

The Birthplace

During its 2008 annual reunion, the National Society of Washington Family Descendants scheduled a luncheon and visit to the George Washington Birthplace National Monument ('the birthplace'). Being dually honored as a member of both organizations and a frequent visitor to the birthplace, I wanted to share with you, my cousins, what sights and sounds you will enjoy during your upcoming visit.

My first visit to the birthplace was to have my sons, then ages 8 and 10, enjoy a hands-on experience at a national monument which was connected to our family's forefathers. I was pleasantly surprised by the overwhelming sense of home and tranquility the birthplace gave me on that and each subsequent visit. Whether making your maiden or returning trip, you can expect to find the same.

The George Washington Birthplace National Monument is located in a pristine and remote setting 35 miles east of Fredericksburg, Virginia. Once you leave Fredericksburg, the surroundings become increasingly agrarian and turn to rural farm land peppered by the occasional house. You leave the city and its hustle and bustle behind as you venture towards George Washington's birthplace, and it's easy to imagine it looks the same as it did in centuries past. As you make the final turn to approach the birthplace you see a Washington Monument in the distance. This smaller version of its Washington DC inspiration marks the entry to our family tree's point of origin.

The acreage of the birthplace is composed of the working farm which includes the Memorial House, the burial grounds and a picnicking area.

As you enter the working farm area and the site of the Memorial House, you walk past a crushed oyster shell outline which marks the original foundation of the house in which George Washington was born. The actual house burned to the ground on Christmas Day in 1779, and the original foundation was never again built upon, lost in fact until the Wakefield National Memorial Association, predecessor of the George Washington Birthplace Association, raised funds to build a memorial house on the site to commemorate George Washington's 200th birthday. The original foundation was excavated in its entirety, but to preserve the actual brick foundation it was reburied and has remained buried four feet below the ground's surface since that time.

Adjacent to the outline of the original foundation is a lovely Colonial Revival garden which has been planted with those herbs which were listed in Mary Ball's letters, and not far there is a building which houses a two-room kitchen. During special events, costumed park staff roasts chicken and bake hoe cakes and apple pies. A coffee grinder that was excavated from the site sits on the mantle. Down the walkway from the kitchen is the brick Memorial House.

The clay used for the house's bricks were formed from clay from the farm and fired on-site. At the house's entrance stands a spacious center hall paneled with beautiful pine wainscoting from wood harvested from the site. Other rooms in the house include the

dining room, with a port bottle owned by John Washington; a withdrawing room that houses a tea table from the original house; and bedrooms, one of which is adorned with a quilt crafted by a local quilt guild after antique quilts in the Washington Birthplace Quilt Collection, and other spectacular treasures.

Just next to the house stands a 250-year-old Hackberry tree. This tree has witnessed two centuries of our family's and country's history, and it is just a prelude to the other spectacular views outside the house. Serene Pope's Creek surrounds a small island which is occupied and surrounded by tundra swans. These white swans with their distinctive black beaks migrate to the island every December. The water on the creek is so still that it looks like glass.

On the opposite side of the Memorial House sprawls the rolling farm land and farm animals. The birthplace has strived to maintain the same breeds of animals that the Washington farm raised, including Hog Island sheep, Ossabawa hogs, cattle, oxen and horses. Additional outbuildings on the farm include fowl houses, a blacksmith shop and a craft house. All the sights and sounds remain now as they were when the family farmed the land over 200 years ago.

On the opposite side of the park is the Washington family burial ground, near the original John Washington home site. Memorials to our forefathers and mothers are located within a brick enclosure from which one can see Virginia, Pope's Creek and the Potomac as they saw it.

I hope you will enjoy your upcoming visit to the birthplace and remember it with the sense of peace and home-coming to this wonderful Virginia landmark as I do.

Submitted by Linda Luphsa, 2008

Thanks to Melissa Easley, the National Park Service guide, who provided Mrs. Luphsa with much of the detail for this article.