

George Washington Memorial Parkway

George Washington Memorial Parkway
District of Columbia/Maryland/Virginia

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Road, trail, and river meet near Fort Hunt Park along the George Washington Memorial Parkway. NPS/STEVE RUTEN

Commander-in-chief in the American Revolution. Founding father. First president. Few figures in United States history are so revered as George Washington. Henry Lee's 1799 eulogy still rings true: "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen." Three centuries later, Washington lives on through countless places of tribute. But sites in and near his namesake city can claim special significance because here he lived, worked, worshipped, and planned for the nation's future.

Even in Washington's lifetime, his home at Mount Vernon drew sightseers, growing more popular with each generation. In 1932, the bicentennial of his birth, Mount Vernon Memorial Highway opened from Arlington Memorial Bridge to the estate. The 16-mile road improved access through Virginia and ushered in a new era of road-building. Built by the Department of Agriculture's Bureau of Public Roads, it was proclaimed "America's Most Modern Motorway." While it was under construction, Congress renamed it George Washington Memorial Parkway, expand-

ing its authorized length and its mission. Under the Capper-Cramton Act of 1930, the federal government acquired land along the Potomac River in Virginia from Great Falls to Mount Vernon to protect the shoreline and palisades, preserve historic features, and provide for public recreation areas.

In the 1950s and 1960s the parkway was extended northward. Traversing more difficult terrain than the southern leg, this section displays the latest in road engineering

methods for its time—a wide, gently curving road with a grassy median, low stone guardrails, and soaring steel-and-concrete arched bridges. By 1970, 6.8 miles of the Maryland section were complete; that section was re-named in honor of Clara Barton in 1989. Today George Washington Memorial Parkway is a 7,600-acre national park area protecting the landscape and native habitat of the Potomac shoreline. Within the park you can visit over 25 sites associated with George Washington's life, and with the life of the nation he helped establish.

A Road Through Past and Present

By the time he became president in 1789, George Washington owned 8,000 acres along the Potomac River in Virginia, from south of Mount Vernon to several miles north of the estate. One of his dreams for post-Revolutionary America was to turn the Potomac River into the commercial gateway to the West. He lobbied for building the Patowmack Canal to route boats safely around the "great falls" of the Potomac, nearly 30 miles upriver from his home. George Washington Memorial Parkway includes remains of this late-1700s canal at Great Falls Park and sections of Washington's tidal Potomac farmlands: Riverside Park, Fort Hunt Park, and Collingwood Picnic Area.

Other members of Washington's family held land that is now within the parkway. Abingdon, home of Washington's stepson John Parke Custis, is the site of Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport. Arling-



Mount Vernon Estate

ton House was the property of Washington's step-grandson George Washington Parke Custis, who was raised by the Washingtons. Custis left Mount Vernon in 1802 after his grandmother Martha Custis Washington died. That year, on the 1,100-acre estate he inherited, Custis began building a Greek Revival mansion. He filled the home, finished in 1817, with Washington heirlooms. Later, Custis' daughter Mary and her husband Robert E. Lee lived here until the Civil War broke out in 1861.

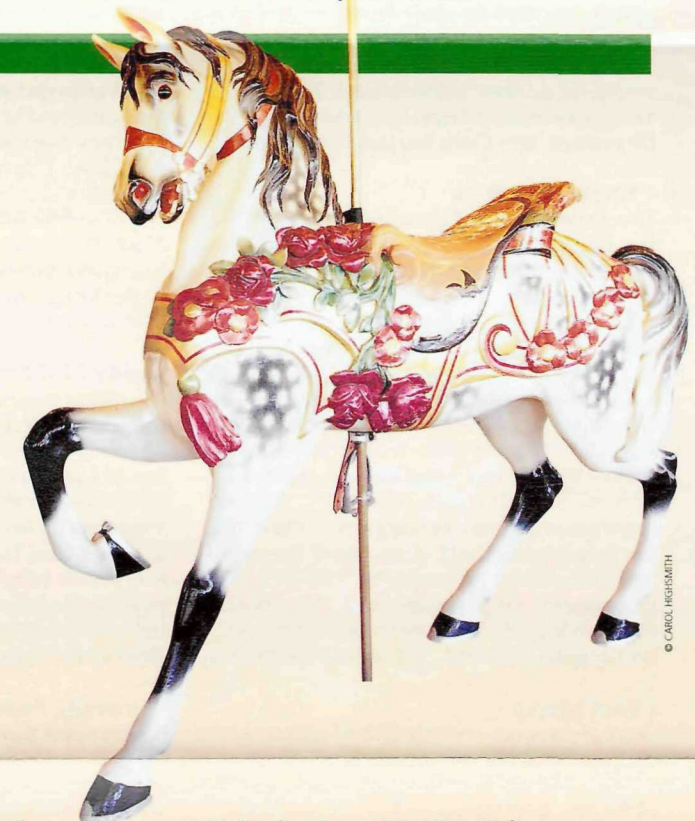
Two more U.S. presidents are honored at Lyndon Baines Johnson Memorial Grove on the Potomac and Theodore Roosevelt Island. Other sites recall the nation's past: Claude Moore Colonial Farm recreates 1700s tobacco farm life. Military sites in Virginia include Civil War-era Fort Marcy and Spanish-American War and WWII-era Fort Hunt. Glen Echo, Md., features the home of American Red Cross founder Clara Barton, and site of a Chautauqua Assembly in the 1800s, now Glen Echo Park.

Turkey Run Park and Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve are natural habitats preserved within parkway lands. Watch for signs of the seasons: spring's dogwood, redbud, and daffodils and fall's fiery hues of oaks, maples, and hickories. Watch for wild turkeys, bald eagles, and other migratory and resident birds. As you travel the parkway, see how the Potomac River's character changes between the falls and tidewater.

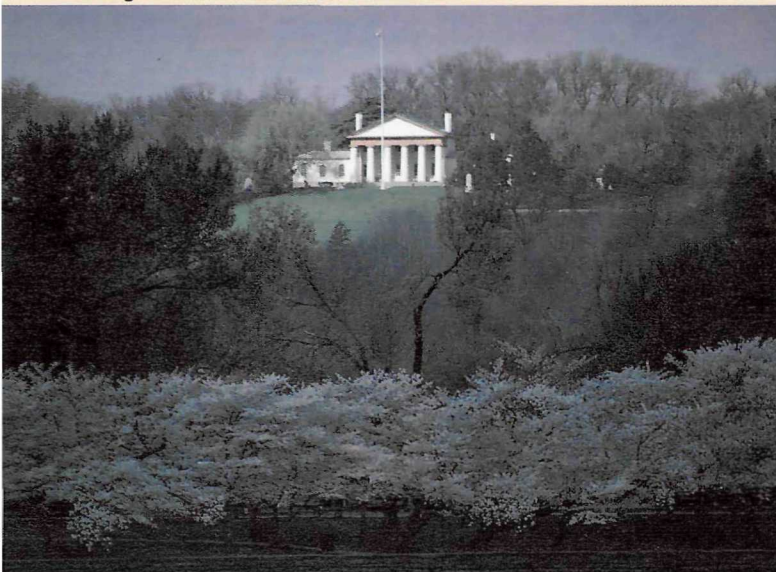


At Great Falls the Potomac River drops 77 feet in one mile. The Patowmack Canal, built in the 1700s to promote trade with western markets, skirted the falls (above).

At Glen Echo Park in Maryland you can ride a high-stepping horse on the restored 1921 Dentzel Carousel (right).



Arlington House, The Robert E. Lee Memorial



Clara Barton National Historic Site



LBJ Memorial Grove



Dyke Marsh Wildlife Preserve



Theodore Roosevelt Island



U.S. Marine Corps War Memorial

