

AW22 Lodge Anecdotes
by
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Lodge No. 39's "Laws"

At the very first meeting held (February 25, 1783), Lodge No. 39 unanimously adopted its first set of "Laws". Today, Masonic lodges usual designate these regulations as "By-Laws" or "Bye-Laws" which set forth a code of rules governing its members. A virtual copy of the Laws of Lodge No. 2 in Philadelphia, they were prepared in advance and presented for adoption by the two grand lodge officers of Pennsylvania, Brother Charles Young, Grand Treasurer, and Colonel Thomas Procter, the Senior Grand Warden, who came from Pennsylvania to assist at the initial meeting. Within the Archives of the lodge, we do not find the original manuscript presented at the time, but the entire text was flawlessly inscribed in the first few pages of the lodge's first minute book. Here, we can see the strictness with which lodges of the eighteenth century operated. Attendance was required unless a sufficient reason for non-attendance was submitted. Profanity and indecency were forbidden under penalty of fine, suspension, or even expulsion. The Craft was referred to as "the sacred institution of Antient Masonry" and new members were admitted only after the closest investigation into their character and standing in the community.

These early Laws of Lodge No. 39 occupy more than nine pages of the first minute book. They are preceded by a full page bearing the inscription "Alexandria / February 25th, 1783", and three pages of signatures (ninety in all affixed at different times). Afterwards, there are several blank pages followed by the "Laws" themselves. In addition to this, various Secretaries have torn a number of leaves out, who undoubtedly used them for memoranda at various times.

Studying the signature pages, we find the first signature affixed seems to have been that of Robert Adam, who was the lodge's first Master. But the name of William Hunter, Jr. has been written above that of Robert Adam, for which no explanation is apparent. Then come the names of Elisha Cullen Dick, John Allison, George Richards, Saml Arell and others. As we have noted before, Brothers Adam, Allison, and Dick were present at the meeting on February 25, 1783, in addition to Peter Dow, whose name for some reason was never affixed to the Laws. These four Brethren, along with William Hunter, Jr., and Michael Ryan had signed the petition presented to the Provincial Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania in 1782. Brothers Thomas Procter, the Senior Grand Warden, and Charles Young, the Grand Treasurer of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania were present as the representatives of grand lodge at the first meeting of No. 39, constituted the lodge with all solemnity, and, upon their own application, "were ballotted for and unanimously received" into the new lodge. But interestingly enough, neither of their names is signed to the Lodge "Laws".

At the bottom of one of the signature pages there is a large half-circular piece missing, in which one or more signatures appeared originally. It is supposed that the deleted portion of the page contained the signature of General George Washington, who probably signed the Laws at the time he was made an honorary member as referenced in an earlier anecdote. Of course, no one will ever know the precise facts in this case. But the conclusion is inescapable, that some thoughtless or deliberate souvenir hunter committed this act of vandalism.

Special attention is called to Laws 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, covering various Masonic offenses punishable by fine, suspension, or expulsion. These constitute nearly half of all the articles listed and are an impressive indication of the strictness that pervaded Antient lodges. In all, there are twenty-one rules set forth and we have not the space here to put forward an

examination of all the Laws of Lodge No. 39. Instead, because of the significant historical importance of these codes, we have attached the complete text to this anecdote. Please take time and read carefully these Laws, as they put forth the basic foundation of today's Masonic jurisprudence.

My son, forget not my Law, but let thine Heart keep my Commandments, and remove not the Land mark which thy fathers have set. – The concluding decree of the Laws of Lodge No. 39.

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**LAWS of
Lodge No. 39
(Adopted February 25, 1783)**

In order to prevent feuds, controversies and illegal debates, And to promote the Harmony and good order of the Lodge, We the subscribers have thought proper to agree to and establish the following rules:

1. That a free and accepted Lodge of Free Masons be held in the lodge room for the time being, regularly on the Friday after the third Monday in every month.
2. That the hours of meeting be from March to September at 7 O'Clock in the Eve, and from September to March at 6 O'Clock in the evening and that the Lodge be opened precisely half an hour after the time appointed.
3. That a Mason well skilled in the Masters part be appointed and established as Tyler to the Lodge whose duty it shall be to carry Notices to all the Members of it issued by the Secretary of the time and place of every meeting, whether on stated Nights or extra occasions.
4. That every member who is absent at the opening of a Lodge shall forfeit and pay to the Treasurer One Shilling, except in cases of sickness, absence from Town, &c. when the excuse must be made to the Chair and if it be Judged sufficient by the Master and Brethren present the penalty may be remitted.
5. When any person is desirous of being received as a Visitor in this Lodge report must be made to the Chair, when two Brethren must always be appointed to examine him, unless he is well known to be an Antient Mason to one or more of the Brethren present.
6. One Brother only is to speak at a time and but once on a subject without leave from the Chair except to explain himself, or when called upon by the Master, and every Brother when he addresses the Chair shall rise, nor shall any other interrupt him while speaking, unless he is wandering or introducing arguments not pertinent to the subject, when the Master may call him to the point he deviated from and correct his error, but should he still persist he shall be publicly reprimanded from the Chair for the first Offence, and for the second fined Two Shillings and Sixpence.
7. Any person, who shall hiss, ridicule, or make sport of a Brother for what he hath said, or shall raise angry disputes against a Brother to the derangement of good order and the disturbance of the Lodge shall for the first Offence be reprimanded, for the second be fined five Shillings and solemnly excluded from the Lodge for the Night, and at its option declared forever incapable of being a Member until he shall evince his contrition by asking and obtaining forgiveness.
8. Any Brother who shall curse or swear or use any reproachful language in derogation of God's holy name or corruption of a good Manner in open Lodge, shall for the first Offence pay two Shillings and Sixpence, for the second five Shillings, and for the third excluded for the night.
9. If a Member of this or any other Lodge come disguised in liquor, he shall be admonished by the presiding Officer and pay two Shillings and Sixpence for the first offence, for the second five Shillings, and for the third he shall be solemnly excluded.
10. When personal quarrels and contests unhappily arise between Brother and Brother, no civil prosecution shall be commenced but the merits of the contest shall be submitted to the decision of the Lodge whose Judgement shall be binding and conclusive on each of the parties, and the Brother who recedes from this mode of reconciliation, or will not abide by the sentence of the Lodge in such case, Shall be

deemed unworthy and excluded the Lodge forever. But in controversies of a Civil nature and concerning property (however preferable this mode of adjustment) no Brother is restricted from a discreet resort to the tribunal of Public Justice as a general restraint might subvert that laudable freedom of choice which characterizes the Masonic Order.

11. Each member shall pay one shilling for every calendar month to the fund which payment together with any fines he may incur he shall make on or before every St Johns day, except in cases of sickness, acknowledged inability, or necessary absence, or proof being made that it was not demanded of him, under a penalty of five shillings; and any member who shall refuse paying his arrearages on every St John the Evangelist's day, except for the same pleas, shall be excluded the Lodge.
12. If any member regardless of the dignity of the Craft shall so demean himself or the sacred institution of Antient Masonry, as to be present at the entering, passing or raising of any person in a clandestine manner, his name shall be erased from the records of the Lodge and be deemed unworthy of its communion, except the Officers and two thirds of the members present on examination receiving his petition agree to pardon him, and in that case he shall pay the sum of three pounds to the fund, and all arrears that may be due from the time of his expulsion to the time of his receiving grace.
13. If any member shall be guilty of disclosing any matter or thing that shall pass in open Lodge, except to a Brother Member he shall be publicly reprimanded from the Chair and further according to the Nature of the Offence at the discretion of the Lodge.
14. The Past Masters together with the Officers of the Lodge shall be a standing Committee, any three of whom to form a Quorum whose business it shall be to see that all dues, fines, and contributions are properly made and that no money is paid but to an order of that Committee signed by the Master or presiding Officer, that their proceeding shall be entered among the transactions of the Lodge and read with the other minutes by the Secretary from time to time, and that their necessary expenses be paid out of the common stock.
15. That the Master shall have full power to call an extra Lodge on any emergency, when every member shall be summoned as on regular Lodge nights, but he is not to enter, pass or raise any person who has not been one month proposed unless he receives a dispensation or order from the R.W.G.M. or his deputy, or the unanimous concurrence of the Lodge.
16. Any person desirous of being made a Free Mason of this Lodge shall be proposed by a member thereof, and such proposal shall be accompanied with a petition and made in Lodge hours, upon which two members of the Lodge must be appointed to make strict enquiry into the merits, character and circumstances of the candidate and report the succeeding Lodge night, the Brother who proposed him shall at the same time deposit one Dollar of his Money to insure his attendance according to the proposal. If the Lodge approves his Character, Age, circumstances and therefore initiates him into the Mystery, &c. he shall pass the further sum of Four pounds sixteen Shillings into the Fund. The Dollar previously deposited to be given to the Tyler; But should the Lodge think him unworthy and refuse to make him, his money is to be faithfully returned by the Brother who made the deposition. But if the Lodge approve him and he refuse to be made the deposit is to be given to the Tyler.
17. That the mode of determining the admittance or rejection of all individuals, and all disputes concerning the Laws of this Lodge be by Ballott. If after ballotting one black ball appears against a member proposed he cannot be admitted that night. If it be thought very extraordinary the Master or presiding Officer may order the Box to be put about a second time for fear of its being an accident, and if a black Ball still appears, the Master may demand the reason the next stated night, unless he has been

satisfied in private in which case a public declaration is not necessary. But if two black Balls appear, that precludes all further enquiry.

18. It is hereby declared and agreed that no person is capable of being a member of this Lodge unless he be of mature age, upright body, sound in understanding, and members, with some vocation or employment likely to maintain himself or family.
19. That in the determination of all Questions, disputes or penalties that is not heretofore specified, it shall be done by the holding up of hands, in which a majority is always to prevail.
20. That Lodge No. 39 be represented either by a Member or by proxy in the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania.
21. That these Laws be open to the perusal of any who wish to become members of this Lodge and that every Member subscribe them immediately after his admission.

My son, forget not my Law, but let thine Heart keep my Commandments, and remove not the Land mark which thy fathers have set.