

Freemasonry in Massachusetts

Historical Survey.

The Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in June of this year is celebrating its bicentenary, and, incidentally, the bicentenary of the active foundation of organised Freemasonry in the United States of America, for, although the Grand Lodge of England had recognised the existence of Freemasonry in the American Colonies as early as June 5th, 1730, when the then Duke of Norfolk, as Grand Master, granted a Deputation to "Daniel Coxe of New Jersey, Esqr." as Provincial Grand Master for the Provinces of New York, New Jersey and Pensilvania (Pennsylvania), the most exhaustive searches both in England and America have failed to elicit any evidence that would establish without doubt the fact that Coxe exercised his powers under that Deputation, and, indeed, everything points to the contrary. In other words it can be accepted that, during the period of two years for which the Deputation in question was operative, Daniel Coxe did nothing whatever for the cause of Freemasonry in America.

He was succeeded by Henry Price, who received a Deputation from Anthony Browne, Viscount Montague (or Montacute as he is sometimes styled), Grand Master of England, as Provincial Grand Master for New England and Dominions and Territories thereunto belonging. The document is believed generally to have been dated April 30th, 1733, though April 13th, 1733, has been ascribed to it. Be that as it may, Henry Price proved as energetic in exercising his powers under this Deputation as Daniel Coxe was lax, for on July 30th,

1733, he called an assembly of Masons and brought the Provincial Grand Lodge of Massachusetts in-to being at Boston. At that meeting was received a petition from Brethren, who had apparently been working in accordance with Old Custom, to constitute them into a regular Lodge, and this was accomplished either then or, as is stated from another source, at the end of the following month. It will thus be seen that within a period of some three or four months of the date of receiving his Deputation in London, Bro. Henry Price had not only assembled a Provincial Grand Lodge of Massachusetts but had constituted Brethren then working in Boston under the Old Customs into a "duly constituted" Lodge.

This Lodge is shown in the Engraved list of Lodges of 1738 as No.126, Boston in New England, and the following year as at the Royal Exchange Boston, while it continues to appear in subsequent lists, the date of constitution being shown as 1733, and the number altering as the roll was revised. The Engraved Lists clearly establish it as the premier Lodge in the United States which had been "duly constituted", and it is now St. John's Lodge ranking first on the register of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts.

When Bro. Henry Price brought the Provincial Grand Lodge of Massachusetts into being in 1733, he appointed as his Deputy Bro. Andrew Belcher, the son of Bro. Governor Johnathan Belcher, who, until recently when a claimant had been brought forward in New Jersey, was known as the first recorded Mason in America, this being based on a reply to a congratulatory address of September 25th, 1741, when visited by a deputation from the "First Lodge of Boston" in which

stated, "It is now thirty-seven years since I was admitted into the 'Ancient and Honble. Society of Free and Accepted Masons'; and from this it will be seen that Jonathon Belcher was doubtless~~ly~~ made a Mason in 1704, probably during his residence in Europe from 1699 to 1705. Bro. Belcher, a native of Boston, was born on January 8th, 1681, and graduated from Harvard in 1699. He was a merchant by profession, and in 1729 was sent to England as agent for the Colony of Massachusetts Bay (hence the title of "The Bay State" which Massachusetts to-day holds). He secured the appointment of Royal Governor in place of Governor Burnett, then recently deceased, and held the office from 1730 to 1741. He became Royal Governor of New Jersey in 1745, and died on August 31st, 1757. Where he was made a Mason has never been ascertained, but most probably in one of the St. John's Lodges which existed before the Grand Lodge era.

The first business of the Provincial Grand Lodge was the reading of Price's Declaration, and this was followed by the consideration of a petition for a Charter signed by eighteen Brethren, of whom at least ten had been made Masons in Boston, and it is believed that the Lodge was organised the same day, and met and worked soon after, as there is a record of August 3rd, 1733, when "John Smith was made". This old Lodge amalgamated with two others later, and is now the St. John's Lodge of Boston.

A second Lodge was organised on December 22nd, 1738, holding its first regular meeting on January 2nd, 1738-9, and was styled the "Masters Lodge", and a theory has been evolved that it was constituted for the purpose of conferring the "Past Master's Degree", which is now an integral part of the Capitular Degrees in

the United States.

Eleven years later a third Lodge was founded, and called "The Second Lodge in Boston", the date of its constitution being February 15th, 1749-50, and March 7th of the following year saw the inception of "The Third Lodge of Boston".

The Provincial Grand Lodge also chartered Lodges outside the Colony of Massachusetts, the first being at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, in 1736, although the records in the possession of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts show that a Lodge was already in existence when a Warrant was petitioned for by the Brethren; and Henry Price also fostered Masonry in Nova Scotia and the West Indies. He named Major Phillips as Provincial Grand Master for Nova Scotia in 1738, and a Lodge was organised under Phillips at Halifax on July 19th, 1750. Forty Lodges had been formed under the authority of Massachusetts in the American Colonies when the Revolution broke out in 1775, these being located in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, West Indies, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland. There were also three military Lodges, the first in the expedition against Crown Point, warranted on May 13th, 1756. A second Warrant was granted on November 13th, 1758, to Brethren of Louisburgh, soldiers in the 28th Regiment of Foot, then besieging the place. The third was issued on January 18th, 1759, for a Lodge "in the present expedition against Canada." This demonstrates how much is owed to Massachusetts as pioneers of Freemasonry in the Western Hemisphere.

Price was succeeded in 1737 by Robert Tomlinson as

Provincial Grand Master, who died in 1740, Thomas Oxnard receiving a Deputation "To be Provincial Grand Master for North America" on September 23rd, 1743. The increase of jurisdiction in the latter Deputation has given rise to much discussion, some contending that it was an error, while others hold the belief that it meant jurisdiction in territory where a Provincial Grand Master was not already in authority, but it has certainly added to the difficulty in studying early American Freemasonry. Oxnard, born in England in 1703, was made a Mason in the First Lodge of Boston on January 21st, 1735-6, being elected Master in December of the same year, and he assisted at the formation of the Masters Lodge. He was Deputy Provincial Grand Master under Tomlinson in 1739, and held office as Provincial Grand Master from March 4th, 1743, to June 25th, 1754, the date of his death.

He was followed by Jeremy Gridley, who, like Henry Price, was a native of Boston, born on March 10th, 1701-2. He was also initiated in the First Lodge of Boston on May 11th, 1748, and was Master in 1753, and later became a member of the Master Lodge. On April 4th, 1759, he was appointed Provincial Grand Master for all such Provinces and Places in North America and the Territories thereof, of which no Provincial Grand Master was then appointed, and held office until the date of his death in 1767, at which time he was Attorney General, a member of the General Court, a Justice of the Province, Colonel of the First Regiment of Militia and President of the Marine Society. Such was the calibre of the men who headed the early Craft in Massachusetts.

Upon the death of Gridley, Henry Price assumed the Office of Provincial Grand Master until John Rowe was elected on January 22, 1768, being subsequently commissioned in the name of Lord Beaufort of the "Moderns" as "Grand Master for North America and the territories thereunto belonging" on May 12th, 1768. His formal installation by Price took place on November 23rd, 1768. Rowe was also initiated in the First Lodge in July, 1740, becoming Master in 1748, and he served in the Provincial Grand Lodge as Treasurer, Junior and Senior Warden and as Deputy Grand Master.

One cannot leave the early history of organised Freemasonry in Massachusetts without giving a brief synopsis of the career of Henry Price who launched the ship on such an even keel. Henry Price was born in London about 1697, and went to Boston about 1723, no trace of him at the latter place being found after that until 1733-4, when his name appears as plaintiff in the Inferior Court of Common Pleas, and his occupation being given as a Tailor. In 1730 he was a member of Lodge No.75, meeting at the "Rainbow Coffee House in York Buildings", London, and alongside of it appears the name Anthony Browne, though it cannot be the Viscount Montagu who was then a member of the peerage. He was in London until 1733, returning to Boston between April and July of that year. Bro. Jonathon Belcher appointed him Cornet of his Troop of Guards in 1733, with the rank of Major, he prospered greatly, and died on the 20th May, 1780 at the age of 83. He was appointed to be the first Provincial Grand Master of New England in 1733, and served continuously in that capacity until 1737, again from July, 1740, to March 6th, 1743-4, from July 12th, 1754, to October 1st, 1755, and from October 20th,

1767 to November 23rd, 1768. He was first Master of the Masters' Lodge, Boston, and of the Second Lodge, and one of the Master of the First Lodge; and, even at the age of seventy-six was asked to preside over the Grand Lodge in the absence of Grand Master John Rowe. A medal, known as the Henry Price Medal has been struck, and is the greatest honour that can be conferred upon Brethren by the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. It is possessed by the M.W. the Pro Grand Master, and was bestowed upon the late R.W. Bro Sir Alfred Robbins when he visited Boston in 1924.

In 1752 a number of Masons met in the Green Dragon Tavern, and formed a Lodge "according to ancient usage", that is, met without warrant or authority of any kind from a governing Masonic body. Realising their position a section petitioned the Grand Lodge of Scotland for a Warrant in 1754, but it was not issued immediately. It was eventually received being dated November 30th, 1756, though it did not reach Boston until September 4th, 1760, four years later. In the meantime the Lodge had flourished and the Provincial Grand Lodge in 1761 passed resolutions of censure, declaring the Lodge to be without regular constitution. The Brethren of St. Andrew's Lodge -- the name adopted by the new body -- resented this, and reported the circumstances to the Grand Lodge of Scotland. The Earl of Elgin and Kincardine in reply, dated June 4th, 1762, indicated the Grand Lodge of Scotland respected the position of the Provincial Grand Master of the English body, and also showed that the authority of Col. John Young, appointed November 14th, 1757, as Provincial Grand Master in North America under the Grand Lodge of Scotland, was respected by England. "These Commissions, when rightly

understood, can never clash or interfere with each other".

The English Brethren paid no further attention to those under the Scottish warrant, even though friendly overtures were made by the latter. These would admit to membership, or as visitors, members of the other Boston Lodges, but the courtesies were not reciprocated. The Scottish Brethren made further overtures at the beginning of 1766, when they addressed a communication to the Grand Lodge of St. John desiring a coalition, but the reply received was anything but fraternal. Aspersions were cast upon the regularity of the five signatories to the communication, one of whom was Joseph Warren, and bad feeling characterised the whole epistle. The St. Andrew's Brethren could not ignore the affront, and prompt action was taken. It brought about a meeting of two committees from each Lodge, by means of which, and the resulting further action in the St. John's Grand Lodge, the situation was somewhat eased, but nothing definite resulted.

At that time there were three military Lodges in Boston, attached to regiments then stationed in the city. The St. Andrew's Lodge secured their support in asking the Grand Lodge of Scotland for the appointment of a Provincial Grand Master for Massachusetts. A petition was prepared and despatched, and in due time, Joseph Warren, the Master of St. Andrew's Lodge, was commissioned on May 30th, 1769, to be "Grand Master of Masons in Boston, New England, and within one hundred miles of the same". The Grand Lodge of Ancient Masons, usually known as the Massachusetts Grand Lodge (as distinguished from the St. John's Grand Lodge), was organised on December 27th, 1769. Joseph Warren, who fell at Bunker Hill five and

a half years later, was elected Grand Master. Paul Revere was the first Senior Grand ~~Warden~~ Deacon. The two military Lodges which had joined in the petition to Scotland (No.58 of the "Antient" Grand Lodge of England, and No.322 of Ireland) were represented at the first three meetings but not later. The third Military Lodge did not participate in the work, the Regiments apparently being withdrawn shortly after. Two other Lodges (Tyrian of Gloucester, warranted March 2nd, 1770, and Massachusetts Lodge, Boston, May 13th, took their places. A third Warrant was granted to St.Peter's Lodge, Newburyport, March 6th, 1772. The new Grand Lodge was "Antient" in its sympathies, this being but natural as the St.John's Grand Lodge was "Modern", and the "Antients" had always maintained friendly relations with both Ireland and Scotland.

The first shot of the War of Independence was fired on April 19th, 1775, being shortly followed by the siege of Boston by the Americans which prevented the annual meeting of Grand Lodge for December, 1775, for its leaders were men for whom a Boston residence was out of the question on account of their labours for the colonial cause; but the Grand Lodge did convene on April 8th, 1776, for the purpose of burying their late Grand Master. Joseph Webb, the Deputy Grand Master was elected Grand Master in 1777, and held office until 1782, when Dr.John Warren, a brother of Joseph Warren, was elected.

On December 6th, 1782, the Grand Lodge adopted the following resolution:-

Resolved: That this Grand Lodge be forever hereafter known and called by the name of the Massachusetts Grand Lodge of Ancient Masons, and that it is free and independent in its government and official authority, of any other Grand Lodge, or Grand Master in the universe."

This marked the severance of all connections with the Grand Lodge of Scotland, but one in which St. Andrew's Lodge did not concur by a vote of 19 to 30 as taken on December 21st, 1782. The nineteen in favour of severance were so dissatisfied that they withdrew from the St. Andrew's Lodge, and obtained authority to establish a new Lodge (The Rising States Lodge), of which Paul Revere became first Master. It was organised on September 4th, 1784, and ceased to meet in 1811. St. Andrew's had re-affirmed its allegiance to the Grand Lodge of Scotland, but later came under the jurisdiction of the present Grand Lodge of Massachusetts -- a union of the St. John's and the Massachusetts Grand Lodge in 1792 -- in 1809.

The Massachusetts Grand Lodge warranted thirty Lodges during its existence, these being in Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire Connecticut, and Vermont, with one (Massachusetts No. 10) in the Revolutionary Army.

The St. John's Grand Lodge (established by Henry Price) at the time John Rowe was designated Provincial Grand Master on January 22, 1768, had thirty nine Lodges on its roll, and from its Constitutions of 1798 we find that Lodges were established at Sherberne, Mass. on May 27th, 1771; Guilford, Connecticut, on July 10th, 1771; and at Boston, Mass., on July 24th, 1772. The last mentioned was the Fourth Lodge of Boston, designated the Rising Sun Lodge.

Then comes the break caused by the hostilities with Great Britain. Boston became a garrison, and was abandoned by many of its inhabitants; the regular meetings of the Grand Lodge were terminated; and the Brethren held no assemblies until after the

conclusion of the war and the establishment of peace. Grand Lodge resumed on February 17th, 1787, for the special purpose of attending the obsequies of Grand Master John Rowe, but the record is very meagre. Nothing of importance attracts attention until January 15th, 1792, when a Committee was set up to confer with the Massachusetts Grand Lodge for the purposes of union. Its report was adopted, and the final meeting of the St. John's Grand Lodge was held March 5th, 1792, when Officers were nominated for the new Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. The Brethren of the Massachusetts Grand Lodge also met on the same day for a similar purpose, and from the nominees made by both Grand Lodges, John Cutler was elected the first Grand Master of the united body. Its full title is "THE GRAND LODGE OF THE MOST ANCIENT AND HONORABLE SOCIETY OF FREE AND ACCEPTED MASONS FOR THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS."

Among the first acts was the publication in 1792 of the Massachusetts Constitutions of the Ancient and Honourable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons, inscribed and dedicated to Illustrious Brother George Washington, The Friend of Masonry, Of his Country, and of Man. Another edition appeared in 1793.

The first Bunker Hill monument was erected by King Solomon Lodge of Boston in memory of Warren and his associates and dedicated on December 2nd, 1792. Paul Revere was elected Grand Master in 1794, and held office for three years. In his capacity he assisted at the laying of the corner stone of the State House on July 4th, 1795.

From this time onwards the progress of Freemasonry in Massachusetts was one of steady advance and prosperity until one

arrives at the great Morgan anti-Masonic campaign in 1826, which proceeded for some seventeen years, and threatened the complete extinction of Freemasonry in the United States. At the outbreak of the persecution there were 101 Lodges with some 4,000 members under the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, and during the next seventeen years no further Lodge was warranted, while no more than ten of the existing Lodges even pretended to preserve their existence during that trying time. 1843 marked, however, a striking revival, dormant Lodges revived their warrants (or Charters as they are known in the United States), and new Lodges sprang up, and this progress has been maintained uninterrupted since that time until at the present time the Lodges number some 130 and the membership 122,629, ranking eighth numerically among the Grand Lodges of the States.

From earliest times it has had among its leaders men in the foremost rank of Civil affairs and its various activities have been marked out by breadth of outlook and vision. It has paid special attention to the study of foreign affairs, having had the benefit for a great number of years of one of the soundest students of this intricate question in the United States (M.W.Bro. Melvin M. Johnson), and it has also had the incentive of having Lodges situated in China, Panama, and Chile to extend its relations wherever it has found it possible consistent with the Masonic principles and tenets as understood by English-speaking Freemasons. To these and to its benevolent activities, as well as its Library, and other points of special interest, reference is made in a separate memorandum. To sum up, it is at present the most English of the American Grand Lodges both in practice and outlook, and is ever

ready to co-operate with the English-speaking Grand Lodges in general and the United Grand Lodge of England in particular, as has been evinced on more than one occasion within recent years.

FRANCIS JONES,

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