



MARCH 2026

NORTHERN NECK HISTORY CULTURE HAPPENINGS

Building X & The Birthplace Question: A Mystery Put to Rest

A reminder that secrets, no matter how long and deep they're buried, eventually get exposed

In the early 1930s, as builders at George Washington Birthplace National Monument were erecting the Memorial House Museum along the Potomac, archaeologists were busy digging out a Colonial-era brick foundation later dubbed Building X.

Once fully exposed in 1936, Building X ignited speculation that it was George Washington's birthplace, a belief fueled by artifacts uncovered during excavation. Like a fuse with no end, this burning suspicion would run for decades to come. But there was no conclusive evidence.

In 1970, as the nation headed toward the Bicentennial, another archaeological project was undertaken on Building X.

With the question still remaining, over the past decade, the focus on finally getting the answer re-intensified. The foundation was uncovered again in 2022; a decisive finding was not.

Those efforts had, however, provided a great deal of insight about Building X. It began as a one-room dwelling and had at least six additional rooms added in two separate building projects. It was determined that Building X likely included two entertaining rooms, passages, and two bedchamber suites on the ground floor with chambers upstairs and extensive cellars.

But none of it was enough to quell the desire to solve the birthplace mystery.

"We needed solid archaeological data," Kerry Gonzalez, the park's chief of cultural resource management, explained last month.

Although the past excavations hadn't answered the question of whether Building X was the birth-

place, Gonzalez explained that data pointed them in the directions to look—leading to the 2024 excavation of Building Y, a brick foundation in the Memorial area.

That led to the decision to return for a deep dive into the collections from past Building X excavations.

In summer 2025, things were recataloged—work involving thousands of artifacts, records, and archaeology, said Gonzalez.

With fresh eyes, new data sets, and the archaeology from both the ground and the collections, nearly 90 years later, paydirt.

On February 21, 2026, at George Washington's 294th birthday celebration, Gonzalez said, "Today, I am proud to stand before you and, with the full support of the park, say that we are now in a place where we can say, Room A, a portion of Building X, is where George Washington was born."

And there was more sweetener for the pot. "We are able to show you what it looked like," Gonzalez added, unveiling an interior conceptual drawing by architectural historian Willie Graham along with an exterior model.

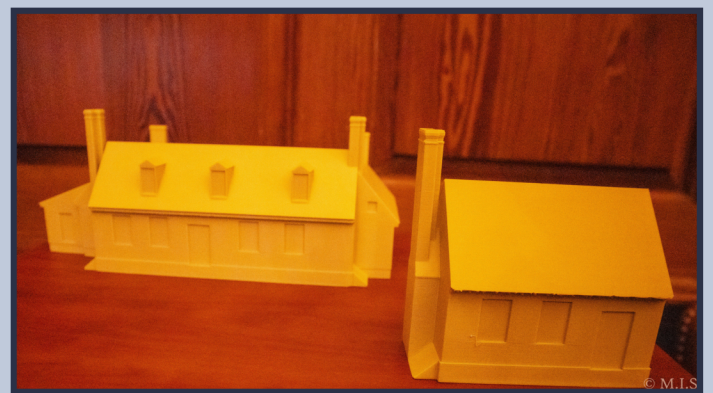
Although there are no existing images to confirm it, the National Park Service believes there's a "solid chance" the concept shows what the interior looked like.

"I've always had to get on my soapbox," said Gonzalez. "You cannot underestimate the value of collections-based research. Because it was analyzed before 10 or 15 years ago, it doesn't mean that new data could not be there."



ABOVE: A visitor examines the conceptual drawing of Room A in Building X.

BELOW: The rear left is a 3D-printed model of Building X, the birthplace house, and the front right is a model of Room A.

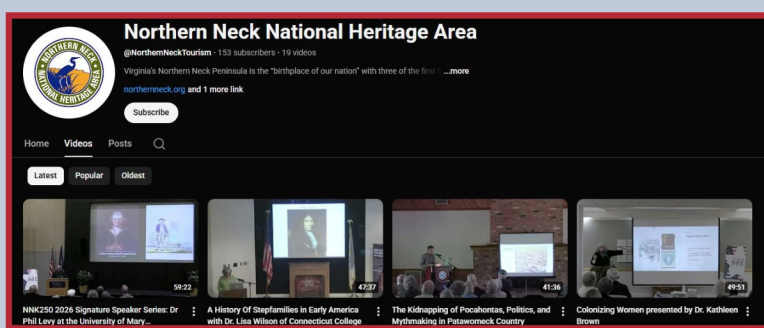


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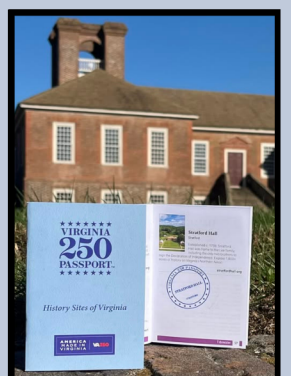
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