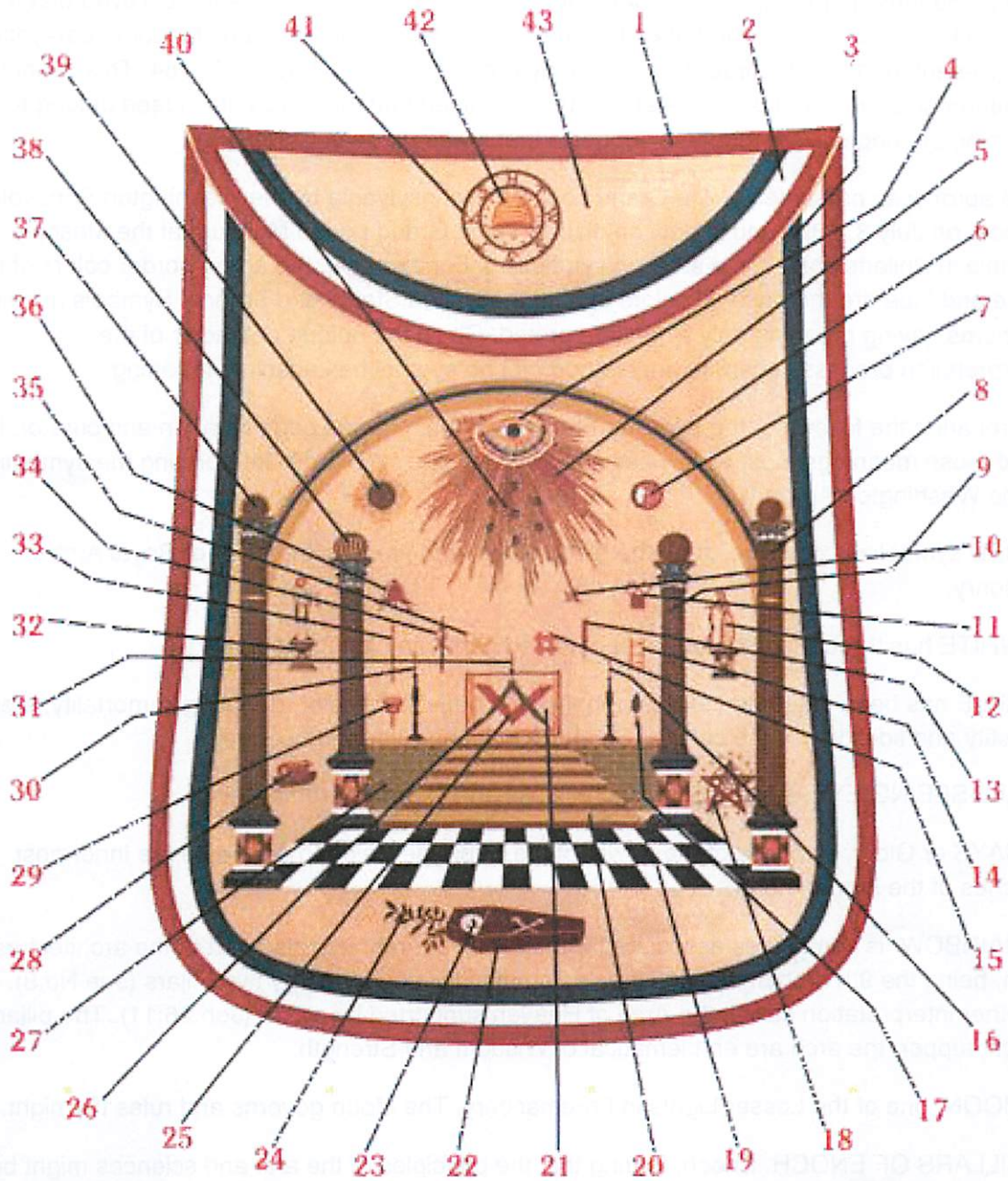


Bro. George Washington's Apron

(one of two that he owned)



When the young Marquis de Lafayette came to America at the age of 20 and joined George Washington's army for the Battle of Brandywine in 1777, the American cause had become his cause.

The affection each man held for the other is legendary. So, too, is the legacy of Masonic history developed through that affection. For many years Masons and non-Masons believed that the white silk apron known as the Lafayette Apron, had been embroidered by Madame Lafayette and presented to Bro. George Washington by Bro. Lafayette in August of 1784. This cannot be documented as fact. It has, however, been ascertained that the Apron did indeed belong to Bro. Washington, and current research suggests that it was made in China.

The apron was presented to the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania by the Washington Benevolent Society on July 3, 1829 and is now on display in the Grand Lodge Museum at the Masonic Temple in Philadelphia. It is a study in symbolism. For example, the apron border colors of red, white and blue are the national colors of both the United States and France. Symbols are silent emblems having meaning only when interpreted. Given the unique character of the interpretation process, it can be understood that no symbol has absolute meaning.

In preparing the following, the late Bro. Frank W. Bobb, Grand Lodge librarian and curator, has used those meanings most widely accepted by Masonic scholars in interpreting the symbolism of the Washington Apron.

1. RED symbolizes courage, zeal, the blood of life, and fire. It is the color of Royal Arch Masonry.
2. WHITE has throughout the ages represented purity and innocence.
3. BLUE has been esteemed since antiquity as a beneficent color, denoting immortality, eternity, chastity and fidelity. It is the color of Symbolic Masonry, "the Blue Lodge."
4. ALL-SEEING EYE, a symbol of watchfulness and of the Supreme Being.
5. RAYS or Glory, symbolic of the power of the Supreme Being to penetrate the innermost reaches of the human heart.
6. RAINBOW is sometimes associated with the Royal Arch. It is also part of the architectural arch, being the 9th arch under Solomon's Temple. It is supported by two Pillars (see No.8). Another interpretation calls it the Arch of Heaven supported by pillars (Job 26:11). The pillars which support the arch are emblematical of Wisdom and Strength.
7. MOON, one of the Lesser Lights in Freemasonry. The Moon governs and rules the night.
8. PILLARS OF ENOCH. Enoch, fearing that the principles of the arts and sciences might be lost, erected two pillars. the one of marble to withstand fire, the other of brass to resist water. On each he engraved that which he feared would be lost. The Globes are symbols of Unity and Peace and Plenty. (See also No.37)

9. **PILLARS B. and J.** were within the porch of King Solomon's Temple. Boaz the name of the left pillar means "in strength"; the right pillar, Jachin, means "God will establish" (see also No.38). The globe on the left pillar represents earth; that on the right, heaven. These brazen pillars with their globes are today the columns of the Senior and Junior Wardens.

10. **DOVE** in early Masonry is a symbol of Noah's messenger. In ancient symbolism, the dove represented purity and innocence.

11. **FORTY-SEVENTH PROBLEM OF EUCLID'S** first book of geometry. It is said that when Pythagoras solved the problem he exclaimed, "Eureka!," which signifies "I have found it." It is, however, not a problem, but a theorem. It has been adopted as the symbol on the Past Master Mason's Jewel in Pennsylvania (The Ahiman Rezon, Art. XVI, Sec. 3 & 4).

12. **HOPE** is sometimes shown as a female with an anchor, also as an anchor near the ark. **ANCHOR**, an emblem of a well-grounded hope and a well-spent life. With hope, an Anchor holds the soul both sure and steadfast.

13. **PLUMB**, the proper Masonic Jewel of the Junior Warden, admonishes us to walk uprightly before God and man. It is one of the working tools of operative Masons, used to try perpendiculars.

14. **JACOB'S LADDER** without a clouded canopy or star-decked heaven, which he saw in a vision ascending from earth to heaven. The three principal rounds are denominated **FAITH**, **HOPE**, and **CHARITY**.

15. **SQUARE WITHIN BOUNDS** is a symbol formed by four stonemason's squares of equal arms superimposed one on the other to form a central square. This symbol has not been found in American or English books of Masonic symbolism and therefore may well be of French origin. There has been no interpretation found for it to date.

16. **LIGHTS** or **BURNING TAPERS**, like the three principal Lodge officers, refer undoubtedly to the three stations of the sun: its rising in the East (Worshipful Master), its meridian in the South (Junior Warden), and its setting in the West (Senior Warden). (See also Nos. 30 & 31)

17. **TROWEL**, a working tool of the operative mason, is used symbolically for spreading the cement of Brotherly love and affection.

18. **FIVE-POINTED STAR** represents the five points of fellowship. Within the star is the letter "G," a well-known symbol of Freemasonry representing both God and geometry.

19. **MOSAIC PAVEMENT**, a representation of the ground floor of King Solomon's Temple. The Masonic Pavement is emblematical of human life, checked with good and evil.

20. **STEPS** are usually three in number. The six steps are said to represent degrees Washington received.

21. **HOLY BIBLE**, the great light of Freemasonry.

22. COFFIN has always symbolized death. It is found on tracing boards of the 18th century and, in that time, constituted a part of the esoteric symbolism.

23. SKULL AND CROSS-BONES are symbols of mortality and death and are so used in French degrees.

24. SPRIG OF ACACIA. The acacia tree is supposedly the shittah wood of the Old Testament. The name is sometimes spelled Cassia. It has long been used as a symbol of immortality.

25. SQUARE is the proper Masonic Jewel of the Master of the Lodge. It is one of the Great Lights in Freemasonry. It is the stonemason's square of two equal arms.

26. COMPASSES, the proper Masonic emblem of the Craft, and one of the Great Lights in Freemasonry.

27. BRICK WALL appears to represent the place in the Lodge occupied by the Altar. The Holy Bible, Square, and Compasses rest upon it, as do the three Lesser Lights. It composes nine rows of bricks, one upon the other. To give the symbolic meaning of the wall would be mere speculation.

28. ARK is emblematical of that Divine Ark which safely carries us over this tempest-tossed life. It is often shown with the Anchor.

29. SETTING MAUL, in operative Masonry, is used for setting stones, that is, tapping them to a firm seat in the mortar or urging them sidewise into place. It is considered by some to be a symbol of untimely death.

30. (See No.16)

31. (See No.16)

32. TREASURER of the Lodge wearing the Apron of his office and holding the emblem of his office, Crossed Keys.

33. TWENTY-FOUR INCH GAUGE symbolizes the twenty-four hours of day divided into three equal parts devoted to God, usual vocations, and rest.

34. SWORD POINTING TO A NAKED HEART demonstrates that justice will sooner or later overtake us; and that although our thoughts, words and actions may be hidden from the eyes of man, they are not hidden from the All-Seeing Eye.

35. TASSEL consists of a cord with tassels on the ends. It alludes to the Care of Providence which surrounds and keeps us within its protection while we govern our lives by the four cardinal virtues: temperance, fortitude, prudence and justice. The tassel may also represent the Mystic Tie, that sacred bond which unites men of diverse opinions into one band of Brothers.

36. LEVEL, the proper Masonic Jewel of the Senior Warden, symbolizes equality and reminds us that we are traveling upon the level of time, It is one of the working tools of an operative mason.

37. (See No.8)

38. (See No.9)

39. SUN, one of the Lesser light as a source of light it reminds the Mason of that intellectual light of which he is in constant search.

40. SEVEN SIX-POINTED STARS. The number SEVEN represents the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences: Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music and Astronomy. The SIX-POINTED STAR symbolizes Divine Providence, the star of David or Shield of David. It comprises two interlaced triangles, which have a number of Masonic interpretations.

41. LETTERS used symbolically in the Mark Master Mason's degree, Chapter of Royal Arch Mason.

42. BEEHIVE is the emblem of industry. It teaches us that as we came into this world rational and intelligent beings, so we should ever be industrious ones.

43. APRON. The Masonic Apron, which derives from the working apron of the stonemason, is in itself a symbol. It is an emblem of innocence, and the badge of a Freemason.

Information provided by the Masonic Temple, Library & Museum of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania.

ISSUE OF
WASHINGTON'S MASONIC APRON GIFT FROM LAFAYETTE

This page presents the rationale to support as 'a most likely myth' the claim that a Masonic apron, made by Adrienne Lafayette, was given by the Marquis de Lafayette to George Washington in 1784. This is not to refute the possibility that Lafayette may have conveyed a Masonic apron, made in Europe, to George Washington when the Marquis visited Mount Vernon in 1784. This page was significantly revised 26 June 2010.

There are essentially three Masonic Aprons being attributed to having been owned by George Washington and purported, at times, to have been a gift from Lafayette. These aprons are now held at:

- **The Grand Lodge in Pennsylvania** (which in some of its sponsored webpages still suggests that the item was a gift from Lafayette).
- **Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22** (which has relinquished any claim to the apron they hold as being from Lafayette, but a strong claim as to the apron actually having been owned by George Washington).
- **Mount Nebo Lodge in Shepherdstown, WV**, (which has credible claim that their apron was owned by George Washington and possibly having been conveyed by Lafayette during his 1784 visit.)

ONLY DOCUMENTATION FOR APRON AT GRAND LODGE IN PENNSYLVANIA IS AS FOLLOWS:

The Washington Masonic Apron's arrival at the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania was recorded in the proceedings of the Quarterly Grand Communication, dated Monday, 7 December 1829. Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania recorded receiving a 'communication', dated 3 July 1829, from the Washington Benevolent Society of Pennsylvania that accompanied a Masonic Apron described as belonging to "our deceased Brother George Washington which had been presented to that Society by his Legatees." The 'communication' reads:

"At a stated meeting of the Washington Benevolent Society of Penna. held on the 3d day of July, 1829. It was resolved that the Masonic Apron of General Washington be deposited with the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, provided that the creditors agree to this disposition of it."



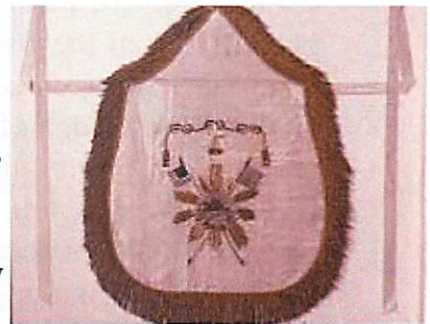
The Washington Benevolent Society of Pennsylvania reportedly obtained the Masonic apron on 26 October 1816, from "the legatees of the Washington estate" along with a short note, currently framed with the apron being presented. The note reportedly reads:

"To the Washington Benevolent Society. The Legatees of GEN. WASHINGTON, impressed with the most profound sentiments of respect for the noble institution which they have the honor to address, beg leave to present to them the enclosed relick (sic) of the revered & lamented "Father of His Country." They are persuaded that the Apron, which was once possessed by the Man, whom the Philadelphians always delighted to honor, will be considered most precious to the Society distinguished by his name, and by the benevolent, and grateful feelings to which it owes its foundation. That this perishable memento of a Hero whose Fame is more durable than Brass" (sic) may confer as much pleasure upon those to whom it is presented, as is experienced by the Donors, Is the sincere wish of the Legatees. October 26th, 1816."

Nothing is mentioned about the where, when, who, why, or how the apron came into the possession of the 'legatees'. Otherwise the basic documentation for this apron is vague and most definitely indirect – suitable to encourage legend making.

DOCUMENTATION FOR APRON AT THE ALEXANDRIA-WASHINGTON LODGE No. 22 IS AS FOLLOWS:

The Masonic Apron Washington was received by George Washington in 1782 from fellow Freemasons Elkanah Watson of Plymouth, Massachusetts, and his partner, Monsieur Cassoul, of Nantes, France. The apron is clearly identified in Mr. Watson's book Men and Times of the Revolution, or Memoirs of Elkanah Watson, (New York, 1856, pages 135-6), stating: "Wishing to



pay some mark of respect to our beloved Washington, I employed, in conjunction with my friend M. Cassoul, nuns in one of the convents at Nantes to prepare some elegant Masonic ornaments and gave them a plan for combining the American and French flags on the apron designed for this use." An autograph acknowledgment was written by Washington – the letter was purchased from the Watson family and is in the possession of the Grand Lodge of New York.

Interestingly, Mount Vernon Library's copy of an inventory of Washington's effects show only one apron! This document is identified as "Inventory of the

Contents of Mount Vernon dated 1810," which appears to be the only recorded inventory of George Washington's belongings. Only one apron in a "Japanese box" was listed. [Document reference was given as LC number E312.43I62F34.]

It was this apron – and a black lacquered [presumed to be an apron box] – that Major Lawrence Lewis, a nephew of Washington, presented to Alexandria-Washington Lodge on 3 June 1812. At the time, Major Lewis and the Lodge believed it to be the apron that legend suggested had been given to Washington by Lafayette. However, Freemason authorities were later made aware that the apron design (particularly the distinctive crossed American and French flags in the center) described in Mr. Watson's book matched that of the apron presented by Major Lewis to the Alexandria-Washington Lodge. **Clearly, the Alexandria Lodge hold's the 'Watson-Cassoul apron', which George Washington acknowledged receiving and was reported to have worn on more than one occasion.**

This apron has the most thorough documented evidence as to when it came into George Washington's estate and from whence it came. In such, there is no direct association with Lafayette.

DOCUMENTATION FOR APRON AT THE MOUNT NEBO LODGE No. 91

AF&AM;IS AS FOLLOWS:

The existence of this apron has not been as popularly known by the general public, though its provenance appears remarkably strong as being the apron primarily worn by George Washington during some of the famous ceremonies. This apron has the distinctive design concept -- crossed American and French flags -- that is on the 'Watson-Cassoul apron' given to Washington in 1782. However, there is considerable evidence that this apron held by the Mount Nebo Lodge in Shepherdstown, WV, was one of the two Masonic aprons listed in the 1804 Mount Vernon inventory. The Mount Nebo Masonic lodge came into its possession of the apron through Captain Thomas Hammond, husband of Mildred Washington, daughter of Charles Washington, deceased brother of the First President. Captain Hammond was Master of Mount Nebo in 1848. Details as to the lodge's acquisition of this apron are at the Mt. Nebo No. 91's website: see <http://www.lodge91.org/>



The Mt. Nebo 91 Washington Apron is currently being studied and preserved at the Mt. Vernon Estates, Mt. Vernon, Virginia. **At present, Mount Vernon's website and museum literature support the claim that this apron was presented to General George Washington as a gift of the Grand Lodge of France. There is no suggestion that the apron was made by Lafayette's**

wife nor was the apron conveyed as a personal gift from the Marquis. This apron has credible documented evidence that it was held in George Washington's estate. However, there is no direct evidence describing when and how it entered George Washington's estate. Examination of the apron supports its possible manufacture in Western Europe, which would agree with it being a gift from the French Masons. **There is no contemporary documentation that the apron was delivered to George Washington by Lafayette during the latter's 1784 visit to Mount Vernon.** Such a claim developed in years soon after Washington's death. [The claim was often embellished with the assertion that the apron was made by Lafayette's wife. Such an invention is not associated with the Mount Nebo Lodge apron.] **Though unsubstantiated by direct evidence, it is plausible that Lafayette acted as the courier of the gift. As the apron was not a personal gift from Lafayette, it is understandable that the incident is not recorded in the extensive interchange of correspondence between the Marquis and George Washington.** However, one would assume that Washington would have acknowledged the gift in writing to the Grand Lodge of France. Unfortunately, the French Masonic lodges were looted by the Nazis, and there is more expectation of finding such documentation among the very modest number of reclaimed Masonic files since WWII.

A recent initiative by the Mt Nebo Lodge to celebrate their 2011 anniversary by exhibiting their apron for a time at Mount Vernon, sparked an examination that alerted interested parties of shared similarities in the designs of the Mt Nebo Lodge and the Alexandria Lodge aprons. This is addressed in detail in an article "A Washington Apron Re-discovered" by Mark A. Tabbert, curator at the George Washington Masonic Memorial, Alexandria. The 24 March 2011 draft article, is posted on the internet webpage "Assessment of French Made Masonic Aprons Owned by George Washington" at <http://xenophongroup.com/mcjoynt/apron2.htm> [Link is provided at bottom of this page.]

CONCLUDING OBSERVATION:

The recognition of the Mt. Nebo Lodge apron encourages continued speculation supporting second hand accounts [Such as in Benson J. Lossing's *The Home of Washington and Its Associations* (published in 1865)] of Lafayette presenting Washington an apron in 1784. [*Past viewers of this webpage will note a significant change in opinion here!*] There were at two Masonic Aprons held by George Washington at Mount Vernon according to an 1804 inventory. Both had similar design patterns. One apron is the Watson-

Cassoul apron held by the Alexandria-Washington Lodge, and did not enter George Washington's estate through the assistance of Lafayette. However, Mt. Nebo Lodge apron could have been conveyed by the Marquis. However, there is no suggestion that this apron was made by Adrienne Lafayette.

Speculation that the apron was made by Lafayette's wife is rejected by key Lafayette scholars [Gottschalk being the most renowned] who seriously question the claim due the lack of supporting primary testimony of Lafayette conveying such an apron made by his wife. Authors with a penchant for promoting attractive legends counter that "there is no proof that an apron was not presented."*

Insisting on evidence to prove a negative is a clever retreat for journalists, but historians familiar with the character of the personalities involved are compelled to look deeper. *It is inconceivable that such a significant gift from the Marquis to George Washington occurred without the event ever being acknowledged in the profuse exchanges of detailed correspondence between Lafayette and Washington at the time. Ignoring the absence of contemporary reference to the gift apron reflects a serious miss reading of George Washington's well established sensitivity to social protocol.*

* Illustrating this difference between the 'journalist' and 'historian' approach to the subject would be to note that the Lafayette Apron gift is not mentioned in either of the recent scholarly print published books on Lafayette and Washington:

James R. Gaines' *For Liberty and Glory: Washington, Lafayette, and Their Revolutions* (2007); or

David A. Clary's *Adopted Son: Washington, Lafayette, and the Friendship that Saved the Revolution* (2007).

Whereas, the gift is asserted in a highly promoted book *Lafayette* published in 2002, and the author's rationale is that one cannot prove the apron "was not presented."

AUXILIARY NOTES ON FREEMASON WEB REFERENCES:

Referenced and quoted text from 'documents', 'communications', and other such display labels associated with the particular Masonic aprons in this webpage were taken from various pages sponsored by various webpages sponsored by Masonic lodges or Freemason historians. As Freemasonry organizations enjoy considerable autonomy among their various groups and orders, one will find variances supporting

the less documented past. This is especially the case concerning aprons claimed to have been owned [or event temporally worn] by George Washington.

As might be expected, The website of The Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania" has a particular page "Brother George Washington's Masonic Apron" [<http://www.pagrandlodge.org/mlam/apron/index.html>] which takes the position that apron in their museum was claimed to have been made by Madame la Marquise de Lafayette and is the one claimed to have been presented "to Bro. George Washington of Fredericksburg Lodge, Virginia by General Lafayette in 1784." With more certainty, the lodge firmly claims that it was an apron owned by George Washington. One is left to untangle the following text from their webpage:

"The affection each man held for the other is legendary. So, too, is the legacy of Masonic history developed through that affection. For many years Masons and non-Masons believed that the white silk apron known as the Lafayette Apron, had been embroidered by Madame Lafayette and presented to Bro. George Washington by Bro. Lafayette in August of 1784. This cannot be documented as fact. It has, however, been ascertained that the Apron did indeed belong to Bro. Washington, and current research suggests that it was made in China."

This last phrase leaves one to wonder until one examines further: The apron is displayed in a sealed glass along with "the original note written in 1816 by the legatees of the Washington estate concerning the apron." See: The Masonic Library and Museum of Pennsylvania webpage,

[<http://www.pagrandlodge.org/freemason/0904/tot.html>]

On the other hand, a Freemason sponsored webpage providing a more disciplined and objective assessment is "Website MasonicWorld.com" at <http://www.masonicworld.com/education/>, with its particular webpage on "Masonic Myths" --The Northern Light webpage by Dick Curtis at <http://www.masonicworld.com/education/files/mf.htm>

[Return to top of this webpage.](#)

[Return to 'La Fayette's Visits to Mount Vernon'.](#)

[Return to 'La Fayette's Ocean Crossings'.](#)

[Return to main 'Lafayette Webpage'.](#)

[Return to 'Assessment of French Made Masonic Aprons Owned by George Washington'.](#)

**ASSESSMENT OF
FRENCH MADE MASONIC APRONS OWNED BY GEORGE WASHINGTON**

"A WASHINGTON APRON RE-DISCOVERED"

By Mark A. Tabbert, Director of Collections,
George Washington Masonic Memorial, Alexandria, VA .
24 March 2011

A little known Masonic apron believed to have been George Washington's was unveiled at the Mount Vernon Estate, Museum, and Gardens on February 19, 2011. Owned by Mount Nebo Lodge No. 91 Ancient Free & Accepted Masons, Shepherdstown, West Virginia, the apron is on public display in Donald W. Reynolds Museum and Education Center until May 19, 2011. Presiding Master of the lodge, George Alwin said, "In commemoration of the bicentennial in 2011 of Mt Nebo Lodge, we are pleased to loan this national treasure to Mt Vernon. It has been our honor to preserve this important piece of Masonic history in our lodge."

The apron's origins and how it came into Brother Washington's possession are subjects of ongoing research. According to Mt. Nebo Lodge history, the apron was a gift to General Washington from the Masonic Grand Lodge of France. Marquis Lafayette was said to have conveyed it to Washington in 1784 when Lafayette returned to America and visited Mt. Vernon. By design, symbolism and construction the apron is indeed French. The crossed U.S. and French Bourbon flags date the apron after 1776 and before 1789. The apron lacks Washington and French Masonic documentation but this may be due to revolutions, wars and Nazi occupation over the last 230 years.

The apron's known history begins after George Washington's death in 1799. The inventory of his estate, compiled in early 1800, lists among the contents of his Study "1 Japan Box containing Masons apron" valued at \$40 and "1 Piece of Oil Cloth contg. orders of Masonry" at \$50. The inventory taken after Martha Washington's death in 1802 does not itemize the Study's contents, so no Masonic aprons are listed. However, a record of personal property sold out of the Washington estate after Martha died lists two Masonic aprons: one was purchased for \$5.00 by Burdett Ashton (1747-1814), husband of Washington's niece, Ann (1752-1777); the second was purchased for \$6.00 by Thomas Hammond (1770-1820), husband to Washington's niece, Mildred (1772-1805). There is no reference in this sales list to any box corresponding to "Japan Box" listed in George Washington's inventory.

Soon after purchasing Washington's second apron, Thomas Hammond and his wife Mildred moved to the Appalachian foothills of Virginia. In 1811 the Grand Lodge of Virginia granted a lodge charter to freemasons in Shepherdstown. Called Mount Nebo No. 91, it retained the same name and number when it came under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of West Virginia in 1872. According to lodge history, Thomas Hammond became a freemason in Mt. Nebo in 1815. In appreciation for his initiation he donated the second apron to the Lodge. Despite the Anti-Masonic Period of the 1830s, the Civil War and countless other dangers, the lodge kept the apron safe.

Meanwhile, the apron purchased by Burdett Ashton is believed to have passed from to his wife's cousin, Lawrence Lewis (1767-1839), a nephew of George Washington's who had married Martha Washington's granddaughter, Eleanor (Nelly) Parke Custis (1779-1852). On June 3, 1812, Lawrence Lewis donated a Masonic apron, sash and a japanned box to

Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22 in Alexandria, Virginia. It is generally accepted that this embroidered apron is the famous "Watson-Cassoul Apron," which takes its name from the two commercial agents, American Elkanah Watson and Frenchman Francois-Corentin Cassoul, who commissioned it while working in Nantes, France during the War of Independence. In 1782 they sent it along with a signed letter to General Washington. Washington received the apron while encamped at Newburgh, New York. His thank you letter, the envelope it was mailed in, and Watson's and Cassoul's initial letter all still exist. It is assumed President Washington wore this apron at the 1793 cornerstone ceremony of the U.S. Capitol. The apron and sash remain in the care of Alexandria-Washington Lodge and are rarely exhibited. The Japanned Masonic box may be viewed in the Lodge's Replica Room within the George Washington Masonic Memorial.



If the dating of both the **Mt. Nebo apron**

(1784) [to the left] and the **Alexandria-Washington apron (1782) [to the right]** are correct then it is not surprising they are similar in shape, style and high craftsmanship. Both display exquisitely embroidered crossed flags, and a knotted and tasseled cable-tow with a suspended gavel on white silk. The central motifs, however, are quite different. Mt. Nebo's apron has a square and compasses with one leg above and one below the square. A spring of acacia intertwines the square. In the center is a skull with a crossed bone and dagger. According to European Masonic scholarship this apron design is not uncommon with the central symbols referring to the murder of Master Builder of King Solomon's Temple, while the acacia symbolizes immortality. The apron is trimmed with black silk ribbon and backed with black silk.



The **design similarities may be the root cause for confusion between the two aprons.** Indeed the controversy began at least as early as Marquis Lafayette's toured the United States as "the Nation's Guest." According to Lodge history, in 1825 he visited Alexandria-Washington Lodge and upon seeing the Watson-Cassoul Apron, declared it to be the one he had given to Washington nearly four decades before. Age 82 and a survivor of the French Revolution, Napoleon's regime and two Bourbon restorations, the Marquis may be forgiven if he mistook one apron for another. Yet it remains unclear if it is Mt. Nebo's apron or Alexandria-Washington's apron that Lafayette conveyed to General Washington.

Since 1844, however, Mt. Nebo's apron is well documented. According to the Lodge's minute books the first public appearance was May 16, 1844 in Charlestown. It was displayed at a banquet celebrating the 90th anniversary of a legendary Masonic meeting in a local cave. The minutes state: ". . . an apron black silk velvet, presented more than half a century to Gen. Washington by the Grand Lodge of France, through the person of this early friend, brother and companion in arms, Bro. Gilbert M.D. Lafayette." In 1847 the apron traveled to the District of Columbia. It was worn by Mt. Nebo Lodge brother S. McElroy at the Masonic cornerstone ceremony of the Smithsonian Institution. Three years later the Grand Master of Virginia, James Points, wore the apron in Richmond at the Virginia Statehouse George Washington Monument ceremony.

President Zachary Taylor also attended. The Grand Lodge of New Hampshire's 1867 Proceedings reported the apron, as well as President and Bro. Andrew Johnson, were present at the cornerstone ceremony of Grand Lodge of Maryland's new temple in 1866. Ten years later, the local newspaper The Shepherdstown Register ran a full story on the apron.

The apron's last major public appearance was in Minnesota. In 1892 Bro. Wynkoop Lemen, a dual member of Mt. Nebo Lodge No. 91 and Warren Lodge No. 150, Warren, Minnesota, gained permission to bring the apron west. It came first to Warren Lodge then appeared at the annual Grand Lodge of Minnesota meeting in St. Paul. Before returning to Shepherdstown, the Grand Lodge commissioned a beautiful hand-carved Masonic framed case. The apron then traveled to Chicago where it appeared at two lodges. The national publication, Voice of Freemasonry ran an illustrated article of the apron and its case. It is curious that its description of the apron is lifted from the 1877 The Shepherdstown's Register's piece.

The Voice's article led to the apron to appear in a well-know 1896 lithograph. The Chicago firm of Kurz & Allen produced a pair of prints "Franklin Opening the Lodge" and "Washington Closing the Lodge." Both are more Masonic fantasies than historical accuracy and are modeled after Emanuel Leutz's 1856 portrait "Washington as Master Mason." Yet, unlike the Leutz painting, Washington is wearing the Mt. Nebo apron. Furthermore, Franklin's apron has a similar square, compasses and acacia sprig. These prints were quite popular and hung in numerous lodges and are still available through the Internet. Perhaps the last major public appearance was at the 100th commemoration of Washington's death. On December 14, 1899, under the authority of the Grand Lodge of Virginia more than 300 freemasons representing every grand jurisdiction in the country attended a special service at Washington's Tomb at Mount Vernon. Afterwards President and brother freemason William McKinley addressed the brethren from the east lawn. According the November 1899 Grand Lodge of West Virginia's annual communication, Mt. Nebo Lodge planned to have the apron present at the commemoration.

After 1900 the apron slipped out of Masonic and public awareness. Mt. Nebo kept the apron in the Minnesota frame and hung it on the north lodge wall. On a few special occasions it was brought out for public view and appreciation. Periodically local newspapers and town histories wrote about the apron, but word of the apron did not spread beyond the mountains. Past Grand Master of Virginia William Mosely Brown in his excellent book, George Washington: Freemason (1952) acknowledged the apron's existence, but did not follow up with further comment.

Until 2009 the apron lived quietly in the Lodge. Now, in celebration of their 200th anniversary, the brethren of Mt. Nebo Lodge have returned the apron to George Washington's home and to public light for everyone's benefit and delight.

[Return to top of this webpage.](#)

[Issue of Washington's Masonic Apron Gift from Lafayette](#)