

Peyton Randolph , Master Mason, Founding Father of the USA

Peyton Randolph was played an integral part in the founding of our country, yet he is largely ignored by history.

Randolph was born into a prestigious Virginia family in September, 1721 at his family home “Tazewell Hall” near Williamsburg, Va. He was educated early by private tutors as befit his family’s station . His father was Sir John Randolph who was the King’s attorney for colonial Virginia for many years.

Randolph attended the College of William and Mary about 1739 and studied law at the Middle Temple in London. He was called to the bar February 10, 1744. In 1748, he replaced his father as the King’s attorney ,a position similar to a present day state attorney general and was elected to the Virginia House of Burgesses. He served several Royal Governors of Virginia as King’s attorney until his resignation in 1766 when he became Speaker of the House of Burgesses. He served in the house until 1775.

Randolph was a close friend of Brother George Washington and is mentioned many times in Washington’s letters. Randolph married Elizabeth Harrison, sister of Benjamin Harrison. The Randolphs had no children of their own but raised several nieces and nephews including Edmund Randolph, who was the first US Attorney General, a US Secretary of State and an aide-to-camp to General Washington .

Peyton Randolph’s original Masonic affiliation is not known. He likely became a Mason while studying law in London. What is known is of greater importance. He was named as a Master of Lodge #6 at Williamsburg in a warrant from Lord Petrie, grand master of the Grand Lodge of England dated November 6, 1773. He was serving as provincial grand master of Virginia while he presided as President of the first Continental Congress in Philadelphia in 1774.

When trouble started in the colonies with England , Randolph was elected to a committee of correspondence whose function it was to monitor actions of Parliament, gather information, and to communicate with similar committees in other colonies. Randolph’s wisdom and restraint in dealing with his fellow politicians earned him the respect of his peers. He was elected to head this committee in 1773. At the first Virginia Convention in August , 1774, he was unanimously elected President. When the first Continental Congress assembled in September 1774 in Philadelphia, he was unanimously elected it’s first President. Randolph resigned the Continental Congress in October of 1774 to attend the Virginia Legislature session. He was re-elected to the Continental Congress in 1775 and again elected it’s President. He resigned in October of 1775 due to ill health.

How ironic that his replacement to the 2nd Congress was a young Virginia lawyer by the name of Thomas Jefferson. I can’t help but wonder how this turn of events effected the future of our country.

Peyton Randolph died on October 22, 1775 in Philadelphia and was brought home to Williamsburg to be buried in the chapel of the College of William and Mary. The Randolph home on Nicholson St. in Williamsburg is one of the 80 or so original structures at Colonial Williamsburg and can be toured today.

By: Rick Bails

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Sources

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