

# District One Event

## General Smyth Funeral Reenactment

### March 18, 2006, Wilmington, Delaware

*By James R. Hanby, Sr.*

On a blustery March afternoon members of the Grand Lodge Staff, lodges from around the state, members of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War, and various members of the public in period style joined together to reenact the funeral of Wilmington's own General Thomas A. Smyth.

The funeral used much of the route that the General's original funeral did. The procession of about seventy-five participants led by a color guard in period uniforms with flags snapping in the wind stepped off from in front of Old Towne Hall after the reading of a speech from Wilmington's Civil War Mayor. A horse drawn hearse donated by Brother Harvey Smith lent an extra touch of historic flavor to the event. After making their way up Market Street the funeral procession turned on 12th Street and proceeded to the Wilmington and Brandywine Cemetery to General Smyth's grave.

There they were joined by some twenty-five onlookers as members of the Grand Staff performed the Masonic burial ritual and the members of the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War performed a period military ritual. Grand Master Ronald W.

Conaway presented a wreath on behalf of the Grand Lodge and Brother James R. Hanby, Sr. Department Commander of the Sons of Union Veterans presented a wreath on behalf of the Sons.

After a brief recounting of why General Smyth should be remembered and thanking everyone for attending, a lone bugler played Taps to end the graveside ceremony.

That evening at the Spencer Hotel in Wilmington, noted local historian and General Smyth expert, Justin Carisio held a standing room only crowd enthralled with the story of General Smyth. Smyth was born in Ireland and came to this country in the 1850's soon adopting Wilmington as his home. When the first shots were fired on Fort Sumter, Smyth was among the first volunteers to jump to the defense of his adopted country. He served with distinction throughout the war. In October 1864 he had been promoted to the rank of Brigadier General and it was as a General that he was leading his men from the front on April 7, 1865 near Farmville, Virginia, when he was mortally wounded. He was carried to a nearby house where near dawn two days later, he died from his

wound. Later that morning just about twelve miles down the road from the farm house where General Smyth died, General Lee would surrender his Army of Northern Virginia to General Grant. That fact would make General Thomas A. Smyth the last General officer killed in the Civil War. He was later made a Brevet Major General.

General Smyth was a member of Washington Lodge No. 1 and may have the distinction of having the shortest Masonic career! He had been balloted on in December of 1864 and received all three degrees in March of 1865 while home on leave from the Army.

The Grand Lodge played a prominent role in his funeral in 1865 and in this Bicentennial year reprised that role. The News Journal wrote two articles about the event and, in spite of the weather, over 125 people took part in some portion of the event that day. Thanks to all the brothers who came out to make this event a special one and a special thanks to the City of Wilmington, Brother Harvey Smith (Past Master of Lafayette Lodge No. 14) of Spicer-Mullikin Funeral Home, and the members of the Grand Staff who took part in the funeral service.