

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

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First Oval Office Project 224

Before the Museum of the American Revolution opened in 2017, we conducted a years-long experimental archaeology program called the First Oval Office Project in conjunction with craftspeople at Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia. The First Oval Office Project, which continues today and began with two summers of public demonstrations at Colonial Williamsburg in 2013 and 2015, had three major objectives. First, we wanted to generate excitement for the forthcoming Museum of the American Revolution by introducing Washington's tent and our project to the public. Second, we needed a stunt double tent to test the framework that would eventually hold Washington's real tent and to secure dynamic movie footage of what the tent would have looked like when in use during the Revolutionary War. Finally, we wanted to better understand the lives of the people who worked on and lived in Washington's tent. This project is an example of experimental archaeology, a pursuit involving recreating the activities and crafts of people in the past to learn about their worlds. We have so many questions about Washington's tent that we can't answer with the real thing: how long did it take to make? How was it set up? How waterproof was it? How warm was it? How long do tents last under active use? Does it seem plausible that Washington's first set of tents, made in Philadelphia in 1776, wore out by late 1777? Our ongoing experiments with the recreated tents have helped answer many of these questions.

The First Oval Office Project continues today as we take our replicas of Washington's tents around the country to historic sites, schools, and community centers each year. You can learn more online and watch out for opportunities to see these tents near you!