

~~the actual procedure in conferring the Degree with the *legendary* procedure in the ascent of the Winding Stair. They do not match, probably because nobody really tried to make them match. It would be simple enough to organize this but, needless to say, I am not suggesting this change.~~

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131. LANDMARKS : TENETS AND PRINCIPLES

Q. We frequently refer in the ritual to the Landmarks of the Order, yet they are nowhere specified or listed. What constitutes a Masonic Landmark, and can you furnish a list of them?

A. This is one of the most debatable subjects in Masonry and it gives rise to very wide differences of opinion. Any good dictionary will define a 'Landmark', but Masonically the term requires a stricter definition. The best writers on the subject are unanimous on two essential points:

- (a) A landmark must have existed from the 'time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary'.
- (b) A landmark is an element in the form or essence of the Society of such importance that Freemasonry would no longer be Freemasonry if it were removed.

If these two qualifications are used strictly to test whether certain practices, systems, principles, or regulations can be admitted as landmarks it will be found that there are in fact very few items that will pass this rigid test.

Nevertheless the tendency, even among prominent writers who try to compile lists of landmarks, seems to be to incorporate items which really come under the heading of regulations, or customs, or principles, and tentative lists of landmarks range from five to fifty separate items.

Without the least desire to be dogmatic, the following is an attempt to compile a list of acceptable landmarks that would conform to the two-point test:

1. That a Mason professes a belief in God (the Supreme Being), the G.A.O.T.U.
2. That the V.S.L. is an essential and indispensable part of the Lodge, to be open in full view when the Brethren are at labour.
3. That a Mason must be male, free-born, and of mature age.
4. That a Mason, by his tenure, owes allegiance to the Sovereign and to the Craft.
5. That a Mason believes in the immortality of the soul.

The first four items listed above are derived directly from the *Old Charges*, which date back to c. 1390 and are the oldest documents in the world belonging to the Craft. The last item in the list, 'immortality', is implicit in the religious beliefs of that period.

English Masons may be interested to know that many Grand Lodges overseas have adopted specific codes of landmarks, usually printed as preambles to their Constitutions, and the brief list above is in close accord (though not identical) with the code adopted by the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts.

One of the most interesting lists was drawn up by Albert Mackey, a great American student (1807-1881). Although he based his selection on the two essential points noted above, quoting them almost word for word, his list ran to twenty-five items, most of which could never have passed as landmarks if he had applied his own test. Limitations of space do not permit a detailed analysis and only a few of Mackey's landmarks are examined here, with comments to illustrate the pitfalls.

Mackey's No. 1. 'The modes of recognition. They admit of no variation . . .' These cannot be landmarks. Several of the most important of them did not make their appearance in the Craft until the 18th century.

Mackey's No. 2. 'The division of symbolic Masonry into three degrees . . .' The trigradal system did not emerge until some time between 1711 and 1725. Prior to this period there is no evidence of anything more than two degrees.

Mackey's No. 3. 'The legend of the Third Degree . . .' The earliest evidence of this legend concerns Noah, not Hiram Abif. There is good evidence of the F.P.O.F., in 1696, as a part of the then second degree (for Master or fellow-craft) and the legend in one of its early forms *may have been in existence at that time*, but there is no evidence of it in the ritual until 1726.

Mackey's No. 4. 'The government of the Fraternity by a presiding Officer called a Grand Master who is elected . . .' The first Grand Lodge was founded in 1717. There was no Grand Master of Masons before that time. This item is a very proper regulation in the *Book of Constitutions*, but it cannot be a landmark.

Mackey's Nos. 5, 6, 7, 8. Various prerogatives of the Grand Master, but all of them are, in fact, privileges vested in him by the Grand Lodge over which he presides. They are regulations, or customs, *not* landmarks.

Mackey's No. 9. 'The necessity of Masons to congregate in Lodges . . .' This extremely interesting item may well be a landmark, but if we

try to go back to 'time immemorial' practice, the operative masons seem to have had the right to congregate for Lodge purposes when any five or six of them came together anywhere. Nowadays, however, the mode of congregation for Lodge purposes is governed by regulations.

Mackey's No. 10. 'The government of the Craft in a (Lodge) by a Master and two Wardens . . .' Another doubtful landmark. There was a time when the Lodge was governed by the Master and one Warden.

Several of Mackey's landmarks deal with the rights of individual Masons, rights which are all governed nowadays by regulations and some of them are certainly not of time immemorial status.

Of course it is quite impossible to discuss such a wide-ranging subject within an article of a 1000 words or so, and these brief notes are designed mainly to open up the subject and to point the way to discussion.

#### TENETS AND PRINCIPLES

Q. We discussed your recent Lodge Summons on the subject of Landmarks at our Lodge of Instruction and one of our younger members asked for a definition of 'Tenets' and 'Principles'. The Dictionaries suggest that the two latter are synonymous. Can you help?

A. The *Masonic* definitions of 'Landmark' are given in (a) and (b) in the answer above.

Tenet—The principal definition in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is

'A doctrine, dogma, principle, or opinion in religion, philosophy, politics or the like, held by a school, sect, party, or person'.

Principle—The best definition for our purpose in the *O.E.D.* is

. . . a primary element, force, or law, which produces or determines particular results; the ultimate basis upon which the existence of something depends; cause, in the widest sense'.

From the above it would seem that 'tenets' and 'principles' could be in some respects alike so that a 'tenet' in certain instances might have the force of a 'principle'. For the sake of a sharper distinction, we may perhaps ignore this aspect of the definition, and rely more strongly on the definition of 'tenet' as 'doctrine or dogma'. The essential element of those two words is that they represent an idea, a belief, or a conviction, which cannot necessarily be proved, *but is held by faith*, and perhaps one of the best examples that one can give of a Masonic tenet is the doctrine of the immortality of the soul.

The *O.E.D.* definition of 'principle' is a very strong one, 'a primary element, force, or law . . .' etc., and one might quote, as an example, the oft-repeated maxim, 'All men are equal in the sight of God'. This could

well be a Masonic principle. In the Craft, however, the term has a more specialized significance. The Code of 'Basic Principles for Grand Lodge Recognition' illustrates this, e.g., No. 7:

That the discussion of religion and politics within the Lodge shall be strictly prohibited.

This item could very well have been a Rule in our *Book of Constitutions*. The Grand Lodge *has made it* one of the 'Basic Principles' of Freemasonry and this leads me to my summing up of the whole question.

'Landmarks', in our sense of the term, are something perpetual and unchanging.

'Tenets' are beliefs that we hold, even though they are beyond proof. They may be of our own invention, or inherited, but we do not question them because they are founded in our faith.

'Principles' may have their roots in natural law, or in ethics and philosophies which shape our code of conduct. But they may also be invented or adopted rules, or beliefs, which have their basic force as 'principles' simply because we choose to acknowledge them as such.

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### ~~132. IS SYMBOLISM A LANDMARK?~~

~~Q. As I understand it, 'Landmarks' are those fundamental principles which characterize Masonry; and Freemasonry is defined as 'a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols'. Since 'illustrating by symbols' constitutes an integral part of the 'peculiar system' would I be right in saying that symbolism is a Landmark of Freemasonry?~~

~~A. The definition you have quoted is a widely accepted one, but I would suggest that it is the system of morality which is the essential characteristic of the Craft, while the manner in which we illustrate it, i.e., by symbols, is incidental. Indeed, I think it would be fair to say that the major part of our teaching is by precept, example and exhortation.~~

~~It is true that we use symbols throughout our ceremonies, etc. in the preparation of Candidates, steps, signs, working tools, clothing and furnishings, right down to the chequered flooring of the Lodge. Practically all of them are 'moralized' in a few words of the ritual, designed to teach their immediate symbolism. But that is only the foundation; the experts in that field could add a chapter where we use only a few words, and they could find meanings for those same symbols vastly different from those that we accept.~~