



How the Washington Story Began Here



The story of this area of Virginia starts in 17th-century Maryland. In the 1640s, Maryland was a rougher place than Virginia. Maryland was small—only a few hundred Englishmen and women lived there, making good money by growing tobacco and trading beaver furs with Native American allies as far away as the Great Lakes.

During these years, England suffered a civil war that pitted the King against the Puritan-allied Parliament, affecting colonies on this side of the Atlantic. Virginia remained mostly loyal to King Charles, as did Maryland's ruling Catholic Calvert family. However, the war created an opportunity for Protestants and other rebels to attack wealthy Calvert-allied Marylanders. Colonists called this period "The Plundering Time." With the internal troubles that Maryland was facing, it was difficult to maintain commercial or farming ventures. Thus, many Marylanders saw in Virginia lots of open land and the peace and quiet that Maryland lacked.

By the end of the 1650s, a new English community had begun in Virginia. Some of its members were freed Virginia servants looking for land to farm for themselves. Others were former Marylanders seeking relief from war and Calvert control. One of those men was English-born Nathaniel Pope. He was already an influential man in Maryland, where his great ambition and drive had made him wealthy. Pope built a home and set up his business on a bluff in what is now Westmoreland State Park, continuing his tobacco growing, fur trading, and buying and selling land. Pope quickly became one of the community's most influential residents.



A glass wine bottle seal marked with the name John Washington.

It makes sense, then, that John Washington, George's great-grandfather, would find his way to Pope's doorstep when he arrived in Westmoreland County, Virginia, in the winter of 1657. By that time, Washington was working for a merchant company that had taken him to Poland and Denmark before he sailed up the Potomac River. Pope and Washington saw the world in similar ways. Both recognized the advantages of building a relationship, and although Pope had his own sons, he quickly brought Washington into the family fold and fortune.

Pope also had an unmarried daughter named Anne. Within a year, she and Washington married, linking the debt-laden and landless Washington to the Pope family name, holdings, and enterprises. With a 700-acre property near Mattox Creek from Nathaniel as a gift for his daughter, Anne and John settled there and began a family.

In 1664, John and Anne bought land overlooking nearby Bridges Creek. Here, they built a typical Potomac-style earth-fast home where they lived with their two children, English servants, and enslaved African people that Washington had imported from Caribbean traders. Washington quickly became a leader in the community, serving in every office in the county, from coroner to military commander.

Anne brought land to the marriage, as well as social, political, and economic connections through her locally prestigious family name. John Washington, as husband, had the legal standing and skill to manage the family holdings. Together, this colonial power couple established a dynasty that would ultimately change the course of the world.