

## Historical Sketch

## Samuel Washington, Owner of a Washington Sword, Was A Resident of Harrison County

George Washington wrote in his will that each of five of his nephews would receive on his death one of the five swords he owned.<sup>1</sup> After George Washington's death in 1799 when the nephews gathered to divide the swords, they let Samuel Washington choose first at his suggestion. Samuel was the only one of the five who had had military service<sup>2</sup> and the only nephew who had seen George Washington wear a sword in an official capacity. Samuel at age twenty-four had been among the troops reviewed by the general at Cumberland, Maryland, when, as president, he traveled to Cumberland and to Bedford, Pennsylvania, during the uprising in the mountains of western Pennsylvania known as the Whiskey Rebellion.<sup>3</sup>

Samuel Washington chose the sword that appeared to be the plainest and the least valuable of the five. "It is a plain couteau, or hanger, with a green hilt and silver guard. On the upper ward of the scabbard is engraven 'J. Bailey, Fish Kill.' It is accompanied by a buckskin belt, which is secured by a silver buckle and clasp, whereon are engraven the letters 'G.W.' and the figures '1757.' These are all of the plainest of workmanship, but substantial, and in keeping with the man and with the times to which they belonged." The sword was historically the most important of the five because the weapon had been the battle sword of Washington in his military campaigns from the days of the French and Indian War to the close of his military service when he last wore it as he reviewed the forces in Cumberland and Bedford in 1794.<sup>4</sup> Samuel Washington also came into possession of a gold-headed cane bequeathed to George Washington by Benjamin Franklin and left by George Washington to his brother Charles who died shortly before the ex-president.<sup>5</sup>

At the time Samuel became the owner of the sword and the cane he may have resided in Jefferson County, (present West) Virginia, where his father Charles Washington had moved from Fredericksburg, Virginia, in 1780 and had built a home "Happy Retreat" soon after 1780.<sup>6</sup> Samuel married Dorothea Thornton who bore him three children.<sup>7</sup> The couple must have lived in Culpeper County, Virginia, in 1807 when a deed proved in court there on September 21 of that year certified that Samuel Washington and Dorothea, his wife, had sold 2233 acres of land in Mason County, (present West) Virginia, on the "east side of the Kenhawa river" for \$17,864.<sup>8</sup>

Dorothea Thornton died in 1813, a year after Samuel Washington on May 6, 1812 mortgaged his property in Fredericksburg. He was living in Fredericksburg in June 1816, but according to a deed of trust of that date, planned to move to the "upper or back country." "Upper" may have referred to the Jefferson County, (present West) Virginia, area and "back" to the area in Virginia west of the Appalachian mountains.<sup>9</sup>

He was in financial trouble.<sup>10</sup> He could not settle his 1812 debt; the holder of the mortgage had drawn up a deed of trust wherein Samuel Washington signed over any profits that might occur from division of the George Washington estate or the sale of lands in Samuel Washington's name in the future in Jefferson County or in Culpeper County.<sup>11</sup>

One historian states "it appears [ Samuel Washington] took up residence" in the Kanawha Valley in 1816.<sup>12</sup> If so, he did not stay long. The deed of trust which Samuel Washington signed in June 1816 in Fredericksburg was submitted to the Harrison County Court August 1817.<sup>13</sup> Whether Washington was a resident of Harrison County at the time is not known. He was a resident of the county in August 1818 for on the 17th of the month he attended for the first time as a "gentleman justice" the Harrison County Court. During the day a Joseph Bailey brought suit against Samuel Washington "In debt. Benjamin Wilson, Jr., [ appeared] for the defendant. The defendant says he has well and truly paid the debt in declaration mentioned and he is ready to verify."<sup>14</sup>

The laws of Virginia prior to 1850 made the justices in counties all powerful. The justices sent to the governor names of prospective new members for appointment as justices; they chose from among their members names to recommend to the governor for appointment for sheriff of their county; they executed all laws, settled all disputes; they served as justices from time of appointment until death.

Court days were festival days when the streets in county seats filled with people, vendors sold spruce beer and gingerbread on the courthouse lawn, and men gathered in the streets to swap horses and knives. If the docket handed the justices by the clerk on the day set for court had not been finished by late afternoon, court continued on succeeding days, sometimes for as many as three. A tally of days in attendance of justices in Harrison County Court for three years and four and one-half months, August 1818 - December 1821, reveals fifty justices as having reported on at least one or more days during the time.

In the more than three years he resided in Harrison County, Samuel Washington had the second best attendance record of the justices. He attended almost every day court met in 1821; on July 19, 20, and September 17, 1821, at the end of the official record of the day's court is the signature "Samuel Washington." The last day Samuel Washington sat in Harrison County Court was September 18, 1821.<sup>15</sup>

## Days of Attendance by Justices at Harrison County Court

	Aug. 17-Dec. 31 1818	1819	1820	1821
Arnold, George				2
Bartlett, Benjamin			2	2
Bartlett, James	2	5	4	6
Bartlett, John			1	
Bogess, Caleb		2	3	6
Brice, Benjamin J.		2		8
Britten, Alexander	2	4		
Campbell, Joseph				2
Campbell, W.		2		
Cheuvront, Joseph	5	6	3	5
Coplin, Isaac		7	8	17
Coplin, Jacob		2	3	10
Cather, John				2
Davis, William		2		1
Davis, Nathan, Jr.				2
Davison, John	1	4	5	9
Fleming, James			4	3
Goff, Jedediah W.	2	6	3	9
Hall, Samuel		1		5
Haymond, Thomas	2	7	7	9
Jackson, Edward B.	6	2		
Johnson, Joseph	2	2	7	7
Johnson, Peter			2	
Kincheloe, Daniel		6	5	3
Lake, William		2	3	2
Lowther, Elias		2	1	
Lynch, Peter	4			14
Martin, Spencer	2	1	3	3
Moore, Samuel P.	4	2	4	8
Moore, Thomas P.			3	7

Morris, Daniel	6	15	8	26
Martin, William			3	15
Newlon, John		5	1	2
Norris, Joseph		1	3	2
Radcliff, Jonathan		1		5
Reed, Francis		1		
Reynolds, John	5	7	7	9
Righter, John	3	7	2	
Robinson, Benjamin	4	5		
Rogers, William A.	2	4	3	7
Shuttlesworth, Nottley		6	4	2
Sommerville, John	4	9	8	7
Stillwell, Elias	1			9
Stout, Benjamin			6	3
Tyson, Isaac T.	3	5	5	5
Waldo, Jedediah		3	4	6
Washington, Samuel	5	7	9	27
Watson, Thomas			1	3
Wilson, Benjamin, Jr.		3		
Winters, Matthias	1	5	2	8 16

Suits for collection of debts, in addition to the one on Washington's first day in court, continued to pop up while he was a resident of Harrison County. In one case Isaac Heiskel entered "a special bail" and in another the court decided "this execution is stayed three months."<sup>17</sup> Two months after Samuel Washington last sat in Harrison County Court two suits against Washington were entered. In one two Harrison County men, Jacob Coplin and Isaac Heiskel who had been assignees for collecting of debts, asked that their cause be withdrawn and that the plaintiffs recover against the defendant the sum of \$50 with interest from February 21, 1821.<sup>18</sup> In the other suit the court found for "William Schlatter, assignee of Daniel Kincheloe vs Samuel Washington, \$40 with interest from November 26, 1819."<sup>19</sup>

No conveyance of land in Harrison County to Samuel Washington is recorded in deed books in Harrison County in 1978; but an 1821 map labels a site "Col. Washington." The place marked is on Anmoore on the left hand side of the old road leading from Clarksburg to Bridgeport just after the Brushy Fork Road branches off and the road makes a turn to the left.<sup>20</sup>

Samuel Washington may have moved in September 1821 from Clarksburg to the Kanawha Valley. He was present at a Fourth of July celebration on the Kanawha in 1826: "[after a ceremony at Mercer Academy] 'the company then repaired to Mr. Wetherill's tavern, and about 75 sat down to a dinner, prepared for the occasion in a very handsome style, at which the Hon. Lewis Summers presided, assisted by Philip R. Thompson and Joseph L. Fry, Esqs. A great number of toasts were drunk, interspersed by some airs and songs, and at a very early hour the company separated, having spent the day apparently in great humor and hilarity.' During the course of the meeting one of the swords worn by Gen. Washington was exhibited by the owner, Capt. Samuel Washington, of Kanawha county, and some wines made from grapes grown in the Kanawha valley were sampled.' (The Samuel Washington home was in Kanawha County at that time, but the site is now in Putnam, that county being formed in 1848, partly from Kanawha.)"<sup>21</sup>

In the division of western lands of George Washington signed by the heirs July 19, 1802, Mildred Washington Hammond, sister of Samuel Washington, received Lot No. 23 in survey "G" consisting of 2630 acres which lay at the mouth of Tyler Creek and is a portion of the land in Kanawha County on which the town of Dunbar is now located. Mrs. Hammond died in 1805 leaving her interest in the land to her husband, Captain Thomas Hammond, for life, to their children thereafter, and in default of children to her brother Samuel and his children. When Charles Washington Hammond, son of Thomas and Mildred Hammond, died in early youth, the Hammond land at the mouth of Tyler Creek was conveyed to Samuel Washington. "On May 1, 1827, the said Samuel Washington, then of Kanawha County, [W.] Va., transferred 1,300 acres to Samuel Washington, Jr., who had been to much expense by reason of litigation, and 'being the same which was allotted to the said Mrs. Mildred Hammond, under the will of General George Washington.'"<sup>22</sup> Samuel Washington died in Kanawha County in 1831.<sup>23</sup>

Samuel T. Washington, son of Samuel Washington, in 1843 sent the Washington sword and the Franklin cane given to him by his father, to George W. Summers, member of the U.S. House of Representatives along with the following letter:

Coal's Mouth  
Kanawha County, Va. [W.Va.]  
January 9, 1843

My Dear Sir:

With this you will receive the war sword of my grand uncle, General George Washington, and the gold-headed cane bequeathed to him by Dr. Benjamin Franklin.

These interesting relics I wish to be presented, through you, my dear sir, to the Congress of the United States, on behalf of the nation.

Congress can dispose of them in such manner as shall seem most appropriate, and best calculated to keep in memory the character and services of those two illustrious founders of our republic.

I am, with esteem, yours,

Samuel T. Washington.

Hon. George W. Summers, House of Representatives.

On February 7, 1843, George Summers presented "The Sword of Washington and Staff of Franklin" to the U.S. Congress. During the presentation he described the sword, gave its history, and said:

I am also in possession of the most satisfactory evidence, furnished by Colonel George C. Washington, of Georgetown, the nearest male relative now living of General Washington, as to the identity of the sword. His information, as to its history, was derived from his father, William Augustine Washington, the devisee first named in the clause of the will which I have read; from his uncle, the late Judge Bushrod Washington, of the Supreme Court; and Major Lawrence Lewis, the acting executor of General Washington's will all of whom concurred in the statement that the true service sword was that selected by Captain Samuel Washington...

John Quincy Adams, member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Massachusetts delivered an address after Mr. Summers had handed over the sword and the cane. He ended his remarks with the following resolution:

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled, That the thanks of this Congress be presented to Samuel T. Washington of Kanawha County, Virginia [W.Va.], for the present of the sword used by his illustrious relative, George Washington, in the military career of his early youth in the seven years' war and throughout the war of the National Independence and of the staff bequeathed by the patriot, statesman, and sage, Benjamin Franklin, to the same leader of the armies of

Freedom in the Revolutionary War, George Washington. That these precious relics are hereby accepted in the name of the nation; that they be deposited for safe keeping in the Department of State of the United States, and that a copy of these resolutions, signed by the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives be transmitted to the said Samuel T. Washington.<sup>24</sup>

"For many years the relics [ sword and cane] were kept in a case in the Department of State, but in 1922 were removed to the United States National Museum and so placed that they are seen by hundreds of thousands of visitors who visit that institution each year."<sup>25</sup>

On June 19, 1978, the Harrison County Historical Society wrote the Honorable Robert H. Mollohan, member of the U.S. House of Representatives, asking him to learn if the sword and the cane were in the collection of the Smithsonian Institution. Mr. Mollohan on July 25, 1978, forwarded to the Harrison County Historical Society a letter written to him on July 20, 1978, by S. Dillon Ripley, secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, part of which reads: "The battle sword of General George Washington and the staff of Benjamin Franklin presented to the U.S. Government by Samuel T. Washington in 1843 are displayed in the Nation of Nations Exhibit in our National Museum of History and Technology."<sup>26</sup>

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Correspondence

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#### FOOTNOTES

- One clause of the will reads: "To each of my nephews, William Augustine Washington, George Lewis, George Steptoe Washington, Bushrod Washington, and Samuel Washington, I give one of the swords or cutteaux, of which I may die possessed; and they are to chuse in the order they are named. These swords are accompanied with an injunction not to unsheath them for the purpose of shedding blood, except it be for self-defense, or in defense of their Country and its rights; and in the latter case to keep them unsheathed, and prefer falling with them in their hands to the relinquishment thereof." Boyd B. Stutler, "The Swords of Washington", *The West Virginia Review*, May 1932, p. 346.
- Samuel Washington enlisted in the Virginia militia as a private September 24, 1794. He served in the Light Dragoons in Mercer's Company, Major Fielding Lewis Jr.'s Command, and was listed on the roll dated "Winchester, November 26, 1794." He served a total of two months and six days until November 30, 1794, when he left the service. He received pay at the rate of \$3.00 a month or a total of \$6.60. "Butt's Co., Militia ---Sheppard's Troop, Cavalry, Militia", Microcopy 905, Roll No. 19, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
- The West Virginia Review*, May 1932, p. 346.
- "Sword of Washington and Staff of Franklin". *The West Virginia Historical Magazine* v. 1, no. 3, July 1901, p. 42.
- Benjamin Franklin wrote in a codicil to his last will and testament: "My fine crab-tree walking stick, with a gold head, curiously wrought in the form of the cap of liberty, I give to my friend, and the friend of mankind, General Washington. If it were a sceptre, he has merited it, and would become it." General Washington, in his will, devised this cane as follows: "Item. To my brother, Charles Washington, I give and bequeath the gold-headed cane left me by Dr. Franklin in his will." *Ibid.*, p. 44.
- John A. Washington, M.D., Harewood, Charles Town, West Virginia, in a correspondence with Dorothy Davis dated June 22, 1978. "About 1770 Colonel Charles Washington, youngest brother of George, acquired a large tract, including the site of the town, and in 1786 had 80 acres surveyed and laid out in streets for a town, which was established by the Virginia Assembly the same year. The place was named Charles Town for its founder . . . [Charles Washington's Office in 1941] is a small one-room brick building painted yellow and used for storage. Charles Washington built this office about the time of the founding of Charles Town and rode into town several times a week to conduct business and meet with the town trustees here . . . at the south end of town, was originally Happy Retreat, the home of Charles Washington; he died there in 1797 [1799]. Between two-story brick wings is a wide two-and-a-half-story central unit . . . The two wings were built by Charles Washington after 1774 and originally were connected by a covered passage. The house was sold to Judge Isaac R. Douglas, who renamed the estate Mordington and in 1833 built the central unit. Behind the east wing is a one-room brick building to which is joined a one-room stone wing; this was originally the kitchen and contains a huge fireplace with a brick oven. A brick slave house stands at the rear of the kitchen...." United States. Works Projects Administration. *Writers' Program, West Virginia: A Guide to the Mountain State*. . . pp. 197, 205.
- John A. Washington, *Augustine Washington's Descendants ---Four Generations*
- Roy Bird Cook, *Washington's Western Lands*. Strasburg, Virginia: Shenandoah Publishing House, 1930, p. 58. These acres were all of "lot 18" and were Samuel Washington's portion of the division signed July 19, 1802, by the heirs of western lands of George Washington. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
- Harrison County, Va. - W. Va., *Deed Book* No. 13, pp. 470-3.
- And this was not the first time. In September 1798 George Washington loaned his nephew Samuel Washington \$1000 interest free. "In answer to his nephew, Samuel Washington, who was threatened with attachment of his Negroes, his uncle [George Washington] had written [May 1799] that he would lend him \$1000, but not one cent beyond; as that sum will take nearly every farthing I have in the bank and is insufficient to meet demands which, every moment, I expect will be made upon myself." John Alexander Carroll and Mary Wells Ashworth (completing the biography by Douglas Southall Freeman), *George Washington*, v. 7, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957, pp. 479, 579.
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- Ibid.*, pp. 79, 257.
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- Cook, *Washington's Western Lands*, pp. 62-4.
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- The West Virginia Review*, May 1932, p. 347.
- S. Dillon Ripley in a letter to the Honorable Robert H. Mollohan, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington D.C. 20515, July 20, 1978.