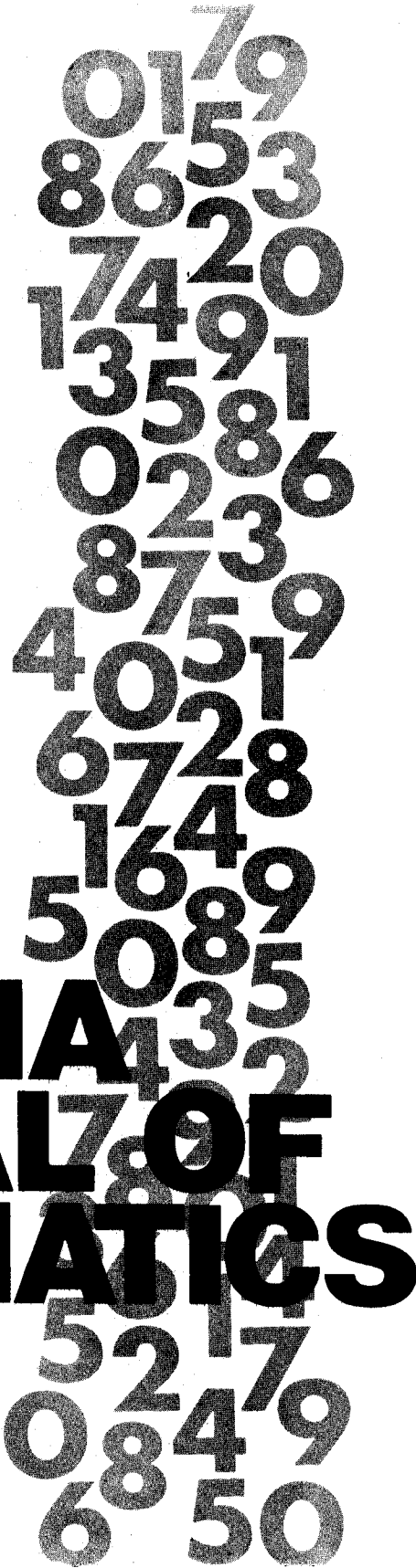


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## GEORGE WASHINGTON: HE LIKED TO COUNT THINGS

By Cora Green

Several years ago I read a short article by a writer named Rudolph Umland. In this article Umland described George Washington as a man who derived pleasure from counting and measuring all kinds of things. Since that day, this idea has always intrigued me. So, armed with a few rough notes taken from the article, I waded through mountains of material to confirm or deny the report. I hope you find the results as interesting as I did.

First, and foremost, he liked to count things on his plantation at Mount Vernon. He counted and recorded his horses, cataloging them by color, working mares and others, unbroken or not, as well as recording their height, age and weight. He counted ewes, hogs, calves, yearlings, spades, axes, and knives. There are dozens of entries in his diaries where he records the number of plows at work or the number of rows of barley planted. He spent February 27, 1786, counting the apple and peach trees on his plantation — row by row. There are several hundred different entries listing the bushels of corn obtained from or planted in various plots. The following diary entries give some idea of the range of his interests.

September 10, 1792

Completed sowing my wheat at the home house, 66½ bush., which makes in all this year: at Ho. house, 16½ bushls; in the Neck 271; Muddy Hole 123½; Ferry Plantn. 152½; Doeg. Run 189; Mill 89; In all, 891½ bushls.

March 29, 1785

Transplanted in the groves at the end of the house the following young trees, viz 9 live oak, 11 yew or hemlock, 10 aspen, 4 magnolia, 2 elm, 2 papaw, 2 lilacs, 3 fringe, 1 swamp berry, etca.

June 13, 1785

Sowed the following nuts and seeds, in the inclosure I had prepared for a nursery, viz.

In the first section, beginning by the walk next the Ho. I built for a hospital (since need for spinning), the first row contains 17 nuts of the sand box tree. Next to these are two rows containing 85 of the palmetto nut, or acorn. Next two rows 87 physic nut; next 3 rows of the seed of the pride of china; next 7 rows containing 635 acorn of the live oak (wch. seemed bad); next (which completed the section) 3 rows of a species of the acacia (or acasee), used in the West Indies for incircling their gardens.

October 7, 1770

My portmanteau horse being unable to proceed, I left him at my brother's and got one of his and proceeded by Jolliffs and Jasper Rinkers to Samel. Pritchard's on cacapehon; distance according to acct. 39 miles; but my computation 42, thus reckoned 15 to Jolliff's; 14 to Rinkers; and 13 to Pritchard's.

After completing the trip of 1164 miles from Fort Pitt to the mouth of the Ohio River, George Washington recorded (November 19, 1770) the distances between 54 towns and landmarks along the way, noting inaccuracies in the regional map produced by Thomas Hutchins.

(Thomas Hutchins (1730-89) was a geographer and captain in the Royal American Regiment of the British Army. As one of his duties he mapped the area from Fort Pitt to the mouth of the Ohio River. When the Revolutionary War broke out, Hutchins joined the colonies and was a captain and geographer in the Continental Army.)

On June 15, 1775, George Washington was unanimously elected General and Commander in Chief of all the forces raised, or to be raised, by the United Colonies. His unpretentious entry for June 15 reads:

Dined at Burnes' in the field. Spent the evening on a committee.

The "committee" he refers to so modestly was the committee to draft the rules and regulations for governing the entire continental army. Throughout the war his diary shows him counting soldiers and armies (as well as the distances between them), guns, ships, horses, mortars, batteries, etc. On October 14, 1781, he records the number of casualties suffered by his army during the previous week. It is in the form of a large chart listing time periods, killed and wounded, and separating it into colonels, Lt. colonels, majors, captains, lieutenants, sergeants, and privates.

As the years went by, he counted more and more.

September 1, 1785

Cloudy morning, with the wind at east. Between 9 and 10 o'clock it began to drip slow rain, in which I planted the remainder of the wheat from the Cape of Good Hope, leaving 230 grains to replant the missing seeds, and some that had been washed up by the late rains; the whole number of grains given me by Colo. Spright amounting to 2476; . . .

Rudolph Umland's article describes how Washington spent a Sunday 190 years ago.

He recorded in his diary on May 11, 1788, that he had spent the entire Sunday at home counting different kinds of peas and beans. Can you visualize the stern military man who had crossed the Delaware, his features set in the grave dignity of his Stuart portrait, hunched over a table moving his lips as he counted the peas and beans one by one into pint containers?

He found it took exactly 3,144 of the small round peas known as gentleman's peas to fill a pint, 2,268 peas of the kind he brought from New York, 1,375 of the peas he had brought from Mrs. Dangerfield's, 1,330 of those he had been given by Heziah Fairfax, 1,186 of the large black-eyed peas, and 1,473 bunch hominy beans. Having arrived at his count, he next calculated the number of hills a bushel of each kind of peas and the beans would plant, allowing five to a hill.

The General made a detailed analysis of various grass seeds. He not only counted the number of seeds which made up a pound and a bushel, but recorded the proportion of chaff in each, the weight of a bushel of each seed, and the number of seeds needed to plant an acre broken into 4 categories. This was no minor achievement since he discovered it took 71,000 grains of red clover to make up a pound. He must have been slowed down by the timothy which weighed in at 298,000 grains to the pound or the orchard grass at 387,000 grains to the pound, but his ultimate feat was to discover that the new river grass had a whopping 844,800 grains to the pound or 4,459,700 grains per bushel.

George Washington was notified on April 14, 1789, that he had just been elected the first President of the United States. On April 16, 1789, he recorded in his diary:

About 10 o'clock I bade adieu to Mount Vernon, to private life, and to domestic felicity, and with a mind oppressed with more anxious and painful sensations than I have words to express, set out for New York in company with Mr. Tomson and Colo. Humphreys, with the best disposition to render service to my country in obedience to its calls, but with less hope of answering its expectations.

He retained his interest in numbers while in New York, then the capital of the United States. He records in his notes distances between towns and cities he visited while President, crop yields in various parts of the country, quantities of shipping on the rivers, populations of cities, and even the number of ladies and gentlemen at parties.

I think that I have established my case: of all the presidents we have had, George Washington was the only who really counted.

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