

JUNE 2017

JUNE 24, 1717 - “the before and the after”

Skilled artisans working in stone have existed for millennia: their monuments can be seen in many locations around the world. Stone was also found to be a suitable medium for recording important societal events. The men who did this work established themselves into groups, usually bound by oath and covenant to observe particular rules for the preservation and good of the group.

While we do not know the precise point (or points) of origin of the institution of “Freemasonry,” we believe it evolved out of the building trades and various guilds. A good craftsman would often keep secret the technique he knew which brought him into great demand. A master and his many apprentices working on a particular site would often occupy a single area of several small buildings in which to live. These quarters were known as lodges. The men were “operative” masons.

By the Middle Ages masons in the British Isles evolved building standards as well as the terms and conditions under which they would enter into contracts for particular construction projects. In Scotland, master masons would occasionally sit on municipal governments to ensure standards were observed both by those providing the services and those doing the hiring. Although many early records have been lost over time, the Records of the City of London show that rules for the guidance of the “London Mason’s Company” were passed in 1356 and that four masons were elected to the City Council in 1376. Company documents for the period 1620-1706 have survived and indicate that over time men who were not masons were occasionally accepted into the Craft without being physical builders—they were shown as “Accepted” into the Company and were the first Speculative Masons.

At this time Lodges were not just confined to stone masons but also included members of other trades such as wood workers, carpenters and cabinet makers, plasterers and slaters. It is not clear when, or how, but over time the working tools of the various tradesmen became useful for moral instruction. Such is the working tool known as the Baal’s Bridge Square (found under the foundations of the Baal’s Bridge in Co. Limerick, Ireland). It dates from 1507 and has inscribed on its face and reverse the following “I will strive to live with love & care”—“upon the level by the square.”

This then, is how we believe Speculative Masonry began. As lodges of operatives had officers whose roles evolved over time, so too did the Speculative ones. Thus with our ritual based on moral allegory do we encourage individual members of our Masonic lodges to strengthen their character, improve their moral and spiritual outlook, and broaden their mental horizons. It would take until the eighteenth century, in London, to organize what we, today, consider the first Grand Lodge. Through Grand Lodges did we evolve our ritual and regulate the working of individual lodges.

So it was by unknown steps that Freemasons met on June 24 (the Feast of St. John the Baptist) 1717 when the representatives of four London lodges met together and formed the Grand Lodge of England. Inasmuch as Freemasonry is “a beautiful system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols,” so too may the precise origin of this first Grand Lodge be considered as symbolic of an event that did occur on, or close to, this date. At this meeting they elected the oldest and most senior as Grand Master *pro tem*. Later records indicate that this was a temporary action until a Royal Prince would occupy the post: for England this has continued to the present time.

Given the transportation challenges of the day, the Grand Master in London eventually appointed his “personal representative Grand Masters” in the British provinces (counties) and designated them as Provincial Grand Masters. The first such was Colonel Francis Columbine (Cheshire, 1725). Abroad the first Provincial Grand Master was appointed in 1728: the name being changed to District Grand Master later on to distinguish between domestic and foreign positions.

This premier (or first) Grand Lodge was soon followed by others of which those of Ireland (formed 1725 or earlier) and Scotland (formed 1736) are the two key ones. These three—today’s United Grand Lodge

of England and the Grand Lodges of Ireland and Scotland—have spread the institution around the world and continue to do so. They hold of no limit on their territory except by mutual consent and they continue to warrant lodges around the world. Where lodges congregated to form new Grand Lodges, tradition permitted lodges predating the event to hold whatever their original authority was. In most cases they surrendered their earlier authorities and became loyal to the new Grand Lodge. This was an important step in the globalization of the craft. It certainly played its part in the development of Canadian Freemasonry through the creation of ten independent Grand Lodges and the ripple-like effect giving Freemasons many opportunities to support and influence the development of Canada.

Freemasonry was carried with explorers, soldiers, developers, settlers, out from the British Isles and around the world. For us in Canada the fraternity was brought by early settlers to the Thirteen Colonies and carried north- and westwards into New France with Lodges being found in a few of the major centres with sufficient numbers of men to establish a Lodge and keep it working: St. John's (NF), Halifax (NS), St. John and Moncton (NB), Quebec City and Montreal (Lower Canada), Kingston and Newark (now Niagara-on-the-Lake in Upper Canada) and even smaller outposts. The creation of Grand Lodges across Canada followed settlement and the establishment of sufficient numbers of Freemasons. Today's Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of Canada in the Province of Ontario was formed October 10, 1855 in Hamilton (when the "Canada" in its title referred to the United Province of Canada, formed by the Province of Canada West and Canada East) and the Grand Lodge of Nova Scotia A.F. & A.M. (formed February 20, 1866) are the only Canadian Grand Lodges formed before the formation of the present-day Provinces (July 1, 1867 and afterwards). The other Grand Lodges followed the formation of their individual Provinces.

| Grand Lodge formed | Province formed |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| New Brunswick—October 10, 1867 | July 1, 1867 |
| Quebec—October 20, 1869 | July 1, 1867 |
| Manitoba—May 12, 1875 | July 15, 1870 |
| British Columbia—October 21, 1871 (named revised to British Columbia and Yukon in 2000) | July 20, 1871 |
| Prince Edward Island—June 23, 1875 | July 1, 1873 |
| Alberta—October 12, 1905 | September 1, 1905 |
| Saskatchewan—August 9, 1906 | September 1, 1905 |
| Newfoundland and Labrador—November 1, 1997 | March 31, 1949 |
| <i>(At present there are no sovereign Grand Lodges in Yukon, Northwest Territories or Nunavut.)</i> | |

As prepared by Michael Jenkyns, Grand Historian, Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Canada in the Province of Ontario

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