

## **The Irish Connection**

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*This Short Talk Bulletin has been adapted from remarks given at the 200th Anniversary of Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania. We thank R.W. Bro. Walker for permitting us to share them with his American Brethren.*

The Grand Lodge of Ireland was five years old, at least, when the first record exists of a Time Immemorial Lodge – St. John's Lodge – in Philadelphia. This was, of course, followed by the first Regular Warranted Lodge in America, three years later, in Boston. I say the Grand Lodge of Ireland was at least five years old in 1730, because we date our Constitution from the first record, in 1725, of a Grand Lodge Meeting "June 26th, St. John's Day: More than '100 gentlemen ' met in the 'Yellow Lion in Warbrough Street' and later went to King's Arms. The procession included 'the Masters and Wardens of the Six Lodges of Gentlemen Freemasons, who are under the jurisdiction of the Grand Master, and the Private Brothers, all in coaches' (it being a very rainy day). A new Grand Master, Rt. Hon. the Earl of Ross was elected. After a meal they went to a play." Clearly, therefore, Grand Lodge was in earlier existence though we cannot say exactly when, or challenge the claim of our much larger Sister Grand Lodge that she is the Mother Grand Lodge. There are, of course, records of Time Immemorial Lodges going back much earlier in Ireland. The first definite clue we have is that when Ball's Bridge was being rebuilt in Limerick in 1830, a brass square was recovered from the foundations on which is engraved "I will strive to live with Love and Care, Upon Ye Level By Ye Square, 1507". We are, therefore, within sight of a 500th Anniversary of Speculative Masonry.

In Ireland we have evidence of skilled Operative Masons very far back in time. We can state with pride that Irish Freemasons were involved before "Warranted Masonry", and subsequently, in promoting and developing the Craft in, what were then styled, "The Colonies". Irish Lodges were warranted in many "British" Regiments, though often mainly manned by Irishmen. The 1st Irish or Blue Horse, later the 4th Royal Irish Dragoon Guards had its Warrant issued by Grand Lodge on 24th June, 1758. This Warrant is still held in the 4th/7th Royal Dragoon Guards and the Lodge is working in West Germany, where the Regiment is stationed as part of the NATO Defense Forces. This is our last truly Travelling Warrant which remains of 185 Warrants issued

in Artillery, Cavalry and Foot Regiments of the Line, as well as 43 Warrants in Irish Militia and Fencible Regiments. Our only other survivor, Glittering Star Lodge No. 322 originally warranted in the 29th Foot in the following year, 1759, was working in Boston in 1765 where on St. John's Day, December 27th, 1769, it helped form the "Ancient" Grand Lodge of that State, and some years later it was in Quebec. These contacts, no doubt later on when the Regiments moved away, led to applications for Regular Warrants from the local Freemasons, made in those Lodges, who were left behind; and so the Craft spread.

In the years between the early 1730's and the eventual, and inevitable, War of Independence, many of the leading and influential Colonists became Members of the Order so that the history of the gaining of Independence and the Craft is inextricably entwined. We must not, however, fall into the trap of imputing a revolutionary or political aspect to Freemasonry because of this. So many of our detractors make the basic and elementary mistake of correlating a man's, or a group's, actions to membership of the Order, when that is coincidental and the same things would have been done or said in, or out of, the Order.

A focal point of the early part of that period must be the granting by Henry Price, in Boston, of the Deputation or Charter applied for on November 28th, 1734, by Benjamin Franklin, when he was appointed Provincial Grand Master for Pennsylvania on February 24th, 1735, barely three months later. So many great names are remembered by us from that period, to which distance lends enchantment: Henry Price; George Washington – elected Master in 1788, if my information is correct, in a Lodge at Alexandria in Virginia, though still under a warrant from Pennsylvania; Benjamin Franklin, who probably did more than any other to establish Freemasonry in America and whose reprint of Anderson's Constitutions was the first, and is the rarest, Masonic book in America; Paul Revere, the silversmith, whose romantic ride from Boston to Lexington warned of the approach of Crown Forces – this has been immortalized by Longfellow; and the gallant and romantic action of Major General Joseph Warren of the Colonial Forces, and Grand Master of Massachusetts, who, having declined to assume command, picked up a musket and tragically fell at Bunker Hill; John Paul Jones, father of the Continental Navy; the Marquis de Lafayette; not to mention the Brethren who signed the Declaration of Independence, and many more.

A famous Brother and Commander in Chief, George Washington, was initiated in Fredericksburg on November 4th, 1752. Another famous Brother and Soldier, Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington was initiated 38 years later in our Lodge No. 494 at Trim, in the Royal County of Meath. Some 25 years later, at Waterloo, he finally routed his old enemy Napoleon, himself not a Freemason, to the best of our knowledge, though a promoter of the Craft and whose brothers and most of his Marshals were. Wellington's elder Brother, Richard, 2nd Earl of Mornington, later Marquess of Wellesley, was our Grand Master in 1782 as his father Garrett, the 1st Earl of Mornington, had been in 1776.

We Freemasons of the Old World were with you in those days to help kindle a flame which has spread throughout America in the intervening years to become the great institution it is today. I know that many Grand Lodges are suffering a reduction in numbers, but we must never be seduced into an acceptance of the attitude "never mind the quality, feel the width!" In the first half of this century there were few competitors for the membership of those whose minds and spirits felt the need for some philosophical inspiration – now they are legion. We have come back now after the seed, which we may have helped to plant some 250 years ago, germinated, grew, became mature and branched out on its own 200 years ago like all sons and daughters to take control of their own destiny.

We had our links with you then – the First Volume of the History of Grand Lodge of Ireland says, in the section on Irish Masons Abroad, "Fortunately we have learned from many other sources, that the issue of Warrants was the very least of the services rendered by Irish Masons in spreading the Craft in the New World, and, we can claim with justice, that these Brethren bore a considerable share in founding some of the greatest and most highly reputed Grand Lodges in the United States.

The Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania we may almost claim as a child. Leaving aside the obscure early Masonic History of this State, when it would appear that English and Irish Masons held meetings by Time Immemorial right, the foundation, in 1759, of the Provincial Grand Lodge after the Antient forms, which subsequently budded into the Independent Grand Lodge, "was primarily due to an Irish Mason who had been made in a Belfast Lodge." I regret the author does not elucidate further and I am not sure to whom he refers, or the Lodge in question, but I bow to his erudition. You may or may not agree according to your point of view, but ties there certainly were. Springett Penn, great grandson of Admiral Penn, and grandson of the Founder of your State, apart from owning an extensive property in Pennsylvania also had an estate at Shanagarry in County Cork; his father, grandfather and great grandfather having been landlords before him. He was an ardent Freemason and was Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Munster in 1726/27 before its amalgamation with the Grand Lodge of Ireland in 1731. It is not improbable that he encouraged Brethren from Cork to colonize on his Pennsylvania estates. For instance, in 1734, in Benjamin Franklin's Account Book which he began on July 4th, 1730, appears an entry "Mr. Newinham Dr. for Bindg. of a Mason Book gilt 4/= ". The old and distinguished Newenham family still thrives a bare 10 miles from Shanagarry as the crow flies, and several of whose members are Brethren of our Lodge No. 1, the "First Lodge of Ireland", which had been a Time Immemorial Lodge before Grand Lodge was constituted. I wonder is there a link there? It does seem likely.

Incidentally, on October 9th, 1735, the Pennsylvania Gazette had a notice of a meeting of the Grand Lodge of Ireland, and previously on May 13th, 1731, referred to a Masonic meeting in Dublin; and similarly again on May 11th, 1732, a year later.

Freemasonry has waxed and waned, been popular and unpopular, been promoted and persecuted, but it has survived. Freemasonry made errors such as the political intrigues and anti-clerical activities of some European Grand Lodges in the 18th and 19th centuries, but today I believe that Regular Freemasonry is back on its correct course worldwide, endeavoring to create in Anderson's words "a bond of union amongst those who would otherwise have remained at a perpetual distance" – a brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God.

I leave you with a few words of Irish: "Co m'beannaigh Dhia dibh, go n'eiri an t-adh is an bothar libh, agus go m'beirimidh beo ar an am seo aris" – which translates as "God bless you, may your good fortune increase and your way be made easy, and may we all be alive this time next year".

*STB - January 1987*