



Freemasonry and our Founder: The Extent of George Washington's Masonic Associations

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Shortly before his twenty-first birthday and at the beginning of his military career, the Masonic lodge at Fredericksburg, Virginia recorded that “Mr. George Washington was initiated as an Entered Apprentice” and the entrance fee of £2 3s was acknowledged’.¹ Months later, on March 3, 1753 Washington received the Fellow Craft degree, and on August 4, of that year, he was raised to the Master Mason’s degree.²

Forty-seven years later, on Saturday December 14, 1799, Tobias Lear, secretary to General George Washington, the man who would be remembered as Commander of the victorious Continental Army, President of the new republic formed in the wake of the Revolutionary War, and who, in the words of his most famous eulogizer, was “first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen”, began a diary record of the great man’s final illness and death. In his account, Lear observed that “the...Freemasons were determined to show their respect to the General’s memory by attending his body to the Grave” and, that along with the individuals that had come to pay their respects to Washington and who were important enough to be allowed to march in the funeral procession, the “Body [was] borne by Free Masons and Officers” and that “the Masons preformed their ceremonies and the Body was deposited in

¹ Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order*. (The University of North Carolina Press., 1996), 50-133.

² Bullock, 50-133.



the Vault”.³ In another account of a memorial service held in form of a mock funeral in the town of Norfolk Virginia, the “Masons marched in their ‘respective orders’”⁴ right behind the funeral bier. In an inventory of Washington’s possessions at Mount Vernon after his death, “one Japan box containing a mason’s apron”⁵ was recorded in the study, Washington’s most private room.

This society, present both at the beginning of Washington’s public life and at the end of his natural life, and one of few social organizations with which Washington identified during his life obviously had some effect on his development as a person and a professional, or else held ideals with which Washington identified throughout his lifetime. Through a review of masonry in the colonial and early American period as well as a look at Washington’s correspondence both on the subject of masonry as well as on other topics in which he espoused Masonic values and ideas, a review of his Masonic activities throughout his life, and a comparison of Washington’s Masonic career with that of one of his contemporaries, it is possible to gain an idea of the nature of Washington’s affiliation with the organization.

By understanding something of young Washington’s goals and motivations, one can see why the organization was so well suited to his needs, and through an understanding of his obsession with public image, one can evaluate what the fact that he allowed his name to be associated with this organization means. Although not the devoted Mason that the brotherhood claims him to be, Washington who chose his associations carefully, was indeed a full supporter

³ Tobias Lear. *1799 A True Copy, Made at Mrs. Lear’s Request, from the Diary of Col. Lear: The Last Illness and Death of General Washington*. The Papers of George Washington-University of Virginia.

⁴ Reverend W.H.T. Squires, “Norfolk in By-Gone Days: President Washington’s Funeral”. *Norfolk Ledger-Dispatch*, 1944. The Papers of George Washington-University of Virginia.

⁵ Inventory of Articles at Mount Vernon: Study 1810, The Papers of George Washington-University of Virginia.



of the freemasons and identified closely with the goals and values of the organization. A look at the values of freemasonry can give one insight into the thinking of our first president.

(Any reader not interested in a brief history of colonial and early American Freemasonry should proceed directly to page ten to continue with Washington's Masonic affiliation)

In order to understand George Washington's connection to the Freemasons of his time, it is first necessary to understand the particular social context in which the Masonic organization operated in colonial America. Freemasonry first appeared in the American colonies during the early eighteenth century. American Masonry at its inception represented the selective Anglicization of colonial elites or their attempt to borrow the aspects of British society they most admired and change them to fit their particular social needs. At the beginning of masonry in the colonies, the biggest need of the colonial elite was to distance themselves from those they considered the "common rabble". Unlike in Europe, the urban environment of early America did little to separate people along class lines. Masonry became a way for those who saw themselves as members of the ruling class to display this status to those around them as well as make connections with their equals.

This new version of Masonry did away with the elaborate rituals and ceremonies of its English counterpart and made the ideals of honor and love its principle focus. Honor was viewed as the public image one presented. In order to display their status, colonial Masons marched in processions wearing lavish items of clothing and carrying symbols of power and authority including white rods, swords, white stockings, gloves, jewels, crimson cushions, and lambskin aprons. Common people participated solely as onlookers. Masons also made sure to



make themselves visible within the social realm of their community. In Philadelphia, Masons made the theater, which was vehemently opposed by many as immoral, a respected and accepted institution by attending plays together wearing their white aprons. Merchants also stocked Masonic items which Masons bought to identify themselves in private life including glasses, jewelry, watches, and badges emblazoned with Masonic emblems. Masons also separated themselves from non-Masons through their knowledge of good manners. Those who had been raised in polite society possessed a refinement of manner that set them apart from the common man. This knowledge of how to behave in certain social situations was necessary for one who wished to become a Freemason. Urban elites also used this principle as a reason to justify denying charters to rural groups hoping to become part of Masonic society. According to the urbanites, proper manners could only be learned in cities. Those who wished to gain access to these “principle people”, as young Benjamin Franklin termed them, did their best to work their way into the Masons. In a society where personal patronage and familial connections were often the only way to advance, ambitious men who lacked these advantages could use a position as a Mason in order to establish contacts that could provide them with the help they needed.

An unfortunate example of a young man whose wish to become a mason and reap the benefits it offered led him to disaster can be seen in the case of Daniel Rees, an apprentice to Philadelphia Doctor Evan Jones. When Jones and his friends found out the young man aspired to be a freemason, they, Masons themselves, decided to play a trick on him. They taught him nonsense signs and oaths to the devil and made him kiss the backside of one of the men. Jones and his friend John Remington then boasted of their exploits to a tavern crowd that included



Benjamin Franklin. The next night, after taking Rees into a dark basement to “initiate” him, Jones “accidentally” spilled boiling spirits on the young man who later died of his burns. Franklin, Grand Master at the time, found himself in trouble when he took the fake oath home and recited it to friends and neighbors. This incident displays Rees’ lack of understanding about the brotherhood. A poor apprentice, Rees would never have been initiated as a mason. Franklin himself was not qualified to be initiated at first because he was not born into genteel society but he was able to use his connections, a lot of persistence, as well as his knowledge of “polite society” to work his way in.

Love, the other major principle of American Freemasonry, was described in terms of eighteenth century social theory as it applied to the American situation. This theory stated that love radiates in circles outwards from the family and the farther out the circle gets, the weaker the bonds of love. Masonry creates bonds between brother Masons and also between Masons and the people they serve through their charity, extending circles of love and brotherhood until they reach around the world. The Masons claimed that this would eventually make the whole world a community of love. This was seen as especially important in the American colonies where according to Newport, Rhode Island, Brother Thomas Pollen, “a monstrous diversity of religious tenants, a mad contention about little honours, a furious clashing in worldly interests, and an unchristian enmity between rival families are rendering the very bowels of a society in pieces”.

In principle, the fraternity sought to bring together the best men in a society in order to improve the world around them regardless of their religion or nationality. However, while



proclaiming values of equality and peace, the masons separated society into classes by allowing only the wealthy and prestigious into its ranks. Merchants, physicians and lawyers made up a large percentage of early urban masons along with men wholly devoted to public service.

Among the controls in place to keep out “undesirables” were high fees and the requirement of an anonymous vote for admission. The brothers passed a ballot box around and each dropped either a black or a white ball into the box. One “black ball” would exclude a man from membership since the masons felt it was better to slight an outsider than to disrespect the wishes of a brother. Often however, personal ties had as much to do with admission as societal rank.

Early colonial masonry, like English masonry of the time was not standardized in its rituals and would not be for another century. Rituals varied among lodges and American masons didn't regard these rituals as important to the brotherhood as masons of the nineteenth century would. However colonial masonry strictly enforced the hierarchy that ruled the rest of society. Brothers knew that fraternal affection did not eclipse social position. Even offices in the lodge were given out according to social rank. The lowest position was that of “tyler” who was a lower class man initiated specifically for the purpose of guarding the door during meetings. The Master of the Lodge possessed the highest rank. The Master had great control over appointments and proceedings as the most socially prestigious member of the lodge. Colonial masonry so closely encapsulated the values of America's urban elite that it never really gained its own identity. By the mid-1700's several clubs and societies had developed that fulfilled the social needs of colonials. For this reason, masonry never became the center of the social lives of its members. However, Masonry outlasted other societies of the day in appeal because of its broad



reaching social functions. It “gave both public and mutual charity; it offered a satisfying ritual to bind the group together; it sponsored activities such as music, theater, dining; and it furnished opportunities for conviviality.” Unfortunately the main feature that set masonry apart from other forms of social interaction also made it most suspicious to outsiders. Others often got the impression that the Masons were hiding something or plotting against the establishment.

In the beginning, Masonry’s elite membership defined it. However this elite membership would not be able to retain its domination over the order forever. In the 1750’s new lodges began to emerge in the colonies that reflected a movement in England. Irish immigrants to England used weaknesses in English masonry during the 1740’s in order to create their own lodges. Soon they created their own Grand Lodges as well and to identify themselves as separate from the other masons. Using the mason’s love of precedent and seizing upon changes that had been made to the original initiation ceremonies, the new masons called themselves “Ancients” and proposed to be bringing back the origins of the craft that the “Moderns” had destroyed. In the colonies, this meant that the emerging urban middle class had a chance to participate in Masonic society. Men considered wealthy enough but not refined enough to be accepted previously organized their own lodges. Often these mostly self-made and self-taught men lacked formal education. They included the composer William Billings, silversmith Paul Revere and printer Isaiah Thomas. The first “Ancient” lodge was formed in Philadelphia under the disguise of being a “Modern” lodge and then began to grant its own charters. The “Ancient” movement also allowed rural gentlemen, previously looked down upon by urban elites as backwards the chance to start their own mason communities.



Rural lodges attracted a different type of man than urban “Ancient” lodges. In rural communities, much like in “Modern” urban lodges, masonry attracted the wealthiest and best educated men around. While “Ancient” masonry brought fraternity to men in rural areas stratified by economic and ethnic differences as well as a social scene to places where it was limited rural “Ancient” masonry because of its location in mostly small towns with little access to cities, provided much less access to the center of power than “Modern” masonry. During the Revolutionary War, masons found themselves fighting brother against brother. However, in most of the country interruptions in lodge meetings were short and sporadic so they did not greatly interrupt Masonic proceedings. However, in Boston and Philadelphia, these interruptions caused the breakdown of the already weakening “Moderns”. The “Moderns” allowed their political views (most were loyalists) to interfere with their Masonic loyalty and this undermined the effectiveness of their lodges.

Masonry also became extremely important to the officers in the revolutionary army. Military tradition had always dictated that officers be of a higher social rank than those under them. However, officers in the Revolutionary War, because of the fact that many of those of wealth and rank either remained neutral or loyal to the British, were insecure in their rank and their position over their men. General Washington’s emphasis on strict discipline and separation between ranks didn’t help this. In the past, American troops had been sustained by the close ties developed between commanders and their men. However, Washington thought this was inappropriate for a professional army. Masonry and the fraternal bonds and prestige conferred



upon those who joined it gave colonial army officers the confidence to lead their men according to these new standards.

At the end of the war, with the “Moderns” almost completely dissolved, the “Ancients” had to decide how the political break with Great Britain would influence the fraternal bonds between American and British masons. A group of Continental Army officers hoped to ask the Grand Lodge in London for a charter to create a Grand Lodge in the United States with none other than George Washington at its head. However, other lodges had problems with this idea for both the reasons of loss of regional control as well as not wanting to retain ties with British Masons. After much debate, an ambiguous solution was reached. While not officially cutting ties with the mother country, American masons decided to confer power on state authorities rather than the British Grand Lodge. This allowed American masons to both maintain local control of their lodges as well as keep the symbolic ties with antiquity they so treasured.⁶

This was the atmosphere of masonry into which twenty-year-old George Washington entered in 1752 and in which he existed most of his life. Looking at the values of masonry at the time Washington joined and the values the adult Washington held through his correspondence and others’ accounts of him, it is easy to see that Washington agreed with the values of masonry in regards to his religious beliefs, his social beliefs, and his correspondence with other masons.

The first aspect of Washington’s Masonic career that it is necessary to look at is the beginning. In discerning the reasons why young Washington might have chosen to seek out membership in the masons, it is possible to set up the attitudes and associations Washington

⁶ Bullock, 50-133.



would bring to the remainder of his Masonic membership and the importance the society had in the rest of his life.

Just like Benjamin Franklin, Washington, the son of a relatively minor Virginia planter, was born a couple of rungs too low on the social ladder to rub elbows with principle people” of colonial society. This, coupled with the fact that his father died when George was a young boy left him to fend for himself. Throughout his life, he cultivated careful personal relationships. For example, Washington remained close with several members of the Fairfax family who served as his patrons early in his career and his friends later. Over one hundred letters exist between Washington and members of the Fairfax family.

Among Washington’s papers are several surveying instructions from George William Fairfax. From the beginning, by all accounts, young Washington was ambitious, and always aimed for the top. As a young man, Washington taught himself the surveyor’s art. His surveying position provided him not only a career but access to connections with Virginia’s elite. Washington taught himself the manners and habits of a gentleman of his day and was fastidious about his personal dress even before he had gained notoriety. It is possible that at first, Washington may have seen Masonry as yet another way to advance himself. To become a Mason was to join a respected organization and to gain access to the influential gentlemen who frequented lodges. Supporting the idea that Washington may have first been attracted to Masonry because of its social networking capabilities is the fact that many other figures of his time seem to have had the same idea. A laundry list of the most well known men of Washington’s generation are counted among the Masons. Nine out fifty-six signers of the



Declaration of Independence, thirteen out of thirty-three signers of the Constitution, and thirty-three of the Continental Army's seventy-four Generals all shared Washington's Masonic affiliation.⁷ Thomas Paine, though not a Mason himself, wrote a pamphlet on the origins of freemasonry. The fact that all of these men who were in the public eye and who sought careers in the public forum saw fit to join the Masons shows that the organization was one which attracted and introduced those in the highest ranks of society and those who hoped to get there.

The Masons promote their organizations first and foremost as a fraternity of brothers. When he joined, Washington would have been aware that being a Mason meant being part of a known entity. A Mason from Virginia could meet a Mason from anywhere else in the nation or around the world and they would immediately know that the man before them shared certain principles and had certain standards of character. This knowledge would allow these two men to immediately trust one another in ways that other men could not.

Several of the Freemasons referred to above are men with whom Washington kept up a regular correspondence. Benjamin Franklin and Washington exchanged more than thirty letters during their respective public service careers. Many of the letters written between the two are letters of introduction of various friends and acquaintances. In one letter Franklin writes, "The bearer, W. Grieves goes to Virginia with an intention of settling there...I beg leave to present him to your Excellency as a Gentleman of Character who has long distinguished himself in England as a firm friend to the Cause of America."⁸ That the two men trusted one another to vouch for the character of men that were introduced to them means that they must have had the

⁷ Paul M. Bessel "Founding Fathers." 15 Nov. 2008.

⁸ Benjamin Franklin to George Washington, 6 May, 1781. *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 4. General Correspondence. 1697-1799.* American Memory. 13 Dec. 2008.



understanding of a common moral code and standard of character. In fact, Washington wrote to Franklin when he returned from Europe in 1785: “permit and individual to join the public voice in expressing a sense of them; and to assure you, that, as no one entertains more respect for your character, so none can salute you with more sincerity, or with greater pleasure, than I do on the occasion”⁹ It is possible that their mutual Masonic affiliation made the trust and mutual regard for the other’s character and judgment more secure.

Following along this line, Washington informed to Charles Crookshanks & Company that he had received a “Letter from Jno. Searle Esqr. and Co. inclosing a Bill of Lading for two Pipes of old Madeira Wine which were Shipped in the Freemason Captn. Wm. Thomas”. He thanked the company for the safe delivery of the wine so far and “entreat that they may be committed to safe hands, to prevent wastage or adulteration”.¹⁰ The fact that he specified that “Captn. Wm. Thomas” is a Freemason and expressed his satisfaction with the way his order had been handled until this point suggests that perhaps he was more likely to trust “Captn. Wm. Thomas” because of his Masonic affiliation.

Washington expressed most distinctly in his writings on religion the similarities in principle that he shared with Franklin and his other Masonic brothers. Although Freemasonry is not a religion, each brother is required to have a religious creed of his own, to practice his religious beliefs, and to profess faith in the Supreme Architect of the Universe in whatever form he may choose to worship Him. Among the principles shared by Freemasons is also the belief

⁹“George Washington to Benjamin Franklin, 25 September, 1785. *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 2. Letterbooks*. American Memory. 11 Dec. 2008.

¹⁰ George Washington to Charles Crookshanks & Company, 15 May, 1783. *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 3h. Varick Transcripts*. American Memory. 11 Nov., 2008.



that all men have the right to profess their religious beliefs, and that men of all religions can come together in fellowship. Reading Washington’s correspondence on subjects of a religious nature, it is possible to form an accurate picture of his religious influences and ideologies and to see how closely these ideas line up with the principles of the Masons. It is difficult to say whether Washington’s stance on religion was shaped by his membership in the Masons or whether Washington sought out the Masons in part because their ideas lined up so closely with his own. Either way, Washington and the Masons shared ideals of religious tolerance.

The Masons require that every man in their organization be part of some organized religion. They believe that religion shows a man to be a man of character and morality and that morality is essential to a successful organization. According to *The Principles of Masonic Law: A Treatise on the Constitutional Laws, Usages, and Landmarks of Freemasonry* by Albert G. Mackey, a guide to Masonic law printed in New York in 1856 by Jno. W. Leonard and CO, a group of Masonic publishers, Masonic law states:

The moral character is intended to secure the respectability of the Order, because, by the worthiness of its candidates, their virtuous deportment, and good reputation, will the character of the institution be judged, while the admission of irreligious libertines and contemners of the moral law would necessarily impair its dignity and honor.¹¹

Thus a candidate for Masonry must be “a man of irreproachable conduct, a believer in the existence of God, and living "under the tongue of good report.” According to Mackey, a man

¹¹ Mackey 1856.



who wishes to be initiated as a Mason cannot be “a stupid atheist, nor an irreligious libertine.” A denier of the existence of a Supreme Architect of the Universe cannot, of course, be obligated as a Mason, and, accordingly, there is no landmark more certain than that which excludes every atheist from the Order.”

Mackey clarifies that although this once meant that men who didn’t believe in the “divine revelation of the Scriptures”, it had, by Washington’s time, been modified and “is now thought more expedient only to oblige them to that religion in which all men agree, leaving their particular opinions to themselves; that is, to be good men and true, or men of honor and honesty, by whatever denominations or persuasions they may be distinguished.” If this was not the case Mackey says, the old rule would “greatly abridge the universality and tolerance of the Institution”¹²

Washington seemed, as did the Masons, to closely connect the concepts of religion and philosophy. In his letters to the families of deceased friends and relatives, Washington writes consistently in one form or another of his hope that the family of the deceased can find a way to “experience all the powerful consolations of Religion and Philosophy”¹³

Much debate exists over the question of whether Washington was a deist or if he believed in the Christian God. However, allowing for either one to be true, it is clear that he believed that all men had the right to choose the God to whom they prayed and what religion they chose to

¹² Mackey, 1856.

¹³ George Washington. Letter to Widow of Gen. Richard Butler, who was killed at "St. Clair's defeat. 6 Jan. 1792. Philadelphia. *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745-1799*. Edited by John C. Fitzpatrick, 11 Nov., 2008.



follow. This lines up with the Masonic idea that every man, so long as he believes in some higher power is free to choose according to his own wishes.

During his time as Commander of the Continental army, Washington refused to look the other way when reports of religious intolerance among his men reached him. In General Orders issued from Cambridge, Washington reprimands a group of soldiers caught expressing intolerance towards Catholics. He wrote:

As the Commander in Chief has been apprized of a design form'd for the observance of that ridiculous and childish custom of burning the Effigy of the pope--He cannot help expressing his surprise that there should be Officers and Soldiers in this army so void of common sense, as not to see the impropriety of such a step...to be insulting their Religion, is so monstrous, as not to be suffered or excused¹⁴

Washington believed that the clergy of different religions should work together for the benefit of their constituents and the benefit of the nation. In a letter addressed “To the Clergy of Different Denominations Residing in and Near the City of Philadelphia” he wrote, “Believing as I do that Religion and Morality are the essential pillars of civil society, I view with unspeakable

¹⁴ George Washington. General Orders to the Continental Army. 5 November, 1775. *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745-1799*. Edited by John C. Fitzpatrick, 12 Nov., 2008.



pleasure, that harmony and brotherly love which characterizes the Clergy of different denominations, as well in this, as in other parts of the United States".¹⁵

Washington also thought that the United States should be a nation in which people of different religions were free to practice without fear of persecution. In a letter to the members of the Swedenborgian New Church in Pennsylvania, Washington expounded upon his belief that the United States should be a place in which the best and brightest should be able to attain political position regardless of their religious beliefs. He said:

We have abundant reason to rejoice that in this land the light of truth and reason has triumphed over the power of bigotry and superstition and that every person may here worship God according to the dictates of his own heart. In this enlightened Age and in this Land of equal liberty it is our boast, that a man's religious tenets, will not forfeit his protection of the Laws, nor deprive him of the right of attaining and holding the highest offices that are known in the United States.¹⁶

He expressed a belief that government should not regulate the religious beliefs or choices of its citizens since those choices were of such self-evidence to individuals as to require little in the way of political direction. On November 3, 1789, he wrote to the ministers and elders representing the Massachusetts and New Hampshire churches that compose the First Presbytery

¹⁵ George Washington. Letter to: The Clergy of Different Denominations Residing in and Near the City of Philadelphia. *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745-1799*. Edited by John C. Fitzpatrick, 12 Nov., 2008.

¹⁶ George Washington. Letter to: Member of the Swedenborgian New Church in Pennsylvania. *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745-1799*. Edited by John C. Fitzpatrick, 11 Nov., 2008.



of the Eastward, "I am persuaded, you will permit me to observe that the path of true piety is so plain as to require but little political direction. To this consideration we ought to ascribe the absence of any regulation, respecting religion, from the Magna-Carta of our country"¹⁷

These letters, written by an older Washington display a temperament of acceptance which if not entirely fashioned by his exposure to Masonic principles at the very least shows his close affinity to the Masonic principles of religious tolerance.¹⁸

A person's affiliation with a group might also be measured by how often he corresponded with them. During his career, Washington corresponded with Masonic lodges all over the United States. In these letters, he expressed his support of Masonic principles and rituals and pledged his help and support to his brother Masons. Many of these letters responded to letters of congratulations received after his election to the presidency. Forty-four letters between Washington and Masons survive in his papers.

The noteworthy aspect of many of these letters is the careful Masonic language that Washington uses. The language shows that Washington was familiar with the goals and principles of masonry and comfortable with their meanings and implications. For this man, so careful in preserving a strong and consistent public image to sign his name to letters with so much masonic content means he must have been comfortable with the message the masons were expounding and with his name being closely associated with that message.

¹⁷ George Washington. Letter to: the ministers and elders representing the Massachusetts and New Hampshire churches which compose the First Presbytery of the Eastward, Newburyport. *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745-1799*. Edited by John C. Fitzpatrick, 10 Dec. 2008.

¹⁸ The best account of Washington's religious beliefs is Mary Thompson, "In the Hands of Good Providence: Religion in the Life of George Washington".



On January 3, 1792, in response to a letter of congratulations Washington wrote to the Ancient York Masons of the Jurisdiction of Philadelphia that he wished for their happiness “while you remain in this terrestrial mansion and that we may hereafter meet as brethren in the eternal Temple of the Supreme Architect”.¹⁹ In 1793, he thanked the Grand Lodge of the Free and Accepted Masons for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in response to a letter of congratulation and a “Book of Constitutions” dedicated to him:

To enlarge the sphere of social happiness is worthy the benevolent design of the Masonic Institution; and it is most fervently to be wished, that the conduct of every member of the fraternity, as well as those publications which discover the principles which actuate them may tend to convince Mankind that the grand object of Masonry is to promote the happiness of the human race.²⁰

Washington also defended American Masonry to those who sought to vilify it or to entangle it with the deeds of other organizations. An example of this can be found in the letters he exchanged with George Washington Snyder in 1798. Snyder sent Washington a book called *Proofs of a Conspiracy &c. by John Robinson*. Snyder said that he was a “German, born and liberally educated in the City of Heydelber in the Palatinate of the Rhine” who came to the United States in 1776. He wrote that the book which he enclosed for Washington’s appraisal had fallen into his hands and although he hoped Washington would not “think it a presumption in a stranger, whose name, perhaps never reached your ears, to address himself to you the

¹⁹ George Washington to Ancient York Masons of the Jurisdiction of Philadelphia, 3 January, 1792. *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 2. Letterbooks*. American Memory. 23 Oct. 2008.

²⁰ George Washington to Grand Lodge of the Free and Accepted Masons for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 27 December 1792." *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 2. Letterbooks*. American Memory. 23 Oct. 2008.



commanding General of a great nation”, he felt it his duty, as a religious man to warn the president of a scheme he had uncovered in the book. According to Snyder’s interpretation of Robinson’s book, the Freemasons, calling themselves the Illuminati wanted to “overturn all Government and all Religion, even natural; and who endeavor to eradicate every Idea of a Supreme Being, and distinguish Man from Beast by his Shape only”. Snyder feared that lodges in the United States may have “caught the infection” and may decide to cooperate with the Illuminati or Jacobin’s in France. Snyder says he addressed the book to Washington in hopes that the president might be able to “Prevent the horrid plan from corrupting the Brethren of the English Lodge over which you preside”.²¹

Washington replied that he “believe[d] notwithstanding, that none of the Lodges in this Country are contaminated with the principles ascribed to the Society of the Illuminati”.²² In a clarification letter dated October 24, Washington wrote:

It was not my intention to doubt that the Doctrines of the Illuminati and principles of Jacobinism has not spread in the United States. On the contrary, no one is more truly satisfied of that fact than I am...The idea that I meant to convey was, that I did not believe that the Lodges of Free Masons in this Country had, as Societies, endeavored to propagate the diabolical tenants of the first, or pernicious principles of the latter.”²³

²¹ George Washington Snyder to George Washington, 22 August,1798." George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 4. General Correspondence 1697-1799. American Memory. 23 Oct. 2008.

²² George Washington to George Washington Snyder, 25 September,1798. *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 4. General Correspondence 1697-1799.* American Memory. 23 Oct. 2008.

²³ George Washington to George Washington Snyder, 24 October ,1798. *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 4. General Correspondence 1697-1799.* American Memory. 23 Oct. 2008.



Snyder was not the only person to write to Washington about the possible corruption of the Freemasons. William Scales argued that the country is “vastly damaged by clerical and Masonic villainy”. Scales hoped that Washington would “extricate [himself] and [his] people from the clerical and Masonic villainy”.²⁴ These letters and Washington’s response to them show that even when Washington was not closely associated with a particular lodge or with the organization as a whole, he still considered himself a Mason and trusted in the integrity and clarity of vision of those leading the Masonic organization.

Throughout his career, Washington participated in a number of masonic ceremonies and lodge meetings. Although it is generally accepted that the extant record shows only that he attended a handful of lodge meetings and a few ceremonies as hard fact, as with most things related to our first president, different sources record vastly different information.

After the three times he attended lodge to receive his first three degrees, Washington is known to have attended the Fredericksburg Lodge on Saturday, January 4, 1755. He is also recorded as having been present at meetings of the 227th Lodge attached to the a British regiment during the French and Indian War at which he received some type of additional degree, most likely the Royal Arch. This is evidenced by the fact that the apron made for Washington by General Lafayette’s wife contained the symbol of the Royal Arch.²⁵

The period of the Revolutionary War is the period in which Washington’s Masonic record absent. He may have attended one of the numerous military lodges which sprang up to

²⁴ William Scales to George Washington, 14 March, 1798. *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 4. General Correspondence 1697-1799*. American Memory. 23 Oct. 2008.

²⁵ Albert G. Mackey. *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*. (Kessinger Publishing, 1946).

²⁵ Bullock, 50-133.



serve the soldiers in his army. Masonic sources claim he did, while non-Masonic sources claim he most likely did not. There are eyewitness accounts describing Washington's presence at military lodge meetings but these, non-Masonic sources say, may simply have been written by soldiers wishing to confer honors upon their own lodges through association. Both acknowledge however, that most records, if any, kept by military lodges are lost to history and therefore we may never know.^{26 27}

The next time Washington is officially connected with the Masons is in 1788 when Lodge #39 proposed to make him their Grand Master. The charter read:

Know ye that we, Edmund Randolph, Esquire, Governor of the Commonwealth aforesaid, and Grand Master of the Most Ancient and Honorable Society of Freemasons within the same, by and with the consent of the Grand Lodge of Virginia, do hereby constitute and appoint our illustrious and well beloved Brother, George Washington, Esquire, late General and Commander-in-Chief of the forces of the United States of America,²⁸

There is also record of eight letters exchanged between Washington and the Alexandria Masons over whom he presided as Grand Master. The nature of the letters varies from one in which Washington says, "I shall always feel pleasure when it may be in my power to render

²⁶ Mackey 1946.

²⁷ Bullock, 50-133.

²⁸ Mackey. 1946.



service to Lodge number 39²⁹ to another in which he thanks the lodge for its well wishes on his retirement from public service observing:

If it has pleased the Supreme Architect of the Universe to make me a humble instrument to promote the welfare and happiness of my fellow men, my exertions have been abundantly recompensed by the kind partiality with which they have been received; and the assurance you give me of your kind belief that I have acted upon the Square in my public Capacity, will be among my principal enjoyments in this Terrestrial Lodge.³⁰

The full weight of confusion about Washington's Masonic participation can be understood when one looks at the conflicting sources that exist about his time as Grand Master of Alexandria Lodge. While the records of the lodge itself has Washington serving as Grand Master for a year from 1788-1789, a eulogy delivered by Timothy Bigelow to the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts two months after Washington's death says "The information received from our Brethren who had the happiness to be members of the Lodge over which he presided for many years, and of which he died the Master, furnishes abundant proof of his Persevering zeal for the prosperity of the Institution Constant"^{31 32}

The first Masonic ceremony to which Washington can be tied is one that took place during the Revolutionary War and that constitutes his only recorded Masonic involvement during

²⁹ George Washington to Alexandria, Virginia, York Masons, 28 December, 1783." *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 4. General Correspondence 1697-1799*. American Memory. 23 Oct. 2008.

³⁰ George Washington. Letter to Alexandria, Virginia, York Masons, 1 April 1797." *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745-1799*. Edited by John C. Fitzpatrick.

³¹ Mackey 1946.

³² Bullock, 50-133.



this period. On June 24, 1779, over one-hundred Masonic brothers marched from West Point in a procession including “a band, ‘the Sword of Justice’, the Bible, and the Square and Compass”. They marched to the Robinson House where they met a group of gentlemen that included Washington. The brothers enjoyed “a sermon, a Masonic address, and dinner”. They made toasts and sang various songs. Washington then returned to his barge on the Hudson to the sound of the band playing “God Bless America”. When he was onboard, Washington received a salute of “three cheers from the shore, answered by three from the barge, the musing beating the ‘Grenadier’s March’”.³³

The second ceremony of which evidence exists linking Washington to the organization comes much later in his life. On September 18, 1793, Washington laid the cornerstone of the United States Capitol in a full Masonic ceremony. According to a New York Times article written for the centennial of the event, Washington was asked to perform the ceremony by “Dr. Dick”, the current Worshipful Master of Alexandria Lodge #22. After a grand procession that included the elite of the surrounding areas, Washington, dressed in a Masonic sash and apron embroidered by General Lafayette’s wife, placed the stone in place in the southeast corner of the foundation as was the custom at the time. Washington was reported to have given a speech on the occasion which “was received with brotherly love and commendation”. The ceremony ended with “prayer, Masonic chanting honors and a fifteen-volley from the artillery”.³⁴

The third ceremony linking Washington to the Masons was not strictly a Masonic ceremony. In fact it was a national one. Washington’s inauguration was conducted by a man

³³ Bullock, 50-133.

³⁴ “Laid a Hundred Years Ago.” *The New York Times* 10 Sept. 1893. [NYTimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com). 1 Nov. 2008
<<http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9B04E3D8163EEF33A25753C1A96F9C94629ED7CF>>.



named Robert R. Livingston, a close associate of the new president. Washington's papers show they exchanged over seventy letters during his life. Livingston was the Grand Master of the New York Masonic Lodge as well Chancellor of the State of New York. The first president took his oath of office with his hand resting on a Bible from his own Masonic Lodge in Virginia³⁵.

Washington also received Masonic attentions from different parties. In March, 1789, the New York City Masons presented Washington with a certificate which read, "We the wardens and brethren of Holland Lodge ancient Masons held in the city and state of New York in North America do hereby certify that in consideration of the Masonic virtues which distinguish our worthy Brother His Excellency George Washington Esquire he was unanimously elected an honorary member of our lodge."³⁶ In September, 1797, Washington received from James Asperne an advertisement for a "Free-Masons' Pocket Book for the year 1798" containing (beside One Hundred and Eight Ruled Pages for Cash Accounts, Appointments, Memorandums, and Observations, and other Information common to Gentlemen's and Traders' Pocket Books) a Number of Articles peculiarly interesting and useful to the Fraternity: particularly a Complete and Correct List of all the Regular Lodges and Royal Arch Chapters, as well as Lodges of Instruction, in Town and Country.³⁷

³⁵ Michael Baigent & Richard Leigh. "George Washington-Freemason". 14 Nov. 2008.

³⁶New York City Masons to George Washington, 7 March 1789. *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 8b. Honorary Degrees, Memberships, and Certificates of Appreciation, 1775-1798*. American Memory. 2 Nov., 2008.

³⁷ James Asperne to George Washington, 30 September, 1797." *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 4. General Correspondence 1697-1799*. American Memory. 15 Dec., 2008.



It is hard to tell from simply looking at the number of lodge meetings he attended, the ceremonies he took part in, or even the letters he wrote how invested Washington was or was not in the Freemason organization. In order to determine his relative investment in the mason's it is necessary to look at Washington's involvement in other organizations and compare it to his Masonic career. Throughout his public career, Washington was surely one of the most well known men in all of the Americas. As such, especially after he became president, any organization that wanted to attach a famous name to its membership list asked for his endorsement. A short list of organizations that asked for support include, the American Philosophic Society, the Philadelphia Emigration Society, the Political Enquiries Society, the Baltimore Mechanical Society, the United Brethren Society, the Concord Massachusetts Independent Society, the Delaware Domestic Manufacturer's Society, the New York Marine Society, the Philadelphia County Society for Agriculture and Manufacturers, the Enkhuisen Holland Patriot Society, the Society of Arts and Commerce at Hamburg, and the Mutual Assistance Society Against Fire on Buildings in the State of Virginia.

Washington had a different level of correspondence with each other of these societies. With some, such as the American Philosophic Society, he joined its register and had sporadic contact with it. He observed that "if I know my own inclination, it is to be the friend and associate to men of Virtue and philosophical knowledge; or if I have a wish ungratified, it is that the Arts and Sciences may continue to flourish with increasing lustre".³⁸ He corresponds with the American Philosophic Society a total of eight times, twice in 1781, four times in 1783, once

³⁸ George Washington to American Philosophical Society, 13 December, 1783. *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 3c. Varick Transcripts*. American Memory. 15 Dec., 2008.



in 1788, and once in 1796. Among his papers is also found a printed report on the proceedings of the society in relation to a new and improved boiler for a steam engine, an “improvement in Dr. Baker’s Grist Mill, an improvement in the Saw-Mill, an improvement in raising water, by means of a Steam-engine.”³⁹

Some societies such as the New York Marine Society, wrote Washington to offer its congratulations on his election to the presidency and confer membership upon him whether or not he wanted it. Present among his papers is a certificate granting him honorary membership. Others such as the Philadelphia Emigration Society, he writes to upon receipt of its letter about congratulations of what he sees as its noble purpose: “the principles of benevolence upon which the society you represent in founded, and which regulate its proceeding, entitle it to the approbation of all your fellow citizens”.⁴⁰ However, despite the praise, this is the only letter Washington ever wrote to this particular organization and the only contact he has with it.

If one were to compare Washington’s affiliation with these societies with his affiliation with the Masons, it would be easy to draw the conclusion that Washington’s Masonic affiliation was important to him. Washington’s Masonic affiliation differed from his affiliation with the organizations mentioned above. With those organizations, he simply earned membership based on his position and the notoriety his name would bring the association, and he rarely corresponded with them. Washington sought out membership in the Masons and pursued degrees with them, investing his time and energy in Masonic advancement. He accepted the

³⁹ American Philosophical Society, Printed Report on Proceedings Relating to a Steam Engine, 18 April, 1788. *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 4. General Transcripts.* 15 Dec. 2008.

⁴⁰ George Washington to Philadelphia Emigration Society, September, 1790. *George Washington Papers at the Library of Congress, 1741-1799: Series 4. General Correspondence 1697-1799.* American Memory. 15 Dec., 2008.



offer of the lodge at Alexandria to be its Grand Master and presumably carried out various duties as such. This must mean that the Masons, their beliefs, and their principles were important to Washington.

However, Masonry was not the society to which Washington was most dedicated. Comparing the correspondence that Washington had with his fellow masons to the correspondence that he had with members of the other society, it is easy to see that Washington was much more involved in the operations of The Society of the Cincinnati than he was with the Masons. He wrote numerous letters to members of the Cincinnati discussing administrative affairs. In one letter, Washington noted, “As to medals and Diplomas for the Cincinnati, the former I believe are to be purchased in Philada., and the latter to be obtained thro’ the State Society of wch. an officer is member.”⁴¹ In another, Washington promised that, “I will immediately inform myself of the name and residence of the Treasurer of the Society of the Cincinnati in this State, and transmit Mr. De Corney’s Bill on Colo. Wadsworth to him.”⁴² In a third letter, Washington observed, “It appears by the Marquis's letter that the answer to a letter which you did me the honor to write to me (now more than two years) respecting the order of the Cincinnati, had never come to your hands. I cannot tell how to accot. for it, as all the papers are in the hands of the Secretary General”.⁴³

⁴¹George Washington. Letter to Antoine F. Wuibert. 31 Jul., 1786. Mount Vernon. *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745-1799*. Edited by John C. Fitzpatrick, 11 Dec., 2008.

⁴² George Washington. Letter to Francois, Marquis de Barbe-Marbois. 12 Jun., 1785. Mount Vernon. *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745-1799*. Edited by John C. Fitzpatrick 14 Dec., 2008.

⁴³ George Washington. Letter to Claude-Anne de Rouvroy, Marquis de Saint-Simon-Montblieru. 10 May, 1786. Mount Vernon. *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources 1745-1799*. Edited by John C. Fitzpatrick, 12 Nov., 2008.



Washington wrote over one hundred letters to various parties discussing the Cincinnati. From these letters, it is clear that he was a participant in administrative duties and decisions in regards to the Cincinnati. Despite the fact that Washington served as Grand Master of the Alexandria Freemasons, no such record exists detailing his participation in the minor details of that organization. His Masonic letters are much more ceremonial, for example receiving congratulations or accepting or declining invitations and special awards and honors. This indicates that while Washington was clearly affiliated with the Masons and well known as a member of his Masonic Lodge, he was not as invested in the day to day operations of the Masonic Lodge as he was of the Society of the Cincinnati.

The depth of Washington's Masonic affiliation can also be evaluated in relation to the Masonic careers of his contemporaries. Perhaps the most famous of Washington's fellow masons is Benjamin Franklin. (The Masonic careers of Washington and Franklin are useful for comparison because neither was born into genteel society and thus both joined masonry from a similar point of view in the socio-economic if not the geographical sense.) Their Masonic careers also ran parallel to lives of significant public service and public duty. Consequently, the two men had similar demands on their time and great reputations to maintain and as such the amount of time they chose to dedicate to an organization of which they were both members can be evaluated side by side.

Franklin, like Washington advanced rather quickly in the Masonic order. Initiated as a mason in 1731 at the age of 25, Franklin was around the same age as Washington when he



joined. Three years later, in 1734, Franklin was made Provincial Grand Master of the “Modern” Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania.⁴⁴ He also printed *Anderson’s Masonic Constitutions* in 1734, the first Masonic book printed in America. In dedicating a sermon he was giving to Franklin, Joseph Pilmore observed that Franklin, among other things was, “An illustrious Brother, Whose distinguished Merit among Masons Entitles him to their highest Veneration”⁴⁵

Franklin, like Washington was forced to defend the Masons to those who had heard false rumors about their morals and purposes. In 1738 Franklin wrote a letter to his parents Josiah and Abiah Franklin. His mother had evidently heard rumors about the true purpose of the masons and was concerned that her son had “imbib’d some erroneous Opinions” while in contact with them. Franklin seeks to defend his association saying:

As to the Freemasons, unless she will believe me when I assure her that they are in general a very harmless sort of People; and have no principles or Practices that are inconsistent with Religion or good Manners, I know no Way of giving my Mother a better Opinion of them than she seems to have at present, (since it is not allow’d that Women should be admitted into that secret Society). She has, I must confess, on that Account, some reason to be displeas’d with it; but for any thing else, I must entreat

⁴⁴ “Benjamin Franklin: American Statesman and Freemason”
http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/masonicmuseum/benjamin_franklin_fdc.htm 15 Dec., 2008.

⁴⁵ Joseph Pilmore. Sermon: Dedicated to Benjamin Franklin. 27 December, 1787. *The Packard Humanities Institute*. 15 Dec., 2008.



her to suspend her Judgment till she is better inform'd, and in the mean time exercise her Charity.⁴⁶

Here Franklin defends the ideals of the Masons as did Washington in his letters to George Washington Snyder and William Scales. This shows that both Franklin and Washington closely identified with the principles of the society.

However, Franklin was much more involved in the internal politics and procedures of the lodge of which he was part than Washington. Being a “Modern” Mason, Franklin sought to defend the craft against what he saw as the intrusion of the false craft of “Ancient” Masons. When he heard that a lodge of “Ancients” was going to be formed in Pennsylvania, he felt it was his duty to write to Henry Price, considered the “Father of American Masonry” to inform him of the fact and ask that “whatever you shall think proper to do therein may be sent by the next post”. He told Price that “some false and rebel Brethren, who are foreigners, being about to set up a distinct Lodge in opposition to the old and true Brethren here, pretending to make Masons for a bowl of punch, and the Craft is like to come into disesteem among us unless the true Brethren are countenanced and distinguished by some such special authority as herein desired”.⁴⁷ In this letter, Franklin showed that he closely followed the internal politics and public image of the Masons. He not only paid attention to a rumor he probably heard either around the lodge or during his dealings in the city but also cared enough to follow up on its validity and then to report it to his superiors in the organization.

⁴⁶ Benjamin Franklin. Letter to: Josiah and Abiah Franklin. 13 April, 1738. *The Packard Humanities Institute*. 15 Dec., 2008.

⁴⁷ Benjamin Franklin. Letter to: Henry Price. 28 November, 1734. *The Packard Humanities Institute*. 15 Dec., 2008.



Franklin also printed announcements relating to the masons in his newspaper, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. Among Franklin's papers are seven newspaper clippings relating to the masons. Four are announcements from the years 1732, 1733, 1734, and 1741 that report that a Grand Lodge meeting had taken place for Pennsylvania and listed the officers who were elected for the following year. The announcement for 1734 reports that "Monday last, a Grand Lodge of the Ancient and Honourable Society of Free and Accepted Masons in this Province, was held at the Tun Tavern in Water-Street, when Benjamin Franklin being elected Grand-Master for the Year ensuing".⁴⁸ A fifth item is an advertisement for a man named John Dabney who advertises himself as a "Mathematical Instrument Maker from London, In King-Street, Boston, New-England" who fixes a number of different instruments including "Free-Masons Jewels".⁴⁹ The sixth item is a report of the death of Daniel Rees, the apprentice who was killed while his master and others were playing a prank on him by pretending to initiate him into the masons. The seventh and final clipping is a defense of Franklin's conduct in regards to this case.

Franklin also made sure not to lose his Masonic affiliation no matter how far from his home lodge he may have roamed. While in France, he joined a French Lodge and became its Grand Master. This shows that Franklin's association with the masons was so strong that even after he left his native land, he sought out the company of his brother Masons. With French enlightenment values at a high point and Franklin and the masons both subscribing heavily to these values, it is likely Franklin found very many like-minded people among his French

⁴⁸ Benjamin Franklin. Announcement in *Pennsylvania Gazette*: Grand Lodge Meeting. 27 June, 1734. *The Packard Humanities Institute*. 15 Dec., 2008.

⁴⁹ Benjamin Franklin. Advertisement in *Pennsylvania Gazette*: John Dabney. 19 November, 1741. *The Packard Humanities Institute*. 15 Dec., 2008.



brethren. It is possible that this, along with the fact that he had been charged with making diplomatic contacts among the French aristocracy for the American cause, drew Franklin to the French Masons. Fraternal organizations, especially the Masons that drew heavily from the upper-classes, were perfect for the latter purpose.

There are several letters to Franklin in French discussing the brotherhood and even letters written from people outside France requesting Franklin's help in getting something accomplished through the Masons in France. One such letter was written to Franklin by Christian Emanuel Frölich, a German, who hoped that Franklin might grant his lodge in Görlitz, Germany, a warrant to establish a branch of the French lodge in Germany. Frölich said that his lodge had "no intention of affiliating with the rite of Strict Observance of the Berlin lodge or the London lodge" and thus wished to affiliate with the French lodge. He says that he asks this of Franklin because, "your readiness to help and your brotherly love are so well known".⁵⁰ On March 1, 1783, Franklin answered a letter much like Frölich's, though from a Frenchman asking for a warrant to affiliate with the French Grand Lodge. Franklin responded to their request in the affirmative saying, "wishing you every kind of Felicity, particularly that your Power of doing Good may always be equal to your Inclination".⁵¹ Franklin also invested his money in the Masons. Franklin signed his name to pledge £20 towards the construction of a building for the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania saying the he and the other signers "agree to advance and pay to Messrs. Samuel Mifflin and John Swift, towards defraying the Expences thereof, the Sums

⁵⁰ Benjamin Franklin. Letter to: Christian Emanuel Frölich. 7 April, 1781. *The Packard Humanities Institute*. 15 Dec., 2008.

⁵¹ Benjamin Franklin. Letter to: Monsieur David de La Sajeole Avocat. *The Packard Humanities Institute*. 15 Dec., 2008.



annex'd to our respective Names on Demand".⁵² Another letter to the Grand lodge of Massachusetts reported that the Pennsylvania Masons had heard that there had been a Grand Master chosen for the entire United States. They thought this was a good thing but requested that "holding annually their Grand Lodge, choosing their Grand Master, Wardens and other officers, who may manage all affairs relating to the Brethren here with full power and authority, according to the customs and usages of Masons, the said Grand Master of Pennsylvania only yielding his chair, when the Grand Master of all America shall be in place."⁵³ Among Franklin's papers is also a letter to his grandson William Temple Franklin, from a man named Samuel Andrews who asks the younger Franklin to have Franklin intercede on his behalf for what seems to be a charge of treason. Andrews writes, "I declare upon my honor & the word of a Mason and an honest man"⁵⁴ that he committed no wrong. Franklin also possessed a copy of the bylaws of the lodge to which he belonged from 1732.

Overall, Franklin and Washington both shared a base commitment to the Masonic brotherhood. Both served as Grand Master of the lodges to which they belonged and both shared the ideals and principles of the Masonic order. However, Franklin was much more involved in the day to day operations of his lodge than Washington. The documents found in Franklin's papers relating to the Masons are of a much more personal and detailed nature than those found among Washington's papers, indeed. They are much less ceremonial and more institutional. In

⁵² Benjamin Franklin. Subscription to Freemasons' Hall. 14 March, 1754. *The Packard Humanities Institute*. 15 Dec., 2008.

⁵³ Benjamin Franklin. Letter to: Henry Price. 28 November, 1734. *The Packard Humanities Institute*. 15 Dec., 2008.

⁵⁴ Samuel Andrews. Letter to: William Temple Franklin. 29 May, 1782. *The Packard Humanities Institute*. 15 Dec., 2008.



fact, Franklin's commitment to the Philadelphia Masons might be compared to Washington's commitment to the Society of the Cincinnati.

George Washington probably joined the Freemasons for the reasons many of his contemporaries did. He seems to have desired the social connections that masonry could provide as well as felt an affinity with the ideals Masonry taught. Throughout his life, though not quite a regular lodge-attending mason, Washington made sure to keep his name associated with the society through his periodic attendance at lodge meetings, his participation in Masonic ceremonies, his correspondence with other masons, and his defense of the organization when it came under attack. While some may argue that Washington simply joined the Masons as a young man and then never bothered to disassociate himself from them, the type of man Washington was must be taken into account. A man as image conscious and concerned about the perception others had of him as Washington was would choose and maintain his associations carefully. George Washington was a Freemason in full support of the goals and ideals of that organization. His association with the Masons reflects both the ways in which his ideals might have been shaped by them and the ways in which the ideals he possessed lined up with Masonic ideals.



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