

COLLINGWOOD LIBRARY AND MUSEUM ON AMERICANISM

Bro. Nelson is a member of Vista Lodge #687, Vista, CA. and The National Sojourners, Inc. On October 20, 1976, without fanfare, a library and museum unique in America came into existence. It is an entity dedicated to providing information about our national heritage to the American public. This facility is available to anyone who cares to learn of the heroic efforts made by American Patriots, particularly members of the Masonic Fraternity, in founding and developing this great nation.

In the early 1970's the National President of National Sojourners, Inc. formed a committee to find and establish a National Home. In 1975 this committee reported to the National Convention that they had located what they believed to be the perfect property for this purpose. The real estate they had found consisted of almost nine acres fronting on both the Potomac River and the George Washington Memorial Parkway in Alexandria, VA. This property had been purchased by George Washington in 1760 and made a part of his River farm, the largest of the five working farms which were a part of the Mount Vernon estate. In 1785 a modest farm house was built, most likely as a residence for his assistant manager. As the years passed there were at least three major additions to the house. The current building had been neglected over the years while being put to a variety of uses. It was a "fixer-upper" to test the mettle of the most dedicated restoration devotee.

Although the convention considered the \$400,000 price tag too risky to be undertaken by such a small organization, the committee pressed ahead with plans to acquire the property because they believed it was an opportunity too good to pass up. Subsequently, on October 29, 1976, these courageous Masons founded a non-profit Corporation pursuant to the laws of the Commonwealth of Virginia and called it "The Foundation for National Library and Museum on Americanism."

The centerpiece of this property was a ramshackle colonial style mansion which had last been used as an upscale restaurant called "Collingwood on the Potomac." This building had been vacant for a long time, and consequently had fallen into disrepair. A call for help went out to members of the Order of National Sojourners, Inc., and to patriotic citizens all across the nation. Many responded enthusiastically with their time, effort, talent and money. The committee reported back to the National Sojourners National Convention in 1976, asking for and obtaining a commitment from the organization for voluntary funding support.

In the years since, much has happened. The mortgage has been paid in full! The building has been restored. Vinyl siding has been added to the exterior. An elevator to the second floor has been installed. A building for maintenance and storage has been built. A retaining wall has been placed along the riverfront to prevent further erosion. Three flag poles have been raised for display of the American Flag and the flags of National Sojourners, Inc. and the Heroes of '76 (an

affiliated Order). The grounds have been magnificently landscaped; a beautifully split-rail fence has been constructed around the property; wrought-iron gates have been placed at the entrances.

It has become a showplace for Americanism and for Freemasonry.

But with all the emphasis on restoration and appearance, the Directors never lost sight of the original purposes of the Foundation. First: to provide a home for National Sojourners, Inc. The National Headquarters of the Order moved into a suite of offices on the ground floor on April 1, 1978. Second: to acquire, catalogue, process, protect and present to the public; documents, literature, artifacts and displays which tend to promote, enhance and inspire patriotism in the citizens of the United States and portray the best possible image of our Nation's development to visitors from foreign lands; and further, to provide reference sources for students seeking material for themes, essays, dissertations and theses on the history of this nation. Stress has been placed upon, although has not been limited to, the patriotic contributions made by members of the Masonic Fraternity.

In keeping with this goal the Foundation has amassed over 6000 volumes of nonfiction books relating to American history and culture. The term "non-fiction" isn't exactly correct because there are a few books of fiction so historically accurate as to be of great value in the study of Americana. An example is the book, *My Antonia*, by Willa Cather which, although a book of fiction, is so historically accurate it is useful as a reference.

Examples of the library's unique collections include both a complete six volume set and an incomplete 39 volume set of the writings of George Washington which lacks only three volumes to complete; an extensive collection of American Indian history; a collection of *Harpers Magazine* beginning with issue number one, from 1850 through 1910; an unusually diverse and valuable 280 volume collection in the personal library of a former U.S.A Chief of Staff.

Also contained in the library is a 19,000 volume micro-fiche set of the *History of American Civilization* compiled by *Encyclopedia Britannica* and the *Smithsonian Institution*. There are only two these sets in Northern Virginia.

Also housed is a Library on Genealogy belonging to the District of Columbia Chapter of the *Descendants of the Mayflower*.

In addition to the large collection described above, there is an accumulation of over 400 books which relate Freemasonry in Colonial America, and approximately 80 volumes on early British Masonry. The library also has a collection of 47 American Grand Lodge Masonic Codes and histories. Efforts are continuing to collect them all.

While many of the books in the library very old, thus far all have been restored to mint condition through the generosity and talents of a dedicated veteran of World War 1. This outstanding Mason restored books for the Library of Congress and Smithsonian Institution until his recent death at the age of 92.

There are many rooms in Collingwood which are dedicated to specific purposes. One is an audio-visual room in which video and projection equipment is available for viewing an extensive collection of photographic slides and video tapes.

Another room, called the Heroes Room is dedicated to Masonic Heroes who risked their lives, their honor, and their fortunes to help establish this Republic. This room features a series of electronic light boxes picturing several of these great Masons along with an audio narration which describes some of their exploits.

There is a large conference room containing a massive antique dining room style table and adequate chairs suitable for small executive conferences. The main library is exquisitely furnished with period pieces. There are comfortable chairs conducive to reading and a large table on which to spread out reference books while working on a project.

Outside the building is a gazebo which, in addition to being an attractive landscaping feature, is often used for weddings. There is adequate room and facilities to cater receptions on the magnificently landscaped grounds. Collingwood hosts many such events each year. The maintenance building in the rear of the mansion contains catering facilities such as refrigeration, storage and clean-up accommodations. The elevator at the rear of the building is accessible from both the outside and the inside, making the second floor available for activities.

The Foundation exists entirely upon contributions from the public. Even though the property is fully paid for, improvements and maintenance continue. An effort is now under way to establish an endowment fund which will ensure that the Foundation will endure forever. (All donations are tax deductible.) The further in time we move from the American Revolution, the more important Collingwood will become. Especially needed are large bequests from the estates of patriotic Americans who believe that this Foundation is vital to the best interests of America. To this end the Directors of the Foundation are working to enlighten the public about what is offered here. The Directors have produced a 29minute video tape which is suitable for presentation either on television or as a meeting program. These video tapes are available free of charge to responsible individuals to check-out and return.

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