

## The cornerstone mystery

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**Fig.1:** Original images from CERN's first foundation stone ceremony at the SC. The audience was full of local and international authorities.

On September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1793, a man wearing a masonic apron climbed up a trench near the Potomac River, where the city of Washington is. He had just laid a silver plate and a heavy cornerstone on it.

The inscription on the plate read: "This Southeast corner stone, of the Capitol of the United States of America in the City of Washington, was laid [...] in the first year of the second term of the Presidency of George Washington, whose virtues in the civil administration of his country have been as conspicuous and beneficial [...]". The ceremony saw a procession that was joined by Masonic lodges from Maryland and Virginia. According to reports, the lodges marched "with music playing, drums beating, colours flying, and spectators rejoicing".

On June 10<sup>th</sup> 1955, in Meyrin, Felix Bloch, 1952 Nobel Prize for Physics and CERN's first Director-General, laid the foundation stone on the Laboratory site, watched by a smiling Max Petitpierre, then President of the Swiss Confederation, who was solemnly holding a trowel.

In an eloquent, though unrheterical speech preceding the laying of the stone, he said: « When the question arose of the establishment in Switzerland of this European laboratory, voices were raised to recommend, first to the authorities, then to the people of Geneva called upon to decide, to decline the honour, that they considered it perilous to welcome this new institution here. The long and cruel years that the world has lived through, the difficulties encountered in solving the political and social problems opened up by the last war, must not, however,

destroy confidence in a better and more peaceful future. And this trust can only be born and develop through increasingly close collaboration in all areas where it is possible. This is why the Confederation has resolved to accept that the laboratory be installed on its territory. »

You are probably wondering what do these two momentous events have in common. The answer is that in both cases the whereabouts of the respective cornerstones cannot be determined with certitude. Nevertheless, thanks to immaterial yet solid cornerstones, both institutions enjoy a glorious past and have a great future ahead of them!

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### BIBLIOGRAPHY FOR THE CURIOUS:

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First Cornerstone

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United States Capitol cornerstone laying

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