

# *Witness* TO REVOLUTION | The Unlikely Travels of Washington's Tent

## AUDIO TOUR »

### Object Highlight: Camp Bed 204

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This bed is a marvel of 18th-century craftsmanship. It folds down to fit into a small camp trunk!

Many people in early America owned “camp bedsteads,” folding beds like this one that they could use for family or surprise guests. And while common soldiers slept on the ground, many senior military officers travelled with field beds and multiple mattresses. This one belonged to George Washington, who used it during the Revolutionary War. His servants and enslaved people would have removed the mattresses and curtains and folded the bedstead into a chest for easy transport. One of these people, Washington’s enslaved valet, William Lee, probably slept on the opposite end of Washington’s tent, perhaps on a smaller folding bedstead or on the ground.

You might have noticed that this bed also seems awfully short: it is only about six feet long and George Washington was six feet, two inches tall. But like most people in the 1700s, he probably slept propped up or curled up slightly, meaning he didn’t need a longer bed. A smaller bed was more portable and efficient, which also is why the top of this bed — its tester — which would originally have supported a canopy, is somewhat unusual. Most bedframes in a home were tall and symmetrical so that people could enter them from either side. But Washington’s — meant for one person — has a top designed to nestle against the sloping roof at the end of his tent.

Do you think you’d be comfortable sleeping in a bed like this?