

May 2008



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T r e s t l e b o a r d

Myths and Facts

by: Allen Roberts
From Northern Light Magazine

Masonic myths and outright falsehood are continually spread concerning Freemasonry. This is an attempt to set and keep the history of the Craft straight.

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

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

Freemasonry, actually, requires no exaggeration to magnify its greatness. The simple truth is all that is required to tell its story. This is the reason for this column; to attempt to destroy the myths that have been prevalent, often for centuries, by telling the truth. Let's begin with the period of the War for American Independence.

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

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

Arthur St. Clair of Pennsylvania. (For further study see Masonic Membership of the Founding Fathers, The Masonic Service Association, 8120 Fenton St., Silver Spring, MD 20910,)

Myth: Washington was Grand Master in Virginia.

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

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

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

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

Fact. To keep the record straight, there is much evidence of his

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

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

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

Myth: Freemasonry is a religion.

Fact: Absolutely false. This is one of several arguments employed by certain religious fanatics in an attempt to discredit Freemasonry. They quote Albert Pike and Henry Wilson Coil, among others, neither of whom was a man of the cloth, to "prove" their statements. Pike was not a researcher. Most of the hundreds of thousands of words he wrote came from his own mind, or the minds of others whom he never mentioned but with whom he agreed. Coil wrote millions of words about Freemasonry, and he was a lawyer and an excellent Masonic researcher. Most of the time the words of these and other writers are taken out of context to "prove" the thesis of the anti-Masons. Freemasonry's enemies conveniently ignore the thousands of Christian ministers, and some Rabbis, who prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that Freemasonry, although religious is far from being a religion. Here are just three of these Doctors of Divinity who have proven the critics in error: Joseph Fort Newton, Norman Vincent Peal and Forrest D. Haggard.

Myth. Pythagoras was Raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason.

Fact. So say the ritualists of yesteryear, and their successors have compounded the fabrication. Pythagoras was indeed a great man (see the forthcoming The Mystic Tie for his story). Although he left behind no writings of his own, his students did. His influence has extended to the

present day. It is little wonder his teachings have reached into Freemasonry, even if only fragmentarily. But, even if a form of Freemasonry was known while he lived (582-507 B.C.), he could not have been made a Master Mason. This degree wasn't invented (or had it evolved) until the late 1720's. Actually there are those who believe that the Freemasonry that did mature into what we have today was influenced by the Pythagoreans.

Myth: Freemasonry is a secret society.

Fact: Unequivocally false. This is widely stated and believed, even by Freemasons. Many Masons believe this so strongly they won't even talk to their wives and families about the Craft. Many writers of yesteryear helped promote this error. Our ritualists have added to the belief. The critics of Freemasonry want the world to believe in this secrecy because they have little else on which to stand. Yet by no stretch of the imagination can Masonry be termed a secret organization. If it was, no outsiders would even know it exists. Anything that is known is not secret. Without question there are many secret organizations throughout the world, but only men and women within those circles are familiar with them. Most, if not all, ritualistic religions have conclaves (literally: rooms locked with a key from outsiders). Should these be condemned along with Freemasonry? Secret means: "Kept from general knowledge or view; kept hidden; operating in a clandestine manner"; and on and on. Secret groups meet in places known only to the few. Freemasons meet in places clearly marked for the public to see. Secret outfits never record anything that might become public property. All Masonic functions are fully recorded, proceedings can be read by the general public, thousands of books have been written and published about Freemasonry, millions of words about the Craft come off printing presses every year.

The Northern Light is an excellent example. Members of secret bands never advertise their affiliation; Freemasons proudly wear the Square and Compasses and other emblems. There are NO SECRETS in Freemasonry. Everything about the fraternity is public to those who look. There are several excellent Masonic libraries such as the one in Lexington, but non-Masons rarely visit them. The so-called secrets in Freemasonry have been "revealed" over and over again in books that can be found in any library or large bookstore. With the coming of television these secrets, often distorted, have gone into the homes of millions of people. So let us dispel the myth that Freemasonry is a "secret Organization." It isn't. It never has been. (NOTE: Several Freemasons are

so concerned with the statements made in their churches about Masonic secrecy they asked for help in answering their critics. This is an attempt to help them.)