

*George Washington's Garden
The General And His
Mount Vernon Landscape*



By Kate Eagen Johnson

Previous Page; "The East Front of Mount Vernon" attributed to Edward Savage, 1787–1792. Oil on canvas, 22 by 35½ inches. The deer park Washington installed below the east lawn in 1785–86 mimicked those on English country estates. It was neither long-lived nor successful. Deer escaped its boundaries and munched on tasty pleasure ground plants while fights broke out with neighbors over hunting trespass. Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, bequest of Helen W. Thompson, 1964. —Harry Connolly photo

MOUNT VERNON, VA. — I am thoroughly convinced that George Washington was far more interested in properly siting, rather than chopping down, cherry trees. And that Martha Washington was an early farm-to-table dining enthusiast when she instructed that the gardens at Mount



Portrait miniature of George Washington after John Ramage, 1789. Watercolor on ivory, gold, glass and hair; 2 13/16 by 1 13/16 inches. Washington owned a total of five farms in the vicinity of Mount Vernon. Prior to 1766, the planter concentrated on tobacco as a commercial crop. He then switched to wheat. Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, gift of the Stanley King Family Foundation, 1997. —Edward Owen photo

Vernon have everything “that will be ne[ce]ssary in the House keeping way — as vegetable is [sic] the best part of living in the country.” And that archaeologists working at the most

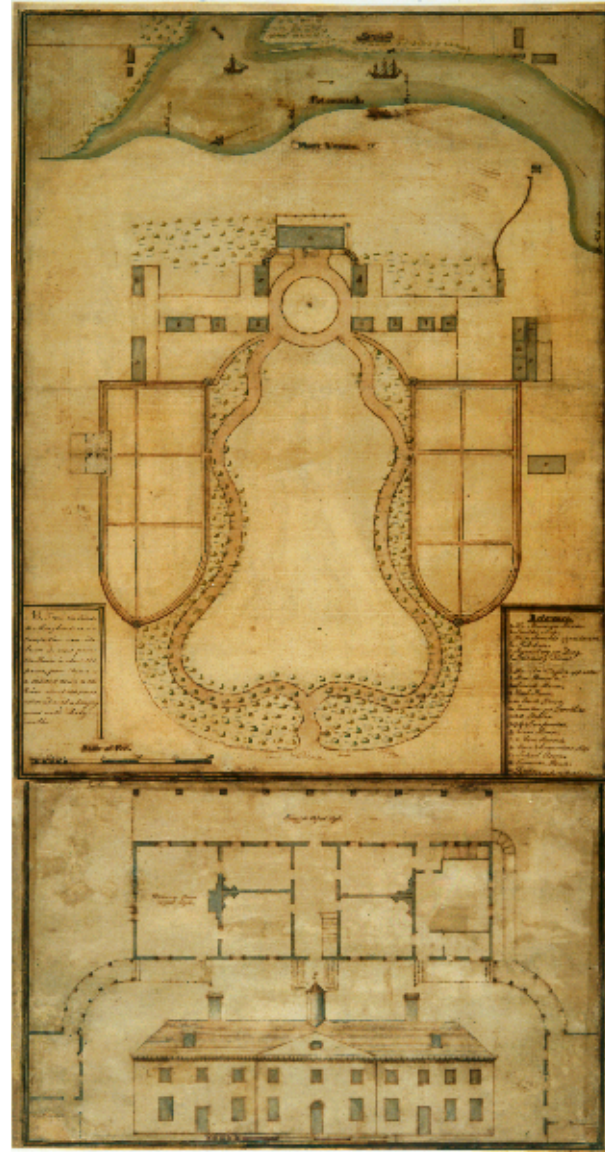
visited historic estate in America continue to uncover amazing finds, including the below-ground remnants of a tree nursery dating from the 1760s.

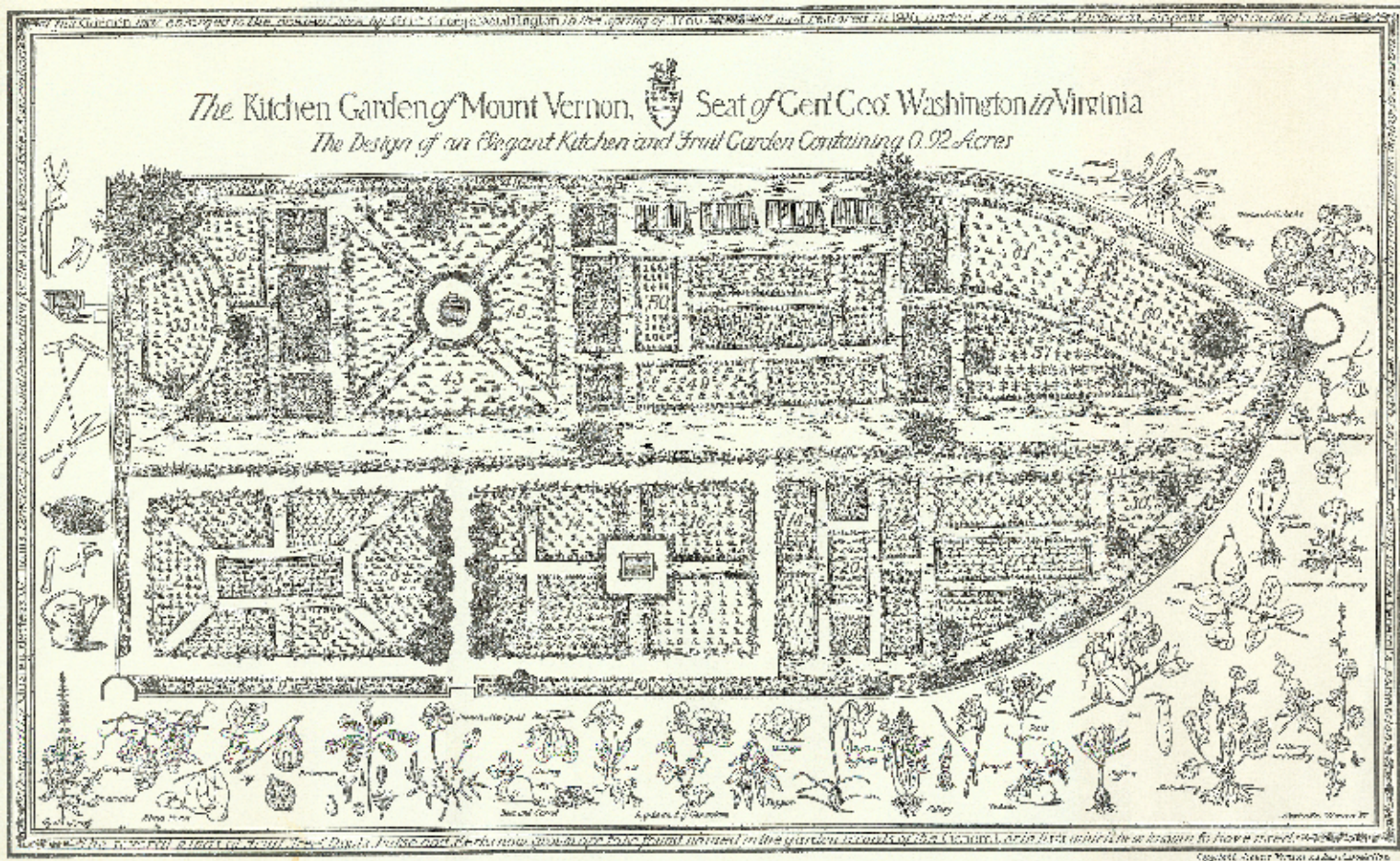


*“Mount Vernon Garden”
post card, circa 1900.
Researchers have relied not
only on extensive written
and visual resources
relating to Mount Vernon’s
landscape, but also on
archeology,
ground-penetrating radar
and dendrochronology.
Mount Vernon Ladies’
Association, The
Washington Library.*

As the volume *The General in the Garden: George Washington's Landscape at Mount Vernon* reveals, the Virginia vistas that Washington and others shaped over the centuries are both timeless and ephemeral. The publication grows from the exhibition “Garden & Groves: George Washington's Landscape at Mount Vernon,” which highlights changes the Great One wrought after returning home from the Revolutionary War and before attending the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia.

Presentation drawing of Mount Vernon landscape by Samuel Vaughan, 1787, Philadelphia. Ink and watercolor on paper, 32 by 16 ¼ inches. This drawing shows the guitar-shaped bowling green bordered by naturalistically planted pleasure grounds. The upper and lower gardens are pointed on one end. The London merchant-banker Vaughn was a supporter of the Revolutionary cause and a friend who advised Washington on landscape design. Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, The Washington Library.
—Hal Conroy photo





"The Kitchen Garden of Mount Vernon, Seat of Genl. Geo. Washington in Virginia ...," designed by Morley Jeffers Williams, drawn by Nathalia Ulman, published by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, 1937, Mount Vernon, Virginia. Ink on paper, 12 ¼ by 19 ¼ inches. This print of the 1937 lower garden plan was available for purchase. Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, gift of Mrs Frank Mauran IV, vice regent for Rhode Island, 2014.

"View of Mount Vernon with the Washington Family on the Piazza" by Benjamin Henry Latrobe, 1796. Watercolor, ink and graphite on paper, 16 3/8 by 24 inches. Living and entertaining in the open air is a hallmark of the American lifestyle. Latrobe depicts a seated George and Martha Washington with Nelly Parke Custis and Frisk, her dog. The man looking toward the Potomac through the spyglass may be Latrobe himself. The identity of the boy is not known. Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, purchased with funds provided in part by an anonymous donor, 2013. —Gavin Ashworth photo



The book draws rightful attention to Mount Vernon's impressive program

of landscape exploration, management and interpretation. It addresses the

gardens and grounds museum visitors experience today, George Washington's personal connections to land and horticulture, and the decision making process Mount Vernon's administrators and researchers have employed — as well as the scientific, technical and historical resources they have used — to document and then “peel back” time's accretions. At Mount Vernon, as is true at other historic sites, each generation has brought a different set of questions, interests, tools and resources to the site's preservation and presentation.

This case study speaks to the broader issue of Americans' changing attitudes toward gardens and landscape over the years.



Sundial owned by George Washington, circa 1765, probably England. Brass, 6 ¼ by 11 ¾ inches. Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, gift of Annie Burr Jennings, vice regent for Connecticut, 1938. —Gavin Ashworth photo

The effort at Mount Vernon is part of a relatively recent awakening in historic preservation circles. The appreciation of landscapes and living collections as bona fide historical resources equal to architecture and fine and decorative arts came of age in the 1990s with the maturation of the academic field of landscape history

and the and the 1996 publication of *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for the Treatment of Cultural Landscapes*. ([Continued on page 30 inside the E-edition](#))

[Read Full Article](#)

[Read Full Article
on Mobile](#)