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What if George Washington was Captured in 1776?

By: Edward G. Lengel, Editor-in-Chief

Most Americans would probably be shocked to learn of some historians' ambivalence about whether the United States could have won independence from Great Britain without George Washington. For James Thomas Flexner, Washington was the "Indispensable Man." For Don Higginbotham, he was the "Linchpin" of the Revolution. Other historians, however—perhaps wary of appearing to subscribe to a "Great Man" approach to history—contend that Washington's death or capture in 1776 ultimately would have made little difference in the outcome of the Revolutionary War. One way or another, they claim, the United States was fated to attain independence from Great Britain.

Resistance to British rule certainly did not depend on Washington. He was not one of the primary instigators of revolution in 1775. At the time of Lexington and Concord, he was largely unknown outside Virginia; and it is probably safe to argue that he did not immediately inspire the day-

to-day will to resist in regions such as New England. His capture at, say, Brooklyn Heights in August 1776 would not have induced Americans from Massachusetts to North Carolina to utter sighs of despair and immediately cast aside their arms.

If Washington's disappearance from the national scene would not have torn out the heart of American resistance, however, it would have destroyed its brain—removing the one organizing principle that kept the many divergent forces of resistance working in tandem against the common foe. For most of the war, and particularly after 1776, Congress lacked both unanimity and authority. *(Continued on Page 2)*

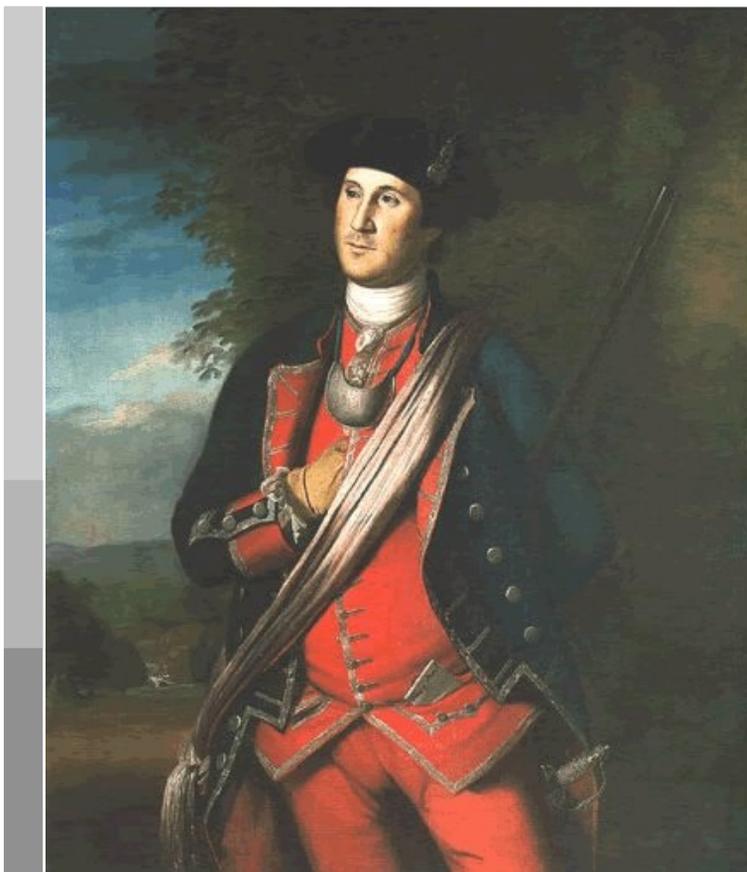
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-Edward G. Lengel

(continued from Page 1)

Its power was derived almost entirely from the states. In practice, Congress had little choice but to delegate to Washington tremendous authority over crucial aspects of strategy, diplomacy, finance, and the day-to-day management of the army. It was not for nothing that some Americans nervously dubbed Washington a dictator. In times of crisis, such as the dismal autumn of 1776; the Valley Forge winter of 1777-78; the Morristown encampment of 1779-80; and the Newburgh Crisis of 1783, the country depended absolutely on Washington's shrewd leadership.

The alternatives were dubious at best. Washington's likely successors in the summer or autumn of 1776—including generals such as Charles Lee, Israel Putnam, Horatio Gates, or Artemas Ward; and politicians such as John Hancock—were either incapable or too inexperienced to manage the army. Granted the luxury of time, better leaders might have emerged, such as Nathanael Greene or Henry Knox; but even they sometimes lacked the tact, charisma, realism, and ruthlessness that defined Washington's leadership. It is difficult to imagine any of these men dealing successfully with the profound problems of mid-level administrative sloth and corruption, along with political back-biting, that brought the Continental Army to the verge of dissolution in 1778. And who else but Washington could so carefully have maintained the alliance with France in 1779-81, or peacefully quelled the flames of army rebellion against civilian rule in 1783?



Great Britain's defeat in the Revolutionary War was not foreordained. Without Washington at the center of power, the Revolutionary War might well have degenerated into a long, drawn-out conflict fought under multiple competing leaders, such as characterized the South American wars of independence against Spain in the early nineteenth century. Like South America, North America might have ended up as a collection of independent but weak sovereignties, or semi-autonomous colonies. But without Washington, there could have been no United States.

“Without
Washington, there
could have been no
United States.”

-Edward G. Lengel



New Website Launched This Fall

Interactive features, modern look improve the user experience

This fall the project launched a new website. With many new features and a more modern appearance, the new Papers of George Washington website encourages interaction between the public and the project. Visitors to the website are able to view selected featured documents, pose questions about research and interesting documents, view an image gallery, and explore a detailed FAQ page about Washington. Furthermore, the website includes a detailed history of the Papers of George Washington project and information about the process of documentary editing. The website is actively monitored and regularly updated with new information, recent news, and multimedia. Check it out at gwpapers.virginia.edu and try out some of the new features!

Find the new website at:
gwpapers.virginia.edu

New Website Features

Some of the highlights of the new PGW Website

“Ask the Editors” welcomes you to submit questions regarding documents, annotation, and the Project

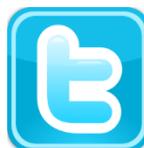


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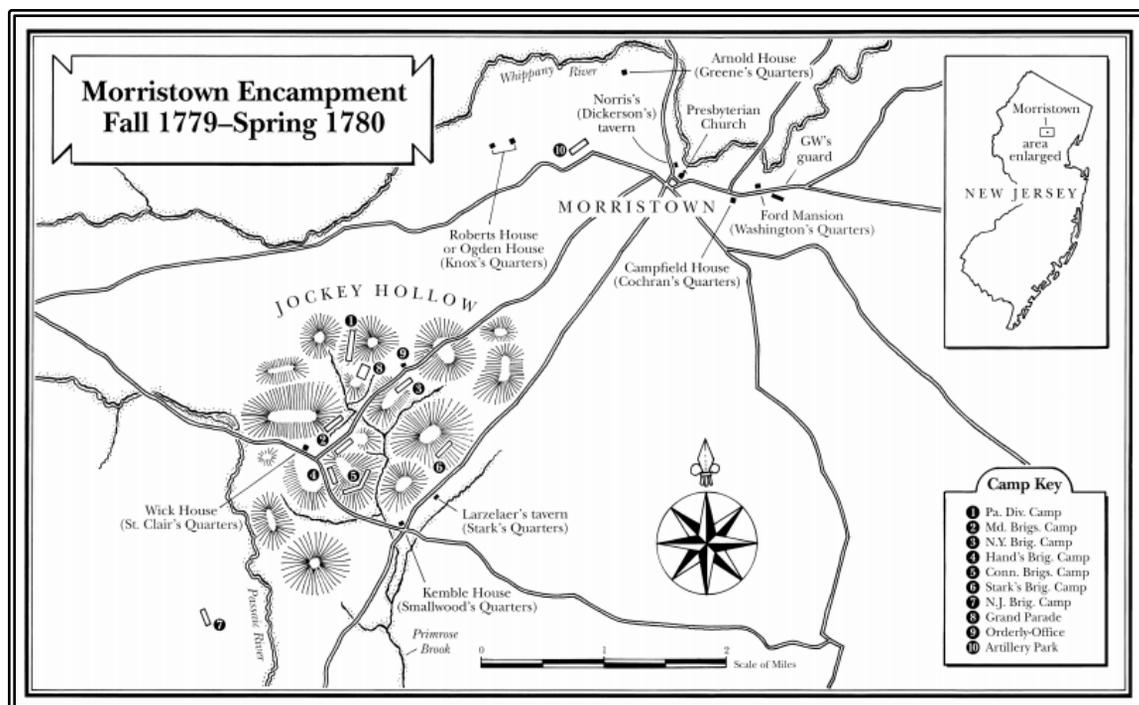
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The First Complete Map of the Continental Army's Winter Encampment at Morristown and Jockey Hollow, N.J., 1779-1780

By: William M. Ferraro, Associate Editor

While the arduous winter encampment at Valley Forge, Pa., in 1777-1778 stands foremost in popular memory, the Continental army probably suffered worse hunger and definitely suffered worse snow and cold during their winter encampment at Morristown and Jockey Hollow, New Jersey, in 1779-1780. Operations along the Hudson River and the potential for a combined operation with the French against the British in New York City delayed establishment of the camp until 1 Dec. 1779. Snow already covered the ground when the soldiers began building their carefully arranged rows of huts on the fields and slopes of Jockey Hollow, a hilly and largely-wooded area just southwest of Morristown.

Numerous maps of the encampment have been sketched for a variety of publications and purposes, but remarkably, none have accurately and comprehensively captured all the pertinent historical and geographic features of the site.

A misreading of a recollection placed the New Jersey brigade in the wrong location on all maps drawn between the middle 1800s and the middle 1900s. Others omit the roads and watercourses or the quarters of general officers. Some are strong on Morristown proper, but weaker on Jockey Hollow, or vice versa.

Working from contemporary and modern maps, a close reading of the documentary record, a careful canvassing of the secondary literature, and notes from volume editors walking the ground, Rick Britton, cartographer for the Papers of George Washington, has produced a fully detailed map of the Morristown encampment. The density of features necessitated employment of a "Camp Key" to avoid a confusing maze of labels. This completely integrated map of the Morristown encampment appears for the first time in this newsletter and will be included in both volumes 23 and 24 of the Revolutionary War Series.

George Washington to William Pearce, June 5, 1796

By: Carol S. Ebel, Assistant Editor

In early June 1796, George Washington prepared for a visit to his beloved Mount Vernon. A lengthy session of Congress, begun on December 7 1795, had recently ended. During that time the president experienced support from and friction with that branch of government. GW achieved progress on the home front and in affairs overseas when the Senate approved the long-awaited peace agreements with the Northwest Indians, Algiers, and Spain. The Senate also gave its consent to GW's nominations of James McHenry and Charles Lee as the new Secretary of War and Attorney General, but rejected GW's earlier July appointment of John Rutledge as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Opposition to GW's policies continued to fester among the Democratic-Republicans in Congress, particularly in the House of Representatives. There, members first demanded that the president submit papers related to negotiations of the 1794 Jay Treaty, but when GW refused his consent in a letter to the House of 30 March 1796, opponents of the treaty tried and failed to reject funding to carry out the agreement. Some members even sought to make a political issue out of the arrival of George Washington Motier Lafayette, son of the Marquis de Lafayette, when the young man sought sanctuary in the United States from the upheavals of the French Revolution.

As Washington made plans for his stay at Mount Vernon, he anticipated a time for much needed relaxation. But he also knew that a plethora of friends and foreign visitors planned to visit the estate. The following excerpt from Washington's letter of 5 June 1796 to his manager William Pearce, which will be published in the forthcoming volume 20 of the Presidential Series, gives an example of the detailed instructions GW prepared for the anticipated arrival of family and guests at Mount Vernon, even while he contended with pressing issues of state. His letter provides a glimpse of the people and work necessary to help GW entertain at Mount Vernon. It also highlights the organizational efforts required of the staff and slaves at the estate to prepare for such a large-scale event.



To William Pearce

June 5, 1796

On Wednesday last Congress closed their Session; but there is yet a good deal for me to do, before I can leave the Seat of the Government. My present expectation however is, that I shall be able to do this on tomorrow week: but as this is not certain, and as I shall travel slow, to avoid what usually happens to me at this season—that is—killing, or knocking up a horse; and as we shall, moreover, stay a day or two at the Federal City, it is not likely we shall arrive at Mount Vernon before the 20th, or 21st of this month.

In a few days after we get there, we shall be visited, I expect, by characters of distinction; I could wish therefore that the Gardens, Lawns, and every thing else, in, and about the Houses, may be got in clean & nice order. If the Gardener needs aid, to accomplish as much of this as lyes within his line, let him have it; & let others rake, & scrape up all the trash, of every sort & kind about the houses, & in holes & corners and throw it (all I mean that will make dung) into the Stercorary and the rest into the gullied parts of the road, coming up to the House. And as the front gate of the Lawn (by the Ivies) is racked, and scarcely to be opened, I wish you would order a new one (like the old one) to be immediately made—and that, with the new ones you have just got made, and all the boarding of every kind that was white before, to be painted white again. If Neal and my own people cannot make the front gate, abovementioned, get some one from Alexandria to do it—provided he will set about & finish it immediately. This must be the way up to the House.

Let the Rooms in the Servants Hall, above & below, be well cleaned; and have the Beds & bedsteads therein put in order; after which have a good lock put on the door of the west room, above, and order Caroline, or whoever has the charge of those rooms, to suffer no person to sleep, or even to go in to it, without express orders from her Mistress or myself. Let exactly the same things be done with the Rooms over the Kitchen; as there will be a white Cook with us that will require one of them; and the other may also be wanted for some other Servants, or use. it being likely, there will be a call for all these places and things. And I hope, especially as there is no Ice to keep fresh meats, that you will have an abundant supply for the demands that will probably be made thereon during our stay at home. And besides, will ascertain from the Butcher in Alexandria, the stated days on which Beef and Veal are killed; that we may know what dependence to place on him. Tell the Gardener, I shall expect every thing that a Garden ought to produce, in the most ample manner.

There may be many other things necessary to be done, as well for appearance as use, that do not occur to me at this mom[en]t but as you can judge from what I have said, what my wishes are, I have no doubt but that you will contribute all you can to accomplish them; and give the whole as neat, & clean an appearance as they are capable of. . . .

Take care to keep a sufficiency of Oats, and the best of your old Hay on hand. I shall have Eight or ten horses of my own with me, and there will be many others with visitors I wish you well and am Your friend

Go: Washington

News

Reviews of recent publications and other news from the PGW

Reviews

Praise for Recent Volumes of The Papers of George Washington and Ed Lengel's edited collection, A Companion to George Washington (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012)

Noted historian and Revolutionary War scholar Caroline Cox glowingly reviewed volume 20 of the *Revolutionary War Series* (8 April-31 May 1779) in the *Journal of American History* 99 (Dec. 2012): 892-93. She gave primary attention to prisoners of war, preparing for Sullivan's expedition, and the Culper spy ring. "The issue of the prisoners of war," wrote Cox, "is one that shows the depth and breadth of the editing in this series that has won it widespread acclaim." Cox closes: "The editors of these papers continue to serve scholars, teachers, and general readers in an exemplary way. Washington would be pleased."

★ ★ ★

Harold E. Selesky, a distinguished military historian and professor at the University of Alabama, favorably reviewed volume 21 of the *Revolutionary War Series* (1 June-31 July 1779) in *The Journal of Military History* 77 (July 2013): 1108-10, observing, "we

learn as much as we will likely ever know about Washington's management of his army at this point in the war." Selesky concludes: "I admire and respect the monumental task the Washington editors have accomplished in making the man come alive."

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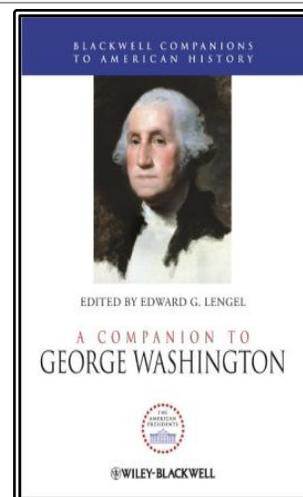
"The editors of *The Papers of George Washington* have continued their exceptional work with the publication of Volume 16 of the Presidential Series" is how prominent political historian Van Beck Hall began his review in *The Journal of Southern History* 78 (Nov. 2012): 958-60. Volume 16 of the *Presidential Series* (1 May-30 September 1794) covers several economic, diplomatic, and frontier initiatives and prompted Hall to remark: "The great value of this work to scholars includes not only the editing of the material but also the careful editorial notes that identify all those mentioned in the correspondence and detail the events narrated in the Letters."

★ ★ ★

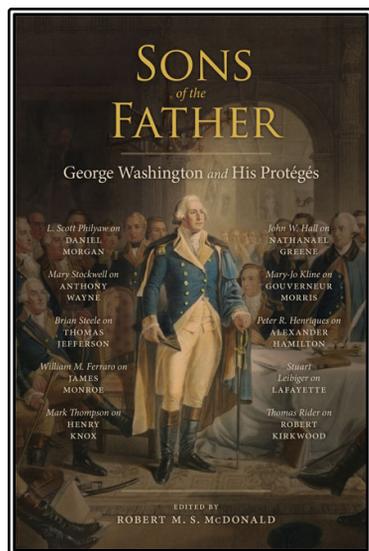
Jeffrey H. Morrison, who has written extensively on politics during the founding era, affirmed "the singular complexity of the man who was Washington" at the start of his review published in the *Journal of American History* 100 (Sept. 2013): 502-3. Morrison applauds the "level tone" of the Companion and finds its "style and content" pleasingly "rigorous and accessible." He describes the collection as "an admirable mixture of sturdy, predictable, but necessary chapters intermixed with refreshingly original chapters on less-studied aspects of Washington's career."

"I admire and respect the monumental task the Washington editors have accomplished in making the man come alive."
-Harold E. Selesky

An early America specialist who teaches history at James Madison University, Rebecca Brannon, reviewed Ed Lengel's *A Companion to George Washington* in *The Journal of Military History* 77 (July 2013): 1110-11). Brannon opens: "First and foremost, this collection fulfills the promise of a scholar's companion--it will be useful for researchers who are not George Washington experts and want a nuanced review of the scholarly literature." She saw "a consistent vision of George Washington" in the chapters. He emerges "as first and foremost a master practical politician versed in the arts of using social skills to create solidarity where it did not otherwise exist."



Project News



William M. Ferraro has published three book chapters over the past year: "George Washington's Mind" in Edward G. Lengel, ed., *A Companion to George Washington* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 542-57; "James Monroe in the 1790s: A Republican Leader" in Stuart Leibiger, ed., *A Companion to James Madison and James Monroe* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 375-90; and "George Washington and James Monroe: Military Compatriots, Political Adversaries, and Nationalist Visionaries," in Robert M. S. McDonald, ed., *Sons of the Father: George Washington and His Protégés* (University of Virginia Press, 2013), 99-120. Ferraro also appeared on the local radio program, "Charlottesville, Right Now," on Washington's birthday, 22 Feb. 2013, for a twenty-minute interview on volume 21 of the *Revolutionary War Series* (1 June-31 July 1779). The interview emphasized GW's leadership in response to the "terrorist" raids in Connecticut, his planning the surprise night attack on Stony Point, N.Y., and his humanity in giving artillery commander Henry Knox leave to attend to his ailing wife upon the sickness and death of an infant daughter. Ferraro, who earned his bachelor's degree from Georgetown University in American Studies, spoke about his career as a historian and documentary editor on a panel of graduates presenting the Annual Richardson Lecture in American Studies at Georgetown on March 20, 2013. Looking ahead, Ferraro's paper titled "Standing Against Corruption and Favoritism: Benjamin Rush and George Washington During the Revolutionary and Founding Eras" has been accepted for presentation at "The Republics of Benjamin Rush," a conference sponsored by Dickinson College and The McNeil Center for Early American Studies and scheduled for March 2014 in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

Pulitzer Prize Winner Researching at Washington Papers

Rick Atkinson, Pulitzer Prize-Winning author of *The Liberation Trilogy* about America in the Second World War, has begun a new trilogy on the Revolutionary War. He visited the Papers of George Washington offices in September 2013 to begin research on this trilogy, the final volume of which should be published at about the same time the Washington Papers are finished, in 2023-2024. Mr. Atkinson's trilogy will thus be the first major work to make use of the entire published corpus of Washington's Revolutionary War papers. Project director Dr. Edward G. Lengel, and project faculty Dr. William Ferraro and Dr. Benjamin Huggins are actively cooperating with Mr. Atkinson in his present and future research.

Fred W. Smith Library Opens at Mount Vernon with Offices for Washington Papers

In a gala event on September 27, 2013, Mount Vernon officially opened the Fred W. Smith National Library for the Study of George Washington. The beautiful and spacious new facility fulfills the promise of Washington's original dream to raise a building at Mount Vernon specifically to house his papers and other collections. Mount Vernon President Curt Viebranz and Library Director Douglas Bradburn envisage the facility as a major new center for scholarship on Washington and the Founding Era. As such, the Library included offices for the Papers of George Washington project, which will occupy them on a rotating basis beginning in the Fall of 2013. Research on the papers and other collections can be performed on-site by resident Mount Vernon Fellows and visiting researchers and scholars.

Edward G. Lengel's recent publications include two chapters on the Revolutionary War for the new *West Point History of Warfare*; articles on Washington's presidential and military careers for *Military History* and *Humanities* magazines; and a book, to be published in 2014, titled *The New Nation: The Creation of the United States in Paintings and Eyewitness Accounts* with the renowned historical artist Mort Künstler. Lengel continued in 2012-2013 to work actively with K-12 teachers and students at the Mount Vernon Teachers' Institute. He also spoke on Washington at the Sarasota County, Florida, Teachers' Workshop; NOVA Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida; the Foreign Policy Research Institute at the First Division Museum in Cantigny, Illinois; the New-York Historical Society (also broadcast on C-SPAN); the Monteagle, Tennessee, Sunday School Assembly; and the Museum of the American Revolution in Philadelphia, Pa.

Publications and Events

Volume 22: Revolutionary War Series Published

Assistant Editor Ben Huggins, Volume Editor

The volume covers the period 1 Aug. to 21 Oct. 1779. Highlights of the volume include Maj. Henry Lee's surprise attack on the British outpost at Paulus Hook, N.J., GW's follow up to the successful assault on Stony Point, N.Y., in July 1779; the completion of Maj. Gen. John Sullivan's devastating expedition against the hostile tribes of the Six Nations; an editorial note on GW's Culper spy ring, which became increasingly important to GW in this period; and, the event that consumed most of GW's time in the weeks covering the last half of the volume, preparations for an attack on New York City in conjunction with a French fleet and army which GW anticipated would come north after an attack on Savannah, Georgia. GW planned to raise 12,000 militia to support his Continentals in the offensive, which he designed as a decisive attack to capture New York City and all its outlying garrisons and outposts. Such a major victory, he hoped, would put an end to the war in 1779. To help explain GW's preparations for this offensive, the volume brings together ten letters in an editorial note. The letters in the note include GW's own notes on his operations plan for the attack and his two letters to the French admiral outlining his plans. In his second letter to the admiral, GW made clear that he was no defensive-minded general: "I shall only add, that if Your Excellency will engage to cooperate with your whole Naval and land force against the Enemy's fleet and Army at New York, till the Winter is so far advanced, that the ice will make it impracticable to remain with your fleet any longer in port, I will bring Twenty five Thousand effective Men into the Field, and will exert all the resources of the Country in a vigorous and decided co-operation."

Papers of George Washington Panel at the 2013 Virginia Festival of the Book

Discussion of PGW Editors' Contributions to Companion to George Washington

The panel was organized by associate editor, Bill Ferraro, and highlighted the contributions of the PGW editors to the recently published *Companion to George Washington* (Ed Lengel, ed.; Wiley-Blackwell, 2012) as well as their work on their recent Papers of George Washington volumes. Held in the auditorium of the Harrison Small Special Collections library at the University of Virginia on March 20th, the panel was chaired by Papers of George Washington Editor in Chief Ed Lengel; Associate Editor David Hoth, and Assistant Editors Carol Ebel and Ben Huggins gave talks. The session was attended by forty persons.

New Faces at the PGW

Mary and Adrina join the PGW Team

Mary Wigge joined the PGW staff in February 2013 as a production assistant for the financial papers. She earned her B.A. degree in history and art history from the University of Virginia. As a student, she worked part-time for the Presidential Recordings Program, specifically the Presidential Recordings of Lyndon B. Johnson Digital Edition, at the Miller Center for Public Affairs. Most recently, she served as development assistant at the Thomas Jefferson Foundation's Monticello.

Mary looks forward to developing her interests in digital history, colonial history, and content management.

Adrina Garbooshian joined our staff as Production Assistant in June. She earned her PhD in Modern Languages from Wayne State University in 2006. She previously worked as a NHPRC Fellow and Assistant Editor at the Papers of Benjamin Franklin, Yale University, where she contributed to volumes 40 through 43. She subsequently served as a consulting editor for the Yale Indian Papers Project, and contracted with PGW to translate French documents for the Rev. War and Presidential Series.

THE PAPERS OF GEORGE WASHINGTON



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The Diaries of George Washington (6 volumes)*

The Colonial Series (10 volumes)*

The Revolutionary War Series (22 volumes to date)

The Confederation Series (6 volumes)*

The Presidential Series (17 volumes to date)

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