

Washington's Secrets Revealed

Quick! Name an American more famous than George Washington. It's tough! Just about everyone knows that he served as our nation's first president. But other things about him might surprise you. Here are five "secrets" we uncovered on a recent visit to Mount Vernon, Washington's Virginia home.

1 He didn't really want to be president.

In 1787, Washington helped create the U.S. Constitution. That famous **document** set up our nation's government. But Washington had no interest in being the president. He wanted to go home to Virginia and retire. He only agreed to accept the job when people from all over the country urged him to. Washington was so popular that no one ran against him. He was sworn in as the first U.S. president on April 30, 1789.

Words to Know

document: a paper containing important information

capital: the city in a country or state where the government is based

2 He led a ring of spies!

From 1775 to 1783, America fought the Revolutionary War to win its independence from Great Britain. Washington was in charge of the American troops. He had his men spy on British soldiers in restaurants and other places to find out what they were planning. Then the spies used secret codes and invisible ink to pass the information on to Washington. This helped America win the war.



Washington's code name was 711. Why do you think he and his spies used code names?

3 He never called the White House home.

In 1791, Washington helped choose the location of our **capital** city—the area that is now Washington, D.C. But he never lived there! During his presidency, Washington led the nation from New York City and then Philadelphia. The new capital—including the White House—was not ready until 1800, a year after Washington died. The city was named in his honor.

4 He was an amazing dancer.

Did you know that our first president was famous for his dancing skills? In the 1700s, dances called balls were a popular form of entertainment. Washington and his wife, Martha, went to many of them. On one occasion, Washington danced for three hours without taking a single break!

5 He got sick—a lot!

Washington caught several serious illnesses in his lifetime. One was smallpox. The disease caused blisters on Washington's face and body. Washington even had unhealthy teeth. By the time he became president, he had just one tooth left in his mouth. Despite his health troubles, Washington lived to be 67 years old. He died from a throat infection in 1799.

Close-Reading Questions

IF YOU LIVED IN
Washington's Time
Life was pretty different in the late 1700s!

You'd eat eel pie.
Pies made with these snake-like fish were a favorite food.



You'd have sore feet.
There were not different shoes for right and left feet. It was hard to break in a new pair.



You'd have no toilet paper.
It did not exist back then. People used corn husks to clean themselves.

MAP MYSTERY



George's Favorite Spot

Look at the four places labeled in red on the map. Use the clues below to find the one that Washington said he loved best! Circle it.

CLUE 1 It is not in Pennsylvania.

CLUE 2 It is not the nation's current capital.

CLUE 3 It is not north of New Jersey.