

"National Honor Is National Property"...

James Monroe: Mason, Soldier, Statesman-Part II **by Gilbert H. Hill**

The British invaded and burned Washington in 1812. Congress was homeless for five years, meeting here and there in structures still standing after that staggering blow dealt by the mother country. Reconstructed, the Monroes opened the White House on New Year's Day 1818 with a great fete and celebration.

The elegant taste of the Monroes is on display today in the Green Room of the executive mansion. The charming Italian mantel was purchased by them. In the Monroe Room, established by Mrs. Herbert Hoover, are copies of all the Monroe furniture. To this was added, in the Eisenhowers tenancy, an original sofa. On a wall facing an entrance hang splendid portraits of James and Elizabeth Monroe. It was the Monroes who started the supreme White House gold collection in French flatware for the dinner set..

Monroe, having served in the administrations of Washington, Jefferson and Madison, only once encountered a lack of confidence in his ability to ably represent the interests of his country. The Jay Treaty was unpopular both in France and the United States and was grudgingly adopted by a bare two-thirds majority, largely at Washington's insistence.

Monroe had "promised" the French that Congress would not accept it. The outcry in France was such that Monroe was recalled. Upon his return, he published a 500-page treatise in defense of his policy. It is said Washington never forgave him for this.

Monroe's two elections to the Presidency were easily won victories. In fact, the 1820 election was the only one since Washington's in which there was no opposing candidate. This period in American politics came to be known as the "Era of Good Feeling."

Having helped settle disputes between America, France, Spain and England, and thereby reducing the danger of hostilities and conflict, it was natural that American foreign policy should bear his name, and the rest of the world began to understand the western hemisphere was not open to conquest and domination.

The annual message to Congress, December 1823, carried the gist of the doctrine which has since born his name: "The American Continents...are henceforth not to be considered as subjects for future colonization by any European powers."

The first inaugural address, March 4, 1817, contained this statement: "National honor is national property of the highest value." When Britain, then "mistress of the waves," suggested that the United States join her in a "hands-off" proclamation as to Latin America, Monroe chose the advice of John Quincy Adams, his Secretary of State, and warned that not only Latin America must be left alone but Russia must not encroach southward on the Pacific Coast.

Monroe sided with the South on the slavery issue, but he made no effort to influence Congress. The Missouri Compromise settled largely by Henry Clay resolved temporarily the clash between the North and South. Discarding sectional bias of previous years, Monroe appointed Calhoun, a Southerner, for Secretary of War, and Northerner Adams, Secretary of State.

According to the John A. Hertel *Masonic Bible and Encyclopedia*, 1951 Edition, the records of Williamsburg Lodge No.6 provide the information that James Monroe's petition for membership in the Fraternity was favorably received November 6, 1775. On November 9 of the same year he was accepted an Entered Apprentice. This would indicate that the first Degree in Masonry was conferred before he was quite 18 years of age. At that time the stipulation of the minimum age of 21 years had not become a rigid regulation. Since no record has survived indicating that the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason was ever conferred upon him in Lodge No.6, it is generally accepted that the additional degrees were received in a military Lodge during the Revolution. Records of the Williamsburg Lodge indicate that payments of dues were made through October 1780. At one time Monroe held membership in the Killwinning Cross Lodge No.2 of Port Royal, Virginia. This record was discovered by George W. Baird.

While Monroe was President, he visited Cumberland Lodge No.8, of Nashville, Tennessee, and was extended the honor of a private reception by the Lodge. He was greeted by Worshipful Master Wilkins Tannehill, who headed the procession to receive him. Tannehill later became Grand Master of Tennessee.

Memorial services were held by Randolph Lodge No. 19 when death brought an end to this great patriot and loyal Mason.

Surrounded by an influence of Masonic Brotherhood in the military Lodges of the Revolutionary War and working with such personalities as Washington, John Marshall, General Lafayette, Robert Livingston, all Grand Masters except Washington, must have been an experience unparalleled in sober and wise guidance. One may also fancy the potency of the philosophy of Benjamin Franklin; inventor, scientist, statesman and Provincial Grand Master of Pennsylvania under the English Constitution.

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