

## THE ORIGIN AND PROGRESS OF FREEMASONRY

**Origin of Freemasonry.** Perhaps the best place to start in learning about this organization is the beginning. Although our fraternity certainly has flourished for centuries, the exact origin of Freemasonry is unclear. Appropriately, one Masonic legend suggests that the organization may date back to one of the early kings of Israel, Solomon. King Solomon may have organized a Lodge in the 10<sup>th</sup> Century B.C., during the building of his famous temple on Mount Moriah in Jerusalem, although there are no facts to corroborate this version of history. We do know that Freemasonry attempts to positively influence the character of its members through the use of many lessons learned from ancient philosophers, architects, and mathematicians.

**Progress of Organized Freemasonry.** Freemasonry is organized into a system of independent Grand Lodges. Each Grand Lodge has in its jurisdiction a number of subordinate, sometimes called local, lodges. This system traces its recorded history to 1717, when four Masonic Lodges in London formed the Grand Lodge of England. Some subordinate lodges that met in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century are known to have continuous written records as far back as 1599. Edinburgh Lodge No. 1 in Scotland is a noted example of such an historic tradition.

Prior to the organization of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717, all Lodges worked independently of each other, and yet comprised a single Fraternity. The Fraternity during this period was composed of what are now referred to as operative masons, who actually built the great cathedrals, castles and towns of the Middle Ages.

Gradually, as the need for skilled stone, or operative masons waned, a transition occurred. This is generally considered by

Masons to be a period of transition from Operative to Speculative Masonry, brought about by the Reformation and the declining demand for the construction of cathedrals. For their preservation, the stone masons who were dwindling in number selected and accepted into their membership a number of gentlemen as Honorary Masons. These Honorary Masons, who did not practice the building craft, became known as Speculative Masons. As society turned more and more to education and philosophy, these Speculative Masons used the tools, materials and terms of Operative Masons to symbolize and teach moral values and virtues.

After the organization of the Grand Lodge of England, Freemasonry spread rapidly. The formation of the Grand Lodges of Scotland and Ireland just a few years later gave added impetus to the Craft, and it is from these three Grand Lodges that present Freemasonry has developed.

**Freemasonry in America.** Included in the flood of settlers to the New World were many Masons. These men quite naturally began to meet and continue their beloved fraternal fellowship. In North America, they made many new members and left an enthusiasm for Freemasonry with local citizens who formed their own Lodges, initially by charter from one of the three Grand Lodges mentioned earlier, then by dispensation from appointed Provincial Grand Masters, who were Masons residing in America. Finally, as the Colonies separated from England, states formed their own Grand Lodges. Freemasonry in the United States dates from at least 1730, and may have existed here earlier.

**What is Freemasonry?** Freemasonry is an organized society of men symbolically applying the principles of operative or stone masonry and architecture to the science and art of character building. Freemasonry hopes to

build its magnificent temples or cathedrals in the hearts of men.

Freemasonry is a charitable, benevolent and educational society. It supports religious activity by its members, but it is neither sectarian nor theological by nature. It encourages the worship of God, by whatever name men may know Him. It teaches each of its members to be true, loyal to his country and obedient to the laws of the state in which he resides. Within the Lodge, it forbids discussions of partisan politics, creeds, or other topics likely to excite personal animosities.

Freemasonry seeks to inspire its members with a profound feeling of charity and good will towards all mankind through the promotion of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. Masonic ideals and principles have influenced leaders of our country, our businesses and industries and everyday citizens to show compassion for human welfare. Whatever good Masonry accomplishes in the world is in direct proportion to the moral values and virtues of its individual members.

Masonry is not a secret society. It is a "society with a few secrets," but only those related to modes of recognition and involving some of its most important teachings of morality. If it were a secret society, Masons would not wear Masonic jewelry, place the Masonic Square and Compasses on their lodge halls, publish notices of Masonic meetings and programs, or issue booklets, such as this one, explaining the origin and purposes of the Fraternity.

**Membership.** Membership is limited to adult men who meet the standards of character, reputation and a belief in a Supreme Being. Membership is never solicited. A man must seek to become a member of his own free will and accord. An ideal candidate for the Degrees in Freemasonry is one who has a good reputation in his neighborhood, in his work, and among his friends. He is one who believes

in God, often referred to in Masonry as “The Supreme Architect of the Universe.”

Freemasonry does not interfere with the duties that a man owes to his family, his neighbor, his God, his Country, or himself. In fact, it encourages its members to actively pursue those duties ahead of all others. Undoubtedly, practicing the fundamental precepts of Masonry will make a good man a better man, a better father, brother, or son. Masonry teaches personal improvement in all facets of life.

**Local Lodge Meetings.** All Lodges hold regular meetings, some monthly, and some semimonthly, according to their by-laws, for transacting Lodge business and conferring Degrees. The Lodge may meet at other times for Degree work, training or educational programs and special events. While every Mason’s attendance is encouraged, there is never an intention to interfere with his work, his duties to his home or family, or his religious activities.

Your Mason has invested time and resources in joining the Fraternity. He can best receive all that is his, and yours, after having taken this first step, by participating in his Lodge’s activities. We sincerely hope that you will approve and that you will encourage him to attend regularly. We also hope that you will join us for as many programs as possible, for you are also a part of Freemasonry.

In the years to come, you will probably hear your Mason addressed as “Brother.” This is a “title,” a distinction and honor, indicating that he is recognized by another Mason as a member of the Masonic Fraternity. It is also distinctly “family” in tone, as it should be, for Freemasonry is a big family. The title “Brother” dates back to ancient times and is used in place of “Mister” or any other title acquired as part of his station or profession in life. “Worshipful Brother” is the respectful title for one who is or has been a Master of the

Lodge. In Masonry, all men are equal, and no man is singled-out for his wealth or position.

**Appendant Bodies.** There are other organizations of which you may have heard that require Masonic membership. The Royal Arch, Commandery, Scottish Rite and Shrine are but four of these. There are numerous other organizations that require Masonic membership as a prerequisite, all of which are optional. There are also appendant bodies that you, as a Mason’s Lady, may petition to join, such as the Order of the Eastern Star. A Mason may take advantage of any or all of these organizations, but on a strictly voluntary basis.

**Illness or Distress.** One of the principles of Freemasonry is to help those who are in distress, in any way possible, within the means of the Lodge. If a member becomes ill, or in need of any sort of assistance, the Lodge’s Master, Secretary, or one of the other officers should be notified. They will advise the membership of the illness or need and appropriate actions will be taken.

**Masonic Funeral.** Masonry has no insurance benefits. A Masonic funeral service will be performed if the family of a Master Mason requests it. Usually, a Masonic funeral service is performed in addition to a religious service. The Lodge will not ask to perform the Masonic funeral service, but rather will leave that to the will of the family. When the family advises the Lodge of the member’s death they should make known their wishes in regards to a Masonic funeral service.

*ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: The Grand Lodge of Virginia recognizes the contributions of the Division Provost for the Eastern Shore of Virginia, Division XII, and the District Education Officers for Districts 12 and 13 in preparing the basis of this pamphlet.*

## THE GRAND LODGE OF VIRGINIA, A.F. & A. M. EXTENDS A WELCOME TO A MASON’S LADY

### Forward

We extend a warm welcome to you as a Mason’s Lady. This little pamphlet, written especially for you, is intended to answer some questions you may have about Freemasonry.

## TO THE LADY OF THE NEW ENTERED APPRENTICE MASON

A man in your family has now received his First Degree in the Masonic Fraternity. After reading this booklet, if you have further questions, or if a question arises in the future, please feel free to write to me at the below listed Lodge address.

Sincerely,

\_\_\_\_\_, Master

\_\_\_\_\_ Lodge Number \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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