

# Camp chest belonged to Gen. Washington

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**W**hen Harry Dashiell placed ads in newspapers in several states to locate Gov. Winder's heirs, he heard from a Mae H. Waterman of Upper Darby, Pa., a great-granddaughter of Levin Winder. She contacted Dashiell to express her appreciation for his efforts, as she too was searching and unable to locate the Winder grave.

"I guess she was close to 75 and came down here and moved to Deal Island and got married," said Dashiell's daughter, Emily Leckey of Princess Anne. "She gave my father a fork which she said came from the camp chest of Gen. George Washington which was presented to Levin Winder," Leckey said.

According to the *History of Freemasonry in Maryland*, Gov. Winder did indeed own such a camp chest.

"The camp chest of his friend and Masonic Brother, Gen. Washington, which he used during the Revolutionary War, came into the possession of Brother Winder, and was most highly prized by him. At his death it became the property of his son, William Sidney (Winder) who, by his will, directed it should be presented to Congress, which was subsequently done through the Hon. John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts, with the necessary documents to substantiate its identity," the story reads.

This chest was kept for years at the home of Winder on his 840-acre estate Bloomsbury near Venton in Somerset County, and was listed among the personal belongs of Winder after his death in 1819.



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# Chest belonged to Gen. Washington

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The location of this chest has been "lost" for years, but Sue Sullivan, office manager of Congressman Wayne Gilchrest's office in Salisbury, located the historic chest.

It is on display at the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History's Armed Forces Hall in Washington. According to Don Kloster, curator, the campaign chest as it is frequently called, is officially a canteen, used on military expeditions. It was given to the Patent Office May 7, 1844, which coincides with the death of William Sydney Winder, the governor's son, in about the same year.

The canteen, or chest, contains: "5 tin plates, 3 tin dishes, 3 tin sauce pans with handles, 1 tin coffee boiler with handle, 1 tin canister for tea, 1 tin canister for sugar, 1 tin candle stick and tinder box, 1 gridiron, 2 glass quart bottles, 1 with salt in, 2 glass pint bottles and 1 bottle with honey in it, 5 small glass bottles, 1 brown earthen tea pot, 1 glass tumbler, 2 knives and 5 forks leaving 5 empty places in the trunk."

In 1957 Leckey's father, Harry Dashiell, wrote to the Masonic museum in Baltimore for aid in his search on the history of the chest made the following comment: "After Washington's death some of his personal effects were sold at public vendue, (at Mount Vernon) as they then called it, and a man from Annapolis, who was a soldier with

Winder in the Revolutionary War, bought the camp chest and carried it over to Annapolis and gave it to Levin Winder. Upon Winder's death the chest came into possession of his son, William Sidney Winder ..."

The chest was not willed to Winder's son as is often said, but the son bought or withheld the chest along with a great deal of other household articles prior to a sale following the death of his mother, Mary Stoughton Sloss Winder, in 1822.

According to Winder family tradition, William Sydney Winder kept one fork from the chest, which became a family heirloom, eventually being passed to his great granddaughter Mae Waterman. The six-inch long fork, with four tines, was offered by Leckey to the Somerset County Historical Society several years ago which expressed little interest in it, she said.

"All I wanted them to do was to keep it under lock and key, and they didn't even respond or acknowledge my offer, and that's the truth. So I gave it as a gift to my nephew, Bill Staub III, who lives in Illinois," she said.

The fork does not match those from the chest in the Smithsonian's possession, which is in itself a mystery as there is no question that the chest belonged to Washington and was owned by William Sydney Winder, according to the Smithsonian's documentation. The curator said that an odd piece

could have been included with the other utensils in the chest, but is surprised that the sole fork has four tines.

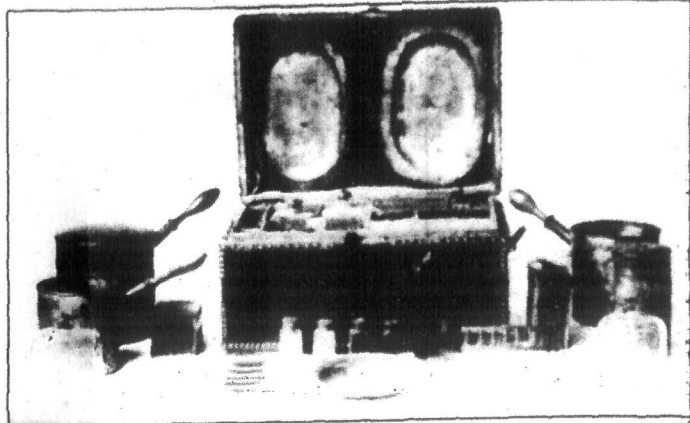
While the fork does not match those in the chest, it was accompanied by a fragile letter in a number of pieces. The letter, though covered on both sides with writing deals with two topics. One side covers the history of the chest, how it was sold at Mount Vernon and acquired by the Winder family, and the other relates particulars on the presentation of the chest by an executor of William Sydney Winder, Gov. Levin Winder's son, to Congress.

Why this letter (and an obituary for Gov. Winder from the *The Baltimore Patriot*, July 3, 1819) accompanied an 18th century fork that apparently doesn't belong to the set in the chest, is a another mystery.

The chest is considered an important part of the institution's Washington collection, and an especially important piece of military history.

The chest shows signs of considerable wear. This bit of American history was used by Washington at Valley Forge and later taken to Washington's home, Mount Vernon. Sold at public auction after Washington's death, the chest was taken to Annapolis and eventually to Somerset County, and now to the Smithsonian.

Ironically, when the Washington



**HISTORIC CHEST.** The contents of President George Washington's military camp chest or canteen are shown in this photograph from the Smithsonian Institution. The chest, on display at the museum, was owned by Gov. Levin Winder of Somerset County.

chest was at Winder's home near Venton, it was just a few miles away from the home site and grave of Washington step-grandfa-

ther, Col. George Gale of Tusculum.

The chest is on permanent display at the museum.