

John Dove

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Virginia Research Lodge No. 1777

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He was born in the city of Richmond, Virginia September 2, 1792, living through the latter part of the 18th century and three-fourths of the 19th century, passing through the portals of death November 16, 1876. This enabled him to know something of the habits, character and changes occurring in the three generations through which he passed and adapt himself to the requirements of society, while not compromising his views of duty.

His early education was under a tutor, who was a Scotchman and it is said he was rigid and exacting. Punctuality, attention to study, exact rendition of the task imposed, respect and

obedience were demanded and he hesitated not to punish when duty was neglected. Doubtless, at that time was the seed planted from which grew the system, regularity and the punctuality which characterized Dr. Dove through his life.

The profession which he selected was that of medicine. He began his studies in Richmond and continued them at Jefferson College in Philadelphia and there received his diploma. He spent his professional life in Richmond, his native city, where he obtained a very



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extensive practice and continued it for nearly sixty years. When he gradually gave up his practice he still continued the duties of physician to the city jail, to which he had been appointed for many years, up to his last illness.

His kindness of heart and manner of gentleness made him a welcomed visitor when sickness needed his attention, and no father could have exhibited more affectionate interest than did he when pain and suffering were present. This interest was not confined to any one class. To the poor and rich alike he devoted his time and skill. Many a sufferer received not only his gratuitous medical attentions, but other benefits delicately bestowed by a tender heart and open hand.

Dr. Dove was annually elected for many years by the citizens of his ward (Richmond was under the Ward system of government) a member of the City Council. In every public situation, as well as City Council, a man, whose judgment could be relied upon for good and his influence was not exerted for any special locality, but for the public as a whole. In those days the "office sought the man and not the man the office". After declining to serve on City Council, he was, against his wishes, elected a magistrate of the city annually for several years. On the bench, as he had been in Council, the same clear-headed, conscientious man.

He also took active interest in politics, attended public meetings and often was selected chairman. In the tumult of large assemblies, his suavity of manner was unchanged. He never permitted his feelings to cause him to forget the character and conduct of a gentleman.

Shortly after the inauguration of the Lancasterian school, Dr. Dove was appointed one of the board of trustees and elected secretary. He held these positions until that institution was superseded by the regular Richmond public school system.

The hearty interest which he exhibited in the welfare and education of orphan and destitute children were marked as a trait of his character. No man could have been more solicitous, more zealous, or accomplished more good for this worthy institution than he, and more than one occupying prominent places as a useful citizen could point to the instruction received there as the starting point for good in their lives.

Dr. Dove was for many years connected with St. John's Episcopal Church. He was often elected a member of the vestry and on several occasions represented that church in the Episcopal councils of the State, having the support of the rector and the members.

In his early life, Dr. Dove became interested on the subject of Ancient Craft Masonry and took the first opportunity its laws would admit, of uniting himself. When he arrived at the legal age of twenty-one, he made application to St. John's Lodge No. 36 for admittance and was accepted. In December 1813, he was initiated an Entered Apprentice and in the early part of the following year passed to the degree of Fellowcraft, and was shortly thereafter raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason. From that moment to the period of his last illness he was active, zealous and an influential Mason.

Not being satisfied with bearing the name of Mason, he at once entered into diligent study and a careful analysis of the subject. The more he examined into and the better he understood the principles and objects of its organization, the more firmly he became convinced that no institution brought into existence by man was better adapted to his wants, or more elevating to his nature, than Freemasonry, if its teachings are properly understood and faithfully adhered to by its members.

With these impressions, it is not surprising that a man of his temperament, his industry, his reflective mind, should have become ardent, zealous, and active in the perfection and the promulgation of its principles to his fellow men.

Sixty-three years unbroken connection with Masonry gives strong and conclusive evidence of the firmness of his convictions, when investigating the subject in the early part of his Masonic career. Day by day, year by year, for more than two generations, he continuously occupied Masonic duties, discharging its responsible trusts.

The first organization of St. John's Lodge No. 36, in which our respected brother was brought to Masonic light, had but brief existence. The difficulty of obtaining and occupying for any length of time a suitable room for Masonic purpose embarrassed them to a degree that they determined to return their charter, in 1816, to the Grand Lodge of Virginia, where-upon many of its members, among them Brother Dove, made application to and became members of Richmond Randolph Lodge No. 19, in which lodge he continued a paying member during his life.

He had been connected with that lodge but a short time when his merits attracted the attention of his brethren, who elected him to its various offices, and finally elevated him to the position of Worshipful Master. It was no light honor to reach the position of Worshipful Master of any lodge in Virginia at that point in time, but especially was it a notable mark of confidence on the part of his brethren, in his moral and Masonic qualifications, to elevate him to the mastership of that lodge over which such men as Edmund Randolph, John Marshall and other distinguished men of their day presided. Brother Dove was equal to the task and under his guidance the lodge maintained its prestige. It stood most high in the Masonic world as a bright, active and zealous lodge, its members understanding and practicing those Masonic virtues so impressively and earnestly enjoined upon them by their Master.

More than once in the history of that lodge will be found that our Worshipful Brother Dove was called upon to discharge the duties of Master. As a presiding officer, more especially of a Masonic organization, our worthy brother had but few equals: an interesting speaker, well versed in parliamentary law and usage and having thorough knowledge of the laws of Masonry and the ritual, his memory active and retentive, his

manner dignified and possessing great firmness and voice clear, distinct and commanding. While exacting perfect order, no exception could be taken as to his manner of obtaining it.

A few years had elapsed when his bright and enquiring mind became satisfied that discrepancies had crept into the ritual not consistent with Ancient York Masonry and in order to be assured, he opened a correspondence with the distinguished Mason Jeremy L. Cross as well as with other experienced and renowned brethren of the Craft. Brother Cross was invited to Richmond and was the Doctor's guest during his stay. While here a thorough examination of the work took place and the exact rendering of the Smith Webb work, so-called York Masonry obtained. Chapter Masonry and the Templar Orders also engaged their attention and in order that they might be perfectly disseminated throughout the state, the services of that bright and intelligent brother, James Cushman from the North, were obtained, who travelled through Virginia, by authority and imparted the perfected York Work and Ritual to various Lodges; Chapters and Commanderies also received the benefit of his instruction.

To the untiring energy and unceasing efforts of Brother John Dove are we indebted for the consistent, beautiful and perfect work now in use and which, in many instances, has been transmitted to other states by Masons from Virginia.

In 1836 a successful effort was made to institute a Lodge on Shockoe Hill, Lodges Nos. 10 and 19 being too remote from the residences of many old Masons for them to attend to their lodge duties. It was thought to adopt the name of St. John's Lodge No. 36. Several of the former members of old 36 united with others in the application for a dispensation, of which Brother Dove was one. Under that dispensation they went to work and at the next Grand Lodge obtained a charter, from which time to the present it has continued to work.

It is reported that Brother Dove had in his possession the treasurer's book of the first St. John's Lodge which he presented to the newly re-activated lodge. He was also elected an honorary member. St. John's Lodge was prosperous and had a large membership, and from it sprang other lodges. To it, Dove Lodge, so called in compliment to the Doctor, owes its origin, Worshipful Thomas P. August being its first Master.

Fraternal Lodge No. 53 was aided by Brother Dove to obtain a dispensation and charter. His name was appended to its application. He was also elected an honorary member.

On December 13, 1835 he was elected Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Virginia, succeeding Right Worshipful John Green Williams, the successor of Right Worshipful Gustavus A. Myers, who was elected to that office on the death of Most Worshipful William H. Fitzwhyllson, Past Grand Master. For forty-one years our respected brother discharged the arduous duties of that office, involving as it did a large domestic and foreign correspondence and the examination of voluminous documents, with great skill, ability and fidelity.

In 1814 Dr. Dove received the degrees of Royal Arch Masonry in Richmond Royal Arch Chapter No. 3. In that branch of Masonry he also took great interest. His activity and intelligence soon made him prominent and sought after by his companions for office. He was elected and passed through the various stations of the chapter and in due time served as Most Excellent High Priest. At the proper period, by virtue of his office, he most efficiently represented that chapter in the Grand Royal Chapter of Virginia. The same spirit actuated him there as in the Grand Lodge. A seeker after light and knowledge, he desired that consistency in the work and ritual be obtained and that the sublime degrees of Royal Arch Masonry should be properly understood, taught and practiced. He perfected and published under authority of the Grand Chapter of Virginia "A Royal Arch Textbook" which embodied the work and lectures of Royal Arch Masonry, as understood and practiced in Virginia, aiding much in the preservation of uniformity.

In November 1818, he was elected Grand Secretary of the Grand Chapter, succeeding Companion John Warrock, who had filled the office from 1808. The term of service for Companion Dove reached fifty-eight years, and the record bears testimony to the remarkable fact that during this long time he was not absent one night or day from his duties. As certainly as the Grand Chapter assembled, as surely would John Dove be met with, and as surely and kindly, give welcome as well to young as old Masons.

Fifty-eight years is a long time to hold office and retain the confidence and affection of that body, which is continually changing year by year and it is remarkable that life should be spared and health given for the discharge of manual duty for that length of time; but for some wise purpose he was with us the Grand Secretary, and in that long life and multiplicity of duties afforded an example worthy the emulation of his companions in Masonry.

In Richmond Commandery No. 2, in the year 1818, he received the beautiful and impressive orders of Templar Masonry. His membership in that Commandery he retained to the day of his death, the latter part as an honorary member. Our brother, as a member of that body, lost not his interest nor lessened his labor in the other branches of Masonry. He took active interest in that Commandery and served as its Eminent Commander, the duties of which he discharged most ably and his lessons made deep lodgment in the minds of those he instructed. When Richmond Commandery No. 2 became dormant he was instrumental in re-activating it as well as helping the Grand Commandery of Virginia in re-organizing.

At the reorganization of the Grand Commandery of Virginia he was elected Grand Recorder, which office he was, with great unanimity, annually re-elected. From the Grand Commandery meeting in Alexandria, November 15 and 16, 1876, he was absent for the first time after being elected recorder because he was on his death bed.

The Grand Commandery of Virginia, in a historic move during its annual Convocation November 15 and 16, 1876, at Alexandria, Virginia, directed that resolutions be prepared on the death of Sir John Dove, a portion of which is as follows:

"In years past our Brother has given evidences of strong religious faith. On the very verge of death, but a few moments before life departed, he raised his hand to his forehead, feeling and knowing as a physician, that it was death's cold sweat that rested upon IL, he solemnly and impressively said, 'Into thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit. Amen.' And his voice was hushed to earth - forever."

Brother Dove was one of those selected by the Council of the thirty-third degree of the Southern Jurisdiction to be the head of the Scottish Ritual in the City of Richmond and after having taken the thirty-second was duly elected and appointed to be invested with the highest official position of the thirty-third. But from circumstances not mentioned he did not present himself for investiture.

During its Annual Convocation in October 1975 the Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Virginia added to its standing committees a "Distinguished Service Awards Committee" and established a "John Dove Medal" as the Award for Outstanding and Distinguished Service to Royal Arch Masonry in Virginia. To become a recipient of the John Dove Medal Award is the highest honor bestowed on a Royal Arch Mason by our Grand Chapter.

It was my proud honor to become the recipient of this award at the Grand Chapter on October 25, 1985 meeting in Williamsburg, Virginia.

On November 16, 1876 Brother John Dove departed this life. On the 18th his remains were conveyed to the old church cemetery, accompanied by his affectionate family, relatives, a large number of friends and the citizens en masse, by St. John's Lodge No. 36, by companion Royal Arch Masons, and under the escort of Richmond Commandery No. 2, the bell tolling a solemn requiem.

The church building was filled to over-flowing. The solemn burial services of the Episcopal Church were conducted by the rector, Reverend Brother A. W. Weddell, assisted by Rev. Messrs. Peterkin and Jackson. His body was then consigned to the last resting place of the dead, near the remains of his beloved wife who had preceded him twelve years earlier.

I am indebted to the following for contributions to this paper:

Wor. Calvin Mitchell, P.M. Dove Lodge No. 51

The Rough Ashlar Publication - September 1891

The City of Richmond

St. John's Lodge No. 36

Richmond Randolph Lodge No. 19

Fraternal Lodge No. 53

Richmond Royal Arch Chapter No. 3

Richmond Commandery No. 2

Grand Lodge of Virginia

Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Virginia

Grand Commandery Knight Templar of Virginia

Mrs. Judith M. King (Typist)