

Where Was Lafayette Made A Mason?

Unknown

Brother Lafayette entered the Grand Lodge Above on May 20, 1834. Many Lodges in 1934 will dedicate meetings to a memory only less immortal than that of his friend and brother George Washington. To aid in such undertakings, this Bulletin sets forth the principal contradictory testimonies about this Masonic making.

Julius S. Sachse, Grand Librarian of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, learned student and scholar. wrote (Brochure. 1916):

“No original documentary evidence is known to be in existence which records the initiation of General Lafayette in the Masonic Fraternity, nor in what Lodge or when it took place. It has always been a tradition in Masonic circles that General Lafayette was made a Mason in one of the Military Lodges at Morristown, New Jersey, where a Festal Lodge was held December 27, 1797, for which occasion the jewels and furniture and clothing of St. John’s Lodge No.1 of Newark, New Jersey, was borrowed. The meeting proved a great success, sixty- eight brethren being present, one of whom was George Washington.

“There is another tradition that General Lafayette was made a Mason in a Military Lodge which met at Valley Forge during the winter of 1777-78, but no official records of such action have thus far been discovered.”

Dr. Fredrick W. Hamilton, Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, eminent and learned Masonic scholar, write (The Builder, March 1921):

“Where and when La Fayette was made a Mason is not known. There are at least two quite different traditions, but neither rests on any very substantial basis or historic fact. Not improbably it was on the eve of his momentous diplomatic mission to France when he was just twenty-two; almost certainly it was in the Army Lodge; very probably it was at the insistence and in the presence of Washington. What is more likely than that Washington should have desires to weave the bond of Masonic brotherhood around the young man who was to play so delicate and important a part in the relations between the great Mason who commanded the American Army and the other great Mason, America’s greatest diplomat, Benjamin Franklin, who was American Ambassador to the French King.?”

“When La Fayette made his last visit to the United States the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania received him with distinguished honors, but before doing so appointed a committee to investigate and report upon his Masonic regularity. The committee reported that they had made careful investigation and were fully satisfied, but unfortunately their report gave no information whatever as to the evidence upon which this conclusion was based.

“Gould, in the ‘Library of Freemasonry.’ named the place of ceremony as Morristown, N.J., saying, “According to the late C.W. Moore, all the American Generals of the Revolution, with the exception of Benedict Arnold, were Freemasons. The Marquis de Lafayette was among the number, and it is believed that he was initiated in American Union Lodge at Morristown, N.J., the jewels and furniture used on the occasion being sent by St. John’s Lodge at Newark, N.J.”

Under the full page portrait of Lafayette which embellishes this article, appears this caption: “The Marquis Lafayette was admitted into Freemasonry in American Union Lodge which was held in a room over the old Freeman’s Tavern, on the north side of the green, Morristown, New Jersey, during the winter of 1777, at which time Brother George Washington presided in person.”

As Benedict Arnold “was” a Mason, his name was expunged from the rolls after he was proved a traitor; the reader must decide for himself how much weight can be given the testimony of “the late C.W. Moore.”

Past Grand Master Harry J. Guthrie, Delaware, Contributed a scholarly paper on Lafayette to “The Builder”, in March, 1925. From it the following is abstracted:

“General Lafayette arrived in this country on June 14, 1777; received a commission (honorary in effect) as a Major General from the congress and was later assigned to Washington’s staff July 31, 1777; led part of the troops in the Battle of Brandywine on September 11, 1777, where he was wounded in the leg and remained incapacitated at Bethlehem, Pa., until the later part of October. He volunteered for duty when scarcely able to place a boot on his foot, was assigned to the command of General Green and assisted in a reconnoiter with a view of giving battle to Lord Cornwallis, strongly entranced at Gloucester Point, N.J. The fact that the whole country between New York and Philadelphia was held in British grip precludes the probability of a gathering of general officers of the American Army attending a Masonic function at Morristown, N.J. between the first of November and the fifteenth of December 1777, on which date Washington went into winter quarters at Valley Forge, Pa., where Lafayette was quartered until after Dec. 30, 1777, after which time he went to Albany, N.Y.

“This should satisfy the mind as to the utter improbability of his having taken any degrees at Morristown, N.J. in 1777. But I am inclined to think the printed date of 1777 an error and that it should read 1779 in accordance with the tradition. History and government records inform us that on October 21, 1778, Lafayette, as a Major General, was granted a leave of absence to go to France to return at his convenience. (Probably on a secret mission) Lafayette left Boston Harbor

Fe. 11, 1779 for France; and the fact that he was presented with the Congressional sword at Havre on Aug. 24, 1779, comes pretty near proving that he arrived in France. On the return trip he sailed aboard the French frigate Herman from Rochelle March 19, 1780, and landed at Boston April 28, 1780, and on May 13, 1780, the Continental Congress considered his return to America to resume his command as a fresh proof of zeal, etc., etc. So it was not possible for him to have received the degrees of Freemasonry at Morristown, N.J. in December 1779, and that is the reason a reference was not made to him and that his name was not included in the Lodge register which contained the names of Washington and the other sixty-seven distinguished visitors.”

Gould, in his “Military Lodges,” says:

“In December, 1777, the Army retired to Valley Forge, and it was there – according to evidence which seems to be of a trustworthy character – that General Lafayette was initiated. The French Officer, though he had been received very warmly and kindly by General Washington, experience much uneasiness from the circumstance that he had never been entrusted with a “separate command.” During the winter he learned there was a Lodge working in the camp. Time hanging heavily on his hands, and the routine of duty being monotonous, he conceived the idea that he would like to be made a Mason. His wish, on being made know to the Lodge, was soon gratified, the Commander-in-Chief being present and in the chair at the time of his initiation.

“After I was made a Mason,’ said Lafayette, “General Washington seemed to have received a new light. I never had from that moment any cause to doubt his entire confidence. It was not long before I had a ‘separate command’ of great importance.”

Moore in his “Masonic Biography” states: “He had already become a member of the Masonic Fraternity.” (This was prior to his coming to America.)

Findel, in his “History of Freemasonry,” states that Lafayette attended a Masonic meeting December 25, 1775, for the purpose of consecrating a lodge named Da La Candeur. Particular mention was made of Lafayette being present.

Brother W.P. Strickland, D.D., stated in his late sixties that Lafayette was a member of the Fraternity when he came to America. Earl B. Dellzell, in the “Grand Lodge Bulletin,” Iowa, November, 1930, states”

“In the proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Tennessee of 1825, pages 133 and 135, the minutes of the Grand Lodge of Wednesday, May 4, 1825, state: “Our illustrious brother General Lafayette was unanimously elected an honorary member of this Grand Lodge.’ Later we find: ‘Our illustrious brother General Lafayette was introduced by Bros. Andrew Jackson and G.W. Campbell, received with Grand Honors, and seated on the right of the W.W. Grand Master.’

“At the conclusion of the Grand Master’s address of welcome, Lafayette made a feeling and appropriate reply, in substance as follows:’

“He felt himself highly gratified at being so kindly welcomed by the Grand Lodge of Tennessee, and at being made an honorary member of that Lodge, in which he had been introduced by the distinguished brother Mason who had erected the lines of New Orleans, and, in technical language of the Craft, had made them “well-formed, true and trusty.” He had, he said, been long a member of the Order, having been initiated, young as he was, even before he entered the service of our country in the Revolutionary War. He had never for a moment ceased to love and venerate the institution, and was, therefore, peculiarly delighted to see that it had spread its genial influence thus far to the west, and that his brethren here were not only comfortable, but brilliantly accommodated. He considered the Order as peculiarly valuable in this country where it not only fostered the principles of civil and religious liberty, but was eminently calculated to link the extremities of this wide republic together, and to perpetuate, by its fraternizing influence, the union of the States.”

Contrast this with the statements made by Dr. George W. Chaytor, addressing Lafayette Lodge No. 14, A.F. & A.M., Wilmington, Delaware, January 18, 1875, on the fiftieth anniversary of its constitution. (Quoted from the Guthrie article in “The Builder,” March, 1925): “He was not a Mason when he landed in America, nor was he a Mason at the Battle of Brandywine. The Army under Washington, in December, 1777, retired to Valley Forge, where they wintered. Connected with the Army was a Lodge. It was at Valley Forge that he was made a Mason. On this point there should be no second opinion – for surely Lafayette knew best where he was made a Mason. We have this statement from himself – made at the time he was the guest of the Grand Lodge of Delaware, and to members of that Grand Body. The statement he made was as follows:

“He had offered his services to this country from the purest motives, and he knew that, in his heart he had no selfish impulses. He found a people struggling for liberty against tyranny, and he put his whole soul in the cause. That Washington received him in the kindest and warmest manner, and never in any direct way showed the he had not the fullest confidence in his intentions and ability as a soldier, but yet, he could not divest his mind of a suspicion (that at times gave him great discomfort) that the General of the American Army was not altogether free from doubt in his case. This suspicion was engendered from the fact that he had never intrusted him with a separate command. This fact, he said, weighed upon him and at times made him very unhappy. With this exception, he had not the least cause for discomfort. During the winter (1777-78), as the Army lay at Valley Forge, he learned there was a Masonic Lodge working in camp. Time hanging heavy, and the routine of duty being monotonous, he conceived the idea that he would like to be made a Mason. He made his wish known to a friend, who at once informed him that he himself was a Mason, and would take pleasure in making his wish known

to the lodge. This was done, and he was there made a Mason. He also stated that Washington was present and acted as Master of the Lodge at the time of initiation.’

“This statement was made to members of the Grand Lodge, from some of whom it was received. I have no doubt that he said what I have here given, for the parties making the statement were gentlemen as well as Masons, and their public lives show the estimate their fellow citizens placed upon their honor and characters. I know that much doubt and contradiction had been bandied about the important point in Lafayette’s life. Various places have been stated as the point of his initiation – but an Army Lodge was always the organization in which he secured light.

“I have not yet finished his statement – the later part is evidence of the former. In the beginning he stated he felt rather hurt that Washington had not shown sufficient confidence to entrust him with a separate command. Now listen to what he said later:

“After I was made a Mason, General Washington seemed to have received a new light – I never had, from that moment, any cause to doubt his entire confidence. It was not long before I had a separate command of great importance.”

Past Grand Master Guthrie says of this writer:

“Dr. George W. Chaytor, well and favorably known, was a notable physician and enthusiastic Mason. He was born December 25, 1813, initiated September 7, 1841, raised November 2, 1841, and died April 14, 1878; respected by all men. He served his lodge as Master and in 1845 became a permanent member of the Grand Lodge of Delaware and was immediately elected Senior Grand Warden, Grand Secretary, 1849-59, Chairman of Committee on Foreign correspondence in 1875, elected Grand Master of Masons of Delaware in 1875.”

Just how much Dr. Chaytor really knew, and how much he was influenced by tradition is now only a matter of speculation. Even a reliable and worth witness may easily be misled in reporting on history a hundred years after the fact. It is interesting, at least, that Chaytor and Gould report the same language as coming from the lips of Lafayette as far as the “separate command” is concerned.

No attempt is here made to settle a question which has vexed the most learned. That Lafayette was an enthusiastic, loyal and devoted Mason no one can doubt; his reception on his final visit to this country was one long Masonic Pilgrimage with Grand Lodges and Lodges vieing with each other to do him honor. But just where he was “brought to light” is so involved with contradictions, that only further discoveries seem likely, finally to settle it to the satisfaction of Masonic Historians.

“ADDENDUM”

In “The New Age” magazine for July 1941, Brother Ray Baker Harris, Librarian of the Supreme Council, 33 deg., Southern Jurisdiction, revealed the acquisition of a rare 18th century program of the inauguration of Lodge St. Jean de la Candeur in Paris in December, 1775.

The Lodge had invited to the inauguration ceremonies “the Honorary, Regular and Subordinate Officers, and Deputies, of all Lodges composing the Grand Orient of France, and all brethren who could be recommended as regular Masons.” Obviously the ceremonies were held “In Lodge.”

Attached to the program is a Tableau of 100 “Les Chers Freres Visiteurs.” The Marquis de Lafayette is listed among the visiting Brethren.

While this seems to establish conclusively that Lafayette was a Mason in 1775 before coming to America, it leaves unanswered the question of when and where he was made a Mason.

STB – April 1934