



National Sojourners



Heroes of '76

George Washington – “Father of our Nation”

Script

Compiled February, 2018 by: Paul A. DeMerath
Past President/Past
Commander (*January 13th,
2020 Revision*)



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Heroes of '76

George Washington
Father of Our Nation

Compiled and edited by:
Paul A. DeMerath, Vice Chairman (Patriotic Programs)
National Americanism Committee

Needed Props/Support Equipment:

Narrator (dressed in Heroes of '76 Colonial uniform)

Assistants (preferably dressed in Colonial attire)

Printed Script

Speaker's Podium

Portable speaker system (CD or Bluetooth)

Music (starting with fife and drum music (on cue) and preferably ending with Anton Dvorak's "Symphony No. 9 – Largo," but many other somber/reflective songs may fit, as long as soundtrack is instrumental (void of lyrical vocals))

Portrait of George Washington (with easel)

~or~

Laptop w/Powerpoint/Projector/Screen

George Washington

Father of Our Nation

Compiled and edited by:
Paul A. DeMerath, Vice Chairman (Patriotic Programs)
National Americanism Committee

(Slide 1 – National Sojourners)

Narrator:

The National Sojourners is an organization made up of current and former members of the uniformed forces of the United States, as well as Honorary Members, who are all Master Masons. We are organized into local Chapters for the promotion of all patriotic aims and activities in Masonry. As Masons, we are proud of our American heritage and have been counted among the leaders of our country for well over two hundred years.

Within the National Sojourners organization, we conduct an auxiliary degree, initiating members into the "Heroes of '76," and we wear these uniforms as a tribute to our nation's forefathers.

(omit this section if introduced)

Good **morning/afternoon/evening**. My name is _____ , member of _____ Chapter number _____ of the National Sojourners, and I will be the narrator for this program.

(narrator salutes audience)

(Optional): Assisting me this **morning/afternoon/evening** are **(is)**:

_____, _____ ,
_____, and _____ .

(assistant(s) step forward when introduced, salute and step back)

(Slide 2 – George Washington, the Mason)

You see before you a portrait of George Washington, commander-in-chief of the colonial armies during the American Revolution, and the first President of the United States of America. He was a Mason; a great man; and he was the Father of our nation.

In 1752, at the age of twenty, Brother Washington joined the Masonic Lodge in Fredericksburg, Virginia. During the War for Independence, he attended Masonic celebrations and religious observances in several states and he was known for supporting Masonic lodges that formed within his army regiments.

During his two terms of office as President, he visited Masons in North and South Carolina, and in 1793, presided over the cornerstone-laying ceremony for the United States Capitol.

In retirement, Washington became a Charter Master of the newly chartered Alexandria Lodge Number 22; he sat for a portrait in his Masonic regalia; and in death, he was buried with Masonic honors.

Such was Washington's character, that from almost the day he took his Masonic obligations until his death, he became the same man in private that he was in public. In Masonic terms, Brother Washington remained "a just and upright Mason," and he was a "living stone" who became the cornerstone of our American experiment of liberty and democracy.

There's much more to be told about his Masonic pursuits, but now I'd like to share with you a brief summary of his life and his devoted service to our great nation.

(Start fife and drum music)

George Washington was born on February 22nd, 1732, in Westmoreland County, Virginia, and his family's presence in North America can be traced to his great-grandfather, John Washington, who had migrated from England to Virginia in 1657. However, little information is available about the family in North America until George's father, Augustine, who was born in 1694.

(Slide 3 – John and Augustine)

Augustine Washington was an ambitious man who acquired land, built mills, and grew tobacco. He married his first wife, Jane Butler and they had three children. Jane died in 1729 and Augustine then married Mary Ball in 1731. George was the eldest of Augustine and Mary's six children, and the family lived on Pope's Creek in Westmoreland County, Virginia.

In 1735, Augustine moved the family up the Potomac River to another Washington family home, Little Hunting Creek Plantation, later renamed Mount Vernon.

Little is known about George Washington's childhood, which has fostered many of the fables that biographers manufactured to fill in the gaps. Among these is the story that Washington chopped down his father's prize cherry tree, and that he openly confessed to the offense. It is known that from the age of seven to fifteen, George was home schooled and studied practical math, geography, Latin and the English classics. But much of the knowledge he would use the rest of his life was learned through his acquaintances with backwoodsmen and the plantation foreman. By his early teens, he had mastered growing tobacco, raising livestock, and surveying.

George's father died when he was 11 years old and he became the ward of his half-brother, Lawrence, who gave him a good upbringing. Lawrence had inherited the family's Mount Vernon Plantation and married Anne Fairfax, the daughter of Colonel William Fairfax, patriarch of the well to do Fairfax family. Under her tutorage, George was schooled in the finer aspects of colonial culture.

(Slide 4 – George Washington, the Surveyor)

In 1748, when George was 16, he traveled with a surveying party plotting land in Virginia's western territory. The following year, aided by Lord Fairfax, Washington received an appointment as the official surveyor of Culpeper County. For two years he was very busy surveying and the experience toughened his body and mind and made him resourceful. It also piqued his interest in western land holdings, an interest that endured throughout his life and his belief that the future of the nation lay in colonizing the West.

***(Fade out fife and drum music)
(Start Shenandoah music)***

In July of 1752, George Washington's brother, Lawrence, died of tuberculosis, making George the heir of one of Virginia's most prominent estates, Mount Vernon. He was 20 years old. Throughout George's life, he would hold farming as one of the most honorable professions and he had become most proud of Mount Vernon.

(Slide 5 – Mount Vernon)

In the early 1750s, France and Britain were at peace. However, the French military had begun occupying much of the Ohio Valley, protecting the King's land interests, fur trappers, and French settlers. But the border lands of this area were unclear and prone to dispute between the

two countries. Washington showed early signs of natural leadership, and shortly after Lawrence's death, Virginia's Lieutenant Governor, Robert Dinwiddie, appointed Washington adjutant with the rank of Major in the Virginia militia.

(Slide 6 –French and Indian War Map)

On October 31st, 1753, Dinwiddie sent Washington to Fort LeBoeuf, at what is now Waterford, Pennsylvania, to warn the French to remove themselves from land claimed by Britain. The French politely refused and Washington made a hasty ride back to Williamsburg, the colonial capitol of Virginia. Dinwiddie then sent Washington back with troops and they set up a post at Great Meadows. Washington's small force attacked a French post at Fort Duquesne killing the commander and nine others, and took the rest prisoners. The French and Indian War had now begun.

The French counter attacked and drove Washington and his men back to his post at Great Meadows, which was later named "Fort Necessity." After a full day's siege, Washington surrendered and was soon released and returned to Williamsburg, promising not to build another fort on the Ohio River. Though a little embarrassed at being captured, he was grateful to receive the thanks from the House of Burgesses.

(Slide 7 – Colonel George Washington)

In 1755, Washington was given the honorary rank of colonel and joined British General Edward Braddock's army in Virginia. The British had devised a plan for a three-prong assault on French forces devised to attack Fort Duquesne, Fort Niagara, and Crown Point. During the encounter, the French and their Indian allies ambushed Braddock, who was mortally wounded. Washington escaped injury with four bullet holes in his cloak and he had two horses shot out from underneath him.

Though he fought bravely, he could do little to turn back the rout and led the broken army back to safety.

In August of 1755, at the age of 23, Washington was made commander of all Virginia troops. He was sent to the frontier to patrol and protect nearly 400 miles of border with some 700 ill-disciplined colonial troops and a Virginia colonial legislature unwilling to support him. It was a frustrating assignment. His health failed in the closing months of 1757 and he was sent home to recuperate.

In 1758, Washington returned to duty on another expedition to capture Fort Duquesne. This time the British were able to score a major victory, capturing Fort Duquesne and they now had control of the Ohio Valley. In December of 1758, Washington retired from his Virginia regiment.

A month after leaving the army, Washington married Martha Dandridge Custis, a widow.

(Slide 8 – Martha Washington)

Martha brought to the marriage a considerable fortune: an 18,000-acre estate. Washington had now become one of the more wealthy landowners in Virginia.

From his retirement from the Virginia militia until the start of the American Revolution, George Washington devoted himself to the care and development of his land holdings, attending to his crops, managing livestock, and keeping up with the latest in scientific advances. He also entered politics and was elected to Virginia's House of Burgesses.

Washington did not take a leading role in the growing colonial resistance against the British until the widespread protest of the Townshend Acts in

1767. His letters of this period indicate he was totally opposed to the colonies declaring independence. However, by this time, he wasn't opposed to resisting what he believed were fundamental violations by the Crown of the rights of Englishmen.

In 1769, Washington introduced a resolution to the House of Burgesses calling for Virginia to boycott British goods until the Acts were repealed. After the passage of the Intolerable Acts in 1774, Washington chaired a meeting in which the Fairfax Resolves were adopted calling for the convening of the Continental Congress and the use of armed resistance as a last resort. He was selected as a delegate to the First Continental Congress in March of 1775.

***(Fade out Shenandoah music)
(Start Dvorak New World Symphony music)***

After the battles of Lexington and Concord in April of 1775, the political dispute between Great Britain and her North American colonies escalated into an armed conflict. In May, Washington traveled to the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia dressed in a military uniform, indicating that he was prepared for war.

(Slide 9 – George Washington in Congress)

On June 15th, he was appointed Major General and Commander-in-Chief of the colonial forces against Great Britain. As was his custom, he did not seek out the office of commander, however, he faced no serious competition.

Washington was the best choice for a number of reasons: he had the prestige, military experience and charisma for the job and he had been advising Congress for months. Another factor was political. The Revolution had started in New England and at the time, they were the

only colonies that had directly felt the blunt of British tyranny. Virginia was the largest British colony and deserved recognition and New England needed Southern support.

Political considerations and force of personality aside, George Washington was not necessarily qualified to wage war on the world's most powerful nation. Washington's training and experience were primarily in frontier warfare involving small numbers of soldiers and he wasn't trained in the open-field style of battle practiced by the commanding British generals. He had no practical experience in maneuvering large formations of infantry, in commanding cavalry or artillery, or in maintaining the flow of supplies for thousands of men in the field. But he was courageous and determined and smart enough to keep one step ahead of the enemy.

Washington and his small army did taste victory early in March of 1776 by placing artillery above Boston, on Dorchester Heights, forcing the British to withdraw. Washington then moved his troops into New York City. But in June, a new British commander, Sir William Howe, arrived in the Colonies with the largest expeditionary force, to date, that Britain had ever deployed.

In August of 1776, the British army launched an attack and quickly took New York City in the largest battle of the war. Washington's army was routed and suffered the surrender of 2,800 men. He ordered the remnants of his army to retreat across the Delaware River into Pennsylvania. Confident the war would be over in a few months, General Howe wintered his troops at Trenton and Princeton, leaving Washington free to attack at the time and place of his choosing.

(Slide 10 – Crossing the Delaware)

On Christmas night in 1776, Washington and his men crossed the Delaware River and attacked unsuspecting Hessian mercenaries at Trenton, forcing their surrender. A few days later, evading a force that had been sent to destroy his army, Washington attacked the British again, this time at Princeton, dealing them a humiliating loss.

General Howe's strategy was to capture colonial cities and stop the rebellion at key economic and political centers. He never abandoned the belief that once the Americans were deprived of their major cities, the rebellion would wither. In the summer of 1777, he mounted an offensive against Philadelphia. General Washington moved in his army to defend the city and was defeated at the Battle of Brandywine. Philadelphia fell two weeks later.

In the late summer of 1777, the British army sent a major force, under the command of John Burgoyne, to split off the rebellion in New England. But the strategy backfired, as Burgoyne became trapped by the American armies at the Battle of Saratoga.

(Slide 11 – British Defeat at Saratoga Map)

Without support from Howe, who couldn't reach him in time, he was forced to surrender his entire 6,200 man army. The victory was a major turning point in the war as it encouraged France to openly ally itself with the American cause for independence.

Through all of this, Washington discovered an important lesson: the political nature of war was just as important as the military one. Washington began to understand that military victories were not as important as keeping the resistance alive. Americans began to believe that they could meet their objective of independence without defeating

the British army. On the other hand, British General Howe clung to the strategy of capturing colonial cities in hopes of smothering the rebellion. He didn't realize that capturing cities like Philadelphia and New York would not unseat colonial power. The Congress would just pack up and meet elsewhere.

The darkest time for Washington and the Continental Army was during the winter of 1777 at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania.

(Slide 12 – Valley Forge)

The 11,000-man force went into winter quarters and over the next six months suffered thousands of deaths, mostly from disease. But the army emerged from the winter still intact and in relatively good order.

Realizing their strategy of capturing Colonial cities had failed, the British command replaced General Howe with Sir Henry Clinton. The British army then evacuated Philadelphia to return to New York City.

Washington and his men delivered several quick blows to the moving army, attacking the British flank near Monmouth Courthouse. Though a tactical standoff, the encounter proved Washington's army capable of open field battle.

For the remainder of the war, General Washington was content to keep the British confined to New York, although he never totally abandoned the idea of retaking the city. The alliance with France had brought a large French army and a naval fleet. Washington and his French counterparts decided to let Clinton be and to attack British General Charles Cornwallis at Yorktown, Virginia. Facing the combined French and Colonial armies and the French fleet of 29 warships at his back, Cornwallis held out as long as he could, but on October 19th, 1781, he was forced to surrender his forces.

(Slide 13 – British Surrender at Yorktown)

General Washington had no way of knowing the Yorktown victory would bring the war to a close. The British still had 26,000 troops occupying New York City, Charleston, and Savannah and a large fleet of warships in the Colonies. By 1782, the French army and navy had departed, the Continental treasury was depleted, and most of his soldiers hadn't been paid for several years.

A near mutiny was avoided when, in March of 1783, Washington convinced Congress to grant a five-year bonus for his soldiers. By November of that year, the British had evacuated New York City and other cities; the war was essentially over. The Americans had won their independence. General Washington formally bade his troops farewell, and on December 23rd, 1783, he resigned his commission as commander-in-chief of the army and returned to Mount Vernon.

(Slide 14 – Washington's Farewell to his Troops)

For four years, George Washington attempted to fulfill his dream of resuming life as a gentleman farmer and to give his much-neglected plantation the care and attention it deserved. The war had been costly to the Washington family with lands neglected, no exports of goods, and the depreciation of paper money. But Washington was able to repair his fortunes with a generous land grant from Congress for his military service, and Mount Vernon become profitable once again.

In 1787, Washington was once again called to the duty of his country. Since independence, the young republic had been struggling under the Articles of Confederation, a structure of government that centered power with the states. But the states were not unified. They fought amongst

themselves over boundaries and navigation rights, and refused to contribute to paying off the nation's war debt.

Washington was intensely dismayed at the state of affairs, but only slowly came to the realization that something should be done about it. Earlier, Congress had approved a convention to be held in Philadelphia to amend the Articles of Confederation, and during that Constitutional Convention, Washington was unanimously chosen as president. Among others, Washington had come to the conclusion that it wasn't amendments that were needed, but a new constitution that would give the national government more authority. Washington spoke but once during the proceedings, however, he lobbied hard with his fellow delegates in the afterhours for major changes in the structure of government.

(Slide 15 – Constitution of the United States of America)

In the end, the Convention produced a plan for government that not only would address the country's current problems, but would endure through time. After the convention, Washington's reputation and support for the new government were indispensable to the Constitution's ratification.

Still hoping to retire to his beloved Mount Vernon, Washington was once again called upon to serve this country. During the presidential election of 1789, he received a vote from every elector to the Electoral College, the only president in American history to be elected by unanimous approval. He took the oath of office at Federal Hall in New York City, the capital of the United States at the time.

(Slide 16 – Washington's Inauguration)

When he delivered his first Inaugural Address to the First Congress, he was well aware of the momentous nature of the enterprise upon which he and the fledgling United States of America were embarked. He stated that:

"The preservation of the sacred fire of liberty, and the destiny of the Republican model of Government are justly considered as deeply, perhaps as finally staked, on the experiment entrusted to the hands of the American People."

As the first president, Washington was astutely aware that his presidency would set a precedent for all that would follow. He carefully attended to the responsibilities and duties of his office, remaining vigilante to not emulate any European royal court. To that end, he preferred the title "Mr. President," instead of more imposing names that were suggested.

President Washington proved to be an able administrator. He surrounded himself with some of the most capable people in the country, appointing Alexander Hamilton as Secretary of the Treasury and Thomas Jefferson as Secretary of State. He delegated authority wisely and consulted regularly with his cabinet listening to their advice before making a decision. He established broad-ranging presidential authority, but always with the highest integrity, exercising power with restraint and honesty. In doing so, he set a standard rarely met by his successors, but one that established an ideal by which all are judged.

In 1791, President Washington signed a bill authorizing Congress to place a tax on distilled spirits, which stirred protests in rural areas of Pennsylvania. Quickly, the protests turned into a full-scale defiance of federal law known as the Whiskey Rebellion.

(Slide 17 – Whiskey Rebellion)

He invoked the Militia Act of 1792, summoning local militias from several states to put down the rebellion. President Washington personally took command, marching the troops into the areas of rebellion and demonstrated that the federal government would use force, when necessary, to enforce the law.

In foreign affairs, President Washington took a cautious approach, realizing that the weak, young nation could not succumb to Europe's political intrigues. In 1793, France and Great Britain were once again at war. At the urging of Alexander Hamilton, Washington disregarded the U.S. alliance with France and pursued a course of neutrality. In 1794, he sent John Jay to Britain to negotiate a treaty to secure a peace with Britain and clear up some issues held over from the Revolutionary War. Though controversial, the treaty proved beneficial to the United States by removing British forts along the western frontier, establishing a clear boundary between Canada and the United States, and most importantly, delaying a war with Britain and providing over a decade of prosperous trade and development that our fledgling country so desperately needed.

Desiring to return to Mount Vernon and his farming, and feeling the decline of his physical powers with age, President Washington refused to yield to the pressures to serve a third term, even though he probably would not have faced any opposition. By doing this, he was again mindful of the precedent of being the "first president," and chose to establish a peaceful transition of government.

In the last months of his presidency, Washington felt he needed to give his country one last measure of himself. With the help of Alexander Hamilton, he composed his Farewell Address to the American people,

which urged his fellow citizens to cherish the Union and to avoid partisanship and permanent foreign alliances. He also stated that:

"Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports . . . reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."

In March of 1797, he turned over the government to John Adams and returned to Mount Vernon, determined to live his last years as a simple gentleman farmer. His last official act was to pardon the participants in the Whiskey Rebellion.

(Slide 18 – Washington returning to Mount Vernon)

Upon returning to Mount Vernon in the spring of 1797, Washington felt a reflective sense of relief and accomplishment. He had left the government in capable hands, at peace, its debts well-managed, and set on a course of prosperity. He devoted much of his time tending to the farm's operations and management. Although he was perceived to be wealthy, during his long absence, the plantation had not been productive, and there was much work to be done.

On a cold December day in 1799, in a driving snowstorm, Washington spent much of the day inspecting the farm on horseback. When he returned home, he hastily ate his supper in his wet clothes and then went to bed. The next morning, December 13th, he awoke with a severe sore throat and became increasingly hoarse. He retired early, but awoke around 3:00 a.m. and told Martha that he felt sick. The illness progressed until he died late in the evening of December 14th, 1799. His last words were *"Tis well."*

(Slide 19 – Washington’s Death)

Four days later, his family held his funeral at Mount Vernon, and placed his remains in a receiving vault located down the slope of the hill toward the Potomac River. News traveled much slower in the 1790s than today, and it was only on the day of his funeral that the United States Congress, still in session in Philadelphia, learned of his death. Shortly after, a joint committee of Congress drafted memorial resolutions and set December 26th as a day of formal mourning.

General Henry “Light Horse Harry” Lee was chosen to deliver a eulogy before the two Houses of Congress. In that eulogy, General Lee described our fallen Patriot as:

“First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen, he was second to none in the humble and endearing scenes of private life. Pious, just, humane, temperate, and sincere; uniform, dignified, and commanding, his example was as edifying to all around him as were the effects of that example lasting.”

The news of George Washington’s death then spread throughout the country, plunging the nation into a deep mourning. Many towns and cities held mock funerals and presented hundreds of eulogies to honor their fallen hero. When the news of his death reached Europe, the British fleet paid tribute to his memory, and Napoleon ordered ten days of mourning.

Congress had made its own plans to re-inter Washington in the new National Capital. On December 28th, Congress approved the erection of a monument to Washington’s memory on the banks of the Potomac. It then requested the privilege, which his family granted, of depositing his

remains at the new seat of the national government, which would be named in his honor. However, our nation failed to put up the funds needed to complete the Washington Monument until the 1880s, so the president's remains stayed at Mount Vernon, where they remain today.

(Slide 20 – Washington's Tomb)

In 1976, President Ford posthumously appointed him as General of the Armies of the United States and specified that George Washington would forever be considered the highest ranking American General Officer, past and present.

(Slide 21 – General of the Armies of the United States)

Many of the traditions and policies, even today, of our nation can be traced to George Washington's influence. He could have been a king, but instead, he chose to be a citizen. He has not only been considered a military hero, but a man of great personal integrity, with a deep sense of duty, honor, and patriotism.

(Slide 22 – George Washington 1732 - 1799)

Without question, George Washington was indispensable to the success of the American Revolution and to the birth of our nation. But his most important legacy may be that he insisted he was dispensable, asserting that the cause of liberty was larger than any single individual.

(Fade out music soundtrack)

(Slide 23 – Credits)

13 July 2018 revision