



## GEORGE WASHINGTON'S WAR TENT

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

#### Q. WHAT IS THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TENT?

**A.** The crown jewel of the the Museum of the American Revolution's collection is one of the most iconic surviving artifacts of the Revolution: General Washington's War Tent. This tent served as Washington's office and sleeping quarters throughout much of the Revolutionary War. It was within the folds of this tent that key decisions were made that affected the outcome of the American Revolution. The significant role that this "other home of George Washington" played in the winning of America's War for Independence has led some historians to call it the "first Oval Office."

#### Q. WHERE AND WHEN WAS IT MADE?

**A.** Created for use as a mobile headquarters during the Revolutionary War, the tent was made in Reading, Pennsylvania, while Washington was encamped at Valley Forge in 1778. Prior to Valley Forge, Washington used another tent that did not survive.

#### Q. WHEN DID GEORGE WASHINGTON LIVE IN THE TENT?

**A.** The tent was used by George Washington from mid-1778 until 1783, including throughout the 1781 Siege of Yorktown, the last major land battle of the war.

#### Q. HOW BIG IS THE TENT?

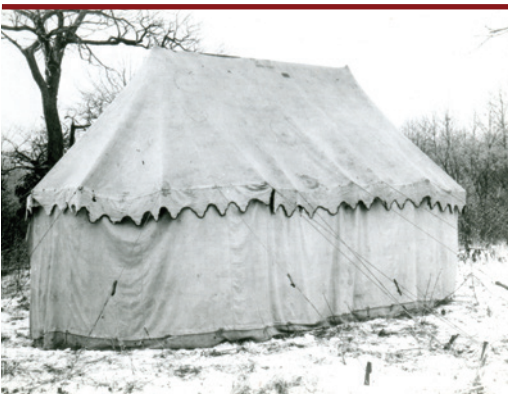
**A.** The tent covers an area approximately 23 feet long and 14 feet wide, comprising three small chambers – a central office, a half-circle sleeping chamber for the general, and a small area for luggage and for sleeping quarters for his enslaved valet, William Lee, who traveled with Washington through the entire Revolutionary War.

#### Q. WHAT HAPPENED TO IT AFTER THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR?

**A.** After the war, the tent was eventually acquired by Martha Washington's grandson, George Washington Parke Custis, and was stored at his Virginia estate, Arlington House. Custis' daughter Mary Anna, wife of Gen. Robert E. Lee, kept the tent, only to have it seized by federal troops at the start of the Civil War. It remained in federal possession for 40 years before it was returned to the Lee family.

In the early 1900s, an Episcopal minister named Rev. W. Herbert Burk dreamed of creating a museum to tell the story of our nation's founding. He began collecting historical artifacts – beginning with General George Washington's War Tent, which had been put up for sale by Mary Custis Lee. He raised the \$5,000 necessary to purchase the tent from hundreds of ordinary Americans. The acquisition began a century of collecting – a collection which eventually came under the ownership of the Museum of the American Revolution.

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## GEORGE WASHINGTON'S WAR TENT *Continued*

### Q. HOW WAS THE TENT CONSERVED?

**A.** Textile conservator Virginia Whelan spent more than 500 hours conserving the priceless hand-stitched, linen tent. "Losses" – small holes which could fray – needed to be stabilized so that original material wasn't lost. The process involved inserting the extremely fine needle and thread between the fibers of the tent's weave and using virtually invisible netting to stabilize the holes.

The conservation effort also entailed using digital inkjet printing to reproduce new fabric that matched the original material. The new fabric swatches were then used to repair holes, rips, and a large piece that had been cut away. For this, Whelan partnered with faculty from Philadelphia University's textile design faculty.

### Q. HOW IS THIS FRAGILE TEXTILE STRUCTURALLY SUPPORTED?

**A.** One of the challenges of displaying the tent was to keep the drape-like effect of the fabric without putting tension on it. To design a system that would support the artifact without inducing stress in the delicate fabric, the Museum commissioned Keast & Hood, a structural engineering firm that is a nationally recognized leader in the preservation, restoration, and rehabilitation of historic structures.

To protect the centuries-old canvas from rope tension, Keast & Hood worked with a team of conservators, historians, and craftsmen to design an innovative umbrella-like aluminum structure to display the artifact. The structure provides adjustability to account for uncertainties in the tent's dimensions while allowing it to drape naturally. A canvas sub-tent membrane stretched over the structure supports the artifact. The umbrella structure is invisible to viewers so that the tent imitates its original shape. The ropes that originally tensioned the tent are now purely aesthetic and representative of the earlier form.

### Q. HOW IS THE TENT DISPLAYED?

**A.** The tent is presented as part of a 12-minute multimedia presentation in a dedicated 100-seat theater, a signature visitor experience of the Museum.

The tent is located behind glass in a 300-square-foot climate-controlled object case. A surround-sound track, theatrical lighting, video projection on a front scrim and screen, as well as on a scenic wall behind the tent support the story that builds to the dramatic tent reveal.

