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GET KNOWLEDGE – GET WISDOM – GET UNDERSTANDING

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The Enduring Tenets & Principles of Freemasonry Which Have “Stood the Test of Time”

By R.W. Bro. Matt Plant – DDGM Nipissing Muskoka District – Official Visit of Mattawa Lodge No. 405, January 3rd, 2017

The year 2017 marks the 300th anniversary of the founding of the Grand Lodge of England. This Grand Lodge was the Mother of our Grand Lodge. On June 24th 1717, four London Lodges, which had existed for some time, came together at the Goose and Gridiron Tavern in St Paul's church yard, declared themselves a Grand Lodge and elected Anthony Sayer as their Grand Master. This was the first Grand Lodge in the world.

The questions of when, how, why and where Freemasonry originated are still a matter of debate. The general consensus amongst Masonic scholars is that it descends directly or indirectly from the organization of operative stonemasons who built the great cathedrals and castles of the middle ages. During the 1600's, non-working or speculative Masons became interested in joining the operative Mason lodges. The first recorded evidence of a speculative Mason being initiated is in 1641 in England.

Ireland and Scotland also formed Grand Lodges and all three of them registered lodges in Canada, as Masons came to Canada as pioneers and military members. The Lodges in Canada at the time included both Quebec and Ontario. The Grand Lodge of England was stubborn in recognizing the establishment of a Grand Lodge in Ontario or Upper Canada as it was then known. They had been petitioned since 1817 by a group of lodges in the Kingston area to have a Grand Lodge established. This did not happen until 1822, when they appointed Simon McGillivray to be Provincial Grand Master for the Province of Upper Canada. The new lodges in Upper Canada were known as the Provincial Grand Lodge and the Grand Lodge of England appointed the Provincial Grand Master. The Lodges of Upper Canada eventually wanted to form their own Grand Lodge in order to have local control, but the Grand Lodge of England ignored this. Finally in October of 1855, 41 lodges met in Hamilton to discuss forming their own Grand Lodge. 26 of these lodges were under the register of the Grand Lodge of England. The other lodges were under the register of the Grand Lodges of Ireland and Scotland. 30 of those 41 lodges voted to become part of the new Grand Lodge. William Mercer Wilson was appointed the first Grand Master. The Past Grand Master of Michigan consecrated the Grand Lodge of Canada and also installed the Grand Master and invested the officers. The Grand Lodge of Ireland and several American Grand Lodges recognized the new Grand Lodge, but nothing was heard from the Grand Lodge of England. It is interesting to note that the Grand Lodge of England had started 168 years earlier in much the same way. A group of 4 independent lodges formed the Grand Lodge of England, but when a group of 30 lodges tried to do the same thing in Canada, they were silent.

When you hear how important it was to our late Brethren that they have their own Grand Lodge for Ontario, you have to wonder why some of us have such a difficult time in keeping our Lodges vibrant today. The tenets and principles of Freemasonry are the same today as they were in 1855. We still attract just and upright men, and observe a belief in a Supreme Being that embraces all religions.

Have our lives become so busy that we step away from our Masonic life? While it is important to attract new members, it is also just as important to keep the members we have. We just have to look around our lodges to realize that there are a large number of our members that pay their dues and rarely attend Lodge. Not all of this can be attributed to age and infirmity.

Maybe we should assign a few Brethren to contact those we haven't seen in a while and find out why they have quit coming and what it would take to revive their interest. It may be as simple as calling a brother and offering to drive him to Lodge. It is easy to get away from having regular attendance at Lodge. Once someone has missed a few meetings, it is only human nature to just say “It's easier to just stay home than to put the effort into going”. If we can show brothers that we enjoy having their company in Lodge, they might realize that it is worth the effort to attend. Let us make the effort to contact a brother when we notice he has stopped be a regular at our Lodge meeting.

Our Grand Master has stated that Masonry is a hobby. Most hobbies people get involved in involve spending some money and time for an activity that they enjoy. Does it make sense to pay money and not take part in the activity? That is exactly what is happening in many of our lodges. We receive dues but don't have the pleasure of a brother's company. If this happens long enough then we can expect to see a demit and lose that brother from Masonry.

Grand Lodge has appointed a committee to coordinate the celebration of the 300th anniversary of the formation of the Grand Lodge of England. There are plans for public celebrations and news articles about our Craft. The Grand Master has given dispensation for the Grand jurisdiction to have some kind of lodge function on June 3rd 2017. This is an excellent opportunity to generate interest in the general public, but it can also be an opportunity for we as Masons to generate interest among our own fraternity. Maybe we can use this event as a springboard to develop a new interest by our own Brethren. An institution that has been around for 300 years in the case of the Grand Lodge of England and 162 years in the case of the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario has to be worth maintaining.



More from R.W. Bro. Charles A. Sankey's Masonic Things To Live By

A HERITAGE OF FREEDOM

Presented in Grantham Lodge No. 697, March 25, 1968

On official visits I have been speaking about Masonic-things-to-live-by. On other occasions, such as ladies nights where non-Masons have been present, I have talked about some features of Masonry which, I believe, should be more widely known. This has frequently involved some reference to the roots from which our present organization sprang. Tonight I propose to take a brief look at some of our roots from the standpoint that, these can and should contribute to our lives and actions.

The founding event of the present Masonic system was, of course, the establishment at the Goose and Gridiron Alehouse of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717. The preparation for this had started the previous year when four Lodges at London decided to form a joint organization. These Lodges were those which met at:

1. The Goose and Gridiron Alehouse in St. Paul's churchyard
2. The Crown Alehouse in Parker's Lane, near Drury Lane
3. The Apple Tree Tavern in Charles St., Covent Garden where the first organization meetings were held, and
4. The Rummer and Grapes Tavern in Channel-Row, Westminster.

There are three important things to note about this. Our first Grand Lodge was based on pre-existing lodges; it was a voluntary union based on a mutual desire to form a fraternal organization; and the establishment meeting, at which Mr. Anthony Sayer, Gentleman, was elected Grand Master, was held on St. John the Baptist's Day (June 24th) designated as the assembly and feast of free and accepted Masons.

The pre-existence of guilds and lodges of operative mason builders goes back many hundreds of years. In England manuscripts with charges to members of mason guilds go back to the ca.1390 Regius MS now in the British Museum. John of Gloucester was called a Master Mason at the erection of Westminster Hall started in 1254. It appears that over five thousand churches were built in England in the 11th century immediately after the Norman conquest in 1066. Their architecture was remarkably similar and different from the earlier Saxon architecture. This is strong evidence of an organized body of artisans trained in a common tradition.

Similar guilds functioned on the continent. There was in the 18th century in France, a Compagnonnage with three divisions, les Fils de Solomon, les Fils de Maître Jacques, and les Fils de Soubisse. According to their legend Maître Jacques was a colleague of Hiram and was also murdered. There are some records of codes of other guilds going back to the 13th century. In Germany there were the Steinmetzen with some records extant to the 15th century. The story gets nebulous as we go to still earlier dates. There may or may not have been a group of "Comacine Masters" operating from near Lake Como in the Italian Alps in the early middle ages. There appear to have been "Collegia" devoted to the craft of building in the times of expansion of the Roman empire. What the story was in still earlier days, e.g. at the time of the building of King Solomon's temple, or of earlier structures in other lands we simply do not know.

That skilled artisans laboured on all the great structures in all lands in the ancient world is obvious. This is a universal matter. It is only reasonable to assume on the basis of their accomplishments that these men had codes of ethics (which from the common nature of their work had much in common), protected knowledge of their skills and were, properly, proud of the results of their labours. The point is abundantly clear that our roots as builders are very ancient.

The value of this tradition to us is, I believe, not primarily because of its antiquity but because of a universality primarily associated with religious activity and because of its emphasis on the importance of the individual and of individual freedom.

Our ancient brethren in the middle ages were not just masons - they were freemasons. In an age of serfdom they were not bound to the land. They were free to move from place to place and valued this freedom with a legitimate pride. They held that if a man had been brought up as a slave he was permanently conditioned to a degree of servility which was wholly unacceptable in a freemason. So every freemason was required to be free-born before being admitted to an apprenticeship which frequently lasted seven years. This is why today we ask every candidate to declare that he is free by birth. I think we make a great mistake in not explaining the reason for this to each of our newly initiated brethren. Without such an explanation the bald question is today at best meaningless and at worst insulting. With an explanation, it is pregnant and challenging.

If you want a specific example of this independence and freedom among our ancient brethren look carefully at the main entrance of Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris. The carvings depict the last judgment and one of the condemned going down to hell is a bishop in full panoply of mitre, cope and staff. What a magnificent lesson and what nerve to so display it in the middle ages.

There is an even more striking example of freedom and independence in the structure of this great Roman Catholic cathedral. Look at its form with two great towers on either side of the entrance and the single spire over the cross of the transepts and the nave, proclaiming to those who have eyes to see, that the divine creativity embraces both the female and male elements.

Our term "accepted" Mason stems, in its origin, from the same independence and sense of brotherhood. The guilds "accepted" members were not operative craftsmen. These men were often royalty or nobility or prominent churchmen. As our ancient brethren were as human as we are, they naturally gave especial consideration to the powerful and wealthy and influential who could advance and assist their work. But they did not bring these men in as "patrons" or as "honorary members". They accepted them, quite literally, to their own brotherhood with all that that implies.

Today we are all speculative rather than operative Masons. We are all accepted Masons. We should remember the meaning of this acceptance by our brethren and, while taking a legitimate pride in our title, each of us should accept the obligation which it imposes.

And so tonight as a Masonic-thing-to-live-by I give you one of our most precious assets - our heritage of freedom:

- * Freedom as builders to build,
- * Freedom as individuals to be individuals,
- * Freedom as worshipers to worship the Supreme Being, in whom we each have expressed a belief, according to the dictates of our own conscience and with respect for all who do so according to their conscience,
- * Freedom as members of the human race to associate with each other as brothers,
- * Freedom, please God, to proclaim and demonstrate to all men in all times the founding principles of a Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons.



BOOK SALES

R.W. Bro. George Warner – Book Sales Team Leader



There are a number of Grand Lodge publications every Brother should have on hand, while they are in pursuit of higher Masonic learning. These publications are written and prepared by Ontario Masons. These brethren have taken on the great responsibility to provide important information for potential leaders.

The following publications provide the background for the building of Craft Lodges and these include; **Towards the Square, Masonic Manual, Beyond the Pillars, Meeting the Challenge, Whence Come We? - Volume 1** and **Penetrating the Veil**. There are others, which are just as important and should become part of your personal Masonic Library; **Question and Answers, and Whence Come We? - Volume 2**.

The publications listed above are available directly from the Grand Lodge office, as well as through your Lodge Secretary or your District Librarian. There are a limited number Non-Grand Lodge publications that are available through the Grand Lodge office. A list is available on Grand Lodge web site. However, these non-Grand Lodge publications are also available by direct contact with Books Galore at booksgalore@powergate.ca, Amazon or Chapters.

Change!

For the Curriculum Group of the Committee on Masonic Education April 4th, 2006
M.W. Bro. Raymond S. J. Daniels, F.C.F.

Antiquity cannot privilege an error, nor novelty prejudice a truth.

"Change is the one constant and Freemasons have done little to keep pace with change." That is the conclusion drawn after a year of study by a special task force commissioned by the 2004 Conference of Grand Masters in North America. It is not a new idea! More than two centuries ago, Bro. Robert Burns, with characteristic insight and wisdom, wrote: "*Nature's mighty law is change.*"

Too often, change connotes pessimism and regret, expressed in the line of the hymn, "*Change and decay in all around I see.*" It is a common fallacy of modern man to think that our problems are more complex and difficulties more challenging than those of our forebears in "the good old days" when we romantically imagine that life was simple and living was easy. Think of the challenges faced in everyday life by our pioneering forefathers – before modern heating and lighting, before modern transportation and communication, before medicare, social security, and pension plans, when it cost the full week's wage of a common labourer to join a Masonic lodge, when brethren walked miles over country roads lit only by the moon to attend a lodge meeting. Yet, Freemasonry flourished. By 1906, after the Grand Lodge of Canada was formed, during the first fifty years, membership had grown from 1179 to 37728, and the 41 lodges that united to form the first Grand Lodge had increased to 395 – a phenomenal growth by any standards!

"*The motive of change is some Uneasiness: nothing sets us upon the change of a State or upon any new Action but some Uneasiness. This is the great motive that works on the Mind to put it upon Action.*" John Locke (1632-1704) An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, 1690

The question has been posed, "*How did our predecessors in Freemasonry change?*" "*How did the early leaders attempt to modify the practice of Freemasonry in their day?*" "*Did their efforts succeed or fail?*" "*What was done – how was it done – was it achieved?*" These are appropriate and legitimate questions to which history can provide illustrative answers and from which we may derive instructive lessons.

The published Proceedings of our Grand Lodge abound with the documentary evidence to enlighten and encourage those who follow. The formation of the independent Grand Lodge of Canada under the leadership of M.W. Bro. William Mercer Wilson, the first Grand Master, is the great example of 'change way back then' achieved by the determination and perseverance of a few good men. They had a dream, a vision of how change could achieve a better way of practicing their Craft in Upper Canada, adapting Old World conventions in principle to serve the needs of their Brethren and conditions in the New World. That is what we recently celebrated in the Sesquicentennial year just past. They understood the delicate balance between timeless values and the necessity of adapting them to the present times and conditions. In this sense they proved that Freemasonry is both timeless and timely.

"*The successful innovator is one who conceives new ways to carry on the old traditions of an old established organization.*" M.W. Bro. R. Johnston – Grand Master New South Wales, 1991

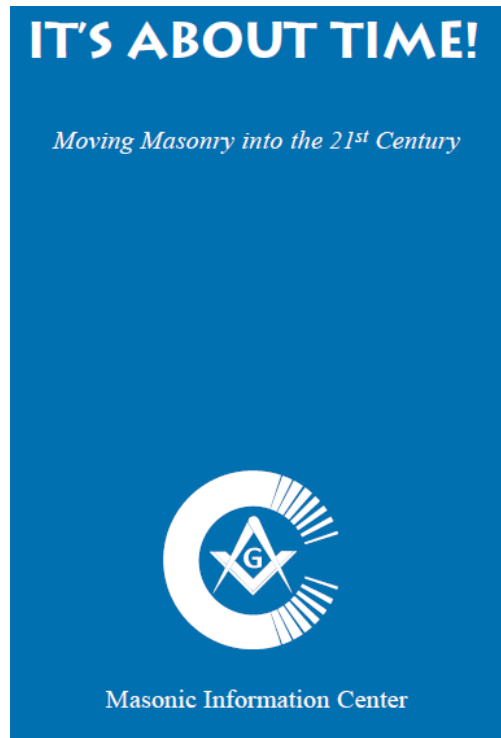
"*Destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice; it is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved.*" William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925) At present, many lodges are enjoying an influx of candidates for Initiation. At last it would seem that we have turned the corner – Initiations are balancing Deaths. It is easy to bring a man into Masonry; it takes only about forty-five minutes. The challenge is to keep these intelligent, curious young men interested and active in the practice of Freemasonry for the rest of their lives. A lodge must be more than a degree mill; more than a social club. A meeting must have more than the reading of minutes, the conduct of routine business, and the perfunctory conferral of yet another degree to supply the "mysteries and privileges" we promise every man that enters the lodge. The lodge must be a place of lively learning – an experience that is rewarding through participation, study, and discussion – education and self-improvement.

"*The great thing in this world is not so much where we are, but in what direction we are moving.*" Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-1894) In short, "*Decisions determine destiny.*" Frederick Speakman "*We must therefore take account of this changeable nature of things and of human institutions, and prepare for them with enlightened foresight.*" Pope Pius XI, Achille Ratti (1857-1939)

The words chosen for the community entrance signs by the town of Hunstville capture perfectly the essence of that balance we must ever try to achieve in our understanding and practice of Freemasonry: ***Touch the Past – Embrace the Future.***

We cannot live in the past, however great and glorious our history may be. When we boast proudly of the great and famous men that were Masons, and publish lists of eminent political leaders and statesmen, renowned writers, artists and musicians, and well-known captains of industry and business that were members of the Craft, they are invariably long dead. Masonry is the men, and a lodge is the members today. The report of the special task force of the Masonic Information Center, It's About Time: Moving Masonry into the 21st Century (2005) begins with this wakeup call quoting Michael Hammer: "*One thing that tells me a company is in trouble is when they tell me how good they were in the past.*"

Same with countries, you don't want to forget your identity. I am glad you were great in the 14th century, but that was then and this is now. **When memories exceed dreams, the end is near.**" The report concluded with this call to arms: "Cast off negativism. Turn the objection around to a challenge. Encourage and reward open and positive communication throughout each stage of change. Share ideas and ask yourself to take ownership of transforming the identity of Masonry through each and every action, regardless of how small. Make the fraternity that you want – brother by brother, lodge by lodge."



<http://www.msana.com/downloads/abouttime.pdf>



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