

### ON THIS DAY IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY SEPTEMBER 16



On September 16, 1795, President George Washington wrote Secretary of War Timothy Pickering proposing that the federal government establish an armory and arsenal at Harpers Ferry.

**CSO: SS.8.13, SS.8.20, SS.8.22**

**Investigate the Document:** *(The writings of George Washington, being his correspondence, addresses, messages, and other papers, official and private, selected and published from the original manuscripts; with a life of the author, notes and illustrations. Jared Sparks, B W27 Coll)*

1. The property at Harpers Ferry sits at the junction of *what* two rivers?
2. How much land does George Washington suppose can be acquired at “reasonable terms?”

**Think Critically:** Six decades after Washington established the Harpers Ferry Arsenal, it would play a huge role in the lead-up and early years of the Civil War. What abolitionist led a daring raid there, in an attempt to spearhead an armed slave revolt in 1859? Why was its location vulnerable at the outset of the Civil War? Think of its location.

## TO THE SECRETARY OF WAR

Mount Vernon, September 16, 1795.

Sir: If, when this reaches your hands, there should be no contract or other obligation existing on behalf of the U. S. for the purchase of land on the Potomac, intended for the public Arsenal, I should wish all further negotiation in this business to be suspended until proper inquiries can be made and information obtained respecting the property at the junction of the Potomac and Shanandoah rivers in this State; for it has been represented to me, that this spot affords every advantage that could be wished for water works to any extent; and that no place is more capable of complete defence at a small expense. And I am also informed that from 800 to 1000 Acres of land might be obtained there on reasonable terms. The land at the junction of the two Rivers, including what is called Harper's ferry, has lately been leased for 7 years, and the lessee has the right of purchasing whenever it may be sold. Should this spot be fixed upon for the Arsenal, the Lessee will relinquish his title to the U. S. reserving only a small piece of the land for the purpose of building Stores and doing business. Six hundred Acres of land adjoining this tract is, I am told, offered for sale by Colo. Ball for fifteen hundred pounds Virga money. Colo. Ball has a lease of this tract for 70 years at £5 pr. 100 Acres, and a number of years have been already paid in the lease. The fee is in Genl. Henry Lee who I have no doubt will dispose of his right on very reasonable terms.

There is another small tract, with a saw mill upon it, adjoining the two foregoing, which I am told may be also purchased.

From my own knowledge, I can speak of the eligibility of this situation for a public Arsenal; but as I have never examined it very attentively, I am not able to speak so decidedly as to the advantages of erecting works there. These, however, I am told, are equal to any on the Potomac or its branches, having the advantage of a considerable fall in both Rivers, which may be brought to operate at this place. At any rate if the thing is open it may be well to have enquiry made and prices ascertained before it becomes known that this spot is in view. I am etc.<sup>55</sup>