

Society Of Cincinnati Members



SOCIETY OF THE CINCINNATI.—MEMBER'S CERTIFICATE.¹

¹ This engraving is a fac simile of a certificate, about one fourth the size of the original, which is thirteen inches and a half in breadth, and twenty inches in length. The originals are printed on fine vellum. The plate was engraved in France by J. J. le Veau, from a drawing by Aug. le Belle. I am indebted to the late James G. Wilson, son of Ensign Wilson, named in the certificate, for the use of the original in making this copy. The former was engraved on copper; this is engraved on wood. The design represents American liberty as a strong man armed, bearing in one hand the Union flag, and in the other a naked sword. Beneath his feet are British flags, and a broken spear, shield, and chain. Hovering by his side is the eagle, our national emblem, from whose talons the lightning of destruction is flashing upon the British lion. Britannia, with the crown falling from her head, is hastening toward a boat to escape to a fleet, which denotes the departure of British power from our shores. Upon a cloud, on the right, is an angel blowing a trumpet, from which flutters a loose scroll. Upon the scroll are the sentences, *Paxis suaviata libertas*, * A.D. 1776. *Paxis sociale cum Gallia*, An. D. 1778. *Pax: libertas parva*, An. D. 1783. "Independence declared, A.D. 1776. Treaty of alliance with France declared, A.D. 1778. Peace! Independence obtained, A.D. 1783."²

Upon the medallion on the right is a device representing Cincinnatus at his plow, a ship on the sea, and a walled town in the distance. Over his head is a flying angel, holding a ribbon inscribed *Virtutis præmium*: "Reward of virtue." Below is a heart, with the words, *Ego perpetuus*: "Be thou perpetual." Upon the rim is the legend, *Societas Cincinnatiæ Instituta A.D. MDCCCLXXXIII.*; "Society of the Cincinnati, instituted 1783." The device upon the medallion on the left is Cincinnatus with his family near his house. He is receiving a sword and shield from three senators; an army is seen in the distance. Upon the rim are the words, *Omnia relinquit servare rempublicam*; "He abandoned every thing to serve his country;" (*referring to Cincinnatus*).

"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 be suspended by a deep blue ribbon, two inches wide, edged with white, descriptive of the union of America with France."

I am indebted to the kindness of Colonel Joseph Warren Scott, of New Brunswick, New Jersey, now (1850) the president of the society of that state, for the following information respecting the successive presidents general of the institution. General Washington was the first president general, and continued in office until his death, in December, 1799. In May, 1800, General Alexander Hamilton was elected as his successor. He was killed in a duel with Aaron Burr in 1804, and, at the next general meeting, General Charles Cotesworth Pinckney, of South Carolina, was elected as his successor. He died in August, 1825. At a special meeting of the society, held at Philadelphia in November, 1826, Major-general Thomas Pinckney was elected president general.³ At his death, Colonel Aaron Ogden, of New Jersey, was elected to fill his place. He held the office until his decease in April, 1838, when General Morgan Lewis, of New York, became his successor. General Lewis died on the 7th of May, 1844, in his ninety-fourth year, and the venerable Major Popham, also of New York, was elected as his successor at the general meeting in November following. Major Popham died in the summer of 1848, and at the meeting in November of that year, General Dearborn, the present incumbent, was elected to supply the vacancy.* Such is the brief history of a society over which the venerated Washington first presided.



ORDER OF THE CINCINNATI.³

* There is a fact connected with this sentence worthy of notice. In the earlier impressions from the plate, taken previous to the year 1785, the sentence is *Paxis suaviata libertas*, not *libertas*. Some person, who doubtless supposed the original word to be incorrect, caused the letters *lib* to be crowded into the space occupied by the final *s* in *libertas*. I have the authority of one of our most learned Latin critics, to whom the question was submitted, for saying that the original word was correct, and that the alteration renders the sentence ungrammatical and badly incorrect, thereby destroying its meaning. Do any of our historical antiquaries know by whose authority the alteration was made?

³ This was drawn from an original in the possession of Edward Phalon, Esq., of New York. The engraving is the exact size of the original. The leaves of the sprigs of laurel are of gold, and green enamel; the head and tail of the eagle gold, and white enamel; and the sky in the center device blue enamel. The device and motto are the same as upon the medallion on the right of the certificate.

Society of Cincinnati members are part of one of the oldest hereditary societies in the United States, founded in 1783. This prestigious organization was established to honor the legacy of General George Washington and to promote the ideals of liberty and democracy that emerged during the American Revolution. The Society serves as a testament to the commitment of its members to uphold the values of their ancestors while fostering a sense of community among descendants of Revolutionary War veterans. In this article, we will explore the history, purpose, membership criteria, and significance of the Society of Cincinnati, as well as the contributions of its members to American society.

History of the Society of Cincinnati

The Society of Cincinnati was founded shortly after the end of the Revolutionary War, with its inaugural meeting taking place on May 13, 1783, at the Fraunces Tavern in New York City. The organization was named after Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, a Roman general known for his civic virtue and selfless service to the Republic.

Key Historical Events

1. **Founding Principles:** The Society was established to promote the principles of liberty and to provide a sense of brotherhood among officers who served in the Continental Army.
2. **Early Membership:** Initial membership was limited to officers of the Continental Army and their male descendants. This exclusivity aimed to preserve the ideals of the American Revolution.
3. **Expansion:** Over the years, the Society expanded its membership to include descendants of officers from various state militias and naval officers who contributed to the war effort.
4. **National Recognition:** The Society of Cincinnati gained national recognition and established state societies across the country, each maintaining its own set of rules and membership criteria.

Purpose of the Society of Cincinnati

The Society of Cincinnati serves several key purposes:

- Preservation of History: The organization aims to preserve the history and legacy of the American Revolution, ensuring that the sacrifices made by its members and their ancestors are not forgotten.
- Promotion of Civic Virtue: The Society encourages its members to embody the ideals of civic responsibility, public service, and patriotism.
- Scholarship and Education: The Society supports various educational initiatives, including scholarships for students and funding for historical research related to the Revolutionary War and its significance.

Membership Criteria

Becoming a member of the Society of Cincinnati is a significant honor, and the criteria for membership reflect the organization's commitment to maintaining its historical integrity.

Eligibility Requirements

To be eligible for membership, an individual must meet the following criteria:

1. Lineal Descent: Members must be direct descendants of an officer who served in the Continental Army or naval service during the American Revolution.
2. Verification of Ancestry: Applicants must provide documentation proving their lineage, which can involve extensive genealogical research.
3. Membership in a State Society: Once eligibility is established, individuals must apply to join their respective state society, which may have additional requirements or processes.
4. Dues and Contributions: Members are usually required to pay annual dues and may be encouraged

to contribute to the Society's charitable initiatives.

Notable Members of the Society of Cincinnati

Throughout its long history, the Society of Cincinnati has boasted many notable members who have made significant contributions to American society. Some of these distinguished individuals include:

- George Washington: As the founding president of the Society, Washington's leadership set the foundation for the organization's values and mission.
- Thomas Jefferson: The third President of the United States and principal author of the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson's involvement in the Society highlights the close ties between the organization and the founding fathers.
- Alexander Hamilton: A key figure in the founding of the United States, Hamilton's membership in the Society underscores the historical significance of the organization.
- John Adams: The second President of the United States and a prominent revolutionary leader, Adams' connection to the Society reflects the broader legacy of the American Revolution.

Significance of the Society of Cincinnati Today

In contemporary society, the Society of Cincinnati continues to play an important role in preserving American history and fostering civic engagement among its members.

Modern Contributions

1. Historical Preservation: The Society actively works to preserve historical sites and artifacts from the Revolutionary War era, ensuring that future generations can learn about this pivotal period in American history.

2. Educational Programs: The Society sponsors educational programs aimed at promoting awareness of the American Revolution and its lasting impact on democracy and governance.
3. Community Engagement: Members of the Society often participate in community service projects that reflect the organization's commitment to civic responsibility and public service.

Conclusion

The Society of Cincinnati members are more than just descendants of Revolutionary War veterans; they are custodians of a rich history and advocates for the principles of democracy and civic virtue. By preserving the legacy of their ancestors and promoting education and community engagement, the Society plays a vital role in shaping the narrative of American history. As the organization continues to evolve, its commitment to honoring the ideals of liberty and service remains steadfast, ensuring that the values of the American Revolution endure for generations to come. Whether through historical preservation, educational initiatives, or community involvement, members of the Society of Cincinnati embody the spirit of their forebears and contribute meaningfully to the fabric of American society.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Society of Cincinnati?

The Society of Cincinnati is one of the oldest patriotic organizations in the United States, founded in 1783 by officers of the Continental Army to preserve the ideals of the American Revolution and maintain the friendships formed during the war.

Who can become a member of the Society of Cincinnati?

Membership is primarily limited to the direct descendants of officers who served in the Continental Army or Navy during the American Revolution, as well as some honorary members who have made significant contributions to the society's goals.

What are the main activities of the Society of Cincinnati?

The Society engages in various activities including historical preservation, education regarding the American Revolution, and hosting events that honor military service and patriotism.

How does the Society of Cincinnati contribute to historical education?

The Society supports scholarships, educational programs, and publishes materials that promote understanding of the American Revolution and the principles of liberty and democracy.

Where is the Society of Cincinnati headquartered?

The Society of Cincinnati is headquartered in Washington, D.C., where it maintains a library and museum that houses historical artifacts and documents related to the American Revolution.

Is the Society of Cincinnati involved in any charitable activities?

Yes, the Society of Cincinnati engages in charitable activities that support veterans, historical preservation projects, and educational initiatives related to American history.

How does the Society of Cincinnati commemorate the American Revolution?

The Society commemorates the American Revolution through ceremonies, events, and the preservation of historical sites, as well as by promoting awareness of the contributions made by its members and their ancestors.

What is the significance of the Society's emblem?

The emblem of the Society of Cincinnati features an eagle holding a shield and the words 'Liberty and Independence,' symbolizing the ideals of freedom and the sacrifices made during the American Revolution.

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Explore the legacy and influence of Society of Cincinnati members. Discover how their contributions shaped American history and continue to inspire today. Learn more!

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