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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

Ceremony Planned Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the Groundbreaking for a Statue of the Marquis de Lafayette in Mount Vernon Place

(Baltimore, Maryland) – The Mount Vernon Place Conservancy (*“the Conservancy”*) announces that a ceremony commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the groundbreaking for the statue of the Marquis de Lafayette in Mount Vernon Place is planned for May 16, 2017 from 5:00 – 6:00 pm. The ceremony will feature remarks from the Conservancy, Mayor Catherine E. Pugh, and representatives of the French government, as well as music performed by the music performance team of the Maryland Defense Force Band. The ceremony will take place at the base of the statue in the South Square of Mount Vernon Place, and the public is welcome.

Dr. Lance Humphries, Executive Director of the Conservancy, notes that the groundbreaking, which took place on May 14, 1917, was likely the most public act that took place in Baltimore as the United States entered World War I.

“The United States entered the war on April 6, and within weeks a delegation of French emissaries crossed the Atlantic to discuss the details of how the Americans might lend their support to the war effort,” notes Humphries. “The then Mayor of Baltimore, James H. Preston, worked tirelessly to encourage the delegation to visit Baltimore so that the people of this city could show their support for the French fighting for the national liberty.”

According to newspaper reports, 50,000 people lined the streets of Baltimore to welcome the delegation. Photographs and news reels document that thousands greeted them at the Washington Monument in Mount Vernon Place.

It was purposeful that ground was broken in 1917 in the shadow of the Washington Monument, as it is not only the first memorial to Washington, but a symbol of American national independence. It was appropriate that a statue honoring Washington’s comrade-in-arms Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, the Marquis de Lafayette, would be placed in this important location, as Lafayette’s contributions to the emergence of the American nation are held in high regard.

The May 16, 2017 ceremony will consist of brief speeches honoring the history and meaning of this event by the Conservancy, Mayor Catherine E. Pugh, representatives of the French government, including Consul General in Washington, Michel Charbonnier, and Robert J. Dalessandro, the Chairman of the National World War I Centennial Commission. Forming a

backdrop for the ceremony will be enormous American and French Flags suspended from fire trucks provided by the Baltimore City Fire Department.

Music, including the American and French national anthems, “Taps” and its French equivalent “Aux Morts” will be performed by the music performance team of the Maryland Defense Force Band. Various veterans organizations, honor guards, patriotic associations, and those interested in promoting Franco-American unity have been requested to attend.

The groundbreaking led to the redesign of the squares by the New York architectural firm of Carrère & Hastings, the design in place today. Humphries further notes: “From the groundbreaking, to the redesign of the squares to accommodate the statue, to the arrival of inscriptions written by President Woodrow Wilson, to the statue’s dedication in 1924 by President Calvin Coolidge, the Lafayette statue was national news.” (see fact sheet)

Because of these historical associations and its architectural beauty Mount Vernon Place was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1971, the highest federal designation for historic spaces in the United States.

In the event of rain the ceremony will be held in the Engineers Club on West Mount Vernon Place.

About the Mount Vernon Place Conservancy:

In its brief time as a non-profit, the Conservancy has raised over 8 million dollars in capital funding and overseen the design and multi-award winning restoration of Baltimore’s iconic Washington Monument. While this major investment was underway, the Conservancy was also improving the maintenance and management of the Mount Vernon Place’s park squares, and bringing attention to this important resource through an increased online presence and an expanded calendar of events in the squares. In the coming years the Conservancy will work towards the restoration of the public squares of Mount Vernon Place.

More information about the Conservancy can be found online at www.mvpconservancy.org or on Facebook: www.facebook.com/mountvernonplace

Historic Footage and Photos for Press, available for download (press control and click to follow link):

- **Video:** [Historic footage of Marshal Joseph Joffre’s visit to the Washington Monument, Mount Vernon Place, May 14, 1917](#) (video credit: WMAR-TV)
- **Photo:** [French War delegation’s welcome to the Washington Monument, Mount Vernon Place, May 14, 1917](#) (photo credit: Permission from The Baltimore Sun)
- **Photo:** [Marshal Joseph Joffre breaks ground for the Lafayette statue, Mount Vernon Place, May 14, 1917](#) (photo credit: Maryland Historical Society)
- **Photo:** [Lafayette statue’s dedication, September 6, 1924, with President Calvin Coolidge in attendance](#) (photo credit: Library of Congress)

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