



THE GEORGE WASHINGTON  
FOUNDATION

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**LONG-SOUGHT BOYHOOD HOME OF GEORGE WASHINGTON FOUND**  
*Cellars Contain Evidence from the Lives of the Washington Family*

**EMBARGOED: For release 2 p.m. (ET, U.S.) Wednesday, July 2, 2008**

STAFFORD COUNTY, Va.—Archaeologists working at the site of George Washington’s childhood home have located and excavated the remains of the long-sought house where Washington was raised. The site was the setting of some of the best-known stories related to his youth, including tales of the cherry tree and throwing a stone across the Rappahannock River.

Digging at the Ferry Farm site near Fredericksburg, Va., the archaeologists say that evidence unearthed over seven seasons of excavation has positively confirmed the foundation and cellars that remain from the clapboard-covered wood structure that once housed George, his parents and siblings.

“This is it — this is the site of the house where George Washington grew up,” said David Muraca, director of archaeology for The George Washington Foundation (GWF), which owns the property. Fredericksburg lies about 50 miles south of Washington, D.C., and Ferry Farm is just across the Rappahannock in Stafford County, Va.

Muraca, working with historical archaeologist Philip Levy, associate professor of history at the University of South Florida, found from the evidence that far from being the rustic cottage of common perception, the Washington house was a much larger one-and-a-half-story residence, perched on a bluff overlooking the Rappahannock. The evidence also shows that a fire that struck the home on Christmas Eve of 1740 apparently was small and localized. Historians had long believed the fire had driven the family to live in out-buildings while waiting out repairs.

“If George Washington did indeed chop down a cherry tree, as generations of Americans have believed, this is where it happened,” said Levy, whose research is partly funded by National Geographic. “There is little actual documentary evidence of Washington’s formative years. What we see at this site is the best available window into the setting that nurtured the father of our country.”

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## FERRY FARM (PAGE 2)

Although the 113-acre National Historic Landmark site called Ferry Farm was known to have been the former home and farm of the Washington family, several attempts by others to locate the house among remains of five farms that once stood on the land had failed. In their search, the GWF archaeologists excavated two other areas on the property, uncovering remains of one house that predated the Washingtons' and one from the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Most of the wood and other elements of the original Washington structure are long gone — many of them “recycled” by builders of houses later built on the property or destroyed by Civil War troops who once camped there — and part of the house foundation has eroded away. But as they dug through layers of soil, the archaeologists came upon the remains of two chimney bases, two elegantly crafted stone-lined cellars and two root cellars, where perishables once were stored.

Excavation of the four cellars yielded thousands of artifacts — pieces of the house's ceilings, painted walls and family hearth; fragments of 18<sup>th</sup>-century pottery and other ceramics; glass shards, wig curlers and toothbrush handles made of bone. The cellars constituted a time capsule of evidence that helped the archaeologists confirm that they had indeed found the long-lost residence.

“The land was plowed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so some of the objects we've found are in small pieces,” Muraca said. “We do have larger objects — parts of a tea set that probably belonged to George's mother, Mary Ball Washington, wine bottles, knives, forks and 10 pieces of a group of small figurines that might have stood on a mantle.”

The archaeologists are particularly interested in a broken-off bowl of a pipe, blackened inside from heavy use, that was typical of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century when George lived in the house. Found in one of the cellars, the pipe bears a clear Masonic crest; Washington joined the Fredericksburg Lodge of the Masons in 1753.

The archaeologists have also located the family's kitchen and slave quarters and are searching for the dairy, smokehouse and, possibly, warehouses. “But it's more than buildings,” Muraca said. “It is places where people worked, socialized and even played, and it is orchards and gardens. We hope to recover all of that.”

Called the Washington Farm in George's day, the place later became known as Ferry Farm, because of a ferry that linked it to Fredericksburg via the Rappahannock, just down the bank from the house. The Washington family moved to the site in 1738 from their previous home 45 miles away when George was 6 so that his father, Augustine Washington, could be closer to the Accokeek Creek Iron Furnace, which he managed. Besides George, Augustine and Mary's family included Charles, Samuel, Betty, John and Mildred (Mildred died as a baby at the farm.). George was known to swim in the Rappahannock and to take the ferry to Fredericksburg.

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Augustine Washington's death five years after the family moved to the farm would forever alter George's life. Mary Washington, a formidable personality, chose not to remarry, which left the family in a precarious financial situation. No longer able to afford school for George, Mary arranged for a part-time tutor.

George grew tobacco there before switching to wheat and corn. "On these fields, George transitioned from boyhood to manhood. He decided to learn surveying, worked at making social contacts and contemplated joining the British Navy, until his mother vetoed the idea," Muraca said. "If she had let him go, the future of our country would have been very different."

The house was the centerpiece of the Washington landscape from the 1740s to 1772, when Mary Washington moved to Fredericksburg. George spent less time at Ferry Farm as he grew older, often taking trips north to visit his half brother, Lawrence, at Little Hunting Creek (later known as Mount Vernon). Around 1753 he finally moved to that estate near Washington, D.C., though he continued to be the official owner of Ferry Farm, having inherited it from his father.

Historians have long known that the Washington house caught on fire on Dec. 24, 1740 — the incident was mentioned in two separate letters. Near the end of last season's dig, the archaeologists found material evidence of it — pieces of burnt plaster and charcoal in one of the root cellars. The evidence showed that the fire had been contained to a relatively small part of the house and that the house was later repaired.

Bisecting the site of the house is a several-hundred-foot-long defensive trench, a relic of a later chapter in American history. Long after the Washington era, Ferry Farm served as a staging ground during the Civil War for Union soldiers attacking Fredericksburg, and President Lincoln visited the troops at the farm in the summer of 1862. Muraca says the soldiers were aware that they were camping on George Washington's land, some of them writing home about the irony of ripping apart the Union that Washington had been so instrumental in creating. By then, the Washington house had been replaced. Union troops demolished the new house, out-buildings, crops, landscape features and livestock. The soldiers did leave something behind: Quantities of musket parts, uniform buttons and other Civil War relics have been unearthed by the archaeologists.

The research at Ferry Farm is funded by the Commonwealth of Virginia, The Dominion Foundation (the philanthropic arm of Dominion), the National Geographic Society, the Mary Morton Parsons Foundation and many individuals.

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Members of the project team include Paul Nasca, GWF staff archaeologist, and Melanie Marquis, archaeology lab supervisor. Now that the house has been found, GWF plans to recreate the structures that were standing during the 1740s, including the Washington house, for educational purposes.

A National Geographic Channel film, "The Real George Washington," which follows the discoveries at Ferry Farm, will premiere this November. Information on air dates is at [www.natgeotv.com](http://www.natgeotv.com).

**The George Washington Foundation** owns and operates two National Historic Landmarks: George Washington's Boyhood Home at Ferry Farm and Kenmore, the 18<sup>th</sup>-century home of George Washington's sister Betty and her husband Fielding Lewis. Ferry Farm is located in Stafford County, Virginia. Kenmore is located in the city of Fredericksburg, Va. Both are open to the public. For more information, visit [www.ferryfarm.org](http://www.ferryfarm.org).

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The discovery of George Washington's childhood house was made possible in part by a generous grant from the **Dominion Foundation**, the philanthropic arm of Dominion. Headquartered in Richmond, Va., Dominion is one of the nation's largest producers of energy. For more information, visit <http://www.dom.com/about/community/foundation/>.

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