

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

AUDIO TOUR »

Object Highlight: Tent Fragments 213

You are in front of a wall of framed fragments of Washington's tent. It may seem hard to believe, but for decades, people cut pieces of Washington's tents and kept them as treasured personal keepsakes. George Washington Parke Custis, who owned the tents for the first half of the 1800s, gave pieces away to admirers. As late as 1907, when the dining marquee was displayed in Norfolk, Virginia, to commemorate the 300th anniversary of the founding of the English settlement at Jamestown, someone cut off a piece of the edge of the roof as a personal souvenir. As you'll learn later here, Washington's tents and camp equipment were scattered around this same time. As a result, today, Washington's sleeping and office marquee is here at the Museum, its inner chamber is at Yorktown Battlefield in Virginia, and his dining marquee is in storage at the Smithsonian, but small pieces of Washington's tents and camp equipment are in museums and private collections across the United States.

Further along in this exhibition, you can learn more about how the Museum of the American Revolution conserved Washington's tent, including the ways holes were stabilized but not perfectly repaired. That means that we can closely examine newly discovered fragments to determine how they fit into the original tent. One of the fragments in front of you, the long narrow one with a short point on the side, actually fits into a hole of that shape in the large wall fragment.

Many of these fragments are in surprisingly good shape. To get a sense of what they feel like, you can touch reproduction fabric swatches below the display that show the difference between the linen canvas tent exteriors and the herringbone-weave linen (called "ticking") used in the sleeping and office marquee's inner chamber.