

~ A Story From 157 Years of Great Banking ~



HOW BURKE & HERBERT, A GROUP OF DETERMINED LADIES, AND A BASKET OF EGGS SAVED THE FUNDS FOR GEORGE WASHINGTON'S MOUNT VERNON ESTATE

In 1853 Ann Pamela Cunningham founded the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association to preserve George Washington's home. Turning over a sizeable down payment, they contracted to buy the estate for \$200,000 from John Augustine Washington in 1858.

Mr. Washington deposited the money at Burke & Herbert Bank, where he knew his friend, John Burke, would, as Washington said, "Protect it as though it were his own."

When the Civil War broke out, Alexandria was occupied by the Union and authorities demanded the Mount Vernon money from the bank. But it was gone. John Burke had hidden the treasure at home in his wife's closet.

John's wife, Martha, was a Union sympathizer but she knew if the funds were seized, the shrine to the late President might never happen. When soldiers searched her home, an officer stopped at her closet. "What's this?" he asked. She replied, "It's my closet. Don't you want to search it?"

The man closed the door and said, "No madam. It is not my wish to search a lady's closet."

John Burke knew he had to find a better hiding place. He called upon a young woman named Sarah Tracy, who worked at Mount Vernon and sold eggs to raise money for the estate. She had a pass from the Union that allowed her to travel freely in her horse buggy. John hid the money in the bottom of the egg basket.

Sarah drove her buggy past Union soldiers, crossed the Potomac, and went to Riggs Bank. There, she placed the funds in a safety deposit box and returned the key to John Burke. When the war ended, the money was safe and Mount Vernon Estate was preserved.



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