



# THE American Surveyor

A FOOT IN THE PAST... AN EYE TO THE FUTURE

Sept/Oct 2005

## George Washington's Gift

### New Technology

Real-time 3D mapping

### Profile

David Evans and Associates

### Mapping the Badlands

Using handheld GPS for locating assets

\$4.95



MS. G. CHANDLER W.

L. LEWIS

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*George Washington's Gift*  
A GOLDSMITH CHANDLEE COMPASS



Goldsmith Chandlee compass and case. Note initials "LL" on compass cover.

# A Gift from George Washington

>> By Dale R. Beeks

**G**eorge Washington's activities as a plantation owner, military superior and statesman are well documented, however, little is known about George Washington the surveyor. George's father, Augustine Washington, died in 1743 when George was eleven years old. Augustine, a farmer and surveyor, left his instrument to George who learned the art of surveying through his brother, Lawrence, and

possibly from other regional surveyors including County Surveyor George Byrne. By 1746-47 George was running lines for area farms. Within the Library of Congress Manuscripts collection is George's first known survey of the Ferry Farm dated 1747. In 1748, at age 16, George ran lines for his brother Lawrence and joined in surveys of the Lord Fairfax lands.

Around 1750 Lord Fairfax invited George to Winchester Virginia to assist in the survey to plat lands in the Northern

Neck Grant and properties along the Shenandoah Valley. In 1750, at the age of 18, George made his first land track purchase of 453 acres near Bullsken Creek south of Charleston, North Virginia.

In 1752 his brother Lawrence died and George assumed the responsibilities of the Mt. Vernon plantations until the death of his brother's wife Anna in 1761. George maintained his responsibilities as a surveyor and was actively platting lands as late as 1799.

Documented within the original executor's inventory of the Mount Vernon furnishings are noted many surveying instruments "...within the iron chest...", "in ...lumber rooms..." and, "...in the study...".

Washington's respect for the art of surveying may have influenced his choice of gifts to both his nephews. Because George Washington owned property in Winchester, Virginia from 1753 through 1794, together with his knowledge of the art of surveying, it is likely he was an acquaintance of the respected clock and instrument maker Goldsmith Chandlee.

Goldsmith Chandlee was a 3rd generation Quaker clock and instrument maker active in Winchester, Virginia during the last quarter of the 18th and first quarter of the 19th century. He was a contemporary of Philadelphia instrument makers David and Benjamin Rittenhouse, and made compasses for statesmen, landowners and important political figures. He must be recognized as a most notable American maker. His compasses are elaborate and precise with engraved decorations, calculating tables and multiple counters, all unique to his manufacture.

Washington had two nephews who received Goldsmith Chandlee compasses as gifts. Lawrence Washington's compass was probably given to him with the Mount Vernon property. It is now owned by the Mt. Vernon Ladies' Association and is located at Mount Vernon.


It may be assumed the Laurence Lewis Goldsmith Chandlee compass was given



Goldsmith Chandlee engraved compass dial with inset bubble level, outkeeper dial and counter. "LT" (Links and Tenths) calculating table is engraved on the arm (see opening photo).

to Nephew Laurence Lewis (on Martha's "Custis" side of the family) when George Washington gave Nelly Custis and Laurence Lewis the Virginia Woodlawn Plantation as a wedding gift in 1799.

Like the Lawrence Washington compass, the dial of the compass is signed with both ownership and maker names. This compass is engraved on the dial, "G. Chandlee, L. Lewis". This is Chandlee's typical manner of engraving a name to an owner or recipient. The lid to the compass is engraved "LL". This form of identification engraving on the

lid has also been documented in other early compasses made by Goldsmith Chandlee. This compass has a well documented provenance in the Lewis family since its gifting from George Washington, until its private acquisition several years ago. 

**Dale Beeks** is Director of the Instrument Identification Committee for the Surveyors Historical Society. He has spent twenty-five years as a collector, purveyor and curatorial consultant, dealing with all aspects of

early surveying instruments, the art of surveying and survey history. He lives in Mt. Vernon, Iowa.

*Author's Note:* Further information on the Chandlee family and instruments may be found in articles by Dr. Richard Elgin at [www.surveyhistory.org/goldsmith\\_chandlee.htm](http://www.surveyhistory.org/goldsmith_chandlee.htm); *Rittenhouse Journal, A Journal of the American Scientific Instrument Enterprise*; and two books by Silvio A. Bedini, *Early American Scientific Instruments and Their Makers* and *With Compass and Chain, Early American Surveyors and Their Instruments*.