



FREEMASONRY

Simple
answers
to
leading questions



Contents

Introduction	4
Where did it all begin?	5
What is Freemasonry?	10
What is a lodge?	13
What do Freemasons do?	14
The benefits of membership	15
Qualifications for membership	16
Freemasons & charity	17
Women & Freemasonry	19
Rituals & ceremonies	21
What does it cost to be a Freemason?	22
The secrets	23
Masonic dress	24
What else is there?	25
Facts about membership	27
Joining Freemasonry	29



Introduction

Speaking up for Freemasonry

We take great pride in Freemasonry – the friendships that are created; the good that is done in our communities; the tolerance that is generated by avoiding issues of a political or religious nature; and most important the qualities of life and action that it promotes to members.

This booklet is designed to communicate openly and freely the many fine attributes of Freemasonry in Rhode Island. The material in this booklet is not intended to be exhaustive, but aims to provide a general outline of Freemasonry as a useful guide to our members, and the public, for a better understanding of Freemasonry.



Where did it all begin?

Freemasonry is a fraternity whose ritualistic roots go back to the building of King Solomon's Temple about 3,000 years ago.

The first written evidence of Freemasonry's existence, the "Regius Manuscript," is dated in the 14th Century in England, but historians believe that it had been copied from an even earlier document. Freemasons often refer to their fraternity as "The Craft;" we believe that Freemasonry is rooted in the lodges of stonemasons' guilds, attached to the great cathedrals being built in the 12th Century.

The rise of Freemasonry in the general population generally is attributed to the changes in society at the time of the Enlightenment: the growth of secularism, the scientific age, and the recognition of an individual's rights.

The Grand Lodge of England was established in London in 1717. Afterward, European Freemasons in Ireland, Scotland and France founded Grand Lodges. Then, Freemasonry spread around the world with the growth of the British Empire.

Freemasonry arrived in the American colonies in 1733 with the establishment of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. It was the first in the New World and the third oldest, following England and Ireland.



And in Rhode Island?

Early history

Thomas Oxnard, Provincial Grand Master of New England and Grand Master of Massachusetts, granted the petition for the constitution of St. John's Lodge of Newport on December 27, 1749, the first in the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. Brother Caleb Phillips was appointed the first Master of the Lodge. The meetings were held during the early period of its history in the Council Chamber of the Old State House that is now used as a courthouse.

The successful petition of St. John's Lodge of Newport inspired the petition of an additional Lodge, St. John's of Providence. The Charter was granted on January 17, 1757 and signed and granted January 18, 1757 by Jeremy Gridley, the Provincial Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts.

Rhode Island Freemasons actively participated in the Revolutionary War including the destruction of the British revenue sloop "Liberty" at Newport, the burning of the British revenue schooner "Gaspee" in Narragansett Bay, the pursuit and grounding of a tender of the British frigate "Rose" onto Conanicut Island, and the capture of British General Richard Prescott by Col. William Barton, a member of St. Johns Lodge, Providence.



With the end of the Revolution came a revival of Freemasonry and the movement for a Grand Lodge now went on with vigor.

The Grand Lodge becomes a reality

The plan formulated by the committees for the proposed organization received the formal approval of St. John's Lodge, Newport on March 14, 1791 and of St. Johns in Providence on April 6, 1791. The first Grand Master was to be chosen from the lodge at Newport, the Deputy Grand Master from the lodge at Providence. The other officers were to be equally divided between the two districts. The First District consisted of the counties of Newport, Washington and Bristol, and the Second District of the counties of Providence and Kent. The two lodges were to have the appointment of Grand Master alternately. The first officers were to continue in office until 1793. Under the terms of this agreement Newport elected Most Worshipful Christopher Champlin, Grand Master and Providence elected Right Worshipful Jabez Bowen, Deputy Grand Master.

On Monday June 27, 1791, "being the day affixed on for the celebration of the Feast of St. John the Baptist" a number of brethren representing the two lodges met in the State House at Newport and proceeded to organize a Grand Lodge in accordance with the plan that had been approved.



How does the Grand Lodge operate?

The Masonic Grand Lodge of Rhode Island, located at 222 Taunton Avenue in East Providence, is the governing body for Rhode Island Freemasonry. It is headed by the Grand Master who is the supreme authority on all matters Masonic in the state. The Grand Master is elected to serve a one-year term at the Grand Lodge Semi-Annual Communication held in November each year. He is officially installed as Grand Master at the Annual Meeting of Grand Lodge in May each year.

The Grand Master is assisted by the Deputy Grand Master, Senior Grand Warden, Junior Grand Warden, Grand Treasurer, and Grand Secretary. Together they form the Grand Council, which serves as the executive committee for Freemasonry in Rhode Island.

The Grand Master is the head of Freemasonry in Rhode Island and has wide-ranging powers and responsibilities for the operation of the Grand Jurisdiction during his tenure. During his term of office, he is referred to as Most Worshipful Grand Master out of respect for his position.

The Grand Secretary is responsible for the day-to-day administration of Grand Lodge operations. He maintains important documents and records and membership information, and he handles the correspondence for Grand Lodge.



In Rhode Island, there are 23 local lodges, often referred to as Blue Lodges, organized into five Masonic districts. Overseeing these districts are Right Worshipful District Deputy Grand Masters. They are assisted by Worshipful Grand Masters of Ceremonies, Associate Grand Chaplains and Assistant Grand Lecturers.

The 24th lodge is Colligivm Luminosvm, a research lodge, which meets in various locations throughout the state.



What is Freemasonry?

Freemasonry is the world's oldest, largest and most philanthropic fraternal organization. As Freemasons we live by an ethical and moral code that distinguishes us and creates an atmosphere where friendship and understanding can grow among men of every religion, race and culture.

In a nutshell it can be confidently said that: *Freemasonry is a brotherhood of good men meeting and working in harmony, teaching strong moral and ethical values in personal, family and community behavior and a code of caring for others.*

In the never-ending quest to define Freemasonry one expression is often used: *Freemasonry takes good men and makes them better men.* Freemasonry is founded upon principles of tolerance, care, kindness, honesty and trust. These are timeless values that are as relevant to the world today as they were when the organization was established.

The principle aim of Freemasonry is the promotion of universal and lasting happiness for all people.



What do Freemasons believe?

That truth, honesty and fair dealing are the cornerstones of respect and dignity in our relationships with others.

That charity in thought, word and action makes a positive difference in the lives of others and ourselves.

That commitment to our families and friends, courtesy to our neighbors and service to our communities and country are the foundations for a well-lived life.

That the opportunities for camaraderie, fellowship and service offered by Freemasonry nurture personal growth, which make us better men.



What Masonry is not

A secret society. Its workings and finances are on public record. There are, however, some traditional symbolic elements members are asked to keep confidential.

A benefit society. However, the deep caring principle in Freemasonry is applied to its members, as well as the community as a whole.

A religion or sect. Men of all faiths are welcome to join, but, as a means of maintaining harmony among all members, Freemasonry does not allow the discussion of religion or politics in its meetings.

A networking organization. Using Lodge membership to promote business, professional or personal interests is strongly discouraged.



What is a lodge?

A Lodge is a group of Freemasons drawn together by location or interest. Meetings are usually held monthly in a dedicated building for the purpose. The most senior position in the Lodge is the Master who is supported by the Senior and Junior Wardens, Treasurer and Secretary, Chaplain, Senior and Junior Deacons, Senior and Junior Stewards, Sentinel and Tiler. Together, they manage the business of the Lodge and conduct Masonic ceremonies.

The Master of the Lodge is afforded the title of “Worshipful Master”, it being an old English title meaning worthy of respect.

Officers in Rhode Island lodges wear distinctive badges during their term of office, or emblems, of their office called jewels that are representative of the tools used by stonemasons. These jewels are worn suspended by chains or collars hung about the neck.



What do Freemasons do?

A Freemason's first Masonic commitment is to attend the regular meetings of his Lodge. If he has ambitions to become the Master, he will need to become an officer of the Lodge and for that he needs to become practiced in its ceremonies and customs. In turn this requires attendance and participation in the more frequent rehearsal meetings.

Visiting other lodges is a well-ingrained activity in which lodges universally engage to build and widen fraternal associations and friendships. A member would usually accompany his Master, though he may make visits independently.

All lodges have an active social life both within and outside the Lodge in which wives, partners and families are frequently involved.



The benefits of membership

Fellowship

Freemasonry creates a strong bond between members and produces life-long friendships.

Benevolence

An essential element of Freemasonry is the care of each other and the whole community. All Freemasons promise to be aware of the needs of those around them.

Self-development

A Lodge provides opportunities in organization management, public speaking and character building.

Life balance

In the 21st Century life can be hectic and stressful. Freemasonry is seen by many to be an oasis where calm and order prevail, therefore providing a distinct and refreshing channel where a busy man can find diversion and relaxation.

Family

Most lodges offer social programs providing opportunities for wives and families to widen their social engagement with other families with common interests.



Qualifications for membership

Freemasonry accepts all men of good character. There are very few limitations, but there are some important exceptions.

Freemasonry requires a belief in deity, for no atheist may become a Mason. It also requires a clean moral life, for a Mason must also be a good citizen. Freemasonry strives to teach a man the duty he owes to God, his country, his neighbor and himself. It instills the practice of every virtue and makes an extensive use of symbolism in its teachings. It does not interfere with religion or politics and will not countenance any argument or contention within the Lodge in connection with an attempt to influence the religious or political beliefs of any person.

In Rhode Island, a man must be 18 years old to join. There is no upper limit on age.



Freemasons & charity

Charity in thought, word and action is a cornerstone of Freemasonry. Masonic Grand Lodge Charities of Rhode Island, Inc. supports a number of civic and social charitable organizations throughout the state through its grant program and provides scholarships for qualified students. The Masonic Grand Lodge of Rhode Island supports the Lawton-Hodges Floor at Rhode Island Hospital which treats childhood illnesses.

Most Rhode Island lodges have a charities program that often includes scholarships to local students, as well as financial and non-financial help to local social services organizations.

Other Masonic charitable programs include the Robert J. Allen Medical Equipment Distribution Center located at Buttonwoods in Warwick. This facility provides medical equipment, such as hospital beds, wheelchairs and walkers, to Masons and non-Masons at no charge.



Many people are familiar with the wonderful work the Shriners do through their Children's Hospitals and Burn Centers, all at no cost. All Shriners are Freemasons.

The Scottish Rite Valley of Providence, a Masonic concordant body, operates a dyslexia center in Cranston, which helps people learn to overcome the limitations of this condition.

York Rite Masons offer programs to help children with central auditory processing disorders.

Chapters of the Eastern Star donate funds to a wide variety of charitable organizations.

National Masonic organizations are often at the forefront in providing relief to victims of natural disasters, and in supporting medical research.

Any Freemason who wishes to participate in charitable programs has a wide range of activities to choose from, and volunteers are always welcome.



Women & Freemasonry

How do women fit into Freemasonry?

From its beginnings centuries ago Freemasonry has always been a fraternal organization, and despite the vast changes in society, the organization has remained so.

Lodges take particular care when accepting new members to ensure wives and partners understand the nature, age, traditional essence and meaning of Freemasonry.

Wives and partners may support their men's membership if they wish by participating in Lodge life through friendships formed with other Lodge families, through charity activities and in the active social life of the Lodge.

Freemasonry teaches that a member's Masonic duties come only after his commitments first to his family and then to his work. Wives, partners and families are welcomed by Freemasonry.



Can women become Freemasons?

No, because Freemasonry is a fraternity. However, The Order of the Eastern Star, an international Masonic-styled organization for women started by a Freemason, operates in Rhode Island.

Freemasonry cares for Lodge widows

All Lodges are especially called to care for the widows of members as part of their charitable duties: First to ensure they are properly provided for and further to keep in contact through social occasions and seasonal entertainment.



Rituals & ceremonies

What are the ceremonies or rituals about?

As mentioned earlier, the main ceremonies and the ritual contained in them are the three Degrees of Freemasonry. These are stages of membership all candidates must pass through on their journey to becoming a Master Mason.

The ceremonies are in the form of dramatically portrayed allegorical stories in which the candidate is taught about Freemasonry and the principles it upholds. These steps or stages, known as Degrees, represent the three stages in a man's life from ignorance, to knowledge, to wisdom. They are known as "Entered Apprentice," "Fellowcraft" and "Master Mason."

Are meetings open to the public?

In Rhode Island, only the semi-public annual installation of new officers is open to family and friends. In some cases, however, the Lodge may run a general interest program at its regular meeting, call a recess and admit friends and family.

What happens in an initiation?

Initiation is the first membership ceremony. It lasts for about one hour and explains Freemasonry while creating a sense of bonding and brotherhood. Only Freemasons can attend the ceremony.



What does it cost to be a Freemason?

All Lodges charge a small fee that covers initiation and degrees, as well as affordable annual dues.

How do Freemasons have so much money?

It is true that throughout the world Freemasonry gives millions of dollars to charitable causes each year. The bulk of these funds is the income earned from investments made up from the donations and bequests of members. The administration and operation of The Grand Lodge of Rhode Island and all lodges are predominantly funded from membership dues and assessments.

Then does a Freemason have to leave money or a proportion of their estate to the organization?

No. There is no pressure or even expectation that members bequest money or property to Freemasonry. It is not uncommon that bequests are made, but any decision is purely the member's personal decision.



The secrets

What are the secrets of Freemasonry?

Many are the myths and rumors about Freemasonry. Conspiracy theories exist, yet, in fact the only part of Freemasonry that is confidential to members are the means of recognition between themselves. This stems from historical times when intelligent but illiterate stonemasons sought to prove to employers that they were skilled and competent to design and build and worthy to receive payment for their talents.

Freemasons today retain this custom as a symbolic statement of their reliability, integrity and trust. These means of recognition include words, signs and a handshake.

A new open attitude

Until quite recently Freemasons were very reticent to talk about their organization and work. Today, a more open attitude is being taken, and Freemasons are encouraged to talk about their membership and what it means to them.

To non-Mason readers we urge you to feel free to ask any Freemason for more information!



Masonic dress

It is customary at Lodge meetings for regalia, signifying Masonic rank, to be worn. The basic dress of all Freemasons is an apron, symbolic of the stonemasons of old, over a dark dress suit. As members advance in the hierarchical structure of Freemasonry the regalia worn becomes more descriptive of their experience in Freemasonry.

Why do Freemasons use formal dress?

Formal dress is part of past tradition and style. Today most lodges see a business suit as suitable, yet all Lodge officers in Rhode Island retain the more formal practice of wearing a tuxedo. It is usual for officers of Grand Lodge, on formal ceremonial occasions, to wear “tails.”

Are casual clothes acceptable?

Freemasonry has a proud tradition and members wear business attire at Lodge meetings out of respect for the institution, its principles and traditions. There are business and social events where casual clothes are appropriate, however.



What else is there?

Master Mason, the third degree, is the highest achievement in Freemasonry. After a Master Mason becomes familiar with his lodge's rituals and activities, he may decide to explore other aspects of Freemasonry through "concordant" and "appendant" bodies. They're members of the Freemason family.

In Rhode Island, the most familiar of those are the York Rite, the Scottish Rite, and the Shriners.

The York Rite comprises three basic groups: Royal Arch Masons, Cryptic Rite Masons, and Knights Templar, all awarding degrees.

The Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite awards 29 degrees -- fourth through 32nd. (A 33rd degree is awarded to Scottish Rite Masons who perform extraordinary service.) The Scottish Rite originated in France and came to America -- to Charleston, South Carolina -- in 1801. The Scottish Rite awards degrees to members who view allegorical plays, each of them related to a degree.

Shriners were once known as "The Ancient Arabic Nobles of the Mystic Shrine," a title that referred to the group's allusions



to its connections with the Middle East. People who are not Masons probably know Shriners as the men appearing in parades as clowns or driving funny miniature cars. Shriners do like to have fun, but on the serious side, they support 22 hospitals for children. All Shriners Hospitals provide free service to children and their families.

Other related, or “appendant,” groups are available to explore, including the Grotto, the Order of the Eastern Star (which is open to women), the Tall Cedars of Lebanon, and more.

Master Masons are not required to seek additional degrees, and many do not. If you are interested in exploring the rest of the Freemason family, ask a brother who has.

Masonic education

After each of the first three degrees, Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft and Master Mason, candidates are required to attend a Forum of Masonic Education. At these forums, the symbolism behind the degrees is explained and some of the more esoteric aspects of Freemasonry are addressed. The history and traditions of Freemasonry are discussed, as are lodge etiquette and protocol. All Master Masons are invited to attend these forums, and participate in the discussions. Check rimasons.org for a forum schedule.



FAQs

About membership

Is Freemasonry open to all men?

Yes, one of the greatest things about Freemasonry is that “all” men—regardless of their race, religion, financial or social status—can come together as equals and share a common bond of friendship and mutual respect.

Is there a trial period before joining?

No. But “full” membership is not attained for a period until all the ceremonials of membership have been completed - perhaps six months or sometimes more.

Why do men join Freemasonry?

There are many reasons but the most common are:

- To share the company and fellowship of like-minded men.
- To fulfill a desire to further develop their life interests.
- To widen both their own and their families friendships in their communities.
- Because of family or friends current or historical connections with Freemasonry.
- To enjoy the social opportunities.



Invariably it is a combination of these reasons that draw men to the organization.

How is Freemasonry different from service organizations?

While charitable service and caring about people is a cornerstone of Freemasonry, there are other equally important parts not found in other service organizations. Men become Freemasons to develop as individuals and meet other like-minded people, and to enjoy Freemasonry's tradition, rituals, and regalia, its ceremony, and the sociable nature of the organization.



Joining Freemasonry

If you wait for a Freemason to ask you to join you'll be waiting forever. It's quite simple to take the first step. Just ask any Freemason you know and he will be happy to direct you on the action that is necessary. If you don't know a Freemason, contact the Grand Lodge of Rhode Island and you will be given further information and directed to Freemasons in your locality.

Grand Lodge of Rhode Island

Free & Accepted Masons

www.rimasons.org

401-435-4650

This booklet is a revised and reprinted version
of a booklet originally produced by the
Grand Lodge of New Zealand.
The Masonic Grand Lodge of Rhode Island
gratefully acknowledges their permission
to use this format.



FREEMASONS' HALL

GRAND LODGE OF RHODE ISLAND
ESTABLISHED 1791



the 1990s, the number of people in the UK who are employed in the public sector has increased by 1.5 million, from 2.5 million in 1980 to 4 million in 1998. The public sector has become a major employer in the UK, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy.

The public sector has also become a major provider of social services, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy. The public sector has become a major provider of social services, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy. The public sector has become a major provider of social services, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy.

The public sector has become a major provider of social services, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy. The public sector has become a major provider of social services, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy. The public sector has become a major provider of social services, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy.

The public sector has become a major provider of social services, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy. The public sector has become a major provider of social services, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy. The public sector has become a major provider of social services, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy.

The public sector has become a major provider of social services, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy. The public sector has become a major provider of social services, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy. The public sector has become a major provider of social services, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy.

The public sector has become a major provider of social services, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy. The public sector has become a major provider of social services, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy. The public sector has become a major provider of social services, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy.

The public sector has become a major provider of social services, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy. The public sector has become a major provider of social services, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy. The public sector has become a major provider of social services, and its growth has been a key factor in the overall growth of the economy.



August 2020