

THE SOCIETY *of the* CINCINNATI

The Institution of the Society of the Cincinnati

Adopted at the founding meeting on May 13, 1783, the Institution of the Society of the Cincinnati remains the principle guiding document of the organization to the present day. The first official copy, known as the original Institution, was inscribed on a large, irregularly shaped sheet of parchment and signed by George Washington and thirty-five other officers.

The Institution lays out the tenets and organizational structure of the Society, the rules of eligibility to membership, the establishment of constituent branches, and details of the Society's insignia. To join the Society, the original members were required to sign their names to the Institution, thus pledging their allegiance to the immutable principles upon which the Society was founded. Of the original fourteen constituent societies, eight original copies of the Institution bearing signatures of the original members are known to survive (for the Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and South Carolina societies).

It having pleased the Supreme Governor of the Universe, in the disposition of human affairs, to cause the separation of the Colonies of North America from the domination of Great Britain, and, after a bloody conflict of eight years, to establish them Free, Independent and Sovereign States, connected, by alliances founded on reciprocal advantage, with some of the great Princes and Powers of the Earth.

To perpetuate therefore, as well the remembrance of this vast event, as the mutual friendships which have been formed under the pressure of common danger, and, in many instances, cemented by the blood of the parties, the Officers of the American Army do hereby, in the most solemn manner, associate, constitute, and combine themselves into one Society of Friends, to endure as long as they shall endure, or any of their eldest male posterity, and in failure thereof, the collateral branches, who may be judged worthy of becoming its supporters and members.

The officers of the American Army, having generally been taken from the Citizens of America, possess high veneration for the character of that illustrious Roman, Lucius Quintus Cincinnatus, and being resolved to follow his example, by returning to their citizenship, they think they may, with propriety, denominate themselves the Society of the Cincinnati.

The following principles shall be immutable and form the basis of the Society of the Cincinnati.

An incessant attention to preserve inviolate those exalted rights and liberties of human nature for which they have fought and bled, and without which the high rank of a rational being is a curse instead of a blessing.

An unalterable determination to promote and cherish, between the respective States, that union and national honor so essentially necessary to their happiness, and the future dignity of the American Empire.

To render permanent the cordial affection subsisting among the officers - This spirit will dictate brotherly kindness in all things, and particularly extend to the most substantial acts of beneficence, according to the ability of the Society, towards those Officers and their Families who unfortunately may be under the necessity of receiving it.

The General Society will, for the sake of frequent communications, be divided into State Societies and these again into such districts as shall be directed by the State Society.

The Societies of the districts to meet as often as shall be agreed upon by the State Society- those of the State on the Fourth day of July annually, or oftener if they shall find it expedient - and the General Society on the First Monday in May, annually, so long as they shall deem necessary, and afterwards at least once in every three years. At each meeting, the principles of the Institution will be fully considered, and the best measures to promote them adopted.

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The State Societies will consist of all the members resident in each State respectively. And any member removing from one State to another, is to be considered, in all respects, as belonging to the Society of the State in which he shall actually reside.

The State Societies to have a President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and Assistant Treasurer, to be chosen annually, by a majority of votes, at the State meeting.

Each State meeting shall write annually, or oftener if necessary, a circular letter, to the State Societies, noting whatever they may think worthy of observation, respecting the good of the Society, or the general union of the States, and giving information of the officers chosen for the current year. Copies of these letters shall be regularly transmitted to the Secretary General of the Society, who will record them in a book to be assigned for that purpose.

The State Society will regulate everything respecting itself and the Societies of its districts, consistent with the general maxims of the Cincinnati, judge of the qualifications of the members who may be proposed, and expel any member who, by a conduct inconsistent with a Gentleman and man of honor, or by an opposition to the interests of the community in general or the Society in particular, may render himself unworthy to continue a member.

In order to form funds which may be respectable, and assist the unfortunate, each Officer shall deliver to the Treasurer of the State Society one months pay, which shall remain for ever to the use of the State Society, the interest only of which, if necessary, to be appropriated to the relief of the unfortunate.

Donations may be made by persons not of the Society and by members of the Society, for the express purpose of forming permanent funds, for the use of the State Society, and the interests of these donations appropriated in the same manner as that of the months pay.

Monies at the pleasure of each member, may be subscribed in the Societies of the districts, or the State Societies, for the relief of the unfortunate members, or their widows and orphans, to be appropriated by the State Society only.

The meeting of the General Society shall consist of its officers and a representation from each State Society, in number not exceeding five, whose expenses shall be borne by their respective State Societies.

In the general meeting, the president, vice President, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer, and Assistant Treasurer, Generals, shall be chosen, to serve until the next meeting.

The circular letters which have been written by the respective State Societies to each other, and their particular laws, shall be read and considered, and all measures concerted which may conduce to the General intendment of the Society.

It is probable that some persons may make donations to the General Society for the purpose of establishing funds for the further comfort of the unfortunate, in which case such donations must be placed in the hands of the Treasurer General, the interest only of which to be disposed of, if necessary, by the General meeting.

All the officers of the American Army, as well as those who have resigned with honor, after three years service in the capacity of Officers, or who have been deranged by the resolutions of Congress upon the several reforms of the Army, as those who shall have continued to the end of the war, have the right to become parties to this Institution. Provided that they may subscribe one month's pay and sign their names to the general rules in their respective State Societies, those who are present with the Army immediately, and others within six months after the Army shall be disbanded, extraordinary cases excepted. The rank, time of services, resolution of Congress by which any have been deranged, and place of residence must be added to each name. And as a testimony of affection to the memory and the offspring of such Officers as have died in the service, their eldest male branches shall have the same right of becoming members, as the Children of the actual members of the Society.

Those officers who are Foreigners, not resident in any of the States, will have their names enrolled by the Secretary General, and are to be considered as members in the Societies of any of the States in which they may happen to be.

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And as there are and will at all times be men in the respective States eminent for their abilities and patriotism, whose views may be directed to the same laudable objects with those of the Cincinnati, it shall be a rule to admit such characters, as Honorary Members of the Society, for their own lives only. Provided always, that the number of honorary members in each State does not exceed a ratio of one to four of the Officers or their descendants.

Each State Society shall obtain a list of its members, and at the first annual meeting, the State Secretary shall have engrossed, on parchment, two copies of the Institution of the Society, which every member present shall sign, and the Secretary shall endeavor to procure the signature of every absent member. One of these lists to be transmitted to the Secretary General, to be kept in the archives of the Society, and the other to remain in the hands of the State Secretary.

From the State lists, the Secretary General must make out, at the first general meeting, a complete list of the whole Society, with a copy of which he will furnish each State Secretary.

The Society shall have an Order, by which its members shall be known and distinguished, which shall be a Medal of Gold, of a proper size to receive the emblems, and suspended by a deep blue ribbon two inches wide, edged with white, descriptive of the Union of France and America.

The principle figure Cincinnatus, three senators presenting him with a sword and other military ensigns. On a field in the back ground, his wife standing at the door of their cottage, near it a plough and instruments of husbandry, round the whole Omnia reliquit servare Rempublicam. On the reverse - Sun rising, a city with open gates, and vessels entering the Port. Fame crowning Cincinnatus with wreath inscribed Virtutis PrÆmium. below, Hands joined, supporting a heart, with the motto Esto Perpetua. round the whole, Societas Cincinnatiarum, instituta AD. 1783

The Society, deeply impressed with a sense of the generous assistance this Country has received from France, and desirous of perpetuating the friendships which have been formed, and so happily subsisted, between the Officers of the Allied Forces in the prosecution of the war, direct that the President General transmit, as soon as may be, to each of the characters hereafter named, a medal containing the Order of the Society - His Excellency the Chevalier De la Luzerne, Minister Plenipotentiary, His Excellency the Sieur Gerard, late Minister Plenipotentiary, Their Excellencies The Count D'Estaing, The Count De Grasse, The Count De Barras, The Chevalier Des Touches, Admirals and Commanders in the Navy, His Excellency the Count De Rochambeau, Commander in Chief, and The Generals and Colonels in his Army, and acquaint them, that the society does itself the honor to consider them members.

We the subscribers, Officers of the American Army, do hereby voluntarily become parties to the foregoing Institution, for ourselves and our Constituents, and do bind ourselves to observe and be governed by the principles therein contained, for the performance whereof we do solemnly pledge to each other our Sacred Honor.

Done in the Cantonment, on Hudsons River, in the year 1783.

Go. Washington

W. Heath MG

B. Lincoln M.G.

Robert Howe M.G.

Steuben MG

H. Knox M.G.

Duportail M.G.

John Paterson BGenl.

Edwd. Hand Brig. & Adj. Genl.

John Groaton BGenl.

Rufus Putnam BGenl.

Elias Dayton Brig Genl

Jed Huntington B. Genl.

Timothy Pickering Col. & G. M. Gen.

H. Swift Col 2d Conct Regiment

P. Cortlandt

Colo. 2d New York Regt

Henry Jackson Colo 4th Mass Reg.

Samuel Shaw - Captain

Massachusetts Artillery

Wm Hull Lt. Colo. 6th Mass Regt

Jos. Pettingill Majr. 1st A. Regt.

Samuel Whitwell Surgn 3d M. Regt

Moses Knap Maj G. 5th Regt.

John Whiting Lieut. 2d Mass. Regt.

Corns V. Dyck Lt Colo

J Gouvion Col. of the Corps of Engineers

Eben Huntington L. Col. 1 Conn Regt

Samel. B. Webb

Colo. 3d Connect. Regt.

Peter Woodward Lt. New York Artillery

Lewis Nicola

Col. Inv.

John Brooks Lt. Col. Comdt. 7th Mass Regt.

Hugh Maxwell Lieut. Colo 8th Mass Regt.

Walter Stewart Col. Insp North. Army

Nath Greene Maj Genl

Alex McDougall M. general

M. Gist BGenl.

C. Armand Mq de ala Rouerie B.G.