

The Happiness of Mankind: George Washington's and Freemasonry's Utopian Vision for the American Republic, 1783 -1793

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Much has been written about George Washington's relationship to Freemasonry. Most of the work on this topic has been done by freemasons seeking to prove Washington was indeed a member of the fraternity. Why was this done? Since Washington's death in 1799 many have questioned Freemasonry's purposes and Washington's membership therein. This was especially true during the American Anti-Masonic period of the 1820s and 30s but continues into the 21st century. Such writing was done for two main reasons. First, freemasons gain legitimacy and honour by confirming Washington's membership, with the greatest example of this being the George Washington Masonic National Memorial, in Alexandria, Virginia. Second, George Washington inspired men to join the fraternity.

But little has been written about George Washington's own understanding and use of the Craft. Why did he join and why did he remain a freemason throughout his life? What was his understanding of it its purposes as it related to the American independence and more especially during his period of military and civilian leadership from 1775 –1797?

This paper will explain Masonry from Washington's point of view as it supported his vision for a utopia in America. While it is impossible to know Washington's mind, this paper will present a different narrative that weaves together Washington's political statements with masonic constitutions and lectures in the 1700s. Through this it will be seen how Freemasonry completed Washington's political vision.

First, however, this paper will examine colonial Freemasonry as a utopian construct from the 1730s through the 1770s. Second, the paper will discuss Freemasonry's rapid change from 1775 through 1786; this includes how the utopian vision was applied in practical political terms. Third, it will look at Washington's use and understanding of Freemasonry during his command of the Continental Army and then as President of the United States. Fourth, it will consider Freemasonry during Washington's presidency to see if it was indeed a functioning utopia. The paper concludes with the questions: if a utopia was achieved how long did it last and why did it end? Each of these points will place Freemasonry into a context during the lifetime of George Washington.

Two premises need articulation before beginning. First, Freemasonry is a product of the Enlightenment and as such it reflects its context in the macro and micro levels. Second, George Washington, born in 1732, is also a child of the Enlightenment, albeit on the fringe of the North American colonies. Therefore as the Father of his Country, Washington's understanding of the Enlightenment and Freemasonry largely determined America's and American Freemasonry's development after independence from Great Britain. In other words, if Washington had an Enlightenment utopian vision did it come from Freemasonry and if so was it achieved?

As stated many times, the North American British colonies, and indeed the New World, were promoted as a paradise or a utopia. Simply put, the colonies were started as utopian visions from the Puritan's "Errand in the Wilderness" and the Biblical "shining city on a hill." The Quakers of Pennsylvania, the cavalier planters in the Virginian tidewater and Oglethorpe's settlement of

Georgia were all utopian ideals. Through the 1600s until the last of the thirteen was founded in 1734, each colony had its own religious, social, economic and political vision. Yet all were united by their British culture and under the British Crown.

Developing at the same time, first in Scotland then England and Ireland was Freemasonry. Created out of stonemasons' use of King Solomon's Temple as allegory and symbolism Freemasonry expressed a vision of "the brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God." The masonic lodge brought together a variety of men who shared the honour of working within a perfected community for the glory of God and happiness of mankind. Freemasonry's allegorical and symbolic world is indeed utopia in microcosm. Within the tyled lodge all men are equal.ⁱ

The first known freemason in the American colonies was John Skeene, a Scots freemason who immigrated to New Jersey in 1682 and died in 1690. The first American born freemason was Jonathan Belcher born in Boston in 1681 and made a mason in London in 1704. He was later colonial governor of Massachusetts and New Hampshire. While we know there were lodges that met in Philadelphia in the late 1720s and early 1730s, the first duly constituted lodge in North America was in 1733 in Boston, now known as St. John's Lodge. Also during this decade the first book on Freemasonry was published in the America. Philadelphia's rising star Benjamin Franklin reprinted Anderson's *Constitutions of the Free-Masons* in 1734. We know he sent 50 copies to his brother, James Franklin in Boston to sell and another dozen to the Carolinas. Today there are seventeen copies known to exist.ⁱⁱ

Although during this stage there were no uniform regulations, modes of recognition and a wide variety of rituals, these first American lodges still shared a vision focused on Solomon's Temple and taught a common morality of quality, brotherly love, relief, and truth. Beginning in the mid-1720s, numerous exposures of the masonic ritual would be published – a practice that continues to this day both in books and on the Internet.ⁱⁱⁱ

At the age of twenty, George Washington was initiated in the Lodge at Fredericksburg, Virginia. What exact variety of Freemasonry was taught to Washington is unclear but with the spread of Franklin's edition of *Constitutions* at least a uniformity of principles or "charges" was understood.

Anderson's *Constitutions* is the first articulation of Freemasonry's utopian vision and through it colonial masons came to understand what they were joining and what was expected of them as brothers. Anderson's charges include such revolutionary concepts as the "IV Charge" regarding "Masters, Wardens, Fellows and Apprentices":

All Preferment among Masons is grounded upon real worth and personal merit only, that so the Lords may be well served, the Brethren not put to shame, nor the Royal Craft despised: Therefore no Master or Warden is chosen not by seniority, but for his merit.^{iv}

Here is a clear statement against prerogatives by birth or social class. Only by merit may a brother become a lodge master after serving as a warden; and wardens may only be a lodge master by due merit. Merit also includes those of royal or noble blood but, and this is key, it is not reserved only to those born of nobility.

If merit determines a lodge's officers, what are the qualifications to become a freemason? Anderson states:

Good and true men, free born, and of mature and discrete, no bondsmen, no women, no immoral or scandalous Men but of good report.^v

Therefore a man must possess a certain quality of morality and merit prior to his petitioning for membership. Once a member, what does a brother do to earn merit to gain high lodge office? Anderson states first “A mason is obliged to by his tenure to obey the moral law.” Then through religious toleration, yet affirmation in deity, as “No stupid atheist nor an irreligious libertine.” So that:

Masonry becomes the centre of Union, and the means to conciliating true friendship among persons that must otherwise have remain'd at a perpetual distance.^{vi}

With Anderson's precepts, Americans began joining and forming lodges—most often assisted by immigrant freemasons. Such was the case when Washington joined in Fredericksburg VA.

Between the 1730s and 1750s, American Freemasonry exhibited three characteristics. First, it was cosmopolitan in that it was connected to military, commercial and even religious networks linking back to London and Edinburgh and through the European empires. Second, the British Grand Lodges appointed Provincial Grand Masters, similar to colonial governors, that exercised a wide range of powers, yet still answerable and subordinate to their “home” Grand Lodge. Third, and most important, because of the very nature of colonial society it articulated a form of meritocracy. Due to a small population great success was more common in the colonies, while the ability to rise within the lodge and society was rare indeed in Europe.

Through Anderson's *Constitutions* and Franklin's reprinting and distribution, Freemasonry spread through the colonies. Simultaneously the colonies economically, socially and politically matured and a movement toward independence quickened. The Seven Years War, started in part by George Washington in Pennsylvania, saw the British Crown capture French Canada including Louisbourg and Quebec by 1759. But with peace such gains were returned and French-supporting Indian tribes were placated. The colonies were obliged to repay the war debt through what they perceived as “cruel” taxes on stamps, tea, playing-cards, etc. The war was fought by colonists and then paid for by colonists, yet the Crown denied North American residents the right to settle on western land. Moreover, British politicians denied colonial representation in parliament, or any other tangible reward, thus encouraging sedition during the 1760s and early 1770s.

As anger against the Crown drove the colonies toward unity, they remained distinctive. While each colony was different in its purpose, economy, ethnic and racial make up, and religious demography, three grass-roots movements began to bind them: First, a growing percentage of the population shared resentment toward the Crown. Second, a growing number of printing presses and newspapers informed the people. Third, the burgeoning network of lodges within each colony taught universal tenets concerning morality, equality, and self-improvement.

While each colony had its own vision under the Crown's protection, Freemasonry presented a unique transcendent vision. The colonies were founded by the English and predominantly run by the English. Hence they continued to uphold divine right, aristocracy, military and naval supremacy. Freemasonry as a product of the Enlightenment was British in its creation but universal in vision and based on the same evolving philosophical and political concepts: self-determination, enlightenment, dispassionate self-regulation, and the belief that human agency can control environment and improve society.

Into this early stage of colonial maturity and masonic development George Washington was born in 1732 – just one year before the first lodge in Boston and two years before Franklin's

republication of *The Constitutions*. Washington was born to an elite family in Virginia. His first thirty years were a time of great energy, experience, disappointment, failure and, of course, maturing.

In 1752, when he was twenty years old George Washington joined his “hometown” Fredericksburg Lodge. His sponsor into the lodge, it appears, was his friend Charles Lewis who was also the brother to his sister’s husband, Colonel Fielding Lewis. Why would Washington join? For the same reasons young men join today: to be connected to something beyond the small town, the colony or even the empire. He certainly wanted association with mature and important men, acceptance in small town life, and to make new connections and strengthen established ones.

In the decade of Washington’s initiation Freemasonry experienced its first division. In 1751 the ‘Antients’ Grand Lodge in London was founded. The ‘Antients’ Grand Lodge chartered lodges more promiscuously than the elder so-called ‘Modern’ Grand Lodge. By 1760 the Antients Grand Lodge chartered lodges from India, to Gibraltar, to the Caribbean and North America. Causing greater confusion were the Scots with their brand of Masonry as they entered into the colonies in greater numbers. Indeed Fredericksburg freemasons received their charter from the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1758. Although six years after his initiation, this event did make Washington, in some respects, a Scottish freemason.

After being raised to the Third Degree of Master Mason, there is no record that Washington attended a lodge until 1775 during the War for Independence. In the intervening 23 years, however, Washington developed in a capable military and political leader. He was educated at home largely by tutors, and worked as a surveyor and spent several years in the Virginia militia. In 1775 he was appointed an aide in the disastrous Braddock expedition to western Pennsylvania. Three years later he returned to Pennsylvania as an officer in General Forbes’ successful expedition to what is now Pittsburgh. In between he fought Indians on the Virginia frontier as a militia colonel. Finally marrying the widow Martha Custis, at the age of 26, Washington retired from active service to focus on his domestic life and the prosperity of his plantation, Mount Vernon. He was frustrated never to receive proper recognition for his service to the Crown. He was also frustrated by the colonies. For years he witnessed the inability of the various colonial governors to coordinate efforts to stop Indian raids coming down from Canada and New York into Virginia and North Carolina. By 1760 he was well aware of the shortcomings and problems of both imperial and colonial governments.

In the 1760s he struggled to make Mount Vernon successful and to free himself from the debt and control of London factors and tobacco merchants. He learned the harsh realities of being a colonial when his requests were modified, his credit ruined and the market for his crops manipulated by European’s exchanges.^{vii}

By the 1770s the colonial political leadership, that included Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Samuel Adams and Thomas Paine, believed two things. First, that intellectual development had progressed sufficiently for a republic to be again a viable system of governance. And second, the various colonies were economically and politically mature enough to separate themselves from the British Crown. By 1775, Washington was also committed to independence, regardless of what form it might take. Perhaps the audacity, optimism, and confidence of many of the Founding Fathers to create a new republic (or republics) came from their experience in masonic lodges. In these lodges they witnessed in the microcosm a utopian culture of equality that they might write large. Such discussion to form a national republic governed by masons and run by masonic constitution is highly doubtful, as events will show.

Between the Boston Massacre in 1770 and the first shots at Lexington in 1775, both the Crown and the colonies sought various ways to impose their will, come to amicable terms or manoeuvre for peaceful resolution. Passing over the causes and the details, the revolution began at Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts on 19 April 1775. The results of these battles, besides a defeat for the British Army, forced every colony to respond. Those assembled in the Continental Congress in June selected George Washington as Commander in Chief and appointed him to take charge of forces that were besieging the British Army in Boston. At this moment, Washington took his place on the world stage and would remain there for the rest of his life.

Despite violent political and military reaction, the colonists themselves remained ambivalent. One third of the population supported independence, one third remained loyal to the Crown, and one third was indifferent. The same can be said about the delegates to the Continental Congress. Each had its own vision of the future if independence was achieved. All of them preferred to retain their own resources, money and men. For example, after Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence in 1776 he returned to Virginia to be governor of his “nation”. He did not serve in the Continental Army or return to the Continental Congress.

While colonial leaders pursued a political, military and diplomatic means to secure independence, Freemasonry was not so sure. What does Anderson’s *Constitutions* say about rebellion?

A mason is peaceable subject to civil powers wherever he resides or works and is never concerned with plots or conspiracies against the peace and welfare of the nation If a brother should be a rebel against the state, he is not to be countenanc’d in his rebellion, however, he may be pitied as an unhappy man; and if convicted of no other crime, though the loyal brotherhood must and ought to disown his rebellion . . . they can not expel him from the lodge, and his relationship to it remains indefensible.^{viii}

That is to say, rebellion against the Crown will make you an unhappy freemason, but not warrant your expulsion for the Craft.

For every mason who became a patriot such as Franklin, Hancock, or Washington, another remained loyal or turned back to the Crown. Many lodges closed during the war and others simply kept politics out and continued to meet. The more loyal, higher class lodges closed and left while the Scots and middle class lodges gained in strength. Dr. Joseph Warren, for example, was a Provincial Grand Master, volunteer for the army and was killed at the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775. Freemason Benedict Arnold, on the other hand, a successful American general turned traitor to the cause and joined the British Army.

As Commander in Chief of a patch-work and confusing collection of soldiers, volunteers, young and old men, veterans and novices, Washington's greatest challenge was not to win, but to build an army that could win. Even as he lost most of his battles, Washington continually fought for supplies and spent most of his time trying to keep a variety of soldiers together as an army. In this process he was reintroduced to Freemasonry and agreed to allow regimental lodges within the army. By the war's end there were of over ten regimental lodges and many dozens if not hundreds of soldiers and officers had become masons. As Steven C. Bullock argues in his 1998 book *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, Freemasonry was the means for men of the middle class to rise in society – especially as more and more loyalists immigrated to Canada or Britain.^{ix}

It is safe to say Washington viewed the fraternity as a means to help unify the troops and create esprit de corps. Over thirty general officers were freemasons, including many of the foreign officers such as Lafayette, Pulaski and Von Steuben. Freemasonry helped inculcate and integrate these foreigners into American culture. Yet there is no evidence Washington ever attended a lodge let alone presided as a master of a lodge. He did happily attend a few masonic events including St. John's Day's banquets. In 1780, when victory was a little more certain, the first casual discussions of a National Grand Lodge of America began among military freemasons.^x

With independence assured in 1783, Washington resigned his commission and went home to Mount Vernon. The Continental Congress lost its national authority. Each colony became a sovereign state and began operating as independent nations working under the Articles of Confederation first adopted in 1781.

Freemasonry was revitalized. During the war, the various Grand Lodges had adapted to the ebb and flow of the conflict. The Virginian freemasons took it upon themselves to become the first American independent Grand Lodge in 1778. The Grand Lodge of New York did likewise in 1781.

With victory attained we can now begin to understand Washington's vision for a utopia and the states. In 1783, when he resigned his commission and gave up power, his farewell address outlined four pillars of independence:

- 1 An Indissoluble Union of the States under one Federal Head
- 2 A sacred regard to Public Justice
- 3 The adoption of a proper Peace Establishment and
- 4 The prevalence of that pacific and friendly disposition among the people of the United States, which will induce them to forget their local prejudices and policies, to make those mutual concessions which are requisite to the general prosperity, and in some instances, to sacrifice their individual advantages to their interest of the community,^{xi}

Here is Washington's vision for a utopia in America. It will happen when a federal government at the top upholds justice and the peace, while at the bottom citizens working together overcome local prejudices to create happiness for all. In other words, as a constitution governs the various states, the states maintain local peace and justice, and citizens will work and mingle together thereby eroding provincialism and prejudice. The result is a unified nation for the betterment of all.

In this vision Washington would achieve the two goals he most wanted. First, an American "empire" that expanded across the continent, and second, peace. Throughout his correspondence he frequently mentions the need for a great inland empire, not only for its commercial and agricultural resources, but also as a means to develop away from European influence and jealousies.^{xii}

Equally important is that the American people find their own peace, which includes stability, security and abundance. Washington wrote about this vision many times and best described it after the Revolution. In a simple response to a concerned citizen, William Moore, on 29 November 1781, he wrote:

beg you to be assured, that a full establishment of Peace, Liberty and Independence to this, and the other United States of America, is the most ardent wish of Sir [Washington].

And on 1 February 1784 he wrote to the Marquis de Lafayette: "At length my Dear Marquis I am become a private citizen on the banks of the Potomac, & under the shadow of my own Vine & my own Fig-tree." This phrase occurs often in Washington's letters. It is a reference to 2 Kings 18:31: "And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, every man under his vine and under his fig tree."^{xiii}

How does Washington's vision for a free United States relate to Freemasonry's vision for society? This can best be understood by reading the lectures given to every new member. The foundation of these "official" instructions comes from William Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry* published in London in 1772. Next to Anderson's *Constitutions*, Preston is the second most important book in American Masonry. The language, teachings and vision Preston presented still constitute the vast majority of the ritual propagated in American lodges today. Here one can see his understanding of Freemasonry's purpose:

By the proper use of talents, the wisdom of precepts, and the force of example, the mind is improved and the brethren are united in social harmony; while the happiness, which originates in the Lodge, disperses its influence to the wide circle of the world.^{xiv}

According to Preston, a perfect society is created in the Masonic lodge. That society is created as individual members are instructed in how to improve themselves. Once joined in social harmony the lodge's happiness influences and improves the happiness of the world. To Preston, then, a perfect society begins at the individual level and spreads outward. But, the ancient landmarks of the Fraternity as articulated by Anderson's *Constitutions* tempered his vision:

These rules and governors Supreme and Subordinate, of the ancient Lodge, are to be obeyed in their respective stations by all the brethren, according to the old charges and regulations, with all humility, reverence, love and alacrity.^{xv}

and

And if any of them do them injury, you must appeal to the Grand Lodge at the quarterly Communications, and from then to the annual Grand Lodge, as has been ancient laudable conduct of our Fore-fathers in every Nation.^{xvi}

Now compare those passages to one of Washington's four points outline in 1783:

. . . that pacific and friendly disposition among the people of the United States, which will induce them to forget their local prejudices and policies, to make those mutual concessions which are requisite to the general prosperity, and in some instances, to sacrifices their individual advantages to their interest of the community.^{xvii}

Washington's utopian vision for America starts at the local level where social harmony breaks down prejudice, yet the best and wisest govern at the state and national level. No hypocrite, in 1784, Washington affirms his duties as a private citizen by accepting membership in his local masonic lodge in Alexandria Virginia.^{xviii}

Also in 1784, in a letter to Virginia Governor Benjamin Harrison, Washington outlines his vision for a possible federal constitutional convention:

My political creed therefore is, to be wise in choice of Delegates, support them like gentlemen-- while they are our representatives-- give them competent powers for all federal purposes, support them in the due exercise thereof and lastly, to compel them to close attendance in Congress during their delegations.^{xix}

Washington affirmed the necessity of selecting the best men who merit power and giving them the authority to create and maintain a strong central government. Here again is a reflection of Anderson's meritocracy toward leadership, but Masonry's governance through a lodge's Master and Wardens and a Grand Lodge's Grand Master and Grand Wardens.

With the failure of the Articles of Confederation, it became necessary to call a Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia in 1786. While not dwelling on the deliberations in the creation of the constitution, it is important to note that Washington, while president of the convention, made no comment during the proceedings. Despite his official silence, the Constitution closely reflects his desires. Hence the articles describing the executive branch are vague compared to the other two branches because all assumed correctly, Washington would be elected the first executive.

A few months later in Philadelphia, the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania established itself as an independent grand lodge contained within the state. This was a seminal act in American Freemasonry for it stunted the idea a unified National Grand Lodge and self-limited the Grand Lodge's authority. In the previous thirty years Pennsylvania had chartered lodges in Delaware, New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia and Georgia. What motivated Pennsylvania freemasons to limit themselves warrants further research and understanding. Unlike political states, Freemasonry is a universal organization and it presented no requirement that Pennsylvania or any American Grand Lodge separate itself from the British Grand Lodges. Americans, however, being practical people, may have decided it best to keep the annual dues at home rather than send the money across the Atlantic.

The Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania's independence set the most important characteristic of American Freemasonry: the doctrine of jurisdictional prerogative. It establishes Grand Lodge authority in all masonic matters within a geographical area. Pennsylvania masons decided they could not or would not supervise lodges throughout the new nation. This differs from the United Grand Lodge of England, the Grand Lodge of Scotland and Grand Lodge of Ireland, all of which, although geographically restricted within the British Isles, chartered lodges indiscriminately throughout the empire and the world.

By this doctrine the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania declared its complete control over Freemasonry within the state, but also abdicated authority outside its geographic boundaries. Consequently lodges chartered by Pennsylvania but working in Virginia, Delaware and elsewhere had to seek new charters from the Grand Lodge of the state in which they were located. Pennsylvania's action led other Grand Lodges to unify and declare themselves independent and sovereign. Thus in 1787 Georgia, Maryland, New Jersey, North Carolina formed sovereign Grand Lodges. Perhaps the most import result of these actions was the death of any possibility of a National Grand Lodge of the United States of America. Freemasonry remained organized within the various states and thus unable ever to compete with federal authority or any national organization.

When Washington was elected president and inaugurated in 1789 we see his utopian vision implemented. During his presidency, he achieved the four pillars he had articulated. First, an indissoluble union of the states under one federal head with separate executive, legislative and judiciary branches. Second, he achieved a sacred regard to public justice guaranteed by the Bill

of Rights, ratified in 1791. Third, he established a proper peace through the 1794 Jay Treaty and neutrality during the French and British wars and peace with the surrounding Indians. Lastly, he patronized religion, education, Freemasonry and other institutions that promoted “that pacific and friendly disposition among the people of the United States, which will induce them to forget their local prejudices and policies.”

With Washington elected president and the end of all consideration of a National Grand Lodge, the New England freemasons established independent Grand Lodges. Connecticut led the way in 1789, with New Hampshire following in 1791 and Rhode Island and Vermont, soon after joining the United States, in 1792. The most curious or problematic was Massachusetts. Since 1769 it had two Grand Lodges, one English and one Scottish. After much wrangling, the Scottish Grand Lodge merged into the English one and formed a new Grand Lodge in 1792. To celebrate the unity Massachusetts freemasons dedicated their new Grand Constitutions to Washington and sent him a copy. The accompanying address to Washington reads:

Taught by the precepts of our Society, “That all of its members stand upon the level,” we venture to assume this station; and to approach you with freedom, which diminished our diffidence, without lessening our respect.

Desirous to enlarge the boundaries of social happiness, and to vindicate the ceremonies of their Institutions, this Grand Lodge have published a Book of Constitutions; (and a copy for your acceptance accompanies this) which, by discovering the principles which acute, will speak the eulogy of the Society; through they fervently wish the conduct of its members may prove its higher recommendations. The Grand Lodge has taken the liberty to dedicate this book to one, the qualities of whose heart and the actions of whose life have contributed to improve personal virtue, and extend throughout the world, most endearing cordialities.^{xx}

Washington's reply to the gift is telling:

[I]t is not less pleasing to know, that the, milder virtues of the heart are highly respected by a society whose liberal principles must be founded in the immutable laws of truth and justices.

To enlarge the sphere of the social happiness is worthy the benevolent design of a Masonic institutions; and it is most fervently to be wished, that the conduct of every member of the fraternity, as well as those publications that discover the principles which articulate them; may tend to convince mankind the grand object of Masonry is to promote the happiness of the human race.^{xxi}

At this moment Washington's and Freemasonry's shared utopian vision were achieved. Both proclaimed social happiness and were the great organizers that would civilize the people as the nation grew westward into a great empire. The utopian vision was the happiness of the human race through an enlightened society. This vision was affirmed when the Grand Lodges of Pennsylvania, Virginia and New York all made similar tributes and dedications and Washington responded in similar manner as he did to the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts.^{xxii}

During Washington's presidency the means to a political utopia was possible. Yet to secure it also required a clear separation between the federal government and state Grand Lodges. Defined as such, the federal government with Washington as President could have no

competition. This was affirmed in 1794 when western Pennsylvanians attempted to fight a federal tax. The Whiskey Rebellion required the US Army to muster and Washington as commander-in-chief to take the field for one last time. A new federal government also meant establishing a National Bank that gathered and assumed all the war debt held by the thirteen states. This required American's foreign creditors to negotiate with one debtor.

Also needed were strong state governments that met the majority of needs of the citizens. Within the states existed the Grand Lodges and a growing number of local lodges. Grand Lodge leadership came from the local gentry. They were educated and encouraged in civic virtues through membership in their local lodges. Those freemasons, in turn, became leaders in their communities and at the state and ultimately national level.

What was the role of the Grand Lodge system in this process? It was to regulate the local lodges and preserve its constitutions and “ancient landmarks”. Just as the states were under federal government, so local lodges were under state Grand Lodges. Just as local lodges hold power from Grand Lodges, so do states hold power from federal government. As long as no state or local power ever challenged the federal government authority, the federal government would never challenge freemasonry's (or any other religious, educational or community organization) moral authority within the states.

Through these mutually supporting sovereignties, Washington was happy to support the Craft in several distinctive ways. First, when he took the oath of the office as US President in New York City, he did so on a Bible from a nearby lodge. The oath was administered by Chancellor and Grand Master of New York, Robert Livingston. While president, Washington supported the Craft as he toured the states, visiting lodges in South Carolina, Georgia and Rhode Island.

Washington combined federal, masonic and civic duty by laying the cornerstone of the US Capitol in 1793. Through this ceremony he used the fraternity as a “civic religion” that unified all the American people. This ceremony for the “Temple of the People” conveyed a vision of the ancient Roman Republic. Freemasonry's mythological lineage back to Rome, the Bible and its “ancient ceremonies” all conveyed the virtues necessary to create a “new republic”.

In conclusion, we may note that George Washington is almost unique in history. As “Father of His Country” he was given the opportunity to create his own utopian vision for his nation, and in large part, it was achieved. How was this based on Freemasonry? Certainly it can be seen that masonic rituals, rules and regulations encouraged this unity and meritocratic vision. He encouraged local and state masonic lodges to prosper without posing any threat to the federal government. In turn, Freemasonry, as a subordinate institution, was given special privilege as a civic religion. Many of America's Founding Fathers, and their generations' soldiers, merchants, artisans, clergy and common Americans became freemasons (and would do so for generations to come). Washington articulated the special place and mission of the Craft:

Your sentiments, on the establishment and exercise of our equal government, are worthy of an association [with freemasonry], whose principles lead to purity of morals, and are beneficial of action.

The fabric of our freedom is placed in the enduring basis of public virtues, and will, I fondly hope, long continue to protect the prosperity of the architects who raised it. I shall be happy on every occasion, to evince my regard for the Fraternity.^{xxiii}

So did Washington create a masonic utopia? Yes he did, in at least one vital aspect. As the most powerful man in the new country after independence, many assumed he would either be

made king or proclaim himself king. Yet in 1783 he returned his commission to the Continental Congress and retired to his family and farm. When recalled to serve as president, Washington resisted a second term in office and flatly refused a suggested third term. By renouncing power he created a nation in his vision. His meritocracy and his virtue of surrendering power, was informed by Freemasonry. That vision remains articulated in the US Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

What happened to Washington's masonic utopian vision? When he retired it quickly eroded. Factions, led by Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton rapidly became vicious political parties. Government means government money and jobs that spawn patronage and a spoil system. Below the surface deeper unresolved issues, especially states rights surrounding slavery, led to many years of regional political strife that culminated in a civil war. Washington's spotless reputation kept these issues largely repressed, but after his death in 1799, his utopia turned corrupt and dissolved.

Freemasonry's success during Washington's life caused its own downfall. Since the 1750s numerous Masonic rituals degrees travelled about the American landscape. In 1797 Thomas Smith Webb in Providence, Rhode Island gathered many of these degrees and added them on to his version of William Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry*.

Webb's book or *Masonic Monitor* also created new governing bodies to propagate and regulate new initiatory degrees of the Royal Arch and Knights Templar, known as the York Rite. In 1803 the French Rite of degrees reaching ultimately to the 33rd was proclaimed under the authority of a 'Supreme Council of Sovereign Grand Inspectors General of the Ancient and Accepted Rite of Freemasonry whose Grand See is in Charleston, South Carolina.' Both these rites implicitly challenged the primacy of the third degree of Master Mason and the Grand Lodges.

Ancient Craft Freemasonry, that which Benjamin Franklin and George Washington knew, was a creation of the Enlightenment to promote rational thought and self-improvement in local lodges, under state Grand Lodges. The York Rite and Scottish Rite, with national governing bodies, brought forth new Biblical stories in addition to that of Solomon's Temple. These stories were part of the new Romantic Movement that revelled in raw emotions that Washington and his generation had spent a life time controlling.

Washington's utopian vision for America was lost among factions, parties and sophistry. Washington's utopian vision for Freemasonry was dispersed into various new mythologies ruled by masonic high priests, kings and knights.

In the end, every generation of Americans and freemasons will revere George Washington, but each generation will make America and Freemasonry according to its own vision until Utopia comes.

NOTES

- ⁱ For an exploration of the development of Freemasonry in England and Scotland see: John Hamill, *The Craft: A History of English Freemasonry* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1986) and David Stevenson, *The First Freemasons: Scotland's Early Lodges and Their Members* (Edinburgh: Grand Lodge of Scotland, 2001).
- ⁱⁱ Alphonse Cerza, "New Jersey" in Lewis C. Wes Cook, ed., *Colonial Freemasonry*, (Fulton, Mo.: Missouri Lodge of Research Transactions. Vol. 30. 1974). p. 106; See Kent Walgren, *Freemasonry, Anti-Masonry and Illuminism in the United States: 1734-1850: A Bibliography*. 2 volumes. Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 2003. Vol 1, item #1, p. 3.
- ⁱⁱⁱ See Jackson, A.C.F. *English Masonic Exposures, 1760-1769*, Full Transcripts of 'Three Distinct Knocks,' 1760, 'Jachin & Boaz,' 1762; 'Shibboleth,' 1765 and Commentaries. London: Lewis Masonic, 1986.
- ^{iv} James Anderson, *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons: Containing the History, Charges, regulations, &c. of that Most Ancient and Right Worshipful Fraternity : for use in Lodges*. London: [Grand Lodge of England]; William Hunter [Printer], 1723) p. 50. (Facsimile edition [London: Quatuor Coronati Lodge] 1976)
- ^v *ibid.* p. 51
- ^{vi} *ibid.* pp. 50-53.
- ^{vii} A good short biography of George Washington is: Richard Brookhiser, *Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington* (New York: Free Press, 1996)
- ^{viii} Anderson, *op. cit.*, p. 50-53
- ^{ix} James R. Case, "American Union Lodge", in Cook, ed. *Colonial Freemasonry*, pp.194-205.
- ^x Ronald Heaton, *Masonic Membership of the Founding Fathers* (Silver Springs, Md.: The Masonic Service Association, 1988). Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1739-1840* (Chapel Hill NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996) pp. 112-114.
- ^{xi} George Washington to John Hancock 11 June 1783- From Newburgh NY - on-line Washington Papers: <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/constitution/1784/hancock.html>
- ^{xii} Richard Brookhiser, *Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington*, pp. 72, 187-189.
- ^{xiii} *ibid.* p.147.
- ^{xiv} William Preston as quoted in Colin Dyer, *William Preston and His Work*, (Shepperton, UK: Lewis Masonic, 1987) 236.
- ^{xv} Anderson, *op. cit.*, p.51
- ^{xvi} Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp.56-57
- ^{xvii} George Washington to John Hancock 11 June 1783
- ^{xviii} J. Hugo Tatsch, *The Facts about George Washington as a Freemason* (NY: Macoy Publishing, 1931) pp.4-7.
- ^{xix} On-Line Washington Papers: <http://gwpapers.virginia.edu/documents/constitution/1784/harrison.html>
- ^{xx} As quoted in Tatsch *The Facts about George Washington as a Freemason*, pp.37-38.
- ^{xxi} *ibid.* pp. 18-19.
- ^{xxii} *ibid.* Other dedications, pp. 34-36.
- ^{xxiii} Reply to Mordecai Gist, Grand Master of South Carolina on his arrival in the state, May 1791, as quoted in Tatsch, *op. cit.* pp. 16-17.