

Mount Vernon: The Original and its Replicas

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*George Washington Lives Here: His Commemoration at Mount Vernon
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Across America -- from small towns to great cities, along country roads and overlooking interstate highways, from coast to coast and in every state in the nation -- Mount Vernon, the home of George Washington, is a constant presence. The distinctive two-story portico is the most copied feature in American architecture, lending distinction to tract houses and mansions, banks and grocery stores, funeral parlors and motels, and even the occasional used car lot. Spurred by the iconic status bestowed on the first president even during his own lifetime, and bolstered by the fascination of succeeding generations with the remarkable story of the nation's founding, Washington and Mount Vernon, more than any other person and structure, have been joined to symbolize both the lessons of their era and the hopes of our own. So completely have Mount Vernon's distinctive architectural elements been ingrained into the nation's subconscious, that the facades of untold numbers of structures continue to incorporate those features, often without the faintest glimmer on the part of their owners' of the original source.¹

Already by the end of his life Washington and his home were closely linked in the mind of the American public. As he embraced the role of Cincinnatus, the semi-legendary Roman general who relinquished his command to return to the life of a simple farmer, the home that Washington yearned to return to naturally took on reflected

significance. A theme that Washington often revisited in his correspondence as he contemplated his retirement from public life was the wish to spend the rest of his days whiling away the hours under the shade of his “vine and fig tree.” During Washington’s life, the opportunity to visit the great man on his home turf made the experience resonate even more powerfully. “No pilgrim ever approached Mecca with deeper enthusiasm,” wrote a New Englander of his trip in 1785, a sentiment that was echoed by many. After Washington’s passing in 1799, Mount Vernon took on an additional dimension as the tangible expression of its owner’s “departed greatness” – personal, military, and political – where Americans could imaginatively touch and affirm the legacy of Washington and of the Revolution itself.²

As it happens, the property that these visitors experienced had an even closer association with Washington than any of them knew, or probably cared to know, as the design of the house and the layout of the entire estate were his creations. Over a span of more than four decades, Washington twice expanded and repeatedly refurbished the dwelling, built in 1735 by his father, Augustine, and which he had inherited following the 1752 death of his older half-brother, Lawrence. He also removed and replaced an earlier array of outbuildings, added many other structures to support his evolving plans, and completely reorganized the surrounding gardens and grounds. Thus, the site where visitors come to honor Washington simply because it was his home is invested with even richer meaning as an expression of the first president’s grasp of current architectural and landscape design, and as a dramatic statement of self definition.³

Although earlier scholars expended considerable time and effort attempting to identify the “architect” of Mount Vernon, there is no doubt that Washington himself

played the central role in designing the Mansion, the outbuildings, and the surrounding landscape. This is not surprising, as professional architects, men who were trained and paid to design buildings and landscapes, were relatively scarce in 18th-century America. It was usually up to owners themselves to guide the design process, and Washington followed the traditional path, as he consulted a variety of sources to assist him in developing his plans: books on building, architecture, and garden design, models in the form of contemporary structures and gardens, and advice from artisans, builders, and others.⁴

When Washington became the master of Mount Vernon in 1754, he initially retained his father's house, which seems to have been little altered from its construction almost 20 years before. For most of the next four years, Colonel Washington was heavily occupied in his leading role as an officer of the Virginia militia fighting alongside British troops during the French and Indian War. The military life had strong appeal for Washington, and during the latter stages of the conflict he lobbied for the support of various officials in hopes of obtaining a regular commission in the British Army. Failing in this effort, Washington made plans to return to Mount Vernon and to commit himself to the life of a tobacco planter. Apparently the house built by his father did not measure up to his vision as the proper setting for his domestic life, however. Washington determined to enlarge and remodel the structure to suit his changing needs, directing that it be raised from one-and-one-half to two-and-one-half stories, and rearranged the interior spaces, reconfigured the main staircase, and upgraded the finishes of the more public areas.⁵

For most of the time when the house was under construction, Washington was absent, first serving with the British during the waning days of the war, and then embarked on his courtship of the widow, Martha Dandridge Custis, whose first husband had died two years before. The young officer hired a local builder to oversee the renovations and the two men kept in close contact through letters -- a pattern that would be repeated at various times over the next four decades as Washington's commitment to public service kept him away from home for long periods at a time. In January of 1759 Washington and the widow Custis were married, and in April of that year the newlyweds set up housekeeping within the freshly painted walls of the refurbished home. This was the Mount Vernon that George Washington new best, as he lived there almost continuously over the next 16 years.⁶

Washington began planning the second rebuilding of Mount Vernon in 1773, and this time he seems to have purposely struck out on his own to design a house that was in many ways remarkable and original. But at the same time it owed both its overall inspiration as well as many specific details to the neo-classical aesthetic popularized by the Italian architect and author, Andrea Palladio, and which at the time was the ascendant architectural fashion in Britain and throughout Anglo-America. British Palladianism consisted of a body of principles harkening back to the architecture of ancient Greece and Rome, which claimed to distill and codify a set of standards of beauty that derived from Nature. Although Palladio is credited with reviving and popularizing the ideas of the "ancients," various other practitioners and authors in Britain made important contributions to the developing style. Washington and his fellow colonists received their greatest exposure to Palladianism through a flurry of builder's guides – often referred to

as “pattern books” – that were published in large numbers over the course of the 18th century. A great variety of decorative elements on both the exterior and interior of the Mount Vernon Mansion may be directly traced to several of these guides.⁷

Once again Washington enlarged the house, this time adding wings to either end and the double-height portico running all along the east facade, as well as attaching the open quadrant colonnades, that linked the house with two dependencies to create a five-part Palladian façade. Although the overall effect evoked the classical influences, the colonnades’ open sides were unusual, as were combining the cupola and the great portico – referred to as the piazza by Washington -- in the context of mid-18th-century Virginia residential architecture. In addition to their aesthetic contributions, each of these elements was practical in nature as well – helping to ventilate the building, providing shelter from the weather, and taking advantage of cool breezes and pleasing views to add a more gracious note to the style of life at Mount Vernon.⁸

Another unusual feature of the house, probably first introduced in the 1758-59 expansion and then continued later, was the use of fully rusticated siding boards not only on the formal front but also on the other facades. Evidence that this was done at least by the 1750s exists in the form of surviving rusticated boards on what had been the north façade of the Mansion, now trapped within the crawl space between the 16-foot-high ceiling of the Large Dining Room and the joists for the floor above. According to Washington’s description, the boards were to be primed and then sand was “dashed hard on” until it would no longer stick. The siding boards themselves were chamfered at the top and bottom and carved with vertical V-channels, to suggest dressed stone blocks. Rustication of this type was used at a number of houses in the Chesapeake to provide an

accent to a prominent doorway or window. But it was rarely employed to cover an entire façade, and there are no known examples of houses in the region where all four facades were treated in that manner. Structures of the period with four fully rusticated facades do survive in New England, and over the years scholars have speculated that Washington saw models there on his travels in 1756 that served as his inspiration.⁹

Drawn in preparation for the expansion that finally was launched in 1774, the simplicity of the only known surviving elevation of the Mansion (the west façade) executed in Washington's hand suggests a conceptual design. And the final result departed from the concept in an all important respect, as it was much less symmetrical as built than is suggested by the drawing. Part of the problem was inherited from the original structure, as the central doorway had been positioned slightly off-center, an anomaly that became more noticeable as the design evolved. But Washington made a series of conscious decisions that greatly increased the challenge, as he installed a more gracious staircase in the passage, which meant that the window that had been located there now was captured within the landing -- an obvious drawback. Shifting the offending window and the one adjacent to it also provided an opportunity, as both openings now were positioned in the Small Dining Room, one of the three highly decorated public spaces on the first floor.¹⁰

In accommodating the needs of the interior design, however, Washington violated one of the most basic rules of Georgian architecture – that principal facades should be mirror images on either side of a central axis. The other facades also include irregular details, such as the bulkhead cellar entrances located at the northeast and southeast corners. The entrance on the north severely intrudes on the balancing effect of the

Venetian Window, a jarring juxtaposition with what is arguably the most elegant ornamental feature of the entire house. Much has been made of these decisions, with one writer even arguing that Washington simply could not have acted in this seemingly cavalier manner unless he was deliberately breaking the rule and using asymmetry as a design theme. Perhaps the goal was to diminish the perception of the building's scale in relation to the surrounding structures, or to retain a link with the more humble vernacular farm houses of his neighbors. Or what seems more likely is that it is an example of Washington, the amateur architect, simply doing the best he could to balance a number of competing interests.¹¹

It was probably in hopes of masking the irregularity of the fenestration and to give the evolved house a much needed cohesive thread that Washington added the cupola and the second of the two pediments superimposed over the door. It was at this point in the process where the misaligned central doorway came into play: the opening is offset from the center line by 18 inches, the difference in the long dimensions between the two flanking west front rooms on the first floor. In the original house, and even as it was enlarged in 1758-59, this discrepancy probably was imperceptible. But when Washington sought to regularize the façade in the 1770s, the offset doorway became a significant issue. His solution was ingenious. By aligning the peaks of the pediments over the door, while positioning the cupola midway on the roof, he undoubtedly hoped that the jog in the center line that he created would be lost to the observer among the symmetrical cues surrounding it.

Some insight into what Washington may have been thinking is provided by excerpts from the correspondence he carried on many years later with William Thornton,

whom Washington had championed as the designer of the new United States capitol building. Washington planned to build a pair of townhouses in the new Federal City, and he sent Thornton the design drawings for his review. Thornton responded with a number of pointed criticisms, which elicited a defensive reaction from the president. “Rules of architecture are calculated,” Washington wrote, “to give symmetry and just proportion to all the Orders and parts of a building in order to please the eye. Small departures from strict rules are discoverable only by the skillful Architects, or by the eye of criticism.” In other words, at times special circumstances call for breaking the rules, and the deviations really are only likely to be apparent to the learned few.¹²

Washington incorporated elements from a number of English pattern books in his designs for both the Mansion’s interior and exterior. Two books by Batty Langley, *The City and Country Builder and Workman’s Treasury of Designs* (1750), and *The Builder’s Jewel* (1757), were particularly influential. They provided the inspiration for the Venetian window that dominates the north wall of the Large Dining Room, the most ambitiously ornamented space in the Mansion, as well as the Tuscan piers supporting the piazza, the frame of the elliptical window in the west pediment, and many more. On the interior, Washington once again referred to Langley, as well as to Abraham Swan’s *The British Architect* (1745) and William Pain’s *Practical Builder* (1774). Swan’s book provided models for the chimney-pieces in both the Small Dining Room and the Front Parlor, while *The Practical Builder* inspired the design for the plaster ceiling in the Small Dining Room.¹³

As Washington was reinventing his house along neo-classical lines, he also demolished and replaced most of the outbuildings, and began to redesign the landscape

following the Picturesque or naturalistic ideals that were the fashionable complement to British-Palladian architecture. English sources once again served as an important reference, particularly Batty Langley's *New Principles of Gardening* (1728), a copy of which Washington purchased in 1760. One of the main tenets of the new aesthetic was to incorporate pleasing features of the natural scene into the design, and to make it appear as if the entire scheme was just the happy product of nature.¹⁴

The Englishman Samuel Vaughan's detailed plan of Mount Vernon that he made after visiting the estate in 1786 captures the landscape design and the layout of the buildings toward the end of Washington's second rebuilding. As the plan indicates, the Mansion was flanked by formal lanes of service buildings to the north and south, where the mundane activities of daily life were largely confined, with long expanses of lawn to the east and west leading to striking natural vistas. The larger of the two lawns, known as the bowling green, is flanked by two large brick-walled gardens, set back within groves of "wildernesses" and "shrubberies." A decade later another foreign visitor to Mount Vernon left an effusive appraisal of the success of Washington's attempt to emulate English models: "In a word the garden, the house, the whole upkeep, proves that a man born with natural taste can divine the beautiful without having seen the model. The G[enera]l has never left America. After seeing his house and his gardens one would say that he had seen the most beautiful examples in England of this style."¹⁵

The portico and the open-sided colonnades together qualify as an inspired application of picturesque ideas. Scholars have spilled considerable ink in debating whether their design was Washington's original invention. But completely original or not, their addition was a masterful stroke aimed at uniting the house with the surrounding

landscape. Building the colonnades with two open sides allowed the Potomac vista to be viewed through the many arched openings – a simple change, but one for which no previous Virginia example has been found. The portico is an even more dramatic solution for a number of design issues, as it provided a comfortable outdoor living space with a magnificent view at the same time that it helped to architecturally finish the unusually long axis of the east façade. Similarly, the brick Ha-ha walls encircling the lawn in front of the portico and elsewhere around the Mansion were carefully planned not to impair the sweeping vistas that Washington so admired, even while they kept intruding animals out of the gardens and lawns.¹⁶

Between the Revolution and the Civil War, millions of Americans sought to remember, invoke, and commemorate the Founding – in many different venues and formats – with public commemorations typically advancing a grand narrative of liberty. The historical pageant naturally featured a pantheon of heroes, George Washington foremost among them. And Mount Vernon assumed its role as the nation’s most sacred place and as a unique repository of historical memory. This movement gained momentum after 1815 with the impending passing of the last survivors of the Revolution, and was further advanced as a result of the Marquis de Lafayette’s “farewell” tour of 1824-25, which solidified the associative connection between commemoration and place.¹⁷

Mount Vernon was already a compelling subject for artists beginning as early as the 1790s, with first-hand drawings and paintings often copied for other media, including a wide range of commercial and commemorative images. The house (usually the east façade) soon adorned clocks, furniture, ceramics, textiles, and the like. During the

tumultuous decade of the 1850s, the twinned images of Washington and Mount Vernon took on new symbolic importance within the context of the sectional tensions growing out of the debate over slavery. Washington was embraced by both the North and the South, as a symbol of national unity on the one hand, and on the other as a true son of Virginia, an implicit supporter of states' rights, and an exemplar of the southern ideal of a compassionate slave holder. Junius Stearns's portrait of *Washington the Farmer* (1851) is the best known instance of explicitly casting Washington in the role of slave master, doing so in this case "in a way that suggests slavery was a benevolent and natural institution." This would hardly be the last time when the image of Washington and Mount Vernon would be evoked for political purposes.¹⁸

When the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association acquired the property from the Washington family in 1858, they embraced the notion of Washington as the central icon of the nation's founding, and sought to rise above the sectional conflict that was swiftly marching the nation toward civil war. The Ladies naturally turned to images of Washington and Mount Vernon as a primary means of publicizing their cause, and they commissioned a series of official depictions of the house that were sold to visitors. These were often highly romanticized views, depicting elegantly clad visitors enjoying the fully restored Mount Vernon buildings and grounds. Later a series of stereographic views and postcards, along with an expanding array of souvenir items emblazoned with depictions of the Mansion, were offered for sale. With the widespread use of photography, images of the Mansion became a staple of tourist picture albums around the world. Thus, by the mid-19th century, and probably much earlier than that, Mount Vernon was likely the most recognizable structure in America. The so-called Colonial Revival that was given

enormous impetus by the centennial celebration in Philadelphia in 1876, and which exerted a powerful force in American life over the next 50 years, further cemented Mount Vernon's place as an icon of popular architecture.¹⁹

In the Northeast, where the Colonial Revival had its start as early as the 1870s, it was largely a conservative response to the perceived threats to the fabric of American society posed by the combined forces of industrialization, urbanization, European immigration, the mass movement of southern blacks to the North, and the like. For many, especially those who were white, well-to-do, and conservative, harkening back to a period in the nation's past when those threats did not exist was an attempt to reaffirm traditional norms and bolster group identity. The impact of the Colonial Revival was not just a regional phenomenon, however, as its impact was felt throughout the country, and particularly in the South. In that region, the movement was tightly connected with other agendas as well, such as the related attempts to mythologize "the olde South," glorify the War between the States, and reinforce the myth of "the lost cause." But at the same time, Southern leaders hoped to lay the ground work for a "New South" that would be a modern commercial and industrial engine, capable of competing with the North. Historic architectural models were adopted as a means of giving tangible expression to this vision of a more hospitable past -- adapted to serve the needs of the future -- and Colonial Georgian buildings in general and Mount Vernon in particular, were an obvious choice for emulation.²⁰

Houses influenced by the specific features of Mount Vernon came to be a variation of the generic Southern Colonial Revival style, which received a major boost in popularity by McKim, Mead, & White's widely praised design for the "white city"

installed at the world's fair held in Chicago in 1893. The enduring hallmark of this architectural style was the two-story brick house featuring an enormous portico supported by massive columns, and dwellings following this model were soon built in great numbers throughout the country. The question of when home owners and architects began to model dwellings specifically after Mount Vernon is more difficult to answer. But whenever it started, the three distinctive features that were selected as embodying the essence of the structure were the portico, a balustrade running around the perimeter of the portico roof, and the cupola. The red-painted roof shingles and, less often, the rusticated siding, also were copied, but those features usually were reserved for the more ambitious replicas. But not even all three of the main elements were required, and it was the two-story portico – supported by as few as four, and upwards of eight, columns or piers – that took precedence over the others as most clearly evoking Washington's home.²¹

As for the balustrade, it was not even an 18th-century element of the house, as it was added by Bushrod Washington, George Washington's nephew, after he inherited the property in 1802. The balustrade and a porch that Bushrod Washington first added to the south facade of the Mansion both finally were removed in the 1930s, after they were conclusively determined to be later additions, and thus no longer fit with the organization's mission to portray Mount Vernon as it had appeared in the year 1799. The porch and the balustrade actually had come and gone at several points over the years: the original porch was demolished by a hurricane in 1861 and was replaced by the Ladies in 1875, and the original balustrade had deteriorated and was replaced at least twice.²²

Several 18th to mid-19th century Virginia houses incorporate at least two of the three features most often used to represent Mount Vernon, and most of these are widely

believed to be conscious reflections of Washington's home. In every case where detailed information is available, however, it appears that the porticoes were not part of the original construction. One exception to this may be Cobham Hall, in Albemarle County, which has been recognized as one of the earliest recorded Colonial Revival dwellings in Virginia (circa 1856). The house includes a number of colonial-inspired elements, including a portico that suggests its antecedent may have been Mount Vernon. Given its location near Thomas Jefferson's Monticello, and the use of red brick as the building material, a Jeffersonian influence cannot be discounted as well. But the inclusion of a substantial porch supported by squared columns running the length of the five-bay front façade, and the use of a balustrade and classical panels between the columns, at least recalls Mount Vernon as a possible source.²³

Virginia is home to a number of 18th century houses to which Mount Vernon-style porticoes were added beginning at least by the 1850s. Welbourne, in Loudoun County, was built circa 1770, with numerous additions made over the years, including a five-bay portico. The portico runs the length of the façade, with a balustrade encircling the roof of the adjoining wing; this raises the question whether a similar railing had once been installed on the portico roof as well. Three other houses where Mount Vernon porticos and balustrades were added have interesting Washington connections. Ossian Hall, a late 18th-century house that no longer survives, was purchased by Washington's nephew, David Stuart in 1804. Given the association with Stuart, it is possible that the portico and balustrade, which were remarkably close matches to those at Mount Vernon, may have been added as early as the first years of the 19th century. Bushfield, which was the 18th-century home of George Washington's brother, John Augustine, had been largely

rebuilt in 1910, to include adding the cupola, portico, and railing. Oak Hill, built in the 1790s in Fairfax County, received its portico and balustrade circa 1945 under the guidance of Walter M. Macomber, who served as Mount Vernon's Architect for Restoration from 1941 until 1976.²⁴

The popularity of building or adapting existing structures along the lines of Mount Vernon undoubtedly received a boost beginning in the late 19th century when Washington's home was selected to serve as the model for official exhibition buildings at four major international expositions. The first, and undoubtedly the most influential, of these events was the World's Columbian Exposition held in Chicago in 1893, which attracted as many as 20 million visitors during its year-long run. The Virginia Building was a full-scale replica of Mount Vernon, based on carefully measured drawings of the original that were prepared by the architect, Edgerton Stewart Rogers, of Richmond, with the cooperation of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association. The quest for verisimilitude extended to the interior, where the woodwork, wall colors, and even some of the furnishings, were copies of the original.²⁵

The choice of Mount Vernon to represent Virginia was a canny attempt on the part of the promoters to further the "New South" agenda of full reintegration into the national culture and economy, while at the same time memorializing the Confederacy's heroism during the Civil War. Because of the iconic stature that Mount Vernon already had achieved, it symbolized a shared national colonial history, but it also served as "a paragon of the Southern plantation system so vigorously defended by the Confederacy." Thus, the home of Washington, both a southerner and the paramount symbol of the

American nation, gave cover to the theme of reunification, even as some of the exhibits inside focused on such Confederate heroes as Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee.²⁶

Over the next 40 years, full-scale Mount Vernon replicas were erected at three other international celebrations: at the Panama Pacific International Exposition, in San Francisco in 1915, as the official exhibit of the United States government at the International and Overseas Exposition, in Paris in 1931, and as the George Washington Bicentennial Commission Building, erected in Prospect Park, Brooklyn, in 1932.

Another Richmond architect, Charles K. Bryant, was responsible for preparing the construction drawings for the latter two exhibits, and the Home Construction Division of the Sears, Roebuck and Company was commissioned as the building contractor. While the replicas in San Francisco and Brooklyn, like the earlier building in Chicago, are long gone, the Paris Mount Vernon survives, having been relocated to an outlying suburb some years after the conclusion of the event.²⁷

The ad managers for Sears, Roebuck quickly exploited the company's role in constructing the Mount Vernon replicas to trumpet the products of their home construction division. Complete with a letter from Charles Bryant testifying to his satisfaction with Sears's performance in building the Paris replica, the advertisement announced that, "Just as Sears built in France a duplicate of George Washington's ideal Virginia home, so are Sears building in every type of community" homes that are "the ideals of individuals in every walk of life." Drawings for a house loosely based on Mount Vernon, including a five-bay portico and balustrade, were included in the Sears Home Construction catalogue beginning in 1932 and continuing for many years: for some unknown reason, the design was unaccountably named "The Jefferson."²⁸

The enthusiasm for Colonial architecture reflected by featuring Mount Vernon in these international venues was carried over into designs by well-known architects of the day for equally distinguished clients. The influential firm of McKim, Mead, & White were involved in designing at least two Mount Vernon-inspired homes. The Pope-Riddle House, now on the grounds of the Hill-Stead Museum, in Farmington, Connecticut, built between 1898 and 1902, was the result of a partnership between the firm and the owner's daughter, Theodate Pope Riddle, who appears to have taken the lead in the design. Upon visiting the site in 1904, the novelist Henry James described it as "a great new house on a hilltop ... apparently conceived – and with great felicity – on the lines of a magnified Mount Vernon." Of course James was responding to the double-height porch and the vestigial balustrades – apparently sufficient in his mind to qualify the building as a close match with Washington's home. A few years later, the firm designed a residence for the prominent New York artist, James L. Breese, erected in Southampton, Long Island, that incorporated the by-now obligatory columned portico and balustrade. What has been termed a "virtual replica" of Mount Vernon was built in Hartford, Connecticut, in 1911. The house was designed by architect Edward T. Hapgood, who seems to have specialized in designing dwellings in the Colonial style for well-to-do residents of the city. In the 1930s, Milton L. Grigg, a well-known architect from Charlottesville, Virginia, who was also involved in the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, designed a three-bay portico with a balustrade that was added to Ramsay, a circa 1900 house in Albemarle, County, Virginia.²⁹

By the 1930s the distinctive Mount Vernon-inspired elements – a tall portico supported by columns or piers, often topped by an ornate railing -- had become a standard

design for residences, both modest and monumental. In suburban neighborhoods across the land, rectangular houses with porches stuck onto their front are ubiquitous. Some aspired to a higher level of refinement, with Tuscan piers, pedimented doorways, a cupola, and even the outbuildings, which usually were adapted for contemporary purposes as garages and pool houses. Two of the more ambitious designs from this period include the homes of Texas oil-man, H.L. Hunt, near Dallas, Texas, which boasted an enormous five-bay portico with balustrade, and an octagonal cupola, and that of the actor and singer, Bing Crosby, in Hollywood, California. Yet another example of a relatively close rendering of Mount Vernon from this period is Green Pastures, in Fauquier County, Virginia, which was designed by the New York architect, Penrose V. Stout (1931).³⁰

Commercial builders seem to have adopted the Mount Vernon look at a somewhat later date, but soon enough banks, funeral homes, motels, and any number of other types of business establishments, were graced by the familiar details. With the growing trend in the 1930s and 1940s on the part of families to take their summer vacations via automobile, motels sprang up along highways across the nation, and Mount Vernon-inspired designs became ubiquitous. With names like the Mount Vernon Motor Lodge, Mt. Vernon Inn, and Mount Vernon Hotel, and boasting the obligatory porticos, balustrades, and cupolas, the debt to Washington's home was made manifest. The outlets of the Howard Johnson restaurant chain, once so numerous and now gone, single-handedly spread Mount Vernon's red-painted hipped roof and cupola – along with cheese melts and chocolate shakes – to the four corners of the country. The Mountcastle funeral home in Virginia, the California Federal Bank building, in Los Angeles, the Mount

Vernon Memorial Park, in Fair Oaks, California, and many, many more testify to both the attraction of the Mount Vernon design and the ease of incorporating the distinctive elements for almost any purpose in almost all situations.³¹

Following World War II, the momentum of the Colonial Revival as a social movement was spent, and the architectural style had become just one among many options available to builders and their clients. In this context, the continuing popularity of large porches mimicking Mount Vernon's seems less likely to relate to the memory of George Washington than to testify to their appeal as a comfortable living space – something Washington himself would have heartily endorsed. But the appeal of Mount Vernon as a model for well-to-do home owners, and especially those fortunate enough to build on a grand scale, remains strong. Over the last 50 years, dozens of faux Mount Vernons have been built, many of which are relatively faithful renderings of the exterior of the original. In most cases, the scale has been reduced, with the portico usually supported by only four columns (either round or square), and the facades regularized, with the floor plans almost always altered to accommodate modern needs. Including the two dependencies and the connecting colonnades in the plan has been done with regularity, with the buildings often adapted for other functions. Most often one of them serves as a garage, with the other building housing a swimming pool, or a guest house, office, workout room, or some other modern amenity. Mount Vernon continues to be popular as the model for commercial buildings as well, especially for funeral homes, banks, and hotels, again testifying to the adaptability of the design.³²

Although George Washington's image has receded in significance from America's schools, courthouses, and living rooms – except during the week before

“President’s Day” – Mount Vernon continues to hang on as both a patriotic symbol and as a post-modernist pop-culture stage set. The centerpiece of The American Village, the headquarters for an educational foundation with a mission to promote good citizenship, is a modified faux Mount Vernon: complete with cupola, red hipped roof, and rusticated siding, but with a portico that is only three bays wide and topped by a pediment. What better setting for school-age children to re-enact important events from the nation’s founding and learn lessons in civic responsibility? On the other hand, the owner of a high-end furnishings store dedicated to children, Susie Hilfiger, commissioned a scaled down playhouse modeled after Mount Vernon, reflecting her own passion for Washington’s home. With faux-grained wood, walls painted the original colors, reduced copies of the furniture, and even a miniature Key to the Bastille, the result is both eerie and endearing. What Washington would have thought about such an outlandish expression of admiration is anyone’s guess.³³

¹ The best source on Washington’s developing role as an icon of the American Revolution, and especially the use of objects, places, and images to recall his greatness, is Karal Ann Marling, *George Washington Slept Here: Colonial Revivals and American Culture, 1876-1986* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988). On the significance of the Mount Vernon Mansion as a symbol of both Washington’s legacy and the cause of national unity during the decades leading up to the Civil War, see *Ibid.*, 65-84; also see Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America’s House Museums* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), pp. 1-37.

² Washington invoked the image of Mount Vernon as his “vine and fig tree” numerous times, most eloquently in a letter to James Anderson, of Scotland, 7 April 1797: “I am once more seated under my own Vine and fig tree, and hope to spend the remainder of my days . . . in peaceful retirement, making political pursuits yield to the more rational amusement of cultivating the Earth,” *The Papers of George Washington: Retirement Series*, ed. Dorothy Twohig (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999) 4: 79. *Memoirs of Elkanah Watson, Including Journals of Travels in Europe and America, from 1777 to 1842, with His Correspondence with Public Men and Reminiscences and Incidents of the Revolution*, ed. Winslow C. Watson (New York, 1856), reprinted in *Experiencing Mount Vernon: Eyewitness Accounts, 1784-1865*, ed. Jean B. Lee (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2006), p. 21. For a detailed study of the widespread adoption of Mount Vernon as the physical embodiment of Washington’s legacy during the antebellum era, see Jean B. Lee, “Historical Memory, Sectional Strife, and the American Mecca: Mount Vernon, 1783-1853,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, vol. 109, no. 3 (2001): 255-300.

³ The best study of the architecture of Mount Vernon is by Robert F. Dalzell, Jr., and Lee Baldwin Dalzell, *George Washington’s Mount Vernon: At Home in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). The dates for the three main phases of construction have been confirmed via a program of dendrochronological investigations that were carried out at the behest of the owner by Daniel Miles, Oxford Dendrochronology Laboratory (2007); these findings contradict an earlier interpretation that the superstructure of the 1735 house had been removed and enlarged during Lawrence Washington’s tenure of ownership.

⁴ For a detailed portrayal of the process of designing and building Mount Vernon, see Dalzell and Dalzell, *George Washington's Mount Vernon*. The main culprit in confusing the issue of the authorship of Mount Vernon's design was Thomas T. Waterman, *The Mansions of Virginia, 1706-1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1945), pp. 268-298. On the limited role played by professional architects generally in 18th-century Virginia, and on the collaborative nature of designing buildings on the part of craftsmen, contractors (known as "undertakers"), and owners, see Marcus Whiffen, *The Eighteenth-Century Houses of Williamsburg* (Williamsburg, Virginia: Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, revised edition, 1984), pp. 25-65, and Charles E. Brownell, Calder Loth, William M.S. Rasmussen, and Richard Guy Wilson, *The Making of Virginia Architecture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992), pp. 133-163.

⁵ Dalzell and Dalzell, *George Washington's Mount Vernon*, pp. 33-43, 47-63.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ For the influence of British-Palladianism on Washington's design of Mount Vernon, see Ibid., 74-85, and also, Scott Owen, "George Washington's Mount Vernon as British Palladian Architecture" (master's thesis, University of Virginia, 1991). For the importance of classical traditions in influencing American architectural design, see Brownell, et al., *Making of Virginia Architecture*, pp. 34-81. For the history of the development of Palladian architecture in Britain and its appearance in America, see Steven Parissien, *Palladian Style* (London: Phaidon Press, 1994). For the significance of pattern books in influencing American architectural designs, see Daniel D. Reiff, *Houses from Books: Treatises, Pattern Books, and Catalogs in American Architecture, 1738-1950* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000).

⁸ Dalzell and Dalzell, *George Washington's Mount Vernon*, pp. 97-124.

⁹ Ibid., 39; Allan Greenberg, *George Washington, Architect* (London: Andreas Papadakis, 1999), pp. 30-32. GW to William Thornton, 1 October 1799, *PGW, Retirement* 4: 334.

¹⁰ Dalzell and Dalzell, *George Washington's Mount Vernon*, 47-49.

¹¹ For a detailed discussion of Mount Vernon's asymmetry and its possible meaning, see Greenberg, *George Washington, Architect*, pp. 20-29.

¹² Thornton to GW, 20 December 1798, *The Papers of George Washington: Retirement Series*, ed. Dorothy Twohig (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999) 3: 274-275; Thornton to GW, 28 December 1798, Ibid., 293-294; GW to Thornton, 30 December 1798, Ibid., 299-301.

¹³ Numerous scholars have made the connection between the pattern books and the specific elements at Mount Vernon for which they appear to have served as the inspiration, among them: Dalzell and Dalzell, *George Washington's Mount Vernon*, Owen, "Mount Vernon as British Palladian Architecture," Greenberg, *George Washington, Architect*, Reiff, *Houses from Books*.

¹⁴ For specific details of Washington's landscape design, and on the significance of the influence of British sources on his thinking, see Peter Martin, *The Pleasure Gardens of Virginia: From Jamestown to Jefferson* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991), pp. 134-144, and Ann Leighton, *American Gardens in the Eighteenth Century: "For Use or for Delight"* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), pp. 247-269.

¹⁵ Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, *Under Their Vine and Fig Tree: Travels through America in 1797-1799, 1805, with Some Further Account of Life in New Jersey*, trans. and ed.,

Metchie J.E. Budka (Elizabeth, New Jersey, 1965), reprinted in Lee, *Experiencing Mount Vernon*, p. 75.

¹⁶ Brownell, et al., *Making of Virginia Architecture*, pp. 45-46. For analyses of the significance of porches in American architecture and attempts to trace their antecedents, see, John E. Crowley, "Inventing Comfort: The Piazza," in Ann Smart Martin and J. Ritchie Garrison, eds., *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), pp. 277-315, and Jay Edwards, "The Complex Origin of the American Domestic Piazza-Veranda-Gallery," *Material Culture* vol. 21 (Summer 1989): 2-58.

¹⁷ Marling, *George Washington Slept Here*; Jean B. Lee, "Historical Memory, Sectional Strife, and the American Mecca: Mount Vernon, 1783-1853," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* vol. 109 (2001), no. 3: 255-300; Daniel Bluestone, "Patriotism in Place: Lafayette's Triumphal Tour of the United States, 1824-1825," in Daniel Bluestone, ed., *Buildings, Landscapes, and Memory: Case Studies in Historic Preservation* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2011), pp. 18-39.

¹⁸ Marling, *George Washington Slept Here*, pp. 53-84; Maurie D. McInnis, "The Most Famous Plantation of All: The Politics of Painting Mount Vernon," in Angela D. Mack and Stephen G. Hoffius, eds., *Landscape of Slavery: The Plantation in American Art* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), pp. 86-114; *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁹ West, *Domesticating History*, pp. 1-37; Marling, *George Washington Slept Here*, pp. 85-114.

²⁰West, *Domesticating History*; Marling, *George Washington Slept Here*; on the development of Colonial Revival architecture in Virginia, see Brownell, et al., *Making of Virginia Architecture*, pp. 108-127.

²¹ Brownell, et al., *Making of Virginia Architecture*, pp. 108-115.

²² Dennis J. Pogue, "Preserving and Restoring Mount Vernon," in *The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association: 150 Years of Restoring George Washington's Home*, ed. Stephen A. McLeod (Mount Vernon, Virginia: Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, 2010), pp. 126-133.

²³ Brownell, et al., *Making of Virginia Architecture*, p. 110; *The Virginia Landmarks Register*, ed. Calder Loth (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1999), p. 10.

²⁴ For information on Welbourne, see Loth, *Virginia Landmarks Register*, p. 277. For information on Ossian Hall, see *Lost Virginia: Vanished Architecture of the Old Dominion*, eds. Bryan Clark Green, Calder Loth, and William M.S. Rasmussen (Charlottesville, Virginia: Howel Press, 2001, p. 34. For information on Bushfield, see John W. Wayland, *The Washingtons and Their Homes* (Berryville, Virginia: Virginia Book Company, 1944), pp. 111-126, and Bushfield, National Register of Historic Places, Registration Form (2003). For Oak Hill, see National Register of Historic Places, Registration Form (2004).

²⁵ Brownell, et al., *Making of Virginia Architecture*, p. 112; Lydia Mattice Brandt, "Re-creating Mount Vernon: The Virginia Building at the 1893 Chicago World's Columbian Exposition," *Winterthur Portfolio* vol. 43 (2009) no. 1: 79-113.

²⁶ Brandt, "Re-creating Mount Vernon," 79-113; *Ibid.*, 81.

²⁷ Brownell, et al., *Making of Virginia Architecture*, p. 112; for information on the Mount Vernon replicas built at the Paris, San Francisco, and Brooklyn expositions, see “Mount Vernon Knock-offs” vertical file, Library of George Washington’s Mount Vernon, Mount Vernon, Virginia.

²⁸ “Mount Vernon Knock-offs” (LGWMV). The design for “The Jefferson” first appeared in the catalogue of the Sears, Roebuck and Company Architecture Division in 1932; for a published facsimile, see Brownell, et al., *Making of Virginia Architecture*, p. 82.

²⁹ For the Pope-Riddle and Breese houses, see Brownell, et al., *Making of Virginia Architecture*, p. 110, and *The Architecture of McKim, Mead & White*, R.G. Wilson, ed. (New York: Dover, 1990); Henry James, *The American Scene* (New York, 1907). David F. Ransom, *The Architecture of Melvin H. Hapgood and Edward T. Hapgood: Catalogue of the Exhibition* (An Exhibition of the Stowe-Day Foundation, 1992). Ramsay, National Register of Historic Places, Registration Form (2005).

³⁰ “Mount Vernon Knock-offs (LGWMV).

³¹ *Ibid.* On the history of early American automobile travel and the rise of motels, see, Warren James Belasco, *Americans on the Road: From Autocamp to Motel, 1910-1945* (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

³² Marling, *George Washington Slept Here*, pp. 365-390.

³³ “Mount Vernon Knock-offs” (LGWMV).