



The Goose and Gridiron

It was above the sign that gave the name to the famous old tavern built in 1666 in which the Grand Lodge of England was organized in 1717. The goose standing on the gridiron is believed to have been a sarcastic allusion to the coat of arms of the London Musicians, which consisted of a lyre and a peacock, symbolic of beauty and harmony. The proprietor of the tavern maintained that the sound of a goose on the gridiron was far more musical and alluring than any melody that ever came from any lyre.

GRAND LODGE CRADLE RAZED.

From The Trestleboard Vol. XXXIII, No. 9, March 1920 pgs 13 & 54

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Mason pilgrims are hard put to even find the location of the historic "Goose and Gridiron" tavern in St. Paul's churchyard London. Yet less than 25 years ago this quaint old structure in which modern Freemasonry was born stood in all its old-time picturesqueness. Modern business expansion, however, is merciless and knows no sentiment. So the ancient tavern, which had been in constant use since 1666, was torn down and a modern structure arose on its site. That this cradle of the Masonic Grand Lodge should have been preserved by the craft is now generally admitted. It naturally would have attracted Masons from all parts of the world. But despite the fact that the structure itself is gone, its memory will live forever and a day. It is indissolubly linked with the movement which "put a girdle around the earth: by uniting Masonic lodges.

Within the spacious and comfortable rooms of this solidly-built old British tavern of brick and stone and good stout oak, there assembled "On St. Baptist's day, in the 3rd year of King George I, A. D. 1717," the members of four lodges of Masons which had been accustomed in former days to assemble separately. Dr. James Anderson, who wrote the New Book of Constitutions in 1738, declares that the lodges represented were those that met,

- "1 At the Goose and Gridiron Alehouse in St. Paul's Churchyard,
- "2 At the Crown Alehouse in Parker's Lane near Drury Lane,
- "3 At the Appletree tavern in Charles Street, Covent Garden,
- "4 At the Rummer and Grapes tavern in Channel Row, Westminster."

It has, however, been asserted on seemingly excellent authority, that at least six lodges took part in this history-making get-together. A rare old book called "Multa Paucis,"¹ published in London in 1730, declares that the so-called "revival" of Masonry in 1717 was in reality no "revival" at all, but merely marked the adoption of a new policy of the lodges of Masons by which the secrecy which had formerly cloaked their meetings was discarded and it was permitted to members to avow membership and let it be known that meetings were held. In former years this information had been prohibited.

Be that as it may, we know that Anthony Sayer, Gentleman, was chosen Grand Master, with Captain Joseph Elliot and Mr. Jacob Lamball, Grand Wardens. From that time down to the present the written records are, of course, clear and unbroken.

Regarding the activities of Masons at an earlier period we learn from Gould the Historian that in 1646 there existed a lodge of speculative Masons in Warrington, England: in 1686 Plot mentions them in Staffordshire, and speaks of them as a secret society which is "spread all over the entire nation." There are also records of Masonic lodge meetings in various cities in England back as far as the tenth century. The formal meeting in the "Goose and Gridiron" however, is the first official and public avowal of the existence of the Grand Lodge, which naturally enwraps this old building with a special sentiment similar to that felt for other structures in which great and noble achievements have seen the light of day.

In connection with the history of this old tavern itself it has been ascertained that it was constructed on the ruins of a tavern known as "The Sign of the Mitre," which was destroyed in the great fire of 1666. This Mitre was the first music hall in London. In 1642, it was presided over by one Robert Hubert, alias Farges, who had a rare collection of curios which, according to a contemporary, comprised: "A choyce Egyptian with hieroglyphicks, a remora and the huge thighbone of a giant." These were but a few of the articles which good Hubert, or Farges, declared he had collected "with great industrie and, thirty years' travel into the foreign countries," and that they "were dailie to be seen at the Music house of the Mitre near the west end of St. Paul's churchyard," up to the time of the great fire in 1666. After which the "Goose and Gridiron" arose, Phoenix-like, on the ashes of the Mitre, to take upon itself immortal fame by becoming the cradle of the modern system of Masonry as recognized throughout the civilized world.

Such in brief is the history of the famous and historic tavern of the "Goose and Gridiron," which was in all probability named by the owner while in a sarcastic mood and with the avowed intent of poking fun at the society of musicians of that period. Their arms were the lyre of Apollo with a swan as a crest. Probably the first proprietor of the "Goose and Gridiron" would point to his sign and declare that the music the goose made on the gridiron was far more enticing than all the melody that ever came from the strings of the lyre of Apollo.

The old structure is gone, but it lives on, enshrined within our hearts and the lessons that were preached within its comfortable walls will likewise endure until civilization itself becomes no more.

¹ The Complete Free Mason or Multa Paucis for Lovers of Secrets

First edition printed 1764, M252 C73 located in the rare book vault, Grand Lodge of Iowa A.F. & A.M. Cedar Rapids, IA

"On August 1, A. D. 1714, The glorious Queen Anne died without issue, and was the last of the Royal Race of King Charles I. For the other being Romans, are excluded by the Act of Parliament for settling the Crown of Great Britain upon the Protestant Heirs of Elizabeth Stewart,.....

A. D. 1714 George I, King of Great Britain, France and Ireland. This King being no Mason, these few Lodges were greatly disappointed of a Royal Grand Master, and therefore came to a resolution to elect a new Grand Master, and to cement under him as the Center of Union and Harmony, till they should have the opportunity of electing a noble or more eminent Brother for their Grand Master.

Accordingly the Masters and Wardens of six Lodges assembled at the Apple-Tree in Charles Street, Covent Garden, on St. John's Day, 1716, and after the oldest Master Mason (who was also the Master of a Lodge) had taken the chair, they constituted among themselves a Grand Lodge, pro tempore, and revived their Quarterly Communications, and their annual feast.

Grand Assembly 1717

At the Goose and Gridiron, St. Paul's Churchyard
Brother Anthony Sayer, Grand Master elect.

And after our good old Master had invested him with the Badges of his high Office and Power, Grand Master Sayer received due Homage of the Fraternity, and nominated Brother Jacob Lambell and Capt. Elliot his G. W."