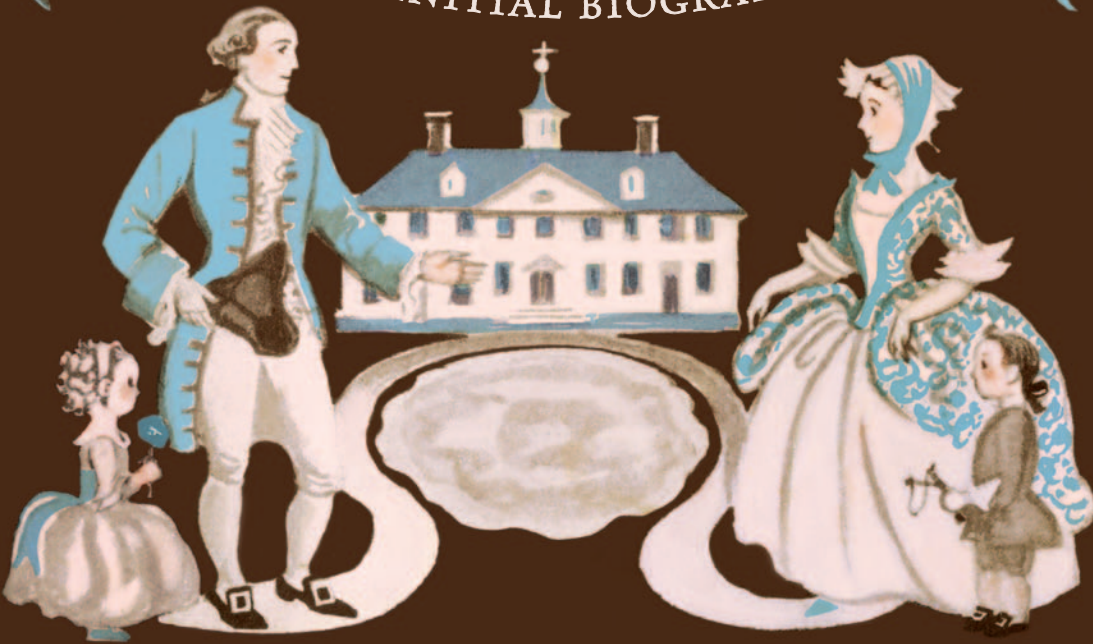


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GEORGE WASHINGTON

AN INITIAL BIOGRAPHY



GENEVIEVE FOSTER

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and his father,
John

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THE FAMILY

THE YEAR WAS 1732. It was a February morning, on a tobacco plantation in the King of England's oldest colony, Virginia. And it was almost ten o'clock. In the living room of a small, low house overlooking the Potomac River, Mr. Augustine Washington waited impatiently, pacing slowly back and forth before a closed door opposite the fireplace.

Occasionally he pulled from his waistcoat pocket a chunky, gold watch and compared its hands with those of the grandfather clock in the corner, which barely seemed to move. He walked to the window and stood looking out through its small, square panes into the fresh spring morning, his legs in their cream-colored stockings wide apart, his hands folded beneath the tails of his purple coat.

Suddenly, with a click of the latch, the door behind him opened. There, at last, stood an old Negro woman with a small white bundle in her arms.

“Here he be, Marse Washington. A boy. A mighty fine, big boy,” she said, her shining brown face wrinkled into a broad smile, as she proudly held the newborn son for his father to see.

“Let’s call him GEORGE,” said his mother later, when they were choosing a name for him. He was Mary Ball Washington’s first son, and she wished him to be named for the man who had been her guardian.

“GEORGE!” exclaimed her husband.

George WASHINGTON? George was the name of their King, to be sure—the King of England. But who ever heard of a Washington by the name of George?

Augustine and Lawrence, now, were regular family names, and so was John. It was his grandfather John, who had been the first Washington to leave England. Sixty six years ago, he had come to Virginia to raise tobacco on this very plantation, here on the *Potomac River*.

But Mary Ball Washington was very positive, and Augustine was agreeable. So, in April, when he was baptized, their baby son, born on the 22nd of February 1732, was given the name he would make famous.

Little George Washington was just learning to walk, not yet steady on his feet when a baby sister was born. They called her Betty. She had the same gray blue eyes as her brother, sandy light brown hair, and soon looked almost like his twin.

The next year, small brother Sam was rocking in the cradle. And when George was past six, and could count to ten and ride his pony all over the plantation, he had three little brothers Sam, John, and Charlie.

Then it was that father Washington told his family they were going to move. He had bought a new plantation. It was called Ferry Farm, he said, and was on another river, named the Rappahannock.

They had moved once before, but George could not remember it. But this move was exciting—to see everything packed up—to ride in the coach all day from early morning, through the woods over the bumpy roads, then finally to see the house with the sun setting behind it. It was a dark red house, standing among some pine trees on a hill.

Inside were eight rooms. George and Betty ran in and out counting them, upstairs and down, opening all the doors, peering in the closets, watching the baggage carried in, seeing the beds being made up, and finding out where everyone was going to sleep.

Next morning early they were out exploring the grounds, looking into the dairy house, the store houses, the kitchen, all the other small separate buildings, the stables and the well. Then they ran down the hill to see the river and the Ferry Boat.

The river was disappointing. It looked so narrow compared to the Potomac, but the Ferry Boat was thrilling. It started right at their own wharf, and carried people and horses across the river to the town of Fredericksburg.

Aunt Mildred lived in Fredericksburg. Until they went over to visit her, George had never in all his life, been in a town. And there was so much to see! Houses and shops stood close together. Down by the wharf on the river, there were long tobacco warehouses. There was a county courthouse, a prison made of stone, and a church with a steeple.

Reverend Mr. Marye was the preacher, and he also had a school. At noon his boys were out playing in the yard. And later, five or six of them were in the apothecary's shop, buying brown sugar candy.

George wished very much to be one of them. He was almost seven. Mr. Hobby had taught him to count. Why couldn't he go to school with the boys in Fredericksburg and ride over on the Ferry every day?

THE TOBACCO SHIP

THE MINUTE HE OPENED HIS EYES one April morning, George was out of bed. It was earlier than usual, but he hurried into his shirt, jumped into his brown trousers and tied the shirt string in the back, as fast as possible. He didn't want to waste a minute.

This was the day the ship was to be loaded. A big ship had come from England a few days before, filled with splendid things for all the family—new shoes and hats, and toys and tools and dishes—all kinds of fine things, that were made in England. Now it was being loaded with tobacco for the voyage back.

Calling to Betty and Sam as he ran by, George sped down the stairs, out onto the wet grass and along the path of soft pine needles toward the river. At the end of the wharf, he could see the ship, with its three tall masts. Halfway down were the men—his father and the Captain, the overseer of the plantation and ten or twelve Negroes, handling the barrels.

"Hi thar, boy! Already? Let 'er go!" shouted the men as they sent one huge barrel after another rolling down the slope, thumping along the wharf, over gangplank and into the ship's hold.



FERRY FARM