



Mount Vernon: The History of George Washington's Famous Plantation

Charles River Editors

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"I can truly say I had rather be at Mount Vernon with a friend or two about me, than to be attended at the Seat of Government by the Officers of State and the Representatives of every Power in Europe." - George Washington, letter to David Stuart, June 15, 1790

Every American is taught a pristine narrative of the life and legacy of George Washington and can easily recite the highlights of the "Father of Our Country". The remarkable Virginian led an under-resourced rag-tag army to ultimate victory in the American Revolution before becoming the nation's first president, setting it on its path toward superpower status. He may not have actually chopped down a cherry tree or tossed a silver dollar across the Potomac, but his contemporaries considered his character above reproach. When Washington voluntarily resigned as commander of the armies, he stunned the world. Everyone in the colonies and the world realized that Washington, at the head of the last army standing in the colonies, could have made himself king of the new United States on the spot, and it would have been a move supported by his rank and file soldiers. Instead, Washington became the first Westerner to voluntarily demobilize his army, ensuring civilian control of the new nation. King George III called Washington "the greatest character of the age" for making that decision. As President from 1788-1796, Washington set every precedent for the executive branch of the new government, from forming a "Cabinet" to limiting himself to two terms. He even set precedents with his farewell address, which helped guide the policies of subsequent presidents. Put simply, Washington did more than any other man to ensure the success of the American Revolution and the safe passage of the new United States from fledgling nation to budding power,

For about as long as Washington has been famous, so has his most famous residence, the spacious Virginian plantation known as Mount Vernon. Washington lived in a smaller structure on the land as a teen, and ironically, tradition and inheritance suggested that George would never be the one to own the land. Of course, fate would intervene, and Washington would not only come into possession of the 10,000 acres in 1761 but build and renovate the property to create one of the most famous private residences in the nation. Washington would live at Mount Vernon before the Revolution and retire there after the war and after his presidency. Indeed, he would die there and be buried there as well.

By 1760, Washington was one of Virginia's wealthiest and most influential citizens, in large measure due to Mount Vernon's success as a tobacco plantation. However, to make that happen, Washington used hundreds of slaves, and though he mandated that his slaves be freed upon his death, the estate continued to employ slave labor until his widow's death years later. Thus, while Mount Vernon remains a hallowed tourist spot, it also underscores the most divisive and controversial issue of the post-Revolution era.

Mount Vernon: The History of George Washington's Famous Plantation tells the story of the residence most associated with the first president, and the controversial nature of the slave labor used there. Along with

pictures of important people, places, and events, you will learn about Mount Vernon like never before, in no time at all.

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