

Women in Masonry?

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Let me start with a story that took place in a neighborhood of Cork, Ireland in the eighteenth century. Lord and Lady Doneraile had several sons and a daughter by the name of Elizabeth. She had heard that her father was a Freemason and even knew that he held Masonic meetings in the Manor with his sons and a few friends. She dared to ask what it was about and was told not to interfere with matters beyond the understanding of her sex. On the days when the lodge met, the ladies and servants were ordered to stay in the upper floors.

One winter afternoon, Elizabeth went on a long gallop over the moor on her favorite horse and afterward being tired and out of breath went into the library to rest in a big arm chair. After a few minutes her eyelids became heavy. When she reopened them, it was getting dark and at the same time she heard voices of men from the next room . . . to shorten this story I will say she climbed a ladder, pulled out a brick which was loose, and observed degree work being done. Becoming faint she slipped down the ladder making a loud cry and was found by old Henry with a sword in his hand and a lamp in the other. She was held in custody by Henry while the brethren considered what had transpired and after much discussion Lord Doneraile struck a violent stroke of the gavel and ended the discussion with these remarks:

"There is nothing in the old charges that forbids initiation of a woman. Our Land Marks neither forbid nor allow it, but remain silent on the matter, and long as superior authority which does not yet exist has not forbidden such an initiation, we must solve the matter according to common sense; everything that is not forbidden is permitted."

A ballot was spread and proved to be favorable and Lady Elizabeth was introduced into the Lodge and initiated. After a short pause, she was passed to the degree of Fellowcraft. Her Masonic career started and continued right up to the chair. She and a young brother by the name of Richard Aldworth were married and for Masonic readers you now know she was . . . Elizabeth . . . her Regalia and Masonic Jewels are preserved among her family heirlooms and this lady Freemason rests in the Lord in a crypt of Saint Finbarr's Cathedral in Cork Ireland.

NOTE: The split between English and Continental Freemasons was accentuated when the English Grand Lodge in 1929 issued a statement explaining the conditions under which it would recognize and cooperate with foreign Freemasons. One of the conditions was strongly worded . . . that the membership of the Grand Lodge and individual Lodges shall be composed exclusively of men and that each Grand Lodge shall have no intercourse of any kind with mixed Lodges or Bodies which admit women to membership.¹ I have given you this bit of information to show you that prior to 1929 there were many cases where women were made Masons.

Paris, France 1792, September 2: Revolutionary detachments broke into the Conciergerie Prison and killed many Aristocrats and the enemies of the revolution who were imprisoned there. Among these was a beautiful Princess named Marie Therese Louise d'Elambelle who was a friend of Marie Antoniette. She was a Freemason. This story is again mentioned in the 1880's by Taxil in his books *Are there women in Freemasonry* and *The Women's Lodges*.

Franco Spain: Franco saw Freemasons as the chief enemy of Spain. In the early 1900's Freemasons dominated among the officials of the League of Nations, The United Nations,

¹ *World Freemasonry*, Hamill & Gilbert, pg. 129.

and the British Broadcasting Company (BBC). Worst of all the enemies of Spain was President Franklin D. Roosevelt's widow, the picturesque Mrs. Roosevelt.

Recently, a brother Charles Fuloran visited a Masonic Lodge in London. After visiting the Lodge his wife asked if he would take her to an Eastern Star meeting. After some inquiries, he talked to a lady in a Pub he had been directed to and was told that the wife could visit but he could not. This was odd seeing he was a Past Patron. Then the woman was asked what she was talking about, she answered that she knew about the Eastern Star but that she was a Master Mason. He questioned that and she went upstairs and returned with her Lambskin apron with the dates on it as to when she was Initiated, Passed and Raised written on it. She also had a trowel, squire and compasses made of brass then told brother Fuloran that since the men refused to let women into their meetings they refused men into theirs and since his wife was not a Master Mason neither of them could visit the Lodge.^{2 3}

Another scene took place in August 1861, as the First Regiment was sent to guard a Railroad Bridge at Mozeille Mills, Missouri. Word was received about guerilla attacks on the bridge. They took precautions and drove off the attackers. The attackers were chased to a farm house which the guerillas set on fire with a woman and two children still inside as a diversionary tactic. But the soldiers caught three of the party. Among them was a boy of 16 with an Irish brogue. A drumhead court martial sentenced the boy to be executed as a lesson to the other guerillas in the area. The boy pleaded for his life, but the pleas went unheeded, then a girl about 18 burst upon the scene, clasped the boy in her arms and exclaimed "Oh soldiers, on Holy Mother, gentlemen for the love of Jesus, do not kill him, he is innocent, he is my brother". *The Masonic Monthly* adds a strange ending to the story . . . the girl was removed, they dragged her but a short distance from him, when looking back and seeing a black handkerchief already tied over his eyes, she with one frantic scream flung the soldier from her and bound back to her brother and

² *The Maryland Master Mason* 1962.

³ *California Freemason* pg. 193

tore the handkerchief from his eyes. As the soldiers again removed her, the coat sleeve of one of them was torn and her eyes fell upon a breast pin that was upon his shirt sleeve. In an instant all physical powers were relaxed, and in a calm, subdued and confident tone of voice she observed as she pointed to the pin: "Soldiers, let me make one more effort for my brother". The soldiers startled at the strangeness of the manner, unloosed their grip and in a moment that the guns were descending to receive the word to fire she, turning her back to her brother, and facing the file of soldiers stood forth a stately woman. There was no scream, no tear, no agonizing expression, but a calm and erect woman. She swept the field with her eye and advancing three steps she gave the Grand Hailing Sign of a Master Mason. None but Masons among the soldiers observed it and there were many of them in that command who stood mute with astonishment. In a few minutes a Captain came forward and in a loud voice said that the execution would be postponed due to the distress and interference of the young woman until nine in the morning. The guard was ordered to be doubled during the night.

Notwithstanding this precaution it was discovered in the morning that the boy and his sister had made their escape. Unknown to many, during the early part of the evening there was a meeting of Masonic members of the company in the Captain's Quarters where the girl was examined and found to have passed all three degrees in Masonry. She and her brother had been in the United States for about 10 weeks, just coming in from Ireland. The boy did not know his sister was a Mason, but knew that his father living in Ireland was a Master of his Lodge.

Again a sad note: The editor of *The Masonic Monthly* in January 1869 writes:

"This copy was copied from the *Evergreen*. We remember hearing at the time that it occurred. We have no doubt there is considerable truth in the narrative. Our contemporary says it . . . a correspondent we do not know if he is a Mason, has sent us this well-told story. Improbable as it is the tale worth reproducing in our columns."

The most modern instance of a woman claiming to be a member of a recognized Masonic Lodge was Mrs. Catherine Babington. It is claimed that she concealed herself in an adjoining room of a Lodge at different times covering a period of a year and a half before finally being discovered by an uncle. When questioned she found to be well versed and familiar with much of the Masonic ritual she was clothed in a suitable uniform of red flannel and taken to the lodge, where she was obligated as a regular Mason but not admitted into membership.

My brothers there are many more accounts of similar concealments but there are also some instances where this was not the case. A Mrs. Harard was proposed and initiated into Palladian Lodge of England. There are no records (conveniently) to substantiate any of the traditions given . . . however . . . Countess Bathory of Hungary is authentic. The act was repudiated by the Grand Orient of Hungary. The Lodge officers who participated were stricken from the rolls of the Lodge and were suspended.

My brothers I'd to make just one more comment about this topic. If all this is improbable, it is said, she is said to been, there are no records...why is so much been written to contradict it all. Thank you for your attention.

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