

Solomon's Builders

SOLOMON'S BUILDERS: FREEMASONS, FOUNDING FATHERS, AND THE SECRETS OF WASHINGTON, D. C.

By Christopher Hodapp

Reviewed by Bro. Michael Adam Neulander

The well-known Masonic author Christopher Hodapp, (1958-present), whose book *Solomon's Builders: Freemason's Founding Fathers, and the Secrets of Washington D.C.*, is unusual in that it is a non-fiction work written to correct the misinformation of two very popular works of fiction by Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* and *The Lost Symbol*. "*Solomon's Builders* was not written to second-guess Brown's sequel, but to separate the truth from fiction about the real Freemasons who were there at the birth of the United States, and the reality behind the construction of Washington, D.C." [1] Speaking of constructing, I now take the opportunity to elucidate what I think is one of the most important goals of Hodapp's book; to educate readers on how our capitol city came into being. Most capital cities around the world first started out as small towns; and then grew haphazardly over time. However, Washington, D.C. was a wholly planned city, and Hodapp emphasized in his book that this fact does not get communicated enough to our citizenry. The Founding Fathers, who were all children of the "Enlightenment;" and many of them also Freemasons, understood the great opportunity afforded them as they "forged" a new nation on the principles of liberty and democracy. Thus, they were given the once in a lifetime opportunity to build a new capitol city; which would fulfill the ancient biblical proverb of the book of *Matthew* 5:14 "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid." All the men involved in the planning and building of the capitol city; many of whom were Freemasons, knew that their new city would serve as a "beacon" of hope to all freedom loving peoples around the world. Thus, Freemason's such as President George Washington, who was selected by Congress to revert to his old profession as a surveyor, was given the task to find the ten-mile square plot of land to build the city upon. In addition, he selected his Masonic Brother, Pierre Charles L'Enfant, who had worked on Washington's staff as a military engineer, to design the city. [2]

Hodapp's other important goal of his book was to "right" the historical "wrongs" and correct the many embellishments that he detected in Brown's books. I must admit that having been an Adjunct Professor of history and philosophy, it should come as no surprise that I have read very few works of fiction in my lifetime; unless, they were works of classical literature. However, after my wife Sharon read Brown's blockbuster novel, *The Da Vinci Code*, she implored me to read it so that I might be able to educate her on Brown's historical assertions concerning Leonardo Da Vinci's works, Renaissance history, and the connections he made to the Freemason's. Of course, I acceded to Sharon's request; and even found myself thoroughly entertained by Brown's use of symbolism and the "yarn he spun" about Mary Magdalen. However, I like Hodapp, was able to detect plenty of "conspiratorial theories" and false historical facts embedded in the book, and I was able to point these out to Sharon. Therefore, when Brown's *Lost Symbol* was published, we both read it with equal enthusiasm; so that I might separate fact from fiction once again. In addition, we were intrigued by Brown's book because over a twenty year period we had traveled with our two girls and grandson to Washington, D.C., and visited many of the museums, monuments, and historical sites

around the city that Brown used in his book. Thus, when I read Hodapp's book to help me interpret Brown's *Lost Symbol*; I found his book especially useful in "illuminating" my path towards understanding the importance of Freemasonry's influence on planning and building Washington, D.C. I now realize that Washington, D.C. is Freemasonry's greatest building achievement outside of King Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem! In this book review I will write about a little out of the way; however, historically important site near the White House, which just so happens to be "steeped" in Masonic significance that I and the family have had the pleasure of visiting. In addition, I will "illuminate" some of Hodapp's insightful facts in this book regarding Freemasonry's importance in providing the "corner stone" on which social and political life in early America was built on.

In late June of 2019, Sharon had a four-day educational conference to attend in Washington, D.C. We decided to take our fifteen-year-old grandson so that he and I could visit some sites that he had not seen on some of our previous trips to the capital. This trip gave me a great opportunity to bring Hodapp's book with me so that I could pay particular attention to the "Masonic" sites of the city. Our planned itinerary included Mount Vernon, the "Spy Museum," the George Washington Masonic Memorial, and the National Archives. However, like many well-meaning plans, sometimes one receives greater joy out of "stumbling over" sites that just so happen to cross one's path. Lafayette Square just so happened to be along our walking route between the hotel and the Metro rail stop we used to travel throughout the city. What caught my eye, as we walked across Lafayette Square for the first time, was the beautiful bronze statue of Freemason and General Andrew Jackson in the center of the square. This statue intrigued me since I had become an "adopted son" of Tennessee; having retired there two years ago. However, what I found even more intriguing, both as a Freemason and a historian who loves studying Revolutionary War history, were the other statues on display in the square. At all four corners of the square there are statues of foreign generals who travelled to America to help us "shoulder the burden" of fighting for democracy and liberty. The first statue I discovered was that of General Thaddeus Kosciuszko, who was a Polish officer who had become a Freemason in Switzerland. The second statue was of Major General Baron Frederick W.A. von Steuben, who was a Prussian officer who first became a Freemason in Europe and later joined Trinity Lodge No. 10 in New York City. The third statue is that of General Jean Baptiste, baron de Vimeur de Rochambeau, a French Freemason. The fourth statue, and the square's namesake, depicts the most beloved of the foreign generals to Americans, Major General Marie-Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert du Motier, Marquis de Lafayette who also was a French Freemason. The Jackson statue was erected in the square in 1853, the other four statues were set in the square in 1930's.[3] I must take a moment to explain why Lafayette was so beloved by Americans.

Lafayette, the last living general from the American Revolution, accepted an invitation in 1824 from his Masonic Brother and President James Monroe to travel to the United States for the nation's 50th anniversary. The fifty-nine-year-old Lafayette accepted the invitation and brought his son Georges Washington Lafayette with him on what newspapers described throughout America as "Lafayette's Grand Tour." Lafayette's visit took place from August 1824 to September 1825. For Americans, Lafayette's appearance in so many of their cities and towns was their last chance to be in the presence of, and in some cases actually "touch," the "glorious past" of our nation's birth.[4] Another incredible fact that proved how revered Lafayette was by our nation's citizenry is that "over 600 American villages, cities, counties, mountains, lakes, rivers, educational institutions and other landmarks would bear his name." [5] To illustrate the point of the quote, the square was renamed for Lafayette during his visit to America in 1825.

In Hodapp's chapter, *How the Freemasons Invented America*, I found much to admire about the story he "weaved" regarding the importance of Freemasonry to the early social and political development of our nation. My experience has been that even most Freemasons, let alone the general public, have a very cursory understanding of the truly in-depth contributions our fraternity has had on shaping early American society. Hodapp observed this lack of knowledge as well. He stated that after he read many well-known scholarly works on early American history; Freemasonry barely received a mention in the footnotes. Thus, Hodapp wrote this chapter out of his frustration he had with how most historians had ignored the contributions that Freemasonry made on early American history. I whole-heartedly concur with Hodapp's frustration on this point. However, I was also pleasantly surprised when he pointed out that there were two exceptions to his complaint that historians had largely ignored the influence of Freemasonry on early America. The historians Hodapp pointed to were Margaret C. Jacob, and Steven C. Bullock. Thus, Hodapp "tapped" the genius of one of the best historians on the "Age of Enlightenment;" Margaret C. Jacob, author of *Living the Enlightenment*, to prove Freemasonry's significant role in developing early American social and political life. Hodapp acknowledged Jacob's influence on his book when he quoted from Jacob's insightful book that: "The lodges sought to civilize, to teach manners and decorum, to augment the order and harmony of civil society. They taught men to speak in public, to keep records, to pay 'taxes' to be tolerant, to debate freely, to vote, to moderate their feasting, and to give lifelong devotion to other citizens of their order."[\[6\]](#) Taking Jacob's assertion to further illustrate his work, Hodapp astutely pointed out that in early America: "The language of the lodge was the language of the businessmen, landowners, politicians, and military officers who were shaping the political dialogue of the colonial period."[\[7\]](#) Thus, who better to prove Hodapp's point of his quote than Most Worshipful Brother Benjamin Franklin? Franklin was the most successful printer in the colonies; in addition, his wisdom and longevity made him the most capable Freemason in America to spread the "language of the lodge" to the public. In addition, Hodapp perceptively showed how Freemasonry influenced the writing of the American *Constitution*. Although Great Britain does not have a "written" constitution to govern the nation; the *Regius Manuscript*, written in 1390 CE, is the first written constitution to govern the stonemasons' guild in London. Soon after "speculative" Freemasonry came on the scene in 1723, Dr. James Anderson published Anderson's *Constitutions*. Hodapp astutely argued that Anderson's *Constitutions* served as a basis for many of the important freedoms codified in the American *Constitution*. Some of the examples he pointed to are how Anderson's *Constitutions* espoused freedom of religion by ensuring there was no religious "test" for its members; members were only required to have a belief in a "supreme being." In addition, it was the members of the fraternity who voted for the officers who would govern them in the lodge. Of course, the notion of "freedom of assembly" in the American *Constitution* was a direct outgrowth of the ability of Freemason's to meet in lodge to openly share ideas of the "Age of Enlightenment;" such as, liberty and fraternity.[\[8\]](#) These are just a few of the great "treasures" that Freemasonry had bequeathed to our nation.

Since Freemasonry traces its roots to builders and stonemasons, I think it is quite natural that all Freemasons should be interested in reading Hodapp's book since he tells a great story of how Freemans were intimately involved in the designing and building of Washington, D.C. its monuments, public and private buildings, and some beautiful works of art "sprinkled" throughout the city. The other reason why I recommend all Freemasons read Christopher Hodapp's book *Solomon's Builders: Freemason's Founding Fathers, and the Secrets of Washington D.C.*, is that he

relied on the solid scholarship of two respected historians to prove his points. The two historians he relied on, Margaret C. Jacob and Steven C. Bullock, are scholars whose books are on the approved reading list of Tennessee Academy of Masonic Knowledge.

1. Christopher Hodapp, *Solomon's Builders: Freemason's Founding Fathers, and the Secrets of Washington D.C.*, (Berkeley: Ulysses Press., 2007), XI.
2. Ibid, 6-7, 134-144.
3. Ibid, 85-90.
4. "The Marquis de Lafayette's Triumphant Tour of America," Thought Co., accessed August 30th, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/lafayettes-triumphant-return-to-america-1773928>.
5. Ronald H. Bailey, "Hail, Lafayette!" History net, accessed August 31st, 2019, <https://www.historynet.com/hail-lafayette.htm>.
6. Margaret C. Jacob, *Living Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1991), 21-22.
7. Hodapp, 110.
8. Ibid, 105-130.