



Profile 11 of 39: But for an ancient coat that 114-year-old John Cary wore months before his death on June 2, 1843, little might be known about his service to America. When reporter James H. Ingraham spotted him walking near the Washington Navy Yard and asked about the coat, Mr. Cary replied that it was a regimental coat given to him by General Washington.

Both Cary and Washington were born in Westmoreland County, Virginia, three years apart—Cary in August 1729 and the general on February 22, 1732. A 550-acre national park there celebrates the birthplace of the future president, whom Cary came to know sometime after his birth. Mount Vernon thrives ten miles from Washington's 555-foot obelisk on the Mall.

Cary served as a soldier and body servant to Washington throughout the Revolutionary War. Years before, he accompanied him during the French and Indian War, including at Braddock's Defeat on July 9, 1755, which resulted in a major British loss. After helping to secure America's independence, Mr. Cary would finally gain his own—granted by the will of the retired president decades later.

An article in the Albany Patriot of June 6, 1843, recounts Mr. Cary's life and funeral service at the First Baptist Church of Washington, where he was a member (now the First Baptist Church in the city of Washington):

"I come now to notice the death of a Christian and Patriot, in the person of JOHN CAREY. He died on the 2d ultimo, about nine o'clock, P.M. No person, I presume, in this city, has enjoyed a greater degree of the confidence of the public on account of his truly CHRISTIAN EXAMPLE. He was a member of the First Baptist Church.

The body was brought into the meeting house, on the Sabbath afternoon, attended by several clergymen. The Pastor, Rev. Obadiah Brown, delivered an excellent discourse. He stated that Carey was born in Westmoreland County, Va., in 1729, as he had learned from documents that he had recently seen. This made him 114 years old next August.

Gen. Washington, who knew how to appreciate worth, in a black, as well as in a white man, chose him for his body servant. He was with him in the old French war, at Braddock's defeat and throughout the revolution. He was often in the ranks, helping to fight the battles of his country. At the close of the war, Gen. Washington gave him one of his regimental coats, which he always wore, especially on public occasions.

And what reward did the grateful Republic give him for his services? Why, a few months before his death, by the exertions of Hon. GEORGE N. BRIGGS, of Pittsfield, Mass., Congress was induced to pass a bill giving him a pension for the rest of his life. He received about enough to bury him decently! Most grateful country! Most magnanimous Congress!"

The Annual Report of the Library of Congress of June 30, 1910, page 34, describes "eight lots...embracing a great variety of subjects - the question of the removal of George Washington's remains; the relief of his body servant John Cary...".