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The Lawrence Washington
Descendants.

House of Representatives
1843

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

February 8, 1843

PRESENTATION OF WASHINGTON'S SWORD AND FRANKLIN'S STAFF

MR. G. W. SUMMERS now rose, and addressed the speaker, who recognized the honorable gentleman as in possession of the floor; and all eyes were at once turned to him, and the whole House was at once hushed into silence. The galleries were densely filled with an anxious and attentive auditory, which had collected in anticipation of the interesting proceedings which were about to be witnessed. Many Senators occupied seats amongst the members in the House, and some of the representatives of foreign powers, accredited to this Government in diplomatic relations, were ranged below the bar; and all listened with profound stillness, while the honorable gentleman from Virginia spoke as follows:

Mr. Speaker: I rise for the purpose of discharging an office, not connected with the ordinary business of a legislative assembly. Yet, in asking permission to interrupt, for a moment, the regular order of parliamentary proceedings, I cannot doubt that the proposition which I have to submit will prove as gratifying as it may be unusual.

Mr. Samuel T. Washington, a citizen of Kanawha county, in the Commonwealth of Virginia, and one of my constituents, has honored me with the commission of presenting, in his name, and on his behalf, to the Congress of the United States, two most interesting and valuable relics, connected with the past history of our country, and with men whose achievements, both in the field and in the cabinet, best illustrate and adorn our annals.

One is the sword worn by George Washington, first as a Colonel in the colonial service of Virginia, in Forbe's campaign against the French and Indians; and afterwards, during the whole period of the war of Independence, as commander-in-chief of the American army.

It is plain cutleau, or hanger, with a green hilt and silver guard. On the upper ward of the scabbard is engraven "J. Bailey Fishkill". It is accompanied by a buckskin belt, which is secured by a silver buckle and clasp: whereon are engraven the letter "G. W". and the figures "1757". These are all of the plainest workmanship, but substantial, and in keeping with the man and with the times to which they belonged.

The history of this sword is perfectly authentic, and leaves no shadow of doubt as to its identity.

The last will and testment of George Washington, bearing date on the 9th day of February, 1799, contains, among a great variety of bequests the following clause: "To each of my nephews, William Augustine Washington, George Steplœ Washington, Bushrod Washington and Samuel Washington, I give one of the swords or cutleaux of which I may die possessed: and they are to choose in the order they are named. These swords are accompanied with an injunction, not to unsheath them for the purpose of shedding blood, except it be for self-defense, or in defense of their country and its rights; and, in the latter case, to keep them unsheathed, and prefer falling with them in their hands, to the relinquishment thereof."

In the distribution of the swords, hereby devised, among the five nephews therein enumerated, the one now presented fell to the share of Samuel Washington, the devisee last named in the clause of the will which I have just read.

This gentleman, who died a few years since, in the county of Kanawha, and who was the father of Samuel T. Washington, the donor, I knew well. I have often seen this sword in his possession, and recieved from himself the following account of the manner in which it became his property, in the division made among the devisees.

He said that he knew it to have been the sidearms of General Washington during the revolutionary war---not that used on occassions of parade and review, but the constant service sword of the great chief; that he had himself seen General Washington wear this identical sword, (he presumed for the last time) when, in 1794 he reviewed the Virginia and Maryland forces, then concentrated at Cumberland, under command of General Lee, and destined to coöperate with the Pennsylvania and New Jersey troops, then assembled at Bedford, in suppressing what has been called "the whiskey insurrection"

General Washington was at that time President of the United States, and, as such, was commander-in-chief of the army. It is known that it was his intention to lead the army in person on that occassion, had he found it necessary; and he went to Bedford and Cumberland prepared for that event. The condition of things did not require it, and he returned to his civil duties at Philadelphia.

Mr. Samuel Washington held the commission of a captain at that time himself, and served in that campaign, many of the incidents of which he has related to me.

He was anxious to obtain this particular sword, and preferred it to all the others, among which was the ornamented and costly present from the great Frederick.

At the time of the division among the nephews, without intimating what his preference was, he jocosely remarked, "that inasmuch as he was the only one of them who had participated in military service, they ought to permit him to take choice." This suggestion was met in the same spirit in which it was made: and the choice being awarded him, he chose this, the plainest and intrinsically the least valuable of any, simply because it was "the battle sword".

I am also in possession of the most satisfactory evidence, furnished by Col. George Washington, of Georgetown, the nearest male relative of General Washington now living, as to the identity of this sword. His information was derived from his father, William Augustine Washington, the devisee first named in the clause of the will which I have read, from his uncle, the late Judge Bushrod Washington, of the Supreme Court, and Major Lawrence Lewis, the acting executor of General Washington's will: All of whom concurred in the statement, that the true service sword was that selected by Capt. Samuel Washington. It remained in this gentleman's possession until his death, esteemed by him the most precious memento of his illustrious kinsman. It then became the property of his son, who, animated by that patriotism which so characterized the "father of his country", has concented that such a relic ought not to be appropriated by an individual citizen, and has instructed me, his representative, to offer it to the nation, to be preserved in its public depositories, as the common property of all: since its office has been to achieve and defend the common liberty of all.

He has in like manner, requested me to present this cane to the Congress of the United States, deeming it not unworthy the public acceptance.

This was once the property of the philosopher and patriot, Benjamin Franklin.

By a codicil to his last will and testament, we find it thus disposed of : "My fine crab-tree walking stick, with a gold head, curiously wrought in the form of the cap of liberty, I give to my friend, the friend mankind, General Washington. If it were a sceptre, he has merited it, and would become it."

General Washington, in his will, devises this cane as follows: Item. To my brother, Charles Washington, I give and bequeath the gold headed cane left me by Dr. Franklin, in his will".

Captain Samuel Washington was the only son of Charles Washington, the devisee, from whom he derived, by inheritance, this interesting memorial: and having transmitted it to his son, Samuel T Washington, the later thus seeks to bestow it worthily, by associating it with the battle-sword, in a gift to his countrymen.

I cordially concur with Mr. Washington in the opinion that they each merit public preservation and I obey, with pleasure, his wishes in here presenting them, in his name, to the nation.

Let the sword of the hero and the staff of the philosopher go together. Let them have place among the proudest trophies and the most honored memorials of our national achievements.

Upon that staff once leaned the sage of whom it has been said, "He snatched the lightning from heaven, and the sceptre from tyrants".

A mighty arm once wielded this sword in a righteous cause, even unto the dismemberment of empire. In the hand of Washington

this was " the sword of the Lord and of Gideon". It was never drawn, except in the defense of the public liberty. It was never sheathed until a glorious and triumphant success returned it to the scabbard, without a stain of cruelty or dishonor upon its blade. It was never surrendered, except to the country which bestowed it.

(Loud and long-continued plaudits followed the delivery of this address).

The Sergeant-at-Arms advanced to the seat of the honorable gentleran, and recieved into his custody the interesting relics.

Mr. Adams then rose to submit a resolution in relation thereto. He said: Mr. Speaker: In presenting this resolution to the House, it may, perhaps, be expected that I should accompany it with some remarks suitable to the occasion: and yet, sir, I never rose to address this House under a deeper conviction of the want of words to express the emotions that I feel. It is precisely because occasions like this are adapted to produce universal sympathy, that little can be said by any one, but what, in the language of the heart--in tones not loud, but--deep--every one present has said to himself. My respected friend from Virginia, by whom this offering has, it seems to me, already said all that can be said suitable to the occasion. In parting from him, as after a few short days we must all do, it will on my part be sorrow, that in all probability I shall see his face and hear his voice no more. But his words of this day have been planted in my memory, and will there remain till the last pulsation of my heart. The Sword of Washington! The staff of Franklin! Oh, sir, what associations are linked in adamant with those names. Washington! whose sword my friend has said was never drawn but in the cause of his country, and never sheathed when needed to his

countrys cause! Franklin! the philosopher of the thunderbolt, the printing press, and the plowshare.

What names are these in the scanty catalogue of the benefactors of mankind---Washington and Franklin! What other two men, whose lives belong to the 18th century of Christendom, have left a deeper impression of themselves upon the age in which they lived, and upon all aftertimes? Washington, the warrior and the legislator! In war contending, by the wager of battle, for the independence of his country, and for the freedom of the human race-- ever manifesting, amidst the horrors of war, by precept and example, his reverence for the laws of peace, and for the tenderest sympathies of humanity. In peace, soothing the ferocious spirit of discord among his own countrymen into harmony, and giving to that very sword now presented to his country a charm more potent than that attributed in ancient times to the lyre of Orpheus. Franklin, the mechanic of his own fortune, teaching, in his early youth, under the shackles of indigence, the way to wealth: and, ~~in the shade of obscurity, the path to greatness: in the maturity of manhood, disarming the thunder of its terrors, the lightning of its fatal blast, and wresting from the tyrants hand the still more afflitive sceptre of poression: while descending into the vale of years traversing the Atlantic ocean:~~ braving, in the dead of winter, the battle and the breeze: bearing in his hand the charter of Independence, which he had contributed to form: and tendering, from the self-created nation, to the mightiest monarchs of Europe, the olive-branch of peace, the mercurial wand of commerce, and the amulet of protection and safety to the man of

peace on the pathless ocean from the inexorable cruelty and merciless rapacity of war; and, finally, in the last stage of life, with fourscore winters on his head, under the torture of an incurable disease, returning to his native land, closing his days as the Chief Magistrate of his adopted Commonwealth, after contributing, by his counsels, under the Presidency of Washington, and recording his name, under the sanction of devout prayer, invoked by him to God, to that Constitution, under the authority of which we are here assembled as the Representatives of the North American people, to receive in their name, and for them, these Venerable relics of the wise, the valiant, and the good founders of our great confederated Republic these sacred symbols of our golden age.

May they be deposited among the archives of our Government; and may every American who shall hereafter behold them, ejaculate a mingled offering of praise to that Supreme Ruler of the Universe, by whose tender mercies our Union has been hitherto preserved through all the vicissitudes and revolutions of this turbulent world, and of prayer for the continuance of these blessings, by the dispensations of his providence to our beloved country from age to age, till time shall be no more. (Great applause).

Mr. Speaker: I submit the following joint resolution.
Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States in Congress assembled, That the thanks of this Congress be presented to Samuel T Washington of Kanawha County, Virginia, for the present of the sword used by his illustrious relative, George Washington, in the military career of his early youth, in the seven years war, and throughout the war of our national independence: and of the staff bequeathed by the patriot, statesman, and sage, Benjamin Franklin, to the same leader of the armies of freedom in

the Revolutionary war, George Washington.

That these precious relics are hereby accepted in the name of the nation: that they be deposited for safekeeping in the Department of State of the United States and that a copy of this resolution, signed by the President of the Senate and Speaker of the House of Representatives, be transmitted to the said Samuel T Washington.

The resolution was adopted unanimously, and with loud acclamation.

Mr. Keennan said, as it was evident, after the interesting scene just witnessed, that the House was not in a fit state for the transaction of business, he would now move that the House adjourn.

Mr. Hopkins requested the gentleman to withdraw the motion for a moment in order that it might be stated on the face of the resolutions that they were unanimously adopted.

The Suggestion was acceded to and the resolutions amended accordingly.

Mr Taliaferro moved that the addresses of Messrs. Summers and Adams, this morning, be spread upon the journal: and also that a copy be transmitted to Mr. Washington, of Kanawha, Virginia.

This motion was adopted, nem. con.

House of Representatives.

Wednesday, February 8th 1843.

Mr Taliaferro submitted the following resolution, prefaced with a few observations, which were inaudible at the reporters desk:

Resolved, that 20,000 copies of the full journal of the proceedings of the House on the presentation of the sword of Washington, be printed for distribution by the members of this House.

Mr Briggs begged permission to amend the journal before that resolution was agreed to. He begged to move an amendment of the journal, by the addition of the following letter of Mr. Samuel T Washington to Mr. Summers, accompanying the sword and cane, which were yesterday presented to Congress:

Coals Mouth, Kanawha County, (Va).

January 9th 1843

My dear Sir: With this, you will recieve the war-sword of my granduncle, General George Washington, and the gold-headed cane bequeathed to him by Doctor Benjamin Franklin.

These interesting relics I wish to be presented, through you, my dear sir, to the Congress of the United States, on behalf of the nation.

Congress can dispose of them in such manner as shall seem appropriate, and best calculated to keep in memory the character and services of those two illustrious founders of our Republic. I am, with esteem, yours,

Samuel T Washington.

To Hon. George W. Summers,

House of Representatives.

The motion to amend was agreed to; and the resolution of the gentleman from Virginia was then adopted.

In Senate

Wednesday, Feb. 8, 1843

A message was recieved from the House of Representatives, by Matthew St. Clair Clarke, their clerk, informing the Senate that, that body had passed a resolution, and had dirrected him to ask the concurrence of the Senate therein: and had also directed him to state that the sword and cane which were the subject of the resolution, were also forwarded, through their Sergeant-at-arms, to be presented to the Senate.

Mr. Archer rose and said he presumed that this would be the proper occasion for making the motion which he desired to make---that the Senate proceed to immediate action upon the subject of the resolution which had just been communicated to them from the House of Represtatives.

The resolution was then read as follows:

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, that the thanks of this Congress be presented to Samuel T. Washington, of Kanawha County, Virginia, for the present of the sword used by his illustrious relative, George Washington, in the military career of his early youth, in the seven years war, and throughout the war of our national independence; and of the staff bequeathed by the patriot, statesman and sage, Benjamin Franklin, to the same leader of the armies of freedom in the Revolutionary war, George Washington.

That these precious relics are hereby accepted in the name of the nation. That they may be deposited for safekeeping in the Department of State of the United States; and that a copy of this resolution, signed by the President of the Senate and Speaker of the House of Representatives, be transmitted to the said Samuel T. Washington.

Mr. A. then proceeded to address the Senate.

Mr. President: The grounds of the proceedings of the other House, in reference to these invaluable relics, not being necessarily supposed to be known to this body, it may not, perhaps, be considered improper or in appropriate, (coming, as they do, from a citazen of that State which I have the honor in part to ^{re}present), that I should make some brief remarks before committing the resolution to the disposal of this honorable body.

Sir, it is known to all who have read the history of General Washington's life, that he left to four nephews each a sword, one of which had had the signal honor of being worn by him during the whole period of his military services, from the time he entered the army in the service of his country, then in a colonial condition, down to the memorable period when, having achieved his country's independence, and coupled his name with immortality, he resigned the high commission which he bore, and retired to the enjoyment of domestic tranquility.

Sir, it was a mark of good taste on the part of one of the nephews of General Washington to select, as a memorial of that illustrious man most worth of being presented to the Congress of the United States, this simple sword. It is a relic of no ordinary value in the estimation of that gentleman, and I am sure it will be in the estimation of the Senate and the country--having been the battle sword of that hero, during the whole period of his immortal career.

Sir, I ought, perhaps, to say that there is no question of its identity, plain and simple as it is; and if I desired evidence to show that it was really the sword which General Washington had worn throughout his glorious career of military service, I would find sufficient to convince myself, at least, in its very plainness and simplicity.

But I will not go into an argument to prove its identity, nor will I trace its history; that has already been done in the other House, by an honorable member of that body, a colleague of mine, who has added, by the manner in which he executed that duty, another wreath to his own honor, and shown how well he deserved to be made the instrument of conveying to Congress this invaluable gift.

Sir, there may be those who think it is unfitting the dignity of Senatorial bodies to pay attention to the preservation of such simple relics as this; but, I confess, if there be any such, I am not of the number.

Sir, those who have been precursors of our course in the great career of liberty, have not been of the opinion that such mementoes were valueless. We have no record of any country, in which freedom has triumphed, where illustrious men, after they have passed from their mortal career, had not statues erected to their memory, and relics and memorials, such as those now lying upon your table, commemorative of their achievements, carefully preserved. They are calculated, in an eminent degree, to produce the feelings and the practice of virtue in successive generations. By associating the memorials of great achievements with the names of those who performed them, and presenting them continually to the eyes of men, they serve to inspire the same feelings which have produced such achievements.

Sir, judging from my own feelings, no statue nor mausoleum can produce so great an effect as the smallest relic which is intimately associated with the person of the benefactor of his country. These are, indeed, small and inconsiderable relics; but who are the persons, and what the names, with which they stand associated. ?

Washington:---when his name is mentioned, who shall be presumptuous enough to conceive that eulogy can add anything to the feelings which the mere sound of it produces?

Washington:---of whom one of the most eminent men living in the present day, and himself the subject of a monarchy, has said, and said truly, that among uninspired men, that was the greatest name of all. And it is, Mr President; for I must be permitted to say, if it were possible that a man as heroic and as virtuous as Washington should be permitted by a beneficent Providence to be placed in authority now, he could not by any possibility be as great a man as Washington was. And why? Because circumstances must, in every case, form one of the elements of greatness. Because no living man can again be placed in circumstances where he can signalize himself as our glorious Washington has done.

Sir, we may have many founders of liberty in every country and in every clime; but never can there be another founder of the liberties of a whole race; and though we should prove recreant to his memory, and treacherously refuse to preserve the mementoes of his fame, this is the character which Washington will receive in all aftertimes, from all races of men. Yes, sir, it is receiving General Washington in a light altogether too confined to claim his benefactions as our exclusive benefactions, and his fame as our fame.

Sir, the thousands of generations which are to spring up in aftertime upon the face of the earth, under the shadow of that glorious germe of liberty which has been planted upon this continent, when it shall have extended its luxuriant branches and brought forth its fruit in full maturity, will all of them claim Washington, as we now are entitled to claim him;--as their benefactor, and the author of their liberties, as he has been of ours.

And Franklin:---names associated in this country's history as the greatest benefactors of the human race---Franklin, scarcely less illustrious for his important discoveries in science. Names now associated by these seemingly fortuitous gift of a mere cane:---

inconsiderable, indeed, in itself, but of immense value, as having belonged to him.

Sir, the discoveries of Franklin, as a philosopher, (for I mean now only to pay passing tribute to him in that view), will hereafter be considered as most extraordinary benefactions to the cause of science---greater than those of any man that has lived in any age of the world.

Such are the names which are here associated by these trifling gifts; And what is it that the Senate is now called upon to do by this resolution? To pay a passing tribute of homage or admiration? No: that is not the word to be employed in speaking of either of these men: it is not homage---it is not admiration: there is but a single word in our language that will express it---the tribute of our veneration.

Sir, it was the simplicity of the style of our venerated Franklin, which distinguished him as much as his eminent virtues, and his profound knowledge, and his glorious contributions to the cause of liberty as well as science. He said of General Washington---the friend of liberty and the friend of mankind---that he deserved a sceptre. Sir, that great man not only merited, but he gained a sceptre. It was thought, at the period of his demise, not to great praise to say that he was enthroned in the hearts of his countrymen. And thus it is that he is destined to be sceptered in the estimation and the admiration of all succeeding ages.

Mr. President, I shall detain the Senate no longer. The inconsiderable need of praise which I feel proud to bestow upon those illustrious names shall no longer be an interruption or impediment to the expression which I know the Senate is ready to make---of that tribute of veneration so justly due to the benefactors of mankind. The resolution having been unanimously adopted, On motion of Mr. Archer, the Senate adjourned.