



General Washington's Christmas Farewell: A Mount Vernon Homecoming, 1783

Stanley Weintraub

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One of America's greatest Christmas stories and also one of its very first -- from the period between the end of the Revolutionary War and the ratification of the Constitution -- was a creation of none other than George Washington. The story isn't just about Washington coming home for Christmas for the first time since the war began, but about the character of our most important Founding Father and about the precedent he set for democratic leadership. It is the story of a loving husband, a beloved military leader, and above all, a humble and great man.

In late November 1783 when Washington finally received formal notice of the signing of a peace treaty with England he had little more than a month to accept the transfer of power from British troops in New York; to bid farewell to his troops; and to resign his commission to Congress if he hoped to make it to Mount Vernon for Christmas. He could have remained in charge of the army and become a virtual king to the Americans who loved him. Control of the newly forming government was his to take -- yet he chose to resign. It was that decision, coupled with his later decision to step down from the presidency after two terms, that rendered him "the greatest character of the age" (according to none other than King George III).

Washington's homeward journey is one of the most moving and inspiring stories from his great and eventful life. When he bade farewell to his troops at Fraunces Tavern in New York City there were no dry eyes. When he reached Congress and gave a retirement speech, it cemented his greatness more fully than had his victory over the British. When he made it to Mount Vernon, finally, on Christmas Eve, it could not have been a happier homecoming.

General Washington's Christmas Farewell is a deeply moving Christmas story as well as a great American story.

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