

A 10TH MASONIC SIGNER OF THE DECLARATION OF I NDEPENDENCE?

Most Freemasons in America will be well aware that nine of their number signed the Declaration of Independence on the 4 July 1776, 230 years ago, and that the signers included such famous Masons as Benjamin Franklin, Paul Revere and John Hancock..

But was there a 10th Freemason who appended his signature to this historic document?

The individual concerned is Thomas Lynch Junior. He was definitely one of the signers of the Declaration but was he on the square? If he was a Freemason then he has somehow escaped the notice of Masonic historians.



Thomas Lynch Junior was born in Prince George's Parish, Winyaw, South Carolina on 5 August 1749. His father Thomas Lynch Senior, was a member of the first and second Continental Congresses and a signer of the Articles of Association in 1774.

Thomas Lynch Senior was also appointed, along with Benjamin Franklin and Col. Benjamin Harrison, as advisers to General Washington in October 1775.

The Masonic connection of the father at this time is obvious.

Junior was also a member of the second Continental Congress (the only father and son to be members simultaneously), as well as the first and second Provincial Congresses, the Constitutional Committee for South Carolina and the first State General Assembly. He is regarded as one of the founding fathers.

Robert E Heaton in his *"Masonic membership of the Founding Fathers"* examines the Masonic membership of the signers of the Articles of Association, the signers of the Declaration of Independence, the signers of the Articles of Confederation

and the signers of the Constitution of the United States. He also considers the General Officers of the Continental Army AND Washington's Aides and Military Secretaries.

The 241 names are divided into three categories:

1. Membership in the Masonic Fraternity accepted (69)
2. Membership in the Masonic Fraternity doubtful or undocumented (26)
3. No evidence of Masonic membership or activity. (146)

Thomas Lynch Junior was placed in category 3.

So then, is there any evidence of any kind which might support the theory that Thomas Lynch Junior was in fact a Freemason?

I believe there is and in my mind Thomas Lynch Junior was definitely on the square, BUT not in America.

He was educated in England firstly at Eton College where he was entered on 9 June 1764 and thereafter he was entered as a commoner into Caius College, Cambridge on 18 May 1767 where he graduated as a lawyer.

He was definitely a member of "The Middle Temple" and in general vernacular these members were known as Middle Templars.

The Middle Temple is one of the four Inns of Court which were exclusively enabled to call their members to the English Bar as barristers. The Middle Temple itself was the western part of "The Temple" which served as the head quarters of the Knights Templar until they were dissolved in 1312.

Thus we have Thomas Lynch Jnr as a young Cambridge graduate exposed to a background of English inns and Knights Templar and although this general exposure certainly has the timbre of Masonic background, it cannot constitute any firm evidence that he was on the square.

However, Bro. R A N Petrie when researching the subject of Masonic Lodges in Universities in England also included in his research, the registers of the Grand Lodge of England, which contain records and lists of lodges and lodge members.

In these archives it is recorded that on 1 March 1763, University Lodge No. 23 was granted a warrant to meet at the Sun Inn, Trinity Street, Cambridge and amongst the list of early members is that of Thomas Lynch Junior who is recorded as being a resident of America to which country he returned in 1772.

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Is it possible that there were two Thomas Lynch Juniors who were born in America and sent to England for education? Is it possible that there were two Thomas Lynch Juniors who graduated as lawyers, joined the Middle Temple and returned to their home country in 1772?

Research by Bro. R A N Petrie clearly indicates that only one student by this name was registered in Cambridge University over the time period concerned, and I honestly believe that in view of this, Thomas Lynch Jnr, who was born in South Carolina and who, at the age of 27, signed the Declaration of Independence in 1776, was in fact a Freemason, a member of University Lodge No. 23 in Cambridge, England.

Why he never apparently followed up his Masonic membership on his return to his home country is a question which cannot be easily answered, but as a member in England he was undoubtedly on the square.

Consequently is it possible then to describe him as an unrecorded Masonic signer of the Declaration of Independence?