

WASHINGTON OLD HALL

WASHINGTON • DURHAM COUNTY • ENGLAND

A SHORT HISTORY

BY ERIC UNDERWOOD

WITH AN ACCOUNT OF
THE OPENING CEREMONY

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Washington  Old Hall

FOUNDED 1183

RESTORED 1955



REMEMBER IN THESE
GLOISTERS, WHICH WERE
FINISHED IN HIS DAY



JOHN WASHINGTON
OF WASHINGTON IN THIS COUNTY
PRIOR OF THIS CATHEDRAL CHURCH
1416-1446 WHOSE FAMILY HAS WON
AN EVERLASTING NAME IN LANDS
TO HIM UNKNOWN

WASHINGTON OLD HALL

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A Thousand Years Ago

BY ERIC UNDERWOOD

CHRIST CHURCH 1912-1914

In the north of England on the banks of the river Wear stands a town which has given its name to the capital of the United States, to one of its States, to thirty lakes, mountains and rivers and to half a hundred towns — and that is the Town of Washington, Durham County.

How significant that this town is D.C. like its “great namesake” in America.

Its history goes back long before the Norman conquest. It is mentioned in a Saxon charter dated A.D. 973 when it was presented by King Egbert to the monks of Thorney Abbey and later formed part of the nucleus of the endowments of Westminster Abbey. Sometime later, Washington, Durham County, passed into the possession of the Bishop of Durham.

Then in 1183 there occurred an event momentous in the nomenclature of world history.

Before that time, surnames did not exist in England. A man was known only by one name, his given or baptismal name — but toward the end of the 12th century surnames came into general use. A man took his surname from his occupation such as Edward the Tinker, William the Smith or John the Farmer and ultimately became Edward Tinker, William Smith or John Farmer. Some took their names from a physical characteristic such as his complexion and therefore — Henry Brown, Robert White or Michael Black. Important people took their names from the land or town they owned or the place in which they lived — so, Thomas Langfort, Andrew Hyde or Barthomaw Braster.

The first known ancestor of the Washington family was identified only with an original Saxon chieftain, “Wassa.” In 1183 William de Hertburne acquired the Vill of Wassa and, adding *ing* which means “children of”; and *ton* — a “fortified manor” — he called himself William de Wessyngton and later, William de Washington; the first man in the world to bear the name of Washington.

The Washingtons in England were always people of standing and substance and though not among the wealthiest landowners or most powerful nobles, they

intermarried with them and some played important secondary roles in English history. One of William's grandsons, for instance, was Sir Walter Washington who fought on the side of the King against Simon de Montfort, the parliamentary leader in the Battle of Lewes in 1264. The King was defeated and de Montfort immediately after set up the first English Parliament, to which were elected representatives from counties and cities. Another Washington, John, was Prior of Durham from 1416 to 1446 and built the cathedral cloisters which may still be seen. As recently as the Second World War John G. Winant, United States Ambassador in London, unveiled a memorial tablet to John Washington in the cloisters.

In 1376 the Washingtons sold part of the property to a family related to them. The deed of this sale is still in existence — a parchment written in Latin to which are attached two seals, one of which bears the stars and stripes. Some years earlier the Washingtons had taken as their armorial bearings a shield with three stars above and two stripes below, and an eagle as crest. These armorial bearings are to be seen in many churches and houses in England — in stained-glass windows, carved in stone on church towers, or on tombstones. The earliest known representation, dating from about 1250, is on the outside of Hylton Castle, one of the early Washingtons having married a Hylton.

Washingtons and their descendants or relations lived at Washington for some 450 years. Some of them migrated to Lancashire, in the northwest of England, and two houses they occupied can still be seen in the parish of Warton. Later they are found in Westmoreland and in Kent. One of the Warton Washingtons married a wealthy lady named Kyston and, in association with his father-in-law Sir Robert Kyston, made a fortune in the wool trade and became Mayor of Northampton. About 1540 he bought one of the smaller religious houses — Sulgrave — which Henry VIII had stolen from the monks. There some Washingtons lived for seventy years, but they evidently lost money, for they moved into a smaller house at Little Brington which is also still in existence. As evidence of their losses the house bears the inscription: "The Lord geveth and the Lord takyth away; Blessed by the name of the Lord."

Through a marriage of one of these Washingtons of Brington with a Spenser, who was an ancestor of Winston Churchill, the former British war leader shares the same blood as that of the first President of the United States. The present Queen of England is also descended from a Washington. Lawrence Washington of Sulgrave was the direct ancestor seventh in ascent from George Washington through one of two brothers who obtained a grant of land in Virginia in 1658. Another of their ancestors was a Fellow of Brasenose College, Oxford, where his portrait may be seen.

Washington, Durham County, is a village some ten miles from the magnificent Norman cathedral of Durham. Within a radius of fifty miles are many places of great beauty and historic interest, including the Roman Wall which the Emperor Hadrian built across Britain in A.D. the Second Century to keep



Kitchen Fireplace

out the invading Scots, he being, as an English cynic once observed, the only man who ever succeeded in doing so!

The church, with its Saxon font in which many generations of George Washington's ancestors were baptized, stands on a once moated knoll. The village smithy, over five hundred years old, still shoes horses as it did long before Columbus discovered America. Here in 1770 a highwayman was caught, tried, hanged, and gibbeted. The War Memorial commemorating the sacrifice of two hundred English Washingtonians in the First World War occupies the site of the old village pond in which a witch was drowned in 1696; on the village green is a 14th-century brick vault, once the refuge of villagers and their cattle in the border forays when the Scots raided the neighborhood in search of plunder. In the Second World War the vault was again used as a place of refuge, it being employed as an air raid shelter. The village inn is known as the Washington Arms.

In 1613 Washington Hall, as the home of the Washingtons was and still is called, came back into the possession of the Bishop of Durham, who pulled down a part of it and rebuilt it using some of the old materials. As he rebuilt it so it appears today except that it is in a sadly dilapidated condition (now restored).* A considerable part of William de Washington's original home has,

*Eric Underwood brought the idea of restoring Washington Old Hall to the American and British Commonwealth Association. This met with warm response and a campaign was started which raised a large per cent of the money for restoring not only the house but also the grounds and gate lodge.



The Hon. Joseph Hodges Choate Memorial Room

however, been found as a result of recent archaeological investigation, including arches, windows, and a fireplace at which the first Washington may well have warmed his hands.

After 1613 the Hall passed through a succession of owners, and in 1896 was sold and converted into a number of small dwellings, without, however, changing its external appearance. In 1934 these dwellings were condemned as unfit for human habitation, and a few years later were put up for sale for demolition at the mercy of any speculator who might like to buy their stones as building material. The associations of the Old Hall, known only to a few experts and historians, were all but forgotten when a small but enterprising local group acquired the place with a view to converting it into a village community center. Then the Second World War came, followed by an uncertain peace, and Washington was again all but forgotten.

Dr. Cyril Alington, late Headmaster of Eton, and now Dean of Durham, Prior John Washington's successor, has written the following lines on the link which binds Washington, Durham County and Washington, District of Columbia:



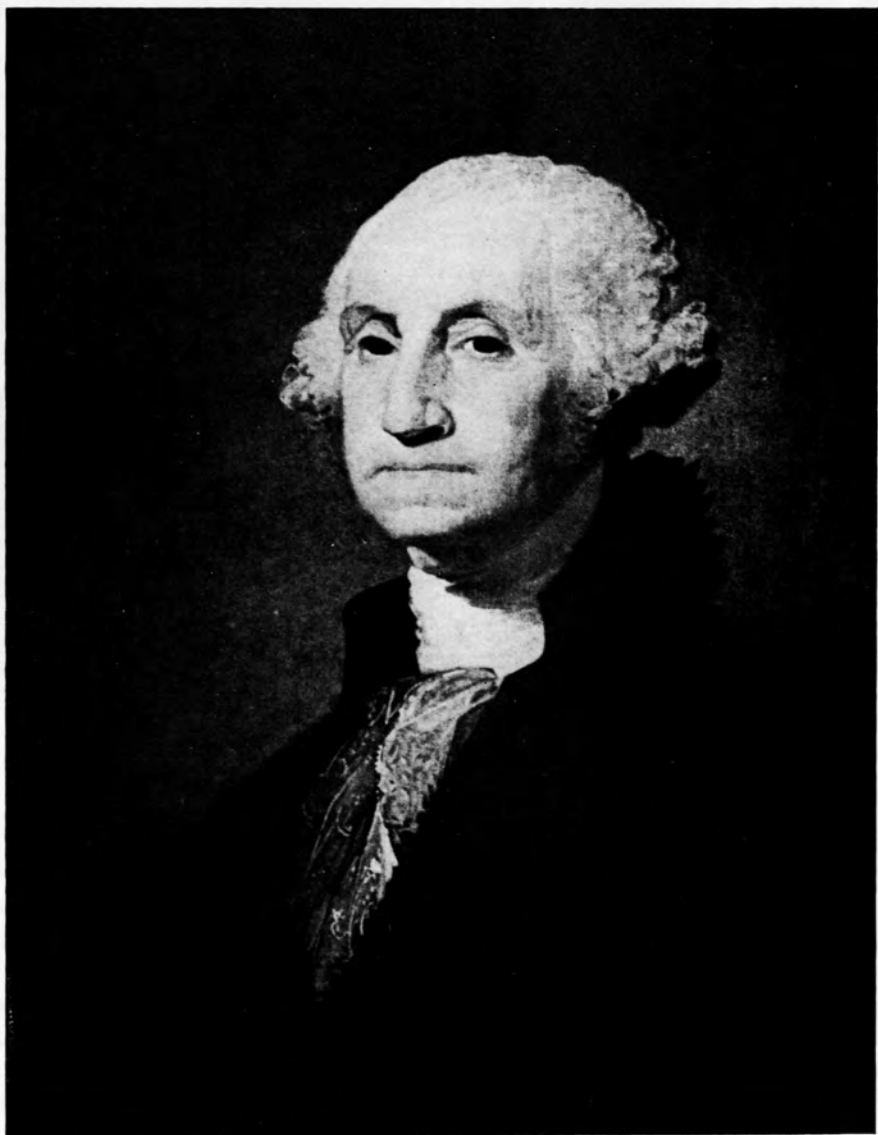
*Wind that carrieth random seed,
Little it careth and hath no heed
Whence it cometh or wither blown
Nor of the crop thereafter sown —*

*If it be grain or idle weed.
Over a thousand leagues of sea
Rich in promise of things to be,
From a Durham village the seed was blown
And in far Virginian fields was sown —
Little seed of a mighty tree.*

*Proud Mount Vernon, gracefully set
On her rolling river, may well forget
The story told of a far-off day
And an English county far away;
But the old pit village remembers yet.*

*Washington, heir to a noble name,
Knowest though whence thy lineage came?
Yet great Potomac and little Wear
Are linked in a memory both hold dear,
Linked in a heritage of fame.*

*Winds of God, is it all unknowing,
Careless alike of seed and sowing,
Careless of human hopes and fears
That ye sweep idly across the years —
Winds of destiny, blindly blowing?*



BY COPLEY

GEORGE WASHINGTON

George Washington was a fourth-generation American, counting his great-grandfather John who arrived in 1657, and the third generation to be born in America. Though George's grandfather and his father came to England for schooling, George himself did not. His formal schooling ended when he was sixteen, and his real education was obtained chiefly outdoors, from practical men, learning how to grow tobacco, raise stock, and run plantations. He taught himself a good deal of mathematics and at fourteen was already an able surveyor. He became a surveyor for a number of his youthful years, and the work took him far and wide into undeveloped regions. He gained from this travel a knowledge of the richness of that new continent and the desire, which never diminished, to see it opened up, populated, and made fruitful.

In working as a surveyor for Lord Fairfax (who came to America to benefit from his vast land holdings in Virginia, George Washington profited from the contact with that cultivated man of fine manners and taste. But George himself was not just a transplanted Englishman, though his English heritage ran strongly in him. He was something new — a blend — a new combination — he was a colonial American responding to the vital influence of a vast new land which inevitably shaped the people who struggled to master it.

In common with most of the leading men of colonial America, George Washington identified himself and his country with the English crown, and had argument only against what as other Americans such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson he considered the harsh and unjust actions of the King and his ministers. He was reluctant to accept the step of political separation, and only did so when convinced that the destiny of America and its people required separation. His greatness then appeared. His character, poise, courage, and solid judgment pulled together all dissident elements and formed the rallying point for the shaping of a new nation.



Seal of three mullets and two bars on the Washington-Blakeston deed of 1376. All the branches of the Washington family bear the "Stars and Stripes" arms.

Book-plate of three mullets and two bars of George Washington, 1776. The first President's coat-of-arms was the origin of the United States flag.



The Origins of the American Flag

On the deed of sale dated 1376 is a lead seal bearing the Washington coat of arms: three stars and two stripes. (These Washington arms may also be seen carved in stone at Hylton Castle; a Hylton baron combined them with his own when he married a Washington heiress.) There is a strong presumption that this ancient Washington emblem was the origin of the American stars and stripes. Moreover, the old Washington crest showed an eagle with outstretched pinions — a famous symbol of the United States of America.

Some Lines of Freedom

A continued history of the advance of Liberty under law,
through England, New England and America

A.D.

- 900 First Representative Assemblies of East Anglia
- 1166 Assize of Clarendon
- 1215 Magna Carta
- 1265 Representative Parliament at Lewes
- 1618 Virginia Great Charter
- 1620 Mayflower Compact
- 1628 Petition of Rights
- 1641 The Body of Liberties of the Massachusetts Bay Colony
- 1688 Parliament — Bill of Rights
- 1774 Declaration of Rights and Congress
- 1787 Constitution of the United States
- 1789 The Bill of Rights



Luncheon in the Great Hall, Durham Castle

WASHINGTON OLD HALL THE OPENING CEREMONY

September 28th, 1955

The restoration of Washington Old Hall was completed in the summer of 1955.

The opening ceremony was announced by the following invitation and program.

COMMITTEE FOR THE
WASHINGTON



PRESERVATION OF
OLD HALL

*The Lord Lieutenant of the County,
The Rt. Hon. Lord Lawson of Beamish, P.C., D.C.L.,
and*

*Mr. Charles Sumner Bird
of Massachusetts, U.S.A.*

(Chairman of the American-British Commonwealth Association)

request the pleasure of the company of

at

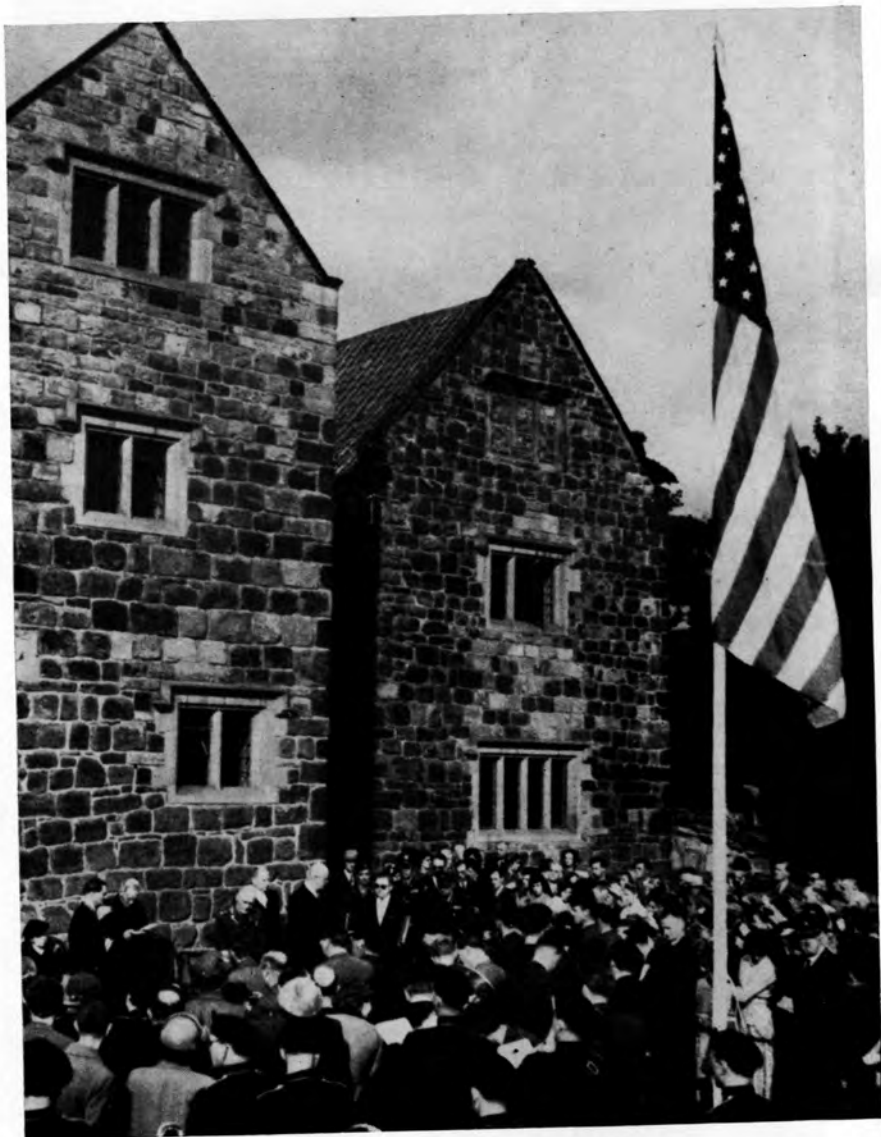
Luncheon at the Castle, Durham,

on Wednesday, 28th September, 1955,

and afterwards at Washington Old Hall (3 p.m.) for the Opening Ceremony.

*R.S.V.P. to—Mr. THEODORE NICHOLSON, T.D., F.S.A.,
20 John Street, Sunderland,
Co. Durham, England.*

12:30 FOR 1 P.M.
INFORMAL DRESS



Ceremony at Washington Old Hall

Programme

at Washington Old Hall

3 P.M. Arrival of the U.S. Ambassador and Lord Lawson of Beamish.

General Salute.

The Ambassador and Lord Lawson inspect Guard of Honour.

Prayer of Dedication — Reverend John Lund, M.A.

United States Flag broken.

The Star-Spangled Banner.

Union Jack broken.

God Save the Queen.

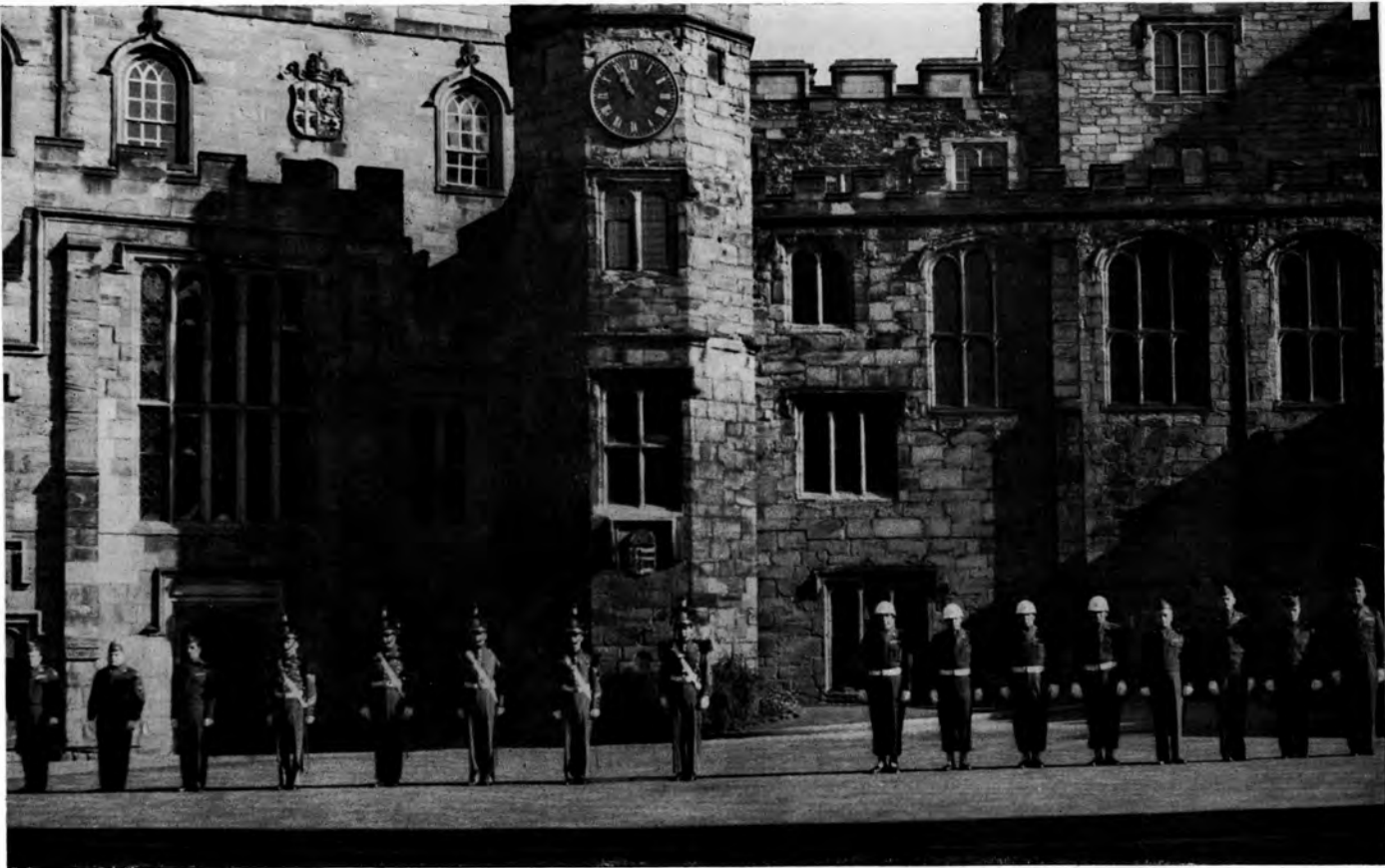
Lord Lawson introduces the Ambassador.

Lord Gort hands the key of the Hall to the Ambassador.

The Ambassador replies, unlocks the door and invites the guests to inspect the interior.

Councillor M. Allon thanks the Ambassador.

Tea at Council Offices by kind invitation of the Chairman.



Review of the Washington Greys in the Courtyard of the Castle

An Account of the Ceremony

September 28th, 1955.

An American plane brought the United States Ambassador, the Hon. Winthrop A. Aldrich, Mrs. Aldrich, and his staff together with Charles Sumner Bird, Chairman of the American and British Commonwealth Association in the United States, to perform the ceremonial opening of Washington Old House, the culmination of four years' work on the restoration of the 12th century home of the ancestors of George Washington.

First to welcome the Ambassador as he stepped from his plane at Woolston was Lord Lawson of Beamish, the Lord Lieutenant of the County.

Traveling in a five-car procession through Newcastle to Durham, they were met on the Palace Green by Canon S. L. Greenslade, Sub-Dean of the Cathedral, who conducted the party through the Cathedral.

Canon Greenslade pointed out to Mr. Aldrich a glass case containing the seals of William of Wessington (1376) and John of Wessington, Prior of Durham from 1416-1466, the forebears of George Washington. In the Cathedral cloisters Mr. Aldrich was shown an enamelled tablet bearing John of Wessington's coat of arms and the inscription: ". . . Whose family has won an everlasting name in the lands unknown to him."

The party then crossed the green to Durham Castle to be officially welcomed by the Mayor of Durham (Coun. H. L. Cawood).

In the courtyard was a detachment of twenty-six officers and men of the Washington Greys Regiment of the New York State National Guard — the oldest military formation in the United States Army. They had been flown from New York for the ceremony because of their link with George Washington. Their forerunners provided a bodyguard for General Washington when he took office in New York on April 30, 1789.

The Ambassador inspected the Greys, who formed a guard of honor under their commanding officer Colonel Carlos C. Webster, Director of Training and deputy Chief of Staff of the National Guard. Two battalions of the Greys were represented, the 258 Field Artillery Battalion and the 991 Field Artillery Battalion dressed in khaki with red neckerchiefs. Their uniforms were striking contrast of old and new. The 258th wore black shakos with 18th century cavalry blue-gray uniforms with red epaulettes bearing the Washington coat of arms. The uniforms were brought out of the United States Museum specially for the occasion.

The party then proceeded to Durham Castle where 170 guests were received in the long gallery.

At the luncheon Lord Lawson proposed the Loyal Toast followed by toasts

to the President of the United States and the United States Ambassador. He described the luncheon as "one of those unusual and striking gatherings that most of us will remember," and "represented the friendship which existed between Great Britain and America and could only result in the strengthening of that friendship."

The Ambassador replied that he was very happy indeed to be in Durham. He said, "It is most remarkable that in Durham County, a very short distance from here, you have the place where the Washington family originated. Nothing could bring home to us Americans more thoroughly than an occasion of this nature, the tremendous ties which exist between our two countries."

NOT ONLY A MEMORIAL TO GEORGE WASHINGTON

After congratulating the committee and the many contributors from both sides of the Atlantic for their final success in restoring Washington Old Hall, Mr. Charles Sumner Bird said, "This ancient Washington Manor House, now a living memorial to George Washington, must also be considered a monument to honor the first settlers in America who came from East Anglia, Northumbria and the Eastern Shores of England to found New England in the 17th century.

Many of these hardy immigrants were graduates of Emmanuel College, Cambridge, animated by the teachings of Wycliffe and Lattimer and the songs of Milton.

With an instinct for self-government and the spirit of personal independence, they brought with them to the Massachusetts Bay Colony representative government. They established town meetings modelled after those of their homeland in which are the genes of English Parliamentary democracy, the American Constitution and the English idea of nation-making by representative government, from Empire to Commonwealth.

Grounded in the principles of the hard won English Charters of Liberties, they passed, in 1641, the First Forty Laws known as The Body of Liberties.

When the American Colonies separated from England, defending the doctrine that they should be governed by law-makers of their own choosing and not by law-makers chosen by other people, one member of Parliament remarked "America is only imitating the mother country" — to which declaration many statesmen in England agreed.

Following the Revolution, however, a controversy broke out between the Federalists and Anti-Federalists.

Gladstone once said that "the American Constitution was the most wonderful work ever struck off at a given time by the brain and purpose of man." But

some States, jealous of their sovereignty, feared that by joining another central government it might only lead to a change of tyranny and not a deliverance from it and for over ten years they refused to ratify the Constitution.

It was only when the Bill of Rights which guaranteed the individual freedoms such as free speech, free press, free religious worship, the protection of personal property and equality before the bar of justice was added to the Constitution as the Ten Amendments that rebellious States were willing to join the Federal Government.

It was the "Bill of Rights" from the Massachusetts Body of Liberties, the Virginia Great Charter and English Charters of Liberties that united the United States of America into a nation.

Therefore, Washington Old Hall should be remembered not only as a memorial to the first President of the United States but also to the first settlers who brought to America the liberties of the English Common Law from which all the races of the world now settled there are the beneficiaries and help recall events in the common history of both England and America that have guided our common destiny.

Following the luncheon, Colonel Webster handed Lord Gort a framed letter from the Governor of New York state, The Honorable Averell Harriman. "It is another bond to the many friendly and brotherly ties that exist between the peoples of our two countries," wrote Mr. Harriman. "The support of the people of Washington, Co. Durham, in this project is heartwarming to Americans."

Then presentations were made from the Washington Greys by the Colonels of its two battalions, Lieut-Colonel James Hirt, who commands the 258th Battalion, and Lieut-Colonel John Pearce, Commander of the 991st Battalion. Colonel Hirt handed over a framed picture depicting the regiment's history from its founding to the present day and Colonel Pearce a picture of the Regiment's coat of arms.

The Dedication, with a special prayer, was given by the Rector of Washington, the Reverend John Lund and Lord Gort then handed to Mr. Aldrich a gold-plated silver key engraved with the Washington coat of arms bearing an inscription commemorating the event.

Opening the Hall the Ambassador said, "Who can resist the conjecture that here at Washington Old Hall is the true origin of the 'Stars and Stripes' and the Great Seal of the United States Government.

"Perhaps it is only coincidence that the family home of Martha Washington in Virginia was known as the 'White House' — the identical name which was subsequently chosen for the official residence of our Presidents — but it is surely more than coincidence that the Washington arms combined the Stars and Stripes and the Eagle, two and half centuries before America was even discovered and five centuries before it became a nation."

"Despite our political separations we are a community of like-minded

peoples and we have the same love of liberty, respect for human rights and belief in a law of common justice."

Mr. Aldrich added that the presence of Colonel Webster, representing the Governor of New York State, with a contingent of the Washington Greys reminded them, as did the presence of the American troops stationed in Britain, that Britain and the United States are joined indissolubly together, with other free nations, in the determination to preserve their way of life — a purpose which derived its greatest strength from the alliance of the British and American peoples and we could find no more perfect meeting place to rededicate ourselves to a future of freedom and friendship than the first house of the first Washington.