GEORGE WASHINGTON: Premier Eighteenth Century American

By WALTER H. ALLEN, JR.

It is now little more than five years before this nation will observe the bicentennial of her birth, remembering how a courageous, liberty-loving people declared their independence and brought a new government into being on July 4, 1776. For General George Washington, premier American of the 18th century, the year marked a decade beyond the mid-point of his life. Just 12 months before, he had undertaken the first of three crucial endeavors for his country when he assumed, near Boston, the post of Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army in the War of the American Revolution. The time for Washington's second important role as a leader of the infant American nation arrived in 1787 when he was unanimously elected President of the Constitutional Convention convened in Philadelphia. Finally, Washington's crowning contribution, which assured him an unequalled position among the founding fathers, commenced in 1789, when he was unanimously elected and subsequently inaugurated—in New York—as the first President of the United States of America.

While these three phases of Washington's public life are more familiar to students of American history, the General's training and military career must be examined for clues to those great qualities of character and leadership which were to prove so decisive in the battles and struggles that lay ahead. Moreover, his relationships with the North Carolina militia and its officers during the French and Indian War offer a sidelight of considerable interest to the region of the Lower Cape Fear River.

The birth of George Washington took place on February 22 (old style, February 11), 1732, at Bridges Creek, near Fredericksburg, in Westmoreland County in what is commonly called the northern neck of Virginia. Little George's great-grandfather, John Washington, had emigrated (from Northamptonshire in England) and settled there in 1657. His father, Augustine Washington, following some schooling in England and seafaring, was then managing his large Virginia estates. After the death of Augustine's first wife, who had four children, he married Mary Ball; and George was the first of their six children.

On George Washington's sixty-fourth birthday, in 1796, Mr. William Smith of South Carolina moved "that the House of Representatives (sitting in the nation's capital, then Philadelphia) adjourn for half an hour." This motion occasioned a good deal of conversation. In favor of it, it was said that it had been a practice ever since the commencement of the Government for the House to make a short adjournment on that day in order to pay its compliments to the President. (Indeed, several members were absent, expecting such an early adjournment.) On the other hand, it was objected that it was the business of the members of the House first to do their duty, and then to attend to the paying of compliments; that just at that time the house of the President was filled with militia and others; and that, therefore, it would be better, upon the whole to wait upon the President after the business of the day was finished. Mr. Albert Gallatin of Pennsylvania then moved that the words "half an hour" be struck out. The sense of the House was first taken on the amendment, which was lost. The motion that the House adjourn for half an hour was then put and voted down, with 38 votes for it, and 50 votes against.²

It may readily be inferred that members of the Congress called upon President Washington at his residence that evening. Moreover, the anniversary of his birth has continued to be an occasion for annual celebration throughout the United States of America. However, from 1791 on, Washington's birthday will be observed (by the federal government, in any case) on the third Monday in February, as provided for in legislation recently enacted by Congress.³

After his unopposed and unanimous election as president of the federal government of the United States in 1789, Washington had deliberately encouraged adulation of himself, apparently for the purpose of strengthening the office of the presidency. After his inauguration on April 30, 1789, a heated debate arose in Congress when his admirers proposed a formal message of congratulations to "His Highness the President of the United States and Protector of their liberties." James Madison and others, inclined to a simpler, republican mode of address, persuaded the majority to adopt "George Washington, President of the United States"; and the chief executive of the United States is to this day introduced in those austere terms. But the

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Membership dues are payable in May for the year 1971-72 and it will save your Society money and a great deal of effort if you will plan to pay promptly.
A Message from the President

The heritage of our area is a unique and irreplaceable asset. History is fascinating and the Lower Cape Fear is particularly rich in it. We need to educate our citizenry in the value of their heritage and to encourage practical use of valuable historic buildings which might otherwise be replaced or destroyed. A scheme that is proving itself in some other cities is new and profitable uses for old buildings saved from demolition. A prime example is San Francisco’s Ghirardelli Square, a waterfront block of old brick shops, restaurants and theaters built around a renovated chocolate factory. Other profitable examples include Head House Square on Society Hill in Philadelphia where a 1745 market hall has been restored, and Georgetown’s (District of Columbia) Canal Square which incorporates pre-Civil War buildings. Good taste and authenticity are important factors in the success of all of these.

The refinement and elegance of past centuries have left us some beautiful architecture and a strong respect for the value of continuity. The changing world of the Twentieth Century has brought new people, new ideas, and the opportunity for fresh self-evaluation. As long as old citizens of the area and new can meet with mutual interest in and appreciation of our heritage, the spirit of the Lower Cape Fear will be progressive and alive. May we have an awareness of the past and enthusiasm for the future.

Over 90,000 persons visited Brunswick Town State Historic Site during the past year, and over 120,000 visited Fort Fisher State Historic Site, the most visited of our state historic sites, during 1970. Tourism is big business in our area and many of our visitors are interested in our illustrious history. We have undoubtedly one of the most historic areas in North America here in the Lower Cape Fear.

The membership committee met twice during the summer and a campaign to increase our membership was launched in early fall. It was gratifying to see such an enthusiastic group. As a result of this campaign, there has been a 10% increase in our membership, or approximately fifty new individual members. Student memberships at $2.00 annually were approved at the fall meeting on October 29th, and this opens a large new field of endeavor for us. Please continue to solicit memberships among your friends and acquaintances as personal solicitation still seems to be our most effective means of adding new members.

Mr. Garry W. Stone, the state archaeologist, continued the excavation at Old Town Plantation, September 14th-23rd, 1970, under the Society’s sponsorship, with the cooperation of the University of North Carolina at Wilmington and the permission of the land owner, Mr. Hugh MacRae II. A coin which was unearthed was found to have been minted in 1636, lending further evidence that we may have located the site of the seventeenth century colony from Barbados. A collection of artifacts from Old Town was placed on display in the Wilmington-New Hanover Museum in December.

The Society was well represented in Charleston, S. C., at the annual meeting and preservation conference of The National Trust for Historic Preservation in the U.S.A. held on November 5th-8th, 1970. A total of seventeen Wilmingtonians, most of whom are members of our Society, attended the conference. The Society’s current president and vice president, as well as the president of Historic Wilmington Foundation, Inc., attended, along with over 1,600 persons of all ages from throughout the nation. It is encouraging to note such broad interest in the field of historic preservation.

Landmarks fall to progress and, whether we like it or not, progress is the name of the game. They say success never stands still, and by that standard Wilmington must be accounted a successful city. The urban landscape is constantly changing and old landmarks vanish with a stealth that sometimes catches the preservationists by surprise. Every change in a city moves a memory, and memories are, after all, part of a great town’s fabric. Change there must be, but fortunately sometimes history and elegance can be saved. With the conservation interests and the efforts being made by certain groups and individuals it may not be too late to save many of Wilmington’s, and the area’s, old houses and buildings.

Let us strive creatively to enrich the present and work diligently to preserve the gifts of the past.

JOHN H. DEBNAM

GEORGE WASHINGTON

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new President “took pains to surround himself with more of the trappings of honor than he allowed himself at Mount Vernon (his home in Virginia).” When he rode abroad, it was on a white horse, with a leopard-skin saddlecloth edged in gold, or in an elegant coach pulled by six cream-colored horses. He rented one of the most sumptuous mansions in New York (first capital of the United States) and stationed powdered lackeys at the door. He held “leaves” in the manner of European monarchs, passing among the assembled dignitaries to give each a brief moment of the presidential presence.” No one has ever invested the office of the President with such dignity, indeed with a presence approaching a sense of the deity.

But pomp and pageantry had not always characterized the life of George Washington. Though little has been recorded of his childhood, it was spent in a four-room farm house and surrounding fields and forests near the Rappahannock River in Virginia. There was latitude enough for the legendary material—‘The Encyclopaedia Britannica calls it “abuse fiction”—invented by parson Mason L. Weems, the imaginative biographer to whom we owe the story of the hatchet and the cherry tree. The truthful boy’s father owned six plantations; and while helping to grow tobacco, raise stock, and watch the slaves, the young lad also learned some principles of surveying and irregularly attended school until 1747. He later taught himself a good deal of mathematics. Added to his horsemanship and outdoor training, these skills qualified him to accompany, as assistant surveyor, the party sent to the Valley of Virginia in 1748 by Lord Fairfax and his family, who owned more than five million acres in that area. This trip provided young Washington with his first taste of frontier life.

But Washington’s military career was to begin very soon. In that period France was in possession of Louisiana and Canada, claimed the whole intervening territory. When the French first moved to take possession of the region along the western slopes of the Alleghenies, land claimed by the British Crown, the Ohio Company had, in 1750, sent to North Carolina for Christopher Gist, then at his home on the banks of the Yadkin River, and employed him to visit the Ohio region and make friends of the Indians—a mission in which he was successful. Gist had gone into the Indian country as far west as Pickawillany. This trading post was attacked in the summer of 1752 by the French, who killed its defenders and then built Fort Presque Isle (present-day Erie, Penn.) in 1752, Fort Le
Boeuf (now Waterford, Penn., 15 miles south of Erie), in the spring of 1753, and Fort Venango (near Franklin, Penn., 50 miles south of Erie), also in 1753.9

In the meantime, Gist had cut a road over to Red Stone Creek and with his and one other family started the first transmontane English settlement.10 By this time the Colonial officials of Virginia and Pennsylvania became convinced they should strengthen ties with the Six Nations of the Iroquois. In 1752, Governor Dinwiddie of Virginia had sent commissioners to Logstown—18 miles northwest of present-day Pittsburgh—where on June 13, 1752, the Iroquois and Delaware Indians ceded to Virginia lands south of the Ohio River and authorized the Ohio Company to build a fort and settle that area.11

In 1753 Governor Dinwiddie proposed an embassy to the Great Lakes region and a party was formed consisting of Major George Washington,12 then just 21 years of age but serving as an adjutant of the Virginia militia; a Dutchman named Van Braam, who was Washington’s fencing teacher and pretended to understand French well enough to be an interpreter; and others, including Christopher Gist as guide, two servants and two traders.13 Numbering seven in all, Washington’s party left Wills Creek on November 15, picked up the Indian chief Half King,14 at Logstown, and proceeded north to Fort Venango. The French officer in charge, Captain Jolincourt, himself half-Indian, showed great hospitality to Half King.15 By December 11, the group from Virginia reached Fort Le Boeuf, having traversed more than 500 miles (from Williamsburg) in forty-one days of the worst weather. Washington delivered to the new French commandant, Lagardeur de St. Pierre, a letter from Governor Dinwiddie protesting against further French encroachments and requesting French withdrawal from the newly-erected forts. St. Pierre was courteous to Major Washington, got his relative, Captain de Repentigny, to translate the letter from Dinwiddie and urged Washington to carry it to the Canadian governor for an answer. But the Virginian, eager to return and give Governor Dinwiddie prompt notice of French intentions, insisted that St. Pierre make reply, which he politely did.16

Leaving Venango on foot, with Gist as his only companion, Washington nearly lost his life.17 But arriving at Williamsburg in January of 1754, he successfully completed the journey which made him famous at an early age.18 In September the Indians had abducted the Treaty of Logstown and moved into the French camp. Not to be deterred by entreaties, the French began to invade western Virginia, seizing the forks of the Ohio in April 1754.19 But the English government sent Governor Dinwiddie orders to demand their withdrawal and to drive them off by force of arms if necessary. Two hundred militia were called out and placed under the command of Colonel Joshua Fry (an Englishman), with Lt. Col. George Washington second in command.20

In organizing the army, Governor Dinwiddie called upon North Carolina for assistance. So in March, 1754, the General Assembly appropriated $40,000, of which $12,000 was to be used to finance a regiment of 750 men for service on the Virginia frontier. When Virginia refused to supply provisions for the troops, the added expense forced the reduction of the number to 250. Matthew Rowan, President of the Council (Acting Governor), appointed a leading citizen of Wilmington in New Hanover County, Colonel James Innes, to command the regiment;21 and other officers included Caleb Grainger, lieutenant colonel; Robert Rowan, major (a kinsman of the President); and six who were captains or lieutenants.22 Two of these were Hugh Waddell (Lieutenant, then Captain), a great Indian fighter who was later to serve as general of the Cape Fear colonial militia under Governor William Tryon,23 and Moses John deRosset (Lieutenant, a citizen and prominent physician in Wilmington who also served a term as mayor from 1766 to his death in 1767).24 Their paper currency virtually worthless, the North Carolina troops had to drive beef cattle and hogs to Virginia to be sold at a sacrifice in payment for their provisions.25

An advance party of Virginia troops sought to build a fort at the forks of the Ohio (confluence of the Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers) but was driven off in April of 1754 by the French, who built there the powerful fort, named Duquesne in honor of the Governor of Canada. Then in May a force of Virginians reached Great Meadow, near the Monongahela River, where they attacked a reconnoitering French detachment, killing ten of the enemy, including their commander, Jumonville. And thus, as Voltaire wrote, "A cannon shot fired in the woods of America was the signal that set Europe in a blaze."26

After the skirmish Washington succeeded to chief command of the expedition upon the death on May 31 of Colonel Fry, who had fallen from his horse a few days before at Wills Creek. Thus "at the age of twenty-two years and three months, he became senior field officer of the small military establishment of the Colony" of Virginia.27 Governor Dinwiddie promptly sent the youthful commander a commission as full colonel, though it was applicable only to the Virginia regiment.28 For on June 3, 1754, Dinwiddie tendered appointment as commander-in-chief of the British colonial forces to Colonel James Innes, a fellow-Scotsman. Innes, however, was then in North Carolina, superintending the departure of his regiment.29

Colonel Washington, therefore, started drawing up entrenchments and a crude stockade, which he called Fort Necessity, while he awaited Innes and two companies of troops en route from New York.30 On July 3, 1754, the French and Indians attacked the 300-man Virginia regiment and a supporting 100-man company of British regulars from South Carolina.31 After a losing nine-hour battle, Washington accepted the French offer of a parole and signed terms of capitulation about midnight. The remainder of his regiment was permitted to march out with honors of war and retreated fifty-two miles to Wills Creek, leaving no British flag to wave west of the Alleghenies. Two days after the disaster at Fort Necessity, Colonel Innes reached Winchester, Virginia, and, hurrying on to Wills Creek, took formal command of the British colonial militia in America.32 What role Washington would have played had Innes arrived earlier we can only speculate.

Colonel Innes' force of 750 men was too small to attack the French; so Governor Dinwiddie suggested the troop units be scattered. With their supplies exhausted, the troops from North Carolina were disbanded at Winchester, Virginia, in August, leaving only 150 Virginians at the front under Innes.33 Colonel Innes remained in command until October, when he was superseded by Governor Horatio Sharpe of Maryland, whose appointment, as Lieutenant Colonel, was made by King George II.34 But Innes continued in service as Camp Master General.35 He completed the construction of Fort Cumberland at Wills Creek and made treaties with the Indians.36

In February, 1755, Major General Edward Braddock, a forty years' veteran in the British army but unfit for fighting in the woods and mountains of North America, arrived in Virginia to take command of His Majesty's forces in America. He expected to supplement the two regiments of British regulars which had accompanied him with a large number of colonists and Indians. Nine companies of Virginians were organized to-
gether with one company from North Carolina, one from Maryland, and three independent companies, numbering altogether about 1200 colonial militia. These joined Braddock's 1500 regulars at Fort Cumberland, named for the General's patron, the Duke of Cumberland, a son of George II. George Washington was also on the scene, having decided about the first of April to accept General Braddock's offer of a captain's commission to be his aide-de-camp, with the courtesy title of colonel. The captain of the newly-raised company of one hundred North Carolinians was Edward Brice Dobbs, a son of the colony's new governor, Arthur Dobbs.

The crucial battle occurred on July 9, 1755, about five miles below Braddock's destination, Fort Duquesne. Having heeded the unwise advice of Washington, the General had divided his army and led forward 1,200 men as an advance corps, with Washington and his Virginians in the vanguard. On the morning of the ninth, a mixed force of about 900 French and Indians attacked. Braddock was fatally wounded and his forces suffered a terrible defeat. The report that the attack came from ambush has been questioned. But apparently at a signal the enemies rose with a war whoop and began to fire from right and left.

Colonel Dunbar succeeded Braddock in command but immediately withdrew to Philadelphia, leaving Colonel James Innes in command at Wills Creek; but, much dissatisfied with affairs, he soon resigned and returned home.

Finally, in 1758, a British and colonial army marched west again. Commanded by a Scotch veteran, General John Forbes, it included 1,400 Virginia troops led by Colonel George Washington and about 2,000 men from the Carolinas. The three hundred troops from North Carolina were commanded by Major Hugh Waddell, who evidently also had charge of the bands of Meherrin, Tuscarora, Catawba, and Cherokee Indians sent northward to join General Forbes.

Forbes' army pushed west toward Fort Duquesne, but winter set in while he was still forty miles away. In sore straits and ill-prepared for a siege or a winter in the mountainous wilderness, the General offered $50 reward to anyone capturing an Indian from whom information could be obtained. Sergeant John Rogers of Major Waddell's contingent, according to Governor Dobbs, "took the only Indian prisoner who gave Mr. Forbes certain intelligence of the Forces in Fort Duquesne upon which they resolved to proceed." Upon reaching the forks of the Ohio, they found the French had abandoned their stronghold and left the fort a heap of smoldering ruins. The place was renamed Fort Pitt, in honor of the Great Commoner, William Pitt, the Prime Minister of England, whose global strategy was winning the war with France; and the site bears the name of Pitt (Pittsburgh) to this day.

George Washington, having served as Colonel of the Virginia regiment from 1715 to 1758, became the Senior Colonel of Virginia militia in the latter year, when William Byrd III was appointed as Colonel to raise and organize another regiment. As the ranking Virginia officer under Forbes, Washington participated in the campaign to take Fort Duquesne, not from hope of preferment or promotion in the British army—such ambition had been discouraged too often—but out of desire for honor and for the conclusion of the effort to conquer and secure the Ohio country. Thus the fall of Fort Duquesne, together with his poor health, prompted his resignation from military service and his return to Mount Vernon.

Already the most famous young man in Virginia, Washington soon became a gentleman planter and political leader in the colony. But the four military expeditions to the Ohio country had laid the foundations for that greatness of character which eventually earned him the eternal affection we still hold for him today. Never better expressed than in the words of John Marshall, the supreme tribute was embodied in the resolution presented in the House of Representatives upon Washington's death in 1799: "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

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FOOTNOTES
6. Ibid., p. 581.
7. The Ohio Company was a land company, organized in 1747, which was later known as the Ohio Company.
8. A great many facts about the location of the Ohio Company can be found in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1954, Volume I, p. 282.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid., p. 435; also Ashe, op. cit., p. 282.
11. Ibid., p. 385.
12. Early in 1753 George Washington was made Adjutant of the newly-created Southern District of Virginia, which extended from Princess Anne County to the western fringe of settlement, covering the entire region between the James River and the North Carolina boundary. Upon taking the oath of an Adjutant, he became a major in the Virginia militia a few days before his twenty-first birthday. Reference: Douglas Southall Freeman, *George Washington, Young Washington*, Volume I, pp. 268-69.
14. Freeman, op. cit., p. 292. Tancharstonian, an Oineden, was known as Half-King because he was a vassal to the Council of the Six Nations of the Iroquois and responsible to them for the Delawares.
15. Freeman, op. cit., p. 305.
16. Hughes, op. cit., p. 84.
17. Ibid., p. 91.
22. Ashe, ibid., p. 283; *Colonial Records*, V. xii.
27. Freeman, op. cit., p. 381.
FOOTNOTES

11. Freeman, op. cit., p. 403.
13. Ashe, op. cit., p. 284; Colonial Records, V, xv-xvi, 408, 409. The editor reproduces two letters from Governor Dinwiddie to Colonel Innes, in the first of which Innes is congratulated upon being appointed Governor of Fort Cumberland.
14. Freeman, op. cit., p. 437. The news of Governor Sharpe's commission from the King had been delivered to Governor Dinwiddie by Governor Arthur Dobbs of North Carolina, who had arrived at Williamsburg on October 7, 1754. After a dismal but dangerous 12-week voyage from England aboard the man-of-war Garland.
15. Ibid, p. 437. Upon arrival in Williamsburg on October 21, 1754, Washington learned the Virginia regiment was to be broken into independent companies. When Governor Dinwiddie offered him nothing more than a captaincy, with the uncertain prospect of a King's commission, Washington resigned as Colonel of the Virginia Regiment and went home, pp. 439-41.
20. Captain Dobb's company was not with Braddock at the Battle of the Wilderness on July 9, 1754, being elsewhere on a scouting mission with Colonel Dunbar. Reference: Ashe, op. cit., p. 289.
25. Colonial Records, V, xxx; VI, 121, 204.
27. Colonial Records, VI, 282.
29. Freeman, op. cit., pp. 308-09.
32. Ibid, p. 386.