

AW22 Lodge Anecdotes
By
RW Claude Harris, PM of the lodge
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The Pennsylvania Warrant

During 1783, why did the Masons residing in Alexandria decide and apply to Pennsylvania instead of the Grand Lodge of Virginia for a mandate to constitute a lodge? With the Grand Lodge of Virginia at Williamsburg, organized in 1777-1778, it should have been logical to approach the regional authority.¹

The answer to our question is to be found not only in the nearness of Philadelphia to Alexandria, but also the fact that the final months of the Revolutionary War had seen such extensive military operations in the Virginia Peninsula, that life in Williamsburg and that of the entire area was completely disorganized. The Grand Lodge of Virginia was rendered inactive, and no more meetings were held after December 28, 1780 for almost four full years. When the grand lodge actually met again, it was on November 4, 1784 and by that time, its seat of power had been transferred from Williamsburg to Richmond, where it has remained ever since. It was during these four years of transition that the lodge at Alexandria was formed and thus looked toward Pennsylvania for a mandate following the example of their brethren in Winchester.

We need not repeat here the circumstances under which the Provincial Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania at this time "invaded" the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Virginia by granting a warrant to the Alexandria petitioners. Pennsylvania had been most meticulous in avoiding any transgression of Masonic landmarks and proprieties and the most jealous of its own prerogatives whenever there may have been even the remotest semblance of an attempt to invade its own territory and "Masonic jurisdiction thereunto belonging". But in 1783, there could not have been the least doubt that Alexandria was located within the bounds of the Commonwealth of Virginia, since the District of Columbia was not formed until 1791. Pennsylvania's grand lodge, still basing its authority on *a Provincial Grand Warrant from the Grand Lodge of London, in Great Britain*, probably did not even trouble itself to consider the question of a possible invasion of Virginia's jurisdiction since it had already granted a warrant for Lodge No. 12 held in Winchester in 1768. This last mentioned act had established, as it were, Pennsylvania's claim to at least a portion of Virginia's territory.² Indeed, the year after the issuance of the Alexandria warrant, Pennsylvania established its third lodge in Virginia at Portsmouth named Lodge No. 41 with an issued warrant bearing the date of June 26, 1784.

By 1790 however, the Provincial Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania had definitely become aware of the existence of the Grand Lodge at Virginia, for in that year Pennsylvania refused to grant a warrant for a lodge "at or near Norfolk". In Dr. John Dove's *Reprint of the Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Virginia from 1777 to 1823* (pages 614, 65) this matter is set forth in some detail:

The Worshipful Deputy Grand Master [John K. Read] laid before the committee a letter from the Deputy Grand Secretary of Pennsylvania, informing that Brother Benj'n Street and others, in or near Norfolk, had made application for a Dispensation to form a new Lodge, which Lodge also enclosed a list of their Grand Officers and an impression of their seal.

¹ We can also note here that the Brethren of Winchester received a warrant from Pennsylvania as early as 1768, but in this case it is understandable since Virginia did not have a grand lodge of its own at that time.

² The doctrine of a single grand lodge with exclusive jurisdiction in each state was a much later development.

Resolved, That the committee of correspondence be directed to return our sincere thanks to the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania for their politeness in rejecting the application of Brother Street; also, informing them that Brother Street is now sensible of the impropriety, and begs leave to withdraw the application. (Proceedings of October 30, 1790.)

Similarly, under the date of December 12, 1798, the Grand Lodge of Virginia refused its approval for the granting of a Pennsylvania warrant to a group of petitioners in Charlestown, Virginia (now in West Virginia) in spite of the distance of that community from Richmond, citing as the chief reason for this refusal the fact that “many and great inconveniences and irregularities have arisen to the Craft from an interference of jurisdiction among Grand Lodges...” In any case, this action on the part of the Grand Lodge of Virginia served to put an end effectively to any future attempt to invade its jurisdiction. Even so, no protest is on record anywhere showing that Virginia may have objected to the warranting of Lodge no. 39 by Pennsylvania.

Please find the exact text of the warrant issued to Lodge No. 39 attached to this anecdote.

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POSTSCRIPT: Today, the original Pennsylvania warrant is kept in the Alexandria-Washington Lodge Archives Storage Room within the GWMNM. It was originally returned to Pennsylvania after the Virginia charter was received, but in December 1878, after many requests for its return, the original 1783 warrant was finally presented to Lodge 22 for safekeeping and is now the property of the lodge.

WILLIAM ADCOCK, G. M.

ALEXANDER RUTHERFORD, D. G. M.
 THOMAS PROCTER, S. G. W. GEORGE ORD, J. G. W.

TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN: We, the Grand Lodge of the Most Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons, according to the Old Institutions, held at Philadelphia, in the Province of Pennsylvania, by virtue of a Provincial Grand Warrant from the Grand Lodge of London, in Great Britain, whereof, then, the Right Worshipful and Right Honorable Thomas Erskine, Earl of Kelly, Viscount Fenton, Lord Baron of Pitten Ween, etc., in Great Britain, was Grand Master of Masons, the Right Worshipful Mr. William Osborne, Deputy Grand Master, the Right Worshipful Mr. William Dickey, Senior Grand Warden, and the Right Worshipful James Gibson, Esq., Junior Grand Warden, under their hands and the seal of their Grand Lodge, constituting and appointing the Right Worshipful William Ball, Esq., Grand Master of Masons for the Province of Pennsylvania, and the Territories thereunto belonging; the Right Worshipful Captain Blaithe Waite Jones, Deputy Grand Master, the Right Worshipful Mr. David Hall, Senior Grand Warden, and the Right Worshipful Mr. Hugh Lenox, Junior Grand Warden, authorizing and empowering them, and their successors, to grant Dispensations, Warrants, or Constitutions, for the forming, holding and governing Lodges within their jurisdiction, as by the said Warrant, bearing date the 20th of June, in the year of our Lord 1764, and of Masonry 5764, reference being thereunto had, as more at large appear,

NOW KNOW YE That we, William Adcock, Esq., Grand Master, Alexander Rutherford, Deputy Grand Master, Thomas Procter, Senior Grand Warden, and George Ord, Junior Grand Warden, present, and legal successors to the above named Provincial Grand Officers, as the Grand Lodge books may appear, by virtue of the power to us granted by the above in part recited warrant, DO hereby authorize and empower our trusty and well-beloved brethren, Robert Adam, Master, Michael Ryan Senior Warden, and William Hunter, Junior Warden, of a New Lodge, No. 39 to be held in the Borough of Alexandria, in Fairfax County, Virginia, or within five miles of the same.

And we do further authorize and empower our said brethren, Robert Adam, Master, Michael Ryan, Senior Warden, and William Hunter, Junior Warden, to admit and make Freemasons according to the Most Ancient and Honorable Custom of the Royal Craft in all ages and nations throughout the known world, and not contrarywise. And we do further empower and appoint our said brethren, Robert Adam, Master, Michael Ryan, Senior Warden, and William Hunter, Junior Warden, and their successors, to hear and determine all and singular matters relating to the Craft within the jurisdiction of Lodge No. 39.

And Lastly, we do hereby authorize and empower our said trusty and well-beloved brethren, Robert Adam, Master, Michael Ryan, Senior Warden, and William Hunter, Junior Warden to nominate, chuse, and install their successors, to whom they shall deliver this warrant, and insert them with all their powers and dignities as Freemasons, and such successors shall in like manner nominate, chuse, and install their successors, &c., &c., &c. Such installation to be upon or near every St. John's day, during the continuance of this Lodge, forever; Provided, always, that the above named brethren, and their successors, pay due respect to the Right Worshipful Grand Master, from whom they have their authority, otherwise, this warrant to be of no force or virtue.

Given under our hands, and the Seal of the GRAND LODGE, at PHILADELPHIA, this third day of February, in the year of our Lord, one thousand seven hundred and eighty-three, and of Masonry, five thousand seven hundred and eighty-three.

CHARLES YOUNG, Grand Treasurer
 JOSEPH HOWELL, JR., Deputy Grand Secretary