

Our Brethren

— of —

REVOLUTIONARY DAYS

— and —

Dissertation



by

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Published By

**WISCONSIN GRAND LODGE COMMITTEE ON MASONIC
RESEARCH**

**Silas H. Shepherd, George C. Nuesse, Henry A. Crosby,
George B. Goodwin and Fred W. Russell**

Research Pamphlet No. 22

March 1, 1925

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EARLY DAY MASONIC BRETHREN

In the early days American Masonic lodges were made up largely of persons who met mainly for special sessions with friends. Their political activities during the Revolution were exceptional; but while similar activities in this country would today be looked upon in the same light, there has, nevertheless, been a development in the fraternity which has given it a more serious turn than generally prevailed in the first years of its existence. It does not follow that there has been any change in accepted principles, but with the growth of the institution, growth in population, membership and modern viewpoint, a wider interpretation of these principles, and a new emphasis upon the altruistic spirit and purposes of Masonry are apparent. This is characterized in our time by the great number of orphanages, schools, hospitals, old people's homes and similar enterprises that Masons are sponsoring, and the work of our Wisconsin Masonic Service Bureau, as well as acts of beneficence in individual lodges. It seems clear that Masons generally have a growing appreciation of their duty to their community and humanity at large.

Brother Roscoe Pound, one of the eminent Masonic scholars of the day, touches upon this thought when he says that the Grand Master of the universe has entrusted to us the principles of Masonry as working tools, but that these are not ours. They belong, he says, to the lodge of the world, and we are to use them that He may have pleasure and that the craft of humanity that labors in this wide lodge of the world may profit thereby.

The significant statement is now made by students of world affairs that the World War was a world revulsion that left in its wake a trend towards super-nationalism, disclosing as it did the great interdependence of countries and peoples, and revealing the ardent hopes of mankind for lasting peace. This hope it was that sustained the soldier, often humble and unknown, symbol of the lowly man who

from the very beginnings of organized society has served humanity, and who with great good will offered his life in the late war at the bidding of this country, stirred by a new trust that the world might be made safe for all mankind.

We have witnessed the collapse of four great empires, Turkey, Germany, Russia and Austria, which gave way to the tremendous shock of a stupendous war. War epitaphs heretofore have been not "Rest at peace," but "Rest at peace until we meet again;" and in countless hearts east and west there is lodged the hope that none may be disillusioned in interpreting present day pleas for disarmament as a new emphasis on protests against the settlement of disputes by violence.

All honor to those who fought for our sakes. None of us would withhold from them one particle of the great glory that is their due. None fail to recognize their great heroism and self-sacrifice. But warfare is not listed among the great gifts of nations to mankind. When we think of these we think of the fact that it was Palestine that contributed religion to the welfare of the world; Greece, culture; Rome, law; while the history and development of our own country clearly demonstrate that in America it was that great gift, the enfranchisement of mankind, a consummation in which Masons have been most intimately concerned, unfortunately with the accompaniment of strife and bloodshed, unavoidable at the prevailing stage of human advancement. We should deeply regret being misunderstood in this matter, but Masonry desires to promote friendship and brotherhood; and to this end it will continue to exercise a powerful influence in the everyday life of the world, none the less so because its influence is often unseen, for it stands unswervingly for the principles of truth and virtue, and a high conception of life in its fullest and purest capacity.

It was in the year 1754 that a congress of the American colonies was held at Albany, N. Y.; and Benjamin Franklin,

a Mason, introduced a plan of perpetual union, which was adopted, and failed by only one vote of being ratified by the colonies.

On the night of April 18, 1775, the British General, Gage, sent a detachment of British troops from Boston to Concord to arrest Samuel Adams and John Hancock on charges of treason, and to seize a quantity of ammunition stored at that point; and Joseph Warren, that vigilant sentinel Mason at the outposts of liberty, rang the alarm bells of Boston, and Paul Revere, a Mason, rode through the night, inspired by faith and a foreknowledge of human liberty cherished and exemplified before the world, to call the Minute Men to arms; and before dawn of the following day, at Lexington, the patriotic farmers fired the shots that historians tell us were heard around the world, electrifying all who had hopes and dreams of human freedom.

The battles of the Revolution were fought and won under the administration of Continental Congresses. Peyton Randolph, a Mason, was president of the first Congress, in 1774. That Congress adopted a resolution declaratory of American rights. John Hancock, a Mason, was president of the second Congress, in 1775; and that Congress appointed George Washington, a Mason, as commander-in-chief of the armies of the country. And John Hancock was president of the third Continental Congress, in 1776, a body made up largely of Masons, and it was this Congress that adopted the Declaration of Independence. Richard Henry Lee, a Mason, from Virginia, had introduced a resolution in June of that year, declaring that the American colonies were and of rights ought to be free and independent states. This resolution was referred to a committee which had among its members Robert Livingston, Grand Master of New York, and Benjamin Franklin, Grand Master of Pennsylvania; and this committee reported a full text of that Declaration, which was adopted the Fourth of the following July. Of the fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence at least twenty were Masons.

This Congress also prepared articles of confederation and the final adoption of these articles in 1778 was attested by many Masons, among them John Hancock and Richard Henry Lee.

Many of the soldiers of the Revolution, and all of its great generals were Masons. Washington, Lee and Warren, the latter Grand Master of Massachusetts, have already been referred to. In the list were also Frederick von Steuben, Francis Marion, John Kalb, who fell at the battle of Camden, pierced by eleven wounds; Nicholas Herkimer, Israel Putnam, Nathanael Greene, Ethan Allen, who captured Ft. Ticonderoga, "In the name of Jehovah and the Continental Congress;" William Mountrie, Mad Anthony Wayne, John D. Stark, John Sullivan, Grand Master of New Hampshire; Rufus Putnam, first Grand Master of Ohio; LaFayette, Richard Caswell, first governor of North Carolina; and Grand Master of his state; John Patterson, Worshipful Master of the American Union lodge, an army lodge in Washington's camp; David Wooster, Worshipful Master of the first Connecticut lodge; Edmund Randolph, Washington's aide during the war, member of the United States Constitutional convention, first United States attorney general, second United States Secretary of State, governor of Virginia and Grand Master of Virginia. It was Robert Morris, a Mason, who at great sacrifices to himself handled the country's financial affairs during this critical period, rendering service of supreme importance to the struggling nation.

The Boston Tea Party in 1773, according to the traditions of St. Andrew's lodge, originated within the walls of this lodge, and was carried out under the leadership of its members. Col. Henry Plunkett, a Revolutionary officer and the last known survivor of the party, declared that the plans were conceived and developed in the lodge and at the Green Dragon tavern, and that the leading spirits were members of St. Andrew's lodge. At least a dozen members who were participants have been identified by the lodge historian. In the minutes of the lodge, for the

date on which the annual meeting was to have been held, is that statement: "N. B. Consignees of the tea took up the brethren's time." It was John Rowe, a member of St. Andrew's lodge, who asked at a town meeting shortly before the party whether "tea would mingle with salt water." It was Paul Revere who traveled on horseback to New York and Philadelphia with the news after the event.

George Washington was not yet of age when a Masonic lodge was organized in Fredericksburg, Virginia, and he was initiated there when he was but twenty years of age. The old record book, reciting his initiation, the bible on which he was obligated, and the seal of the lodge, are still preserved. The record is but a perfunctory one, as were practically all the records of lodges of early days, and as many are today; but there is no doubt that it is authentic. There is a story, unfortunately neither disputed nor corroborated by written evidence, that Washington and his military brethren held military Masonic lodges; and there is a cave near Charleston, in Virginia, where he had his headquarters for two years, and which is today called Washington's Masonic cave. At one time Washington was offered the distinction of being elected the first independent Grand Master of Virginia, and Grand Master of the country, but would not countenance the proposal. An interesting memorial of Washington, a life sized statue from a single block of wood, was carved by a young man, now unknown, who chanced to see him while Washington was on a visit to York, when the British occupied Philadelphia. It is still in the possession of Masonic Lodge No. 43, to which it was presented by the young artist, who explained that he made it because he was so impressed by the majestic appearance of Washington. Washington attended many Masonic functions, and is said to have encouraged military lodges as tending to assuage the trials of the service and to provide congenial atmosphere for social intercourse. Incidentally it is known that at various times regalia of enemy lodges was captured, but in each instance this was promptly returned. This was so striking

an action that it was made the subject of an account in the London Free Mason's Magazine, which reported the return of a chest to Lodge No. 227 of Ireland, accompanied by a guard of honor, flutists playing a sacred march as they passed through the enfiladed ranks of the soldiers. On another occasion a Templar's sash and a Master's apron were found in captured goods. They were taken to the tent of Washington, who at once gave orders for their care, and directed that an attempt be made to find the owner. He proved to be Sergeant Kelly of the British Army, to whom the articles were restored, after which Kelly was sent back to England on parole. Shortly before his death at an advanced age, he requested that the sash and apron be sent to Montgomery lodge, in the city of New York, with an accompanying letter stating the facts. This lodge received them in 1838, and still has them.

General LaFayette was a bosom friend of Washington. He is believed to have been made a Mason in one of the American military lodges but whatever record there may have been of this has been lost. Washington was well known in France at this time as a Mason, and a Franco-American firm "East of Nantes" presented him with a Masonic sash and apron of the finest satin, wrought with gold and silver tissue by nuns in a convent at Nantes. Washington's letter of thanks, dated at New York, August 10, 1782, is the earliest Masonic correspondence of Washington thus far found. The sash and apron were later presented to Washington lodge, No. 22 at Alexandria, where they are still to be seen. Gen. LaFayette on a visit to America in 1784 presented Washington with a Masonic apron made by Madame LaFayette. This is now in the possession of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania. There is a record of Washington's election as Master of Alexandria lodge, Virginia. There are other and similar records of his Masonic affiliations and character, manifested in his service to humanity in a most critical period of the world's advancing civilization. The secret of his great power lay not alone in his great talents, but in the

general belief of his countrymen that they could trust him implicitly. In recognition of his great service, there is being erected to his memory the George Washington Masonic memorial on Shooters' Hill, Alexandria, which commands a view of the city of Washington. The site is part of Washington's old farm. From the base of the hill to the top of the tower the memorial will be 279 feet in height. The base will be 240 x 168 feet, and will contain a great Washington hall, lodge rooms, museum, etc. The cornerstone was laid November 1, 1923. The cost will be defrayed by contributions from Masons.

A great deal has been written about the Masonic activities of Benjamin Franklin, the "shirt-sleeve" diplomat, author, scientist, philosopher and statesman, whose professions of Masonic equality were practiced outside the lodge, as well as in it. It was he who raised the first American "Liberty" loan—in France, to equip a squadron for John Paul Jones. He was born in Boston, Massachusetts, January 17, 1706, one of fifteen children, went to school two years, ran away from an apprenticeship and finally landed in Philadelphia. He was made a Mason in St. John's lodge at the Tun tavern, Philadelphia, in 1731, and was soon an active member of the organization. He published a number of Masonic works, and one of his Masonic references that has been much discussed and debated among students of the fraternity appears in the Pennsylvania Gazette, No. 108, December 8, 1730, and reads: "As there are several lodges of Free-Masons erected in this Province, and people have lately been much amused with conjectures concerning them, we think the following account of Free-Masonry from London will not be unacceptable to our readers. * * *."

The significance of this item lies in the fact that students disagree as to records of the institution of a Masonic lodge in this country before that of St. John's lodge, which met at the Bunch of Grapes tavern, Boston, and which was instituted in 1730, as No. 126, England.

Franklin was soon after his initiation serving as secre-

tary of his lodge, and among his early references to the order is a letter which he wrote to his father, to "quiet some uneasiness" of his mother, in which he said:

"I must entreat her to suspend judgment until she is better informed, unless she will believe me when I assure her that they (Freemasons) are in general a very harmless sort of people, and have no principles or practices that are inconsistent with religion and good manners."

Franklin was elected Junior Warden, June, 1731, and advanced to Master, June 5, 1732, serving six months in each station, which was the custom at that time. He was appointed Junior Grand Warden, June 24, 1732, by Grand Master William Allen. On the date of his election as Master, a committee of which he was secretary, rendered a report. This document was in the handwriting of Franklin and is the oldest draft of by-laws of an American Masonic lodge in existence, antedating by 16 months the first by-laws of the first lodge in Boston, Mass.

In 1749 Franklin was appointed Provincial Master for Pennsylvania. It was during this term that he published his "Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania," which are said to have led to the later development of the University of Pennsylvania.

The following year, William Allen, Chief Justice of the Province, was commissioned as Provincial Grand Master by the Grand Master of England. Franklin became Deputy Grand Master. He joined the famous lodge of the Nine Sisters; i. e., the Nine Muses, at Paris in 1777, and, in 1782, was elected Master. He was present at the initiation of Voltaire. This lodge was composed of many scientists, artists and writers.

He printed the first American edition of the book of the Constitution in 1734, it being the first Masonic book printed in America.

Paul Revere was of Huguenot descent, was born in Boston in 1735 and died there in 1818. He was a Master

Engraver. An urn of gold which he fashioned, and which contains a lock of the hair of George Washington, is now in possession of the Grand Lodge of Masons of Massachusetts. He was one of those who took part in the destruction of tea in Boston Harbor, and his celebrated ride at night, by way of Charleston, to give warning of the attempt of the British to destroy military stores at Concord, is one of the dramatic incidents of Colonial history.

Little is known of the Masonic career of General John P. Muhlenberg, a member and descendant of a noted Lutheran family, except that he a number of times declared himself to be a Mason. He was born in New Providence, Pennsylvania, in 1746, was made a colonel by George Washington, and proved to be an inspiring leader of Revolutionary forces. He was a member of the Virginia convention of 1776, and later a congressman and United States Senator. It was he who, after delivering a sermon to his parishioners, threw aside his clerical robes, declaring "there is a time to fight, and that time has come now." A drummer beat the roll at the church door, and 300 men were recruited on the spot. A beautiful memorial to Muhlenberg was erected in Philadelphia by the State of Pennsylvania.

"He wrote his name where all nations should behold it, and time shall not efface it." These words are engraved upon the statue of John Hancock (the first to sign the Declaration of Independence), at the foot of the stairs, in the main corridor of the United States senate. Hancock was one of the frequent attendants at meetings of his Masonic lodge. He was a member of St. Andrew's, and became Grand Master of Freemasons in Massachusetts. He was born in Quincy, Massachusetts, in 1737, and died there in 1793. He was a member of the Continental Congress from 1775 to 1780, and its president from May, 1775, to October, 1777. He was a major general of militia, and the first governor of Massachusetts.

Jeremy Gridley was a member of the Masonic order

in Massachusetts, and Grand Master of that state from 1755 to 1767. He was a learned jurist and public spirited citizen. His writings were of so high a character as to effect reform in the language.

David Wooster, a brigadier general in the Revolution at 65, was one of those who participated in the attack on Fort Ticonderoga, which was destroyed in 1775. He died of wounds received in an engagement April 27, 1777. He was Master of Hiram lodge, Connecticut, in 1750.

A man of courageous and fiery patriotism was General Joseph Warren who was born in Roxbury, Massachusetts, and who was killed at the battle of Bunker Hill in 1775. He was president of the Massachusetts Congress in 1774, and to him is largely attributed the success of the battle of Lexington. He was a Mason in deed as well as word, and many lodges throughout the country have been named in his honor. He was initiated in St. Andrew's lodge, Boston, September 30, 1761. In 1770 he was Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. The famous Bunker Hill monument was erected to his memory.

Captain John Paul Jones, who commanded the U. S. S. Bonhomme Richard in its celebrated battle with the British frigate Serapis, in 1779, and gained the most famous American naval victory of the Revolutionary war, was a Mason. His victory enormously increased the prestige of the young republic in Europe.

Nathan Hale, who was hanged as a spy by the British in New York on September 22, 1776, was a member of St. John's Regimental Lodge of that city.

John Marshall, who was an officer in the American Revolution, and later became chief justice of the United States, was Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Virginia in 1793. He was the most famous lawyer and master of jurisprudence in American history, and served on the Supreme Court bench for thirty-five years. John Marshall was born September 24, 1755.

Rufus King, of Massachusetts, was a member of St. John's Lodge of Boston. He served in the Continental Congress from 1784 until its close. With Jefferson he helped to enact the famous Old Ordinance of 1787, which organized the Northwest Territory and prohibited slavery there. He was United States Senator in 1789, Minister to England from 1795 to 1803, Senator again in 1813, defeated by James Monroe for president in 1816, and returned to the Senate in 1819.

James Otis was an officer of St. John's lodge, Boston, as early as 1752, and is the author of the expression, "Taxation without representation is tyranny."

Dr. Matthew Thornton, one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, was made a Mason in Louisburg Military Lodge while a colonial soldier of the Crown, in the 28th Regiment of Foot, New Hampshire troops. His epitaph reads: "The honest man."

Gen. Jedediah Preble was a charter member of Portland Lodge, No. 1, the oldest in the "Pine Tree" state. It is said that Tory and Patriot sat together in this Lodge during the Revolution.

Capt. Stephen Decatur, of the Continental Navy, was made a Mason in Lodge No. 16, Baltimore, Md.

Capt. Jonathan Harrington, the last survivor of the Battle of Lexington, was raised in King Solomon Lodge of Charleston, near Boston.

Generals John Sullivan and Henry Dearborn were raised in St. John's No. 1, Portsmouth. This old lodge, chartered in 1736, has complete records from 1739.

These are illustrious names in the roster of our order and may we not believe that Masonry confirmed these men, if it did not inspire them, in their great services to their country?

Great as are some of their achievements and those of other noted Masons, we are often led to wonder whether

we appreciate the value to our community and to our time of the common social life and contacts in Masonic lodges. These meetings in themselves are a service not to ourselves, alone. Although we, and no others, gather there to dine and exchange pleasantries, after all we are cultivating a spirit of friendliness, and of friendship, the effects of which extend beyond the confines of the lodge. Cultivating the habit of friendly intercourse, we become friendly with our neighbors in our everyday relations with them; and who can doubt that this helps us both, and therefore tends to make our community and our country a better place to live in?

To quote somewhat loosely the words of William Preston, a Mason of over a century ago: "Where friendship is unknown, jealousy and suspicion prevail; where this virtue is the cement, happiness subsists. Friendship, which appears divine when employed in preserving the liberties of our country (upon the battlefield), shines with equal splendor in more tranquil scenes. Before it rises into the noble flame of patriotism, we behold it burning with an even glow, permeating and improving the soft hours of peace. No subject can more properly engage the attention than the benevolent dispositions which an indulgent nature has bestowed upon the rational species. These are replete with the happiest effects, and afford to the mind the most agreeable reflections. In every breast there is a propensity to friendly acts which, being exerted to effect, sweeten every temporal enjoyment. Actuated by this spirit, each individual connects his happiness with that of his neighbor, and a fixed and permanent union is established among men."