

George washington – life of a freemason

[History](#), [American History](#)



Since the late 14th century, the Freemasons have established themselves as a society with great influence, power, and mystique. For centuries the notorious society influenced many aspects of various civilizations throughout the course of history. Some of these facets include politics, economics, culture, and social life.

The subject of Freemasonry during the United States' rise and the American Revolution seems to spark controversy between experts as to the extent of their influence over the colonies and its' major players; in particular George Washington. Throughout the history of the United States, historians and biographers of George Washington have written or discussed the life of the Father of Our Nation. From his childhood at Ferry Farm, through his military career and presidency, and ending with his death at Mount Vernon, Washington has been praised and scrutinized as a dedicated Freemason. While our first president was famous for being a Freemason, a Thirty-Third degree Mason to be exact, there are many sources which demonstrate Washington having an indifferent relationship with the fraternity.

It is no secret that the Freemasons have been the center of countless conspiracy theories as to their intentions or motivations behind many historical events, such as the American Revolution. Aside from Masonic lodges that were known to be major points of contact between military officers, well-documented Masons contributed to our Declaration of Independence, specifically George Washington. As the general of the First Continental Army, Washington established himself as not only a great military strategist, but as a tactician within the world of espionage. Washington was known to have developed a ring of spies designed to

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infiltrate military posts and colonies occupied by the British. As to the point of his induction in the Freemasons, historians have written that Washington's commitment to the fraternity was at the least wavering, if not completely non-existent.

The purpose of my research proposal is to discover and identify Washington's relationship with the Freemason Brotherhood. Was it for personal and social growth, or to infiltrate the organization in preparation of a revolution? For many, Washington was viewed as a committed Mason, while others did not. Manuscripts and correspondence obtained through the centuries, exhibited Washington as uncommitted.

In his early years, Washington never took Freemasonry very seriously; for him, as for so many other colonial gentlemen, it was originally just a social club. After he was raised to the third degree in August 1753, he only twice in his life attended a meeting of his Fredericksburg lodge. It was only after the Revolution, when he was President of the United States and the Freemasons had come to be regarded as the men who had made the Revolution, which he attended, in his Masonic apron, the laying of the foundation stone of the Capitol in the new city of Washington, DC, in 1793.

It may be conceivable that Washington's membership into the Freemason organization was an attempt to penetrate British strongholds with the hopes that classified information may help the colonies claim victory. This notion can invite challenge by experts since any evidence indirectly labels Washington as a spy within the Society.

It is stated that there are still a large number of Washington papers in the Library of Congress that are not accessible, as they have thus far not been classified or indexed. Thus, it is in the possibilities that there may be still further documentary evidence found of Masonic import in addition to such as are set forth upon these pages.

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Although he wrote letter indication that he was happy to be a Freemason, or repudiate his Masonic membership, there is little to no evidence that he attended many Masonic lodge meetings after his initiation in 1753 he seems not to have participated in meetings of the lodge of which he was the first Master of what today is called Alexandria-Washington Lodge No. 22. While Master of the lodge, he did not assist in the work of the lodge. In one puzzling letter he denied that he was a Mason.

In his book, *The Freemasons in America*, H. Paul Jeffers discusses Washington and his obligation to the Freemasons. Although a strong case can be made that Washington's commitment to his Masonic brothers was indecisive, it could be argued that General Washington was much too concerned with the impending Revolution. However, it should be pointed out that many other Freemasons were heavily involved with our independence, in particular Benjamin Franklin. While there is no suggestion of betrayal to the Masons, there seems to be a tone of indifference. As with the writings of historian Jasper Ridley, author of *The Freemason: A History of the World's Most Powerful Secret Society*, Jeffers furthers a notion that Washington's

participation in the Society and becoming a Master Mason may have been purely strategic.

David G. Hackett, writer of *That Religion in Which All Men Agree: Freemasonry in American Culture*, examines Masonic lodges as a network for military officers as well as the development of Christianity within the colonies. Lodges were more effective than Christian ministers in building ties among Continental Army officers. In comparison to the historical writings mentioned above, Hackett displays some irregularity as to Washington's involvement with Masonic meetings.

On July 4, 1775, the day after Washington took command, he reminded the army that the Articles of War forbade profane cursing, swearing and drunkenness and imposed on all officers and men when not on duty punctual attendance on Divine Service to implore the blessing of heaven upon the means used for our safety and defence. Despite this, he found it necessary throughout the war to reiterate the obligation of men and officers to attend divine services.

According to historians, Jasper Ridley and H. Paul Jeffers, there is no proof or documents that Washington himself ever attended any meetings after his initiation. In support of my argument, it's plausible that Washington advised his officers to attend services with the intention of conducting military operations. Furthermore, it's debatable that Washington's religious affiliation was fairly loose; as if he never declared a denomination. According to biographers David and Jeanne Heidler, authors of *Washington's Circle: the*

Creation of the President, Washington acknowledged Heaven and a Higher Power, but never references God. During his inauguration speech:

Each of the six paragraphs in the inaugural address he had just delivered contained a reference to God as a higher power and the ultimate authority. Washington spoke of fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the universe, paid homage to the Great Author of every public and private good, invoked God as a providential agency, and noted the propitious smiles of Heaven.

Washington is frequently added to the list as a passive participant (Christianity) - a reluctant Anglican at best, a secular realist at heart.

Nevertheless, few agree about Washington's religious beliefs. It is true that after the Revolution, he ceased taking communion. Historian Mary Thompson, whose knowledge is unsurpassed on the subject, believes that Washington in his later years became uncomfortable with the Episcopalian teachings of his youth. In short, his concept of Christian charity became both broader and simpler.

For many Freemason enthusiasts, it is widely known that belief in God is necessary for membership. The oath that the candidate takes at the altar is, therefore, seen as being taken in front of God as well as the lodge. The oath itself conveys the duties, rights and expectations of the candidate; at a deeper level, it also represents a personal relationship with God. God is at the heart of Masonry.

A rationale can be made that while Washington referred to a Higher Spirit, suggesting faith in God, his claim to be a devout Christian is disputable and therefore in defiance of Masonic teachings. And although much of the text written by Heidler supports this notion, Heidler displays a major flaw. Even though Washington never explicitly explained his own beliefs in a concise manifesto, he obviously believed in God as a participant, an agency, in the lives of men and women and nations. With this in mind, it becomes apparent that David and Jeanne Heidler favor Washington as a servant of God. But any beliefs Washington had in God were anything but obvious, and displaying an impartial devotion to Him is unfitting within Christianity.

In his book, *The Secret World of the Freemasons*, author Tim Dedopulus explores the importance of the Society's role in the American Revolution. Along with their central position, Dedopulus states Washington's influence on the Revolution.

The colonies had entirely separate governments, different religious tendencies, widely separate social standards, and highly disparate national origins. All of them were fiercely independent once again; Freemasonry was the sole point of common contact. It offered a point of contact, some structure, and a social outlet. As the American Revolution kicked off, it was largely the will and spirit of George Washington that held the colonial army together. A long-standing Mason, he was known to refer to Freemasonry's cross-colony influence as the cement which binds us together. There were military lodges across the colonial army as well, and Washington is said to

have visited them all personally, helping them to inspire courage, hope and morale.

Taking this statement into account, it's undeniable that the Freemasons played a pivotal part in the American Revolution and Washington was at the center. Even though there is no mention that clearly identifies Washington as an infiltrator in the organization, it may be possible that he had the foresight of Freemason authority and determined the value of membership. And while his ideas may hold substance for my research proposal, Dedopolus visibly shows favoritism towards the Brotherhood and Washington. He states that US Founding Father and President George Washington was a dedicated Freemason. But as discussed, Washington never attended lodge meetings. There is little evidence through the Washington Papers and secondary sources which indicate Washington as a devoted Freemason.

Many of the secondary sources provide factual information known to historians and biographers of George Washington. And although many writers have different views on our first president, there seems to be a consensus that Washington was of high moral standard and exhibited traits of America's favorite hero. However, sifting through multiple writings, there is an underlying of confusion as to Washington's tactics and strategies. As I pieced together different perspectives from various authors, it's clear that he was either regarded as military genius, or completely inept as a strategist. While most, if not all of the evidence to support my proposal is circumstantial, I have chosen to interpret these findings in demonstrating Washington's ability to disguise and mislead. Ultimately, I find the possibility

that Washington may have infiltrated the Freemasons in order to gather British intelligence as potentially promising, or at the very least uncommitted.

That though General Washington caused to be carefully copied in books kept for that purpose, all his letters on every subject, no trace whatever of any of the five letters under consideration, nor any letters to any other Lodge or Masonic body whatever, are to be found among the records of his correspondence. That although WASHINGTON was extremely scrupulous in preserving his correspondence with all public or private bodies, there is not a line of his relating to Freemasonry, to be found among all his papers, except the correspondence with Mr. Snyder! It is also a fact that WASHINGTON was equally scrupulous in dating his letters, and it is believed that not one can be found, which is without a date.

This passage, written by Jared Sparks, a historian at the turn of the 20th century, and renowned bibliographer of George Washington, is one of many in Washington's Masonic Correspondence found in The Washington Papers. The five letters referenced, refer to correspondence believed to be written by Washington to five Grand Lodges. The Masonic Correspondence archives were originally compiled by Julius F. Sachse; librarian of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania. Although Sachse was thought of as a meticulous and honest archivist of Washington's Masonic Correspondence, his own involvement may be considered a potential limitation in that Sachse himself was a Freemason. Although Sachse credits the Anti-Masonic party, Jared Sparks in particular, Sachse summarizes Washington's letters with a biased interpretation.

A careful study of this correspondences carefully cherished by WASHINGTON, puts an entirely new phase upon WASHINGTONS connection with the Masonic Fraternity, and his esteem of Freemasonry. These papers absolutely thrust aside all of the statements, arguments and libels, brought forth by our misguided enemies at the time of the Anti-Masonic craze during the last century, and in a small way kept alive even down to the present day by some people who are blinded by their ignorance or malice; referring to some of their published statements that Washington never belonged to the Masonic Fraternity and that there were neither authentic Masonic letters nor copies thereof among his records so frequently made during the political Anti-Masonic craze.

Because the Washington Masonic Correspondence is incomplete, this drawback offers little solution to any prejudices uncovered by historians. Many documents were lost throughout history, along with remaining letters which are still in the Library of Congress. These manuscripts which have been unseen by the public could very well be the answer to overcome any restraints held by Washington's Correspondence.

To his credit, Washington was observed and praised by many for maintaining his steadfast devotion to the Freemasons and as a faithful servant to God; both publically and privately. In a publication by the Newport Herald titled Ratification by The States, on August 19, 1790, the Society of Freemasons addressed George Washington in lieu of the victory during the American Revolution. In this address, the Society commended Washington as being

both an excellent Commander and President, as well as upholding his duties as a Freemason.

To GEORGE WASHINGTON, President of the United States of America.

We the Master, Wardens, and Brethren, of King David's Lodge, in Newport, Rhode-Island, joyfully embrace this Opportunity, to greet you as a Brother, and to hail you welcome to Rhode-Island. We exult in the Thought, that as Masonry has always been patronised by the Wise, the Good, and the Great, so hath it stood, and ever will stand, as its Fixtures are on the immutable Pillars of Faith, Hope, and Charity." With unspeakable Pleasure, we gratulate you as filling the Presidential Chair, with the Applause of a numerous and enlightened People" whilst, at the same Time, we felicitate Ourselves in the Honour done the Brotherhood, by your many exemplary Virtues and Emanations of Goodness proceeding from a Heart worthy of possessing the ancient Mysteries of our Craft, being persuaded that the Wisdom and Grace with which Heaven has endowed you, will ever Square all your Thoughts, Words, and Actions by the eternal Laws of Honour, Equity, and Truth; so as to promote the Advancement of all good Works, your own Happiness, and that of Mankind" Permit us, then, illustrious Brother, cordially to salute you, with Three Times Three, and to add our fervent Supplications, that the Sovereign Architect of the Universe, may always en-compass you with his holy Protection.

This dedication, along with admiration, paid tribute to George Washington as a devout Mason with the honor of the Thirty-third Degree Master Mason; the

highest honor of the Society. In addition, Washington was also acclaimed as a pious Christian by the Newport Clergy:

To GEORGE WASHINGTON, President of the United States of America.

The Address of the Clergy of the town of Newport, in the State of Rhode-Island.

SIR, With salutations of the most cordial esteem and regard, permit us the Clergy of ??? the Town of??© Newport, to approach your person, intreating your acceptance of our voice in conjunction with that of our fellow-citizens, to hail you welcome to Rhode-Island.

Shielded by Omnipotence, during a tedious and unnatural war," wise, as a messenger sent from Heaven, in conducting the councils of the cabinet" and, under many embarrassments, directing the operations of the field; Divine Providence crown'd your temples with unfading laurels, and put into your hand the peacefully-waving olive-branch. Long may you live, Sir, highly favored of GOD and beloved of men, to preside in the grand council of our nation, which, we trust, will not cease to supplicate Heaven, that its select and divine influences may descend and rest upon you, endowing you with grace, wisdom, and understanding, to go out and in before this numerous and free people; to preside over whom Divine Providence hath raised you up.

And therefore," before GOD, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, in whom all the families both in heaven and earth are named, according to the law of our office, and in bounden duty," we bow our knee" beseeching him to grant you every temporal and spiritual blessing" and that, of the plentitude of his

grace, all the families of these wide extended realms, may enjoy, under an equal and judicious administration of government, peace and prosperity, with all the blessings attendant on civil and religious liberty.

These passages can give cause as to Washington's deep devotion to God and the Masonic Order; however, these letters conveying admiration, could merely be a formality, or possibly obligatory to gain favor, in other words: to play politics.

The overall consensus of George Washington is one of approval and applause; mainly as a General and the First President. And although many sources, both primary and secondary, continue to discuss his personal life with regards to Christianity and Freemasonry, there is reason to believe that many findings are circumstantial as to his commitment to either.

Unfortunately, very little primary sources exist pertaining to the analysis of Washington and his Brethren. It may be feasible that the Library of Congress as well as the Grand Lodges of Fredericksburg and Alexandria may contain further documents supporting my proposal. On the opposite side of the spectrum, the Anti-Masonic party offers little to no evidence. Any proof or indications made by the party could also be considered one of partiality. However, the ambiguity surrounding Washington's relationship with the Freemasons can be viewed as evidence in itself in support of my argument; after all, it would not be the first time an American organization hid their dirty laundry.