

*An  
Omnibus of Facts  
About  
Freemasonry*



*Prepared for use by the lodges and their members  
by the Iowa Committee on Masonic Education, Grand  
Lodge, A. F. & A. M., Iowa.*

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*This Booklet was prepared for the purpose of general Masonic information by the Iowa Committee on Masonic Education, Grand Lodge of Iowa, A.F.&A.M.*

*The Committee carries on its work continually throughout the year from its offices in The Iowa Masonic Library. It acts under immediate responsibility to the Grand Master, has its activities reported to and reviewed by the Grand Lodge at each annual Grand Communication, co-operates with the Grand Secretary and The Iowa Masonic Library, and receives counsel and advice from representatives from the Board of Custodians and the Committee on Lodges Chartered and Under Dispensation.*

*R. W. H. L. Haywood, of The Iowa Masonic Library, had a major share in the preparation of this booklet. The Committee*

## **AN OMNIBUS OF FACTS ABOUT FREEMASONRY**

The oldest of all known written Masonic documents is in the British Museum, London, England. It was written in 1390, and therefore proves that Masonic lodges were at work at least as far back as more than five centuries ago.

The oldest known existing Lodge Minutes which show the initiation of a candidate were made in northern England to record the admittance of Robert Moray, May 20, 1641.

During the Middle Ages in England a workman in any of the building crafts was called “mason.” Among masons was a special group with a fraternity of their own who were trained architects, and could design a great building as well as construct it. They were called “Freemasons.” Our own fraternity began with them.

By “operative” was meant a mason who worked on the actual building. “Speculative” meant the making of plans and designs and the knowledge of geometry. An “accepted mason” was one who did not make building

Regius Ms. Some 150 or so copies of such documents are still in existence. They are known *as* the Old Charges. A number of the emblems and symbols now in the ritual originated in those Old Charges.

For some three or four centuries the only architectural style used in either northern Europe or England was that which afterwards came to be called the Gothic. Some 1500 cathedrals were erected in that style by the Freemasons. For that reason they often are referred to in histories as “the Gothic builders,” or as “the cathedral builders.’

About 400 years ago lodges began to “accept” a larger number of non-operative members. By 1700 many lodges were wholly operative, many were wholly speculative ( or “accepted”), and the rest were a mixture of the two.

In 1717 a few old lodges in London, England, set up a new organization to be a center for all London Freemasons. To it they gave the name of “Grand Lodge.” It was the first in the world, was followed by other Grand Lodges in other countries, and was the beginning of that which became the Grand Lodge System. It had lodges as its members, instead of individual Masons. To the chief officer of it they gave

“Grand ( which meant chief) Master.”

This Mother Grand Lodge began to set up Provincial Grand Lodges in America *as* early as 1730, which was only thirteen years - after it itself was organized.

The evidence indicates that in 1717 the Craft thought not of degrees but of lodges; a candidate was initiated into a Lodge of Entered Apprentices and passed to a Lodge of Fellow Crafts. There was at that time no Lodge of Master Masons (“fellow” meant the same thing as “master”). It was added to the system about 1740. In late years Masons have come loosely to call those three lodges “degrees.”

Before 1717 each lodge kept on a pedestal a copy of the Old Charges to serve as constitution, charter, rules, and regulations. A candidate took his obligation on that document. Soon after it was organized in 1717 the new Grand Lodge discovered that it needed a version of the Old Charges for its own purposes. After two or three years of careful preparation it published such a document in 1723, in the form of a printed book, which it called the Book of Constitutions. All Grand Lodge Constitutions and Codes now in use in the United States descended from that book.

In 1751 a second Grand Lodge was or-ganized at London. It was called the Antient Grand Lodge. ( The

Before 1717 a lodge was self-constituted. If a few Masons could secure a copy of the Old Charges they could organize themselves into a lodge. The Grand Lodge of 1717 soon began to require of any new lodge that it should be warranted by the Grand Master, which meant that he himself approved of it. A few years later, lodges were required to secure from Grand Lodge a written charter.

When it was only eight years old the new Grand Lodge began to warrant lodges in Europe, and within another decade it was planting lodges in Asia, and in the islands of the Pacific. ( This rapid proliferation of Speculative Freemasonry throughout the whole world in so short a time is a phenomenon which no historian has ever yet been able fully to explain.)

The first Provincial Grand Master to be appointed in what is now the United States was Daniel Coxe. In 1730 he was given jurisdiction over Masons in New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania.

John Skene, a member of the lodge in Aberdeen, Scotland, came to America to live in 1684. As far as is now known the first native of America to

be made a Mason was Jonathan Belcher, who was admitted into a London lodge in 1704.

The oldest lodge record in America, according to present knowledge, is a minute book of a lodge in Philadelphia, dated in 1729.

The first *written* authorization given by the Mother Grand Lodge to any American was issued to Henry Price, of Boston, in 1733, who in that year constituted the first lodge in Boston, and on the same day set up a Provincial Grand Lodge, with himself as Provincial Grand Master. The present Grand Lodge of Massachusetts dates from that event.

The first Masonic book ever issued in America was an edition of the Book of Constitutions which Benjamin Franklin printed at Philadelphia in 1734. (The Iowa Masonic Library has one of the few existing copies of it.)

During the American Revolutionary period American lodges worked under authority from the Grand Lodge of England of 1717, the Grand Lodge of England of 1751, the Grand Lodge of Scotland, the Grand Lodge of Ireland,

and from a few sources in France and the West Indies.

The Masonic Fraternity as a whole did not take sides in the war of the American Revolution. There were as many lodges in the British army and navy as in the patriot forces. Some of the old Provincial Grand Lodges did not sever their ties with Great Britain until some years after the war; they could not see what a war had to do with Freemasonry, and were careful to violate no Landmarks.

During the Revolutionary War a movement was started to set up one Grand Lodge for the whole of America. That movement was continued until about the time of the Civil War, but never had a chance of success because there are too many Ancient Craft lodges and too many members in them to be governed by a single Grand Lodge and one Grand Master.

When George Washington was sworn in *as* the first President in 1789 he was Worshipful Master of his lodge at Alexandria, Virginia. The Bible on which he took his oath had been borrowed from the altar of St. John's Lodge, of New York City.

The Presidents of the United States known to have been Masons by documentary evidence have been: Washington, Monroe, Jackson, Polk, Buchanan, Johnson, Garfield, McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, Taft, Harding, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Harry S. Truman. There is some reason to believe that Jefferson and Madison were Masons but documentary proof is lacking ( although it may be discovered at any time ).

Of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence those known of a certainty to have been Masons were: Franklin, Hancock, Hall, Hewes, Hooper, Nelson, McKean, Paine, Penn, Stockton, Sherman, Thornton, Whipple, Walton, Witherspoon. ( Two or three others are doubtful. )

The oldest Masonic document thus far discovered in America is believed to be the Carmick Manuscript, belonging to the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, which bears across the top of it the date 1727.

Although American Masonry ( by which is meant Masonry in the United States) is the same as regular and duly-constituted Masonry elsewhere, it exists in this country in a form known as the American System. To it belong Ancient Craft Masonry, Capitular

Masonry ( Royal Arch), Cryptic Masonry ( the Council ), Templarism, and the Scottish Rite. These five Rites exist in a system of comity, and membership in any one of them is predicated on membership in an Ancient Craft lodge.

There are 49 Grand Lodges in the United States. Each of them is sole, sovereign, supreme, and independent within its own state ( including the District of Columbia). That in Freemasonry over which one of these Grand Lodges rules is called its Grand Jurisdiction. An official meeting called by one of them is named Grand Communication. Each one of them publishes each year a report of its own official activities, which is called ( usually ) Annual Proceedings. A Master Mason in good standing may demit or visit among these 49 Grand Jurisdictions.

That in the Ritual which cannot be writ-ten is called the Esoteric Work; that part of it which is printed in Monitors is called the Exoteric Work. In the early period of the Craft in the United States local lodges were permitted to modify the Work in many ways to please themselves. When this had grown to be anevil Grand Lodges began to enforce a single,

uniform Work among their lodges. This official version as used within a Grand Jurisdiction is called its Standard Work. Since each Grand Lodge adopted its own Standard Work, there are differences in detail from one state to another; these differences are called Divergences.

The first lodge in the Territory of Iowa was organized at Burlington under a Dispensation granted by the Grand Lodge of Missouri dated November 20, 1840. The lodge was organized on November 30th. A Charter was granted to it under date of October 20, 1841; in it the name was given as Des Moines Lodge, No. 41.

Iowa Lodge, at Bloomington ( now Muscatine ), though organized later, was chartered on the same date. On October 10, 1843, the Grand Lodge of Missouri granted Charters to Dubuque Lodge, No. 62, at Dubuque, and to Iowa City Lodge, No. 63, at Iowa City.

These four lodges held a preliminary Convention at Iowa City, on May 10, 1843. At a second Convention held in Iowa City on January 2, 1844, a Constitution was adopted, and Grand Officers were elected. On January 8, 1844, R...W. • Ansel Humphreys, District Deputy Grand Master, Grand Lodge of Missouri,

Immediately after he had been installed as the first Grand Secretary of the new Grand Lodge, Theodore Sutton Parvin began the movement which led to the formation of The Iowa Masonic Library. The Library was given a home of its own when the Main Wing of the present building was erected in Cedar Rapids in 1884. A second Wing, which more than doubled the original size, was constructed in 1913.

The Iowa Masonic Library has long had an active and important role in world Freemasonry. Notable among its many other services were its part in helping to launch the famous National Masonic Research Society, which published the first issue of its official journal, *The Builder*, in January, 1915; and its large share in founding the Masonic Service Association of the United States in 1918. During the past half century it has mothered a number of Masonic scholars and authors whose books are known and read the world over, among them being: Joseph E. Morcombe, Joseph Fort Newton, Charles Clyde Hunt, Jacob Hugo Tatsch, and H. L. Haywood.

Shortly after it began to work Under Dispensation the lodge at Burlington adopted a set of by-laws. It had these printed in 1841. This was the first Masonic

book ever published in Iowa. ( The Iowa Masonic Library has three copies.)

The first Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Iowa was Oliver Cock, Worshipful Master of Des Moines Lodge.

In 1844 the new Grand Lodge of Iowa had four lodges with 101 members. By 1864 it had 169 lodges with 5,416 members. In 1904 it had 504 lodges with 34,595 members. In 1924 it had 552 lodges with 83,871 members. As of May 20, 1948, it had 545 active lodges; as of January 1, 1948, its total membership was 84,802.

In 1948 there were in the 49 Grand Jurisdictions of the United States 15,205 lodges, with 3,284,068 members.

### *Other Booklets.*

The Iowa Committee on Masonic Education proposes to publish a series of booklets similar in size and design to the present one. Each one will be complete and independent. Other titles already available for distribution are:

THE STORY OF FREEMASONRY

IDEAS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR MASONIC  
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FIFTY WORDS IN FREEMASONRY

AN OMNIBUS OF FACTS ABOUT  
FREEMASONRY

*Copies of this booklet, up to three at one time, will be sent to any Mason from whom a request is received, promptly and without cost.*

*Lodges that may wish to mail a copy to each of their members may make special arrangements for quantities in units of fifty or one hundred. The prices charged represent the actual cost of printing and mailing.*

*The booklets published by the Committee are uniform in paper and dimensions with the present one. They cover a wide range of Masonic subjects. Any Mason will receive a list of titles upon request.*

*Address all communications to:*

The Iowa Committee on Masonic Education

The Iowa Masonic Library

815 First Avenue, S.E.

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THE IOWA COMMITTEE ON  
MASONIC EDUCATION

*This standing Committee of the Grand Lodge of Iowa, A.F.&A.M., maintains its own full-time secretary with staff and offices in the Iowa Masonic Library. It is prompt and willing at all times, without fee or other obligation, to lend its assistance to any Iowa Lodge or individual Mason in preparing programs, and planning for social and entertainment occasions.*

*Movies, music, home-talent plays, programs for special nights or for the lodge year, preparation of speeches, booking speakers, minstrels, educational methods for use within the lodge, study clubs, information on where to secure Masonic equipment and supplies, parties, lodge budgets, lodge methods, these are a few selected from a large number of special subjects upon which it can give its assistance to the members of the Craft in Iowa.*

*For information on the above subjects, or on other subjects similar to them, write to:*

The Iowa Committee on Masonic Education  
The Iowa Masonic Library  
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