

Throughout the centuries Freemasonry has taught its valuable lessons through allegory and symbols. The man from Galilee used parables extensively and well. Many historians and better speakers constantly employ anecdotes to illustrate the points they want to make. These methods emphasize the search for truth in an interesting and factual manner.

Myths on the other hand, can be innocent or dangerous. They can be outright lies or the perpetuation of distortions handed down through the generations. Many of these were invented by Masonic writers and speakers to enhance the image of Freemasonry. Some of these corruptions have caused the Craft problems with credible historians because they were outrageous lies.

At least one of these items concerns the "Masonic" membership of the founders of the United States. It is re-circulated constantly in usually reliable Masonic periodicals. It not only should be, it must be destroyed. In recent years other items have been circulated. These claim the Constitution of the United States comes from the Masonic Constitutions Anderson's compiled in 1723. A "play" called "the truth" is based on this. Many of the characters are called "Masons" who never received a Masonic degree. It's the stuff on which the critics of Freemasonry feed.

What follows is the truth insofar as I have been able to find it. The facts herein come from reliable Masonic researchers, and include two late Fellows of The Philalethes Society, James R. Case and Ronald E. Heaton. They spent a lifetime researching the Masonic connections in the beginnings of the United States. Freemasonry, actually, requires no exaggeration to magnify its greatness. The simple truth is all that is needed to tell its story. This is the reason for this column; to attempt to destroy the myths that have been prevalent, often for centuries, by telling the truth. Here's what occurred, Masonically, during the period the spurious item covers.

Myth: Thomas Jefferson and Patrick Henry were Freemasons.

Fact: Neither Thomas Jefferson or Patrick Henry were members of the Craft. An exhaustive search of Masonic records in Virginia, and elsewhere, offers no iota of evidence to make them Freemasons. Jefferson participated in the cornerstone laying of his University at Charlottesville, which was done Masonically. He praised Freemasonry and his own words proved he had never been a member of the Craft.

Myth: All of George Washington's generals during the War for American Independence were Masons.

Fact: Thirty-three of the generals serving under Washington were members of the Craft, a long way from "all." The late James R. Case and Ronald E. Heaton made comprehensive studies of the Revolutionary period and debunked many of the claims considered here.

Myth: Washington insisted that the Marquis de Lafayette be made a Mason before he would promote him to general, and the same claim has been made about the Baron von Steuben.

Fact: Both Lafayette and von Steuben were Freemasons before they arrived to help fight the British. This was true of Lafayette even though he wasn't 21 years of age when he arrived in America. It's highly likely that Washington never did know they were Masons. The stories of both of these men are highly interesting, but space prohibits the telling of them here.

Myth: The governors of the thirteen original colonies when Washington was inaugurated President of the United States were Freemasons.

Fact: From Lexington until the inauguration thirty different men served as governors. Of these ten were Freemasons. That's one-third! Wouldn't it be wonderful for the country if we could claim the same percentage today?

Myth: The Boston Tea Party was organized in St. Andrew's Lodge in Boston and its member participated in tossing the tea in to Boston Harbor.

Fact: So well has the secrecy surrounding the Boston Tea Party been kept that to this day not a single participant can be truthfully named! It's true that St. Andrew's Lodge didn't meet on the night of the "party." This proves nothing. The "T" that has been claimed is part of the minutes of the Lodge is actually an indistinguishable scroll. By no stretch of the imagination can it be called a "T" or any other letter.

Myth: All, or almost all, Signers of the Articles of Confederation, Signers of the Declaration of Independence, and Signers of the Constitution were Freemasons.

Fact: Ten of the signers of the Articles, nine signers of the Declaration, and thirteen signers of the Constitution -- and only this number -- were, or would become, Freemasons. Even so, this is an excellent percentage of the participants. It should be noted that Edmund Randolph, governor and Grand Master of Virginia, although an important participant in the Constitutional Convention, didn't sign the document. He did, however, fight for its ratification. It should also be noted that four Presidents of the Continental Congresses were Freemasons: Peyton Randolph of Virginia, John Hancock of Massachusetts, Henry Laurens of South Carolina, and Arthur St. Clair of Pennsylvania. (For further study see *Masonic Membership of the Founding Fathers*, The Masonic Service Association).

Myth: There are many aprons owned or worn by George Washington floating around.

Fact: The only documented apron owned by Washington was one presented by the firm of Watson and Cassoul. It had been made by nuns at Nantes. It was the only apron listed in Washington's inventory that was released after his death.

Myth: Washington was Grand Master in Virginia.

Fact: Washington never was a Grand Master. At the instigation of American Union Lodge he was suggested for the office of Grand Master of a National Grand Lodge -- a non-existent body. The Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania and some others agreed, but too many others disagreed with the concept of a National Grand Lodge. Washington was appointed Master of Alexandria Lodge No. 22 in Virginia by Grand Master Edmund Randolph when that Pennsylvania Lodge requested a charter from the Grand Lodge of Virginia. The following year he was elected Master, but there is no record of his installation into this office, nor is there any record of him presiding over this Lodge. To keep the record straight, there is much evidence of his respect, and perhaps even love for Freemasonry. Proof? He was buried with Masonic rites!

George Washington has been the source of many Masonic myths and exaggerations for more than two centuries. This is unfortunate. Of all the Freemasons we can eulogize he requires no embellishment. From his childhood to his death his extraordinary wisdom, industry and

patriotism predominated.

Let's try to set the record straight.

Myth: George Washington was Grand Master of Masons in Virginia.

Fact: Washington never was a Grand Master. American Union Lodge, on December 15, 1779, proposed Washington become General Grand Master of the United States! This proposal speaks volumes for the character of the Commander-in-Chief. The Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania agreed five days later! Too many others were frightened by the concept of a National Grand Lodge. It is highly doubtful that Washington would have accepted such an office.

Washington was appointed Master of Alexandria Lodge No. 22 in Virginia by Grand Master Edmund Randolph when that Pennsylvania Lodge (No. 39) requested a charter from the Grand Lodge of Virginia. The new charter was dated April 28, 1788. In December of the same year he was elected Master, but there is no record of his installation into this office, nor is there any record of him actually presiding over this or any Lodge.

Myth. Washington acted as Grand Master when the cornerstone of the Federal Capitol was laid on September 18, 1793.

Fact. It was the Grand Lodge of Maryland that was called on to lay the cornerstone. Alexandria Lodge, of which Washington was a Past Master, held a place of honor. It was Joseph Clark, the Junior Grand Warden of the Grand Lodge of Maryland, who acted as Grand Master, *pro tem*. Clark placed the President between himself and the Master of Alexandria Lodge. The newspaper article reporting the event mentioned Clark as the Grand Master, *pro tem*. on several occasions. So did the Maryland historian in 1885. Washington didn't act as Grand Master, but without question he was the most honored and influential Freemason participating in the event.

Myth. George Washington never was interested in Freemasonry. He rarely, if ever, attended Lodge meetings.

Fact. To keep the record straight, there is much evidence of his respect and even love for Freemasonry. True, he seldom attended Masonic meetings. This is understandable when it is realized that from the day he was made a Master Mason until shortly before his death he worked for his country. Did he love and respect the Craft. The ultimate proof -- he was buried with Masonic rites! And this even before the Congress knew of his death. (For further study of George Washington and a complete account of his Masonic activities see *George Washington: Master Mason*, Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Co., Richmond, VA.)

Myth: There are many aprons owned or worn by George Washington floating around.

Fact: The only documented apron owned by Washington was one presented by the firm of Watson and Cassoul. It had been made by nuns at Nantes. It was the only apron listed in Washington's inventory that was released after his death. The "Lafayette" apron, purportedly made by the wife of the Marquis, may be a fact as many authorities claim (and I was one who did so claim in G. Washington).

Myth. *George Washington renounced Freemasonry.*

Fact. On the contrary he remained a member of the Craft from the moment he was Initiated into the Lodge at Fredericksburg, Virginia (No. 4) until the day he died. Even then his wife, Martha, asked the Freemason of Alexandria, Virginia, to hold and conduct his funeral (see above).

In 1837, at state expense, Joseph Ritner, Governor of Pennsylvania, endeavored to "save" the reputation of the first President. He had published a tract "proving" Washington had never participated in Masonic events. Earlier the Blanchards, father and son and heads of a so-called "Christian" anti-Masonic organization, were among the first "Christians" to "prove" Washington wasn't a Freemason. Much of the anti-Masonic diatribe they promulgated has been carried to the present day by crusading "saints" against "secret" societies.

Myth. Washington was uneducated.

Fact. Uneducated -- no; unschooled -- yes. As far as we can determine Washington never attended any school. Through his father's vast library Washington learned the fundamentals of mathematics, surveying and many other subjects. At the age of 17 he earned a substantial wage as a surveyor. In 1749 he was appointed surveyor of Culpeper County, Virginia, having produced a certificate "from the President and Masters of William and Mary College, appointing him to be surveyor of this county." From the many military visitors to Mount Vernon he learned the principles of warfare. From the intellectuals he learned how to study and use his common sense. The history of his life proves he became one of the most knowledgeable men of his, or any, day.