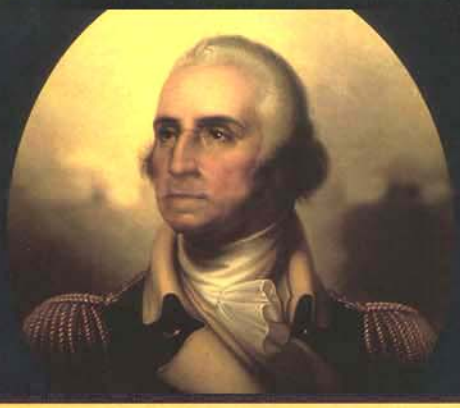
Washington Monument



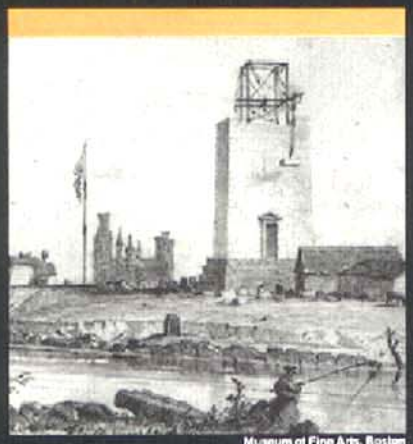
Mount Vernon Ladies Association

Washington: The Man

George Washington was born February 22, 1732, on his father's plantation in Westmoreland County, Virginia. As a young man he worked as a surveyor, gaining detailed knowledge of western lands and a taste for adventure. When Washington was 21 Virginia's royal governor sent him into the Ohio Valley to warn the French to stay out of lands claimed by Great Britain. In the ensuing French and Indian War, Washington received his first military experience. Fame gained on the field of battle led to his first political victory, election to the Virginia House of Burgesses, where he served during the growing political difficulties with Great Britain. He represented Virginia in the Continental Congress, and in 1775 Congress chose him to command American troops. He created the Continental Army, found and selected talented officers, and successfully waged a revolution against the most powerful nation in the world. At war's end Washington had become identified with the Revolution's triumphant conclusion; no American commanded the respect he did. After the war, Washington returned to Mount Vernon where he hoped to remain. But the young federation was faltering, and as the people had looked to Washington for leadership in war, so they looked to him for leadership in peace. At the resulting Constitutional Convention, Washington was elected the presiding officer. The new Constitution provided for a President to head the government, and Washington was the ideal choice. He served two terms, 1789-97, and refused pressure to run for a third. He retired, again, to Mount Vernon and remained there until his death, December 14, 1799.

The Monument

The Washington Monument at 555 feet, 5¼ inches, towers over everything in the Nation's Capital and reminds us of the immensity of George Washington's contribution to this republic. The monument is a classic obelisk and has little in common with the colonnaded temple designed by Robert Mills to house statues of America's heroes. The cornerstone was laid July 4, 1848, in a ceremony attended by President James K. Polk and other dignitaries, among whom were Representatives Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson. The monument rose steadily to 152 feet financed by popular subscriptions collected by the Washington Monument Society until funds ran out in 1853. It stood unfinished for nearly 25 years until President Ulysses S. Grant approved an act authorizing the Federal Government to complete the project. Lt. Col. Thomas Casey, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, took control, simplified Mills' design, and began construction. In December 1884 a 3,300-pound marble capstone was placed on the obelisk and topped with a 9-inch pyramid of cast aluminum, a rare metal in 1884.



Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Visiting the Monument

The Washington Monument is open every day except December 25 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., September through March; 8 a.m. to midnight, April through August. An elevator carries visitors to the 500-foot level in 70 seconds to see spectacular views of the city named for George Washington. A small facility at the top offers information for sale. Park interpreters lead scheduled tours that walk down the 897 steps past 193 memorial stones presented by individuals, societies, cities, states, and nations. Check with a park ranger for times and details.

Library of Congress

The Washington Monument is a unit of the National Park System, which consists of more than 360 parks representing important examples of our country's natural and cultural heritage. For more information, write: Superintendent, National Capital Parks-Central, 900 Ohio Drive SW, Washington, DC 20242.

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