

## BENJAMIN FRANKLIN – FREEMASON

So many volumes have been written about this illustrious American patriot and Freemason, that your speaker cannot contribute one iota toward making his star shine any brighter. His life and work speaks for itself. Perhaps the only thing that can be done here, is to brief from the records - some of the many highlights of his active and productive life, placing the accent on his brilliant Masonic career.

Brother Franklin was born in Boston, Massachusetts January 17, 1706. This would have made him about twenty-six years older than Brother George Washington.

In February of 1731, he was initiated in St. John's Lodge in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. This date would show he became a Mason at the young age of twenty-five. His Masonic activity almost immediately became useful to the Craft, because in June of 1732 he drafted a set of by-laws for St. John's Lodge, and in the same month was elected Junior Grand Warden. His advancement was meteoric. In June (24) 1734 - just two years later he was elected Grand Master of Pennsylvania. Just two months later - August 1734 - he advertised his "Mason Book", which was a reprint of Anderson's "Constitution of Freemasonry," - the first Masonic book printed in America.

During the same year, 1734-35, the State House (now called Independence Hall) was built during Franklin's administration as Grand Master. According to the old Masonic and family traditions, the cornerstone was laid by him and the brethren of St. John's Lodge.

At this point, a digression will be made for a few moments, to bring out a few facts of interest covering this National shrine. Brother Edmund Woolley did carpenter work on this famous building. He built the steeple in 1741 and also hung the Liberty Bell. Proposals to build the Statehouse began in 1729 and subsequently the ground upon which this building now stands, was purchased for the purpose by William Allen, Grand Master of Pennsylvania - who bought the lots in his own name, and expended his own money therefor. (Schaff & Westcott's History of Phila., Vol. 1, p. 206.)

The accepted plans were drawn by Andrew Hamilton, Speaker of the Assembly, and who was the father-in-law of the Grand Master. Contracts for building were not given out until March 1732-33. Shortly after, the ground was staked out by Brother Edmund Woolley master carpenter, and work commenced on the excavation. The foundation was begun by Brother Thomas Redman, an early-member of St. John's Lodge. It was during Franklin's incumbency as Grand Master, that the superstructure of the grand old building was raised. Even the brick mason was Brother Thomas Boude, St. John's first Secretary and Senior Grand Warden of the Grand Lodge when Franklin filled the position in the South.

Four brethren of the First Grand Lodge - James Hamilton, Robert Hunter Morris, John Penn, and Benjamin Franklin - all became Governors of Pennsylvania and occupied the venerable building during their respective terms of office.

Even the ornate silver inkstand, used continuously by the Assembly in the State House, and from which was dipped the ink when the Declaration of Independence was signed, was the handiwork of Brother Philip Syng, who served as Grand Master in 1741 with Brother Thomas Boude, brick mason of the State House, as his Deputy.

Returning now, to Brother Franklin, we learn that he visited the First Lodge (St. John's) in Boston, on June 10, 1749 where he received his appointment as Provincial Grand Master from Thomas Oxnard, of Boston. In August (29) of this same year, Tun Tavern Lodge petitioned Provincial Grand Master Franklin for "a deputation under his sanction." Franklin's appointment caused considerable discussion among the Brethren for it superseded the old Grand Lodge. Steps were taken to nullify this action of Provincial Grand Master Oxnard of Massachusetts. An appeal to authorities in London resulted in the appointment of William Allen as Provincial Grand Master of Pennsylvania by Grand Master of England, William Lord Byron. Allen was recognized in Grand Lodge as such on March 13, 1750. He appointed Franklin Deputy Grand Master. On March 12, 1752, Franklin was appointed on the committee for building "the Freemasons' Lodge" in Philadelphia. On October 25, 1752 he visited the Tun

Tavern Lodge. On October 11, 1754, he was present at the quarterly communication of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts held at the Concert Hall in Boston.

He took a prominent part in the Grand Anniversary and dedication of the "Freemason Lodge" in Philadelphia (June 24, 1755), the first Masonic building in America. In 1760 he was Provincial Grand Master of Pennsylvania. During the same year, November 17, Franklin was present at the Grand Lodge of England, - held at the Crown and Anchor, London. His name was entered upon the minutes as "Provincial Grand Master." In 1762, he was addressed as Grand Master of Pennsylvania. In 1776, he affiliated with Masonic Lodges in France. The following year, 1777, he was elected a member of Loge des IX Soeurs (Nine sisters or Muses.) Brother Franklin, on February 7, 1778, assisted at the initiation of Voltaire in the "Lodge of Nine Sisters" — and also officiated at the "Lodge of Sorrow" or Masonic funeral services, of Brother Voltaire, on November 28, 1778.

Eventually, in 1782, Brother Franklin was elected "Venerable" (Worshipful Master) of this same Loge des IX Soeurs, under the Grand Orient de Paris. Following these honors, he was, on July 7, 1782, made a member R.: L.: De Saint Jean de Jerusalem, - while on April 24, 1785 - just three years later - he was elected Venerable d'Honneur of the same Lodge. Again, in the same year, he was elected honorary member of Loge de Bon Amis (Good Friends), at Rouen, France.

Finally, on April 17, 1790, Brother Franklin passed to the Grand Lodge above, and was interred at the S. E. corner of 5th and Arch Streets, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

From this blazing record of Masonic activity, which covered a period of sixty years, there can be no doubt that this illustrious brother was indeed an exemplary worker in the Masonic vineyard. This work, alone, would endear him to our hearts.

Leaving his Masonic record at this point - let us observe some of the other brilliant facets in the life of this great Brother. In researching his many biographies, one at once wonders where and when he had the time and opportunity to accomplish so many outstanding things. The American Philosophical Society requires twenty large book pages, merely to catalog his inventions, discoveries, accomplishments, and the events in which he was intimately concerned. A quotation from a Masonic Service pamphlet on Franklin relates, "-- he was printer, author, editor, inventor, scientist, diplomat, founder of schools, postal systems, government; ambassador, wit, speaker, philosopher, politician - and Freemason; he was not only the amazing intellect, the Voltaire of Colonial America, but one of the most complex and gifted men of all times. He was the Francis Bacon of his age, far ahead of the years in which he lived, and as such, the subject of criticisms of those who did not understand him.

"Certain facts of his Masonic career stand out - particularly is it to be noted that Franklin was not merely a Lodge member, content with that and nothing more - but a Freemason intently interested in his Craft, willing to give his enormous powers for its welfare, and leaving an indelible impress upon its history in this country. His activities were so great and his Masonry so influential in his life, there seems little reason for historians to quarrel about matters of "dates" and "firsts" in connection with his revered name -----."

Most of his biographers are agreed that Franklin's genius showed to the greatest advantage in his philosophical concepts, and his abilities as an ambassador. The one, pictures the man as he was "in his heart" which is not only good Masonic ritual but also good scripture, since "as he thinketh in his heart, so is he;" - the other, paint him a master of tact, of homely wit and fair-mindedly keen in an age when wit had a rapier edge; as skilled in the arts of diplomacy in a time when intrigue, trickery and deceit were the very backbone of bargaining between nation and nation.

His whole life of service exemplifies the practice of toleration on the one hand, and a non-dogmatic, non-credic religion on the other. We cannot prove that he received the inspiration for these from the Freemasonry he loved and practiced, but neither can anyone prove the contrary. It is difficult to associate Masonic ideas with such thoughts as Franklin so often expressed, and not see a connection between.

In the Constitutional Convention, when Franklin saved it for the Union, and the Union for posterity, he said: "The longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth, that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an Empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the Sacred Writings, that 'except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it' — I firmly believe this; and I also believe, that, without this concurring aid, we shall succeed in this political building no better than the builders of Babel." It would be difficult to put much more Masonry in the same number of words.

To his father, he wrote: "The Scriptures assure me that the last day we shall not be examined for what we thought, but what we did; and our recommendation will not be that we said, 'Lord, Lord: ' — but that we did good to our fellow creatures." (See Matthew XXV.)

The famous epitaph he wrote for himself so slightly conceals the Masonic theme of immortality as told in our Legend that all may read who pass by:

"The Body of B. Franklin, Printer, (Like the Cover of an old Book, Its contents torn out and stript of its Lettering and Gilding) Lies here, Food f or Worms. But the Work shall not be wholly lost; For it will, (as he believ'd) appear once more, In a new and more perfect Edition, Corrected and Amended by the Author."

Benjamin Franklin had everything a reformer should have, except the desire to reform for the sake of the reformation. He improved everything which interested him, but he never tried to force his improvements into the lives of others. He could show a world a new way of making glasses, and that lightning comes down a kitestring, and that daylight saving time adds to leisure, and that wit and humor win more causes than arguments and contention, but he did not try to "make laws about it." He improved the printing press, the army and navy, the common stove, ideas of ventilation, paved Philadelphia and made it a better lighted town, invented a hundred gadgets for common living such as a three wheel clock, a combination library chair and step ladder (they can be bought to this day), an artificial arm to get books from a high shelf, BUT HE NEVER TRIED TO IMPROVE OR CHANGE OR ALTER FREEMASONRY.

Franklin is generally conceded to have been a diplomat of the first rank, but only those who read history carefully know what a load he carried on his old shoulders when in 1776 he went to France to represent the United States. He had to win the support of a nation largely controlled by court, fashion, beauty, gallantry, - anything but the hard common sense of a Franklin. Yet this same practical philosopher, this inventor, scientist, printer, pamphleteer, politician, - took France by storm. He was a gallant gentleman to the ladies, a man among men with the French gallants. He won sympathy without display of suffering, and made friends without seeming to try. He convinced everyone of his honor and probity by being honest in an age when dishonesty was fashionable. On his simple promise to pay, he secured millions in ships, men and goods, where a less able representative might have failed with an order of Congress on the Treasury for backing. He played international politics by using the King's hatred of the English. He selected and forwarded military supplies. He fitted out and commissioned privateers. He kept the accounts between the two nations. He helped plan the campaigns at sea. He enthused the French ruler and the French people. And through it all - he kept his sanity, made new friends and retained the old ones, all by the fairmindedness, the innate justice and the toleration which are part and parcel of the teachings of Freemasonry.

Dr. Franklin enjoyed a world-wide reputation and was the holder of honorary degrees from the most distinguished of British universities. Active in civic affairs, he was responsible for the establishment of the University of Pennsylvania and for the formation of the Philadelphia police and fire departments. He served for many years in the General Assembly of Pennsylvania and as the Colonial Postmaster General. He acted as Colonial Agent in Great Britain and was a Commissioner to the British Parliament. When the break with the Mother country occurred, he returned to America, became a member of the Continental Congress and served as one of the committee which drafted the Declaration of Independence. He next served as our Minister to France, and was principally responsible for the negotiation of our alliance with King Louis XVI. When our national independence was finally won, he served as one of the Commissioners, negotiating the Treaty of Peace with Great Britain. He also negotiated treaties with Sweden and Prussia. Returning to the United States, he served as

President of Pennsylvania and as a member of that Constitutional Convention which formulated the Constitution of the United States.

It seems to me - because we have great respect for our early American Masonic ancestors, that we in this day and age, are in great need for men of his character and patriotism, more than ever before. I cannot help thinking that if we had more real, true Americans such as Brother Franklin, Washington, Jefferson, Revere, Hancock, Warren Hale - and others of their generation, we would never have been faced with the never-ending cold war and the present daily threats to our very existence.

If one gives some thought to the philosophy of reincarnation (and most creeds and faiths accept the doctrine) we may have some hope for the birth of new leaders - bringing with them the experience and wisdom of previous incarnations - to take over and - with the aid of the Supreme Architect of the Universe - re-mold our national will and declining character, and place us again in a position where others will be anxious to copy our examples. Yes, my Brethren, we need a lot of Benjamin Franklins.

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June 28, 1971