

Source A – House Bell, 1784-1788

Source Type: Object

Courtesy of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association

Background Information: The house bell system enabled the Washingtons to call slaves and servants to various rooms of the mansion when needed. Those who worked in the house were always on call.



Source B – Punch Bowl, 1735-1757

Source Type: Object

Courtesy of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association

Background Information: “We had rum punch, brought us by a servant.” Amariah Frost, Mount Vernon visitor, 1797



Source C – George Washington’s Dressing Table, 1787-1789

Source Type: Object

Courtesy of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association

Background Information: As George Washington’s personal valet in the late 1790s, Christopher Sheels helped his master dress, wash, and tie his hair back into its trademark queue, or ponytail. This routine occurred each morning in Washington’s private study, where he placed this French dressing table, acquired during the presidency.



Source D – Argand Lamp, 1790

Source Type: Object

Courtesy of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association

Background Information: Enslaved housemaids like Caroline Branham were responsible for tending to the fires, candles, and oil lamps that served as Mount Vernon's only artificial light sources. Argand lamps like this were cutting-edge technology in the 1790s, designed to maximize brightness and minimize smoke.



Source E – Traveling Razor Case, 1775

Source Type: Object

Courtesy of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association

Background Information: This traveling razor case allowed George Washington to maintain his grooming habits while in camp. Although Washington shaved himself, his enslaved valet, William Lee, organized his belongings, laid out his clothes, and combed the General's hair into his trademark queue, or ponytail.



Source F – Artifacts Recovered from the Site of the Mount Vernon Slave Quarters

Source Type: Objects

Courtesy of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association

Background: These items were recovered during an excavation of Mount Vernon's House for Families, one of the slave quarters on the estate. They stand in stark contrast to the high-quality items the enslaved population of Mount Vernon handled for the benefit of the Washington family and their guests.



Source G – Martha Washington’s Silk Gown, 1790-1800

Source Type: Object

Courtesy of the Mount Vernon Ladies’ Association

Background: Eliza Parke Custis Law lovingly preserved this gown with a handwritten note identifying it as “a favorite gown of my dear Grandmother Mrs. Washington.”

