

Taverns, Spirits, Coffee Shops & Freemasons
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Prologue

There are many renown venues throughout Masonic history, such as the Goose and Gridiron Tavern, Shepherd's Tavern, Apple Tree Tavern, Green Dragon Tavern, Tun Tavern, Indian King Tavern, Rising Sun Tavern, Christiana Campbell's Tavern, and so many more. So, history is clear that the original Masonic temples were erected from within the smokey walls of a public house, or as one wise Pennsylvania Brother reports it, "From Taverns to Temples"¹.

But it wasn't just taverns that filled the lore of Masonic history. Masons also had their coffee shop conspiracies, tea parties, prison parties, as well as sedition and sanctions, revolutions and resistances, and while this paper has many opportunities to present these events, as a matter of timeliness, we will only delve into a few just to give the readers or listeners a little taste of our Masonic legacy.

TAVERNS: THE OLD MASONIC TEMPLES

John Jones' Tavern

The Masonic Lodge at Fredericksburg (now designated as Fredericksburg Lodge No. 4) held its first meeting on September 1, 1752, at John Jones' Tavern². John Jones passed away in 1752 and his widow, Barbara took over running the small 2-floor tavern with several beds and six tables and invited the first Masons to have their Lodge meetings there.

On November 4, 1752 (two months later), a young local gentleman by the name of George Washington would be initiated into Freemasonry during a Lodge meeting at this very tavern. The Masons continued to meet at the Jones Tavern until Barbara passed away in 1756, and it is believed that their regular meetings would begin to be moved about to different locations during that period.

The Jones children struggled to maintain the property until 1760 when at Washington's invitation, Col. Hugh Mercer would resign his commission in Pennsylvania and moved to Fredericksburg to renew his medical practice, and there he would contract with the Jones' to

¹ (Comfort 2021)

² (Walker 2002)

lease their property to convert it into his apothecary shop. Brother Mercer would become a Mason in 1761³.

Unfortunately, the original Jones' Tavern / Mercer Apothecary was destroyed during a fire in 1807. Today, we know the John Jones Tavern to be located on Caroline Street, just two lots down from the restored Mercer Apothecary Shop across the intersection of Amelia Street (see map), on an open lot where today there is no standing structure (roughly 1104 Caroline Street)⁴.

The “Sedition Sessions” at George Weedon’s Tavern

While there are no known records of Fredericksburg Lodge ever using Brother George Weedon’s Tavern (also known as the Gordon Tavern, his father-in-law) as a Masonic venue, it is recorded that Lodge members were often present during social and personal time and this tavern was recorded as the location for these Masons’ “sedition sessions” just prior to the American Revolution. It was also at this tavern where Thomas Jefferson wrote the very first statute on religious freedom⁵.

Being an early sympathizer of the war, on one occasion, it was reported by an English tourist in Fredericksburg, that he made note of George Weedon as “very active and zealous in blowing the seeds of sedition” but reported Hugh Mercer as “ever the gentleman” and could not understand the relationship between the two⁶. One master of Fredericksburg Lodge, Henry Mitchell, often attended these sessions, until it was discovered that he was a Loyalist. He fled Fredericksburg for New York before the Lodge members could confront him⁷.

Tun Tavern: The Few, the Proud ...

Another meeting place for the Masons of Philadelphia was the Tun Tavern. It was here that the United States Marine Corps would claim as their place of birth, but prior to this and even afterwards, it was a hub of Masonic activity for St. John’s Lodge No. 1. Benjamin Franklin, a Provincial Grand Master, was the tavern’s most prominent figure and it was certainly known to be the place where he created the Pennsylvania militia in 1756.⁸

³ (George Washington's Mount Vernon 2022)

⁴ (The Freelance Star 1999)

⁵ (National Park Services 2002)

⁶ (Smyth 1784)

⁷ (The George Washington Foundation 2017)

⁸ (Kestrel 2017)

On November 10, 1775, the Second Continental Congress commissioned Brother Samuel Nicholas to be the first Marine Commandant of the new nation and Brother Nicholas appoints Tun Tavern owner and proprietor, Brother Robert Mullan, to be their chief recruiter. The two new battalions of Marines would go on to be deployed on naval vessels as sharpshooters.⁹ Tun Tavern had a reputation for the finest beers in Philadelphia and still exist to this day.

SPIRITS OF THE ANCIENT TEMPLES

The “Two Worthies” of the Rising Sun Tavern

Another location for Masonic meetings in Fredericksburg was the Rising Sun Tavern¹⁰. In 1792, Brother Gustavus Wallace purchased the tavern from Charles Washington (George's youngest brother), who moved to Charles Town, WV (which was named after him). This tavern was used for special occasions (i.e., St. Johns Day celebration) until 1812 when it became the Lodge's regular home after their home at the Market House was torn down. The Masons would meet there until their permanent home at 803 Princess Anne Street was constructed in 1816.

In the early days of this tavern, the members of the Lodge would always ensure there were two “worthies” present during special occasions, but they were never permitted to enter the Lodge. The brethren designated them as Jachin and Boaz, and while very popular, Jachin and Boaz would never be allowed to go beyond the anteroom. The reason for this was because Jachin and Boaz were both large demijohns; one filled with Jamaican rum, the other with Holland gin¹¹.



⁹ (Doylestown Lodge 2018)

¹⁰ (Virginia Tourism Corporation 2023)

¹¹ (Brown 1958)

The brethren would always keep an old-fashioned sugar loaf in between them. Lodge members, John Goolrick and Sylvanus Quinn both reported that, “*Some of the brothers were content to tarry in the ante room and never got any farther*”. Another point to note, which was to the pleasure of the members of Fredericksburg Lodge, was that there was never a documented incident of intemperance during these moments of social "interaction"¹².

The Jail fest of 1754

While some of our brothers were still in harm's way at the frontier during the French and Indian War, many of our local brethren held civic offices and were using their offices during this time to suppress a local tyrant within government as well. One of these stories was recorded as being told by the sheriff in Fredericksburg, pertaining to what is now called the “*Two Merry Masons*”, whose names were Dr. John Sutherland and Robert Duncanson¹³.

These two good-natured Masonic brothers came to Fredericksburg in the 1740's and they were self-sufficient but likewise, they held no real civic responsibilities. They were constantly itching for good-natured excitement but would often find before the courts and while they were tolerated with much amusement by most of the justices of the court, they quickly obtained the resentment and animosity of one, Chief Magistrate Benjamin Grymes.

Brother Sutherland especially enraged Judge Grymes, who issued a warrant for him “as a person of infamous character”. The other justices defended Sutherland, but Judge Grymes was a man of vicious disposition and a superiority complex and because of this, there were many who would undermine Grymes' order just to spur his overzealous rage. One such person was Brother Charles Dick, who as Sheriff would ignore these warrants, as did the other justices and this would enrage Justice Grymes even more.

Brother Duncanson was not as fortunate as Brother Sutherland because he found himself removed from Judge Grymes' courtroom and thrown into prison until he could post bond for his good behavior. Despite this setback, Brother Duncanson made the most of his incarceration and turned it into a party. An enraged Grymes reported of the event to the Lord Governor witnessing that “*with sundry others to carry table, chairs, and liquor into the gaol (jail), they there revel till late into the night.*”

¹² (Goolrick 1906)

¹³ (Rappahannock Gazette 2008)

There is no known record of any reprisal for this “Jail-fest”, but Chief Magistrate Grymes will eventually be removed by the Governor in 1769 in order to “*restore peace and harmony to that county*” and would be replaced by Brother Fielding Lewis at the request of Charles Dick and the other justices¹⁴.

The Masonic Craft Beer Society (MCBS)

In many jurisdictions today, alcoholic beverages are limited or banned, and the brethren are compelled to seek their preferred spirits from public venues near their Lodges, but not within the Lodge itself. The responsibility of the Junior Warden to measure the intemperance or excess of the brethren, while still his charge, is seldom or never exercised within the walls of a Masonic temple. In these jurisdictions, the topic of rule changes can be a popular one, as they explore the possibilities that are a reality in other jurisdictions.

In modern times however, Masons are finding new and creative ways to explore one of favorite social moments during fellowship. Brethren of the United Grand Lodge of England established a regular virtual meeting during the COVID pandemic to discuss the different beers that they would drink, and it became so popular that they had to expand it and establish a social media group, which still functions to this day with hundreds of brethren from many jurisdictions. This group became known as the Masonic Craft Beer Society¹⁵.

FROM TEATIME TO COFFEE BREAKS

The Boston Tea Party

The road to coffee occurred because of the Stamp Act imposed by the British and tea became synonymous with British oppression. The boycotting of tea was not only revolutionary, but it was even considered a form of Americans patriotism. Even John Adams wrote to his wife, “*Tea must be universally renounced and I must be weaned, and the sooner the better.*”¹⁶ So, even though coffee-houses were not always a socially acceptable place for everyone, its reputation improved during the American Revolution, and the consumption of coffee soared in its wake.

¹⁴ (Encyclopedia Virginia 2020)

¹⁵ (The Masonic Craft Beer Society 2020)

¹⁶ (Smith 2013)

There are jokes about Americans and the beverage that we call tea. One is how on December 16, 1773, Americans would quit drinking tea and have since preferred coffee and how the British would speculate that the reason why Americans lost their taste for tea was that they had a peculiar way of mixing it with salt water. Another humorous tale is how the British would slight Americans on how they prefer to leave their teabags in their cups, to which an American responded that more correctly is that they prefer to leave it in the harbor.

This all stems from the Boston Tea Party, and while it was certainly not a Masonic event, we do know that many members of the Sons of Liberty were also Masons of St. Andrews Lodge, who held meetings at the Green Dragon Tavern¹⁷. During the days up to the night of the Boston Tea Party, the minutes of St. Andrews Lodge often reported the lack of meetings or the adjourning of the annual election, due to the “few members present” or because “*the consignees of tea took up the brethren’s time*”.¹⁸

Charles Julian’s Tavern & Coffee Shop

Following the closure of Fredericksburg Lodges’ first meeting place at the John Jones’ Tavern in 1760, Barbara Jones' son-in-law, Brother Charles Julian, would open his own tavern and coffee shop in 1751, across the street from the original tavern of his in-laws, and the Masons would elect to meet there regularly about 1759, until they relocated to the newly constructed Market House in 1763. Renown local historian, Paula Felder reports the following:

“In 1751, Charles Julian of Norfolk, a baker, opened a coffee house and was granted an ordinary license. When he joined the new Masonic lodge in 1756, the meetings were held ‘at brother Julian’s’ until the lodge meetings were moved to the new Town House in 1763. The coffee house remained a prominent gathering place for many years. A ceremonial luncheon was given here in honor of George Washington in February 1784 on his first visit after the Revolutionary War.”¹⁹

The Coffee Break: A Mason Proclaims a National Trend

One Masonic legend is the story of how Brother Gutzon Borglum established the idea of a regular "coffee break" in 1939. As the story is reported, one frigid morning during the

¹⁷ (MasonryToday.com 2023)

¹⁸ (St. Andrews Lodge 1773)

¹⁹ (Felder 2004)

construction of the Mt. Rushmore Memorial, the workers huddled together in one of the mountaintop shacks warming up to some hot coffee, when Brother Borglum burst in and demanded to know why no one was working. Upon the workers' chilled, mumbled response that they were just having a cup of coffee, Brother Borglum directed his assistant to, "*See to it that about 10 o'clock every morning, we get donuts and hot coffee up here for these bums.*"²⁰

World War II: Coffee Shops of the Dutch Resistance

Nazi SS leaders, Nikolaus 'Klaus' Barbie and Otto Adolf Eichmann, very first job in Germany was to find and document all active Freemasons. After the German invasion of the Netherlands on May 10, 1940, they were instructed to apply the same methods for the capture and identification of Jews and Freemasons as they did previously in Germany²¹.

Recently retired Dutch General, Hermannus Von Tongeren, was the Grand Master of Masons in the Netherlands when Nazi Germany decided to invade his country and suppress the fraternity. Although known by the Nazis, who kept close tabs on him, Most Worshipful Von Tongeren was able to keep the fraternity alive and active by having it meet under the guise of "coffee clubs" in plain sight of Hitler and his commanders²².

But eventually, the coffee clubs were discovered and Hermannus ultimately died in the Sachsenhausen concentration camp. After his death, Hitler recognized the opportunity to go in and seize all the art collections of the Dutch Masonic Lodges as well as their bank accounts²³, but upon attempting to confiscate them, none of the collection could be found.

During the "coffee club" meetings, Van Tongeren had successfully smuggled out or liquidated most of the Dutch Masonic resources and his daughter, Jacoba van Tongeren, used a great deal of the resulting money to fund Group 2000²⁴, a wildly successful resistance campaign that fought via the press as well direct armament against the Nazis for the remainder of the war.

²⁰ (MSA's Short Talk Bulletin 2015)

²¹ (Holocaust Historical Society 2019)

²² (Masonic Encyclopedia 2019)

²³ (Holocaust Encyclopedia 2005)

²⁴ (Jacoba van Tongeren 1945)

Busy Brew Coffee

Even today, Waco Masonic Lodge No. 92 has been operating a coffee shop at the Grand Lodge of Texas building. These brethren decided to develop their own brand of coffee to serve at Grand Lodge and on August 21, 2017, during an eclipse, Busy Brew Coffee was established as a Masonic operation.

There are so many other stories in the world on these topics, but it is quite clear that the taverns and coffee shops were once the Masonic places to be, and that both spirits and java, when measured well by the most adept of Mason, can change the world. Let us at least meet all the world's challenges with awakened eyes that drinks the cup of coffee or with the glass of gin or rum that refreshes the spirit, but which knows no excess, for that in itself is good Masonry.

THE BOSTON TEA PARTY

So how have Freemasonry influenced our society?
Oh, I don't know, let's discuss that topic over a cup of coffee...



Freemasonry: You wake up every day to its truism.

TAVERNS, SPIRITS, COFFEE SHOPS & FREEMASONS

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