March 2020

Impeachment and Brother Andrew Johnson

In the nearly 250 years of United States history, the impeachment of a President has only taken place three times.

The U.S. House of Representatives “impeaches,” but removal from office must then be approved by a 2/3 vote in the U.S. Senate. None of the three impeachments by the House were approved by the U.S. Senate. Therefore, all three Presidents continued in office.

The three presidents that were impeached by the U.S. House of Representatives were Andrew Johnson, William Clinton, and Donald Trump.

Andrew Johnson was a Master Mason from Tennessee. He was the Vice President of the United States in April, 1865, when President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated. Johnson was immediately elevated to President. The issues for his subsequent impeachment were numerous, but in short, President Johnson’s lenient Reconstruction program for the defeated South after the Civil War was opposed by many in Congress.

While in the White House, Brother Johnson was known to attend Lodge and enjoy the fellowship of his brethren. He reportedly attended Lodge rather than his own impeachment trial.

According to The Old Past Master’s Masonic Almanac, Johnson became the first President to become a Scottish Rite Mason, receiving his degrees in the White House on June 20, 1867. He had earlier received the Knight Templar orders.

While President, he participated in at least four Masonic cornerstone ceremonies: the Monument to Stephen A. Douglass in Chicago, September 6, 1866; and Masonic Temples in Baltimore on Nov. 20, 1866; Boston on June 24, 1867, and Washington, DC, on May 20, 1868.

When the cornerstone was laid in Baltimore, someone suggested that a chair be provided for the President on the reviewing platform. Johnson refused, saying, “We all meet on the level,” and he remained standing with his brethren.

Brother Johnson was proud of his Masonic membership. When he died, he was buried with full Masonic honors. History may provide one side of Andrew Johnson, but we, as Masons, can see another side of this Masonic Brother.

4 Grand Masters Honor President Ford

Four Grand Masters placed a wreath at the gravesite of former President and Brother Gerald R. Ford on November 23, 2019 in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The Grand Masters were Most Worshipful Brothers Robert C. Strader, of Wisconsin; Kenneth Roy, of Indiana; Mark Manning, of Michigan, and Keith Newton, of Ohio.

They were attending a Tri-State (Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio) degree exemplification event in Grand Rapids.
Masonic Fund Gives $100,000

In the past decade, the H. L. Palmer Masonic Angel Fund in southeastern Wisconsin has contributed in excess of $100,000 to more than 15,000 needy children since its establishment in 2009.

Not only the Masonic community, but non-Masons too have become increasingly more generous in their recognition and support of the program.

Lodges, Chapters, Shrine and other Masonic groups, as well as individual members attest to the widespread support.

According to the February, 2020, issue of *The Wisconsin Masonic Journal*, "Our Angel Fund not only benefits needy children, but demonstrates to the community at large, our character as Masons and our involvement in the welfare of their children."

Masons Making a Difference

Geary F. Laird, Grand Master of Kentucky, selected "Masons Making a Difference," as his theme this year. He explains it in this way:

*Brothers, I know that each of you possess a unique talent. Your specialty may be conferring the degree work, cooking for meetings and special events, washing dishes, mowing the grass, or maintaining your Lodge. We should not only make a difference in our Lodges, but also in our communities. Masons - at work in the community, volunteering, hosting a blood drive, supporting youth organizations and random acts of kindness - can make a difference."

A Lesson in Geography

The late Most Worshipful Brother Donald G. Ingalls, Grand Master of California in 1978-79 once compared the two seas in the Holy Land.

One of those seas is fresh and filled with fish. Its banks are green and trees spread their branches over it and plunge their thirsty roots into its waters. The River Jordan fills this sea with sparkling water from the hills. Men build houses near it, and birds their nests, and life is happier on its shores.

But, the River Jordan flows south into another sea. Here there is neither fish, nor trees, nor song of birds, nor children's laughter. The air hangs heavy above its water and neither man, nor fowl, nor beast will drink of it.

What makes this difference in these two seas fed by the same river?

The Sea of Galilee passes on that which it receives. For every drop of water that flows in, a drop of water flows out. The other sea has no outlet, it keeps what it gets. It stagnates and is called the Dead Sea.

This comparison illustrates that to give is to live - and our gift to give, this special gift called Freemasonry, is a way of life and a willingness of the heart. We must act to pass on to our neighbors, our friends and nation these precious gifts of right living which our Craft has so generously bestowed on us.

—This material is from a keynote address by Jack R. Levitt, Past Grand Master of California, at the Grand Lodge of Montana in 2001.