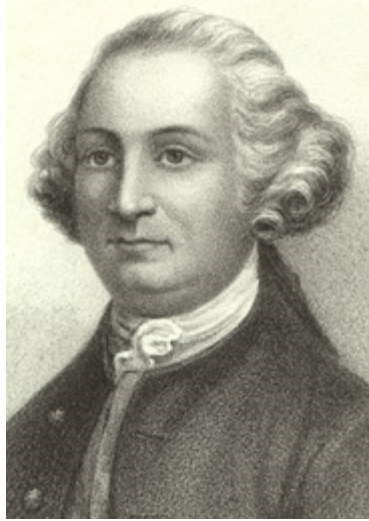


## Brief History of Freemasonry in North America

No one knows with certainty how or when the Masonic Fraternity was formed. A widely accepted theory among Masonic scholars is that it arose from the stonemasons' guilds during the Middle Ages. The language and symbols used in the fraternity's rituals come from this era. The oldest document that makes reference to Masons is the Regius Poem, printed about 1390, which was a copy of an earlier work.



Henry Price, First Grand Master of Masons in America, and of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts 1733. Born in London 1697. Died at Townsend Mass. 1780.

There is little but tradition regarding Freemasonry in North America prior to 1750. Setting aside an inscribed stone dated 1606 from Goat Island, Nova Scotia; ambiguous Plymouth County records from 1654; and the Rev. Edward Peterson's claims for a Rhode Island lodge in 1658, the first reference to a freemason in North America is Jonathan Belcher, born in Boston in 1681, who was initiated into an "occasional lodge" while travelling in Europe in 1704, making him, upon his return to Boston in 1705, the "Senior Freemason of America".

There is some evidence that Lord Alexander, Viscount Canada (*d.* 1638)—who was admitted into the Lodge of Edinburgh on the 3rd of July, 1634—established a lodge in the colony on the banks of the St. Lawrence, but there is no trace."

In 1717, four lodges in London formed the first Grand Lodge of England, and records from that point on are more complete.

The first Lodge meeting in the western hemisphere, the knowledge of which is supported by something more than pure tradition, was probably held in King's Chapel, Boston, in 1720.

From 1721 there are newspaper accounts of Masonic affairs, implying that Freemasonry was of public interest and that there were freemasons in the colonies. A number of members of the lodge meeting in King's Chapel, Boston relocated to Nova Scotia after 1723 and may well have held occasional lodges in their new home.

Within thirty years, of the founding of the first Grand Lodge of England the fraternity had spread throughout Europe and the American Colonies. The first lodge in Boston, St. John's meeting at Tun Tavern, was constituted July 30, 1733 but claimed an older history. Its first record book dates from the eleventh meeting of the lodge on December 27, 1738 to July 24, 1754.

The brethren who met in Philadelphia left an account book, now known as "St. Johns Lodge Libr B", beginning with June 24, 1731. In the archives of the American Philosophical Society at Philadelphia is a volume entitled "Benjn Franklins Journal, began July 4, 1730". It is an account book containing an entry for September 9, 1731 referring to the "Lodge of Masons held at B. Hubard's". Bro. John Hubbard kept Tun Tavern, where the lodge met.

Unfortunately, "...the premier Provincial Grand Lodge of the Western Hemisphere, organized in Boston, Massachusetts, July 30, 1733 [by Henry Price], has no formal and continuous records written in a book.

Freemasonry became very popular in colonial America. George Washington was a Mason, Benjamin Franklin served as the head of the fraternity in Pennsylvania, as did Paul Revere and Joseph Warren in Massachusetts. Other well-known Masons involved with the founding of America included John Hancock, John Sullivan, Lafayette, Baron Fredrick von Stuben, Nathanael Greene, and John Paul Jones. Another Mason, Chief Justice John Marshall, shaped the Supreme Court into its present form.

The first Lodges in the US were chartered directly by Lodges or Grand Lodges in Britain; after awhile, however, Lodges in the colonies would issue warrants to form new Lodges themselves and eventually organized their own (Provincial, during the colonial period, but independent later on) Grand Lodges. The first truly independent Grand Lodge in America was organized by four Lodges meeting in Virginia. As each had been chartered by a different Grand Lodge in other states, the resulting ritual was a mixture of that in use in the other states. At the present time there is a Grand Lodge for each of the 50 states, as well as one for the District of Columbia. That is a fairly recent development; until just a few years ago, the Grand Lodge of California had jurisdiction over the Lodges in Hawaii. The Grand Lodges in the United States observe a custom of exclusive geographic jurisdiction (with some few exceptions in Alaska); no Grand Lodge may charter Lodges in the territory of another Grand Lodge. This custom does not prevail in other parts of the world.

In a young America, Masonic ideals fully took flight—sometimes in unexpected ways. In Boston in 1775, Freemasonic officials who were part of a British garrison granted local freemen of color the right to affiliate as Masons under the banner of African Lodge No. 1. The African Lodge later became known as Prince Hall Masonry, so named for the order's founder, Prince Hall, a freed slave. Hall became the first African-American named a Grand Master. Despite the African Lodge's segregated status, Prince Hall Masonry was a bastion of abolitionism. Its leader affixed his name to some of the republic's earliest anti-slavery petitions in 1777 and 1778. As such, African Lodge No. 1 represented the first black-led abolitionist movement in American history.