

The ANCIENT LANDMARKS OF MASONRY

Based upon the work of Mark Slaw

We've all heard about the Landmarks of Freemasonry. Indeed, in the charge at the end of the Degree of Master Mason, we are told that "The Ancient Landmarks of the Order committed to your care, you are carefully to preserve and never suffer them to be infringed, or countenance a deviation from the established usages and customs of the Fraternity." But these Landmarks are not clearly spelled out and, indeed, our Grand Lodge has never officially adopted a list of Landmarks.

So what are Landmarks and why are they important?

They are said to be the foundation on which Freemasonry stands; having existed since time immemorial. In other words, they are the core beliefs that define us and cannot be altered, repealed, or removed without doing major damage to the Fraternity.

Landmarks are supposed to be principles on which all Masons would agree. Unfortunately Masons and Grand Lodges have not unanimously agreed which items should be included on the list of things that are "universal, and cannot be altered, repealed, or removed."

However, there have been a number of lists of Masonic Landmarks. One of the most well-known was prepared by a famous Masonic author Albert Mackey in 1858. And it is instructive to hear what he includes on his list of the 25 fundamental principles or Landmarks of Freemasonry.

The first is the modes of recognition.

The second is the division of symbolic Masonry into three Degrees.

The third is the legend of the third Degree.

The fourth is the government of the Fraternity by a presiding officer called a Grand Master.

The fifth is the prerogative of the Grand Master to preside over

every assembly of the Craft.

The sixth is the prerogative of the Grand Master to grant Dispensations for conferring degrees at irregular times.

The seventh is the prerogative of the Grand Master to give dispensations for opening and holding Lodges.

The eighth is the prerogative of the Grand Master to make Masons at sight.

Nine is the necessity of Masons to congregate in Lodges.

Ten is the government of the Craft, when so congregated in a Lodge by a Master and two Wardens.

Eleven is the necessity that every Lodge, when congregated, should be duly tiled.

Twelve is the right of every Mason to be represented in all general meetings of the Craft and to instruct his representatives.

Thirteen is the right of every Mason to appeal from the decision of

his Brethren in Lodge convened, to the Grand Lodge or General Assembly of Masons.

Fourteen is the right of every Mason to visit and sit in every regular Lodge.

Fifteen is that no visitor, unknown as a Mason, can enter a Lodge without first passing an examination according to ancient usage.

Sixteen is that no Lodge can interfere in the business of another Lodge, nor give degrees to Brethren who are members of other Lodges.

Seventeen is that every Freemason is amenable to the Laws and Regulations of the Masonic jurisdiction in which he resides.

Eighteen is that qualifications of a candidate are that he shall be a man, un-mutilated, free born, and of mature age.

Nineteen is a belief in the existence of God.

Twenty is that, subsidiary to this belief in God, is the belief in a resurrection to a future life.

Twenty One is that a "Book of the Law," for example, the Holy Bible, shall constitute an indispensable part of the furniture of every Lodge.

Twenty Two is the equality of all Masons.

Twenty Three is the secrecy of the institution.

Twenty Four is the foundation of a Speculative Science, for purposes of religious or moral teaching.

And Twenty Five is that these Landmarks can never be changed.

Although the Grand Lodge of Virginia has not adopted these 25 Landmarks, they are substantially in accordance with our practice and teaching.

Although various Grand Lodges have disagreed with one or another of the Landmarks on Mackey's list they all have agreed to three Landmarks – and these are incorporated into the standards of recognition adopted by the Conference of Grand Masters to evaluate the regularity of a Grand Lodge.

As you know, each year the Conference of Grand Masters receives requests from various “new” Grand Lodges seeking recognition, and the Conference makes recommendations which are generally followed by our Grand Lodge as well as most other Grand Lodges.

The first standard of recognition is “Legitimacy of Origin.”

The second, is “Exclusive Territorial Jurisdiction, except by mutual consent and/or treaty.”

And the third, is “Adherence to the Ancient Landmarks specifically, a Belief in God, the Volume of Sacred Law as an indispensable part of the Furniture of the Lodge, and the prohibition of the discussion of politics and religion.

Of course we are concerned about more than just the organizational structure of Freemasonry and how Grand Lodges are organized, and so we need to consider also what might be called the personal Landmarks of a Master Mason.

These are the moral lessons and fraternal obligations taught in our ritual and which must ultimately reside in our hearts. These Landmarks should guide our thoughts, words, and actions, and

define for us what it means to be a Freemason and how to act like a Master Mason.

You remember that Grand Lodge asked each subordinate Lodge to consult with the Brethren and identify the ten attributes they believed best defined the behavior of a Master Mason. These Lodge submissions were tallied and integrated, and there was substantial agreement on the ten attributes, or Landmarks.

What were these ten “Landmarks?” They were that a Mason:

1. Believes in a Supreme Being;
2. Has Moral Values;
3. Exemplifies Honor and Integrity;
4. Believes in the Brotherhood of Man;
5. Fulfills Masonic obligations;
6. Practices Charity;
7. Exercises Brotherly Love;
8. Is committed to Family;
9. Demonstrates Patriotism; and,
10. Supports Widows and Orphans

We start with the view that morality must be grounded in a belief

in a Supreme Being, that there must be something to which we answer that is greater not only than ourselves, but greater than our Fraternity as well.

Critical to our brotherhood are the obligations we take on with respect to each other – from keeping a confidence and providing advice and guidance, to more tangible and material support. And these obligations extend to the wives and widows, children and orphans, of our Brethren. We are religious and patriotic, but our Lodges are non-sectarian and non-political.

And there is more. We seek to be virtuous and honorable men. We believe that every human being has a claim upon our good offices, and we see it as our duty to assist in making the world a better, more loving, and more compassionate place. So we search for truth, we support justice, we show toleration, and we act charitably.

In my view, these are a few of our **personal** Landmarks, some of the things that distinguish us from other social clubs or societies, and what makes our Fraternity so special and makes Freemasonry a force for good in the world.