THE GENERAL & Mrs. Washington

The Untold Story of A Marriage & A Revolution

Bruce Chadwick

Sourcebooks, Inc.®
Naperville, Illinois

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Chapter One

GEORGE AND MARTHA

She did not expect to see him at the home of her friend William Chamberlayne that March afternoon in 1758.

Martha Custis and her two small children had been invited to spend the day at Chamberlayne's modest two-story brick home on his plantation, Poplar Grove, on the banks of the Pamunkey River in New Kent County, Virginia. Chamberlayne was a vestryman at nearby St. Peter's church, where she worshipped. He knew Martha because her late husband, Daniel Custis, and her father, John Dandridge, were also vestrymen. His daughters had been classmates of hers at the local school. She knew everyone at the Chamberlayne home from other receptions and parties she had attended at the sprawling plantations throughout the Tidewater area of the colony and in the large mansions of Williamsburg, the capital of Virginia. Martha, twenty-seven, had

been a widow for eight long months. She had become a member of the colony's gentry in 1750 when she married Daniel Custis. He was a planter twenty years older than she; she was just nineteen when they wed.

Daniel Custis was the third-richest man in Virginia and one of the wealthiest men in America. He owned more than fifty thousand acres of valuable land near Williamsburg and several town lots in that community. He also owned 287 slaves, and had made a fortune raising and selling tobacco on his plantation, White House, on the banks of the Pamunkey. The Custises lived in a well-appointed home at White House and owned one of the largest mansions in Williamsburg, a well-designed, spacious brick house with lawns and gardens, whose six tall chimneys could be seen from anywhere in the community. Custis had died suddenly of bilious fever and heart complications in 1757 at the age of forty-six, leaving Martha the richest widow in Virginia.

Martha Custis was a very small woman, barely five feet tall in her stockings, overweight and "plump," as many who knew her said. She had tiny hands and her face was oval, with a small mouth, high forehead, and rounded chin. She had beautiful white teeth—a rarity in the era. Her face was highlighted by her short brown hair and soft hazel eyes. Martha had a thin, slightly hooked nose and was, by all accounts, rather plain-looking. Martha was not an educated woman and rarely read books at that time; her penmanship was nearly illegible and her spelling atrocious, much like the spelling of most Virginians of the day.

The charm of Martha Custis, though, was her personality. Family members and friends acknowledged that she was no beauty, but all who knew her enjoyed her company. She was friendly, compassionate, and always seemed vitally interested in what a companion had to say. She shared in the joys of others when they married or gave birth, but she also grieved with them upon the deaths of loved ones.

Daniel Custis's widow luxuriated in any discussion of children and family. She could carry on conversations about any mundane topic, from the weather to Sunday's church sermon. Those who

met her said Martha could carry on an interesting conversation about what roadway a guest followed that morning, and she always seemed to know somebody acquainted with a guest. People who knew her when she first began to attend social events in Williamsburg as a girl readily acknowledged that she was not physically attractive but quickly added that people were drawn to her because of her cheerful disposition. Perhaps John Enys, an Englishman who met her later in her life, described her best when he compared her to a fictional British heroine, writing of Martha, "She appears to me to be a plain good woman very much resembling the character of Lady Bountiful, is very cheerful and seems most happy when contributing towards the happiness of others." A relative wrote that it was her personality that "caused her to be distinguished amid the fair ones who usually assembled at the court of Williamsburg."

She was the daughter of a successful planter and had grown up in comfortable surroundings. She was groomed all of her life to be a fine lady of the Virginia upper class. She loved beautifully made clothes, ornate carriages, expensive furniture, good food, and elegant homes. Her refinement, as well as her amiable ways, had made her popular as a girl and as the young wife of Daniel Custis.

Martha was as surprised as everyone else when the well-known colonel in charge of the state militia regiment, the 6'3, two-hundred-pound George Washington, uninvited and unannounced, arrived at Chamberlayne's that afternoon. Washington and a white manservant, Thomas Bishop, a tall man himself, had been riding back to Washington's farm at Mount Vernon on the southern bank of the Potomac River, the northern border of Virginia. They had casually ridden north on a narrow dirt road from Williamsburg, where Washington had been to see a doctor about his health. Bishop had been asked to work for Washington by General William Braddock, as Braddock lay dying on a battlefield during the French and Indian War three years earlier. Bishop would work for Washington on and off for forty years. As they approached the ferry slip, Washington realized he was right across the river from the plantation of Chamberlayne, a friend. On the spur of the moment, he reined in

his horse and headed for the small wooden public ferry that carried visitors and their horses across the Pamunkey River towards the Chamberlayne estate.

George Washington had a physical presence that impressed all who met him, whether the dirt-poor, shabbily dressed farmers on the frontier who relied on him and his soldiers to protect them from the Indians, or the wealthy, finely dressed patricians who lived in the large brick mansions on the neat, well-planned, tree-lined streets of Williamsburg. Washington was a very tall man, six feet, three inches in height and two hundred pounds, and he walked ramrod straight, head high, making him appear even larger to those who were introduced to him. He looked even more intimidating on top of one of his horses; later, a French soldier in the Revolution who saw him for the first time wrote that Americans must be "a band of giants." He had a thick torso, long arms and legs, wide hips, and very thick thighs. The colonel had huge hands, so wide that the hands of other large men disappeared inside his when they greeted each other, prompting the Marquis de Lafayette to remark, "I never saw so large a hand on any human being." Washington wore size thirteen shoes. His face was oval, highlighted by blue-gray eyes and a large nose.

The colonel's hair was reddish-brown and tied in a cue. His skin was pale and burned easily in the hot Virginia summer sun. It was covered with light pock marks from his near-fatal bout with smallpox at age nineteen. His smile, when it could be seen, was enigmatic. The colonel always seemed overly grave to most people when they first met him because he rarely smiled or laughed, probably afraid to show the defective teeth that he worried about all of his life. Yet some found his countenance easy and amiable, especially when he was with friends. One man wrote of the colonel's looks that "in conversations they become animated."

The shape of his eyes always seemed different to people. One person who met him would remark about how grim his eyes appeared and another would describe them as alert, especially when he was intrigued by something. "His eyes were…indicative

of deep thoughtfulness, and when in action, on great occasions remarkably lively," wrote a later friend, Jedidiah Morse.

There was an air of authority about him, even at age twenty-seven. His friend George Mercer wrote about him that "in conversation, he looks you full in the face, is deliberate, deferential and engaging. His demeanor is at all times composed and dignified. His movement and gestures are graceful, his walk majestic." Another man wrote, "His general appearance never failed to gain the respect and esteem of all who approached him."

Later, when he was selected as commander in chief of the Continental Army, John Adams would tell people that one of the reasons Congress gave him the job was that nobody had ever met a man who looked more like a general than Washington. Adams's wife Abigail, stumbling for words, wrote of him that "not a king in Europe but would look like a valet by his side." Throughout his life, all who met him were taken by his appearance. A chaplain wrote that anyone who saw him had to believe that he "was reserved for some great destiny," and a teenager who met him said that "so superior did he seem to me to all that I had seen or imagined of the human form." During the war, a doctor wrote, "His personal appearance is truly noble and majestic."

On the afternoon that he stopped off at Chamberlayne's house, though, there was little majesty or nobility about him. Washington had been suffering from dysentery for more than six months. He appeared pale and gaunt, seemed tired, and found it hard to carry himself as well as he usually did.

He knew that guests were in the house as he walked toward the front door because he saw activity throughout the building and horses and coaches in front of it. Washington did not know who they were, however. He was surprised to see Martha Custis as he entered, and all were surprised and pleased that the dashing Colonel Washington, the hero of the French and Indian War, had decided to drop by. They had read about him in the *Virginia Gazette* and had heard about him in the taverns of Williamsburg.

George and Martha had probably met before. They traveled in the same social circles and had been at several of the same functions.

The pair had some of the same friends. Colonel William Fitzhugh, as an example, was a friend of Daniel Custis and also a friend to Washington because he and George shared a passion for racehorses. Fitzhugh not only bred horses, but he also owned a racetrack where contests were staged for horses owned by planters in the colony. Washington attended many of them. George and Martha, however, apparently never had the opportunity to engage in lengthy conversation with each other at any of those encounters. There, at Chamberlayne's on that chilly March 5 afternoon, they finally had that chance.

The guests noticed that George and Martha had drifted into a deep conversation as the afternoon wore on. There was small talk with the other guests and Chamberlayne, but everyone there realized that the pair only had eyes for each other. Dinner was served in late afternoon and both George and Martha talked with the others around Chamberlayne's table, enjoying a variety of meats and wines brought into the dining room by servants. Following dinner, George and Martha went into the parlor alone and continued talking in front of a roaring fireplace. Martha, nine months older than George, told him of the death of her husband, her troubles running the plantation, and the woes of trying to be a businesswoman.

And then there were the deaths of her children. Virginians had large families because diseases sometimes took children. The Custises, though, had been struck by genuine tragedy. Two of Martha's four children had died before the age of five. Washington offered his condolences to her on their deaths and on the passing of her husband, and she commiserated with him on the death of his brother Lawrence six years before. She must have felt compassion for him as he explained his years in the military with great frustration, outlining a controversy over a slain French diplomat, the debacle at a stockade called Fort Necessity, and the death of General Braddock. And, too, he lamented, his first effort into politics had met with disaster when he was defeated in his campaign for the House of Burgesses, the Virginia state legislature, in the 1758 elections. Reportedly, it was because he did not buy enough

drinks for the men who turned out to vote, an illegal but common practice in Virginia politics.

Neither realized that darkness had started to fall and that all of the other guests had gone home. Martha had planned to stay over, but George had to go on to Mount Vernon. The Chamberlaynes, who, like everyone else in the house, realized a romance was blooming in their parlor, insisted that the colonel remain overnight. They also encouraged the pair to continue talking as the fire burned and, within moments, the Chamberlaynes said good night, rather early, and conveniently disappeared. George and Martha talked long into the night, retiring only when the embers of the fire had died out, leaving the room in near darkness.

In the morning, with the sun enveloping the parlor on the eastern side of the home, the Chamberlaynes mysteriously disappeared once more. Alone again for the next several hours, George and Martha continued their conversation of the previous evening. George's manservant, Bishop, tipped off by Chamberlayne the night before, spent the evening sleeping at their host's house, too, and in the morning chatted with workers as his boss continued to talk, and talk, and talk to Martha Custis. Finally, in early afternoon, George Washington said good-bye to Martha after accepting an invitation to visit her a few weeks later at White House; she wished him good luck with his health. They had talked for over fourteen hours and had genuinely enjoyed each other. It was more than that, however. As she said good-bye to him and he stepped onto the wooden planks of the ferry, both realized that there was a quiet chemistry between them. Something serious had started.

George Washington was ready for marriage. He had courted numerous women in Virginia and in New York, but the relationships never amounted to much. Many of his friends had been married for several years and already had families. He was twenty-seven and it was time for him to settle down. Martha had been a widow for almost a year. A widow in the eighteenth century, especially one with small children, found herself in an extremely awkward position. She had to grieve for her husband

and yet, after an appropriate interval, was expected to remarry. She was invited to social functions and always attended alone. The widow, who knew very little about running her husband's farm, shop, or plantation, had to grapple with his debts and payrolls and attempt to run his business. As the widow of a slaveholder, she also had to oversee the lives of the slaves on the family plantation; the management of Custis's over two hundred slaves was an enormous chore. Martha already employed overseers for the slaves, and she hired lawyers and business managers to help her care for the Custis plantations and tobacco exporting business, but she was tired of it.

She was suddenly faced with the management of the Custis plantations at White House, her home there, and her magnificent brick mansion in Williamsburg. She had been brought up to be a plantation wife, not a plantation administrator. She did not know how to manage the business operations of the farms, keep books, buy and sell necessary goods, and oversee the work and lives of her slaves. She needed a man to do that. She knew, too, that it could not be just any man. It had to be a good businessman, someone with an eye for detail and, most important, someone who spoke and acted with authority.

She was the mother of two children, the adorable two-year-old girl, Patsy, and Jacky, her rambunctious, almost-four-year-old son. Martha had domestics to help her with the children, but they needed a father. It could not be just any father, though. It had to be a man who would not simply care for Patsy and Jacky as stepchildren, but someone who would love them as his own. Their father had to be a man that they grew to genuinely admire.

Martha Custis was a young woman who needed a husband. She enjoyed a good relationship with Daniel Custis, but at nineteen she was an inexperienced and apprehensive young bride. He was thirty-five. There was love and comfort, but little electricity. Now, at twenty-seven, she wanted a loving mate. Martha was rich and enjoyed a very good life in Virginia, but she was lonely. She wanted to share all the good things in her life with a man her own age, a man she could respect and love. She saw in George

Washington the possible answer to all of her needs. And, she thought, like any young woman, that there was something dashing about a military hero.

The colonel had needs, too, and they were immediate. Mount Vernon was an incomplete home and in disrepair because he was always away on military business and was rarely around to supervise workers refurbishing the house, a challenging project that involved raising the roof to create a full second floor. He had purchased thousands of dollars worth of furnishings and farm equipment and was in debt. He needed money. Washington was at the age when he knew he should have a family. The military had begun to frustrate him, and he yearned for a return to civilian life. He wanted to take his place in Virginia high society, as he had always dreamed, but he had never had the financial and land resources to do so. He also wished to establish Mount Vernon as the grandest estate in Virginia, with a wife who could, with him, welcome guests, and stage dinners, parties, and balls. And he, too, was lonely. He had never met the right woman, and the woman he had fallen deeply in love with, gorgeous Sally Fairfax, was married to his best friend.

In Martha Custis, Washington saw the answer to his own needs. Marriage to her would immediately make him one of the wealthiest men in Virginia and permit him to lead the life of comfort that he had always dreamt about as a member of the gentry. She would give him an immediate family. Her arrival at Mount Vernon as his wife and sexual partner would also, hopefully, put an end to his infatuation with Sally Fairfax and permit him to move on with his life—and his new wife.

And he liked Martha Custis. There was something charming about her that intrigued him.

Washington next saw Martha in late March, when he took her up on her offer to visit at her White House plantation. They met again during the first week of May when she asked him to spend several days at White House. He had been in Williamsburg on business and stopped off at her home for a two-day stay

on the way back to Mount Vernon, about sixty miles from White House. There, after getting to know her better and meeting and playing with her two children, he asked Martha Custis to marry him, and she accepted. A pleased Washington immediately ordered a wedding ring from Philadelphia that cost him two pounds and sixteen shillings.

They did not see each other for months afterwards because Washington had to rejoin the Virginia regiment at Fort Cumberland. The regiment was part of a force that captured Fort Duquesne (now Pittsburgh) from the French that summer and renamed it Fort Pitt.

He wrote Martha a tender letter on July 20, 1758, just after the march to Fort Duquesne commenced: "I embrace the opportunity to send a few words to one whose life is now inseparable from mine. Since that happy hour when we made our pledge to each other, my thoughts have been continually going to you as another self. That an all-powerful Providence may keep us both in safety is the prayer of your ever faithful and affectionate friend."

Washington had decided that if the regiment had some success he would retire. He had put in five years of near-continuous service. He had joined the army to pursue his goal of becoming a British officer. It was clear that he would never get that appointment because he was an American. He had no future in the military, and his growing affection for Martha Custis, and his decision to marry her, was the perfect reason to leave it. He did so and returned to White House to visit Martha and her children again during the last week of December. They finalized their plans for a January 6, 1759, wedding, an event that brought him great joy.

There was more good news. Washington had been elected to the House of Burgesses, representing Frederick County, on his second attempt. The colonel had not only been elected, but was the leading vote-getter with 307 votes, well ahead of runner-up Colonel Thomas Martin, who received 240 votes. He did not campaign because he was with the army, but this time, following the advice of local politicians, he made certain that his campaign manager, Colonel James Wood, provided plenty of drinks for

those who turned out on election day. To guarantee the landslide, Wood not only arrived at the polls with a barrel of spiked punch, but added thirty-five gallons of hard cider and also bought dinner for all those who voted for Washington.

The wedding of the Washingtons was one of the highlights of the social season in Virginia. Friends and relatives of the pair were quite pleased with the match. Virginians in the gentry were always encouraged to marry into similarly comfortable families, and this merger of the Custis and Washington families fit that tradition. It was Martha's second marriage and, understandably, could have been a small affair. She may have insisted on a lavish ceremony in order to please her husband and to let everyone in the colony know that their marriage was important. They chose January 6 because that was the traditional date of Twelfth Night, the English holiday that celebrated the close of the Christmas season. Christmas was a religious holiday; Twelfth Night was the holiday for dinners, parties, and dancing. It was a date that everyone remembered, and the Washingtons wanted all to remember the day they were joined in matrimony.

The site of the wedding remains uncertain. Some accounts place the ceremony in St. Peter's Episcopal Church, and there is a painting of the marriage in a church. Others contend the event occurred in the parlor of Martha's home at White House. It was an elaborate affair, and the bride and groom wore expensive clothes ordered from London for the occasion. George wore an elegant blue cloth suit with a white satin waistcoat, breeches, and new shoes with shiny gold buckles. White dress gloves covered his large hands. The groom's clothes were tight, as always, because even the best tailors in Great Britain could not properly fit a man of his gargantuan size.

According to family lore, Martha wore an elegant gold damask dress trimmed with lace over a petticoat of white fabric decorated with silver threads. She walked down the aisle in purple satin high-heeled slippers embellished with silver metallic thread, sequins, and pearl jewelry. Later, she made a silver handkerchief out of part of her petticoat that she kept as a memento. The two

children wore new clothes specially ordered for the event, too. Washington's manservant, Bishop, was resplendent in one of his British Army uniforms.

The ceremony was conducted by the pastor of St. Peter's, the Rev. David Mossom. Martha arrived in an elegant horse-drawn carriage, and George rode the handsome horse given him by General Braddock. The wedding took place on a cold day, and the countryside around White House was stark; guests arrived dressed in winter coats and gloves, and most shivered a bit as they stepped down from their horses or carriages.

The reception at White House was elegant. Martha Custis's parlor was filled with tables overladen with meats and desserts. Servants brought in wines and ales. Later, in the parlor, guests danced until late in the evening. The reception reportedly continued for three days.

Guests filled every bedroom of White House; others slept in hastily arranged guest quarters in the outbuildings of the plantation. The invited comprised a "Who's Who" of Virginia politics and high society. They included the royal governor, William Fauquier, in scarlet robes, a shoulder-length wig, and a ceremonial sword at his side, and his wife; several members of the state legislature, all dressed in their finest coats; the brothers and sisters of George and Martha; and friends and neighbors from both the Potomac and Pamunkey River regions. It is not known whether George's feisty mother, Mary Ball Washington, was in attendance.

One week after he married Martha, Washington received a very moving congratulatory note on his retirement from the army and also on his wedding from the members of the Virginia Regiment. In it, the men called him "the soul of the corps." Washington wrote an emotional note back, thanking them for their service to the colony and to him, and added tenderly that no one could appreciate the pangs he felt upon parting with a regiment "that has shared my toils and experienced every hardship and danger which I have encountered. Gentlemen, with uncommon sincerity and true affection for the honor you have done me—for if I have acquired any reputation, it is from you I derive it. I thank you also

for the love and regard you have all along shown me. It is in this I am rewarded. It is in this I glory."

It was a letter written to show his deep affection for the soldiers that fought with him on the Virginia frontier and to say farewell to the military life. It would also explain why, seventeen years later, Washington would be back in uniform and tens of thousands of other men would risk their lives for him.

The newlyweds opted not to honeymoon and remained at White House plantation for three months. They left only for a visit to Williamsburg for the legislative session, where they were greeted by friends as man and wife for the first time. During the final week of March, George and Martha Washington and their children climbed into their elegant, horse-drawn carriage as trees and flowers began to bloom throughout Virginia. They proceeded north for the banks of the Potomac River and their new home, Mount Vernon.

Chapter Two

COLONEL WASHINGTON

When Martha Washington died in 1802, the Washington family's total assets in money, slaves, land, and their gorgeous mansion on the Potomac—Mount Vernon—made it one of the wealthiest in America. When the first Washington, John, came to America from England in 1656, he was surely one of the poorest.

John Washington, a tall, muscular, robust man, was a victim of the English Civil War that took place in the mid-seventeenth century. His father Lawrence, a rector, lost his post because he sided with the Royalists, not the opposition, and he died in reduced circumstances. His sons John and Lawrence fled to America, nearly penniless. They joined the thousands of people who braved the hard sea passage across the Atlantic.

John Washington labored harder than most when he arrived in America, and he began to buy up parcels of land in the central and

northern regions of his new home, Virginia. He also purchased slaves to work on his farms, as so many men did. His sons and grandsons followed this practice of purchasing land and slaves over the next seventy years. They all prospered by growing tobacco, a product much in demand in the British Isles and in Europe.

His grandson Augustine was also a giant of a man. Height and strength were already hallmarks of the Washington men by the time Augustine married Jane Butler. She gave birth to three sons, Butler, Lawrence, and Augustine, and a daughter, Jane, before her death in 1728. Augustine then married Mary Ball, an attractive twenty-three-year-old orphan who already had a reputation as being an excessively strong-willed, highly opinionated woman. The spirited Mary bore him six children at their farm, Pope's Creek Plantation, in the central region of the state. The first child was George, who came into the world on February 22, 1732.

George would have three half brothers, Butler, Lawrence, and Augustine; one half sister, Jane, who died at age two; three brothers, Samuel, John Augustine (Jack), and Charles; and two sisters, Betty and Mildred. He would wind up with twenty-five nephews and nieces from their families, plus five more nephews and nieces from the family of Martha Custis. He maintained close relationships with his brothers and sisters, particularly Jack, throughout their lives.

Augustine Washington moved his family to Ferry Farm, a rather flat piece of land across the Rappahannock River from the tiny but bustling town of Fredericksburg, in order to run an iron foundry nearby. He died young, at forty-nine, as did many of the men in his family, and bequeathed most of his land to his sons by his first marriage. That angered Mary Ball. Lawrence was given a large farm on the southern shore of the Potomac River that he named Mount Vernon, after a military leader he had served under during a brief stint in the British Army. George, eleven at the time, had to be satisfied with the relatively tiny Ferry Farm, its small farm house, and its nineteen slaves. There, he and his mother oversaw the production of wheat, tobacco, and corn. They also earned some money from the operation of a small ferry that crisscrossed the Rappahannock River.

Lawrence Washington married into the wealthy and politically influential Fairfax family soon after taking up residence at Mount Vernon. He told his stepmother that the Fairfaxes had considerable influence and might be able to help young George, then fourteen, obtain an appointment in the British Navy. Perhaps he would be made a cabin boy for a famous sea captain and embark on a career, becoming a captain himself one day, a position of great prestige in society.

The overly protective and irascible Mary would hear none of it. She knew that life in the navy would take George away from her on long and dangerous sea voyages. Seamen visiting different ports, especially in the Caribbean, often contracted fatal diseases, too, such as smallpox and tuberculosis. Her half brother, Joseph Ball, who lived in London, supported her decision, writing to her that not only was navy life unhealthy, but that officers would "use him like a Negro, or rather like a dog." He advised her that her son would be better off as "an apprentice to a tinker" than a seaman.

George had no great desire to join the navy, either, even though he seemed fascinated by military life, and raised no objections to his mother's decision to keep him home at Ferry Farm.

George was intrigued by Virginia society and was determined, even as a young teenager, to find an avenue that would permit him to enter it. Toward that goal, he read whatever he could; simple books at first and, later, popular novels such as *Don Quixote* and *Tristram Shandy.* One of his favorite works was *The Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation,* a short guide on how to become a gentleman. Washington read it several times and even copied the entire work in his own handwriting. It would be, he hoped, his guide to upward mobility.

By seventeen, he became a land surveyor, a profession that he thought might help him move into the circles of the rich and influential. Washington had become an expert horseman and learned to read maps and use surveyors' tools left to him by his father. The work gave him a chance to earn money and, best of all, spend long days riding through the countryside. He loved horses almost as much as he loved the rolling farmlands of Virginia. Riding was

a recreation that he enjoyed as a teenager and liked even more as he grew into a young man. He would ride horses just about every day of his life. Even then, onlookers were impressed with Washington's grace and skills as he rode various mounts. "He is a very excellent and bold horseman, leaping the highest fences and going extremely quick without standing upon his stirrups, bearing on the bridle, or letting his horse run wild," noted a man who frequently rode with him. Others said that only the veteran express couriers on their fleet mounts could make the distance between Winchester and Williamsburg faster than Washington.

There was a great need for Washington's services, but many planters had all of their money invested in land, slaves, and farming equipment and could not pay Washington in cash. So they gave him land, a rather common practice, and in a few years the aggressive surveyor owned fourteen hundred acres in addition to Ferry Farm. He also surveyed for counties and towns, earning fees for that work.

Washington had grown into a tall, strong young man. He was often described as "a giant" or "gigantic." He was a muscular man. He had powerful arms and was able to hurl stones and pieces of wood great distances. Once, joking with his friend Fielding Lewis, he bent down, picked up a flat stone, and tossed it quite some distance across the Rappahannock River.

His brother Lawrence convinced him to leave Ferry Farm and move in with him. Moving north to Mount Vernon was full of opportunity to help Lawrence, whom he admired; to meet new people and make friends in Virginia society; and to put some distance between himself and his overbearing mother.

Lawrence's house at Mount Vernon was not a grand mansion at the time. The residence was actually a one-and-a-half story structure with dormer windows jutting out from the roof on the second level—modest compared to most of the plantation homes in the area and downright puny compared to the lavish, three-story-high brick manor house with its huge porch and lengthy driveway at Belvoir, the neighboring plantation, where the Fairfaxes resided.

There at Mount Vernon, having just turned eighteen, George slowly began to indulge himself in the social life of the Virginia

wealthy, a dream since boyhood. He attended Lawrence's dinner parties and those of friends at nearby plantations. He frequented the taverns of Alexandria, Norfolk, Fredericksburg, and Williamsburg and thoroughly enjoyed the camaraderie and entertainment there. Washington became a dedicated card player, keeping close track of his winnings and losings in games at the raucous taverns that served as the center of social life in those communities. He enjoyed drinking tankards of good ale and listening to funny stories and ribald jokes. Although he spoke little and seemed stoic for someone so young, he was an easy man to get along with and soon assimilated into this new world.

Washington learned how to dance, and dance well, during this time, and enjoyed the fast-paced Irish jigs and Virginia reels as much as the traditional, slow minuets. People marveled at how gracefully he moved for such a big man. His superb dancing made him a sought-after guest. His physical strength and endurance made it possible for him to dance for hours, and it was common for him to dance well past midnight at the lavish parties and balls that were frequent throughout the colony. He developed a love of the stage as he approached the age of twenty and went to the theater in Williamsburg as often as he could to see plays presented by local companies or traveling theater troupes, some from London.

The tall surveyor also developed a fondness for ladies during his travels to Williamsburg and, rumor had it, spent time with some of the actresses in the plays he enjoyed so much. Some of these relationships seemed serious to him at the time, and there were a number of them. Many of his paramours were quite young, such as Mary Fairfax, just fourteen. She reminded him of another type of beauty. He wrote to a friend that the girl "revives my former passion for your lowland beauty, whereas was I to live more retired from young women, I might in some measure alleviate my sorrows by burying that chaste and troublesome passion in the grave of oblivion or eternal forgetfulness."

There were a number of lowland beauties in Washington's premartial life. He frequently saw Mary Bland, of Westmoreland County. There was Lucy Grymes, who married Henry Lee and

whose grandson was Robert E. Lee. There was Betsy Fauntleroy, just fifteen, who lived on the large Naylor's Hole plantation on the banks of the Rappahannock.

None of these relationships worked out, though. Washington sulked in letters to friends about his romantic failures, and at times he was reluctant to strike up a new relationship with a woman because he feared that it too would result in rejection.

He was, after all, not a scion of a wealthy family or the descendant of British royalty. He was not a physician or lawyer, just a lowly surveyor. As a soldier later, he was merely an American—not a British—officer. Unlike many of the rich young men of Virginia, he had never sailed to England or toured Europe and had no money for such adventures. He was well-read but had not spent much time in a formal school.

Although he comported himself well in small groups of men, he had great difficulty socializing with women. The gift of easy conversation in mixed company eluded him. ("Speak seldom. A dictatorial style, though it may carry conviction, is always accompanied by disgust," he later wrote.) Washington was the son of a domineering mother who would drive any young woman to distraction and, on top of all that, he had bad teeth. To the young women of Virginia, George Washington was a man who did not have much of a future.

But there was something about Washington that all women and men noticed early. Even while still a teenager, friends recalled that he had always looked calm, poised, and possessed of unusual self-assurance. George Mason, a friend, said he had a "commanding countenance." Thomas Jefferson later wrote that he could not remember Washington speaking for more than ten minutes at any session of the Virginia legislature, but always "to the main point, which was to decide the questions." Another man who knew him well wrote that he was "a modest man, but sensible, and speaks little…like a bishop at his prayers." This stoic persona would serve him well all of his life.

The social life at Mount Vernon that he enjoyed disappeared rapidly in the early 1750s. George found that he had to spend much of his time caring for his brother Lawrence, who suffered

with crippling tuberculosis. Doctors told Lawrence that a trip to a warm-weather climate might help him recover, so in 1751 he and George sailed to Barbados, in the Caribbean. Lawrence did not heal under the hot Caribbean sun, however, and his tuberculosis became worse, not better. George, his caretaker, derived no enjoyment from the tropical island, either. He contracted a bad case of smallpox and was confined to his bed on the hot, sultry island. He survived, but he had light pock marks on his face for the rest of his life.

They returned to Mount Vernon in far worse condition than when they had left. George came home right away and Lawrence sailed to Bermuda for more rest. When Lawrence finally returned to Mount Vernon, his wife, Anne, and George did what they could to care for him, but Lawrence took a turn for the worse and died in the summer of 1752. He left Mount Vernon and its twenty-five hundred acres to his wife. She remarried a year later and leased the plantation to George, who was next in line to inherit it.

Shortly after entering into the lease agreement, the grieving Washington joined the army. Lawrence had used his connections to the Fairfax family to secure George a commission as an adjutant in one of Virginia's two militia companies. The Fairfax family again interceded for George to enable him to fill Lawrence's old post as an officer in the state regiment. The Fairfaxes had considerable political clout in the colony and George Washington knew it. In a letter that showed his own understanding of the need for influential friends, he wrote to his brother Jack that he should get to know the Fairfaxes: "Live in harmony and good fellowship with the family at Belvoir, as it is in their power to be very serviceable upon many occasions to us as young beginners. I would advise your visiting often as one step towards the rest, if any more is necessary, your own good sense will sufficient dictate; for to that family I am under many obligations, particularly to the old gentleman."

Recognition was always important to George. He wrote to William Byrd in 1755 that he was joining the army out of patriotic fervor, but added, "If I can gain *any credit* or if I am entitled to the least countenance or esteem, it must be from serving my country."

He was direct about his desires to use his connections for success, too, writing to his brother Jack a short time later that he planned to make the utmost of his appointment as one of General Braddock's aides so that he could "push my fortune in the military way."

George Washington's militia service came during a time of considerable tension in the colonies. The French government had started to show some swagger in its possessions in the Ohio River valley, and also in the Great Lakes, building forts and securing trade agreements with the Indian tribes of the Iroqouis Confederation residing there. The British and their American colonists feared Indian raids on colonial towns and farms, and a French takeover of the vast North American territories.

Washington entered the service because he saw the military as another stepping stone to the successful life he sought. British officers were held in high esteem in the colonies.

The French incursion into the middle of America made Virginia governor Robert Dinwiddie apprehensive. England insisted that their holdings in the Americas extended all the way to the Mississippi River, halfway across the continent and, some optimistically argued, all the way to the Pacific Ocean. The French countered that they did not. Dinwiddie wanted a strong message sent to the French demanding their evacuation of the area; he chose his brand-new adjutant, young Washington, twenty-one, to carry it.

Washington, the guide Christopher Gist, and a small party traveled from Virginia to a French compound, Fort Le Boeuf, in what is now northern Pennsylvania, in the months of November and December to deliver the message. At the fort they met with the French commander, Jacques Le Gardeur, sieur de Sainte Pierre, and a prominent Indian chief, Half King, who represented the powerful Iroquois Confederation. Washington wrote that the French officer quickly dismissed the governor's letter, "Telling me that it was their absolute design to take possession of the Ohio and by G——they would do it." Washington remembered, too, Half King's contention that the land contested between the French and

English actually belonged to the Indians who lived there. The rejection, and apprehension about the well-armed French soldiers and Indian warriors all around them, made Washington nervous. He wrote in his journal, “I can’t say that ever in my life I suffered so much anxiety as I did in this affair.”

In Dinwiddie’s name, he graciously accepted the French rejection and the Indian warning. He also took a close look at the French soldiers, their weapons, ammunition, and the architecture of their fort, committing all to memory in case he wound up fighting them later.

His return trip to Virginia was far more arduous than his trek north. He and Gist left in mid-December, after winter had set in. Their trip home was plagued by cold fronts, rain, sleet, and storms that dumped several inches of snow on the land. Their first passage was down a shallow creek with fast-running water. Gist wrote, “We were forced to get out, to keep our canoes from oversetting, several times; the water freezing to our clothes.”

They later reached the Allegheny River and traveled down it by raft, but the fast-running waters and sizable chunks of ice caused the raft to become unstable. Washington wrote, “We expected every moment our raft to sink, and ourselves to perish.” Shortly thereafter, the current became too strong for anyone to successfully pole the raft, even the muscular Virginian officer. A beleaguered Washington wrote, “The rapidity of the stream threw [ice sheets] with so much violence against the pole that it jerked me out into ten feet of water.” He nearly drowned, but was lucky enough to grab the side of the raft as it sailed past him.

A party of Indians had followed them for several days and confronted the men. One fired his musket point-blank at Washington but missed. The Virginians fashioned snowshoes and walked the rest of the way back to Williamsburg, exhausted, hungry, half frozen, and having failed in their mission.

The trip had its benefits, however. First, this initial foray into military life intrigued Washington. Second, it showed him that he—anyone—could live through bitter winters if they were ingenious and resilient. Third, it gave him a little taste of fame. Governor

Dinwiddie asked him to keep a diary of his trip and urged him to publish it upon his return. The pamphlet, *The Journal of Major George Washington,* was reprinted in several colonial newspapers and in magazines in Great Britain. Washington found the notoriety much to his liking.

In 1754, Washington was back in the service and ordered to take charge of a half-built fort at the intersection of the Monongahela and Allegheny rivers in western Pennsylvania. On the way, he learned that the French had seized the garrison, completed construction, and named it Fort Duquesne. Then, his men, along with Indian allies, encountered a small French force of thirty-two soldiers and attacked them. Unfortunately for Washington, Monsieur Joseph Coulon de Villiers, sieur de Jumonville, a diplomat, was one of the French soldiers killed in the attack, which had turned into a massacre when the Indians set upon the enemy.

Washington wrote a letter to his brother that was forwarded to Virginia newspapers. In it, he gloated, "I heard the bullets whistle and believe me there was something charming in the sound." The remark, on the heels of the controversial slaying of the diplomat, in what was said to be the first battle of the French and Indian War, brought mixed reaction. The residents of Virginia seemed to appreciate Washington's self-confident and daring language, but his superiors in London were angered. Even King George II was annoyed by the braggadocio, and said of Washington and his bullets that "he would not say so, if he had been used to hear many."

Washington, fearful of other enemy war parties, ordered the construction of the aptly named Fort Necessity nearby. On July 3, a force of eleven hundred French soldiers and Indian allies, led by the slain de Villier's brother, arrived and laid siege to the wooden stockade and captured it. Washington and his men were permitted to march home, humiliated.

Washington came under withering criticism from many sides. Virginia's governor and the House of Burgesses tried to make the best of the rout, even passing a proclamation praising Washington and his men for "gallant and brave behavior."

Badly shaken by his failed first military engagement and the criticism he received, an angry young Washington resigned. Still, even in departure, he acknowledged his love of the military life. He wrote to a friend, William Fitzhugh, “My inclinations are strongly bent to arms.”

He did not remain retired for long. A year later, in 1755, determined to let the world know who controlled North America, England sent one of its best generals, Edward Braddock, with a large and well-supplied army, to march through the Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Ohio regions and crush any French or Indian forces he encountered.

To young Washington, still sulking at Mount Vernon, this was the chance of a lifetime. If he could join this army he would not only have the opportunity to redeem himself, but would share the glory of an historic victory. Best of all, he would serve with the much-heralded Braddock, a man of enormous stature who could surely secure a British Army commission for him. Braddock was glad to have him because Washington knew the landscape, but he took Washington on as an American volunteer and captain, not a British officer.

George Washington possessed two great skills throughout his military life. One, he never made the same mistake twice. Two, he learned everything he could about the enemy. He had done so in his winter trek northward to see the French and in his disastrous encounters with the French and Indians at Fort Necessity. He had learned that Indians traveled light, unencumbered with wagon trains full of supplies. They struck quickly and, if they lost, escaped just as quickly. Indians never attacked an enemy head-to-head in an open field. They lurked in the woods and fought in the brush, or they ambushed a foe.

He gave that information to General Braddock as the highly visible British Army, with its armada of wagons and military bands, inched slowly and noisily westward. Indians had trailed the army, picking off stragglers and scalping them. Washington could feel their ominous presence in the woods. He begged Braddock to move faster.

Washington fell ill with a high fever and stayed behind; he did not catch up with the army until July 7. The sick Virginian arrived on his horse, fragile and still extremely weak, the pains in his stomach bothering him, a pillow tied to his saddle to ease a case of painful hemorrhoids. The very next day the army was ambushed by the French and Indians as it marched down a narrow dirt road in a forest in the Pennsylvania wilderness, just as Washington had feared.

The French soldiers and their Indian allies were in the woods when the ambush started. Braddock began to line his soldiers up in standard defensive military formations in the center of the clearing near the edge of the road where they were trapped. The soldiers were easy targets in their bright red coats and rigid formations. To Washington, they seemed immobilized. Washington sought out Braddock and told him that those types of formations would not work in the battle that was commencing. They had to attack the Indians in the woods and not leave large groups of men exposed and practically defenseless in the open. He asked for permission to take several hundred men into the forest and assault the French and their Indians, fighting the Indians just as the Indians fought everyone else. Braddock turned him down.

There was no time for a second plea because the attack against the British began with a thunderous volley of guns, accompanied by shrill war whoops as the Indians emerged from the woods. A rain of arrows flew through the air along with the musket balls, and within minutes dozens of British soldiers began to fall, dead or wounded, their blood splattering on the crisp, clean uniforms of those standing next to them. The redcoats had little chance in the ambush, as Washington could see from his position on the field. The problem for the English was that most of the men being killed were officers. Braddock lost sixty-three of his eighty-six officers in the skirmish; there were few officers left to direct the men as the fusillade of musket balls continued.

Washington reined in his horse and began to ride across the battlefield to direct men himself. It was a bold move, and he nearly paid for it with his life. He had two horses shot dead underneath him. He himself was shot four times; miraculously, the musket

balls merely tore into his clothing and did not hit his body. Apprehensive, but fearless, the Virginian continued to rally the troops.

Then, across the field, he watched as General Braddock was shot in the chest and fell. The general was severely wounded; now there was no leadership. Washington turned and rode toward the wounded general, surrounded by some officers. It was an eerie scene. Braddock was bleeding badly, his shirt and jacket soaked in crimson, and his men were trying to save him amid the roar of gunfire and the hailstorm of musket balls. All around them men fell to the ground screaming.

Displaying a coolness under fire that would later become his trademark, Washington dismounted and began to give orders. He had several men get a stretcher. At Washington's direction, the general was lifted up, placed on it, and hastily carried off the field. The Virginian then began to shout precise orders for an organized retreat. He took command of the army and moved them out of the clearing and through a wooded area back toward the road on which they had arrived.

The British had suffered a devastating defeat that day, with nine hundred of their fourteen hundred troops killed or wounded. Braddock died a few days after the battle; he thanked Washington for saving the regiment and for trying to save his life. To protect Braddock's body from mutilation by the Indians, Washington ordered him buried beneath the roadway and the ground covered over to make it appear undisturbed. Washington then had the army move out in an attempt to put as much distance as possible between the British and the enemy. It worked. The army escaped without a further attack, was able to regroup, and then make its way to safety. Washington's actions had prevented a disaster.

Upon his return to Williamsburg, the twenty-three-year-old officer was applauded for his bravery and leadership. His uncle, Joseph Ball, wrote to him that it was the rash conduct of Braddock that had brought about the defeat, and praised his nephew. "You have behaved yourself in such a martial spirit in all your engagements with the French [since the] Ohio. Go on as you have begun; and God prosper you."

He was the hero of the hour, a man who showed courage under fire. The grateful governor promoted him to colonel, gave him a bonus, and put him in charge of the entire one thousand-man Virginia regiment. Dinwiddie wrote to the state legislature about the soldiers and Washington that "the natural bravery of our countrymen, if ever questioned, is now established beyond a doubt, by those Virginia forces who purchased, with their lives, immortal glory to their country and themselves on the banks of the Monongahela."

Washington's newfound prominence was pleasing for a while, but the French and Indian War was not fought in Virginia. Most of the activity took place in Canada, New York, and the New England states, with some action in the Ohio territory. There was little for Washington to do with his new post except serve as an administrator of several frontier forts. In that capacity he led several campaigns against rumored Indian raiding parties, but found few. He recruited troops for the frontier militia, represented the state with local public officials, and supervised the construction of some garrisons. He gained a reputation as an able administrator, an efficient military leader, and a harsh disciplinarian who meted out frequent lashings for soldier transgressions. He boasted that he had a gallows in his fort and was not afraid to use it to punish his men if necessary.

Over his years in the service, Washington had become a highly praised officer, even though his efforts to gain a commission had failed. He kept his superiors and political figures well-informed about the activities at his posts, was honest with them and his men, and seemed hardworking and productive. He was a military administrator who demanded order and discipline in his camps and forts, and he was an officer who paid attention to every tiny detail. He was directly involved in every aspect of the management of his military posts. These were all skills that would serve him well when he became the administrator of a large plantation when he returned to civilian life, and even more so when events later brought him back to the military.

There was little action for the Virginia regiment on the frontier, though, and Washington became bored. He was appalled when

the 1757 militia draft in Virginia produced several hundred fewer soldiers than the required twelve hundred. He complained that the soldiers had no training, telling the governor that they were "[incapable of] defending themselves…or afford any protection to the inhabitants."

Washington was frustrated and began to engage in small political feuds with Dinwiddie, who found fault with his work as head of the regiment. Washington insisted that Dinwiddie pay him the respect he had earned in his years on the frontier. Washington wrote, "No man that was ever employed in a public capacity has endeavored to discharge the trust reposed in him with greater honesty and more zeal for the country's interest than I have done."

He knew, too, that even though he had impressed all of the officers in Braddock's army, he could not obtain a commission as an officer in the regular army because he was a Virginian. He had been an American officer with the army or the state militia since the age of twenty and now, at twenty-four, he was no closer to a much-desired commission. He vented his frustrations to John Campbell, the Earl of Loudon, the new British general in Virginia, in the winter of 1756–1757, telling him that the orders he received were "full of ambiguity" and left him "like a wanderer in the wilderness."

Friends and family tried to convince him to remain in the service and assured him that all Virginians thought highly of him, as did his officers, who lionized him. His half brother Augustine wrote to him, "I am certain that your character does not in the least suffer here. You are in as great esteem as ever with the governor here and especially the House of Burgesses. Don't give up your commission."

At the same time, he realized that Mount Vernon had fallen into disrepair because of his absence. Buildings had collapsed, some cattle and hogs had vanished, and crops were badly harvested. The plantation was in such dismal shape that the front lawn of the main house had turned brown and had to be reseeded. Washington had ordered a large amount of supplies from London

to refurbish the home, including parts of a chimney, wallpaper for five rooms, mahogany tables and chairs, and two hundred and fifty window panes, but he was not around to receive them. Washington's neighbor and close friend, George Fairfax, along with a plantation manager, John Patterson, had to oversee repairs to the main house, outbuildings, and slave quarters in Washington's continued absence. They needed decisions from him concerning the renovations, but he was far away.

But the talk around Virginia in the winter of 1757–1758 was not about repairs to Mount Vernon or whether or not Washington would remain in the service. People began to wonder when, or if ever, George Washington would settle down, marry, and raise a family. He was nearly twenty-six, past the age when most men in the gentry married.

All of the colonel's problems were put aside when, at the end of the winter of 1757, George Washington became gravely ill. He fell victim to dysentery, which afflicted many in that era, but his doctors on the frontier had no cure for it. His army doctor, James Craik, a Scotsman, bled Washington several times, the standard practice of the day, to rid his body of tainted blood. It did no good and Washington became bedridden and "unable to walk," according to Craik. The doctor told army officers that their colonel's problems in his bowels and lungs seemed to be incurable by bleeding and medicines. A medicine to cure him of one thing made him ill with something else or, as the confused Craik wrote, "as what is good for him in one respect hurts him in another." He told the colonel to go home, rest, and hope for the best.

Washington's condition deteriorated, and he was bedridden at Mount Vernon for nearly six months. Washington wrote to Dr. Craik that his health was getting worse, not better. He, too, assured him that all he needed to be cured was plenty of rest. Washington was so ill that he actually thought he was going to die, writing an army friend that "wherever I go, or whatever becomes of me, I shall always possess the sincerest and most affectionate regards for you."

It was at that time that the tangled romance he shared with the lovely Sally Fairfax reached its apex. He had met the slim, beautiful, dark-haired Sally, the eldest of the four Cary sisters, daughters of a wealthy Virginia businessman, nearly ten years before when he moved to Mount Vernon to live with his brother Lawrence. Sally had married his friend and next-door neighbor George Fairfax. Washington and Sally had become close friends—very close. Young Washington had become infatuated with the adorable Sally, who was two years older than he. His feelings for her grew deeper as the years went by, despite his friendship with her husband.

George and Sally exchanged letters frequently, beginning in 1755, when Washington was on the frontier with the army. The contents were unknown, but the few that survived indicated that Sally was a hopeless flirt, and George was smitten with her. Ordinary letters from friends in the Potomac region or from those who visited Mount Vernon in his absence often carried postscripts that Sally had sent her regards, or wished him well, or was looking forward to his return.

In 1755 he came back to Mount Vernon after General Braddock had been killed to find a letter from William Fairfax welcoming him. In her lovely handwriting, Sally took it upon herself to write the tantalizing postscript: "Dear sir, after thanking heaven for your safe return, I must accuse you of great unkindness in refusing us the pleasure of seeing you this night. I do assure you that nothing but our being satisfied that our company would be disagreeable should prevent us from trying if our legs would not carry us to Mount Vernon, but if you will not come to us tomorrow morning very early, we shall be at Mount Vernon."

George's brother John "Jack" Augustine, who had been spending time at Mount Vernon, had married and moved far away, leaving the ailing George alone with his servants in the mansion on the Potomac when he returned so sick from the army. At that same time, William Fairfax died. His son George had to travel to England for several months to settle his father's estate. He left his wife Sally alone at Belvoir, next door to Washington.

It was apparent that winter and summer, even as he was planning to marry Martha Custis, that Sally and George tumbled deeper into a romance, the depth of which is not clear. He sent her a note upon his arrival at Mount Vernon to let her know how sick he was and asked if she could help him obtain medicines in Alexandria. These included jellies, hyson tea, and a wine mixed with gum arabic. She did so immediately, riding to Alexandria herself or sending slaves. She could see how sick he was when she saw him the day after his return. Sally visited him frequently at Mount Vernon in her newfound role as nurse. No one knows how often Mrs. Fairfax traveled to see her bachelor neighbor in his bed, how long she stayed, or what was said between them. There is no record of what servants, if any, lingered in the house while she was there in George's bedroom, helping him recover.

Sally was a classic coquette. She was gorgeous and she knew it. Men were attracted to her and she enjoyed their arousal. She flirted with older men as well as young ones, and even flirted with General Braddock when he passed through Alexandria. Sally was a tease and continually kept Washington dangling throughout the years prior to George's marriage. In his letters, Washington constantly asked her, in a roundabout way, if she loved him. There was never a concrete answer. He asked her to write to him frequently but she did not. Early on, in 1756, she even told him to stop writing to her because she did not think the relationship a healthy one. At another point, she said he should only communicate with her through a girlfriend. Sometimes he was welcomed at Belvoir and sometimes he was not. She even had her sister write Washington a curt note telling him to leave Sally alone. He did not. The two played out a classic dance of courtship for years, although no one knows how far it actually went.

The pair developed very deep affection for each other during those years and might have been in love with each other by 1757. Washington's only two existing letters to her clearly indicate this. He wrote her this halting, disorganized, but heartfelt letter on September 12, 1758:

"I profess myself a votary to love. I confess that this lady is known to you. Yes, madam, as well as she is to one, who is too sensible of her charms to deny the power, whose influence he feels and must ever submit to. I feel the force of her amiable beauties in the recollections of a thousand tender passages that I could wish to obliterate, till I am bid to revive them. But experience alas! sadly reminds me how impossible this is—and evinces an opinion which I have long entertained, that there is a destiny which has the sovereign control of our actions, not to be resisted by the strongest efforts of human nature.

"The world has no business to know the object of my love, declared in this manner to you—when I want to conceal it. One thing, above all things in this world I wish to know, and only one person of your acquaintance can solve me that, or guess my meaning, but adieu to this, till happier times, if I shall ever see them."

In the letter, in direct and unmistakable language, Washington told Sally that they were destined for each other, even if in secret. He told her that "the world has no business to know the object of my love, declared in this manner to you."

Two weeks later, on September 25, he sent her another tender letter, referencing secret lovers in the 1713 novel *Cato.* He wrote, "Do we still misunderstand the true meaning of each other's letters? I think it must appear so, though I would feign hope the contrary as I cannot speak plainer without—but I'll say no more, and leave you to guess the rest…I should think my time more agreeable spent, believe me, in playing a part in *Cato* with the company you mention and myself double happy in being the Juba to such a Marcia as you must make."

But perhaps the strongest sentiments he expressed to Sally did not come then, when he was a young man, but long afterward, in 1798, just before he died. Sally's husband George Fairfax had died in England, and Washington wrote Sally one last letter, approved by his wife. In it, he told her that "the happiest moments in my life" were the ones "I have enjoyed in your company." Belvoir had burned down in 1783 in a fire that might have been caused by lightning. George Washington often rode over to Belvoir, each

time looking at the ruins and remembering events there. He wrote to the Fairfaxes a line surely intended for Sally, "I could not trace a room in the house [in the ruins] that did not bring to my mind recollections of pleasing scenes."

Sally's loving care and frequent visits in 1757 and the crude medicines of local doctors did very little to help him, though, and his health did not improve as winter deepened and several snowfalls covered the grounds of Mount Vernon. Finally, in March 1758, fed up with his doctors and angry that he was not getting any better, Washington traveled to Williamsburg to visit to Dr. John Anson, one of the colony's most experienced surgeons, in his office on one of the town's narrow lanes. Washington had convinced himself that he never had dysentery. He was certain that he actually had tuberculosis, the same disease that killed his brother Lawrence. Anson, he believed, would tell him that. But the physician did not. The doctor gave Washington a thorough examination and confirmed earlier diagnoses of dysentery. He did not have tuberculosis, Anson said; he would get better, and would hopefully live a long life.

Although his health was still fragile, Washington's spirits now soared. He could return to the regiment. Anson probably told him to remain at Mount Vernon for a few more weeks or months until he was better. The doctor gave him some medicines to help ease his pain. Washington left Williamsburg on horseback a week later, accompanied by Thomas Bishop. On his way home, he realized that he was close to the home of friend William Chamberlayne and decided to take a ferry across the Pamunkey River, a branch of the wider York River, and pay him a visit.

There he saw Martha Custis.