

Washington's 1799 Last Will And Testament and William Lee

1 **Background:** William “Billy” Lee was George Washington’s manservant. Washington purchased
2 William Lee in 1768 to perform domestic or household duties. Lee performed his duties by
3 Washington’s side for many years. He went with him on surveying expeditions, to the First
4 Continental Congress in Philadelphia and even served alongside General Washington during the
5 Revolutionary War. Later in his life, Lee injured both of his knees, leaving him disabled. Not being
6 able to perform his duties for the President, Lee returned home to Mount Vernon and became the
7 shoemaker for the enslaved population there.

8 ... And to my Mulatto man William (calling himself William Lee) I give immediate
9 freedom; or if he should prefer it (on account of the accidents which have befallen him,
10 and which have rendered him incapable of walking or of any active employment) to
11 remain in the situation he now is, it shall be optional in him to do so: In either case
12 however, I allow him an annuity of thirty dollars during his natural life, which shall be
13 independent of the victuals and cloaths he has been accustomed to receive, if he chuses
14 the last alternative; but in full, with his freedom, if he prefers the first; & this I give him as
15 a testimony of my sense of his attachment to me, and for his faithful services during the
16 Revolutionary War.

17 **Source:** [http://www.mountvernon.org/educational-resources/primary-sources-2/article/george-](http://www.mountvernon.org/educational-resources/primary-sources-2/article/george-washingtons-1799-will-and-testament/)
18 [washingtons-1799-will-and-testament/](http://www.mountvernon.org/educational-resources/primary-sources-2/article/george-washingtons-1799-will-and-testament/)

VOCABULARY

victuals: food

1. What type of primary source is this? _____ When was this document created?

2. What is William “Billy” Lee’s relationship to George Washington?

Circle the three best words or phrases in lines 1-16 to support your answer.

3. What were Billy Lee’s duties over the years?

Why did they change?

Provide multiple pieces of evidence from the document to support your answer.

4. The Latin root **ann** means year. How does knowing the meaning of the root help you to understand the meaning of the word **annuity** on line 12? What is the meaning of the word in the context of this document?

5. What did George Washington give to Billy Lee in his will?

6. Where did Billy Lee have the option of living? Provide evidence from the text to support your answer.

7. What reasons did Washington state for doing this?

8. What does this tell you about the character of George Washington?
