



Name of Property: George Washington Masonic National Memorial
City, State: Alexandria, Virginia
Period of Significance: 1922-1973
NHL Criteria: 1 and 4
NHL Exceptions: 8
NHL Theme: II. Creating Social Institutions and Movements
1. Clubs and organizations
III. Expressing Cultural Values
5. Architecture, landscape architecture, and urban design
Previous Recognition: 2010 Historic American Buildings Survey, HABS No. VA-1431
National Historic Context: Special study

NHL Significance:

- The George Washington Masonic National Memorial stands among the most architecturally significant projects to honor George Washington and one of the boldest efforts by a private entity to memorialize him.
- The unprecedented building project brought together the independent Grand Lodges of the states and territories in a rare initiative among freemasons having a national scope. The freemasons established the George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association to realize this goal.
- Paralleling trends in contemporary scholarship about and public interest in Washington, and against the backdrop of intensifying popular notions of what it meant to be “American,” the freemasons sought to demonstrate how aspects of Freemasonry had shaped Washington’s character and influenced actions taken by him during the Revolution and the establishment of the nation.
- The Memorial’s national significance also rests on the building’s success as a design solution for a project having complicated programmatic and iconographic requirements. The individuals and firms involved in the process took an unconventional route that



expertly merged architecture and landscape, and tradition and modernity in a way that conveys strength and an apt sense of timelessness in honor of George Washington.

- The Association hired the well-known New York firm of Helmlé & Corbett, one of the leading offices specializing in tall commercial buildings, to design the Memorial. Harvey Wiley Corbett was the principal for the project and he devised a striking memorial for a dramatic hillside site overlooking Alexandria, whose terraced landscape design was produced by the famed Olmsted Brothers firm.
- The eclectic building combined neoclassical austerity common to contemporary American memorials and civic buildings with the excitement and energy of modern skyscraper design. The Memorial's tower firmly situated the building within the 1920s mania optimistically exploring the potential of high-rise buildings for virtually any function.

Integrity:

- The use of fine and durable materials and robust construction methods has allowed the Memorial to maintain a high degree of historic integrity and is essentially unchanged from the period of significance.
- The Memorial was principally constructed between 1922 and 1932, but at the time of its dedication it was largely incomplete, a finished shell of granite-faced concrete that was mostly unfinished on the interior.
- The building's interiors would not be completed until well after World War II, and not always in the manner initially envisioned as a number of spaces, mainly in the tower, which has limited access, would be given over to auxiliary Masonic groups and did not relate to the Association's mission to memorialize George Washington. Most of these auxiliary spaces have since been altered or removed.
- The processional movement through the landscape and the formal parts of the building remains fully intact from the time of its dedication. All parts of the experience convey the undeniable gravitas and solidity of the Memorial. The terraces, in particular, underscore the striking quality of the interplay between architecture and landscape architecture.

Owner of Property: The George Washington Masonic National Memorial Association

Acreage of Property: Approximately 36 acres

Origins of Nomination: HABS/NHL staff developed a nomination based on the HABS historical report researched and written by the 2010 Sally Kress Tompkins (SKT) Fellow. The SKT Fellowship is an annual joint program of the Society of Architectural Historians (SAH) and HABS that permits a rising architectural historian to work on a twelve-week HABS project.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

- Designation will recognize the significance of the Memorial as the only major unified, fully national initiative of the freemasons and among the boldest attempts by a private organization to memorialize George Washington.



- Designation will recognize the role of the Memorial to convey the far-ranging ways in which modern design came to be incorporated into American architecture.
- Recognition will help to ensure that a preservation ethic will guide the future management and maintenance of the Memorial, and encourage civic pride and popular support for the site.

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: None known

Landmarks Committee Comments:

Landmarks Committee Recommendation: Designation. Dr. Allan moved, Dr. Chen seconded; 1 abstention; 10 yeas; approval.

Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of 2/10/15):

Catherine K. Miliaras, Historic Preservation Planner, Department of Planning and Zoning, Alexandria, Virginia

K. Carter Batey Jr., Member, Alexandria Historical Restoration and Preservation Commission, Virginia

Advisory Board Recommendation: