

Esoteric Symbolism of the Lafayette Apron

Written by: Bro. John M. Parrish

Edited by: RW Richard E. Saunders, PDDGM

George Washington Research Lodge No. 1732

Ancient Free & Accepted Masons

February 28, 2014

Esoteric Symbolism of the Lafayette Apron

The Lafayette Apron is an elaborately decorated Masonic apron belonging to the late Wor. Bro. George Washington. This apron was given to Wor. Bro. Washington as a gift from his beloved friend, Bro. Lafayette in August of 1784 during his visit of the newly formed United States of America. The Lafayette Apron is a custom designed apron with nearly forty Masonic symbols and emblems sewn between the borders of the apron. From the vibrant colors to the embroidered Masonic emblems, this apron has long been viewed as a treasure-trove of Masonic symbolism.

Colors

The Lafayette Apron is a white satin apron embroidered with a red, white, and blue silk boarder. The white apron has always been an emblem of innocence and a badge of a free and accepted mason. The red color that provides the outer border of the apron is symbolic of faith, love, fortitude, zeal, and is representative of high dignity (Tuckwood, 2002).

The white silk border symbolizes purity and innocence. The blue silk that provides the inner border of the apron has always had a strong tie to Freemasonry. The color blue has been a symbol of brotherhood, eternity, and fidelity. In 1727, the Grand Lodge of England adopted the color blue for official Masonic use by its Grand Lodge Officers; permitting the Grand Master, his Deputy, and his Wardens to use blue ribbon to secure the jewels of their office around their neck, and allowing those officers to wear white aprons lined with blue silk (Short Talk Bulletin, 1934). This would lead one to believe that Lafayette included the blue silk border as a symbol of respect to Wor. Bro. Washington, equating his Masonic stature to that of the Grand Lodge Officers of his time. Jointly, these colors represent the union of two great countries. France, and the newly

formed United States of America, both use red, white, and blue as their national colors, and boldly fly these colors on the flags of their respective countries.

Working Tools

There are a number of Masonic working tools embroidered on the Lafayette Apron. These include the Twenty-four inch Gauge, Plum, Square, Level, and Trowel. Each of these working tools has their own significance in the degrees of Masonry. The Twenty-four inch Gauge symbolizes the twenty-four hours of the day, which we are reminded to divide into three equal parts; devoting our time equally between God, our usual vocation, and rest. The Plum, Square, and Level are all tools of the Fellowcraft degree and reminds us of how to meet, act, and part when traveling through our different stations of life. Lastly, the Trowel is used symbolically in Masonry to remind us to spread the cement of Brotherly Love and affection that unites us as one sacred band or society, of friends and brothers.

Symbolic Temple

The main focal point of the Lafayette Apron is that of a symbolic representation of King Solomon's Temple. The two pillars in the foreground represent the Pillars of Enoch. The globes adorning each of these pillars represent unity, and peace and plenty. In the background are the Pillars of Boaz and Jachin. The pillar on the left representing the Earth, and the right representing Heaven. In the area encompassed by the four pillars is a black and white mosaic tiled floor. These colors and patterns are representative of the patterns used on the floor of King Solomon's Temple ("Bro. George Washington," 2011). From that mosaic pavement, there are six steps leading up to the Holy Bible, Square, and Compasses which are elevated along with the three burning tapers.

Other Esoteric Symbols

In addition to the colors, working tools, and the symbolic layout of the Lodge, there are a number of other Masonic symbols present on the apron. At the bottom of the apron lays the coffin, skull and crossbones, and the sprig of acacia. The coffin has always been used as a symbol of death, while the skull and crossbones are meant as reminders of our own mortality. Whereas, the sprig of acacia is placed at the head of the coffin to symbolize the eternal human spirit (Lomas, 2011).

Between the Pillars of Enoch and the Pillars of Boaz and Jachin are four Masonic symbols: the Ark, the Anchor, the five-pointed star, and the treasurer. Masonically, the Ark and Anchor are usually seen together. The Ark symbolizes the Divine Ark which carries us safely through the storms of life, while the Anchor reminds us to maintain a well-grounded hope (“Bro. George Washington,” 2011). The five-pointed star represents the five points of fellowship, and is seen with the “G” in the center, while the treasurer appears in a white robe wearing the apron and jewel of his office.

To the left and right of the Holy Bible are nine Masonic symbols: the setting maul, the Twenty-four inch Gauge, the Level, the sword pointing at the naked heart, the Plum, the dove, the 47th Problem of Euclid, Jacob’s ladder, and the Trowel. As the Gauge, Level, Plum, and Trowel were previous explained, their importance will not be readdressed in this section.

The setting maul is a tool used for setting stones in place by the builder. This is also the instrument believed to cause the untimely death of Hiram Abif (Bessel, 1995). The sword pointing at the naked heart reveals that although our intentions may be hidden from man, our actions are not hidden from the all-seeing eye (Grand Lodge, 2007).

The symbol of the dove originates from the Holy Bible where, along with the olive branch, it symbolizes purity, peace, and innocence (Brown, 1991). The 47th Problem of Euclid, also known as Pythagorean's Theorem, emphasizes the importance of applied geometry. Jacob's ladder is an important symbol in the Entered Apprentice and Fellowcraft degrees, as well as the 13th degree of the Ancient Free & Accepted Scottish Rite degrees. This ladder, that's origin traces back to the Holy Bible, represent the spiritual ascent of man, from one world to the next (Zeldis, 2009).

Embroidered directly above the pages of the Holy Bible are the tassel and interlocking squares. The tassel is to remind us of the care of Providence which protects us and governs our lives. It is also emblematical of the sacred tie that unites all mankind. The interlocking squares are four squares forming the outline of one centralized square. The esoteric meaning of this symbol is not found in American or English Freemasonry. It is believed that the symbol must be of French origin ("Bro. George Washington," 2011).

Above all of the previously explained symbols lay the sun, moon, rainbow, All-Seeing Eye, and seven six-pointed stars. The sun and moon are common Masonic symbols explained in the degrees of Masonry. The rainbow is a lesser known symbol sometimes used in Royal Arch Masonry. It also alludes to the importance of the arch in geometry. The All-Seeing Eye is a symbol of the Supreme Being which always keeps a watchful eye on all our interactions with mankind. The seven six-pointed stars are believed to represent the seven liberal arts and sciences ("Bro. George Washington," 2011).

Finally, on the top flap of the apron is the bee hive encompassed by letters. The bee hive is a symbol of industry, where the unity of many men should promote the accomplishment of great tasks (Mackey, 1914). The letters surrounding the beehive are symbolic of the Mark Master Degree in Royal Arch Masonry.

Conclusion

Aside from the meaning behind the symbols embroidered on the Lafayette Apron, it is a true work of art with historical significance. The elongated apron's use of beautiful silks and vibrant colors make the apron a unique Masonic treasure. To make the gift of an apron even more special, Bro. Lafayette included nearly forty different Masonic symbols that were close to the heart of Wor. Bro. Washington. Although Wor. Bro. Washington chose to wear the Watson-Cassoul Apron to most public events, the Lafayette Apron was a dear gift given by a dear friend. The Lafayette Apron is currently on display at the Grand Lodge Museum at the Masonic Temple in Pennsylvania.

References

- Bessel, P. W. (1995). *Gavels in Freemasonry*. Retrieved on February 10, 2014 from <http://www.bessel.org/gavels.htm>.
- Bro. George Washington's Apron. (2011). Retrieved on February 12, 2014 from <http://www.papranglodge.org/lam/apron/index.html>.
- Brown, N. D. (1991). The plants and animals of freemasonry. *Transactions – Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, 104*.
- Grand Lodge, Ancient Free & Accepted Masons of the Commonwealth of Virginia. (2007). *Presentation Volume*.
- Lomas, R. (2011). *The Secret Power of Masonic Symbolism: The Influence of Ancient Symbolism on the Pivotal Moments in History and an Encyclopedia of all key Masonic Symbols*. Beverly, MA: Fair Winds Press.
- Mackey, A. G. (1914). *An Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and its Kindred Sciences: Comprising the Whole Range of Arts and Sciences and Literature as Connected with the Institution*. New York, NY: The Masonic History Company.
- Masonic Service Association of North America. (1934). *Short Talk Bulletin, 12(7)*.
- Tuckwood, K. J. (2010). Masonic colors & their symbolism. *Talks on Freemasonry*. Retrieved on February 12, 2014 from http://tonecoloralchemy.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Masonic_Colors.pdf.
- Zeldis, L. (2009). Symbolism of the ladder. *Short Talk Bulletin, 87(9)*,

Appendix

