

NV Grand Lodge Short Lecture Series

MASONIC PRESIDENTS

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Until 1971, both February 12 and February 22 were observed as federal holidays to honor the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln (February 12) and George Washington (February 22). In 1971 President Richard Nixon proclaimed one single federal holiday, Presidents' Day, honoring all past presidents of the United States of America to be observed on the third Monday of February.

While many Masons know about the Masonic affiliation of Brother George Washington, thirteen other Presidents have also been Masons. These fourteen Masonic Presidents span the history of the United States from George Washington to Gerald Ford. February and Presidents' Day offers the opportunity for Masons to recognize the contributions of these Brothers to their country.

The fourteen Masonic Presidents are George Washington, James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, James K. Polk, James A. Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, James A. Garfield, William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, William H. Taft, Warren G. Harding, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, and Gerald R. Ford. The following paragraphs provide a summary for each of these Masonic Presidents.

George Washington, First U.S. President, 1789-1797: George Washington served as the first President of the United States of America. He was inaugurated on April 30, 1789 and served two terms as President. Born in 1732, Washington was initiated on November 4, 1752, passed on March 3, 1753, and raised a Master Mason on August 4, 1753 in Fredericksburg Lodge, Virginia. He would serve as the Commander in Chief of the Continental Armies during the Revolutionary War. In 1788, Washington was appointed Charter Master of Alexandria Lodge No. 22, Virginia during the organization of the lodge and in December 1788, he was elected Master. There is no evidence that he was ever installed or presided over any meetings of this lodge. While President, he would act as Grand Master in leveling the cornerstone of the U.S Capitol in Washington, D.C. on September 18, 1793. During his life, Washington was somewhat active and supportive of Freemasonry. He died on December 14, 1799, less than three years following his second term as President.

James Monroe, Fifth U.S. President, 1817-1825: James Monroe was born in Westmoreland County, Virginia in 1758. Monroe attended the College of William and Mary, fought with distinction in the Continental Army, and practiced law in Fredericksburg, Virginia. There is some dispute regarding the Masonic affiliation of Bro. Monroe due to the loss of lodge records. It appears that he was initiated on November 9, 1775 in St. John's Regimental Lodge in the Continental Army. He later affiliated with Williamsburg Lodge No. 6 in Williamsburg, Virginia. There are no known records to confirm his advancement through the degrees but there is evidence that Monroe was received as a Master Mason during a visit to a Tennessee lodge in 1819. It is interesting to note that Bro. Monroe was not yet eighteen when initiated indicating the concept of "lawful age" had not been universally fixed at twenty-one at this time. Like Washington, Monroe would serve two terms as President. He died on July 4, 1831 in New York.

Andrew Jackson, Seventh U.S. President, 1829-1837: Born in the backwoods settlement of Waxhaw, South Carolina on March 15, 1767, Andrew Jackson received sporadic education. But in his late teens he read law for about two years, and he became an outstanding young lawyer in Tennessee. Fiercely jealous of his honor, he engaged in brawls, and in a duel killed a man who cast an unjustified slur on his wife Rachel. A major general in the War of 1812, Jackson became a

national hero when he defeated the British at New Orleans. The Masonic record of Brother Jackson has not been located though there is no doubt he was a Mason. He appears to have been a member of St. Tammany Lodge No. 29, Nashville, Tennessee, as early as 1800. The lodge name was later changed to Harmony Lodge No. 1 on November 1, 1800. Brother Jackson is officially listed as a member in the Lodge Returns to the Grand Lodge of Tennessee for 1805. Very active in Freemasonry, Brother Jackson was a Grand Master of Masons in Tennessee, serving from October 1822 until October 1824. Jackson served two terms as President from 1829 until 1837. He died on June 8, 1845 at the Hermitage near Nashville, Tennessee.

James K. Polk, Eleventh U.S. President, 1845-1849: James K. Polk was born in Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, on November 2, 1795. Studious and industrious, Polk was graduated with honors in 1818 from the University of North Carolina. As a young lawyer he entered politics, served in the Tennessee legislature, and became a friend of Andrew Jackson. Brother Polk was initiated in Columbia Lodge No. 31 on June 5, 1820 located in Columbia, Tennessee. He would be passed and raised in this lodge though the actual dates are unknown. In 1825 he was exalted a Royal Arch Mason in LaFayette Chapter No. 4 located in Columbia. Polk would serve as the Governor of Tennessee from 1839 through 1841 prior to his election as President of the United States. He would serve one term as President from 1845 to 1849. He left office in poor health and died a few months later on June 15, 1849 in Nashville, Tennessee.

James A. Buchanan, Fifteenth U.S. President, 1857-1861: Born in Cove Gap near Mercersburg, Pennsylvania into a well-to-do Pennsylvania family on April 23, 1791, James A. Buchanan, a graduate of Dickinson College, was gifted as a debater and learned in the law. Tall, stately, and stiffly formal, he was the only President who never married. Brother Buchanan was initiated on December 11, 1816, passed and raised in Lancaster Lodge No. 43 in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He served as Master of his lodge from 1822 to 1823. In 1824, he was appointed District Deputy Grand Master for the Counties of Lancaster, Lebanon and York. His tenure as President was fraught with controversy surrounding the issues of states' rights and slavery. Inaugurated in 1857, Buchanan retired from the Presidency after one term in office and returned to Lancaster, Pennsylvania where he died on June 1, 1868.

Andrew Johnson, Seventeenth U.S. President, 1865-1869: Born in Raleigh, North Carolina, on December 29, 1808, Johnson grew up in poverty. He was apprenticed to a tailor as a boy, but ran away. He opened a tailor shop in Greeneville, Tennessee, married Eliza McCardle, and participated in debates at the local academy. Entering politics, he became an adept stump speaker, championing the common man. Johnson became a Mason in 1851 when he was initiated, passed, and raised in Greenville Lodge No. 119 located at Greenville, Tennessee. Following the assassination of Abraham Lincoln in 1865, the Presidency fell upon Vice-President Johnson, an old-fashioned southern Jacksonian Democrat. Although an honest and honorable man, Andrew Johnson was one of the most unfortunate of Presidents. Arrayed against him were the Radical Republicans in Congress, brilliantly led and ruthless in their tactics. In 1867, the House of Representatives voted eleven articles of impeachment against him. He was tried by the Senate in the spring of 1868 and acquitted by one vote. While serving as President, he received the Scottish Rite degrees during 1867. Johnson left the White House in 1869 after serving almost four years as President completing Lincoln's second term. Johnson died on July 31, 1875 in Carter's Station, Tennessee.

James A. Garfield, Twentieth U.S. President, 1881: James A. Garfield was born in Cuyahoga County, Ohio, on November 19, 1831. Fatherless at two, he later drove canal boat teams, somehow earning enough money for an education. He was graduated from Williams College in Massachusetts in 1856, and he returned to the Western Reserve Eclectic Institute (later Hiram College) in Ohio as a classics professor. Within a year he was made its president. Garfield was

initiated on November 19, 1861 in Magnolia Lodge No. 20 in Columbus, Ohio. Owing to Civil War duties, Brother Garfield did not receive the Third Degree until November 22, 1864 in Columbus Lodge No. 30 in Columbus, Ohio. On October 10, 1866, he affiliated with Garrettsville Lodge No. 246 in Garrettsville, Ohio. Brother Garfield became a Charter Member of Pentalpha Lodge No. 23 of Washington, D.C. on May 4, 1869. Garfield was elected President in 1880 by a margin of only 10,000 popular votes and was inaugurated on March 4, 1881. His Presidency was cut short when an embittered attorney who had sought a consular post shot him on July 2, 1881, in a Washington railroad station. Mortally wounded, Garfield died on September 19, 1881 from the gunshot wound.

William McKinley, Twenty-Fifth U.S. President, 1897-1901: Born in Niles, Ohio, on January 29, 1843, McKinley briefly attended Allegheny College, and was teaching in a country school when the Civil War broke out. Enlisting as a private in the Union Army, he was mustered out at the end of the war as a brevet major of volunteers. He studied law, opened an office in Canton, Ohio, and married Ida Saxton, daughter of a local banker. McKinley was initiated, passed, and raised in Hiram Lodge No. 21 located in Winchester, Virginia during 1865. He affiliated with Canton Lodge No. 60 in Canton, Ohio on 1867 and later demitted to become a Charter Member of Eagle Lodge No. 431, also in Canton. McKinley was elected Governor of Ohio in 1891 and served two terms from 1892 to 1896. He was inaugurated as President in 1897 and was elected to a second term in 1900. Garfield's second term as President came to a tragic end in September 1901. While attending the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York he was shot by a deranged man. Garfield would die eight days later on September 14, 1901, becoming the second Masonic President to be assassinated.

Theodore Roosevelt, Twenty-Sixth U.S. President, 1901-1909: With the assassination of President McKinley in 1901, Theodore Roosevelt, not quite 43, became the youngest President in the Nation's history. He brought new excitement and power to the Presidency as he vigorously led Congress and the American public toward progressive reforms and a strong foreign policy. He was born in New York City on October 27, 1858 into a wealthy family. Though he suffered from ill health as a youth, he was an avid outdoorsman and conservationist. During the Spanish-American War, Roosevelt was lieutenant colonel of the Rough Rider Regiment, which he led on a charge at the battle of San Juan. He was elected Governor of New York in 1898, serving with distinction. Assuming the Presidency in September 1901, Roosevelt received the three degrees in Matinecock Lodge No. 806 in Oyster Bay, New York during the year. He was very supportive of Freemasonry during the remainder of his life. Following the completion of McKinley's term, Roosevelt was elected to a second term in his own right and served as President through 1909. Roosevelt died on January 6, 1919 in Oyster Bay.

William H. Taft, Twenty-Seventh U.S. President, 1909-1913: William Howard Taft was born on September 15, 1857 in Cincinnati, Ohio, the son of a distinguished judge. He was graduated from Yale and returned to Cincinnati to study and practice law. He rose in politics through judiciary appointments earned through his own competence and availability. Brother Taft was made a "Mason at Sight" within the Body of Kilwinning Lodge No. 356 located in Cincinnati, Ohio on February 18, 1909. Taft's father and two brothers were also members of this Lodge. After the ceremony, Brother and President Taft addressed the Brethren, saying, "I am glad to be here, and to be a Mason. It does me good to feel the thrill that comes from recognizing on all hands the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man." Taft was a distinguished jurist and an effective administrator but a poor politician. Large, jovial, and conscientious, Taft was inaugurated as President in 1909, and spent four uncomfortable years in the White House caught in the intense battles between the political factions of Washington. Taft's term ended in 1913 and, free of the Presidency, served as Professor of Law at Yale until Brother and President Warren G. Harding

made him Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court, a position he held until just before his death on March 8, 1930 in Washington, D.C.

Warren G. Harding, Twenty-Ninth U.S. President, 1921-1923: Warren G. Harding was born near Marion, Ohio, on November 2, 1865. An active civic leader, he became the publisher of a newspaper. He was a trustee of the Trinity Baptist Church, a director of almost every important business, and a leader in fraternal organizations and charitable enterprises. Harding was initiated in Freemasonry on June 28, 1901 in Marion Lodge No. 70 located in Marion, Ohio. Because of some personal antagonism, Brother Harding's advancement was hindered until 1920, by which time he had been nominated for President. Friends persuaded the opposition to withdraw the objection, and on August 27, 1920, nineteen years after his initiation, Brother Harding achieved the Sublime Degree of Master Mason in Marion Lodge. Harding won the Presidential election of 1920 by an unprecedented landslide of 60 percent of the popular vote. By 1923 the post-World War I depression was giving way to a new wave of prosperity and newspapers proclaimed Harding as a wise statesman. However, word began to reach Harding that some of his friends were using their official positions for personal enrichment. This alarmed and worried Harding but he feared the political repercussions of exposing the scandals. Looking wan and depressed, Harding journeyed westward in the summer of 1923 carrying the burden of revealing the corruption. Unfortunately, he did not live to find out how the public would react to the scandals of his administration. On August 2, 1923, Harding died in San Francisco of a heart attack.

Franklin D. Roosevelt, Thirty-Second U.S. President, 1933-1945: Franklin D. Roosevelt was born on January 30, 1882 at Hyde Park, New York. He attended Harvard University and Columbia Law School. On St. Patrick's Day, 1905, he married Eleanor Roosevelt. Roosevelt entered public service through politics, serving in several state and federal positions before being elected Governor of New York in 1928. In the summer of 1921, at the age of 39, he was stricken with poliomyelitis. Demonstrating indomitable courage, Roosevelt fought to regain the use of his legs, particularly through swimming. Roosevelt received the three degrees in Masonry within Holland Lodge No. 8 located in New York City in 1911. During his lifetime he was supportive of Freemasonry and somewhat active in the fraternity. He was elected President in November 1932 to the first of four terms spanning the Great Depression to World War II. His tenure as President was a period of great social and political change in the United States. Assuming the Presidency at the depth of the Great Depression, he brought hope to the American people as he promised prompt, vigorous action, and asserted in his Inaugural Address, "the only thing we have to fear is fear itself." When the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Roosevelt directed organization of the Nation's manpower and resources for global war. During this period, he directed the war effort but also contemplated the planning of a United Nations in which international difficulties could be resolved. As the war ended, Roosevelt's health deteriorated, and on April 12, 1945, while at Warm Springs, Georgia, he died of a cerebral hemorrhage at the beginning of his fourth term as President.

Harry S. Truman, Thirty-Third U.S. President, 1945-1953: Harry S. Truman was born in Lamar, Missouri, in 1884. He grew up in Independence, and for 12 years prospered as a Missouri farmer. He went to France during World War I as a captain in the Field Artillery. Returning, he married Elizabeth Virginia Wallace, and opened a haberdashery in Kansas City. A very active Freemason, Truman received his Masonic degrees in Belton Lodge No. 450 in Grandview, Missouri in 1909. In 1911, Truman and several other Masons organized Grandview Lodge No. 618 and Truman served as the first Master of the Lodge. In 1940, Truman was elected Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Missouri and would serve as such until October 1941. Truman became a U.S Senator in 1934 and was active in monitoring the war effort while in the Senate. Brother Franklin D. Roosevelt chose Truman to be his Vice-Presidential candidate in the 1944 elections, which Roosevelt won. During his few weeks as Vice President, Truman scarcely saw President

Roosevelt, and received no briefing on the development of the atomic bomb or the unfolding difficulties with Soviet Russia. Suddenly these and a host of other wartime problems became Truman's to solve when, on April 12, 1945, he became President upon the death of Roosevelt. He told reporters, "I felt like the moon, the stars, and all the planets had fallen on me." As President, Truman made some of the most crucial decisions in history. Soon after V-E Day, the war against Japan had reached its final stage. An urgent plea to Japan to surrender was rejected. Truman, after consultations with his advisers, ordered atomic bombs dropped on cities devoted to war work. Two were Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The Japanese surrender quickly followed in 1945. In 1948, campaigning against the backdrop of crises in foreign affairs around the globe, Truman won a term as President in his own right. Deciding not to run for a second term, Truman retired from the Presidency in 1953 and returned to Independence, Missouri where he died on December 26, 1972 at the age of 88.

Gerald R. Ford, Thirty-Eighth U.S President, 1974-1977: Born in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1913, Gerald R. Ford grew up in Grand Rapids, Michigan. He starred on the University of Michigan football team, and then went to Yale where he served as assistant coach while earning his law degree. During World War II he attained the rank of lieutenant commander in the Navy. After the war he returned to Grand Rapids, where he began the practice of law, and entered Republican politics. In 1948 he was elected to Congress where he developed a reputation for integrity and openness. That reputation made him popular during his twenty-five years in Congress where he served as House Minority Leader from 1965 to 1973. Ford was initiated in Freemasonry on September 30, 1949 in Malta Lodge No. 465 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. In 1951 he received the Fellowcraft degree and was raised to the Master Mason degree in Columbia Lodge No. 3 in Washington, D.C. as a courtesy for Malta Lodge while Ford served in Congress. When Ford took the oath of office as President on August 9, 1974, he declared, "I assume the Presidency under extraordinary circumstances.... This is an hour of history that troubles our minds and hurts our hearts." It was indeed an unprecedented time. He had been the first Vice President chosen under the terms of the Twenty-fifth Amendment and, in the aftermath of the Watergate scandal, was succeeding the first President ever to resign. President Ford won the Republican nomination for the Presidency in 1976, but lost the election to his Democratic opponent.

Reference

The Grand Lodge of Texas. (2020, Sep 23.). *U.S. Masonic Presidents*. Retrieved from <https://www.universalfreemasonry.org/en/article/us-masonic-presidents>