



WASHINGTON'S LAST BIRTHDAY

A ONE ACT PLAY
BY
GORDON SHUMARD

1st Prize

Background for Play.

Scene I

Discussion of political affairs and Washington's life as a private citizen at Mt Vernon among Washington, Jefferson, Hamilton, Knox and Randolph before fireplace in Library.

Scene II

Same as scene I
Following discussions a minuet is danced honoring Nellie Gustis' wedding and Washington's birthday.

Note - Washington's speeches and opinions are taken from his letters and writings.

Authority - Irving's Life of Washington and Woodrow Wilson's Life of Washington.

Washington's Last Birthday.

^{By}
Gordon Shumard.

Time - February 22, 1799

Place - Library at Mt. Vernon.

Cast of Characters

George Washington

Martha Washington

Alexander Hamilton

Thomas Jefferson

Henry Knox

Edmund Randolph

Nellie Custis - Martha Washington's
granddaughters.

Lawrence Lewis - Washington's nephew.
Other guests.

} Members of
Washington's first
Cabinet.

(Explanatory - Eleanor (Nellie) Custis was the granddaughter of Martha Washington but adopted by George Washington and lived at Mt. Vernon. She was a great favorite with him and chose his birthday on which to be married. This scene follows the wedding.)

(Suggestion - "Other Guests" might be a group already trained to dance the minuet)

Washington, Hamilton, Jefferson, Knox and Randolph are grouped about the fireplace. Washington speaks.

G.W. - This is one of the happiest days of my life, to think my granddaughter would select my birthday for her wedding.

Knox - And I never saw a more beautiful bride General.

G.W. - Yes, and she means as much to me as if she were my own child and you may know that I was greatly pleased when I learned that she was to marry my sister's son.

Randolph - Will they live on here at Mt. Vernon?

G.W. - Yes, for a time at least. I have given them a part of the plantation for their own. I plan to make a new will soon and I shall increase their inheritance.

Jefferson - Lawrence is really at home here since he is of your own blood.

G.W. - Yes, he has relieved me of a great deal of responsibility in entertaining the many guests who come to Mt. Vernon. While I appreciate the honor these strangers do me in coming to my home, yet sometimes I wish to be only with my family and old friends.

Hamilton - How do you fill your time General now that you are out of politics?

Jefferson - Your pardon Mr. Hamilton, but I would hardly say Gen. Washington is out of politics, since he is consulted upon every national question that comes up.

Hamilton - That's true I myself always write him, before an important step is taken.

G.W. - My days are simple, but busy. I get up with the sun and if my hirshings are not at ^{work} I send them messages of sorrow and having put these wheels in motion I examine the state of things further, and the more I examine them the more I find the effects of the neglect which my buildings have suffered during my eight years absence in the presidency, and by the time I have done this breakfast is ready.

Knox - I suppose your breakfast is early?

G.W. - Yes, about 7:00

Randolph - After breakfast what do you do with the rest of the day?

G.W. - I mount my horse and ride round my farms which employ me until it is time to dress for dinner.

Jefferson - Do you ever long to be back in the seat of government in active politics.

G. W. - No, indeed I only want to live on here at Mt. Vernon in peace and let you, your gentlemen carry on the politics of this growing nation, but I shall never decline any assistance in my power when necessary to promote ~~the~~ the good of the service.

Randolph - I believe the whole country believes that of you.

G. W. - My politics are plain and simple, I think every nation has a right to establish that form of government under which it conceives it may live most happy, provided it is not dangerous to others.

Hamilton - You still believe that a naval academy would be a good thing for our young men and the nation in general, do you not?

G. W. - O yes. There is little doubt but that one will be established before many years.

Hamilton - I should think the little town of Annapolis on the Maryland shore would be a suitable location.

It is only thirty miles, from our new capital of Washington?

J.W. - That would be a fine place for St.

Hamilton - Getting back to your daily routine. General what do you do with your evenings.

J.W. - After a nice walk and tea it is candle light and I usually retire to my study and write to old friends and I always write in my diary, then I am feeling a bit drowsy and I retire.

Knox - Do you have frequent visitors?

J.W. - Yes, They arrive daily. Sometimes they pay their respects and ride out, but usually with their servants and horses they put up for several days.

Jefferson - Do you have no relief from this eternal procession of visitors?

J.W. - Sometimes Mrs. Washington and I go to Alexandria for a few days and attend the theatre or other entertainment.

Jefferson - Scientific farming seems to hold more interest for you than the movements of armies right now.

GW- Rotation in crops is so important to
save and to build up the soil.

I have been writing instructions
for the management of my estate,
so that I may more freely take
my departure for the land of the
spirits when the time comes.

Hamilton - What would you do in case of another war?

J. W. - Gentleman, I will always be with my country in peace or war, but we must never interfere with the affairs of other countries, and I hope we will never be at war with another nation again. I am glad our trouble with France was settled without actual war.

Jefferson - We will never see a greater leader in peace or war, than you General. Mr. Adams knew what to do in case of a crisis. The enemy fled when they found you were for all commander in chief of the army.

J. W. - Ah! but without such men as you who stood by me in my office as president and aided in the cause of the Revolution, I could never have accomplished so much, but here we are talking seriously when we should be gay.

Knox - You are right we should be gay.

End of scene I

Scene II

Continuation from scene I

Enter Nellie Lawrence, Martha and other guests and Nellie speaks gaily to Washington.

Nellie Curtis - Will you dance with me again grand father?

* -> G.W. - No, my child and is enough for an old man, but I think that Lawrence can substitute for me and let us older ones watch.

Lawrence - I expected to see you in the grand embroidered uniform which was just made for the French war.

Martha - Nellie did ask him to wear it but Mr. Washington liked the old one best.

Nellie Curtis - Yes (turning to him) I did ask him, but I love him better in this suit after all.

G.W. - Start the music and let's see if you younger folks can dance the minuet as well as we did.

(Minuets, with Washington, Martha,
Hamilton, Jefferson, Knox and
Randolph looking on.)

Then when finished, talking
merrily walk out followed by
Hamilton, Jefferson, Knox and
Randolph and then Washington
and Martha arm and arm
walk out.

The End
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★ or -

H.W. - Yes, I will have one dance with
you, then I had better turn you
over to Lawrence.

(If these lines are used all
speaking characters could
dance the minuets and there
would have to be fewer guests
and easier to obtain costumes
and to present)