

George Washington, The Mason

By HERMAN J. LICHTY

George Washington was just a little lad when his father moved his family to a farm on the Rappanock River, opposite Fredericksburg, Virginia, called Pine Grove Farm. This was later changed to Ferry Farm, the name of which it is known today. It was on this farm that George lived when the cherry tree incident happened. He attended school and took his Masonic degrees while living on this farm.

George Washington, the Mason, was initiated November 4, 1752, as an entered apprentice into Fredericksburg Lodge # 4 of Fredericksburg, Va., one of the oldest lodges in America. He passed Fellow Craft on March 3, 1753 and was raised a Master Mason on August 4, 1753. He lived his Masonry and demonstrated it in many ways. One of the first acts after being made a Mason was to take Governor Dinwiddie's message to the French in the Ohio country. He had to have an interpreter, so he returned to Fredericksburg and invited Jacob Van Braam, a Brother Mason to go with him.

The meetings of Fredericksburg Lodge were held the first Friday of the month, from March to September at 6 o'clock in the evening, and from September to March at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. Washington traveled to and from lodge on horseback, leaving in the middle of the afternoon and never returning home until midnight.

Washington was a Mason through and through. He had a depth of religious spirit that few could fathom, so it was natural for him to return to Masonry to intensify his spiritual strength. Any Mason can readily understand why it made such a strong appeal to the Greatest American. Anyone who will read, even a little history of Masonry, will understand why this body was at once a magnet and comfort to Washington.

When Benedict Arnold deserted the American cause, Washington's disappointment was made more bitter because Arnold was a Mason. His comment was: "Now whom can we trust?"

On another occasion when Lewis Littlepage returned to his home in Fredericksburg, from the court of the King of Poland, after being decorated and honored by many of the courts

of Europe, the King requested President Washington to allow Littlepage to wear his decorations, and retain titles bestowed upon him. In spite of the fact that Littlepage was one of the greatest Americans of his time, and had done much for the American cause in the courts of Europe, and besides being a Brother Mason, belonging to his own lodge, Washington refused to grant this request on the grounds, that for an American citizen to wear decorations and go under a title in this country, would be against the ideals of Democracy and the principles of Masonry.

Washington often expressed his love for Masonry and his Mother Lodge at Fredericksburg, Va. Many of his closest friends and associates, his generals and military aides belonged to the Ancient Craft, and many of that number to his own lodge at Fredericksburg. In the formative period of this nation, when men had decided views on government, it was necessary for leaders to surround themselves with men whom they could trust. When an important post was to be filled, or an important message was to be delivered, Washington often selected a man as much of his Masonic affiliations as for his ability, because living his Masonry, he looked for others to live their Masonry also.

The Holy Bible on which Washington took all three Masonic obligations, is kept in a fire-proof vault, within the lodge room at Fredericksburg. It is protected by a covering of strong glass and can be seen at any regular communication of the lodge. On a few exceptional occasions it has been taken to Masonic gatherings to grace the proceedings. Whenever it is taken from the lodge at Fredericksburg it travels under guard. The Minute Book of the lodge shows the entry of Washington's three steps in Masonry. This is also kept in the lodge room with the Holy Bible.

When Washington moved to Mt. Vernon he was elected an honorary member of Alexandria Lodge #30. This lodge operated under a charter granted by the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania. After all the Provincial Charters had been withdrawn the Grand Lodge of Virginia was petitioned on

April 28, 1788, to form Alexandria Lodge #22 with George Washington as its first Master. On December 12, 1805 the name of the lodge was changed to Alexandria-Washington Lodge.

While Master of Alexandria-Washington Lodge Washington took a large Chippendale chair from his library at Mt. Vernon and presented it to the lodge. It has been used for 118 years but now is only used on special occasions and at the annual installation of officers.

The trowel and working tools used by Washington when he laid the cornerstone of the U. S. Capitol on September 13, 1793 belongs to Alexandria-Washington Lodge. The trowel is silver with an ivory handle. It cannot be used or taken from the lodge room unless every member receives due notice and with two-thirds majority voting at a regular communication. President Eisenhower recently used this trowel to lay the cornerstone of the new State Department Building in Washington, D. C.

The cornerstone ceremonies at the Capitol were conducted under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Maryland. Washington acted as Grand Master pro tem for the occasion. Washington is the only President to serve as Master of his lodge during a term of office. The gavel used at the cornerstone ceremonies belongs to Potomac Lodge. The apron presented to Wash-

ington in January, 1781, by Watson and Cassoul, friends of the General, was worn while he was Master of Alexandria Lodge and while he laid the cornerstone of the Capitol.

In 1793, the lodge requested General Washington, then President and living in Philadelphia, to sit for a picture, and employed William J. Williams of that city to execute the work. Washington approved the likeness, and late in 1794 it was received from the artist and accepted by the lodge. The picture is devoid of idealism. The artist's instructions being, "Paint him as he is." This Mr. Williams appears to have done, bringing out in bold relief several facial blemishes, which the General is known to have possessed, and which are shown in a modified form, if at all, by other artists. It is well worth the trip to the George Washington National Memorial in Alexandria, Va., to see. The portrait was used in 1932 for the 9-cent George Washington Bi-Centennial stamp.

During his lifetime Washington had many honors bestowed upon him, and many were offered that he could not accept, especially that of Grand Master and General Grand Master. He did accept honorary membership in other lodges, but did not demit from his Mother Lodge, Fredericksburg, Va., #4. The reports of the Grand Lodge of Virginia shows that Fredericksburg Lodge #4, was the only lodge reporting the death of Brother George Washington.

Additional Information:

This photograph of the chair George Washington took to and used at Alexandria Lodge when he was Master, and later gave it to the lodge, is on the cover of the MP that contains this article. The photo was therefore taken prior to March 1958. The chair is now encased in a plexiglass container, so a good photograph is not possible.

One account of the chair states, "George Washington brought this chair from Mount Vernon to the tavern where his Masonic lodge met because he was too tall to fit comfortably into a tavern chair." This being the case, he obviously took it to Alexandria Lodge as well.

Reference: MP Vol 14, No. 7, March 1958

