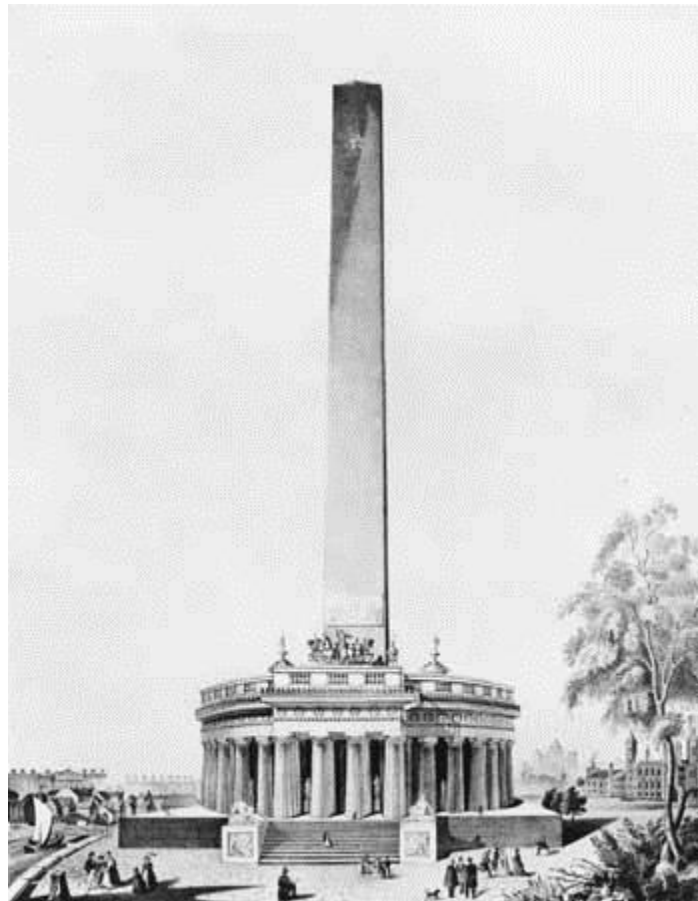


Masonic Stones within the Washington Monument

Hailed as the father of his country, and as the leader who was "first in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen," George Washington was the dominant military and political leader of the new United States of America from 1775 to 1798. Even his erstwhile enemy King George III called him "the greatest character of the age." At his death in 1799 he left a critical legacy; he exemplified the core ideals of the American Revolution and the new nation: republican virtue and devotion to civic duty.

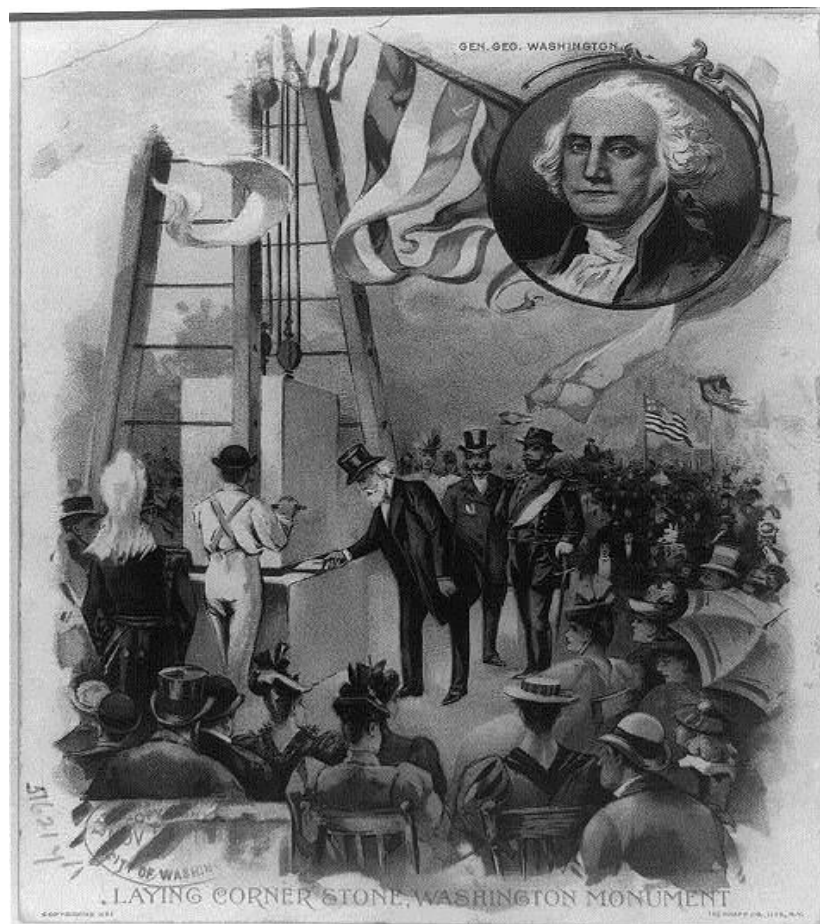
Progress toward a fitting memorial finally began in 1832. That year, which marked the 100th anniversary of Washington's birth, a large group of concerned citizens formed the Washington National Monument Society. In 1836, after they had raised \$28,000 in donations (\$17 million in 2015 dollars) they announced a competition for the design of the memorial that same year. The winner was architect Robert Mills. The citizens of Baltimore had chosen him to build a monument to Washington, and he had designed a tall Greek column surmounted by a statue of the President. Mills also knew the capital well, having just been chosen Architect of Public Buildings for Washington. His design called for a tall obelisk—an upright, four-sided pillar that tapers as it rises—with a nearly flat top. He surrounded the obelisk with a circular colonnade, the top of which would feature Washington standing in a chariot. Inside the colonnade would be statues of 30 prominent Revolutionary War heroes.



The Washington Monument was originally intended to be located at the point at which a line running directly south from the center of the White House crossed a line running directly west from the center of the Capitol. The ground at the intended location proved to be too unstable to support a structure as heavy as the planned obelisk. At that originally intended site, which is 390 feet WNW from the current monument, there now stands a small monolith called the Jefferson Pier.



In early 1848, workers started to lay the Monument's foundation.



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.

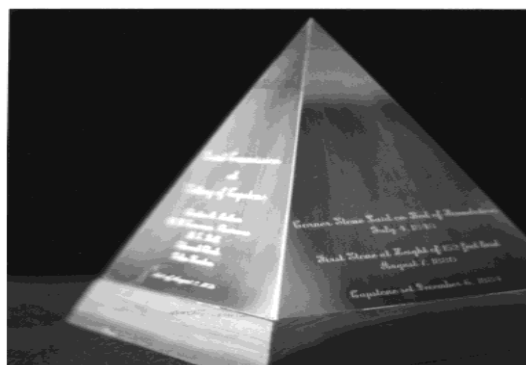
Grand Master French began the ceremony with these words directed to Brother Mills, "I now present to you, my Brother, the square, level, and plumb, which are the working tools you are to use in the erection of this monument. You, as a Freemason, know to what they morally allude...Look well to the erection 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."

Relics from Washington's tenure -- including a personal portrait, copies of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence, an American flag and newspapers from at least 14 states -- are sealed within the 24,000-pound cornerstone. Construction continued until 1854, when donations ran out and the monument had reached a height of 152 feet.



When the public contributions to the Washington National Monument Society ceased, they appealed to Congress for money. Before work could begin again, arguments about the most appropriate design quickly resumed. Many people thought a simple obelisk, one without the colonnade, would be too bare. Architect Mills was reputed to have said omitting the colonnade would make the monument look like "a stalk of asparagus"; another critic said it offered "little ... to be proud of." Construction finally resumed in 1879 under the direction of Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Lincoln Casey of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Casey redesigned the foundation, strengthening it so it could support a structure that ultimately weighed more than 40,000 tons.

The building of the monument proceeded quickly after Congress had provided sufficient funding. In four years, it was completed, with the 100-ounce aluminum apex/lightning-rod being put in place on 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 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.

The monument opened to the public on October 9, 1888. At the time of its completion, it was the tallest building in the world, a title it retained until the Eiffel Tower was completed in 1889; however, the Washington Monument is still today the tallest stone structure in the world.

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 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, and a sword on the Book of Constitutions.



The Grand Lodge of New York stone contains a square and compasses.



The Kentucky stone cites Washington as a Christian Mason and contains the compass and square, all-seeing eye, and sword upon the Book of Constitutions.



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



The eleventh level the marble stone of Mount Lebanon Lodge, No. 226, Ancient York Masons, Lebanon, Pennsylvania and is dated 1851. The members of the Lodge presented a block of native marble as a testimony of their veneration and respect for the character and services of George Washington. A.L.5851, A.D. 1851.



Nearby is the highly 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 an open book on the altar with his left hand. He holds a scythe, and an hour glass is lying on the ground.



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 the seal of its Grand Lodge. Masonic symbols are arrayed in the circle of the seal around and within an archway resting on the two columns from Masonic ritual known as Jachin and Boaz.



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 Square and compass.



The Grand Lodge of Illinois sent a very dramatic stone showing a wall of finished ashlars, contained within an archway supported by two columns. Within the archway is a bearded Father Time. In front of him is a young maiden standing before a broken column. She holds an acacia branch in her right hand. Before her rests and open book. Father Time is seen counting the ringlets of 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".



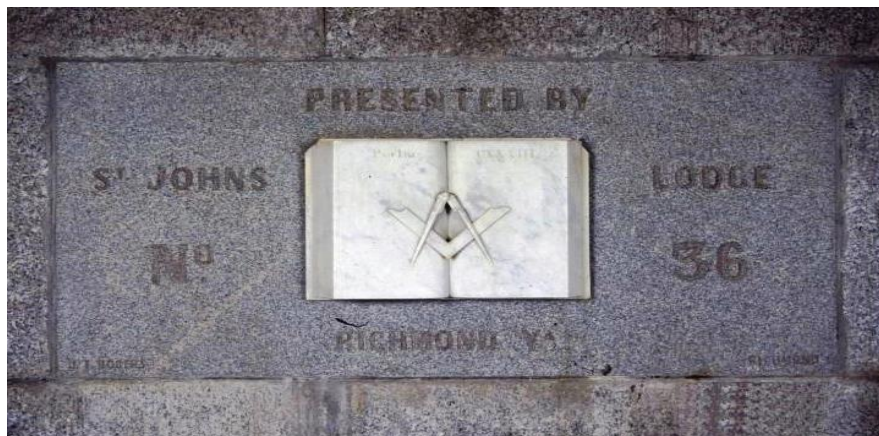
At the fifteenth landing is a granite Stone from Washington Lodge F.& A M., Roxbury, Massachusetts. That stone is actually from a later period and arrived at the monument in 1871.



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.



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 of granite with a raised marble Bible carved with a compass and square.



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. The designer, 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 from the 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 at the top of the stone.



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.



Within the monument itself are 898 steps and 50 landings. The mortar between the 36,000 stones in the monument has been replaced at least twice. The National Park Service recently installed a glass windowed elevator so that visitors may view all 193 memorial stones as they take the five-minute elevator ride to the top of the Monument. The monument underwent an extensive restoration project between 1998 and 2001. During this time it was completely covered in scaffolding.



The monument was damaged by numerous structural cracks resulting from the 2011 Virginia earthquake and Hurricane Irene in the same year. Surveillance video taken the day of the quake and later released by the park service showed the spire shaking violently. Daylight could be seen through some of the cracks, the largest of which was reported to be at least 4 feet long and about an inch wide. The Monument remained closed to the public while the structural integrity was assessed and repairs were undertaken.



After 32 months of repairs at a cost of 15 million dollars, the National Park Service reopened the Washington Monument to visitors on May 12, 2014.



Based on a post-earthquake leveling survey done in 2012, The National Geodetic Survey (NGS) determined the earthquake "had no discernible impact on the settlement of the Washington Monument." NGS further found that the rate of settlement for the Washington Monument itself, based on multiple measurements taken since 1901, is two-hundredths of an inch per year. This indicates that the monument has settled just under 2¼ inches since 1901, none of which is attributable to the 2011 earthquake.

In December of 2014, using new international measurement standards and technology not available in the past, The NGS calculated the official architectural height of the Washington Monument to be 554 feet 7 11/32 inches.

Although the newly established height differs from the historical height of 555 feet 5 1/8 inches, neither the starting point nor the so-called "standard deviation" used for the original 1884 measurement is known, making comparison of the two measurements rather difficult. The new architectural height provides baseline documentation that can be easily reproduced for comparison with future measurements and investigations to determine if the height of the monument is changing in any way.

There you have a brief history of our National Monument to George Washington, and the story behind 22 rather important stones (I'll call them 'nuggets') from the quarry of Freemasonry.



...Another 'nugget from the quarry of Freemasonry'. SM

Douglas M. Messimer, PM Tuckahoe Lodge 347, Richmond, VA #75 in a series 8/2015

Source: This presentation is an expanded edition of an original 'nugget' by the author, presented in February of 2010. This presentation included additional in-depth research and acquiring additional photographs. Portions adapted from the spring 1997 issue of The Voice of Freemasonry, by the Grand Lodge of D.C. Photographs: Public Domain from the Library of Congress, National Park Service, and personal photographs by the author.