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# Foreword

*Jack D. Warren, Jr.*

In the spring of 1892, workmen at a construction site in Augusta, Georgia, made a curious discovery. Digging on the site of an old stable, they uncovered a marble tombstone and beneath, a small brick burial vault enclosing the remains of a dog. The tombstone had been placed in 1798, although the dog, a greyhound, had died in the summer of 1791. His name was Cornwallis.

Cornwallis — named for the British general who surrendered at Yorktown — was George Washington's canine companion on his 1791 presidential tour of the South. It's not clear whether Cornwallis rode in Washington's carriage or trotted alongside down the thousand miles of rutted dirt roads between Mount Vernon and Augusta. If he went on foot most of the way, as I imagine, he probably died of exhaustion. His master set a terrific pace.

Like many of the stories told about George Washington, there is a touch of fable to this one. The newspaper account of the workmen's discovery was published on April 1, leading some Augustans to regard the whole thing as a hoax. But like the story of the little hatchet and the cherry tree, it embodies a fundamental truth about Washington. The hundreds of places Washington is supposed to have slept actually testify to his inexhaustible energy. To sleep in all of those places — scattered between Maine and Georgia — he had to get to them first. This was no mean feat before turnpikes, railroads, and steamboats revolutionized transportation. And Washington visited more of his own country while in office than any president before the twentieth century. He certainly drove himself hard enough to run a dog to death. Even a greyhound.

Washington left Mount Vernon on his tour of the South on the morning of April 7, 1791. A few miles from home, while he was crossing the Occoquan River on a ferry, his lead horse was startled and went

## *In the Footsteps of George Washington*

overboard, dragging the rest of the team into deep water. A dozen people jumped in to get the tangled harnesses off and save the horses from drowning. Cornwallis, I imagine, stood on the side of the ferry and barked. Washington slept that night in Dumfries, pressed on early the next morning, stopped for breakfast in Stafford, and reached Fredericksburg — just forty miles from Mount Vernon — at one o'clock.

In the days and weeks that followed, Washington and Cornwallis pushed south to Richmond, Petersburg, and New Bern, North Carolina. President and dog rode down South Carolina's "Long Beach" (now Myrtle Beach) and on to Charleston. They moved on to Savannah, then west to Augusta, where Cornwallis breathed his last. Washington pushed on without him, north through the Carolina backcountry to Virginia. Everywhere he went he was met by cheering crowds and an unprecedented outpouring of patriotic sentiment.

Washington reached Mount Vernon on June 12. His horses, he reported, were "much worn down." He said nothing about himself. He had covered 1,887 miles in sixty-seven days. In doing so he had made the distant federal government — a tiny institution in a great land — seem real to thousands of ordinary Americans. He also set a precedent that the federal government should concern itself with the needs of ordinary citizens in every part of the country. He left behind a deeper attachment to the United States, and scattered reminders — like the curious grave of the faithful Cornwallis — of the personal loyalty he excited in Americans wherever he went.

That loyalty lives on in Bill Clotworthy, who has scoured the eastern United States for sites associated with the life of our first great national hero. This book is the product of those labors. He has found scores of sites, ranging from the great plantation houses of Virginia, the battlefields of the French and Indian War and the Revolution, to the dozens of other places where Washington attended church, spent the night, or held a council of war. He has found places where Washington is said to have planted a tree and even taken a bath. He is carrying on a long tradition. Pilgrims have been making their way to some of those places since the earliest days of the republic. In 1777, pioneering American historian Ebenezer Hazard went out of his way to visit Ferry Farm, the plantation near Fredericksburg, Virginia, where Washington grew up. Although the Revolutionary War was still underway — and its outcome uncertain — Washington had already become the heroic symbol of the American cause and the embodiment of the revolutionary ideal of republican virtue.

## *Foreword*

The patriotic impulse that led Hazard to Washington's childhood home has inspired millions of Americans in the last two centuries. In the first years of the republic, the former British colonies that made up the new nation had little common history and few shared symbols. Washington was the chief symbol of American nationhood. Nearly every site associated with him became a place of veneration.

That so many of these sites are still preserved and accessible to the public is a testament to Washington's enduring historical reputation. Mount Vernon, acquired for the American people in 1858 by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, remains one of the most popular historical attractions in the United States. George Washington Birthplace National Monument, the first historic site incorporated into the National Park System, has welcomed visitors since 1932. And as recently as 1996, patriotic Americans joined ranks to prevent commercial development from swallowing up the site of Washington's childhood home, which was recently designated a National Historic Landmark.

Bill Clotworthy has done a remarkably thorough job documenting these and dozens of other places. He has done it the old-fashioned way, by visiting them personally. Yet in the end, he confesses, he cannot document all of the sites associated with the Great Man. There always seems to be one more to discover. Washington leaves him, like the unfortunate Cornwallis, panting beside the road. But historic travelers and armchair tourists could not find a better guidebook or a friendlier, more enthusiastic guide.