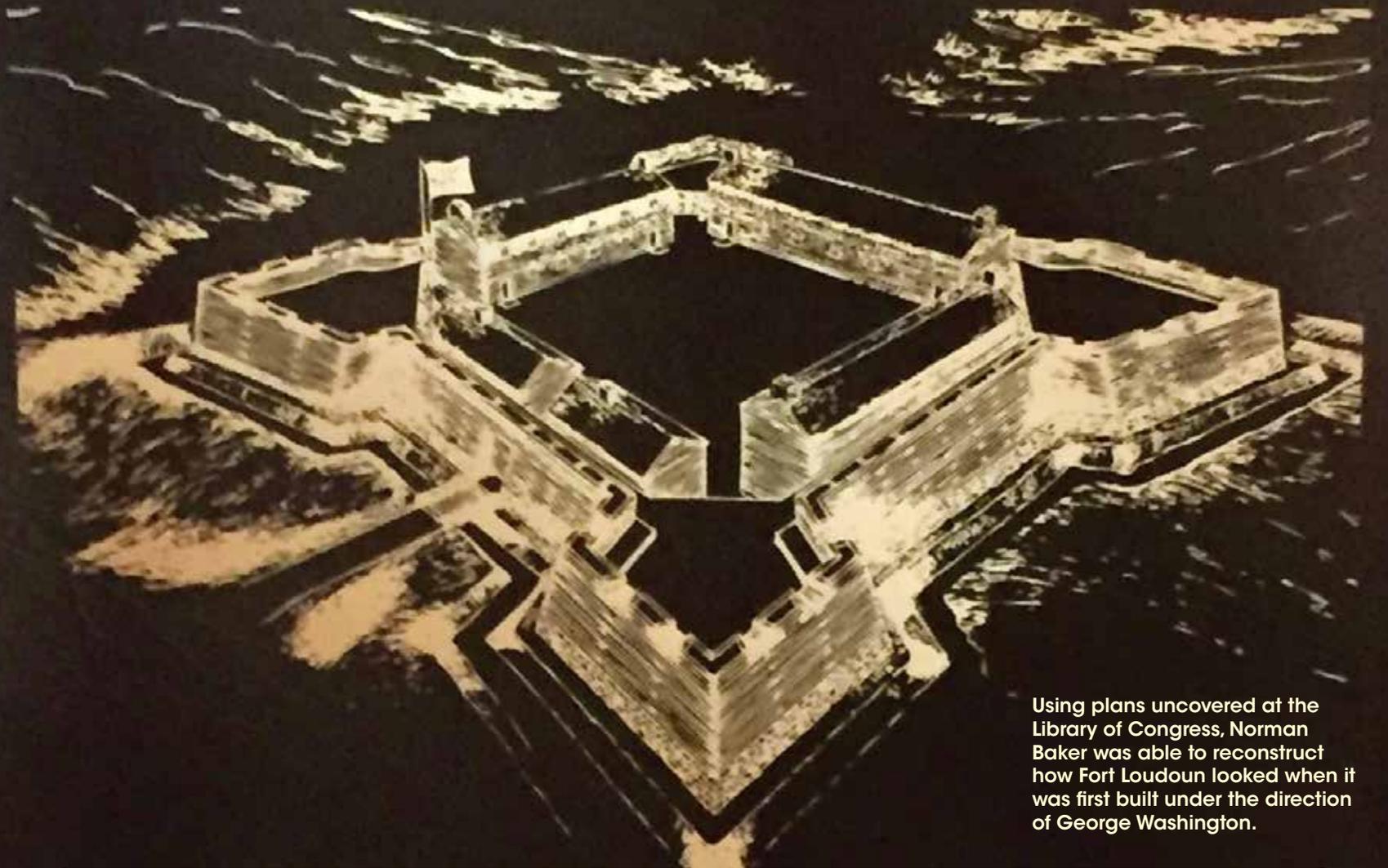


Fort Loudoun in Winchester

Retracing a lost chapter in history

Barbara Miller Beem

Images courtesy Barbara Miller Beem unless otherwise credited



Using plans uncovered at the Library of Congress, Norman Baker was able to reconstruct how Fort Loudoun looked when it was first built under the direction of George Washington.

There are no cannons, no barracks, no gatehouses, just an antebellum structure. To the casual observer, all that differentiates this house at 419 North Loudoun Street, Winchester, Va., from others in the neighborhood are two signs. For those walking along the uneven sidewalks or navigating the narrow streets, this handsome historic house blends in with all of the others. What makes it significant is that it was built on the site of Fort Loudoun. Otherwise, most of the activity in this corner of town is generated by the extensive renovation of a nearby imposing building, its old spaces being converted into modern condominiums. To the casual eye, there's not much more to be seen in this corner of the laid-back

town, an outlying bedroom community of the nation's capital.

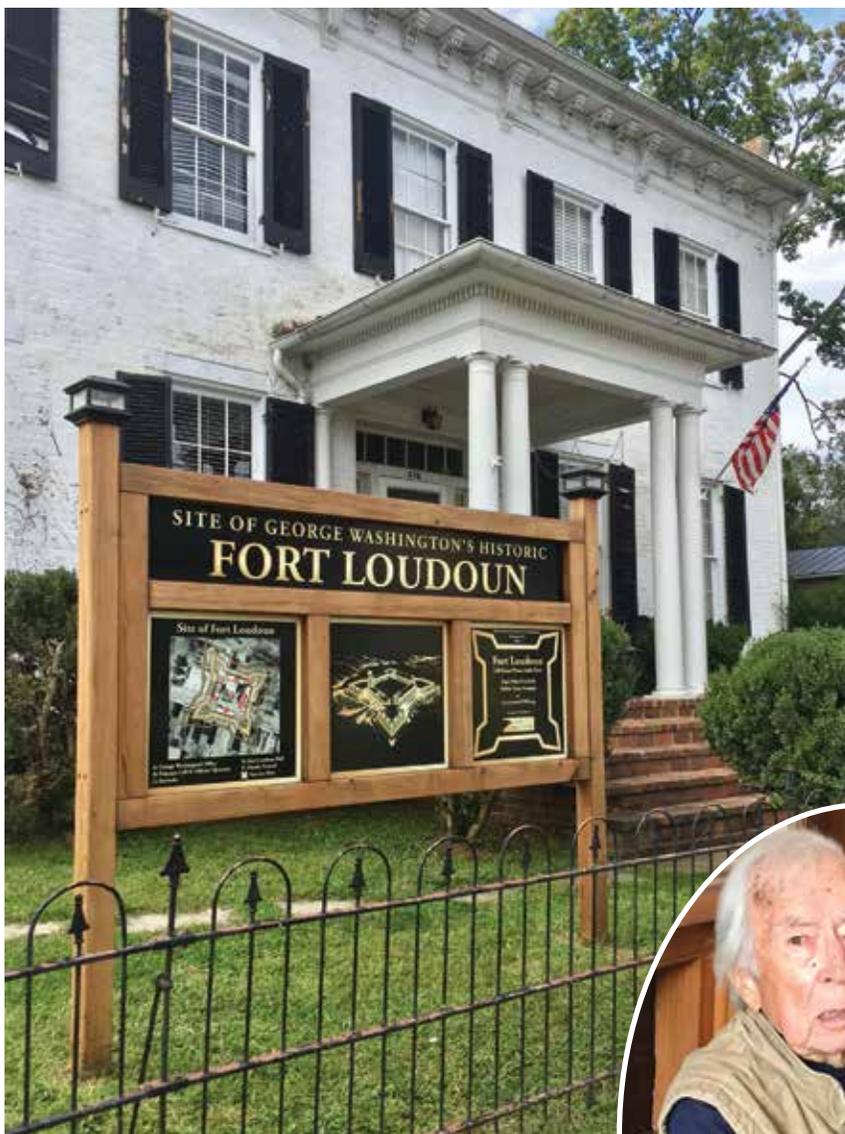
But what lies under the surface, both historically and physically, are clues to an important chapter in the story of the birth of a nation. Just as the French and Indian War is an oft-overlooked and understudied conflict in American history, so Fort Loudoun is a forgotten landmark. But thanks to the tireless research of Norman Baker, and the formation of the French and Indian War Foundation, that is changing.

The building of Fort Loudoun

For six-year-old George Washington, moving from the Northern Neck plantation where he was born in 1732,

to a farm across the Rappahannock River from Fredericksburg, Va., would prove to be life altering. What had promised to be a privileged childhood easing into a comfortable adulthood was dramatically changed five years later with the death of his father, Augustine. Unable to study in Europe, George, nevertheless, was groomed to be a gentleman by his devoted (and determined) mother.

Unlike other members of his family, George was not rooted to the land, exhibiting an oversized imagination along with not a small dose of wanderlust. When his mother refused him permission to join the Royal Navy, Washington, at the age of 16, went to Frederick County, Virginia, to serve as a surveyor's assistant for Thomas,



The house at 419 North Loudoun Street was built on the grounds of what was once Fort Loudoun. Today, the Foundation owns the property and plans to expand it into an educational facility.

6th Lord Fairfax. Over the next five years, he gained a firsthand knowledge of the backcountry and its inhabitants.

In 1753, Washington began his military career as a major in the Virginia militia and volunteered to serve as an envoy for Gov. Robert Dinwiddie. His mission: to carry a message to Jacques Legardeur de St. Pierre, the commandant at Fort LeBoeuf, demanding that the French quit their outposts in the Ohio Valley. While awaiting an answer, Washington studied details of the French fort, as well as learning of preparations for expansion in the area. His return to Williamsburg (with Legardeur's polite but firm refusal to submit to Dinwiddie's wishes) was fraught with danger, but his carefully kept journal was published, elevating

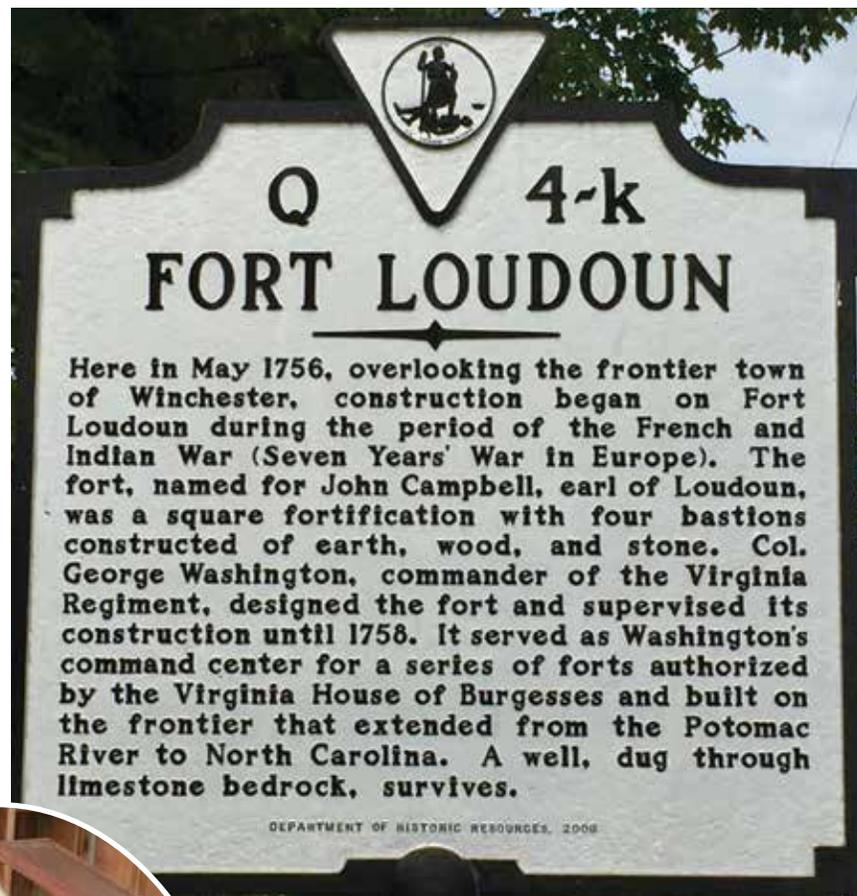
him in the public's mind.

The following year, the new Lt. Col. Washington was made second in command of the Virginia regiment and was sent to what is now Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, to remove the French from Fort Duquesne. A preliminary skirmish forced his retreat to a poorly conceived and hurriedly constructed Fort Necessity, where, on July 4, 1754, Washington suffered a humiliating defeat. Washington subsequently resigned his commission but volunteered to serve as Gen. Edward Braddock's aide-de-camp, repairing his reputation and achieving hero status for his leadership during the otherwise disastrous Battle of Monongahela.



Above: Save for two historical markers, including this one, Fort Loudoun might easily fade from the nation's collective memory.

Left: Norman Baker, who has devoted considerable time and energy researching, among other topics, the French and Indian War. His contributions furthering interest in Fort Loudoun have been invaluable.



In 1756, war was declared between the British and the French. Col. Washington was placed in charge of protecting the backcountry; as such, he lobbied that a major fort, in addition to Fort Cumberland, be built. Subsequently, the Virginia House of Burgesses approved the construction of a chain of forts to defend the colony's frontier. Writing to Lt. Col. Adam Stephen on May 18, 1756, Washington said that he had been "detained" in Winchester so that he might "construct and erect a fort, which the Governor has ordered to be done with expedition." Anticipating the labor force that would be required, he requested that Stephen arrange for soldiers

to be sent to the town "to carry on the work with spirit and vigour."

At the time, the town of Winchester was small (approximately four blocks), but it was strategically located, the first town west of the Blue Ridge Mountains. With his background in surveying, Washington was well equipped to evaluate the land. He chose "Outlot No. 49," a limestone elevation, covered by shallow soil. Strategically located at the intersection of main roads and just outside town, the five-acre tract was part of a 439-acre land grant from Thomas Lord Fairfax to Isaac Parkins.

Washington proposed at least two plans for the fort, the second one ultimately favored by William Fairfax. Work began in mid-May 1756. A 204-foot-square



Other archeological finds include bottles of varying ages and a soda can! Local enthusiasts hope that these onsite studies as well as many hours spent at the Library of Congress will shed new light on the French and Indian War, in hopes of better understanding the history of America.



Archeological finds in recent years have included shards of red ware and Delft pottery, a button and nails, horseshoes and animal bones.



Among the artifacts uncovered in recent years are musket balls and cannonballs, one of which weighed nearly 12 pounds.

fortification with bastions at each corner, the double-walled structure was built of locally quarried limestone and horizontally arranged logs. (More than likely, the surrounding forested area was cleared in the process.) The outside wall, 16 feet tall, leaned inward 17 degrees; the inside wall was upright. The space in between was filled with dirt, rocks, and whatever could be salvaged for the purpose.

The inside walls of the rampart doubled as the rear walls of the fort's buildings; facilities included three two-story barracks for 450 men. The powder magazine was located in the

south bastion. A six-foot wide well was sunk 103 feet though solid limestone, with the hope of supplying the fort with water. In December 1756, Washington moved his headquarters to the as-yet incomplete structure; he called the gate his "front porch." Thanks in large part to his efforts, Fort Loudoun was unmatched in size along the colonial Virginia frontier that stretched from the border of Maryland to North Carolina.

Washington's military experience had shown him what worked – and what did not. Believing it could withstand the siege of

cannons, Washington lobbied for his fort to be heavily fortified, requesting 24 cannons, favoring 12-pounders and a "large Magazine to supply the diverse Forts with Stores." In the end, he was granted four 12-pounders (on loan from Braddock), which were so heavy that horses died while delivering them. As for the rest, Washington had to content himself with 10- and 6-pounders to fill in.

While construction was underway, the town of Winchester housed soldiers, and Washington appealed to local men to aid in the work. The fort was not completed until 1758,



Once a girls' boarding school, this nearby building is currently being converted into condominiums. Back in the 1700s, the gate shown here was on the spot of George Washington's "front porch."



The site of the unsuccessful, six-foot-wide, 103-foot deep well whose location has made it possible to determine the footprint of Fort Loudoun.



One of the goals of the French and Indian War Foundation is to encourage the next generation to have an interest in history. It's working: a local Boy Scout traced some of the fort's footings for an Eagle Scout project.

but immediately, normal wear and tear, as well as destruction and deterioration, took their toll. Additionally, a series of woes, including insufficient funding, plagued not only the structure but the men as well. After the French and Indian War, the fort was used as a primary base for developing the frontier. Parkins sold the site upon which the fort was built to a merchant named Robert Rutherford, who retained ownership of the site for the next two decades, even as the facility served as a military installation (and prisoner of war camp) during the Revolutionary War. Over the ensuing years, the property changed hands a number of times and the structure was cannibalized. The neighborhood became a part of the city of Winchester, and a variety of structures were built on the land. Contemporary sketches and writings document the demise of the fort.

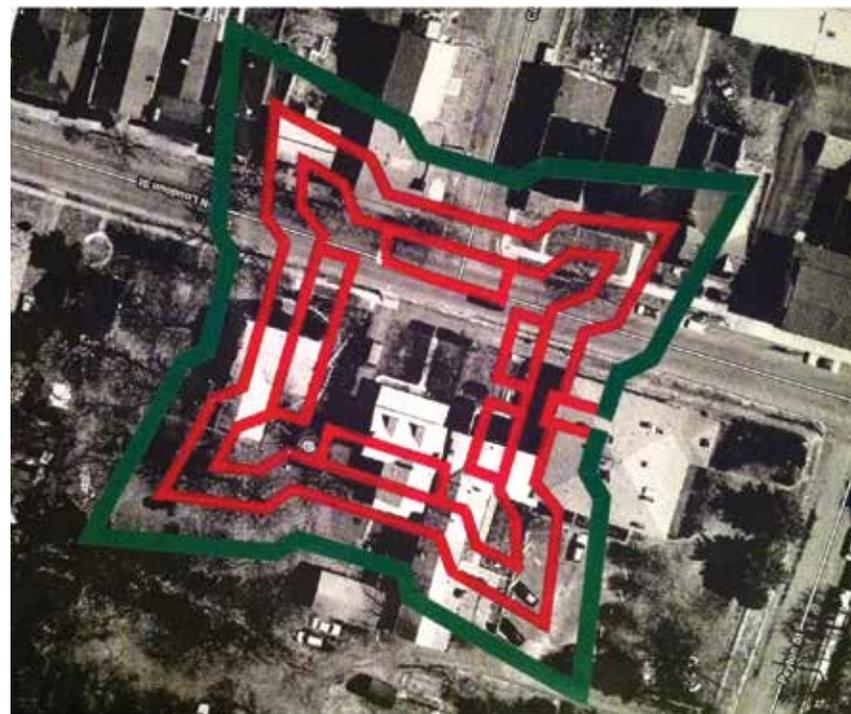
What remains

Washington believed that he had addressed every issue when designing Fort Loudoun. The well, however, was a continual sticking point. Two years of digging to a depth of 103 feet had proven insufficient. Money to continue the necessary endeavor was lacking, and water supply was a very real problem. Ironically, it is

the survival of this well that has enabled modern historians to fix a point and thereby redraw the lines of the fort. Original research, including hours at the Library of Congress, has resulted in Norman Baker's uncovering much of the fort's story that would otherwise be lost. The author of several books, including *Fort Loudoun: Washington's Fort in Virginia*, Baker continues to share his findings. Indeed, without his work, much of the information presented here would have been lost.

Along with others, Baker founded the French and Indian War Foundation in the spring of 2002. The Foundation owns the house at 419 North Loudoun Street; plans are to expand its educational facilities. Archeological excavations have yielded a number of interesting artifacts, including a cannonball that weighs 11.8 pounds, thereby tracing it to Washington's cannons. Remnants of the bastion can be viewed on a guided walking tour that traces the footprint of the fort. Official tours can be arranged by appointment. A highlight of the Foundation's year is the celebration of Loudoun Day, held the third weekend in May.

For more information, go to www.fiwf.org.



This overlay locates Fort Loudoun within today's streetscape. Courtesy Norman Baker and the French and Indian War Foundation.

Pie Safes *continued from page 36*

safes, all with well-executed tins. This group spans over 40 years, from the Empire to the Victorian periods. The punching became less detailed over time, but the overall tinwork and floral designs remained consistent.

From custom made to catalogue order

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Industrial Revolution signaled the end of a tradition. Large factories created standardized furniture at competitive prices, including cabinetry pieces that were constructed in sections and shipped on the newly expanded railroad system. While this did not happen as quickly in the Shenandoah Valley, especially in rural areas where transportation of goods remained difficult,

commercially manufactured goods began to replace locally hand-made furniture. By the late 1850s factory-made safes were readily available in Valley outlets, and by the late 1870s, safes could be ordered by catalogue.

Two hundred years after the safes first appeared in the Valley, experts Russ and Evans are raising awareness of their importance and link to the past. The pie safe flourished throughout the Valley region, becoming an important artifact of the material culture of the nineteenth century, and yet it is one of the most under-appreciated forms of American furniture. The humble pie safe is once again receiving recognition, not only as a cultural artifact but also as a meaningful category of Shenandoah Valley decorative arts.



Sideboard Safe, 1840-1850. Attributed to Eli Andes (1815-1874), Greenmount area of Rockingham County, Va. Courtesy of the Museum of the Shenandoah Valley. Collection of Roddy and Sally Moore.

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