

A Chapter from Masonic History...

GEORGE WASHINGTON-MASTER MASON

by William E. Parker

Few indeed are the men revered as is Washington. More than thirty years after our Bicentennial, the 200th Anniversary of the birth of this great nation, what are our thoughts for this man who gave so much for his country and without whose leadership during a trying moment of history it is doubtful that our nation would be as it is today? It was in February of 1732, 275 years ago, that George Washington entered this world and in December 1799, some 68 years later, that he entered the Grand Lodge Above. What can we say of this man that has not been said before, this man we call the "Father of our Country"? And yet, his place in history is so unique, so important, that a few words bear repeating on the life of this great American, the "Heartbeat of the American Revolution." As Masons, we believe that his Masonic background was a significant part of his philosophy of life, a philosophy so important in the legacy he left to us, that which we now call our American Way of Life. His deep regard for human liberty and the dignity of man gave strength to our cause at a moment when strength was needed. Most people are aware of his English ancestry but it is of note to mention that Washington also had a proud French heritage being a descendent of one Nicholas Martiau a French Huguenot who emigrated to the United States in 1620. The high moral and industrious qualities of these freedom-seeking people have left an indelible mark upon history. "In the general darkness of the period of feudal decay," Roche writes, "the enlightenment of the Huguenots who were self-reliant burghers, businessmen and skilled craftsmen, was shown by contrast, though it was only relative. But the candle they lit in that darkness grew into a great flame; and the principles for which they were persecuted, were, in embryo, the same principles, moved from the theological confines, on which the United States of American was founded and for which both the pioneering American Revolution and its offspring, the French Revolution, was fought."

The qualities of character of these early Huguenots were passed down through succeeding generations to Washington that he, like a shining beacon, might illuminate the path amidst the darkness of despair.

Strange indeed are the ironies of history that the events in 17th century France contributed to the birth of a new nation in a new land almost two centuries later. And, stranger still, that it was yet another Frenchman, and a Mason, General Lafayette, who stood side by side with Washington during the stirring days of our nation's birth and whose contributions proved so vital to the successful outcome.

Washington the man and Washington the Mason: Initiated an Entered Apprentice Mason in the Lodge of Fredericksburg, Virginia, in November of 1752, he was Passed in March and Raised in August of 1753 in that same Lodge. He was proud of his membership, saying, "The object of Freemasonry is to promote the happiness of the human race," and in 1788 served as first Master of what is now known as Alexandria-Washington Lodge. It was perhaps inevitable that, after Washington's magnificent contributions to the nation during the Revolutionary period, he should be named a Virginia Delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1787, where as Presiding Officer he played a key role in the success of the Convention and ultimately became our first President in 1789. Washington thus became the first Master of a Masonic Lodge to become President, holding, for a time, both that high office and that of Worshipful Master of his Lodge, a rare distinction indeed. Washington's words upon becoming President reflect well his

philosophy: "Integrity and firmness are all that I can promise." What more could a nation ask? From the very beginning, Masonry has been closely associated with the history of our nation. And never more dramatically evidenced than in 1793 when, wearing a Masonic apron presented to him by General Lafayette and embroidered by Madame Lafayette, Washington in a Masonic ceremony laid the cornerstone of the United States Capitol at Washington, D.C. In August of 1790, in a letter to King David Lodge, Newport, Rhode Island, Washington wrote: "Being persuaded that a just application of the principles, on which the Masonic fraternity is founded, must be promotive of private virtue and public prosperity, I shall always be happy to advance the interests of the society and to be considered by them as a deserving brother." Washington had a deep sense of national union. In a response to an address of Charleston, South Carolina, Masons, he said: "The fabric of our freedom is placed on the enduring basis of public virtue, and will, I fondly hope, long continue to protect the prosperity of the architects who raised it." In Washington's famous Farewell Address on his retirement from public life, he emphasized that the responsibility for America's destiny rests directly upon its citizens, and he urged Americans to forge a nation of high principles: "Observe good faith and justice toward all nations. Cultivate peace and harmony with all. Religion and morality enjoin this conduct."

Washington served both God and man with the firmness of his convictions. During the darkest days of the Revolution and the cruel winter at Valley Forge, it was Washington who stood firm in the face of adversity and knelt for prayer in the snow to reaffirm his faith in God and seek divine assistance in the justice of his cause.

As his hope was in God, so must we, too, place our hope in God. Washington carried in his heart the ideals of liberty, justice and freedom. As Masons, we must likewise carry forward those same ideals.

Much more could be said about this great American, but I believe the facts speak for themselves far more eloquently than any tribute I might be able to offer-"First in war, first in peace and `indeed' first in the hearts of his countrymen."

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