

“Masonic Examples of Brotherhood in the Hudson Valley During the American Revolution”

Or “...together with a Charter or Dispensation from some grand body of competent jurisdiction empowering it to work”

During the French and Indian War, The American Revolution, Wars in the Caribbean, India, Asia and Africa and today, to satisfy the requirement that our Senior Warden often mentions, British, French, Scottish and Irish Masonic lodges and even some few American Lodges were granted military traveling dispensations by their Grand Lodges to act as and actively function as they traveled throughout the world. These traveling lodges carried their regalia, their jewels, their constitution, their aprons and their Bible in a trunk that was compact and easy to move with their regalia. This article could also be – “Treasure in a Battered, Brass Bound, Bullock Trunk - with a Smashed Lock.”

There were American military lodges set up the same way and Brother George Washington sat and enjoyed the company of his countrymen and his Brothers in Newburg at the Temple of Virtue, possibly at Valley Forge and Philadelphia, and at Morristown at Arnold's Tavern. There is a story about British Masonic Lodges, within two separate military units, and how these lodges met American forces first as enemies and then as brothers. These two examples include their officers and men who met, acted and parted on the square of Masonry. These lodges were within the 46th Light Infantry (The Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry from 1752 until 1846) and the second example in the 17th Rangers. Both stories took place on the New Jersey side of the Hudson River during the American Revolution.

A quick definition - “light infantry” - meant “troops set up for a skirmish” and were almost always used as scouts for the main Army. The soldiers were often called “Light Bobs.” The name of the 46th Regiment's lodge during the French and Indian War and the American Revolution was “The Lodge of Social and Military Virtues, No. 227.” It was well known that fighting the American's in their War of Independence was unpopular in many parts of Great Britain; but some of the Scottish Lodges, urged perhaps by government officials, had offered bounties to pay recruits for joining the army. When the Grand Lodge met that year, it condemned this practice in unmistakable terms: "Masonry is an order of Peace, and it looks on all mankind to be Brethren as Masons, whether they be at peace or at war with each other as subjects of contending countries."

When action in the war of the Revolution was about to begin, General Howe had been appointed to the command of the British forces. The fleet carrying the British troops arrived from Halifax and stood off the port of New York in June 1776. Howe fixed his headquarters on Staten Island where the 46th Light Regiment had just arrived from Ireland. Think about this. Some soldiers and even citizens who had fought side by side in the previous war against the French as friends and some maybe even visiting brethren in the Regimental Lodge were now on opposite sides militarily. The conflict had begun in Boston and the troops on both sides now came to New York. And then in New York City almost immediately, the Declaration of Independence was read, the war in the New York area began and the British crossed over to Brooklyn.

Skipping ahead a year..... In the fall of 1777, General Wayne and the Americans encamped at Paoli, Pennsylvania, about twenty-five miles outside of Philadelphia. They were in a secluded spot off the main road, but the whereabouts of these American forces soon became known. General Howe dispatched Major General (afterward Lord Earl) Grey with two regiments and a body of light infantry to surprise General Wayne on September 20, 1777¹. This battalion was made up of the light companies of the 46th Regiment and five other regiments. Grey, ordered the flints to be taken from the muskets and to attack only with the bayonet, hence he was nicknamed by the Americans "no flint Grey." By the light of the campfires the British approached the sleeping camp in silence, and with the bayonet, killed three hundred soldiers, taking just a few prisoners and ran off with the Americans equipment and supplies. General Grey and the attacking force lost only seven. The Americans who escaped the massacre vowed vengeance, sending word that should they meet again, and no quarter would be given; the "Light Bobs" replied that "they were quite ready for such revenge, and to prevent others from suffering on their account had stained their helmet feathers red." Throughout the war – and later - this was the distinguishing badge of the 46th and the other five companies. Washington and his army soon went into winter quarters at Valley Forge about twenty-five miles from Philadelphia

and about seven miles from Paoli. In the countryside of Valley Forge, Baylor's 3rd Dragoons, a cavalry unit, because of their horses, were quartered elsewhere around the city. The 46th and the British army generally occupied the city, and during the winter of 1777-8 detachments from both armies ranged throughout the countryside, keeping open communications and collecting supplies.

When quartered in the city, it is said by a few historians that the lodges resumed regular meetings, and that the Masons of both armies met and interchanged visits at both places – Valley Forge and Philadelphia. Chas. E. Myers of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania wrote in *Masonry during the Revolution* that, "In the lodge during the turmoil of war, the Royalists and Federalists were wont to meet upon the square, both sides meeting upon the level." ⁱⁱ

Now, as an exception. No matter how "friendly," no matter how "brotherly," Brother Washington would not cross lines to go to a Tory or British Lodge. In the spring, the Armies moved towards New York and passed through New Jersey on June 28, 1778 when the two forces met, and fought, in an undecided battle at Monmouth. After the Monmouth engagement, Sir Henry Clinton collected his wounded, moved forward and towards the Atlantic coast and rested his army for some days on the New Jersey Highlands. The troops then went aboard Lord Howe's fleet inside Sandy Hook and sailed to New York City. The French Admiral who had proposed to attack the British fleet remained outside Sandy Hook. Washington, deeming it prudent not to follow the British too closely, put his forces in order and then crossed the Hudson and occupied White Plains, later moving his headquarters to an area known as "Fredericksburg." "Fredericksburg" was the colonial name for today's present Hudson Valley towns of Patterson, Kent, Carmel and Southeast in Putnam County and Pawling in Dutchess County.

An expedition composed of the 46th and other regiments under Major General Grey sailed down Long Island Sound and proceeded against New Bedford in Massachusetts. On September 5, 1778, the British troops were landed, sacked the place, destroyed privateers and naval stores, and next day went back aboard, sailed for Martha's Vineyard, and seizing arms, livestock and the recently collected taxes of the Federalists and then returned to New York.

One of the items the British took was a Bible owned by Bartholomew West of Bedford, CT. Mr. West was an elderly man, quite outspoken about his hatred of the British and his children saved him by pulling him out of the house as the British burned his home to the ground. It was thought that the Bible was destroyed with the house and it wasn't until in the late 1800's did the family learn of the whereabouts of their family Bible. *Rivington's Royal Gazette*, published at the time, read that immediately on Grey's return, Sir Henry Clinton sent troops up the Hudson under Lord Cornwallis and Grey to collect forage and provisions. *Collecting forage* can be said to be the "stocking up of the kitchen pantry for the winter."

Landing troops near Sneden's Ferry on the west side of the Hudson, Cornwallis hoped to entrap Wayne and others whom Washington had ordered to support the militia and to disperse any foragers and scouts whom they might come across. Cornwallis also sent Lord Grey with the 2nd Battalion Light Infantry and other troops up the Hackensack river, and troops from the Hudson River at Sneden's were to meet at Tappan, N.Y. We see that the 46th Regiment is not committed in this tactical move. Grey learned from local Tories that Colonel Baylor's Virginia Third Dragoons were encamped near Tappan – actually in today's River Vale, NJ - and he decided to repeat his Paoli "no flint" exercise of a year and a week earlier. The light infantry got behind Baylor's outposts at midnight, September 27, repeated the massacre as at Paoli by rushing upon the Americans with the bayonets as the dragoons lay sleeping in farmhouses and barns. Few escaped, being either killed, wounded or taken prisoners including Colonel Baylor and Major Alexander Clough. The captured and wounded were taken to the Dutch Reformed Church in Tappan where the dead promptly were buried. ⁱⁱⁱ

Again the Americans repeated that they were going to seek revenge. This was considered an overzealous and bloody service, and it was acknowledged by all that the British might have spared the unresisting. The day following, the British troops returned to camp in New York. This event, this battle, was known as "The Baylor Massacre." Except ---- Dr. David Griffith, the doctor that General Washington sent to report on the massacre wrote to Washington that, "It appears, indeed, that one of their Light Infantry Captains, had the feelings of remorse, and ventured to disobey his orders, he gave "Quarter" to the whole 4th Troop, and not a man of them was hurt - except two that happened

to be on guard: for the honour of Humanity it is to be wished this gentleman's name had been known." While there is no report of a Masonic sign of distress being given, this certainly sounds like a Masonic intervention.

Cornwallis had now possession of the Jersey side of the Hudson, and we learn from Deputy Adjutant General Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Kemble's Journal of September 30th, "A grand foraging party, the 44th and 46th regiments, light infantry and other troops, advanced on the main road to Tappan, scouts being sent in different directions to learn conditions as far as West Point, the troops sometimes having brushes with small parties of Militia and other American troops." Soon, American Lieutenant Colonel Butler, with a detachment of infantry and some cavalry under Major Henry Lee, meeting a small party of Hessian jaegers and chasseurs, under Captain Donop, "severely punished them, killing, wounding and taking prisoners."

Chief Justice John Marshall in his *Life of Washington* says that, *This at the time this was considered a slight revenge for the onslaught on Colonel Baylor a few days before" and the capture of a trunk.* These movements continued, when on the October 27, the 46th was suddenly ordered to the West Indies, forming part of the army of ten regiments under Major General Grant, which sailed with the fleet for the West Indies on November 2, 1778, thus terminating the services of the 46th in the war of the Revolution.

"The Albion", a newspaper from 1854, carried an article labeled "A Curious Story" that told that there was a traveling Lodge in the 46th Regiment, holding its Warrant of Constitution under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Ireland. Further in the "Freemasons Monthly Magazine, 1842" ^{iv} the basis for this story and an almost word for word description in both as follows: *"It is said that after an engagement between the American and British forces, in which the latter were defeated, the private chest of the Lodge, containing its jewels, furniture and implements, fell into the hands of the Americans. The captors reported the circumstances to General Washington, who at once ordered the chest to be returned to the Lodge and the regiment, under a guard of honor. "The surprise," says a historian of the event, himself an Englishman and a Mason, "the feeling of both officers and men may be imagined, when they perceived the flag of truce that announced this elegant compliment from their noble opponent, but still more noble brother. The guard of honor, with their music playing a sacred march - the chest containing the Constitution and implements of the Craft borne aloft, like another ark of the covenant, equally by Englishmen and Americans, who lately engaged in the strife of war, now marched through the enfilded ranks of the gallant regiment that, with presented arms and colors, hailed the glorious act by cheers, which the sentiment rendered sacred as the hallelujahs of an angel's song."*

By the way, the chest or trunk, also contained that Bible with the family history of one Bartholomew West of Bedford, Massachusetts in it. As time passed, British Colonel William Lacy reported that in the Bible was a page with a note that reads, "On this Sacred Volume, Washington received a degree in Masonry." ^v Well, all of us Washington buffs know he took his degrees in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Masonic researchers including Brother Bemish of the NJ Grand Lodge was quoted in a paper by William A. Brown, presented to the A. Douglas Smith, Jr., Lodge of Research, #1949, that suggested that Washington did the Mark Master degree visiting the 46th in Philadelphia during the Valley Forge period! If this were true, maybe the British Lieutenant met Brothers of the 4th troop of the Third Dragoons on the level and then again at Tappan! ^{vi} However, as great as this sounds, I do believe the Bible was resting on the shelf in Bedford, Massachusetts at Mr. Wise's home during the winter of '77-'78 even if there were a truce and exchange of Masonic Brotherhood in Philadelphia, the Bible was added to the 46th's Masonic trunk in September 1778.

The note that Washington "received a degree" may have been even added later by the Americans meaning that Washington had received a degree on Masonry like all Brothers on a "Sacred Volume" like this. Could it also be said, that "On this Sacred Volume, Washington, you and I received a degree in Masonry?" That seems to fit historically too. This note might have happened when the Bible and gear were captured as it was being returned.

Now the great thing about research is finding someone who might know. After tracking the Bible by the whereabouts of the Lodge of Military and Social Virtue into another lodge, Lodge of Antiquity #1 in Ontario, and finding that no one knew of this story and Bible, research took another route. Follow the Regiment! And there was the Bible in the Cornwall Museum in Bodmin, England. The collection tells the story of the County Regiment from 1702 until the

present date. The displays cover the story of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry, the volunteers and volunteer militia and the successor Regiment, The Light Infantry.

The curator there, Mr. Hugo White, told another story.^{vii} He said that Colonel Lacy did find this old trunk and inside was the "West" Bible.^{viii} Lacy had the Bible recovered to preserve it and Lacy said there were stories of American ladies that had visited the unit after Church services - in at least two countries - and soon it was noted that the page with Washington's statement on it had been torn out! Mr. White added, that he "had looked through the Bible numerous times and there are no pages missing and that maybe, just maybe Col. Lacy added "Washington's name just to make his discovery more important!"

The Itinerary of General Washington by W. S. Baker does show that Washington had his headquarters at Fredericksburg, NY and that he was regularly informed of all movements in the area. When the LTC Butler/Major Lee capture was made known to General Washington, he ordered the return of the trunk and, at the same time sent a message, "that Americans were not warring against institutions of benevolence."^{ix}

This is later confirmed in the eulogy by Brother Tim Bigelow of Massachusetts for General Washington. Yet, going to the primary sources there are no records of this as an event or a Masonic happening. Fine story but how about the military truce during when the trunk was returned to the 46th Regiment? There is only a short period when this could have been done. The capture and return of the trunk is recorded in so many references - even *Masonry for Dummies!* Never mentioned is anything specifically about the capture or return. Then these two letters by General Clinton to General Israel Putnam. *Henry Cuyler, James Dole, & Alex'r White being duly exchanged for (British) Major Lush & Messrs. Vantassel & Maybe of this State, I gave them with their Families & effects Permission to pass to N. York with a Flag on Tuesday [6 Oct.] with the Officer to command the Flag to be appointed by the Commanding Officer at W. Point.*

This could be the means for returning the trunk! A second letter with the same theme immediately followed and reads: *I am this Moment favored with a Line from Genl. Washington informing me that a Boat with a Flag coming up from the Enemy for Mr. Cuyler & his Family is stopped below the Fort. I am extremely happy this Caution is taken, for tho Mr. Cuyler & the other Persons are completely exchanged and I have no Objection ag't their passing to N. York with their Families & Effects as soon as convenient, yet I have Reason to believe the Enemy must have other views in send'g up the Flag than barely for Mr. Cuyler, as Mr. Cuyler informed me on his Return lately from N. York where he had been to perfect his Exchange, that he had Permission to proceed to New York with the sloop engaged here for that Purpose.*

Another example of Masonic brotherhood happens again the following year. During 1779 the British 17th Regiment of Foot, as Unity Lodge #18, was at New York with a detachment quartered at and defending Stony Creek or Stony Point, the fortified post on the Hudson River. On the night of July 15-16, the fort was suddenly attacked by a superior force of Americans under General "Mad Anthony" Wayne, to which, after stubborn and gallant resistance, the survivors were obliged to surrender to the American forces as prisoners of war. Along with their supplies, equipment and baggage came their Masonic trunk with the lodge Warrant and regalia.

All this went into the hands of the American General, Samuel H. Parsons, American Union Lodge, who moved by the genuine principles of Masonry, returned them to the British Commander at New York, with the following letter:

"West Jersey Highlands, July 23, 1779. Brethren: When the ambition of monarchs or jarring interest of contending States, call forth their subjects to war, as Masons we are disarmed of that resentment which stimulates to undistinguished desolation; and however our political sentiments may impel us in the public dispute, we are still Brethren, and (our professional duty apart) ought to promote the happiness and advance the weal of each other. Accept therefore, at the hands of a Brother, the Constitution of the Lodge Unity, No. 18, to be held in the 17th British Regiment which your late misfortunes have put in my power to restore to you. I am your Brother and obedient servant SAMUEL H. PARSONS. Addressed to Master and Wardens of Lodge Unity No. 18, upon the Registry of England."^x

At General Washington's death, Brother Timothy Bigelow in *AN EULOGY ON THE LIFE, CHARACTER AND SERVICES OF BROTHER GEORGE WASHINGTON. Pronounced before the Fraternity of FREE AND ACCEPTED MASONS, by Request of the Grand Lodge, at BOSTON, February 11, 1800* said, "...Having already contemplated such a variety of distinguishing features in this great and amiable character, does it still admit of addition? Is there room in the portrait for another trace of the faithful pencil, that will increase its beauty? Yes, my brethren, to us another and no less interesting view remains. Animated with a generous philanthropy, our deceased Brother early sought admission into our ancient and honourable fraternity, at once to enable him to cherish with advantage this heavenly principal and enlarge the sphere of its operation. He cultivated our art with sedulous attention, and never lost an opportunity of advancing the interest or promoting the honor of the craft. **While Commander in Chief of the American revolutionary army, he countenanced the establishment and encouraged the labors of a traveling Lodge among the military. He wisely considered it as a school of urbanity, well calculated to disseminate those mild virtues of the heart, so ornamental to the human character, and so peculiarly useful to correct the ferocity of soldiers and alleviate the miseries of war. The cares of his high office engrossed too much of his time to admit of his engaging in the duties of the chair; yet he found frequent opportunities to visit the Lodge and thought it no derogation from his dignity there to stand on a level with the brethren. True to our principles on all occasions, an incident once occurred, which enabled him to display their influence to his foes. A body of American troops, in some successful rencounter with the enemy, possessed themselves, among other booty, of the jewels and furniture of a British traveling Lodge of Masons. This property was directed by the Commander in Chief to be returned under a flag of truce to its former proprietors, accompanied with a message, purporting that the Americans did not make war upon institutions of benevolence.**"^{xi}

Maybe just sometimes, just sometimes, these war stories are heard mouth to ear and the rest of the story is just heard in our hearts. And as we would have said then, as today, So Mote it Be!

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ⁱ "The History of Freemasonry in Canada from its Introduction in 1749" F. Ross Robertson, PGM of the Grand Lodge of Canada, Volume two, Toronto, p. 641

ⁱⁱ "Historical sketch of the lodge of antiquity," J. Beamish Saul, 1912, p. 28

ⁱⁱⁱ "Dragoon Diary," C.F. William Maurer, p. 138

^{iv} "Freemasons Monthly Magazine – 1842",

http://www.themasonictrowel.com/Articles/History/england_files/freemasonry_in_the_british_army.htm

^v "The History of Freemasonry in Canada...", p. 642

^{vi} "Masonic Voice-Review", January 1940 – "Washington Bible, p. 43

^{vii} Letter from Mr. Hugo White to Maurer, dtd 20 January 2014, Ref: MUS/8 (2014)

^{viii} "The History of Freemasonry in Canada...", p. 643

^{ix} "The History of St. Andrew's Lodge, No. 1, 1750-1920," by A Past Master, 1920, p. 187.

^x "The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Essentials of Freemasonry", S. Brent D. Morris, Ph.D.

^{xi} "An eulogy on the life, character and services of Brother George Washington, deceased: pronounced before The fraternity of the free and accepted Masons, by request of the Grand Lodge, at the Old South Meeting-house, Boston, on Tuesday, February 11, 1800: being the day set apart by them to pay Funeral honors to their deceased brother," Timothy Bigelow, 1800