

# THE GEORGE WASHINGTON MASONIC NATIONAL MEMORIAL

A Short History



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[www.gwmemorial.org](http://www.gwmemorial.org)  
October 2011

START



The vision of a George Washington Masonic Memorial existed before the Association's 1910 founding and even goes back to Washington's lifetime. Only through successive generations' and many Grand Lodges' efforts did a permanent memorial come to fruition. Yet even after a century of dedicated service to George Washington, Freemasonry's obligation to the great man is just beginning.



President Washington has numerous statues, landmarks and countless other honors named for him. Most of these are monuments. Only a few are memorials. A monument is commonly dedicated to the actions of an individual, a people or to a great event, while memorials are dedicated to the memory and character of a single person. Such is the distinction between the George Washington Monument on the Nation's Capitol and the George Washington Masonic Memorial in Alexandria, VA. The Monument is dedicated to Washington's great service as citizen, soldier, president and statesman. . . .

*“To inspire humanity through education to emulate and promote the virtues, character and vision of George Washington, the Man, the Mason and Father of our Country.”*

*Memorial Association Mission Statement*



George Washington Memorial Hall



. . . while The George Washington Masonic Memorial is dedicated to the character of the man, the Masonic virtues he exemplified and to “The Father of our Country.”



The first small step in commemorating Washington as Freemason began in 1795. *The Sentimental and Masonic Magazine*, of Dublin, Ireland published a tribute to Washington. The image shows Freedom, Love and Honor gazing upon his profile. Blindfolded Justice, holding a sword in one hand and scales in the other, wears a Masonic apron. In the foreground an open book displays the letter “G” and the motto “Vide, Aude and Tace” [See, Hear and Be Silent – Pronounced “VID-day, OW-day, TAH-kay”].





In 1784 George Washington was elected an honorary member of Alexandria Lodge #39 in Alexandria, VA. Four years later, when the Lodge was re-chartered as #22 under the Grand Lodge of Virginia, Washington agreed to serve as its Charter Master.



Washington 's Apron, 1783



U.S. Capitol Cornerstone Trowel



After his death in 1799, the Lodge began acquiring many Washington artifacts from family and friends. This collection set the first foundation stone of the future Memorial. To further commemorate their illustrious brother, in 1804, the Lodge changed its name to Alexandria-Washington Lodge #22.



Fredericksburg Lodge #4 Hall

Holly Bible upon which Washington took his Masonic Obligations, 1752



The 1853 centennial of Washington's initiation into Freemasonry inspired his "Mother Lodge", Fredericksburg #4, to undertake a grand building. They originally conceived a great Masonic hall containing a large statue of Washington in Masonic regalia, but financial realities limited the Lodge to a statue. Sculptor Hiram Powers received the commission. Born in Vermont, he lived most of his life in Rome, Italy. By 1860 Powers completed the statue and shipped it to Virginia. Lodge history states: "[It] reached Fredericksburg by the last steamer that came up the Rappahannock River before it was closed to navigation by the Federal authorities at the beginning of the War Between the States." The Lodge displayed the statue for two years before moving it to Richmond for safekeeping. Sadly, it was destroyed in a fire during the Confederate evacuation in April 1865.

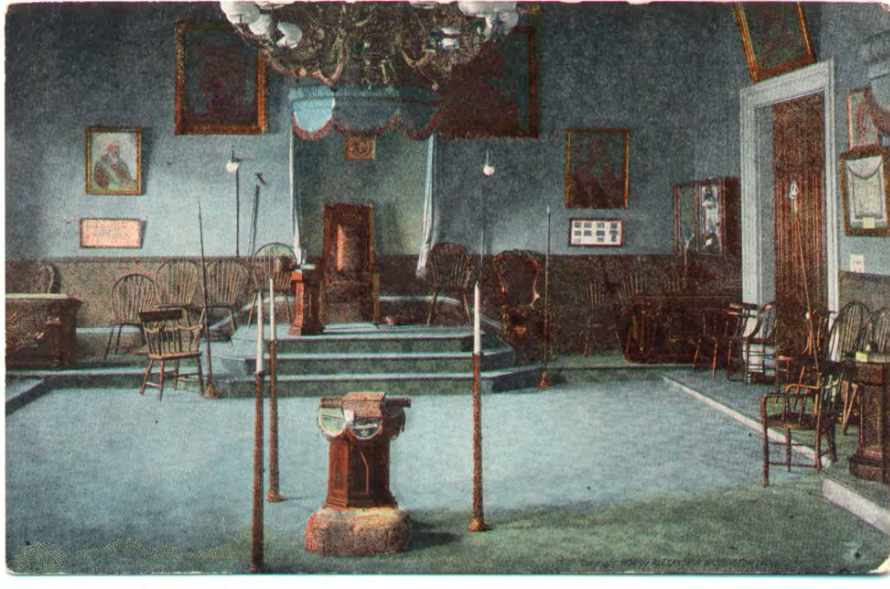




Like mile-stones down the course of history, one more anniversary led American Freemasons to its Washington Memorial. In 1893 Grand Master of Colorado William D. Wright sent letters to all US Grand Lodges recommending a committee, under the leadership of the Grand Lodge of Virginia, to organize a suitable commemoration of the centennial of Washington's death.



On December 14<sup>th</sup> 1899 more than 300 Freemasons and their families made a “pilgrimage” from Alexandria by electric train and steamboat to Mt. Vernon. Grand Master of Virginia, R.T. Duke, presided over the service at Washington’s tomb with appropriate Masonic funeral rites, wreath laying and prayers. The assembly then moved to Mt. Vernon’s east lawn and listened to minute guns firing from the Presidential yacht and nearby Fort Washington. The commemoration concluded with President and Freemason William McKinley’s arrival and solemn address.



Alexandria-Washington Lodge #22 Hall, ca. 1900

As Washington's second lodge, Alexandria-Washington Lodge #22 hosted and co-sponsored the commemorative funeral service. Since Washington's death, its large collection of valuable artifacts grew so in the 1850s the Lodge opened a museum. Fifty years later fires and growing tourists' demands caused the Lodge to discuss building a large fireproof hall and museum.



M.W. Bro. Charles Callahan, PGM,  
GLVA (1858 – 1844)

About this time an unassuming, but ambitious, man joined the Lodge. Charles Callahan was the Commissioner of Revenue for Alexandria. He possessed a deep and abiding reverence for Washington and the talents to write and inspire others. As he progressed in the Lodge, Callahan conceived of a great Masonic Memorial to George Washington on top of nearby Shuter's Hill. Upon his installation as Master of Alexandria-Washington Lodge #22, and under the authority of the Grand Master of Virginia, Callahan sent invitations to every US Grand Lodge to discuss a national George Washington Masonic Memorial.






Callahan's meeting was held in the Alexandria-Washington #22 Lodge room on February 22, 1910 with the Grand Master of Virginia as chair. The representatives from eighteen Grand Lodges concluded the day with a unanimous resolution to form the George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association and the election of the Grand Master of Maryland, Thomas J. Shryock (Pronounced "Shry-ock") as president.





A highly successful Baltimore businessman, politician and soldier. Shryock's mother, however, was from Alexandria. Indeed, when a child, she presented a welcoming bouquet to the Marquis de Lafayette when he visited in 1825.


## Washington - the Man and the Mason

 HIS BOOK has been officially endorsed and recommended to the Masonic Fraternity of the country by **The George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association**. The net profits derived from its sale are to be devoted exclusively to "The Memorial to Washington the Mason" movement, and to that extent the subscriber

a member of \_\_\_\_\_ Lodge  
 No. \_\_\_\_\_ F. & A. M., of \_\_\_\_\_  
 has contributed to the above named fund.

**In testimony whereof**, the seal of said Association has been hereto affixed on this \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_ A. D. 19\_\_\_\_

To raise funds Charles Callahan wrote *Washington the Man and Mason*. Freemasons who purchased the book received this certificate



Early Memorial Association Seal

The Association's first few years were difficult as the 48 US Grand Lodges had their own priorities and projects. In the first five years the Association raised only \$15,000, but a majority of US Grand Lodges did endorse the project. Sadly President Shryock died in 1918 after serving nearly 35 years as Grand Master of Maryland.



President Shryock's successor was well-suited to the job. Past Grand Master of Pennsylvania Louis A. Watres (pronounced "waters") was remarkable. Receiving little formal education, he became a successful lawyer and industrialist in Scranton, PA. He commanded a regiment in the Spanish-American War, was elected lieutenant governor and served many charitable foundations. It was Watres who organized the Grand Lodges, raised the money and discovered the talent to make Callahan's vision a reality.



President Watres found the Memorial's architect in New York City. Harvey Wiley Corbett had assisted on the plans for the Brooklyn Masonic Temple and later designed Metropolitan Life Insurance Company's building and the Roerich Museum. In 1932 he became a principal architect of Rockefeller Center in Manhattan.



#### FIRST SKETCH

*"I certify this is the first sketch of the Memorial and was made on the train after I first visited the site by Mr. Corbett & Myself.*

Holmes & Corbett  
Frank J. Holmes  
Harvey W. Corbett



*I certify this is the first sketch  
for the Memorial... and was made  
on the train after I first met Mr.  
Sole by Mr. Corbett's suggestion.  
J. Langley Corbett  
Frank J. Holmes  
Harvey W. Corbett*

After viewing Alexandria's Shuter's Hill, Corbett made a quick sketch of a colossal "lighthouse" of Freemasonry dedicated to Washington. Within a few weeks his sketch became a formal proposal that the Association approved in 1921





Groundbreaking ceremony took place on Shuter's Hill, June 5, 1922. Callahan's and Watres' first shovels began months of moving earth to drop the hill by nearly 20 feet. With the site leveled, a protective concrete footing was required. Three shifts worked nonstop for twenty-one days pouring 9,000 cubic yards of concrete onto 720 tons of reinforced steel.



Meanwhile the Association selected the New Hampshire granite quarry to supply the Memorial's façade and even as the foundation's cement cured, trainloads of "hewn, squared and numbered" stones arrived at the bottom the hill.



Despite this great initial expense, the Association determined never to borrow money. Construction proceeded only as the Association secured Grand Lodge, Lodge and individual donations.

President Calvin Coolidge (1872 – 1933)



On November 1, 1923 the Memorial's cornerstone was dedicated in a Masonic ceremony. President Calvin Coolidge, former President and Chief Justice William H. Taft, and numerous public and Masonic dignitaries performed the ceremony while more than 20,000 Freemasons and an equal number of citizens looked on.





The US Grand Masters and other officials later filled the cornerstone with a Bible, US flag, copies of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution, and a variety of local and state items.





For over ten years Freemasons steadily and faithfully contributed to the construction of the Memorial.



More than \$350,000 a year was raised per year as the Memorial rose higher and higher.

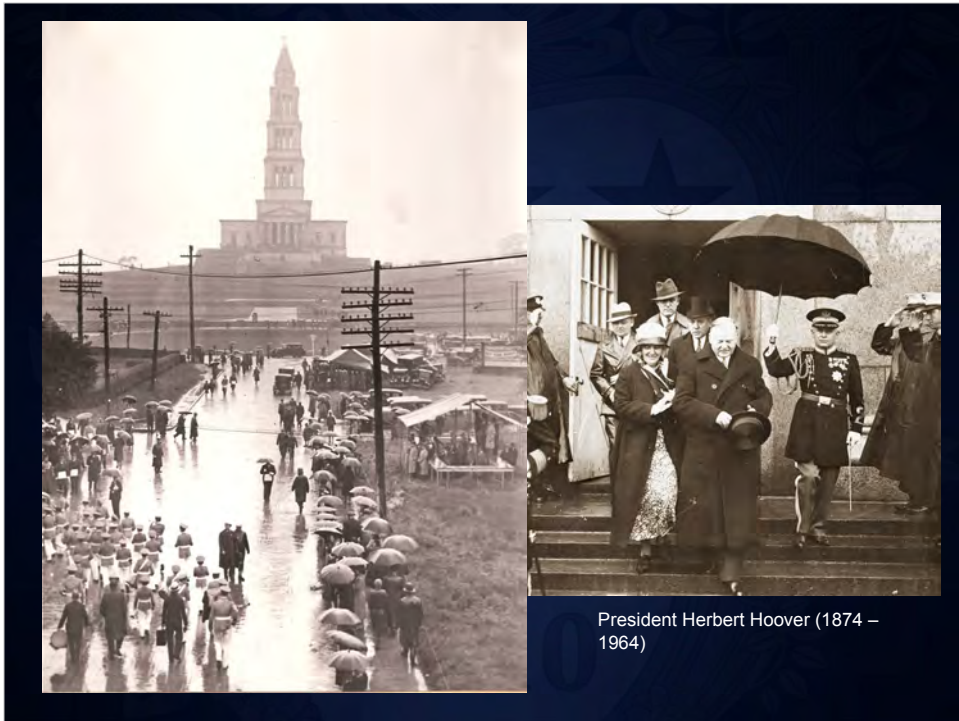


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When completed the Memorial contained almost 75,000 tons of cement, gravel, sand, granite, and steel. Construction consumed more than a million feet of lumber, and 25 tons of nails.





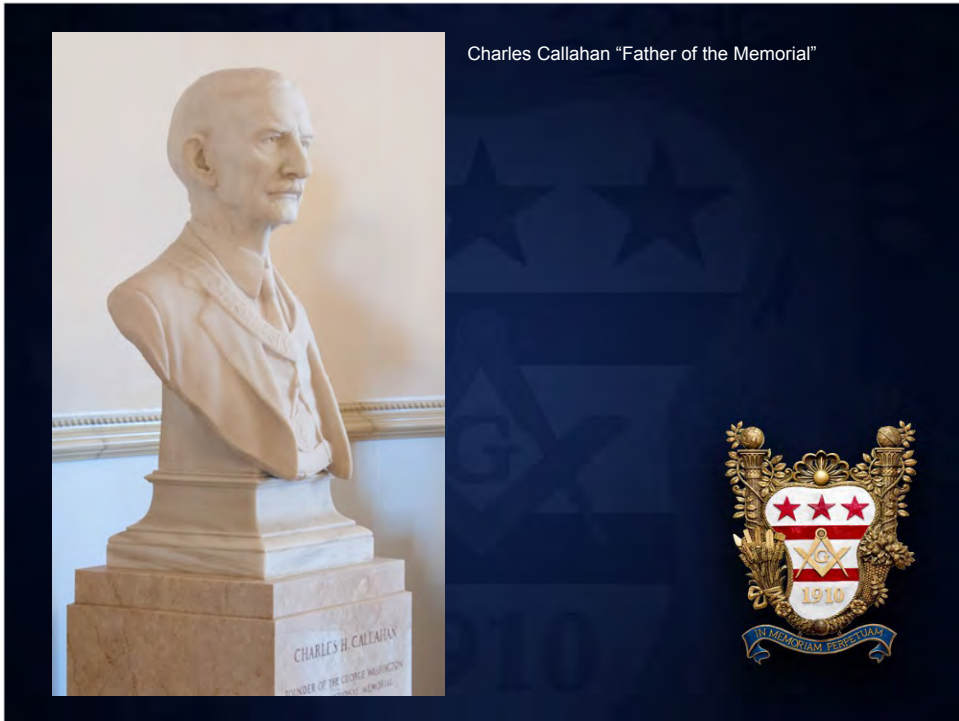
The Memorial was officially dedicated during the bicentennial year of George Washington's birth. On May 12, 1932, President Herbert Hoover joined with Grand Masters from every Grand Lodge in the ceremony. Unfortunately a relentless rain curtailed the large public spectacle and forced it to be held in the auditorium.



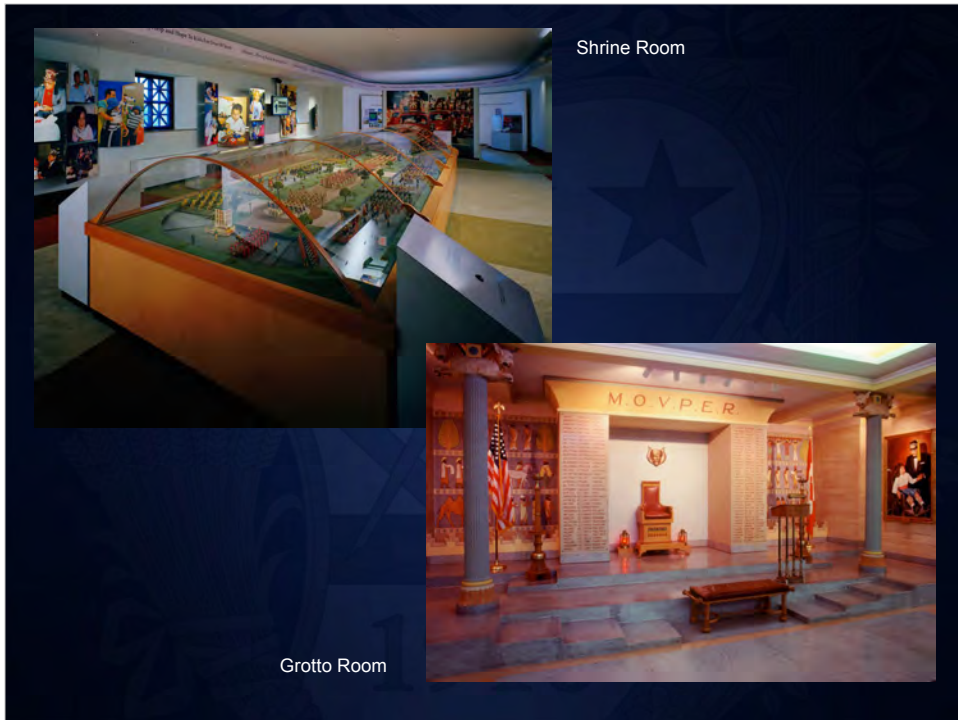


Alexandria-Washington Lodge #22 Replica Lodge Room

Due to the Great Depression and the death of Louis Watres in 1938, work at the Memorial nearly stopped. In 1942, however, work resumed with the opening of Alexandria-Washington Lodge #22's "Replica Lodge Room." With the exterior complete and a new museum room to display the Washington artifacts, much of the Memorial mission was accomplished.



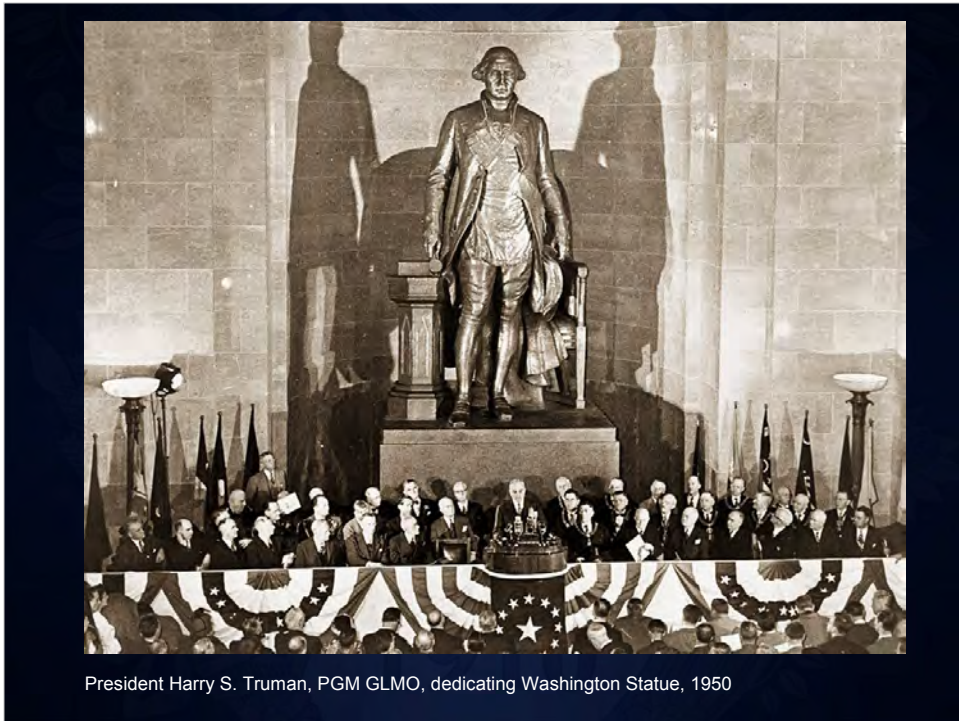
In 1944 84-years-old Charles Callahan visited the Memorial for the unveiling of his marble bust. He had seen his vision fulfilled and passed away five months later. Through his initiative and tireless efforts Callahan became the “Father of the Memorial.”



Shrine Room

Grotto Room

After World War II, work on the Memorial's interior began in earnest. In 1945 Shriners International dedicated two display rooms. The Veiled Prophets of the Enchanted Realm, or "Grotto", were first in the tower. Well before the elevators were installed they dedicated their third floor exhibition in 1948.



President Harry S. Truman, PGM GLMO, dedicating Washington Statue, 1950

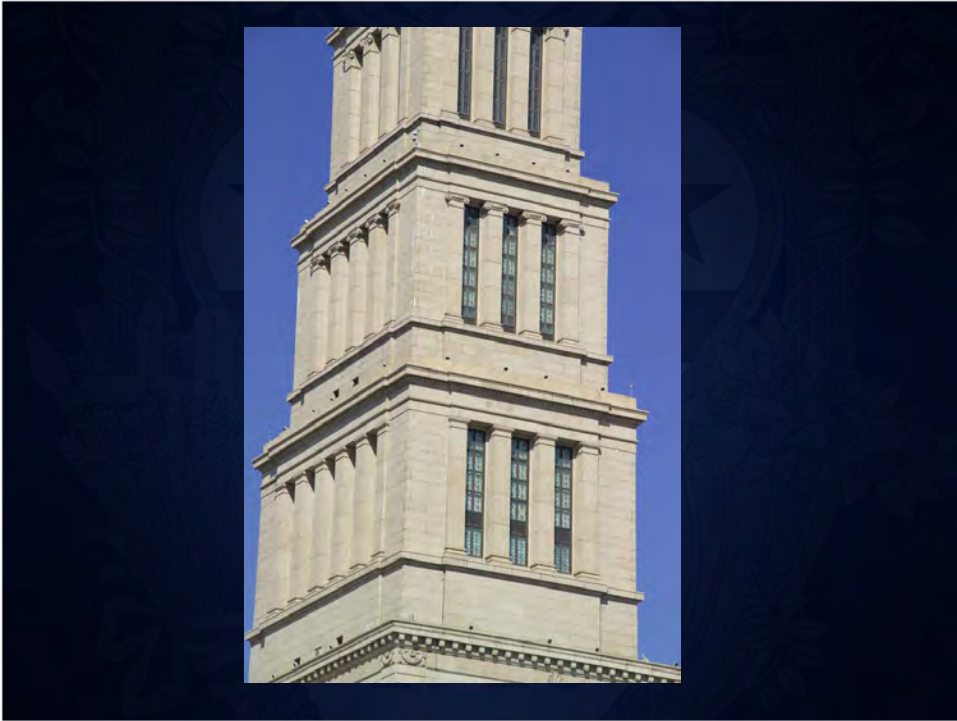
Beginning in 1947 Memorial Hall was completed through several Masonic organizations. The Association installed the marble interior façade and floors while the Order of the Eastern Star purchased the grand candelabras. On Washington's Birthday in 1950, US President and Past Grand Master of Masons in Missouri, Harry S. Truman dedicated the great bronze Washington statue in Memorial Hall. The statue of Washington as a Master of his Lodge is over 17 feet tall and weighs more than 7 tons. It was sculpted by Bryant Baker and funded by International Order of DeMolay for Boys.



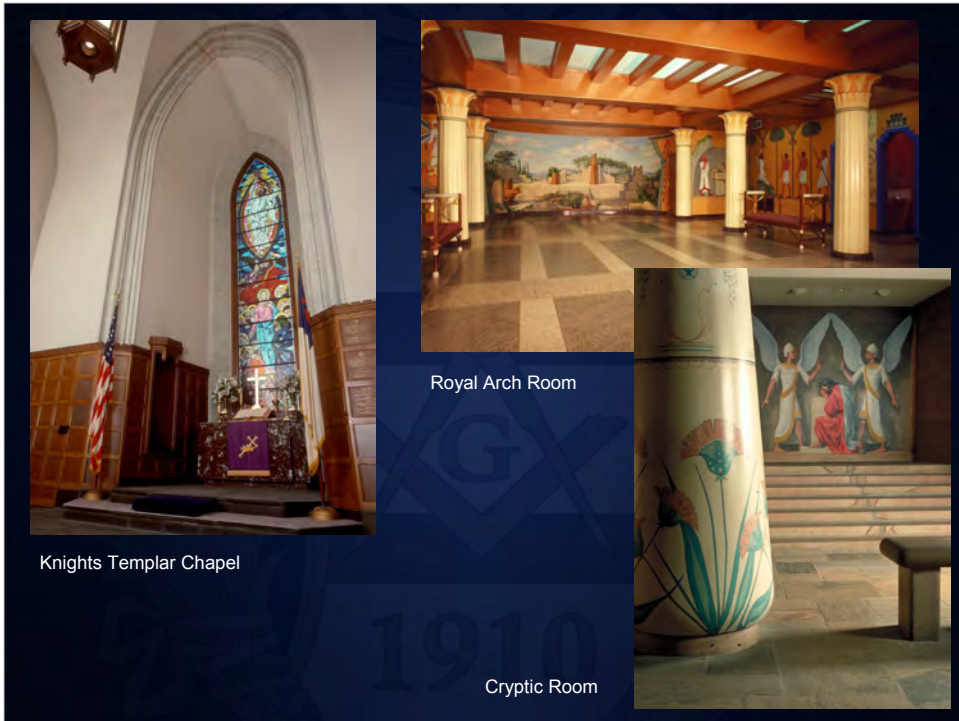


California Freemasons commissioned Allyn Cox to paint Memorial Hall's two murals. The South mural shows President Washington at the 1793 US Capitol Cornerstone ceremony and the North depicts General Washington attending a St. John's Day Masonic Observance at Christ Church, Philadelphia, in 1778.





The Memorial's two elevators were installed in the 1950s. Wonders in themselves, they move horizontally as they move vertically converging at a 7.5-degree incline.

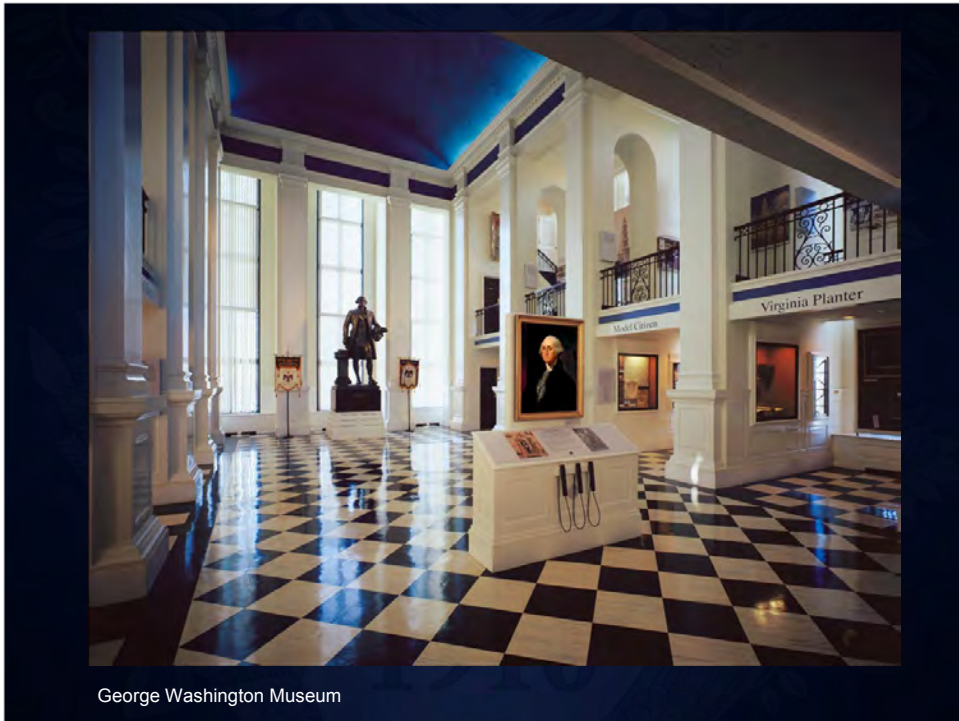


The 5<sup>th</sup> floor Royal Arch Chapter Room, the 7<sup>th</sup> floor Cryptic Masons' Room and the 8<sup>th</sup> floor Knights Templar Chapel were completed in the 1950s.



Louis A. Watres Library

The Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania sponsored the 6<sup>th</sup> floor Louis A. Watres Library.



George Washington Museum

In 1966 the two Scottish Rite Supreme Councils jointly funded the 4<sup>th</sup> floor George Washington Museum. Both Supreme Councils funded a renovation of the floor in 2004.



Dedication of Masonic Emblem, 1999



Tall Cedars Room

By the 1970s the George Washington Masonic Memorial was at last completed with several major projects. The Tall Cedars of Lebanon opened their room on the 9<sup>th</sup> floor observation deck in 1984, and in 1999 the large Masonic emblem was dedicated on the Memorial's front lawn.





George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association Board of Directors, 2011

Since the turn of the millennium the Association has rededicated itself to George Washington. A refocused Board of Directors and staff are laboring for a second century of service that will surpass the first.



Major renovations and exhibitions within the Memorial and new educational programs to reach Freemasons and people around the world . . .

***"To inspire humanity through education to emulate and promote the virtues, character and vision of George Washington, the Man, the Mason and Father of our Country."***



..... will ensure the Memorial remains the enduring symbol of "George Washington, the man, the Mason and the Father of the Nation."

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SUPPORT!



The GWMNMA is a 501c3 Non-Profit Educational Foundation.  
Donations are Tax Deductible. [www.gwmemorial.org](http://www.gwmemorial.org)



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