

This address was delivered by Dr. Bing on February 22, 2003, in Cedaredge at the Annual Ekert Lodge #136 George & Martha Washington Banquet. His address was divided into three parts, "Patriotism," "Brother George Washington," and "Our Forgotten Presidents."

PATRIOTISM

Terrorism has painfully rekindled the flame of patriotism in many and their acts of patriotism and courage, which are largely unheralded, have served and continue to serve our country well.

Paradoxically there are a growing number of attacks on our Constitution and our Founding Fathers by individuals and organizations that ought to know better. They consider our Constitution, our Founding Fathers and their ideals as being largely irrelevant to today's societal needs and that some of them owned slaves. In their words the Founding Fathers were "a group of old rich white men." They were unarguably white. Most of them were young to middle aged. But what's wrong with being old? There is a Mexican proverb that says "the devil is wise because he is old not because he is the devil" and Shakespeare said "ripeness is all." Most were of the merchant and agricultural class and craftsmen. But what's wrong with being rich? There isn't a person who has not said that they want to know what it is like to be rich. Mark Twain said "on the whole I do not approve of Millionaires but that it would be dangerous to tempt me."

Some did own slaves. But many, such as George Washington and Thomas Jefferson, considered it to be an abomination. The Founding Fathers created an instrument, the Constitution, that had in it the mechanisms that led to the abolition of slavery. Therefore, its critics should value it even more highly.

The Constitution and our Founding Fathers are the very basis of our freedom and existence. We owe them much and should not relegate them to the trash heap of history. The historian Tacitus said "the task of history is to hold out for reprobation every evil word and deed and to hold out for praise every great and noble word and deed."

Here are some things that we as individuals can do: 1) Re-read our history. There many excellent sources other than the text books of my vintage. It is even enjoyable! 2) Look at your children and grand children's books and ask what they are being taught in class. 3) Help the school board in their selection of text books. And 4) tactfully challenge those who harbor this unfortunate attitude. In today's parlance help them with a positive attitude adjustment.

Brother George Washington

On February 22 we celebrate the birthday of the Master Builder of our Nation, Bro. George Washington. The character of America is the character of Bro. Washington and his life is an ongoing example of citizenship.

Bro. Washington was raised in Fredericksburg Lodge No. 4 on Aug 4, 1753. The Lodge was a Scotch-Irish Time Immemorial Lodge, i. e. they were a group of Masons who met as a Lodge by the immemorial right of Masons to meet, but without a charter from a Grand Lodge. They did receive a charter from the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1758. He became Master of Alexandria Lodge No. 22 in 1788.

The influence of Masonry on Washington was frequently evident. For example, he always referred to God in public addresses as the Supreme Architect of the Universe and when he spoke to religious groups he always spoke of harmony and brotherly love.

He is the only President to have received all of the Electoral College ballots. Remarkably he voluntarily returned the power of the Presidency to the Continental Congress at the end of his term although he was offered the roles of king, dictator and President for Life. King George, his recent adversary, said that if he gave up power he would surely be one of the greatest men in history. He also refused to be Grand Master of the United States.

He sought to keep political bitterness out of our society and instead spread brotherhood and tolerance. Grand Master Duke

said of him "We came to learn how man can achieve greatness without sacrificing himself to ambition."

President James Buchanan said, "when the birthday of Washington shall be forgotten, liberty will have perished from the Earth." Surely this would never happen. Consider the following, the name of the George Washington High School in New Orleans has been renamed because its critics felt that Washington and his role in our history were no longer relevant to today's students and that he had owned slaves. He did own slaves as many did in those times, but he freed his slaves. Perhaps Pres. McKinley was more on target when in 1899 he said "the nation is his best eulogist and his noblest monument."

The National Endowment for The Humanities named a group to access and update our history and the way it was being taught. Sadly the report was rife with errors and an unusual emphasis was placed on commonly taught American History. For example, only passing mention was made of Washington and his role in our history. Dr. Lynne Cheney, the chairman at that time and now our Vice President's wife, soundly and in no uncertain terms rejected and condemned the report as a travesty and a collection of half truths and a mis-emphasis of our history.

Perhaps Major General Lee summoned him up best by saying "Washington taught an admiring world that to be great you must be truly good."

1. Seghers, G. D., The George Washington Masonic National Memorial, *Scottish Rite Journal*, Feb, 2001, p 6
2. Rogers, L. R., *OUR MASONIC PRESIDENTS*, Texan Press, 1998
3. Roberts, A. E., *G. WASHINGTON: MASTER MASON*, Macoy Publishing & Masonic Supply Co., Inc., 1976

Our Forgotten Presidents

Masons pay tribute to the sixteen Presidents known to be members of the Craft, particularly George Washington. But there were fourteen Presidents before Washington who receive little attention. Our forgotten Presidents served under the most difficult circumstances – the years of conflict with Great Britain for independence and then the years trying to unite the colonies into one nation.

These men were heroes and patriots. All pledged their lives, their fortunes and their property for the cause of liberation. All were declared traitors and were to be hanged for treason if caught by the British. This was no idle threat. It prompted Bro. Benjamin Franklin to say that if we do not hang together we will surely hang separately. Some indeed were imprisoned and tortured and lost their lives. Others lost their fortunes and property.

Of the fourteen Presidents, elected for one year terms, four were Masons. Our Fraternity has the distinct honor of providing two “first” Presidents, George Washington and Peyton Randolph, the first President of the Continental Congress. The other three Masonic Presidents were: Henry Laurens, Arthur St Clair and John Hancock.

Bro. John Hancock was held in such high esteem that he was elected President three times. It was under his presidency that the war against Britain was initiated in earnest and Washington was appointed to direct it. And it was Hancock, who

boldly and alone signed the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. It was another month before the others signed it. He signed it large enough that King George wouldn't need his glasses to read it. He was a leading Boston merchant, a Major General in the militia, and the first Governor of Massachusetts. He was made a Mason in Marchant Lodge No. 277 and affiliated in St Andrew's Lodge of Boston in 1762. Today there is a U. S. Navy guided missile frigate named after him.

Bro. Henry Laurens served as President in 1778. He was a South Carolina merchant. While on a diplomatic mission to Holland he was captured by the British and imprisoned in the Tower of London from Oct 1780 to Dec 1781. He was exchanged for Lord Cornwallis. He was thought to be the first person cremated in America. He was a member of Solomon's Lodge No. 1 in South Carolina and Grand Steward of South Carolina in 1754.

Bro. Peyton Randolph was the first President of the Continental Congress in 1774. He was the last Provincial Grand Master in Virginia.

Bro. Arthur St Clair was a Major General in the Revolutionary War and the first Governor of the Northwest Territory in 1787. He signed a request in 1791 for a charter for Lodge Nova Cesarea Harmony No. 2 in Cincinnati and is recorded as visiting many times.

John Jay also served as Plenipotentiary to Spain. At 34 he was the youngest of these Presidents. He later became Governor of New York and the Chief Justice of the U. S. Supreme Court. There is no proof that he was a Mason but he wrote the following

in a letter to Washington: "The dissolution of our Government threw us into a political chaos. Time, wisdom, and perseverance will reduce it into form, and give strength, order and harmony. In this work you are a Master Builder and God grant that you may long continue a Free and Accepted One."

The following were not Masons but will also be mentioned.

Elias Boudinot of New Jersey signed the Treaty of Peace with Great Britain in 1783. He was the first president of the American Bible Society

Richard Henry Lee was a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses and later became a U. S. Senator. He was the author of the Resolution of Independence in 1776: "these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be free and independent states, that they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connection between them and the State of Great Britain, is and ought to be totally dissolved." He might have been the author of the Declaration of Independence but because of his illness, Thomas Jefferson was asked to write it.

One can not help but be proud of these brethren and of our Craft and belatedly recognize their enormous contribution.