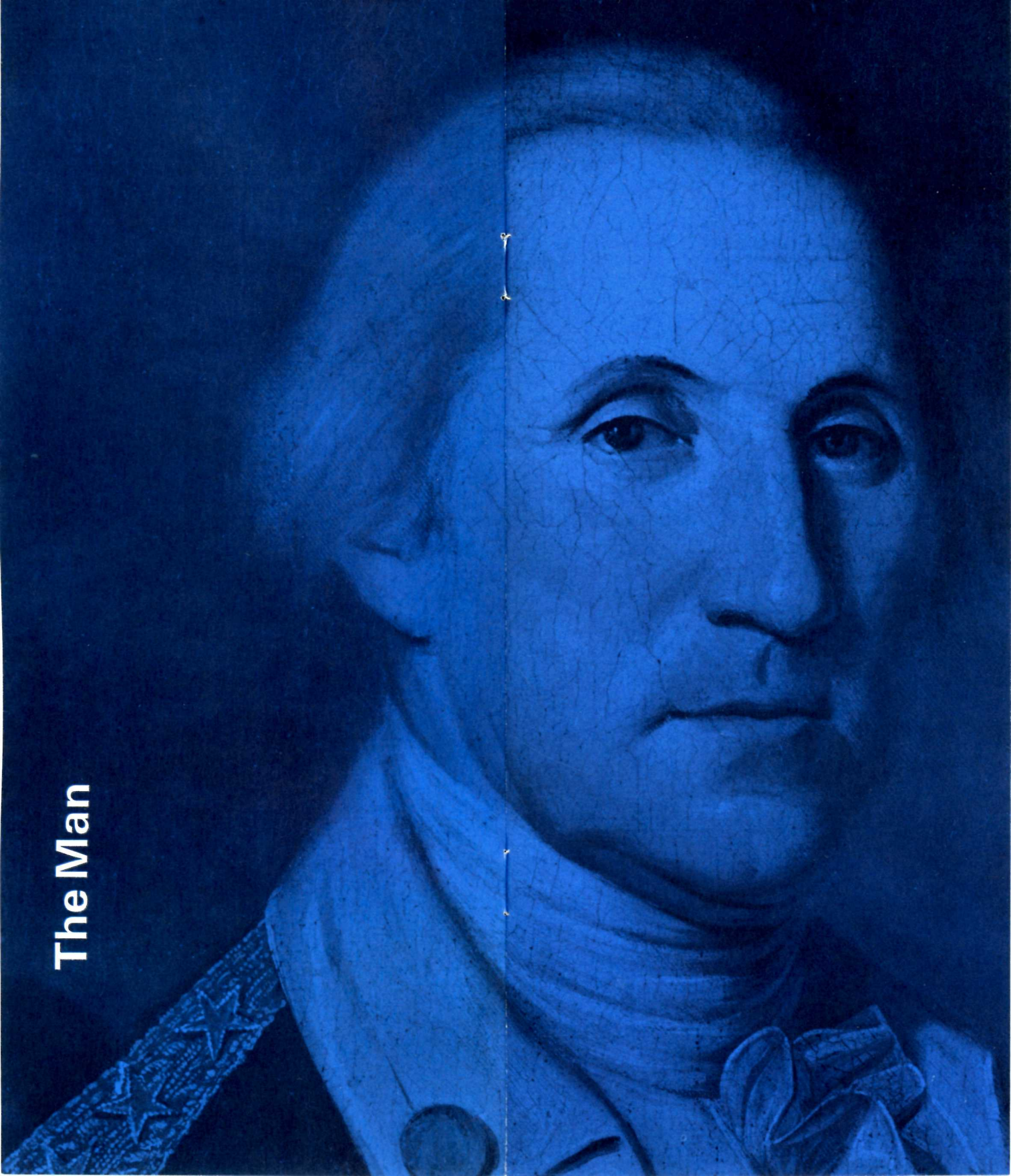


**The Man**



He was a big man. He stood 6 feet, 2 inches, broad of shoulder, long of limb, erect and muscular at 200 pounds. His strength was extraordinary and his walk was majestic. By common consent he was one of the best horsemen of the continent; when mounted for travel, for the hunt, or for the field of battle, he filled the eye.

And he was big in character. Thomas Jefferson described him as a man who was not an intellectual but whose judgment was sound and sure. "Perhaps the strongest feature of his character," Jefferson said, "was prudence, never acting until every circumstance, every consideration, was maturely weighed . . . His integrity was most pure, his justice the most inflexible I have ever known . . . He was indeed, in every sense of the words, a wise, a good and a great man . . . On the whole, his character was, in its mass, perfect, in nothing bad, in few points indifferent; and it may truly be said, that never did nature and fortune combine more perfectly to make a man great . . ."

But he was not without human frailties. He tended to be overly acquisitive and sometimes contentious. He had an enormous pride and was likely to regard any scrutiny of his acts as a reflection upon his character. His thunderous temper flared infrequently but memorably. There smoldered in him, thought Gilbert Stuart, the painter, "the strongest and most ungovernable of passions." He was given to pomp and display. While he considered the "expensive manner in which I live" to be "contrary to my wishes but really unavoidable," he freely admitted his penchant for the "pleasures of good living." Most often in company he appeared the aloof aristocrat. Congeniality did not come easy to him. He was amiable but reserved with all save his closest associates, and he largely adhered to the maxim he voiced to a nephew: "Be courteous to all, but intimate with few and let those few be well tried before you give them your confidence; true friendship is a plant of slow growth."

When he gave his confidence, he could be "talkative," as Jefferson, James Madison, and other friends attested. Although he did not possess a ready and spontaneous wit, Madison observed "he was particularly pleased with the jokes, good humor and hilarity of his companions." And once he remarked, "It is assuredly better to go laughing than crying through the rough journey of life." He was a good listener, always courteous, and many men saw in him a charming simplicity and a gentle sweetness of character.

The picture of George Washington as a cold, distant figure and a paragon of unmitigated virtue is a misconception that has tended to obscure his vigor, his wide-ranging interests, his kindness, and the warmth of his personality. Many vignettes survive, like Elkanah Watson's, that reveal the "human" Washington. Watson, a merchant adventurer who came to Mount Vernon on business, went to bed his first night with a cold and a cough. During the night he was surprised to behold Washington himself, "standing at my bedside with a bowl of hot tea in his hand."

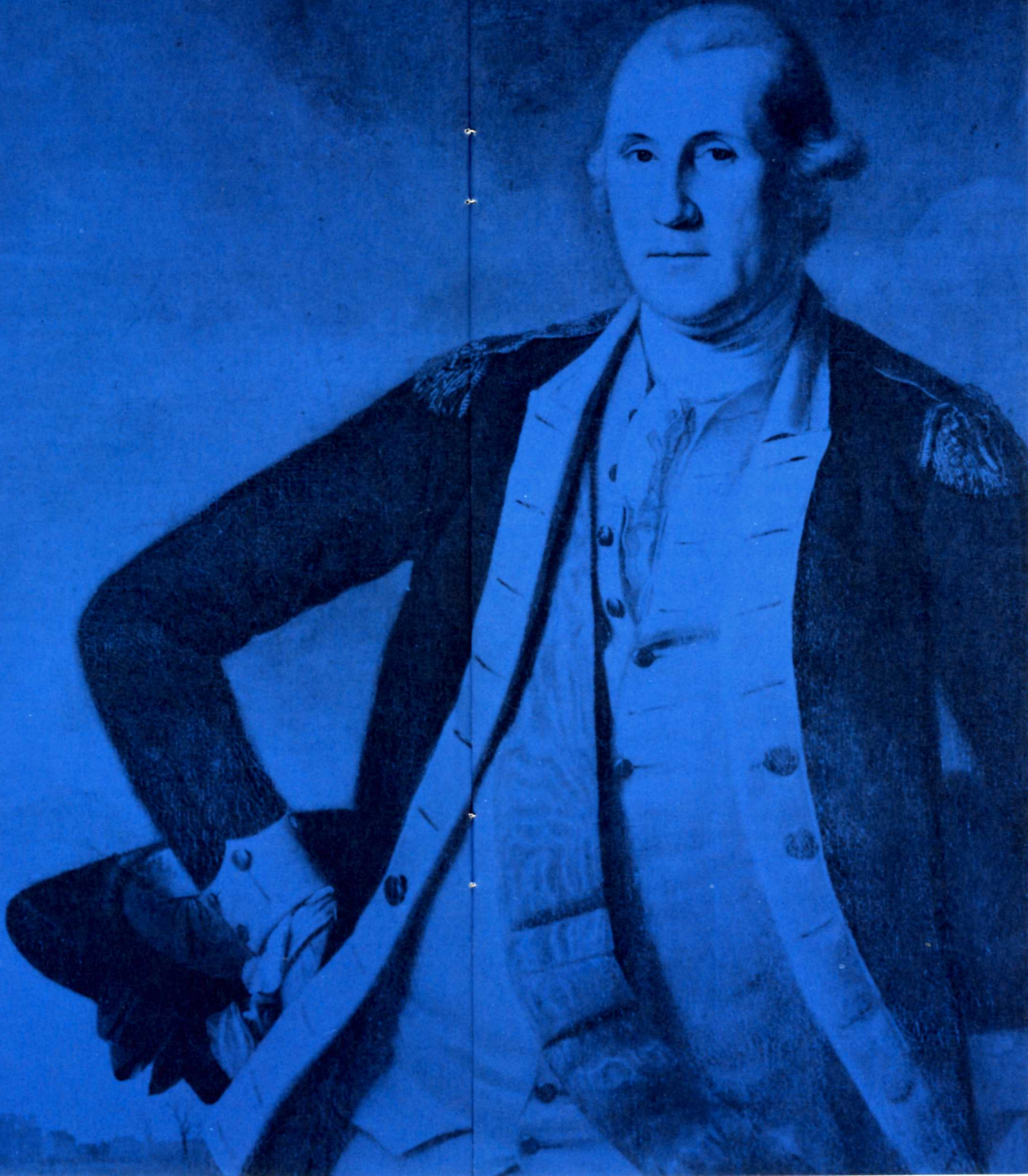
On another occasion, several young men visiting at Mount Vernon were on the lawn, sleeves rolled, playing "pitch the bar," the ancient sport in which contestants throw a heavy bar toward a mark. Washington strolled up and, without removing his coat, picked up a bar and threw it with all his strength. Smiling, he walked away, saying, "When you beat my pitch, young gentlemen, I'll try again."

As a soldier he was a rigid disciplinarian, not given to "leveling" among ranks, but there is an account which relates that on mild days at Valley Forge he went out and pitched ball with his young aides, or, as one officer said, sometime "did us the honor to play at wickets with us." When occasion allowed, he enjoyed tarrying long after dinner to gossip with his military family over hazelnuts and wine. And from the farmhouse near Middlebrook, where the army wintered in 1778, Gen. Nathanael Greene wrote a friend, "We had a little dance at my quarters a few evenings past. His Excellency and Mrs. Greene danced upwards of three hours without sitting down. Upon the whole, we had a pretty little frisk."

If the ladies found the General sometimes preoccupied, they also found him often pleasantly familiar and witty. Mrs. Theodorick Bland, visiting the army at Morristown when Mrs. Washington, as usual, was wintering with the General, wrote her sister-in-law: "We visit them . . . frequently. From dinner till night he is free . . . His worthy lady seems to be in perfect felicity, while she is by the side of her 'Old Man' as she calls him. We often make parties on horseback, the General, His Lady . . . and his aides-de-camp. Generally . . . General Washington throws off the hero and takes on the chatty agreeable companion. He can be downright impudent, sometimes, such impudence, Fanny, as you and I like."

Yes, he was a big man—and a big human being.

## His Career



George Washington's life was not one of rags to riches, though it was to a large extent one of obscurity to renown. By the time he was born to Mary Ball and Augustine Washington, a well-to-do planter and ironmonger on Pope's Creek in Virginia's Northern Neck, the Tidewater already supported a life of abundance and some elegance, patterned after the squirearchy of rural England. In this proud and robust society, George, with a modest inheritance, might have made his mark as a local figure and died an able, honorable, and unsung country gentleman. But his relentless ambition, his lifelong dedication to excellence, and the destinies of his life ordered it otherwise.

George was 11 when his father died. For model and mentor he then took his urbane half-brother, Lawrence, 14 years his elder. He did not return "home" to England for an education as many of his contemporaries did, nor did he attend any of the colonial colleges. His formal education ended when he was 16. However, he learned to write an excellent hand, to spell reasonably well, to be proficient in mathematics, geography, and astronomy, and to know at least the rudiments of Latin and literature. And at 16, as an apprentice, he had learned the surveyor's trade. In frequent long visits away from his mother's farm at Fredericksburg to Lawrence's splendid estate called Mount Vernon, he learned the practical business of plantation management—and there he learned also to dance, to play billiards, whist, and loo, to break his own horses to the saddle and to follow hounds he himself bred.

Inordinately ambitious for wealth and eminence, George set out early in life to attain them. Like all Virginians of his class, he had an absorbing thirst for land; at 18 he acquired in the Shenandoah Valley his first acreage and eventually owned some 50,000 acres. At 21, as a path to distinction, he turned to "the military line." When he heard in 1753 that Gov. Robert Dinwiddie planned to send a courier to warn the French to stay out of English claims in the Ohio Valley, he volunteered for the mission. In November, he led a small party a thousand miles through the wintry wilderness to deliver the Governor's proclamation. He was fired on by an unfriendly "French" Indian and swept overboard from his raft into the angry, ice-clogged Allegheny River. But in January he was back in Williamsburg, having delivered Dinwiddie's message and taken an ac-

curate measure of the French rivals at the forks of the Ohio. With the publication of his formal report in Williamsburg and London, his ascendancy began.

The next year, elevated to a colonelcy, he led a military expedition against the French, who stubbornly refused to relinquish the Ohio country. And for the better part of the next 5 years he was engaged in warfare in the West. Although he distinguished himself in the disastrous Braddock expedition, the highly sensitive, ambitious young colonel, to whom bullets, he said, made a "charming" sound, was sufficiently discouraged by lack of recognition to resign his commission in December 1758, at age 26.

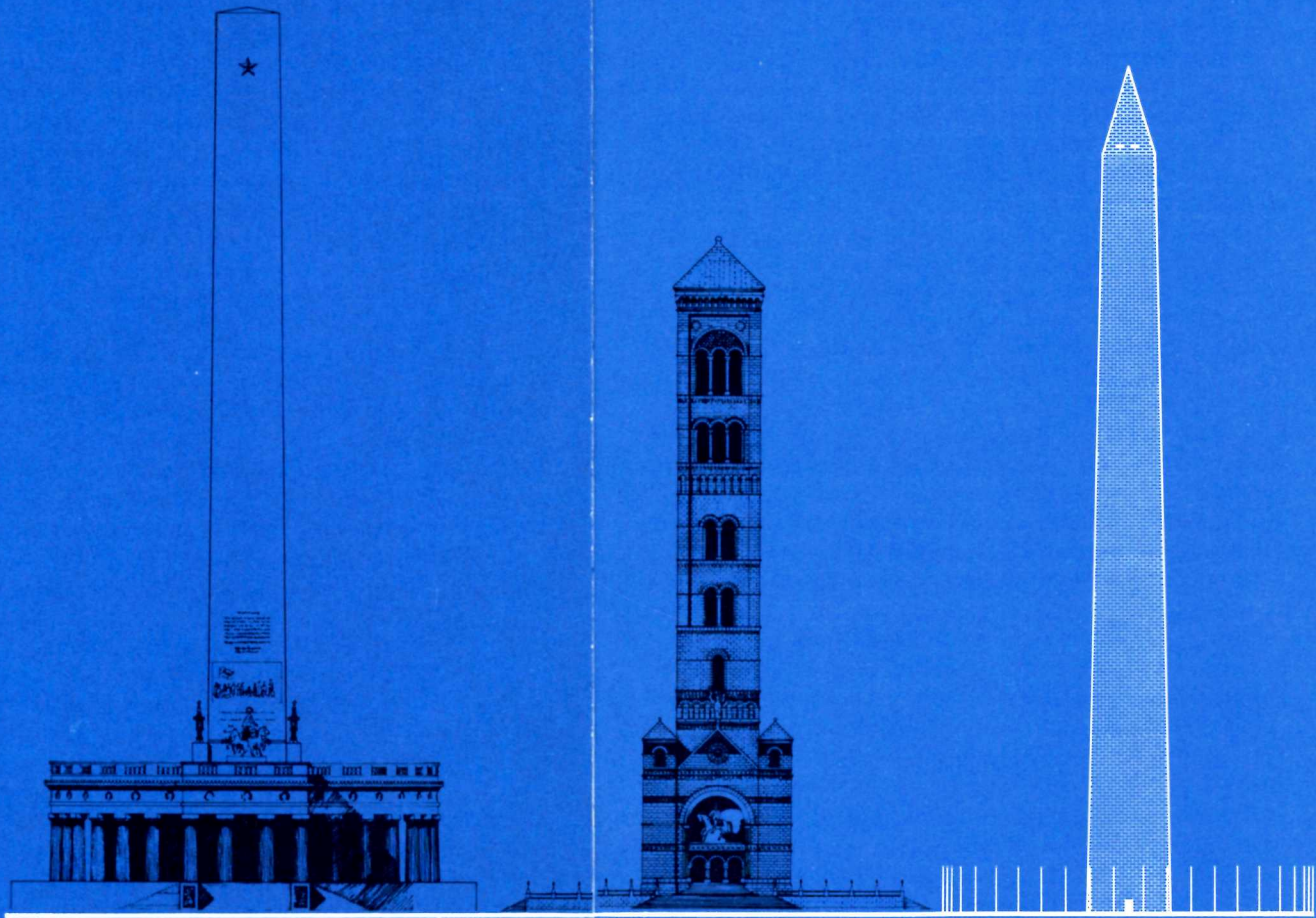
George had had his boyish love affairs. He had sighed over his "lowland beauty" and a girl named Betsy who would not reply to his stilted but impassioned love sonnets, and he had fallen harmlessly in love with Sally Fairfax, the wife of his neighbor and friend. But when in January 1759 he married lively, affable Martha Dandridge Custis, a 27-year-old widow with two children, he found the wife to whom he remained deeply devoted for over 40 years.

For 15 years Washington lived happily at Mount Vernon, which he had inherited from Lawrence. He improved his plantation, increased his properties, and served as church vestryman, county justice, and member of the Virginia legislature. Like every colonial businessman during those years he chaffed under the ever harsher regulations of the British government. And when the first intercolonial Congress assembled in Philadelphia in September 1774 to consider united resistance to Britain, Washington was a delegate from Virginia.

The following spring he was sitting in the Second Continental Congress when word came from New England that a war had started there against the Crown. When the Congress resolved to "adopt" the New England army of farmers, shopkeepers, and mechanics, Colonel Washington was chosen unanimously as commander in chief. To the Congress he represented military experience (though his was limited), wisdom, and strength.

For 8 years, making mistakes and profiting by them, holding together by the force of his will an often indifferent

# His Monument



*Robert Mills' original design (left) and a substitute offered but rejected in 1876 when work was resumed. At far right is the simple obelisk that stands today.*

George Washington's death cast the entire Nation into mourning. And when the news reached Europe, that continent, too, lamented. The London *Morning Chronicle* declared, "The long life of General Washington is not stained by a single blot . . . His fame, bounded by no country, will be confined to no age." Napoleon ordered a 10-day requiem throughout France. Dirges were played in Amsterdam. In America, President John Adams ordered the Army to wear crepe armbands for 6 months, and in cities and towns ladies donned black "as if for a relation." At Philadelphia, the Congress adjourned immediately and set December 26 as a day for formal mourning. That day from the pulpit of the Lutheran Church, Virginia Congressman Henry Lee, who had known Washington so well and so long, spoke publicly the words never forgotten, "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen."

A grieving and admiring Congress immediately resolved to erect a marble monument in the Capital City. The House passed a \$200,000 appropriation, but the Senate considered the measure a year, then let it die. For the next 33 years, except for an occasional fruitless expression of interest in the halls of Congress, the project languished.

Then in 1833, influential citizens of Washington city, led by George Watterston, who had been the first librarian of Congress, organized the Washington National Monument Society to raise by private subscription the memorial Congress had forgotten. From designs submitted in competition, that of Robert Mills, an eminent architect, was selected. It pictured a "grand circular colonnaded building" 259 feet in diameter and 100 feet high, from whose top rose a decorated Egyptian obelisk 500 feet high. Its total height of 600 feet would make it the highest spire in the world.

Dollar donations were solicited from the public, but response was disappointingly slow. It was not until 1847 that \$87,000, a sum sufficient for a beginning, was raised. President James K. Polk, with the assent of Congress, selected the site on public lands, upwards of 30 acres, "so elevated that the Monument will be seen from all parts of the city," as indeed it is today. On the sunny Fourth of July 1848, Benjamin B. French, Grand Master of the District of Columbia Masonic Lodge, laid the cornerstone of the monument.

But as the monument began to rise, funds dwindled. Along with appeals for further funds, the Society invited each of the States to furnish for mounting in the interior walls a block of native stone, and later extended the invitation to municipalities, organizations, and foreign powers. Inscribed stones were enthusiastically shipped into Washington—and one brought about a long halt and almost an end to the erection of the monument.

From the Temple of Concord in Rome, Pope Pius IX sent a stone. About 1 o'clock in the morning of March 7, 1854, several members of the anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic Know-Nothing Party, which had sprung into being in the 40's, tied the night watchman at the monument in his watch box, stole the Pope's gift from its shed, and presumably smashed it and flung it into the Potomac. An outraged Nation curtailed its donations, funds ran out, and the huffing of the steam hoist and the creaking of the derrick at the monument were stilled. The Monument Society appealed desperately to the Congress for financial aid, and Congress agreed to appropriate \$200,000. But the next spring, while the grant was being considered, the Know-Nothings illegally elected a new slate of officers of the society and seized possession of the monument and its records. Congress tabled its resolution. For nearly 4 years, until it collapsed as a political entity, the Know-Nothing Party kept possession of the unfinished monument. Hoping to raise \$1,000,000, it received from its members only \$51.66, and could do no more than put on two courses of inferior stone which later had to be removed.

The rude incursion of the Know-Nothings, for all its threat to the monument, was as nothing compared to the sundering of the Nation in those years of the 1850's. The approaching catastrophe of civil war was subtly reflected in the inscriptions on the tribute stones. The Delaware inscription read, "First to Adopt, Will be the last to Desert the Constitution." Michigan sent her block of copper engraved as "An Emblem of Her Trust in the Union." Louisiana, an early contributor, proclaimed herself, "Ever Faithful to the Constitution and the Union." But other Southern States, as the divisive years moved toward their fiery culmination at Fort Sumter, were more equivocal. Georgia's stone arrived bearing the motto, "The Union as it was, The Constitution as it is." While Missouri offered her stone "To the Memory of Washington and a Pledge of

her Fidelity to the Union of the States," Mississippi simply saluted "The Father of His Country." Proud, embittered South Carolina and several others carved on their stones only their State seals. These stones dot the landings today, serving as memorials not only to Washington but also to union, disunion, and reunion.

When civil war overtook the country in 1861, the 150-foot stub of the monument stood dejected amidst construction debris and the evil-smelling marshes stretching out from its base. In the mad scramble for space in the capital city, cattle pens, slaughterhouses, offices, repair shops, and depots covered the monument grounds.

After the war, there were national wounds to heal, and the monument remained forsaken, a sorry spectacle, surmounted by its silent derrick weathering in the wind and rain. "It has the aspect," said Mark Twain, "of a factory chimney with the top broken off . . . Cowsheds about its base . . . contented sheep nibbling pebbles in the desert solitudes . . . tired pigs dozing in the holy calm of its protecting shadow."

But when 1876 arrived and the Nation celebrated the centennial of American Independence, Congress was once again inspired to action and appropriated \$200,000 for completion of the monument. Over the years, Robert Mills' original design had been modified piecemeal; now it was discarded entirely for a simple, traditionally proportioned but impressive obelisk 555 feet 5½ inches high.

When Army engineers took over in 1880, they discovered that the structure had tilted very slightly. Carefully it was shored up and a new slab of concrete, 13½ feet thick, laid under the old foundations. The faces of the 150-foot unfinished shaft were found not to align with the points of the compass, so a slight "twist" was given the construction to bring the upper surfaces into the planes of the compass. The Corps of Engineers, during its first working season, was unable for a time to obtain Maryland marble like that used to face the first 150 feet, so 26 feet of Massachusetts marble were laid. At the 176-foot level, the Engineers were able again to obtain Maryland marble. The courses of Massachusetts marble weathered to a slightly

different tone, which accounts for the "ring" noticeable on the shaft.

At last on December 6, 1884, in a howling gale, the capstone was set, the aluminum tip placed, and it was finished—an 81,120-ton hollow shaft which had taken 36 years, 5 months, and 2 days to build.

Since Washington's birthday, an appropriate date, fell on Sunday in 1885, the monument was dedicated on Saturday, February 21. President Chester A. Arthur accepted it "in behalf of the people." Representative John D. Long of Massachusetts read the dedicatory oration written by Robert C. Winthrop who, 37 years before, had delivered the principal address at the laying of the cornerstone. "The matchless obelisk stands proudly before us today," Winthrop had written. "The storms of winter must blow and beat upon it . . . The lightnings of Heaven may scar and blacken it . . . An earthquake may shake its foundations . . . But the character which it commemorates and illustrates is secure." Three years later, the Washington Monument was opened to the public.

Eight hundred and ninety-eight steps lead to a chamber within the base of the pyramidal top. Along this stairway are the memorial stones. Mixed with the State stones are those from organizations and municipalities. On the first landing the Franklin Fire Company of Washington, D.C., advertises, "We Strive to Save." On the 17th landing all the stones are from foreign nations. On the 25th landing a stone from the employees of R. Norris & Son Locomotive Works of Philadelphia incongruously shares honors with a stone from the Alexandrian Library of ancient Egypt. As late as 1935, Hawaii added a stone.

From the beginning there has been a passenger elevator in the shaft, first a steam lift and today an electric car which whisks visitors to the top in 70 seconds.

From the eight barred windows at the summit, the visitor has a majestic view of the District of Columbia and parts of Maryland and Virginia. Below him spreads the Federal City of Washington's dreams, a gem of capitals for a Nation shaped and guided by his hand.

*George F. Scheer*