



George Washington was born in 1732 to a family of Virginia farmers. As a teenager, he was interested in military arts and western expansion. At sixteen, he helped survey lands in the Shenandoah for Lord Fairfax. In 1754, as a commissioned Lt. Colonel, he fought in the early skirmishes of the French and Indian War. The next year, while serving as an aide to Gen. Edward Braddock, he personally escaped injury even though two horses were shot (while he was riding them) and four bullets tore-up his coat.

Between 1759 and the beginnings of the revolutionary war, Washington managed his lands at Mount Vernon and served in the Virginia House of Burgesses. Married to Martha Dandridge Custis (whose first husband had died), he had a happy, busy life.

However, Washington (like so many other colonial farmers) believed that British merchants were exploiting the Americans and Parliamentary regulations were unfair. He was not afraid to firmly express his concerns about all the restrictions.

Washington was a delegate to the Second Continental Congress when it met in Philadelphia during May of 1775. After the skirmishes at Lexington and Concord - and before the Battle of Bunker Hill - Washington was elected Commander-in-Chief of the Continental Army.

On the 3rd of July, 1775, he met his ill-trained troops at Cambridge (Massachusetts) and took command.

Washington used a strategy of harassment against the British. He reported to Congress that:

...we should on all Occasions avoid a general Action, or put anything to the Risque, unless compelled by a necessity, into which we ought never to be drawn.

During the war for American independence, Washington often ordered his troops to fall back slowly, then strike unexpectedly. It was a strategy which worked well for the Commander-in-Chief and the Patriots.

At 6 feet 3½ inches, Washington was a tall man. According to curators at Mount Vernon, however, he usually told people he was 6 feet tall:

Washington believed that external appearance should reflect inner merit. He possessed a tall, commanding physical presence that warranted development of grace and public humility. For example, although Washington was actually six feet, three and a half inches tall, he often told people he was only six feet tall.

Valuing self-control, Washington had a role model. It was Cato the Elder (234 BC - 149 BC), a Roman statesman who also displayed patriotism.

Mount Vernon's curators tell us about Washington's admiration for Cato:

He could be excitable and demonstrated impatience during early campaigns, but learned to channel strong passions through carefully cultivated deportment. Washington aspired to embody the Catoic image of self-mastery portrayed in Joseph Addison's "The Tragedy of Cato" based upon the life of Roman statesman Marcus Porcius Cato Uticensis. In correspondence with close associates, Washington often quoted Cato, who exemplified patriotic virtue.

The image we see here was created by Valentine Green in 1781. He was a London printmaker who based his work on a painting by John Trumbull, an American patriot who created artistic interpretations of many famous revolutionary-era scenes.

People in Europe wanted to know more about the man who was leading the troops in the rebellious American colonies. This print at least helped them to see his likeness.

The National Portrait Gallery tells us more:

This print, issued in 1781 by the London printmaker Valentine Green, was one of the first means of familiarizing Europeans with the general who was leading the American revolt against British rule. The image was based on a painting by John Trumbull, a well-born American patriot who had served for a time as Washington's aide and traveled to London in 1780 to pursue his career as a painter.

Shortly after arriving in the British capital, he was arrested briefly as a spy. At some point during his English stay he found time to paint a full-length portrait of Washington. Relying partly on his own memory of his subject, Trumbull also probably based his likeness on an American print of Charles Willson Peale's portrait of Washington, painted in 1776.

Trumbull would later become a chronicler of the Revolution, with his series of large, historic tableaux depicting such events as the British surrender at Yorktown and the Battle of Bunker Hill.

An avid reader, with a library of around 900 volumes, Washington read around ten newspapers every day:

Washington read around ten newspapers each evening (he read newspapers to his wife and Tobias Lear just before his final illness) and accumulated a library of around nine hundred volumes.

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