

Washington: Early EA or Fortunate Freemason

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While it is agreed by both scholars and historians as to the record virtues and integrity of Illustrious Brother George Washington, one of the greatest unknown points of contention on this well-known and beloved iconic figure has been the circumstances of his initiation into the mysteries of Freemasonry. For years, Masonic adepts have discussed and deliberated over this one question and many have been put their own spin out there in regards to this one mystery. One of the difficulties which give essence to this issue is the lack of details in what extant records which remains on the workings of Fredericksburg Masonic Lodge on November 4, 1752, exactly 160 years from the date of this paper. While only a “Lewis” can be initiated into Freemasonry before the age 21, there was one particular year in the recorded four hundred years of Freemasonry where this rule did not apply and Washington received the first degree of Masonry due to this good fortune.

George Washington was born on February 22, 1732 at Pope’s Creek in Westmoreland County, Virginia and was the eldest son of Augustine Washington and his second wife, Mary Ball Washington (George Washington's Mt. Vernon Museum, 2012), who was an heiress. Augustine was considered English gentry, which is acknowledge and reinforced by the property that he owned and the social relationships established by his sons and wife. In 1738, his family moved to their Ferry Farm Plantation near Fredericksburg, Virginia, where young George lived, worked and studied and it was here where he was molded into the man he would become. At age 11, his father died, leaving what is now Mt. Vernon to George’s older half-brother, Lawrence, while he received Ferry Farm as his inheritance. Although his property was smaller than his brother’s, Lawrence looked out for him and his family and got him his first start.

George Washington's first known interaction with Freemasons is first recorded when Lawrence Washington married Lady Anne Fairfax, the eldest daughter of Colonel William Fairfax who was the cousin and land agent of Thomas Fairfax, 6th Lord Fairfax of Cameron (Mastromarino, 2012). This family is a famous and important family in English Freemasonry as they have both blood and Masonic ties to General Thomas Fairfax, 3rd Lord Fairfax of Cameron and Commander-in-Chief of the victorious Parliamentary forces during the English Civil War in the 1650's. I make note of this because Sir Thomas, along with his father, brothers and their descendants into the 19th century, were well documented Freemasons (Allerton & Wilson, 2003, p. 28).

The Masonic significance of Brother Fairfax is during the English Civil War when he used his military office to elevate many of our Brethren into the officer cadre of Parliament's "New Model Army". One historian reported; "*With the passage of the New Model ordinance only the delicate task of selecting the Army's officers remained uncompleted. This was according to the compromise reached by the Houses, delegated to Sir Thomas Fairfax, who was to name all senior officers below the rank of Colonel.*" (Kishlansky, 1979, p. 40) He did this because he lacked officers due to the traditional practice of commissioning officers only from the English nobility and gentry, who during this conflict overly supported the King's forces against Parliament. This major inconvenience gave Freemasons their first opportunity to hold an overt position in society because Masons were "made" gentlemen if not "born" gentlemen such as those with royal pedigree.

The Washington-Fairfax family relationship would do much to elevate young George Washington as he was hired to first survey the Fairfax lands in Northern Neck and later, Sir William Fairfax would sponsor him in winning the contract to become the surveyor for the

western frontier lands of Culpeper, Virginia and beyond. It would also be this personal and detailed knowledge of these lands that will soon win him the military rank of major, and it will be this specific military inexperience which will bring France and England into the French and Indian War (Meade, Rasmussen, & Tilton, 1999). It is on May 7, 1750 that George's sister Betty marries Fielding Lewis of Fredericksburg, Virginia. Fielding Lewis is not only a man of great wealth and property; he is also a Freemason and charter member of Fredericksburg Masonic Lodge (Walker, 2002). This is the same Masonic Lodge that is established in 1752 and becomes young Washington's mother Lodge that he remains a member of until his death on December 14, 1799.

Although it is possible that his brother Lawrence was a Freemason or became a Freemason as a result marrying into English Freemasonry's most prestigious family, Fredericksburg Lodge records indicate that it was Fielding Lewis who sponsored George Washington into the mysteries of our gentle Craft. What is clear to us is that we can surmise that at best, there were four people who were both close enough and influential enough to inspire him into our fraternity and yet of these four, his father Augustine and his brother Lawrence are still unproven as Freemasons. So from this, we have three questions to seek clarity:

1. If George Washington was a "Lewis", then why did Lawrence not sponsor George on behalf of their deceased father Augustine?
2. If George Washington was a "Lewis", then would not Sir William Fairfax sponsor him when George turned 18 years old working for him?
3. If George Washington was a "Lewis", then why did he wait over two years after his approved age of eligibility to be sponsored by Fielding Lewis to become a Freemason?

The only logical answer to this question is the British changeover to the Gregorian calendar; a calendar which was established by the Roman Catholic Church by Pope Gregory XIII in a papal bull on February 1582. This was done in order to correct the errors that were created every 128 years by the Julian calendar which would always place the solstice and equinox out of sync and this affected agriculture. We also learn that because of England's break with the Catholic Church previous to this, they refuse to accept and adopt the papal bull until Parliament themselves decided to take corrective measures in 1750 (History & Genealogy Unit, 2008) to fix the errors of the Julian calendar. Documented by the Connecticut State Library, the change from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian calendar by the British Empire was to involve a series of steps as follows:

- December 31, 1750 was followed by January 1, 1750 (under the "Old Style" calendar, December was the 10th month and January the 11th)
- March 24, 1750 was followed by March 25, 1751 (March 25 was the first day of the "Old Style" year)
- December 31, 1751 was followed by January 1, 1752 (the switch from March 25 to January 1 as the first day of the year)
- September 2, 1752 was followed by September 14, 1752 (drop of 11 days to conform to the Gregorian calendar)

Because of the shifting which added roughly three month and eleven day in the transitioning of the new year from March to January in 1752, plus the two additional months from September of 1752 to his initiation in November of the same year, it is apparent that the shifting of these calendar days could in fact shuffled enough time for the 20 years and 9 month old George Washington to now be over the age of twenty one by November of 1752 and therefore would

have been legally permitted to enter into the mysteries of Freemasonry of his own accord and without receiving any benefits from a father who was never proven to be a Freemason. To support this claim, records shows that Washington was born on February 11, 1731 (Old Style) which is converted to February 22, 1732 (New Style), with the shifting of February from the twelfth month of the Julian year to the second month of the new Gregorian year. The advancement of his age is clearly recorded on the plate of his coffin, which gives his age at death as “AET. 68.” (Tatsch, 1931)

So, indeed, while only a “Lewis” can be initiated into Freemasonry before the age 21, there was one particular year in the recorded four hundred years of Freemasonry when this rule did not apply and because of this, it is probable that young George Washington received the first degree of Masonry due to this good fortune. That year was 1752, because it was during this year that the British Empire decided to join the rest of the world and changes over from the erroneous Julian calendar to the more accurate Gregorian calendar and as a result of this, George Washington comes of age and becomes a Freemason. With such, as the new George Washington Research Lodge No. 1732, and as its Master, I would be honor to present this information to the rest of the world as a sincerity of our efforts. I ask that you review the data here and as you deliberate our information, I ask that the Great Architect of the Universe be with each of you.

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