

The First United Grand Lodge

By MWB SIDNEY M. AUSTIN, PGM

The history of the Mother Grand Lodge of England is so well known that it might be considered presumptuous on my part were I to address you at length on that subject. However, a few pertinent facts and dates will tend to refresh your memory and also serve the useful purpose of enabling you fully to understand and appreciate the great and enduring institution that those relatively few brethren brought into being when they decided that a Central Governing Body would be a very necessary and vital factor in order to stabilize and strengthen an institution that had already existed as operative masonry for centuries and which, at this particular epoch, was showing signs of decay.

The first meeting was held at the Apple Tree Tavern, London, sometime during the latter part of the year 1716. Some writers believe that this meeting may have been held during the very early part of 1717. However, we do know that during this preliminary meeting matters were discussed appertaining to the formation of a lodge that would serve as a governing body and to which the other lodges would be subordinate.

It is very unfortunate indeed that we do not have any really authentic information regarding this historic meeting beyond the approximate date thereof, and the place where it was held. However, we can be sure that the discussions must have ended to the satisfac-

tion of the brethren present because arrangements were made to hold the first meeting as a Grand Lodge on St. John the Baptist's Day in 1717, the meeting place was designated as the Goose and Gridiron Ale-house and we do know that this meeting took place as arranged and that a certain Brother Anthony Saver was elected as the first Grand Master and he, in turn, appointed the following as his Grand Wardens:—

Jacob Lamhall and Joseph Elliot, the former was a carpenter and the latter a captain. However, we do not know for sure which one was the senior and which was the junior.

The election of the Grand Master was accomplished by a show of hands and it is a great pity that we do not know more about the individual to whom fell the unique and great distinction of being the first Grand Master of the fraternity? He is referred to by various writers as a gentleman which leads us to presume that he must have been, at that time, a man of independent means, otherwise, an individual who did not have to accomplish physical work in order to provide for himself and family.

During the course of this meeting, the brethren constituted themselves a Grand Lodge, pro-tempore, in due form and we cannot help but feel pangs of regret that no minutes have come down to us of the quarterly meetings for the first six years and we have to

rely upon Bro. Anderson for much of what we know about those early formative years.

We do know that regular quarterly meetings were held and that the Annual Assembly and Feast was held on June the 24th of each succeeding year.

At the second annual meeting, Bro. George Payne, Esq. was elected Grand Master and he chose as his Grand Wardens the following brethren:—George Cardwell and Thomas Morice.

After the new officers had taken over, the newly elected Grand Master requested that the brethren bring to Grand Lodge any old writings and records concerning masonry and masons in order to show the usage of ancient times and several copies of the Gothic Constitutions were produced and collated.

During the Assembly of 1719 Bro. John Desaguilier was elected Grand Master and during this year the formation of several lodges took place in London and vicinity and several men of noble birth were made masons during the course of the year.

Thus the first Grand Lodge of the world gradually grew but it was not all plain sailing. Apparently, a few private lodges opposed the formation of a Grand Lodge and resisted all overtures for their co-operation, in fact a few of these lodges actually destroyed some very valuable manuscripts. At this period of the craft's history they had no printed matter at all that dealt with regulations, charges and secret usages of the craft. Masonic scholars deplore this destruction of those manuscripts as they may have given us very valuable information about the operative craft that we shall, in all probability, never be able to obtain.

At the quarterly assembly held on

St. John the Evangelist's day of the year 1720, it was agreed that in order to avoid disputes and save valuable time, the name of the incoming Grand Master should be proposed to the Grand Lodge at the quarterly meeting immediately preceding the annual assembly by the Grand Master and, if approved, that the brother, if present, should be saluted.

During the annual assembly of 1721, the first nobleman was elected as Grand Master, the Duke of Montague, and it was at this assembly that it was suggested that the stewards were appointed to assist the wardens to prepare for the feast at the annual assembly the following year.

Also at this meeting we get the first indication that the craft was expanding because arrangements had to be made to find a more commodious meeting place and this resulted in the assembly of 1722 being held in Stationers Hall and we are informed that twelve lodges were represented by their masters and wardens. These representatives met at the King's Arms Tavern and marched in procession to the meeting place.

In this way the new governing body existed from year to year until 1723 when it was put upon a more business-like basis; minutes were kept; regulations were promulgated and some sort of order was put into its records and determined efforts were made to standardize the ritual and even Anderson's Constitutions were produced and accepted.

Those few brethren who instituted that historic meeting at the Apple Tree Tavern during the year 1716 could not have had the least idea that they were sowing the seeds of what was to develop into one of the foremost organiza-

tions of all time.

If we take time out to reflect back upon many of the great movements that have come into existence we cannot help but remark that most of them appeared to have been started on their way in a casual or accidental manner.

Speculative masonry is no exception. In fact the revival of masonry in 1717 put a new force and form into the craft that it had never known before and the impulse sent it on its beneficent mission throughout the entire world.

In fact so unpremeditated was the beginning of this new movement that we can claim that the history of the origin of modern masonry is clothed in as dense a fog of mystery as that which surrounds the origin of our ancient symbols and rites and it is quite possible that this veil of mystery will never be pierced by man.

From out of a period of mist and darkness the new masonry began to throw a beam of light that enabled man to see through the darkness and which seemed to bring with it a promise of a philosophy that would bring untold benefits to the lot of mankind.

Although we are masons we are still human beings and, as such, we cannot help but possess a very keen curiosity to learn how our institution developed into the vital force for good that it has become today.

We have very many questions to ask but, unfortunately, very few answers; seem to satisfy those questions and, much to our sorrow, we realize that the answers we are eager to have may never be found unless some hidden manuscripts, the existence of which is not even suspected at the present moment, are brought to the light of day.

However, in spite of our unsatisfied curiosity, we must freely admit that the brethren of those formative days must have put their masonic teachings into actual practice and that they had cultivated the ability to guard a secret with a very pronounced success because they have left us so very little information and there is so much that we would like to learn.

We cannot say for sure how many lodges there were in London when the thought of establishing a Grand Lodge first began to germinate in the minds of those early brethren. However, we do have some reason to believe that there were more than the four "Old Originals" that were represented at that history-making first meeting.

We do not know what bond existed among them that could have caused them to unite to take common action in such a stupendous undertaking beyond the fact that we have strong reasons to believe that such action was necessary in order to save the craft from falling into a condition of such decay that it might have been beyond repair.

We also know that some of the old lodges that were in existence at that time were wholly operative in nature whereas some were a mixture of operative and speculative masons and that, at least, one was wholly speculative in character.

History informs us that the craft at that time was in a very unstable condition, some writers claim that it was bordering on disintegration and we do not have to seek far in order to find the reason for this most unfortunate state of affairs.

It is well known that the operative craft enjoyed a brief period of prosperity immediately following the great

fire of London in 1666 when the services of experienced masons were in great demand but, thereafter, a decline set and that put the operative craft in sore straits.

According to one record that has come down to us, we learn that the few lodges of London feeling themselves neglected by Sir Christopher Wren thought it fit to cement together under a Grand Lodge as the "Center of Union" and Harmony."

Wren was the famous architect of that day and was responsible for the design and erection of St. Paul's cathedral and many other churches that were rebuilt after the great fire that practically destroyed the City of London.

What tends to pique our natural interest and curiosity is that we cannot find any record that would tend to prove that Wren was ever a member of any lodge notwithstanding the various rumours and assertions to the contrary, even that great Mason, William Preston, stated that Wren was a member of the famous Lodge of Antiquity and that he had presented to that Lodge three carved candlesticks. It may be that as Wren was the foremost architect of that time that his name became intimately connected with the operative masonic institution. Therefore, it could be but a natural consequence that his name would be associated with any new move that had any connection with the masonic craft.

As I mentioned before, the minutes of the meetings of the newly formed Grand Lodge were not kept until six years after that first historic meeting as a Grand Lodge and we are therefore, mostly dependent upon Bro. Gould, a past Grand Deacon and one of our foremost historians, for most of what

we have been able to learn regarding those first six years. Even he was obliged to refer to an account which was not written until the second edition of the Constitutions of 1738, that is about 21 years after the events had taken place.

It does seem to be really remarkable that a movement of such great import should have left such a meagre record and a report that was made long afterwards and consequently, may not be as accurate as we could have wished it to be.

We must all feel the urge to ask why were the minutes not kept? or presuming that they were kept and recorded, what has happened to them? That is something that we shall, in all probability, never know.

Another matter that must intrigue us is, why was the first Grand Lodge in the world formed with apparently no thought being given to the importance of having a constitution? Even the General Regulations did not come out until 1721 and the constitution did not appear until 1723.

After studying the scanty records that were enlarged upon by Bro. Gould, the impression is forced upon one that the formation of the Mother Grand Lodge must have been in the nature of an experiment rendered because of the pressing need of a "Centre of Union and Harmony" and, from what we are told by the majority of our scholars, it must have been a pressing need indeed at that time in order to save the Craft from falling into a state of disintegration.

It is very apparent that those early brethren did not intend that the new Grand Lodge should attempt to impose its will upon the rest of the country. Its activities and authority were

to be restricted to the lodges that were operating in and around London and less must have been their thought that its influence would be felt in all lands overseas in a comparatively short space of time.

It is a very significant fact that out of all the trade guilds and other similar associations that flourished at that time, Masonry is the only one that went from strength to more strength after it underwent the change from operative to speculative, preserving its emblems, symbols and much of its ancient customs to teach the spiritual moral and charitable concepts of life. This feature of our institution causes us to believe that Masonry continues to exist because it had never been merely an order that was created entirely for the benefit of architects and builders but that it had always made it a point to combine first class workmanship with spiritual and moral instructions to its votaries. △

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FILIPINO MASONS . . .

(Continued from page 95)

cent United States tour. The organization meeting was topped with a fra-

Among the members of the club are: N. Morabe, Ibarra 31; H. Sotto, Roosevelt 81; L. Cosca, Ibarra 31; S. Sison, Roosevelt 81; M. Contapay, Ibarra 31; C. Alfolor, Primera Luz Filipina 69; J. Villanueva, Ibarra 31; A. Asercion, Primera Luz Filipina, 69; F. Ricaltrate, Ibarra 31; G. Manalo, Mount Mainam 49; J. Atienza, Bagong Buhay 17; Y. Trias, Zapote 29; I. Parro, Keystone 100; R. Ancheta, Union 70; F. Racadag, Keystone 100; S. Maramag, Keystone 100; M. Mata, Bagong Buhay 17; E. Alora, Roosevelt 81; E. Potente, Roosevelt, 81 and F. Eusebio, Ibarra 31.

EASTERN STAR OFFICERS

(Continued from page 90)

SAMPAGUITA CHAPTER NO. 3

Fe C. Deocales, Worthy Matron; Rufino Tolentino, Worthy Patron; Vis-tacium S. Crudo, Associate Matron; Castor Silvestre, Associate Patron; Felicidad Mendoza, Secretary; Victorina R. Silvestre, Treasurer; Honorata Asistores, Conductress; Alicia Abarquez, Associate Conductress; Telesfora Lolarga, Chaplain; Rose S. Ghent, Marshal; Riorita Tolentino, Organist; Tercita Deocales, Adah; Luz Silvestre, Ruth; Angelita Cervantes, Esther; Lydia Salcedo, Martha; Amparo de los Santos, Electa; Demetrio Quintana, Warder; Emilio Asistores, Sentinel.

TEODORO M. KALAW CHAPTER NO. 9

Cristeta Santiago, Worthy Matron; Vicente del Carmen, Worthy Patron; Virginia Domingo, Associate Matron; Francisco Alizon, Associate Patron; Domingo F. M. Domingo, Secretary; Eva E. Kalaw, Treasurer; Luz B. Sese, Conductress; Soledad Rivera, Associate Conductress; Daniel Kolipano, Chaplain; Victorina Abejo, Marshal; Teofilo Abejo, Organist; Paz Ross, Adah; Antonia Kolipano, Ruth; Purita Donor, Esther; Guadalupe Martinez, Martha; Aurea del Carmen, Electa; Milagros Olizon, Warder Porfirio Aquino, Sentinel. *(For more officers, see page 120)*

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To live in the presence of great truths and eternal laws — that is what keeps a man patient when the world ignores him and calm and unspoiled when the world praises him.

—Honore Balzac