

# Freemasonry and Revolution

Presented at Boynton Lodge meeting February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2011 as part of masonic education.

In the Lodge, we are taught that two topics of discussion that we are forbidden to discuss in Lodge are Religion and Politics. In fact, during the opening of a Lodge, we salute “the Flag of Our Country” (this is also done in other countries<sup>[1]</sup>), offering respect to the government of the nation. Why, then, does it seem that many Revolutionary movements are led by Freemasons? In Lodges that follow Continental Masonry, those that do not trace their descent to the United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE), such as those Lodges subordinate to the Grand Orient de France, the prohibition on Lodge discussion of religion and politics is not followed. One of the ancient Landmarks, a belief in Deity, is not considered necessary, and therefore, atheists may become Masons in a Continental Lodge. These Lodges are considered ‘irregular’ by mainstream Freemasonry, and Masonic contact is not permitted between these Lodges, and ‘regular’ Lodges. In discussing the Boston Tea Party, Christopher Hodapp, author of *Freemasons for Dummies*, explains that while members of St. Andrews’ Lodge in Boston were heavily involved in that incident, it was certainly not plotted in the Lodge. The group responsible for the Boston Tea Party, the Sons of Liberty, met regularly at the Green Dragon Tavern in Boston, just a few doors down from Dr. Warren’s house. The Tavern was owned by St. Andrews’ Lodge, which met in a lodge-room upstairs. Dr. Joseph Warren, Paul Revere, John Hancock, and Sam Adams, Masons all, are said to have been involved in the Boston Tea Party, a protest against taxes imposed by the *legal* British Government.

One of the Ancient Charges of a Freemason counsels the Mason to be “a peaceable subject to the Civil Powers” and “never to be concerned in plots and conspiracies against the peace and welfare of the nation.” This charge was listed as the second of those contained in the Constitutions adopted by the Premier Grand Lodge at London in 1723, long before the American Revolution. We do have proof that there were Colonial Freemasons involved in the Revolution; in fact, there were Brethren on both sides of the conflict. Dr. Warren led the fledgling American troops at the Battle of Bunker Hill, where he lost his life, while another Brother of St. Andrews’ Lodge, Dr., John Jeffries, fought alongside the British at the same battle.

One possible argument for the involvement of Freemasons in this conflict for freedom is that the Fraternity itself was not taking sides. The ‘noble experiment’ that is the United States of America may have been birthed in Philadelphia, on July 4, 1776, when independence was declared with the vote of the Continental Congress, but the conception of the nation occurred over at least the

---

<sup>[1]</sup> Doing a Google search, I translated “Flag of our Country” and “Freemason” into French, and pulled up an article, which, when translated back to English, discussed paying proper respect to the Flag of Our Country.

<http://jean-paul.barriere.pagesperso-orange.fr/livres/initianc.htm>

[http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=fr&u=http://jean-paul.barriere.pagesperso-orange.fr/livres/initianc.htm&ei=y\\_6-](http://translate.google.com/translate?hl=en&sl=fr&u=http://jean-paul.barriere.pagesperso-orange.fr/livres/initianc.htm&ei=y_6-)

[T0mZJo00IQfWycThBw&sa=X&oi=translate&ct=result&resnum=5&ved=0CC4Q7gEwBA&prev=/search%3Fq%3D%2522drapeau%2Bde%2Bnotre%2Bpays%2522%2Bma%25C3%25A7on%26hl%3Den%26rls%3Dcom.microsoft:en-us](http://T0mZJo00IQfWycThBw&sa=X&oi=translate&ct=result&resnum=5&ved=0CC4Q7gEwBA&prev=/search%3Fq%3D%2522drapeau%2Bde%2Bnotre%2Bpays%2522%2Bma%25C3%25A7on%26hl%3Den%26rls%3Dcom.microsoft:en-us)

previous half-century, if not over several centuries, as thoughts of self-government and the ability to elect a leader from among the population took place in the Lodges of Speculative Freemasonry.

The Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania traces the decline of the “Modern” branch of Freemasonry and the ascent of the “Ancient” to the Revolution. The Moderns tended to be loyalists, while the Ancients were strongly patriotic. According to the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, out of the 56 signatories of the Declaration of Independence, nine have been proven to be Freemasons, with another eleven suspected of membership or affiliation. Of the 39 signers of the Constitution, 13 were Brethren. Of the 74 General officers commissioned in the Continental Army between 1775 and 1783, 33 (46%) were Freemasons.

Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Presidents of the United States have both traditionally been included in lists of Masonic Presidents. Their membership cannot be conclusively proven, although they did both have much contact with Masons and it is still speculated that they were in fact Brethren. Whether they were or were not initiated, passed, and raised, the specifics of both Jefferson’s *Declaration of Independence*, and the *Constitution of the United States*, primarily written by Madison, show the influence of Masonic thinking.

Jefferson and Madison secretly wrote the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions in 1798 and 1799 after the passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts, under the principal that the individual States were united under a federal government only when the government acted within its Constitutional limits. The 10<sup>th</sup> Amendment specifically gave the States the right to act in the best interests of their own citizens. “The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.”

Another conflict in which Masonry was significant was the American Civil War of the mid-century. It could be argued that the States’ rights issue nineteenth which caused 13 states to secede from the Union was a revolutionary movement.

In the 1830s, federal tariffs on goods were benefitting northern industrial states, and causing hardship on the agrarian southern states. Instead of being able to buy goods from foreign nations at a cheaper level, import tariffs forced people to buy goods produced domestically, at a higher price than they would have originally paid. Certain state legislators also vowed to fight against the return of captured slaves to their owners, especially in the north and northeast of the nation. This growing tide of unrest precipitated the Civil War. South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas seceded from the Union, and formed the Confederate States of America, basing their constitution on a strong states rights principal with a weaker federal government. After the southern attack on Fort Sumter, in Charleston, SC, Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina and Tennessee seceded and joined the Confederacy. Slave-owning states that did not secede and remained in the Union were Missouri, Kentucky, West Virginia, Maryland and Delaware. President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation of 1862 did not free any slaves in states that were a part of the Union, only in Confederate states, which were not bound to listen to him as President.

Abraham Lincoln was not a Freemason, although he had many good things to say about the Order. He assisted with the charter of the Knights of Pythias, a fraternal organization founded in Washington, DC, in 1864. There were many Masons involved in this war on both sides of the conflict. Fourteen percent of Union Generals were Freemasons, while over twelve percent of

Confederate Generals were Brethren<sup>[2]</sup>. Lincoln's cabinet had 16 men in it, of which five were Freemasons. Jefferson Davis' Confederate cabinet had 18 men, of which four were Freemasons. In this conflict, men on both sides were sure that they were fighting for the principles that this country was founded on. One side saw the strong union of states, with a powerful federal bureaucracy, as good and necessary, while the other side preferred that the strength remain in the hands of the individual states, bound together in a confederation, as the fledgling United States was, before the Constitution was written, during the Articles of Confederation. Which group was acting un-Masonically? Was either faction wrong?

In France, Freemasonry started as English Masons travelled to the continent and build Lodges. The Grand Orient de France was founded in 1733. Benjamin Franklin was a prominent American Freemason, and a member of the Lodge Les Neuf Sœurs, a Lodge which offered assistance to the Americans during the American Revolutionary War, and also proved to be a source of the intellectual discourses leading up to the French Revolution. Another member of this Lodge was Georges Danton, a leader during the Revolution, and the first President of the Committee of Public Safety.

A schism took place between the UGLE and the Grand Orient, in 1877. A Protestant priest demanded that a belief in a Supreme Being – one of the Ancient Landmarks of Freemasonry as practiced by the United Grand Lodge of England, no longer be required for a man to become a Mason. The Grand Orient argued that the Landmarks in Anderson's Constitutions are his own collection and his own interpretation, and therefore open to other interpretations. A second Grand Lodge formed in 1894, as Lodges left the Grand Orient, to form the Grand Loge de France. A Third Grand Lodge was formed by the UGLE in 1913, the Grand Loge Nationale Français, which is the only Grand Lodge in France deemed "regular" by the UGLE and most Anglophone Lodges.

Although many French Freemasons took part in the Revolution, there are no written records conclusively linking Freemasonry and the Revolution. One of the key leaders of the French Revolution was the Duc D'Orléans, cousin to the King, and Grand Master of the Grand Orient de France. According to Gould's *History of Freemasonry*, there were at least 10 and possible as many as 30 Masonic organizations conferring degrees and issuing warrants for Lodges in the years leading up to the French Revolution. When the National Assembly was formed, out of the 1,336 delegates to the Estates-General, at least 320 are believed to have been Freemasons. Several writers, such as John Robison and Abbé Baruel, in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries attempted to draw connections between the Bavarian Illuminati and the French Revolution, though later scholarship has shown these associations to be specious. It is likely that the French Emperor, Napoleon Bonaparte was a Freemason, initiated into the Army Philadelphia Lodge, in 1798. He was certainly well-versed in the Brotherhood. His four brothers were Masons, as were 5 of the 6 members of his Imperial Council. He also apparently believed in the rumor of Freemasonry directly descending from the Knights Templar.

These two writers, still often quoted in Anti-Masonic screeds, are both guilty of taking information out of context. Robison relied on translations of German writings, which lacked citation in his 1798 *Proofs of a Conspiracy*.

---

<sup>[2]</sup> There were 584 General officers in the Union army including brevet ranks, of which 81 were Freemasons. In the army of the Confederacy, there were 424 General officers including brevet ranks, of which 53 were Freemasons. Information was obtained from the websites <http://sunsite.utk.edu/civil-war/generals.html> and <http://www.authentic-campaigner.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-717.html>

The continued existence of the Illuminati is debated, with most scholars believing that the order ceased to exist by 1785, while conspiracy theorists claim that the organization is still active, and actively running the world from behind the curtains. It can be said that the Illuminati do survive in the western world, as their main goals of representative democracy, separation of church and state, and the emancipation of women have been established in modern society.

Giuseppe Garibaldi is considered to be one of the founders of the modern Italian state. He fought in both wars of independence in Italy, and although never joining a Lodge in Italy, he did try to use the organization to help organize the new nation and for political purposes and was seemingly frustrated by his inability to do so. The Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite named Garibaldi Grand Master while the Grand Orient of Italy gave him the honorary title of "First Italian Freemason."

Simón Bolívar was President of Gran Colombia, a union of states newly independent from the Spanish Empire, in South America. Bolívar was initiated in Cadiz, Spain, and joined the Scottish Rite in 1807. Bolívar was present at the coronation of Napoleon in Paris, and this apparently ignited the fire of independence in him. He led an invasion of Venezuela in 1813, becoming known as "*El Libertador*". Under his leadership, Gran Colombia was created, encompassing modern-day Colombia, Panama, Venezuela, and Ecuador. Bolivia was named after him, as was the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

In Haiti, François-Dominique Toussaint L'Ouverture, a Freemason, led that country's independence movement from France. He was the governor of the Colony in 1797, when he expelled the French commissioner, and wrote a new constitution, naming himself governor-for-life.

I conclude that although politics, and therefore revolution, are not discussed in open Lodge, the sort of man who becomes a Freemason is the sort of man who will not stand by as the rights of his fellow man are trampled and is the sort of man who will fight for independence, and the equality of man. He who will fight strongly, even to the death, for the right of others to say words that he may not agree with, is the man whom I would be proud to call my Brother.

Brother Scott A. Schwartzberg

#### References

Albert Mackey, *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*

Chris Hodapp, *Freemasonry for Dummies*

Robert Freke Gould, *The History of Freemasonry, Its Antiquities, Symbols, Constitutions, Customs, etc.* Vol. III

<http://www.freemasonry.bcy.ca>

<http://www.wikipedia.org>

<http://www.pagrandlodge.org>

<http://www.bessel.org>