



## **Welcome to Mount Vernon!**

This guide will take you and your scouts on a walking tour of the Mount Vernon estate. Location numbers in parentheses (#) correspond to those on the Mount Vernon Map & Guide, available at the Ford Orientation Center. Discussion questions are provided to help your group get the most out of their visit. Some answers to the Scout scavenger hunt clues will be in this guide, while some answers will be found on text panels throughout the estate. You may also ask Mount Vernon staff, including the History Interpreter who will provide a Mansion tour for your troop.



## **BOWLING GREEN (#5)**

Welcome to Mount Vernon's historic area! The large green area in front of you is called the bowling green. The sunken brick walls on either side of the gate are called ha-ha walls. These "invisible" walls kept farm animals away from the Mansion, but did not disturb the scenic view for the Washingtons and their guests. Look for other ha-ha walls as you travel with your scouts through the estate today.

Washington created this space as part of a landscape redesign that he completed in the 1780s. While we may be accustomed to large areas of evenly trimmed grass, to 18th-century visitors, a green area this large would be extremely impressive, as lawns were expensive to plant and maintain.

Washington carefully planned the landscape surrounding the bowling green. In some cases, Washington selected trees from the forested areas of the estate and had them replanted here. As you walk along the path, see if your scouts can identify any of the trees.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- Q: Why do you think they were called ha-ha walls?
- **A:** What do you think would happen if you walked to the edge of the bowling green without realizing there was a drop of several feet? You might be surprised or you might fall, causing your friends to laugh at you!
- **Q:** By including such a large area of grass in his landscape design, what do you think George Washington was trying to convey to his visitors?
- **A:** He was wealthy enough to plant and maintain grass. Without the lawnmovers we have today, maintaining an even surface and uniform height required skill. Enslaved gardeners rolled the ground with a heavy roller and cut the grass with a scythe. Only the most experienced gardeners were assigned to this task.



### **UPPER GARDEN (#7)**

When George Washington began redesigning Mount Vernon's landscape in the 1780s, he wanted to create an upper garden that was beautiful as well as practical. Enslaved workers lined the edges of the garden beds with all types of beautiful flowers, but in the center, they planted vegetables and fruit trees to provide food for those who lived on the estate.

Washington was meticulous in his record keeping, including his gardening plans. Today, Mount Vernon's horticulture department studies Washington's diaries to learn more about when and where plants were grown. This helps them keep the appearance of today's landscape similar to the one that was here in Washington's lifetime. For example, reports from 1789 describe "digging and planting box edging." In some cases, Washington had the boxwoods trimmed into specific shapes and patterns. These are called parterres.

While in the upper garden, scouts can also visit the greenhouse (#9), which is a reconstruction of the one George Washington had built in 1787. In this heated space, Washington and his gardeners grew delicate tropical plants and fruits that could not withstand cold Virginia winters, including lemons, limes, and oranges. The original structure burned down in 1835, and the building you see today was built in the 1950s. Some of the bricks used in the reconstruction came from the White House in Washington D.C.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Q:** Can you find boxwood in the shape of the French fleur-de-lis? Why would Washington include this symbol associated with France, in the upper garden?

**A:** During the Revolutionary War, France served as America's ally, helping Washington and his army win the war. Washington also had a close personal relationship with the Marquis de Lafayette, a French aristocrat and military officer who spent time at Mount Vernon

**Q:** Why was it so important that the upper garden not only be beautiful, but also produce food?

**A:** Washington was responsible for feeding many people—not only his family that lived in the Mansion, but also the hundreds of enslaved workers on his farms, and the many guests who came to visit Mount Vernon each year.

Without the convenience of grocery stores, the estate had to produce most of the food needed at Mount Vernon.



# GREENHOUSE SLAVE QUARTERS: WOMEN'S BUNK ROOM (#11)

Attached to the greenhouse are the quarters that housed enslaved people who worked on Mansion House Farm. We believe that one was for men (#14) and one for women and children (#11). As many as 15 to 20 people may have shared each room in these communal living quarters. Young children in enslaved families usually lived with their mothers if their fathers worked on a different farm. Enslaved children had jobs such as hauling water, weeding the family garden, and looking after younger siblings. At some point between the ages of 11 and 14, children began assisting enslaved workers. By their mid-teens, they were assigned to jobs as part of the enslaved workforce.

Although there are large fireplaces, these rooms would have been cold in the winter and the people who lived here likely slept two or three to a bunk. Each enslaved worker received a blanket in the fall. Food rations were issued once a week by an overseer, but many enslaved families also kept garden plots or raised poultry. The people who lived here did their own cooking in a communal living area. The work week was six days, sun up to sun down, with Sundays off. When not at work, the enslaved community participated in activities such as games, singing, and storytelling.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Q:** Can you find any objects that tell you how members of the enslaved community spent their free time?

**A:** Look for a jaw harp, doll, and marbles. There are other personal items such as combs, buckles, and buttons.



# GREENHOUSE SLAVE QUARTERS: SHOEMAKER'S SHOP (#12)

The shoes worn by the enslaved people at Mount Vernon were made here. Each enslaved person received one pair of shoes per year. The Washington family ordered their shoes from Europe or local merchants. Shoes in the 18th century were straight last, which means there was no difference between left or right shoes. William Lee became Mount Vernon's shoemaker after severe knee injuries prevented him from continuing to serve as George Washington's enslaved valet.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Q:** Why do you think being a shoemaker was a suitable job for William Lee?

**A:** William Lee's knee injuries prevented him from moving easily or standing for long periods of time. Being a shoemaker allowed Lee to sit down while doing his work.



## **BLACKSMITH SHOP (#15)**

The blacksmith shop was an essential operation on the estate. Records indicate that as early as 1755, a blacksmith shop was located near the Mansion. Two of the enslaved blacksmiths, Nat and George, performed a variety of tasks that kept Mount Vernon running smoothly, including repairing wagons, carriages, and large agricultural equipment. They also made tools. Washington sold items they made for extra income. The blacksmith shop you see today is a reconstruction, as records indicate the original shop was probably demolished in the late 18th century.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Q:** What kind of products do you see in the blacksmith shop?

**A:** Chains, hooks, and horseshoes are a few of things that Mount Vernon's blacksmiths still make today.

**Q:** What does the blacksmith use to make the fire hotter?

**A:** A bellows blows air on to the fire. More air means that more oxygen is available to burn, resulting in a hotter fire.



## **SPINNING HOUSE (#18)**

In the 18th century, most of the fabric for the Washingtons' clothing and daily use in the Mansion was imported from England. Some of the clothes for the enslaved people who lived and worked here were made from fabric created on the estate. The raw material necessary for cloth-making, including flax for linen and fleece for wool, was produced at Mount Vernon. Making cloth was time-consuming and done completely by hand. Some of the equipment needed for the process is located here in the spinning house.

Spinning was mostly done by enslaved women such as Alce, Myrtilla, and Kitty, while the weaving was largely done by men. Spinning and weaving were considered skilled trades on the estate.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

Q: What kind of tools were used in the spinning house?

**A:** The spinning house contains equipment such as spinning wheels for making thread and looms for weaving cloth.

**Q:** Who wore the clothing made at Mount Vernon?

**A:** The clothing made at Mount Vernon was primarily worn by enslaved workers on the estate.



## THE MANSION'S EXTERIOR (#24)

When George Washington inherited Mount Vernon, the house was only slightly larger than the kitchen building. Over the years he enlarged the home to the 21-room Mansion you see today. The Mansion appears to be made of stone.

Encourage your scouts look more closely, so they can see that it is actually made of wood. The process of creating this look is called rustication, which was achieved by beveling wooden planks to look like masonry blocks, painting them, and then applying sand to the wet paint.

**SCOUT LEADERS:** If you wish to tour the Mansion during your visit, please review the following information and questions with your group BEFORE entering so that your scouts, as well as other visitors, may listen to the History Interpreters.

They will talk to your group throughout the house, covering the topics on the next page, which you can discuss after the tour.



#### **POST-TOUR DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Q:** Which of George Washington's occupations is reflected in the decorations on the plaster ceiling and the ornate fireplace in the New Room?

**A:** Farming. George Washington considered himself a farmer.

**Q:** What item from a French prison was sent to George Washington as a gift and hangs on a wall in the central passage?

**A:** The Key to the Bastille prison. The Marquis de Lafayette sent the key to Washington in 1790, after the destruction of the Bastille during the French Revolution. Washington hung it in the central passage of the Mansion, where it remains to this day.

**Q:** After George Washington died in his bedchamber on December 14, 1799, what happened to Mrs. Washington?

**A:** Mrs. Washington remained at Mount Vernon until her death in 1802. After her husband died, she closed the bedchamber they had shared and likely never slept there again, moving to a small room on the third floor.

**Q:** Name an object in Washington's study that reflects one of his interests or professions.

A: Surveyor's chain, books, fan chair, and telescope.

**Q:** Who were some of the enslaved house servants who worked in the Mansion? What were their jobs?

**A:** Frank Lee was the butler, William Lee and Christopher Sheels both served as Washington's valet, and Caroline Branham, Charlotte, and Molly were housemaids.



## KITCHEN (#25)

The kitchen was one of the busiest places on the estate. It was here that the enslaved cooks, Lucy, Nathan, and Hercules, prepared meals for the Washington family and their many guests. The kitchen features a scullery, where dishes and cooking equipment were washed, and a larder, where foods were kept cool to delay spoiling.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

Q: Where was the food cooked?

**A:** The large fireplace was used for cooking, with a small fire burning under each pot. A mechanical rotisserie, called a smoke jack, was used to roast meat over the fire. The oven was used for baking breads and cakes.



# STOREHOUSE & CLERK'S QUARTERS (#26)

Some of the most valuable items on the estate were kept in the storehouse under lock and key. These items were not gold and jewels—they included tools, nails, bolts of cloth, and beehives. Many of these items either had to be shipped from England, or were costly to produce at Mount Vernon, making them expensive to replace if they were lost or stolen. Only the farm manager, overseer, and George Washington had keys to this building.

Washington complained that the enslaved workers broke, misplaced, or stole tools. This was a form of resistance on the part of enslaved people.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

**Q:** Name some of the items in the storehouse that you recognize.

A: Farm tools, nails, beehives, barrels, cloth.



## **LOWER GARDEN (#34)**

The lower garden, overseen by Mrs. Washington, could also be called a "kitchen garden," because it produced a variety of fruits and vegetables that were prepared in the kitchen and then served at Mount Vernon's dining tables. The food grown here was also preserved and stored in the Mansion's cellar for use throughout the winter.

Today, Mount Vernon's horticulturists plant fruits, vegetables and herbs that were noted in George Washington's writings and in weekly reports from his head gardener. The fruit trees trained to grow against the wall and along the walks are also documented in the records. Horticulturists believe that the garden possibly had a simpler design in Washington's time.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Q:** Why do you think the lower garden was surrounded by a brick wall?

**A:** To protect the garden from deer and other animals and to lengthen the growing season. The extra height of the wall helped the garden to retain heat. The gardener also used glass bell jars and hotbeds covered with frames to create an effect similar to a miniature greenhouse, allowing the garden to produce vegetables even in colder months.

Q: Name some of the food grown in the lower garden.

**A:** Apricots, nectarines, peaches, pears, cherries, apples, lettuce, turnips, green beans, cabbage, beets, and peas.



## **SMOKEHOUSE (#28)**

Similar to the storehouse, the smokehouse was locked for security. Preserved meats were essential to feed family members and guests at Mount Vernon. The pit in the middle of the smokehouse floor held the fire that smoked the meats.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- **Q:** What methods were used to preserve meats year round?
- A: Salting, drying and smoking.
- Q: What type of meat was stored in the smokehouse?
- A: Bacon and hams.



## COACH HOUSE (#30) & STABLE (#31)

The coach house is where George Washington stored a number of his vehicles. Today scouts can see a riding chair, a light-weight vehicle that was perfect for traveling narrow country roads. In the 18th century, taxes on these types of vehicles were based on the number of wheels they had, which may have made a two-wheeled riding chair more affordable than a four-wheeled coach.

Scouts can see an example of a four-wheeled coach across the way in Washington's stable. None of the vehicles owned by the Washingtons survive. This coach was owned by Samuel Powel, mayor of Philadelphia and family friend of the Washingtons. It is similar in style to the type of coach Washington owned, and was possibly made by the same manufacturer.

The stable was home to Washington's horses and mules. Peter Hardiman was the enslaved groom who oversaw their care.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- **Q:** What challenges were faced by 18th-century travelers?
- **A:** There were very few roads in the 18th century, and most were unreliable. They were not paved, which usually made for an uneven and jarring ride. Additionally, any type of foul weather, such as rain or snow, could make roads completely impassable.



## THE WASHINGTONS' TOMB (#38)

George Washington died at Mount Vernon on December 14, 1799, and four days later he was buried in the old family vault. In his will, Washington specified the location and materials he wanted for the construction of a New Tomb to replace the existing one.

In 1831, the remains of George and Martha Washington were moved to the New Tomb, where they now rest in two marble sarcophagi. The one on the right, decorated with an eagle, is General Washington's, and the sarcophagus on the left is Mrs. Washington's. The door on the back wall leads to another room of the mausoleum, where other members of the family are interred.

Visitors to Mount Vernon come to the Tomb every day to pay their respects to George Washington and honor his legacy. Your scouts are invited to do the same.

### **SCOUT LEADERS:**

For your visit to the Tomb, please consider scheduling a wreath-laying ceremony. From November 1 through the Sunday before Presidents' Day, Scouts are invited to participate in a wreath-laying ceremony at General Washington's Tomb. For more information, please mountvernon.org/wreathlaying

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

- Q: What is a legacy?
- **A:** A legacy is something handed down to us from the past, or something for which we remember a certain individual.
- Q: What is George Washington's legacy?

**A:** In many ways, the United States itself is George Washington's legacy. As commander in chief during the American Revolution, and as our first president, Washington worked very hard and made many sacrifices in order to create the country we have today. He is also remembered as an innovative farmer, architect, and family man.



### **SLAVE MEMORIAL & CEMETERY (#39)**

At the time of George Washington's death, over 300 enslaved workers lived and worked at Mount Vernon. Of these people, 123 legally belonged to Washington, 40 were rented, one was owned by Mrs. Washington, and the remaining belonged to the estate of Martha Washington's first husband, Daniel Parke Custis. The enslaved community at Mount Vernon was diverse and vibrant, made up of men, women, and children whose work made Mount Vernon a successful plantation.

This memorial marks the burial ground that became the final resting place for many members of Mount Vernon's enslaved community. There are no gravestones or markers so it is difficult to know the identities and number of those buried here. However, we believe this may be the final resting place of William Lee, General Washington's personal valet during the Revolutionary War.

In 1929, the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association placed a stone marker to commemorate the site.
In 1983, a Slave Memorial was designed by students from Howard University to honor the men, women, and children who were enslaved at Mount Vernon.

Mount Vernon's archaeological team has undertaken a multi-year study to learn more about the slave burial ground and the enslaved community. The project seeks to better document the number of burials in the cemetery, and how they were interred. Out of respect, none of the remains will be disturbed.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Q:** How does archaeology help us learn more about the enslaved community at Mount Vernon?

**A:** Archaeologists study the past by finding and documenting the things that people have left behind, such as clothing, tools, toys, and dishes. Mount Vernon's archaeologists are excavating the burial ground to help Mount Vernon determine how many individuals are buried here and perhaps learn about the community's burial traditions and belief systems.



## THE WHARF (#40)

In the 18th century, the few roads that existed were not always safe or reliable, so people often traveled by water. In Washington's time, the Potomac River was filled with sailing vessels moving up and down the river. The wharf you see today is located about a mile from the one that existed in Washington's lifetime. Large plantations like Mount Vernon were built on rivers so that goods and crops produced there could be shipped easily to sell in the United States, Europe, and the West Indies.

Washington also used the river to set up one of his most successful business ventures – his fisheries. During the spring, fish, such as shad and herring, moved up the Potomac River to lay eggs, or spawn. The fishing season was brief, lasting only five to seven weeks, making it very labor intensive to catch, clean, preserve, and pack massive quantities of fish. In one fishing season, Mount Vernon's enslaved workers brought in over 1,000,000 fish! The fish were food for Mount Vernon's enslaved workers, and were also sold at market.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Q:** What important role did the river and the wharf play at Mount Vernon?

**A:** In addition to creating a beautiful view, the river connected Mount Vernon to the outside world. The wharf was a place from which some goods were transported and others were received.



## **PIONEER FARM (#41)**

Mount Vernon was once made up of five farms: Union Farm, Dogue Run Farm, Muddy Hole Farm, River Farm, and Mansion House Farm. The estate as you see it today was considered part of Mansion House Farm. This Pioneer Farm site is intended to recreate a small version of one of George Washington's four outlying farms, where most of his enslaved workforce lived and worked, and where his crop cultivation took place.

Washington was an innovative farmer. He expanded Mount Vernon from a 2,000 acre plantation to an estate of 8,000 acres by the time of his death in 1799. As early as the mid-1760s, he switched his cash crop—his main moneymaking crop—from tobacco to wheat, largely because of the nutrient-depleting effect tobacco had on the soil. He also began using crop rotation, alternating when and where he grew certain crops to keep his land fertile and productive. Washington experimented with fertilizers, using compost and manure to improve his crops. Over the years, he grew over 60 different crops at Mount Vernon.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Q:** What are some of the examples of crops that Washington grew on his outlying farms?

A: Wheat, corn, and potatoes.

**Q:** Why did Washington switch from tobacco to wheat as his cash crop?

**A:** At the time, tobacco was the most common cash crop in Virginia. However, George Washington knew that tobacco made the soil less fertile, causing farms to become less productive. He switched to wheat because it was less harsh on the soil, and also more profitable than tobacco. Washington felt that farming was the key to the success and prosperity of the newly formed United States, and that the country had the potential to be a "granary for the world."



## 16-SIDED BARN (#42)

In George Washington's time, separating the wheat seed from the stalk was most commonly achieved by beating the harvested plants with a flail, which was a time-consuming process. To create a more efficient way of doing this, Washington designed a 16-sided barn like the one you see on the Pioneer Farm today. The wheat was first spread on the upper floor of the barn and then horses were brought in to tread or trot across it. The friction and weight of the horses' hooves on the wheat caused the wheat grain to separate from the stalk and fall between the slatted boards to the floor below. Enslaved workers then gathered the fallen wheat so it could be taken to Washington's gristmill and ground into flour.

The 16 sides of the barn made it roughly circular, and created an easy path for the horses. Since the barn was not a perfect circle, it was probably slightly easier to build using 18th-century methods and tools.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTION**

**Q:** Why did George Washington design a barn with 16 sides?

**A:** When horses come to a corner, they usually stop moving, but a barn with 16 sides has no pronounced corners, making it easier to keep the horses moving and treading the wheat.



## **SLAVE CABIN (#43)**

More than half of Mount Vernon's enslaved workers labored on one of Washington's outlying farms, and the majority of these individuals laborers were women. They worked from sun up to sun down six days a week, planting, cultivating, and harvesting.

This reconstructed cabin is typical of the housing that was on the outlying farms. Enslaved people lived where they worked so families were often separated, with wives and children on one farm, and husbands living on another. Many of the enslaved men who lived apart from their families walked several miles on Saturday nights so they could spend Sundays together.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Q:** How does the slave cabin compare with the slave quarters near the Mansion?

**A:** The greenhouse slave quarters are made of sturdier materials—brick and stone rather than wood. However, the cabin would have provided slightly more privacy than the slave quarters in the greenhouse.



## FOREST TRAIL (#44), CREATURES IN THE FOREST

**PLEASE NOTE:** The Forest Trail includes several steep hills and some uneven surfaces. It takes approximately 10 minutes to walk from start to finish.

George Washington used about 3,500 of the 8,000 acres he owned as cultivated farm land; the remainder was natural woodland. The forest supplied firewood for the estate, lumber for construction, as well as saplings that could be replanted as part of Washington's landscape design. Washington believed it was very important to conserve land and protect wildlife—for example, he prohibited hunting deer on his land. Today, the Forest Trail provides you with the opportunity to explore the natural landscape of Mount Vernon. Signs along the trail will help your scouts learn how the forests and wildlife may have changed since George Washington's time.

## **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

**Q:** What animals that we rarely see today in this area once lived in the forests of Mount Vernon during George Washington's lifetime?

**A:** The American bison (rare in this area even in Washington's time due to over hunting), timber wolf, black bear, and passenger pigeon. Today, American bison live mostly in National Parks. Although timber wolves and black bears still live in American forests, they are generally found in more isolated locations.

**Q:** Who were the first inhabitants of the Mount Vernon area?

**A:** For thousands of years before the Washington family acquired the land in 1674, Native Americans resided in the area. Three tribes lived along this stretch of the Potomac River—the Dogue, Patawomeke, and Piscataway.

## Huzzah!

Your scouts have now completed the Mount Vernon Historic Trail! Thank you for participating in this tour of George Washington's home and estate. Your scouts may purchase the Mount Vernon Historic Trail patch and the George Washington Pioneer Farmer patch at The Shops at Mount Vernon or order them online at mountvernon.org/shops.

More information about resources for scouts can be found at mountvernon.org/scouts







- (\$) ATM
- Information
- Restrooms
- Shopping
- Water Fountain

- Inquire at Guest Services for assistance
- Accessible Path
- **Stairs**
- Seasonal Shuttle Stop
- Dining

- Main Entrance
- **Ford Orientation Center**
- 3 Historic Area Entrance & Exit
- **Bowling Green**
- **Mansion Line Entry**
- 7 **Upper Garden**
- Women's Bunk Room
- 12 Shoemaker's Shop
- 15 **Blacksmith Shop**
- 18 **Spinning House**
- 24 Mansion
- 25 Kitchen

- Storehouse & Clerk's Quarters 26
- Smokehouse
- 30 Coach House
- 31 Stable
- Lower Garden
- **Washington Tomb**
- Slave Memorial 39
- Wharf 40
- 41 Pioneer Farm
- 16-sided Barn
- 43 Slave Cabin
- Forest Trail



## mountvernon.org

© 2018 Mount Vernon Ladies' Association. All rights reserved.