

Did you know?

Tidbits of Masonic Trivia

* In 1794 a Masonic token was minted in honor of the Prince of Wales in England. A son of George III, he later became George the IV. From 1790 to 1813 he served as the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England. The originator of the coin was Brother James Sketchley of Birmingham who created the coin to commemorate the election of the Prince as Grand Master. These coins were so superior in their copper content that they readily became legal tender. In 1817 they were withdrawn from circulation by government order.



1794 Masonic token

* James O. Halliwell-Phillips, an English antiquarian and librarian, was not a Mason. While engaged in his work, he came across a manuscript in the British Museum catalogued as *A Poem of Moral Duty*. It was actually a statement of the "Old Masonic Charges" in poetic form. It is believed to have been prepared in 1390, thus making it the oldest known Masonic document. Now called the *Regius Poem*, or the *Halliwell Manuscript*, it was published in 1840 in a brochure entitled *On the Introduction of Freemasonry into England*.

* In 1835 a group of Masons met under a large oak tree in Brazoria, Texas (just south of what is now Houston) and took the first step to form Holland Lodge No. 1. The tree, known as the Masonic Oak, has continued to grow and is still in existence. On May 15, 1966, the Masons of Texas made a pilgrimage to the Oak. There was singing, dinner, preaching and much fun. The Grand Master, H. W. Fullingim, dedicated the location by placing a Texas State Historical Marker near the Oak tree to commemorate the start of the lodge.



The Masonic Oak

* The Masonic Lodge with the highest meeting place on the earth is Roof of the World Lodge No. 1094, of Oroya, Peru. The elevation of the Lodge room in the Andes Mountains is 14,167 above sea level. The closest competitor in the United States is Corinthian Lodge No. 35 in Leadville, Colorado with an elevation about 10,200 feet.



Roof of the World Lodge

* John Stafford Smith (1750-1836), a member of Royal Somerset House and Inverness Lodge No. 4, London, actually wrote the music which later became our national anthem. Its original use is not known, but at an early date it was adopted by an Irish Masonic orphans' Home as its song. When Francis Scott Key utilized this music for the Star Spangled Banner, the tune was popular in taverns of that time.

* Czar Nicholas I banned Masonry in Russia in 1801. He rescinded the order in 1803 and became a Freemason, probably for political reasons; but in 1822 he again banned Freemasonry in Russia. Masonry was reconstituted several times in the ensuing years, but was declared officially 'dead' around the time of the Bolshevik revolution. It rose from the ashes again in 1995 under the Grand Lodge Nationale Francaise.

* In order to have unbroken floor space in the George Washington Masonic National Memorial in Alexandria, the cars in two elevator shafts move sideways thirty-five feet. As the elevators rise 255 feet in two slanting hoist-ways from the main floor to the observation platform at the top of the building, it moves sideways 1 foot for approximately every 7 ¼ feet it ascends or descends.

* Ely S. Parker, a full-blooded Indian chief, was the grandson of Red Jacket, a close friend of George Washington. He was a Union Brigadier General in the Civil War, and served as General Grant's secretary. He was raised in Batavia Lodge No. 88, Batavia, New York, and later affiliated with Valley Lodge No. 109. He demitted and became a founder and first Worshipful Master of Akron Lodge No. 527 of New York. Ely Parker Lodge No. 1002 of Buffalo, New York is named after him.

* When William McKinley was asked how he happened to become a Mason he explained: "After a particularly hard fought battle, I went with the surgeon of our Ohio regiment to the field where there were about 5,000 Confederate prisoners under guard. Almost as soon as we passed the guard, I noticed the doctor shook the hands with a number of Confederate prisoners. He also took from his pocket a roll of bills and distributed all he had among them."

Boy-like, McKinley looked on in wonderment; not knowing what it all meant. On the way back from camp he asked the Surgeon:

"Did you know these men, or ever see them before?"

"No," replied the doctor, "I have never seen them before."

"But," McKinley persisted, "You gave them a lot of money, all you had about you. Do you ever expect to get it back?"

"Well" said the doctor, "If they are able to pay me back, they will. But it makes no difference to me; they are brother Masons in trouble and I am only doing my duty."

McKinley said, "If that is Freemasonry, I will take some of it for myself."

* One hundred fifty years ago in the U.S., there were nearly 3,000 Masonic lodges that can be described as "Moon Lodges"; in 1972 there were fewer than 500, today fewer than 350 . These lodges met on or near the day of the full moon for very practical reasons; the brethren had light to travel by at night. With the advent of electricity, street lights, and the automobile, the reason for meeting on such nights became unnecessary.

* "Fort Masonic" was built on what was known as the Heights of Brooklyn, which later became Bond and Nevins Streets in Brooklyn, New York. On September 1, 1814, the officers of the Grand Lodge of New York accompanied by a group of Masons from fourteen lodges went to the place and performed one day's work. On September 17th, another day's work was done to complete the fort. "Fort Hiram" was built on October 3, 1814, at Fort Point, Rhode Island. Thomas Smith Webb, Grand Master at the time, supervised the work of 230 Master Masons that day. The purpose of the fortification was to protect the harbor of Providence, Rhode Island.

* Paul Boynton, during the 1832 political campaign, lived in the Green Mountains of Vermont. Those were dark days for the Craft. Andrew Jackson, a past Grand Master of Tennessee, was the candidate for the Presidency against William Wirt, a Mason running on, of all things, the Anti-Masonic ticket. Brother Boynton was a devoted Freemason and did not recant or hide his association with the Craft while the storm was brewing and many members deserted. He made an election vow that if Vermont went for Wirt he would move "out west". In those days "out west" meant St. Lawrence Country, New York, to New Englanders.

When Wirt won in Vermont (the only state he won), Brother Boynton kept his word and moved. At the end of an eighty day journey on horseback, Brother Boynton settled down in Canton New York. He swapped his horse for a pocket watch and a gun shop. He became the best gunsmith in the area and his gun stocks are actually collector's items today. He invented many things, such as the eight day clock, and a pedometer. In 1835 he built what is now known as The Royal Arch House, located at 12 Pine Street, as a constant reminder to friend and foe alike, that he was a Mason.

* On November 7, 1935, President Franklin D. Roosevelt attended the meeting of Architect Lodge No. 519 in New York and raised two of his sons, James and Franklin D., Jr. An honorary membership certificate was presented to the President by the Lodge.

* John Hancock was a member of St. Andrew's Lodge, Boston, Massachusetts. He was the first person to sign the Declaration of Independence. He wrote in a bold flourishing style. When asked why his signature was so large, he replied: "So that George III may read it without putting on his spectacles."

* On December 20, 1874, a special meeting of New York Lodge No. 330 was held to exemplify the Master Masons degree for the edification of a visiting Brother. His Royal Highness David Kalakaua, King of the Hawaiian Islands, and a member of Le Progress Lodge No. 124 in Honolulu.



Brother David Kalakaua

After the degree was exemplified, the Bible on which George Washington had taken his oath of office was displayed. The royal visitor asked that the book be opened at the page where Washington's oath was administered. He took the book in both hands and kissed the page saying "I thank God for this privilege." On January 15, 1865, the same royal visitor attended Chicago's Oriental Lodge No. 33 which had called a special meeting. Over four hundred distinguished visitors attended.

* A Union general, Thomas H. Benton, Grand Master in Iowa, 1860 - 1862, saved Albert Pike's Masonic Library at Little Rock, Arkansas, by placing Federal Troops around Pike's home when the city was invaded during the Civil War.

* It was a time not long after Fort Sumter and the War of Northern Aggression was well under way. The Yankees, as they are still wont to do, had promptly flocked to Hilton Head and Tybee Islands, on opposite sides of the mouth of the Savannah River. The Savannah Folks didn't mind much that the Yankees had stolen the good beaches, for the water was still a bit cool for Southern preferences and, besides, they knew the gnats and mosquitoes would teach the Yankees a lesson they'd never forget. So, the Southerners, as Southerners are wont to do sometimes, just waited.

They didn't have to wait very long before the Yankees on Hilton Head sent out a messenger under a white flag. It seemed that the Yankees had among them a young fellow who had passed through the Fellow Craft Degree before shipping out. The Yanks were just sitting around slapping gnats when it occurred to one of them that, just maybe, there was a nearby lodge that could test him in the Fellow Craft Degree and raise him to the sublime degree of Master Mason.

As luck would have it, there was indeed a lodge in Savannah that would soon be having a Master Masons Degree. One morning, not too many days later, a detail of Confederate Cavalry slipped across the Savannah River into South Carolina and traveled through Bluffton to the shore opposite Hilton Head Island.

From there they escorted one Fellow Craft Mason and, a significant number of Master Masons of the Northern Persuasion, safely through the Confederate Lines and back through about 35 miles of Confederate defenses to Savannah where the candidate and his witnesses were delivered into the local Masonic Lodge.

The records of the Lodge note that this Brother was indeed proficient in the Fellow Craft Degree and he was raised as a Master Mason. Later that night another detail of Confederate Cavalry slipped back across the Savannah River and safely escorted their Brothers back to Hilton Head. I have loved this story since the first time I heard it many years ago. It clearly demonstrates that, even in a dark period in our Nation's history, when brothers were killing brothers, Masonic Brothers could still be Brothers.

* And this, from our own beloved Masons Hall in downtown Richmond (the oldest Masonic Lodge building in continuous use in the U.S.)...In 1865 when Union troops entered the city a Northern General, also a Mason, ordered a guard placed at the Lodge building to prevent its burning. In the ante-room of Richmond-Randolph Lodge No. 19 there hangs to this day a beautiful saber, with its original patina, left behind by a Union soldier following the 'recent unpleasantness' while the city was still under military rule. That saber is being held by the Lodge for the soldier to return and claim that relic of strife.



Mason's Hall, Richmond