

Wednesday, September 06, 2000

Dear Brethren,

I have received these questions from a member of the lodge relating to:

Anecdote No. 5: Washington and Freemasonry.

Since the questions are lengthy and specific in nature, I have decided not to issue another anecdote this week, but instead, I will try and answer these questions posed concern Washington and his role in Freemasonry. Please, note we will shortly be issuing other anecdotes about Washington and his specific role in our lodge.

Question: You talk about the Enlightenment ideals and ideology, and then say, "With this understanding, we can realize why colonial Freemasonry appealed to the young George Washington in 1752." What evidence -- writings by Washington, of which there are many, or any other solid evidence -- do you have for making this statement? Isn't it just as likely, even more so as several of Washington's biographers have written in detail, that Washington's main motivation at the time was to do whatever he could to be accepted in polite society, and that his joining Freemasonry had nothing to do with ideals and everything to do with social climbing?

Answer: As far as we know, the young Washington (20 years old), did not write about his true motivation for entering Freemasonry. But, in the basic rules of our order, we are taught not to allow anyone to enter the craft based on a motivation of self-aggrandizement. In the first degree, the candidate is reminded this at several stages in the ceremony and given opportunity to withdraw. The general character of the young Washington would also indicate that he would not enter the craft under false pretences. We will never know what was in the mind of the young Washington at the time, but after experiencing the degree progress, he as all Freemasons, are placed on the path to Masonic enlightenment. Thereafter, it is up to each individual to find that enlightenment for himself. During this period, the ideal of love, of fraternal connection among diverse men, provided most men their first appeal of Masonry. In the various scattered settlements of the region, it is true, the fraternity increased opportunity for contact and sociability, but in Washington's case, I can't agree that social climbing was his major reason for joining the craft.

Question: You then said, "George Washington's affiliation with Masonry was thus an important part of his role as the country's military and political leader." Again, is there any evidence to support this statement? Washington wrote frequently of his enjoyment of the theatre, and of many other things. What did he write about his enjoyment of Freemasonry during this period? Nothing, I believe. Do you really want to make a statement for which there is no real evidence, or do you know of evidence that has not been published before? Again, should any of us be disseminating stories that we wish were true, rather than those that are supported by evidence?

Answer: When we look at the history of Washington's life in totality, Masonic historians agree that the moral teachings of Freemasonry must have played some kind of role in his life. The parallels between Freemasonry's teachings and Washington's personal philosophies are too numerous not to be counted as evidence during this period. The father of our country, with his great insight, would also not have remained a member of an order that did not correspond with his own ideology. Washington wrote later in life, the following letter to King David's Lodge No.1 in Newport, Rhode Island dated August 22, 1790: "Being persuaded that a just application of the principles on which the Masonic Fraternity is founded, must be promotive of virtue and public prosperity, I shall always be happy to advance the interest of the Society, and be considered by them a deserving brother."

Question: Then you said, "Washington's later encouragement of military lodges in the Continental Army was also an additional factor in holding the loyalty of his soldiers. As a matter of

fact, Masonic ties and patriotism were so closely entwined during this period that they virtually merge in popular usage." This means that you have made an historic find, because no historian ever found evidence of this before.

Answer: These sentences do not come from my own finding, but are referenced from several publications such as:

Brown, William M., *George Washington: Freemason* - 1952
 Bullock, Steven C., *Revolutionary Brotherhood* - 1996
 Hayden, Sidney, *Washington and His Masonic Compeers*, - 1866
 Moore, William D., Hamilton, John D., *George Washington, American Symbol* – 1999
 Tatsch, J. Hugo, *The Facts about George Washington as a Freemason* – 1931

In referring to these and other books, we find references that show how many officers chosen by Washington, were Freemasons. The loyalty of these brethren should be compared to others that were not members of the craft. This will give you your answer.

Question: Then you said, "Not much is known of Washington's Masonic life during the quarter century following the degrees at Fredericksburg." Is it likely to assume that this is because there was no Masonic life in Washington's live during the quarter century following his degrees at Fredericksburg? Why say not much is known, when it is just as correct, more so, to say it is probable that he was not involved in any way with Masonry for 25 years (or longer)?

Answer: One could phrase my sentence as you have suggested, but as an optimist, I would rather think positively about these "unknown" years concerning Washington's Masonic activities.

Question: Next you say, "Tradition puts him in various military lodges during the time, but because of their travelling nature, there remains no record of his attendance." Tradition also can put Santa Claus at military lodge meetings. Rather than tradition, what evidence is there? You say the travelling nature of military lodges somehow is the answer to their being no record of Washington's attendance. But I have seen attendance records, good ones, for military lodge meetings. Is it reasonable to assume that George Washington's name was accidentally left off the attendance records, or perhaps no one noticed or cared that he attended? Or is the likely answer that he didn't attend these meetings, because he had no interest in them? And that he didn't support them in any way, contrary to what you said?

Answer: Because of the traveling nature of most military lodges, few records remain concerning most of these lodges. But since there are many "traditional references" in various Masonic editions on the subject, I see no harm in using the word "tradition" to describe what evidence exists today. Need I remind you that our order passed down a great deal of our own history and ritual from "mouth to ear"? This tradition is the basic nature of our institution. If we can't include this kind of traditional evidence---recent histories passed down about our own members---how could we believe the many histories of passed civilizations such as the history of Israel, of Christ or of Buddha? These traditional histories were passed down orally for a hundred or more generations before they were written down. In my opinion, we can give credibility to these accounts, if there is enough traditional evidence pointing to the same conclusion---and the conclusion here is Washington did attend military lodges during the revolution.

Question: Next you say, "But Washington must have remained active in Freemasonry because in 1777, a convention of Virginia lodges recommended him to be Grand Master of the newly established grand lodge of that commonwealth." How does this prove that Washington "must" have remained active in Freemasonry? It's just as reasonable to conclude that the Virginia Masons asked him to be GM because they hoped that he might agree to lend his name to this, not knowing if he had the slightest interest in Freemasonry. Again, what evidence, if any, do you have for your statement?

Answer: Please refer to the next answer.

Question: You answer your implied question about why Washington didn't want to be GM by saying, "he declined sighting two reasons: first, his necessity to lead the Continental Army at a critical stage in the struggle for independence, and second, "he did not consider it Masonically legal that one who had never been installed as Master or Warden of a lodge should be elected Grand Master." This in itself has an added significance of its own because it proves him to have had intimate experience with the customs of Freemasonry." Did Washington really "say" these things?

Answer: Those men that established the Grand Lodge of Virginia were leaders of their time, some of whom knew Washington personally. These men needed to select a member of the craft that could unite the various lodges in Virginia into one grand lodge. If Washington did not have any knowledge of the craft, how could his appointment have served the Grand Lodge of Virginia? Yes, Washington's name might have been sought to help solidify the lodges into a new grand lodge, but why appoint an unknowable leader? Therefore, I conclude Washington "must" have had some knowledge of the craft for this proposal to be made in the first place. But, according to the below references:

Brown, William M., *George Washington: Freemason* - 1952

Brown, William M., *Freemasonry in Virginia* - 1936

Hayden, Sidney, *Washington and His Masonic Compeers*, - 1866

Tatsch, J. Hugo, *The Facts about George Washington as a Freemason* – 1931

"He did not consider it Masonically legal that one who had never been installed as Master or Warden of a lodge should be elected Grand Master." Let me make it clear that Washington did not say these exact words---the quotes refer to the above sources only. But one reference is of particular interest: Brown, William M., *Freemasonry in Virginia* – 1936. Here on page 53, we find the following: "More than a year elapsed before another meeting [of the convention to form a grand lodge] was held. Meanwhile, the suggestion, that he [Washington], accept the office of Grand Master (for which Winchester Lodge claims the original credit), was communicated to Washington." The underlined statement in parentheses should be investigated. If Winchester Lodge has original documentation on when and in what situation their members approached Washington---and his exact response---this could be the evidence you are seeking.

Question: You mentioned the actions of a convention of military lodges (holding what authority, by the way?) and of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania to try to make Washington GM for the U.S. Did the GL of PA communicate this with Washington, and if so, what was said by Washington? If the GL of PA did not communicate about this with Washington, what can we conclude from that, if anything?

Answer: Please refer to *Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia---American Union Lodge*, concerning military lodges. As you suggest, the Provincial Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania did not communicate their wish to make Washington GM of the US. This movement was made during a grand lodge meeting held on January 13, 1780 and they even elected him to that office. If there were enough active participants (various grand and provincial grand lodges) in favor of a General Grand Master of USA, Washington would have been the only choice. But, since Washington had not yet served as Worshipful Master (he was appointed "Charter" Master of Alexandria Lodge No. 22 on April 28, 1788) it is doubtful he would have accepted the position based on the above references.

Question: In the next paragraph you referred to what you call, "Washington's most important Masonic commitment: to be named Worshipful Master of the lodge at Alexandria," and you say that he "accepted" this responsibility. When and how did he make this commitment? What evidence is there that he even knew his name was being used in this way? And do you have any evidence that Washington did anything, attended any meeting, wrote a single word, about his

being Worshipful Master of the lodge at Alexandria? If so, please let me know, and we can all spread the word of this important evidence.

Answer: There was a specific committee appointed by Lodge No. 39 concerning this matter. In the lodge meeting held on May 29, 1788 we find the following recorded: "Ordered that Brothers McCrea, Hunter, Jr., Allison and Powell wait on General Washington & enquire of him whether it will be agreeable to him to be named in the Charter..." I can't believe that these faithful brethren would have proceeded to use Washington's name without his knowledge, and then continue to invite him to meetings. Nonetheless, this point will be dealt with in an up-coming lodge anecdote since it pertains directly with the history of our lodge.

Question: A minor point -- You said that Washington was the only President of the U.S. to simultaneously serve as WM of his lodge. I believe that Harry S. Truman was WM of his research lodge while serving as U.S. President. But this is a minor point.

Answer: One generally understands a lodge of research, such as the Missouri Lodge of Research, as a lodge that does not function like a normal Masonic lodge, i.e. conferring the three degrees of Freemasonry, etc. Therefore, it is agreed that Washington should retain this historic record.

Question: You say that Washington visited lodges and Grand Lodges after he was President. I am familiar with the letters and documented visits *with* Masons in various locations. Do you have any evidence that Washington attended ANY Masonic lodge meetings during this time, even one? If so, again, please let me and others know. If he didn't why not? He attended lots of leisure time activities, so he could have easily attended lodge meetings -- if he wished to. You mention Washington marching in Masonic processions and attending Masonic funerals, implying that he did this often. Are you aware of more than about 3 occasions when he did this?

Answer: Please refer to the above stated references for the accepted Masonic itinerary of Washington. Concerning grand lodges, I stand corrected. Washington did not attend any grand lodge, but did write several letters to them: one to the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts and the other to the Grand Lodge of Maryland both dated 1797.

Question: You say that Washington was carrying on "friendships that had begun in the lodges of the Revolution." Can you name a single friendship of Washington's that began in any lodge in the Revolution? If not, wouldn't it be the right thing to withdraw this type of statement?

Answer: Since you don't believe that Washington participated in military lodges---this question need not be answered. Nevertheless, in time of war, and if Washington did participate in military lodges, won't you agree that friendships could have been made? Why not ask those that have participated in our armed forces if they retained friendships made during their service? Logically, if Washington participated in military lodges, he had to retain friendships.

Question: You say, "he and his associates knew that Freemasonry was in its own silent and pervasive spirit helping to united and bind together a national unity." Did Washington say this, or is this just a made-up statement? What evidence exists that Washington felt this way? Maybe he felt that Freemasonry caused a split in the nation, and that's why he didn't have anything to do with it. (Just as with Chief Justice, and former Virginia Grand Master, John Marshall.)

Answer: This statement is based on: Bullock, Steven C., *Revolutionary Brotherhood* – 1996. In my opinion, one of the finest studies made about Freemasonry during this period. Here Bullock goes into great detail about Freemasonry's role during the American Revolution. As far as what Washington thought of Freemasonry---he wrote the following only thirteen months before his death. Washington is replying to a letter from the Grand Lodge of Maryland: "So far as I am acquainted with the doctrines and principles of Freemasonry, I conceive them to be founded in

beneficence, and to be exercised only for the good of mankind. I cannot, therefore, upon this ground, withhold my approbation from it.”

Question: You talk about Masonry after 1793 as being a "pervasive organization ... led by no other than the father of his country, George Washington." How was this organization led by Washington? And wasn't the pervasive nature of our organization just what caused trouble in the 1820s and 1830s? And what does pervasive mean, as you used it here?

Answer: Please read two references: *George Washington, American Symbol* – 1999, and *George Washington, an American Icon* – 1982. Both these books go into detail about how Washington was made into a figure larger than life. In this type of symbolism, he was bestowed the title of the American Moses who led his people to freedom. It was likewise in Freemasonry. Washington led the Masonic community in the capacity as a human Masonic icon or symbol---our King Solomon of America.

The American anti-Masonic period is a complex subject. The pervading influence of Freemasonry at the time may have led to this conflict, but there are many other factors that must be referenced before we make this conclusion.

Question: You ended your anecdote with a statement about what Washington said about the object of Freemasonry. Is there any reason why you didn't include some of Washington's statements about some of the negative things about Freemasonry?

Answer: Optimism and inspiration---these anecdotes are directed to the officers and members of the lodge. But, since you bring it up, Washington did write about how various Freemasons promoted radicalism during the French Revolution.

RW Claude Harris, PM of the lodge
Email: charris@ksc15.th.com