The George Washington Masonic National Memorial Announces
Two Major Masonic Digital History Projects-Part I
by Mark A. Tabbert, Director of Collections

Created and governed 52 American Grand Lodges, the George Washington National Masonic Memorial is dedicated to George Washington, but it is also dedicated as the "National Masonic Memorial." Inherent in this dual mission is to preserve the memory of not just Brother Washington but of every American who joined the Craft. To fulfill this greater mission, the Memorial will initiate two major digital projects in 2007.

The first project is an on-line data base of all duly constituted US Grand Lodges and local Lodges ever chartered. The second is the digitization of every Grand Lodge annual proceedings. Through these two projects, the Memorial will meet the needs of present and future Brothers, but also it will answer the growing number of research questions from scholars, genealogists, and more especially, from men interested in joining the fraternity.

On September 8, 2006, the Memorial held a meeting with Masonic representatives to discuss the projects. Those attending included several Grand Lodge Secretaries, Masonic librarians, and Grand Lodge and nonMason information technology experts. The attendees agreed the Memorial is well-situated to recommend uniform technological and informational specifications. Furthermore, as it is governed by Grand Lodges, it is a natural neutral institution to coordinate the information owned and maintained by each Grand Lodge. Through the Memorial's website, on-lineresearchers could access every Grand Lodge proceedings, Lodge records, library and museum collections.

Project one is "The National Masonic Research Database." This on-line database will contain records of every regular and recognized American Grand Lodge since the 1730s. This includes "Modern" and "Ancient" Grand Lodges of early America, as well as Grand Lodges that later divided, such as the Grand Lodge of Dakota, which split into North and South in 1889. From this table, records of every chartered Lodge would be added. Each individual Lodge record would include charter date, location, and if a lodge moved, merged, divided, went dark or was rechartered in a new Grand Lodge. In short, it would be a genealogical record of every American Lodge.

To initiate this project, the Memorial will license a version of the Masonic On-line Registry Interface (MORI) system from Vita Rara, Inc. (www.vitarara.net). Specifically designed by Freemasons for Masonic Lodge and Grand Lodge record keeping, MORI will be customized for this project. Through the MORI system, participating Grand Lodges may directly enter their Lodge histories through the Memorial's website. Or if Grand Lodges already have their Lodge histories in digital format, they can choose to send it to the Memorial for conversion into MORI. Once its local Lodge records are entered, a Grand Lodge will be free to edit them and post them on its own website. The Memorial will maintain the unified database and website to present all Grand Lodges and Lodge histories. Once the database is fully functioning, the Memorial and participating Grand Lodges will conduct annual reviews for ongoing MORI upgrades.

For those Grand Lodges that choose to participate and support the project at a determined level, the Memorial has arranged for Vita Rara to provide a full working installation of MORI for its own use. This software includes: membership registry management, subordinate body management, Grand Lodge management and reports, mail room functions,

and fund-raising management. Vita Rara will import any existing electronic Lodge and membership records. MORI further includes an on-line Lodge module that allows local secretaries to directly input and manage member records, dues, and finances. Lastly, Vita Rara will provide on-site MORI training to Grand Lodge staff.

The National Masonic Research Database will have two further great advantages. First, once Lodge records have been created, each Grand Lodge will have the ability to add records for deceased and inactive members to the National Masonic Research Database. This can be done by each Grand Lodge or Lodges and members they designate for their jurisdiction. Like the Lodge histories, each Grand Lodge will retain control over which records are viewable by researchers and the public.

The second advantage is that other Masonic organizations could create parallel databases containing their national, state, and local bodies. This means on-line databases of every Knights Templar Commandery, Eastern Star Chapter, Grotto, etc., that ever existed. Furthermore, once Grand Lodges enter their membership records, they could be linked to the York Rite and appendant bodies' databases. In its fullest form, therefore, by finding one Brother within the database, a researcher can discover if that Brother was a member of one Lodge or several Lodges in different states. The record could also include his membership in the York Rite bodies, Eastern Star, and other Masonic organizations. Lastly, the researcher will know when that Brother's Lodge, Chapter, Council, etc., was chartered and if and where it currently meets.This article will be concluded in Part II in the March 2007 issue of the magazine.

Grand Lodge officers and other Masonic leaders interested in receiving project prospectus should contact Mark Tabbert, Director of Collections, GWMNM at mtabbert@gwmemoriaLorg or call (703)683-2007, ext. 17. Mark Tabbert, 330, is a Past Master of Mystic Valley Lodge, Arlington, MA, a member of the Society of Blue Friars, and the author of American Freemason: Three Centuries of Building Communities.

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Two Major Masonic Digital History Projects-Part II
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1. To read about the first project, an online database of duly constituted U.S. Grand Lodges and local Lodges ever chartered, see the February 2007 issue.

Project two is "The Digitization ofAmerican Masonic Proceedings."

This project's mission is to bring the facts and figures, statistics, reports, and activities of every U.S. Grand Lodge out of dusty old books and into every on-line computer in the world. Through this project, every report, page, word, and image in every proceedings since 1733 could be searched on-line by keyword. No longer will Grand Lodges need to keep thousands of hardbound proceedings from every sister jurisdiction and every Masonic body. Like project one, however, the Memorial can only recommend technological and informational specifications to the Grand Ldge for this project. Each Grand Lodge will always be free to choose to participate and at what speed they may convert their proceedings to digital format.

To coordinate this project, the Memorial is recommending Online Computer Library Center (OCLC) to the Grand Lodges. OCLC is a nonprofit world leader in both digitization and library cataloging, with more than 53,500 public, private, and academic libraries and other cultural heritage organizations in 93 countries (www.oclc.org). Through OCLC, Freemasonry can bring its history to the widest possible audience using one of the most accepted systems. As with Project One, the Memorial will act as the coordinating agent with OCLC to digitize proceedings. Participating Grand Lodges will determine what years they wish digitized according to their own financial resources and donations from foundations, Lodges, and individuals to underwrite the projects. The Memorial currently holds two nearly complete sets of Grand Lodge proceedings, and as money is pledged, proceedings will be sent to OCLC. The larger the batch of proceedings, the lower the price will be to scan each page. In short, Grand Lodges, Lodges, and individual Brothers can donate money to have decades, a few years, or a single year scanned.

Once scanned, the proceedings will be converted into OCLC's searchable system called "CONTENTdm." The costs to license this software and make it accessible through the Memorial website will be shared by all participants, with additional funds coming through grants, donations, and other sources. The good news is that this system is already licensed by over 325 organizations, including but not limited to:academic, public, and historical society libraries and museums. Grand Lodges may receive complete sets of their proceedings in TIFF format on DVD for their own use and donation to libraries that use CONTENTdm.

The use of OCLC and its CONTENTdm software also provides two great advantages. First, CONTENTdm is essentially a database, and although its primary use is to search the printed word, it is a natural platform to catalog Masonic historical artifacts. Every Grand Lodge that digitizes their proceedings will automatically have the ability to catalog their Masonic museum collections. Therefore, by digitizing U.S. Masonic proceedings, the Memorial will have the means to coordinate a national database of Masonic historical artifacts, photographs, and even audio and video recordings. This will allow anyone on the Internet to find Masonic digital resources for school,scholarly and genealogical research,and for publications,

exhibitions, and other media.

OCLC's second advantage is a national union catalog of Masonic library holdings. Because OCLC's core customers are libraries, through the digitization process every Masonic library in America can enter into a consortium that will allow one universal catalog of Masonic books. What's more, this catalog will be linked to the more than 53,500 OCLC libraries worldwide. Through such a consortium, every Masonic library-big or small, national, state, and local-can easily create its own on-line catalog by appending its library code to preexisting book catalog records.

Lastly, just like project one, OCLC's digitization process, as well as its CONTENTdm and library catalogs, will be available to all other Masonic organizations. It is quite possible to have Grand Chapters, Grand Councils, and Grand Commanderies digitizing their proceedings within a batch of Grand Lodge proceedings.

Simultaneously, York Rite, Eastern Star, and other Masonic museums and libraries could also catalog their artifacts and books concurrent with Grand Lodges and Lodges. These two great and important undertakings represent the Memorial Association's renewed commitment to its founding mission.

The Association was founded in 1910, yet it was in 1932 that the Memorial was dedicated. Just as it took many years to construct the physical Memorial, so it may take years to create a digital "National Masonic Memorial." We cannot erect a physical monument to every Grand Master, Past Master, and Brother who served his Lodge, community, and country. However, through these digital projects, we can tell the world of their work and honor their virtues "until time shall be no more."

THE END

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