

The History of the Pledge of Allegiance

I stand before you this evening in the uniform of the Heroes of '76, a side order of the National Sojourners. The uniform is representative of those worn by members of our Brother George Washington's Continental Army and is, in part, a symbol of the commitment the National Sojourners make to *Proudly Serve the Cause of Patriotism*. Such service, however is not unique to individual Sojourners --- in fact, it could be said that *Proudly Serving the Cause of Patriotism* is a passion of all Masons.

In fact, the roots and symbols of American patriotism have their birth in Freemasonry. The precepts and teachings of Freemasonry helped shape the birth of this nation and are exhibited by the many notable patriots listed on the roles of lodges across America and Europe. The lodge rolls include founding fathers, presidents, congressmen, representatives, governors, commissioners, mayors, and council members. The lodge rolls also include many Congressional Medal of Honor recipients, Generals, Admirals, unit commanders, line officers, and a wealth of the enlisted ranks. All are dedicated to the freedom granted to all mankind by the Great Architect of the Universe. Furthering the guarantee of freedom and the expression of one's personal belief, the lodge rolls have notable religious leaders, civil-rights leaders, astronauts, inventors, industrialists, poets, authors, and entertainers that are all dedicated to the

common cause of personal freedom of all mankind.

Masons, in particular, were instrumental in inspiring many of our patriotic symbols and the means for expressing our patriotism. Among them were:

James McHenry - A surgeon in the American Revolution, private secretary to Generals Washington and Lafayette, and Secretary of War under Brother George Washington. Fort McHenry, Maryland, of "Star Spangled Banner" fame was named after Brother McHenry.

Francis Scott Key - While there is no hard proof that Key was a Mason, it is thought, as a minimum, that he was closely affiliated with members of the Craft. An American lawyer and poet, he penned the lyrics which in 1931 became the United States' National Anthem.

John Stafford Smith – A composer and musical scholar who was born in England. He wrote vocal music, and the tune used for our National Anthem.

John Philip Sousa - U.S. Marine Crops Band leader from 1880 - 1892, he wrote numerous marches including the United States' 'national march,' "The Stars and Stripes Forever."

Captain Thomas Driver - In 1831, Captain Driver received a delegation of ladies aboard his ship, the S.S. Charles Daggat. They presented him with a new flag, which they had just made. Touched by the unexpected gift, he immediately ordered the new colors run up the mast and as he saluted, declared: "I name thee Old

Glory." The name stuck and Brother Driver carried "Old Glory" twice around the world.

At the opening of Lodge this evening, we recited the Pledge of Allegiance. For many, the words of the Pledge roll off their lips without thought or fanfare in a mechanical rhythm developed through repeated recitation. Accordingly, I would like to focus on the pledge by detailing its history and reflecting on its meaning as a means of enhancing our collective and individual appreciation of its thirty-one words.

So let's begin on September 8, 1892 --- on that date a Boston-based youth magazine, "*The Youth's Companion*," published a 23-word recitation for school children to use during planned activities the following month to commemorate the 400th anniversary of Columbus' discovery of America. Under the title "The Pledge to the Flag," the composition was the earliest version of what we now know as the Pledge of Allegiance.

The October 12, 1892 Columbus Day celebration of the 400th Anniversary of the discovery of America was planned for years in advance, and anticipated much as modern Americans look forward to and plan for the advent of a new century. The United States had recovered from most of the effects of its Civil War that began 30 years earlier, and people from around the world were flocking to the "Land of Opportunity." The previous year, almost a half million immigrants had entered the United States through the Barge Office in Battery Park, New York, and on New Year's Day of 1892 the new Federal Bureau of Receiving's

station at Ellis Island had opened.

Two men interested in both education and planned Columbus Day celebrations around our Nation's 44 states were Brother Francis Bellamy --- yes another Mason, Baptist Minister and member of Little Falls Lodge No. 181, Little Falls, New York and his friend, James Upham. To this day, it is still unknown which of the two men actually authored the words that were to become the Pledge of Allegiance. It was published anonymously and not copyrighted. James Upham was an employee of the Boston publishing firm that produced "The Youth's Companion" in which it first appeared. Brother Francis Bellamy was an educator who served as chairman of the National committee of educators and civic leaders who were planning the Columbus Day activities. What we do know for certain is that the words first appeared in the September 8, 1892 issue of "The Youth's Companion," and a month later, more than 12 million school children recited the words for the first time in schools across the nation. Our Pledge of Allegiance was born, but like anything new, it took many years to "reach maturity" and underwent several changes along the way. That first Pledge of Allegiance read: "I pledge allegiance to my Flag, and to the Republic for which it stands: one Nation indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all."

After the Columbus Day celebration, the Pledge to the Flag became a popular daily routine in America's public schools, but gained little attention elsewhere for almost 25 years. Finally, on Flag Day - June 14, 1923, the Pledge

received major attention from adults who had gathered for the first National Flag Conference in Washington, D.C. Here their Conference agenda took note of the wording in the Pledge. There was concern that, with the number of immigrants now living in the United States, there might be some confusion when the words "My Flag" were recited. To correct this, the pledge was altered to read: "I pledge allegiance to ~~my~~ **the Flag of the United States**, and to the Republic for which it stands: one Nation, indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all." [June 14, 1923]

The following year the wording was changed again to read: I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States **of America**, and to the Republic for which it stands: one Nation, indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all." [June 14, 1924]

The Pledge of Allegiance continued to be recited daily by children in schools across America, and gained heightened popularity among adults during the patriotic fervor created by World War II. It still was an "unofficial" pledge until June 22, 1942, when the United States Congress included the "Pledge to the Flag" in the United States Flag Code (Title 36). This was the first Official sanction given to the words that had been recited each day by children for almost fifty years. One year after receiving this official sanction, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that school children could not be forced to recite the Pledge as part of their daily routine. In 1945, the Pledge to the Flag received its official title as: "The Pledge of

Allegiance.”

The last change in the Pledge of Allegiance occurred on June 14 (Flag Day, again), 1954, when President Dwight D. Eisenhower approved adding the words "under God." As he authorized this change, he said: "In this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America's heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country's most powerful resource in peace and war."

This was the last change made to the Pledge of Allegiance. The 23 words what had been initially penned for a Columbus Day celebration now comprised a thirty-one word profession of loyalty and devotion to not only a flag, but to a way of life . . . the American ideal. Those words now read: "I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands: one Nation under God, indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all. [June 14, 1954]

One point to note is the punctuation in the Pledge of Allegiance - there are three commas, one colon, and one period. Now you might ask, "Why in the world would anyone care about the punctuation in the Pledge of Allegiance?" The reason is that when Congress added and the President approved the words, "under God" after "one nation" in the Pledge of Allegiance, they did not put a comma, they did not put a pause, and they did not put any separation between our nation and our God. When you

say the Pledge of Allegiance, say it as “one nation under God” an indivisible term, one and inseparable, a perfect union, rather than “one nation pause under God.” At a time when there are those who would try to take the words “under God” out of the Pledge of Allegiance, do not give them a place to drive their wedge.

One further point is how we salute the flag during the Pledge of Allegiance. Originally, when it was first published, children saluted by placing their right hand, palm down, horizontally across their heart for “I pledge allegiance.” They would then raise their right hand and arm and point it upward at a 45 degree angle with the palm upward at the words “to the flag.” This was the manner of saluting the flag from 1892 until 1942. In 1936 the Olympics were held in Berlin, German, and a young black man from the United States of America stood on the top step of the podium to receive four gold medals. That man was James Cleveland Owens from The Ohio State University. Better known as Jessie Owens, the “World’s Fastest Man,” he thought that the method of saluting the flag with the arm raised at 45 degrees palm upward looked too much like the Nazi salute with the palm downward and Hitler was known to be in the audience. He rendered a customary military salute to the flag four times during playing of the Star Spangled Banner for his wins in the 100-meter sprint, 200-meter sprint, 4x100-meter relay, and long jump. Six years later when the Pledge to the Flag became an Official document signed by Brother President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the proper way for civilians and military personnel not in uniform to salute the flag during

the Pledge of Allegiance and the Star Spangled Banner was changed to placing the hand over the heart. Of course, military personnel in uniform render a military salute. More recently, the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008 authorized military personnel not in uniform, retirees, and veterans, to render a military salute to the flag at times of its passing. A later amendment added the military salute for veterans not in uniform for the Star Spangled Banner. NOTE: Nothing really authorizes rendering a military salute by veterans and military not in uniform for the Pledge of Allegiance, thus its honors are slightly different than the Star Spangled Banner, our National Anthem.

In 1892, 1923, 1924, and 1954 the American people demonstrated enough concern about the actual words in the Pledge to make some necessary changes. Today there may be a tendency among many Americans to recite "by rote" with little thought for the words themselves. Before continuing, let's examine these 31 words a little more thoroughly.

I Pledge Allegiance	I Promise to be faithful and true (Promise my loyalty)
to the flag	to the emblem that stands for and represents
of the United States	all 50 states, each of them individual, and individually represented on the flag
of America	yet formed into a perfect UNION of one Nation.
and to the	And I also pledge my loyalty to the

Republic	Government that is itself a Republic, a form of government where the PEOPLE are sovereign,
for which it stands,	this government also being represented by the Flag to which I promise loyalty.
one Nation under God,	These 50 individual states are united as a single Republic under the Divine providence of God, "our most powerful resource" (according to the words of President Eisenhower)
Indivisible,	and can not be separated. (This part of the original version of the pledge was written just 50 years after the beginning of the Civil War and demonstrates the unity sought in the years after that divisive period in our history)
with Liberty	The people of this Nation being afforded the freedom to pursue "life, liberty, and happiness",
and Justice	And each person entitled to be treated justly, fairly, and according to proper law and principle,
for All.	And these principles are afforded to EVERY AMERICAN, regardless of race, religion, color, creed, or any other criteria. Just as the flag represents 50 individual states that cannot be divided or separated, this Nation represents millions of people who cannot be separated or divided.

Thus it is, that when you Pledge Allegiance to the United States Flag, You:

- Promise your loyalty to the Flag itself.
- Promise your loyalty to your own and the other 49 States.
- Promise your loyalty to the Government that unites us all,
- Recognize that we are “ONE Nation under God” as a single concept, not “One Nation,” and “Under God,” but “One Nation under God,” a single concept without being divided – no commas, no pause, and no separation between our Nation and our God.
- That we cannot or should not be divided or alone,
- Understanding the right to Liberty and Justice belongs to ALL of us.

And now, I would like you to hear from another Mason --- a Brother who needs no introduction. What you are about to see and hear was recorded thirty-three years ago on August 5, 1980. The place is the Nugget Hotel and Casino in Sparks, Nevada. [PLAY Brother Red Skelton's DVD --- also see the YouTube version at: https://youtu.be/hJNL_rhGDq4]

And now against the backdrop of a renewed appreciation of the history, the words and the ritual of the pledge, I invite the Worshipful Master to call up the Craft and lead all who are so privileged to Pledge Allegiance once again to the Flag of Our

Country.

Brethren, that concludes my program. Worshipful, I am appreciative of your invitation to offer a patriotic program and thank you for the courtesies and hospitality that you have extended to me.