

# African-American caretaker of Mount Vernon memorialized

*Family says former slave was buried in the tomb of George Washington*

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

**DENVER** - The Mount Vernon Estate celebrated George Washington's 270th birthday with a presidential wreath laying at his tomb recently. West Ford also was remembered with a wreath laying by his descendants.

It is well documented that Ford, once a slave of the Washington family and freed at the age of 21, was a longtime caretaker at Mount Vernon. "West Ford had a relationship with the Washingtons that went beyond that of a privileged servant," said Linda Allen-Bryant, fifth great-granddaughter of West Ford.

"We are very pleased that the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association has given us the opportunity to honor our family's patriarch," Allen-Bryant said.

"Every year the slave memorial is recognized by the

association at this celebration and this is the first time West Ford will be singled out and honored."

The Ford oral history states that George Washington was the father of Ford and this was what gave him his privileged status. Ford was given 160 acres of land at Gum Springs in Fairfax County, Va., a few miles from the Mount Vernon Estate. Ford's original land grant is now the oldest African-American settlement in Fairfax.

The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association purchased Washington's estate in 1858, and Ford was retained to help in its refurbishing. Ford died on the estate in 1863 and his descendants claim he was buried in the old tomb of the first president.

"We hope to make this wreath-laying ceremony an annual event for the Ford descendants," Allen-Bryant said. "We are in the process of formally requesting the association for (a) date to hold a Ford family reunion at Mount Vernon, similar to what has occurred with the Jefferson family descendants at Monticello."

Allen-Bryant is the author of "I Cannot Tell a Lie: The True Story of George Washington's African American Descendants."



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