

'I prayed it would not come to this'

By Barbara Holsopple

The Pittsburgh Press



Barry Bostwick (left) stars as George Washington, with David Dukas as his best friend, the aristocratic Will Fairfax. They find themselves on opposite sides of the war.



Patty Duke Astin's Martha Washington joins her husband (Barry Bostwick) at military encampments during lulls in the Revolutionary War. "I feel at peace with you," he wrote in a letter to his wife.

Specials this week

SUNDAY

Home Sweet Home, Channel 11 — 11 a.m.; Monday, Channel 10 — 7 p.m.
Great TV Auction, Channel 13 — 1 p.m.
Story, Song, Stars, Channel 11 — 3 p.m.
Outreach '84, Channel 40 — 7 p.m.
George Washington, Channels 2, 7, 10 — 8 p.m.
People Do the Craziest Things, Channel 4 — 8 p.m.
Homemade Comedy, Channels 6, 9, 11 — 10 p.m.

MONDAY

Outreach '84, Channel 40, 8 a.m., 1:30, 8:30 p.m., 1:30 a.m. through Friday.
Great TV Auction, Channel 13 — 3 p.m. through Friday.
Barbara Walters, Channel 4 — 8 p.m.
Academy Awards, Channel 4 — 9 p.m.

TUESDAY

Special Treat, Channels 6, 9 — 4 p.m.
Creegan & Crow, Channel 9 — 5 p.m.

Keystone Primary, Channel 10 — 7 p.m.

George Washington, Channel 2 — 7:30 p.m.; Channels 7, 10 — 9 p.m.
Decision '84, Channel 11 — 10 p.m.

WEDNESDAY

Afterschool Special, Channel 4 — 4 p.m.
George Washington, Channels 2, 7, 10 — 8 p.m.

THURSDAY

Peter and the Magic Egg, Channel 53 — 5 p.m.
A Step Too Slow, Channel 53 — 5:30 p.m.
Cousteau's Amazon, Channel 53 — 8 p.m.
Diana, Channels 2, 7, 10 — 10 p.m.

FRIDAY

Peter and the Magic Egg, Channel 6 — 4:30 p.m.

SATURDAY

Great TV Auction, Channel 13 — 1 p.m.
Charmkins, Channel 53 — 5 p.m.
My Little Pony, Channel 53 — 5:30 p.m.
Bugs Bunny Easter Special, Channels 7, 10 — 8 p.m.

HE IS CALLED the father of our country, yet few Americans know much about him except that he cut down a cherry tree and couldn't lie about it, wore wooden teeth and threw a silver dollar across the Potomac.

In fact, George Washington did not have wooden false teeth, has never been proven as a chopper of cherry trees and probably never threw anything across the Potomac, according to historian James Flexner.

"Those are myths," Flexner insists. So who was George Washington?

"My research persuaded me that Washington became one of the noblest and greatest men who ever lived," says Flexner. "But he was not born that way. He perfected himself gradually through the exercise of his own will and skill. He possessed a transcendent ability to learn from living."

Flexner's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Washington forms the basis for "George Washington," an eight-hour production airing Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday on CBS.

It is an excellent history lesson and an intriguing personal look at a man who, despite his contribution to world history, has defied characterization.

The \$10 million production opens

with Washington at the age of 11, when his stepfather's death in 1743 alters his future as a gentleman farmer in Virginia. It ends with Washington at the age of 54 as he bids farewell to his Continental Army troops in 1783 and returns to farming in the newly-born United States of America.

Obviously, the mini-series cries out for a sequel and CBS hopes the ratings will justify the story's continuation through Washington's presidency.

Barry Bostwick stars as the adult Washington, moving him carefully through the transitions of young adventurer, inept military commander, reluctant politician and finally, the great commander of the American Revolutionary War.

Bostwick is supported by a fine, star-studded cast.

Patty Duke Astin portrays Martha, the dull but kindly (and wealthy) widow he married. Jaclyn Smith is Sally Fairfax, the great love of Washington's life and the coquettish wife of his best friend (played by David Dukas).

Rosemary Murphy is Mary Ball Washington, the mother whose nagging about money drove young George from home.

Hal Holbrook is John Adams, Washington's defender in a political arena



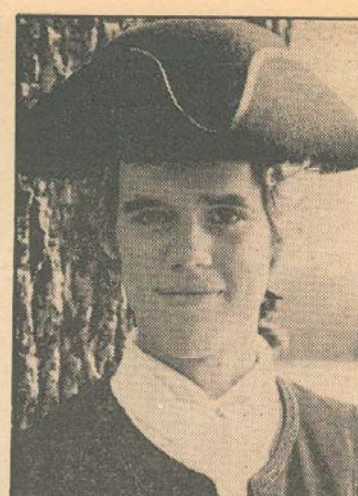
Jaclyn Smith plays Sally Fairfax, Washington's secret love and the wife of his best friend and neighbor.



Lloyd Bridges plays Caleb Quinn, representing the frontiersmen who taught Washington wilderness skills.



Rosemary Murphy portrays Washington's mother, whose self-interests conflicted with her son's public life.



John A. Washington V, a seventh-generation nephew of Washington, plays his namesake, George's brother John.



Barry Bostwick, on horseback, leads the ragtag colonial army into battle in "George Washington." The mini-series airs Sunday, Tuesday and Wednesday on CBS.

as competitive as any since. Jose Ferrer is Robert Dinwiddie, lieutenant governor of Virginia who gives Washington his first military command.

Richard Kiley is George Mason, a neighbor and passionate patriot who awakened Washington's reluctant support of the fight against Great Britain. Jeremy Kemp is Gen. Horatio Gates, a constant thorn in Washington's side and a key rival for leadership of the Continental Army. Stephen Macht is Gen. Benedict Arnold, a close friend whose betrayal stuns Washington. James Mason is Gen. Edward Braddock, friend and foe. Robert Stack is Gen. John Stark, the New Englander who represents the appointment of a Virginian to lead the army but who later becomes his staunch supporter.

Many of them make only brief appearances, yet a tight script by Richard Fielder and strong direction by Buzz Kulik zero in on the characters' impact on Washington's career and personal life.

Fielder's script was carefully checked by Flexner, who served as consultant to the production and who says he is pleased with the way it captures his 12 years of research.

While he admits that many personal conversations in the mini-series are

pure speculation, Flexner says they are in keeping with "the tone" of the man, the times and historic accuracy.

The production by David Gerber is beautifully mounted, filmed on location wherever possible, from Mount Vernon to Valley Forge.

Gerber and Fielder wisely have stayed away from too many epic battle scenes, concentrating instead on the personalities of history and the political climate of the time. Especially fascinating is the political feuding among the leaders of the revolution.

Washington is the centerpiece and the film's soft core. While the script delineates the man, Bostwick does not quite capture the aura of leadership and authority which must have marked him for history.

Yet so strong is the production and so aptly told is the story, it is possible to overlook Bostwick's weaknesses. Finding the definitive Washington may, after all, be like trying to find the perfect portrayal of Jesus Christ.

Sunday's opening episode, airing from 8 to 11 p.m., is the weakest of the three parts — mainly because it deals with Washington the man, as opposed to Washington the leader. It is in Part I that the viewer unsuccessfully searches Bostwick's performance for the hint

of greatness to come.

That leadership is not evident in the young Washington's actions. He was a failure as a military commander in the French and Indian War, accused even of precipitating that war as an emissary to the French, who were moving down from Canada into British territory in New York and the Ohio Valley.

When his mission results in the death of the French ambassador, Jumonville, an angry superior roars at him, "You have helped the French tie a string of firecrackers to the tail of the British lion which will reverberate in the House of Parliament for many years to come."

The young Washington has no heart for soldiering. When he loses Fort Necessity, he resigns from the army, saying, "No man can know what it is like to lead men into slaughter against an overwhelming enemy."

Returning to Mount Vernon in 1755, he is drawn reluctantly back into the war as a civilian aide to Gen. Braddock. "Great events are afoot," he says. "I mean to be a witness."

Braddock's death convinces Washington that the British army is ill-trained for wilderness warfare against the guerrilla-like tactics of the French and Indians. It is a lesson that Wash-

ington ultimately uses to historic advantage in Parts II and III, as the creation of a nation unfolds.

Yet at the end of Part I, Washington is proposing livestock legislation in the Virginia House of Burgesses while his fellow representatives are setting in motion the declaration of independence from Great Britain.

"You cannot ignore history," his neighbor tells him. "Oh, by God, I can. If only it will ignore me," says Washington.

Gradually, Washington is drawn into the events swirling around him. As the political factions of north and south threaten to diminish the colonies' position against the British, Washington is maneuvered into a position of leadership because he is the least controversial choice. Yet even now he is not sure that independence is the wisest course of action.

"I prayed it would not come to this," he says when told of the battle of Lexington. "Now we will face the fury of the most awesome power on earth."

Washington as a reluctant father of his country? It is a fascinating picture, as history comes alive in "George Washington."

(Barbara Holsopple is Press TV-radio editor.)