

Masonic Stones Within the Washington Monument



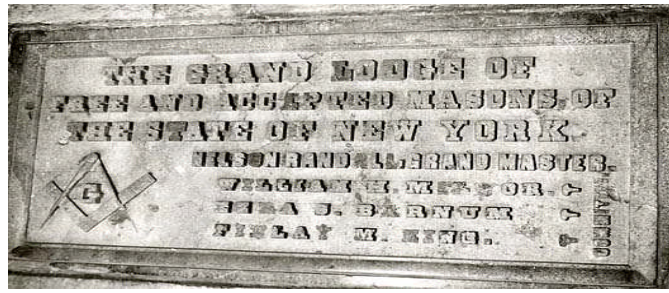
The Washington Monument

The Egyptian-styled obelisk was designed by Freemason Robert Mills in honor of George Washington. At noon on July 4, 1848, the Grand Master of Masons of the District of Columbia Benjamin Brown French led the cornerstone laying ceremony in the presence of President Polk and numerous dignitaries with these words directed to Brother Mills, "I now present to you, my Brother, the square, level, and plumb, which are the working tools you are to use in the erection of this monument. You, as a Freemason, know to what they morally allude...Look well to the erection of this National Monument; see that every stone is well squared, and that it is placed in its position both level and plumb, so that this noble offering of a nation to commemorate greatness, patriotism, and virtue, may stand until the end of time."

Brother Gary Scott, a Past Master of Naval Lodge No. 4 and Chief Historian of the National Park Service, reports that the Washington National Monument Society in 1851 and 1853 solicited members of the Masonic fraternity, through the Grand Lodges, to make contributions to a fund that was used for the construction of the Washington Monument. The Society also asked each state and territory to present a carved memorial stone for placement within the interior of the monument walls. Soon thereafter stones began to arrive from across the country, and by 1855 the Society had installed 92 commemorative stones of diverse size and composition. Among the stones collected 22 were of Masonic origin, 14 from Grand Lodges, and 8 from individual Lodges.

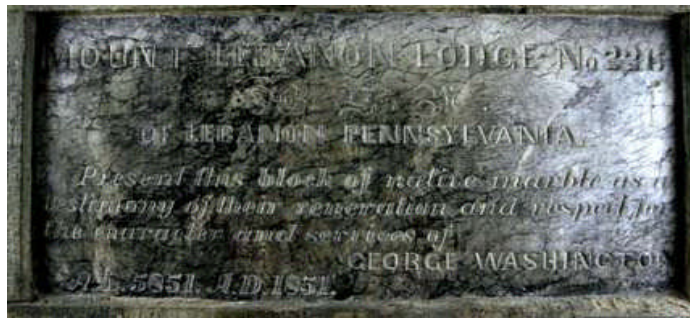
In ascending the Monument from ground level the first Masonic stone encountered is that of the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia at the 50-foot landing. Adjacent to it is the stone of Naval Lodge No. 4 of the District of Columbia. Both of these stones are of marble. The rest of the Masonic stones are described by Brother Scott as follows: "Masonic stones again appear at the ninth landing (the 110 foot level) with the marble stones of the Grand Lodges of Ohio, New York, and Kentucky.

The Ohio stone contains a compass and square, an all-seeing eye, The Kentucky stone cites Washington as a Christian Mason and contains the compass and square, all-seeing eye, and sword upon the constitution. The Grand Lodge of New York stone contains a square and compasses.



Grand Lodge of NY

At the 120-foot level is the unadorned stone of Patmos Lodge No. 70, Ellicott City, Maryland. It is dated February 22, 1852, and made of rough granite.



Mt. Lebanon Lodge 226

The eleventh level the native marble stone of Mount Lebanon Lodge, No. 226, Ancient York Masons, Lebanon, Pennsylvania dated 1851.



Maryland Grand Lodge

Nearby is the ornamented marble stone of the Grand Lodge of Maryland, containing the names of donors and Grand Lodge officials. The stone is dated 1850 and contains a carved figure of Father Time in supplication before an altar. His eyes are fixed on a star in the heavens, and he is pointing to the open book on the altar with his left hand. He holds a scythe. An hour glass rests on the ground.



Washington Lodge 21

Also at this level is the marble stone of Masons of the Washington Lodge Number 21 of the city of New York. Carved on the stone are a sun, a plumb, a trowel, a triangle containing the letter G, and a square and compass on a Bible.

The twelfth level at 140 feet contains three Masonic stones. The state of Alabama contributed an interesting Alabama marble stone containing what must have been the seal of its Grand Lodge. Masonic symbols are arrayed in the circle of the seal around and within an archway resting on two columns. The Masons of Georgia contributed a Georgia marble stone with a 15-inch shield containing a raised circle 7 inches in diameter. The circle contains an all seeing eye and a compass and square.



Illinois Grand Lodge

The Grand Lodge of Illinois sent a very dramatic stone showing a wall of finished ashlar, contained within it an archway supported by two columns. Within the archway is a bearded man, perhaps Father Time. In front of him is a young maiden standing before a broken column. She holds an acacia branch in her right hand. In her left she grips a mallet resting on an open book. The bearded figure of Time seems to be stroking her hair. The stone is dated 1853.

Moving up to the fourteenth landing (160 feet up) there is a marble Masonic stone from Lafayette Lodge No. 64, F. & A.M., New York City. The stone contains a square and compass under the words, "our tribute". At the fifteenth landing is a granite Stone from Washington Lodge F.& A M., Roxbury, Massachusetts. That stone is actually from a later period and arrived at the monument in 1871.



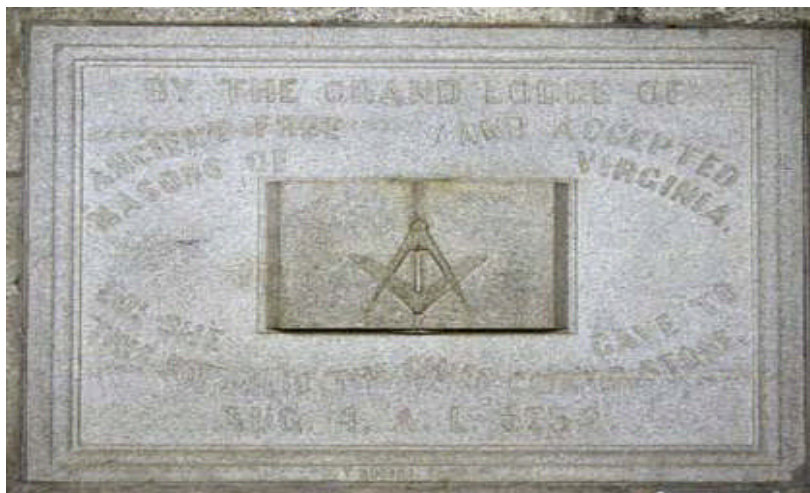
Grand Lodge of PA

On the 180-foot level, the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania contributed a richly carved marble stone. Prominent upon the stone is carved an arch and keystone.



St. Johns No. 36

At the 200-foot level Virginia presented two Masonic stones. The first was presented by St. John's Lodge No. 36, A.F. & .A.M., Richmond. The stone is granite with a raised marble Bible carved with a compass and square.



Grand Lodge of VA

The stone from the Grand Lodge of Virginia is of granite with a raised border and also contains the Holy Bible with compass and square. J.T. Rodgers of Richmond has signed the lower border.

Moving up to the nineteenth landing at 210 feet, the Grand Lodge of Iowa, contributed a simple granite stone from an Iowa quarry and squared by an Iowa craftsman. It was shipped prepaid (for \$7.50) as a gift of 80,000 Free and Accepted Masons of Iowa. The Grand Lodge of the State of Mississippi contributed a carved sandstone memorial to their "Worshipful Brother George Washington." The stone has a raised border. A compass and square and an arm upraised with a mallet appear on the left and right side of the inscription.

The stone given by the Grand Lodge of Arkansas is the most fanciful of all. The lettering is an accentuated script with ornate characters. The various Masonic items are given exaggerated shapes. A coffin adorns the lower portion. An exaggerated eye with a bushy eyebrow peeks from within an ornate letter G.

The last Masonic stone is at the 230-foot level, the twenty-first landing. It is marble and presented by the Grand Lodge of the State of Florida. Its raised border creates a frame effect for the simple compass and square in the center of the stone.

By 1854, the Washington National Monument society had exhausted its funds and all work stopped at the 150-foot level. Turmoil within the Society, bad economic times, and the fury of the coming Civil War and its aftermath halted monument construction for 22 years. To this day there is a discernible line between courses of differing stonework indicating the resumption of construction on August 2, 1876. The resumption of the stone work was spurred on by the centennial celebration of the Declaration of Independence. The Army Corps of Engineers carried on construction until its completion in 1885.

Between July and September 1874 over two hundred pledges were received by the Society from every part of the country, primarily from the Masons, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Red Men, and other fraternal groups. By April of 1875, 211 Masonic lodges from across the country had responded to the call, with the Grand Lodges of Florida, Illinois, Ohio, and Massachusetts, each giving \$1,000 to the cause.

The aluminum metal apex, representing a small pyramid, 5.6 inches on each base side and 8.9 inches high was set December 6, 1884 on top of the 3300 pound capstone. The apex was engraved with the names of the engineers and notables who completed the monument. On the East facing side of the aluminum cap are engraved the Latin words: Laus Deo. No one can see these words. In fact, most visitors to the monument have no idea they are even there. But there they are 555 feet and 5 1/8th inches above the ground, perched atop the monument to the father of our nation.

Laus Deo! Two seemingly insignificant words, out of sight and, one might think, out of mind, but very meaningfully placed at the highest point over what is arguably the most powerful city in the world. Those two words comprised of just four syllables and only seven letters means, very simply... "Praise be to God!"

The formal dedication was held on February 21, 1885. Again the Grand Lodge of Masons of the District of Columbia participated using an adaptation of the cornerstone ceremony they had used in 1848. Grand Master Myron M. Parker gave an oration, and again the George Washington Masonic relics were displayed and Washington's Masonic career was discussed.



Within the monument itself are 898 steps and 50 landings, and the mortar between the 36,000 stones in the monument has been replaced at least twice. The 22 Masonic stones within the monument may be seen by visitors who take a scheduled tour walking down the interior staircase. The walk down is a bit long and is designed only for the athletically inclined. The National Park Service is working toward the installation of a glass widowed elevator so that visitors may view all 193 memorial stones as they take the five-minute elevator ride to the top of the Monument.

There you have the history behind 22 more stones from the quarries of Freemasonry.

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Photographs: Library of Congress, Washington Timelines