



THE WEST FRONT OF MOUNT VERNON attributed to Edward Savage, ca. 1787–1792

Courtesy Mount Vernon Ladies' Association

Washington was concerned about the health of everyone living on his estate. In 1799 there were family members, hired staff, and 316 slaves.

As head of household, plantation owner, businessman, Revolutionary War general, and president, George Washington had many different concerns and responsibilities, from running his estate to ensuring the stability of a new nation. Alongside the traditional demands of political life and military leadership, he focused considerable attention on the health and safety of his family, staff, slaves, and troops.

ON THE PLANTATION

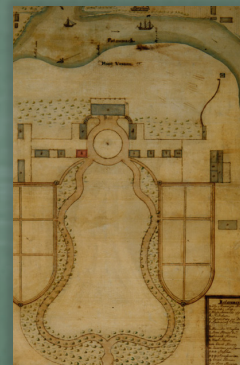
*“DISORDERS...are EASIER PREVENTED than CURED”**



WASHINGTON THE PLANTER, etching by Louis Conrad Rosenberg, 1932
Courtesy Mount Vernon Ladies' Association

As the owner of Mount Vernon, George Washington was responsible for the health of everyone on the plantation, including his enslaved workers. They numbered over 300 people at the end of his life.

Washington expressed concern that the slaves be given “every necessary care and attention” when unwell and complained that many overseers neglected the slaves when they were too ill to work, “instead of comforting and nursing them when they lye on a sick bed.”



Left:

DENTAL SCALER SET, 1795–1850; said to have been used to clean the teeth of slaves at Mount Vernon
Courtesy Mount Vernon Ladies' Association

Washington routinely visited sick slaves and oversaw numerous health efforts, including dental care.

Right:

PLAN OF MOUNT VERNON by Samuel Vaughan, 1787
Courtesy Mount Vernon Ladies' Association

The highlighted building was initially constructed in the 1770s as a hospital for sick slaves.

**Above:*

QUOTE FROM A LETTER FROM GEORGE WASHINGTON TO RICHARD VARICK, September 26, 1785



GEORGE WASHINGTON AND FAMILY, oil on canvas, Thomas Prichard Rossiter, 1858–1860
Courtesy Mount Vernon Ladies' Association

HOME AND HARDSHIP

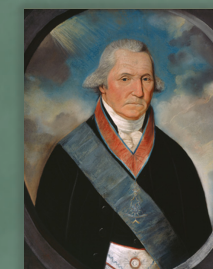
*“OUR DEPARTED FRIEND...”**

Washington came from a large family, which included five siblings and four half-siblings. Like many other families during the 18th century, the Washingtons were plagued by fits, fevers, and agues, as well as suffering the loss of cherished relatives due to the high mortality rates of the era.

Like others on the plantation, George and Martha experienced seasonal malaria and lung problems. Later in life, they dealt with such age-related concerns as rheumatism, hearing loss, and failing eye-sight. The responsibilities both had for looking after the health of others in the family and on the plantation continued despite these difficulties.



MARTHA WASHINGTON by James Peale, 1796
Courtesy Mount Vernon Ladies' Association



GEORGE WASHINGTON by William Williams, 1794
Courtesy Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22, A. F. & A. M., Alexandria, Virginia
Photography by Arthur W. Pierson

William Williams painted this portrait during Washington's presidency. The artist carefully depicted a scar on Washington's left cheek from an abscessed tooth, smallpox scars on his nose and cheeks, and a mole under his right ear.



DENTURES OWNED BY GEORGE WASHINGTON, ca. 1790–1799
Courtesy Mount Vernon Ladies' Association

George Washington lost his first tooth at the age of 24 and his last when he was 64. Both he and his wife wore false teeth in their later years.

**Above:*

QUOTE FROM A LETTER FROM GEORGE WASHINGTON TO FRANCES BASSETT WASHINGTON, FEBRUARY 24, 1793

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AT THE BATTLEFRONT

*“MORE TO DREAD... than
from the SWORD of the ENEMY”**

On June 15, 1775, George Washington was unanimously selected as commander in chief of the Continental Army. Within weeks, he began making preventative health decisions about food storage, placement of latrines, disposal of animal carcasses, and general provisions for clothing and shelter.

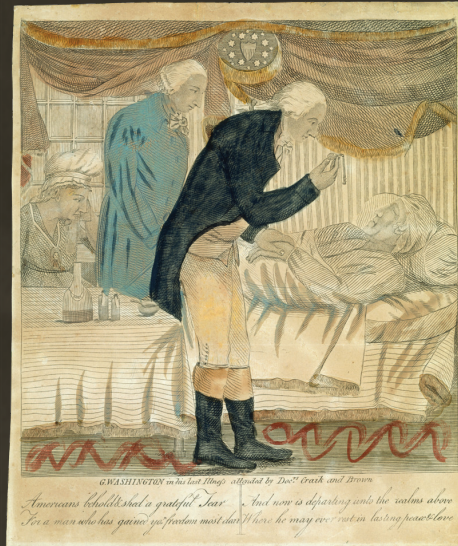
Washington began to inoculate and quarantine troops to control and minimize the impact of smallpox, which threatened the outcome of the war. His decision was bold and dangerous, as inoculation brought risk of death, although far less frequently than if contracting smallpox naturally.



WASHINGTON TAKING COMMAND OF THE AMERICAN ARMY, 1876
Courtesy Mount Vernon Ladies' Association

*Above:

QUOTE FROM A LETTER FROM GEORGE WASHINGTON TO DOCTOR WILLIAM SHIPPEN, February 6, 1777

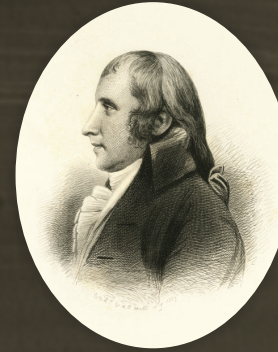


G. WASHINGTON IN HIS LAST ILLNESS ATTENDED BY DOCTRS. CRAIK AND BROWN, etching by an unidentified artist, early 19th century

Courtesy Mount Vernon Ladies' Association

TOBIAS LEAR, Washington's personal secretary, 1869

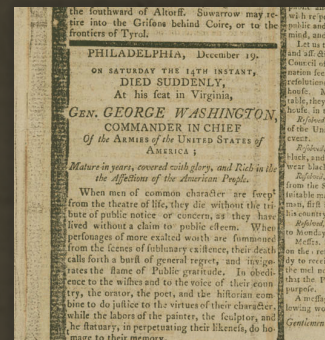
Courtesy Mount Vernon Ladies' Association
Lear provided the most detailed description of the general's last days. On Saturday, December 14, Washington awoke, feverish and with labored breathing. While he awaited the assistance of a physician, he tried home remedies. He instructed his overseer to bleed him and Lear applied a menthol vapor rub to his throat.



AT JOURNEY'S END

*“THE DEBT of NATURE...
MUST BE PAID by US ALL”**

Having returned to Mount Vernon after John Adams was sworn in as the country's second president; George Washington spent much time outside, making the rounds of his estate. Washington endured five hours of rain, snow, hail, and high winds on Thursday, December 12, 1799, and didn't change his wet clothes before dinner. The next day, Washington was outside in poor weather again, marking some trees for removal. That evening, unconcerned with his sore throat, he told Tobias Lear, his personal secretary, “You know I never take anything for a cold. Let it go as it came.”



NEWSPAPER NOTICE OF GEORGE WASHINGTON'S DEATH, 1799

Courtesy Mount Vernon Ladies' Association

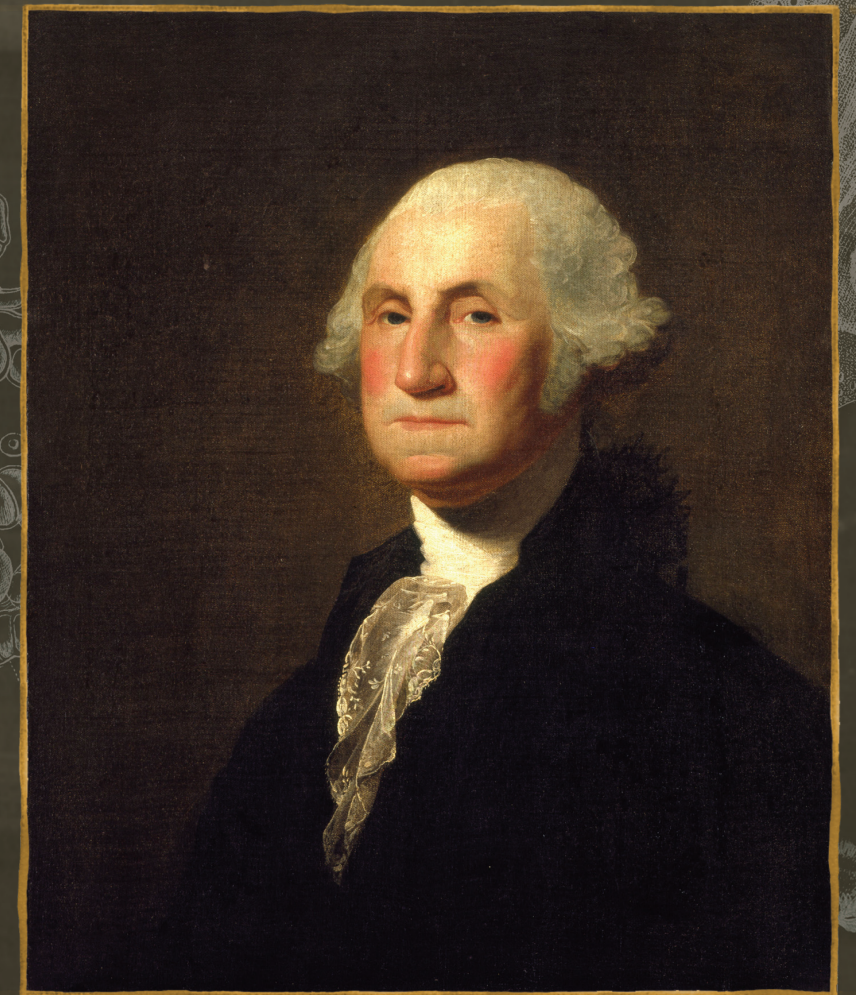
Washington was attended by his close friend, Dr. James Craik, who perceived the gravity of the situation and enlisted the assistance of Dr. Gustavus Brown from Fort Tobacco, Maryland, and Dr. Elisha Dick, a young doctor from Alexandria, Virginia. Despite their attempts to alleviate Washington's condition, they were unsuccessful. Evidence suggests that Washington died from swelling and obstruction of his airway. With the news of Washington's death, the country went into mourning and hundreds of eulogies were delivered.

*Above:

LETTER FROM GEORGE WASHINGTON TO GEORGE LEWIS, April 9, 1797

EVERY NECESSARY CARE & ATTENTION*

GEORGE WASHINGTON & MEDICINE



GEORGE WASHINGTON by Gilbert Stuart, ca. 1798
Courtesy Mount Vernon Ladies' Association

*Above:

QUOTE FROM A LETTER FROM GEORGE WASHINGTON TO HIS OVERSEER, WILLIAM PEARCE, May 10 1795