

## George Washington's Powder Bag and Puff: A Different Side of War

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### Students will learn...

- Information about officer experiences in the Revolutionary War
- How military discipline shaped and was influenced by Washington's character
- To use objects and primary documents to answer questions

### You will need...

- Picture of Washington's powder bag and puff
  - Envelopes with a mix of the different handouts related to the bag and puff
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### Opener: What is this?

- Show a picture of the powder bag and puff and ask your students what they think it is.
  - Gradually reveal more information, such as; this was used by Washington when he was at camp during the Revolutionary War, it is a little over a foot long, it is made of deerskin, etc.
  - Finally, tell them that it is called a powder bag and puff- what do they think it was used for then?
  - Reveal what it is used for.
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### Task: Gathering Context

- Divide your students into pairs or groups and give them each an envelope that contains a couple of the handout documents that relate to the powder bag and puff.
- Then assign or let each pair or group pick a question that they need to answer using various documents.

- Sample questions could be:

- What was military life like during the Revolutionary War?
- Why do you think an officer's appearance mattered so much to the generals and the soldiers under them?
- How do you think they balanced the more 'civilized' side of war with the atrocities that went along with it?
- How does military life in the Revolutionary War compare to how you view war today?
- Why do you think this item was saved throughout the years? Do you think this documentation is enough to say for sure that it was Washington's power bag and puff?
- What do you think it was like for Benjamin Graves, a 15-23-year-old during the Revolutionary War, to be a body servant for Col. David Humphreys? Why?

- *Optional:* Have groups come together to compare their documents.
- *Optional:* Record their answers in some way- like a big poster paper or online through sites like Padlet

### Closer: Reflections

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- Bring the class back together to talk about their answers to the questions.
- Does everyone agree with their conclusions or have other students drawn other conclusions from the documents.
- Have each pair or group cite the documents they used to answer their questions.





Date: 1780

Geography: possibly made- United States  
possible made- England

Material: Leather, cotton



## Powdering the Hair

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The Toilette of the State Prosecutor's Clerk, c. 1768 by Carle Vernet



**From Ledger B, 1772-1793 p. 3**

<https://www.mountvernon.org/education/for-teachers/>

Transcript:

		Contra Cr				
1772		By amount brought from the other side	3	£184	9	3
March	18	By a pair of Gloves			2	
		By Cards	48		15	
	19	By Cash paid Thomas Lynch on Acct of Mr Custis's Estate		1	0	0
	21	By Cards	48		5	
		By Postage of Letters			4	
		By a Powder Bag & Puff			3	3
		By a Mourning Ring for Mr Wm Triplet	29	1	10	
		By Cards	48	6	10	
	22	By Ferriages to Gloucester & Back			4	
	23	By Expences in York Town			3	9
		By Club at Mrs Campbells two Nights			7	6
	24	By Cards		1	17	6
		By Club at Anderson's			3	9
	25	By Spinnet Strings for my Brothr John	12		5	
		By Club			2	6
	26	By Mounting two Fan's pr Jane Hunter [Charlton]			5	
		By Postage of Letters			3	
	28	By Club at Mrs Campbells			3	
		By Cards	48	6	5	
		By Charity			5	
	30	By George Lafong Barber		1	15	
		By Club at Mrs Campbells			5	
April-	1	By Cards	48	6	10	
		By Club two Nights at Mrs Campbells			10	
		By Postage of Letter			1	
	2	By Cards	48	5	0	0
		By Club			7	6
	3	By Mrs Charlton's Acct against Miss Custis		1	7	6

		By Miss Davenports Acct agt— Do		2	15	3
	5	By Charity		1	0	0
	6	By Mr Rind for ye [the] Revd Mr Boucher	49		5	0
		By Ditto for Colo. Mason	6		3	
		By Messrs Purdie & Dixon for Mr Bouchr	49	2	6	
		By Mr Baker Surgn Dentist		4	0	0
		By a Concert Ticket			6	
		By Club at Mrs Campbells			5	
		By Cards	48	6	5	
		By Doctr [William] Pasteur's Acct against Mr Custis		14	11	
		By Ditto against self			8	6
		By Mr [William] Prentis's Acct agt Mr Custis			16	4
		By Purdie & Dixon Advertg Meetg Ohio Co.			3	
	7	By Cards		1	5	
		By Club at Mrs Campbells			2	
	8	B[y] Dinners & Clubs thereat, at Mrs Campbells during my Stay in Willmsburg		7	7	6
		By Mrs Charlton's Acct against Miss Custis			16	3
		By Ditto for Mrs Washington			16	
		By Ditto for my Board there since the 1st of March		11	0	0
		By Amount carrd over		£276	10	4

# The Appearance of an Officer

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## Extract from General Orders, 1 August 1778

To Parole Tuscany from Head-Quarters White Plains  
C. Signs Truro—Tartary

...As there is something extremely awkward and unmilitary in Officers saluting at different times and in different manners the following general Direction is to be observed; The saluting Officer is to look full in the Face of the Officer saluted, his body upright and his step firm and to begin at such a distance as to finish the salute when opposite the Person for whom it is intended—The Motions of the Sword or Fusil & the Feet ought to be exactly in Concert; in order to which and for the graceful Performance of salutes it is expected Officers will spare no Trouble or Pains to perfect themselves and arrive at Dexterity and Uniformity as it is a matter which forms no unessential Part of their duty and will be highly ornamental to their military Appearance and Character.

When the guards are ordered to march off the Brigade Major is to see that they all step off at the same instant with their left feet and the Officers of Platoons will be particularly attentive that the step is afterwards preserved: As the Platoons pass in Review before the Major General or Officer Commanding the Parade the men are to hold up their heads and look full in their Face.

No Officer who has Regimentals is to mount guard in any other dress, and when men are warned for guard they are to be directed to come on with clean hands and faces hairs combed and powdered, and are to appear in all respects as decent and soldierlike as circumstances will permit.

Brigade Majors and Adjutants will recollect that it is an indispensable part of their duty to attend to this and see that the mens Arms Ammunition and Accoutrements are continually in the best order.

The Major General of the day thro' the Field Officers will have a careful Inspection made into these several matters and where there appears to be any deficiency will call the Brigade-Majors and Adjutants to account on the spot, and either reprimand arrest or acquit as circumstances shall warrant; These are to be considered as standing orders which it is expected all officers and soldiers will be made acquainted with & punctually observe...

See the original document here



# A Treatise on Hair

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## A treatise on the hair. By David Richie hairdresser. (1770)

.....75.....

Of the modern Fashion of Dressing Gentlemens Hair.

The general and most fashionable method of dressing gentlemens hair in this country, is, when it is of a proper length, to tie it almost close to the neck, and the remainder to be queued<sup>1</sup>, ramillied<sup>2</sup>, or put up in a club, either smooth or plaited<sup>3</sup>, and wrapt round with a black ribbon, or inclosed in a rose or full-dress silk bag, according to fancy: the front hair may be cut or dress'd in various fashions, as follows:

The top may be dress'd in several forms, as a toupee, or curled in the shape of a horseshoe; or fizzed backwards from the forehead about two or three inches, rising highest in the middle, called an Allegreek top: the side curled at

.....76.....

at the ear may be dress'd in one, two, three, or more rows of curls, one above another, either separate or promiscuous; some have curls all over the fore-part of the head, and the others have the hair cut to comb plain over the forehead: but of all these fashions, property, convenience, and what suits the features, out to be considered.

It is now the fashion that gentlemens hair is never thought to be dress'd without powder....

.....78.....

...Women study dress only to add to their beauty; whereas men should dress suitable to their various ranks in life...to produce in us different ideas of the qualities of men, which may be seen by actors, who alter their dress according to the different characters there are to preform; for when the hair is dress'd short at the ear, in various curls, and raised at the top of the head, this gives the person so dressed an air of freedom and gaiety;

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<sup>1</sup> When the hair is pulled back very tight into a single tail, which may or may not be braided.

<sup>2</sup> A wig with a long braid in back with a big bow on top and a smaller one on the bottom.

<sup>3</sup> A plait means a braid.



gaiety; but in proportion as they are lowered at the top and sides of the head, indicates sedateness and gravity; as may be seen by the dress of the clergy, judges, counsellors, &c. whose wigs, being made suitable to their particular functions, and not in imitation of natural hair, n: but to dress the hair in any fashion that can add grandeur or dignity to the countenance, depends on the art and judgement of the hairdresser.

Ritchie, David, Hair-dresser. *A treatise on the hair: Shewing Its Generation. Means of its Preservation. Causes of its Decay. How to recover it when lost. What occasions its different Colours; with the probable Means to alter it from one Colour to another. Its most proper Management in different Climates, and in all the Stages, and Circumstances of Life. also a description of the most fashionable methods of dressing ladies and gentlemens hair; both Natural and Artificial. With An Essay on Dress in General, Address'd to the Ladies of Great-Britain.* By David Ritchie, Hair-Dresser, Perfumer, &c. London, MDCC.LXX. [1770]. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale. GEORGE WASHINGTONS MOUNT VERNON. 11 Apr. 2019 <<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=moun3955&tabID=T001&docId=CW3315878991&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>>.

# Benjamin Graves' Statement

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## Statement Accompanying Powder Bag and Puff

Transcript:

This bag was used for carrying the powder and the puff was used by me in dressing the head of Gen<sup>l</sup> George Washington, from time to time, for the space of three and a half years or thereabouts; during which time I was attached to his family in the capacity of body servant to Co<sup>l</sup> Humphrey aid to the General; I have been detached from the second Connecticut Regiment for that purpose

At the close of the Revolutionary war I removed to the County of Clinton in the State of New York (of which county I was Sheriff for many years) and brought this bag and Puff with me & some years after gave it to my Brother in law Major George Marsh, and now finding in the possession of S<sup>t</sup> John B. L. Skinner, I hail it as an old acquaintance and cheerfully give this certificate of its character, identity and services—I am now in the seventy fifth year of my age— Plattsburgh September 3 1835.

[signed] Benj<sup>m</sup> Graves

[The handwriting of the statement and of the signature are not the same]

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Benjamin Graves was born in Salisbury, Connecticut in November 1760<sup>1</sup>. He was the body servant to George Washington's aid-de-camp Colonel David Humphreys during the Revolutionary war. At the time, Graves was 19 to 23 years-old. He later went on to be Sheriff of Clinton in New York for three terms in 1801-3, 1810-11 and 1812-14<sup>2</sup>. He also got married to Rebeckah Marsh and they had four children. He later died at the age of 83 in March 1843.

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<sup>1</sup> "Benjamin Graves." *FamilyCentral*, Family History Services, [www.familycentral.net/index/family.cfm?ref1=22:471&ref2=22:525](http://www.familycentral.net/index/family.cfm?ref1=22:471&ref2=22:525).

<sup>2</sup> Hurd, D. Hamilton. *History of Clinton and Franklin Counties New York. With Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of its Prominent Men and Pioneers*. Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis & Co. 1880, p. 286.

# Describing George Washington

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## **A Military Journal: During the American Revolutionary War, From 1775 to 1783. Describing Interesting Events and Transactions of this period; with numerous Historical Facts and Anecdotes by Dr. James Thacher**

His Excellency, the Commander in Chief, made a visit to our hospital ; his arrival was scarcely announced, before he presented himself at our doors. Dr. Williams and myself had the honor to wait on this great and truly good man, through the different wards, and to reply to his inquiries relative to the condition of our patients. He appeared to take a deep interest in the situation of the sick and wounded soldiers, and inquired particularly as to their treatment and comfortable accommodations. Not being apprized of his intended visit in time to make preparation for his reception, we were not entirely free from embarrassment, but we had the inexpressible satisfaction of receiving his Excellency's approbation of our conduct, as respects the duties of our department. The personal appearance of our Commander in Chief, is that of the perfect gentleman and accomplished warrior. He is remarkably tall, full six feet, erect and well proportioned. The strength and proportion of his joints and muscles, appear to be commensurate with the preeminent powers of his mind. The serenity of his countenance, and majestic gracefulness of his deportment, impart a strong impression of that dignity and grandeur, which are his peculiar characteristics, and no one can stand in his presence without feeling the ascendancy of his mind, and associating with his countenance the idea of wisdom, philanthropy, magnanimity, and patriotism. There is a fine symmetry in the features of his face, indicative of a benign and dignified spirit. His nose is strait, and his eyes inclined to blue. He wears his hair in a becoming cue, and from his forehead it is turned back and powdered in a manner which adds to the military air of his appearance. He displays a native gravity, but devoid of all appearance of ostentation. His uniform dress is a blue coat, with two brilliant epaulettes, buff colored under clothes, and a three cornered hat, with a black cockade. He is constantly equipped with an elegant small sword, boots and spurs, in readiness to mount his noble charger. There is not in the present age, perhaps, another man so eminently qualified to discharge the arduous duties of the exalted station he is called to sustain, amidst difficulties which to others would appear insurmountable, nor could any man have more at command the veneration and regard of the officers and soldiers of our army, even after defeat and misfortune. This is the illustrious chief, whom a kind Providence has decreed as the instrument to conduct our country to peace and to Independence.

# George Washington's Complaints

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## George Washington to Henry Laurens, Valley Forge, 23 Dec. 1777

Sir,

Full as I was in my representation of matters in the Commissary's department yesterday, fresh and more powerful reasons oblige me to add, that I am now convinced beyond a doubt, that unless some great and capital change suddenly takes place in that line this Army must inevitably be reduced to one or other of these three things. Starve—dissolve—or disperse, in order to obtain subsistence in the best manner they can. rest assured, Sir, this is not an exaggerated picture, and that I have abundant reason to support what I say.

Yesterday afternoon receiving...I ordered the Troops to be in readiness, that I might give every Opposition in my power; when behold! to my great mortification, I was not only informed, but convinced, that the Men were unable to stir on account of provision, and that a dangerous mutiny, begun the night before and which with difficulty was suppressed by the spirited exertions of some Officers....

All I could do under these circumstances was, to send out a few light parties to watch and harrass the Enemy, whilst other parties were instantly detached different ways to collect, if possible, as much provision as would satisfy the present pressing wants of the Soldiery—But will this answer? No Sir: three or four days bad weather would prove our destruction. What then is to become of the Army this Winter?...Soap—Vinegar and other articles allowed by Congress we see none of, nor have we seen them, I believe, since the battle of Brandywine. The first indeed we have now little occasion for, few men having more than one shirt—many only the moiety of one, and some none at all...as a farther proof of the inability of an Army under the circumstances of this, to perform the common duties of Soldiers, besides a number of Men confined to Hospitals for want of Shoes, & others in Farmers Houses on the same account, we have by a Field return this day made, no less than 2898 Men now in Camp unfit for duty, because they are barefoot and otherwise naked; and by the same return it appears, that... no more than 8200—in Camp fit for duty. Notwithstanding which, and that since the 4th Instant our numbers fit for duty from the hardships and exposures they have undergone, particularly on account of Blankets (numbers having been obliged and still are, to set up all night by fires, instead of taking comfortable rest in a natural and common way) have decreased near 2000 Men...

But what makes this matter still more extraordinary in my eye is, that these very Gentlemen, who were well apprized of the nakedness of the Troops from ocular



demonstration, who thought their own Soldiers worse clad than others and advised me near a month ago, to postpone the execution of a plan I was about to adopt in consequence of a Resolve of Congress for seizing Cloaths, under strong assurances, that an ample supply would be collected in ten days agreeably to a decree of the State (not one article of which, by the bye, is yet come to hand)... I can assure those Gentlemen, that it is a much easier and less distressing thing, to draw Remonstrances in a comfortable room by a good fire side, than to occupy a cold, bleak hill, and sleep under frost & snow without Cloaths or Blankets: However, although they seem to have little feeling for the naked and distressed Soldier, I feel superabundantly for them, and from my soul pity those miseries, which it is neither in my power to relieve or prevent. It is for these reasons therefore, I have dwelt upon the subject, and it adds not a little to my other difficulties and distress, to find that much more is expected of me, than is possible to be performed; and, that upon the ground of safety and policy, I am obliged to conceal the true state of the Army from public view, and thereby expose myself to detraction & calumny.

I have the Honor to be Sir Your Most Obedt Servant  
Go: Washington

# George Washington's Demands

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## **George Washington to a Continental Congress Camp Committee, Valley Forge, 29 Jan. 1778.**

To make soldiers look well and bestow proper attention and care, upon their cloaths, they ought to receive them at stated periods. This gives a taste for decency and uniformity and makes the officers regardful of the appearance of the men; a matter of no small moment in an army, as tending to promote health, and foster a becoming pride of dress; which raises soldiers in their own esteem and makes them respectable to their enemy.

The periods, I would fix upon for delivery, are on the first days of June and January. In June should be given a waistcoat with sleeves, flannel, if to be had, two pair of linnen overalls, one shirt, a black stock of hair, or leather, a small round hat bound and a pair of shoes. In January, a waistcoat to be worn over the former, close in the skirts and double breasted, resembling a sailors, to have a collar and cuff of a different color, in order to distinguish the regiment, a pair of breeches, woolen overalls, yarn stockings, shirt, woolen cap, and a blanket, when really necessary. Watch coats ought, if possible, to be provided for sentinels. Whatever might be furnished more than these, the soldier ought to have stopped out of his pay, upon the terms fixed by Congress, in their late resolve: A list of the cloathing to be kept by the commanding officer of each company, an inspection into them made at least once a week, and punishment inflicted, or restitution made, for every article missing, unless well accounted for. If it could be done which is much to be doubted, it would be well to discriminate the troops of each state, by the color of their cloaths and each regiment by that of the collar and cuff.

If this plan could be adopted, and a quantity of supernumery articles laid in, for occasional demands, our men would appear infinitely better, be much healthier, and the army a great deal stronger, than it commonly is.

The Clothier-General ought to be authorised and directed to enter into contracts, for as large quantities as possible of shoes and stockings to be manufactured in the Country. These are articles, that can least be dispensed with, and the deficiency of which we have most severely felt. A Mr Henry of Lancaster, I am told, would contract for one, or two hundred thousand pair of shoes, annually, to be paid for in raw hides. The number of cattle killed for the consumption of the army enable us to make this contract to great advantage.

# Katerine E. Cox's Statement

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## Written statement of Katharine E. Cox, sister of the donor (Hannah Julia Cox).

### To Whom it May Concern:

The Powder puff and bag with accompanying "certificate of its character, identity and services" signed by Benjamin Graves in Plattsburgh, N. Y., in 1835, has been in the possession of my family since it was given to my great-grandfather St. John Bull Laurence Skinner, who resided in Plattsburgh, N. Y. (St. John B. L. Skinner was commissioned 1st Assistant Post Master and its certificate by President Andrew Jackson.) The powder puff, its bag, and its certificate signed by Benjamin Graves were given by my great-grandfather St. J. B. L. Skinner to his daughter Hannah Julia Skinner, who married Thomas Mason Cox of Charleston and grandmother Hannah Julia Skinner Cox to her son Thomas Augustus Cox of Cullowhee, North Carolina; they remained in my father's possession throughout my childhood (when I was shown them many times) and until his death. After the death of my father, Thomas August Cox, these three articles were in my care until given into the care of my sister, Hannah Julia Cox of Alexandria, Virginia.

[signed] Katerine E. Cox

3711 Washington Ave., S. E., Charleston, W. Va.

January 22, 1963