



LODGE VEGAS # 32

In 2013 we will celebrate Washington's 281st Birthday!



Why Today is Not “Presidents’ Day”

By James C. Rees, Executive Director, Historic Mount Vernon

Every February, thousands of shopping malls and car dealerships should be accused of false advertising during their massive “Presidents’ Day” sales. This annual holiday is not “Presidents’ Day.” Officially, it is the national tribute to only one president – George Washington.

Declared a legal holiday by the federal government in 1885, George Washington’s Birthday has culturally morphed into “Presidents’ Day.” Even the so-called authority on American holidays, *The American Book of Days*, has it wrong. In 1968, the “Monday Holiday Law” was enacted by the United States Congress to provide for uniform annual observances of public holidays. George Washington’s Birthday was slated to be recognized on the third Monday in February. The law was enacted in 1971, yet popular culture has perpetuated the myth that the holiday was designated to honor presidential officeholders in general. Officially, however, the holiday has never changed. Nor should it.

To lump Washington together with the 42 other men who have been elected president in this country does not assign him the significance he deserves. The only president to be elected unanimously – and it happened to him twice – Washington essentially shaped the office of the president. With tremendous foresight, he knew that his actions would set important precedents, and he conscientiously labored over many of his decisions. Unlike modern presidents, Washington did not conduct polls to determine what steps to take. Instead, he asked the same question, over and over again: “What is the best course for America?” His instincts were seldom wrong, and his patriotism never faltered. Washington once said, “I can never resist the call of my country,” and he responded to his country’s needs time and time again.

Washington’s critical role as commander in chief during the Revolutionary War, his refusal to become king when others called for it, his chairmanship of the Constitutional Convention, his ability to hold the nation together and remain neutral during European conflicts, and his wise and

steady influence during the nascent development of the new republic – these are just some of the reasons why Washington, The Father of His Country, should be given singular attention.

George Washington was said to be “first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen.” Unfortunately, that oft-repeated quote, originally proclaimed by Henry Lee at one of the hundreds of memorial services to George Washington, is not as ubiquitous as it once was. Schools no longer feature portraits of Washington in their classrooms, and children grow up with the vague notion that Washington was a great man, but they are unable to articulate why.

Many Americans may take seriously their love of country, yet evidence suggests we are caring less and less about the people and events that played key roles in the history of the United States. As author and historian David McCullough so eloquently said, “Indifference to history isn’t just ignorant; it’s a form of ingratitude.”

We have a long road to travel to reverse this disturbing trend. A good place to start is by returning “Presidents’ Day” to its rightful name and purpose. On this day that is set aside to honor George Washington, Americans should re-discover why he was so crucial to the founding of this nation. They should talk to their children about his renowned character and virtues. Families should plan trips to Mount Vernon and other historic places where Washington lived and worked. And most of all, Americans should shed their indifference and be grateful for the man who led this remarkable nation to freedom.

And wouldn’t it be refreshing if families postponed their trips to the mall to gather around the dinner table to talk about George Washington and the other Founding Fathers. That linen sale will still be there tomorrow, so don’t be bashful – have that second slice of cherry pie.

George Washington

On April 30, 1789, George Washington, standing on the balcony of Federal Hall on Wall Street in New York, took his oath of office as the first President of the United States. "As the first of every thing, in our situation will serve to establish a Precedent," he wrote James Madison, "it is devoutly wished on my part, that these precedents may be fixed on true principles."

Born in 1732 into a Virginia planter family, he learned the morals, manners, and body of knowledge requisite for an 18th century Virginia gentleman.

He pursued two intertwined interests: military arts and western expansion. At 16 he helped survey Shenandoah lands for Thomas, Lord Fairfax. Commissioned a lieutenant colonel in 1754, he fought the first skirmishes of what grew into the French and Indian War. The next year, as an aide to Gen. Edward Braddock, he escaped injury although four bullets ripped his coat and two horses were shot from under him.

From 1759 to the outbreak of the American Revolution, Washington managed his lands around Mount Vernon and served in the Virginia House of Burgesses. Married to a widow, Martha Dandridge Custis, he devoted himself to a busy and happy life. But like his fellow planters, Washington felt himself exploited by British merchants and hampered by British regulations. As the quarrel with the mother country grew acute, he moderately but firmly voiced his resistance to the restrictions.

When the Second Continental Congress assembled in Philadelphia in May 1775, Washington, one of the Virginia delegates, was elected Commander in Chief of the Continental Army. On July 3, 1775, at Cambridge, Massachusetts, he took command of his ill-trained troops and embarked upon a war that was to last six grueling years.

He realized early that the best strategy was to harass the British. He reported to Congress, "we should on all Occasions avoid a general Action, or put anything to the Risque, unless compelled by a necessity, into which we ought never to be drawn." Ensuing battles saw him fall back slowly, then strike unexpectedly. Finally in 1781 with the aid of French allies--he forced the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown.

Washington longed to retire to his fields at Mount Vernon. But he soon realized that the Nation under its Articles of Confederation was not functioning well, so he became a prime mover in the steps leading to the Constitutional Convention at Philadelphia in 1787. When the new Constitution was ratified, the Electoral College unanimously elected Washington President.

He did not infringe upon the policy making powers that he felt the Constitution gave Congress. But the determination of foreign policy became preponderantly a Presidential concern. When the French Revolution led to a major war between France and England, Washington refused to accept entirely the recommendations of either his Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, who was pro-French, or his Secretary of the Treasury Alexander Hamilton, who was pro-British. Rather, he insisted upon a neutral course until the United States could grow stronger.

To his disappointment, two parties were developing by the end of his first term. Wearing of politics, feeling old, he retired at the end of his second. In his Farewell Address, he urged his countrymen to forswear excessive party spirit and geographical distinctions. In foreign affairs, he warned against long-term alliances.

Washington enjoyed less than three years of retirement at Mount Vernon, for he died of a throat infection December 14, 1799. For months the Nation mourned him.

George Washington, The Mason

George Washington joined the Masonic Lodge in Fredericksburg, Virginia at the age of 20 in 1752. His Masonic membership, like the others public titles and duties he performed, was expected from a young man of his social status in colonial Virginia. During the War for Independence, General Washington attended Masonic celebration and religious observances in several states. He also supported Masonic Lodges that formed within army regiments.

At his first inauguration in 1791, President Washington took his oath of office on a Bible from St. John's Lodge in New York. During his two terms, he visited Masons in North and South Carolina and presided over the cornerstone ceremony for the U.S. Capitol in 1793.

In retirement, Washington became charter Master of the newly chartered Alexandria Lodge No. 22, sat for a portrait in his Masonic regalia, and in death, was buried with Masonic honors.

Such was Washington's character, that from almost the day he took his Masonic obligations until his death, he became the same man in private that he was in public. In Masonic terms, he remained "a just and upright Mason" and became a true Master Mason. Washington was, in Masonic terms, a "living stone" who became the cornerstone of American civilization. He remains the milestone others civilizations follow into liberty and equality. He is Freemasonry's "perfect ashlar" upon which countless Master Masons gauge their labors in their own Lodges and in their own communities.

[A Timeline of George Washington's Masonic Activities](#)

1752

- November 4, 1752 - Initiated as Entered Apprentice at Fredericksburg Lodge No. 4, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

1753

- March 3, 1753 - Passed to the Degree of Fellow Craft at Fredericksburg Lodge No. 4
- August 4, 1753 - Raised a Master Mason at Fredericksburg Lodge No. 4.

1778

- December 28, 1778 - Marched in a Masonic procession in celebration of Saint John the Evangelist Day

1779

- June 24, 1779 - Celebrated Saint John the Baptist Day with American Union Military Lodge at West Point, New York
- December 27, 1779 - Celebrated Saint John the Evangelist Day with American Union Military Lodge at Morristown, New Jersey

1781

- October - Reportedly visited Lodge No. 9 at Yorktown, VA with General Lafayette after defeat of British General Cornwallis

1782

- Brothers Watson and Cassoul of Nantes, France present Washington with exquisite silk Masonic apron, acknowledged by letter dated August 10
- June 24, 1782 - St. John the Baptist celebration - Marked with American Union Military Lodge at West Point, New York.
- December 27, 1782 - St. John the Evangelist Day - Celebrated with Solomon's Lodge No. 1, Poughkeepsie, New York.

1784

- June 24, 1784 - St. John the Baptist celebration - Marked with Alexandria Lodge, Alexandria, Virginia
- June 24, 1784 - Made an honorary member of Alexandria Lodge No. 39 (Now Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22) Alexandria, Virginia
- August 1784 - Presented a Masonic apron made by Madame de Lafayette to General and Bro. de Lafayette

1785

- February 12, 1785 - Walked in Masonic funeral procession for Bro. William Ramsay at Alexandria, Virginia

1788

- April 28, 1788 - Named Charter Worshipful Master of Alexandria Lodge No. 22 when a new charter from the Grand Lodge of Virginia was issued. Unanimously re-elected Master December 20, 1788 for one year.

1789

- Elected honorary member of Holland Lodge No. 8, New York, NY
- April 30- Inaugurated President of the United States using Bible from St. John's Lodge No. 1, New York

1791

- April 15, 1791 - Welcomed by members of St. John's Lodge No. 2, New Bern, NC
- May 1791 - Received the greetings of the Grand Lodge of South Carolina by General Mordecai Gist, Grand Master, Charleston, SC

1793

- September 18 Acting Grand Master - Laid the cornerstone for the United States Capitol, Washington, D.C. 1794 Sat for William Williams, portraitist, in Masonic regalia at the request of Alexandria Lodge 1797 March 28 Received a Masonic delegation from Alexandria Lodge

1798

- April 1, 1798 - Attended Alexandria Lodge No. 22 Proposed a toast at the banquet that followed

1799

- December 18, 1799 - Buried at Mount Vernon with Masonic rites as well as those of the church, conducted by Alexandria Lodge

“If the freedom of speech is taken away then dumb and silent we may led, like sheep to the slaughter”

George Washington