

George Washington as a Freemason

“First in war, first in peace and first in the hearts of his



countrymen!”

No person has had greater influence on our country or Freemasonry in the United States than our first President, George Washington, the “Father of our Nation.”

While 14 Presidents of the United States have been Freemasons, only George Washington was both U.S. President and Master of his Masonic Lodge at the same time.

The 13 other Presidents of the United States who were Masons include Andrew Jackson, James Polk, James Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, James Garfield, William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, Warren G. Harding, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman and Gerald R. Ford.

Early Life

George Washington was born on Feb. 22, 1732, per a newly-revised calendar. Actually, Washington had been born on Feb. 11, 1731, under the previous Gregorian calendar that was later changed to match the calendar with the prevailing seasons.

At Washington's birth, the population of the Virginia colony, which also included what is now the state of West Virginia, was about 50 percent black, mostly enslaved Africans and African Americans. The growth of tobacco as a commodity in Virginia could be measured by the number of slaves imported to cultivate this crop.

Washington first embarked upon a career as a planter, which historians defined as anyone who owned 20 or more slaves, and at first Washington was mostly involved in farming and growing tobacco.

Surveyor and Land Speculator

In 1748 at age 16, young George was invited to help survey Lord Fairfax's lands west of the Blue Ridge Mountains in western Virginia.



In 1749, at age 17, he was appointed to his first public office, as surveyor of the newly-created Culpeper County located in northern Virginia.

As a surveyor, Washington acquired what would become invaluable knowledge of the terrain around his native colony of Virginia. Years later, Washington would become rich through wise investments in good land that could later be sold at a premium.

Through his older half-brother, Lawrence Washington, George also was involved in the Ohio Company, an enterprise to exploit and buy Western lands for investment and speculation.

In 1751, George and his half-brother Lawrence traveled to Barbados, hoping for an improvement in Lawrence's tuberculosis, but Lawrence died there in 1752, and George inherited part of his estate and took over some of Lawrence's duties as an adjutant military officer for the colony.

George Washington was then appointed as a district adjutant general in the Virginia militia in 1752, and he held the rank of major by age 20. He was charged with training the militia in the quarter of the colony assigned to him.

Steps into Freemasonry

It was also at age 20 that Washington filed a petition to become a Freemason with a lodge in Fredericksburg, Va.

The minute book of the Lodge at Fredericksburg, Va., has a typical entry in its minutes, in that on the 4th of November, 1752, George Washington was initiated as an Entered Apprentice. George Washington was then 20 years of age.

On the 3rd of March, 1753, the minutes have this entry: "**Mr. George Washington**" is recorded as having

been passed a Fellow Craft. He was then 21 years of age.

On the 4th of August, 1753, the transactions of the evening are that "**Mr. George Washington**," and others whose names are mentioned, are stated to have been raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason.

Early Military Career

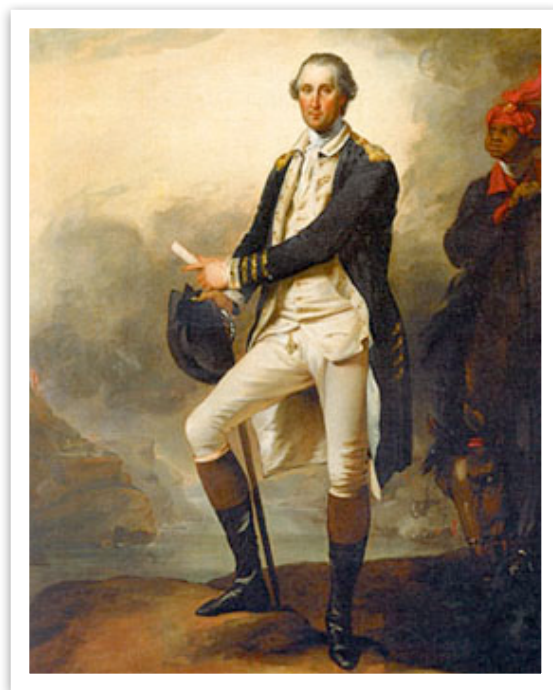
In December 1753, Washington was asked by Virginia Governor Dinwiddie to carry a British ultimatum to the French Canadians on the Ohio frontier.

Washington took a group out there and assessed French military strength and intentions, and delivered a message to the French Canadians at present-day Waterford, Pa., near Pittsburg. The message called for the French Canadians to abandon development of the Ohio country. They refused to leave an area in what is now western Pennsylvania.

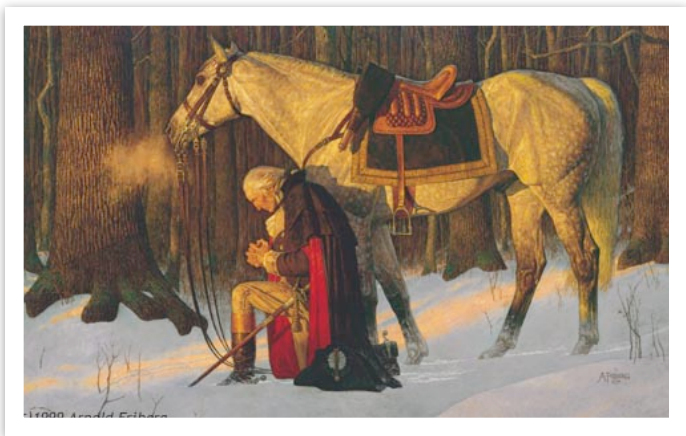
The two colonial powers were heading toward worldwide conflict in what today is called the "French and Indian War."

Only Military Defeat

The following year in 1754, Dinwiddie commissioned Washington as a lieutenant colonel and ordered him to lead an expedition to Fort Duquesne to drive out the French Canadians. With Indian allies, Washington and his troops ambushed a French Canadian scouting party of some 30 men, but a larger and better-positioned French Canadian and Indian force overwhelmed Washington and his troops at Fort Necessity, resulting in Washington's



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only military surrender.

Released by the French Canadians, Washington returned to Virginia, where he was cleared of blame for the defeat, but he soon resigned because he did not like the new arrangement of the Virginia Militia.

Early Recognition of Heroism

In 1755, at age 22, Washington was an aide to British General Edward Braddock on an ill-fated expedition to retake the Ohio country.

General Braddock was killed, and the expedition ended in disaster, but Washington distinguished himself as a hero. One biographer, Joseph Ellis, said that Washington rode back and forth across the battlefield, rallying the remnant of the British and Virginian forces to an orderly retreat, instead of a rout.

Washington was later given a difficult frontier command in the Virginia mountains, and he was rewarded by being promoted to colonel, and he was named commander of all Virginia forces.

In 1758, at age 26, Washington participated as a brigadier general in an expedition that prompted the French evacuation of Fort Duquesne, and the British establishment of Pittsburgh. The French never returned to Pennsylvania or Ohio.

Return to Civilian Life

Later that year, Washington resigned from active military service, and he spent the next 16 years as a Virginia planter and politician.

As a respected military hero and large landowner, Washington held local office, and he was elected to the Virginia provincial legislature, the House of Burgesses, beginning in 1758, at age 26.

On Jan. 6, 1759, Washington married a widow, Martha Custis, and he acquired one-third of the 18,000-acre Custis estate upon his marriage, and he managed another 12,000 acres on behalf of Martha's two children from a previous marriage.

He frequently bought additional land in his own name. In addition, he was granted land in what is now West Virginia as a bounty for his military service in the French "George Washington as a Freemason" is based on a November 2010 presentation by Brother Rob Chandler of the Sunnyside Lodge No. 138 of Free & Accepted Masons of the Grand Lodge of Washington. Masonic lodges are free to use this article with attribution.

and Indian War.

By 1775, some 16 years later, Washington had doubled the size of his Mount Vernon estate to some 6,500 acres, and he had increased the slave population there to more than 100.

Washington lived an aristocratic lifestyle, and fox hunting was his favorite leisure activity.

English Force Stamp Acts on Colonies

But with the stamp acts and other measures by England to get more money out of its American colonies, fighting broke out between England and Massachusetts.

The colonies were in turmoil, and they threatened rebellion.

Washington Ready for Armed Conflict

Washington was elected as a delegate from Virginia to the First Continental Congress, and in April 1775, he showed up at the Second Continental Congress in a military uniform, signaling that he was prepared for war. Washington had the prestige, the military experience, the charisma and military bearing, the reputation of being a strong patriot, and the South, especially Virginia, supported his leadership.

Although Washington did not explicitly seek the office of commander, and he even claimed that he was not equal to it, there was no serious competition.

Congress created the Continental Army on June 14, 1775.

Nominated by John Adams of Massachusetts, Washington, then 43 years of age, was appointed major



general and elected by Congress to be the commander-in-chief of the colonial military forces.

Washington's Impressive Appearance

George Washington stood at 6-3, and by today's standards, he was not that tall. But by the 18th-century standards, he was really tall, and that can be recognized by anyone who has ever walked below decks on the U.S.S. Constitution, Old Ironsides, that still is berthed in Boston Harbor. The below-deck ceilings are about 5-6, and for anyone of any stature, it is difficult to get around. Even the bunks are tiny. But that height was still sufficient during the time of the War of 1812, when the ship was in active duty.

Early Revolutionary War

With few large guns except those captured at a surprise attack by Vermont's Green Mountain Men at Fort Ticonderoga in upstate New York, General Washington had few resources. He displayed true cunning in avoiding a major conflict that might mean sudden defeat for the rebellious Continental forces. All the while, Washington maintained a force that was always a threat to the English, even though he was outmanned and received little financial backing from the Continental Congress.

When Washington occupied New York City, he evaded capture by an overwhelming British force in a daring nighttime escape in rowboats across the East River to Brooklyn.

Valley Forge

When the British occupied the seat of the Continental Congress in Philadelphia, Washington was just 18 miles away in Valley Forge.

Valley Forge was a low point for the American rebels, in a period Washington himself called **"a time that tries men's souls."** It seems Masonry held a unique position in calming the revolutionary leaders and making them steadfast in their desire for independence.

A majority of the commanders in the Continental Army



33 Freemason generals, the list includes Henry Knox, the Marquis de Lafayette, Friedrich W. A. von Steuben, Benedict Arnold, James Clinton, Gabriel Muhlenberg,



Elias Dayton, Joseph Frye, Mordecai Gist, John Glover, John Greaton, Edward Hand, James Hogun, Benjamin Lincoln, William Maxwell, Hugh Mercer, Richard Montgomery, John Peter, John Nixon, Samuel Holden Parsons, John Paterson, Israel Putnam, Rufus Putnam, Arthur St. Clair, John Stark, John Sullivan, Jethro Sumner, William Thompson, James Mitchell Varnum, George Weedon, Otho Holland Williams, William Woodford and David Wooster.

Eight of Washington's aides and military secretaries were Freemasons, and they include Hodijah Baylies, Richard Cary, John Fitzgerald, David Humphreys, James McHenry, William Palfrey, Edmund Randolph and John Walker.

A Masonic Monument at Valley Forge was dedicated on August 24, 1997, next to the National Memorial Arch. The monument bears the following inscription: **"In remembrance of the Continental Army led by George**



were Freemasons and were members of "Army Lodges." Most of Washington's generals were Freemasons. Of the "George Washington as a Freemason" is based on a November 2010 presentation by Brother Rob Chandler of the Sunnyside Lodge No. 138 of Free & Accepted Masons of the Grand Lodge of Washington. Masonic lodges are free to use this article with attribution.

Washington, a member of the Masonic Fraternity, and in honor of the many Freemasons who were a part of the encampment at this site, the Freemasons of Pennsylvania place this monument so that future generations will know that freedom was as important in 1997, as it was in 1777-1778."

Valley Forge National Historical Park is 18 miles northwest of Philadelphia, and it preserves and reinterprets the site where the main body of the Continental Army, between 10,000 and 12,000 troops, was encamped from December 19, 1777 to June 19, 1778, at the start of the American Revolutionary War.

During that harsh winter, Washington's troops were ravaged by disease, suffering as many as two thousand losses, with thousands more listed as unfit for duty. The troops were undernourished and poorly clothed through the harsh winter.

But despite the conditions, the winter at Valley Forge proved invaluable for the young army, which underwent its first uniform training regimen, under the guidance of Prussian drill master, Baron Friedrich von Steuben, and



the influence of regular Masonic lodge meetings.

Many historians say that had the British known how bad conditions actually were, they could have mounted a surprise attack and quickly ended the American Revolution. Washington's troops would have been no match.

A Staunch Advocate for Freemasonry

General Washington was a staunch advocate for Freemasonry throughout the eight years of the American Revolutionary War.

The 46th regiment of the British army also had a traveling Masonic Lodge, and the lodge held its Warrant of Constitution under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge

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of Ireland. After an engagement between the American and British forces, in which the British were defeated, the private chest of the Lodge, containing its jewels, furniture and implements, fell into the hands of the Americans. The captors reported the circumstances to General Washington, who at once ordered the chest to be returned to the Lodge and the regiment, under a guard of honor.

An historian of the event, himself an Englishman and a Mason wrote at the time, **"The surprise and the feeling of both officers and men may be imagined, when they perceived the flag of truce that announced this elegant compliment from their noble opponent, but still more noble brother. The guard of honor, with their music playing a sacred march, the chest containing the Constitution and implements of the Craft borne aloft, like another ark of the covenant, equally by Englishmen and Americans, who lately engaged in the strife of war, now marched through the enfiled ranks of the gallant regiment that, with presented arms and colors, hailed the glorious act by cheers, which the sentiment rendered sacred as the hallelujahs of an angel's song."**

Albert Mackey's Comments

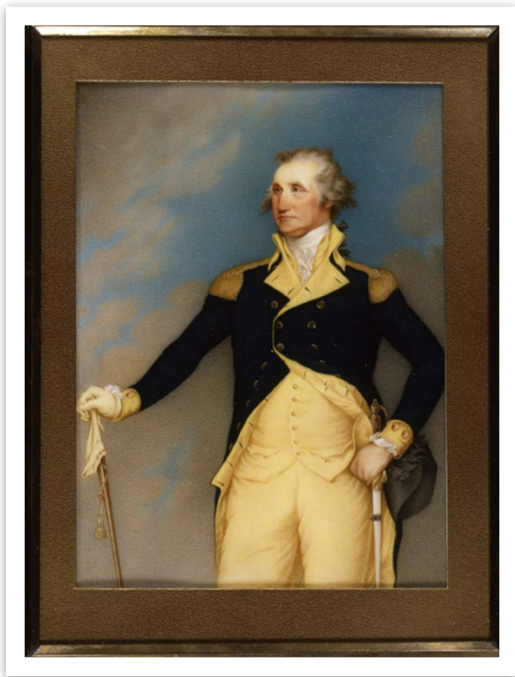
There is not much written about Washington's role as a Mason before the war, but Dr. Albert G. Mackey, M. D., Grand Lecturer of the Grand Lodge of South Carolina, gave an address at Charleston, S. C., on Nov. 4, 1852, the centennial celebration of the initiation of George Washington into Freemasonry.

Mackey provided some flowery language about Washington's role in Masonry up until this point in time:

"Years after his initiation as a Master Mason, when he held the exalted rank of leader of our armies in those deeply perilous days, which have been so well defined as 'the times that tried men's souls,' notwithstanding his responsible duties, his arduous



labors, his mental reservations, he would often lay



aside the ensigns of his supreme authority, and forgetting for a time the pomp and circumstance of glorious war, Washington would enter the secluded tent and mingle on a level with his brave companions, in the solemn devotions and mystic rites of some military lodge, where, under the sacred influence of Masonry, the god of carnage found no libations poured upon his altar, but where the heartfelt prayer for the prevalence of harmony and brotherly love was offered to the Grand Architect of the Universe."

Mackey continues, "We have the authority of a distinguished Mason of Virginia, who has elaborately investigated the Masonic life of Washington, for saying that 'frequently, when surrounded by a brilliant staff, he would part from the gay assemblage and seek the instruction of the Lodge.'

"And there was actually living in Ohio in about 1840, a revolutionary veteran, a Captain Hugh Malloy, who on one of these occasions was initiated in the marquee of Washington, the Commander in Chief himself presiding at the ceremony."

In scenes like these, Washington was a willing witness of the great doctrine of Masonic equality.

Mackey said another distinguished veteran and brother Mason once remarked, in an address delivered by him before the Grand Lodge of South Carolina, that as much as he admired Masonry, it was only on the field of battle that he had really learned to love it.

"Wisely and truthfully were those words uttered," Mackey said, "For it is there, amid loud hosannas to the god of slaughter, when

*'Men with rage and hate
Make war upon their kind,
And the land is fed by the blood they shed,*

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'In their lust for carnage blind,'

That the voice of Masonry speaks in tones that are heard above the dull booming of artillery, and the shrill blast of the bugle.

"It is there, Mackey said, "when the utterance of humanity is hushed, when language, created by its beneficent author, to express man's wants and man's affections, is exchanged for the clashing of steel, when the plunge of the bayonet or the thrust of the saber is too often the only reply to the cry for mercy - and when human sympathy has been driven from its throne in the human heart - it is there that the whispered word may make its strong appeal, and the mute yet eloquent sign, will paralyze the uplifted arm, converting by its hidden sorcery, hate into love, and binding in a moment, the conqueror and the conquered with these strong cords of fraternal affection which will withstand the utmost strain of national enmity to snap asunder."

British Defeat at Yorktown

After the defeat of British General Cornwallis at the Battle of Yorktown, Va., Washington disbanded his army and, on Nov. 2, 1783, he gave an eloquent farewell address to his soldiers, even though some of his ranking officers suggested a coup to reclaim back-pay and lost wages from the Continental Congress.

The British forces finally evacuated from New York City on Nov. 25, 1783.

Return to Civilian Life

Washington bade his officers a final farewell at Fraunces Tavern in New York City on Dec. 4.

General Washington then resigned his commission on Dec. 23, 1783, with plans to return to private life and farming at his estate at Mount Vernon.

Worshipful Master

But Washington did not abandon his interest in the Masonic institution of which he had become an honored member.

In 1788, he united with others in presenting a petition for the formation of a new Lodge at Alexandria, Va., just outside present-day Washington, D.C., and the Warrant of Constitution, as the instrument authorizing the organization is technically called, is still in existence, preserved in the archives of that Lodge, and it has been seen by thousands.

That Warrant commences with these words: **"I, Edmund Randolph, Governor of the State, and Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Virginia, do hereby constitute and appoint our illustrious and well-beloved Brother George Washington, late General and Commander-in-Chief of the forces of the United States of America, and our worthy Brothers Robert McCrea, William Hunter, Jr., and Joseph Allison, Esq., together with all such other brethren as may be admitted to associate with them, to be a just, true and regular Lodge of Freemasons, by the name, title and designation of Alexandria Lodge, No. 22."**

On April 29, 1788, Washington was appointed Worshipful Master of Alexandria Lodge 22, and he held that office when he was later elected President of the United States.

The Lodge is still in existence and in active operation, but in 1805, it changed its name in honor of its first Master to that of "Washington Alexandria."

Continental Congress

Washington's retirement to his estate at Mount Vernon was short-lived.

He made an exploratory trip to the western frontier in 1784, and he was persuaded to attend a Constitutional



Convention in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787, where he was unanimously elected president of the Convention. He participated little in the debates, but his high prestige maintained collegiality and kept the delegates at their labors.

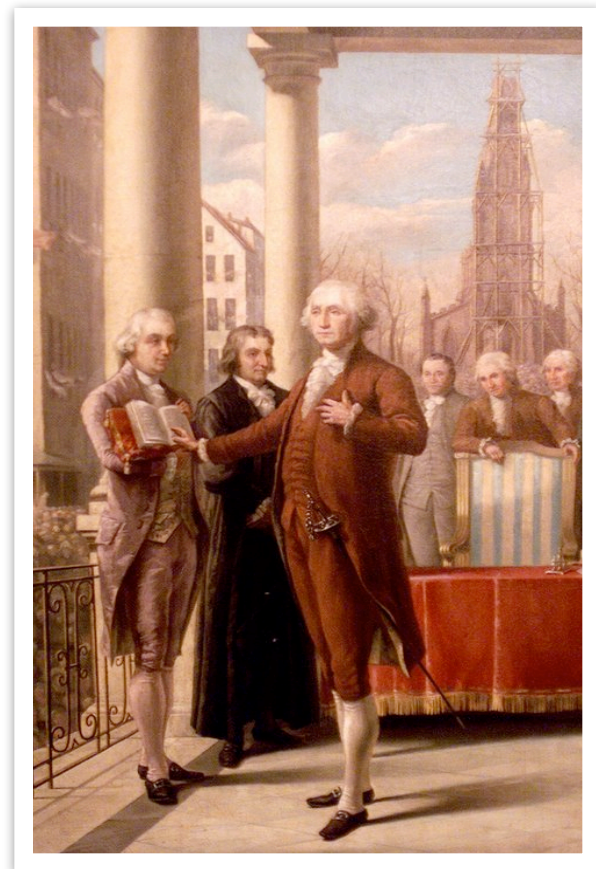
The delegates designed the office of presidency with Washington in mind, and allowed him to define the office once he was elected.

After the Convention, his support convinced many, including the Virginia legislature, to vote for ratification; the new U.S. Constitution was ratified by all 13 states.

U.S. Constitution

The Constitution of the United States, in a very real sense, is a Masonic document. In its final form, the Constitution represented the collective thoughts of Benjamin Franklin, Edmund Randolph, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams and George Washington. Of these, all but Jefferson were not only active Masons, but men who took their Freemasonry most seriously.

The New Republic, when it emerged with the



Constitution, conformed to that ideal image, and that image reflected the ideals of Freemasonry: That the United States of America was, and is, the "Great Masonic

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Experiment!"

President Washington

The Electoral College elected Washington unanimously in 1789, and again in the 1792 election; he remains the only president to have received 100 percent of the electoral votes. When first elected, Washington was 57 years of age.

Washington's Inauguration

At his inauguration, Robert Livingston, the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of New York, administered Washington's oath of office, and Washington took his oath of office by placing his right hand on a Bible from St John's Lodge of New York City. Both the marshal of the day, Jacob Morton, and his escort, Morgan Lewis, were generals in the United States Army and Freemasons.

Washington was still Worshipful Master of the Lodge at Alexandria, Va.

The Inauguration Prayer of George Washington is as follows: **"Almighty God, we make our earnest prayer that Thou wilt keep the United States in Thy Holy protection, that Thou wilt incline the hearts of the citizens to cultivate a spirit of obedience, and to entertain a Brotherly affection and love for one another, as fellow citizens. May we be pleased to do justice, to love mercy, and to conduct ourselves in charity, humility, and gentle temper of mind, which were the characteristics of the divine author of our blessed religion, and without whose humble example we can never hope to be a happy nation. Grant us our supplication through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. So Mote It Be!"**

At his inaugural parties, Washington also insisted on having Barbados Rum served.

Freemasonry makes men better.

Freemasonry was important to Washington throughout his life, as he attests in a 1791 letter in which he said "... I "George Washington as a Freemason" is based on a November 2010 presentation by Brother Rob Chandler of the Sunnyside Lodge No. 138 of Free & Accepted Masons of the Grand Lodge of Washington. Masonic lodges are free to use this article with attribution.



shall always be glad to advance the interests of this Society and be considered by them a deserving brother."

Incidents like these are not all that there is to exhibit the attachment of Washington to Masonry. On repeated occasions, Washington wrote about his profound esteem for Free Masonry.

In the year 1797, in reply to an affectionate address from the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, Washington said, **"My attachment to the Society of which we are members will dispose me always to contribute my best endeavors to promote the honor and prosperity of the Craft."**

Five years before this letter was written when he was still President, Washington had, in a communication to the same body, expressed his opinion of the Masonic institution as one whose liberal principles are founded on the immutable laws of **"truth and justice,"** and whose **"grand object is to promote the happiness of the human race."**

In answer to an address from the Grand Lodge of South Carolina in 1791, President Washington said: **"I recognize, with pleasure, my relation to the brethren of your Society,"** and **"I shall be happy, on every occasion, to evince my regard for the fraternity."** And in the same letter he took occasion to allude to the Masonic institution as **"an association whose principles lead to purity of morals and are beneficial of action."**

In writing to the officers and members of St. David's Lodge, at Newport, R. I., in 1791, President Washington used this language: **"Being persuaded that a just application of the principles on which the Masonic Fraternity is founded must be promotive of private virtue and public prosperity, I shall always be happy to advance the interest of the Society and to be considered by them as a Brother."**

This inscription is carved onto the outside walls of the George Washington Masonic National Memorial located just outside Washington, D.C. in Alexandria, Va. The memorial is on a hillside just above the local Amtrak station.

While President, Washington also said, **"Every post is**

honorable in which a man can serve his country.”

Laying the Cornerstone of the U.S. Capitol

On Sept. 18, 1793, President Washington laid the cornerstone of the brand new U.S. Capitol building wearing full Masonic Grand Master regalia.

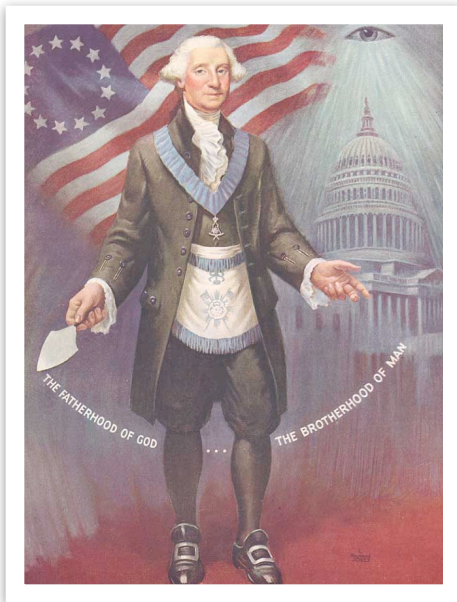
The Grand Lodge of Maryland presided over the ceremony, and Washington was asked to serve as Master.

The affiliated Lodges under Maryland's jurisdiction were in attendance, as was his own Lodge from Alexandria. There was a great procession, which included a company of artillery. Then came a band, followed by Washington, attended by all officers and members of the Lodges in full Masonic regalia.

When Washington reached the trench in which the northeast cornerstone was laid, he was presented with a silver plate commemorating the event and inscribed with the designations of the Lodges in attendance. The artillery fired a volley. He then descended into the trench and placed the plate on the stone. Around it was placed containers of corn, wine and oil. All present joined in prayer, and the artillery fired another volley.

Gilbert Stuart paintings

Sunnyside Lodge No. 138 has copies of two historic



paintings of George Washington, both completed by Gilbert Stuart. The one of George Washington standing up was done just before he was to retire from his second term as President.

Gilbert Stuart painted the second picture of Washington at the request of Martha Washington. Gilbert Stuart purposely left the second painting unfinished so that he could use it as a model for all the requests he was

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getting for paintings of George Washington. The face on this painting was later used for our \$1 bill.

Retirement and return to Mount Vernon

After retiring from the presidency in March 1797, Washington, then 65, returned to Mount Vernon with a profound sense of relief. He devoted much time to farming.

On July 4, 1798, Washington was commissioned by President John Adams to be Lieutenant General and Commander-in-chief of the armies raised or to be raised for service in a prospective war with France. He served as the senior officer of the United States Army between July 13, 1798, and Dec. 14, 1799.

In a November 1798 letter, just 13 months before his death, to the Grand Lodge of Maryland, Washington made this explicit declaration of his opinion of the Institution, **“So far as I am acquainted with the doctrines and principles of Freemasonry, I conceive them to be founded in benevolence, and to be exercised only for the good of mankind. I cannot, therefore, upon this ground, withdraw my approbation from it.”**

Final Illness and Death

On Dec. 12, 1799, Washington spent several hours inspecting his farms on horseback, in snow and later hail and freezing rain. He sat down to dine that evening without changing his wet clothes. The next morning, he awoke with a bad cold, fever, and a throat infection called quinsy that turned into acute laryngitis and pneumonia.

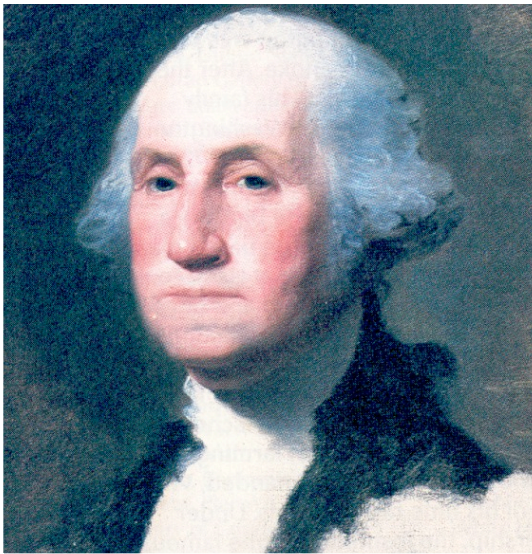
Washington died on the evening of Dec. 14, 1799, at his home, aged 67, while attended by Dr. James Craik, one of his closest friends, Dr. Gustavus Richard Brown,

Dr. Elisha C. Dick, and Tobias Lear V, Washington's personal secretary. Lear would record the account in his journal, writing that Washington's last words were, "**T'is well.**"

Modern doctors believe that Washington died largely because of his treatment, which included calomel (administering mercury chloride to induce vomiting) and bloodletting, resulting in a combination of shock from the loss of five pints of blood, as well as asphyxia and dehydration.

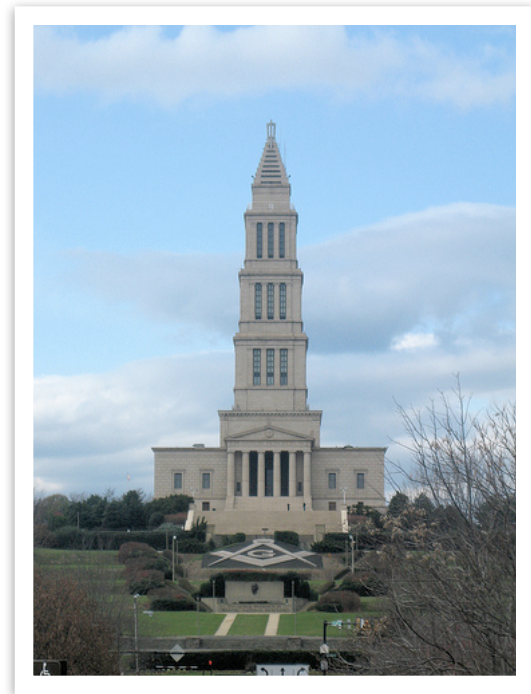
Masonic Funeral

He was buried at his home at Mount Vernon, with full



Masonic honors, by the Alexandria Lodge, whose members were his pall-bearers. Freemasons and the military attended the funeral in a body.

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The Hon. Timothy Bigelow, in a eulogy delivered before the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, two months after Washington's death, when there were still living witnesses of Washington's Masonic life, with whom Bigelow had spoken has said:

"The information received from our brethren who had the happiness to be members of the Lodge over which he presided for many years, and of which he died the Master, furnishes abundant proof of his persevering zeal for the prosperity of the institution. Constant and punctual in his attendance, scrupulous in his observance of the regulations of the Lodge, and solicitous at all times to communicate light and instruction, he discharged the duties of the chair with uncommon dignity and intelligence in all the mysteries of our art."

Public Mourning for a Great Leader

Around the world, Washington was honored with eulogies and newspaper memorials.

The United States mourned him for months, staging long funeral processions in towns and cities throughout the country.

In the U.S. Senate, a statement was read summing up the feeling of the new nation: **"With patriotic pride, we review the life of our Washington, and compare him with those of other countries who have been preeminent in fame. Ancient and modern names are diminished before him. Greatness and guilt have too often been allied, but his fame is whiter than it is brilliant.... Let his countrymen consecrate the memory of the heroic Gen. Washington, the patriotic**

statesman and the virtuous sage. Let them teach their children never to forget that the fruit of his labors and his example are their inheritance.”

Conclusion

Thus, George Washington was not only **“First in war, first in peace and first in the hearts of his countrymen,”** our George Washington was first and foremost a Freemason!

Masonic ideals formed the framework of George Washington’s ethics and character, and freemasonry made him a better person.

Each Mason today aspires to be like George Washington and to become a better person.

