



**The Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and  
Accepted Masons of Virginia**



**Committee on Masonic Education**

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**Lodge Presentation Program Paper**

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**MASONIC FOUNDERS DAY**

**Adapted from a paper by Brother Alexander S. “Sandy” MacNabb  
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Freemasonry is the world’s largest, oldest, and best known fraternal organization, mythically descended from the builders of King Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem. It is believed to have developed from the craft guilds of European stonemasons who built castles and cathedrals during the Middle Ages. Temporary buildings called Lodges were built next to the cathedrals, and the masons used them to meet, to receive their pay, to plan their work, to train new apprentices and to socialize.

The first Grand Lodge was established in England in 1717, transforming what were craft guilds composed of “operative” masons, who constructed buildings, into a “speculative” fraternity that used the tools and terminology of the medieval masons as illustrations of character building and which later developed ceremonies using stories of the construction of the King Solomon’s Temple as symbols for building an inner temple in the hearts of men.

Freemasonry circled the globe on the colonizing ships of the British, French and Dutch, and by the 1730s, had spread to the American colonies. Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Paul Revere, and some of the other Founding Fathers were among the first Masons in the United States.

The Lodge at Williamsburg had been warranted by the Grand Lodge of England on November 6, 1773 as Lodge No. 457 on the English Roster. On precisely the same date, the Grand Lodge of England also warranted the Botetourt Lodge at Gloucester Court House. Both of these English warrants are still extant.

There were about a dozen Masonic Lodges in Virginia at the outbreak of the Revolutionary War. For example, Lodges were then, or had been, in existence at nearby Norfolk, Hampton, Yorktown, and several other Tidewater Communities. It was in Williamsburg Lodge, however, that the movement for Masonic independence had its beginning, but, most of the other Lodges soon became centers espousing the spirit of liberty throughout the colony.

After the American Revolution, the subordinate Lodge relationships with the Grand Lodge of England were severed, and Grand Lodges were established in each state. Virginia had never had its own Provincial Grand Lodge, as did several other colonies. Hence, it held the distinction, and still does today, of having the first really independent Grand Lodge in America with no Provincial Grand Lodge antecedents.

At the time of the organization of the Grand Lodge of Virginia in 1777-1778, the very atmosphere of Williamsburg, Virginia's capital at the time, was surcharged with the spirit of liberty and independence. The

ravages of war had not yet been seriously felt by the community and such loyalist sentiments as might have existed at the beginning of the Revolution had long since been extirpated by intervening events and the separation from the mother country.

”There were at least eight extant Lodges in Virginia when the Grand Lodge of Virginia was established in 1778, as the first independent Grand Lodge in America.” The organization of Virginia’s Grand Lodge was not done hastily. There were four conventions called, with the fourth and final one held on October 13, 1778, which is the date we now celebrate as Founder’s Day.

While it is fitting that we celebrate Founder’s Day by recalling the formation of the Craft in Europe, in the United States, and particularly in Virginia, it is equally important that we take stock of the Fraternity today and think about our future.

Today, there are some four million Freemasons worldwide, including about 1.5 million in the USA, and there are thousands of local Masonic Lodges to be found around the globe. Membership in our Fraternity is open to men who believe in a Supreme Being and who meet its qualifications and standards of character and reputation. But, while we openly share our philosophy, ethical principles, and charitable engagements with the public, and we stand ready to answer questions of those who would seek to join our Fraternity, our tradition is not to solicit members.

It is also a tradition in the United States, and indeed, established in Virginia Masonic law, that, in the interest of harmony, there is no discussion in Lodge of the divisive topics of religion and politics, which are likely to excite personal animosities. Nevertheless, Masons are not indifferent to the world around them. A key to understanding Freemasonry is its belief that each man can make a difference in the world by improving himself and taking an active role in his community and the world around him. We realize that we should seek to improve ourselves, then our communities, and then the world. The Fraternity encourages continuous learning, so we might grow intellectually. It also encourages charity and benevolence, so we might also grow morally.

The future of Freemasonry, now as in the past, depends on each new generation of Masons. Thus, our responsibility, as we celebrate Founder's Day, is to bring in new Brethren and then to mentor them. The challenge we face is crystallized by Worshipful Ralph W. Smith, Jr., Past Master of Henry Lodge No. 57 when he suggested, and I paraphrase:

*We have made them Masons according to our ritual, but we must now pause and ask ourselves if this ends our duties toward them. **Have we made them Masons at heart?** Have we encouraged them through an understanding of the sublime philosophy that is part and parcel of Masonry to set higher standards for themselves? Have we prepared them to go forth into the world and let the light of Truth, Morality, and Brotherly Love shine forth in their lives?*

The effort to inculcate a deep love for, and appreciation of, Freemasonry in each succeeding generation of Freemasons is nothing new, but it remains as critical today as it was when Brother Rudyard Kipling expressed his feelings of Masonic love and humility so long ago in a poem titled "The Mother Lodge." Let me conclude this talk by quoting one verse of that poem:

"We 'ain't good regalia,  
An' our Lodge was old and bare  
But we knew the Ancient Landmarks  
An' we kept 'em to a hair;  
An' lookin' on it backwards  
It often strikes me thus,  
There ain't such things as infidels,  
Except', per'aps, it's us."

Thank you, and may God continue to bless our great Fraternity.

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Reference resources used in preparing this paper:  
*"Freemasonry in Virginia", by R. A. Rutyna and P. C. Stewart*  
*Grand Lodge of Virginia Manual of Lodge Programs & Protocol*  
*Journal of The Masonic Society, et al.*