At the age of 21, George Washington stood 6'2" tall, wore his auburn hair tied with a ribbon, and was already known for his strength, horsemanship, and energy. Self-educated and without significant land holdings, the insecure young man’s driving ambition was to receive a commission in the Virginia Militia and to be accepted by Tidewater Virginia’s landed gentry. He had fallen hopelessly in love with Sally Fairfax, the flirtatious wife of his friend and neighbor, and was desperate to find fame and fortune. George agreed to undertake a dangerous mission to wild, uncharted Western Pennsylvania.

Late in 1753, Lt. Gov. Dinwiddie promised Washington a major’s commission in the Virginia Militia if he would single-handedly confront the French forces that occupied strategic positions in the Ohio River Country claimed by England and France. Miraculously, the boy major endured the exhausting 500-mile trek and delivered the governor’s eviction notice near Lake Erie. He talked his way out of a brief captivity, dodged an Indian assassin’s bullet, and almost drowned in a raft crossing of the ice-packed Allegheny.

Early in 1754, almost as soon as he returned to Williamsburg, British authorities sent Washington back into harm’s way at the head of a force which intended to build a fort at the confluence of the Monongahela and Allegheny rivers. George and his men would receive land for their services. The inexperienced Washington could barely keep his motley command of militia, regular soldiers, and Indian allies together. Before the expedition went home, Washington had managed to kill a French peace commissioner, surrender his entire force to the enemy, and touch off a global conflict, known to history as the French and Indian War. The following year, 23-year-old “Colonel” Washington nearly died with General Edward Braddock as the French repulsed yet another British attack—this time just 10 miles from Fort Duquesne at the “Point” in what would become Pittsburgh.

Washington never gave up on Western Pennsylvania, returning for the final ouster of the French in 1758 and, in 1770 and again in 1784, to administer his vast land holdings. In 1794, as President and Commander in Chief, he sent an army to suppress the Whiskey Rebellion and force Western Pennsylvania’s independent farmers to pay federal taxes on their homemade spirits.

George Washington’s formative years were spent in Western Pennsylvania. The story of his life and our history are inextricably linked. From July 29 through October 22, the History Center will host a very special exhibit: George Washington: The Man Behind the Myths, made possible through an extraordinary collaboration with the Virginia Historical Society, Washington’s Mount Vernon, and the Smithsonian Institution. This exceptional gathering of artwork and artifacts is sure to provide your family a history adventure and memories that will last a lifetime.

Andrew E. Masich
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EXHIBITS AT THE HISTORY CENTER

GEORGE WASHINGTON: THE MAN BEHIND THE MYTHS OPENS JULY 29

MATTHEWS: 150 YEARS OF IDENTIFYING PEOPLE, PLACES & EVENTS THROUGH 9/4

WHAT WE WORE: HARD HATS TO HIGH HEELS THROUGH 2001

HEINZ 57 THROUGH 2001

GLASS: SHATTERING NOTIONS ONGOING

POINTS IN TIME: BUILDING A LIFE IN WESTERN PENNSYLVANIA ONGOING

DISCOVERY PLACE ONGOING

GENERAL INFORMATION

1212 SMALLMAN STREET, IN THE STRIP DISTRICT (412) 454-6000
www.pghhistory.org

PARKING
$3 in the lot at 12th and Smallman with History Center validation.

HOURS
Museum Shop: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., daily.
Library & Archives: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday.
Center closed on Easter, Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day.

ADMISSION
Members: free; Adults: $6; Students/Seniors: $4.50; Ages 6-18: $3;
Under 6: Free. Wheelchair accessible. Café on site. Discovery Place
for children.

GROUP SALES

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