

Friend to Friend Masonic Memorial

By: Edward A. Fowler, Jr. GM.

On August 21 1993 the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania dedicated the "Friend to Friend Masonic Memorial" at Gettysburg, Pa. This STB is the text of the address given by R.W. Bro. Edward Fowler, Jr., Grand Master of Masons of Pennsylvania on that occasion. – Editor

Background

The memorial conceived and sponsored by the Grand Lodge of Free and accepted Masons of Pennsylvania, centers on a monument of two sculptured bronze figures atop a large granite base. The figures portray the historically verified encounter between Confederate Brigadier General Lewis Addison Armistead and Captain Henry Harrison Bingham. Bingham was an aide to Union Major General Winfield Scott Hancock on Cemetery Ridge during Pickett's charge of July 3 1863. This attack became known throughout the world as the "High Tide of the Confederacy"

Although Armistead and Hancock had been friends and fellow officers for many years, their political differences came between them at the outbreak of the Civil War. Armistead joined the newly formed Confederacy while Hancock chose to stay by the flag of the United States. Both officers served their counties well and were promoted into leadership positions.

After the two men went their separate ways, it was twenty-seven months before they were to meet again. This meeting finally took place on the battlefield remembered forever as "Gettysburg." During Pickett's charge, both officers were wounded. Armistead was mortally wounded and Hancock received a wound for which he would require hospital care for many months. Armistead's cries for help were heard by several officers nearby, and it was a fellow fraternity brother, Captain Bigham, who arrived and offered aid the his fallen comrade-in-arms.

Armistead spoke of his close relationship with Hancock and he asked Captain Bigham to relay a message to his friend. He entrusted his personal effects to the captain. Armistead died two days later at the George Spanger farm hospital site.

(From "Freemasons at Gettysburg" by Sheldon A. Munn)

Oration by R.W. Edward Fowler Jr.

Can there be anyone here today not stirred with emotion as we look over these grounds that hold the remains and the heroics of our countrymen who gave their lives in the wars of our nation?

Is there anyone here today who can look upon this larger-than-life statue of "Brother Helping Brother" without sensing a love for humanity--without feeling the compassion and charity that comes from the Fatherhood of God and a Brotherhood of Man!

Can't you see in this masterful sculpture. the tenderness of a human Brotherhood, a compassion that surpasses personal allegiances even the harsh political differences of a bitter war?

It is the spirit of Fraternalism – the bond that exists among men of principle whose values lead them to do the right things ... the good things ... instinctively, willfully and lovingly.

No doubt, it was with that kind of spirit of unanimity with which – in these difficult times President Abraham Lincoln spoke the oft repeated words:

"With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan ... "

Abraham Lincoln was not one of the fourteen United States Presidents who was a Freemason, but there were occasions when he spoke of the fraternity with praise and shared an appreciation for its values.

But, there were other Presidents, Generals and great Americans who joined in tribute as men and as Freemasons. On July 4, 1865, right behind us in the National Cemetery, the Right Worshipful Grand Master of Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania dedicated the cornerstone of the Soldiers' National Memorial That was the first monument of its type to be placed in Gettysburg.

Among the more than ten thousand people here were President of the United States Andrew Johnson; former President James Buchanan; Major General John White Geary who was the parade marshal; Lt, General Winfield Scott; Vice Admiral David Farragut, and Pennsylvania Governor Andrew Curtin – all Freemasons!

It is the reflection of those values-specifically the "Bonds of Brotherhood and Compassion"-and as a tribute to the men who lived and died for them-that the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania has sought to portray in this "Friend to Friend Masonic Memorial Monument."

Sculptor Ron Tunison skillfully captured with precise detail the emotion and the compassion that was displayed 130 years ago on the field of war.

I feel I can almost hear General Lewis Armistead asking Captain Henry Bingham to "Tell General (Winfield) Hancock for me that I have done him, and done you all, an injury..."

I can sense the tenderness of Captain Bingham asking, "If you have anything valuable in your possession which you desire taken care of, I will take care of it."

I can relate as a man ... as a Freemason ... as a human being ... to the confidence with which General Armistead is consigning his very personal possessions – his spurs and his gold watch with the Square and Compass and the Letter "G" on the chain to one he can trust as a Brother, even though they have been combatants on the field of war.

Freemasons have placed this statue and developed the grounds around it in the Cemetery Annex as a never-to-be forgotten tribute to the values of Brotherhood, Compassion and Patriotism.

Freemasons and the Masonic Fraternity are proud to be a part of our national heritage here at Gettysburg.

The dedication of this statute is the climax of a wonderful suggestion by two Freemasons from the Gettysburg area – Brother Sheldon Munn, a jeweler and Gettysburg Battlefield Guide, and Brother John Schwartz, an optometrist and also a Battlefield Guide.

They conceived the idea for a monument at Gettysburg to be dedicated to "Brotherhood Undivided." It started several years ago when the two wrote their idea for a monument as a recommendation to the Grand Lodge Officers. Now, through several years of dedication, development, negotiation, research and hard work, we stand in reverence, awe and pride beneath the "Friend to Friend Masonic Memorial Monument."

As soon as the Grand Lodge Officers accepted the recommendation of Brothers Munn and Schwartz, a Committee under the leadership of our Right Worshipful Deputy Grand Master George Hohenschildt set out on a task that some said would take a miracle to accomplish. Perhaps it seems close to being a miracle when we look back on all of the negotiations, the trips to Gettysburg and to Washington, the planning, designing, commissioning and creating the monument and reconstructing the Cemetery Annex. It was a task far more complex than anyone involved had anticipated.

It is significant that this is the first time that an effort of this nature has been carried out jointly by a private organization and the National Park Service.

Superintendent Jose Cisneros and The National Park Service staff at Gettysburg certainly played a key role in making the monument and the development of the Cemetery Annex become a reality.

Historical accuracy had to be indisputable. It was Cathy George-Harrison of the National Park Staff at Gettysburg who recommended that we select this historically verified scene of General Armistead and Captain Bingham for the "Friend to Friend-Brotherhood Undivided" portrayal.

As we went about the extensive task of reviews and approvals, the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania got some valuable assistance. We very much appreciate the help we got from Michigan Congressman William F. Broomfield and his Administrative Assistant Miss Helen Lomax in communicating in Washington and gaining the approval of the Department of the Interior.

The accomplishment in itself is a statement of a unanimity that exists among people with vision. The Friend to Friend Masonic Memorial Monument and the beauty of the plazas and grounds surrounding it now stand in honor of our sincere Brotherhood of Man.

Captain Bingham kneeling in compassion to aid a fallen Brother ... General Armistead, hand to hand, placing trust and hope in his fellow man ... makes a dramatic statement about values. They are good men with different views, faithfully patriotic to their respective causes, yet concerned for their Brother's Welfare –

The Freemasons of Pennsylvania are exceedingly proud to have undertaken this project and to have commissioned the well known historical sculptor, Ron Tunison, to create this statue and to have the U.S. Department of Interior accept it on behalf of the National Park Service and the Gettysburg National Military Cemetery.

The Friend to Friend Masonic Memorial Monument will be here to remind all who stand in awe of its beauty and its significance of the bonds of a "Brotherhood Undivided."

It will represent well the message of Brotherhood Abraham Lincoln left here:

"Let us neither express no cherish and harsh feelings toward any citizen who by his vote has differed with us. "Let us at all times remember that all Americans are Brothers of a common country and should dwell together in the bonds of Fraternal feelings.'

With those thoughts of Fraternal feelings in our hearts and minds, let us look once again upon the Brotherhood Undivided statue of the Friend to Friend Masonic Memorial and say as all Freemasons do in supplication: So Mote It Be--or, So Be It!

STB - November 1993