

Frequently Asked Questions

ABOUT THE DIG:

When did you first suspect you had discovered what could be the remains of the house, and how?

There were three areas that were candidates for the house. We excavated the first two areas and found the remains of houses belonging to other owners, then we turned our attention to the third area of interest. After one field season in this third area, we were having trouble understanding what we were uncovering because we had not opened up a large enough area. This problem was remedied in the next field season and we began to suspect that we had located the Washington house. The size, characteristics and location of the structure all suggested a possible Washington affiliation.

How did you conclude that these are the remains of the actual house in which George Washington lived?

The conclusion process is two-fold. First, as we obtained more data, other possible interpretations became more and more infeasible. For example, the large size of the structure rules out the possibility that it was any of a number of outbuildings. The second part of the process is recovering artifacts that indicate the age and function of surviving elements of the structure. We excavated several building elements, some of which dated to the original construction of the house, some that were later additions and some that were filled in by the destruction of the house. This data was compared to documentary evidence, period paintings and written recollections about the house.

How large was the house?

The walls were 53 feet, 8-1/2 inches by 28 feet, 4 inches. One long side faced the Rappahannock River.

Ferry Farm has long been known as the boyhood home of George Washington; why hasn't the house been uncovered already?

Several people have claimed to have found the Washington house. For example, early in the 20th century, the farmer who owned Ferry Farm claimed to have built his house on the remains of the Washington house, but this was not true. Archaeology is a relatively new field, and there were few serious attempts to find the house. Two attempts were made in the 1990s, but the scale of those searches was so small that the chances of success were greatly reduced and both attempts failed.

How many people have you had working on the site during the project time period?

Each field season (late spring into early fall) is different. The largest team included about 35 people, and the 2008 team has 21 members.

How did you find/choose your archaeologists and researchers?

David Muraca came from Colonial Williamsburg, where he specialized in large-scale excavations of plantations. Philip Levy's doctorate is from the College of William and Mary, and his archaeological training was obtained at Rich Neck plantation, located outside Jamestown, Va. He has operated his own excavations in the past, including the Nassau Street site in Williamsburg, Va. He is also an expert in colonial history and has written extensively about colonial architecture.

Who were the consultants who helped confirm the find?

The discovery of the home was verified by several independent specialists, including Julia King, noted historical archaeologist and associate professor at St. Mary's College; Myron Stachiw, historian, architectural historian, archaeologist and curator; Mark Wenger, architect at Mesick, Cohen, Wilson, Baker, Architects; and Raymond Cannetti, stonemason and restorer.

How is the project being funded?

Funding is derived from a combination of individual, corporate and government sources, including The Commonwealth of Virginia, the Dominion Foundation (the philanthropic arm of Dominion) and National Geographic Society.

ABOUT THE RECONSTRUCTION:

What structures will be reconstructed?

Structures that were standing during the 1740s are being considered for reconstruction. This includes, but is not limited to, the house, kitchen and possibly a slave quarter. Other buildings may be added as they are discovered.

When will the reconstruction begin? And how long will it take to complete?

Reconstruction is expected to begin in 2011 to 2012, but surveys and the development of master plans, concept designs and schematics for exhibits are expected to take place in the next 24 months.

How much will the reconstruction cost?

Details and costs are in process as plans emerge.

How will you ensure the historical accuracy of the home during its reconstruction?

A team of experts has been assembled, including archaeologists, architectural historians and colonial historians. The team will use three distinct data sets to ensure historical accuracy: the physical remains of the house and its associated artifacts; documents, paintings and recorded recollections; and existing 18th-century structures.

Who will be responsible for the reconstruction?

Rebekah Wood, director of architectural restoration at The George Washington Foundation, will oversee the reconstruction efforts.

Will the reconstructed house be open to the public once it is complete?

Yes. The house will serve as a stage for education programs about George Washington and 18th-century life.

ABOUT FERRY FARM:

For what is Ferry Farm currently used?

Currently, Ferry Farm is a historic-site museum.

When was the plantation acquired by the Washington family?

Augustine Washington moved his family to Ferry Farm in 1738, where they remained until 1772.

Who occupied the land before George Washington and his family?

William Strother and his family. Strother was a member of the local gentry.

Who purchased the property from the Washington family?

Hugh Mercer, a brigadier general, purchased the farm in 1774. He died shortly after he bought the property, during the Revolutionary War.

What was Ferry Farm used for during the Civil War?

There was a farm on the property at the beginning of the Civil War, but the occupants fled some time before the Battle of Fredericksburg. Union soldiers used the farmhouse as their headquarters before they tore it down for firewood.

Are there any remaining structures?

There are no remaining structures from the Washington period and none from the Civil War era, but there is one remaining 19th-century structure on the property. It is currently referred to as the surveyor's shed because for many years it was thought to date back to Washington's time. A legend grew that this building was where George Washington taught himself surveying. Recent research, however, indicates that the structure was built after 1870.

When did interest in preserving Ferry Farm arise?

At the beginning of the 20th century. Preservation efforts for Ferry Farm escalated just before the 1932 bicentennial of Washington's birth.

What type of wildlife can be seen on the property?

Small mammals can be seen on the property including squirrels, rabbits, groundhogs, foxes, beaver and deer. In addition, reptiles such as turtles and snakes, as well as hundreds of species of birds, including turkeys and eagles, can be seen on Ferry Farm.

Does the federal government recognize Ferry Farm as being a national monument?

It is on the National Register of Historic Places and is a National Historic Landmark. The National Park Service holds a preservation easement on the property, and it is part of the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network.

From where is funding for upkeep of the grounds derived?

Upkeep is funded through individual, corporate and foundation support as well as admission fees.

Can I volunteer at Ferry Farm?

Yes, Ferry Farm accepts volunteers. Information and a printable version of the volunteer application is available on our Web site, www.ferryfarm.org.

Where can I find more information about visiting Ferry Farm?

For more information, visit our Web site, www.ferryfarm.org.

ABOUT THE WASHINGTONS:

How did the Washington family become so wealthy/influential/powerful?

The Washington family actually was not very wealthy. Augustine Washington had procured several plantations and interest in an iron furnace, but the family was by no means at the top of the social ladder. They were well-off regional elites. George and Lawrence, his brother, both married well and subsequently moved into the top stratum of Virginia society.

How many Washington family members lived at Ferry Farm?



Initially, eight Washingtons, including Augustine, Mary Ball, George, Betty, Samuel, John, Charles and later, Mildred, lived on the estate. Several slaves lived on the property as well.

How old was George when he arrived at Ferry Farm, and how long did he live there?

George was six when he arrived and he remained at the farm until he was nearly 20 (perhaps as late as 1753). As George grew up, he spent some time away from Ferry Farm but came home often.

How much land did George acquire from his father's will?

From his father's will, George acquired the 600-acre Ferry Farm and a few lots in Fredericksburg, Va.

Where did George receive his education?

George might have crossed the river to study in Fredericksburg, Va. at the school kept by the Reverend James Marye, rector of St. George's Parish.

What were the major events in George's life that took place while he lived at Ferry Farm?

- George's sister Mildred died in 1740.
- The house caught on fire on Christmas Eve, 1740, and was repaired.
- George's father died in 1743.
- George learned surveying.
- He learned how to behave in society by writing out the "Rules of Civility" (a book of etiquette based on maxims in a 1595 French manuscript).
- He applied for his first military appointment on June 10, 1752. This letter is now in the collection of the Foundation and was generated at Ferry Farm.
- George became a Mason at Fredericksburg Masonic Lodge #4 on November 4, 1752, while still living at Ferry Farm.

What events occurred on the property in the years following the Washingtons' residency?

The property was leased, then sold and tenants were installed at the farm. Civil War occupation, destroyed the house along with outbuildings, crops, landscape features and livestock. Nothing remained on the landscape after the Civil War.

How long did Mary Ball Washington remain at the farm?

She remained until 1772, when her son George bought her a house in the town of Fredericksburg, Va., near her daughter Betty. Mary was 64.