

Tudor Place Manuscript Collection
Martha Washington Papers
MS-3

Introduction

The Martha Washington Papers consist of correspondence related to General George Washington's death in 1799, a subject file containing letters received by her husband, and letters, legal documents, and bills and receipts related to the settlement of his estate. There is also a subject file containing material relating to the settlement of her estate, which may have come to Tudor Place when Thomas Peter served as an executor of her will.

These papers were a part of the estate Armistead Peter placed under the auspices of the Carostead Foundation, Incorporated, in 1966; the name of the foundation was changed to Tudor Place Foundation, Incorporated, in 1987. Use and rights of the papers are controlled by the Foundation. The collection was processed and the register prepared by James Kaser, a project archivist hired through a National Historical Records and Publications grant in 1992. This document was reformatted by Emily Rusch and revised by Tudor Place archivist Wendy Kail in 2020.

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Biographical Sketch

Martha Dandridge (1731-1802) married Daniel Parke Custis (1711-1757), son of John Custis IV, a prominent resident of Williamsburg, Virginia, in 1749. The couple had four children, two of whom survived: John Parke Custis (1754-1781) and Martha Parke Custis (1755/6-1773). Daniel Parke Custis died in 1757; Martha (Dandridge) Custis married General George Washington in 1759 and joined him at Mount Vernon, Virginia, with her two children. According to family legend, General George Washington raised John Parke and Martha Parke Custis as his own son and daughter. At Mount Vernon Martha Washington skillfully maintained her new home and administered to her extended family's needs. During the Revolutionary War years she frequently endured the hardship of travel to join her husband and encourage him and the American forces in their effort. As First Lady she performed the tasks appropriate to her position, although she longed to return to the tranquility of Mount Vernon, a wish eventually fulfilled.

Her son John Parke Custis married Eleanor Calvert (1756/7-1811) in 1774 and four children were born of this union, including a daughter in 1777, Martha Parke Custis, who became Martha (Custis) Peter. John Parke Custis served as Washington's volunteer aide-de-camp at Yorktown and in 1781 died of camp fever after visiting a British hospital. John Parke Custis' widow, Eleanor Calvert Custis, then married Dr. David Stuart (1753-1814). At the Stuart's home, Hope Park, ten miles west of Alexandria, Virginia, Thomas Peter married Martha Parke Custis in 1795.

The eight and one-half acres and the structures upon it that became Tudor Place were purchased with an \$8,000 inheritance accorded Martha (Custis) Peter from her stepgrandfather General George Washington. After her grandmother Martha Washington's death in 1802, Martha (Custis) Peter inherited the 1796 engraving of General George Washington by Thomas Cheesman after John Trumbull's portrait *George Washington at the Battle of Trenton*, and her grandmother's writing desk. In the desk two letters were discovered that George Washington had written to his wife as he took command of the Continental Army in 1775.

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Scope and Content

After General George Washington's death in 1799, the government, various organizations, and individuals wanted to honor him and Martha Washington was obliged to respond to these various requests. The most important request was made by President John Adams, who asked that Washington's body be moved and placed under a memorial to be constructed in the Federal City. A copy of the letter written on her behalf in which she acquiesces to this is in the collection. Citizens also sent her copies of funeral sermons and orations in honor of her departed husband, and she was required to thank them. She was granted the franking privilege of sending and receiving mail without charge by Congress, through a document in the collection. Letters of request and the responses to the requests are often in the hand of Tobias Lear, General George Washington's secretary, who continued in that role for his employer's wife for a brief period of time.

Another set of responsibilities after the death of her husband related to the settlement his estate, evidenced by the presence of bills and receipts, as well as a number of legal opinions concerning matters relating to the estate. This material may have come to Tudor Place through Thomas Peter's role as an executor of her estate. The collection also includes an inventory from the estate sale held after her death in 1802, provenance for many items now at Tudor Place that were purchased at the sale.

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Series Description

CORRESPONDENCE

Series

CORRESPONDENCE

1778-1800

Arranged chronologically

All but one letter relates to the death of General George Washington. These consist of incoming letters and outgoing drafts in the hand of Tobias Lear conveying condolences, and proposals for commemorating the memory of General George Washington. A letter predating these was written by John Parke Custis from Mt. Airy, Maryland, after the birth of Martha Parke Custis.

SUBJECT FILES

Series

GEORGE WASHINGTON

1770-1800

Arranged by type and then chronologically

Includes letters Washington received from Thomas Peter and John Trumbull and a merchant's account statement.

GEORGE WASHINGTON ESTATE

1800-1831

Arranged by type and then chronologically

Consists of legal opinions concerning the estate by Charles Lee, Bushrod Washington, Charles Simms, and Thomas Swann, as well as a stock certificate transferred to Martha Peter, and bills and receipts.

MARTHA WASHINGTON ESTATE

1800-1811

Arranged by type and then chronologically

Includes receipts for legatee disbursements, estate sale inventories, and bills and receipts and includes bills for Martha Washington's funeral.

LISTS

Series

LIST OF FUNERAL SERMONS AND ORATIONS TO BE BOUND

1800

List includes names of eulogists grouped by state.

SCRAPBOOK MATERIAL

Series

LABELS: MADE FOR LETTERS OF CONDOLENCE

1799-1800

Labels, most in the hand of Tobias Lear, used as covers for bundles of letters.

MS-3
Box 1

Folder

1	Correspondence: Fragment: Voucher to Miss Custis' Account; Colonel Fairfax's Account with George Washington	1770; 1771
2	Correspondence: John Parke Custis to Martha Washington	Apr 3, 1778
3	Correspondence: Presidential Invitation: The President of the United States and Mrs. Washington, request the Pleasure of	179_____
4	Correspondence: Thomas Peter to George Washington	Feb 1, 1799
5	Correspondence: John Trumbull to George Washington	Oct 5, 1799
6	Correspondence: John Adams to Martha Washington	Dec 27, 1799
7	Correspondence: Martha Washington to John Adams, [Hand of Lear]	Dec 31, 1799
8	Correspondence: Elizabeth Spotswood to Martha Washington	Jan 2, 1800
9	Correspondence: The Grand Lodge of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to Martha Washington, John Warren, Paul Revere, Josiah Bartlett	Jan 11, 1800
10	Correspondence: At a Meeting of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, Daniel Oliver to Martha Washington	Jan 11, 1800
11	Correspondence: Martha Washington to Governor Jonathan Trumbull, Jr., [Hand of Lear]	Jan 15, 1800
12	Correspondence: Joseph Scott to Martha Washington	Jan 25, 1800
13	Correspondence: Martha Washington to the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, [Hand of Lear]	Jan 27, 1800
14	Correspondence: Theodore Sedgwick to Martha Washington	Feb 4, 1800
15	Correspondence: Tobias Lear to Theodore Sedgwick	Feb 15, 1800
16	Correspondence: Catherine Garretson to Martha Washington	Feb 27, 1800
17	Correspondence: Francis Adrian van der Kemp to Martha Washington	Mar 10, 1800
18	Correspondence: Martha Washington to Julia Bowen, Mary B. Howells, Abby Chace, Sally Halsey, [Hand of Lear]	Mar 12, 1800

19	Correspondence: Martha Washington to Catherine Garretson, [Hand of Lear]	Mar 15, 1800
20	Correspondence: Theodore Foster to Martha Washington	Mar 18, 1800
21	Correspondence: Bishop James Madison to Martha Washington	Mar 24, 1800
22	Correspondence: Martha Washington to Theodore Foster, [Hand of Lear]	Mar 28, 1800
23	Correspondence: Julia Bowen, Mary B. Howells, Abba Chace, Sarah Halsey to Martha Washington	Apr 2, 1800
24	Correspondence: Martha Washington to Bishop James Madison, [Hand of Lear]	Apr 5, 1800
25	Correspondence: Clement Biddle to Martha Washington	Apr 5, 1800
26	Correspondence: Timothy Pickering to Martha Washington: Copy of Act of Congress signed by John Adams	Apr 7, 1800
27	Correspondence: Joseph Willard to Martha Washington	Apr 16, 1800
28	Correspondence: Tobias Lear to Timothy Pickering	Apr 20, 1800
29	Correspondence: Tobias Lear to Clement Biddle	Apr 20, 1800
30	Correspondence: John Russell and John West to Martha Washington	Apr 28, 1800
31	Correspondence: A. Gray to Martha Washington	Apr 28, 1800
32	Correspondence: Tobias Lear to John Russell, John West	May 12, 1800
33	List: Orations and Eulogies on the Death of General Washington; Sermons and Funeral Discourses on the Death of General Washington	May 17, 1800
34	Correspondence: Tobias Lear to Joseph Willard	Jun 6, 1800
35	Labels: Letters which have been answered or which do not require an answer; Letters to & Copys (sic) from Mrs. Martha Washington, Decd.; Copies of Letters	ND[1799-1800]
36	Label: "Letters from 'Mt. Vernon'" [Hand of Armistead Peter, Jr.]	ND

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Box 2

Folder

1	Legal Opinion: Questions and Answers on the Estate of George Washington regarding the Rights of Lawrence Lewis, Bushrod Washington	Ca. 1800
2	Accounts: Lawrence Lewis	1800-1803
3	Legal Opinion: Three Questions upon the Will of George Washington as they affect the Rights of Mrs. Washington and the Residuary Devisees, Charles Lee	Feb 15, 1800
4	Receipt: Real Property Tax Paid by Thomas Peter	1801
5	Questions of the Executors upon the Wills of George and Martha Washington, Charles Lee and Charles Simms	Ca.1802
6	Legal Opinion: Opinions on the Questions of the Executors of Martha Washington's Will, Charles Lee and Charles Simms	Jul 2, 1802
7	Legal Opinions: Answers submitted to the Questions on the Estates of George Martha Washington; Charles Lee, Charles Simms, Thomas Swann	July 17, 1802
8	Receipt: Filing Papers Paid by Thomas Peter	Mar/Aug 1802; 1804
9	Bill: Dress for Martha Washington, Receipt Paid by Thomas Peter	Feb 25, 1802; Jun 21, 1803
10	Bill: Funeral Goods Receipt Paid by Thomas Peter	May 24, 1802; Jan 20, 1804
11	Receipt: Recording of Will of Martha Washington by Thomas Peter and George Washington Parke Custis; Receipt to Probe Mrs. Washington's Will Paid by Thomas Peter	Jun 1802; Mar 1804; Jun 19ND [1802]
12	Bill: Drafting of Will; Bill for Opinions on Sundry Questions Delivered to Mr. T. Peter; Bill For Opinions On Many Questions Proposed by Mr. Custis; Bill from Charles Lee Paid by Thomas Peter	Jun 4/Jul 1802; Jan 31, 1803
13	Receipt: Indian Corn Paid by Thomas Peter to George Washington Parke Custis	Jun 22, 1802
14	Bill and Receipt: Leading of Coffin	Jun 24, 1802; Jul 1, 1802

15	Martha Washington Estate Sale List, [Hand of Thomas Peter]; Wrapper [Document 1]	Jul 1802
16	Martha Washington Estate Sale List, [Hand of Thomas Peter] [Document 2]	Jul 1802
17	Bill: John Anderson to Thomas Peter for Whiskey; Receipt: Thomas Peter for payment from John Anderson July 28, 1802	Jul 20, 1802
18	Receipt: Freight of Furniture from Mount Vernon Paid by Thomas Peter	Aug 4, 1804
19	Receipt: Dr. James Craik Paid by Thomas Peter	Sep 8, 1802
20	Receipt: Legatee Anna Maria Washington from Martha Washington's Estate Paid by Thomas Peter	Sep 28, 1802
21	Bill: Taxes on Washington's Land in Fairfax County Paid by Thomas Peter	Dec 30, 1802; Mar 14, 1811
22	Receipt: Legatees Martha Maria and Frances Dandridge from Martha Washington's Estate Paid by Thomas Peter	Mar 12, 1803
23	Receipt: Legatee F.D. Henley from Martha Washington's Estate Paid by Thomas Peter	Apr 1, 1803
24	Request to Alexandria Chancery Court to Refund Money to Thomas Peter	Jan 20, 1804
25	Receipt from Richard Burnett against Estate of Martha Washington Paid by Thomas Peter	Feb 11, 1805
26	List: Legatees for Martha Washington's Estate in Hand of Thomas Peter	Ca.1820
27	Correspondence: John Dandridge to Benjamin Lincoln Lear Granting Lear Authority to Act for Dandridge in Alexandria Chancery Court Case	Jan 24, 1826
28	Receipt: Legatee John Parke Custis Peter from Martha Washington's Estate Paid by Thomas Peter	Feb 4, 1826
29	Receipt: Legatee America Pinckney Peter from Martha Washington's Estate Paid by Thomas Peter	Feb 4, 1826
30	Receipt: Lawrence Lewis for legatee Mary E.A. Lewis from Martha Washington's Estate Paid by Thomas Peter	May 13, 1826

31	Bill and Receipt: Robert P. Dunlop for Taking Deposition in Alexandria Chancery Court Case Paid by Thomas Peter	Sep 21, 1827
32	Receipt: Money Paid on Account of John Dandridge's Judgment against Mrs. Washington's Executors Paid by Thomas Peter to Benjamin Lincoln Lear	Oct 27, 1830
33	Bill and Receipt: Thomas Peter for Filing Answer in John Dandridge's Judgment in Alexandria Chancery Court Case Paid by Thomas Peter	Apr 1831; Mar 16, 1832
34	Receipt: R. J. [I] Taylor, Lawyer for Thomas Peter in Alexandria Chancery Court Case Paid by Thomas Peter	Oct 29, 1831
35	Bills and Receipts: Martha Washington and James Anderson	Jan-June 1800
36	Bills and Receipts: Martha Washington and James Anderson	Jul-Dec 1800
37	Bills and Receipts: Martha Washington	1800-1801
38	Bill: Martha Washington Paid by James Anderson	Jan 14, 1801
39	Bills and Receipts: Martha Washington	1801-1804
40	Wrapper: Papers Relating to Mrs. Washington's Estate	ND
41	Wrapper: Receipts of Mrs. Martha Washington	ND