

**Research Into The True Name Of The Grand Lodge Of
Virginia, A.F. & A.M.**

by
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Before I begin my research paper, I want to tell you what sparked my interest in doing this particular research. In February of 1988 I received my Past Grand Masters Certificate from the Grand Lodge of Virginia. It is beautifully framed and gives all of the dates and information concerning my serving as Grand Master in Virginia in 1987. I was somewhat surprised to find engraved under the Grand Master's jewel the words "Ancient York Masons of Virginia."

A careful search of the records of the Grand Lodge of Virginia seems to indicate that it has never officially adopted a name for itself. The present name was apparently first coined and used by our Illustrious Brother, Dr. John Dove, for many years the Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge. The name, however, does not agree with that which was used when our Grand Lodge was founded at Williamsburg in 1778 or in the years immediately following. In 1959 Most Worshipful Archer Bailey Gay recommended in his Annual Address that the incoming Grand Master appoint a committee to study the earliest available records and to report their findings to the 181st annual communication of the Grand Lodge as to the name first adopted by our founding fathers. It was further recommended that upon receipt of the report the Grand Lodge adopt an official name.

Following this recommendation, Grand Master Earl Stanley Wallace assigned this research problem to Virginia Research Lodge No. 1777 and the Master of that Lodge, Dr. James Noah Hillman, appointed a committee to begin the research. Later the Grand Master designated the personnel with some changes as a select committee in two capacities: 1. as a select

committee of the Grand Lodge, and 2. as a research committee of Virginia Research Lodge.

The committee reported in 1960 at the 181st Grand Annual Communication and outlined certain findings. It made no recommendations however but requested further time to make a wider search into old records, charters and particularly into Grand Lodge Proceedings. The extra time was granted and the committee made an in-depth report at the 182nd Annual Communication in 1961.

The committee found that many names have been used from time to time since its foundation in 1778 by the various Grand Secretaries, Grand Masters and other dignitaries as the name for this Grand Lodge.

They found that if minor differences, such as the interchangeable use of the words "State" and "Common-wealth" are eliminated, the differences consist essentially in the use of three phrases: "Free and Accepted Masons", "Ancient York Masons" and "Ancient Free and Accepted Masons." They even found the phrase "and Masonic Jurisdictions thereunto belonging", which are words used by Pennsylvania, was also used by Virginia apparently as a part of the Grand Lodge name.

As an illustration of the changes which have taken place over the years in our Grand Lodge, the title pages of the printed proceedings of the Grand Lodge from 1778 to the present show several variations. For the first ninety-four years the Grand Secretaries were content with using the simple title "Grand Lodge of Virginia" on the title pages.

It appears that in 1871 the words "Ancient Free and Accepted Masons" were used for the first time in Virginia. In 1877, without any apparent action taken on the subject by Grand Lodge, this is abruptly changed to "Ancient York Masons."

In 1877 the Grand Secretary reverted to the phrase "Ancient Free and Accepted Masons." These words were used in the full title of our Grand Lodge until the proceedings of 1918 when the word "Commonwealth" is substituted for "State." The committee reported that it had personal contact with members who remembered when that change was made.

The Committee pointed out the importance of remembering that those men who participated in the early days of our Grand Lodge included the best legal minds on the continent. John Blair and John Marshall graced the Supreme Court of the United States. Edmund Randolph was Attorney General both of the United States and the Commonwealth of Virginia and later became the Governor of Virginia and Secretary of State of the United States. James Mercer was on our own Court of Appeals and had been counsel to many eminent Virginians including George Washington. The remaining 18th century Grand Masters included many of great eminence. No one can examine the records without being impressed with the care with which they apparently approached their task. They obviously were not misled by the modern theory that the Grand Lodge is a sovereign body. The committee calls special attention to this because these men were leaders of the legal profession at a time when form was of vastly greater importance than it is today. It's quite obvious that they firmly believed in the sovereignty of the Craft. Thus their energies were directed in the first instance to the election of a Grand Master on the same grounds that Virginia in the political field declared its right to erect an Independent Commonwealth. In each case they proceeded on the theory of popular sovereignty. Although Thomas Jefferson was not a Free Mason, the legal theory expressed in the

Declaration of Independence was no different from the theory back of the revolutionary assertion of the right to separate Masonic independence.

Our founding fathers had a name for the Craft in which sovereignty resided. It was called by various names but through the years the commonest was "The Ancient and Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons." Sometimes this is abbreviated. For instance, the inscription on the "Shockoe Creek" cornerstone in Richmond, laid by John Marshall, describes him as "Grand Master of the Society of Free Masons." The earlier charters invariably described the Grand Master as "Grand Master of the Ancient and Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons."

Thus in order to clear up our thinking we must return to first principles and remember that the Craft is sovereign and that this sovereignty is exercised through two instrumentalities, the Grand Master and the Grand Lodge. Virginia, by the way, so declared in effect at the Grand Lodge of 1955. This phrase "Ancient and Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons" was used by every 18th century Grand Master. The election of John Blair was not by a Grand Lodge but by a "Convention" and is the only instance in which there was a direct exercise of sovereignty. The Convention was the Ancient and Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons in action. They elected a Grand Master and the Grand Master formed a Grand Lodge.

There appears to be no historical basis for the use of the word "Ancient" in our title. The word Ancient belongs in the name of the Society where it implies antiquity and not ancestry. Use of any of these terms by Freemasons lies deep in Masonic history. At the time of the establishment of the first Grand Lodge in 1717 the description of "Free and Accepted Masons" was accepted by everyone. The Grand Lodge of England continued thus for almost a century. Meanwhile by a seceding movement the so-called "Ancients" arose claiming to practice what they were

pleased to call "Ancient York Masonry" as distinguished from earlier Grand Lodge practices. Actually there was little difference between the two groups but this distinction in name continued for some decades with the ludicrous situation of the younger group being described as "Ancients" and the members of the premier Grand Lodge of the world being labeled "Moderns." These distinctions ended in England when the two contending Grand Lodges combined to form the United Grand Lodge of England under the name of "Ancient Free and Accepted Masons." At this time our Grand Lodge was actually thirty-seven years old.

A similar division of Grand Lodges existed in parts of America. In Massachusetts there were Grand Lodges of both persuasions and they logically combined the two terms upon their union and called themselves "Ancient Free and Accepted." By a strange irregularity, Pennsylvania, which is wholly ancient in its origin, does not carry this adjective into its title. Pennsylvania and Massachusetts however afforded no precedent for Virginia. Pennsylvania was wholly ancient and Massachusetts was of mixed origin. The lodges which united in electing John Blair were of English, Scottish and provincial origins but devoid entirely of Ancient heritage. It's true that one lodge in (Winchester,) Virginia in 1778 was of Ancient stock through a charter from the Provincial Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania but this lodge took no part in the election of John Blair and did not receive a Virginia charter until almost three decades later. Two other lodges of Ancient origin were also received into our fellowship but this was apparently without any concession on the part of our Grand Lodge. (Alexandria & ??) Certainly the Freemasonry of John Blair, Edmund Randolph and John Marshall was wholly "Free and Accepted." Our own proceedings show that John Blair was installed as Grand Master of "Free and Accepted Masons."

If the 18th century Masons were led by great Masonic scholars we must also recognize that the early days of the 19th century were years in which there was lesser knowledge of Masonic law and history. While the contention across the seas between the original Grand Lodges and the so-called "Ancients" was at its height, Freemasons on this side of the Atlantic were mostly unaware of the real merits of the contest. In the first half of the 19th century and after the formation of the United Grand Lodge of England, the words "Modern" and "Ancient" on this side of the Atlantic continued as adjectives without much understanding of their origin. Indeed our own Grand Lodge on one occasion so far misconceived the origin of these words that they cautioned their own brethren to have no relations with "Modern Masons" or to admit them to their Lodge. Yet the very Grand Lodge that made this declaration was composed wholly of so-called "Moderns." Gould in his scholarly "History of Freemasonry" was obviously puzzled by this and comments as follows: "It is safe to presume that the matter was not understood and that those commonly called "Modern Masons" were supposed to be of recent as well as spurious origin."

It may be argued that Virginia Masonry is more Scottish than English in origin. This is true but only introduces new evidence in favor of the term "Free and Accepted" because Scottish lodges then and now are "Free and Accepted." Until the "Ancient" heresy arose no other term was known. Peyton Randolph, the Provincial Grand Master of Virginia was a "Free and Accepted Mason."

The reasons for the introduction of the term "Ancient" as a special kind of Freemasonry are veiled in history. It seems quite clear however, that the ritualists had their part. Cross and Cushman were largely responsible for the present ritual. They are in the tradition of Webb and Preston. These men used the catchwords of the "Ancients" and to them we owe the phrase "Ancient York Ritual" although degrees were

unknown to the operative craft and were invented by the Free and Accepted Masons in the Grand Lodge of England. The Cross and Cushman ritual with variations and additions is used by practically every Grand Lodge in the United States except Pennsylvania. The publications and monitors of this ritual generally described it as "Ancient" or "Ancient York." It seems probable that this was the principle source of contamination.

The 1961 committee in summarizing their report found: (1) that the lodges that took part in the convention that elected John Blair were wholly composed of Free and Accepted Masons, that he was installed as the Grand Master of such, that our early records and charters do not justify the use of the word "Ancient" as describing Masonry as practiced in Virginia. (2) that the frequent changes in the designation of the Grand Lodge were made without authority. (3) that the Grand Lodge should properly be described as an agency of the Craft and that the Grand Master should be described as the head of the Craft. (4) It recommended that the Grand Lodge discard all innovations and return to the faith of their fathers. And (5) it specifically recommended that the body of the Craft hereinafter be known as the "Ancient and Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons;" that the Grand Lodge should be known as the "Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of the Ancient and Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons in Virginia."

This committee was composed of Judge Hugh Reid as Chairman, A. Douglas Smith, Jr., Archer B. Gay and Carl Frank Wood. The report of the committee was read by Most Worshipful Hugh Reid but, as you may have guessed, on motion, was NOT ADOPTED by the Grand Lodge.

From that day to this I can not find the subject of the correct name of our Grand Lodge being discussed during a Grand Lodge meeting and recorded in the proceedings. More research needs to be done on the many things that have been voted on by the delegates

at a Grand Lodge meeting and never recorded in the Virginia Methodical Digest. As time permits, I hope to continue my research and perhaps report at another time on whatever I find.