

# Mount Vernon Suggested Readings

Most Mt. Vernon neighborhood residents own at least one biography of George Washington (1732-1799), but almost no one owns a biography of the neighborhood's namesake, Admiral Edward Vernon (1684-1757). And there are no biographies, period, of the man who first called his Potomac River plantation "Mount Vernon"—Major Lawrence Washington (1718-1752), George's eldest brother, who served under Vernon. There are no books on the three men who most influenced the shaping of young George's character-- his father Augustine ("Gus") (1692-1743), his brother Lawrence, and Lawrence's father-in-law, William Fairfax of Belvoir (1691-1757). The standard reference for Fairfax's life remains an endnote in 1924 history of the Northern Neck. More has been written about George's great-grandfather than his father. This writer has spent nearly 20 years specializing in the history of 1730-1750 and offers a brief "Top 10" list of interesting books on the history of the Northern Neck, the Mount Vernon estate, and the war which joined Lawrence Washington to Edward Vernon.

Historically yours,

Rick Gamble

[swegam@verizon.net](mailto:swegam@verizon.net)

1. [Mount Vernon Revisited](#) (Images of America series) by Jessie Biele and Michael K. Bohn (2014: Arcadia Publishing) Released in 2014, this 125-page picture history of the Mount Vernon area offers an excellent 200-year overview of our area.
2. [In the Path of History: Virginia Between the Rappahannock and the Potomac – An Historical Portrait](#) by Nan Netherton, *et al* (2004). This 186-page, over-sized picture book presents a "popular" history of the Northern Neck (the area of land, a "neck", between the two rivers.) This has considerably more text than the smaller "Mount Vernon Revisited".
3. [Landmarks of Old Prince William](#) by Fairfax Harrison (1924, reprinted 1987) this 700-page book is the foundation stone on which all Northern Neck history is based. Exhaustively footnoted, yet entertaining to read. If you own only one "local" history book, this is that one. Modern reprints are available for about \$30, or, you can pay hundreds for a 1st edition. As his name suggests, Fairfax Harrison was descended from old line Virginia families. As President of Southern Railroad, based in Alexandria, Harrison used his money and position to indulge his passion for local history- an interest instilled by his mother, Constance Cary (Harrison). Her articles on George Washington and Mount Vernon, published in popular magazines in the 1880s and 1890s are fascinating (and much overlooked.)
4. [Fairfax County Virginia: A History](#) by Nan Netherton, *et al*. (1992; Fairfax County Publishing). This 750-page book was prepared by a team of FX County historians for the county's 250th Anniversary (1742 – 1992)
5. [Beginning at a White Oak: Patents and Northern Neck Grants of Fairfax County](#)

[Virginia](#) by Beth Mitchell (1977, Fairfax County Publishing) This over-sized, soft-cover book comes with a wall map of the county depicting modern streets overlaid with their original 18th century property boundaries.

6. [Virginia Baron: The Story of Thomas 6th Lord Fairfax](#) by Stuart E. Brown (1965) This 245-page biography is the only one on the county's namesake. Thomas placed his cousin, William Fairfax, in our neighborhood in 1738 to oversee his Northern Neck Proprietary, which grew to encompass 5 million acres. Lord Fairfax moved to Virginia, permanently, in 1747 and took an interest in assisting the surveying career of young George Washington.
7. [The Angry Admiral: The later career of Edward Vernon, Admiral of the White](#) by Cyril Hughes Hartmann (1953: William Heinemann Publisher) This 235-page "popular history" biography of our neighborhood's namesake remains the only modern, book-length treatment of Vernon. The family's Latin motto was *Ver Non Viret* ("Spring does not always flourish"). He never fought a major sea battle and, for that reason is not counted amongst England's greatest naval heroes, but he is studied today because of his push to modernize the Navy. See: [Command at Sea: Naval Command and Control since the Sixteenth Century](#) by Michael A. Palmer (2005); also [Precursors of Nelson: British Admirals of the Eighteenth Century](#) edited by Peter Le Fevere and Richard Harding (2000). Previously credited with having invented naval grog (watered down rum), "Old Grog" is now credited with having promoted and institutionalized its use, vice inventing it. See: [Nelson's Blood: The Story of Naval Rum](#) by Captain James Pack (1983)
8. [Medallic Portraits of Admiral Vernon: Medals Sometimes Lie](#) by John W. Adams and Dr. Fernando Chao (2010: Kolbe & Fanning Numismatic Booksellers) This over-sized, high gloss, specialized picture book sells for about \$90. The foreword (available on-line) offers the best description of Vernon's attacks on Porto Bello (1739) and Cartagena (1741), which catapulted him to the heights of public addulation. There were more (different) commemorative medallions of Vernon created to sell to the English public than for any other person in the 18th century. The Vernon craze was brief, but intense.
9. [Marlborough's America](#) by Stephen Saunders Webb (2013: Yale Press) This 575-page military history is focused on the early 18th century, but Webb's "Epilogue: The Golden Adventure" (pp. 371-413) is, now, the definitive military account of the Cartagena campaign and the American Regiment, and includes mention of the important combat role played by Lawrence Washington. See also: [America's First Marines: Gooch's American Regiment 1740-1742](#) by Lee Offen (a 2010 paperback); also [Amphibious Warfare In The Eighteenth Century: The British Expedition to the West Indies, 1740-1742](#) by Richard Harding (1991, Royal Historical Society Studies in History #62). When England went to war against Spain in the Caribbean in 1739 – The War of Jenkins' Ear – they raised a regiment of colonial troops as part of the British Army "regulars". Known as the "American Regiment" or "Gooch's Marines" – the Regiment was commanded by Virginia governor William Gooch -- all of the company officer's were

commissioned from the American colonies. Lawrence Washington (1718-1752) the older brother of George Washington, secured the position of senior Captain of the Virginia company, but he was then conscripted by Admiral Vernon to serve as “Captain of the Marines” on Vernon’s flagship, HMS Princess Caroline (80 guns). Having direct contact with the most famous man of the age, Lawrence, in 1742, decided to name the new home that his father was building for him at Little Hunting Creek plantation “Mount Vernon” in honor of his commander. A year earlier (May 1741) Lawrence had written to his father, Augustine “Gus” Washington, of his intention to build a townhouse in Fredericksburg if he should survive the war. Prior to joining the Army and going off to war, Lawrence had been living and managing the Washington-family estate at Little Hunting Creek. In order to keep Lawrence on the plantation, Gus had a new home built atop the bluff overlooking the Potomac.

10. [\*\*The First Hundred Years at Mount Vernon, 1653-1753\*\*](#) by Robert M. Moxham (1976, privately published by Colonial Press) This paperback monograph remains the only book-length history of the early years of the famous estate. Available only at selected research libraries. Moxham, a professional cartographer, was the foremost expert on the Colonial-era settlement of Fairfax County. His exhaustive research concluded that the Washington family lived in a (relatively small) “Quarter” near the mouth of Little Hunting Creek from 1735-1738, before moving to Fredericksburg and turning the Quarter over to eldest son Lawrence Washington. Lawrence went off to war in September 1740, and sometime after May 1741 his father began to build a “gentleman’s home” atop the bluff. Lawrence named it “Mount Vernon” in 1742. The original “Quarter” is shown on a 1741 detailed property plat drawn by the county surveyor pursuant to a court order. The original map (plat) is on display at the George Washington Masonic Memorial in Alexandria. The site where today’s Mansion House sits is vacant on that 1741 survey.
11. [\*\*The Washingtons and Their Homes\*\*](#) by John W. Wayland. Published in 1944, this outstanding 380-page reference work is available in paperback reprints. Wayland was a Virginia historian who understood that George Washington biographies treat George as the “only begotten son of Mary”, and they make no attempt to differentiate between what traits were unique to George, and which were Washington family traits. George Washington’s brothers and sisters were all quite successful, but overshadowed by the fifth child of ten.
12. [\*\*Fielding Lewis and the Washington Family: A Chronicle of 18th Century Fredericksburg\*\*](#) by Paula S. Felder (1998) Felder, who died in 2012, was the foremost expert on the Colonial-era history of Fredericksburg and she was *the authority* on George Washington’s mother, Mary Ball. This is a fascinating 340-page history that firmly anchors George to the world in which he grew up. Fielding Lewis married George’s sister, Betty Washington.
13. [\*\*Old Dominion Trolley Too: A History of the Mount Vernon Line\*\*](#) by John E. Merriken (1987: Taylor Publishing) This 142-page, over-sized picture history book is a labor of love, describing the electric trolley line that connected Alexandria to the Mount

Vernon estate from 1892 to 1930. The trolley was replaced by the George Washington Parkway in 1932.