



Martha Washington: The Indispensable Woman of the Revolutionary War

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Historians agree that George Washington's leadership skills helped the Americans win the Revolutionary War. Although some may debate his level of prowess on the battlefield, few can question his incredible ability to hold the troops together through some of the harshest conditions imaginable. The Continental Army looked to the resolve of its Commander-in-chief when defeat seemed inevitable and retreat constant. For the men fighting for American independence, George Washington served as a symbol of strength. But who could the weary warrior confide in when the burdens became too much for one set of shoulders to bear? Only one person possessed both Washington's full trust and the ability to soothe his tired soul – his wife. Although her contribution has largely been overlooked in the annals of American history, Martha Washington proved indispensable to the Patriot cause. Every winter, she travelled in freezing conditions, sometimes through enemy territory, to assist her husband and care for his war-weary soldiers. In fact, Martha Washington spent more time near her husband than away from him throughout the course of the war (53 out of the roughly 103 months between The Battles of Lexington and Concord in April 1775 and Washington's resignation in December 1783).ⁱ While living in the army's winter



encampments, Martha brought some of the comforts of home to George, allowing him to indulge in rare moments of relaxation. She also tended to the sick soldiers, mended their deteriorating clothes, and encouraged other local women to do the same. “Lady Washington,” as the soldiers referred to her, provided a gentle, matronly touch to complement the General’s stern hand. Even when they were apart, Martha and her husband kept a constant correspondence – one that undoubtedly gave George an outlet to ease his worried mind. Martha Washington was the American secret weapon in the Revolutionary War; without her faithful support, George Washington would not have had the steady resolve and peace of mind that enabled him to keep an inexperienced Continental Army together long enough to defeat the world’s greatest empire.

At first glance, Martha Washington’s background does not seem to provide any clues that would foretell the strength she showed throughout the war; however, a closer examination reveals that she overcame many adversities in her life, experiences that fortified her character and gave her the courage to persevere through difficult times. Born in 1731, Martha was the eldest Dandridge child, a modest yet respectable family from the “second-tier” of planters in New Kent County, Virginia. Her childhood was like that of any other girl in her social class; her education probably consisted of basic literacy and arithmetic skills along with the domestic arts. In 1750, a young Martha married into one of Virginia’s most prominent and wealthy families when she wed Daniel Parke Custis, a bachelor twenty years her senior. By the end of the decade, she



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would give birth to four children, lose two of them, and watch her husband succumb to a painful, suffocating demise caused by some type of virulent throat infection.ⁱⁱ

But death was a common occurrence in eighteenth-century Virginia, and time could not be wasted on extended periods of mourning, especially with two small children to care for. As Daniel Custis died without finalizing his will, common law dictated that his large estate should be divided up equally among his survivors. Martha found herself the sole manager of over 17,500 acres of land and 300 slaves, making the 26-year-old one of the wealthiest widows in Virginia.ⁱⁱⁱ Her first appearance in the historical record occurs at this time, when she wrote to London merchants in continuance of her husband's business. A little more than a month after Daniel's death, Martha informed John Hanbury and Company that, "I have now the Administration of his Estate & management of his Affairs of all sorts."^{iv} That same day, she communicated her business plans to another London company: "I shall yearly ship a considerable part of the Tobacco I make to you which I shall take care to have made as good as possible. . . .As Mr Custis died Without Will. . . I think it will be proper to continue this Account with you in the same manner as if he were living, as most of the goods I shall send for will be for the use of the Family."^v Martha demonstrated that she could handle almost any task even while under duress, especially if the well-being of her loved ones depended on her taking action.



But Martha would not have to be alone for long. Many suitors began calling; whether the young widow's charms or her fortune enticed them is not known. One man stood out, a tall and handsome colonel also from an affluent Tidewater family. George Washington was the highest-ranking officer of the Virginia provincial troops and already internationally known through his role in the war against the French and their Indian allies. It must not have taken Martha too long to become smitten with the dashing young officer. Although George may not have thought the widow Custis as physically beautiful as his supposed crush, Sally Fairfax, "he saw in Martha a loving companion and a friend, a woman whom he could trust and a woman who would always be there as a wife and counsel."^{vi} An engagement followed within weeks of their meeting. Wearing shoes of purple satin and standing at a whole foot shorter than the groom, Martha Dandridge Custis married George Washington on Twelfth Night, or the Epiphany, January 6, 1759. It would be a day that the Washingtons seldom spent away from each other.^{vii}

This ceremony marked the official beginning of Martha's weighty influence over one of the most significant figures in American history. For the next fifteen years, the Washingtons lived in domestic tranquility at Mount Vernon, with George happily managing his multiple farms and Martha focused on raising her two children, John "Jacky" Parke and Martha "Patsy" Custis. Shortly after the family settled into Mount Vernon, George wrote to a business connection, "I am now I beleive fixd at this Seat



with an agreeable Consort for Life and hope to find more happiness in retirement than I ever experienced amidst a wide and bustling World.”^{viii} But George Washington’s idea of retirement is quite different from the usual definition. Not only did he busy himself with managing his farms and experimenting with new crops and agricultural techniques, he was also active in Virginia politics, serving in the House of Burgesses. Although Martha was primarily concerned with the upbringing of her children at this time, she must have known full well about the rising tensions between the American colonists and the British government.

Out of all the injustices committed against the colonies, the astute businessman George Washington seemed most riled by those that interfered with the economy. He vehemently opposed the Stamp Act of 1765 and was a vocal critic of the Intolerable Acts of 1774, which he claimed exhibited, “an unexampled testimony of the most despotic system of tyranny that was ever practiced in a free government.”^{ix} The House of Burgesses unanimously passed a proposal to declare June 1, the day the port of Boston was to be closed, a national day of “fasting, humiliation, and prayer.” Virginia’s Royal Governor Lord Dunmore, who was once a friend of the Washingtons and frequently invited George to stay at the governor’s palace,^x dissolved the legislature in retaliation. Several nights later, the delegates reconvened around the tables of Raleigh Tavern in Williamsburg to continue the debates and eventually accepted Massachusetts’s proposal for a Continental Congress in the fall, a chance for delegates from all the



colonies to meet in Philadelphia and discuss the political situations. Naturally, Washington was chosen to be part of Virginia's delegation. In the meantime, Washington worked with George Mason and other local Patriots to draft the "Fairfax Resolves," which rejected Parliament's absolute authority over the colonies and urged Virginians to boycott British goods. At first, Martha was uneasy about the boycott and must have dreaded giving up her imported silks and other luxury items. However, she knew that her husband's emerging leadership role with the discontented colonials meant that duty would compel her to set an example for the other Virginia ladies. Martha eventually conceded.^{xi}

On August 31, 1774, George Washington prepared to depart for Philadelphia, the first of many trips north and the beginning of his extended absence from his beloved Martha and Mount Vernon. His fellow Virginian delegates, Patrick Henry and Edmund Pendleton, had spent the night at Mount Vernon and undoubtedly passed the evening engrossed in intense discussion, especially given the marked difference between Henry's radical views and Washington's more conservative leanings. Martha was most likely privy to it all, as "politics at Mount Vernon was not a hush-hush matter kept from the ladies' delicate ears. Martha and George discussed anything and everything."^{xii} But no matter who she agreed with the most, Martha sent off the delegates to the First Continental Congress with encouraging words and a caring smile. In a letter to an



unknown recipient, Pendleton portrayed Martha as an ideal Republican Mother, already loyal to the Patriot cause even before it was fully formulated. He wrote:

I was much pleased with Mrs. Washington and her spirit. She seemed ready to make any sacrifice and was cheerful though I knew she felt anxious. She talked like a Spartan mother to her son on going to battle. "I hope you will stand firm – I know George will," she said. The dear little woman was busy from morning until night with domestic duties, but she gave us much time in conversation and affording us entertainment. When we set off in the morning, she stood in the door and cheered us with the good words, "God be with you gentlemen."^{xiii}

Clearly, Martha Washington was just as intensely devoted to the protection of American rights and liberties as she was to her husband. Already energized through his passionate ideals, George must have been in high spirits as his coach pulled away from Mount Vernon, knowing that he had at least one unwavering supporter.

The Congress, made up of delegates from twelve of the British North American Colonies, organized a boycott on virtually all British goods and petitioned King George III with a list of grievances. The Congress also proposed to meet the following year if the Crown refused to honor its requests. Martha religiously read newspaper accounts of the events at Philadelphia, and we know from other references that the Washingtons corresponded regularly throughout George's absence. Unfortunately, all of these letters are thought to have been destroyed, as Martha burned hundreds of their epistles shortly after his death. When George returned home on October 30, life at Mount Vernon carried on as usual, even if the boycott made life a little less pleasant. The colonies appeared to be on a path to reconciliation, merely seeking to regain the privileges



thought to be rightfully theirs as subjects in the British Empire. This seemingly idyllic autumn gave Martha a chance to reflect on the past few years, both in terms of the growing political storm and the events of her personal life. On June 19, 1773, Patsy Custis, who had suffered all her life from what were probably epileptic seizures, suddenly fell to the ground “with one of her usual Fits, & expired in it, in less than two Minutes without uttering a Word, a groan, or scarce a Sigh.” A bursting cerebral aneurysm is what most likely took Martha’s only living daughter away from her when the girl was just seventeen years old. “This Sudden, and unexpected blow,” George later wrote, “has almost reduced my poor Wife to the lowest ebb of Misery.”^{xiv} Still grieving, Martha missed her son Jack’s marriage to Eleanor “Nelly” Calvert, of the influential Maryland family, in February 1774. The upheavals of her own life must have made the political instability all the more palpable, but nevertheless, Martha supported her husband in his political pursuits just as he had comforted her in times of need.

Meanwhile, the British King and his Parliament ignored the American colonists’ demands for change. George was chosen to once again represent Virginia in its delegation to the Second Continental Congress, but before he could even begin to prepare for his trip, Massachusetts militiamen fired the shot heard round the world. The events at Lexington and Concord that spring reset the agenda for the upcoming meeting in Philadelphia, as the delegates were forced to adopt more decisive measures in order to come to terms with the fact that the colonies were now in arms against one



of the most powerful armed forces in the world. George left that May wearing his old colonel's uniform from the Virginia militia – impressively, it still fit after fifteen years. Martha expected her husband to return in a few weeks; after all, sixteen-year-old Nelly Calvert was pregnant with their first grandchild, expecting at any moment, and George hated to be away from Mount Vernon during harvest season when he was unable to micromanage his plantation affairs. But neither of them could have predicted the life-changing ramifications of that meeting.^{xv}

Realizing the necessity of a unified continental army as opposed to a loose confederation of militia forces, Thomas Johnson of Maryland followed John Adams's suggestion and nominated George Washington to become commander-in-chief of the reconfigured troops. Like many other times in Washington's life, his appointment passed unanimously. In his address to the Congress, the new general expressed his unease that his military capabilities might result in events "unfavourable to my reputation" and informed those gathered that he would not accept any salary, because "no pecuniary consideration could have tempted me to have accepted this Arduous employment at the expence of my domestk ease & happi[ness]." ^{xvi} Even as he ascended to one of the highest positions of American society, Washington mentioned his beloved home life at Mount Vernon, which he would later write, "no estate in United America is more pleasantly situated." ^{xvii}



When George sat down to inform his wife of the appointment, he knew that she would be distraught to hear of the situation. It was not just his absence that would have bothered Martha; although the couple hated to be apart, George was frequently absent, whether for assembly sessions in Williamsburg or exploring his lands out west.^{xviii} But now, as the undisputed leader of the Patriot forces, George Washington was public enemy number one in the eyes of the British. If he was not killed, he would most certainly be sent to Britain for severe punishment. George knew that Martha would have worried about such a fate when he penned this letter to “My Dearest” a few days after his appointment:

I am now set down to write to you on a subject which fills me with inexpressable concern – and this concern is greatly aggravated and Increased when I reflect on the uneasiness I know it will give you – It has been determined in Congress, that the whole Army raised for the defence of the American Cause shall be put under my care, and that it is necessary for me to proceed immediately to Boston to take upon me the Command of it. You may beleive me my dear Patcy, when I assure you, in the most solemn manner, that, so far from seeking this appointment I have used every endeavour in my power to avoid it, not only from my unwillingness to part with you and the Family, but from a consciousness of its being a trust too great for my Capacity and that I should enjoy more real happiness and felicity in one month with you, at home, than I have the most distant prospect of reaping abroad, if my stay was to be Seven times Seven years. But, as it has been a kind of destiny that has thrown me upon this Service, I shall hope that my undertaking of it, is designd to answer some good purpose. . . . I shall rely therefore, confidently, on that Providence which has heretofore preservd, & been bountiful to me, not doubting but that I shall return safe to you in the fall – I shall feel no pain from the Toil, or the danger of the Campaign – My unhappiness will flow, from the uneasiness I know you will feel at being left alone – I therefore beg of you to summon your whole fortitude & Resolution, and pass your time as agreeably as possible – nothing will give me so much sincere satisfaction as to hear this, and to hear it from your own Pen.^{xix}



It is fortunate that this epistle is one of the three surviving letters between George and Martha Washington, as it provides a clear and touching portrait of the couple and the man who, destined for greatness, still kept his wife's well-being as one of his top priorities. This letter almost seems like George is trying to justify his acceptance of the post as he lovingly refers to life at Mount Vernon and claims that he was unwillingly thrust into the position. However, as George arrived in Congress dressed in full military garb, Martha must have known that her husband wanted to clearly convey his readiness for command. Perhaps his postscript was meant to be a sort of peace offering: he purchased, "two suits of what I was told wa[s] the prettiest Muslin. I wish it may please you." It is also interesting to note that George included a will for Martha to examine. This further proves George's devotion to his wife; most eighteenth-century men did not consult their spouses in regards to finances, even if the woman's wealth composed the majority of their funds. But George considered Martha to be his partner and valued her opinion.^{xx} No matter what George's intentions were when he set off for the Congress at Philadelphia, this letter lucidly demonstrates George's love for his wife and his need for her support. He would receive both throughout the war.

The fact that George was deeply concerned for Martha cannot be more clearly demonstrated than in the seven known letters he penned in the first week of his appointment. Only two were written in his new military capacity; the others were either



addressed to Martha or to relatives concerning her safety and happiness. George told Burwell Bassett, a fellow burgess and Martha's brother-in-law, that he had not sought the appointment because of "an unwillingness to quit the peaceful enjoyment of my Family" and continued, "I must Intreat you & Mrs Bassett, if possible, to visit at Mount Vernon as also my Wife's other friends—I could wish you to take her down, as I have no expectations of returning till Winter & feel great uneasiness at her lonesome Situation."^{xxi} George's previous promise to his wife to return home by the fall was apparently nothing more than sweet and soothing words. He then wrote to Jacky:

my great concern upon this occasion, is the thoughts of leaving your Mother under the uneasiness which I know this affair will throw her into; I therefore hope, expect, & indeed have no doubt, of your using every means in your power to keep up her Spirits, by doing everything in your power, to promote her quiet—I have I must confess very uneasy feelings on her acct... At any time, I hope it is unnecessary for me to say, that I am always pleased with yours & Nelly's abidance at Mount Vernon, much less upon this occasion, when I think it absolutely necessary for the peace & satisfaction of your Mother; a consideration which I have no doubt will have due weight with you both, & require no arguments to inforce.^{xxii}

George knew how important family was to Martha, and if he could not be with her, he wanted to make sure someone that she cared for would be near. The next day, he wrote his younger brother, "I shall hope that my Friends will visit, & endeavour to keep up the Spirits of my Wife as much as they can, as my departure will, I know, be a cutting stroke upon her; and on this acct alone, I have many very disagreeable Sensations."^{xxiii}

It is undeniable that George Washington was deeply concerned about his wife's well-



being, both physically and emotionally. His love for Martha went beyond the standard requirements of protection that would be expected of a Virginian gentleman at this time. Through these letters, we can see that George had a genuine affection for Martha, and it was this tenderness that would strengthen his resolve in the Revolutionary War's darkest hours.

Just before George departed Philadelphia, he wrote one last note to his wife. Once again claiming that he had "full confidence of a happy meeting with you sometime in the Fall," George reminded his loving partner, "I retain an unalterable affection for you, which neither time or distance can change."^{xxiv} These kind words may have greatly comforted Martha, and as Ellen McCallister Clark contends, it seems more than coincidental that out of all the letters Martha burned, these two epistles, "written on this momentous occasion that changed their lives forever, were found tucked behind a desk drawer after her death."^{xxv}

The Washingtons carried on in each others' absence, but kept up an almost constant correspondence. Martha traveled to her son's house for the birth of her first grandchild, a girl who sadly died at birth. George's troops had already fought in the Battle of Bunker Hill, losing the field of battle but winning an extremely important moral victory. He was now occupied in buttressing the colonial defenses and molding the militias into a regular, well-drilled army. Back in Virginia, rumors swirled that Martha was in danger, as their infamous old friend Lord Dunmore was on board a



British man-of-war in the Potomac and ready to strike Mount Vernon at any moment. While George initially dismissed these stories – “I can hardly think that Lord Dunmore can act so low, & unmanly a part, as to think of siezing Mrs. Washington by way of revenge upon me” – he still expressed his concern about this and other threats to Martha’s safety in his letters.^{xxvi} But though Martha occasionally stayed in Alexandria or visited with relatives elsewhere in Virginia, she never left Mount Vernon for long. If George was to ever fulfill his promise of returning home soon, or at least to take leave and visit during the army’s winter encampment like many officers did at this time, Martha wanted to be there for his homecoming. However, General Washington understood that his soldiers were unlike any other army. He knew that if he left camp, troop numbers may be decimated when enlistments expired on January 1. He knew his presence was necessary to hold the Continental Army together at this critical juncture, but he also missed his wife’s company and feared for her safety. By late October 1775, George initiated the annual practice that would occur throughout the Revolutionary War and asked Martha to join him in the winter camp.^{xxvii}

Like so many times before, George treated his wife like a partner in this matter; he did not order her to camp, but merely invited Martha “to come to me, altho’ I fear the Season is too far advanced. . . to admit this with any tolerable degree of convenience.” George knew that his wife had never been north of Annapolis, and travel during the harsh New England winters would not be pleasant for anyone, especially a



Southern lady. And so, he described “the difficulties. . . which must attend the journey before her and left it to her own choice.”^{xxviii} To his minor discontent, Martha kept her husband waiting while she decided what to do. While she wanted to join George and give him the support that every spouse needs from their significant other, Martha was preoccupied in Virginia. Her daughter-in-law Nelly was still mourning the loss of her infant, and the slaves at Mount Vernon were enticed by Lord Dunmore’s promise of freedom for all runaways who took up arms with the British. However, a newspaper published a potentially ruinous libel that forced Martha to decide where she would spend that winter. Burwell Bassett showed her the clipping: “Mr. Washington we hear is married to a very amiable Lady, but it is said Mrs. Washington, being a warm Loyalist, has separated from her husband since the commencement of the present troubles, and lives, very much respected in the city of New York.”^{xxix} George could not afford to have his fragile authority undermined by such unfounded vitriol, so Martha set off for Cambridge by mid-November, bringing along with her Jack, Nelly, a young nephew (one of George’s first of many namesakes) and some precious few comforts of home.

The month-long journey was like a goodwill tour for the family as Martha attempted to dispel the rumors. The matron of Mount Vernon, bedecked in homespun gowns and a wig without powder, won over the populace as she met with Patriot leaders along the way. Soon enough, tolling church bells announced her progress



towards Massachusetts.^{xxx} The shift in response was remarkable, cementing Martha's position as a public figure as well as bolstering support for General Washington. "Using a combination of carriage, livery, postilions, homespun, the family coat of arms, artlessly good manners, and a display of wifely devotion strong enough to carry her a thousand miles in the dead of winter... she enhanced the image of the commander in chief by showing herself to be a model consort."^{xxxi} Martha knew that she was now in the public eye and unable to escape its scrutiny. As she told a friend back home in Alexandria, "I dont doubt but you have seen the Figuer our arrival made in the Philadelphia paper – and I left it in as great as pomp as if I had been a very great somebody."^{xxxii}

Martha must have felt a pang of sorrow at the death of her private life and the sacrifice of her idyllic existence at Mount Vernon, but she was irrevocably entrenched in the depths of her husband's war by the time she arrived at Cambridge on December 11. The only thing she could do was to support the General in every way possible. However, Martha could never have prepared herself for the scenes of bloody conflict that she witnessed in her first winter at war. Martha described her new situation:

some days we have a number of cannon and shells from Boston and Bunkers Hill, but it does not seem to surprise any one but me; I confess I shudder every time I hear the sound of a gun... I just took a look at pore Boston & Charlestown – from prospect Hill Charlestown has only a few chimneys standing in it, there seems to be a number of very fine Buildings in Boston but god knows how long they will stand; they are pulling up all the warfs for firewood – to me that never



see any thing of war, the preparations, are very terable indeed, but I endeavor to keep my fears to myself as well as I can.^{xxxiii}

To keep her mind off the conflict, Martha reorganized the living arrangements at the Vassal House, a handsome Georgian two-story frame house that the General chose as his headquarters (it would later be inhabited by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow). The Washingtons, in their mid-forties, shared their quarters with aide-de-camps in their twenties, with Martha acting like what her biographer Patricia Brady called “a fraternity house mother. . . . The young men slept two or three to a bed and several to a room; they were always bustling back and forth on military errands, sometimes seeking out their own private entertainments of the sort not best shared with Lady Washington.”^{xxxiv} While her domestic support must have been invaluable for a man who needed to devote his undivided attention to military matters, George benefited most through her emotional support. She was now by his side and could love and comfort him in ways that no letter can convey. With Martha, George was not required to play the role of stoic and fearless general; he could express all of his anxieties and worries, knowing that she would still love him.

Martha acted as George’s silent bedrock throughout the first winter of the Revolutionary War. The camp was disheartened with troubling news from the Canadian front, and many troops were counting down the days until their enlistments expired on January 1, 1776. On that same day, Lord Dunmore shelled the Loyalist city



of Norfolk for seven hours to dishearten the nearby rebel elements. Martha must have been worried about her relatives not far away in New Kent County when she penned this letter to her sister:

I have wrote to you several times. . . . I am really very uneasy at not hearing from you and have made all the excuse for you that I can think of but it will not doe much longer if I doe not get a letter by this nights post I shall think myself quite forgot by all my Freinds. . . . The General myself and Jack are very well Nelly Custis is I hope getting well again, and I believe is with child, I hope noe accident will happen to her in going back I have not thought must about it yet god knows whare we shall be I suppose thare will be a change soon but how I cannot pretend to say - A few days a goe Gen. Clinton, with several companyes Sailed out of Boston Harbor to what place distant for, we cannot find out. . . they have been kept in Boston so long that I suppose they will be glad for a place where they may have more room^{xxxv}

General Henry Clinton was actually headed south to access military opportunities in the Carolinas, a situation that would trouble the Americans later, but for now meant that the British forces in occupied Boston were weakened.

As George planned a number of recruitment tactics to keep up his personnel numbers, Martha tried her hardest to brighten the mood at camp. She insisted that they celebrate Twelfth Night, their anniversary, with a ball – or at least the best gathering that the situation could afford. Even though George at first thought that it seemed frivolous, the party marked the beginning of one of Martha’s most important roles at camp. Throughout the winter the officers’ wives would take turns hosting the other couples, and Martha Washington set up a rotation to ensure that no one would be denied a chance to dine and dance with the General. These pleasant diversions not only



greatly lifted morale, but also improved relations between the officers and with their commander-in-chief. George admitted to his wife that his manner was often alienating and had sometimes caused “unintentional offences,”^{xxxvi} so Martha used any opportunity available to assuage any hurt feelings. She also used these events to charm any distinguished guests. Mercy Otis Warren said that she “was Receiv’d with that politness and Respect shewn in a first interview the well bred and with the Ease and Cordiality of Friendship of a much Earlier date” and went on to tell Abigail Adams that “the complacency of her Manners speaks at once the Benevolence of her Heart, and her affability, Candor and Gentleness Quallify her to soften the hours of private Life or to sweeten the Care of the Hero and smooth the Rugged scenes of War.”^{xxxvii} Before Martha arrived at camp, George felt he wasted too much time entertaining influential visitors. While civilian support was crucial, he had a war to plan and could not afford to spend his evenings toasting Liberty everyday. Martha gladly took over this role and smoothed any ruffled features with the help of her natural social talents and Southern hospitality.

Winter’s end brought more than just pleasant weather for the General and Lady Washington. Incredibly, General Henry Knox transported over fifty canons recently captured from Fort Ticonderoga across 300 miles of snow-covered, sometimes mountainous terrain. The Continental Army then positioned the artillery on Dorchester Heights overlooking Boston, convincing General William Howe that it was finally time



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to evacuate. By the end of March, the British Army and many Loyalist civilians sailed out the harbor. However, Martha could not join the celebratory dinners in the city, as a smallpox epidemic had broken out towards the end of the siege and only those with immunity could enter safely. She had more pressing matters to attend to, however, as George was preparing his march towards New York City.^{xxxviii}

Washington was there by April 13, 1776, but Martha did not arrive until a few days later, held up by Jacky's illness and a very pregnant Nelly. George must have expected to stay in New York for a while, as he purchased a featherbed, pillows, and crockery for his residence at the Mortier House. He also envisioned many more nights in the field and bought various tents and camp chairs.^{xxxix} Martha could not stay long, though, as the arrival of the army also brought in smallpox. George was already immune owing to a light case he had contracted while visiting Barbados, but his wife never had a pock, and therefore was still susceptible. Safety compelled her to leave, but Martha was determined to stay near her husband. George wrote to his brother, "Mrs. Washington is still here, and talks of taking the Small Pox, but I doubt her resolution."^{xl} After all, an eighteenth-century inoculation was no simple matter, and Martha had been extremely anxious throughout Jacky's procedure a few years earlier.^{xli} Despite his doubts, Martha voluntarily infected herself the first day the couple arrived in Philadelphia for George's consultations with Congress. She made a quick recovery. George's stepson noted the benefits of her immunity:



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She can now attend you to any Part of the Continent with pleasure, unsullied by the Apprehensions of that Disorder; and whose Presence will alleviate the Care and Anxiety which public Transactions may occasion. this Consideration has added much to the pleasure I feel on this Occasion, as your Happiness when together will be much greater than when you are apart.

Martha's successful inoculation might have greatly affected George's opinion on the matter. While he was an early supporter of the procedure, the General worried that a mass inoculation would debilitate his troops, make them vulnerable to attack while in a weakened state, or possibly trigger an accidental epidemic. In fact, he made inoculation a military offense that same year. However, after witnessing Martha's full recovery and possibly thinking back to reports of rampant infection during General Benedict Arnold's siege of Quebec, George reversed this policy and required all new recruits to be inoculated, making the Continental Army one of the first military forces to institute wholesale vaccination. Clearly, Martha Washington's influence on her husband had far greater reach than just who they invited to dinner. It has been estimated that nine times as many soldiers were killed by smallpox as by the enemy in the Revolutionary War, and Martha's resolve may have helped reduce that statistic.^{xlii}

George returned to his headquarters in New York, and left Martha behind in Philadelphia so she might fully recover. She had every reason to believe that he would soon call her back, as domestic necessities required a female presence at camp, and there had been talk of a spy at New York headquarters, when George's hired housekeeper was accused of being a secret Loyalist sympathizer. However, with the



arrival of General Howe's troops on Staten Island and the promise of more reinforcements from England, George decided it was too dangerous for Martha. Although she must have been upset, this allowed her to be present in Philadelphia when the Declaration of Independence was read aloud from the Pennsylvania State House; she knew before the general and his army that they were now fighting for an entirely new level of freedom.

Like the rest of the country, the summer of 1776 marked a pivotal time in Martha Washington's life. Her husband had retreated from Manhattan and was now holed up in Brooklyn with demoralized troops and limited supplies. Her granddaughter was born without her guidance at the Calvert's Mount Airy Plantation in Maryland. Martha was completely separated from her loved ones – alone for the first time in her life. Anxiety and worry fill her letters, as she told her sister on August 28, "I am still in this town and Noe prospects at present of my leveing it. . . . I doe my Dear sister most relegiously wish thare was an End to the matter that we might have the pleasure of meeting again - My Duty to my Dear mamma - and tell her I am very well - I dont hear from you so often as I used to doe at Cambridge."^{xliii} However, such revelations are few, as Martha was determined to assure her family that all was well with Lady Washington.

By the time Martha returned to Mount Vernon in November, the house was in disarray. Many slaves had run away, enticed by Lord Dunmore's promise of freedom,



and those that remained cared little about the estate. However, Martha was deeply affected by the sight of troops whose ragged clothes were literally rotting away on their backs, and she knew that George's pleas to Congress for more supplies would go unheeded. So, putting aside the mansion's upkeep for the time being, she greatly increased the production of flax and wool. Martha assigned sixteen slaves to spin thread and weave cloth, while others were instructed to knit socks and shirts. But she was not just a delegator, as she started to unravel silk stockings and cushions and wove the thread into homespun fabric, adding a little fashionable flare to the boycott dress. Martha kept up her support on the home front until an incredible bit of news arrived in January. George had crossed the Delaware River and taken Trenton, New Jersey, from the hung-over Hessians. After driving the British from Princeton, he finally settled his troops into winter quarters at Morristown in January 1777.

The break in fighting did not provide a reprieve for Washington, however. The weather was harsh, supplies ran low, and disease spread rampantly. Both the Baptist and Presbyterian churches at Morristown were converted to makeshift hospitals, and the locals certainly did not appreciate having thousands of sick and hungry troops quartered in their homes. By the end of winter, a quarter of Morristown residents died from smallpox or dysentery. As if the situation was not dire enough, George suffered deeply from homesickness and mortification because of the erratic arrival of Martha's letters, "as it deprives me of the consolation of hearing from home on domestic



matters." George believed that no one "suffers more by an absence from home than myself."^{xliv} By the time Martha arrived in mid-March, both the troops and the townsfolk resented the General. Once again, she took the initiative to turn public sentiment in favor of her husband. With material brought from Mount Vernon, Martha organized sewing circles to fabricate clothing and roll bandages for the troops, and encouraged other women to do the same. Several prominent ladies who visited camp found her devotion surprising:

As she was said to be so grand a lady, we thought we must put on our best bibs and bands. So we dressed ourselves in our most elegant ruffles and silks and were introduced to her ladyship. And don't you think, we found her *knitting, and with a specked apron on!* There we were without a stitch of work and sitting in state, but General Washington's lady with her own hands was knitting stockings.^{xlv}

Martha's example of industry and loyalty not only convinced the local women to view the army in a more sympathetic light, but must also have reminded the soldiers of their own mother. It is no wonder that the troops cheered every time Lady Washington's carriage rolled into sight.

The Washingtons spent less time together in 1777 than any other year of the war, and many people at camp noticed their contentment with each other in these precious few months. Bystanders must have laughed whenever Martha pulled on her husband's coattails in order to get the busy-minded General's attention, who would then smile down lovingly from his great height.^{xlvi} General Nathaniel Greene informed his wife



Kitty, who must have been dying for information about her old friends at camp, as she was home bound in Rhode Island with a difficult pregnancy, that “Mrs Washington and Mrs Bland from Virginia are at Camp, happy in their better halves. Mrs Washington is excessive fond of the General and he of her. They are very happy in each other.”^{xlvi}

Martha Dangerfield Bland, the wife of Colonel Theodorick Bland and a daily visitor of the Washington headquarters, told her sister-in-law that the George’s “Worthy Lady seems to be in perfect felicity while she is by the side of her Old Man as she calls him. . .

. General Washington throws of[f] the Hero – and takes on the chatty agreeable companion – he can be down right impudent sometimes – such impudence, Fanny, as you and I like.”^{xlvi}

But with the coming of summer, the soldiers had to take up arms again. George prepared to move his troops out while Martha returned to Virginia in June, where her son and Nelly (pregnant again) awaited her arrival. With a house full of family, life at Mount Vernon must have seemed almost normal to Martha. However, the end of the year would prove to be an eventful one. On September 25, the British army occupied Philadelphia, a painfully symbolic defeat for the Americans and their fleeing Congress. Less than a month later, General Horatio Gates defeated the British at Saratoga, New York, a victory that would convince the French to openly support the Patriot cause. And just before Christmas, Martha experienced a horrible tragedy – her best friend and sister, Anna Maria Dandridge Bassett, had finally passed away after years of chronic



illness. Martha may have been thinking back to the scenes of death at camp when she sent this melancholy letter of condolence to her brother-in-law:

she has I hope made a happy exchange – and only gon a little before us the time draws near when I hope we shall meet never more to part – if to meet our departed Friends and know them was scertain we could have very little reason to desire to stay in this world where if we are at ease one hour we are in affliction days. . . nothing in this world do I wish for more sincerly than to be with [you], but alas I am so situated at this time that I cannot leve home. . . the General had wrote to me that he cannot come home this winter but as soon as the army under his command goes into winter quarters he will send for me, if he does I must go^{xlix}

As much as Martha wished to travel to New Kent County to mourn with Burwell Bassett and to possibly adopt her niece Fanny, Nelly was about to give birth to another daughter, and most importantly, her husband could send for her at any moment. As soon as little Martha “Patsy” Parke Custis was born, Mrs. Washington set out for Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, only vaguely aware of the notorious conditions she would encounter. Her traveling party included eighteen Mount Vernon slaves, possibly to assist in the perpetual clothing drives. While stopped at an inn one night, a huge snowstorm made the roads impassible. Martha, never being one to yield to obstacles, left her carriage there and hired a sleigh. Many trips had to be made to fetch the valuable people and sewing supplies left behind.¹

“We are in a dreary kind of place, and uncomfortably provided,” George Washington informed Jacky Custis.^{li} Although a string of victories in the Philadelphia campaign helped with troop morale, the army faced a dire shortage of blankets,



firewood and food. And unlike Morristown, few houses existed around Valley Forge, so the troops had to build their own huts for shelter without hay to insulate the cold earthen floor. The wet conditions of a Pennsylvania winter only worsened the rate of disease, and George saw his troop numbers decrease by some 2,500 deaths by the end of the season. The camp was desperate for a feminine touch. The Marquis de Lafayette wrote to his wife: "Several general officers have brought their wives to camp, and I am very envious, not of their wives [who are rather dull], but of the pleasure they have in being able to see them. General Washington has also just decided to send for his wife, a modest and respectable person, who loves her husband madly."^{lii} When Martha finally arrived at Valley Forge in early February 1778, many soldiers cheered "God Bless Lady Washington!" Perhaps a new pair of socks would be theirs soon enough.

George had chosen the Potts House for his residence, which gave the couple only two rooms for personal use. Martha informed Mercy Otis Warren that "the Generals apartment is very small he has had a log cabben built to dine in which has made our quarter much more tolerable."^{liii} Once again, Martha filled many valuable roles for her husband, assisting him and his troops any way possible. A woman at camp recalled, "I never in my life knew a woman so busy from early morning until late at night as was Lady Washington, providing comforts for the sick soldiers. . . . Every few days she might be seen, with basket in hand, and with a single attendant, going among the huts seeking the keenest and most needy sufferers, and giving all the comforts to them in her



power.”^{liv} Martha delivered the fruits of her sewing circles to the needy soldiers and offered a kind of comfort to the sick that no doctor could administer, especially at times when there was nothing left to do but pray. Pierre-Etienne Duponceau, a French volunteer who accompanied the Baron von Steuben, observed that “her presence inspired fortitude” and that those who visited her “retired full of hope and confidence.” He was impressed that “Mrs. Washington had the courage to follow her husband in that dismal abode.”^{lv}

Although Valley Forge has been memorialized as a hell on earth for the Continental Army, it also proved to be rejuvenation. Steuben had drilled the troops into perfection by the end of the winter, Congress was finally able to send supplies, and George had convinced the locals to sell pork, poultry and milk to the soldiers. But most importantly, news arrived that France had recognized the independence of the United States of America, and that a treaty of alliance had been signed. The General declared the next day to be devoted to celebration and thanksgiving, sending Martha off to Mount Vernon in high spirits.

The buoyant mood continued after the sweltering Battle of Monmouth. Although a tactical draw, it proved that the well-trained forces of the Continental Army could withstand attacks from a professional army, even when outnumbered by the thousands. However, George’s luck would soon run out. The plunging value of the paper dollar wrecked havoc on the newly-formed nation, especially compared to the solidly reliable



British pound. Ideas about a massive land and sea attack on New York City never fully materialized, and the rest of the year's campaigning was dominated by bloody skirmishes on the frontier. Martha had hoped that with French support, George would be able to visit Mount Vernon, but it became more apparent each day that he could not. The constant relocations were beginning to take a toll on Martha, now close to fifty, as she made clear in a letter to her brother: "I am very uneasy at this time - I have some reason to expect that I shall take another trip to the northward. The pore General is not likely to come to see us from what I can hear - I expect to hear seertainly by the next post - if I doe I shall write to you to inform you and my friends - if I am so happy to stay home."^{lvi} George eventually sent for her, and to take the strain off his wife, they met each other in Philadelphia to spend the holidays together. At the end of January, they set off together for winter headquarters at Middlebrook, New Jersey. Although food and supplies remained scarce, this camp was nothing like Valley Forge. The weather conditions were mild, the men had reasonable lodgings, and there were no rotting horse corpses littering the ground. The Washingtons stayed in the Wallace House, one of the largest in New Jersey. Like the other winters, she performed her social duties brilliantly and provided the domestic and moral support that the recovering commander-in-chief needed. But she must have felt that she could be of better use in Virginia, where Nelly was again expecting. Martha was back home by June 1779.



Martha did not stay at Mount Vernon for long, however. As the British army dealt a series of blows to the Continentals in the South, the worried General desperately needed his caring consort. He went into winter camp early that year, choosing Morristown for the second time. It would prove to be a trying period for everyone involved, as the winter of 1780 was one of the coldest ever.^{lvii} Many troops were forced to sleep on open ground, with their feet facing the campfires. The war seemed to drag on endlessly, especially given the inability of Congress to properly supply, or even pay, its troops. George needed Martha more than ever, as General Greene explained to his wife: "Our good General is in health, but not happy; things don't go to his mind. Some where I can plainly see the marks of distress. He intends to have his Lady at Camp this Winter."^{lviii}

A few days after Martha arrived near the end of December, four feet of snow fell on Morristown. But if Lady Washington was to be in camp, the extremely pregnant Kitty Greene was determined to be there, too. Against her husband's better judgment, Kitty traveled through the bone-chilling conditions and arrived safely, giving birth to their son Nathaniel on January 31. As usual, Martha performed her war relief efforts out of her residence, this time in an unfinished eight-room house that the Washingtons had to share with the widowed landlady and her children.^{lix} But this year, the coming of spring did not end the suffering of winter, as the melting snow turned Morristown into a sea of mud and filth. When two foreign dignitaries visited in April, Don Juan Mirailles



of Spain suddenly fell ill and Martha nursed him personally; however, it was to no avail. On May 31 the camp had received word that the British had taken Charleston, South Carolina. George knew that he would have to steer some forces south in hopes of stopping General Charles Cornwallis.^{lx}

Martha would later recall that “I suffered so much last winter. . . . there was not much pleasure thar the distress of the army and other difficultys th’o I did not know the cause, the pore General was so unhappy that it distressed me exceedingly.”^{lxi} But although she was exhausted from the relentless winters at camp and the rough travel conditions, Martha was determined to continue her support from Mount Vernon. While stopped at Philadelphia en route home, she learned of a fundraising campaign, spearheaded by Joseph Reed’s young wife Esther, to gather funds from wealthy ladies in all the states to donate to the neediest of soldiers. Martha undoubtedly provided plenty of anecdotal accounts to spur the women to open their purses. When George heard of the project, he was quite touched and wrote Joseph Reed to suggest spending the funds on:

a provision of shirts in preference to any thing else, in case the fund should amount to a sum equivalent to a supply of eight or ten thousand. The Soldiery are exceedingly in want of them, and the public have never, for several years past, been able to procure a sufficient quantity to make them comfortable. . . . Should the fund fall short of a supply of the number of shirts I have mentioned, perhaps there could be no better application of the Money, than laying it out in the purchase of refreshments for the Hospitals.^{lxii}



George's account books for October noted, "Mrs Washington's bounty to the soldiers, £6000," the equivalent of \$20,000 today. ^{lxiii}

The Americans faced a number of setbacks in the field that year, including General Benedict Arnold's defection and General Horatio Gates' defeat at Camden, South Carolina. Martha again came to winter quarters at her husband's request, this time in New Windsor, New York. She tried her hardest to uplift spirits, but the weather was harsh, supplies were almost nonexistent, and most troops had not received payment. Even if they had seen any money, it would be useless in the face of the Continental dollar's uncontrollable inflation. Desertion was rampant and whispers of mutiny spread throughout the camp. But every small victory in the south bolstered sentiments in New York, and by May 1781, George was planning an assault on New York City. While preparing to leave, Martha fell ill with a gallbladder attack and was forced to spend weeks bedridden. The widow of a British army officer sent Martha a letter reporting that "some Intercepted Letters mention her being Indisposed,"^{lxiv} and delivered a box of fruit that included pineapples, oranges, and lemons. George recognized the propaganda value of such a gesture, even if it was sincere, and returned the goods claiming that Martha was fully healed. He sent her home a few days later to prove his story.^{lxv}

While Martha was at Mount Vernon taking care of her new grandchild, George Washington Parke Custis, George received word that the French fleet was on its way to



the Chesapeake Bay. Giving up his plans for a New York siege, Washington moved his troops southward. He rode sixty miles out of his way to reach Mount Vernon, where he could plan his attack in the comforts of his own home. Martha spent three days and nights attending to George and his officers, who complimented her genuine hospitality. As George prepared to leave for Yorktown, Virginia, Jacky Custis, who had never before seemed interested in military affairs, suddenly wished to join his stepfather. The General grudgingly agreed to give him a noncombat assignment and they soon rode south. After a near constant bombardment on General Cornwallis and his cornered troops, the British Army surrendered their weapons on October 19, effectively ending the Revolutionary War. Jacky had fallen ill with camp fever during the battle, but summoned up enough energy to witness the ceremony. However, his condition rapidly deteriorated, and he was sent to nearby Eltham to recover. Martha and Nelly came south from Mount Vernon and reached his bedside before George did. Jacky succumbed on November 5. Martha had outlived all four of her children.

After years of being her husband's silent and steady bedrock, it was now George's time to comfort his grieving consort. Even though he was summoned back to Philadelphia, Congress would have to wait until Jacky was properly buried. The family rested at Mount Vernon for a week before George headed north. Martha must have decided that she could not stand to spend this of all winters alone, as she accompanied her husband. The couple had grown incredibly close over those trying years, and now



that the war finally seemed to be nearing its completion, the Washingtons needed each other more than ever. After convincing Congress to keep an army in the field, George and his wife headed to their headquarters at Newburgh, New York, at the end of March, 1782. Martha attempted to brighten up their new home, a one-story Dutch farmhouse with a beautiful view of the Hudson River, while George figured out how he should deal with the British, who still occupied New York and Charleston.

In midsummer, Martha returned home to care for her grandchildren, the youngest two of whom the Washingtons would later adopt. As peace negotiations dragged on in Paris, it became clear to George that he would not be returning to Mount Vernon that year. Frustrated and extremely bored, he sent for Martha to make one last trip north and to spend the final winter of the war as they always had, together. She returned to the same stone farmhouse in Newburgh, and the Washingtons tried to keep each other company as the weeks passed without any news from Europe.

However, unrest was growing among the troops, who were adequately fed but still unpaid. Rumors circulated that George planned to make himself king, and some officers were advocating that idea. An interesting but possibly apocryphal letter dated February 7, 1783, was quoted in Benson Lossing's *Mary and Martha*:

Yesterday there was an interesting scene at Headquarters. Over fifty soldiers thinly clad, and with pale but happy faces, whom the General had pardoned in the morning for various crimes, came to express their gratitude for his mercy and his kindness to them. . . . My heart was touched and my eyes were filled with tears. I gave the speaker some money to divide among them all, and bade them "go, and sin



no more.” The poor fellows kissed my hand and said “God bless Lady Washington”.
Poor fellows.^{lxvi}

If this story is untrue, the event could have very likely occurred, as Washington had pardoned all military prisoners the day before. The right words and actions from the commander-in-chief peacefully quelled the discontent, and Martha was by her husband’s side throughout this stressful time. In April, news of a peace agreement arrived in camp. The war was finally ending, but the Washingtons were not finished yet. Martha fell ill during the summer and did not return to Mount Vernon until October, when George went to Princeton to meet with Congress at its temporary seat. Two months later, Washington followed it to Annapolis, Maryland, where on December 23, George read an emotional Farewell Address and returned his commission as commander-in-chief to the civil body from which it had come, becoming a private citizen for the first time in almost a decade. He then mounted his horse and galloped hard towards his beloved Martha and Mount Vernon, arriving home at last on Christmas Eve.

General George Washington refused to take a salary for his service in the Revolutionary War, but did send Congress a list of expenses. Included in the ledger was Mrs. Washington’s travel expenses, £1,064.10, which Patricia Brady points out was “a bargain price, considering her importance to the American cause.”^{lxvii} Martha’s contribution to the American Revolution has been greatly overlooked. General



Washington never ordered his wife to come to his side, but every single year she honored his request for companionship and continued to help his cause in any capacity she could. Even if she had not fed the troops, mended their clothes, knitted countless pairs of socks, soothed tempers at camp and in the public, entertained the officers and guests, overcame her fears of traveling and inoculation, tended the sick, comforted the dying and the bereaved, and raised thousands of dollars to aid the Continental Army – the emotional support and boundless love that she provided her husband at seven winter camps would still make Martha Dandridge Washington the indispensable woman of the Revolutionary War.

ⁱ Mary V. Thompson, ““As if I had Been a Very Great Somebody’ Martha Washington in the American Revolution: Becoming the New Nation’s First Lady.” George Washington Symposium, Mount Vernon, Virginia, 9 Nov. 2002.

ⁱⁱ Ellen McCallister Clark, *Martha Washington* (Mount Vernon, Virginia: Mount Vernon Ladies Association, 2002), 7-8; Patricia Brady, *Martha Washington: An American Life* (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), 48-51

ⁱⁱⁱ Clark, *Martha*, 12.

^{iv} MW to John Hanbury and Company, 08/20/1757, “*Worthy Partner*”: *The Papers of Martha Washington*, comp. Joseph E. Fields (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 6.

^v MW to Robert Cary and Company, 08/20/1757, *Worthy Partner*, 5-6.

^{vi} Bruce Chadwick, *George Washington’s War* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2005), 48.

^{vii} Clark, *Martha*, 17.

^{viii} GW to Richard Washington, 01/16/1759, *The Papers of George Washington: Colonial Series*, 10 volumes, ed. W.W. Abbot (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1983-1995), 6:359.

^{ix} Quoted in Chadwick, *Washington’s War*, 65.

^x Frank E Grizzard, *George Washington: A Biographical Companion* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2002), 89-90.

^{xi} Clark, *Washington*, 27; Brady, *Martha Washington*, 91.

^{xii} Brady, *Martha Washington*, 91.



- ^{xiii} Edmund Pendleton to _____, [9/1774?], *The Letters and Papers of Edmund Pendleton, 1734-1803*, 2 volumes, ed. David John Mays (Charlottesville, Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 1967), 1:98.
- ^{xiv} GW to Burwell Bassett, 06/20/1773, *The Papers of George Washington: Colonial Series*, 9:243-44.
- ^{xv} Helen Bryan, *Martha Washington: First Lady of Liberty* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2002), 184.
- ^{xvi} Address to the Continental Congress, 06/16/1775, *The Papers of George Washington: Revolutionary War Series [PGW(R)]*, 13 volumes, eds. Philander D. Chase et al (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1985—), 1:1-3.
- ^{xvii} GW to Arthur Young, 12/12/1793, *The Writings of George Washington*, vol. 12, ed. Jared Sparks (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1855), 310.
- ^{xviii} Bryan, *First Lady of Liberty*, 184.
- ^{xix} GW to MW, 06/18/1775, *PGW(R)*, 1:3-6.
- ^{xx} Brady, *Martha Washington*, 95.
- ^{xxi} GW to Burwell Bassett, 06/19/1775, *PGW(R)*, 1:12-13
- ^{xxii} GW to Jack Parke Custis, 06/19/1775, *PGW(R)*, 1:15.
- ^{xxiii} GW to John Augustine Washington, 06/20/1775, *PGW(R)*, 1:20.
- ^{xxiv} GW to MW, 06/23/1775, *PGW(R)*, 1:27.
- ^{xxv} Clark, *Washington*, 28.
- ^{xxvi} GW to Lund Washington, 08/20/1775, *PGW(R)*, 1:335.
- ^{xxvii} Brady, *Martha Washington*, 97-99.
- ^{xxviii} GW to John Augustine Washington, 10/13/1775, *PGW(R)*, 2:162.
- ^{xxix} Bryan, *First Lady of Liberty*, 188.
- ^{xxx} *Ibid*, 191; Roberts, *Founding Mothers*, 87.
- ^{xxxi} Bryan, *First Lady of Liberty*, 193.
- ^{xxxii} MW to Elizabeth Ramsay, 12/30/1775, *Worthy Partner*, 164.
- ^{xxxiii} *Ibid*.
- ^{xxxiv} Brady, *Martha Washington*, 105.
- ^{xxxv} MW to Anna Maria Dandridge, 01/31/1776, *Worthy Partner*, 166-67.
- ^{xxxvi} Bryan, *First Lady of Liberty*, 200.
- ^{xxxvii} 04/17/1776, *Adams Family Correspondence*, ed. L.H. Butterfield (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 1:385
- ^{xxxviii} Brady, *Martha Washington*, 108-10.
- ^{xxxix} *Ibid*, 110.
- ^{xl} GW to John Augustine Washington, 4/29/1776, *PGW(R)*, 4:173.



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- ^{xli} Thompson, “Very Great Somebody,” 12.
- ^{xliii} Bryan, *First Lady of Liberty*, 205.
- ^{xliiii} MW to Anna Maria Dandridge Bassett, 08/28/1776, *Worthy Partner*, 172.
- ^{xliv} Brady, *Martha Washington*, 114.
- ^{xlv} Bryan, *First Lady of Liberty*, 215.
- ^{xlvi} Brady, *Martha Washington*, 114.
- ^{xlvii} Nathanael Greene to Catherine Greene, 4/8/1777, *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, vol. 2, ed. by Richard K. Showman (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 54.
- ^{xlviii} Martha Dangerfield Bland to Frances Bland Randolph, 5/12/1777, in *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society* (July 1933, 150-153), 152.
- ^{xliv} MW to Burwell Bassett, 12/22/1777, *Worthy Partner*, 175.
- ^l Bryan, *First Lady of Liberty*, 220-22.
- ^{li} Brady, *Martha Washington*, 120.
- ^{lii} Lafayette to Adrienne de Noailles de Lafayette, 1/6/1778, *Lafayette in the Age of the American Revolution: Selected Letters and Papers, 1776-1790*, ed. by Stanley J. Idzerda (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977), 1:225
- ^{liii} 03/07/1778, *Worthy Partner*, 178.
- ^{liv} Bryan, *First Lady of Liberty*, 227.
- ^{lv} Brady, *Martha Washington*, 120-21.
- ^{lvi} MW to Bartholomew Dandridge, 11/02/1778, *Worthy Partner*, 180.
- ^{lvii} Brady, *Martha Washington*, 132.
- ^{lviii} 12/8/1779, *The Papers of General Nathanael Greene*, 3:257.
- ^{lix} Brady, *Martha Washington*, 132.
- ^{lx} Chadwick, *George Washington’s War*, 362; Bryan, *First Lady of Liberty*, 240-41.
- ^{lxi} MW to Burwell Bassett, 07/18/1780, *Worthy Partner*, 183.
- ^{lxii} 06/25/1780, from Thompson, “Very Great Somebody,” 21.
- ^{lxiii} Thompson, “Very Great Somebody,” 19-24.
- ^{lxiv} Martha Morier to MW, 06/15/1781, *Worthy Partner*, 186.
- ^{lxv} Brady, *Martha Washington*, 135; Bryan, *First Lady of Liberty*, 250-51.
- ^{lxvi} *Worthy Partner*, 189.
- ^{lxvii} Brady, *Martha Washington*, 145.