

CLEANING AND REPAIRING
of the
HOUDON STATUE OF GEORGE WASHINGTON
and
BUST OF THE MARQUIS de LA FAYETTE

REPORT OF THE SENATE RULES COMMITTEE
to
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA



Senate Document No. 28

1974

MESSRS. EDWARD E. WILLEY, *Chairman*
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MEMBERS OF THE SENATE RULES COMMITTEE

Louise O'C. Lucas
Clerk of the Senate

Report of the Senate Rules Committee
to
The General Assembly of Virginia

Richmond, Virginia
March 9, 1974

TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA:

Chapter 464, 1973 Acts of Assembly
Item 779.2.1

“Out of the contingency fund of the General Assembly there shall be expended a sum sufficient, estimated at \$5,000, for the restoration, by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, of the Houdon statue of George Washington and bust of Marquis de LaFayette.”

Pursuant to the above chapter, the Rules Committee directed the Clerk of the Senate to contact Mr. James M. Brown, Director of the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and make the necessary arrangements for work to begin on the cleaning and repairing of the Houdon statue of George Washington and the bust of the Marquis de LaFayette.

On the recommendation of Mr. Brown, Mr. Joseph Ternbach, born in Vienna and a restorer of great renown, 110-21 69 Avenue, Forest Hills, New York 11375, was invited to come to Richmond to examine the Houdon statue and bust.

Joseph Ternbach received his Master's Degree in sculpture and art crafts from the School for Art and Crafts in Vienna. He was later appointed expert and appraiser at the courts in Vienna. Since 1939, he has been working as a restorer of sculpture in all media for prominent United States museums.

An agreement was reached and Mr. Ternbach began work in June and completed the project in August, 1973.

The committee feels that the attached treatment report on this restoration should be preserved in our records.

Excerpts from various papers, which are on file in the Senate Clerk's Office are also included in this report.

Respectfully submitted,



Edward E. Willey, Chairman.

To: Hon. Louise O'C. Lucas
Clerk, The Senate
Commonwealth of Virginia
Richmond Virginia

REPORT ON THE RESTORATION OF THE GEORGE WASHINGTON, marble statue, and LAFAYETTE, marble bust, by Houdon, in THE CAPITOL.

The Washington sculpture was thoroughly cleaned of surface grime with benzine and alcohol, some paint spots were removed with acetone, and the whole was washed several times with mild soap, water and ammonia.

The joints of the breakage of the cane were cleaned of the excess glue and plaster of Paris covering the area of mending. The mended joints were 'v'-ed out and recemented with crushed marble chips, and retouched. Some 'cords' of the tassel on the cane were repaired and the portion of the broken left spur was recemented. On the sword, around the guard and the sword grip, a surplus of plaster of Paris was removed and the area cleaned.

The base with the dedication inscribed on the front was thoroughly cleaned to match the whole tone of the statue, although the base is of a different marble.

Finally, a very thin coat of bleached white beeswax diluted with synthetic turpentine was applied over the whole statue, including the base. This will serve as a protective cover against dust and chemicals in the air, and has smoothed areas previously treated with harsh abrasives.

The Lafayette bust was cleaned and washed a few times with benzine, alcohol, soap and water and ammonia; paint stains on the base were removed with acetone.


After preliminary cleaning of the nose, including scraping out the glue and plaster of Paris that covered the joints of the break, it was clear that this nose was not the original one which had been carved as one piece with the bust. It was itself a replacement which was set into the roots of the original nose. Once this fact was established as well as the fact that the joints met properly, the course of treatment was dictated: not to remove the nose but merely to clean out thoroughly the line of the joint and fill it with marble chips and marble cement and refinish the joint.

Missing loops on which the Medal of Cincinnati hang were replaced, as well as a few tips of the tassels of the epaulette.

The dedication tablet which had loosened from the previous attachment with plaster of Paris had to be removed and reset with two dowels and marble cement. The lower left corner which was chipped off was filled in with marble cement.

The whole sculpture was given a thin coating of bleached white beeswax diluted with synthetic turpentine to keep it clean of dust and chemicals in the air.

Joseph Ternbach



August 7, 1973

GEORGE WASHINGTON

Born in Westmoreland County, Va., February 22, 1732.

Died at "Mount Vernon", Fairfax County, Va., December 14, 1799.

Entombed at "Mount Vernon".

Adjutant General with rank of Major, 1751.

Adjutant General, appointment renewed, 1753.

Lieutenant Colonel of provincial troops, 1754.

Aide-de-Camp to Braddock, 1755.

Burgess, 1765-75.

Member of Virginia Convention, 1775.

Member of Continental Congress, 1774-75.

General and Commander-in-Chief of Continental Forces, 1775.

General and Commander-in-Chief of the Armies of the United States, resigned 1783.

Commissioner to Convention in Philadelphia (1787) to revise Federal Constitution, elected by General Assembly, December 4, 1786.

President of the United States, 1789-97.



Equestrian Statue on Washington Monument in Capitol Square.
Statue in Rotunda by Jean-Antoine Houdon.

Inscriptions

Below the cane held in the right hand of the statue:

fait par houdon Citoyen francais 1788

On the front of the upper pedestal:

GEORGE WASHINGTON

On the front of the lower pedestal appears the inscription by James Madison:

The General Assembly of the Commonwealth
of Virginia have caused this Statue to be erected
as a monument of affection and gratitude to

GEORGE WASHINGTON

who, uniting to the endowments of the *Hero*
the virtues of the *Patriot* and exercising both
in establishing the Liberties of his Country
has rendered his name dear to his Fellow Citizens,
and given the world an immortal example
of true *Glory*. Done in the year of

CHRIST

One thousand seven hundred and eighty-eight
and in the year of the Commonwealth the twelfth.

M A R Q U I S de L A F A Y E T T E

Born at Chateau de Chavaniac, near Auvergne, France, September 6, 1757.

Died in France, May 20, 1834.

Buried in Picpus Cemetery, Paris, France.

Major General, Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the United States in Virginia.



Bust in Rotunda (Virginia State Capitol) by Jean-Antoine Houdon.

Inscription:

*This bust was voted on the
seventeenth day of December seventeen
hundred & eighty one by the*

GENERAL ASSEMBLY of the STATE OF VIRGINIA,

to the honor of the

MARQUIS de LA FAYETTE,

*Major General in the service of the United
States of America, and late Commander
in Chief of the Army of the United States
in Virginia, as a lasting monument of
his memory and their gratitude.*

Excerpt from
PROCEEDINGS
of the
MASSACHUSETTS HISTORICAL SOCIETY.
Second Series. — Vol. XV.

1901, 1902

Richmond
5 April, 1789

The bust of the Marquis arrived at Baltimore from whence we have had it transported to this place, which it reached a few days past. How or where it happened I know not, but so it was, that on opening the cases wherein it was inclosed, a part of the nose was found broken off. The pieces were in the case excepting the thin part which separates the nostrils. We have engaged a man here, the best qualified of any we could procure, to repair the injury, and he thinks he can restore the pieces without any material change in the appearance of that part of the bust. Should he fail, the accident will prove a disagreeable circumstance.

(Letter of Joseph Jones to James Madison)

EXCERPTS FROM
MEMOIRS OF THE LIFE
AND WORKS OF
JEAN ANTOINE HOUDON

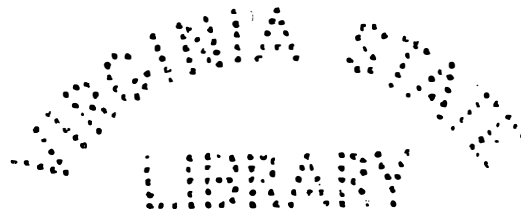
THE SCULPTOR OF
VOLTAIRE AND OF WASHINGTON

BY
CHARLES HENRY HART

AND
EDWARD BIDDLE

WITH THIRTY-THREE ILLUSTRATIONS

PHILADELPHIA
PRINTED FOR THE AUTHORS
MCMXI



EXCERPTS FROM MEMOIRS OF THE LIFE AND WORKS OF
JEAN ANTOINE HOUDON

“Whereas, it was unanimously resolved, on the 17th day of December, 1781, that a bust of the Marquis de la Fayette be directed to be made in Paris, of the best marble employed for such purposes, with the following inscription: [Vide p. 227.]

“Resolved unanimously, that the Governor, with the advice of the Council, be authorized and desired to defray the expense of carrying the said vote into execution, out of the fund allotted for the contingencies of government; that he cause said bust to be presented, in the name of the Commonwealth, to the city of Paris, with a request that the same may be accepted and preserved in some public place of the said city.

*“Resolved unanimously, that as a further mark of the lasting esteem, of this Commonwealth, for the illustrious qualities and services of the Marquis de la Fayette, the Governor, with the advice of the Council, be authorized and desired to **cause another bust of him, with a similar inscription, to be procured by draught on the said fund, and that same, when procured, be fixed in such public place, at the seat of government, as may hereafter be appointed for the erection of the statue voted by the General Assembly to General Washington.**”*

At this time Patrick Henry was Governor of Virginia, and he communicated the new enactment to La Fayette . . .¹

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. . . . as will be seen by his letter to Washington of October 26, 1786.¹ He writes:

A new instance of the goodness of the state of Virginia has been given me, by **the placing of my bust at the Hôtel de Ville of this city.** The situation of the other bust will be the more pleasing to me as, while it places **me within the capitol of the State, I shall be eternally by the side of, and paying an everlasting homage to, the statue of my beloved general.**

Bachaumont says: ² “Every one is going to the Hôtel de Ville to see the bust of M. the Marquis de la Fayette, executed by the Sieur Houdon and placed in one of the rooms of the building with much ceremony and pomp.” Later in the month, Jefferson wrote to M. de Corny, asking for a report of the proceedings attending the inauguration of the bust, that he might forward them to the Governor of Virginia. The conclusion of the letter shows that M. de Corny was of no little aid in carrying out the project.³

Your goodness, already so often manifested in this business, encourages me to endeavor to obtain these through your intervention. I do it the rather as it furnishes me an occasion, very grateful to my feelings, of returning to you, at the same time, my sincere thanks for the zeal with which you have seconded the views of the state, the readiness with which you have condescended to give me information in the course of the proceedings and to secure by your influence the success of these proceedings.

There was considerable delay attending the securing of this report, and Jefferson was unable to forward it until February of the following year. With it he writes to Governor Randolph: ¹

¹ Henry’s “Life of Patrick Henry,” Vol. II, p. 262.

¹ “Memoirs, Correspondence and Manuscripts of General La Fayette.” Published by his family. London, 1837, Vol. II, p. 148.

² “Mémoires Secrets,” October 6, 1786, Vol. XXXIII, p. 90.

³ Washington’s Jefferson, Vol. II, p. 44.

¹ Washington’s Jefferson, Vol. IV, p. 118.

The principle that the King is the sole fountain of honour in this country opposed a barrier to our desires which threatened to be insurmountable. No instance of a similar proposition from a foreign power had occurred in their history. The admitting it in this case is a singular proof of the King's friendly disposition towards the states of America, and of his personal esteem for the Marquis de la Fayette.

The **second bust of La Fayette, made for Virginia by Houdon**, was exhibited at the Salon of 1787, and catalogued, "256. M. le Marquis de la Fayette. Buste marbre, pour les Etats de la Verginie." The only contemporary remark upon the bust that I find, while possibly true, is not complimentary to the subject, "Whose face is rather simple than ingenuous,"² but adds that it does "honor to the precision" of Houdon's chisel. The bust was not forwarded to Virginia until late in the year 1788, by André Limozin, who advised the Governor from Havre on November 11th,³ "I have consigned to your Excellency, on board the American ship *Sally*, Kennedy Master, bound for Baltimore, a large box, containing Marquis de la Fayette's bust, for which I enclose the bill of lading." This letter was laid before the Council by the Governor on January 29, 1789,⁴ when it was "ordered that the Governor take measures for bringing the said bust here"; and on June 30th, "an account of John Groves amounting to 2 pounds, 17 shillings and 3 pence for freight and expenses of bringing the Marquis Fayette's bust from Maryland," was ordered paid.¹ This is the last record we have been able to find concerning this bust. We do not know when it was put in the place it was destined to occupy for many years — a niche in the wall of the rotunda of the State Capitol, above the line of vision, opposite to Houdon's statue of Washington; but, as the building was not finished until 1796, it probably was put in place at the same time that the statue of Washington was erected. **The reproduction shows that the nose has at some time been broken off and restored, but when and how the injury occurred, nothing but varied and uncertain traditions remain**, the most commonly accepted being that **at the time of La Fayette's visit to Richmond, in October of 1824, the bust was taken down from its niche, to be used in the decorations for his reception, when it fell and received this fracture.** This, not unlikely, is correct, as it would account for the wording of a report in the Richmond newspapers of La Fayette's reception, which says:

At the north entrance gate of Capitol Square, there was an ornamental quadrangular pedestal on which *it was intended* to place the marble bust of La Fayette in the Capitol.

The use of the word "intended" shows clearly that the bust was not placed on the pedestal, but no reason is given for its not being so placed, which may very well have been the accidental fall that disfigured the face so that it could not be exhibited in the presence of the original. However this may be, no record can be found of the fracture and its restoration, and the bust continued to occupy the niche where it was originally placed until **July, 1904, when it was removed to the State Library, where the writer saw it in the spring of 1907.** For sentimental reasons, if for none other, it should be returned to its original abiding-place, where, as La Fayette wrote to Washington, "I shall be eternally by the side of, and paying an everlasting homage to, the statue of my beloved general."

The conclusion of this chapter will show how very unfortunate Houdon's several busts of La Fayette have been in their unusually checkered careers.

² "Memoires Secrets," August 25, 1787, Vol. XXXVI, p. 396.

³ Calendar of Virginia State Papers, Vol. IV, p. 512.

⁴ MS. Council Journal, October, 1787, to April, 1789, p. 566. State Library at Richmond.

¹ MS. Council Journal, April, 1789, to October, 1791, p. 78. State Library, Richmond.

Misfortune seems to have pursued them, and it has been left for us, on this side of the water, to disentangle the meshes of error concerning them, which have been so tightly twisted in their native land, the home of both sculptor and subject.

The life of the bust presented to the city of Paris was short and its fate tragic. The Revolution followed close upon the heels of its dedication and the Hôtel de Ville became the rendezvous, in turn, for each party, and the scene of many of the Revolution's most stirring incidents. There the Notables assembled on the 22d of February, 1787, and there the States General gathered together on the 5th of May, 1789. La Fayette was a member of both of these bodies, and in July of 1789, almost in sight of his bust, was chosen General-Commander of the Parisian troops and Commander-in-Chief of the National Guard.

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The marble bust of La Fayette in the Museum of Versailles, with powdered hair and wearing the uniform of the Commander of the National Guard, is signed by Houdon and dated "1790." It is the one that was exhibited in the Salon of 1791, and whether or not it sustained a mutilation in 1793, **it has at some time suffered an injury precisely similar to that sustained by the bust of 1786, belonging to the State of Virginia,** and has been restored in a precisely similar manner, which, to say the least, is a curious coincidence.

