

Freemasons at the Battle of Yorktown

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Freemasonry, during the time of Colonial America, was a vibrant and growing movement which was likewise a unifying factor within a society that consisted of thirteen different colonies, colonies with their distinctly different laws and a myriad of sub-groups of societies having their own cultures and even languages. And yet, with all the diversity and contrasts of its people, Freemasonry became a movement which unified and spoke to each of them. L. Randall Rogers, in his book, says this concerning this moment in both America's and Washington's history,

“Masonry was widespread over the colonies in 1776. There were 110 Lodges at that time and fifty military Lodges. Masonry grew during the Revolutionary period and for several years afterwards. There were several causes for the growth of Masonry during this period. The influence of Washington and his support must have been a factor in that growth.”¹

The keywords here are, “*fifty military Lodges*”. This means there were a significant number of Masons already involved in the American Revolution, and not just on the colonial side. We note both the British Army and Navy, led by Masonic and familial brothers William and Richard Howe, had the greater share of Masons in their ranks, but we also recognize that America was certainly not at a loss for having their fair share of Masons; from colonial statehouses to the Continental Congress, from the Green Dragon Tavern in Boston over to Tun Tavern in Philadelphia, down to the Rising Sun Tavern in Fredericksburg, and so forth.

¹ Rogers, L. Randall. 1998. *Our Masonic Presidents*. Texian Press.

In fact, the records of the Masonic Lodge in Fredericksburg reports that a total of ninety-five brethren joined “the Cause”, entering military service against the British ², as part of the Independent Company of Fredericksburg, with Brothers Hugh Mercer and George Weedon as the officers of this militia; this may well be the largest number of Masons coming from one specific organization, aside from the British army or navy.

So, what we know is of the 81 general officers in the Continental Army, 33 of them, or 41% of them are Freemasons.³ Of all the generals who worked directly for General and Brother George Washington, all but two were Freemasons. But what about the junior officers who supported them and the many “rank and file” non-commissioned officers and enlisted men who likewise basked in the Light of Freemasonry? We may not every reclaim every brother who rendered their good service to the American cause, and it is certain that other Masons have performed a great deal of research on this historic event⁴ but here is a list of brethren who we do know were present at Yorktown.

Freemasons of the Command Staff:

Lt. Gen. *George Washington* (Commander-in-Chief) – Mother Lodge is Fredericksburg No. 4 in Fredericksburg, Virginia and he was the first Master of Alexandria Lodge #22 under its Virginia Charter, 1788-1789. Brother Washington is the supreme commander of the Continental forces in American Revolution, and he becomes the first President of the United States; and

² Walker, J. Travis. 2002. A History of Fredericksburg Lodge No. 4, A.F. & A.M., 1752-2002. Fredericksburg: Sheridan Books, Inc.

³ Scottish Rite Journal. 2012. "General Officers in the Continental Army who were Freemasons." The Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, SJ. June. https://scottishrite.org/scottish-rite-myths-and-facts/george-washingtons-generals/?fbclid=IwAR0bbt7fkafo4eSgBef3wRrcuj-Kf3J11ZyveGI-iO-bIfmUmAtE_4z2d6k.

⁴ Case, James R. 1981. Freemasons at Yorktown. Research Paper, Wallingford: Grand Lodge of Connecticut. <https://www.masonicworld.com/education/files/apr02/include/freemasons%20at%20yorktown.htm>.

"father of his country.". It is speculated that he received the Royal Arch degree in Fredericksburg Lodge as it was being worked by that lodge at the time Washington was raised. This claim is aided by the fact that in August 1784, Lafayette presented Washington with a Masonic apron which had been embroidered by Madame Lafayette and contained emblems of the Royal Arch with the letters H.T.W.S.S.T.K.S. in a circle and a beehive within the circle to indicate that it was the wearer's mark.⁵ It should also be stated that the "father of his country", while still a young man, was raised among the Fairfax family, which was the most influential Masonic family in England during those years. From a hundred years before, their lineage ran to Lord Thomas Fairfax, who was commander-in-chief of the Parliamentary Army during the English Civil War and from his actions, he surrounded himself with Freemasons as his military officers as well, much like Washington did for his own.⁶

Brig. Gen. *Edward Hand* (Adjutant General) - He was a member of the Pennsylvania Military Lodge, now Montgomery Lodge No. 19. In 1774 he accompanied the 18th Royal Irish regiment to this country as a surgeon's mate but resigned and settled in Pennsylvania where he practiced medicine. At the start of the Revolution, he joined Thompson's brigade as a lieutenant colonel, serving at the siege of Boston, and in the battles of Long Island and Trenton. He was appointed brigadier general in 1777. He succeeded General Stark in command at Albany in 1778, and soon afterward served with General Sullivan in his expedition against the Indians in central

⁵ Denslow, William R. 1957. 10,000 Famous Freemasons. Vol. 4. 4 vols. Richmond, Virginia: Macoy Publishing & Masonic Supply Co., Inc.

⁶ Chandler, Shelby L. 2015. Freemasonry and the English Civil War. Research Paper, Fredericksburg: George Washington Lodge of Research No. 1732 AF&AM.

New York. He was a member of the U.S. Congress in 1784-85 and a signer of the Pennsylvania constitution of 1790.⁷

Maj. Gen. **Henry Knox** (Chief of Artillery) – Brother Knox is believed to be a member of St. John's Regimental Lodge at Morristown, N.J., warranted in 1775 and is credited with helping to constitute Washington Lodge at West Point in 1779. He is recorded a guest of Williamsburg Lodge No. 6, Williamsburg, Va.; St. John's Lodge, Boston; Amity Lodge No. 6, Camden, Maine; and Orient No. 15, Thomaston, Maine. Orphaned at age of 12, he was apprenticed to a bookseller, and in 1771 he opened the "London Book Store" in Boston when he was 21. He attempted to prevent the Boston Massacre of 1770. His military knowledge was gained from the textbooks which he supplied to British officers. He joined the American forces at the outbreak of the war and fought at Bunker Hill. He planned the defenses of the camps before Boston and brought much needed artillery from Lake George and the border. He was made brigadier general and chief of artillery after Trenton and was present at Princeton, Monmouth, and Yorktown. After the surrender of Cornwallis, he was made major general (1781). He took the initial steps in creating the U.S. Military Academy in 1779; was a member of the court-martial which tried Major Andre in 1780; and commanded West Point in 1782. He was considered one of Washington's most trusted advisors and a close friend.⁸

⁷ Harvey, Oscar Jewell. 1897. A History of Lodge No. 61, F and AM., WilkesBarre, PA. WilkesBarre, Pennsylvania: R.B. Yordy Printer.

⁸ Tillman, S E. 1915. "A Review of West Point's History." University of Chicago.
https://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Places/America/United_States/New_York/_Texts/journals/ProcNYSHA/15/A_Review_of_West_Points_History*.html.

Freemasons of the First Division:

Maj. Gen. *Marquis de Lafayette* (Commander - First Division) - Mother Lodge is in France. Brother Lafayette refused a prominent position in the French court to become a soldier in 1771 and later withdrew from the service in 1776. Instead, Lafayette outfitted his own ship, *Victoire*, and sailed with 15 other young adventurers, including Baron de Kalb, to fight for the American colonists against England. He was commissioned a major general on July 31, 1777 and he became an intimate associate of Washington. He was with Washington at Brandywine and Valley Forge; served on Major Andre's court martial; fought Banastre Tarleton and Benedict Arnold in Virginia; and was at the Battle of Yorktown for the surrender of Cornwallis.⁹ He returned to America in 1824-25 at the request of Brother James Monroe and became a member of several Masonic Lodges during these visits, to include Fredericksburg Lodge No. 4.

Brig. Gen. *John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg* (Commander - First Brigade) – Brother Muhlenberg is a member of Royal Arch Lodge No. 3, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1779. He was a Lutheran pastor and was also ordained in the Anglican Church and was educated in Germany. At the outbreak of the war, he called upon his parishioners to support the American cause by proclaiming "there is a time to preach and a time to fight, and now is the time to fight!". Muhlenberg chose to serve not as a chaplain but, rather, as a line officer of the 8th Virginia Regiment, made up primarily of German Americans. He was later promoted to brigadier general and given command of all the Virginia regiments, known as the Virginia Line in the army. He and the Virginia line fought at the Battles of Brandywine, Germantown, and Monmouth. When the Virginia Line was later ordered south to help defend Charleston, Muhlenberg was reassigned

⁹ Virginia Places. 2022. "The Revolutionary War in Virginia." Virginia Places. <http://www.virginiaplaces.org/military/revwar.html>.

to assist Baron von Steuben with the defense of Virginia. At Yorktown, Muhlenberg served as a brigade commander in Lafayette's Division. He was breveted a major general before retiring in November 1783 and he returned to Pennsylvania to serve his nation in a civil capacity.¹⁰

Freemasons of the Second Division:

Maj. Gen. *Frederick William Augustus Henry Ferdinand von Steuben* (Commander - Second Division) – His Mother Lodge is in Germany, and he became a member of Trinity Lodge No. 10 (now 12) in New York, later affiliated with Holland Lodge No. 8. Brother Von Steuben was a Prussian military officer, who directly served the Prussian King (and our Masonic Brother), Frederick the Great, before his coming to America. Brother Frederick was renown in Europe for his military prowess and Brother Von Steuben was directly trained by him. To Von Steuben's credit and honor, he is considered by military historians as the primary lynchpin to the success of the American Revolutionary struggle, in that it was because of his direct training and drilling of colonial troops (in the disciplines of soldiering) that the American army became professionally capable of directly facing off against the British Army in the European style of warfare. Washington considered him one of his most trusted and most experienced officers.¹¹

Brig. General *Anthony Wayne* (Commander – Second Brigade) - He is credited with membership in Winchester Lodge No. 12, but no location is given for it. He was a surveyor and farmer in Pennsylvania. He recruited and led a regiment at the start of the Revolution, becoming a brigadier general in 1777, and his bravery earned him the name of "Mad Anthony." After the war, Washington appointed him a major general in command of the regular army in 1792 and his

¹⁰ US Department of the Interior. 2015. "Yorktown Battlefield: John Muhlenberg." National Park Services. February 26. <https://www.nps.gov/york/learn/historyculture/muhlenbergbio.htm>.

¹¹ Independence Hall Association. 1999. "Historic Valley Forge: Who Served Here? Baron von Steuben." US History.org. <https://www.ushistory.org/ValleyForge/served/steuben.html>.

successful negotiations and military victories over the Indians opened the Northwest U.S. to settlers. He is credited with membership in "Winchester Lodge No. 12."¹² On July 16, 1857, the Grand Lodge of New York dedicated a monument to Brother Wayne's memory at Stony Point, N.Y. on Dec. 15, 1796.

Col. **Walter Stewart** (Commander – 1st PA Battalion) – Brevetted Brig. Gen., Stewart was a member of Pennsylvania Union Lodge No. 29. Brother Stewart started early in war when he raised a company for the 3rd Pennsylvania battalion and was commissioned captain. He was later appointed an aide to General Gates and served in that capacity from 1776 to 1777. Stewart later led a regiment of Pa. militia at Brandywine and Germantown and in Nov. 1777, his regiment was annexed to the Continental Army, becoming the 13th Regiment of the Pa. line. Brother Stewart retired in 1783 with the rank of brevet brigadier general. He was considered by many of the time to have been the handsomest man in the American Army and was known as the "Irish Dandy." He afterward became a well-known merchant in Philadelphia, and a major general of state militia. His full-length portrait is in Col. Trumbull's picture of the surrender of Cornwallis, on the left of the line of American officers.¹³

Freemasons of the Third Division:

Maj. Gen. **Benjamin Lincoln** (Commander - Third Division) – Mother Lodge is St. Andrew in Boston, Massachusetts in 1781. Brother Lincoln was active in organizing and training continental troops and appointed major general of militia in 1776 and was commissioned major general in the regular army in 1777 on the recommendation of Washington. He fought at

¹² Julius, C. Clark. 1994. "Mad Anthony Wayne." Knight Templar Magazine, July: 19-22.

¹³ The State Society of the Cincinnati. 2022. "Col. Walter Stewart." The State Society of the Cincinnati. https://pasocietyofthecincinnati.org/gallery_post/col-walter-stewart/.

the battles of Long Island, White Plains, and Fort Independence and he was with Gates at Stillwater and commanded the right wing. He was severely wounded at the Battle of Bemis's Heights. In Sept. 1778 he was given command of the southern department and was eventually captured with his army at Charleston. Exchanged, he immediately joined Washington on the Hudson River, participated in the siege of Yorktown, and was appointed by Washington to receive Cornwallis' sword of surrender.¹⁴ He was a member of the Massachusetts convention that ratified the U.S. Constitution and was president of the Massachusetts Society of the Cincinnati from its organization until his death. He was much esteemed by General Washington.

Brig. General *James Clinton* (Commander – First Brigade) - Member of Warren Lodge No. 17, New York. Before the American Revolution, Brother Clinton served in the New York militia during the French and Indian War. With the outbreak of the Revolution, Clinton was commissioned a colonel of the 2nd New York Regiment and five months later, he was promoted to brigadier general. He served most of the war in the Northern Department, along the New York frontier. During the Saratoga Campaign, he commanded Fort Montgomery in the Hudson Highlands. Clinton was able to escape from the fort when it fell to a British army led by Sir Henry Clinton (no relation). In 1780, he temporarily commanded the Northern Department and in October 1781, Clinton's brigade joined Washington's army to fight at Yorktown. Following the war, Brother Clinton served on a boundary commission that adjudicated land claims between New York and Pennsylvania.¹⁵

¹⁴ Springfield Technical Community College. 2008. "Shays' Rebellion - The Making of a Nation: Benjamin Lincoln." Springfield Technical Community College.

http://shaysrebellion.stcc.edu/shaysapp/person.do?shortName=benjamin_lincoln.

¹⁵ National Park Service. 2015. "Yorktown Battlefield: Brigadier General James Clinton." National Park Services. February 26. <https://www.nps.gov/york/learn/historyculture/clintonbio.htm>.

Freemasons of the Virginia Militia Division:

Brig. Gen. *Thomas Nelson, Jr* (Commander - Virginia Militia Division & Governor of Virginia) – Mother Lodge is Williamsburg No. 6 in Williamsburg, Virginia. A signer of the Declaration of Independence, Brother Nelson was the commanding General of the Lower Virginia Militia and took part in the final siege at Yorktown. It should also be stated that Nelson was Governor of Virginia at the time of this battle. According to legend, Brother Nelson urged George Washington (or Marquis de Lafayette, depending on the version of the story) to fire upon his family home, Nelson House, where Cornwallis had made his headquarters. To this, Nelson allegedly offered 5 guineas to the first man to hit the house once the artillery were within range.¹⁶

Brig. Gen. *Edward Stevens* (Commander – Second Brigade) – Member of Fairfax Lodge No. 43 in Culpeper Virginia. Brother Stevens commanded a battalion of militia at the Battle of Great Bridge, which was the first battle on Virginia soil in December 1775. The following year he was appointed colonel of the 10th Virginia Regiment, which joined Washington's Army in New Jersey in 1777, and faced off with General Howe's forces at the Battle of Brandywine, where he held the road until nightfall, preventing a serious disaster for the Americans. While serving at Germantown, he was made a brigadier general and in August 1780, he joined General Horatio Gates in the Battle of Camden and Guilford Courthouse where he was severely wounded. He recovered in time to serve at the siege of Yorktown. From the adoption of the state constitution until 1790 he was in the Virginia senate. Brother Stevens was buried at the Culpeper Masonic Cemetery, land which he donated from his family's property to his Masonic Lodge.¹⁷

¹⁶ Masonry Today. 2022. "Today in Masonic History: Thomas Nelson Jr. is born." Masonry Today. Accessed July 31, 2022. https://www.masonrytoday.com/index.php?new_month=12&new_day=26&new_year=2014.

¹⁷ Jefferies, Margaret. 1937. "LVA Titled Files: Survey Report, Masonic Cemetery:" US Gen Web Archives. Library of Virginia Digital Collection. August 16. <http://files.usgwarchives.net/va/culpeper/cemeteries/masonic01.txt>.

Brig. Gen. *George Weedon* (Commander - Weedon's Brigade) – Member of Kilwinning Cross Lodge No. 2 in Port Royal, Virginia and later affiliated with Fredericksburg Lodge No. 4, where he served as Worshipful Master where he was designated a Right Worshipful Grand Master. Brother Weedon served under Washington during the French and Indian War and following this service, he married and became an innkeeper of the tavern where Thomas Jefferson wrote the first statute on Religious Freedom. He was brother-in-law to Brigadier General and Brother Hugh Mercer, who was the Hero of Kittanning and who died at the Battle of Princeton in January 1777.¹⁸ Weedon became a lieutenant colonel of the 3rd Virginia Regiment in February 1776 and in August of the same year was transferred to the 1st Virginia Regiment. Commissioned brigadier general in February 1777, he participated in the battles of Brandywine and Germantown. He retired from the Army over a dispute regarding seniority of rank, but in 1780 he took command of a brigade in support of Brother Lafayette's defense of Virginia and Weedon was present at Yorktown where he formed a defense across the river at Gloucester Point. It was Weedon's forces who took on Colonel Banastre Tarleton's forces and permanently ended General and Brother Cornwallis' one means of escape until Brother Washington's forces could arrive.¹⁹ He oversaw the renewal of Freemasonry in Fredericksburg following the war.

Admiral *François Joseph Paul de Grasse* - Mother Lodge in France. The French Admiral who led the French fleet into the Chesapeake Bay and destroyed the British Fleet before sailing up the York River to help trap Cornwallis at Yorktown. De Grasse started his naval career serving as a Knight Hospitaller (Order of Malta) from age 12-18 at which point he returned

¹⁸ George Washington's Mount Vernon. 2022. "Hugh Mercer." George Washington's Mount Vernon. <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/hugh-mercer/>.

¹⁹ George Washington's Mount Vernon. 2022. "George Weedon." George Washington's Mount Vernon. <https://www.mountvernon.org/library/digitalhistory/digital-encyclopedia/article/george-weedon/>.

to France. His son, Alexandre Francois Auguste, Comte de Grasse (also a Mason), with his son's father-in-law (Jean Baptiste Delahogue), moved to Charleston, South Carolina in 1793, and where they both would go on to become founders of the Supreme Council, Southern Jurisdiction, Mother Council of the World Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry.²⁰

General *Lord Charles Cornwallis* - Mother Lodge is almost certainly in Great Britain and quite possibly a military Lodge but no records. What is recorded is that he performed the grand honors of Masonry at the funeral of American Major General DeKalb after the battle of Camden. Brother Cornwallis was the 2nd Earl and first Marquis of Cornwallis. He fought in Germany in 1761-62 and was considered a brilliant military leader. He became a major general during the American Revolution, where he chased Washington in New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. He was sent to South Carolina where he defeated Greene at Guilford Court House in 1781 and pushed his way to Virginia but was besieged at Yorktown and forced to capitulate.²¹ He was then transferred to India, where he was governor general and commander-in-chief in 1786 and he was promoted to full general in 1793. He was then viceroy of Ireland from 1798-1801, resigning because of the king's refusal to grant Roman Catholic emancipation. He negotiated the treaty of Amiens in 1802 and was again governor general of India in 1805.

²⁰ Supreme Council for the Southern Jurisdiction of the United States. 1872. A Historical Inquiry in Regard to the Grand Constitutions of 1786. Washington, DC: Ancient & Accepted Scottish Rite, SJ

²¹ The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History. 2022. "Surrender of the British General Cornwallis to the Americans, October 19, 1781." The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History. <https://www.gilderlehrman.org/history-resources/spotlight-primary-source/surrender-british-general-cornwallis-americans-october>.

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