

## T. Roosevelt, Mason

One of the most interesting Presidents we have ever had was aware of everything, and alive to everything, and interested in everything, hence it surprised nobody when at the comparatively ripe age of forty-three he petitioned Matinecock Lodge No. 806, in his home community of Oyster Bay, Long Island. He was Initiated January 2nd, 1901; Passed March 27th, 1901; Raised April 24th, 1901. He was Vice-President at the time, and destined in only nine months to become President.

While in the Presidency he was too hard-pressed for time to work in the Fraternity, else he would doubtless have gone through the offices of the Lodge, and taken a part in Grand Lodge, for he was a man who took his Masonry with gusto, and had a feeling for it. Even so, he took part, and while President, and on more than one occasion. On November 5th, 1902, he attended the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania in celebration of the

150th anniversary of Washington's Initiation; on February 21st, 1903, he assisted to lay the corner-stone of the Army War College, at Washington, D.C.; and on May 26th, 1903, turned the first spadeful of ground for the Masonic Temple at Spokane, Washington. He was elected Honorary Member by Pentalpha Lodge, No. 23, Washington, D.C., April 4th, 1904 — the Lodge of which President Garfield had been a charter member in 1869. On April 14th, 1906, he delivered a Masonic address at the laying of the corner-stone of the House of Representative Office Building in Washington; and on June 8th, 1907, in Masonic Regalia, delivered another address at the laying of the stone of the New Masonic Temple, in Washington. A picture of him in the Worshipful Master's regalia has been circulated, but it is misleading because he never occupied the Chair. The Grand Lodge of New York erected an unusual monument to his memory as a Mason in the form of a special issue of its official magazine, *The New York Masonic Outlook*, with his son and his sister among the contributing authors.

His sister, Corinne Roosevelt Robinson, the poet, writing not long after his death, said that he had often spoken of Freemasonry to her, and always in a spirit of enthusiasm for it; and that he "felt so strongly his Masonic duties that he lost no opportunity, wherever he found himself, to visit Masonic Lodges in that vicinity. He was deeply interested in the Lodge at the Azores, and did not fail in making an effort when in far-off Aden to show his interest in his Masonic brothers." He was one of the few Masonic Presidents who has spoken out of his personal feelings for the Fraternity in public addresses which have been preserved. Thus in an address at Washington, D.C., November 5, 1902, he said, as quoted in the *New York Masonic Outlook*:

"One of the things that attracted me so greatly to Masonry that I hailed the chance of becoming a Mason, was that it really did act up to what we, as a government and as a people, are pledged to—namely, to treat each man on his merits as a man. When Brother George Washington went into a Lodge of the Fraternity he went into the one place in the United States where he stood below or above his fellows



Theodore Roosevelt by Ritter von Krumhaar (1859–1915).

according to their official position in the Lodge. He went into the place where the idea of our government was realized, as far as it is humanly possible for mankind to realize a lofty ideal. I know that you will not only understand me, but sympathize with me, when I say that, great though my pleasure is in being here as your guest in this beautiful temple, and in meeting such a body of men as that I am now addressing, I think my pleasure is even greater when going into some little Lodge where I meet the plain, hard-working men—the men who work with their hands—and meet them on a footing of genuine equality, not false equality—of genuine equality conditioned upon each man being a decent man, a fair-dealing man.”

In another connection Roosevelt said:

“Masonry should make, and must make, each man who conscientiously and understandingly takes its obligations, a fine type of American citizen, because Masonry teaches him his obligations to his fellows in practical fashion.

“If we could get wage-workers and employers in any given occupation or in any given district in a Lodge together, I would guarantee the result . . . and I would guarantee it, because if that thing happened we would come into the Lodge, all of us, each wanting to do what was good for his brother; each recognizing that in our government every man of us has to be his brother's keeper; not recognizing it in any spirit of foolish emotionalism; not under the impression that you can benefit your brother by some act of weak, yielding complacency that will be a curse to him (and of course to you). That is not the way to benefit him. Masonry teaches us in this direction, and makes us care for the brethren that stumble and fall, and for the wives and little ones of those who are beaten down in the harsh battle of life.

“Masonry teaches and fosters in the man the qualities of self-respect and self-help—the qualities that make a man fit to stand by himself—and yet it must foster in every one who appreciates it as it should be appreciated the beautiful and solemn Ritual—it must foster in him a genuine feeling for the rights of others and for the feelings of others; and Masons who

help one another help in a way that is free from that curse of help, patronizing condescension.

“You take a Lodge where, as is the case in our own little Lodge, you see the capitalist and wage-worker, men of all classes, men of every kind of social position and wealth, and see them meeting together with the feeling for one another that should always go with Masonry; when one sees a Lodge such as that, a meeting such as that, one sees how a certain small fragment of our industrial problem is being solved.

“It is not possible to have the ideal that I would like to have; to have, as I said, all of the best of all classes and creeds represented in Masonry in every district; but it is possible for each of us to go out into the world trying to apply in his dealings with his fellows the lessons of Masonry as they are taught in the Lodge, and as they are applied in the Brotherhood.”

James Amos, Roosevelt's Negro butler and private valet, and who, as it happened, was at the bedside alone with Roosevelt at the time of his death, gave a version of his own of why “the President” had “joined:”

“He was not much of a joiner. Of course, as President, he was elected to all sorts of organizations. But I think the only one he ever joined of his own volition was the Matinecock Lodge of Masons at Oyster Bay. And I am sure he did this largely because his gardener Seaman was the Master of the Lodge. He used to go to the meetings occasionally. He enjoyed going there as a simple member while his own gardener sat in the seat of authority and presided and called him ‘Brother Roosevelt.’”

H. L. Carr, Secretary of Matinecock Lodge, No. 806, at Oyster Bay, extracted from the Minutes a list of the officers who assisted at the then Vice-President's Initiation, Passing, and Raising; the list is starred with the names of Grand Masters and Past Grand Masters from New York and from the neighboring states of Connecticut and New Jersey; he reported that eighteen of the twenty Lodges of the District were represented on the night of Initiation; and that on the night the Third Degree was conferred, “every Lodge in the District was represented by delegations and hundreds were turned away because of lack of accommodations.”