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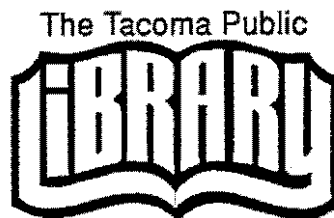
Reese, Gary Fuller.

George Washington of Centralia

: the history of George Washin

# George Washington of Centralia.

The history of George Washington  
who came to the Pacific Northwest in 1852  
and founded the city of Centralia.



*Compiled by  
Gary Fuller Reese  
Tacoma Public Library  
Tacoma, Washington  
1992*

George Washington, like so many children today, came from a broken home. But unlike modern children, George Washington's family ceased to exist because his father, a slave, was sold and taken far from their Virginia home. he was fortunate in that his mother was able to find another family who quickly made George a part of their life. For most of his childhood, George was under the care of Mr. and Mrs. James Cochran. He later repaid their kindness with one of his own, caring for their every need when they were elderly.

George Washington, like nearly every other man of color living in the United States in the 1840's and 1850's, suffered from discrimination and was often taken advantage of because of his race. He tried several businesses and was successful as long as he was left alone to work and prosper. After a number of years on the Missouri and Illinois Frontier, he decided he had had 'enough' of the kind of discrimination he had suffered and, with his stepparents, moved west.

He eventually chose to settle on some especially good farming land in the Chehalis Valley and, getting his stepfather to file a claim, began to develop a prosperous farm. He married, raised a stepson, and following the death of his first wife married again and, in his later years, raised a son.

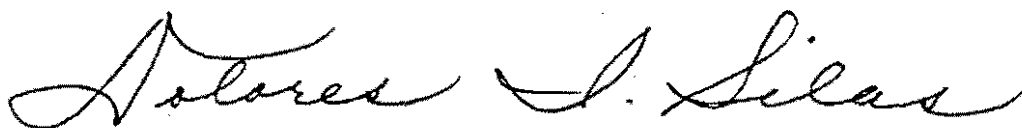
He became the founder of the city of Centralia and worked for many years to make it into a prosperous city. There he lived for the rest of his life.

This collection of writings about George Washington was taken from a variety of sources and includes information about the life and times on the 1850's frontier. In the 1880's, Mr. Washington wrote a short account of his travels to Oregon for the Tacoma Daily Ledger, as part of a series of recollections by local pioneers.

The story of Stacey Coones, Washington's stepson, is especially interesting. Coones came to live with his mother and stepfather as a teenager and was the only Black youngster in the region. The story of how he survived and prospered is fascinating.

In all the writings about George Washington, only one unkind account was found, written for a local magazine in the 1890's. The author described Washington's stepmother's meals as consisting only of wild game, grasshoppers and honey when there wasn't a nearby henhouse to rob. He described Mrs. Washington's extensive flower and vegetable gardens as nothing more than a 'melon patch,' and the Washington's two story home as a 'rude hut.'

The stories included here create a fascinating and highly-detailed portrait of this early explorer and Northwest pioneer.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Delores A. Silas". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

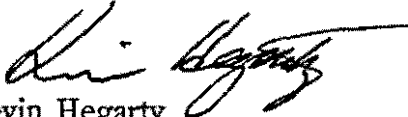
Dr. Delores Silas, Councilmember  
Tacoma City Council

The Tacoma Public Library is pleased to offer this collection of information about George Washington the founder of Centralia. It was determined that history would be served best if articles written by several people at various times were printed as they were written and not "reworked" by anyone.

Materials at the Tacoma Public Library, at the Washington State Library, and at the Centralia Public Library were surveyed to find information about Mr. Washington. In most cases the articles reproduced here have been reworked and rewritten over the years with little or no new information found. It is hoped that, as work continues on the black history of the Pacific Northwest, additional information about Mr. Washington and his family will be found. Certainly a study of the life and times of Stacey Cooness, son of the first Mrs. Washington, would be of great interest as the story of how he at first coped and then flourished as the first and only Black teenager in the Centralia is told.

The final article in this collection is an unfriendly one written in the 1890's. It is the only writing of its type found in studying the life of George Washington and is included for it "chronicles" the eating habits of Mr. Washington as he moved west, stealing chickens from hen houses along the way and living on honey and grass hoppers. Mrs. Cochran would not be pleased to have her cooking described in this way. "His rude hut" was probably just that in the beginning, but it provided much needed shelter for passers-by and was later replaced by three homes, each larger and more well built than the one before it.

The compilation of writings included here was collected by Gary Fuller Reese, Managing Librarian of the Tacoma Public Library's Northwest Room and Special Collections.

  
Kevin Hegarty  
Library Director  
Tacoma Public Library  
February, 1992

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

- PART ONE Page 3  
*George Washington, Founder of Centralia*, by Dorothy Mae Rigg.
- PART TWO Page 23  
*A note on early Centralia*, by Donna Tisdale.
- PART THREE Page 24  
*Early History of Washington*, by Horace Cayton in the *Seattle Republican* in 1896.
- PART FOUR Page 26  
*Marched Westward with the Star of Empire*, by George Washington, 1893.
- PART FIVE Page 28  
*George Washington of Centralia, Washington*, by W. Sherman Savage.
- PART SIX Page 31  
*The Pacific Northwest's Own George Washington*, by Bob Karolevitz
- PART SEVEN Page 34  
*Stepson of Washington aided in history facts*, by Stacey Coones.
- PART EIGHT Page 35  
*History of Blacks in the Pacific Northwest*, by Quintard Taylor, Jr.
- PART NINE Page 37  
*History of Lewis County*, by Alma and John Nix
- PART TEN Page 39  
An unfriendly account from the 1890's.

## **GEORGE WASHINGTON A CHRONOLOGY OF HIS LIFE AND TIMES**

- 1817 Born August 15, 1817 in Frederick County, Virginia. 1821. The Cochran family moves with George to Ohio. 1837: The family moves to Bloomington Missouri to run a grist mill and distillery. 1841: Started his own sawmill in St. Joseph, Missouri.
- 1850 Crossed the plains leaving Council Bluffs, Iowa on May 6, 1850.
- 1852 Settles on the site of Centralia, builds a cabin and starts farming.
- 1853 Purchased his own claim from the Cochranes for \$3,400.
- 1855 Erects his own stockade for protection during the Indian War of 1855
- 1859 James Cochrane dies.
- 1861 Mrs. James Cochrane dies.
- 1867 Marries Mrs. Mary Jane Cooness.
- 1868 George Washington builds his second house.
- 1872 Stacey Cooness, who is eleven, comes to live with his mother and stepfather.
- 1875 Filed intention to lay out a new town on his claim on January 8, 1875.
- 1875 Gives the local Baptist Church two town lots for a building and two acres for a cemetery.
- 1878 Builds his third home.
- 1889 Mary Jane Cooness Washington dies on March 5, 1889.
- 1890 Stepson Stacey Cooness marries Victorine Hickling.
- 1890 George Washington builds his fourth home.
- 1891 George Cleveland Washington, son of George Washington and his second wife is born, December 15, 1891.
- 1893 The Panic of 1893 nearly destroys Centralia.
- 1905 George Washington dies on August 26, 1905 at the age of 87.
- 1922 Centralia's Women's Civic Club presents a marble seat to the City as a Memorial to George Washington.

## Part One

### GEORGE WASHINGTON - FOUNDER OF CENTRALIA BY DOROTHY MAE RIGG

As published as Chapter fifteen in Herndon Smith's *Centralia, the first fifty years, 1845-1900*. *Centralia: The Daily Chronicle*, 1942.

A white marble seat rests on the green grass of Centralia's City Park. Engraved on it is an inscription: "In memory of George Washington, donor of this park. "My mother read it to me when I was still a very small child.

After sliding my fingers over the smooth surface and then over the more interesting rough edges of the carving on the side, I scrambled up with much effort and sat on the top. "Mother," I asked, "who was George Washington?"

"He was the man who founded, who made the very beginning of Centralia, and gave the land for this park. " That was all mother knew of him and it satisfied my childish curiosity but not for long. For my interest was aroused. And now, twelve years later, I am writing of his life, the life of a man who despite birth and color, founded a town in which he was respected and loved for his justness and kindness.

Nearly fifty years before the end of the Civil War gave equal rights to the Negro, a little colored boy was born on August 15, 1817, in Frederick County, Virginia, within two miles of the historic city of Winchester. The father, whose name was Washington, was part Negro and a slave; the mother, a white woman of English descent. Shortly after the child's birth, the father was sold to a new master a great distance away. The mother's white friends, Mr. and Mrs. James C. Cochran, agreed to take the child into their home until he should reach the age of twenty-one. They named him George. Harrison's victory at Tippecanoe and the building of the Cumberland Road were drawing many families in search of new lands.

Everywhere, people's thoughts were turning westward. When George was about four years old, James Cochran felt the call also. He gathered his family and George and their belongings together and moved into Delaware County, Ohio. Once they had felt the breath of virgin lands, it urged them farther westward. And when George was nine the family pushed on into northern Missouri. This life was to shape the destiny of the boy.

The wild backwoods produced a new kind of men who became sturdy fighting the untamed forests and cultivating the untouched soil. They were self-reliant and resourceful men who judged one another by their ability to use the broad axe and the rifle. By the time he was ten, George had killed several deer and all the tree squirrels he brought down were shot squarely through the head. As he grew older, he acquired such skill with the rifle that he'd make a cross on a piece of paper, place a tack in the center of it, then at forty yards with a rip as steady as though held in a vise, he'd raise his rifle until the intersection of the lines was hidden by his gun sight. Out of the twelve times he'd pull the trigger, eleven shots would hit dead center.

It was well that boy learned the use of firearms, for when he was eighteen he sat under a tree all one night during the Mohawk War, his rifle in his hand, keeping watch for prowling Indians. He learned the self-reliance of the pioneer in domestic skills as well. Anna, or "Mother," as he called Mrs. Cochran taught him to cook, spin and weave, and make his own shirts and trousers. In one day he could knit himself a

pair of long, ribbed socks with double heels and toes. He also learned to tan beef hides, using a special preparation and working them until the finished product was as pliable as a piece of buckskin. And he could lay a threshing floor with the heads of the grain so placed toward the center that only a cupful or two of grain would be lost in the straw as the farm animal yearlings, two-year-olds and all were driven round and round treading out the grain.

Mrs. Cochran told him about God and read to him from her Bible and taught him hymns from her book that had no music in it and indicated only the rhythm by the words "long meter" or "common meter." When the law of the State of Missouri didn't permit him, a colored lad, to be taught to read or write, much less to go to school, he did not let that stop him. He taught himself. And he learned to figure so that he could work out a problem in land dimensions in his head before others could do it on paper.

He also became so skilled with the broad axe that the puncheon floors he split and laid were water tight and as smooth as though they had been surfaced with a jack plane. Swinging the axe developed the great muscles of his arms and back. And when he had attained his growth, he was a man of unusual strength, six feet in height and slightly less than 200 pounds in weight.

By 1837 George Washington and the Cochrans had moved into Bloomington, Missouri, where they erected a grist mill and a distillery. There Washington built a handsome brick house and learned the tailoring trade. But he stayed in Bloomington only one year. He liked the out-of-doors. Within fifteen miles of where "St. Joe" now stands, he and a partner rented a sawmill.

Then for the first time in his life, he encountered real difficulty. He sold a bill of lumber to a certain Jeremiah Coyle, taking his note in payment. However, Mr. Coyle refused to pay when it became due and in the resulting suit, Washington secured judgment, but before he could collect the amount due him, Mr. Coyle had taken advantage of unjust laws and had George Washington arrested, claiming that although he was a free man of color, he had no rights in the state of Missouri. The state was made the plaintiff and the trial attracted a great deal of attention. In the meantime, Mr. Cochran had taken a petition around requesting that the state legislature grant his foster son the rights of a citizen since his mother was a white woman of English descent, and he was free born and of good moral character. By a special act, the Missouri legislature then gave him all privileges and immunities of a citizen except that of holding office. When his sawmill was destroyed by high water, again he yielded to the urge to go to new lands. He moved to Schuyler County and entered eighty acres at the land offices of Fayette, Missouri.

Some time later he went to Illinois and purchased a patent right for making whiskey and bought equipment for putting out a barrel a day. While he was erecting the building to house his distillery, however, he found that the legislature, then in session had passed a bill prohibiting any person of color from manufacturing, handling, or selling spirituous or malt liquors. In disgust, he sold everything and returned to Missouri to visit his foster parents at Lancaster, "the old people" he affectionately called them. "Mother, I'm going to the Oregon country," he said to Mrs. Cochran. But she thought he was joking. Several days later he mentioned it again. "Yes," he said, "I'm going to get a couple of yoke of cattle and I'm going to Oregon. If there's any decent place in the world, I'm going to find it."

"We want to go with you," said Mr. and Mrs. Cochran. "Yes, we want to go, too," said ten-year-old Sarah Jane Fletcher, their little granddaughter, who had made her home with them since the death of her mother six years before. So they decided to

go together and he told his foster parents that they could depend on him always, for he would never leave them.

George Washington purchased four yoke of oxen and a wagon to carry the provisions and bedding; Mr. Cochran, two span of Canadian ponies and a light wagon in which cots might be set up for himself, his wife, and little granddaughter. And so that little Sarah Jane might travel in greater comfort, George Washington made a little chair of hickory with withes of the same, steamed and peeled and woven back and forth to form the seat. Also in his wagon were his two-pound tailoring scissors with 12-inch blades, his long-barreled Kentucky rifle, and a hymnal two inches thick like the one from which Mrs. Cochran had taught him the church songs when he was a boy.

It was early spring, March 15, 1850, that the rumble of the heavily-loaded wagons sounded the starting note. Fifty-six armed men were in the train of fifteen wagons. Slowly the wagons moved forward. Winter was tardy in leaving; the wind was cold, the grass was reluctant to grow. It was April 7, when the wagons arrived at Council Bluffs with their first two hundred miles behind them. Winter seemed determined to detain them. The grain supply must be conserved; so the travelers waited one month until the prairie grass attained sufficient growth to support their animals.

Not until May 6, was the Missouri River reached. The scenery seemed endless, unchanging most of the time. Once in a while George Washington shot a deer, a welcome change of fare from the bacon and beans and the corn bread cooked in the Dutch oven. Then perhaps, when they lay over on Sunday, there'd be biscuits cooked over the camp fire with the aid of a reflector and called by the Cochrans "seldom" after the old Southern custom of so-naming that which seldom varied the corn bread diet.

Twice the party had encounters with the Indians. The first time an elderly chief came to protest that some of his horses and animals had been killed. But the emigrants were left unharmed when they convinced him that this had been done by the train just preceding them. The second time, however, results were far more serious. A young man in the party, about 21, frequently went hunting and as the train traveled slowly, he found it easy to rejoin them whenever he wished. He constantly talked about killing redskins though the captain of the party repeatedly warned him, "If you see any Indians let them alone. We don't want any trouble." But one day while they encamped near a watering place in a grove of shade trees, the young fellow saw a squaw. He raised his rifle and killed her. The captain immediately ordered all the cattle yoked up ready to start for he knew the Indians would soon be after them. He was right. About 4 or 5 o'clock that afternoon, five or six hundred of them were seen approaching. Hurriedly, the emigrants arranged their wagons in a circle and put the women and children inside.

About 250 yards away, the Indians stopped and a handsome young chief came toward the circle and dismounted. In perfect English he said, "One of your party has killed one of our women. If you turn him over to us, there will be no trouble. If you do not, all of you will be massacred." There was nothing to do but surrender the young man. While the emigrants waited within the circle of their wagons, they saw the Indians build a fire about 200 yards away, skin the young man alive, and throw his body into the flames. Then the train was permitted to go on its way, unharmed.

When the party reached Oregon City after 117 days of travel, George Washington sold his cattle and rented a place near there for "the old people." He then went to work slashing and cutting timber for \$90 a month and board. He was glad to be back felling forest trees. He liked the feel of the axe in his hands. He liked the out-of-doors. Three months later, however, he became seriously ill. The Cochrans took him to



the only hospital in Oregon Territory, the one at Vancouver Barracks. But "the old people" were informed that the government hospital was only for soldiers. Nevertheless, when the doctor realized that the patient was in a serious condition, he took him in, operated on him, and cared for him for three or four months.

During this time, the Cochrans were living five miles from the hospital, and twice a week Mrs. Cochran walked there to visit her foster son and take him something nice to eat. One day not long before he left the hospital, another woman accompanied her. After the stranger had left, Mrs. Cochran said, "Don't you know who that woman was? She was your mother." Then she told George Washington that his mother had remarried, had four daughters, and had come West approximately the same time as he. Hearing that a family by the name of Cochran had a young colored man with them, she had sought them out with the hope that she might find her son. George Washington never saw his mother again.

Later he visited his youngest half sister, but he never told her that they were related. During the time he was in the hospital, he became salivated as a result of taking calomel. Although he could have pulled each of his teeth out with his fingers, they later regained their firmness. By the time he was released, he weighed but 141 pounds and he had lost all of his hair.

Washington, the Cochrans, and their little granddaughter, Sarah Jane Fletcher, then went north to the Cowlitz River where several families joined with them and built a boat. They proceeded up the stream to Cowlitz Landing where the Hudson Bay Company had a trading post. Here George Washington settled "the old people" in a log house and provided them with the necessities for taking in boarders. Now, quite recovered, he began looking for a place of his own.

He found it where the Skookumchuck River joined the Chehalis—land covered with timber-sandy soil; "Tuaoton" where the permanent homes of that branch of the Chehalis Indians had stood for so many years. There he staked a squatter's claim in the year 1852 and became the fourth settler in this locality. With his own hands he made a rough one room log cabin close by the Chehalis River at a location which today would be on the northern border of the gravel pit. He hewed the timbers himself and gathered the rocks and sticks and mud with which to make his fireplace. The floor was of hard-packed dirt. A few feet from the door was the one window which had no glass and through which came the light and smell of out-of-doors that he loved. His only door was never locked and travelers often stayed overnight with him. Frequently they called to him from the opposite bank of the Chehalis River and he crossed over and transported them across on his little pole ferry.

There was little time for leisure. George Washington worked from early morning 'till sundown. He fenced twelve acres of land and sowed it in oats, wheat, and garden stuff. He took care of two cows. He made his own trousers and shirts and did his own cooking.

He was not the only one, however, who thought the land he had chosen was pleasant. For the Indians returned each summer to camp along its northwestern boundary where the Skookumchuck River joined the Chehalis and to catch salmon at the mouth of the little creek that diagonally cut across his land. Washington lived in peace with his neighboring Indians. They called him "Noclas," meaning "black face." and also "Myeach," meaning "black or charred wood." He knew all of them from Cowlitz Prairie to Puget Sound for often these tribesmen crossed his land as they journeyed to their summer camping places or returned to their winter homes.

On the northwest portion of his land were the graves of more than two hundred of them who had been wiped out by a smallpox epidemic. The tribe continued

to use the burial place, a little grove of fir trees to the northwest of his cabin. There they placed their dead on small platforms among the branches. Here also, it is said, canoes served as coffins, one inverted over the other to form the cover. One day, so the story goes, when George Washington was out hunting near the burial place, he heard a dog barking so he followed the sound into a thicket. He discovered it was coming from a pair of suspended canoes. When he took the top one off to liberate the dog, he noticed among the dead Indian's possessions a rifle which was better than his own. He took out the firearm, exchanged it for his own, and replaced the top canoe. One evening, two men spent the night with him on their way to Olympia. They commented on his land, on its favorable location.

Early the next morning they left, but not before they had hinted that they intended to file on his claim at the Olympia land office. Then George Washington acted quickly. He knew that the territorial government of Oregon had several years previously passed an act forbidding the settlement and residence of negroes and mulattoes. He, a colored man, could not file on the land. But he had squatted on it with the hope that in a year or two the law might be changed and then he could legally settle on the land and, after a term of residence, make it his own. He now resolved he would take no chances on losing his land. He had crossed three thousand miles of continent and had searched for two years through Oregon Territory to find it. He had cleared it, plowed its acres, fenced his crops, and now it was a part of him.

Quickly he turned his cows out and walked to the Cochrans at Cowlitz Landing. They, as yet, had not taken claim of their own. He asked them to buy his improvements for \$200. They agreed and Mr. Cochran mounted his pony and hurried back to the prairie claim. Shortly after he arrived, the strangers returned. They had been to the land office at Olympia, made necessary arrangements, and were ready to buy the improvements so that they might file on the land. But they were too late. They found Mr. Cochran in possession. He and Anna, his wife, might now take out a donation claim of 640 acres. The old people went to live with their foster son in the little cabin on the banks of the Chehalis River where the pole ferry continued to transport passengers and the location came to be known as Cochran's Landing. They also built additional rooms and ran a crude way-station for travelers. It was, by far, the best arrangement that could have taken place, for Mr. and Mrs. Cochran were not as young as they had once been. Their pioneer life had been a hard one.

Each year George Washington cultivated more soil, sowed and harvested more grain. Each fall the ripened stores were loaded on the wagon for the trip to Tumwater and the mill. There the supplies, enough to last over the winter, were loaded and brought back by the oxen that swam streams and pulled across the gravelly prairies. And on one of these journeys to Olympia, the Cochrans put their little granddaughter Sarah in school, boarding her at the home of the druggist Willard where there were daughters of the family about her own age and a boy, Rufus, a few years older. Mr. Cochran made other trips as well, one when he was selected by Lewis County to be a representative at the Cowlitz Convention, which met to petition the Congress of the United States for separation from Oregon Territory. He was also a nominee on the Republican ticket for a member of the first legislature of the new territory. Meanwhile, the livestock on the prairie farm was increasing so Washington and Mr. Cochran felled more trees, hewed the logs, and notched the corners. Then, on June 17, 1854, their neighbors helped them raise a new barn. Other settlers as well were occupying lands that had belonged to the Indians. The country was filling up. Disease, gambling, liquor, guns, all gifts of the white men, were breeding trouble.

News drifted in, sailed in, of reported fighting and Indian uprisings over the mountains and in the White River district. Settlers listened to every scrap of news. Neighbors and friends met more frequently. They speculated as to whether the rising,

burning feeling would grip the local red men. They watched every move of the "Friendly Chehalis" with suspicion. They built a stockade and called it Fort Henness. The men enlisted for volunteer service. Then George Washington had a dream warning him that the settlers would take refuge in the fort and that he would take the old people there. While he was visiting them one day, an Indian would come to the fort selling turnips and that he would buy a little "passel" of them. The dream was very vivid. Then the warning came. He took "the old people" to the fort and one day while he was visiting them, an Indian came along and he bought a little "passel" of turnips. The reality was even more vivid than the dream. George Washington knew Sayayackum, the local chief. He did not feel that the friendly Chehalis would cause him any trouble. Nevertheless, day after day he plowed his land along the river with his rifle slung over his back. He built a stockade near his corral, but he used it only once. That was when a band of Indians rode by, shouting to him in Chinook, "Noclas afraid. Nika dare him come out." He said nothing. They repeated, "Noclas afraid." Then he came out, a powder horn and gun over his shoulder. He replied in Chinook, "Klatawal Come one step closer and you will be dead Indians." Klatawa meant "leave in haste," and the Indians did, for they knew of his skill as a marksman. Later he used his stockade as a granary.

Meanwhile, Sarah Jane was growing up. A rather attractive miss she must have been. Young Rufus Willard, who was working in his father's drug store and preparing to be a doctor, must have thought her comely, too, for in 1858 they were married. Patterson Luark gave Sarah Jane's grandfather \$750 for seven cows, three heifers, and five heifer calves in that year. The money, most probably, was used as a dowry for her marriage. The years of toil and pioneering were bending more heavily upon the shoulders of Mr. and Mrs. Cochran "the old people." They depended on their foster son and his strength. He bore it gladly, and tenderly cared for the two who had so unselfishly guided and protected his youth.

When they had proved up after four years' residence on their claim, they deeded the 640 acres to George Washington who gave them \$3,200 in cash so they might have ready money for any emergency. In 1859, Mr. Cochran died. During the next two years Mrs. Cochran's health waned. But early in the fall of 1860 the temperature dropped to below zero. It was difficult to keep her comfortable and do the added chores caused by the freezing weather. He had to chop holes in the ice-bound Chehalis River to water his stock and provide the forage which the animals were unable to gain while the fields were crusted with snow. He had to cut even larger amounts of firewood and store it, for the cold weather continued. To avoid her being lonely, he often took Mrs. Cochran to stay with three of her friends, Mrs. Sidney Ford, Mrs. Joseph Borst, or Mrs. Elkanah Mills. Twice a week he would walk over to visit her. "Whatever Mother wants," he told them, "try to get it for her, and I'll pay you for it. As long as she lives, I want her to be comfortable." They made it pleasant for her and she enjoyed these visits to households full of gaiety and laughter.

Sometimes she stayed several weeks at a time, and then she'd send him word she wanted to come home and he'd go for her. But her strength failed rapidly and for a time her foster son cared for her as one would for an infant. She died February 3, 1861. All winter, the snow had fallen and frozen; fallen and frozen until it was five feet deep on the level. But George Washington hitched up his pair of ponies and accompanied by his neighbors, the Waunches and Fords, took the body of his foster mother out to the burial ground on Fords Prairie and laid it beside that of her husband. Her death left a void in his life. To him, freedom from her care was not freedom but a burden from which he could rid himself only by taking on additional labor. Nature seemed to demand work that winter. Even after the twentieth of March the snow lay two feet deep on the edge of the prairie next to his cabin. Early in the 1860s, George Washington

entered upon sixty three acres bordering the south end of his land, paying the prevailing price, probably the standard \$1. 25 an acre. New settlers were moving in; there were new neighbors bounding his land. George Washington had more criticism to bear because of the rising agitation. Many would not associate with him. Then the war broke out which was to determine the freedom of the Negro.

But here at the border of the great continent the conflict was mild indeed. Life went on much the same for Washington and his neighbors, the sowing of the grain, the harvesting, and the twice-yearly journeys to Olympia with the grist. On one of these trips George Washington met Mary Jane Coonness, a large, attractive colored widow who was three quarters of Jewish extraction. He always laughed when he told of the beginning of their acquaintance. There was another who admired her. Oddly enough, it was he who introduced them. George Washington thought that strange, for the usual procedure of suitors was to keep all rivals away. "I'd not be the one to step in and try to take another man's girl away from him," George Washington would explain; "but he let down the bars and, well I walked right on through."

The summer of 1868 he spent fitting together a second house, facing it south toward the orchard he'd set out eight years before and situating it on a little knoll a quarter of a mile to the northeast of his first cabin. Made of rough boards, with four rooms downstairs and two upstairs, it had many windows with small panes of glass and was a great improvement over the first small cabin. Cleared land surrounded it. Shaded by two fir trees, it crouched looking at the hills and on the cottonwoods and maples down by the river bank.

George Washington was married to Mary Jane Coonness in 1869. An industrious, friendly woman, she soon took hold of her household duties and became acquainted with her new neighbors. And George Washington had chair frames made at Tumwater to furnish the new house. For the seats, he tanned beef hides leaving the hair on them, cut them in strips, and wove them back and forth with the hair side uppermost.

A year after they were married, George Washington bought his wife a sewing machine the first one owned by anyone near the settlement later to be known as Centerville. Women came from far and near just to look at it, to examine it, and to shyly ask permission to use it.

The shadow of the great hand of the Industrial Revolution, filled with ingenious ideas, was shading even this land-once virgin land. George Washington used the sewing machine as well and found it a great aid in doing his tailoring. For he continued to make his best clothes as well as his everyday ones. And one suit of English broadcloth he made he wore for nine or ten years. In the spring of 1872, when Mary Jane's eleven-year-old son Stacey came to live with them, his stepfather made his suits and hickory shirts and denim trousers. He'd take the boy's measure for a suit, make a pattern, and soon he'd be cutting out the goods with the 12-inch blades of the tailor scissors he'd brought from Missouri. "Till I was sixteen or seventeen he made all my shirts," recalls Stacey, now a man of eighty. "He could cut out a shirt, sew up the seams, pink the edges, fell them over, and have the entire garment finished including worked button holes and sewed on buttons - all in an hour and a half's time. "He'd help my mother make her dresses too," continued Washington's stepson, "putting in four sets of gathers at the waist and stroking every gather to make it lie even. Then he'd help her fit her dresses and when they were finished, they looked as though they had been molded on her."

Even so, life was hard with no time to rest and endless tasks to be done from early morning till the last fading streaks of daylight. And young Stacey, like the other boys of the early settlers, had many tasks. He had to help plow, baring the earth to the

sun and rain in rows up and down on either side of the little creek. Wheat and oats he helped plant, care for, and harvest. From the present gravel pit near the Chehalis River to the Allred and Hubbard places and from thence east toward the hill, stretched the pasture where Stacey went with his dog, Rockwood, to bring back the cows to the barn each evening. But all of young Stacey's time was not to be spent doing chores.

The spring term of school started April 17, just two weeks after his arrival. New experiences were ahead of him, for the children had never before associated with a colored child. One of these scholars was young Bob Ready, a lad just Stacey's age. And when an old man he still remembered his reaction that April morning, nearly seventy years before.

"That morning I put on my hickory shirt and blue jeans and started off barefooted to school. I was walking along looking at the ground when all of a sudden I saw the oddest footprint in the dust. A human one it surely was, but it looked as if the arch of the foot had pressed down and made a hole in the ground. The tracks went the way I was going and I followed them clear to school.

"When I looked up, I saw a little nigger boy sitting on a bench leaning against the school building, his bare feet dangling. But he sat so still he hardly seemed alive. I went up and looked him over. Then, to see if he'd move, I gave him a poke in the stomach with my finger. He rose right up, opened that big mouth of his a foot wide, and bit me right in the stomach. I could feel the teeth prints through my hickory shirt all the rest of the morning. That was the way I kind of initiated him. After that we were good friends."

The girls and boys who arrived in whooping, laughing, or whispering groups Stacey's first morning soon saw the results of his five years' previous schooling in Victoria, B.C., where there were only two weeks of vacation a year. When Friday afternoon came, the time for recitation by the students, they found that Stacey knew three pieces from memory. One was Patrick Henry's "Liberty or Death" speech and the recital of any of them took almost the whole program period. They also discovered that when Stacey recited, they didn't have to. So each week on Friday, they all cried, "Let Stacey give a piece." Nevertheless, the scholars weren't accustomed to a colored child and neither were their parents. Some of the latter even encouraged their young offspring to throw the young lad's books over the fence into the field. He told his stepfather that he could hold his own and take care of himself. But he made Stacey a desk just like the teacher's one with a top that would open up and that had a lock. The locked desk helped, but those who are persecuted have a tendency to retaliate.

Stacey started off to school earlier than usual one sunny morning. There were many things to look at when the grass was still wet by the dew. Walking along with no thoughts of mischief whatsoever, his eyes suddenly caught the quick movement of a little animal among the tall grass and weeds by a post. Creeping up very quietly, he saw what looked to be an over-grown squirrel no, it had a bad stripe on it. Providing he caught it, if the others were at school when he got there, he'd have some fun. If they weren't, why there was the teacher's desk. His key also unlocked it. So he emptied his lunch box, got in position, and reached over and picked the up little animal up by the tail before it knew what had happened. He dropped his catch into his lunch box and hurriedly ran for school. No one was in sight. He went in, unlocked the teacher's desk, and dropped the surprise gift inside. Outside again, he could just hear the whoops and laughter of the approaching groups. Dodging under a fence into the pasture near by, he ate wild strawberries until he had heard most of them arrive. Then he crawled back under the fence with his lunch bucket and walked back to school.

The teacher arrived last and rapped on the side of the schoolhouse with a big stick to call the children inside. A strange odor pervaded the atmosphere. It remained

unexplained until the teacher unlocked his desk. He looked accusingly at the young colored lad. "We know Stacey didn't do it. We were here when he came this morning," the pupils all shouted. The teacher remained unconvinced but he, as well as the scholars, felt the imperative need of fresh air. There was no school that day. The boys and girls also enjoyed young Stacey's whistling. Before he learned to talk, the boy had whistled and by the time he came to Centerville, he was accomplished at trills, parts, bird calls, and could imitate any instrument in a band. He was a beautiful whistler and could be heard a mile away, the early residents recall. Every spring the waters of the Chehalis and Skookumchuck swelled until the rains shoved them over their banks filling the low places and backing up all the small streams. The little creek that ran through George Washington's land spread out until a veritable lake was formed. There each year, hundreds of wild ducks flocked. Young Stacey would take the gun his stepfather had bought for him and in half an hour shoot all the birds the family could use. Then the salmon run would fill the shallow water with all the fish he could wish for. Stacey's pets were his saddle pony and his big dog, Rockwood, part hound and part cur, who lived to be fifteen years old and always accompanied him when hunting for deer and other wild animals. It was one day in the early spring that Stacey's mother said after supper, "I certainly wish I had sowed the mustard seed for greens."

"Let me sow it, Mother," said her son hopping up. "Well, I guess you can," said Mrs. Washington and she handed the quart jar of mustard seed from the shelf down to Stacey. He took it and hurried out of doors. The air smelled fresh; rain had fallen in the afternoon. The newly-plowed garden plot lay wet and brown, and with every step Stacey's feet sank down. Carefully, he sowed the brown seed.

Then he looked closely. Why, he couldn't see any at all. Well, perhaps he had better do it again. Retracing his sunken footprints, he carefully resowed the mustard seed. But still he couldn't see any. He wanted to please his mother. So again he scattered the mustard seed. "That must be enough," he thought.

His feet were getting damp anyway. "You sure are the best boy I ever raised," Stacey's mother laughingly said, when the mustard seed came up. For it was a solid green mass. "Here, you take the butcher knife," she'd say, "and hack down all we can eat tonight. Then tell the neighbors to come take all they can use. When it rains again, so much more will come up, you won't be able to tell any was ever cut. There's enough seed in that plot to sow an acre field. Why, hair couldn't grow any thicker on a dog's back than that mustard."

The winter of 1874, George Washington was ill with erysipelas. Thirteen-year-old Stacey had to do all the chores. The weather was very cold. Every day for five weeks the boy had to walk a quarter of a mile to chop holes in the ice-bound Skookumchuck to get the water for the stock, then heat it at the house and carry it to the barn. He had to mix the feed for the forty hogs, care for the twenty horses, and, with the help of a neighbor, milk the forty cows. And when there was no more fire wood, Stacey got another of the neighbors to cut down a tree and pull it on a hand sled to a spot where he could chop it into firewood. "It is, indeed, a hard living country," thought thirteen-year-old Stacey. When the Northern Pacific Railroad crossed his land in 1872, George Washington could see that many settlers would be coming, new neighbors that would be looking for a home and security.

Then, for the first time, his desire to live an independent, out-of-door life changed. He now thought of building and caring for a little town, a striving center where neighbors would be dependent on one another. And he dreamed that it might come true on his own land. Those who heard of his plan thought it foolish.

No town could grow here they said. George Washington, nevertheless, thought and thought about it. He would reason with himself, with his wife, and with his stepson Stacey, this is the halfway point on the railroad between Kalama and Tacoma," he would say, "It's a central point. I'll name it Centerville." So George Washington argued to convince himself and his family. He couldn't rid himself of the idea. The town of Centerville was to be the fulfillment of a dream. Often they all three sat around the table after supper and talked about the plan of the town and its streets. East Front and West Front, Mrs. Washington decided, they'd name the two wide ones that ran on each side of the railroad track. Main Street, she thought would be a good name for the chief one to pass by the place where Isaac Wingard had already built his little store. Likely she'd often visioned the "pearly gates" and the "golden streets" of the "new Jerusalem" that he'd read about in her little Bible she'd brought with her from Honolulu. So the streets running alongside East Front and West Front, she named Pearl and Gold. And the other one, Diamond. She must have thought of the trees she loved, the magnolia and its creamy, fragrant-cupped blossoms she'd known in her birthplace in Louisiana, the locust with tender green leaves like fingers reaching up toward the warm sun, the blazing maple she had often seen near her old home in Victoria, its golden flare against the blue hills in the autumn, the sturdy pine with its blooms that stand-like little candles of new tops in the springtime. For these she named the streets running, east and west. When the first plat of the new town, just four blocks square, was finished, George Washington and his wife, Mary Jane, took the roll of paper and drove over to the new county seat at Saundersville, later Chehalis, to the two-story courthouse on State Street.

Before John West, the auditor, and his wife, Dora, as witness, on January 8, 1875, they filed their intention to lay out a new town. It read: "This town of Centerville, lays in the North East Corner of Section Eight, Township 14, Range two West. I have agreed to sell lots to any person for ten dollars per lot that want them to any actual settlers. The Streets and Alleys are as follows, West Front Street 68 feet wide, East Front Street 66 feet wide. All the rest of the Streets are sixty feet wide, Three Alleys Twelve feet wide. Said Streets and Alleys are hereby dedicated as 'Highways for the Public use.'" George Washington, with the exactness of this back woodsman's training could have stepped off the new sixty-by-one-hundred-and-ten-foot lots himself. But he wanted to carry out his plan as perfectly as possible. He bought a surveyor's chain in Olympia and had Jim Lum who had often, measured around the settlers' claims, help him. Then he got Robert Brown, who lived on Fords Prairie, and a stranger also. The fourteen-year old Stacey served to carry and hold the chain.

The Washington family entertained the stranger during his stay, and the day of his arrival he was invited to dinner. That forenoon, young Stacey had worked with the queer looking man with whiskers all over his face, but he hadn't heard the man's name and neither had his mother, who had been occupied with the dinner.

After the blessing was said, she passed the stranger his plate and inquired, "And what might your name be?"

"Mr. Potts," said the gentleman in a voice that Stacey imagined sounded like a pig caught in a pen crack. "Potts," the lad said aloud without thinking, "Potts, half brother to a kettle!"

Suddenly realizing what he had said, he decided to fly to the kitchen while he had the going. And there, sitting on the edge of the wood box, he finished his dinner.

Every town, of course, must have a church and a cemetery. George Washington and Mary Jane were Baptists, and had united with that sect when it began holding meetings in the schoolhouse. So in the summer of 1875 they gave the newly-organized

group of that denomination two lots on the corner of Main and Gold streets and two acres for a burial ground on the northwest portion of their farm. They saved a family lot, however, in the center of the new cemetery; and several years later, reburied Mr. and Mrs. Cochran there. George Washington took his broad axe and aided in clearing the land for the new church and he felled the trees and helped hew and shape the logs for the floor sills and rafters.

George Washington's dreams had come true before and it seemed that the one of his town would also. "Town people," as he called them, had bought his lots and built "box" houses of upright boards. As he would walk down the clear paths in front of their homes, their children would run to meet him and call him "Uncle George." The town people visited with George Washington and his wife, and enjoyed his good humor, especially his love of a laugh. "When he laughed, he shook all over and could be heard a block away," they recall. They like to tell of the time young Stacey ate his fill at the McElroy's and George Washington laughed till he rolled on the ground when he heard of it. The McElroys, who lived where the Fair Grounds are now, were noted for their thrift with regard, to food. They hired young Stacey to dig potatoes for \$1. 50 a day and his dinner and supper. At the end of his first day's work, his stepfather was waiting for him by the corral. "Hurry home," he said, "your mother has supper ready for you. I'll tend to the stock. She knew you'd be about starved after having to eat your dinner and supper at McElroy's."

"Now it's all a mistake about McElroy's not feeding well," replied Stacey. "I can't understand that," said his stepfather. "Well, it was this way. When they passed me the meat, I took all I'd need during the meal. I did the same with all of the rest of the other food. The family had to wait until Mrs. McElroy went out to the kitchen and cooked more victuals, but I got along first rate." Then Washington laughed. He laughed so hard he got down on the ground by the corral and rolled. Even after that, he shook with laughter every time he heard anyone tell how his stepson said it was all a mistake about the McElroy's not feeding well. Then he'd laugh again at the conclusion to the story. When Stacey left that night, he'd not gone far when Mr. McElroy called him back. "Here's your money, Stacey," he said. "I'm sorry I can't have you work for me any more. It isn't that you aren't a good worker. You sure are worth a dollar and a half a day. But you're such a big eater I can't afford to keep you."

By 1878, George Washington had built a third house just opposite what was later to be the "Public Square", and at the site of the present Elks Temple. Daniel Davis and his son Herbert helped to build it, planing the one-by-eights surfaced on one side brought from the mill at Seatco to make the rustic for the outside.

Washington made the shingles himself with a frow and drawing knife. For the recreation of the townspeople and their children, George Washington set aside one block of the second addition of Centerville which he platted in 1881, designating it as the "Public Square" and dedicating it to the use of the residents and for the erection of public buildings. For the next decade, it was the center of outdoor recreation in the town. Known as the "City Park," even now it forms an oasis of green in the center of the city. Ever since, as a little boy, when he had leaned on Mrs. Cochran's knee while she read to him from the Bible and told him about God, George Washington had found something in religion that struck deep into his soul. He loved the hymns she taught him especially "Salem's Birth King," which remained his favorite all the rest of his life. He sang as he plowed his fields and tended to his stock at the corral where Main Street now intersects Harrison Avenue. The townspeople could hear him way up in Centerville, a mile away. "A great old hymn singer," they called him. Sunday meant much to him for then, he and Mrs. Washington and young Stacey walked on the narrow dirt paths to the little Baptist Church for which he'd hewed the rafters. There



he'd sit by his smiling, good-natured wife and listen to the gospel and join in the singing. Sunday was a special day and he also observed it in another way.

Then he wore his Sunday wig, a black one. The early residents who remember him in the 60's recall him as being perfectly bald-the result of his long illness. But in the late seventies when the town was coming along nicely, he began to wear a wig, a brown one for every day and black one for Sunday. Those who sang in the choir recall they never felt quite easy until Brother and Sister Washington had entered and he had carefully lifted up his hat and pulled out and smoothed down his wig. There are others also who recall helping "Uncle George" chase the brown wig when a gust of wind sent his hat and wig rolling off at varying rates of speed toward the waters of the little stream now known as China Creek. But religion was also something deeper than mere ceremonial observance to George Washington. It was his attitude toward his fellow men. "He always believed in a square deal to everyone he contacted," his stepson said. "And he helped those in need and did it with a free heart. He had no use for those who gave for publicity and never cared to have anyone know of the good he did."

"I'd hear him and Mother talking," continued Stacey. 'I want to do right by my fellow men', he'd say, 'And if I do, then I'll never lose anything by it'. This seemed to be his guide all through his life. I think he had it figured out about right. I never saw him excited or worried in his life."

"One of the homesteaders in Salzer Valley was pretty hard up," recalls Stacey Coonness. "He'd moved his family to town, but he'd been refused credit by two or three stores for they were in bad shape themselves. He sort of lost his reason temporarily and rode up and down the main street threatening his neighbors with a long auger bit. After being arrested and taken to Chehalis where he was given a sanity hearing, he was freed and went back to his farm up the valley where he was digging potatoes. My stepfather walked up the trail to the valley and offered to give him a job splitting rails. 'I have plenty of food for you - all your family will need,' he said.

He also believed in truth and justice and at times had a rather forceful way of teaching a lesson. The southeast section of his land from the present Chestnut Street up Gold to Main was heavy timber.

"There in the early 1880's the town people cut wood for the railroad," continued Stacey Coonness, "receiving \$1.25 a cord from the railroad and paying my stepfather ten cents a cord stumpage. When the wood was cut and ready for the railroad, he'd go step it off and write the amount down in his book. He never bothered to measure it. He could tell the exact amount by stepping it. Then the road master would measure it and send the money to the Daniel Davis Store where my stepfather collected his stumpage and the rest was applied on their grocery bills.

"Bill Salisbury was cutting; so when he got his stack ready, my stepfather went down and stepped it off. After he'd finished, the woodcutter came along. 'How much wood do you think you've got here, Mr. Salisbury?' 'Ninety-three cords', Mr. Salisbury replied. My stepfather didn't say anything. He just took out his book and wrote it down. When the road master paid at Davis Store, my stepfather was there to collect his stumpage. Sixty cords was all the railroad had allowed Bill Salisbury. Before the crowd standing around, my stepfather said, 'Now, Mr. Salisbury, I have your own word for it that you cut 93 cords on my land. I wrote it down in my book. Now I want my \$9.30!' It hurt Bill awfully to have to pay, for money was scarce; but my stepfather made him do it. That night he went down to the Salisbury home. He asked for Mrs. Salisbury. 'Here is \$6.30,' he said, 'that just as honestly belongs to you.' Then he turned to Mr. Salisbury. 'I knew exactly what you had, Mr. Salisbury, I stepped it off before you came. The next time, if you can't tell the truth, don't tell it.' My

stepfather learned him something. After that if Bill Salisbury said anything, you could be sure it was true.

And George Washington also had definite convictions he sought to carry out with regard to the townspeople he fathered. He had no favorites. He believed that in the sight of God one person was as good as another regardless as to what one's own personal feelings might be. One of the firmest of his convictions was that a man's first duty was to his family to see that his children had warm clothing and good wholesome food. After that, Washington felt he shouldn't discharge the obligations he owed to his fellow men. Accordingly, the father of Centralia never pressed a man for a debt to the detriment of his family. "If your family is in need, don't try to pay me till you get on your feet," he'd say. "I can wait for what you owe me. If you need food, I have some for you and you can work it out for me. I have plenty you can do."

Just how broad his sympathy and understanding of his neighbors and townspeople was, is perhaps best shown by the incident which happened when Stacey Coonness was a boy and which he likes to tell about his stepfather and a man and woman it perhaps would be best to call John and Mary Jones for they still have relatives living here. It also gives an understanding picture of Mrs. Washington.

"John Jones who had a wife, Mary, and four or five children," said Stacey Coonness, "called by at 7:30 one morning just as breakfast was ready. My stepfather said, 'Just in time for breakfast, John.' "John looked like he'd like to cry. My stepfather said, 'Look me in the eye, John. Tell me how is it with you and Mary?' The man confessed his family was all out of food and that they had eaten the last bite for dinner the day before when they had used up the last of their flour.

"Then my mother got really angry, angrier than I'd ever known her to be, and the only time I've ever seen her so since she professed Christianity. She always baked a pan of biscuits two feet square every morning and it lasted the three of us for two meals. She had breakfast already cooked—biscuits, eggs, bacon, and mashed potatoes. She put the pan of biscuits in a clean pillowslip, put the mashed potatoes in a bowl and the eggs on top of it. Then as she gave him these things and sugar and coffee and a jar of milk, she said, 'Why did you let things go so long when you knew you could always come to us? You take this to Mary and the children and then come back and I'll have breakfast ready for you by the time you get here.' He started off—he lived about three-fourths of a mile away. His wife and children were just about starved to death. My mother started up the fire and set me to peeling potatoes and when he got back she had a second breakfast ready. As soon as we'd eaten, my stepfather told John that he had some work he'd intended having done later but that he could just as well put him at it now. 'But, John', he said, 'I'll not pay you a cent in money for you don't know how to make a dollar go. But I'll give you the equivalent of \$2.25 a day and your dinner and supper; and if wages rise, I'll pay you more.

"Then my stepfather said, 'Go home now, John, and cut Mary some wood. Saw a few cuts and split it up and have it handy so she and the children can get it. Come back at one o'clock, and we'll line up your work and I'll pay you the same as if you'd worked for me the whole day.' As soon as John had left, Mother went down to see Mary, She and the children had hardly enough to cover them—they were just in rags. 'Mary, can you cut and make clothes?' Mother asked. 'I can sew a bit, but I'm not much good at cutting.' 'You come up after John leaves,' Mother said. 'Lay out lunch for the children so they won't get hungry. Bring your needle and thimble and I'll show you how to cut and make some clothes.' Mary's feet were out on the ground, so she had no shoes to go up town in. Mother sent my stepfather to town and she told him what to buy—a bolt of canton flannel, they call it outing flannel now, and a bolt of unbleached sheeting to make underclothes. He paid \$4.75 for good calf shoes and bought

a pair for each of them. When he returned, he took half a ton of flour and half a ton of bacon, a five-pound caddy of green Japan tea at \$1.65 a pound, five gallons of syrup in a keg, and butter. He loaded the team up and John took them home and came back the next day to work.

"He was a shiftless man and no one else would give him a day's work and he was discouraged and had lost all heart.

"My stepfather could make him work and manage him when no one else could. He never gave John the money, but gave it to Mary—four dollars or so at the time so that when she saw something for the children or wanted to give money to the church, she'd have it. For a year and a half he worked for my stepfather that way, and Mother, in the meantime, fixed them up quite respectable. My stepfather really made a man of him, watching over him, encouraging him, and restoring his self-respect in the eyes of his family and the neighborhood."

It was shortly after this time that George Washington built his fourth home, the one which still stands on West Locust between Iron and Rock streets. Its large front room had a big brick fireplace and mantle. In the barn, located where the Free Methodist Church is now, he kept a driving horse and a team for working around the place. A six-foot fence surrounded the barnyard which had a gate that opened to the west to permit its owner to drive out in his shiny carriage, a phaeton impressive with mudguards and fringe around its top. Among Mrs. Washington's friends who would come to call on her was Mrs. Ready who lived just across Iron Street. One day when she came in for a visit, her small daughter accompanied her. Little Ada had bright reddish hair that lay close to her head in small, tight waves, while her Mother's hair was straight and black. Evidently the child had thoughts of her own as she stood by Mrs. Ready's chair and looked first at Mrs. Washington, then at her mother. For during a pause in the talk between the two women, she suddenly said in a loud, childish voice, "Mother, it's a good thing you didn't have curly hair like mine, or you'd have been taken for a Negro sure."

Not all of the new arrivals who were coming into the rapidly growing town had a feeling of neighborliness toward its colored founder. Tim Winston had been reared in the South where he had been accustomed to Negro servants before he had come West. In 1884 he and his family moved into property adjacent to the Washington home.

"I'll not have my children associating with niggers," he said as he looked at his neighbor's place. So he immediately built an eight-foot fence to shut off all view of the Washington yard. But the fence only gave the children an increased desire to become acquainted with the other side of it. They soon learned to lean a ladder against it and took turns mounting it and sitting on the top of the tall barrier talking to George Washington. Soon they began to call him "Uncle George." While the little Winstons were enjoying their indulgence in the forbidden, their father was also becoming acquainted with his colored neighbor and soon learned to appreciate his fine character. So he cut a gate through the fence, though the boards were so high it more nearly resembled a door. All of the family loved "Uncle George" and often Mrs. Winston asked him to watch the children while she was to be away for a few minutes.

George Washington was living in town, but there were evidences that the frontier was still a part of him. "He had a regular arsenal by his bed," recalls his stepson. "On a stand he kept a rifle, a revolver, a tomahawk, and a dirk knife. If he heard anything move about in the dark, he had it covered before it had moved five feet. After he'd locked up the house for the night, anyone who knocked at the door had better tell who he was or when the door opened he'd have a gun thrust in his face."

The population of the town had been gradually increasing. Then came the boom year of 1889. New residents poured in; property was in demand and prices sky-rocketed. By November of that year Washington had platted fourteen new additions. Many persons came to make a home; many came to speculate. But even the homeowners were willing to sell as land prices rose. Through it all, George Washington sold his lots for what he considered a fair price. He never charged more than \$158 for a lot 70 by 140. That was \$600 an acre, he said, and all that the land was worth. He still wanted to sell only to those who desired to make a home in his town. He asked each prospective buyer right out if he intended to speculate or to build. He asked only \$20 to \$30 down and the balance within a year.

"He talked so square I got suspicious," one buyer said. "Why he is willing to sell me three lots for \$10 down. I can get \$300 more than that price in three days." But that was George Washington's way. He didn't speculate himself. He wanted only what he considered a fair price. But he didn't need to speculate. Everything he put his hand to turned to money. During the sudden growth, he built hundreds of "box" structures of upright boards for \$300 and rented them for \$6.00 to \$7.00 a month. But newcomers also learned that George Washington was a man of convictions. He rented no property to a saloon, and if the neighbors complained that his buildings were being used for objectionable purposes, he'd find out for himself. He'd go at 12 o'clock at night to see if the neighbors were right in their complaint and if they were, he'd give the occupants notice before the end of the month. Sometimes they would be carrying on objectionable practices and would try to be sly about it; offering to double their rent two times over if he'd let them stay. The answer invariably was, "No, I'd rather burn the place down before I'd receive rent for a purpose like that." Young Stacey in the meantime had been growing up. He had a beautiful tenor voice and sang in the Methodist choir at the morning service and then in the Baptist Church in the evening.

With his horse and neat little carriage, he often drove around the town and surrounding country. A bit vain he must have been of his looks, too, for Ada Ready, now Mrs. Smith, who was frequently sent over by her mother on the neighborly errand of caring for Mrs. Washington, who was ill, often saw Stacey going through the rather complicated process of putting a part in his hair. "He soaped it quite generously," she recalled, "then parted it carefully with a comb and tied a red bandanna firmly around it until it dried. Then he had a part that would stay."

It was in Portland during the Christmas holidays in 1889 that Stacey met his future wife, a beautiful octoroon named Mary Victorine Hickling, a brilliant young woman, the valedictorian of her Portland high school graduating class and a talented musician as well. They were married July 24, 1890, a month after her graduation, and went to live in a small white house, that still stands north of the corner of Main and Harrison, on the large section of land his stepfather had given him in the northwest portion of his old claim.

In 1892, Stacey and Rena, as her friends called her, built a large new home on South Silver Street at a cost of \$3,089. They delighted the neighbors with their fun. "When the two met uptown," they recall, "they had a certain word they'd say. Then taking an even start, they'd race to see which one could get home first." Often the neighbors heard Stacey whistle gay, happy trills that could be heard a mile away. The couple often entertained their friends, the young people of the town, in their new home. Rena, as well as her husband, was an accomplished whistler, so that the two had many ways of performing for their guests vocal and whistling solos and duets, accompanied by the young wife on the organ or with group singing led by her lovely voice. The young Mrs. Coonness was also a gymnast and boxer an accomplishment considered a bit different for a young woman of her day. "My wife was five feet, five

and a half inches tall," said Mr. Coonness, "and weighed between 160 and 172 pounds. She could perform on the bar and, after putting on a pair of overalls and a jumper, would place her hand on the top rail of a fence and leap right over it. She could bend over and lay the palms of her hands flat on the floor without bending her knees." She was an able boxer and in Portland had trained for thirteen months with Jack Dempsey, lightweight champion of the world. She could stand up against any man in gloves.

Mrs. Coonness taught school up the Hanaford, at Cinebar, for six years in Salzer Valley, at Null's Crossing, and also substituted in the Centralia High School. She charmed club members with the original papers she read at their meetings and conventions and for six years was lead singer in the choir at the Christian Church which she and her husband began attending shortly after the birth of their child, Audrey. The talents of her parents were even more brilliantly accentuated in the daughter. Before she could walk, she whistled. When she was six, she could catch a 50 pound sack of flour by the ears, swing it back and forth several times, and throw it upon her shoulders. By the time she was eight, she could catch her father at the hips and lift him off the floor. He weighed 210 pounds. Her mother trained her in boxing and likewise in reading and studying. Mrs. Coonness taught her daughter to read a book, then go back over it and reread it. Months later she could give any information it contained: dates, facts, incidents. "The two were always reading and what they read, they never forgot," recalls Mr. Coonness. Like her mother and father, Audrey was extremely talented in music - both vocal and instrumental. For two and a half years she was pianist at the Christian Church and she was to have been accompanist for the Centralia Oratorical Society at their recital in Portland when she became ill. A cold, followed by pneumonia and then tuberculosis, and in thirteen months and a week, Audrey Coonness was dead before she was twenty-two years of age. The neighbors heard Stacey whistle but seldom. Mrs. Coonness and Audrey had been like two sisters. The mother grieved so much for her daughter that she died two years later. The neighbors never heard Stacey whistle again.

The Sunday after his wife's death, it is recalled, Stacey took his usual place in the choir. Mrs. Emma Salzer remembered that she told him she didn't see how he could bear to do it. "I didn't think I could, but I knew Rena would want me to do my duty. So I got down on my knees and prayed for God to give me the power to rise above my grief and do my Christian duty. And He did." Mrs. Washington never lived to share the joys and sorrows of her son's marriage. She had been ill because of a dropsical condition. As soon as the early 1880's, she had attacks. Once young Stacey had run on the railroad tracks for the only physician available, Dr. Herndon in Chehalis. In 48 minutes, he had run there and back. The doctor had followed on horseback. But by the last of 1888, Mrs. Washington was extremely ill. For three months she couldn't get on her feet and had to stay in bed all of the time. The last three weeks before she passed away on March 5, 1889, she had to be propped up all the time. The neighbors and her husband and son had cared for her and they all missed the woman they loved. Her death shadowed the prosperity of the town she and her husband had planned and nurtured.

George Washington's wealth was piling up. The dream he had of a city coming into being on his farm was now a reality, but it could not replace the loneliness he felt. He tried to help others in order to forget himself. He offered to marry a widow, with several small children, who did his washing for him. She accepted. In 1890, shortly after his second marriage, George Washington and his wife moved to a home near the Washington Lawn Cemetery. A large white structure, it still stands at 224 North Ash. A blue-trimmed windmill stood by it. Its seven or eight rooms had twenty-two windows.

The new Mrs. Washington always felt quite safe while living there for she often said that she'd never have to fear if fire broke out in the night. She could just jump out the nearest window. There on December 15, 1891, when George Washington was 73 years of age, his first and only child was born, a son whom he named George Cleveland after himself and the newly elected president. Shortly after the birth of little George, Washington and his wife separated; and he took his young son. They lived in a double house he had built across the street just east of the site of the present Elks Temple. When the boy grew older, he was extremely fond of rooster fights. He'd go from one end of town to the other to match his rooster against likely opponents and was often seen with his game bird under his arm. Until he was 80, George Washington retained much of the unusual strength he had as a young man. Until he was 75 or 76, his arm retained its vise-like steadiness with a rifle and he could still hit dead center at 40 yards. He continued to be adept with a revolver and if an obliging friend would stand 10 feet away and throw an oyster can into the air, he could empty the barrel in it before it would land. He could also walk around a tree and girdle it with a row of revolver bullets so that the circle would join, the last shot not more than an inch higher or lower than the first. When George Washington was left alone again with only his little son George, he was still physically strong, but the work to which he had once turned was no longer needed. Where trees and grass had once claimed the land, people lived and a town had sprung up. But the town had reached its height. Suddenly the panic of 1893 gripped it. Those who could, moved out leaving many rows of vacant buildings that seemed to mock the previous prosperity. But there were many who could not leave and who were in actual want.

It was to these Washington turned, forgetting his own misfortune in helping them. In Portland he bought rice, flour, and sugar by the ton. In Chehalis he went to Mr. Dobson and his friend Bill West and bought lard and side bacon wholesale at the packing house. Every Saturday night between 9:30 and 10:00 o'clock he went to L. Bar's Clothing Store to square up his account where for two years he maintained a standing order for Mr. Bar to furnish shoes to those he'd send. Thus, George Washington carried out Centralia's first large relief program. But he never took away a man's pride in giving him help, for he would have him work for the food and clothing he had received paying him the equivalent of the prevailing wage in commodities at wholesale prices. All during what were called the "hard times," George Washington kept the same calmness he'd maintained all of his life. He merely tried to do right by his fellow men. By so doing he knew he'd never lose. Many owed him money. Serenely he waited and never pressed his debtors. Some he carried five or six years. He never sold them out except at their own request and when he did, he returned to them all he had realized above their actual debt. If they wished to give him something for his trouble, he appreciated their gratitude; if not, he bore no ill-feeling. "Some aren't so fortunate as I and perhaps they need it all," would be his only comment. So he kept on during the hard years of '94, '95 and '96; even during '97, the hardest year of all. He had had faith that the town he'd founded would come into being and grow. It had. Now, he believed that it would prosper again.

Even while fashionable homes in the North End sold for the cost of their hardware and a brick business block brought \$10 at public auction - Washington had faith. Then, in 1898, the tide turned, but not before the town people had learned that he was a true friend, one who always gave them more help than they even hoped for. He allowed good wages and always had jobs for those who wanted to work out their contract. He'd wait as long as four or five years for a debt of \$100, and he charged 1,10 interest. "Lige Thompson up the Hanaford," recalls Stacey Coonness, "had an eighty-acre timber claim he'd taken out as a homestead. But it was mortgaged and he got discouraged and wanted my stepfather to foreclose and release him. 'No, Lige, you've

got a good claim,' my stepfather said. 'I don't want it. I only want the money I put in it. I'm in no hurry. I'll wait.' A year later, Lige came again. 'I can't make it,' he said, 'I want you to take me over; I want to get out of debt.' 'Wait, Lige, you can sell the timber off, pay out, and still have the place left for yourself.' 'No, I want you to take it.' 'If I do, Lige, I'll not keep it. I'll sell it and get my money out of it.' So my stepfather did foreclose. He gave Lige \$200 or \$250 difference above the mortgage. Then he waited eight or ten months and sold it for \$500 or \$600 above what it had cost him. A short time later he met Lige in town. 'Come over to the house, I want to see you,' he said. 'Now, Lige,' he said to his visitor, 'I have \$500 here above interest and profit after I sold your farm. Here's \$250. I'll split with you.' 'I was the most surprised and pleased man in the world,' said Lige Thompson afterward in telling of my stepfather's offer."

Wealth and an esteemed position in the community had come to Washington, but even in the late 1890's he knew that though he had many friends in the town he had started, it contained some bitter and jealous people as well who would have been glad to have seen him lose his money and prestige even if it meant the taking of his life to accomplish it. And many believed that was just what someone tried to do the night he took carbolic acid by mistake. Vernon Dunning, who cared for him for more than three days after the accident, tells about it in this way.

"I had attended a lodge banquet and after escorting my girl friend home, about one o'clock I was passing Washington's house located across from where the Elks Temple now stands. I heard someone running on the board walk. Just as I turned to investigate, a figure ran toward me. It was eight-year-old George in his bare feet and night clothes. He grabbed hold of me and cried out again and again, 'Oh, Papa's goin' to heaven! Oh, Papa's goin' to heaven!' When I asked him what the trouble was, all I could make out again was the excited cry, 'Oh, Papa's goin' to heaven! Papa's goin' to heaven!' I hurried to the bedroom of old George. He was writhing and twisting on the bed. I tried to hold him, but he was a powerful man and tossed me aside as easily as a straw. But when I got close to him I could smell carbolic acid. "I ran to Dr. Dumon who lived up the block on Locust Street. 'Doc, oh Doc,' I yelled, 'Come quick! Washington's awfully sick. It's carbolic acid.' He brought olive oil and we poured it down his throat. Strips of flesh and skin as long as my hand he spit up. I stayed there for ninety-three hours and never left him. All I could do was give him tulle oil and wait for it to neutralize the burning of the acid. The only people I let in to see him were Stacey and his wife. It was terrible to see a powerful body like that throw itself around, and throw me around, too, as if I were nothing at all.

It had happened like this. An old friend, a Mr. Ives, had given him a bottle of wine. He'd put it on a stand by his bed and he'd take a sip of it from time to time. He reached out this night and tipped the bottle and drank before he realized it wasn't wine, but carbolic acid. It got in his throat, but he didn't swallow it. Someone had changed bottles. Washington told me later, 'I have enemies in this town who would delight in doing away with me.'"

But he wouldn't accuse anybody. That was the kind of a man he was. "When I was staying with him," Mr. Dunning continued, "old George told me quite a bit about himself and his life. He told me of the dream he'd had before the Indian uprising and how real it had been. Now while he was recovering from the effect of the poison, he had dreamed that the house he was living in had been moved nine inches from the walk. The dream was even more realistic than the other had been, so vivid in fact, that he asked me to go out and see if the building had been moved. Now it's a queer thing, but several years later when that building, as well as the others around it, was sold, all were moved away except that one which was merely set back from the walk. It was left for quite awhile before being taken away, and I in curiosity went over and measured the distance between it and the walk. It was exactly nine inches."

A short time later George Washington built a home on the east side of Gold Street near the intersection of East Chestnut. Before his illness, he had been robust in health and enjoyed walking. He never rode. When people asked him, "Why don't you ride in your buggy?" He'd always said, "No, I'll go to town in the forenoon and come back in the afternoon. I've got plenty of time." However, his strength gradually declined and later he was often seen riding in his phaeton decorated with fringes on its top and mud guards over the wheels.

Since George Washington was a wealthy man, it's only natural that many stories should be told about his money. According to Ada Ready Smith, he had an aversion to green backs and was known to demand "hard coin," as gold and silver were called. According to Mrs. Smith, his dislike for currency had its origin in this incident. One day he was sitting in front of his large brick fireplace counting some paper money, when suddenly the door opened and a gust of wind blew a twenty dollar bill into the flames where it caught fire and went on up the chimney. Ever after, he demanded the type that would more effectively withstand the natural elements—wind and fire.

Many Centralia citizens recall that George Washington was once seen pushing home a wheelbarrow full of gold. This actually took place, according to Stacey Cooness, his stepson. It happened in this way and it may be noted that the same good fortune or intuition that guided him in so many of his dealings seems to be also responsible for this one. "About 1898," said Stacey Cooness, "My stepfather took a trip back to Missouri. While on the train, he became acquainted with two men who knew of a local banker. The younger of the men said, 'Uncle, I don't want to meddle in your business; but if you have any money in his bank I would advise you to take it out.' Then the two went on to explain how this man had become known in banking circles in the Middle West for accepting large deposits before his bank suddenly closed its doors.

"When my stepfather got back, the interest on his money was due in about four weeks. Three days before this time, he notified the bank of his intention of withdrawing his account, saying that he had given them previous warning so that they would have time to get the needed amount of gold from Portland. He would accept neither currency nor draft, but only hard coin.

"The bank had been paying him six per cent and immediately offered him seven if he would permit his account to remain with them. The next day they called him in and offered him eight per cent. 'No,' he said, 'Wednesday morning I am coming to get my money.'

"As soon as the bank was open that morning, my stepfather and I were at the door. I had a wheelbarrow and two sacks in which to take the money home for him. Those who tell the story are partly correct. My stepfather's money was transported along the streets of Centralia in a wheelbarrow, but I was the one who did the pushing.

"My stepfather surely knew what he was doing. In less than three weeks the bank went broke. Many were terribly hard hit. One woman who lost \$7,000 went crazy. I never knew how much money I brought home in the wheelbarrow. My stepfather didn't tell me and I never asked him. However, he didn't ever trust his money to a bank again but kept it hidden somewhere on his place."

Perhaps this is the reason that there are many stories about Washington's buried gold. He lived for several years in his home on Gold Street. But while young George was a small boy, his father bought a house which still stands at 203 East Chestnut.

When Washington moved from one dwelling to the other, so it is said, he had his gold in a keg in the woodshed. Young George admired the bright coins and,



childlike, placed them in piles and patterns. His father looked at him as calmly as though he were playing with a keg of nails. "That's all right, son. Play with the gold as long as you like," he is supposed to have said, "just see that you put it all back in the barrel before you go away." And this keg of gold, some say, is still buried at the old Washington home on Chestnut Street. "I know my stepfather's money is still hidden some place," said Stacey Coonness. "In April, he told me, 'If I never get another cent, I've got plenty to last me for the next ten years.' He died the following August. All the day he died, he'd been saying he wanted to tell me something. He'd been ill for some time and two men stayed with him and cared for him. That day I was working on the construction of the road to Chehalis. He got awfully bad that afternoon. They didn't notify me until several hours later. I hurried to him, but he was so far gone he couldn't talk."

The father of Centralia died August 26, 1905, at the age of 87 years. He was buried from the Baptist Church that he had hewed the rafters for the first structure shortly after he laid out the town. A proclamation by the mayor asked that all business houses close during the funeral—the largest that the city of Centralia has ever known.

In 1922, the Women's Civic Club presented a marble seat to the city in memory of George Washington, founder of Centralia.

Dorothy Mae Rigg, "George Washington, the Founder of Centralia." *Centralia, the first fifty years*, by Herndon Smith. Centralia: *Daily Chronicle*, 1942.

## Part Two

### A NOTE ON EARLY CENTRALIA BY DONNA TISDALE

As published in Herndon Smith's book  
*Centralia, the first fifty years*. Centralia: The Daily Chronicle, 1942.

As long as travel along the Cowlitz Trail was by stage and along the Military Road the settlement near Borst's Fort continued to flourish. With the advent of the railroad in 1872, attention became focused on the Washington Claim. Where the new railroad line crossed Black George Prairie, Isaac Wingard built a one-story frame building which served as a residence, store, post office, and hotel. In 1873 Clanrick Crosby, Jr. established a store to the south; while in the next year the Joseph Young family bought lots diagonally across from Wingard and built the Pioneer house, a larger hotel, the Wingard's claim to hostelry being an attic for the accommodation of travelers. These three buildings were clustered around what is now the intersection of Town and Main Streets in Centralia. George Washington determined that he would lay out a town known as Centerville around this nucleus. The new town was four blocks square, extending north and south from Locust to Magnolia Street and east and west from Pearl to Diamond. The five streets running in the last named direction paralleled the railroad, East Front, now no longer in use, being directly east of the tracks while West Front was the name given to present Tower avenue. In a year the population was fifty persons. By 1880 seventy-eight had located in the town limits.

By 1883 the name Centerville had been changed to Centralia; by 1886 the population had grown to 325 and town government had been established in the form of a Board of Trustees. In 1889 a boom was experienced. In one year the number of residents increased from seven hundred to three thousand two hundred. Plans were made for Centralia to be the radiation point of five railroads. Coal mines were being developed and more than ten lumber and a score or so of shingle mills were in operation in the immediate vicinity. Prices of local real estate soared; new additions were platted and added to the city. A hundred buildings were under construction at the same time. The city of Centralia was incorporated by the state legislature. Municipal improvements included a sewer system, water works, telephone service and a street car line. Two large schools and a seminary were built. There was even the possibility of locating the state capital in Centralia. The population at this time leaped to 5,000. Then came the crash of 1893. Eastern capital was withdrawn.

Railroads ceased building. The mills shut down. People left the city as quickly as they had come. For more that six years the town was as if dead. Cattle were stabled in the first floor of the partially completed Hotel Centralia. Lots in the fashionable residential section of the north end sold for a dollar apiece. Just before the close of the century, however, business revived.

Centralia took on a new life and began in the 1900's with a population of 1,600. No longer like a cock-sure inexperienced boom town, it grew more deliberately and on a more solid foundation. Gradually during the twentieth century it became what it is today the Hub City of Southwest Washington.

Donna Tisdale, "From Prairie Settlement to City Progress," Centralia, the first fifty years. *Centralia: The Daily Chronicle*, 1942.

## Part Three

### EARLY HISTORY OF WASHINGTON BY HORACE CAYTON

Horace Cayton, "Early History of Washington,"  
*The Republican*. (January 4, 1896 - excerpts).

In 1855 a small band of home-seeking pilgrims straggled into the Territory, after many weary months of toil and traveling. It was similar in make up to the Simmons-Bush Party, as its leader was a Negro. This man was a Virginian by birth, but had left there and gone to Illinois, thinking that he would be protected in exercising his liberty, but this he found not to be so, for he had to give a heavy bond in Illinois for his good behavior. He at once conceived the idea of collecting a few friends together and starting for the setting sun. Whither he could land, he knew not, but he felt that he could not fare any worse than where he was, and the journey was begun. Months passed, and yet they traveled and on they came until they reached the community where now a prosperous city is flourishing, and here they pitched their tents. It was at that very moment that the foundation for the City of Centralia, Washington, was laid by a Negro known as George Washington. Mr. Washington, not being in the territory in 1850, could not take advantage of the special act passed by Congress for the benefit of George Bush, the settler of Bush Prairie in the county near him. He, therefore, got one of his friends to homestead him a piece of land and, after proof had been made, he bought it giving him \$2,800.

George Washington now began in dead earnest to accomplish the thing he had so long cherished and for which he came West, to found him a home, and such a one as met his ideas of a typical home. After many years of toil and privations he was made happy by the Northern Pacific Railroad which began to extend its roadbed from Tacoma to Portland. This road passed directly in front of his farm. Here he saw an opportunity, and he was not slow in making the Northern Pacific people a proposition, which was so liberal to the company that it readily accepted it and gave Mr. Washington a town site, and then began the struggle of the city of Centralia, which should have been called Washington. No stone was left unturned by the father of this village to make it a thriving city, and right well did he succeed. It is now a powerful rival of the county seat, which is only four miles away.

Quite a prominent gentleman in this state said to the writer a few days ago while passing the city of Centralia: "If Chehalis had had a George Washington instead of Centralia there would have never been any Centralia, but there would not be a Chehalis twice as large as both Centralia and Chehalis" which undoubtedly was a glowing tribute paid to this son of African descent, which race the American people have taught their children to believe was a very inferior one and not far above the brute creation.

That Mr. Washington is immensely wealthy goes without saying. He is now enjoying the earnings of his youthful days in a comfortable home in the town that he has so tenderly nursed into maturity, respected and loved by all who know him personally or only by reputation. In this connection it would be well to mention Mr. Stacey Cooness, a stepson of Mr. Washington, who came to the territory with his father and partaking of his sterling qualities, soon became a trader of no mean ability and now Mr. Cooness is considered among the wealthy men of the state. Both he and

his step father own magnificent homes which are sumptuously furnished and are truly lords of all they survey.

A story is told about George Washington, the founder of Centralia, which is worth repeating. Once the old pioneer went to the Methodist Episcopal church of the city, of which he was also a member and a new usher seeing a colored man come in made room in an obscure corner for him. Ushers do this at all times and in most places. It so incensed the old gentleman that he left the building at once and vowed vengeance on the outfit. In a few weeks he had built an entirely new church edifice and asked the presiding elder of the district for a pastor which was readily given him. The old church not being able to find any more George Washingtons, was soon abandoned for lack of support and now Mr. Washington has the most prominent pew in the new building, and the smart young pompadoured usher attends the Baptist church, his services not being in demand with Methodists.

Horace Cayton, "Early History of Washington," *The Republican*. II (January 4, 1896.).

## Part Four

# MARCHED WESTWARD WITH THE STAR OF EMPIRE TO WASHINGTON IN 1850 BY GEORGE WASHINGTON

As published in the  
Tacoma Weekly Ledger, April 29, 1892.

I am a native of Virginia, being born in Frederick County, within ten miles of Winchester August 15 1817. My whole life has been that of a pioneer, following the receding Indians until my final settlement in Washington territory, then almost unknown. At the age of four years, I moved with the family of James E. Cochrane to Ohio, settling in Delaware County fourteen miles from the city of that name. Here, at first, the Indians were largely in the majority, but in five years the county became somewhat settled with white men and we moved to the northern part of Missouri, as far as had been penetrated. Five year later we moved fifty miles further on the frontier. We then moved to Bloomington, Missouri, where I was employed in Mr. Cochrane's grist mill and distillery, which he erected two. Two years were spent there and two on the east fork of the Chariton River, where Mr. Cochrane built a sawmill. I then moved to Bloomington, Missouri, invested in real estate, and built a brick house and owned property. A year later, with a partner, I rented a sawmill on the Missouri River in the Platte Country, fifteen miles from the City of St. Joseph. It was here that the state legislature passed a bill making me a citizen of the state, entitled to all the privileges and immunities of a citizen, except that holding office. The case came up as follows: one Jeremiah Coyle brought a bill of lumber from me, giving his note in payment. When it became due he refused payment. A suit secured judgment and the amount was collected; but Coyle had me arrested, claiming that as I was a free man of color I had no right in that state according to the law. The state was made plaintiff, and the case attracted great attention. Finally coming before the legislature, it was shown that my mother was a white woman of English descent, that I was free born and of good moral character, and I was made a citizen by special act.

The sawmill was destroyed by high water and I moved to Schuyler County, where I erected the first house ever built in Lancaster, the county seat, of logs, cut and hauled by myself. I afterward entered eighty acres of land at Fayette, Missouri. I bought a patent right for making whiskey and secured machinery in Quincy, Illinois, for making a barrel a day. While building the distillery in Lancaster, the legislature, then in session at Jefferson City, passed a bill prohibiting any man of color from manufacturing or selling spirituous or malt liquors. I sold out and arriving at Quincy, Illinois, found a bill had been passed by which any colored man entering the state to remain was compelled to give a bond of six thousand dollars for good behavior. I left in disgust and seeking out my old friend Cochrane we planned together to go to Oregon, then the least known part of this country. On the 15th of March, 1850 we started for the Pacific Northwest. I had four oxen and a wagon, and Cochrane had two span of oxen, a light buggy and a pair of Canadian ponies, the only kind in those days that could stand a trip across the plains. Before we started we pledged ourselves to stick together till the last. Our first halt was at Council Bluffs, Iowa, on the Missouri River where we arrived, April 7th, completing the first two hundred miles of our journey. We waited a month till the prairie grass grew high enough to support the animals when our feed should have given out.

On May 6th, we crossed the Missouri with a train of emigrants, our force consisting of fifty-six well-armed men, two old men exempt from guard duty, four women and five children. We followed the Platte River on the south side, at one time camping opposite Fort Kearney, crossing the south fork and went down historic Ash Hollow, crossed the north fork; thence to Fort Laramie, and then shaped our course for the Black Hills. Later on we struck the Sweetwater River as it was called at Independence Rock. The rock was then inscribed with names carved by those who had preceded us. We also visited the Devil's Tato. In the course of our journey we crossed and recrossed the Sweetwater over a score of times. After making the last crossing, we went through the Rocky Mountain Pass. We had no trouble with Indians or disasters, owing to constant watchfulness and care. In fact, our whole journey though full of hardships, was uneventful so far as danger of life or loss was concerned. On one occasion, while yet on the Platte River we were nearly surrounded by a party of six hundred Indians, half starved and fierce, returning to their northern homes from an unsuccessful raid far to the south. Every man was at his post, fully armed and the Indians, who finding they could not frighten us into yielding them over our provisions, and that we would certainly fight to defend what we had, drew off without bloodshed and we went on our way unmolested. One hundred and seventeen days of hard travel brought us to Oregon, our future home. Crossing the Cascades at Barlow's Pass, we camped at Mr. Foster's house at the foot of the mountains. The train broke ranks at Oregon City, scattering in all directions. A year later Mr. Cochrane and I arrived at the Cowlitz River. The next year a boat was built and several families moved up the Cowlitz together. We landed at Old Cowlitz Landing, crossed to the Chehalis River and pitched our tents not far from where the present Lewis County building stands in the town of Chehalis. In the fall of 1852, I settled where I am now, built a log cabin, cleared, fenced and sowed about twelve acres of ground. Indians were plentiful, but peaceable, and I always maintained friendly relations with them. I sold my land with the improvements for two hundred dollars, fearing it would be jumped on by the rapidly incoming settlers. Mr. Cochrane moved here and took a donation claim of 640 acres which I afterward bought for \$3,200. We ran an inn and ferry for travelers for several years. Mr. Cochrane died in 1859 and his wife in 1861. I buried these friends of a lifetime with sincere regret.

In 1872 I laid out the present site of Centralia, on the Northern Pacific. I have accumulated property and money to the value of \$150,000. I had a wife, one child and four step children and am a member of the Baptist Church.

George Washington, "Marched westward with the Star of Empire to Washington in 1850," *Tacoma Weekly Ledger*, April 29, 1892.

## Part Five

# GEORGE WASHINGTON OF CENTRALIA, WASHINGTON BY W. SHERMAN SAVAGE

As published in the  
*Negro History Bulletin*. XXVII (November, 1963), pp. 44-47.

Among the first settlers of what is now the State of Washington was George Washington, the founder of Centralia, Washington, who moved to Lewis County, Oregon Territory. He was born August 15, 1817, in Frederick County, Virginia, about ten miles from the famous town of Winchester, Virginia. His father was a Negro and a slave and his mother was a white woman of English descent. Soon after the child's birth, the father was sold a long distance from Virginia, probably in the lower South, where we are not able to ascertain at this time. It was customary for slaves to be sold at any time, and of course, it was necessary in this case to get the slave out of Virginia. The mother, on the other hand, gave young George to James Cochran and wife, who were friends of the mother. They were to keep him until he was twenty-one years of age.

This family remained in Virginia until George was four years old and like many other families moved west. They settled in Delaware County, fourteen miles from Delaware City, Ohio. At the time, Delaware was on the frontier and Indians were the majority of the population and young George grew up familiarizing himself with their way of living. When George Washington was nine, the Cochrans moved from Ohio to Bloomington, Missouri. Five years later, they moved fifty miles further and George was fifteen. By this time George had attained an excellence with the rifle which lasted all through his life.

His exploits were talked about by many of the settlers in his community, and many nights he watched for Indians. The youth found employment in a grist mill and distillery in northern Missouri, and two years more at a mill on the Cheriton River on its east fork. At the end of this employment, George left his boyhood friends for the first time and went to Bloomington, Illinois, the seat of Mason County. A year of city life was all this rural youth could take. He moved back to Missouri and entered business for himself with a partner.

They rented a plant on a river in Platt County in northwestern Missouri. In spite of the fact that George had grown up in the care of the Cochran family, he was considered a Negro in Missouri because he had more than an eighth of Negro blood in his veins. Later the mill was destroyed by water and he moved on to Schuyler County and entered a claim for eighty acres of land at the land office in Fayette, Missouri. (This he could do under rights given him by a state law which was passed especially granting him the rights of a citizen in Missouri.) His next venture in business was the securing of a patent right for making whiskey. He also purchased the necessary machinery in Illinois for making a barrel a day. While he was in the process of erecting his building which was to house his whiskey machinery, the Missouri Legislature passed a law making it illegal for a person of color to make, handle, or sell spirituous liquor in that state. George Washington made up his mind to leave the State of Missouri and find a place where he could be treated as a normal person.

The first move was to Quincy, Illinois, but young Washington found that the State of Illinois had just passed a law that all free Negroes who came to the state had to

post a bond for good behavior. This caused Washington to go to his old friend and supporter James Cochran and tell him that he was going to find a new home in the west. The west at that time almost always meant Oregon, although because of the Mexican War which had just ended, California was coming into its own. James Cochran decided he too would go farther west with young Washington. They selected the Northwest instead of California, although they knew that perhaps they could not settle south of the Willamette River, for Oregon had passed a law that free Negroes and Mulattos could not dwell in the Territory of Oregon. George Washington was equipped for this trip as were the Cochrans.

George Washington had four oxen and the Cochrans had two spans of horses and a light carriage. They arrived at Council Bluffs on April 7, where they remained until May 6th. At that time, they crossed the Missouri River with a large number of emigrants who had gathered at that place and started for Oregon. After traveling for one hundred seventeen days, they crossed the Cascade Mountains at Barlow Pass and camped at the house of one Mr. Foster at the foot of the mountains. The train broke ranks at Oregon City. It seems that in spite of the law against Negroes, George Washington stayed at Oregon City for more than a year. Washington and the Cochrans moved to Lewis County (north of the Columbia River) when they left Oregon City. They were located roughly where the City of Centralia now is. This place was called *Muckla* by the Chehalis Indians, but was called *Indian Prairie* by the early settlers, and later *Black George's Prairie*. After George Washington had settled on the land, Indians appeared and told him to leave. He at once drew his bowie knife and pistol and threatened to shoot them at once if they did not leave. In a short time the Indians were gone and they were so impressed with Washington's action, they did not return. This brave man understood the way of the Indians which he had learned in Ohio and Missouri. George Washington made it known that he was not afraid of anything. During the Indian War in that section, he helped to build the fort at Mound Prairie and stood guard there night after night. George Washington soon found he could not file on land unless some white man acted in his behalf, which Cochran was glad to do.

Washington farmed here for some time. It was not until 1872 when the railroad (from Kalama to Tacoma) was finished did persons realize how valuable (Washington's) land was. In that year George Washington filed in the Auditor's office at Chehalis, the first plat of Centerville. Washington agreed to sell lots to any persons who wanted them for ten dollars a lot to actual settlers. By 1889 Centralia as the town came to be known had a population of nine hundred and Washington was able to sell two thousand lots and was rated worth \$150,000 dollars. Washington was generous with his land and was willing to make any sacrifice so that his town would grow. He donated a tract of land near the center of town for a park. He also contributed to all the enterprises which played an important part in building up the town. He was very much interested in the Church and tried to do something about it. Stories were told about this sturdy pioneer who came to the Pacific Northwest. It was said that when he came to this section, he went to the Methodist Church and was shown the corner where the Negroes usually sat. Washington left the church and built his own. This story is probably not true for he was from the first a Baptist.

He was connected with this church from early times and had always tried to live a Christian life. It was mainly through his efforts that the first Baptist church building was erected in Centralia. George Washington went into the forest, cut down and prepared the timber, and personally became responsible for the lumber which was used in the construction of the edifice. He further donated the lot on which the building stood. The church was to hold that land as long as it was used for Church purposes. This pioneer had a very limited education owing to the constitution of the states where he had lived. At the time there were few schools on the frontier and that was where



George Washington had spent the greater part of his youth. He attended school only nine months, but he was studious in later life and was considered a well informed and cultured man. His large library, which he enjoyed, enabled him to show to better advantages than many persons who had more formal training than he. George Washington had been one of the pioneers of the Pacific Northwest. When he came, Negroes could not own land in their own right, at the time of his death, fifty years later, he had founded a city and was respected throughout the State of Washington. He deserves to be better known.

Savage, W. Sherman, "George Washington of Centralia, Washington," *Negro History Bulletin*. XXVII (November, 1963), pp. 44-47.

## Part Six

# THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST'S OWN GEORGE WASHINGTON

BY BOB KAROLEVITS

As published in the  
*Seattle Times*. February 16, 1964.

Today the thriving city of Centralia stands as a monument to a gentleman who carried the distinguished name of George Washington. The latter was the son of a slave, a persistent jack-of-all-trades and one of the Pacific Northwest's most successful pioneers. The row hoed by the George Washington who came West was not an easy one, yet he rose up from his lowly station to establish a bustling city, make a small fortune in real estate and otherwise conquer the tremendous barriers which faced Negroes of his day.

George was born on August 15, 1817 in historic Frederick County, Virginia. His last name came from his father's master, and some students of history have speculated that the Washington involved might have been closely related to the gallant general of Mount Vernon. But that had little affect on young George. Soon after his birth, his father was sold to a new owner, and the baby was taken into the home of Mr. and Mrs. James E. Cochrane, a white couple who ultimately adopted him. While records are sketchy, it appears that the Cochranes moved to the Ohio frontier and later on into northern Missouri, when their adopted son was little more than a toddler.

When he reached school age he was denied formal training because he was black. But Mrs. Cochrane stepped into the breach. With a tattered Bible and old hymnals as textbooks, she taught him to read. She and her husband tutored him in arithmetic, too, and before he was twenty, George mentally could compute land measures faster than his white contemporaries could get the answers with their pencil stubs. Jim Cochrane also saw to it that the boy was handy with a rifle because on the frontier, self protection was mandatory. Cochrane operated a grist mill in Bloomington, Missouri, then a whiskey distillery and later a sawmill. Young George learned about each, while also adding bricklaying and tailoring to his skills.

In 1841 when he was twenty-four, George Washington left his foster parents to make his own way. In St. Joseph, Missouri, he rented a small sawmill, and ultimately sold some lumber to one Jeremiah Coyle, a white man. Coyle refused to pay and Washington sued. His debtor, in turn, took advantage of an old law and had George arrested on the grounds that as a "free man of color" he had no rights in the State of Missouri. Jim Cochrane came to his adopted son's side and by petition, secured from the state legislature the rights of citizenship for the young man, less that of holding office. These were the beginnings of the restrictions, the first real bitter tastes of prejudice experienced by Washington. He moved into Illinois, only to learn that a new law there necessitated his posting a bond of six thousand dollars to guarantee his good behavior. Bitterly angered by this condition, George Washington returned to the Cochranes and told them that he was going to Oregon, "...to find a place in the world, if there was any, where a Negro would be treated like a man..." The Cochranes decided to join him.

Washington was thirty-three when the wagon train left Council Bluffs, Iowa, on May 6, 1850. He and the Cochranes had a wagon and a light carriage, four oxen, two span of horses and several Canadian ponies. The journey was a rugged one, lasting 117 days and included at least one serious episode with an Indian war party. When the train crossed the Cascades at Barlow's Pass, Washington helped the Cochranes establish a home near Oregon City, and then took a job cutting timber for ninety dollars a month. His hoped-for freedom was almost cut short when the rigors of the trip, the new climate and the hard work felled the normally hardy Negro. He was desperately ill before Mrs. Cochrane got him into a bed and began the difficult task of nursing him back to health. In time, he recovered completely and the family moved northward to Cowlitz Landing.

Again George helped the Cochranes establish a home before he looked for one of his own. His search finally took him to a verdant spot where the Skookumchuck River joins the Chehalis. This had been an Indian summer home and burial ground, and from a brief fling at real estate in Illinois, Washington had learned that the juncture of two rivers is an ideal spot for a settlement. He immediately staked a claim for six hundred forty acres. But prejudice had marched westward with him. The Oregon legislature had approved a law making the settlement of Negroes and mulattoes in the territory illegal. George then got Jim Cochrane to file on the choice land to protect it for him.

Together they raised cattle, operated an inn and a river ferry. In 1853, when the laws of the new Washington Territory did not bar ownership by a Negro, George gave Cochrane \$3,400 for the original claim. He later added sixty-three acres by filing a claim and paying a dollar and a quarter an acre. Then personal tragedy struck. In 1859 Jim Cochrane died, followed two years later by his wife.

They had devoted their lifetime to the care of a deserted Negro youngster, and their passing was a great blow to their grateful beneficiary. With his foster parents gone, George lived alone for several years, farming, lumbering, and improving his land. When he was fifty he met and married his first wife, an attractive widow who had been born of Negro and Jewish parents. Theirs was a happy union of twenty-one years before she died in 1888. In the meantime the two of them began to reap some of the rewards of George's foresight. The homestead which George Washington had so carefully selected just happened to lay astride the line which the Northern Pacific Railway pushed northward to the Chehalis River in 1872. This was a break indeed and Washington meant to capitalize on it. On January 8, 1875, he appeared before the territorial auditor and filed his intention of laying out a new town. It would be called Centerville, and Washington began immediately to plan for its future.

He started modestly at first with four square blocks which he platted into lots sixty by one hundred twenty feet. He sold these for five dollars a lot, at the same time making each purchaser agree to erect a building on the property with a value of no less than one hundred dollars. By this time Washington controlled all the ideal property, but to spur interest in his new town he set aside park land and two acres for a cemetery. He dedicated sixty foot wide streets and twelve foot wide alleys for public use, and he gave choice building lots for churches. Of his holdings, he reserved fifty four acres for his home with Mary Jane and her son, Stacey. To make Centerville more attractive to newcomers, Washington later doubled the size of his lots, and the little village began to sprout ambitiously. When the State of Washington was admitted to the Union in 1889 the town's population was almost a thousand. Two years later George Washington had sold his 2,000th lot. Meanwhile the residents of the burgeoning village decided they didn't like its name, primarily because it was too easily identified with other western towns of the same name. A public meeting was called and a

teamster newly arrived from Centralia, Illinois, convinced the citizens that they should adopt this name of his former hometown.

After the death of his first wife, George Washington married Charity Brown, and a year later his only child, George Cleveland Washington was born. Soon afterwards the couple separated and the 74 year old father assumed the additional task of raising an infant son. Though he already had a great deal of money by the standards of the time, Washington continued to work hard, even doing manual labor where necessary. He personally hewed the timbers for the Centralia Baptist Church to which he belonged, and he worked on other construction projects elsewhere in the little city.

Then came the Panic of 1893. Centralia was hard hit. The Simmons Iron Works and the lumber mills shut down or curtailed employment severely. To save the town, George Washington became a one man relief agency. According to old newspaper reports, he made wagon trips to Portland to get rice, flour and sugar by the ton. From the packing plant in Chehalis, he purchased large quantities of side bacon and lard. He lent considerable sums of money without interest and with no terms of repayment. Mainly, however, he provided work, so that his beneficiaries did not have to accept pride-damaging charity. Instead, they got food, shoes and clothing in exchange for a day's work. Washington further saved the town from bankruptcy or absentee ownership by buying up property which went on the auction block.

His faith in the city paid off. By 1900 he was a wealthy and respected citizen of the state. In spite of his age, he was constantly planning for the future, being active in business until August, 1905. Then in an accident, not uncommon in those days, he was thrown from his buggy by a runaway horse and injured critically. Three weeks later, on August 26, 1905 he died in his 88th year. The mayor proclaimed a day of mourning and his funeral was the biggest in Centralia's history. Services were held in the Baptist Church he helped build on ground he had given the city, and beside him were the bodies of his foster parents whom George had thoughtfully moved to the family plot. Today, a thriving city stands as a living monument to his persistence, his industry and vision.

Karolevitz, Bob, "The Pacific Northwest's own George Washington," *Seattle Times*. February 16, 1964. (Essentially the same article appeared in *The Daily Chronicle of Centralia* on February 22, 1964).

## Part Seven

### STEPSON OF WASHINGTON AIDED IN HISTORY FACTS

As published in *The Daily Chronicle*. February 22-23, 1969.

George Washington and his first wife had no children, but she had a son, Stacey Coonness, who was born in 1861, and lived most of his life in Centralia. Stacey was apparently the only colored boy in the community's first school and was the butt of many of his school mate's pranks. Most of his stepfather's early years on his homestead were spent in farming and Stacey, by the time he was thirteen years old, was doing a man's work. Washington's stepson married a beautiful octoroon, a brilliant young woman who was valedictorian of her Portland High School graduating class. They were wed in 1890 and she taught school in various communities around Centralia. They had a daughter, also exceptionally talented, who died before she was twenty-two. Her mother, grief stricken, died two years later. Stacey Coonness never wed again.

He remained in Centralia the rest of his life. Apparently he inherited little of his stepfather's wealth for he did odd jobs of gardening and splitting and stacking wood for many years. Many Centralians today remember Coonness because he did not die until the 1940's. He, too, was respected and well regarded in the community he saw grow from a homestead to a city. Centralians today can also thank the memory of Washington's stepson for something else. Much of the information of the city's father that has become history came from Stacey Coonness.

## Part Eight

### A HISTORY OF BLACKS IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST BY QUINTARD TAYLOR, JR.

As published in *A History of Blacks in the Pacific Northwest, 1788-1970.*  
University of Minnesota, 1977.

In 1852 Black pioneer George Washington settled in Lewis County. He was born on August 15, 1817, in Frederick County, Virginia. His father was a mulatto slave and his mother was a white woman of English ancestry. Shortly after the birth, George's father was sold to another plantation and Mr. and Mrs. James G. Cochran, friends of the mother, agreed to raise the child until he was twenty-one.

The Cochrans moved to Delaware County, Ohio in 1821 and in 1826 to Bloomington, Missouri. By 1837 Washington, now twenty years old had learned the tailoring trade. After spending a year in Bloomington he moved to Platte County in northwestern Missouri where he and a partner rented a sawmill. Washington sold lumber to Jeremiah Coyle, taking a note in payment. Coyle later refused to pay and when the bill became due he had Washington arrested, claiming that as he was a free man of color he had no rights in the state of Missouri.

Cochran successfully petitioned the Missouri legislature to grant citizenship rights to Washington, who after losing his sawmill in a flood moved to Schuyler County, Missouri. The Missouri act was entitled "An Act for the Benefit of George Washington, A Free Man of Color of Macon County," as it appeared as a Missouri Session Law, 1842, in the Twelfth Legislative Session, of the Missouri Legislature pp. 107-08, as recorded in the Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City, Missouri. Washington purchased a patent right for making whiskey but while he was erecting the distillery, the Missouri legislature passed a bill prohibiting any blacks or mulatto from manufacturing, handling, or selling spirits or malt liquors.

Washington was forced to sell everything and moved to Quincy, Illinois, only to find that the State of Illinois had passed a law requiring all free blacks to post a bond of one thousand dollars for good behavior. Washington did not have the money but more importantly he felt that the law was unjust to him and people of color and decided to leave the States for the Oregon Country, an area that seemed far removed from the slavery question and represented to Washington a chance for a better life. The Cochrans accompanied Washington to the new land, and in March, 1850, they, along with other families in the area, in all a train of fifteen wagons, set out for Oregon.

By July the party reach Oregon City, where George Washington hired out to cut timber. After working for a year, Washington stake a squatter's claim on land in the Chehalis valley, becoming the fourth settler in this locality. He cleared the land and began cultivating oats, wheat and garden vegetables. Like George Washington Bush earlier, George Washington turned his attention toward the area north of the Columbia River because much of the Willamette Valley was occupied while the area that was to become Washington Territory had 1,049 people and seemed more attractive for homesteading. Another factor affecting Washington's decision was the 1849 prohibition against Blacks or mulattos settled in the Oregon Territory. While this legislation did not affect George Washington Bush who was already a resident, it did challenge Washington who arrived in 1850. (Taylor, p. 36-38. ).

In 1852 the Oregon Territorial Legislature was presented a petition requesting that George Washington, of Lewis County, north of the Columbia River, be exempted (from the 1849 Oregon Exclusion Act). This petition evolved into a special exemption bill which was assured of passage until an attempt was made to amend the bill to suspend enforcement of the 1849 act until January 15, 1854. One legislator called it a "scandal upon the country" claiming that each man should be judged on his own merits. Others favored immigration of blacks as a cheap labor supply. The amendment was defeated and the exclusion bill was passed by seventeen votes to six. (Taylor, p. 67).

The Oregon territorial legislature finally passed an exemption from the exclusion act of 1849 for George Washington on December 20, 1852. The sponsor of the "Petition for the benefit of George Washington" as contained in Oregon Territorial Records, #4530 at the Oregon State Archives was sponsored by Colonel Isaac N. Ebey who at the time was the representative of the area north of the Columbia River. This law had little or no effect on George Washington for the Territory of Washington was organized on March 2, 1853.

Quintard Taylor, Jr. *A History of Blacks in the Pacific Northwest, 1788-1970.*

A thesis submitted to the faculty of the graduate school of the University of Minnesota, 1977.

## Part Nine

### THE HISTORY OF LEWIS COUNTY, WASHINGTON BY ALMA AND JOHN NIX

As published by the Lewis County Historical Society, 1985. Centralia.

The City of Centralia's roots reach way back into an empty whiskey barrel. The town's founder, George Washington, was building a distillery in Missouri in the mid 1800's when, after it was nearly finished, the Missouri Legislature passed a law prohibiting blacks from owning or operating a distillery. It was one of the many frustrations Washington encountered because of the color of his skin. He sold the distillery and nearly everything else he owned and went to visit his foster parents, Mr. and Mrs. James Cochran.

The Cochrans had reared Washington, the son of a slave and a white woman, from the time he was an infant. The Cochrans, when Washington's father was sold to a new master, had agreed to look after the boy until he reach age twenty-one. Washington told them what had happened with the distillery and vowed to find a place, somewhere. "I'm going to find a place where a man can be what he wants to be and do what he wants to do," he said. The place he sought, of course, was west to the Oregon Territory. He preceded his foster parents to the area that is now Centralia in 1852 at the age of thirty-five. The Cochrans arrived two years later and settled at Cowlitz Landing, now Toledo.

Seeking a place of his own and the chance to be free, Washington staked a squatter's claim at the confluence of the Chehalis and Skookumchuck Rivers. However, the problems of his color had followed him west. Two men on their way to Olympia spent a night with Washington and were impressed with the land he had claimed, telling him as much. But Washington, before the men departed, also overheard them talking about filing on his claim at the Olympia Land Office. Washington, who knew that a colored man could not legally hold a claim in the Oregon Territory, had been hoping to hang onto the land until the law was changed. Now he was in danger of being dispossessed again. He went to the Cochrans and persuaded them to buy his improvements for two hundred dollars and to take over the claim. When the two men returned with the proper papers and prepared to buy Washington's improvements at the claim, they found Cochran, a white man in possession. They were too late. Later Washington was able to get his claim back and the Cochrans sold him the claim.

From then on Washington prospered and his holdings increased. In 1873 the Northern Pacific Railroad constructed its tracks across Washington's lands. Washington thought that with the coming of the railroad an increasing number of settlers would come to the area. He began to dream of a town. On January 8, 1875, he and his wife, Mary Jane went to the court house in Saundersville, now Chehalis, and filed a plat for a town to be called Centerville. It was a four block area bounded by Magnolia Street on the north, Locust to the south, Diamond to the east and Pearl to the west. There was some confusion with the mail, since there was also a Centerville in Eastern Washington. David Foutts, a newcomer from Centralia, Illinois, suggested the name be changed. In 1886 Centralia got its first governing body, a board of trustees and the population rose to 325 people. The era of slow growth was over. By 1893 the population of Centralia increased to 5,000 and the town was booming.



The year 1893 was also the year of the stock market crash. Businesses failed and hundreds of people were out of work. People left the town in droves and the population dwindled to around 1,200 by the year 1900 before the town began to revive. Centralia might have become a ghost town if it hadn't been for the strength, wealth and generosity of its founder, George Washington. He persuaded many of the towns people to stay and helped them through those poverty stricken times by purchasing food and supplies and distributing them free to the needy.

Centralia was thriving again at the turn of the century and by 1910 the town owned its own electric power system, an electric railway, telephone service, sewage system, and had established a paid fire department. In 1810 there were thirty-five saloons on Tower Avenue and prohibitionists were battling the city in an effort to keep the saloons confined to one area. The business district steadily grew. Two lots were set aside for the town's first church, the First Baptist Church. Today, more than 110 years after its founding, Centralia continues to grow and thrive.

*The History of Lewis County, Washington*, by Alma and John Nix; Published by the Lewis County Historical Society, 1985. Centralia.

## Part Ten

### AN UNFRIENDLY ACCOUNT

As published in "Centralia, Southwestern Washington,"  
Pacific Publishing Company, No date.

Centralia possesses an interesting relic in the person of George Washington, not the immortal father of his country, but an aged darkey, to whom it is supposed that illustrious name was given to enhance by the law of contrast the reputation acquired by our first president for strict veracity. As the sable edition of George Washington was born way back in 1817, the above must of necessity be partly conjecture, though any one who converses with the old man for a brief space of time will be struck by its plausibility. Forty years ago George Washington escaped from bondage, and in company with his faithful coon dog fled toward the setting sun.

Previous to his departure from the tobacco fields of West Virginia he borrowed a gun and a pair of blankets and these constituted his entire baggage. As the western country was then but thinly settled, and the village hen coops few and far between Washington was obliged to depend upon his gun for meat, varying the diet occasionally with wild fruits, grasshoppers and honey. After many and devious wanderings to and fro, now with the Indians and then with no company save the faithful canine herein before mentioned he drifted to Oregon.

Finding white men there he crossed the Columbia and wandered over Western Washington, looking for an eligible site for a water melon patch. One balmy June morning in 1851 Washington was aimlessly wandering along the banks of the silvery Skookunchuck, when he came upon a broad, level expanse of land, perfectly clear and surrounded on either side by low hills, crowned with evergreens. Wending his way to the summit of an adjacent elevation he beheld one of the prettiest valleys that he had seen in the course of his travels. As he stood and viewed the broad fertile acres the determination seized upon him to locate there, and end his restless wanderings. He accordingly felled a few trees, and constructed himself a rude hut, and settled down to lead a life of peace and quiet. His visiting list was confined to a few of the local Indians, with whom he soon became on intimate terms. His dream of earthly paradise seemed almost realized but was rudely disturbed by the advent of white people, who looked with disfavor upon the spectacle of a colored man holding down some six or eight hundred acres of Uncle Sam's best soil. He managed, however, to retain possession, and finally the emancipation of his race enable him to obtain a patent for his claim. This claim comprised much of the present site of Centralia. Soon other settlers came and occupied the surrounding claims, and the wonderful resources of the country became known.

The growth of the village was at first slow, there being but seven hundred people here as late as January, 1889.

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