

## **One Man's Legacy**

By

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One of my favorite quotes is from a song that goes something like this 'It's not what you take when you leave this world behind you, It's what you leave behind you when you go.'

Many of us entered public service for this reason and because we genuinely enjoy helping people and making a difference in their lives. We give that most precious gift that one can give another, a gift that can never be returned - time! In fact just by doing our jobs we are leaving a legacy.

However, some people leave legacies much larger than their professional or personal lives. One such individual was a simple Virginia farmboy who, through hard work and determination achieved greatness and created a lasting legacy in the process.

Charles Hilliard Callahan was born at Aquia Mills, Stafford County, VA August 22, 1858. He was the son of Allen and Sarah Callahan. Charles grew up on farms in Stafford, Prince William and Fairfax counties. As the son of a farmer, Charles received only a modest public education. By 1880, the Callahan family were living on a farm near Mount Vernon in Fairfax County. This proximity to the home of our first President George Washington, would have a profound and lasting impact on 21 year old Charles. From Mount Vernon Charles moved to Alexandria, VA to join his younger brother, John, who was serving as Deputy Clerk of the Circuit Court. By 1894, Charles too, was working for the City of Alexandria.

His affinity for George Washington probably motivated him to join the Alexandria-Washington Masonic Lodge No.22, in 1903. This was the very lodge in which Washington was

previously a member. In 1909, Charles became the Master of his lodge.

The lodge was the custodian of many valuable relics of George Washington. After a series of fires had destroyed several of these, Charles, as newly elected Master, embarked on an ambitious plan to erect a fireproof building to safeguard these relics. This idea soon grew into a National Masonic Memorial to honor America's most distinguished Mason - George Washington.

To assist with fund raising, Charles wrote a biography of the masonic life of George Washington. Washington, the Man and Mason was published in 1913 and was immensely popular. It is still used by Washington scholars today.

Slowly, the monument rose on Shooters Hill, the tallest point in Alexandria. In 1923, Charles, assisted by President Calvin Coolidge and Chief Justice William Howard Taft, presided over the laying of the cornerstone.

In 1924, Charles received another high honor and was elected the masonic Grand Master of Virginia. Nine years later in 1932, Charles again presided at the dedication of the completed memorial. President Herbert Hoover attended as a special guest. The services were attended by thousands.

While Charles was engaged in his monumental task, he no doubt still attended to his duties as the very popular Commissioner of the Revenue for the citizens of Alexandria. Evidence of his popularity is demonstrated by the fact that he was reelected to that position for forty six years until his death in 1944 at the age of 87! Charles' son, Aubrey Callahan, succeeded his father in office

and served as Commissioner of the Revenue for Alexandria until 1974. Together father and son served Alexandrians for a total of 76 years!

Fittingly, Charles Callahan was given one final honor. The George Washington National Memorial stands at 101 Callahan Drive, Alexandria, Virginia and is open to the public.

Sadly, Alexandria is now one of the six Virginia localities that does not maintain the traditional constitutional officer form of government. The offices of Commissioner of the Revenue and Treasurer were abolished by referendum in 1974.

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