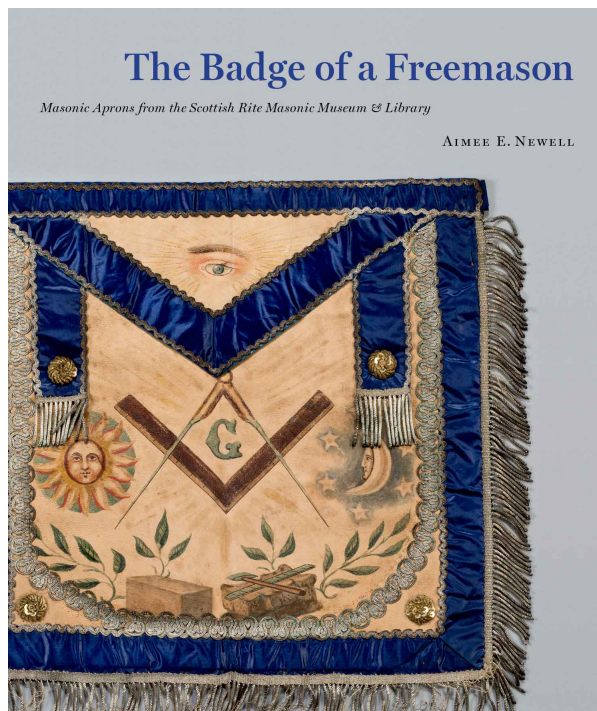


## The Badge of a Freemason: Masonic Aprons from the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library

by Aimee E. Newell. Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library, 2015. 247 p. ill. ISBN 9781889541020 (cl.), \$39.95.

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Aimee E. Newell, who serves as the Director of Collections at the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library and holds a Ph.D. in history from the University of Massachusetts, provides a fascinating analysis of Masonic aprons from around 1760 to 1964. This carefully researched and extensively illustrated catalog offers an informative snapshot of the development of Masonic aprons in the United States.

The Masonic apron, worn by a man upon becoming a Master Mason of the fraternity in order to show his level of initiation, was modelled on the leather aprons of actual stonemasons but imbued with the symbolism of the group through elaborate decoration. After a brief introduction discussing Freemasonry, the evolution of Masonic aprons, and an argument describing a higher

level of female involvement in Masonic circles than previously assumed by many scholars, Newell examines over eighty specific aprons from the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library collection. Organized chronologically, each apron is represented by at least one full color illustration and accompanied by a detailed and footnoted analysis of its iconography, symbolism, and history.

Newell's discussion is limited almost entirely to examples from an array of Freemasons in the United States, citing only a few aprons from other countries. The catalog pays special attention to changes in the material and style of aprons through the years, as apron decoration was

influenced by surrounding aesthetic and fashion trends and eventually became more uniform. Some Masonic apron designs were modelled on specific engravings and chromolithography techniques, which Newell identifies and displays side-by-side with her catalog descriptions. Newell also has invested much time investigating the biographies of aprons' owners as well as the artists responsible for designing the aprons and related aprons in other collections.

Extensive footnotes and a selected bibliography provide a rich context for the book, and the index includes personal names, specific lodges, and subjects. The book is lushly illustrated, including two fold-out pages and boasting over 150 color illustrations of mainly Masonic aprons but also related decorative arts and period documentation.

Considering its thorough research and impressive presentation, this book would be a fantastic and beautiful addition to any museum or academic collection focusing on Americana, textiles, or Freemasonry.