



A History of Alexandria-Washington Lodge N^o 22

Founded in February of 1783, Alexandria-Washington Lodge N^o 22 is one of the oldest continuously existing institutions in Alexandria, preceded only by Historic Christ Church and the incorporated city itself. The first Masonic Lodge in the city, it was originally founded under a warrant from the Provisional Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania as Lodge N^o 39, and met in various taverns throughout the young town, until establishing its first dedicated meeting space in the Market Building on Cameron Street in 1802 [now City Hall].

A PARTICIPANT IN LOCAL AND NATIONAL HISTORY

The Lodge has been prominently involved in historical moments for both the city and the nation. A key public activity of Masonic Lodges is the laying of cornerstones for public buildings, and it is in this regard that Alexandria-Washington Lodge has distinguished itself through the years. In 1785 the Lodge laid its first cornerstone, for the Alexandria Academy, one of the nation's earliest public schools. In 1791 it laid the cornerstone at Jones Point, which defined the original southern boundary of the District of Columbia—"the bottom of the diamond". In 1793, the Lodge enjoyed what was perhaps its most significant historical moment, when it laid the cornerstone for the United States Capitol, with President Washington acting as Master.

At Washington's death in 1799, the Lodge organized and formed the Masonic funeral procession at Mount Vernon, an event it commemorates every year by laying a wreath at Washington's Tomb. In 1825, the Marquis de Lafayette was received by the Lodge during his famous tour of the nation. Additionally, the Lodge was invited to participate in the cornerstone laying for both the Smithsonian Institution and the Washington Monument, in 1847 and 1848 respectively.

A PENNSYLVANIA LODGE IN ALEXANDRIA

Two men were the prime movers behind the establishment of a Masonic Lodge in Alexandria: Robert Adam (1731-1789), a successful merchant and manufacturer, and Elisha Cullen Dick (1750-1825), a prominent physician. Both were already members of the fraternity. Adam had been made a Mason in an unknown or "clandestine" Lodge, possibly in Maryland. Dick, however, had been made a Mason in Philadelphia's Lodge N^o 2 in 1779, and this provided a clear path to seeking and receiving a warrant from Pennsylvania to form the Lodge.

In the early days of Freemasonry in Colonial America, the notion of “territorial jurisdiction” of Grand Lodges was not clearly and universally established. Lodges received their warrants or charters from different Grand Lodges throughout the world, or from Provisional Grand Lodges operating under their authority. The Provisional Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania was just such an entity. The newly formed Grand Lodge of Virginia, established in 1777, did not meet from 1780 to 1784, due to the Revolutionary War. Additionally, it was unknown to most Lodges operating in Virginia at that time. When discussion began in 1782 about forming a Lodge in Alexandria, a Pennsylvania warrant was the best and most practical choice for the aspiring Lodge to pursue.

Adam had to receive the Masonic degrees again before the two men would be granted the warrant for the Lodge. He completed this “healing” of his Masonic standing in Lodge N^o 2 on February 3, 1783, and at the Lodge’s first meeting on February 25, was installed as the first Master of the Lodge. He served in that capacity for over three years, and from all indications Robert Adam was a brother who took Masonry with the utmost seriousness. In a letter to the brethren shortly after the Lodge was founded, he wrote that the institution of Freemasonry should be “a sacred asylum of temperance, order, and decorum,” and “the rigid school of social virtue.” Elisha Cullen Dick became the Lodge Secretary, and would become a seminal player in the historical events to come thereafter.

The Lodge’s relationship with George Washington also began in 1783. Already a Freemason, and personally acquainted with both Adam and Dick, Washington received a letter from the Lodge dated December 26, welcoming him back to Mount Vernon after resigning his commission from the army, and inviting him to attend Lodge N^o 39 . He replied on December 28, addressing the following correspondence to “Robt. Adam, Esq., Master, Wardens and Treasurer of Lodge N^o 39.”:

“Gentlemen: with a pleasing sensibility I received your favor of the 26th, and beg leave to offer you my sincere thanks for the favorable sentiments with which it abounds. I shall always feel pleasure when it may be in my power to render service to Lodge N^o 39, and in every act of brotherly kindness to the members of it, being with great truth. Your affectionate Brother and obedient Servant, G^o. Washington.”

The following year Washington was again invited to join the Lodge, for its St. John’s Day celebration. He did attend, and at the lodge meeting that evening, on June 24, 1784, was elected to honorary membership.

THE BIRTH OF ALEXANDRIA LODGE N^o 22

In 1787, when the Provisional Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania decided to reconstitute itself as an independent Grand Lodge, Lodge N^o 39 elected to seek a charter from the Grand Lodge of Virginia. Elisha Cullen Dick was now Master of the Lodge, and there can be no doubt that he saw an enticing opportunity to make history with that act. A committee was appointed to call on Washington, to request his permission to be named the Charter Master of the proposed rededicated Virginia Lodge. On receiving his consent, a letter was sent to the Grand Lodge of Virginia requesting a charter, which was granted on April 28, 1788.

Thus it was that George Washington would become the first Master of the newly named Alexandria Lodge N^o 22. He was Master from April 28, 1788 to December 20, 1789, after which Dick returned to serve as Master for several years thereafter.

Washington is the only President of the United States to be Master of a Lodge while in office. Although we have no record of his ever actually presiding over a tyled meeting of the Lodge during that time, he was in the company of the Lodge on three occasions. The first was at the St. John's Day banquet held by the Lodge on June 24, 1784, where he was made a member of the Lodge. The second was at the laying of the cornerstone of the United States Capitol on September 1793, where the Lodge processed to the Capitol site under its banner, with Washington presiding as Master for the ceremony at the request of then Master Elisha Cullen Dick. The last occasion was at a dinner of the Lodge held on April 1, 1797, convened in his honor.

At Washington's death on December 14, 1799, one of the three attending physicians at his bedside was once again his loyal friend and brother Elisha Cullen Dick. At the moment of his death, Dick stopped the hands of his bedchamber clock, and this clock was then given to him by Martha Washington. Dick then gave the clock to the Lodge, where it has remained in our collection of artifacts since that time.

“HIS MEMORY IN OUR HEARTS”

In 1804, to honor the memory of its most famous brother, the Lodge petitioned the Grand Lodge of Virginia to change its name to Alexandria-Washington Lodge N^o 22. After some negotiation over the matter of whether or not the Lodge would be able to keep its original 1788 charter bearing Washington's name, the Grand Lodge agreed in 1805 to allow both the name change and the Lodge's possession of the original charter. A replica of that charter is on display in our Replica Lodge Room, as well as a replica of the 1783 warrant from Pennsylvania.

THE ALEXANDRIA-WASHINGTON LODGE MUSEUM

While it may seem that the creation of a public Masonic museum would be more commonly found as a 20th century development, Alexandria-Washington Lodge has, due to the nature of the relics it possesses, showcased its relics to the public for 200 years. The Lodge Museum was established on March 12, 1812, and historically forms the basis for the George Washington Masonic Memorial as a permanent exhibition hall for the Masonic artifacts of Brother Washington. Even the Lodge Gift Shop found in the Memorial today has its roots in this first museum, where small souvenirs were available to visitors as early as 1818.

DURING THE CIVIL WAR

The arrival of the Civil War in Alexandria meant that the normal operations of the Lodge would be interrupted. The Lodge 'dispensed' with its labors—a Masonic term meaning that the Lodge is not closed, but its work suspended—from May 23, 1861 to May 11, 1865, meeting only twice during that period to confer Masonic funerals. The same officers elected in 1860 held their positions in the Lodge until 1865.

**RESURGET CINERIBUS:
THE 1871 FIRE AND THE ORIGINS OF THE MEMORIAL**

After the war, the Lodge returned to its usual activity, building an additional banquet hall in 1868. But on May 19, 1871, a fire completely destroyed the Market Building. The Lodge was able to save most of her relics, but lost some cherished ones, including framed letters from Washington.

By the following year, an exact replica of the entire edifice was rebuilt on the same spot, and the square and compasses emblems placed on the facade of the Cameron Street entrance to the City Hall building in 1872 remain there today. Yet the fire gave rise to a sense of ongoing concern about the safety and security of the Washington relics owned by the Lodge. For many years thereafter there was discussion among the brethren of the idea to build a new, fireproof temple, not only to house those priceless items, but to serve as a unique monument to the Masonic life of Washington. Interest in such an endeavor rose even more as the nation observed the centennial of Washington's death in 1899.

On February 13, 1908, Alexandria-Washington Lodge N^o 22 created a committee to study the feasibility of building just such a temple, which would serve as a new, permanent home for the Lodge as well as her artifacts. Taking the lead on this committee was Charles H. Callahan, the Junior Warden of the Lodge, and the man who would be for all practical purposes, the father of the George Washington Masonic National Memorial. As the Commissioner of Revenue for Alexandria, Callahan was ideally placed to assist the Lodge in the project.

One year later, under Callahan's direction, the Lodge bought the first plots of land on which to build the new temple. But while the Lodge Committee to establish the Memorial had enthusiastically begun its work, everyone knew that it would take more than just the Lodge alone to make the grand vision a reality. Masonic protocol prohibited the Lodge from directly contacting the other Grand Lodges in the nation to ask their support for the project. Therefore, in the autumn of 1909, Alexandria-Washington Lodge asked the Grand Lodge of Virginia to make an invitation to those Grand Lodges on its behalf, to send representatives to assemble at the Lodge on Washington's Birthday to discuss this great and important undertaking.

On February 22, 1910, with Charles H. Callahan now Master of the Lodge, a meeting was convened in the Lodge Room, with representatives of eighteen Grand Lodges in attendance. At that meeting, M.: W.: William B. McChesney, Grand Master of Masons in Virginia, said the following:

“By the grace of God and the invitation of Alexandria-Washington Lodge N^o 22, we are here today to form an organization, which we hope will be as lasting as the memory of him whose birthday we celebrate. In the beginning I wish to state that this is a function entirely of Alexandria-Washington Lodge. I, like the other representatives from other Grand Jurisdictions, am an invited guest. They have conceived this to be something that is due the nation. Having, for their first Master, Worshipful Brother George Washington, they necessarily feel that he is of them and is theirs. They have priceless relics of his life surrounding them, and as they wish to preserve them for the benefit of Masonry in a national sense, propose to make this a national organization. If they desired to erect a building simply as an ornament to their city or for the comfort of their Lodge, the sale of these cherished heirlooms at public auction would yield a sum

sufficient to build the finest temple in Virginia, but appreciating their history and believing that the other Grand Jurisdictions feel as deeply interested in Brother Washington as they do, they come before you with this proposition, that the matter may be taken up as a national project.”

After making this statement, a resolution was proposed by Grand Master McChesney and adopted, which approved and endorsed the proposed erection of a Masonic Temple as a memorial to George Washington. The attendees agreed to reconvene the following year to formally create the George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association, and on February 22, 1911, the project was officially joined by Masons from throughout the country. At that meeting the Lodge was honored by the presence of Brother and President William Howard Taft.

THE LODGE TODAY

As Elisha Cullen Dick was the driving force in the early days of the Lodge, Callahan was that same force in the early days of the Memorial. He devoted all his energies to the effort, and he later took part in the ground breaking ceremony in 1922, as well as the cornerstone laying in 1923, an event attended by President Calvin Coolidge and Chief Justice Taft. The Lodge would have its own dedicated modern Lodge Room in the Memorial, as well as a Replica Lodge Room which was modeled on the style and exact dimensions of the old Lodge Room above City Hall. The historical artifacts would be exhibited both in those spaces as well as throughout the building.

While the Lodge did not move in to the Memorial completely until 1949, it did hold meetings in the building during its various stages of completion. The first man to be made a Master Mason in the new structure was Brother Robert S. Cochran, on November 14, 1929.

In the same way that Washington honored the Lodge with his presence in its infancy, President Harry S. Truman visited Alexandria-Washington Lodge during its rebirth in the Memorial, both before and after he became President. A Past Grand Master of Missouri, President Truman even participated in a degree ceremony, briefly presiding over the Lodge during that same meeting. Aside from the completion of the long-awaited Memorial, this was the crowning moment for the Lodge in the 20th century.

The 21st century finds the Lodge as a leader in Masonic excellence. Masons from all over the world frequently visit its meetings. In everything it does, Alexandria-Washington Lodge seeks to embody best practices, in order to honor the reputation of Freemasonry as well as its Charter Master.

With members who share a sincere commitment to the same Masonic principles that attracted men like Washington to join it, the Lodge not only survives, but is thriving towards the achievement of its third century in existence. Through Masonry, we unite in true friendship men of every race, creed and opinion, who might otherwise remain at a perpetual distance. We are proud of our ongoing contribution to our city and our fraternity.

