**William "Billy" Lee**, [](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:GW-painting.jpg)Born circa 1750, Lee was purchased on May 3, 1768, when he was just a teenager, by George Washington, as described in Washington's account book as *Mulatto Will*, from the estate of the late Colonel John Lee of Westmoreland County, Virginia for sixty-one pounds and fifteen shillings. William kept the surname "Lee" from this previous owner.

1John Trumbull's 1780 painting George Washington also depicts William Lee.

William served in a variety of roles, including Washington's [valet](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valet) or [manservant](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manservant). As valet, Lee performed chores such as brushing Washington's long hair and tying it behind his head.

Washington was a frequent [fox hunter](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fox_hunting), and Lee became his huntsman (the person in charge of the hounds), a role that required expert horsemanship. In his memoirs, Washington's step-grandson [George Washington Parke Custis](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Washington_Parke_Custis) described Lee during a hunt:

Will, the huntsman, better known in Revolutionary lore as Billy, rode a horse called *Chinkling*, a surprising leaper, and made very much like its rider, low, but sturdy, and of great bone and muscle. Will had but one order, which was to keep with the hounds; and, mounted on *Chinkling* ... this fearless horseman would rush, at full speed, through brake or tangled wood, in a style at which modern huntsmen would stand aghast.[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Lee_%28valet%29#cite_note-2)

Before the Revolutionary War, Lee often traveled with Washington to the [House of Burgesses](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Burgesses) in [Williamsburg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Williamsburg,_Virginia), or on journeys such as a surveying expedition to the [Ohio Valley](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ohio_Valley) in 1770 and to the [First Continental Congress](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Continental_Congress) in [Philadelphia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philadelphia) in 1774. Lee served at Washington's side throughout the eight years of the Revolutionary War, including the winter at [Valley Forge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Valley_Forge) and at the [siege of Yorktown](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Yorktown). According to historian Fritz Hirschfeld, Lee "rode alongside Washington in the thick of battle, ready to hand over to the general a spare horse or his telescope or whatever else might be needed....”

In 1785, Lee injured a knee while on a surveying expedition with Washington. Three years later, while going to the post office in [Alexandria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alexandria,_Virginia), he fell and injured his other knee, rendering him seriously disabled. When Washington was elected president in 1789, Lee attempted to make the journey to New York City for the inauguration but had to be left in Philadelphia for medical treatment. He was attended by several physicians, who made a steel brace for his knee that allowed him to join Washington's presidential household.

Even following Washington's 1797 retirement, Lee's disabilities prevented him from continuing his previous duties, and he spent the last years of his life as a shoemaker at Mount Vernon. Revolutionary War veterans who visited Mount Vernon often stopped to reminisce with Lee about the war.

When Washington died in 1799, he freed William Lee in his will, citing "his faithful services during the Revolutionary War". Lee was the only one of Washington's 124 slaves freed outright in his will; the remaining slaves owned by Washington were to be freed upon the death of [Martha Washington](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martha_Washington). (Another 153 slaves living at Mount Vernon were the property of Martha's first husband's estate, and could not be freed by Washington.)[[5]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Lee_%28valet%29#cite_note-5) Lee was given a pension of thirty dollars a year for the rest of his life, and the option of remaining at Mount Vernon if he wanted. Lee chose to live out the rest of his life at Mount Vernon, where he is buried.