

TOMB OF THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION IN THE CHURCHYARD BURIAL GROUND



The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier of the American Revolution in the churchyard burial ground of the Old Presbyterian Meeting House honors an unidentified soldier whose remains were unearthed just to the north of the memorial's location and reburied at its current location in 1826. It also honors all of the other Patriots who helped secure Independence for the United States of America, and especially those who rest in unmarked graves. The memorial reminds us of the gratitude that we owe to all those who have served, and to those who continue to serve, to keep the United States a free and independent nation.

Creation of the Memorial

In 1826, during construction of the original place of worship for the Basilica of St. Mary, the body of an unidentified man, clothed in a Revolutionary War uniform, was unearthed. The body was reinterred within the current bounds of the Meeting House burial ground. The memory that the remains of an unidentified soldier had been reburied at this site was carried into the twentieth century by Mary Gregory Powell (1847-1928), a member of the Meeting House congregation and historian of the Mount Vernon chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution. Her father, William Gregory (1789-1875), came to Alexandria from Scotland in 1807 and served the congregation for many years as an elder and member of the church committee. Mary Gregory had placed flowers on the unmarked grave of the unidentified soldier as a child.

Several events that took place during the 1920s influenced the creation of the Un-known memorial. One was the memorialization of soldiers who had died in World War I who remained unidentified. On the second anniversary of the signing of the treaty that ended World War I, Armistice Day 1920, memorials to unknown soldiers were dedicated in Britain and France. The United States dedicated its memorial to an unknown soldier of that war at Arlington National Cemetery on November 11, 1921. The sarcophagus-style monument that now sits atop the burial vault of the Unknowns was added in 1932.

The 1920s also witnessed a surge of interest in honoring and preserving our nation's colonial heritage. Among Alexandria's earliest colonial-revival preservation efforts was the restoration of the Meeting House, which began in 1925. As that project drew to its completion, Mary Gregory Powell contacted John B. Gordon, chair of the restoration committee, about honoring the Revolutionary Unknown Soldier in some manner. The decision to formally mark the gravesite was made and leadership in achieving that goal was provided by Alexandria's American Legion Post No. 24.

On February 22, 1928, a temporary marker was placed at the gravesite in conjunction with Alexandria's annual celebration of George Washington's birthday. Dedication services held that day followed traditions dating from the colonial period – participants in the ceremony initially gathered at Gadsby's Tavern and then joined in a processional walk through the city's streets to the Meeting House, where a service was conducted, and Mary Gregory Powell dedicated a temporary marker in the churchyard burial ground. The current marble tabletop memorial was dedicated the following year.

Dedication of the Memorial

The memorial you see today was created through the leadership of the National Society of the Children of the American Revolution and Mrs. Josiah A. Van Orsdel, the society's president. It was dedicated on Lexington-Concord Day, April 19, 1929, with services in the Meeting House and in the burial ground. The service in the Meeting House was led by Mrs. Van Orsdel and included two addresses, "Story of the Discovery of the Grave," by John B. Gordon, chair of the committee that had led the recent restoration of the Meeting House, and "157,000 American Unknown War Dead Here and Abroad," by James W. Good, U.S. Secretary of War. William Tyler Page, Clerk of the U.S. House of Representatives and author of "The American's Creed," read the "Epitaph of the Unknown Soldier," which he had prepared for the table-top memorial (text is located on cover of this brochure). Music was provided by the U.S. Army Band. The band joined with the church's historic Erben organ to lead the singing of the *Star Spangled Banner*. Following the service, the assemblage moved to the gravesite, accompanied by the solemn tolling of the church bell. Numerous memorial wreaths were placed at the foot of the new memorial by patriotic and military organizations. The 90-minute program was broadcast live to a national audience by radio station WRC of Washington, D.C.

The Memorial Today

The Unknown Soldier of the American Revolution continues to be honored regularly by visitors and with services conducted by the Children of the American Revolution, Daughters of the American Revolution, Sons of the American Revolution, Society of the Cincinnati, First Virginia Regiment of the Continental Line, Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, Knights of Columbus, Legion of Honor of Shriners International, National Sojourners of Freemasonry, and other groups.

We remain ever grateful to those who first secured our Independence and to those who continue to maintain it.

The Churchyard Burial Ground

The churchyard burial ground is the final resting place of some three-hundred persons dating from the colonial and early national periods. Few of the graves remain marked. These grounds contain the remains of the congregation's first minister, Rev. William Thom (1750-1773). The congregation's third minister, Rev. James Muir, D.D. (1757-1820) is buried within the Meeting House. Others buried here include John Carlyle (1720-1780), founding trustee of Alexandria and signer of the famous Fairfax Resolves; Dr. Robert Creighton (1734-1801), physician with General Braddock's forces in the Seven Years' War; Dr. James Craik (1730-1814), surgeon general in the Continental Army and close confidant and physician to George Washington; William Hunter (1731-1792), mayor of Alexandria and founder of Alexandria's St. Andrew's Society; Lewis Nicola (1717-1807), Colonel of the Corps of Invalids of the Continental Army; numerous veterans of the Seven Years' War; twenty-seven Patriots of the Revolutionary War; and numerous founding

members of Alexandria-Washington Masonic Lodge No. 22, which George Washington served as master.

After 1809, members of the congregation were buried at the Presbyterian Cemetery and Columbarium located one mile west of here. Sixteen additional Patriots of the Revolutionary War are buried there.

Tabletop of the Memorial and Epitaph



Here lies a soldier of the Revolution whose identity is known but to God.

His was an idealism that recognized a Supreme Being, that planted religious liberty on our shores, that overthrew despotism, that established a people's government, that wrote a Constitution setting metes and bounds of delegated authority, that fixed a standard of value upon men above gold and lifted high the torch of civil liberty along the pathway of mankind.

In ourselves his soul exists as part of ours, his memory's mansion.

Ceremony Honoring the Unknown Soldier of the American Revolution. This ceremony occurred on George Washington's Birthday, 2012, and the re-enactors are from the First Virginia Regiment of the Continental Line.



Tomb Guards at Unknown memorial



Wreaths honoring the Unknown



Muskets fired in salute of the Unknown



Flowers placed on the memorial by persons attending the ceremony to honor the Unknown

