

Freemasonry in Michigan

By petitioning for membership in a Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons, you will be associating with a fraternal order in Michigan that was organized in 1826 and was operating several years before our State was admitted to the Union. However, Freemasonry, as we know it today, dates its formal beginnings to the 18th century. Therefore, you will become, upon acceptance, a member of the oldest fraternity in the world.

While we cannot claim that Freemasonry came to the Great Lakes area on any specific date, we know that it was first brought to the area by the French at a time when it was Indian territory. The earliest documented Lodge west of the Allegheny Mountains was warranted in Detroit on April 27, 1764, by George Harison, Provincial Grand Master of the Provincial Grand Lodge of New York, with Lt. John Christie of the 2nd Battalion, 60th Royal American Foot Regiment (British), as Worshipful Master. By 1772, there were at least three Lodges functioning at Detroit: Lodge No. 1 and two Irish Military Lodges, Nos. 299 and 378, warranted to Masons of the 10th Regiment, then stationed at Detroit. The next three Lodges warranted for work in Michigan were also started by members of the visiting military. These were Harmony Lodge in Detroit, St. Johns Lodge No. 15 on the island of Mackinac and Zion Lodge No. 10 (now No. 1) warranted in 1794 for work in Detroit.

Many events are recorded in the well-kept Minutes of Zion Lodge, but perhaps the most momentous occurred in September of 1817, when the Lodge provided much needed support for the newly-created University of Michigan. The idea first took shape in the minds of Augustus Woodward, a Mason and the first Judge of the Territorial Supreme Court; the Reverend John Monteith, a Presbyterian clergyman and Father Gabriel Richard, a Roman Catholic Priest. On September 15, Zion Lodge met and subscribed the sum of \$250 in aid of the University of Michigan, payable in the sum of \$50 per year. Of the total amount subscribed to start the University, two-thirds came from Zion Lodge and its members.

The members of Zion Lodge sponsored and supported additional Lodges in Upper Canada and Michigan, including Detroit Lodge No. 337 (now No. 2), Oakland Lodge No. 343 in Pontiac, Menomenie Lodge No. 374 in Green Bay (then a part of the Territory) and Monroe Lodge No. 375 in Monroe. These five Lodges laid plans for a Grand Lodge in the Territory to handle the growing plans form Masonry in the area, and in June of 1826 a Grand Lodge for the Territory of Michigan was established in Detroit. There are over 375 Lodges in the State of Michigan at the present time. Each Lodge sponsors several social and charitable events during the year. One of our major charities is a home for elderly Masons and their wives located in Alma, Michigan. We are justifiably proud of this Masonic Home, and you and your family are invited to visit at your convenience.

What is Freemasonry?

THE MASONIC COMMITMENT TO CHARACTER

Many years ago, the famous Dr. Albert Schweitzer wrote these magnificent words:

"It is not enough merely to exist... Every man has to seek in his own way to make his own self more noble and to realize his own true worth."

Those words capture the meaning of Freemasonry. As the world's oldest and largest fraternity, our goal is to build a man's most valuable possession, his character.

We believe that the strength of the family, the church, the community and our country rests with men of strong conviction, firm ethical and moral values and a devotion to our democratic system of government. As Masons, we help each other intensify our devotion to these enduring values.

In a day when it seems that few people really care about rising to the highest and best in life, it is good to know that there is a organization where a man can really improve himself.

In lodge meetings, there is not talk of politics, no discussion of religious issues, even though every Mason must affirm a belief in deity according to his own understanding, and devotion to his country.

Masons are concerned with developing their minds and enlarging their scope of knowledge. In a word, Masons are dedicated to becoming better men.

Men of every walk of life belong to Masonic Lodges. They are proud of the centuries of tradition, their belief in brotherhood, country and the many Masonic acts of charity and compassion.

THE FOUNDING OF FREEMASONRY

The origins of Masonry reach back to Medieval times when the great cathedrals of Europe were built. The stonemasons who created these inspiring Gothic structures formed craft guilds to protect the secrets of their trade and to pass on their knowledge to worthy apprentices.

In 17th century England, these guilds began accepting honorary members, men of learning and position. These new members were not working stonemasons or even associated with the building trades. As "accepted Masons," they eventually grew into a separate organization called Freemasonry, a moral and ethical society that taught the 18th century ideals of equality and the importance of education in freeing mankind from prejudice, superstition and social injustice.

MASONRY TODAY

Masons continue to use the simple tools of the ancient stonemasons - the square and compasses, the trowel, plumb and level as symbols to teach their ideals. A Mason is oathbound to build his life and character with the same care and precision that stonemasons used to construct the cathedrals and temples centuries ago.

Today, there are almost five million Masons in the world, with the United States claiming about three million of the total membership.

MASONIC CONCERN FOR OTHERS

Freemasonry has an outstanding record for helping others. Along with scholarships and loan funds to assist young people in furthering their education, Masons support many community based charitable projects. Retirement homes and hospitals for the elderly provide care for those who no longer can care for themselves.

THE IMPROVEMENT OF LIFE

Yes, Masons are members of a fraternity that has its secrets, but the many character-building activities of Freemasonry indicate that it is far from a secret organization. Masons are active in their dedication to improve life. Always ready to undertake a difficult task in a quiet, dignified way, today's Masons go about the job of extending the hand of brotherhood. For the man who is looking for deeper meaning in life and who wants to be part of a fraternity committed to his growth and improvement, Masonry is filled with marvelous opportunities and limitless possibilities.