

# Grand Master's Jewel: Fact, Fable, or Fantasy?

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During a convention held in Williamsburg, Virginia, on October 13, 1778, the first independent Grand Lodge was organizing, as they elected Right Worshipful John Blair, Jr., a Past Master of Williamsburg, to serve as Grand Master of Masons in Virginia. Brother Blair was unanimously elected, but he wasn't the first choice of the Virginia Masons. During an earlier Convention, held on June 23, 1777, George Washington's name was proposed for Grand Master, but action was postponed until all the Lodges could be represented.

The Secretary of the Convention, James Kemp of Kilwinning Port Royal Crosse Lodge, recorded the following statement, and I quote:

And in order to give dispatch to this business, this convention beg leave to recommend to their constituents and to the members of all other Lodges in this State, His Excellency General George Washington as a proper person to fill the office of Grand Master of the same, and to whom the charter of appointment afore mentioned be made. But should the Lodges prefer any other person to this office, it is recommended that the respective Lodges do elect some other person and notify the same to the Williamsburg Lodge, being most convenient, who are to examine such appointments and declare thereupon, on whom the majority falls to be nominal Grand Master of this State.

More than a year elapsed before another meeting was held. William Moseley Brown, in his book, *Freemasonry in Virginia*, page 53, suggests that Winchester Lodge claims credit

for communicating with George Washington. He goes on to say that George Washington declined because he was not a Past Master and also because of the press of his duties as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army. Dr. John Dove has long been regarded as the father of this statement, that Washington was invited to become Virginia's first Grand Master, but that he declined the office. The authenticity of these statements has been questioned by some writers. There was not any direct and authentic word from Washington on this subject. If we can accept this as evidence that George Washington was asked, he must have declined as suggested, because at the October 13, 1778 Convention, his name was not mentioned. As a foot note, being a Past Master does not appear to be grounds for declining. The delegates to the Convention knew he wasn't a Past Master, and in fact, John Marshall, who served as Grand Master in 1794-95, never served as Worshipful Master of a Craft lodge.

The second choice was Right Worshipful Warner Lewis, a Past Master of Botetourt Lodge. *The History of Botetourt Lodge No. 7* by John B. Donovan, published as an appendix to the Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Virginia, 1882, states that Brother Warner Lewis carried a protest from Botetourt Lodge to Williamsburg opposing the election of a Grand Master for Virginia. The protest was dated April 30, 1777, and Lewis may have been the author. According to Donovan, when Lewis was offered the Grand Mastership, he probably felt that he could not accept the office under the circumstances. Warner Lewis was very prominent in public affairs and resided at Warner Hall in Gloucester County.

When Brother Lewis declined, Brother John Blair, Jr. was nominated and unanimously elected. Brother Blair was the Acting Governor of Virginia.

The installation was held on October 30, 1778. It is interesting to note, that the worshipful master, The Reverend Robert Andrews, announced that the Convention had been called "for the purpose of installing the Right Worshipful John Blair, Past Master of the Williamsburg Lodge into the office of Grand Master of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of Virginia." Brother Andrews also conducted the ritualistic ceremony.

I review these brief facts with you this morning to provide an introduction to my subject, "The Jewel of the Grand Master of Masons in Virginia."



**Jewel Front**

Many, if not all of you have seen this jewel. It is beautiful, composed of the compasses extended to 60 degrees over a quadrant. I read recently a Library Tid Bit, authored by Brother Catlin E. Tyler, the Librarian for the Richmond Scottish Rite Bodies. He uses a quote that the compasses should be extended to 47 degrees to call our attention to the seasons of the year, the solstice, representing the Masonic Feasts on June

24th and December 27th. I made inquiry with various Grand Lodges concerning the angle in which the compasses should be extended. In all cases, they indicated that the compasses in their respective jurisdictions were extended to 45 or 60 degrees. The United Grand Lodge of England extend the compasses to 45 degrees. I wrote to Brother Wallace McLeod, who I regard as a Masonic Scholar, and who will be speaking to this Lodge next year, regarding this issue. He felt that our Masonic predecessors were fairly straightforward about what they were doing, and he doubts the suggestion that the solstice or the Tropics of Cancer or Capricorn, figured in their imagery.



**Jewel Back**

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The blazing sun is fixed in the center of the compasses and the quadrant. You probably observed that this jewel does not have the letter "G" in the center. In fact, prior to 1873, it was unusual to find the letter "G" in the center of the square (quadrant) and compasses. According to Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia, the letter "G" was evidently added by some jeweler in making a badge or pin, and the idea quickly took hold and became very popular. No representation of the letter "G" has been found as early as 1850. Again, according to Coil, the only regulation Masonic symbol of Square and Compass with anything in the center is that symbol with the Blazing Star, Sun or Moon in the center. On the reverse side of the blazing sun is engraved these words:

"Original jewel made in 1778 to be worn by George Washington as first Grand Master of Masons in Virginia. He declined the office being in command of the Army. It was therefore first worn by Gov. John Blair who was the first Grand Master."

Is this a Fact, a Fable, or a Fantasy? Perhaps this is a question that will never be answered fully. I have asked myself many questions about this jewel, and unfortunately my answers are not completely satisfying. The language contained in the engraving on the reverse of the blazing sun, implies that this jewel must have been crafted prior to the election of John Blair. It states that it was crafted in 1778, to be worn by George Washington. Well, if George Washington declined, as we are informed, then it must place the date it was crafted, prior to October 13, 1778. A Fact, Fable, or Fantasy?

My interest in the Grand Master's Jewel was first fueled by a research paper presented by Most Worshipful A. Douglas Smith, Jr. in Virginia Research Lodge No. 1777, on December 11, 1982. In his presentation, he stated: "I have always been puzzled over the Grand Master's jewel which has been in use, insofar as I know, since before I was raised." Most Worshipful Smith was raised in 1927.

Brother Smith's interest may have been enhanced on March 28, 1953, when Most Worshipful James Noah Hillman read a paper in Virginia Research Lodge on the life of John Blair, Jr. Brother Smith was present at that meeting, and the Secretary, Archer B. Gay, recorded the following:

The Worshipful Master [Brother Hillman] then spoke of his efforts to trace the Grand Master's jewel, which was worn by John Blair and left to some member of his family. He spoke of his conversation with Mr. B. D. Peachy, Jr. of Williamsburg, who had seen the jewel and apron. Mr. Peachy seemed to think that this jewel had been taken from the Spencer home by Daingerfield Spencer, who was a collateral descendent of John Blair. The jewel, it is thought, was pawned either in Richmond, Norfolk, or Washington, and Mr. Peachy had promised to get in touch with Spencer to ascertain, if he could, the actual place of the disposal.

It was suggested at that meeting, that a thorough research be made of the jewels worn by the Grand Master and Deputy Grand Master, and an attempt also be made to determine their age.

At the June 27, 1953 meeting of Virginia Research Lodge, it was reported that Mr. Peachy of Williamsburg had died about ten days after the last communication of the Lodge, and therefore nothing more could be determined concerning the Grand Master's jewel.

My interest was further excited when I purchased a copy of the Grand Lodge of Virginia *Proceedings* for the years 1777 to 1823. By now, as I am sure you all know, John Blair, Jr., served as our first Grand Master, being elected on October 13, 1778, and served until 1784. In the *Proceedings* just mentioned, there is a beautiful engraved picture of Brother Blair, wearing, what appears to me to be, the jewel presently worn by the Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Virginia.

There are six other Grand Masters listed in the *Proceedings* for the years 1777-1823 that include engravings of what appears to be the jewel now worn by the Deputy Grand Master. These include Edmund Randolph (1786-1789), John Marshall (1793-1795), Benjamin Day (1797-1800), Solomon Jacobs (1810-1813), John H. Purdie (1819-1821), and Samuel Jones (1821).

Brother Smith's paper, presented at the annual communication of this Lodge in December of 1982 includes an interview about the Deputy Grand Master's Jewel as told by Worshipful Christian Henry Schneider. I think it is important to quote this story in its entirety at this time because of its importance to this subject.

You will note that this interview took place the same day, June 27th, as the communication of Virginia Research Lodge in 1953.

On June 27, 1953, Most Worshipful Brother Smith called upon Worshipful Christian Henry Schneider at his home, 2808 Ellwood Avenue, Richmond, Virginia. Brother Schneider was the son of F. H. Schneider who had immigrated to America from Germany in 1852. Brother "Chris," as he was affectionately called, was born at 507 West Leigh Street nineteen years later, September 17, 1871. He was Raised in April 1904 in St. John's Lodge No. 36. He served as its Worshipful Master in 1911.

It should be stated that this good Mason had, perhaps, instructed as many, if not more, members of the Fraternity in the ritual than any of his contemporaries, and until recently was instructor of the Saturday Night Temple Class.

I don't know when I didn't know him, and he seemed to have changed little over the years. Short in stature and of bald head, he was always strict in his teaching and gave the ritual with the accent of the oft misstated words. He was a bachelor.

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When apprised of my mission, his face lighted up. It should be here stated that although an accident of more than fifty years before had left him walking with a limp and the use of a cane, as far back as I can remember his mind was and is most alert. His affection for Masonry was of the first order.

He recalled that he had purchased the property he was then occupying about 1925, but hadn't moved in until "it was paid for" in the early thirties. It is a two-family house and it appeared that the family of Ambolds lived upstairs. She was, he said, the daughter of "Ike" Scott, who was the son of Most Worshipful Brother Robert G. Scott, who served as Grand Master in 1828-29. He said that Mrs. Ambold often told him of a "Great Big" jewel that the Masons had given her grandfather.

Shortly thereafter Mr. Ambold died and the family moved out, and "within a comparatively short time thereafter," said Brother Chris, "I went out to the coal house one moonlit morning and I saw this thing sitting beside the coal house and shining in the moonlight. I brought it inside. It was pretty badly bent up, but I could tell that it was a Masonic jewel, but not until that night when I returned from work did I recognize that it was just like the one that the Grand Master used to wear before 'Joe' Eggleston had it changed. I took it down to the Temple, and Oscar Adams who was for many years very active in Masonry in Richmond and Grand Tiler, said it was a Grand Lodge Jewel, and it was solid silver with gold over it."

Brother Chris continued: "I believe that there were at least three of those jewels, and a lot of the 'older boys' thought that what happened was that Grand Master Scott used to do a lot of visiting for the Grand Masters back when it wasn't so easy to get around, that, maybe one night he just wore the jewel home and then he died and it was found among his effects and passed on it the family."

If I may digress for a minute, Most Worshipful Brother Scott, was born in Georgia in 1789; he served as Grand Master of Masons in Virginia 1828-30; he died in his native Georgia in 1870, and was buried at Monroe County, Georgia. Brother Scott was educated at the College of William & Mary, and practiced law in Williamsburg. He represented York County in the Virginia Legislature. He served as a Lieutenant of cavalry in the War of 1812. He moved to Richmond, and in 1853, President Franklin Pierce appointed him Consul at Rio de Janeiro. Knowing this raises some questions, at least for me, that suggests that maybe Brother Schneider's opinion may be inaccurate.

Brother Smith continued:

When he was asked why he thought he had come upon it in such a strange manner, he suggested that maybe because he was a bachelor, and Mrs. Ambold was afraid that a gift of it to him might have been misunderstood, and yet she knew that he was bound to find it where it had been placed and that he would be sure that it was placed in the right hands.

We then spoke of the present jewel used by the Grand Master with the quadrant. Brother Chris insisted that when he first came into Masonry, and up to the time that J. W. Eggleston was Grand Master (1908-09) the Grand Master's jewel had always been the Square and Compasses and the Sun, but that Grand Master Eggleston "told me that he had had the quadrant and the inscription put on because the other jewel didn't conform to his idea of what a Grand Master's jewel should look like."

Brother Schneider expressed the opinion that Eggleston had gotten either Frank or Charlie Kibler, well-known Richmond jewelers of that day, to make the change and the inscription.

I asked if he thought the jewel he had found had been used by earlier Grand Masters. He said that he couldn't tell since that which was changed by the late



Brother Eggleston was the only Grand Master's jewel he had known until he found the one now used by the Deputy Grand Master."

Brother Smith, then goes on to state that, "On my Masonic honor, I have transcribed this interview with great care, since I believe that it will be of historic importance, and in the event of my research thereon may not be completed before my death, and I want it correct."

I am not sure that this paper would have satisfied Brother Smith's quest to find indisputable evidence on the jewel worn by our Grand Master, but I thought that one sure way to dispel the story that Most Worshipful J. W. Eggleston had the jewel changed from a square to a quadrant, would be to find a picture of a nineteenth century Grand Master wearing a jewel with a quadrant. I wrote letters to two Lodges, Alexandria Washington Lodge No. 22, and Marshall Lodge No. 39, and searched through the records of Widow's Sons' Lodge No. 60. These Lodges had a number of Grand Masters during the 1800's. I was looking for pictures of Grand Masters; Peyton S. Coles (1880-81), Rt. T. W. Duke, Jr. (1898-99), James B. Leitch (1855-56), William H. Lambert (1874), Robert T. Craighill (1889-90), John R. McDaniel (1860-61), and Robert E. Withers (1872-73). Through the efforts of Most Worshipful Donald M. Robey, a Past Master of Alexandria Washington Lodge No. 22, and Brother Claude H. Harris, the Lodge Senior Warden, I was able to secure a photograph of a portrait of Most Worshipful William H. Lambert. Brother Lambert served as Grand Master in 1874, and in the portrait, he is wearing a jewel, with the quadrant, that looks exactly like the one being worn today by the Grand Master of Masons in Virginia. The exact date that the portrait was painted is unknown. Brother Lambert died December 7, 1907. The Lambert portrait was painted by Eugenie (DeLand) Saugstad, who was born in Washington, D.C., in 1872. She lived most of her life in Alexandria, and her art career didn't begin until 1898. This means that the portrait was painted sometime after 1898. A complete search of the records of Alexandria Washington Lodge No. 22, from 1890 to 1910, produced no evidence to indicate when the portrait was painted.

The use of a quadrant with the compasses, as a Masonic symbol, has been in use by Masons for over 200 years. Let me cite several examples associated with Virginia Freemasonry. The jewel of Past Grand Master Powhatan B. Starke, which is now in the possession of Powhatan Starke Lodge No. 124, Petersburg, Virginia, has a quadrant. Brother Starke was Grand Master in 1859, and died in 1870. The only thing unusual is that the compasses are extended under the quadrant, like we set the jewels for an Entered Apprentice.

The jewel worn by Worshipful George Washington used a quadrant. The book, *The Lodge of Washington*, a history of Alexandria Washington Lodge No. 22, Alexandria, Virginia, written by Worshipful F. L. Brockett, a Past Master of Alexandria Washington Lodge No. 22, was published in 1876, and has a jewel on the cover. It also used the quadrant and the blazing sun. Included in the Virginia Presentation Volume, is a picture of the Grand and subordinate lodge jewels. The jewel of the Grand Master uses the quadrant and looks just like the one now worn by the Grand Master. This might not seem significant, but the exact same information is contained in a copy of the Virginia Text Book, compiled by Brother John Dove, and this book is dated 1889.

In the History of Winchester Hiram Lodge No. 21, there is a picture of Judge Richard Parker, who served as Grand Master in 1877. This picture of Brother Parker has him wearing the Grand Master's Jewel with the quadrant and blazing sun. He died in 1893, and the portrait was dated the same year.

As you can see, there is some evidence that a jewel similar to that presently used by our Grand Master was in use prior to the time that Brother Eggleston was Grand Master in 1908. In the 1913 *Proceedings* of the Grand Lodge of Virginia, on page 80, the following resolution was adopted: "Whereas, the Grand Master's Jewel is the same as that worn by our first Grand Master at the organization of the Grand Lodge in 1777; therefore, Resolved, That the above facts be suitably engraved upon said Jewel, so as to place them on permanent historical record."

The cost for this engraving is recorded in 1914, on page 21, at \$5.64. This amount was paid to Jahnke Bros, for engraving the jewel of the Grand Master. So we now know that the historical record was engraved on the jewel in 1913, and not during the term of Most Worshipful J. W. Eggleston, or when it was reported to have been crafted in 1778.

Also recorded in the 1913 proceedings, on page 93, is this interesting statement, and I quote, "The Most Worshipful Grand Master (W. L. Andrews) designated Most Worshipful Brothers Joseph W. Eggleston and Ed. N. Eubank to prepare a form for certificates for Grand Officers, and the Finance Committee to prepare a design, and purchase the jewels for the Past Grand Masters."

In the 1914 proceedings, page 13, the committee reported as follows: "Your committee, appointed at the last Annual Communication to have charge of the selection and preparation of Jewels to be, by this Grand Lodge, presented to its Past Grand Masters, will make a report showing that work done, and, at some suitable time during the session, they will be presented."

Most Worshipful Brother Andrews, on behalf of the Grand Lodge, presented to all the Past Grand Masters, beautiful Jewels. The following were present: William H. Pleasants, Alfred R. Courtney, R. T. W. Duke, Jr., George W. Wright, H. O. Kerns, Ed. N. Eubank, Thomas N. Davis, Joseph W. Eggleston, and William B. McChesney. So we also learn that the design and issuance of a jewel for the Past Grand Masters began in 1913.

The engravings of the Grand Masters, between 1778 and 1823, wearing the jewel of the Deputy Grand Master is still unexplained, and perhaps it is destined to remain a mystery. My research has produced nothing to explain this mystery. If we can believe the 1913 Resolution, the present jewel is the one worn by Brother Blair. I must say, that if the jewel was in existence in 1778, I find it very difficult to understand why it was not used in the engravings.

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I have asked myself if it was possible that Brother Schneider's recollections, and opinions, could have been clouded with time? Forty-five years had elapsed when Brother Smith conducted his interview. Could Brother Schneider have been confused about the story of the Grand Master's Jewel with the issuance of the Past Grand Master's Jewel in 1913?

A search of the Grand Treasurer's cash book, for the years 1907-1910, produced no record or entry for a new Grand Master's Jewel, or for a Jeweler. I must also add, that the cash books, or treasurer's record, for the Grand Lodge of Virginia does not exist prior to 1857. The records for 1777 to 1856, do not exist.

There is no way to verify whether there was an expense for jewels purchased during these dates. There is nothing in the printed record that would reveal any light on this subject. In the Grand Lodge minutes of November 4, 1784, there is recorded the following: "That the Most Worshipful Grand Master do cause to be provided a seal and clothing for the use of the Grand Lodge, and that he be empowered to draw on the Grand Treasurer for the payment of the same."

It wasn't until 1785, that any legislation generated income for the Grand Lodge, and those funds were specifically designated for charity, one might wonder where the funds came from during those years prior to 1785. Does the reference of "clothing" include jewels?

I began this paper, asking if, what we knew about the jewel of the Grand Master of Masons in Virginia, was a fact, a fable, or a fantasy. Time has clouded much of the truth about this mystery. Perhaps we will have to be satisfied by saying, that tradition indicates that the jewel was made in 1778, and was first worn by John Blair.

After all, much of what we know about our Craft, has come to us through the handing down of information, from one generation to another, and many times without written documentation. What has been a mystery for so many years, remains.