

IN PERSON

When the College of Philadelphia's charter was voided in 1779, Provost William Smith found himself unemployed for the first time in 24 years. To support his family, the Anglican clergyman became Rector of the Chester Parish and began to reorganize a local school that would become Washington College.

His contributions to higher education in early America are widely celebrated. We know less about his affiliation with the Freemasons. Dr. Smith often returned home to his country estate along the Schuylkill River in Philadelphia to fulfill his four-year term as the Right Worshipful Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania.

Smith also edited the first American book of Masonic law while he lived in Chestertown. In 1781, his version of the Book of Constitutions, based on the work originally published by the Grand Lodge of England, was approved by his Brothers in Philadelphia. Smith wrote that Ahiman Rezon, abridged and digested, was meant "to help all that are, or would be Free and Accepted Masons, and signifies the will of a class or society of men who are chosen or selected from the rest of the world as Brethren."

Dedicated to Brother General George Washington and published in 1783, Dr. Smith's adaptation also contains a copy of the sermon he preached at Philadelphia's Christ Church, two blocks north of the Freemasons' Lodge, on December 28, 1778, with General Washington in attendance.

Dr. Smith's Ahiman Rezon was used for 42 years. In all public processions, the Master of the oldest Masonic Lodge present would carry the volume Smith prepared.

Submitted by Leslie Lighton-Humphreys '82, who is writing a new biography of Dr. Smith.

WILLIAM SMITH D.D.

College Founder and
Freemason

