Benjamin Franklin, The Freemason

By WILLIAM J. PATTERSON

Library and Curator

Benjamin Franklin, as a young man of 24 years, made his first visit to London, and his later years in that city, in general, greater in fact than any other person connected with our history.

While in London, the young printer had undoubtedly learned something about the Craft, the membership of which was then almost exclusively confined to the nobility and gentry, and which was attracting more or less attention in the public prints.

The knowledge thus obtained, whether orally or from publications of the day, limited and restricted as they must have been, appears to have quickened the ambitious philosophical brain of the young printer, to his subject of Freemasonry, and whetted his desire to be numbered amongst the elect; an ambition actuated, it is true, under various circumstances.

But he was still under the influence of the Masonic and the community spirit, and, as a mere noseg-fielder’s son, lacking both social and financial standing.

This applies to him during his sojourn in London, as well as in Philadelphia, at this period.

Upon his return to Philadelphia, this desire became even stronger when he learned that a Lodge had either been set up here, or was contemplated by the resident Brethren.

In the year 1727 Franklin organized a secret society of his own known as the “Leather Apron Society,” the name itself indicating the Masonic Fraternity.

In 1728 he gave the name of the Club was changed, and the character of the Club was also revised, so as to become a purely literary one and took the name of “Junto.” In its chief element, “jury” patterned after the Masonic Fraternity, was, however, retained, otherwise it became a purely literary character, or as Franklin himself wrote, “a club for Mental Improvement.”

In the outcome of this venture, by side by side with the Craft, was the formation of the Library Company of Philadelphia, a body long since lost or destroyed.

A society of his own known as the Masons, the Cornerstone of which was laid in 1731 and the American Philosophical Society in 1743, in both of which Franklin was the leading spirit.

As a matter of fact, it was within the Masonic Lodge at Philadelphia, where Franklin had his first experience in learning the use of actual practice or occupancy any position of authority and government.

Consequently, his but to assume that here in St. John’s Lodge, and subsequently in the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, was the foundation of Franklin’s future greatness as a Parliamentary and a prominent figure in all the many and various organisations with which he became identified during his long and active public career.

Further it is an indisputable fact that the offices conferred upon Franklin by the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, of that day, were the first public offices held by the great Printer and Statesman.

To write the history of Franklin as a Freemason is to virtuously chronicle the early Masonic History of America.

Early in the year 1731, we find that the young printer was Entered, Passed, and Raised as a Master in the Masonic Lodge in St. John’s Lodge, held at this Town Hall in Water Street, Philadelphia. The cost of his entrance fee was three pounds sterling.

The published records of the Craft in his newspaper were as “The Pennsylvania Gazette” supplant the early minutes of this Lodge long since lost or destroyed.

His communications with St. John’s Lodge gives us an insight into the financial affairs of early Freemasonry, as found in the yellowing pages of the first American Masonic newspaper.

His service to the Lodge and later as Provincial Grand Master are a permanent lesson to us students of the early history of this Jurisdiction.

During the later years of his life he had an active Masonic career in France. There, his activity and intimacy with the Brethren was intimate and close, both personal and official, even advancing to the so-called higher degree.

The Masonic career of Benjamin Franklin extended over a period of almost sixty years, during which time he was accused the highest Masonic honours at home and abroad.

It has been my purpose during my term of office to keep you currently advised on all Masonic matters.

In the next issue of the Pennsylvania Freemason, it will be printed after the election and installation of the new Grand Master.

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Bristol Lodge Celebrates 175 Years of Freemasonry

Bristol Lodge No. 1 was chartered on December 7, 1785, by the Virginia Grand Lodge. It is the oldest Masonic Lodge in Pennsylvania. In 1843, the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania adopted the Grand Lodge of Virginia as a model for the organization of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania. This event opened the door for Masonic lodges in Pennsylvania to join the movement of organizing lodges and the adoption of the Virginia Grand Lodge as the model for organization.

The Lodge continues to celebrate its rich history and traditions, engaging in various events and activities to honor its past and maintain its place in the community. The Lodge is committed to maintaining the values and principles of Freemasonry, fostering fellowship, and contributing to the local community.

The Lodge's history and traditions are a testament to its enduring legacy, and it remains an active and vibrant community today.