

October – Celebrating Founders Month in Virginia



Each October is designated as a time for brethren to recall important events in the life of Masonry in Virginia; the establishment of our Grand Lodge, and our Masonic Home. From recorded history we know that our Grand Lodge was established on October 30, 1778. There were nine chartered Lodges known to have been invited to participate in the organization of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge, A.F. & A.M., of the Commonwealth of Virginia.

How long these Lodges had already been functioning has not been clearly established. They were originally chartered by the Grand Lodges of Scotland, England and Ireland. That Masonry almost certainly was operating in Virginia prior to the establishment of any chartered Lodge seems very likely, though documented proof is very scarce. In this English colony, it is very probable that there were some Lodges operating under the law of “immemorial custom,” in which case a charter was not deemed necessary.

The nine Lodges and their locations were, Norfolk; Port Royal in Caroline County; Blandford at Petersburg; Fredericksburg; Saint Tammany at Hampton; Williamsburg; Botetourt at Gloucester Courthouse; Cabin Point in Prince George County, and Yorktown. Three other Lodges were located in Colonial Virginia but apparently did not take part in the organization of the Grand Lodge.

Four Lodges responded to the call for a convention on October 13th, and on the second vote Right Worshipful John Blair, Jr., Past Master of Williamsburg Lodge, was unanimously elected as Grand Master of Masons in Virginia. The installation of Grand Lodge Officers occurred on October 30, 1778, at which time there was reported to be a good attendance of Brethren from the several subordinate Lodges.



The series of events that led to the founding of the Masonic Home of Virginia brings into focus the story of two men, one with a burning desire for action, the other with property and a purse. Verbal history suggests that following the merging of the Masonic Academy into the Richmond public school system in 1871, Masons in the Richmond area began discussing the need for a Masonic Orphanage.

Several Grand Lodge committees were instructed to survey the need for such a facility. When the committees reported back to the Grand Lodge, they consistently stated the establishment of such an institution was not feasible. As far as I could find, no reasons were given for the negative reports. However, it was clear that such a daunting task needed a spark to light the fire.

In an effort to establish a 'home for orphans' Dr. George Potts, a member of Astrea Lodge No. 85 in Canterbury England, made several appeals to committee members and to Grand Lodge, but without success. In December 1889, Dr. Potts made one more very eloquent plea to Masons assembled in Grand Lodge. Moved by the reasoning and passion of Dr. Potts' speech, Captain A. G. Babcock offered a gift of \$5,000 in cash and a conditional pledge of further assistance if the home were established. This pledge motivated the Grand Lodge Committee to amend its previous action and favorably report on the need and feasibility of a home for orphans.

In response to the Committee report and the pending gift, a groundswell of support emerged among the delegates to Grand Lodge and a resolution was adopted, authorizing the establishment of a Home for orphans of Virginia Master Masons. A petition to the Virginia General Assembly resulted in a charter issued on January 7, 1890. Legally, that is the date of the founding of the Masonic Home of Virginia.

In February of that year, Captain Babcock donated real estate consisting of 44 ½ acres of excellent farming land on Nine Mile Road, with.... ' a dwelling of ten rooms in good order, a large barn and stable, and all of the other necessary outbuildings'. This property made up the bulk of what is today the campus of the Masonic Home. Additional parcels from Captain Babcock and others that were added over the years brought the total campus size to over 90 acres.

From this humble beginning, our Masonic Home raised 839 children of Virginia Master Masons from 1890 to 1975 and has cared for over 1,200 adults since the adult division began in 1955. The Home owes its existence to the persistence of one man and the generosity of another, two founding heroes whose foresight and courage began the journey that led to today's Masonic Home of Virginia, a place where life is celebrated and enjoyed in a unique caring community of active residents who are served by a very caring staff of dedicated professionals. Imagine living in a place where your children, friends and relatives all know that you are safe and enjoying a quality of life that is treasured by all.

The mission of the Home is the Masonic principle of care for others. For that purpose, members of the Masonic Fraternity founded this community of care and continue to support it through their financial gifts and with their volunteer efforts. No elaborate plea for money tonight...but I will just place in your mind, and hopefully on your heart, the continued need for your support. Just know that any donations you make will help ensure the future of *your* Masonic home, the crown jewel of Masonry in Virginia.



...Another 'nugget from the quarry of Freemasonry'. SM

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