

**Freemason's
Companion**

Ashlar Lodge No. 98

F. & A. M.

St. Augustine, FL

2017

FREEMASON'S COMPANION

History

No one knows for certain when the Masonic Fraternity was formed, but Freemasonry is the oldest Fraternity still existing in the world. The oldest existing records of a Lodge of Freemasons date to January 1599 and are from Lodge Aitchinson's Haven in East Lothian, Scotland. Minutes dated July 1599 exist for the Lodge of Edinburg at Mary's Chapel. In 1647, Elias Ashmole, a librarian at Oxford University, wrote in his diary for 16 October: "4:30 pm, I was made a free-mason at Warrington in Lancashire." In 1686 Dr. Robert Plot wrote that it was the custom to admit men into the Society of Freemasons throughout the nation, especially in Staffordshire.

Bede in his *Ecclesiastical History of The English People* for the year 675 wrote that Bishop Benedict crossed into Gaul and brought back to England masons and makers of glass. In the same ancient chronicle, Bede referred to the Church of the Four Crowned Martyrs being almost consumed by fire in 619. The Four Crowned Martyrs were the patron saints of ancient masons.

The most ancient Masonic document is accepted to be the *Regius Poem* or *Halliwel Manuscript* which is dated to about 1390. Other ancient Masonic documents include the *Cooke Manuscript* dated to 1410; the *Schaw Statutes* dated to 1598; and the *Graham Manuscript* dated to 1726.

Modern Freemasonry, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom, dates from the formation of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717. The United Grand Lodge of England celebrates its three hundredth anniversary in the spring of 2017.

Freemasonry came to what is now the United States in the early 1730s. General James Oglethorpe,

founder of Georgia, established a Lodge at Ft. King George in what is now Darien, GA, in 1734. It is now Solomon Lodge No. 1 in Savannah, the oldest continuously operating English Constituted Lodge of Freemasons in the Western Hemisphere.

The first Lodge established in St. Augustine was Glittering Star Lodge in 1769. It was a military lodge and part of the 29th Regiment of Foot of the British Army. This Lodge still exists in Worcestershire, United Kingdom.

In the United States, there is no single Grand Lodge System. Each state in the union hosts its own. Many world leaders, entertainers, and prestigious individuals have been members.

Fourteen US Presidents were Freemasons: George Washington, James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, James Polk, James Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, James Garfield, William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, Howard Taft, Warren Harding, Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and Gerald Ford.

Other famous Freemasons included Ernest Borgnine, Winston Churchill, Billy Graham, J. Edgar Hoover, Bob Dole, Trent Lott, Thomas Dewey, John Elway, Shaq O'Neal, Don Rickles, W.C. Fields, Clark Gable, Richard Dreyfuss, Nat King Cole, Roy Rogers, Red Skelton, George Pullman, Cecil B. DeMille, Benjamin Franklin, Paul Revere, George Marshall, "Buzz" Aldrin, Normal Vincent Peal, Cy Young, Henry Ford, and Fiorello La Guardi as well as British Kings George IV, William IV, Edward VII, Edward VIII, and George VI.

Abraham Lincoln petitioned to join a Masonic Lodge in Illinois in 1860 but withdrew noting that he did not want his petition perceived as an attempt to gain votes. He stated that he would resubmit his petition when he returned from his presidency. His successor, Andrew Johnson, was a Freemason.

What is Freemasonry

Freemasonry is a fraternity of men, bound together by brotherly love, relief, and truth. They offer mutual assistance, equality, secrecy, and trust. They teach lessons of social and moral virtues based on the symbolism of the working tools of operative masons. Masons meet in Lodges chartered by a Grand Lodge. There is no religious dogma permitted in Freemasonry. A man is asked one simple question: does he believe in a Supreme Being? Freemasons do not discriminate based on race, religion, national origin, social status, or educational background. Their personal beliefs are just that: personal.

Politics do not intrude into a Masonic Lodge. Freemasons are composed of men of various ages, backgrounds, faiths, professions, and political persuasions. Men of various social, religious, and political persuasion are Freemasons. The two topics forbidden are those that can destroy any friendship or marriage: politics and religion.

Freemasonry is not a religion nor does it espouse any religious dogma. Protestants and Catholics, Jews and Muslims sit together “on the level” in a Masonic Lodge. Nor is Freemasonry a science. It does not dictate, it encourages exploration. It teaches its members to value learning and education. Benjamin Franklin, a Freemason, was instrumental in the founding of the University of Pennsylvania. The Fraternity encourages its members to think but does not tell them what to think.

Freemasonry grew rapidly during the 1800s and early 1900s when there were no government “safety nets.” Freemasons funded homes for the elderly and disabled; for widows; for orphans; and provided cemeteries for their members. For a brief time, some Lodges even provided group insurance policies. In North America, Freemasons contribute an

estimated \$1.5 million daily to charities including Masonic homes, the Shrine Hospital System, treatment of childhood language disorders, research into eye disease, support for public education and scholarships, and medical research.

There are approximately four million Freemasons worldwide with about two million in the United States. The Grand Lodge of Florida has about forty thousand members. There are Masonic Lodges in all Western Nations including Cuba which is home to more than three hundred. There are Grand Lodges in Israel, Lebanon, Japan, the Philippines, and Egypt.

The basic unit of Freemasonry is the local Lodge or Blue Lodge. Its traditions are based on those of the medieval European guilds and include signs, passwords, grips, and special clothing. Its work is done through rituals which are kept private or secret, but it does participate in public ceremonies to include cornerstone laying for municipal buildings and funeral services for its members.

Secrets

Freemasonry is not a secret order nor is it a secret society. Freemasons wear lapel pins, rings, belt buckles, and shirts advertising their membership. Lodges are well marked; many with brightly lit signs. It does have secrets, though, which are associated mainly with admittance into the Lodge to include handshakes, words, and signs that enable one Masons to know another quickly and effectively. Masonic ritual is also considered secret or, more properly, a mystery.

Masons obligate themselves to keep secrets both about the organization and those that might be revealed to them by a worthy Brother. The issue is not that it is secret, but can a Mason keep his word. If he can be trusted with the small things—words and grips

of the Fraternity—he can be trusted with greater things. He is a man of his word; his word is his bond.

Officers in a Lodge

The Worshipful Master sits in the East, symbolic of the rising sun. His word is final over all Lodge actions during his term of office which is usually one Masonic year. He presides over business and confers degrees. The jewel of his office is the square denoting virtue and truthfulness.

The Senior Warden sits in the West, symbolic of the setting sun. He assists the Worshipful Master in his duties and is second in command of the Lodge. Anciently, his main duty was as pay master. His jewel is the level denoting “meeting on the level” without regard to social, political, or religious standing.

The Junior Warden sits in the South, denoting the position of the sun at midday or high twelve. Anciently he was the timekeeper and provided food for the workers. His jewel is the plumb denoting rectitude of conduct.

The Senior Deacon sits at the right of the Worshipful Master and is the Master’s messenger. He welcomes visitors and conducts candidates. He is also responsible for opening and closing the Great Lights (Volume of Sacred Law), presenting the flag, and controlling the ballot box. His jewel is the square and compasses with a sun in the middle. He carries a rod or *caduceus*.

The Junior Deacon sits at the right of the Senior Warden and is his messenger. He is the inner guard and admits members into the Lodge. His jewel is the square and compasses with a moon in the center. He also carries a *caduceus*.

There are two Stewards on either side of the Junior Warden. Their principal duties are to assist the Junior Warden during hours of refreshment and to

prepare candidates for degrees. Their jewels are the cornucopia or horn of plenty representing food and drink—an essential part of any Masonic gathering. They, too, carry rods.

The Treasurer sits at the right of the Worshipful Master and is responsible for Lodge finances. His jewel is the crossed-keys representing the company chest or cash box.

The Secretary sits at the left of the Worshipful Master. He is critical to a successful Lodge. He keeps all records, prepares communications, submits reports, and performs the administrative tasks associated with any large organization. His jewel is the crossed quills denoting minute taking.

The Chaplain sits in front of the Secretary. He opens and closes the Lodge with prayers. He is most often not a minister or rabbi. His jewel is the Volume of Sacred Law.

The Tyler is the doorkeeper or outer guard. His duty is to protect the entrance to the Lodge and be sure that those who enter are truly regular Masons. His jewel is a sword, often with a wavy edge.

“There is no past faster than a Past Master” or previous Master of a Lodge. After serving his year in the East, the Past Master is presented with a Past Master’s apron and jewel. A Past Master’s jewel is most often the compasses over a quadrant with the sun in the center. In some jurisdictions, the jewel is a representation of the 47th Problem of Euclid.

The Rule

Each Grand Lodge establishes and publishes its own rules and regulations through a Digest of Masonic Law. Each particular Lodge augments this through its bylaws which must be approved by its Grand Lodge.

A regular Mason is a man who is a member of a Lodge descended in some way from the original

Grand Lodges of England, Scotland, and Ireland. He must believe in a Supreme Being and not have been convicted of a felony.

Particular Lodges (Blue Lodges) confer only three degrees: Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason. There are appendant bodies such as Scottish Rite, York Rite, and Shrine which confer additional degrees. To be a member of an appendant body, a man must first be a Master Mason in a Regular Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons.

The three degrees have specific symbolic meaning.

- The Entered Apprentice Degree represents youth and initiation.
- The Fellow Craft Degree represents the passage into manhood and education.
- The Master Mason Degree represents maturity, aging and death.

What to Expect and What to Know

Freemasonry is a fraternity that does not solicit members. Traditionally, a man had to ask three times before receiving a petition. The fraternity utilizes a stringent background check, investigation including home visit, and strong vetting before accepting a petition for the trial of the ballot box. Anciently, Freemasons have voted with black cubes and white balls. The white ball indicates a positive vote; the black cube a negative vote. A single negative vote (black cube) is sufficient to prevent a man from becoming a Freemason. All ballots are secret and there are strict penalties for discussing how one voted. The ballot is sacred and final.

When a man determines that he wishes to become a Mason, he approaches a man he knows to be a Freemason, a close friend, and asks for a petition.

The petition requires two Lodge members' endorsement through signature. When the petition is received, all members present vote to determine if it is accepted. If accepted, it is referred to an Investigation Committee composed of no fewer than three members who visit the home, question friends and employers, and do their best to determine the petitioner's qualifications to be Made a Mason. All petitioners are required to submit to a national background check.

When the committee is satisfied, the petition is presented (read) again in open Lodge and the secret ballot occurs. All members of the Lodge present vote in a prescribed manner. If the petition receives a clear ballot—all white balls—the candidate is notified of the date and time of his initiation.

Masonic Lodges must meet at least once each month for a Stated Communication to conduct business. They may also meet for a Called Communication to confer Degrees. Ashlar Lodge No. 98 meets for Stated Communications on the 1st and 3rd Thursdays of each month. Called Communications for Degree Work may be held on the 2nd and 4th Thursdays. Lodge practice is on 4th Thursdays.

The Masonic Year begins on December 28th, the day after St. Johns' Night. Officers are installed on St. Johns Night—the Feast of St. John the Evangelist. The year runs through December 27th. A second St. Johns' Night may be held on June 24th, the Feast of St. John the Baptist. The two St. Johns are patron saints of modern Freemasons.

Freemasonry has traditionally involved a significant amount of memorization. Until recent years, all ritual was passed “mouth to ear.” There are modern ciphers to aid with memory, but the traditional mode of instruction still prevails. It serves to form close fraternal relations, brotherhood, and to protect the secrets and mysteries of the craft.

For Companions

- A Freemason's obligation is to his family first. He may refer to it as his "cable-tow". This is not a negative comment. It includes his health, his family, his business, and his obligations to others.
- A Freemason will gladly share information about the Fraternity. But remember, he took an obligation to maintain secrets about ritual, recognition, and some internal functions. This is a test of his worthiness to be trusted, nothing more. There are few secrets in Masonry especially in the modern digital age.
- Masonic Lodges hold family nights on a regular basis. Family, friends, and potential members are invited to attend.
- Masonic Lodges host events for Masonic Widows and Sweethearts that are open to non-Masons.
- Masons will not act unless asked. A man cannot become a member unless he "knocks at the door." He may be asked once if he is interested.
- Should the family of a Mason require assistance, they should contact the Worshipful Master, Secretary, or other Lodge officer, especially for Masonic Funerals.
- Masonic Funerals are performed only at the request of the immediate family. **A friend may not make the appeal.** The Lodge's Tyler oversees Masonic Funerals. The most common is the grave-side or interment service. Masonic Funerals may also be performed in a church, in a Lodge, at a funeral home, or other appropriate

location. If the service is in a church, be sure that the minister or pastor approves.

- Each man who becomes a Master Mason and receives a Lambskin Apron is entitled to have that apron placed on the **outside** of his casket and interred with him. Special provisions may be made for cremations. The family should consult with the Worshipful Master of the Lodge for guidance.
- There are several avenues available for contacting a Lodge.
 - a. The Lodge's Trestleboard or newsletter is mailed or distributed digitally to all members.
 - b. Many Lodge's utilize websites, Face Book pages, or other electronic media.
 - c. Grand Lodges maintain websites which include a Lodge Locator. The locator will provide names and contact information for all Lodge Officers.
 - d. An internet search using the Lodge name and number or Grand Lodge name will provide additional information.

A Promise

- A Brother is guaranteed these things:
 - a. Fraternity and Brotherly Love
 - b. Visitation when sick or distressed
 - c. A Masonic Funeral upon request from immediate family

- A Brother will receive regular mailings or emails to include **Trestleboards** or newsletters. The Brother is encouraged to share The **Trestleboard** with his family and they are encouraged to read it and other posting on Facebook (**Ashlar Lodge #98 Families**) and the Lodges web site (<http://www.ashlarlodge98.org>) to keep informed.

Finally, when a Brother passes to the Celestial Lodge Above, the family is **encouraged** to maintain communication with the Lodge and update their contact information on a regular basis. A man is a Mason not only for life but in the afterlife, and his family is always part of the great, world-wide Masonic Family. Lodges sponsor events for spouses and widows. **Masonic widows are fully eligible for Masonic relief including placement in the Masonic Home of Florida upon request.** Mothers and fathers of Master Masons are also eligible to become residents at the Home.

There may also be items among the Brother's possessions which the family wishes to part with but which would be of interest to the Lodge or a Brother Mason. This may include Masonic jewelry, clothing, aprons, or other items clearly identifiable as Masonically oriented. Many Brothers maintain extensive Masonic libraries, some of which contain rare books. This type of material should remain within the Fraternity by being passed to family members who are Masons or archived at the particular Lodge or Grand Lodge.

No question is too insignificant. Do not be afraid to ask. The Brother will gladly share what he can. He is proud to be a Mason. His family should be, too.