

august body under whose orders I have so long acted, here offer my commission and take leave of all the employment of public life."

As he handed his commission to the President of the Congress, the men and women gathered there to witness the solemn ceremony realized that the American war for independence had been won. But let us turn again to an eyewitness account. James McHenry, for whom the famed fortress in Baltimore was named, was among those present, and, in a letter to his sweetheart, he wrote:

"It was a solemn and affecting spectacle, such a one as history does not present. The spectators all wept, and there was hardly a member of the Congress who did not drop tears."

*The Maryland Gazette's* reporter described it in these words:

"Few tragedies ever drew more tears from so many beautiful eyes as were affected by the moving manner in which his excellency took his final leave of Congress."

From all accounts, it is evident that this noble figure of history inspired not only reverence, but a strong and abiding affection in the hearts of men and women who were his contemporaries. The passing years have not diminished that reverence and that affection.

The resolution stated by Washington before the Congress to "Take leave of all the employments of public life," we know, was destined not to be fulfilled. Six years later when the American people, in order to form a "more perfect union" of the states adopted a new Constitution, Washington again was pressed into the service of his country. He was elected the first President of the United States and served in that high office eight years with the distinction that characterized his leadership of the military forces during the war for independence.

Let me offer you just one more incident that describes Washington's intimate relationship with my State. On the first February 22 that followed his death in 1799, Maryland proclaimed a statewide day of fast and humiliation, so great was the grief of its people. The birthday of the father of our country, now a national holiday, has been observed in Maryland every February 22 since then.

And now, as a Marylander and an American, let me say once more that I am proud and honored to be here today at Valley Forge to take part in these ceremonies in which we commemorate this grand and noble figure. To all Americans, Valley Forge stands as a symbol—a symbol to which we turn especially in times of peril and adversity. As nowhere else, here on this sacred soil despair turned to hope and