

Chapter VI

*The Grand Lodge:
The Early Years*

IN SEARCH OF A COMPASS

North Carolina's Grand Lodge, during its early years, was more important as a figurehead than a controlling influence in Masonic affairs. Not all at once and in a burst of light did the governing organization learn its precise role and discover the most appropriate and effective means for exerting its authority. It was enough, in the beginning, that the Grand Lodge simply existed, that it held sessions, that it brought the subordinate lodges into a little better and more frequent communication. Nobody as yet was asking it to refurbish the Craft by virtue of its newly authoritative declarations and strict injunctions against casual practice and diluted belief.

Almost from its origin, as early as November, 1789, the Grand Lodge had adopted the practice of permitting the convening of "occasional lodges", *i.e.* extra sessions of the Grand Lodge, for the purpose of conferring Masonic degrees. Samuel Johnston and Stephen Cabarrus having requested, in 1789, to be raised to Mark Masters, the Grand Lodge on November 20th permitted what is believed to have been the earliest working of this degree in the United States—or, at least, the earliest recorded instance thereof. On the day following this historic event, Brethren John Stokes and John Macon made a similar request and this, too, was granted.¹

It had evidently not yet occurred to the officers of the Grand Lodge that this practice might be adverse to the interests of the subordinate lodges, perhaps denying to them a measure of the local prestige they required in order to attract and hold the kind of members they desired. So the “occasional lodges” continued and on November 16, 1790 the Grand Lodge recorded another historic first by allowing a “Mark Master’s Lodge” to be convened by its officers at Lee Dekeyser’s tavern in Fayetteville.² On that evening, eight Marks were conferred, the honored recipients being David Witherspoon, Zechariah Harman, Patrick St. Lawrence, John Winslow, Guilford Dudley, Archibald Davis, James Withrow, and Thomas Gerard. Following the conferring of their Marks, all eight were initiated into the degree of Past Master. A week later, three more received these degrees at Fayetteville,³ and, on November 29th, still another three.⁴

In the meantime, some of the brethren were beginning to raise questions about the legitimacy of the practice. Consultations with Masonic authorities led to the discovery that the Grand Lodge could justify these occasional lodges only when there was “an absolute want of Brothers qualified to administer the same degree.” Since there were now several dozen, at least, who were Mark and Past Masters acting in North Carolina, and because the practice was understood to be “improper and illegal” as well as “detrimental ... to the interests of the individual lodges”, the Grand Lodge members on December 9, 1790 resolved to discontinue the practice.⁶ Even so, the last such degrees had not been awarded by the Grand Lodge and there are records of four other occasional lodges during the next seven years in which the degree was conferred.⁷ Slowly, the Grand Lodge was forming a better conception of its role and the relationship in which it ought to stand with subordinate lodges.

The Grand Lodge began to come into its own in the vexed dispute among the Wilmington, Halifax and New Bern lodges over the old question of precedence. Here was an issue, the first one confronted by the Grand Lodge, in which a firm voice was needed to prevent a relatively small question from developing into a major divisive influence and undermining the new mood of harmony among the lodges of North Carolina.

The question of precedence, the numerical order in which the lodges of North Carolina were founded, doggedly pursued the itinerant Grand Lodge from town to town during the first

seven years of its existence. In June, 1789 the Halifax and Wilmington delegates at the Grand Lodge raised the question of which of the two should be given the honor of “number one” for North Carolina.⁸ Bye-laws adopted the next day included a regulation that each private lodge should transmit to the Grand Secretary copies of their charters in order that these might be chronologically arranged according to their dates of granting.⁹ In November, the necessary teeth were inserted into this regulation by a further resolve that any lodges failing to submit their charters for this purpose should have no further claim to precedence but would be assigned rank “according to the rotation in which” they made their applications.¹⁰

The issue between Halifax and Wilmington was conveniently settled by the discovery that the charter for Royal White Hart Lodge in 1764 had been issued by Cornelius Harnett, Master of St. John’s in Wilmington.” The rival claims of the various lodges were at length settled on June 25, 1791 when the Grand Lodge formally assigned first rank to Wilmington St. John’s, second to Halifax Royal White Hart, and third to New Bern St. John’s.” The designations of rank for fifteen other lodges were agreed upon at the same time and charters were ordered to be made out for the eighteen North Carolina lodges, each containing the respective ranking number.”

Those who anticipated that the eighteen numbers assigned in 1791 would put an end to the precedence controversy were destined for disappointment. St. John’s of New Bern, as we shall see later, greatly resented its failure to receive second rank and would one day put to a strong test the Grand Lodge’s determination to act as arbiter of disputes between its subordinate units.

THE MONTFORT LODGES IN A NEW AGE

The question of precedence, with which the Grand Lodge struggled in its early years, was settled with less difficulty in the cases of the lodges below third rank, but questions of historical lineage still remained. Especially was this true for the other lodges tracing their charters back to Joseph Montfort. For the historian, the rankings of 1791 are somewhat less than authoritative. From the historical perspective, the questions are clouded by the fact that for only one of these other lodges are any records preserved of their work following recovery from their wartime dormancy or other interruptions. In the case of each of the four

other Montfort lodges in North Carolina that are known to have been revived in the 1780's, a brief period of earnest activity was to be followed by declining fortunes—in two of these cases by total collapse.

The number four was assigned in 1791 to St. John's Lodge at Kinston. This lodge traced its history with a fair degree of confidence back to the year 1772 when it had been the third to receive a charter from the Montfort Grand Lodge. It does not appear to have operated during the war or for several years afterward and was not represented at the aborted Fayetteville Convention in 1787. But the remnants of the Kinston lodge rallied themselves in the latter part of that year and sent a full delegation to Tarboro in December.¹⁴

Six members of Kinston St. John's were at that time veterans of the order and these were presumably the leaders of the revival that salvaged fourth rank for Kinston. They were Richard Caswell, James Glasgow, Stephen Cade, Benjamin Caswell, William Randal, and Matthias Handy.¹⁵ The senior member was Richard Caswell, already a Mason for more than a quarter of a century. Twelve new members were apprenticed at Kinston in 1788,¹⁶ bye-laws were adopted in July of that year and, despite its long dormancy, the Kinston lodge exercised an influence in the Grand Lodge far out of proportion to its circumstances. With Richard Caswell elected first Deputy Grand Master and James Glasgow Grand Secretary, Kinston St. John's had vaulted abruptly into pre-eminence over older and larger lodges. It sent a full representation to the Grand Lodges in 1788 at Hillsborough¹⁷ and Fayetteville¹⁸ and had the satisfaction of seeing Caswell elevated, at the end of 1788, to the Chair of Grand Master. The death of Caswell in 1789 and the transfer of Glasgow, who was Secretary of State, to Raleigh when the capital was fixed there in 1792, deprived Kinston of its Masonic prestige and St. John's No. 4 ceased to play an important role in the affairs of the Order.

Royal Edwin No. 5 at Windsor was another lodge whose voice was disproportionately strong in the first years of the Grand Lodge. Samuel Johnston's four terms as Grand Master, interrupted only by Caswell's year, insured for Windsor a position at the center of Masonry from 1787 until 1792. Royal Edwin was represented at the Tarboro Convention by John Johnston, brother of Samuel Johnston, and by Andrew Oliver and Silas

White Arnett, the former serving as Grand Senior Warden during 1788 and Arnett as Grand Junior Warden in 1789.” But Royal Edwin soon began paying but spasmodic attention to the Grand Lodge, a sure sign of weakness, and was only rarely represented there.²⁰ Although it still carried on its rolls in 1798 the names of twenty-four members,²¹ it had lost, well before this time, all of its former effectiveness at the state level.

Of the two others whose charters carried over without lapse since colonial times, neither seems to have survived the year 1791. At Winton, Royal William No. 6 was devastated by the establishment of American George Lodge at Murfreesboro in 1789.²² This denied to Royal William the services of several active members who lived closer to the latter place, including Hardy Murfree and William Person Little.²³ Other Winton Masons, including Dr. Patrick Garvey and John Bryan Bunbury, soon moved to Murfreesboro as the more promising of the two Hertford County communities.²⁴ From this time on, nothing further is heard of Royal William Lodge in Masonic records, from which its name was finally removed in 1799.²⁵

Unanimity Lodge, despite a hopeful new beginning in 1787,²⁶ sputtered forlornly into inactivity during 1791. With John Mare once again declining office for that year,²⁷ and the leading gentry still estranged from its activities, the Edenton lodge struggled on until June 20, 1791 when Brothers Samuel Tredwell and Abraham Hodge were requested to examine the accounts of the lodge and determine “whether the numbers & circumstances ...bear its expense Sc further continuance.”²⁸ Their report must have been a negative one because there is no further indication of any kind of Masonic activity at Edenton for the remainder of the 18th century.

The infirmity of all of these old lodges was related to the drift westward of the focus of North Carolina concerns and the bulk of the population. Places like Winton, Windsor, Kinston and Edenton had not commercial or other assets strong enough to maintain their former level of prosperity. For every such town suffering some symptoms of decline, several new towns were forming in the Piedmont and beyond, but the effect was to move the scenes of chief Masonic interest westward. Only a few of the eastern lodges, chiefly those at Wilmington and New Bern, withstood this shift and continued to prosper.

A FLURRY OF NEW LODGES

Eleven North Carolina lodges were either initially chartered or else fundamentally reorganized in the years from 1787 to 1791. They were Phoenix Lodge No. 8 at Fayetteville (replacing Union Lodge), Old Cone No. 9 at Salisbury, Johnston-Caswell at Warrenton (formerly Blandford Bute), Caswell Brotherhood No. 11 in Caswell County, Independence No. 12 at Pittsboro, St. John's No. 13 in Duplin County, Rutherford Fellowship No. 14 in Rutherford County, Washington Lodge No. 15 at Washington, St. Tammany's No. 16 in Wilmington, American George No. 17 at Murfreesboro, and King Solomon No. 18 in Jones County.

The varying fortunes of these new lodges will be considered in later chapters, but it is worth observing here that their creation in this short span of time is further evidence of the stimulus provided to North Carolina Masonry by the establishment of the Grand Lodge. The encouragement of a greater uniformity of Masonic teachings and practices, the prompting of greater attention in individual lodges to financial and business matters, and the establishment of regular channels of communication to draw the scattered lodges into closer touch with one another, were among the less-obvious benefits of the new governing body.

THE BROTHERHOOD IN WILMINGTON

Probably the saddest void in the historical record of early Masonry in North Carolina is the disappearance of the minutes and papers covering the first thirty-three years of the proceedings of St. John's Lodge at Wilmington. It is likely that there were several breaks in the continuity of the work of St. John's, notably while Lord Cornwallis occupied Wilmington during parts of the years 1780 and 1781. The absence of delegates from Wilmington at both the Fayetteville and Tarboro Conventions in 1787 is evidence of another period of inactivity at St. John's and it is not until the end of 1788 that we again observe signs of life in the lodge. This had evidently been only a brief interruption rather than a decade-long dormancy stretching back into the war years, since there were a good many veteran Masons on hand when meetings were resumed.

When finally we have a full record of the proceedings at St. John's No. 1 in late 1788, the lodge included some seventeen members, with William Campbell in the Master's Chair and

George Duffy and Lawrence Ashe Dorsey as Wardens.” Duffy’s resignation from his office promptly brought about further changes and on January 1, 1789 James Walker replaced him as Senior Warden, with John Mackenzie becoming Junior Warden, John Campbell Secretary, Dorsey Treasurer, and John Bradley and Peter Maxwell Stewards.³⁰ A committee was at the same time appointed to frame new bye-laws³¹ and, by June, a new Tyler had been found in the person of the Frenchman Desire Lamberteaux.³² William Campbell, now “old and infirm,” was plagued by illness during the first months of 1789 and in May stepped down so that Duffy might take his place as Master.³⁴ St. John’s was now in sound condition and ready for a long period of uninterrupted harmony stretching forward to the years of the Civil War.

The Wilmington Masons assembled in these years in a spare room of Lawrence Dorsey’s tavern, the only one in town.³⁵ It has been described as “an old brick tenement, perforated with innumerable windows and doors... ~.”³⁶ The place seemed to have been thrown together by unskilled labor,

the windows were carelessly fixed in their casements, and when the wind was high, made just such a clattering noise as the innumerable drays and carriages driven rapidly over the pavements.... In fact, some have asserted they were set to music, and like the chiming of church-bells, played regular catches.... There were often two or three hundred boarders at a time, and but 20 or 30 rooms to accommodate them ...It was kept by an old sea-captain, who was an Emperor in his way, and certainly stood at the head of his profession. ...He was the very beau ideal of the jolly landlord—obese and rotund—latitudinal in his dimensions, florid in his countenance, with a venerable whiteness of locks...

The brethren of St. John’s No. 1 included several who were also members of the “Wilmington Whistling Society”, a ribald chorus which also held regular meetings at Dorsey’s Tavern.³⁸ Among these were Archibald Cutlar, “A Scotch gentleman who had an impediment in his speech, giving a pleasing effect to his drollery.” Others included Edward Jones, “an Irish barrister, a perfect Gentleman and of inimitable humor”, Dr. James Laroque, a French physician, and Jacob Levy, “the prince of auctioneers, whose jests and gibes [were] proverbial in the town..., his hooked nose, his shrewd eye, his laughing mouth.”⁴⁰

GOD AND MAN IN THE WILMINGTON CRAFT

The two last-named Masonic members of the Whistling Society remind us that Masonry in those days was not the province, any more than it is today, of a single creed or the vehicle for a narrow religious doctrine. The Great Architect of the Universe was perceived by Masons as the Lord of any and all who accepted His divine authority and tried to live a virtuous life. Jacob Levy, who became a member at St. John's in 1793 and later a member of St. Tammany's in the same town,⁴¹ was a leader of Wilmington's distinguished Jewish community, several of whom owed their residence in North Carolina to the long commercial association between colonial businessmen of the region and Aaron Lopez, a Portuguese merchant of Rhode Island.⁴² Levy and his cousin, David Lopez, were among Wilmington's most devoted Masons in the decade of the 1790's and afterward.

Dr. Laroque was one of those French Catholics who, in defiance of repeated papal denunciations of Freemasonry during the preceding half-century,⁴³ remained active in the Craft. It is often impossible, in the case of the many Frenchmen and Irishmen whose names appear on the early rolls of St. John's and other North Carolina lodges, to be certain which were Catholic and which Protestant or rationalistic freethinkers, but there can be little doubt that many, such as the Marquis de Bretigny, were at least nominal Catholics. One does not encounter on the roster of St. John's such names as Michael Michloziwicz or Lawrence A. Dorsey without suspecting a Polish or Irish papist.⁴⁴ In more recent times, the same lodge has accepted the application of an Arab Mohammedan.⁴⁵ Any applicant to a lodge might, of course, find himself banned by the prejudice or the private judgment of one or two members, but the Craft itself remained safely above the quarrels of the conflicting cults.

THE NEW BERN LITERATI

On the eve of the greatest occasion in the early history of North Carolina Masonry, the visit of George Washington, the lodge at New Bern was the most active and distinguished Masonic fraternity in the state. Not until the fall of 1792 would the New Bern brethren begin using Tryon Palace on a regular basis,⁴⁶ but already their lodge was handsomely equipped for its

business, and it had recruited an unusually talented group of men from the community.

The leadership of St. John's Lodge No. 3 was at this time remarkably literary and the writings of the most productive of the members make an impressive library of both Masonic and non-Masonic books and pamphlets. Not least among these writers was the Rev. Mr. Thomas P. Irving, an erstwhile poet whose "beautiful ode", read before the lodge at the festival of St. John the Evangelist in 1794, won him the thanks of his brethren.⁴⁷ He also read either this or another ode at the same festival a year later.⁴⁸ Irving was a Maryland native who had come to New Bern in 1793 to become principal of the academy. He was a Princeton graduate with a master of arts and he was to serve for eighteen years as rector of Christ Church in New Bern, noted for his musical and dramatic abilities as well as for the productions of his pen.⁴⁹ In the early years of the 19th century, Irving would serve St. John's for a time as its Master.⁵⁰ It was in part owing to Irving's frequently-exercised talent that St. John's was the only lodge in North Carolina known to have possessed its own book for recording "orations, songs, etc."⁵¹

Still more prolific as a writer was Irving's predecessor in the Christ Church pulpit, the Rev. Dr. Solomon Halling. A physician of Danish extraction and Pennsylvania birth,⁵² who had served as a surgeon with the American army during the Revolution, Dr. Halling settled at New Bern at the close of the war. He soon abandoned medicine in order to study for the ministry and was ordained as an Episcopal clergyman in 1792⁵³ Among his literary works were a translation of Klopstock's German poem, "The Messiah" (1809),⁵⁴ and two manuscripts, apparently never published, on medicine⁵⁵ and the history of the Hailing family.⁵⁶

An interesting glimpse of Hailing's style is contained in the St. John's Day address delivered by him before "St. John's Lodge No 2" (as the New Bern Masons insisted upon styling themselves)⁵⁷ on December 27, 1789. Touching upon the historical significance of the Craft, Hailing acquainted his brethren with the fact that

The votaries of Masonry have ever said, that it is the most ancient, most honorable and most useful of all sublunary institutions. A variety of productions have appeared to prove its antiquity. The opinion most generally received is, that this society commenced at that

time, when the wisest of men erected the sacred temple to the best of beings. May not the origin of Masonry be traced back even to the formation of the globe? Yes. Thou, great—thou sublime Architect of all worlds! with holy dread, awful reverence and profound veneration ...I speak it. From that instant when in charity divine thou laidst the foundation of this earth, when thou saidst: ‘Let there be light’, ...thou didst ordain [that] the children of men should be united by love.

Arriving at his main theme, the duty of charity, Hailing continued:

It is so clear a truth, that it would be almost unnecessary to make the observation, did not our conduct evince that it too oft escapes us; that in whatever situation of life, however exalted it may have pleased Heaven to have placed the best, the greatest, the proudest of the sons of men, yet, Providence has wisely ordained that no one should, independently of his fellow, enjoy even the common necessities and conveniences of life. Therefore, from the very nature of things, we are bound to assist each other—and ...as omniscient God [has] imparted, in his mercy, to man one divine emanation flowing immediately from himself—the brightest of virtues CHARITY.

Let us reflect, while we enjoy the bounties of indulgent heaven ‘on how many bare, unsheltered heads the rude storms of howling winter beat pityless.’ What numbers solicit charity?

The poor, the aged parents of numerous offspring stretch out their palsied hands for relief. The helpless widow, with her infant train, requests some small pittance. The war-worn soldier ...the sick, the maimed, and the blind desire to partake of our bounty.

...there is no moral duty more strongly indicated; no virtue whose practice is more powerfully insisted on, than Philanthropy. Therefore our obedience to its dictates shall be most amply rewarded. Nay, our Supreme Grand Master has himself declared, that he will welcome those who shall have fully discharged the duties of humanity, into the Celestial Lodge on high....

And, as this virtue was primeval with light, it shall survive the ruins of Time. For, when Faith shall be lost in beatific vision ...when Hope shall be succeeded by the most perfect fruition, then, shall Charity blaze forth with inextinguishable lustre, and illumine the eternal day.”



Francois-Xavier Martin. Author, printer, and for many years a leading member of St. John's Lodge No. 3, New Bern. (N.C. Dept. of Cultural Resources.)

Following one of Dr. Halling's more admirable performances on the same theme in June, 1795, the Secretary of St. John's was moved to insert into the minutes that the orator's subject "was no less suitable to the occasion than the warmth and energy with which it was delivered while each heart of the Audience caught the flame of the purpose and function of the noble and liberal hand of Charity, [which] was not withheld from the poor and .⁶⁰

The foremost literary artist of the New Bern lodge, however, was neither Irving nor Halling but Francis Xavier Martin, the eloquent Frenchman, whose celebrated writings included his *History of Louisiana*, the *History of North Carolina*, his treatises on the offices of justice of the peace, constable, coroner, sheriff, executors and administrators, his digests of laws and court cases, his New Bern newspapers, and the many books and pamphlets by other authors which were reprinted by Martin's press.⁶¹ After coming to New Bern as a youth from his native Marseilles, Martin worked his way up from a "printer's devil" to become the foremost publisher in North Carolina.⁶² We have already noted his handsome funeral oration for Richard Caswell

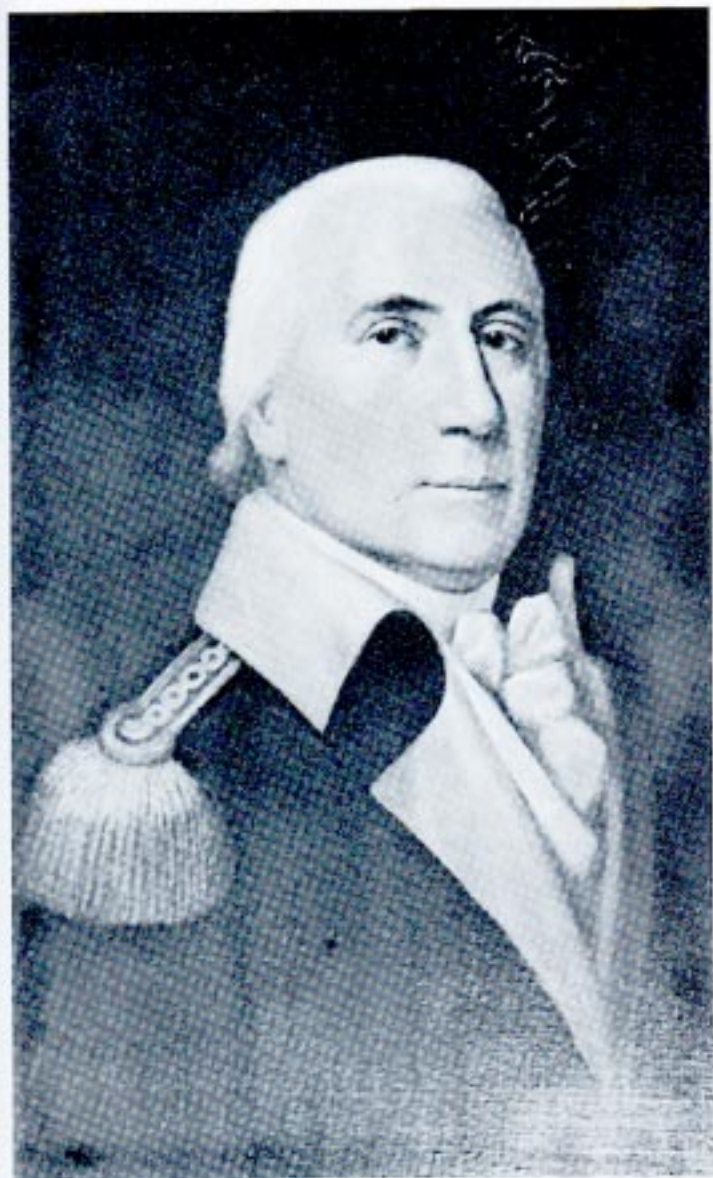
in 1789,⁶³ but Martin performed many other literary services for Masonry besides this one.

An example of Martin's Masonic writing was the discourse he delivered before St. John's Lodge on June 24, 1789. The youthful orator—just turned twenty-seven—conceded that a description of Masonry as “a select association of men” was one that might, in some audiences, “excite a smile”.⁶⁴ He went on, however, to justify the description by reviewing the strict inquiries made in the case of applicants and the efforts used to keep members in the pathway of virtue. He closed with this admonition:

Let not the foregoing observations produce in us a sterile admiration: but let them stimulate us to be operative, as we are speculative, masons. Let the apprentices cherish the practice of the lessons of philanthropy they receive. Let an heroic fortitude distinguish the craftsmen. May those, who have presumed to make further advancements, endeavour to attain that degree of perfection, of which human nature is capable. So that, when our works shall be examined by our Supreme Master, the Architect of all worlds, the square of his approbation sitting easy thereupon, we receive that reward, which this world giveth not.⁶⁵

The single most praiseworthy literary service of the New Bern brethren to their colleagues across the state was the compilation and publication of the *Ahiman Rezon and Masonic Ritual* in 1805. This handsome volume of 161 pages, the work of John C. Osborne, who had been commissioned by the Grand Lodge for the work in 1803, was said to be the first manual of its kind that was not “loaded with ...extrinsic matter”.⁶⁶ It contained an enormous quantity of Masonic law and practice, including full commentaries on the qualities required of those who joined the fraternity, a compendium of the regulations of the Grand Lodge of North Carolina, and descriptions of the ceremonies appropriate to the different degrees. In a second part of the volume were added the 1797 Constitution of the Grand Lodge, the funeral oration for Caswell by F. X. Martin, Dr. Halling's St. John's Day address of 1789, and other Masonic works.⁶⁷

If New Bern was for a time considered “the Athens of North Carolina”, perhaps Masonry should receive some of the credit for the inspiration behind it.



Alexander Martin, Governor of N.C. 1782-1784, 1789-1792, Congressman, Patriot, Freemason. (N.C. Dept of Cultural Resources)

THE VISIT OF GEORGE WASHINGTON

The Southern Tour of President Washington in the early spring of 1791 was an unforgettable event in the lives of all the citizens of North Carolina but more especially so for the Freemasons of the state. The President's own identification with the Craft of Masonry was long and devoted.⁶⁸ He had been initiated at Fredericksburg Lodge No. 4 in the year 1752 and passed and raised there in the following year.⁶⁹ He had taken the oath of Presidential office with his hand on a Masonic Bible, had laid the capitol cornerstone in the city of Washington with a Masonic trowel, and was a Past Worshipful Master of Lodge No. 22 in Alexandria.⁷⁰

Since 1789, Washington had been contemplating a general tour of the United States in order to familiarize himself, as he put it, with the "principal characters and internal circumstances" of each section of the young nation.⁷¹ During the latter part of 1789 and in 1790 he was able to find time to visit the eastern states, and North Carolina's belated ratification of the Federal Constitution in late 1790 opened the way for a southern trip as well. A route was planned that would carry him south to the town of Petersburg, from which he might proceed either south to Halifax or else swing southeast to Edenton before continuing on through Charleston to Savannah, the southernmost point on his projected route. Choosing the Halifax road in order that he might avoid the delay of a long ferry-trip at Edenton, the President departed New York on March 21, 1791 with his official party.⁷²

Washington entered North Carolina along the Petersburg-Halifax road on April 16th and reached Halifax at six o'clock that evening.⁷³ We have no record of official Masonic preparations for, or participation in, his welcome there, though Royal White Hart Lodge was doubtless in the forefront of the reception ceremony and other aspects of the visit. The President stayed two nights at Halifax before departing on April 18th for Tarboro and then Greenville, fourteen miles beyond which he spent a night at Colonel Shadrack Allen's inn at Crown Point, reputed home of the old "First Lodge of Pitt County".⁷⁴ On the afternoon of April 20th, the Presidential party reached New Bern.

The citizens of New Bern had heard reports for months that the President would pass through their town on his Southern Tour, but it was not until April 11th that St. John's Lodge was

formally notified that Washington was “expected to arrive in this town shortly.”⁷⁵ Called together on that evening by Worshipful Master Isaac Guion, the brethren of St. John’s were directed by him “to consult of some manner of shewing him [Washington] the respect this lodge entertains for him.”⁷⁶ After some discussion, it was resolved that an address of welcome, to be prepared and delivered to the President on behalf of the members of St. John’s Lodge, would be the responsibility of Francis X. Martin, Solomon Halling, and George Duffy.⁷⁷

The official New Bern delegation of eight which met Washington at West’s Ferry on the Neuse River included Masons Isaac Guion, Samuel Chapman, Joseph Leech and William McClure. Leech, Mayor of New Bern, delivered a brief address of welcome and the President’s carriage was escorted into town by the New Bern Volunteers under Captain Edward Pasteur, another Mason.⁷⁷ He was accompanied to his quarters at the late John Wright Stanly’s handsome town-house at the corner of Middle and New Streets and was visited later that afternoon by a committee from St. John’s Lodge, headed by Isaac Guion and including Chapman, Halling, Pasteur, William Johnston, James Carney, and Francis Lowthrop.⁷⁷

Dr. Guion’s address to Washington, later entered into the minutes of St. John’s, welcomed the President

not with the language of adulation, but sincere fraternal affection—your works having proved you to be the true and faithful brother, the skilful and expert Craftsman, the just and upright man. But the powers of eloquence are too feeble to express with sufficient energy the cordial warmth with which our bosoms glow toward you.

We therefore ardently wish ... That ... Providence may strengthen, establish, and protect you in your walk through this life; and when you shall be called off from your terrestrial labours by command of our divine grand master, and your operations sealed with the mark of his approbation, may your soul be eternally refreshed with the streams of living water which flow at the right hand of God, and when the supreme architect of all the worlds shall collect his most precious jewels as ornaments of the celestial Jerusalem, may you everlastingly shine among those of the brightest lustre.⁸⁰

To these expressions of Masonic good-will, the President responded with his thanks for the approval of “a fraternity

whose association is founded in justice and benevolence”, and his “sincere prayer for your present and future happiness.”⁸¹ The response was read to the lodge at a meeting on April 29th.⁸² Following a ball at Tryon Palace on the evening of April 21st, Washington left next morning for Wilmington.⁸³

Masonic welcomes greeted Washington’s party at frequent intervals along his journey. At Trenton, in Jones County, he was greeted on April 22nd by members of King Solomon’s Lodge, whose Secretary, William T. Gardner, expressed the hope of the brethren that “the Great Architect of the Universe may long preserve your invaluable life to preside over a great Sc free People & to the Advancement of the United States in Opulence, order Sc Fidelity⁸⁴

Reaching Wilmington in the early afternoon of April 24th, Washington was escorted to Dorsey’s Tavern but, the rooms intended for him not being ready, he was invited instead to stay in the home of the widow Mrs. John Quince.⁸⁵ Among his principal escorts at Wilmington was Edward Jones of St. John’s No. 1, Solicitor-General of the state. The address to the President on behalf of the citizens of the town was made on April 26th by Thomas Wright, Senior Warden of the Wilmington lodge.⁸⁶ The existing minutes of St. John’s Lodge do not, however, contain reference to the Presidential visit.

An anecdote, not necessarily true, of Washington’s visit to Wilmington concerns the proprietor of Dorsey’s Tavern, where the President may well have dined even though he did not sleep there. It seems that Washington inquired of Dorsey how the water at the tavern tasted and that Dorsey replied that he could not say, having never tasted the water unmixed with rum in more than forty years.⁸⁷ The President is said to have “made no further inquiries concerning the water during his stay at Wilmington.”⁸⁸

After leaving Wilmington on April 26th, the Presidential party drove to the Brunswick County plantation of Colonel Benjamin Smith, a Masonic brother, who had been Washington’s *aide-de-camp* for a time in New York during the Revolution. After spending the night at Colonel Smith’s brick manorhouse, called “Belvidere”, the President presented his host with a white Masonic apron, afterwards donated by a descendant of Smith to a lodge in Pennsylvania.⁸⁹ From “Belvidere”, the Presi



Benjamin Smith, Governor of N.C. 1810-1811, aide-de-camp to General Washington, host to President Washington in Brunswick County in 1791, member of St. John's Lodge No. 1, Wilmington. (N.C. Dept. of Cultural Resources).

dent was escorted into South Carolina by Congressman William Barry Grove, a member of Phoenix Lodge at Fayetteville.⁹⁰

Returning through North Carolina in late May and June, Washington was greeted by other fellow Masons, including Captain Montfort Stokes at Salisbury,⁹¹ Governor Martin at Salem,⁹² and others. His visit undoubtedly added still further stature to Masonry in North Carolina, serving as it did wherever he appeared, as a reminder of the President's close ties with the Craft and his devotion to its principles. His visit had also offered another occasion for the Masonic brotherhood to fit itself out in its most imposing regalia and to stage more of those colorful and solemn public displays with which its proceeding were now becoming synonymous throughout the state.