**User Script:**

**A Short History of Freemasonry**

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**This survey is an introduction for you about the History of our Order. It is a short introduction that we hope will whet your appetite to delve into the subject more deeply.**

**Introduction:**

There is much we simply do not know about the history of Freemasonry, and those gaps are often a place of study and exploration.

We will touch on a few theories, and we will focus on some of the generally accepted elements of our history

**Muddy:**

As with any organization that is hundreds of years old, more especially so called “secret societies,” such as ours, prior to about 1717 the history gets muddy.

We have a lack of written documentation and there is a great deal of anecdotal stories out there.

Unfortunately the meaning of anecdote is not as all the same as proven empirical data.

**What we do have:**

is a scattering of early documents that we can draw upon to make some educated guesses.

I will briefly explore some of these shortly.

**There are two Theories we will Discuss:**

There are two theories about our history that we as Masons hold dear, although there is little documentary evidence for either.

What I will present next is a mix of tradition and let’s be honest…hope that we are reasonably correct.

**The Knights Templar**

One theory is that we are at least partly derived from the remnants of the Poor Knights of the Temple of Solomon. There was a chivalric monastic military order that was created as a military police force for the Christian Kingdom set up in Jerusalem in 1118, when the First Crusade brought the city under Christian control.

Their job was to protect Christian pilgrims on the road to Jerusalem.

They became known to history as the “Knights Templar.

They grew, obtained Papal status as an Order of Monastic Warrior Knights, flourished as bankers, flourished as warriors, and had secret rituals.

The Knights Templar were disbanded and banished from existence by Papal order between Friday the 13th, 1307 and the burning at the stake of its last Grand Master, Jacques DeMolay in 1314.

The Knights Templar had great wealth, a full navy of warships and Merchant vessels, Castles and other properties all over Europe and the Eastern part of the Mediterranean. But almost instantly, all the Templar Knights and their wealth vanished from the face of the Earth, with little if any records existing today to explain where they went.

Many expositors about Freemasonry think they disappeared into the craft guilds of middle ages Europe, or exiled themselves to Portugal or Scotland, where the Templars were never persecuted.

Many believe much of our core values and some of our ritual comes from these Knights.

**Medieval Stone Masons Theory**

The more accepted theory, also grounded in the Middle Ages, is that the Fraternal Order we know now evolved from the operative Guilds of Masons who kept the secrets of geometry and certain other mathematical processes so essential to the building of all structures.

This was especially the case for the great Cathedrals being built during these time periods.

These Operative Masons did this by use of ritual and allegory and signs. They kept the secrets of their stonework and related mathematical methods inviolate within their guilds.

Manuscripts from as early as 1390 clearly show the creation of much of the ritual we use today, and a cursory review of the Regius Poem and other documents noted help us understand the evolution of the craft.

One of more important historical threads involves The Lodge of Edinburgh, 1599

This Lodge of Masons has the oldest set of minutes of any Lodge, going back to 1599.

It is interesting to note that this Lodge began as a guild of regular craftsmen, that is, operative Masons, before accepting “speculative Masons” into their ranks in 1634. Perhaps this is the one of the birthplaces of our modern Masonic craft.

**In 1717 The Masonic Lodges Goes Public**

An early Masonic author named Anderson in 1723 describes the establishment of the Grand Lodge of England by the union of four old London Lodges. It was done to allow the four Lodges to establish a Grand Master, have regular joint meetings of their officers, and establish the Grand Lodge.

Anderson’s History infers that such meetings, or at least some Annual Assemblies and Feasts, had, on occasion, taken place under the leadership of Sir Christopher Wren and other notables who were now speculative masons. It’s a good story, but the best that can be said for the statements is that they are not well proven.

Now, however, a definite move was made and a preliminary meeting was held on June 24, 1717.

This is when the Grand Lodge of England went public, pulling themselves into to public sphere.

Next let us turn our attention to the development of Colonial Lodges, and Freemasonry in the Americas,

Freemasonry as we know it was most certainly “fully developed” by the time of the American Revolution in the late 18th Century, and there were Colonial Lodges for both the French and the British in North America and Canada.

**And lastly there is the history of Freemasonry and its influence on our Republic’s Founding Documents**

The tenants of Freemasonry are infused into many of our founding documents here in the United States, by Freemasons who were intimately involved in the creation of them.

**Conclusion**

So now it becomes clearer how operative masons worked, kept secrets, and promoted their guild members; that is, the entered apprentice, the fellow craft and the master mason. These three degrees were all metaphorically carried over into the realm of speculative Freemasonry.

The ritual evolved, moving from the Guilds to the Lodges.

The creation of the system of morality and the lessons about it was amazing work done by good men really trying to find a catechism, and in due course a way of life, that would allow good men to become better.

**Thoughts to carry away today:**

This brief history should give you enough information to draw your interest and help you better understand development of our teachings and ritual.

Placing yourself within the study of the history of an ancient fraternity can bring great joy, but with it comes with serious responsibility.

Let us not break this chain of work done by our forebearers, Freemasons all, going back hundreds of years, who have so devoutly passed their teachings and ritual down to us.

Thank you very much.

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