

A Masonic Minute



The Value of History

We can draw lessons from the past, but we cannot live in it.

Bro. Lyndon B. Johnson (1908-1973), 36th President of the United States (1963-1969)

As Freemasons we have a long tradition and rich history of which we can be justly proud. The essence of Freemasonry is said to have existed '*From Time Immemorial*' and we trace our philosophical roots to the mystery schools of the ancient world. Our rites and ceremonies link us to the accumulated wisdom of the ages. Masonic history is classified as 'traditional' and 'documented.' When Dr. James Anderson produced the first Book of Constitution for the Grand Lodge of England in 1723, compiled from copies of the older Gothic Constitutions, he included a 48 page *History of Masonry or Geometry and Architecture*. Reference is made to prominent figures in ancient history: Noah, Abraham, Solomon, Athelstan, the builders of the Tower of Babel, the Egyptians, et al. These and others appear in many of the additional degrees.

Bro. Albert Pike reminds us of what we mean by the phrase, *From Time Immemorial*: "*Masonry cannot trace its authentic history, with its present Degrees, further than the year 1700. But by whatever name it was known in this or in any other country, Masonry existed as it now exists, the same in spirit and at heart, not only when Solomon builded the temple, but centuries before – before even the first colonies emigrated into Southern India, Persia, and Egypt, from the cradle of the human race.*"¹

The oldest Lodge in what is now Canada was established in Annapolis Royal in 1738, warranted by the Provincial Grand Lodge at Boston by Henry Price, Grand Master of New England.² During the French and Indian War in America during the middle of the eighteenth century, culminating in the British conquest of Quebec on the Plains of Abraham in 1759, Military Lodges with travelling warrants brought and spread Freemasonry to the New World. Such is the oldest lodge in Ontario: Niagara No. 2, Niagara-on-the-Lake, instituted in 1792.

Let us now praise famous men and our fathers that begat us.

Ecclesiasticus 41:1 Apocrypha

This year, on October 10th, we celebrate the 160th anniversary of the formation of the Grand Lodge of Canada when independence from the Provincial Grand Lodge was declared at a meeting in Hamilton, Ontario. Prior to Confederation in 1867, what then became the provinces of Ontario and Quebec were Canada West and Canada East.

¹ Albert Pike (1809-1891) **Morals and Dogma**, p. 208.

² Henry Price (1697-1780) appointed Provincial Grand Master of North America, 1733.

Hence the designation Grand Lodge of Canada. Our Grand Lodge enjoys a special distinction as the first Grand Lodge in the British Empire to be granted recognition by the United Grand Lodge of England after declaring independence.

We must never live in the past, but we can always learn from it. We cannot help but be inspired by the courage, determination, foresight and perseverance of our founding fathers. We have inherited a proud tradition, but as Matsuo Basho cautions, *“Do not seek to follow in the footsteps of the men of old; seek what they sought.”* It is our privilege to stand proudly on the shoulders of the giants that have preceded us and who laid the solid foundation for our generation to build upon. It is also incumbent upon us to use this as a vantage point from which to look to and ensure the future.

Touch the Past ~ Embrace the Future

This autumn, several lodges will be holding centennial and sesquicentennial celebrations marking significant milestones. Two of these are in the near north, (Timmins, Englehart) reminding us that as settlement spread in the early nineteenth century, a Masonic lodge was one of the first institutions to be established in the young community. We congratulate them on the service they have provided to their communities. However, these milestones are not stopping points, but benchmarks along the way – opportunities to celebrate the past and plan for the future. Dorothy West reminds us that *“There is no life that does not contribute to history.”*

*“Our duty is to preserve what the past had to say for itself,
and to say for ourselves what shall be true for the future.”*

John Ruskin (1819-1900)

We are the inheritors of a great tradition extending through the centuries. We must endeavour to be more than mere custodians of that tradition. We must strive to enhance what we transmit to the next generation when time passes and so do we. Our mission: to ensure the vitality of Freemasonry in each of our lodges, not preoccupied with quantity, but building on quality, striving for excellence in every aspect of our Masonic activity.

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