

“GEORGE PURVIS, A LESSER MASONIC LIGHT”

During the American Revolution no less than ten military lodges were chartered within the Continental Army. One of these was Lodge No. 30, A.Y.M. Delaware Regimental Lodge. Although no warrant is known to have been issued by the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, its chartering has been substantiated by a memorandum in their archives.

As all Masonic Lodges must have both greater and lesser lights, Hiram Delaware Regimental Lodge was no exception, even though only two of its members are known: Brothers David Hall and George Purvis. The greater light, Brother Hall, was Worshipful Master of this military lodge while the lesser, Brother Purvis, served as its secretary.

David Hall is well established in the archives of Delaware history, being born in Lewes on January 4, 1752, admitted to the Delaware Bar in 1773. In January of 1776 he was commissioned a Captain under Colonel John Haslett, fighting in the battles of Long Island and White Plains. He was advanced to the rank of Colonel in the Delaware Regiment in April 1777, and was wounded at the battle of Germantown in October 1777. He returned to Lewes on furlough in October 1779, never to return to the war. He was later to serve as Governor of Delaware from 1802-1805 and Associate Judge from 1813 until his death on September 18, 1817, in his native Lewes, being buried in the Lewes Presbyterian Church Cemetery.

Masonically Brother David Hall, whose father was the charter Senior Grand Warden of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania in 1761, was a member of “Lodge Number 18 A.Y.M., held at Dover, Delaware, Kent County on Delaware, in the Territories of the Providence of Pennsylvania”. He received the Entered Apprentice Degree on February 17, 1776; was Crafted on May 14, 1776 and Raised on May 18, 1776. On June 15, 1776 Captain David Hall was one of nine Brothers, all being in the service of the Continent and about to join the main Army, applied for their certificates of Masonic membership. Brother David Hall was destined to later serve as charter Worshipful Master of both Hiram’s Delaware Regimental Lodge No. 30, A.Y.M., in 1780 as well as Lodge No. 63, A.Y.M., held at Lewes Town, Sussex County, Delaware in 1794, both lodges being chartered by the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania.

Having focused on the greater light, Worshipful Master David Hall, let us now contemplate on the lesser light, Secretary George Purvis, who was, in all probability, also a native Delawarean. The first reference to George Purvis was in a letter written by Col. Patterson of the Delaware Flying Camp Battalion from Perth Amboy on October 8, 1776, recommending him to succeed John Watson of Sussex as Quarter Master, as he had acted as his assistant from the first. The following month, November 1776, Col. Patterson lists him among his staff officers as Quarter Master with the report stating that the battalion was very badly clothed and that a number of blankets were lost on the expedition on Staten Island and that they had not been able to procure any since, so that many of the battalion were badly off. In December 1776, George Purvis was promoted to 2nd

Lieutenant and was assigned to Captain Enoc Anderson's Company where he served until April 1777.

As the result of Colonel Haslett being killed at the Battle of Princeton on January 3, 1777, David Hall was promoted to the rank of Colonel with George Purvis assigned to his command as a 2nd Lieutenant. From June until August 1777, Lt. Purvis was stationed in Wilmington but participated in the battle Germantown on October 4, 1777. Both he and Col. Hall were wounded in this encounter as were 24 other of the Delaware Regiment with three being killed and nine missing in action. As the result of Captain Holland being one of those killed, George Purvis was promoted from 2nd to 1st Lieutenant on October 14, 1777. Later in October 1777 he was reported sick in Bethlehem. The muster rolls for November 1777 record that he returned from imprisonment, was absent with leave and was present although sick.

From February until May 1778 Lt. Purvis was assigned to recruiting for Captain Kirkwood's Company and was appointed Regimental Adjutant on August 16, 1778. Beginning in September 1778, Lt. Purvis served with Captain James Moore's Company and was again wounded on Nov. 28, 1778. He was hospitalized upon the order of General Muhlenberg in New Windsor Hospital.

From March until July 1779, Lt. Purvis served with Major Joseph Vaughn's Company. It was during this period that he, along with 15 other officers of the Delaware Regiment, drafted the famous Letter from Camp Middlebrook on May 16, 1779, to the Delaware Assembly. In it they threatened to withdraw themselves from the military service on July 20, 1779, if they did not receive the support from the State of Delaware which other Officers were receiving from their respective states. From August until November 1779 Lt. Purvis was on furlough to the Delaware State but was found to be recruiting for Lt. Skillington in Wilmington in September. Later in the same year he was able to secure clothing for the Delaware Regiment listed as hats, coats, jackets, breeches, shirts, stockings, shoes and watch coats.

In March 1780, 1st Lt. George Purvis was with Captain Kirkwood's Company of Foot in the Delaware Regiment serving under the command of Col. David Hall. On April 26, 1780, we find Lt. Purvis and twelve other Brothers, evidently members of the Delaware Regiment, attending an emergency meeting of Lodge No. 14 in the home of a Bezlin Bently in Wilmington for the purpose of raising a Brother Anderson to the Sublime Degree of M.M.. Brother Anderson, who was also a member of the Delaware Regiment, returned thanks for the honor conferred upon him.

It must have been about this time that the warrant for Lodge No. 30, A.Y.M., Delaware Regimental Lodge was secured from the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania with Col. David Hall as Worshipful Master and 1st Lt. George Purvis as Secretary. This was just prior to the departure of the Delaware and North Carolina troops for the south to oppose the British in the Carolinas and Georgia. The Delaware Regiment, which numbered 200, went south without Col. Hall who was at his home in Lewes on furlough. Due to the overconfidence of Gen. Gates, the Battle of Camden was lost on August 16,

1780, with a total of 30 officers being captured, which included Captain George Purvis and nine other Delaware officers. The Delaware Regiment of 200 had three killed, twenty wounded and fourteen captured, of which ten were of their officer's staff. It was in this battle that the baggage of the Delawareans fell into the hands of the British, including the warrant, jewels and records of the Regimental Lodge. The hasty memorandum sent by Brother George Purvis to Brother Alexander Rutherford, Deputy Grand Master, at Philadelphia acquainting him with these facts is the only evidence surviving in the Pennsylvania Grand Lodge archives to substantiate the existence of Hiram's Delaware Regimental Lodge, No. 30, A.Y.M. in the year 1780.

During April 1781, we find Capt. Purvis securing provisions in Wilmington and the following month, May, 1781, foraging in the vicinity of Cantwell's Bridge.

In the archives of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania we also find the certificate of Masonic membership for Brother George Purvis issued by Lodge No. 18 held in the town of Dover on the 11th day of June A.D. 1782 A.L. 5782. It attests to his having received the three degrees of Masonry in St. John's Regimental Lodge, held in camp near Morris Town. The roster of Lodge No. 18, A.Y.M., lists him as being entered in Lodge No. 63 at Albany and as retiring in December 1782.

In the closing chapter on Brother George Purvis, he submitted his certificate of security in 1783 for commutation of five years' full pay as his pension from the State of Delaware for services in the Delaware Regiment in lieu of half pay for life. Thus, how can Brother George Purvis Masonic patriot, be regarded as a lesser light as long as his light still shines brightly from the archives of Delaware history as both a Mason and a hero of the American Revolution?

The highest tribute we can pay Brother George Purvis is contained in his Masonic certificate of Lodge No. 18 issued in 1782: "and during his stay among us behaved himself as a worthy and good brother: as such we do hereby recommend him wherever these presents shall come:".

FIAT LUX

Delaware College, S.R.I.C.F.

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