

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE -

Fraunces Tavern® Museum conserves a ladies' slipper in its collection that once belonged to Martha Washington (1731-1802) thanks to a grant from Americana Corner

One of the more valuable objects in the Museum's collection, a ladies' slipper that belonged to Martha Washington (1731-1802) who gifted it to Lady Mary Watts in 1789, was recently conserved thanks to a generous grant from Americana Corner.

Boro 6 Art Conservation took on the project which involved cleaning, filling areas of fabric loss, and covering the exterior of the slipper with a net overlay to stabilize the loose and fragile silk.

The slipper was previously featured from November 4, 2016 - July 8, 2019 in the Museum's "Valuable" exhibition where objects were chosen for their varying values within the making, history, preservation and interpretation of American culture.

We believe the stories of these two women are intrinsic to our mission. The slipper is now on permanent display in the McEntee Gallery on the 3rd floor of the Museum.



Martha Washington married her second husband, George Washington, in 1759. She was known for hosting social events at Washington's Mount Vernon plantation. During the Revolution, Martha often traveled with her husband. She also raised money to support the war effort and made clothes for soldiers, as well as helping to nurse the sick and wounded. Martha was referred to as "Lady Washington," as the term 'first lady' was not yet coined. She became central to early American society. She hosted weekly private dinners for government officials, as well as weekly public receptions for both ladies and gentlemen. Martha's position made her one of America's first celebrities; the press often reported on her activities, from entertaining to shopping to taking her grandchildren for a walk.

Mary Watts was the daughter of Major General Alexander, well known as Lord Stirling, who was captured at the Battle of Long Island and a member of George Washington's camp at Valley Forge. He became a trusted part of Washington's military family and developed a close relationship to the Commander-in-Chief. In 1775, Mary married loyalist Robert Watts and moved to New York City. Due to her husband's political views she was shunned by Patriot Society, even denied the right to attend her sister Kitty's marriage in 1779. Mary remained in New York City throughout the British occupation (1776-1783). After the War it was documented that Mary, Kitty, and their mother attended George Washington's May 7, 1789 inaugural ball. It may have been after this event that the shoe was given to Mary Watts as a token of apology as Martha Washington was unable to attend.

This style of shoe is called a slipper. Slippers are light, slip-on shoes made of silk or thin leather. Slippers were meant to be worn only indoors, at balls or other social events. This slipper is made from silk, with the inside most likely being made of soft leather. The buckle on the slipper is made from metal, decorated with small jewels. The jewels used on shoe buckles are most often paste, rather than natural gems. Even the wealthiest people usually preferred to adorn their buckles with paste jewels, since paste jewels could be more easily cut and shaped. For preservation, the slipper is supported from the inside, to preserve the shape of the shoe; without this support, the slipper would probably have lost its shape over time.

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About Fraunces Tavern Museum:

Fraunces Tavern Museum's mission is to preserve and interpret the history of the American Revolutionary era through public education. This mission is fulfilled through the interpretation and preservation of the Museum's collections, landmarked buildings and varied public programs that serve the community. Visit the rooms where General George Washington said farewell to his officers and where John Jay negotiated treaties with foreign nations. Explore additional galleries focusing on America's War for Independence and the preservation of early American history.

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