COMMEMORATION OF WASHINGTON

Two hundred and fifty years ago this November, with an eviction notice in hand from the Governor of Virginia to the French military commander in western Pennsylvania, twenty-one-year-old George Washington launched a career of public service unsurpassed in American history. He is one of those relatively few individuals who personally changed the course of world events in very significant ways.

Mr. and Mrs. David B. Walters have recently presented the Clements Library with a marvelous, seven-page letter written by George Washington in 1793, while he was President. They will be donating other materials in the future. The letter is addressed to the estate manager at Mount Vernon. As with many great leaders in history, Washington paced himself. He appreciated the importance of relaxation. Horseback riding, taking care of personal correspondence and accounts, entertaining at dinner with good food and conversation, and thinking about the Mount Vernon estate were the ways he could “turn it off” and restore the energy, composure, and mental sharpness needed to deal with his public life.

Mount Vernon was a world completely his, where he did not have to hold back and be political, but could indulge his personal enthusiasms to the fullest. He invented all sorts of projects to improve the farm and its buildings, planning each with carefully executed drawings and charts beforehand, measuring their successes afterwards. The donated letter documents clearly that George Washington was a demanding person to work for. He micro-managed his employees.

In public, Washington never relaxed. He was a commanding presence—tall, powerful, and formidable—not someone you ever trifled with.

Among his closest friends and his family he was gentle, indulgent, and fun to be with. The public, formal side of the man is documented by vast quantities of written records and first-hand descriptions. The private Washington is less well recorded. It did not help that Martha Washington destroyed the majority of her personal correspondence with her husband, or that Gilbert Stuart intentionally emphasized the forbidding qualities of the aged President in the portraits most often used to picture him for posterity. Nor did it help that the next two generations of Americans preferred to think of Washington as an idealized, god-like figure rather than as a human being.

To mark the accession of the recently donated letter, the Clements Library staff decided to dedicate the summer of 2003 to remembering George Washington. The Director has mounted a very special exhibit entitled “George Washington: Getting to Know the Man Behind the Image” that will run to November 21. It draws upon remarkable original letters and documents, both from the Library’s collections and from private sources. It is Washington’s voluminous literary output—especially his letters, to which we have much greater access than did earlier generations—that provides a way to understand him as a person. The exhibit focuses on examining the factors that made George Washington such a unique person and the personal characteristics that made him the most successful leader in American history. We will also host several events associated with the exhibit, to be announced separately.

As with most issues of the Quarto, we have attempted to serve up a few appetizers on a subject that currently interests the staff, based upon the Library’s very substantive collections on the subject. Should the “hors d’oeuvres” tempt any of you, we invite any and all to come to the Clements and sample the “main course.”

—John C. Dann
Director
On October 19th, 1781, at Yorktown, Virginia, British general Earl Cornwallis’s surrender to General George Washington signaled that the endgame phase of the American Revolution had begun. "The World Turned Upside Down" was among the tunes played that day by British regulars as they laid down their arms in front of the combined American and French forces. The shocking news of the surrender caused celebration throughout the United States and despair in Britain. Visual images were required to make the unbelievable believable.

Although there are many detailed reports of Cornwallis’s surrender and many graphic images in paint and ink, none is a true eyewitness depiction, drawn on the spot. American, French, British, and German participants were present, along with many spectators, but none is known to have recorded a picture of the event that finalized the break between the colonies and the crown. The lack of a definitive eyewitness illustration opened the door for artistic interpretation with a varying and interesting range of results that recreate, imagine, and interpret the meaning of the surrender.

To be most satisfying to an American audience, the image of Cornwallis’s capitulation had to represent aspects of the American point of view, including the transition of political power and the stature and dignity of Washington as the representative of the new nation. Of course, Cornwallis himself could serve as a powerful symbol of the defeated British crown, particularly if shown as humiliated and frustrated. Yet, from accounts of the surrender ceremony, we know that Cornwallis was not there. After having completed the emotionally difficult negotiation of surrender terms, Cornwallis excused himself from the actual ceremonial presentation of his sword to his enemy. He had taken ill, or was likely too distraught to endure the proceedings. The opening sentence of Cornwallis’s letter to his commander in chief, Sir Henry Clinton, uses the word “mortification” to describe his emotional state. It would not be surprising if he simply could not bear to be present. But, for a completely satisfying portrayal of this unprecedented event, Cornwallis himself had to be in the image, and that is what we have in many early illustrations of the surrender at Yorktown.

A little American engraving from The Life of George Washington by Aaron Bancroft (1826) rings true to the larger concept of American victory with simplicity and directness but is nothing like what actually occurred. We know that British General Charles O’Hara, commander of the Second Battalion of Guards, represented the absent Cornwallis. In a spiteful gesture, O’Hara attempted to surrender Cornwallis’s sword to the French but was directed by General Rochambeau to Washington. American General Benjamin Lincoln, who had surrendered Charleston to Henry Clinton in 1780, was granted the privilege of receiving the sword — and the satisfaction of honorably returning it.

The engraving from Bancroft’s book illustrates British recognition of the now-established American independence and power, symbolized by a red-faced Cornwallis giving up his sword directly to a cool and distinguished Washington. Cornwallis faces his mortification alone, his aide turns away, while Washington is supported by a group of his officers and French allies. A very satisfying little print.

Ironically, the Bancroft engraving was based on the work of a British artist, Robert Smirke (1752-1845). King George III had denied Smirke an appointment as Keeper of the Royal Academy, and it has been speculated that this was an attempt to contain the spread of the artist’s freely expressed revolutionary opinions. Whether Smirke’s depiction of Cornwallis came from ignorance of the details or from deliberate manipulation is unclear.

From the other side of the Atlantic, a British print, engraved for Edward Barnard’s The New, Comprehensive, Impartial and Complete History of England (1783), contrasts sharply with the previous...
example. Barnard's image partly lives up to its claim of "Impartiality, Accuracy, New Improvements, Superior Elegance, &c." Although vague in some details, it is closer to the actual event but farther away from the greater concept of acknowledging the exchange of power in America. In Barnard's hand-colored engraving the figure of Cornwallis meets Washington with a pride and bearing that is at least equal to that of the conquerors. The central figure here is the British officer, looking not the slightest bit mortified, physically greater in stature than the marginal American. British colors are unfurled, and trumpets are sounding. France is represented on the sidelines by a submissive figure (Rochambeau) of lesser significance. Elegance, yes. Impartiality, no.

An entertaining and fanciful print by Louis-Joseph Mondhare (circa 1781) represents a somewhat partisan French view of the surrender. Those are the Americans, way off in the distant background on the left, with the resplendent French army lined up in front, nearer to the viewer. The triumphant French fleet under the Comte de Grasse is prominent in the right foreground, and the British are spilling out of the formidable citadel that represents Yorktown. Mondhare's hand-colored etching is one of a series designed for viewing in a "vue d'optique"—a table-top device that expands the illusion of three-dimensional depth with a large convex lens and mirror.

The story told by this celebratory image is of a colossal French victory over an entrenched arch-rival. Oh yes, the Americans were there too. This amazing view is typical of European products created by imaginative artists, who were unfamiliar with American topography. The depiction of a medieval walled "Yorck town" would not seem at all far-fetched to residents of fortified European cities. Apparently, the French needed to report a victory over rival Britain badly enough to co-opt this celebration almost completely. Notable individuals such as Washington are nowhere to be seen, but there are plenty of happy European-looking celebrants.

Another French point of view is presented in a more detailed scene that provides the title cartouche for Louis Brion de La Tour's 1782 map of the southern theater of the American war. Is it Cornwallis himself who is offering his sword to Washington, as the illustration title implies? Or is it a French officer who is receiving or deferring the gesture of surrender to the Americans? Perhaps the afterglow of a successful French alliance with the Americans resulted in a fairly accurate rendering of the scene.

Although the characters are vague, details of uniforms and stacked arms are crisp and believable. Once again, a European engraver has determined that an impressive gate of a walled Yorktown is the most suitable backdrop for such an important drama. French, British, and American heraldic devices displayed on a palm tree (a common icon identifying the scene as American) represent the key players. As a whole, this image is full of life, and the redcoat covering his eyes registers a classic expression of disbelief and shock that victors would want to see.

Probably the best known and most accurate image of the surrender was created by John Trumbull, a former Continental Army officer and aide-de-camp to Washington. True to facts, Washington is not receiving the sword of Cornwallis, nor is he central to the exchange, yet he is clearly presiding over the scene from a position of dignified superiority, even if in the background.
Following the example set by Benjamin West in his “The Death of General Wolfe,” Trumbull strove for a combination of realism and immortalization in an image. The painting that resulted from his extensive research is accurate in the portraits of the major figures and generally true to the choreography of the event. But, as an artist of his time, Trumbull’s task was twofold. A successful eighteenth-century history painter would be expected to manipulate the components of the image to both record the event and, more important, build the legend of the central figure, in this case Washington. If he varied from the literal truth to do so, it is because it was necessary to complete the task of commemoration.

Prior to the design of his “Surrender of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia, October 19th, 1781,” Trumbull traveled Europe and the United States, painting portraits of the major participants and sketching the fields at Yorktown. He added Washington’s portrait in New York in February or March 1790. Trumbull’s familiarity with the subject was unmatched. However, we know that O’Hara was actually on horseback, and General Lincoln was likely facing him. Trumbull sketched more than one variation of the composition before he decided on the final form, which we see here in a late nineteenth-century photogravure print.

In spite of John Trumbull’s carefully researched and balanced composition, something is lacking. It is the great satisfaction of seeing Washington grasp the sword directly from his enemy, Cornwallis. There are times when followers need to see their leader and champion with the trophy actually in hand to fully believe and celebrate the reality of the victory. At Yorktown, this only happened in the fiction of prints. In some ways, the fanciful small engravings and woodcuts are far more sophisticated and satisfying to an American patriot than all of Trumbull’s efforts.

— Clayton Lewis
Curator of Graphic Materials

John Trumbull produced the most accurate impression of the surrender ceremony, though it includes its own artistic licenses. Photogravure print published in 1898 by A.W. Elson & Co. of Boston.
f the many paintings and prints of George Washington executed during his lifetime, Edward Savage’s *The Washington Family* particularly delighted the President. The painting and first print, engraved by Savage and David Edwin (1776-1841), were a decade in the making. They depict Washington seated at a table with his wife, Martha, surrounded by her grandchildren, George Washington Parke Custis and Eleanor Parke Custis, and their servant William Lee.

The scene is one of domestic tranquility and studiousness. All are relaxed, with Washington dressed in his uniform, his sword and hat on the table atop a map of Washington, D.C., to which Martha points with her fan. Young George Custis casually supports one of the President’s arms on his left shoulder while holding a compass above a globe with his right hand. Eleanor Custis looks on between them, while William Lee stands attentively in the background. The curtains are open to what portends to be the Potomac from Mount Vernon.

Edward Savage (1761-1817) was a prominent Massachusetts and Philadelphia painter and engraver, who had previously done portraits of George and Martha and her grandchildren around 1790. But it was not until his collaboration with David Edwin, a skilled stipple engraver, that the print of the family was first published in Philadelphia in 1798 by Savage and Robert Wilkinson. The original Savage painting is today at the National Gallery of Art in Washington.

The print was an instant success. The Washington family was sent four copies: three black-and-white glass-framed engravings, which the President subscribed for, and a color print, which was presented as a gift to Martha Washington. In a letter to Washington on June 3, 1798, Savage reported a subscription list of 331 based on a twenty-day newspaper advertisement, a previous list of 100 subscribers, and a projected year’s income of at least $10,000. What attracted so many subscribers was a deep affection for the Washingtons and a gladness that the President could now spend his days away from the theater of war, surrounded by his family and pursuing agriculture and the other arts and sciences that had always motivated him. This was a change in occupation shared by many who had followed Washington’s lead in the struggle for democracy.

*The Washington Family* print has been much copied since its initial publication. Variations have included changes in the seating arrangement, the exclusion of George and Eleanor Custis, and of William Lee. Variations in the map on the table range from a quasi-Mount Vernon-Potomac setting to a loose street plan of Washington, D.C.

Among the more gifted reproductions has been a mid-nineteenth-century mezzotint by John Sartain (1808-1897), illustrated here, and an 1865 engraving by his son William Sartain (1843-1924) after a copy of a painting by Christian Schouessele. Another interesting variation is a carte-de-visite photograph of a painting or engraving in the Currier-Macombs Photograph Division of the Clements Library.

The earliest version of The Washington Family print even inspired a metrical effusion during a time of national crisis as the United States and Britain clashed in the War of 1812. Washington, as the revered father of his country, was just the symbol to represent American values and inspire confidence in its cause. Published in the Baltimore Patriot of March 20, 1813, the poem is prefaced with a detailed description of the print.

"Many respectable families have, as an ornament to the parlour, a handsome Plate, representing the 'Family of Washington.' They are grouped around a large table, on which rests a Map, with particular delineations, the General's Military Hat, Sword, &c.; Lady Washington and Miss Custis, a grandchild, are on the left, a servant in the back ground; Master Custis stands at the side of Washington, resting his hand on a Globe, listening to the General, who occupies the right, in the front ground of the piece. It is adjudged a good representation; and in a recent party, becoming a subject of notice, a gentleman from Boston, on a visit to this city, wrote in answer, the following interesting description:"

This carte-de-visite photograph places the members of the Washington family in a single group.

THE Father of his People sits the Chief;
Around him group'd his family appears
The colorings are joy succeeding grief,
With smiles and blisses superseding tears.
He has returned—The HERO is at home;
All hearts are gladden'd, in the pleasant scene;
The Map—the Globe, like pictur'd views in ROME,*
Display terrific warfare—all serene.
There sits the bosom friend of Vernon's shades;
There list'ning, with delight, the grand-son stands
There the domestics, in their different grades,
Wait on their lord's affectionate commands:
There the fair pledge of fond affection views
The varied battle scenes, along the Chart;
Paints where the Victors gain—the Vanquish'd lose,
And notes the "Times of Trial," to the heart.

All listen, with emotion, to the CHIEF;
The eye—the ear, in rapt attention, move;
An Eight Years' Hist'ry is portray'd, in brief,
Exciting veneration, joy, and love.
The laurel'd Victor, with complacent smiles,
With cheering hopes, and patriotic flame,
Kens the bright future, through th' arduous toils,
Which give his country an ILLUSTRIOUS NAME.
Thus group'd are VIRTUES, and domestic BLISS,
Exalted WORTH and HONORS peerless won:
A FAMILY belov'd—belov'd for this—
The scene is Vernon's Mount—
The Hero—WASHINGTON.

* The science of geography was a favorite study of the venerable Washington.

— John C. Harriman
Assistant Editor
No sooner had George Washington been inaugurated as the first president of the new republic than people started arriving at his private residence in New York, which was also the seat of the executive office. In a letter to David Stuart, Washington wrote that from breakfast until bed time, “I could not get relieved from the ceremony of one visit before I had to attend to another.” Some were well-wishers, others sought jobs or came with business matters, but the steady flow of traffic was a problem that had to be addressed at once.

Washington did not know what he should do. No policies had been put in place regarding official protocol, etiquette, titles, public receptions, and state functions. One of his immediate concerns was scheduling. He needed time set aside to receive people, time for private affairs, and time to conduct the business of government. He also wanted clear guidelines for an appropriate presidential image. What should his title be? Should he continue his role as a general? Should he meet with the public at all, or would it be better to seclude himself?

All eyes, foreign and domestic, were turned toward the newly formed republic and its leader. In early May, 1789, soon after his inauguration, Washington sent his Federalist advisers nine questions regarding the “line of conduct to be pursued by the president.” In closing, he warned that small matters that seem insignificant “may have great and durable consequences.” If a good system were created at the beginning, it would be easier “than to correct errors or alter inconveniences after they shall have been confirmed by habit.”

Alexander Hamilton’s response was that it was the “primary object that the dignity of the office should be supported.” Robert Livingston, chancellor of New York, thought that Washington should be more reserved and distant than he had been as a general and should give no formal dinners, return any visits, nor accept formal invitations.

Vice-President John Adams believed that “state and pomp” were necessary: “neither dignity, nor authority, can be supported in human minds collected into nations...without a splendor and majesty [sic].” Ardent Federalists argued for regal-sounding titles like His Excellency, His Highness, Serene Highness, or His Serene Highness the President of the United States. Anti-Federalists were adamantly opposed to such titles and anything that hinted of royalty or aristocracy. They argued that the Revolution was fought to rid the country of monarchs, nobility, and courtly behavior.

Washington himself held to a middle ground. He and his wife were members of the Virginia gentry and were familiar with elegance and impeccable manners, but they had lived simply at Mount Vernon, surrounded by friends and family. Washington wrote Catherine Macaulay Graham that his wife felt as he did about “simplicity of dress, and everything which can tend to support propriety of character without
partaking of the follies of luxury and ostentation.” Washington was loathe to return to public life and diffident about the role he should play, but he knew that the first president had to set a standard. “In our progress towards political happiness, my station is new; and, if I may use the expression, I walk on untrodden ground. There is scarcely any part of my conduct which may not hereafter be drawn into precedent.”

In the end, a decision of neutrality was made; the President and his wife would be referred to as “President and Mrs. Washington,” and they would conduct themselves in a dignified but modest manner; they would be reserved but accessible. Regarding his schedule with the public, he and his advisers agreed that the President would return no visits nor accept any visitors, other than those on official business, with the exception of three occasions during the week when the Washingtons would be available to greet people.

On Tuesdays, Washington would receive gentlemen at his house from 3:00 to 4:00 for a levee, or reception. On Friday evenings from 8:00 to 10:00, Martha Washington would host a similar levee, called a “Drawing Room,” for ladies and gentlemen. Both levees were open to the public, without invitation, but the attendees were required to wear formal dress. A formal state dinner, by invitation only, was to be held on Thursday evenings from 4:00 to 6:00. Washington, a stickler for punctuality, insisted that dinner begin promptly at 4:05, giving those with different watch times a grace period of 5 minutes. This system, instituted early, lasted throughout his administration.

The etiquette for these three social occasions was prescribed. The dignity of office, not Washington’s own disposition, determined protocol. His demeanor could not be too formal, nor could it be too casual. Abigail Adams captured the President’s image perfectly: “He is polite with dignity, affable without familiarity, distant without haughtiness, grave without austerity.”

No pomp or ceremony was required at the levees or dinners, but protocol dictated that the President bow instead of shake hands. He dressed formally in civilian clothes made of imported black velvet (rather than native broadcloth), yellow gloves, silver knee and shoe buckles, a dress sword in a white leather scabbard, his hair in full powder and pulled back in a silk bag, and a cocked hat carried under his arm. At the President’s levee, the guests were met at the door and ushered into the drawing room, where they were instructed to form a circle. The President then walked around the circle and talked to each gentleman for a few minutes, after which, he wrote to David Stuart, they “come and go, chat with each other, and act as they please,” and retire “without ceremony.”

Martha Washington’s Drawing Rooms for ladies as well as gentlemen were more sociable, but full dress was still required. Mrs. Washington sat on a sofa beside the fireplace, and as guests were brought in and introduced to her, she rose and curtseyed. The ladies returned their curtseys and the men their bows. The ladies were then seated in a semi-circle to her right, and the gentlemen either stood or were seated next to their wives. If Mary Morris, wife of the financier Robert Morris, or Abigail Adams, wife of the Vice President, were present, they were seated immediately to the right of Martha Washington.

Refreshments of coffee, plum cakes, whipped syllabub, ice cream, and lemonade were served. Martha, like her husband, was dignified but unassuming. George, as a guest at his wife’s levee, was dressed formally but did not carry his dress sword and cocked hat. Perhaps the best description we have of these Drawing Rooms is from a letter in the Duane N. Diedrich Collection of the Clements Library. It was written by Moses Everett, who went to both levees when he was in Philadelphia on a business trip in December 1796, at the end of Washington’s second term.

“When we entered she was seated with about 20 or thirty Ladies placed on her right—seats were provided for the gentlemen by the side of them so as nearly to form a semicircle in the room. The President was there & took a seat beside the gentlemen or Ladies as it happened & conversed with individuals on common topics—Judge Livermore conducted me to her Ladyship, she rose & made her curtsey & I my bow as well as I could—He then conducted me to the President who gave me his hand & directed me to a seat—we tarried about half an hour in which time coffee & tea cakes, Whip Syllubab, Lemonade &c were served round & we retired with Little or no ceremony.”

Though the levees had their critics—some thought they were too formal even to the point of mimicking royalty, others that they were not royal enough—they were extremely popular. The events succeeded not only in making the President visible to the public
but in allowing time in his schedule to conduct the business of the executive office.

Such was the image that Washington and his advisors crafted for the president of the new republic. No one, least of all Washington, had the slightest idea how much this image would change as subsequent generations reinvented him.

In the years before the first battles of the Civil War, when sectionalism was threatening the Union, the nation needed a reaffirmation of its identity. Historical artists reached the height of their popularity, painting important persons or events that stirred nationalistic feelings. The Washingtons, as icons of the Republic, were favorite subjects. Anyone looking at the huge, 5 1/2 by 9-foot painting of Martha Washington’s Drawing Room, completed in 1861 by Daniel Huntington, would be struck by the aristocratic setting and the majesty of the first lady, referred to as Lady Washington by Huntington. Entitled The Republican Court in the Time of Washington, or Lady Washington’s Reception, it was meant to be a representation of her Friday night Drawing Rooms.

Huntington packed sixty-four figures into his painting, all known and famous people of the time, including the Duke of Kent and Louis Philippe d’Orleans, the future king of France, who are paying court to Lady Washington. She is standing on a dais, illuminated in white, as though a spotlight shone on her, while the rest of the room is more subdued. The drawing room in Huntington’s picture, more like a ballroom, is much grander than the smaller eighteenth-century drawing rooms in the Washingtons’ houses in New York and Philadelphia, and the actual rooms did not have marble columns or statues on pedestals. Nothing about the picture is historically accurate, except for the people, who at one time or another probably attended one of Mrs. Washington’s levees. Huntington created an image that appealed to a public in need of heroes and heroines—the grander the better—who evoked patriotic sentiment.

Would Washington have approved of Huntington’s fanciful painting of his wife’s levee if it helped to create feelings of national unity for a country divided against itself? George and Martha’s fondest desire in 1789 was that he not assume the office of President, but that they retire to Mount Vernon and live there happily for the rest of their lives. But Washington, who always put the public good ahead of his personal happiness, knew he was the most popular hero in the United States after the war, and was probably the best person to draw together the still fragile confederation of “united” states. He was willing to conduct himself in the best way necessary to serve this higher purpose. We are cynical now about presidential handlers, image-makers, and spin doctors, but the craft of making and remaking presidents and their wives is as old as the Republic.

—Barbara DeWolfe
Curator of Manuscripts

A recipe for “whip syllabub,” a popular refreshment at Mrs. Washington’s receptions. From the manuscript notebook of Susan F. Berry, 1793.
Tobias Lear (1762-1816)

The news that George Washington had died on Saturday, December 14, 1799, was of great interest to the whole world, where his name was legendary. At his deathbed was Tobias Lear, private secretary to the President since 1785, a Harvard graduate of considerable intelligence and experience. The account that Lear wrote in his journal is the primary evidence we have for what actually happened, and the original copy of that account rests in the Clements Library. Mr. Clements bought it in 1921 from the estate of William F. Havemeyer through the agency of Joseph Sabin, a great American bibliographer and book dealer. Clements regarded it as one of the jewels of his collection.

Lear's admiration for Washington was unbounded, and in describing the great man's death he was at pains to adapt his narrative to the heroic stature enjoyed by Washington worldwide. He wrote it the day after Washington's death and later copied and revised it into his diary, which is owned by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. This revised version contains some information not found in the original journal. The editors of the recently completed publication of The Washington Papers printed both the journal and the diary accounts as a single document, leaving it to the biographers and historians to sort out any discrepancies between the two.

What is known beyond doubt is that Washington, with Lear, had ridden out on Thursday, December 12, to inspect his farms, as was his habit. The weather turned ugly, with cold wind, rain, snow, and sleet, but Washington was determined to finish his rounds. When they returned after about five hours, Washington went into dinner still wearing wet clothes.

Next day, bad weather kept him at home, but in the afternoon he went outside to mark trees for removal even though he had complained of a sore throat. Later that evening, despite his throat, he read aloud from the newspapers to Lear and Mrs. Washington, and discussed public affairs. Lear reported that the President declined any remedies for his ailment, which he assumed to be a cold. "Let it go as it came," were his words. When he retired for the night at about nine, he "appeared in perfect health, excepting the cold...which he considered as trifling....and had been remarkably cheerful all the evening."

But late in the night, between two and three, he awakened his wife Martha, and told her he was "very unwell, and had had an ague"—an uncontrollable chill. She saw he had difficulty speaking and breathing, but he would not let her call a servant, fearing that she would catch cold herself. But at daybreak, when a maid came to start the fire in his room, he told her to call Mr. Rawlins, an overseer skilled in bloodletting. Bleeding was common practice at the time for almost any ailment. Lear quickly dressed, went to the President's room, found him gasping for breath and almost unable to speak. After consulting Mrs. Washington, he wrote a note summoning Dr. James Craik, Washington's friend and physician from nearby Alexandria. Meanwhile, a syrup of molasses, vinegar, and butter was prepared and administered, but the patient "could not swallow a drop. Whenever he attempted it, he appeared to be distressed, convulsed, and almost suffocated."

Mr. Rawlins arrived soon after sunrise and prepared to bleed Washington. Rawlins was "agitated," and the President told him to calm down and go ahead. Although the President told Rawlins the incision was too small, in fact his arm bled freely. Mrs. Washington, unsure whether bleeding was the right remedy, begged that not too much blood be taken, and asked Lear to stop it. In turn, the President, raising his hand, stopped Lear, and when the flow of blood slowed, croaked out the single word "more." With Washington insisting and his wife objecting, about half a pint was removed altogether.

Mrs. Washington asked Lear to send for Dr. Gustavus Brown, who lived just across the Potomac at Port Tobacco, Maryland. But Dr. Craik was the first to arrive, soon after nine o'clock. Lear had been gently bathing the President's throat and wrapping his neck in flannel, but Craik ordered more bleeding, blistering the throat, and inhalations of steam from a teapot of vinegar and hot water. Craik also prepared a gargle of sage tea and vinegar, but when Washington put his head back he gagged and almost suffocated.

At about eleven o'clock Craik sent for his Alexandria colleague, Dr.
Elisha Dick, who arrived about three, and Dr. Brown soon after. Bleeding continued, but the flow was slow and seemed "very thick." Craik had also given Washington an emetic, which produced an evacuation of his bowels but no improvement in his condition. The doctors consulted outside the room, and decided to administer another emetic, which did not help.

After four in the afternoon Washington asked Lear to bring his wife to his bedside, and told her to bring him the two wills from his desk. After looking at them, he handed one to her and told her to burn it and put the other one away. When Lear returned to the bedside and took his hand, the President managed to say, "I find I am going, my breath cannot continue long, I believed from the first attack it would be fatal," telling him to look after his accounts and papers—"you know more about them than anyone else."

Between five and six o'clock, when the doctors returned, Washington was able to sit up and say, "I feel myself going, you had better not take any more trouble about me; but let me go off quietly; I cannot last long." When the

This passage from Tobias Lear’s journal records the death of his President.

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"Look at me again, and say ‘Do you understand me?’—I replied ‘yes’—’It’s well,’ said he. About ten minutes before he expired his breathing became much quicker; he lay quietly; he withdrew his hand from mine. He felt his own pulse—spoke to D. Cruger who sat by the fire—and came to his bedside. The same hand fell from his breast—I took it in mine—and laid it upon my breast. D. Cruger put his hands over his eyes and he expired without a struggle or a sigh! While we were fixed in silent grief—All Washington stood, with a solemn collected Voice, ‘If he goes, I could not breathe, but help of my hand as a signal that he was. ‘If he goes,’ said I, ‘I shall soon follow him!’"
other doctors withdrew, he told his old friend Craik, "Doctor I die hard, but I am not afraid to go." At ten o'clock the doctors returned and, perhaps desperate for a remedy, blistered his legs and feet.

Lear remained while Washington, "very restless, constantly changing his position to endeavor to get ease," seemed to breathe a little easier after the blistering. At about ten o'clock, after several attempts, he managed to say to Lear, "I am just going. Have me decently buried, and do not let my body be put into the Vault in less than two days after I am dead."

Soon afterward, Lear spoke to Dr. Craik who had been sitting by the fire, and the doctor came to the bedside. The two men stood by as the great man died "without a struggle or a sigh!"

Mrs. Washington asked, "Is he gone?" Lear could not speak, but held up his hand in an affirmative gesture. "Tis well," she said, "I shall soon follow him." Lear added to his account that she had been seated at the foot of the bed while servants passed in and out during the day. One of them, Christopher, had remained standing in the room throughout the day until Washington, sometime in the afternoon, told him to sit down. At the end it was Christopher who told a grief-stricken Lear to retrieve the keys from the President's pocket. At midnight the body was brought downstairs, and on Wednesday, December 18, it was buried.

Doctors who have reviewed the evidence conclude that Washington suffered a severe infection of the epiglottis, at the base of the tongue. Rapid swelling is painful, frightening, and obstructs the airways. But acute epiglottitis may not have killed him. The repeated bleeding, perhaps as much as three liters of blood removed, may have put him into hypovolemic shock, and the emetics further deprived him of precious fluids. Dehydration and hemorrhage, direct results of his medical treatment, were probably the immediate cause of death. Craik, Brown, and Dick, his three doctors, were capable, responsible men who were guided by the medical knowledge of their day. By their own subsequent accounts it appears that Dr. Dick had objected to the continued bleeding as weakening the patient, and was himself ready to perform a tracheotomy—a direct incision in the windpipe—to open an air passage. But the latter procedure was controversial and he was overruled, though Dr. Brown agreed with him about excessive bleeding. In the end, Dr. Craik ruled, and would regret to the end of his own life that he had failed to save his great friend, George Washington.

— Arlene Shy
Emeritus Head of Reader Services
— John Shy
Professor Emeritus of History

A patriotic carte-de-visite unites the Republic's two greatest heroes.
THE PHILADELPHIA WHITE HOUSE

Neither President Washington nor President Adams chose to occupy the very formal house erected for their use in Philadelphia. From William Birch & Son's 1800 collection of views of the city.

The imposing ballroom in Daniel Huntington's 1861 composition, The Republican Court in the Time of Washington, no doubt impressed audiences that viewed it 65 years after the fact. By that time, the Republic had all the official trappings of government, including a grand residence for its executive. The public rooms of the White House, although not as lavish as that imagined by Huntington, provided appropriate space for the pomp and ceremony surrounding an elected head of state.

The White House was not, of course, the first residence of America's President. George Washington occupied two different houses while Congress met in New York City. Then, from 1790 until 1800, Philadelphia was the seat of government. Washington and his successor, John Adams, resided there until Adams became the first to occupy the official residence in the new city of Washington. Philadelphians were not inclined to meekly relinquish the honor of hosting the nation's capital. Despite firm plans for a federal city on the banks of the Potomac, the city undertook construction of an enormous house for the chief executive as part of an effort to entice Congress to remain in their town. Located on Ninth Street, the building was never occupied by either of the first two presidents, neither of whom wished the capital to remain in Philadelphia.

Instead, Washington rented a smaller house, though still one of Philadelphia's grandest. It was located on the south side of Market Street between Fifth and Sixth, a block from Independence Hall. Washington rented it from Robert Morris, but the place had seen other distinguished occupants since its construction in 1767. Richard Penn, lieutenant governor of the colony, lived there before the Revolution. During the war it served as headquarters for British general William Howe and American general Benedict Arnold before his treason. Morris bought the house after it had been damaged by fire in 1780 and later offered it as a temporary residence for the President.

John Adams subsequently lived in the house for three years before moving with the government to Washington, DC, in 1800. The former presidential residence was then converted to a hotel, but the establishment was not a success. The building languished, and much of it was demolished in 1832. Parts of the walls stood until 1951. The site is today within the boundaries of Independence National Historical Park.

— Brian Leigh Dunnigan
Curator of Maps and Head of Research & Publications

No contemporary view of the Robert Morris House survives. This rendering was produced for John F. Watson's Annals of Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1830).
WASHINGTON'S UNIQUE AUTOGRAPH

The Library was saddened by the recent demise of Ruth Briggs Hoyt-Donovan (1933-2003) of enthusing member of the Clements Library Elk Rapids, Michigan, a long-term friend and expand its "outreach" activities to the general office holder, she encouraged the Clements to part of the attraction is the handwriting itself. During the course of the 1750s, Washington transformed a fairly commonplace manner of writing into one of the most distinctive autographs in history. Although fluid and artistic, there is nothing casual about it. It would have to have involved careful calculation and practice to perfect.

The eminent French statesman and author François Guizot edited Washington's letters in the middle of the nineteenth century. He was intrigued by the changing handwriting and published this series of facsimiles.

What was George Washington telling us about himself in the way he penned his letters and his name? Your guess is as good as that of anyone else!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RUTH BRIGGS HOYT-DONOVAN

The Library was saddened by the recent demise of Ruth Briggs Hoyt-Donovan (1933-2003) of Elk Rapids, Michigan, a long-term friend and enthusiastic member of the Clements Library Associates Board. Formerly a resident of Bucks County, Pennsylvania, she reinvigorated a connection between the Clements and the University of Michigan Alumni Club of Philadelphia that began in the 1920s. With a background as a teacher, librarian, and elected office holder, she encouraged the Clements to expand its "outreach" activities to the general public. She will be missed, but long and fondly remembered.

PRICE VISITING RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS

We are pleased to announce the award of six Jacob M. Price Visiting Research Fellowships for the 2003 calendar year. These grants provide support for graduate students and junior faculty whose research will benefit from the collections of the Clements Library. This year's field of applicants was very competitive, representing a wide range of topics in history and literature that reflect the diversity of the Library's holdings. The successful applicants are all expected to visit the Clements before the end of December.

Deborah Allen, Rutgers University, for her dissertation, "To Measure and Describe the Whole Globe of the Earth": Geographical Writing and Imperial Enterprise in North America, 1700-1815.

Caleb Crain, independent scholar, for his book, "Ned v. Kate: The Divorce of Edwin and Catharine Forrest."

Carl Robert Keyes, Johns Hopkins University, for his dissertation, "Advertising and the Commercial Community in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia."

Robert G. Parkinson, University of Virginia, for his dissertation, "Enemies of the State: The Revolutionary War and Race in the New American Nation."

Dr. David Ryden, University of Houston, for his book, "Producing a Peculiar Community": The British West Indian Sugar Industry and Slave Society on the Eve of Abolition.

Colleen A. Vasconcellos, Florida International University, for her dissertation, "And a Child Shall Lead Them?": Slavery, Childhood, and African Cultural Identity in Jamaica, 1750-1838."

POLICE GAZETTE VIDEO

On April 24-27, 2003, the Library was transformed into a theater, the stage for an immensely successful original musical. Written by Joan Morris and based loosely upon the Library's prized publisher's file of the somewhat scandalous National Police Gazette, "The Police Gazette, An Original Musical Drama" sold out four performances. The cast included such notables as prizefighter John L. Sullivan, singer-performers May Irwin, Lillian Russell, and Tony Hart, journalist Nelly Bly, Gazette editor Richard K. Fox, and even Buffalo Bill Cody. There were seventeen turn-of-the-century songs, each of them memorable and wildly popular in their day but rarely performed today.

For those who missed it, were too distant to attend, or who might like to see it again, we are pleased to make available a VCR ($20 postpaid) or DVD ($25 postpaid) for your private entertainment. The offer is made exclusively to individual (vs. institutional) members of the Clements Library Associates. If you wish to order a copy, call 734-764-2347 and ask for Sheen Coldiron. Payment may be made by credit card or check.
CALENDAR OF EVENTS


May 6: Clements Library Associates Board of Directors meeting.

May 18: Ann Arbor Antiquarian Book Fair. Michigan Union, 11:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m. Admission is $5.00 per person. Proceeds of the fair benefit the Clements Library.

