

NV Grand Lodge Short Lecture Series

G. WASHINGTON, "THE WIDOW'S SON"

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The life of George Washington and the introduction of Masonry into America is remarkably concurrent. Washington himself entered this world on February 22, 1732, and the first Masonic lodges appeared in the following year in Boston, Philadelphia and Charleston, SC. He was a true "widow's son" his father having died when he was but 11 years old and his mother superintending his early education.

Even in his boyhood he is said to have manifested a military taste and to have exerted a commanding influence over his youthful associates, and by the age of 19 he had achieved the position of Adjutant General in the Virginia Militia. Such he'd already achieved when at the age of 20 he first offered himself to Fredericksburg Lodge as a candidate for the mysteries of Masonry. He was initiated on Nov. 4th, 1752, passed on March 3rd, 1753, and raised to the sublime degree on August 4th, four months later. In November of that same year, he was commissioned by the Governor of Virginia to journey to Ohio and demand, in his name, that the French relinquish and depart the territory, and cease to intrude what was considered England's domain. This of course the French refused to do. Following his return to Virginia and upon the death of his commanding officer, Colonel Fry in 1754, Washington was placed at the head of Virginia's troops. His first lessons in active military life were direct experience, for he had few to council and none to guide him. His campaign was short, ending in July of that same year with his capitulation to the French at Fort Necessity. This marks the only time in his life when he ever struck his flag to a foe.

Of his first six years as a Mason, five of those were spent in conflict, and thus his attendance in his own lodge in Fredericksburg was infrequent, but tradition states that Washington and his Masonic brethren held Military lodges during the war, and there is a cave near Charleston, Virginia which is to this day referred to as Washington's Masonic Cave. It is divided into several apartments, one of which is called "the lodge room" and it is said that he and his brothers held their lodges here.

After the war, he took a seat in the Colonial Assembly of Virginia, and in the same month, married Mrs. Martha Custis, a wealthy and accomplished widow whose ample fortune enabled them to maintain a style of living equal to Virginia gentlemen of the first rank of society. The next 15 years of his life were spent in domestic retirement, interrupted only by his public duties as a member of the Colonial Assembly, and his duties as Master of Alexandria lodge #22, near Mount Vernon.

Then, in 1774, when the clouds of political adversity were gathering above our country, a congress of delegates was convened in Philadelphia, to which Washington was a representative of the State of Virginia. The conflict had already begun at Lexington and Concord, and Washington was elected as Commander-in-Chief of the American Army. He was 43. On the same day, in Boston, the Battle of Bunker Hill was fought, and American Masonry lost General Joseph Warren, Grand Master of Massachusetts in the battle. This was the first grand sacrifice of Masonry at the altars of liberty but would not be the last.

On taking command of his army, one of Washington's chief duties was to provide for the comfort and necessities of his troops. At this time a movement was begun to establish a Masonic lodge in the camp. They applied for and received dispensation from the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, and the American Union Lodge was formed. Tradition holds that Washington attended often, though the loss of their records prevents us from verifying this, with the notable exception of the Feast of St. John the Evangelist, held on December 28, 1777, the record of which still exists and bears his name.

In 1780, however, an attempt was made to unify the colonies into one Masonic Grand Body, and specifically named General George Washington as the first General Grand Master of Masons of the United States of America, but this attempt was put off until such time as "a general peace shall happily take place throughout the continent". This concept never gained traction, and independent Grand Lodges formed within each state, similarly to the political independence held by states in the early days following the revolution. From this action arose, undoubtedly, the wide-spread appellation of the title of General Grand Master for Washington, which, though a historical error, has not yet been eradicated from the minds of the public, or of many Masons, a Myth made stronger by the fact that almost every Masonic jurisdiction in America today has at least one lodge bearing to his name, and that many dedicated their first Book of Constitutions of Grand Lodge of England editions to him.

Upon his death on December 14th, 1799, just days before the turn of the new century, he was buried with Masonic honors, and lodges throughout the country held Lodges of Sorrow during the entire month. A Golden Urn containing a lock of his hair, along with his Masonic apron and regalia are on display at the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, where he was first made a Mason, and though he held no Masonic office, other than that of Past Master of his lodge in Alexandria, Washington is and ever shall be regarded as the great patron of American Freemasonry.

References

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