



WISCONSIN MASONIC HANDBOOK

CHAPTER 12

THE CHARGES AND THE LANDMARKS

A. INTRODUCTION

The theory is that, at first, operative masonry existed simply as an art of building. For a variety of reasons, operative masons, with the assistance of learned and pious men invented the speculative science or Freemasonry. Operative masonry existed from its ancient beginnings until about 1600 A.D. when Masonic lodges began to accept non-operative brethren in significant numbers. Then a transition period ensued from 1600 until 1725 when speculative Masonry clearly emerged.

B. THE CHARGES

1. HISTORY

A "Charge" is defined as a responsibility or duty and also as instruction or command specifically "To give command, instruction, direction or advice, especially in an official or formal address; to exhort, instruct earnestly, solemnly, authoritatively."

The "Charges of a Freemason" were thus developed early in the transition period from operative to speculative Masonry to instruct non-operative Masons in their duties and responsibilities as members of the Craft.

The first comprehensive compilation of the Charges of a Freemason was published by Dr. James Anderson as a part of his Constitutions in 1723, and called "The Old Charges." In 1772, William Preston interpreted and embellished "The Old Charges" and printed them in his book titled, "Illustrations of Masonry."

In a majority of American Grand Lodges, a brother appointed for the purpose delivers the "Charge" of the degree upon the brother newly initiated, passed, or raised. In most Grand Lodges these are Thomas Smith Webb's abbreviations of the original Prestonian Charges mentioned above.

Thus, the tradition of instruction in the duties and responsibilities of a Freemason is perpetuated from generation to generation.

2. CHARGES USED BY THE GRAND LODGE OF WISCONSIN

The Grand Lodge of Wisconsin in Section 2.03 of the Masonic Code declares "The Ancient Common Law of Freemasonry is the ancient usages, charges and Regulations of Freemasonry . . ." Thus, in our Constitution we declare fidelity to "The Old Charges." The charge each new Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Mason is derived from Webb's abbreviations of the original charges written by Preston. They can be found in the Multiple Letter Cipher.

3. "THE OLD CHARGES" FROM ANDERSON'S CONSTITUTION

These Charges have been considered significant enough by the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin to be included in our Masonic Code.

C. THE LANDMARKS

1. WISCONSIN AND THE LANDMARKS

The Preamble to the Constitution of the Grand Lodge F. & A. M. of Wisconsin declares that this absolute sovereign body is subject to the Ancient Landmarks of Freemasonry. Section 2:01 of the Constitution states, "The Ancient Landmarks of Freemasonry are the supreme Masonic Law, and are immutable, not repealable and unalterable. They are the ancient unwritten Masonic laws, existing from time immemorial, which differentiate and distinguish the Masonic Fraternity from all other organizations. This Grand Lodge, being a sovereign body, may interpret the terms and conditions of the Ancient Landmarks."

We have further declared that the Constitution of the Grand Lodge is subordinate only to the Ancient Landmarks.

Wisconsin publishes in its Code of Masonic Laws (Appendix 9) the twenty-five Landmarks of Albert G. Mackey and the seven Landmarks as defined by Roscoe Pound. We supply the explanatory information that the Ancient Landmarks have been controversially debated since the beginning of organized Masonry and that no full agreement has yet been reached on just how many Landmarks there are and which ones have been so intimately woven into the fabric of Masonry that no one may detract from them or do anything else but to live by and obey them. Wisconsin has never officially adopted any of the Landmarks.

2. WHAT ARE THE LANDMARKS?

There is wide variance among Freemasons as to what is a Landmark. There is no agreement even among the Grand Lodges of the United States. Thirteen have "adopted" no list at all. Five are satisfied that "The Old Charges," as expressed in Anderson's Constitutions of 1723, are their Landmarks. Thirteen Grand Lodges have actually and eight have by custom adopted Mackey's list of twenty-five Landmarks. Ten Grand Lodges list their own Landmarks. Nothing prevents the reader from adopting for his own guidance a list of what appeals to him as "The Landmarks of Freemasonry." To do so, each Freemason should keep some guidelines in mind.

The Landmarks must be something, or those some things, which are ancient and universal, and which could not be taken from Freemasonry without changing Freemasonry into something else. Not only may they not be taken away from Freemasonry, but also they cannot be changed.

The Landmarks are those fundamental principles, which characterize Freemasonry, as defined in the Charges of a Freemason, and without which the Institution cannot be identified.

3. MACKEY'S LANDMARKS

Albert G. Mackey defines a Landmark as that which in Freemasonry existed from "time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary, which is not repealable, and which is universal". The following is his list of twenty-five paraphrased Landmarks:

1. The modes of recognition.
2. The division of symbolic Masonry into three degrees.
3. The legend of the third degree.
4. The government of the Fraternity by a Grand Master.
5. The prerogative of the Grand Master to preside over every assembly of the Craft.
6. The prerogative of the Grand Master to grant dispensations for conferring degrees at irregular intervals.

7. The prerogative of the Grand Master to give dispensations for opening and holding Lodges.
8. The prerogative of the Grand Master to make Masons at sight.
9. The necessity for Masons to congregate in Lodges.
10. The government of the Craft, when so congregated in a Lodge, by a Master and two Wardens.
11. The necessity that every Lodge, when congregated, should be duly tiled.
12. The right of every Mason to be represented in all general meetings of the Craft.
13. The right of every Mason to appeal from the decision of his brethren, in Lodge convened, to the Grand Master.
14. The right of every Mason to visit and sit in every regular lodge.
15. That no visitor, unknown to the brethren present or to someone of them as a Mason, can enter a Lodge without first passing an examination according to ancient usage.
16. No lodge can interfere with the business of another Lodge.
17. Every Freemason is amenable to the laws and regulations of the Masonic jurisdiction in which he resides.
18. A candidate for initiation must be a man un-mutilated, free born and of mature age.
19. A belief in the existence of God as the Grand Architect of the Universe.
20. Belief in a resurrection to a future life.
21. A "Book of the Law" constitutes an indispensable part of the furniture of every Lodge.
22. The equality of all Masons.

23. The secrecy of the Institution.

24. The foundation of a speculative science upon an operative art, and the symbolic use of terms of that are for the purpose of moral teaching.

25. These Landmarks can never be changed.

A more comprehensive explanation of each of these Landmarks can be found in APPENDIX 9 to the Masonic Code of Wisconsin.

4. POUND'S LANDMARKS

In recent years, students of Masonic jurisprudence have given considerable weight to the "Ancient Landmarks" as defined by Roscoe Pound, Dean of Harvard Law School. The following is Pound's list:

1. Belief in God.
2. Belief in the persistence of personality.
3. A "Book of the Law" as an indispensable part of the furniture of every Lodge.
4. The legend of the third degree.
5. Secrecy.
6. The symbolism of the operative art.
7. That a Mason must be a man, free born and of age.

5. LANDMARKS ADOPTED BY OTHER GRAND LODGES

The Masonic Service Association has published a booklet listing the "Ancient Landmarks of Freemasonry." A revised booklet is available from the Masonic Service Association, 8120 Fenton Street, Silver Spring, MD 20910-4785.

6. CONCLUSION

Had the Grand Lodge, which first adopted the General Regulations of 1723, formulated the "Ancient Landmarks," it would have saved much trouble and con

fusion for those newer Grand Lodges which came later. Apparently, however, the unwritten law of Freemasonry was so well understood and practiced then that it was not thought necessary to codify it.

It is appropriate to close the consideration of the Landmarks with the observations of the late, Charles C. Hunt of Iowa, Grand Librarian, Grand Secretary, Honorary Past Grand Master, and respected and admired Masonic student:

"In ancient times a landmark was an object that marked the boundary line between one person's property and that of another. Masonic landmarks are those things, which distinguish the Fraternity from other organizations. If changed or altered, it might remain a fraternity, but it would no longer be Masonic. Hence, our Grand Lodge admits that its powers are limited by the 'Ancient Landmarks.'

"However, we must remember that it was the position of the object which marked a boundary that made it a landmark, not the object itself. The stones, which are used as landmarks, cease to be such when moved away from the boundary line. It is the line rather than the stone that is important. In the same way, it is the principles of Freemasonry rather than concrete lists, which determine the character of our institution. A post or some other object could replace a stone used as a landmark, but the boundary remained unchanged. The object must mark the line or it is no landmark.

"We believe it as unnecessary to adopt an official list of landmarks as to adopt an official list of scientific laws, such as the law of gravitation. The landmarks, like scientific laws, are valid only in so far as they are true, and their adoption by any so-called body has no effect whatever on their validity. Individual scientists may list what they conceive to be laws of nature, but no scientific society would undertake to officially adopt these laws as the official laws of the science in which they are interested.

"The Master of a Masonic lodge prior to installation promises to be a good man, and true, and strictly to obey the moral law. Can a lodge or Grand Lodge by law determine the characteristics of a good man and true and define the moral law? If a Grand Lodge should attempt to do so, what effect would such legislation have on the moral law?

"The Masonic conception of a landmark is a fundamental law or principle of Masonry which no body of men or Masons can repeal. Anything that can be adopted can be repealed. If a Grand Lodge has power to adopt, it has the power to repeal. It is the very fact that they are unalterable that makes them similar to scientific laws which cannot be changed or altered by any man or body of men."

