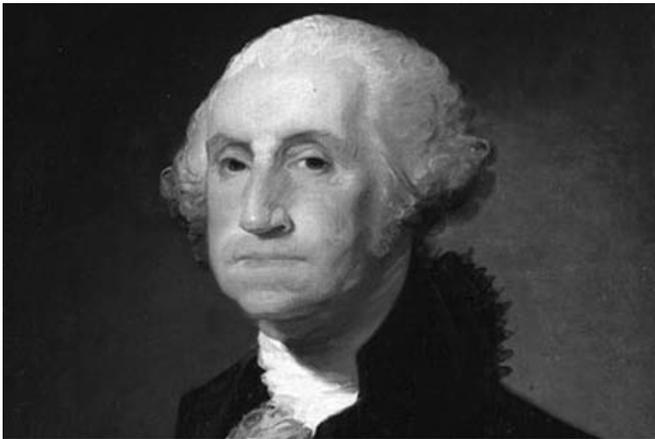


George Washington



Links with Washington, England

If George Washington's ancestor had not settled in Washington, the capital of America would have been called Hertburn!

The town of 'Washington' takes its name from Anglo-Saxon times and over the years has been spelt in various ways including Wessyngton, Wassington and Whessingtun. Today there are still some local people from the area who pronounce the word as Whesshintun. The Anglo-Saxon meaning of 'Washington' breaks down into three parts: Wass = a Saxon Chief, Inga = the family of and Tun = the estate, together meaning "the estate of the Wass family".

The first ancestor of George Washington to live in Washington was William de Hertburn, who settled there around 1183. A knight of Norman descent, William had previously occupied land at Hartburn, County Durham, but exchanged this with the Bishop of Durham who wanted Hartburn. Following the custom of the time, William changed his name to "William de Wessynton", taking his name from the land on which he now lived.

Five generations of George Washington's direct descendants lived in Washington Old Hall, Tyne & Wear. Later, descendants of William de Wessynton's great great grandson, who settled in Lancashire for eight generations, moved to Northamptonshire in the mid – 1500s. Lawrence Washington became a wealthy wool merchant here, and built a new family home called Sulgrave Manor. In 1656, his grandson John Washington became disillusioned by the turbulent situation in England following the English Civil War and settled in Westmoreland County, Virginia. Three generations later, George Washington was born there.

Washington DC and Washington Sunderland therefore have a historical link dating back to 1183. To celebrate this, a Friendship Agreement was signed on 20 June 2006 with the previous Mayor of Washington DC, Anthony Williams and the Leader of Sunderland City Council, Councillor Bob Symonds. Under the Agreement, the two cities will co-operate and exchange ideas and information in a number of key areas. These include economic development, tourism promotion, ICT (Information and Communication Technology) and eGovernment initiatives to increase social inclusion and citizen participation, and cultural and educational programmes to improve residents' quality of life in both cities.

Early Life

Born in Westmoreland County, Virginia on 22 February 1732, George Washington was the eldest son of Augustine Washington and his second wife, Mary Ball. Augustine's first wife, Janet Butler, died, leaving him with two sons and a daughter.

George Washington's early years were spent on his father's plantation at Pope's Creek, on the Potomac River. The family later moved to another home on the same river – Little Hunting Creek Plantation (Mount Vernon) then again to Ferry Farm, a plantation on the Rappahannock River near Fredericksburg, Virginia.

When George was eleven years old, his father died, leaving most of his property to George's older half brothers. Soon after the death of their father, George began to spend a great deal of time with his older half brother, Lawrence, at his home, Mount Vernon.

Career

In 1746 Lawrence proposed that George join the British navy, but his mother refused her consent. His interests then turned to surveying and he became a county surveyor at the age of 17. George worked hard, saved his money and bought unclaimed land. His half brother Lawrence died in 1752 and George inherited Mount Vernon. He also obtained Lawrence's place in the Virginia militia and received a Major's commission.

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From 1753 – 1759 Washington started his impressive and courageous military career. The French and Indian war created new opportunities for the ambitious Washington, and at the age of 27 he was the most experienced native military officer in Virginia.

Political Career

As a respected military hero and large landowner, George Washington held local office, and was elected to the Virginia provincial legislature, the House of Burgesses, beginning in 1758. He was selected as a delegate to the First Continental Congress in 1774. Soon after, Washington was named Commander in Chief of the Continental forces, and moved to Boston.

The 1776 Revolutionary War against Great Britain was long and difficult, yet Washington succeeded in holding his badly-equipped army together and finally secured victory when the British general, Cornwallis, surrendered at Yorktown in 1781.

In 1783 a peace treaty with England was signed. Some of General Washington's officers wanted him to seize power and run the new nation, but he refused. Instead he resigned as Commander in Chief, disbanded the Army, and went home to Mount Vernon to live the rest of his life as a private citizen.

However, Washington's retirement to Mount Vernon was short-lived, and he was elected to preside over the 1787 Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, helping to draft a new system of democratic government. Once the Constitution was approved, Washington hoped to retire again to private life, but on 30 April 1789, George

Washington was inaugurated as the first President of the United States. After completing two terms as president, Washington refused to be considered for a third, and returned home to finally retire at Mount Vernon.

Mount Vernon

In 1759 George Washington married a wealthy young widow, Martha Dandridge Custis, and settled at Mount Vernon. Although the couple remained childless themselves, Washington became stepfather to Martha's two young children, John Parke and Martha Parke Custis from her first marriage.

When George Washington lived there, Mount Vernon was an 8,000-acre plantation divided into five farms. Each farm was a complete unit, with its own overseers, work force of slaves, livestock, equipment, and buildings.

Washington's Legacy

On 14 December 1799, George Washington died at Mount Vernon, at the age of 67.

At this time there were 316 slaves living on the estate. In his will he arranged for all of the slaves he owned to be freed after the death of his wife, Martha. He also left instructions for the continued care and education of some of his former slaves, support and training for all of the children until they came of age, and continuing support for the elderly.

George Washington became a legend in his own lifetime and was a central figure in the founding of the United States of America. The nation's capital, Washington DC, was named in his honour.



Find out more about George Washington

- 'Washington's Crossing', by David H Fischer (2006)
- 'George Washington: first in war, first in peace', by James A Crutchfield (2006)

More information can be found at www.mountvernon.org

Washington Old Hall is now owned and managed by the National Trust. For more information,

call 0191 416 6879, email washington.oldhall@nationaltrust.org.uk, or visit www.nationaltrust.org.uk