

GEORGE WASHINGTON MASONIC NATIONAL MEMORIAL

GEORGE WASHINGTON MASONIC NATIONAL MEMORIAL Proud Memorial or
Forgotten Legacy?

By Donald M. Robey, P.G.M.

The important question being asked in this Short Bulletin is "Proud Memorial or Forgotten Legacy?" Faced with increasing costs and decreasing income the George Washington Masonic National Memorial is now in serious trouble. This STB was prepared with the intent of telling the story of the Memorial's plight so that Masons everywhere may know exactly what the situation is! There is a short history of the Memorial and then a discussion of its financial situation. While a solution is suggested, the Memorial would welcome any other suggestions as to how to overcome this most serious problem! MSA thanks Don Robey, PGM of Virginia and a member of Alexander Washington Lodge # 22 for preparing this Short Talk Bulletin. -Editor

Just ten years after we entered the Twentieth Century the Grand Lodges of the United States united in a great National Masonic undertaking. They formed an Association to erect a Memorial to our most distinguished Mason Brother George Washington. The period between 1910 and 1922 was utilized to have the building designed and to get the fund raising operation underway to finance the construction of this massive undertaking. We must remember that during this time in our history the world was in a turmoil of controversy which resulted in World War One. On June 5, 1922 a small party of Masons and friends climbed to the top of Shooters Hill, on the West side of Alexandria, Virginia and after a short but formal ceremony, Col. Louis A. Watres, Past Grand Master of Pennsylvania and President of the Association and Charles H. Callahan, who became known locally as the founder of the Memorial, officially broke ground. The Cornerstone ceremony for the Memorial was held on November 1, 1923. Among the honored guests present for the ceremony were President and Mrs. Coolidge, Chief Justice Taft, Gov Trinkle of Virginia, almost all of the Grand Masters and many Past Grand Masters of the 48 states and many members of Congress and government officials. The list was indeed endless! The trowel used by George Washington when he laid the cornerstone of the United States Capitol in 1793 was permitted to be taken from the archives of Alexandria-Washington Lodge and used at this cornerstone laying ceremony. President Coolidge spread the first cement and each of the Grand Masters present advanced, one by one, and placed a small dab of cement on the resting place of the stone.

Construction continued during the 1920's and the outer facade of the building was completed in early 1932. 1932 was also the Bicentennial Anniversary of the birth of George Washington. Although the interior of the Memorial was far from complete, the Association decided to hold a Dedication Ceremony on May 12, 1932 to coincide with the Bicentennial celebration which was being observed throughout the country. All of the Grand Masters from the Forty-Eight Grand

Jurisdictions in the United States were present for the Dedication Ceremony. It was indeed a proud day for all Freemasons to so great an American as George Washington. Housed within this magnificent edifice is a Replica Lodge Room with the actual furnishings used by Washington while Master of his Lodge. Through the generosity of the two late Misses Patty and Anne Washington, and Alexandria Washington Lodge No. 22, the Association has the deed to Mount Vernon, the Washington family Bible (with the record of the births, baptisms, marriages and deaths), a portion of the library from Mount Vernon, many priceless oil paintings of historic significance, Washington's Lifeguard Flag and two original battle flags of Virginia Regiments of the Revolutionary War. The Washington Museum on the fourth floor was sponsored by the two Scottish Rite Jurisdictions as a joint effort. The Library on the sixth floor was furnished by the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania and contains well over six thousand volumes on Freemasonry. The A. Douglas Smith Lodge of Research, which meets in the Memorial, has volunteered to sort and catalogue the Library collection with the intent of making the Library available, in the near future, to Masonic scholars who wish to do research at the Memorial. Any Freemason who visits this beautiful Memorial cannot help but swell with pride in the fact that this building was constructed entirely with voluntary contributions from members of the Masonic Fraternity. The Memorial Association is the only unified effort of all of the Grand Lodges in the United States. The construction of this beautiful, awe-inspiring Memorial was the single most important 20th century endeavor by the entire Masonic fraternity. Each Grand Lodge is a sovereign body in its own territorial jurisdiction but the love and reverence for George Washington by the Masons in this country is amply demonstrated by the collective effort of all of the jurisdictions to keep this Memorial to Washington the Mason a living reality. All this is history.

Today the Association has a major problem: To establish this Memorial on a sound economic basis. We have an Endowment Fund of something under \$7,000,000; but:

- (1) Annual cost of operating this Memorial is about \$700,000
- (2) Annual income from the Endowment Fund is about \$36,000.
- (3) Annual contributions from Grand Lodges is about \$140,000
- (4) Annual contributions from Appendant Bodies is about \$70,000
- (5) Annual income from use of the building is about \$15,000.
- (6) Annual deficit is about \$115,000 and this cannot continue.

The Executive Committee of the Association has been struggling for several years to work within the income provided and yet maintain this Memorial in a manner befitting the memory of our greatest American Freemason, Brother George Washington. All but eight of the fifty-one Grand Jurisdictions, which are members of the Association, have adopted a \$5.00 per new initiate contribution to support the maintenance and operation of the Memorial. With the decline in the number of new initiates into our Lodges in every Grand Jurisdiction, the Memorial is faced with steadily declining income to support the operation and maintenance of the building. Many

members of the Grand Lodges in this country see an entry in the annual budget of their Grand Lodge indicating an amount for support of the George Washington Masonic National Memorial.

Many think this is money from the per capita tax, paid to the Grand Lodge from each member's dues to their subordinate Lodge, but this is not the case. A few Grand Lodges already have the necessary legislation in progress but no Grand Jurisdiction has a fixed per-capita tax to support the Memorial. The 1992 edition of the "List of Lodges Masonic" indicates that there are 2,500,000 members in the fifty-one Grand Jurisdictions in the United States. Just five years ago in 1987 this same publication reported that there were 2,750,000 members. This represents an average loss of nearly 1,000 members per year in each Grand Jurisdiction during this span of five years. The number of new initiates in each Jurisdiction is following a similar trend.

If each Grand Jurisdiction had just a \$0.15 per-capita tax pledged to support the operation of the Memorial this would be more than double the amount now received from the \$5.00 per new initiate plan utilized in most Grand Jurisdictions. Many Grand Jurisdictions have a State Chairman to represent the Memorial in their respective jurisdiction. Each State Chairman has brochures on the Memorial available for distribution to Lodges, and each State Chairman has a set of color slides which can be brought to individual Lodges for a program about the Memorial.

Unfortunately few Lodges take advantage of this resource for a program about the Memorial. A concentrated effort is being undertaken to improve awareness about the program and to make more Lodges aware of the Memorial. It should never be forgotten that this Memorial is a project of all of the Grand Lodges of the United States. It is now over 80 years since the Sovereign Grand Jurisdiction in this country united in this great enterprise to honor the memory of our greatest American and most well known freemason, George Washington. We have created a proud Memorial to a great man. I fear that as we face uncertain economic times in this Country and in our Grand Lodges, we tend to forget the sacrifices our forefathers made in getting this Memorial erected and dedicated. The greatest task we face today is to keep alive those dreams our predecessors had for this fraternity that we all love, and want to see continued for years to come. This Memorial stands for more than the memory of George Washington. It also stands for the hard work and contributions of millions of people who believe Freemasonry has a continuously important place in our nation and society!