

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

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## "LONG LIVE THE PRESIDENT"

Our subject for this article centers upon a button. Pictured here, you will notice it states around the outer edge "Long Live The President." In a center oval are the initials "G.W." for George Washington. This small piece of Americana measures 1 3/16 inch in diameter and is made of brass with a brazed-on shank on the back for fastening it to a coat. This particular button comes down in my own family as an heirloom with a legendary story.

It seems that sometime after the Civil War a famished, destitute beggar happened to pass by the farmstead of my great-grandparents, Francis and Sarah Harling, who lived on East County House Road in the Town of Albion. Their stone house is now the residence of Eugene and Judy Christopher. The beggar was practically starved to death and likewise in very ill health. He asked my great-grandmother for something to eat for which she obliged. But because he was so hungry he gorged himself, becoming sick. Recognizing his plight, my great-grandmother took on the task of nursing him back to health, allowing him only small portions of food until he was able to regain his strength.



Brockport. With their help I was able to better identify the button.

These were made for George Washington's first inauguration which was to have taken place on March 4, 1789 but was actually rescheduled for April 30, 1789 due to bad weather. Twenty-three different patterns have been recognized as genuine, all with variations in design. It is believed these buttons were used on uniforms and other apparel at the time. But they were certainly made as a form of souvenir or memento to commemorate the inauguration of our first president who was so highly revered by his countrymen.

And yes, I inquired about its present value. A button of this type is currently appraised for \$1,200 to \$1,400. Imagine the surprise of the penniless beggar in the mid-19th century, had he known how sought-after these buttons would be today. Needless to say, the button is now kept in our safety deposit box at the bank.

Finally, I'd like to say, "Seller beware!" If you have ever watched the Antique Road Show, you know how often things which are perceived to be of little value sometimes turn out to be worth thousands. Before you go throwing something out or putting it in a garage sale, have it checked out if there is any question at all in your mind. Find an expert to evaluate it, like I did with the Washington button. As the New York Lotto states: "Hey, you never know."

Because the beggar had so treasured this memento, Sarah Harling likewise treasured it as a keepsake too, and thus told the tale of its acquisition. Hence, the button was passed on to my grandmother Sophia and then to my father who treasured this artifact. If the button could only talk it might well reveal battles of the Civil War for it must have served perhaps, as a good luck charm in times of danger for the beggar.

As Paul Harvey might say, "Now, the rest of the story." Recently, I decided I'd like to know more about the origin of this heirloom, so I called Betty Gleason of Holley who is a member of the Towpath Button Club which meets regularly at the Sweden Senior Center in Brockport, and also the Button Club which meets monthly in