

America's Story

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George Washington the Husband

After Washington resigned from the French and Indian War and returned home to Mount Vernon, he married Martha Dandridge Custis on January 6, 1759. He had met Martha Custis, a widow, the previous March and had proposed at that time. This cartoon of Washington proposing makes fun of what Washington might have said, "Dear Martha, will you be the mother of your country...?"

Dear Martha, will you be the mother of your country, love, this land of liberty?

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George and Martha's wedding on January 6, 1759

George Washington the Husband

Martha had been married to Daniel Parke Custis, a wealthy planter in Virginia, and they had two children together before Daniel died. John ("Jacky") was six and Martha ("Patsy") was four when George and Martha married. Washington was very fond of his stepchildren and treated them as his own. George and Martha had a happy marriage. For eight years, while he was at war, Mrs. Washington joined her husband at his headquarters every winter. She did everything she could to help encourage the soldiers and she was determined to keep a positive outlook. What other characteristics do you think were important for the wife of the president to have?

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Mount Vernon, Washington's estate in Virginia

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George Washington the Husband

As a young woman growing up in Williamsburg Virginia, Martha Dandridge had lessons in sewing, housekeeping, cooking, dancing, and music. She also had private tutors to teach her how to read and write. Martha liked her private life and enjoyed being at Mount Vernon with her family.

Even when she couldn't be there or when her husband was away, she was, "... still determined to be cheerful and happy, in whatever situation I may be; for I have also learned from experience that the greater part of our happiness or misery depends upon our dispositions, and not upon our circumstances."

George Washington, too, loved being at Mount Vernon. He enjoyed farming and wrote that "it is honorable, it is amusing, and, with superior judgment, it is profitable." He believed Mount Vernon was the best estate in America for farming. Later in his life, he took great pride in being thought of as the first farmer of the land.



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