

## **Which Grand Lodge Is The Oldest In America?**

By

Jim Connal, District 1-B Education Officer

**Presented to A. Douglas Smith, Jr. Lodge of Research, #1949**

On

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*The opinions presented in this paper are strictly those of the author and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Master and Wardens of the A. Douglas Smith Jr., Lodge of Research #1949 or the official views of the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Virginia.*

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We must first understand the question. Do we mean which Grand Lodge is the oldest in the United States that was independently formed? Or do we mean which Grand Lodge is the oldest in the area that is now the United States?

Since we're in Virginia, we'll start here. It's easy to determine the age of the existing Grand Lodge of Virginia. The minutes exist and are available to read. There were 12 Lodges known to be working in Virginia in 1777, nine of which were invited to meet and form a Grand Lodge. These existing Lodges were chartered under the Grand Lodge of England (Modern), Scotland, Ireland, Pennsylvania and a vague reference to a Grand Lodge of America.

There were a series of meetings, with properly recorded minutes and attendees that led to a meeting on October 13, 1778. This meeting saw the creation of the Grand lodge of Virginia, AF & AM in Williamsburg. John Blair was installed as Grand Master on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 1778.

Prior to this, there were at least three (and perhaps four) Provincial Grand Masters of Virginia. It seems that William Allen was Provincial Grand Master in 1750. There is what's described as "slight evidence" that H. P. Thornton was Provincial Grand Master in 1764. The patriot, Peyton Randolph, was appointed Provincial Grand Master in 1774. There are claims that Cornelius Harnett was Provincial Grand Master in 1777, but that is in dispute because he was the Deputy Provincial Grand Master in North Carolina at the time. It is important to note that there are no records of a Grand Lodge actually meeting under the authority of any of the Virginia Provincial Grand Masters.

The Grand Lodge of Virginia makes its claim to be "the first Grand Lodge constituted in America".

Let's head north... to Massachusetts. The Grand Lodge of Massachusetts makes the claim to be the

"oldest continuously operating Masonic organization in the Western hemisphere".

The Grand Lodge of England named Henry Price to be Provincial Grand Master of Massachusetts on April 30<sup>th</sup> (maybe April 13<sup>th</sup>) of 1733. Bro. Price moved quickly and there are existing minutes of the Grand Lodge meeting on July 30, 1733 at the Bunch of Grapes on King Street in Boston. They met to constitute the Lodge named "First" Lodge.

The Massachusetts Grand Lodge came into being on March 8, 1777 when a group of lodges met and declared itself to be the Grand Lodge and elected Joseph Webb as Grand Master. However, this Massachusetts Grand Lodge was closed *sine die* and was not merged into the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts that was formed in 1792. This Grand Lodge of Massachusetts was the continuation of the *Modern* Provincial Grand Lodge in Boston operating since 1733.

On to Pennsylvania. The Grand Lodge of England named Daniel Coxe as Provincial Grand Master of NY, NJ & Pennsylvania on June 5, 1730. However, there is no evidence of Bro. Coxe actually holding a Grand Lodge meeting. According to existing hard evidence, the oldest Lodge in North America is Tun Tavern Lodge, which met on June 24, 1731 with 14 members.

The Brethren of Pennsylvania went on to form a Grand Lodge. The Ancient Provincial Grand Lodge declared its independence of the Ancient Grand Lodge of England on September 25, 1786. The following day, September 26, 1786, 13 Lodges met and formed the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania.

In summary: there's something for everyone.

Actually forming a new Grand Lodge... Massachusetts 1777, Virginia 1778, Pennsylvania 1786.

Newly constituted Grand Lodge and still operating:  
Virginia 1778, Pennsylvania 1786.

Provincial Grand Lodge: Pennsylvania 1730,  
Massachusetts 1733, Virginia 1750.

Thank you...I am honored to serve the craft.