

Freemasonry: From England to the Colonies to the USA

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I. Where did Masonry start?

Without a doubt, Masonry has existed from the time when "the memory of man runneth not to the contrary" - that is from "time immemorial." Some Masonic writers in the late 190' Century claimed Noah as our founder. Those of us who have had the pleasure of witnessing Springfield Lodge's presentation on Cleopatra's Needle are aware of the very Masonic symbols that were found under the base of an Egyptian obelisk that was erected about 1500 B.C. John Robinson in *Born in Blood* provides much evidence that we owe our lodges to the Knights Templar who needed a cover following their suppression by the Catholic Church in 1307.

The most generally accepted view, points to the guilds of freemasons. Operative masons have always been involved in the building of temples and other monuments from antiquity to the present day. Written evidence indicates that sometime before 926 AD masons had formed guilds or lodges but appear to have had some problems in their government. The Regius Poem or Halliwell Manuscript, which dates from 1390, tells how Athelstan, King of All England, called an Assembly at York in 926 to consider the government of the Master Masons and Craftsmen. At this assembly, fifteen Articles were adopted for the government of the Master Mason. These Articles include that:

The Master must be steadfast, trusty and true.

His apprentice must be of lawful blood and have his limbs whole.

The Master must teach his apprentice.

The Master must do nothing that would turn the craft to shame.

In addition, Fifteen Points were adopted for the government of the Craftsmen. These include that:

The Craftsman must love well God and holy church and his master and fellows.

The Craftsman must keep his Master's counsel in chamber and in lodge.

The Craftsman must respect the chastity of his master's wife and his fellow's concubine.

The Craftsman must swear never to be a thief and never to help any of false craft.

The poem ends in a manner well known to us: "Amen!, Amen!, So mote it be! Say we all for charity"

These so-called "Gothic Constitutions," with later restatements, were the law for the government of the craft for the next 750 years.

In the middle of the 17th Century, joining the Masonic Lodge became a desirable thing for gentlemen to do. Kilwinning Lodge No. 0 in Kilwinning, Scotland was primarily an operative lodge claiming descent from the lodge formed when the abbey was built in 1140. Their minutes of 1672 show the admission of Lord Cassilis as a speculative Mason. The diary of Elias Ashmole, who donated the Ashmolean Museum to Oxford University, records under the date of October 16, 1646 that he was made a Free Mason at Warrington in Lancashire. From this and other notes by other writers, it can be concluded that there were a number of small lodges located around England and Scotland, and that many of them included speculative members.

Until 1717, however, Masonry remained a truly secret society - one whose very existence, let alone its membership, was not publicized. Its lodges met in various taverns and ale houses for dinner, sociability, and a little degree work. (Since the new members paid for the banquet, the degree work was probably an essential activity.) Its membership, especially in the cities, was increasingly made up of speculative masons, not operative ones. Then on June 24, 1717 at the Goose and Gridiron Ale House in St. Paul's Churchyard, London, Freemasonry came out of the closet. Speculative Masonry had become too popular an activity, and four lodges felt that some sort of control should be exercised. They had met at the Apple Tree Tavern in 1716 and there formed a Grand Lodge *pro tempore*. At the meeting in 1717 they elected one of their number, Anthony Sayer ("Oldest Master Mason and then Master of a Lodge") as Grand Master and agreed to hold a Grand Feast once a year. Sayer also appointed Grand Wardens and "commanded the Master and Wardens of Lodges to meet the Grand Officers every Quarter in Communication." The four lodges were those that met at the Goose & Gridiron Ale House, the Crown Ale House, the Apple Tree Tavern, and the Rummer and Grapes Tavern. (Masonry had a different view of taverns in those days.) They agreed

that only the Grand Lodge would have the authority to issue a warrant, and that lodges without warrants were unlawful.

II Moderns, Ancients and Others

The Moderns

The Grand Lodge constituted in 1717 was titled "The Right Worshipful Fraternity of Accepted Free Masons," and later became "The Most Ancient and Honourable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons under the Constitution of England" more generally known as *The Premier Grated Lodge* or *The Grand Lodge of England*. Their purpose was to revive the institution from its depressed state. Their original jurisdiction extended for about three square miles, not all England, but they were certainly the start of today's Grand Lodge system.

They are often called "The Moderns," a term that probably originated with their rivals. And rivals there were. Some lodges felt that the creation of a Grand Lodge was in violation of Masonic law, while others simply were against being ruled from the city. By 1725 the Lodge in York had declared itself a Grand Lodge. The ultimate problem arose when Dr. James Anderson, D.D. was commissioned "to digest the (Gothic Constitutions) into a new and better method." His *Constitutions* were adopted in 1723 and the 1738 edition included changes in the modes of recognition to tell the true from the imposter - a change that was greatly disapproved in some circles, and possibly was the immediate cause of the formation of the "Antient" Grand Lodge.

The Antients

On July 17, 1751 "The Most Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons, according to the Old Institutions" usually referred to as the "Antient Grand Lodge of England" or "Atholl Grand Lodge" was formed by six lodges that appear to have been mostly of Irish Masons. The work of this Grand Lodge was similar to that used in both Ireland and Scotland. Laurence Dermott was its guiding hand, serving as Grand Secretary from 1752 to 1771 and then Deputy Grand Master until 1787. He wrote its Book of Constitutions - the *Ahiman Rezon* (i.e. *the Law of Prepared Brothers, or A Help to a Brother.*) This title will be found in the law of many US Grand Lodges, including that of Virginia.

A key provision of the Antient work was the inclusion of the Royal Arch Degree as a part of the working. This was a stumbling block for all proposals to unite the two Grand Lodges, and was also source of problems among lodges in the US.

Although Freemasonry in the United States was no longer influenced by that of England, we should note in passing that on November 25, 1813 the two Grand Lodges united as "The United Grand Lodge of Ancient Freemasons of England." The key compromise in The Articles of Union "declared and pronounced, that pure Ancient Masonry consists of three degrees, and no more, viz., those of the Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft and the Master Mason (including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch.)"

Others

Although early Irish Masonic records are lacking, there is a Freemason's Stone in Dublin which appears to date from about 1602, and a lecture given in Dublin University in 1688 makes references that imply that Masonry was not unknown at that time. The Grand Lodge of Ireland was established no later than 1725 and followed the Ancient form of work.

Scotland had many operative lodges, but apparently speculative members were not very welcome, and a central authority even less so. (John Robinson notes that American Freemasonry can be classed as Reformed, English - Conservative, and Scottish - Orthodox.) The example of England and Ireland proved too strong, however, and in 1736, thirty-three lodges met in Edinburgh and constituted the Grand Lodge.

In addition, four other Grand Lodges were established in England prior to 1800, but most of these had no influence on Freemasonry in the United States. The notable exception was the Lodge at York which declared itself a Grand Lodge in 1725. While never particularly successful, it expired in 1790, it was the lodge of William Preston, whose *Illustrations of Masonry* as revised by Thomas Smith Webb form the basis for most of our Lodge ritual today.

III Masonry in the Colonial United States

Masonry arrived in the Colonies in 1682 when John Skene of Aberdeen Lodge, came to Burlington, New Jersey. Nothing much more is known of him.

Over the next 50 years Colonial Freemasons exercised the immemorial right of Masons to form a lodge and make Masons. Coil reports evidence that although no chartered lodge existed in the Colonies, a lodge was held in King's Chapel in Boston in 1720, and that the *Boston News Letter* for May 25, 1727 gave a detailed account of the Grand Lodge meeting in London.

Starting in 1730, the Modern Grand Lodge appointed Provincial Grand Masters in the Colonies. The first Provincial Grand Master in America was Daniel Coxe, appointed for New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania in 1730. There is no record of his performing any actions as a Grand Master. The Modern Grand Lodge also warranted lodges throughout the colonies starting with St. John's Lodge in Boston in 1733, and in that same year, Henry Price was appointed Provincial Grand Master for North America. He opened the *St. John's Grand Lodge* in Boston, and issued warrants to lodges in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia and elsewhere.

The Grand Lodge of Scotland warranted lodges throughout the colonies starting in 1756 with St. Andrew's Lodge in Boston and Blandford Lodge in Virginia. They also appointed Capt. John Young as Provincial Grand Master in 1757. Joseph Warren was appointed in 1769 to have authority "at Boston and within 100 miles of the same." In 1773 this was expanded to cover the "continent of America." As Grand Master he opened the *Massachusetts Grand Lodge* and issued warrants for lodges in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Vermont, and New York.

Ireland warranted a number of traveling lodges with the Army in America. These lodges initiated colonists who later became members of other early lodges. The initiation of Prince Hall and 14 others into an army traveling lodge near Boston in 1775 was an event that continues to have ramifications in Masonry today.

Kilwinning Lodge in Scotland, which claims to be the oldest active lodge in the world, issued warrants to other groups to make Masons on behalf of the Mother Lodge. The first of these was issued in 1677 to Cannongate Kilwinning which still meets in Edinburgh on St. John Street, near the Cannongate. Although Kilwinning Lodge joined in the formation of the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1725, a dispute over their proper place on the list caused them to break away in 1743 for a period of over 60 years. In this period they warranted other "Kilwinning" Lodges, including now extinct lodges located in Virginia at Tappahannock and Falmouth, and perhaps also our Kilwinning-Crosse #2-237 and Fredericksburg #4.

IV The First United States Grand Lodges

The death of Joseph Warren at the Battle of Bunker Hill on June 17, 1775 left the lodges under his jurisdiction in a state of confusion, since his authority was a

personal one, and did not include the naming of a successor. Thomas Smith Webb recounts the events following his death as follows:

The brethren, influenced by a pious regard to the memory of the late grand master, were induced to search for his body, which had been rudely and indiscriminately buried in the field of slaughter. They accordingly repaired to the place, and by directions of a person who was on the ground at the time of his burial, a spot was found where the earth had been recently turned up. Upon removing the turf, and opening the grave, which was on the brow of a hill, and adjacent to a small cluster of sprigs, the remains were discovered, in a mangled condition, but were easily ascertained (by an artificial tooth); and, being decently raised were conveyed to the state house in Boston; from whence, by a large and respectable number of brethren with the late grand officers attending in procession, they were carried to the stone chapel where an animated eulogium was delivered by brother Perez Morton. The body was then deposited in the silent vault...

On March 8, 1777 the brethren assembled, formed the *Massachusetts Grand Lodge*, and elected Joseph Webb their Grand Master. By 1783 there was some misgiving over this act, and so a committee was appointed to examine the record. Their final conclusion was that although such action was unprecedented, the political facts made it necessary and therefore it was proper. They also observed that the existence of two Grand Lodges in England along with Grand Lodges in Ireland and Scotland showed that there is no universal authority in Masonry. This was the first independent Grand Lodge formed in America. It was closed *sine die* at the merger of the St. John's and Massachusetts Grand Lodges in 1792.

The next Grand Lodge was formed in Virginia on October 13, 1778 following a series of meetings that began in May of 1777. Since the history of the Virginia Grand Lodge is a separate topic, I will leave that story for later.

The minutes of the forming of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania typify the occurrences in most of the Colonies.

"The grand officers, together with the officers and representatives of a number of regular lodges under their jurisdiction unanimously resolved "That it is improper that the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania should remain any longer under the authority of any foreign Grand Lodge." Arid the said Grand Lodge did then close, *sine die*. The Grand convention thus assembled did then and there unanimously resolve that the lodges under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of

Pennsylvania, lately holden as a provincial grand lodge under the authority of the Grand Lodge of England should, and did form themselves into a grand lodge to be called the "Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania and Masonic jurisdiction thereunto belonging".

A notable exception occurred in the State of New Jersey. A convocation of Master Masons in 1787 declared that it being necessary to have a grand lodge, the Grand Lodge of New Jersey was thereby created, officers elected, and new charters issued. This is the only instance in which a Grand Lodge was formed by individual Master Masons not acting as representatives of their Lodges.

V The Spread Across the Continent

Since colonial times, after each new state was admitted, a Grand Lodge was formed so that today we have Grand Lodges in each of the 50 states and in the District of Columbia. In the course of these creations, interesting events occasionally occurred:

When the state of Tennessee was admitted to the union in 1796, St. Tammany Lodge No. 29 was working in Nashville under a North Carolina charter. Over the next several years North Carolina chartered a dozen more lodges. In 1811 these lodges requested that North Carolina assent to the formation of a Grand Lodge of Tennessee. This resulted in a long period of discussion, but on December 27, 1813 the Grand Lodge of North Carolina delivered the "Great Charter" that established the Grand Lodge of Tennessee. Never before had one Grand Lodge actually chartered another since it would appear to make the recipient subservient to the giver. There is no evidence that Tennessee has ever considered themselves subservient to North Carolina.

In Louisiana, the presence of charters from New York, Pennsylvania, the Grand Orient of France, and the Provincial Grand Lodge of Marseilles as well as a mixture of English and French speaking lodges greatly complicated the agreements. As a result of the essential compromises made at that time, Louisiana lodges were permitted to work in the York, French and Scottish Rites. I understand that even today some Louisiana lodges confer the first three degrees using the Scottish Rite ritual.

In California a meeting was held in March 1850 to discuss the formation of a Grand Lodge. Four lodges were present: Western Star No. 58 with a Missouri charter, Connecticut No. 175 with a Connecticut charter, New Jersey Lodge UD with a New Jersey Charter and Pacific Lodge UD who neglected to bring their charter. These representatives agreed to form the "Grand Lodge of Free & Accepted Ancient York

Masons of California." A month later, there was a problem raised - the Pacific Lodge charter had been issued by the Grand Lodge of Ancient York Masons of Louisiana which at that time was considered clandestine by Missouri, and there was a question whether a UD lodge could participate in forming a Grand Lodge. Fortunately California Lodge No. 13 with a District of Columbia charter, was represented, providing three regular charters, and the new Grand Lodge was established.

When Hawaii, our youngest Grand Lodge, was planning its separation from California, a problem was encountered in determining which lodge should be Number 1. Their solution was based on that adopted by Massachusetts nearly 200 years before. Their lodges are not numbered.

In 1784 the (Modern) Grand Lodge of England chartered African Lodge #459 in Boston, Massachusetts. This lodge remained on the rolls of the Grand Lodge until the Union of 1813 when it and many others in America were dropped for failure to remit payments to the charity fund. The lodge, however, was still functioning and granted warrants to other lodges. It is the Mother of the Prince Hall Grand Lodges.

Virginia is the mother of two Grand Lodges. Five lodges chartered by Virginia assembled in Lexington, Kentucky in 1800 and constituted the Grand Lodge of Kentucky. Similarly, seven of the eight lodges that formed the Grand Lodge of West Virginia had Virginia charters, as did seven others that later joined into the new Grand Lodge in 1865.

The Grand Lodge of Ohio was formed in 1808 with the famous American Union Lodge as No. 1 on its list. American Union Lodge was a travelling military lodge chartered by Massachusetts during the Revolution. It had resumed working in Marietta in 1790. Being unwilling to surrender their unusual charter, American Union refused to join in the new Grand Lodge and continued to meet under the old charter. Finally in 1815 the Grand Master declared the Massachusetts charter to be forfeited and American Union to be a clandestine lodge. The following year the Grand Lodge issued a new charter to some of the American Union members, and the lodge still stands as No. 1 in Ohio.

VI Conclusion

The defining characteristic of our Masonic organization is the Grand Lodge. The Grand Lodge provides us with standards for ritual, administration, membership requirements and fraternal intercourse. The very definition of a lodge in our ritual requires the existence of a Grand Lodge to provide the warrant or charter which gives

the authority by which the brethren assemble. Thus, however Masonry may have been initiated, modern Freemasonry originated in a London tavern on June 24, 1717.

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