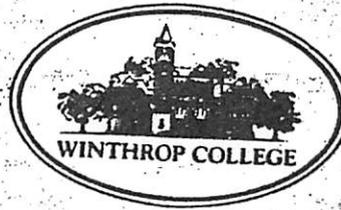


# S.C. Native Credited With Mount Vernon Restoration

RON ?

The Lancaster News Wednesday, October 31, 1984 Page 3-B

## South Carolina's Story The making of a state



In the early 1850s Mount Vernon, the home of George Washington, was going to ruin. Neither the United States government nor the Commonwealth of Virginia seemed particularly interested in taking care of the mansion and its grounds. A group of speculators, looking for the fast dollar, had even offered a large sum of money to purchase Mount Vernon and turn it into a place of public amusement.

Meanwhile, a young mother and her daughter, returning to South Carolina from a trip to Philadelphia on a steamboat, happened to be on the Potomac River, passing Washington's former home. A few casual remarks by the mother about the shabbiness of the once beautiful dwelling and national treasure inspired the daughter to do something about its condition.

The daughter, Ann Pamela Cunningham, did not seem like the type who would be moved to public action. She grew up in Laurens County as a daughter who had everything. At 17 she was thrown from a horse and severely injured her spine. As the years passed, her condition worsened, causing her to spend her life as a semi-invalid.

Upon reaching Charleston after her fateful trip down the Potomac, Ann Pamela Cunningham sought the advice and counsel of a number of prominent individuals. The result was a movement among Southern women and a wave of patriotic enthusiasm which swept the country.

Miss Cunningham started a letter-writing campaign, with the first one appearing in a Charleston newspaper. The letter was signed "A Southern Matron." During this period of history, the only time a woman's name appeared in a newspaper was at birth, marriage and death.

Organization and an active campaign followed with women managers in every state. One-dollar donations were asked for, and money came in from all over, even as far as the Sandwich Islands in the Pacific.

The Mount Vernon Ladies' Association was organized with Miss Cunningham as regent. The association was the first women's patriotic organization in the country.

In 1858 the association purchased the home from John Augustine Washington, a great-grandnephew of George Washington. Two hundred thousand dollars was paid for 200 acres of land. Under Miss Cunningham's leadership, the association managed to obtain a charter from the Virginia Legislature, giving the patriotic organization the right to hold the property.

The years from 1859 until the outbreak of the War Between the States were spent by Miss Cunningham in organizing and developing the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association. Funds were raised to restore and repair Mount Vernon, but all such efforts were ended with the outbreak of the Civil War.

In December 1860 Ann Pamela Cunningham went back to Rosemont, her family home. During the war, she made an appeal to both sides to make a pledge for the safety of Mount Vernon. She also tried to carry on the work of Washington's home, corresponding and communicating with her Northern sisters in the association. However, as the war progressed, contact became increasingly difficult.

In late 1866 Miss Cunningham returned to Mount Vernon to continue her work. Burdened by the business matters of Rosemont, she was unable to concentrate her energies on her beloved project.

Ann Pamela Cunningham's relationship with the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association continued until 1873. At a council meeting in May that year, she resigned, giving up an office she had held for 20 years.

She began a history of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, but this ended with her death at the relatively young age of 59. Her body was brought to Columbia and buried in the First Presbyterian churchyard in Columbia.

Today her portrait hangs in the State House in Columbia and at Mount Vernon. When South Carolinians visit Mount Vernon, like millions of other Americans, they can be proud that it was one of their own who was responsible for its restoration and preservation.