



This is NewsLetter Issue No. Two ~ For the year 2024

George Washington's Royal Gift

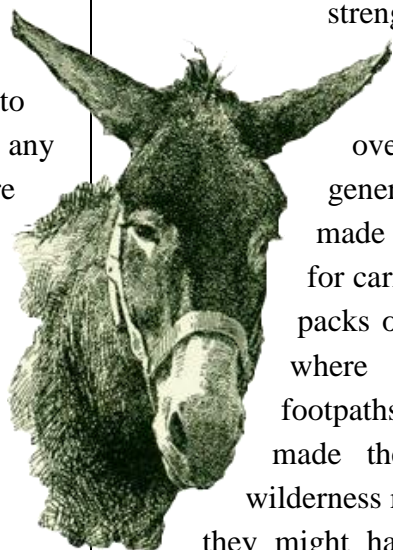
I want to start off by thanking Compatriot John Betting for suggesting this subject. Having produced 98 newsletters for this Chapter to this point, I sometimes run low on subjects. So I had put out a request for suggestions, and John answered my call. If anyone else has any ideas for subjects, please send them to me and I will research them and present them in future issues.

So what was George Washington's Royal Gift? In November 1784, Spain's King Charles III presented Washington with a gift. But the gift did not actually arrive at Mount Vernon until a year later.

George Washington had the desire to breed a donkey with his mares. He knew, as any *Gentleman Farmer* would know, that horses are finicky and easily spooked. And when they are spooked, a horse will go to great lengths to extricate itself from the situation ~ to the point of harming itself and any human being near it. Horses are employed in many situations where intelligence, speed and agility are required, but as a pack animal, horses are not the most desirable.

An alternative to the horse is the donkey. A donkey is a bit more intelligent than a horse and

therefore as easy, if not easier, to train and handle as a horse, but when compared to horses, donkeys are not as strong. What they might have lacked in strength, donkeys made up in being very surefooted and reliable to carry weights over long distances. Their generally lower center of gravity made the donkey the ideal choice for carrying heavy weights, such as packs of goods, through the forests where roads were usually just footpaths. When 'Indian' traders made their way into the frontier wilderness regions in the 1730's to 50's, they might have ridden horses, but they probably led one or more donkeys bearing the many packs of the goods they planned to trade



with the Amerindians.

Another attribute of the donkey is its docile nature. If a hornet alights on the nose of a horse, it will probably be spooked and react violently. But if a hornet lands on a donkey's nose, it will be unfazed maintain its composure.

So what would be the result of merging the steadiness and intelligence of the donkey with the brute strength of a horse? The result is a cross-breed that unfortunately cannot reproduce itself ~ the mule. The mule was the desired beast of burden since it had the strength of the horse and the intelligence and passive nature of the donkey.

The present that King Charles III of Spain gave to George Washington was a 'jack'. [The adult male donkey is variously called a *jackass* or *jack*, while the adult female donkey is variously called a *jennet* or *jenny*.]

George Washington, before becoming the archetypal *Founding Father*, had been a 'Gentleman Farmer' and when he went back to Mount Vernon, he went back to his farm. On 18 July 1784, Washington wrote a letter to Robert Townsend Hooe, a friend and the first mayor of Alexandria, Virginia, in which he asked: "*Hering that you have a Vessel bound to some port in Spain, I am induced to ask if it is safe and practicable to bring from thence a good Jack ass, to breed from. The late Don Juan de Miralles, a resident from the Court of Spain at Philadelphia, promised to procure one for me; but in his death I met a disappointment. Another Gentleman of his*

Nation, not long since, has also given me a promise, but it is not yet fulfilled, and as I am convinced that a good Jack would be a public benefit to this part of the Country, as well as private convenience to myself, I am desirous of having more strings than one to my bow." Mr. Washington did not want just any jack. He continued in his letter: "*An ordinary Jack I do not desire; I will describe therefore such an one as I must have, if I get any. He must be at least fifteen hands high; well formed; in his prime; and one whose abilities for getting Colts can be ensured...*"



A year had gone by, and Washington still didn't have his jack. Richard Harrison, a merchant operating out of Cadiz, Spain, was engaged by Washington to help procure a male donkey. On 25 July 1785, the future

President wrote to his old friend, the Marquis de Lafayette: "*Soon after I had written to you in Feby., Mr. Jefferson, and after him Mr. Carmichael informed me that in consequence of an application from Mr. Harrison for permission to export a Jack for me from Spain, his Catholic Majesty had ordered two of the first race in his Kingdom (lest an accident might happen to one) to be purchased and presented to me as a mark of his esteem. Such an instance of condescension and attention from a crowned head is very flattering, and lays me under great obligation to the King; but neither of them is yet arrived... I have long endeavored to procure one of a good size and breed, but had little expectation of receiving two*

as a royal gift.”

As time went on, Mr. Washington worried that something might have happened to one or both of the now promised animals. Finally in October 1785, he had received news that one of them had been delivered to the North American Continent. The *Salem Gazette* reported on 25 October that one of the jacks had died in the transatlantic passage, but that one had survived and arrived at Gloucester, Massachusetts that day.

Washington sent a certificate to a distant relative, John Fairfax on 26 October. The certificate stated: “*The bearer Mr. John Fairfax is sent by the subscriber to Boston for a Jack Ass; of the arrival of which at that place he is advised; and where a second is also expected on his account from Spain.*” Washington advised Fairfax: “*You will proceed in the Stage from Alexandria to Boston without losing a day that can possibly be avoided; and when arrived at the latter place, deliver the Letter herewith given you to the Honr. Thos. Cushing, Lieut; Governor of the State of Massachusetts, who resides in the town of Boston, and whose directions you are to follow. The intention of your going thither is, to bring one, perhaps two Jack asses, which have been imported for me from Spain: A Spaniard [Pedro Tellez] is arrived with, and attends the first; and probably if the second is arrived, there will be one with him also: one, or both of these men, according to the instructions they may have received in Spain, or agreeably to the directions you may receive from the Lieut: Governor, are to come on with you and the Jacks.*” Washington further expressed his worries that some harm might befall the valuable gift that he earned for so long. He told Mr. Fairfax: “*You know too well the high value I set upon these Jacks, to neglect them on the road in any instance whatsoever; but if the one which is now at Boston, and the other if it arrives in time, should come on under their proper keepers, your business will then*

be to see that every thing necessary is provided, leaving the management of them to the Spaniard or Spaniards who will attend them, and who best know how to travel and feed them. See however (if their keepers are drunken and neglectful) that due attention and care are bestowed on these animals... Let the Jacks be put separate and with no other creatures, lest they should get kicked, and hurt themselves or hurt others; and if it is necessary they should be cloathed (which you must know before you leave Boston) provide Blankets or such other cloathing as their keepers think best, at that place.”

Pedro Tellez delivered to Mount Vernon the single jack that had arrived at Boston by mid-December 1785 and Washington provided a pass to him for his return north. Tellez was to go to New York and from there to Spain. Washington then sent a letter to José Moñino y Redondo, 1st Count Floridablanca on 19 December 1785. He wrote: “*My homage is due to his Catholic Majesty for the honor of his present. The value of it is intrinsically great, but is rendered inestimable by the manner and from the hand it is derived. Let me entreat you therefore, Sir, to lay before the King my thanks for the Jack Asses with which he has been graciously pleased to compliment me; and to assure his Majesty of my unbounded gratitude for so condescending a mark of his royal notice and favor. That long life, perfect health, and unfading glory may attend his Majesty’s reign, is my fervent wish. With great respect and consideration I have the honor etc.*”

While the object of obtaining the jack was to breed with his mares, Washington also desired to obtain one or more jennys. He probably planned to breed the jacks and jennys to increase the total number of donkeys in the states. On 10 February 1786, Washington wrote to Samuel Branden: “*I have lately received from Spain, a Jack Ass of the first race in the Kingdom, and am very desirous of*

availling myself of his breed. Hearing that she Asses of good appearance are to be had at Surinam, I take the liberty of asking your assistance to procure me one of the best kind..."

Royal Gift, the name George Washington gave to the jack he received from the King of Spain was bred with mares and jenny that

Washington added to his stable. In a letter to John Tayloe written at Mount Vernon on 13 January 1799, the last year of his own life, George Washington noted Royal Gift and an "Imported Jenny from Malta" gave birth to a "valuable" Jack Ass named Compound.




2024 Meeting Dates (edited)

First Quarterly Meeting	March 9	Bedford Hoss's
Second Quarterly Meeting	June 8	Marzoni's
Third Quarterly Meeting	September 14	Bedford Hoss's
Fourth Quarterly Meeting	December 14	The Dream



The next meeting of the Frontier Patriots Chapter of the Sons of the American Revolution will be held at Marzoni's restaurant at 164 Patchway Rd, Duncansville, PA on Saturday, 8 June 2024 starting at 12 Noon.

Notice that the 2024 calendar of meetings was edited and re-included in this issue. Unfortunately, and despite the fact that many Compatriot members enjoyed meeting at the Creekside Inn, it went out of business So I needed to find alternatives. I decided to hold one of the Blair County meetings at the Marzoni's restaurant beside the Hoss's at Wye Switches/Duncansville and the other at The Dream. I hope that you will be satisfied with the choices and will plan to join us there.



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Frontier Patriots Chapter website: <https://frontierpatriots.com>