

Constitution

The backstory

Martha Washington (1731-1802)



Martha Dandridge was born in the Province of Virginia on her parent's plantation, Chestnut Grove, on June 2, 1731. At the age of 18, Martha married Daniel Parke Custis, a wealthy planter who was 20 years older than her. Martha and Daniel had 4 children, only two of whom lived into early adulthood. Daniel died in 1757, leaving Martha a wealthy young widow at the age of 25. She did well in running 5 plantations and negotiating with London merchants.

In January of 1759, Martha married George Washington. It is thought that Washington knew both Martha and her late husband before his death because he was also a property owner in the same area. While Martha and George had no children together, they raised Martha's children and some of her grandchildren after her son John passed away.

During the Revolutionary war, Martha traveled hundreds of miles to be by her husband's side during the winters. She did this because she supported the cause of freedom, and it has been written that she "loved her husband madly." Martha was known to be a wonderful hostess, and things were no different when she was visiting her husband at Valley Forge.

After the war, Martha opposed her husband's agreement to become the first U.S. President and even refused to attend his inauguration. Once George Washington became President, Martha hosted many affairs of state in both New York and Boston (both were temporary capitals during Washington's time in office).

Although the term wasn't coined until after her husband's time in office, Martha Washington is considered the first First Lady of the United States.

What do you think about the fact that Martha Washington did not attend her husband's inauguration? What do you think would be the reaction today if Michelle Obama hadn't attended her husband's inauguration?

Next Lesson April 15