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U.S. Department of the Interior

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## George Washington Birthplace - News Release

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### Washington's Birthplace to Celebrate Second Day of Christmas

Christmas will be celebrated at George Washington Birthplace National Monument from 10-6 on Tuesday, December 26. No admission will be charged for this special event which will offer demonstrations of traditional activities such as cooking and spinning and the performance of Colonial Christmas music.

When asked why the Birthplace changed the date of its annual holiday event to the day after Christmas instead of the traditional time of a week or two before the holiday, Superintendent Vidal Martinez said, "It has a little to do with visitor appreciation and a lot to do with improving our presentation of history." Although modern Americans see Christmas day as almost the end of a long holiday celebration, early English Americans thought of it as the first day of celebrations culminating with the end of the holiday season 12 days later on the feast of the Epiphany. The days before Christmas day, or the liturgical season called Advent, were seen as days of fasting and prayer, much like many religions still view the days before Easter, the liturgical season of Lent. In George Washington's lifetime to have celebrated before Christmas would have been viewed as improper by many religious Virginians.

"We also felt that many people could more clearly appreciate the simplicity of a Colonial Christmas after experiencing their own modern, more elaborate holiday celebrations," Martinez added. "I hope this cures many from the traditional post-holiday 'let down,'" he said.

Just like George Washington's first Christmas at Popes Creek Plantation in 1732, the day will be filled with food, music and fun. Colonial cooks will be preparing a sumptuous feast full of rare



Cooking and eating were more important than gift giving at Christmas in Colonial Virginia.

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delicacies such as cinnamon, cloves and oranges. Hams and turkeys will be dressed and roasted for the countless relatives and friends expected over the next 12 days. Modern guests will be served a sample of the feast in the form of holiday cookies and cider provided by the George Washington Birthplace National Memorial Association.

Singing and the notes from a traditional style spinet and other musical instruments will fill the air of the Memorial House throughout the day. At dusk the buildings and grounds of the plantation will bask in the warm glow of candle lanterns.

Missing will be some of the elements associated with "old fashion" Christmases. Decorations will be simple and natural. In fact, since Christmas trees are a German invention and the Washingtons were English, visitors will not encounter any decorated evergreens. Gifts were few and were given by relatives and friends and not by a portly elf dressed in red.

The event will be held on Tuesday, December 26 from 10-6. No admission will be charged on that day.

George Washington Birthplace National Monument is located on route 204, 2 miles off of route 3, 35 miles east of Fredericksburg and 11 miles west of Montross. Normal admission fees are \$4 per adult, and visitors under 16 are always free. The site will be closed on December 25 and January 1, but it is open every other day from 9-5.

