

Another Look at the Trestleboard

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The legend of Hiram Abif, the celebrated Master Architect of King Solomon's Temple, is so familiar to Masons that at times it almost becomes an historical fact.

Secular history is silent on such a personage, and Biblical history simply relates, "The artificer whom the King of Tyre sent to King Solomon to assist in the completion and decoration of the Temple, whose mother was the widow of a man of Naphtali, his father a Tyrian, and on completion of the temple, he returned home." Hale and hearty, thank you very much.

Masonic legend reiterates an entirely different story. We well remember hearing, "Why is there confusion in the Temple?" King Solomon demanding, "Why are the Craft not at their labors?" And the answer, "Hiram Abif is missing and there are no designs upon the Trestleboard." No designs upon the trestleboard!

The Workmen of the Temple

Our ritual relates the legend of the Master Architect Hiram going into the temple at high twelve, when the Craft were called to refreshment, to offer up his adorations to Deity and to draw his designs upon the Trestleboard. The Master Architect Hiram was laying out the work for 153,300 workmen, three thousand, three hundred Masters or overseers of the work, eighty thousand Fellow Crafts in the mountains and in the quarries, and seventy thousand Enter Apprentices or bearers of burden. Quite an undertaking in any time, but three thousand years ago, before cellular phones, walkie talkies, and computers, and we are told that universal peace and tranquility prevailed during that important period.

The Forests of Lebanon

Have you ever wondered about the timbers, felled and prepared in the forests of Lebanon? The Biblical account in I Kings and II Chronicles tells us that thirty thousand men were conscripted to work in the forests of Lebanon, rotating ten thousand per month. All this over a period of seven years! More designs upon the trestleboard. What did the Master Architect write or scratch out on the trestleboard to oversee such a stupendous undertaking as building the magnificent Temple of King Solomon? We can only imagine. Did he draw new designs each day? Quite likely, as it was his custom to draw designs at "High Twelve", lunch time for the Craft!

The Masonic Trestleboard

While Speculative Masonry existed well before 1717, little is known of the first designs on the Masonic Trestleboard. Information is sketchy and provides little insight, particularly with the lapse of time. Some writers have found references to the Gothic Constitutions and an assemblage of Masons in York called by Prince Edwin in 926 A.D.

The Peasant's Revolt

The Peasants' Revolt in England in 1381 has been described as an uprising by upwards of one hundred thousand Englishmen, well-organized, marching on London against the injustices of the crown and those in power. Were they Masons? Author and Brother John Robinson thought so. What designs were on their trestleboard?

The Old Charges

Next on our Masonic trestleboard, we find the Old Charges. The first of these Old Charges is called the *Regius Poem*, circa 1390, only nine years after the Peasants' Revolt!

Brother Wallace McLeod, a Professor of Classics at Victoria College in the University of Toronto, made the *Old Charges* the subject of the Prestonian Lecture in 1986. They had been called the "Title Deeds of the Craft" earlier. One hundred thirteen copies are known

to be in existence today, but many other copies were destroyed, supposedly by Masons to prevent their falling into the wrong hands. Brother McLeod summarized the Old Charges thusly:

They all begin with an invocation,

The purpose and contents are stated, followed by a brief description of the seven liberal arts and sciences.

Next follows an extended history of Geometry, Masonry, and architecture, taking up half the text.

The manner of taking the oath is explained.

Next, an admonition against taking an oath falsely, "Take good heed that you may keep these charges, for it is a great peril for a man to foreswear himself upon a book." Perhaps a reference to The Great Light of Masonry, Zechariah 8:17 "and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the Lord."

Then, the Specific Charges, six in number:

- 1) "No man shall take upon him no lord's work, nor no other man's work, but that he know himself able and cunning to perform the same. Also that no Master take no work but that he shall take it reasonably."
- 2) "Ye shall be true liege men to the King without treason or falsehood, and also that every Mason keep true counsel of lodge and of chamber."
- 3) "You shall not take your Fellow's wife in villainy, nor desire ungodly his daughter nor his servant."
- 4) "And also that no Fellow slander another behind his back, to make him lose his good name or his worldly goods."
- 5) "And that no Fellow go into the town in the night time there as is a lodge of Fellows, without a Fellow with him, that may bear him witness that he was in honest places."
- 6) "And also that every Mason shall receive and cherish strange Fellows when they come over the country, and set them to work; and if he have no stones for him, he shall refresh him with money to the next lodge." Six very simple rules to live by, and lastly, an oath by the aspirant to keep these charges.

While the Old Charges were most likely provided for the use of Operative Masons, they found use later in Speculative Masonry when the Constitutions of 1723 were written, and the Old Charges were included in these constitutions almost verbatim. The Old Charges provided direction for Masons for hundreds of years. They also provided the necessary initiation ceremonies. They were, in essence, a way of life for Masons, a very good and complete trestleboard, and incidentally, in use in some jurisdictions even today. Brother McLeod has performed a yeoman's job of researching and writing this paper and I would suggest it for further study on the Old Charges. (See *The Grand Design*, Anchor Communications, VA.)

The Age of Enlightenment

A book entitled *Living the Enlightenment* by Margaret Jacob details many Masonic Lodge activities in Merry Olde England, as well as the Continent during the last part of the Seventeenth Century and the Eighteenth Century. The author states, "The culture of Masonry possessed certain characteristics, and was most frequently progressive and reformist."

The lodge members, often royalty and the educated, being a part of the Age of Enlightenment, discussed current events, their daily lives and activities and ways to improve their lot.

Ironically, members often were on both sides of issues. Some members favored, and backed the monarchy, others favored more democratic types of government, and this was true of many issues. An excellent book to follow Masonic activities during the Age of Enlightenment, and to see Masonry's impact at this time.

The First Grand Lodge

June 24, 1717 is the day recognized as the beginnings of the Grand Lodge of England, the Mother Grand Lodge of the World. Four lodges met at the Goose and Gridiron

Alehouse in London, formed the Grand Lodge and elected Anthony Sayer, one of their members, as the first Grand Master. It was likely a very modest start, little fanfare, and even little recorded of this auspicious occasion. In *FREEMASONRY, A CELEBRATION OF THE CRAFT*, we read, "For the first three years of its existence Grand Lodge simply provided an opportunity of an annual social gathering of the London Lodges."

Dr. James Anderson, a Presbyterian minister and lodge member, although it is not known when he became a Mason, was commissioned in 1721 by the newly formed Grand Lodge to write a constitution. This constitution included a history of the world, laws for the Craft, the Old Charges, and lastly, general regulations for the Grand Lodge. It was adopted in 1723. Basically, it was the same, designs on the trestleboard that had served earlier generations, plus the General Regulations for the Craft that had been adopted in 1721. A complete and comprehensive trestleboard to guide the Craft as Speculative Masonry developed.

Dr. Anderson has received much acclaim for this Constitution, however the General Regulations had been written in 1720 by the then Grand Master, George Payne, and approved by the Grand Lodge in 1721. The Old Charges were simply handed down, as was a section on world history. Bro. Lionel Vibert, a Past Master of Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, authored a book, *ANDERSON'S CONSTITUTIONS OF 1723*, published in 1924. The author not only published the Constitutions of 1723, but added his own commentary and aspects on historical events that lead to the Constitutions of 1723.

Vibert comments, "Dr. Anderson made one big change from the Old Charges when he removed definite religious requirements, i.e. a belief in the Trinity (State religion), to a 'Religion in which all men agree, leaving their particular opinion to themselves.' It was a far more serious matter that he was instrumental in removing from the literature of the Craft all definite religious allusions; but as we now see, the Craft in fact owes its universality today to its wide undenominationalism and in this respect he builded better than he knew."

Before Dr. James Anderson wrote the Constitutions of 1738, shortly before his death, the Grand Lodges of Ireland (1731), Massachusetts (1733), Scotland (1736), and South Carolina (1737) had been established, and ultimately, each with its own constitution.

A Cluttered Trestleboard

Since those early days of Speculative Masonry, not only has there been a proliferation of constitutions, amendments, and rituals, but various and numerous codes and enumerated landmarks have been developed.

Consider this, is the trestleboard getting cluttered? For over one hundred years, Masonry prospered, the two Grand Lodges in England united, Masonry spread through Europe and abroad without the myriad of codes, enumerated landmarks, and rituals. Just how many designs on our trestleboards do we need to erect our temples?

The Ancient Landmarks

Other than a reference to "carefully observing the landmarks" in 1717 by the newly formed Grand Lodge of England, no attempt was made to enumerate them until 1817, one hundred years later when the Wigan Grand Lodge adopted a list of fifteen landmarks. The Wigan Grand Lodge was short-lived and the list passed into obscurity too.

The *AHIMAN REZON* states, "The Landmarks of Free Masonry are those marks of distinction by which we are enabled to prove our rights (r-i-g-h-t-s) and privileges, and also those ancient and universally established usages, which, having existed unchanged from time immemorial."

John Simons defines landmarks as, "The form and essence of the society." Masonic scholars agree that the Landmarks of Masonry are "old, permanent, universal, notable, and immutable."

Dr. George Oliver, an influential Mason, writer and publisher of Masonic books from 1823 to 1863 made a special study of the "Ancient Landmarks", enumerating them several times, each time differently. Dr. Oliver's first list of landmarks included sacred items such as the Creation, the Fall, the Vision of Jacob, the Construction of the Tabernacle, and the Contest of Jephtha with the Ephraimites, and others. Dr. Oliver's last list of landmarks included items such as 1) Elementary, 2) Inductive, 3) Ritual, 4) personal, 5) Cardinal Points, 6) Scientific, 7) Historical, 8) Typical, 9) Doctrinal, 10) Practical, and 11) Obsolete. Quite different from what we think of as the landmarks of Masonry.

According to *COILS MASONIC ENCYCLOPEDIA*, Dr. Oliver wound up in confusion, and surely we agree. *Could* the "landmarks of Masonry" be enumerated? *Should* the landmarks be enumerated?

So much for attempts to list the landmarks in England - the birthplace of Freemasonry. There was little interest, little desire, so the landmarks remained landmarks, but not enumerated by Mason or body of Masons.

The Grand Lodge of Missouri appointed a committee in 1850 to ascertain what the landmarks were. They referred to Anderson's Constitutions of 1723 and adopted a resolution as such.

The Grand Lodge of Minnesota made the next attempt to enumerate the Ancient Landmarks in 1856. This Grand Lodge, still in its infancy, a mere three years old, enumerated twenty six landmarks, the only list of twenty six.

Rob Morris of Kentucky published a list of seventeen landmarks, also in 1856.

Albert Mackey released his list of twenty five Ancient Landmarks in 1858, and ignoring previous lists, unequivocally declared his list was first.

Albert Pike, a contemporary of Albert Mackey allowed only three of Mackey's list as actually being ancient and landmarks of the Craft, and we read in Mackey's own writings, *MACKEY'S JURISPRUDENCE OF FREEMASONRY*, "The Foundations of Masonic Law are to be found in the Landmarks or *the Unwritten Law*."

The Masonic Service Association published a booklet in 1932, *Ancient Landmarks of Freemasonry*. It was updated in 1978 and again in 1983. This booklet indicates that seventeen United States jurisdictions use Mackey's list either by adoption or by custom.

Thirteen United States jurisdictions developed their own list and range from Michigan with three ancient landmarks, Minnesota with twenty six, Nevada with thirty nine, and Kentucky with fifty four.

Four jurisdictions use the Old Charges, and sixteen jurisdictions, including Virginia, have not bothered to enumerate any list. Jurisdictions outside of the United States have wisely chosen not to enumerate any lists of landmarks. Right Worshipful Brother Benjamin Franklin expressed it so well, "The government that governs least, governs best."

It is agreed among many Masonic scholars that most of the enumerated ancient landmarks are neither ancient nor landmarks. They had arrived at the Age of Permanence, and cluttered up the trestleboard in the process. Certainly Mackey's twenty fifth landmark, "These landmarks can never be changed" hardly qualifies as a landmark of Masonry.

Section XXXIX (39) of Anderson's Constitutions provides, "Every Annual Grand Lodge has an inherent Power and Authority to make new Regulations, or to alter these, for the real benefit of this ancient Fraternity: Provided always that the Old Land-Marks be carefully preserved."

No "Old Land-Marks" were enumerated in the Old Charges. Perhaps their initiation ceremonies included references to the landmarks of Masonry and no more was necessary.

The Present Charge

But the past is only prologue. Masonry through the years developed into a giant for all that is good, all that is just, right, and true, and we owe a huge debt of gratitude to those who went before us. The charge before us now is to continue Masonry, a vibrant and viable organization on into the future.

Today, United States Masonry is struggling to find its place in society. Not only is it stifled by a morass of constitutions, codes, conventions, and landmarks, but the ritualists are holding firm to their belief that Masonry consists of memorizing degrees and lectures, those interested in charity are pushing for huge endowments, others have their own agendas, while some have a preoccupation with mere numbers, further degrees and activities.

The wide variances of constitutions, codes, conventions, customs and landmarks between the various jurisdictions leads to confusion in the temple. Which is right and which is wrong?

We have lost our way in this quagmire partially due to an obsession, a love affair with permanence. Is it possible we have lost sight of the real purpose of Masonry too?

From the CompuServe Masonic Forum, "If you want to worship God, go to a church; if you want to do charitable works, go to work for a charity. Masonry does neither of these things as well as those organizations, and yet more. It helps you develop the ability to worship, to be charitable, to be better as a man and a Mason." Does Freemasonry have a place in today's society?

Freemasonry Defined

If we were to ask our Brothers, "What is Freemasonry", we would receive almost as many different answers as questions asked.

THE AMERICAN COLLEGE DICTIONARY on Freemasonry, "A member of a widely distributed secret order, having for its object mutual assistance and the promotion of brotherly love among its members." Still misses the mark, and very definitely not a secret order.

Johnston in *MASONRY DEFINED*, "Masonry, according to the general acceptance of the term, is an art founded on the principles of geometry, and directed to the service and convenience of mankind." To the serious student of Freemasonry, it becomes a way of life, pursuing the hidden treasures, living the lessons learned, enjoying the company of Brother Masons, and helping the less fortunate.

In the United States our society is governed by a constitution guaranteeing life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Even so, there are many individuals who would wish to impose their beliefs and opinions on others, even when in the very smallest minority, while other individuals have no regard at all for others' lives, liberty, or the pursuit of happiness. Still others look for reasons to excuse those who have little regard for their fellow human beings. This often results in moral poverty and bankrupts society. Masonry teaches us toleration - toleration of others opinions and beliefs.

While society does change, albeit slowly, generations do tend to have certain general characteristics. Yet there are those in any generation that subscribe to a better way, being the best you can be, working together for the common good, and family values. Freemasonry must seek out those who are "Masons in their hearts", those who would live by the teachings and tenets of Freemasonry to become members, to carry on our traditions.

The Old Charges taught the initiates to be responsible for their actions, to be kind and considerate of others. Certainly these six specific charges are among the real, but not enumerated landmarks of Freemasonry.

Let's repeat them once again - simply and paraphrased:

A good work ethic,
Be true to your country,
Do not covet your Brother's wife, daughter or mother,
Do not slander your Brother,
Keep good company, and
Help the needy.

Freemasonry meeting society's needs and desires.

With all the codes, conventions, and constitutions in Freemasonry today, and the prohibitions, hindrances, and barriers that come with them, it is indeed difficult to sort out the good, the honorable from the bad, the faulty. We must remember, rules and regulations can outlive their original purpose.

Constitutions, codes, by-laws, and even rules need to be re-evaluated constantly. Amendments are often added which only lead to further confusion, sometimes in conflict with other sections of the code.

Imagine the confusion that would exist in the United States today if the originators of our country's constitution had added a clause stating, "These principles are the rules of government and policy that may never be altered or disturbed."

I have no quarrel with the provisions of the enumerated landmarks, but do not believe they should be accorded the status of landmark, and may well be placed in other sections of codes. Generations of Masons lived quite well without enumerating the landmarks of Masonry. Why then did succeeding generations feel the need to enumerate, and worse, enact them into codes for "all time?"

Nothing stifles initiative more than hearing, "but we've never done that before!" More downers include, "Is it in the code," or "What do the Ancient Landmarks say?" Those

interested in doing things differently, in trying new ways and activities, often find it's easier to get forgiveness than to get permission.

As Freemasonry enters the Twenty First Century, changes will abound. The computer and the various linkages throughout the world is already making changes and is sure to engender many more. The world that many jurisdictions involved themselves with from their inception is gone and in its place are instant communications and exchanges of ideas with other jurisdictions, including those not recognized.

Not many years ago, this would have been tantamount to unMasonic conduct, now Freemasonry is on the threshold of living up to its basic tenet, a universal Brotherhood.

Masonic Education

Masonic education, or more especially, the lack of it, has long been an Achilles heel, and is now on the rebound. Many up-to-date Masonic books and videos are available, well-written, interesting, certain to enlighten the Craft, and attract others to Masonry. Masonry in the past depended on Masons to "spread the word", to tell others of its good effects. One of the saddest things I can think of is hearing a son at his father's wake, repeating, "I didn't know my father was a Mason!" It is indeed sad when fathers do not inform their own sons about Masonry, its benefits, and how to become a Mason.

Many Masons do not tell their friends what Masonry is. My contention is that they do not know enough about Masonry to know what to say to others. They fear telling the secrets of Masonry.

All lodges should have a program for the new members, those really excited about Masonry, what few secrets there are, and more especially, what can be told to their families, friends, and co-workers. All Masons should have a knowledge of Masonry so they can tell others of "its good effects."

However, many are bound by a fear that they will say "the wrong thing." Codes and landmarks may be violated. Again, the trestleboard has become so cluttered, it is strangling the very organization it was designed to serve.

Freemasonry in the past included in its membership the leaders of society, the movers and shakers. I fear that there is more shaking than moving now. Freemasonry in recent years has become counter-cultural and as such, often ignored, discredited, questioned, and rejected. Freemasonry can once again be a force for good, it can help the individual in the pursuit of happiness, self-improvement, and a better life. Freemasonry can relate to those in society who are searching for a better way, a better life, but changes in procedures and activities are necessary.

Certainly, the Old Charges didn't have restrictions such as regularity, clandestine, recognition, etc. Let's go back a few hundred years, give up micro-managing, give up rules handed down to us by those wishing to impose their small and petty beliefs on future generations.

Remember, change is taking place whether we realize it or not, whether we are involved or not. Why not get involved in making the "right changes." I'm not going to repeat a long list of ills; most, if not all of us have been to boring meetings, poorly done ritual, witnessed little commitment, empty sidelines, and shrinking membership lists. We must promote and encourage our members to participate, get involved, use modern management techniques to apply the teachings of our gentile Craft to today's society. New members often have fresh ideas, let's listen to them. Let's help those who are willing to try new ideas instead of saying, "But we've never done that!"

Let's clean off the cluttered trestleboard and put on some designs mutually useful for the workmen in building their temples today.