

The Arizona Keystone

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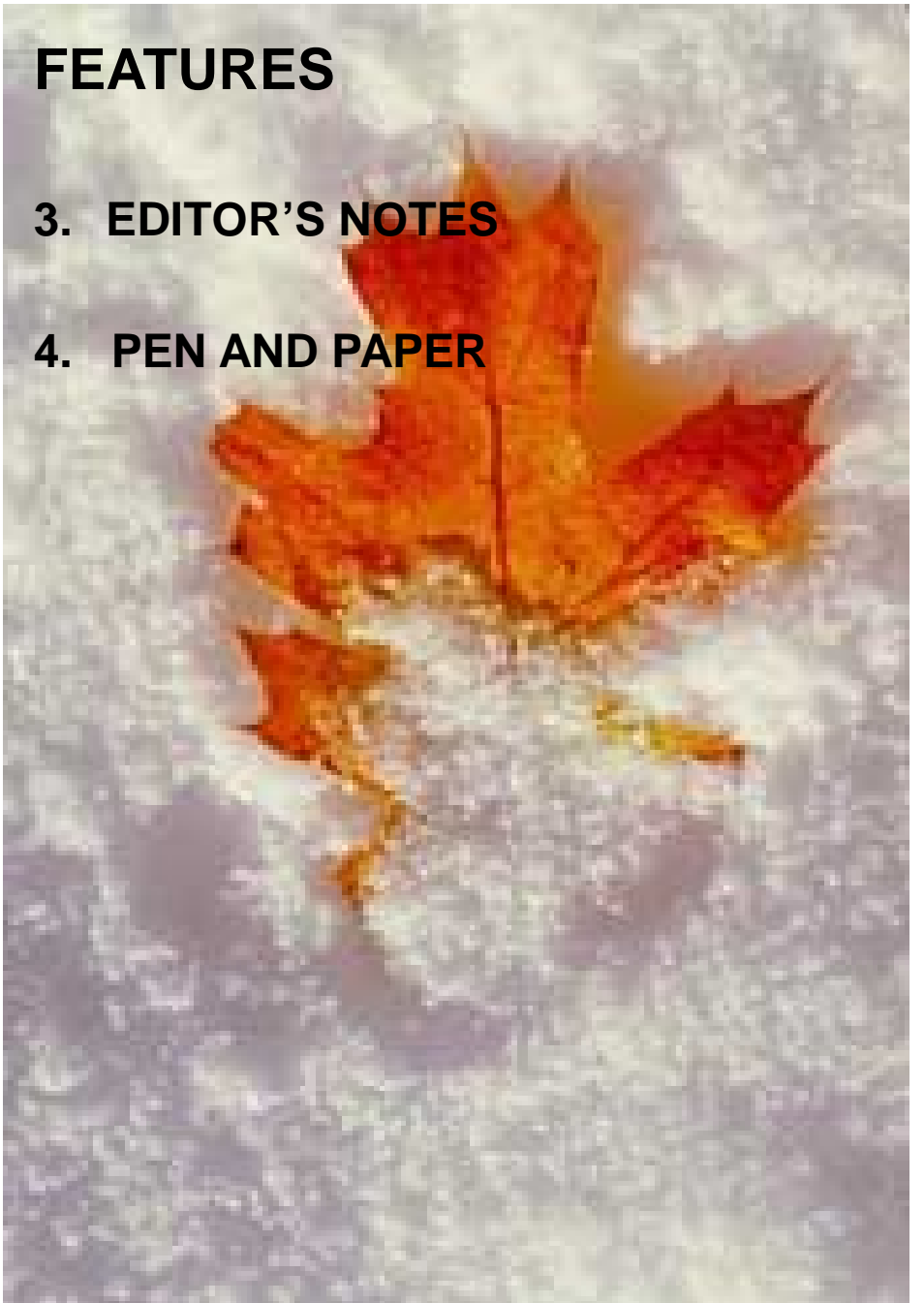
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Editor's Notes



My Brothers,

From the Scottish Rite Research Society's book called *Heredom*, (Volume 14, 2006). Bro. Stephen Defoe, 32^o writes about the rise and fall of Masonic Education. Let me share with you an excerpt from a 1726 book about Freemasonry:

They have in their Lodge several Gentlemen, sons of Art, each very eminent in his Profession: These Gentlemen at the Command of the Master, are obliged to read a Lecture upon whatsoever Topic he shall direct. This gives the Brethren of the Lodge an insight into all Arts and Sciences, and furnishes them with a Competency of Universal Knowledge, so necessary and commendable in a Gentlemen...

Yes, once upon a time Freemasons consisted largely of gentlemen and intellectuals who discussed the marvels of science and the important events of the day. It was this type of intellectual inquiry that made up the bulk of a Masonic meeting in those days.

Bro. Sir Isaac Newton said in the introductory edition of the Masonic Publication *The Builder*, the road to Masonic Knowledge has been paved with many quality books and periodicals produced by the labors of many great Masonic educators over the years. Sadly they have gone unread by the masses, but they are there for those scattered few who would one day pick the fruit from the vine by asking, seeking and knocking upon the door of Masonic inquiry.

Let us not forget why our Research Lodge exists and as caretakers of this Lodge let us not let the fruit of the Masonic scholar rot on the vine.



PEN AND PAPER

Shaped by the American Frontier

Milo Dailey On The Influence Of The Frontier On American Freemasonry



What gives American Masonry a different flavor from the Craft in the British Isles and Europe? It's not so much the differences in ritual, but the emphasis on the individual Freemason rather than the lodge, an emphasis, which was forced upon it by the environment.

The last major U.S. frontier was the central northern plains. Although the frontier experience there was little different from that of eastern America, it remains new and real: some Freemasons' grandparents were among the earliest settlers. Tales of that time may serve as the best illustrations how the frontier influenced all but the early American colonial cities as the Craft flowed west on a tide of humanity.

Freemason Winston Churchill once referred to 'The American Race' with due consideration. When it came to the frontier, the old saying is quite true: 'The cowards never started, and the weak died along the way'; it's a race not of common genes, but of common pioneering spirit.

Some examples...

It was 1863, Lieutenant Frederick Beever looked out at the storm-tossed sea of grass with the eyes of the English Freemason he was. He wore the blue of an American 'Union' officer as he rode west from Minnesota with General Henry Sibley and several regiments of volunteer troops. They were to 'subdue' Sioux Indians near the present site of Bismarck, North Dakota.

Beever was himself 'subdued' when the Sioux caught him alone carrying dispatches between separated troops. Scouts later found a body whose bearded face was hacked off in lieu of his balding pate. Spots of blood proved he resisted well against overwhelming odds of Dakota and Lakota Sioux. Beever's was the first Masonic funeral on the United States northern plains of the old 'Dakota Territory' as Brothers on the expedition gathered to perform their sad duties. As a legendary Master Mason before him, Beever was thrice buried as the military cared for its own as best it could.

Brothers among the officers and troopers included many prominent masons from Minnesota. Others made themselves known on the trek with sewn-on Masonic emblems, watch fobs and pins – or with words from the American Webb-style ritual sprinkled into informal campfire commentaries.

In Egypt, the French were building the Suez Canal. In the United Kingdom the novelist Thackeray died. Masons at their festive board may have discussed the Civil War in America or the cricket score of Cambridge University versus Oxford at Lord's, June 22-23. They were not different nations, but different worlds.

In a rough Montana mining camp in that same year, a dying mason told friends that he would like to be buried with Masonic honors. Such were provided - and the masons gathered for the funeral from miles for the ceremonies. After the funeral they met as a Lodge before riding out again for their isolated tents and rude miners' cabins.

It's said that another meeting of these Montana masons in the early 1860s brought the formation of a citizens' vigilance committee – called 'Vigilantes' - to combat murder and theft in the otherwise lawless vicinity isolated from any government.

One outlaw hanged by the Vigilantes posse that almost certainly included Freemasons was the elected 'sheriff', Henry Plummer. His badge had been his disguise as the leader of cutthroats responsible for many crimes. Brothers had earlier denied Plummer the Masonic degrees when he applied. Some Montana masons today believe that the Brothers had already investigated the sheriff's lifestyle and felt he deserved a more decisive use of a cabletow.

The First Frontier Meetings

The first Masonic Meeting in the Rocky Mountain region was opened in due form on the top of Independence Rock – today in southern Wyoming - by about twenty sojourning masons on 4 July 1862. The emigrants walked or rode from their Oregon Trail wagon train to the top of the monolith.

They represented lodges in about a dozen states. Many probably carried rifles with them as others scouted for Indians. This occasional lodge was called Independence Lodge No. 1, Ancient Free and Accepted Masons. It was American Independence

Day at Independence Rock. The Lodge jewels were cut from cardboard. There was no charter or warrant. They were only masons who found each other on the trail and celebrated their brotherhood.

Something over a dozen years later, a Past Grand Master returned from the far west to offer the new Wyoming Grand Lodge the cardboard ‘jewels’ he held safely through the rest of his travel west to the Pacific coast settlements. The meeting on the rock with fellow pilgrims had made a deep impression on him.

America’s frontier changed what originally was an essentially British culture into a more specifically ‘American’ one. When the Craft arrived in America, the Eastern Seaboard colonies resembled in many ways a rural England of the time period. Philadelphia was among the larger English-speaking cities of the world. But unlike masonry in York or New York, London or Philadelphia, the frontier was an entirely fresh start. There was no town with settled artisans nor countryside with established gentry. Even if resident ‘Red Indians’ had left the area, the weather itself was an enemy showing little mercy and against which there was no neighborly assistance.

On the 9th of December 1867 Lieutenant George Washington Grummond at Fort Phil Kearny, Dakota, led the first Masonic funeral for two Freemasons slain in combat with Indians. Less than two weeks later he lay dead and mutilated on a hillside several miles north of the fort. His body, frozen solid in the winter cold, was transported several months later via wagon train, then rail, to ‘the east’ by his young and pregnant wife.

Fort Phil Kearny was the epicenter of the famed Red Cloud War – the 1866-68 war against Lakota Sioux and Cheyenne along the Bozeman Trail to the Montana gold fields. The Masonic funeral included not only soldiers, but also civilian contractors at the fort. There was a strong fraternal harbor in a daily siege finally won by the Indians. They obviously were known to each other even in absence of a formal Lodge structure.

May 13, 1892, Buffalo, Johnson County, Wyoming: it was two years after the U.S. Census Bureau declared the American Frontier ‘closed’ and less than a day’s horseback ride to the site of Fort Phil Kearny. The Tyler for a Masonic funeral at St. Luke’s Episcopal Church stood guard at the door with his sword – and his revolver under his apron. Freemason George Wellman had been shot in an ambush while riding into Buffalo from a ranch south of town. The newly-married ranch foreman had also just been commissioned a deputy U.S. Marshal. A 44-40 caliber saddle carbine shot to his spine killed him instantly.

The ‘Red Sash Gang’ of rustlers during the famed Johnson County Cattle War had sworn to kill him and they also threatened any who would bury him with proper ceremony. The gang was so feared and fearless they had set fire to a military barracks at Fort McKinney just outside Buffalo in a warning to the U.S. Army to stay out of their affairs. The word from the gang leaders for Brother Wellman? ‘The Potter’s Field for him.’

The Reverend Charles Duell and Brethren of Anchor Lodge, No.7, refused to be cowed. The vicar carried arms under his vestments and the masons had six-guns under their aprons. It was said by some that the gang was impressed with the courage and combat potential of the Masons; the services and burial proceeded without incident.

Some in the Buffalo community during the famed cattle war were critical of the sheriff. ‘Red’ Angus, they said, should have quickly chased down the killer or killers but there was neither arrest nor prosecution. Some today believe the killer was known throughout the community, although he got away free.

And Angus? He also was a mason and Knight Templar in the United States ‘York Rite’. On the other hand, he was aligned in the public mind with the ‘rustler’ side of the cattle war. His predecessor as sheriff and fellow Freemason, Frank Canton, was aligned with the big cattlemen. It was an interesting era.



From particulars to conclusions

How do these tales explain the differences in American and English masonry? First, there are the long distances – in travel time, at least – of the frontier. One also notes the lack of formal law. Freemasons in the area were community leaders, yet were often on opposite sides of local politics and even life and death struggles.

Masons during the 1860s U.S. Civil War often wore square and compasses embroidered on their clothing. Some carried Masonic watch fobs or wore Masonic pins in hopes they might somehow find a friend for aid – or a Brother to send their few possessions home from the field where they died.

On the frontier it appears that many men's first questions on meeting others in the field or local saloon might have been words from the Webb Masonic ritual or allusions to well known Masonic symbols and practice. Tales have been recorded of Montana gold-seekers meeting a group of men on the trail – and being relieved to hear Masonic words spoken instead of the demands of a highwayman. Far from a settled lodge, these masons sought a handclasp that might be recognized even in the dark of a perilous world.

Today some American masons are critical of United States Grand Lodge policies where it has been common to suggest that lodge attendance is not nearly as important to a new mason as their obligation to Brothers as they travel through the world. American masonry seems on occasion to be made up of men who remember little or no ritual, nor have crossed the threshold of a Lodge in decades, nor care to. But remember: they are of the same lineage and training as those who wore six-guns under aprons to bury a Brother.



Milo D. Dailey IV is Past Master of the South Dakota Lodge of Masonic Research and the Frontier Army Lodge of Masonic Research, No. 1875, uniquely chartered by both North and South Dakota Grand Lodges.

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My Brothers,

Until the next issue...May the light shine brightly in your lives forever and ever.

