

In the Spotlight

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 27, 2022

LIVING HISTORY



by Gene Pisasale

An interview with General Washington

By Gene Pisasale
Contributing Writer

No person is more responsible for the creation of our country than George Washington. Without his steadfast perseverance, the cause for independence would have been doomed. Despite numerous setbacks over the eight-year long Revolutionary War, Washington remained committed to what he called “the cause.” The concepts behind it were enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. It laid the foundation 11 years later for the U.S. Constitution, called by British Prime Minister William Gladstone “...the most wonderful work ever struck off... by the brain and purpose of man.”

Those founding documents have been recognized as among the most important in human history. Washington provided the driving force which brought them to life.

I am friends with “Living Biographer” Carl Closs of Kennett Square, who has studied Washington’s life in detail and portrayed him at venues around the nation for over 20 years, from Brandywine Battlefield and Valley Forge to Mount Rushmore. Closs not only looks like Washington, when dressed in blue Continental Army officer’s uniform, he is Washington. Below is an interview with the General regarding his views on the American Revolution, his achievements and America today.



General Washington on his favorite horse.



General Washington with children at Mount Rushmore.

Q: What did “the cause” mean to you?

A: It all came down to liberty. After the Declaration of Independence was written, I received a copy and insisted that it be read to the troops. I believed strongly in the phrase “life, liberty and the pursuit of

happiness...” For me, it was a cause worth fighting and dying for.

Q: You had no children of your own, but in a way, you helped ‘give birth’ to America. Do you think others of your era felt the same?

A: Most people at the time greatly appreciated my efforts, considering me the “savior” of the Revolution. That is how the term “Father of Our Country” came about.

Q: During the tough fight against the British, was there ever a time when you were close to giving up?

A: Yes—Valley Forge. Roughly 2,000 men died from disease during the winter of 1777- 1778. We were perilously close to failure. On December 23, 1777, I wrote to Henry Laurens, President of the Continental Congress: “...I am now convinced beyond



General Washington with reenactor Sandi Johnson at the historic Barns Brinton House circa 1714.



Washington at one of the reconstructed huts used by the soldiers at Valley Forge.

a doubt, that unless some great and capital change suddenly takes place... this Army must inevitably be reduced to one... of these three things: Starve—dissolve—or disperse...” We were outnumbered and outgunned, just trying to survive. Perhaps it helped that I was an optimist.

Q: Some of your compatriots believed America would not endure unless its citizens were morally strong and religious. Can you describe what you call “the sacred fire of liberty”?

A: That is a line from my First Inaugural Address. I once said “Labor to keep alive in your breast that little spark of celestial fire, called conscience.” Liberty is only possible by remaining true to that “sacred fire.” When we have a strong moral compass, we can accomplish great things.

Q: Of all the persons of your era, who did you feel closest to?

A: I was close to General Nathaniel Greene and respected his abilities and devotion. I was fond of the Marquis de Lafayette. He was like a son to me, the one I never had. My longtime friend, Surgeon General Dr. James Craik, who was with me at Mount Vernon on my last day. Alexander Hamilton and I shared the same vision for America—one of economic growth and expansion, which strengthened and united the republic. Yet one must be very careful in associating with others. “Friendship is a plant

of slow growth and must undergo and withstand the shocks of adversity before it is entitled to the appellation.”

Q: America has survived under the Constitution for over 230 years. Did you ever think it would last this long?

A: Yes. I knew it had the potential to last for a very long time. However, there are many challenges today. It is disappointing that so many citizens and politicians do not apply religious principles to their daily lives. Religion and morality are the essential pillars to a civil society.

Q: What qualities are necessary in a leader?

A: Prudence, fortitude, justice and humility. By justice, I mean doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. Important moral virtues are faith, hope and love, meaning charity towards others. Most people considered me quite civil, a very giving person. I always instructed my servants at Mount Vernon to welcome anyone who came to our door needing assistance and help them in any way we could.

Q: What characteristics of a successful government are most needed today?

A: We need to get back to our ‘founding principles.’ For those principles to be reflected in the government, they must come from the people, whose lives should be based on a strong set of morals. It starts with the family.

Q: What do you think your place in history will



General Washington at the Barns Brinton House, which is owned and operated by the Chadds Ford Historical Society.

be?

A: As a General, for allowing liberty to survive- and a republic to come alive- by leading the Continental Army to victory. As President, helping people to feel they were part of one nation- not citizens of individual states. Unity is essential to success- in war and in government. We must remember that or we will fail.

Q: Do you have any recommendations for people today concerned about the future of our country?

A: Live by the concepts espoused in the Declaration of Independence. Parents need to teach those sacred principles to their children in the home, the breeding ground for the success of a nation. It will take a generation or more for those principles to be fully reflected again throughout our country. In some ways, we need to start over, from scratch. It took a long time for the Roman Empire to become decadent. It will take a long time to turn the country around, but it can be done.



Washington with Thomas Jefferson, Teddy Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln at Mount Rushmore in 2012.



Washington at the Valley Forge Memorial Arch.