

**Washington Memorial Exercises,  
Mount Vernon And Colorado,  
December 14, 1899**

By

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This paper is not so much about George Washington, the Father of our Country, as it is about Colorado and Virginia Masons and the great effort they made to perpetuate the memory of this great Brother Mason.

George Washington, the third son of a middle-class immigrant family, was a self made man. His father died when he was 11, leaving him dependent on his two elder stepbrothers. He started work at the early age of 17, and, after some military adventures and achievements, settled down at 27 to acquire land. Married at 35, he became a prosperous Virginia Country Gentleman. At 42 he represented his State in the first Continental Congress. The blunders of George the III and the battles of Lexington and Bunker Hill impelled Congress to select Washington at age 43 to head the Army in the fight for freedom and independence. The bitter war years, the suffering defeats and neglects, the struggles to raise men, money and supplies, were overcome in the skirmishing victories at Delaware, Trenton, and Saratoga, and then the decisive Battle of Yorktown and victory and peace. Thereafter Washington's guiding hand was an essential ingredient for the stability and constitutional birth of the new Nation.

Throughout all this, Freemasonry sustained and inspired his heroic devotion to duty, steady purpose and concentration on goals. A part of his Masonic record follows:

Fredericksburg Lodge, No 4, Fredericksburg, Virginia:

Initiated November 4, 1752,  
Passed March 3, 1753,  
Raised August 4, 1753

Alexandria-Washington Lodge, No 22, Alexandria, VA.:

First chartered as Alexandria Lodge, No 39, under the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, it became Alexandria Lodge, No 22, under the Grand Lodge of Virginia in 1788. After Washington's death it was named Alexandria-Washington Lodge No 22, in 1895.

He was made an Honorary member of this Lodge on June 24, 1784, and became the charter Master when the charter was issued by the Grand Lodge of Virginia on April 28, 1788.

He was unanimously re-elected Master on December 20, 1788.

On September 18, 1793, acting as Grand Master Pro tem of Maryland, he laid the cornerstone of the United States Capitol at Washington, D.C.

On December 12, 1799, he caught a chill while taking his usual horseback ride around the Mount Vernon Estates. The day had been snowy, with mixed rain and hail; yet he rode for five hours, carefully seeing that all was in order. Two days later, near midnight, he woke Martha, his devoted wife, to complain of throat pain, but would not allow her to go outside in the inclement weather for help. Actually, he had a quinsy sore throat, easily cured in modern medicine. At dawn, the plantation overseer was called because he was proficient at bloodletting, and he removed 14 ounces. At mid-morning his friend, Dr. James Craik, arrived and performed two more bleedings of slightly over 2 pints of blood. Later in the afternoon an additional 32 ounces were drawn for a total of over 5 pints of blood, which not only did not cure but only weakened him. Stoic and courageous in death as in life, the great man said, "but let me go off quietly; I cannot last long." His last words were, "tis well".

So died the greatest of Americans, a man whose birthday all America celebrates and a man whose memory will forever live so long as mankind prizes integrity, honors valor, and reverences freedom.

Washington died at twenty minutes past 10, on Saturday night, December 14, 1799. On the succeeding Monday a funeral Lodge was held to make arrangements for the interment. At an early hour on Wednesday, the 18<sup>th</sup>, the Masonic Fraternity, under escort of the military and citizens of Alexandria, started for Mount Vernon, where they arrived about one o'clock in the afternoon, and at three the funeral procession moved in the following order:

The troops, horse and foot.

The Clergy.

The General's horse (with saddle, holster and pistols), led by two colored grooms.

Music.

Guard.

The body of Washington, which was borne on a bier by a detail of four Virginian Lieutenants.

The pallbearers, consisting of officers of the revolution, all except one members of Alexandria Lodge.

The principal mourners.

The corporation of Alexandria.

Alexandria Lodge No. 22.

Brooke Lodge No. 47, of Alexandria.

Federal Lodge No. 15, of Washington.

Upon arriving at the grave the services of the Episcopal Church were conducted by the rector of Christ Church of Alexandria, and the Masonic ceremonies by Dr. Elisha Cullen Dick, Worshipful Master of Alexandria Lodge No. 22, and Reverend James Muir, Chaplain of the same Lodge.

During the exercises, general discharges were fired by the infantry, the cavalry, and eleven pieces of artillery on the banks of the Potomac, back of the vault, and minute guns from a vessel in the stream.

These are well known events that are often repeated. Less known, however, are events leading up to and surrounding the first Centennial Memorial of George Washington's death held at Mount Vernon, VA., on 14 December, 1899.

The Masonic Memorial Exercise was formally inaugurated by the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Colorado in 1893, in response to a recommendation in the address of Grand Master William D. Wright, made on the suggestion and request of Past Grand Master Roger W. Woodbury, (Grand Master in 1878).

Most Worshipful Brother Woodbury was elected to the office of Senior Grand Warden in 1876, the year Colorado became a state. In making the recommendation he felt strongly that "as Colorado was admitted to the Union of States on the one-hundredth anniversary of the promulgation of the Declaration of Independence (which Brother George Washington made an effective instrument by his success in the field and in State-craft), the suggestion of holding Memorial Exercises on the anniversary of his death would emanate from Colorado with as much propriety as a child may suggest and arrange to observe the anniversary of a parent's loss with due solemnity and reverence."

The recommendation was referred to the Committee on Jurisprudence, consisting of Past Grand Masters R. W. Woodbury, James H. Peabody, and William D. Todd.

Its execution was entrusted to a committee consisting of: Roger W. Woodbury, William D. Wright, and William D. Todd.

The next six years were very busy for the committee. The first circular requested Grand Masters throughout the world to recommend the formal approval of their Grand Lodges and to appoint committees to report to and cooperate with the Colorado Committee. Some acted promptly; some neglected for another year; some advised delays; and one or two, perhaps more, disapproved.

After many discouragements, several circulars and scores of letters, the cooperation of Grand Lodges was slowly obtained, until, when the committee had been engaged three years at their work, enough Grand Lodges had acquiesced to ensure a national character to the memorial exercises on the lines originally proposed.

All the preliminary work having been accomplished, and it having been determined that the exercises could only take place at Mount Vernon; on the

committee's recommendation, the Grand Lodge of Colorado formally invited the Grand Lodge of Virginia to arrange all details, with Colorado guaranteed as a faithful supporter to the end. Most Worshipful A. R. Courtney, Most Worshipful Grand Master of Virginia accepted the invitation with special acknowledgements to the Grand Lodge of Colorado for its inception of the Memorial, and for the services it had performed.

In its circular of 1896, the Colorado committee recommended as follows:

"We conceive that each Grand Lodge should advise its Subordinates to arrange for memorial exercises in each of their Lodge rooms on the date of the anniversary".

Such an undertaking is not entirely without cost. On August 20, 1898 the following was received from the Virginia Committee:

"After repeated meetings of our committee and most careful consideration of the subject, we have found that it will require an outlay of money which will be equal to a per capita assessment of one cent per member in each Jurisdiction." and "the committee deems it proper that all Grand Lodges should have the opportunity-if they so desire-to contribute to its proper observance."

In his address during the 1898 Grand Lodge session, the Grand Master of Colorado fraternally recommended that we should contribute our per capita proportion and even more if necessary, to protect the Grand Lodge of Virginia against undue expense.

During that same session, the Committee report contained the following from the Virginia Committee, headed by Right Worshipful Brother K. Kemper:

"That the Grand Lodge of Colorado be fraternally thanked for inaugurating this matter, and that some duty in the program be especially assigned to the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of that Jurisdiction."

On January 24, 1899, Grand Master Horace T. DeLong authorized the Colorado committee to solicit funds to assist in defraying the expense. As a result, one hundred Colorado Masons pledged \$10.00 each. Later, the Grand Lodge of 1899 appropriated \$1,000, relieving the one hundred brethren. However, for their efforts, their names are listed in the book recording these events.

### THE EXERCISES AT MOUNT VERNON

The program of events contained the following:

"The Grand Masters and representatives of the several jurisdictions attending the Centennial Ceremonies, and all other Masons desiring to participate will, on December 14, 1899, leave Washington, D.C. for Mount Vernon, at 9:30 a.m., in steamers engaged by the committee for that purpose and touch at Alexandria, for the Grand Lodge of Virginia and their families, arriving at Mount Vernon about 11 o'clock a.m.

At Mount Vernon the Masonic bodies will form together with the invited guests on the east side of the Mansion and proceed to the old vault, by the same path and in the same order in which the procession was formed and moved on the day of General Washington's funeral, December 18, 1799. At the old vault the services will be conducted as follows:

Solemn dirge by the band.

Prayer by Brother, the right rev. A. M. Randolph, Bishop of the Southern Episcopal Diocese of Virginia.

Music by an octet from the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia.

Address by the Grand Master of Masons of Colorado.

After the address, the procession will march to the tomb in which are now deposited the remains of Washington.

The Grand Masters of the thirteen original States (or their representatives) will then stand in a line in front of the tomb, facing out. The Grand Masters of other States and Foreign Jurisdictions (or their representatives) in a half circle facing them. The Grand Lodge and other brethren in a circle around the tomb, joining hands."

Here followed a beautiful detailed ceremony written to involve all of the Grand Jurisdictions present at the event.

Then, "The Grand Masters then deposit their wreaths or evergreens and the Craft slowly march past the tomb, depositing the evergreen."

The program continued:

"After which the brethren will proceed to the Mansion, where Brother William McKinley, after being appropriately introduced by the Grand Master of Virginia, will deliver an address, and the ceremonies at Mount Vernon will be closed with an appropriate benediction."

Afterwards, a reception was held at the Willard Hotel, corner of Pennsylvania Ave and 14<sup>th</sup> Street by the Grand Masters and other distinguished Masons, including President McKinley.

The exercises were carried out as planned with "Several thousand Masons and as many other persons" proceeding to Mount Vernon on the morning of the 14<sup>th</sup> of December.

The Colorado delegation report included the following:

"To one who has long lived "beneath the shadow of the Rocky Mountains" there was a wondrous inspiration in gathering on the centennial of Washington's death where he lived, loved, worshipped and died.....we who journeyed from Colorado felt it to be hallowed ground, where the head is involuntarily bared, the voice becomes hushed and gentle, and the heart is open to all those silent influences which make men better, and fill them with the resolve of emulation."

## EXERCISES IN COLORADO

At the Annual Grand Communication of the M.W. Grand Lodge of Colorado, A.F. & A.M., held on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September, 1899, the committee's report expressed the opinion that local exercises by Masonic Lodges throughout the country would be of at least equal effect as the national exercises at Mount Vernon, in attracting the attention of the present generation to the virtues, patriotism and Masonic and public services of Washington and his compeers. Local Lodges were furnished with a copy of that part of the report which related to local exercises, which is, in part, as follows:

That where there is more than one Lodge in any town or city, the brethren all unite in the exercises.

That they be held on the day or evening of the 14<sup>th</sup> of December, the anniversary of George Washington's death.

That the M.W. Grand Master be requested to issue general authority to all Lodges that may wish to avail themselves of the same, to hold their exercises in any public hall, to be attended by the public, and to march in procession thereto.

(Here followed explicit instructions as to the manner and content of the recommended program to be followed.)

A special effort was made by the committee to procure copies of all the addresses made in Colorado Lodges, which were published in the final Memorial Volume.

## EXTRACTS FROM PROCEEDINGS OF GRAND LODGES

A measure of the overall success of this venture is found in the comments of those Grand Lodges who participated in the exercises, a sampling of which follows:

### ARIZONA'S REVIEW OF COLORADO

...The idea originated with this Grand Lodge (Colorado), and it has all the reflected glory of such conception, and the

Committee says: "The action of this Grand Lodge, in initiating this memorial, will long appear in its history as the most beautiful jewel that sparkles in its crown."

#### IOWA'S REVIEW OF COLORADO

(Referring to the report of the Colorado Committee) "The report is a noble document of genuine interest; and the historic value of the volume compiled by the Committee, containing the addresses at Mount Vernon, and those before Colorado Lodges, together with Memorial Circulars and photographs, is great, and will be increasingly so in after years. The seven years of service by that committee were, in result, as that of Joseph in Egypt during a like number of years of plenty.

#### MAINE

We feel that it was the most important event in which Masons, as such, have ever participated. So far as the outward world is concerned, the occasion gave a tremendous impulse to patriotism and veneration for the men who enrolled our country among the nations of the earth, and laid the foundation for government by the people, and especially for him, who now, more than ever before, is hailed as the "Father of our Country."....."Grand in its conception and successfully executed, the ceremonies at Mount Vernon on the 14<sup>th</sup> of December stand without a parallel in the Masonic history of America, or in the world."

#### CONCLUSION

The following is extracted from the Conclusion of the Memorial Exercise Volume:

"In closing this volume, a few words seem necessary by reason of unforeseen circumstances. The mind which conceived the idea of these exercises, and whose program from inception to conclusion was practically carried out, not only in Colorado, but at Mount Vernon, was that of Roger Williams Woodbury, Past Grand Master of Colorado. Not only was it his mind to plan,

but his hands to do, the consequent work. This Memorial Volume was entirely prepared by him, the copy all in the hands of the printer and a part of the proof read, when, without warning, "in the twinkling of an eye," he was taken to his long home July 11<sup>th</sup>, 1903."

