

THE "MASTER'S LODGE" IN BOSTON

This month marks the 250th Anniversary of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. It was formed during that historic period between the Witchcraft trials and the start of the Revolutionary War, and has been a part of the history of our Nation. It has witnessed great strides in the development of society and history and particularly in the evolution of Freemasonry in the United States.

In April 1733, Henry Price received a deputation from the Grand Lodge of England appointing him Provincial Grand Master of New England. On July 30, 1733 he called together ten Masons known to him, read his deputation and organized the Provincial Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. Eighteen qualified Brethren were constituted that day into a Regular Lodge called The First Lodge in Boston (known as Saint John's Lodge since 1784). It is regarded as the oldest Regular and Duly Constituted Lodge in the Western Hemisphere. With the precedence of 1733 given by the Grand Lodge of England, The Grand Lodge of Massachusetts is considered the third oldest Grand Lodge in the world--preceded by the Grand Lodge of England organized in 1717, and the Grand Lodge of Ireland, dating from 1725.

The Bunch of Grapes Tavern on King Street, now State Street, was the first meeting place in Boston. Here Henry Price organized the first Provincial Grand Lodge in Massachusetts. Grand Lodge met in at least five other taverns or public halls and in several homes of individual Masons before a permanent Temple was erected. From this date in 1733, the Grand Lodge of Masons in Massachusetts has held its quarterly communications in no less than nineteen different locations.

It is probable that many Masons do not know that the lodges first established in New England did not confer the Master Mason degree. That they did not confer this degree is not surprising when we consider that regularly organized Freemasonry at that time was a new institution, and its single degree had but recently been developed into a system of three degrees.

Even as late as 1735 the Entered Apprentice's degree contained the most prominent form of initiation, and he who was an Apprentice was, for all practical purposes, a Freemason. It was not until repeated improvements by the adoption of new ceremonies and new regulations, that the degree of Master Mason took the place which it now occupies; having been confined at first to those who had "passed the chair."

No doubt the Master's degree was early looked upon as a desirable honor but as the two lodges of Boston did not have, or at least did not exercise the right of conferring the degree, some other way had to be devised by which suitable brethren could be admitted to its secret. Accordingly, a lodge was established for the express purpose of conferring the Master's degree. It was called the "Master's Lodge" and its records are in the archives of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. From those records we give to our readers selections which cover the beginning of the body and a considerable portion of its subsequent history.

Regulations for a Master's Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons

To be held at the Sun Tavern being at present the house of Brother Andrew Halliburton (durento placito) upon the first Tuesday in every month at six of the clock in the evening.

First, the proper officers to be elected: A Master, a senior and junior warden, two stewards, a secretary and a tyler, and to enjoy their several offices during the space of six months.

Second. The senior steward to be treasurer and the junior steward to keep an account of expenses so that the master and wardens shall not be interrupted in their business.

Third. No Brother to be raised master unless he goes through the Fellow Craft work to the approbation of this lodge, and such examination to be performed the lodge night before such candidate is to be balloted and raised always reserving an unanimous vote of the lodge to the contrary, and such candidate to pay forty shillings into the hands of the senior Warden.

Fourth. Each Brother who desires to become a member of this lodge shall pay down into the hands of the senior steward, twenty shillings towards defraying the expenses of the jewels and all other necessary ornaments for this lodge.

Fifth. Every member shall pay fifteen shillings a quarter, and every visitor seven shillings and six pence for the night, and such visitor not admitted to be clothed in this lodge.

Sixth. The senior steward shall make a demand of the visiting money, and receive the same before the lodge is closed.

Seventh. No Brother dwelling in this town to be admitted in this lodge unless he be a member of one or more regular lodge or lodges.

Eighth. Neither of the stewards shall resign their office unless they first deliver up to the master and wardens of this lodge a fair and true account of what cash they have received and paid by the authority of their said office, to the satisfaction of this lodge, and in case one or both of them of that trust upon their timely representing the same and accepting to the acceptance of the lodge, shall be discharged, and the lodge to fill up said vacancy by unanimous vote.

Ninth. No motion, applications, memorial or petition to the chair, nor any matter regulating the proceedings of the lodge upon offering the same to be determined immediately, but a certain day to be then set and fixed for the discussion thereof at the discretion of the members then present that received the same.

Tenth. That every member shall pay his quarter ages upon the first night of the quarter, and that the secretary give due notice thereof the lodge night before such payment is to be made.

We, the subscribers, being a committee appointed to make proper regulations for the M. R's. Lodge, have accordingly met this day, the 22nd of December, 1738 and do offer the above regulations to the consideration of the lodge.

Benj. Hallowell Thomas Oxnard John Overing.

The first meeting of the Masters' Lodge was held January 2, 1738. At this meeting the Regulations agreed upon December 22, 1738 were read and adopted.

The first volume of the records of the Master's Lodge begins January 2, 1738 and closes with the record of the meeting held November 6, 1761. The second volume begins December 1, 1761 and ends with the record of January 15, 1783. There is a record of 223 meetings in the first book, an average of about ten each year. During the first period recorded in the second book, the meetings were not as frequent, numerous entries being made that no meetings were held. Henry Price appears to be most prominent in support of the Masters' Lodge and was its Master until January, 1744.

The first work of the lodge was February 6, recorded as follows:

"Brother George Moncerieff, desiring to be raised was accordingly duly examined and being found a good Mason to our satisfaction was unanimously voted in and raised a master in due manner and form. "

October 5, 1750. Three dollars more given to the Grand Lodge for the same purpose.

Nov. 2, 1750. "Brother McDaniel proposed the Rt. Worshipful Lord Colvil, Dr. Allen and Mr. James Thompson. " Voted that these above proposed gentlemen shall be raised masters without the previous examination in the Fellow Crafts part, but to be no precedent for future raising.

Oct. 5, 1753. Committees appoint to amend the by-laws, recorded in full following the meeting of Dec. 7, 1753.

Jan. 4, 1754. Brother James Otis, attending was introduced, examined, approved and raised a Master in due form.

April 5, 1754. Voted that as we have not any stocks, our Rt. Worshipful Master, to beg the Grand Lodge to excuse our not sending charity.

Nov. 1, 1754. The lodge reported to be about L60 in debt and a committee appointed to pursue some measures to retrieve the lodge's bad circumstances.

April 4, 1735. Voted that ye Masters and Wardens attend ye Grand Lodge according to ye Grand Master's Summons, but having no stock we cannot send any charity.

Oct. 1, 1736. Voted that Brother Williams, ye Treasurer, be allowed what was stole from him, being L5, 13.6 O. T. and that he charge ye lodge for above sum in his account.

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