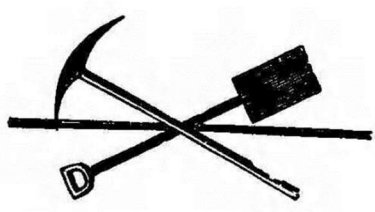


**THE GRAND HISTORIAN LECTURE**

**“AMERICAN CINCINNATUS”**

M.E. GLENN E. CHANDLER, SNR.

EX. GRAND HISTORIAN 2021-2022



**THE MOST EXCELLENT GRAND CHAPTER OF**

**ROYAL ARCH MASONS OF FLORIDA**

**MAY 17, 2022 A.D., 2552 A.I.**



# THE GRAND HISTORIANS LECTURE

## “AMERICAN CINCINNATUS”

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May 17, 2022 A.D., 2552 A.I.

Many of us already know quite a lot about George Washington, especially his role as Commander in Chief of the Continental Army, as President of the Constitutional Convention, or being the first President of the United States. However, prior to all this, he was simply a Freemason from the Colony of Virginia.

If George Washington were to become a Mason today, a large edifice would be needed to accommodate the Brethren at his initiation. But on the evening of November 4, 1752, only fourteen men gathered in a small Lodge room in the village of Fredericksburg to confer the Entered Apprentice Degree on a young gentleman farmer and surveyor, not yet twenty-one years of age. Four months later he was Passed to the Degree of Fellow Craft and, five months after that date, on August 4, 1753, he was raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason.

Five months after Washington was Raised, the first unquestioned minutes of a Lodge recording the conferring of the Royal Arch Degree are those from the Lodge at Fredericksburg Virginia for December 22, 1753. Apparently the Lodge was acting under

immemorial right and probably following the custom of conferring the Royal Arch Degree in the Lodge as a fourth degree.

What opinion did he form of the Fraternity? In his own words he stated, “The Masonic lessons I learned on my admission to Masonry and my contact and conversation with prominent Masons thereafter were of the greatest encouragement in after years when I encountered and underwent several trials, especially those of commencement and during the Revolution.”

Many Americans aren't aware of the many trials and hardships Washington faced as Commander of the Continental Army, much less that the American Revolution lasted for a period of eight long years. The quote that really says it all for me is the question he asked upon assuming command of the Continental Army early in 1775 and is, “Are these the men with which I am to defend America?”

The General was a keen judge of character; he knew how to “size a man up”. Accordingly he picked his aides carefully. Of the twenty-nine major generals on his staff, ten can be verified as Freemasons. Washington was essentially a man of action. He planned his campaigns in hours of deep reflection, upon which no intrusion was permitted. He was not a talker; he gave confidences to few; but mentally he rehearsed every part of his strategy-and everyone's part in it until every possible

movement, with all that it might entail, stood out in bold relief in the background of his mind. Contingencies were provided for: accidents considered; the unexpected especially guarded against. His favorite strategy (learned from the Indians) was to catch the enemy by surprise. Because the Redcoats expected surprise attacks at dawn, he recommended midnight. “A dark night and even a rainy one will contribute to your success,” said the Old Fox to his staff at councils of war. He took great precautions to prevent any leakage of his plans. Even major generals were, until the very moment of action, kept in ignorance. He believed strongly in reliable intelligence reports and overcame his natural stinginess to pay well for them. Washington lived in fear of enemy spies but that didn’t keep him from setting up his own elaborate spy network to gather information and to spread misinformation. Throughout the war, he was his own intelligence director. He proved himself a master of the game, running as many as a half dozen spy rings in Philadelphia and New York, and constantly urged his generals to follow suit. More than once he permitted British spies to rummage among his private papers-which had been carefully “doctored” for the occasion; with the result of directing the enemy attention to quarters where it would be least likely to interfere with Washington’s projects. At Valley Forge, he manufactured documents in his own handwriting, full of returns from imaginary infantry and cavalry regiments. Even the famous Christmas

evening crossing of the Delaware River that led to the victory at Trenton was set into motion by a spy Washington had personally recruited to pose as a loyalist butcher. The disguise was so convincing that Washington had to issue an order protecting the wife and children of the man he described as a “notorious Tory.” The night before the crossing, Washington had spent Christmas Eve brooding over the state of an army dressed in tatters and preparing to leave him within the week due to enlistment expirations. He had come up then with the countersign for the attack on Trenton, and he issued it on the riverbank, to be passed along the ranks. It was “Victory or death.”

The logistics of the Trenton Campaign of 1776 had been turned over once again to Colonel Henry Knox, the Boston bookseller who had overseen the dragging of cannon from Fort Ticonderoga. Knox, who stood six foot three and weighed two hundred and eighty pounds, had a deep bass voice that carried over the roar of the Delaware. When the advance guard had reached the other bank and secured the landing site, Washington boarded one of the boats. Soldiers were amused that the sharp wind had turned his nose bright red. Otherwise, the optimistic mood of the march had given way to uneasiness. Few men were dressed for the bitter chill, and sleet was threatening to dampen their ammunition. But General Washington was determined to be cheerful. As he stepped over men to get to where Henry Knox was sitting he hailed him coarsely, at least in

Knox's version. Few men ever penetrated Washington's careful reserve, and as his every word quickly went the rounds, it was usually touched up in the retelling. His troops enjoyed hearing that on this night Washington had nudged Knox with the toe of his boot and said, "Shift that fat ass, Harry. But slowly, or you'll swamp the damned boat!"

Over the years I have read various articles that inferred that Washington considered himself such an aristocrat that he refused to shake hands but bowed instead. At the close of the Revolution, after victory was achieved the following event took place. At noon on Tuesday, December 4, 1783, his officers in New York held a farewell dinner for him at Fraunces Tavern on Pearl Street. When the General arrived, his men seemed to hold their breath. No one spoke. Washington filled his glass with wine and raised it. "With a heart full of love and gratitude," he began, "I now take leave of you." Washington wished for them that their days ahead would be as prosperous and happy, as the days behind them had been glorious and honorable. His officers took up their glasses. Then Washington said, "I cannot come to each of you, but I shall feel obliged if each of you come and take me by the hand." General Henry "Ox" Knox was nearest. As he grasped the General's hand, Washington's face was bathed in tears and they embraced silently. After that, each officer came forward and kissed Washington on the cheek. The only sound was weeping.

No one present that day was more eager for peace than Washington. At the age of fifty-one, he had spent the last eight and a half years in uniform. In all those years he had been home to Mount Vernon for only three days; since the Continental Congress had given him command of a rustic rabble in 1775, he had lived in 280 borrowed houses. His once-auburn hair had gone gray; pale and haggard, his cougar-like head was wrinkled from a decade of worry, struggle, and sadness.

Yet there was something calm in his features, and he was still imposing in the saddle. A giant for his time, a full head taller than most men, Washington's 209 pounds were spread over a taut six-foot-four-and-a-half-inch frame. Wherever he went, crowds gathered to see the ramrod-straight man on the tall warhorse Ajax. But Washington had endured enough of war, uniforms, and flattery. The hero worship from strangers displeased him. Too many of his best friends had died before this day. He only wanted to go home to Mount Vernon.

When George Washington died on the 14th of December in 1799 at the age of sixty-seven, he was laid to rest with Masonic Funeral Ceremonies. He had written his own epitaph 2 1/2 years previously. Simple and eloquent, it declares: "I Have Acted Upon the Square."

Companions, thank you for your attention.

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