

The Freemason Letters (Probably Fiction)

Back in 1995, when President Clinton was in office, a strange discovery was made during the renovation of the Lincoln Bedroom in the White House. All of the furniture and artwork in the room was carefully assessed and catalogued as part of this renovation process, and while many of the items in the room were found to be associated with the time of Lincoln's presidency - the mantel was not of the same period. The decision was made to replace it with a better-suited neo-classical one of 19th century design. When pulled from the wall, a peculiar iron-lined hole, 1 foot in width, was discovered in the portion of the wall the mantel had formerly covered.

President Clinton, being intrigued by this, asked one of his interns in the office of presidential letters and messages at the time, Michelle Von Euw, to investigate.

Michelle believed this iron-lined hole could only be explained by the presence of a secret compartment of some kind in the original mantel contained in the room. After a visit to the Library of Congress, she was able to obtain an old photograph of the room from 1989 showing the first mantel.



Finding the mantle itself, on the other hand, proved much more difficult. Despite the fact that most of the other original furniture that had been moved from the room was able to be quickly recovered, the original mantel's location remained elusive. Michelle was, however, able to determine that it had been moved from the Lincoln Bedroom in 1902 during the construction of the West Wing, but nobody knew where it had ended up - the trail went cold. She reported this to President Clinton, and shortly thereafter finished up her internship with the White House.

Returning to George Washington University, Michelle largely forgot about the mantel until one day in January of 2001, when she was doing some house cleaning. Going through some of her papers as an intern, she again came across the photograph of the mantel, only this time, she noticed a detail that she hadn't seen before. In the center of the mantel, there was a carved depression that appeared to match - in relief - the form of an oddly-shaped door knob shown in the same photograph...

Following a hunch, she contacted her former boss, with a strange request... She asked President Clinton if he could have someone mail her the antique door knob from the Lincoln bedroom for analysis. Clinton thought this was peculiar, but seeing as how he was leaving office at the end of the month, and had - in preparation for incoming president George W. Bush - already removed the letter "W" from all of the computer keyboards that he could find, snatched 5 brass nameplates with the presidential seal on them, and left a somewhat puerile prank for the next several hundred people to use one of the photocopy machines, he told Michelle he would be happy to send her the door knob, as long as she didn't send it back. As it was, Clinton ended up sending Michelle two door knobs with a brief note about not knowing which she needed.

Believing that the knob could be a "key" with which the suspected secret compartment might be unlocked, Michelle reasoned that both it and the mantel must have been made by the same person, and that discovering the identity of that person might reveal the current location of the mantel. Upon close inspection of one of the door knobs, she found the initials "PR" impressed into the silver metal of its spindle, as if struck with a die, so as to make the lettering appear slightly raised. After doing a bit of research on the internet, she was shocked to discover the

knob's craftsman - but the combination of the initials and the odd choice of silver for the inner mechanism of a door knob left little doubt. This antique doorknob had been crafted by none other than Boston's most famous silversmith and revolutionary hero, Paul Revere!

Armed with this revelation, she contacted a friend at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History to see if anyone knew of a connection between Paul Revere and a mantle. She discovered that in 1969, a collector by the name of Isadore Warshaw had assembled various items tied to Paul Revere, and – while the collection had still not been processed by the museum yet – someone there did recall that a mantle was one of the pieces! The trail had just gone from cold to hot!

Michelle rushed over to the museum, door knob in hand. Her friend guided her back to where the mantel was stored. It was the same mantle as the one in her photograph! Upon looking at the back of the mantel, she found a protruding box of wood of slightly smaller dimensions than that of the iron-lined hole found in the Lincoln Bedroom. One more thing to test her theory - she inserted the knob into the matching depression on the mantle, and then with a quarter turn to the right, a panel popped open revealing the contents of that wooden box she had seen on the back side... a large leather binder bound with a thin strap and with a single small silver decoration on its front:



Some of the pieces of this puzzle were starting to click together. She recognized the silver adornment as the long-established symbol for the secret society of Freemasons, a society to which it is well-known that Paul Revere belonged. Indeed, the society of Freemasons has spanned centuries and included many members of great historical significance - from Founding Father of the United States, Ben Franklin, and naval hero John Paul Jones, to Astronauts John Glen and "Buzz" Aldrin. Most notably, there have been several presidents* among their ranks, including Teddy Roosevelt, who just happened to be president when the West Wing was being constructed and the mantle disappeared. Abraham Lincoln hadn't been a Freemason, but he did apply for membership shortly after his nomination for the presidency in 1860. Shortly thereafter, Lincoln had to withdraw his application, postponing it for political reasons, and was assassinated before he could complete the process.

Michelle examined the thin leather strap as she pulled it from the binder. It had several letters written along its length, although the letters did not form any words to speak of - and largely appeared to be in random order.

Michelle carefully opened the binder. Inside, she found a great collection of papers. Some of these were handwritten, and appeared very, very old indeed – possibly hundreds of years old. Others appeared more recently drafted – a few were even typed, possibly in the 1940's or 50's, based on the typeface. All of them were completely unreadable, each being comprised solely of letters, numbers, or symbols in no apparent order, similar to what was found on the binding strap.

There could only be one conclusion, everything Michelle saw before her was written in code...

*George Washington, James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, James Polk, James Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, James Garfield, William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, Howard Taft, Warren Harding, Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and Gerald Ford were all members of the Freemasons.