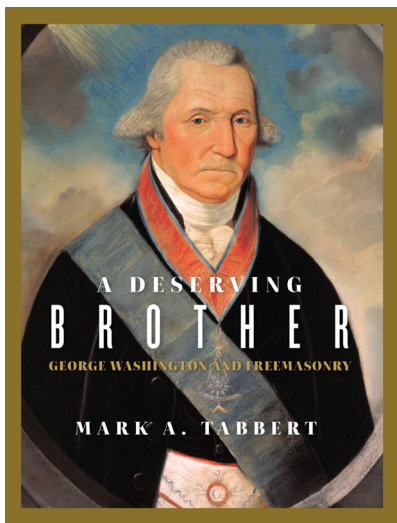


In Review



**A Deserving Brother:
George Washington and Freemasonry**
MARK A. TABBERT

University of Virginia Press, 2022
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299 pages, \$35.00 US

WHEN GEORGE WASHINGTON was made a Freemason at age twenty, he made what turned out to be a lasting connection with the Order. In *A Deserving Brother: George Washington and Freemasonry*, Mark Tabbert endeavors to set before us the surviving evidence of Washington's connections to the Craft.

As the mythology goes, Washington could not tell a lie—but a man whose shadow in history is so large is bound to have many exaggerations told about him. So it has been, understandably if no less

unfortunately, with the manner in which Freemasons have creatively expanded upon Washington's role in the Craft. One can't be a living legend without attracting folklore, and the situation is only amplified upon the demise of someone so storied. Many of the common claims that have circulated regarding Washington and Freemasonry—even ones that are frequently reprinted and may seem to be well-established—ultimately turn out to have thin attestation in the historical record, or none at all. As such, a work that presents at least the bare evidence upon which future scholarship might rely has long been a desideratum of the field.

(At this point, a disclosure is owed. It is well known that Mark Tabbert is a colleague of mine at the George Washington Masonic National Memorial, where we have worked together for a decade.)

A Deserving Brother begins with an eighteen-page introduction by historian Edward Lengel that summarizes Washington's Masonic biography and sets the stage for the more detail accounts that follow. After this, Mark Tabbert's careful assembly of the evidence begins. *A Deserving Brother* is arranged chronologically, with each piece of evidence briefly summarized. Of particular interest is an early section that details Washington's first steps in Masonry in the Lodge at Fredericksburg, Virginia. Of course, since the ritual used at that lodge at that time is unavailable, some points of the initiation process were inferred from later practice. One example, the act of a ceremonial apron being worn differently in the various degrees, may not

have applied at the time. Details such as this only illustrate how difficult it can be to be certain of specifics in the course of this sort of research.

Fortunately, the text abounds with verified details—far more than will be found in any other treatment of Washington as a Freemason. Tabbert also helps interpret the absence of information. In a section titled “The Search for Washington at Masonic Meetings, 1755–1775,” he details his methodology of looking for opportunities for Washington to attend lodge meetings based upon his travels and the known meeting nights of lodges in locales Washington visited. Nothing has been found, and it is very possible that Washington attended no lodge meetings for a very extended period. This is contrary to characterizations offered by writers connected with the fraternity. Earlier accounts of Washington as a Mason were, whatever their merits, not scholarly nor fully referenced. For academics to feel comfortable relying upon a text,

it must be well documented—otherwise they may not wish to cite it at all.

That will not be the case with this outstanding new book, which will be standard reference material for the foreseeable future. From his original initiation to his lodge funeral ceremony, every documented element of Washington’s Masonic life is ably presented here. The work also includes an appendix listing Masonic items for which a connection to Washington is claimed, but which lack confirmation in the historical record.

Handsomely produced by the University of Virginia Press, *A Deserving Brother* features dozens of high-quality color photographs of items connected to Washington and the Masons.

Mark Tabbert has given students of American history a magnificent resource that can be used as the springboard for more extensive analyses of Washington’s experience of the Masonic fraternity.

Reviewed by Shawn Eyer, FPS

Masonic Engravings

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- that was desired at the time.
- 3 See David Harrison, *Lost Rites and Rituals of Freemasonry* (Addlestone, UK: Lewis Masonic, 2017), 127–33.
 - 4 Book of Revelation, 1:8, 21:6, 22:13.
 - 5 There can be found a number of French portraits of men wearing military dress sporting an earring from the later eighteenth century. De Lintot is not seen wearing an earring in the previous engraving.
 - 6 For further details on the life of James Ludovic Lindsay, see David Harrison, *The Transformation of Freemasonry* (Bury St. Edmunds: Arima, 2010), 115, 138, 170.
 - 7 This possibly provides an idea for a work-in-progress engraving of de Lintot’s.
 - 8 See Pierre Mollier, ‘Freemasonry and Templarism’, in *Handbook of Freemasonry*, 82–99. Mollier discusses the ‘Knight Kadosh’ degree dated to 1750, which he puts forward is ‘nothing other than a ritual for the Elect of 1x’, which features ‘a mystical ladder thrown in’ and
 - 9 ‘a slightly odd story in which the Templars intervene’.
 - 10 The image may be seen at https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1896-0511-385-1
 - 11 The Masonic legend of St. Alban was referred to by Mackenzie in his *Royal Masonic Cyclopædia*, 641.
 - 12 The serpent could symbolise the temptation of the original 15 who conspired against Hiram, the symbolism of the serpent linking directly to the temptation of Eve in the Garden.
 - 13 Waite, *A New Encyclopædia of Freemasonry* (London: Rider & Co, [1920]), 2:2.
 - 14 This letter can be seen transcribed in its entirety in Appendix I of the author’s *The Rite of Seven Degrees* (Addlestone, UK: Lewis Masonic, 2021). Transcriptions have previously been published by M.C. Peck in *AQC* 10 (1897), and in Wonnacott, ‘The Rite of Seven Degrees in London’, 39 (1926), 68–69.
 - 15 The Triple Tau is a symbol that is discussed in Richard Carlile’s *Manual of Freemasonry* (London: Reeves & Turner, n.d.), 97.