

AW22 Lodge Anecdotes

by
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Robert Adam – Our Founding Father

Without doubt, no one else can be credited with the title “founding father” of our lodge other than Worshipful Brother Robert Adam. It was he that traveled twice to Philadelphia attending the quarterly communications of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania to request a warrant for the establishment of a local Masonic lodge. His name appears at the top of the list of petitioners for that warrant, and it was Brother Adam that was selected to be the first Master of Lodge No. 39 serving almost four years in office. Although encouraged and assisted by Dr. Elisha Cullen Dick, a member of Lodge No. 2 of Philadelphia, there is ample evidence that it was Robert Adam who was the prime mover of the project.

As referenced in “The Lodge of Washington”, Robert Adam was the son of Reverend John Adam, D.D. and Janet Campbell of Kilbride, Scotland. He was born on May 4, 1732 and immigrated to America in 1753. After a short residence at Annapolis, Maryland, he settled in a country estate within Fairfax County, Virginia, about four miles from Alexandria. Instrumental in establishing several useful manufactures, he was a gentleman of refined taste, cultivation and wealth.

When Brother Adam attended the Quarterly Communication of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania “Ancients” held on September 2, 1782, the grand lodge was apparently very favorably disposed in granting a warrant for him and his petitioners, but it was found that “Brother Adam, the proposed Master thereof, had been found to possess his knowledge in a clandestine manner”. This was understood to mean that he had received his degrees in a lodge of “Moderns” which at the time were considered irregular. Nothing therefore could be done but defer all action until Brother Adam could be made a “regular” mason.

[The Ancient or Atholl Masons of England were a group of mostly Irish Masons living in London, who established in 1751 a separate grand lodge designating it the "Grand Lodge of England according to the Old Institutions," and fashioned themselves "Ancients". Their rivals were the regularly established grand lodge of 1717, which the Ancients called "Moderns" because of accusations pertaining to *modern-day* innovations of ancient landmarks, tenets and practices of the order. These so-called innovations (which, among others, removed all Christian references) were said to have taken place from the Moderns establishment about 1730, developing dramatically until the breakup of the two rival grand lodges in 1751. One of the major catalysts that induced the initial separation was the historic complement of the Master Mason's degree or Royal Arch element. The Ancients had completed the otherwise inferior third degree with the Royal Arch component, with which the Moderns were unfamiliar, or had once lost. This element played an important role to the Ancients and was later adopted into the Moderns' ritual when the two grand lodges consolidated in the year 1813.]

Brockett states that it is not known with what lodge Adam was first connected, but two years before he came to Annapolis, Maryland, a lodge denominated “Moderns”, was instituted at that place by Saint John's Grand Lodge, holding its seat at Boston. The embarrassment of Brother Adam under the circumstances can be easily imagined. He furthermore had to return to Alexandria empty handed and explain this oversight to the other petitioners.

What happened between the dates of September 2, 1782 and the subsequent meeting of the grand lodge held on February 3, 1783 is indicated by the following extract of the minutes of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania:

“It appearing that since the last Communication of the Grand Lodge that the said Brother Adam has passed through the several steps of *Ancient Masonry* in Lodge No. 2 (Dr. Dick's

lodge of Philadelphia) under the jurisdiction of this Right Worshipful Grand lodge: It is ordered, that the prayer of the said petitioners be complied with, and that the Secretary present Brother Adam with a warrant to hold a Lodge of Ancient Masons, in Alexandria, in Virginia, to be numbered 39...Brother Robert Adam was then duly recommended, and presented in form, to the Right Worshipful Grand Master, in the chair, for installation as Master of No. 39, to be held in the Borough of Alexandria, in Fairfax County, Virginia. He was accordingly installed as such."

Thus begins the history of our lodge with Robert Adam and the Provincial Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, February 3, 1783.

On returning to Alexandria, we find the first meeting of Lodge No. 39 held on Tuesday, February 25, 1783. The original lodge minute book records two grand lodge officers of Pennsylvania came to Alexandria to assist Worshipful Adam at the initial meeting. In fact, Worshipful Adam is recorded as serving as Junior Warden and Brother Charles Young, Grand Treasurer, occupied the East with Colonel Thomas Procter, the Senior Grand Warden in the West. The meeting took place on the second floor of Lamb's Tavern located on the west side of Union Street with six brethren present. There, the petitioners (not all were there) including Dr. Dick were elected to membership (there was no installation ceremony per se). Afterwards, all three degrees were conferred on Robert McCrea and Richard Conway. At the conclusion of this degree work, we find they too elected to membership along with the two grand lodge officers making a total of eight brethren present for the evening. Robert Adam would not preside in the East until the next "Extra Lodge" meeting held on Saturday, March 8, 1783.

From various sources, we learn that Robert Adam was a very busy and successful businessman. As noted before, he established several manufacturing firms including that of *Carlyle and Adam*, later of *Robert Adam and Company*, and in about 1783, he organized with Peter Dow and Colin McIver (who were also members of Lodge No. 39) the firm of *Adam, Dows and McIver*. All these companies are mentioned in Washington's correspondence, most with favor, although we do find a few critiques of his business dealings with Brother Adam.

Even though busy with personal and business affairs, Worshipful Adam had faithful lodge attendance. During the first twelve months in office, we find a total of twenty-six meetings, fifteen of which were conducted on the first degree of Masonry. Some twenty-nine petitions for the degrees were presented of which eleven were rejected. We also find six petitions for affiliation all being received into membership. While it is not entirely clear as to the total membership at the end of the first twelve months, one can safely conclude there were at least thirty to thirty-five elected members of the lodge.

Other accomplishments Adam's first year were:

- The adoption of a code of laws copied and referenced from the bylaws of Lodge No. 2 of Philadelphia.
- The first gift presented to the lodge: an edition of the Holy Bible made by Worshipful Robert Adam.
- The purchase of all lodge furniture and regalia as required for Ancient styled workings.
- The first official correspondence with Fredericksburg Lodge, beginning our fraternal relationship with Washington's mother lodge.
- The first relief of a "poor brother" whose health and financial resources made it necessary for him to pawn his watch. The lodge redeemed the timepiece and obligated itself to provide for his necessities until he could take care of himself.
- On June 24, 1783, we find the first Saint John the Baptist's Day observance with brethren clothed in full regalia. The public procession marched "some distance down Fairfax Street", to the Presbyterian Meeting House for a charity sermon. This would become a tradition of the lodge that united the city of Alexandria and Freemasonry. The attendance was seventeen members and nine visitors that day, the largest assembly of Freemasons to date.

From this period forward, the lodge would continue to prosper under Robert Adam's leadership, for on June 24, 1784, Worshipful Adam welcomed Brother George Washington himself to this festivity, electing him to honorary membership and officially beginning his relationship with our lodge.

Other important measures taking during Adam's term:

- November 20, 1783 First purchase of aprons for individual members rendered.
- January 23, 1784 First mention of Washington's name in the lodge minutes.
- March 25, 1785 First case of discipline for excessive absences by a member.
- May 20, 1785 First lodge notice "in the Alexandria paper".
- September 7, 1785 First cornerstone to be laid: Alexandria Academy.

From Minute Book No. 1, we find the following entry concerning the appreciation the brethren felt toward their first Master expressed just after the close of his tenure.

"ORDERED, the Brothers George Richards, Charles Simms, & William Herbert prepare a Letter to our late Worthy Brother Robert Adam, Master, expressing the high sense that Lodge No. 39 entertains of his great merit in filling said office for several years. "

Jany 13th 5787

Worthy Brother:

Agreeable to the order of the Lodge on the 22nd ultimo, we now address you to Express the sense of gratitude the Lodge entertains for the attention, assiduity and friendship to the Craft, which has actuated your conduct during your long and faithfull continuance as Master, and at the same time to present you with the Lodge's thanks, hoping that your example will emulate all, who may hereafter be appointed to fill that important office, to do it with the same fervour and zeal, and that you from a conscious rectitude of having acted as became the Worthy Mason, may be ever blessed with the pleasing sensations of have conformed to the just points of Masonry. We at the same time assure you, that it is with the greatest pleasure we execute the order of the Lodge, having been witnesses to the propriety of your Conduct. We beg leave also to inform you that our delay in not executing it sooner was owing to nothing more than we conceived, it would have been time enough between the time appointed and the next stated Lodge. We are with sincere esteem

Your affectionate Brothers

G.R.

C.S.

W.H.

It should be noted that to this letter, Worshipful Adam made a reply dated February 20, 1787, which was read to the lodge on February 23, and "...accepted and approved of, and ordered to be recorded". But Dennis Ramsay, the Secretary of the lodge, failed to carry out this order thus depriving history of Brother Adam's final address to his beloved brethren.

On December 22, 1786 Brother Robert McCrea, who was made a Mason at the very first meeting of Lodge No. 39 in 1783, succeeded Worshipful Adam. A little more than two years later, Worshipful Adam would be called to the Celestial Lodge above, the first member of No. 39 to be taken by death, *the Grand Leveler of Human Existence*.

Worshipful Robert Adam died at his estate on March 27, 1789 at the age of 58 years.

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