

# ‘Unique and Amazing’ Frescoes

## 12 Paintings Completed in 1868 Cover the Walls Of the Winchester Masonic Lodge Meeting Room

By F. C. Lowe - *The Winchester Star* - January 9, 2003

[http://www.winchesterstar.com/thewinchesterstar/030109/life\\_paintings.asp](http://www.winchesterstar.com/thewinchesterstar/030109/life_paintings.asp)

A treasure-trove of frescoes has adorned the plaster walls of a Loudoun Street building for more than 100 years.

The 1868 artwork on the walls of the top floor of the Winchester Hiram Lodge No. 21, Ancient Free and Accepted Masons building, was a surprise and a delightful treat to many residents who took part in the Preservation of Historic Winchester’s tour in December.

“These paintings are most unique,” said Lokie Voight of Winchester, junior past master of the lodge and guide during the tour. “I don’t think you will find anything like it in the world. No other lodges have anything like it anywhere.”

The frescoes, water colors on fresh plaster, have never been touched up or cleaned,” said Voight. “We have been told that the paint is an egg-white base, commonly used in those days.”



Frescoes on the walls of the Winchester Mason Lodge on the Loudoun Street Mall include George Washington (above) a member of the organization, a depiction of the the four cardinal virtues of temperance, fortitude, prudence, and justice (top left), and crossing of the River Jordan (left).  
(Photos by Scott Mason)

“Amazing” and a “real treasure” is the way Anna Thomson, executive director of PHW, described the artwork. “I can’t believe they’re in Winchester.”

PHW had wanted to have a tour in the downtown area for years, said Thomson, but didn’t due to the lack of residential property.

Thomson was approached by Jill Feltner of The Feltner Museum at 9 Court Square, to have the tour to coincide with an opening the museum was planning.

The theme “Uptown Downtown” was established for the tour, and several downtown buildings were featured as well as residences outside the Loudoun Street Mall area.

Thomson remembers seeing the “amazing” artwork at the temple during a PHW annual meeting in the late 1980s, when several downtown buildings were featured.

Approaching a member of the lodge, Thomson was given the encouragement to pursue the tour. She was told the group wants to try to make people more aware of the treasures.

“This was a very different tour this year,” said Thomson. ”People got to see things they don’t usually see.”

\*\*\*

The 12 paintings were completed by a Mr. Ango from the Peabody Institute in Baltimore, according to minutes of the lodge meetings, but the institute does not have a record of the artist.

Calling him a “fantastic artist,” Voight said he knows of no other work by the artist. He was hired by the lodge in January of 1868, to complete the work, and it was finished in June of the same year. Records show the lodge paid him \$826 for the work.

No monetary value has been placed on the artwork, and Voight feels you could not put a price on them now.



Artwork on the walls of the top floor of the Winchester Masonic Lodge on the Loudoun street Mall include Jacob's Ladder (above) showing faith, hope, and charity. The painting below is of an unknown mason believed to be George Washington's good friend, Marquis de

Lafayette, a member of the Masons in France.  
(Photos by Scott Mason)



The lodge has no record of who decided what paintings the artist should do. Basically, the lodge leaves the paintings as they are but uses the room for initiations of members, and many of the paintings are part of the ceremony.

The paintings absorb light so the present fluorescent light in the room works the best, said Voight. “We tried other types of lighting but no others have worked.”

\*\*\*

The actual lodge was formed in 1768 in Winchester and was chartered under the grand lodge of Pennsylvania since Virginia did not have a grand lodge at the time.

During the Civil War, in order to bring stability to the community, local leaders asked the general of the Union, Philip Sheridan, to allow the lodge to meet.

Sheridan turned the group down due to fears of rebellion because of the closed nature of the meetings, according to lodge records.

A member of the general’s staff , Dr. C. H. Allen of Vermont, was a Mason and past master of an Aurora lodge. Allen thought it was a good idea and told the general if the meetings were allowed, he would attend to monitor. He persuaded Sheridan to allow the meetings to take place.

From Nov. 28, 1864, to June 24, 1865, 231 candidates were raised into the organization, 207 from the Union army.

One of the members was President William McKinley, who at that time was a captain in the Union army.

Due to the initiations during the war, the seed money to erect the building during the lodge’s 100th anniversary was raised at the present location at 118 N. Loudoun St. Meetings have been held at that location since then.

“No other building on the Loudoun Street Mall has had the continuous ownership and tenant as long as we have,” said Voight. “We do not have the funds to maintain a sextant or tour guide to show the artwork on a regular basis. If people want to see it, they can ask a member of the Masons.”

\*\*\*

The 12 paintings include the following:

- \* Lodge meetings on high hills and low vales, depicting members meeting in natural settings that would give them privacy.
- \* Three columns that represent the three stationed officers of the organization — worshipful master, senior warden, and junior warden.
- \* A broken column showing the unfinished temple of King Solomon.
- \* A picture of a temple room that shows all races and nationalities gathering for a meeting.
- \* Collection of all emblems (compasses, square, level, plum, trowel, gavel, and 24-inch gauge) of Masons showing the three degrees.
- \* Three work men depicting the three degrees — entered apprentice, fellow craft, and master work man.
- \* Four cardinal virtues of temperance, fortitude, prudence, and justice.
- \* Winding stairs representing the entrance to King Solomon's temple.
- \* Jacob's Ladder showing faith, hope, and charity.
- \* Crossing of the River Jordan.
- \* George Washington who was a member of the Fredericksburg lodge of the Masons.
- \* Unknown mason who many believe is the artist's interpretation of Washington's good friend, Marquis de Lafayette, who was a member of the Masons in France.

The present lodge has about 242 members and is part of District 3 which includes White Post, Strasburg, Front Royal, Little Washington, and the Plains.

"You may belong any where in the world to the Masons," said Voight, who said most people attend the group nearest them.

Basically the group is built on friendship and more like a family than civic groups that are more service and social oriented, explained Voight. "It is more of a fraternity and true brotherhood. It teaches us to live a good, clean, religious life."

A member since 1960, Voight said in some cases, it continues in families. All three of his sons are members.

All denominations are invited to join, added Voight, who listed two criteria for membership — male and believing in God, a single deity.

Other area organizations that are appended bodies of the Masons include the Order of the Eastern Star, which is housed in the Loudoun Street building and has female and male members, Royal Arch Chapter, and Winchester Commandry.

Some untruths have circulated about the organization, said Voight. “Some reform groups teach that the Masonic lodge is un-Christian but this is incorrect. Preachers, priests, bishops, Lutherans, Methodists, Episcopalians, and Jewish rabbis are members.”

At one time, Voight explained that the Catholic church had forbidden its members to join but that ban has been lifted.

“We are not a religion but we are religious,” said Voight.

If anyone is interested in seeing the artwork or becoming a Mason, Voight says they should ask a Mason. Business meetings are at 7:30 p.m., the second Tuesday of every month. The phone number at the lodge is 540-662-0020.