

The Landmarks

Lodge System of Masonic Education

Before the development of local land recording systems and modern surveying, land boundaries were often established by trees, rocks and streams. Those boundary markers were called landmarks. Destruction of a landmark was a serious offense because property boundaries could not then be fully defined, and part of the property could be lost if claimed by another person.

So what do Landmarks have to do with Masonry? Masonry has a character or identity of its own. Some things in it can be changed or abolished without destroying its identity; it would continue being what it was before the change. But if certain other changes were made, Freemasonry would lose its identity and become something else altogether. The Landmarks of Freemasonry then are those things that cannot be changed, because changing them would cause our Fraternity to lose its identity.

Many of the practices, customs, symbols and emblems of the Operative Masons of England, who began Freemasonry over 600 years ago, are permanently woven into the present structure of Masonry. If all those things we inherited were abolished, not only would our historical connections be destroyed, but the Fraternity would be changed out of all recognition. So our inherited principles, practices and customs are all Landmarks. Secrets in Masonry are connected with Ritual and modes of recognition. They're really no more secret than your own family affairs which are nobody else's business. But our secrets are so essential to the nature of the Craft that we couldn't conceive of having Masonry without them. So our secrets have the power of a Landmark.

Masonry has certain qualifications for membership. A person under age couldn't be held accountable for certain Obligations he would be tied to. Admission of women would require such massive reconstruction of our system, that it would be unrecognizable as Masonry. And of the remaining qualifications, certainly the most important is the good character of the petitioner. Masonry doesn't try to make good men out of bad, but rather makes good men better. So membership qualifications are Landmarks that cannot be changed.

Another Landmark is the secret ballot by which Lodge members determine acceptance of a candidate. If a member feels that a petitioner is morally unqualified, or that he would be a disturbing influence on the harmony of the brotherly relations within the Lodge, he may cast an anonymous negative ballot. Traditionally, only one negative vote was sufficient to reject a petition. Many jurisdictions, including our own, have adopted a rule requiring three negative votes to reject a candidate.

Masonic Ritual, which is used in teaching the principles, morals and purposes of Masonry, is one of our most important Landmarks; and it has withstood the test of centuries of use. No

discussion of religion or politics is allowed within a Lodge, and all Masons must respect and obey the civil law. Failure to observe either of these Landmarks would make us susceptible to pressure by some outside power, whether it is church, political party, or whatever, and leave us without the power to regulate and control our own existence.

In spite of the fact that sectarian discussion is forbidden in a Masonic Lodge, the crowning Masonic Landmark of them all is a belief in God and the immortality of the soul. In the center of every Lodge room is an Altar, and during a meeting an open Volume of Sacred Law rests upon it-- usually the Bible. This is the religious aspect of Freemasonry; and without this basis, we would be just another social club--which is the exact opposite of what we really are.

I haven't given you an exhaustive list of Landmarks, but just a few examples of those characteristics peculiar to Masonry called Masonic Landmarks. Without any one of them, we would be an organization unrecognizable from what we are now.

There is another purpose behind my explanation of Masonic Landmarks, beyond giving you a better understanding of Freemasonry. That purpose is to make you understand that you can't change Masonry to suit your tastes, prejudices or opinions. Rather, you must change yourself to conform to Masonry. That doesn't mean that there's no room in Masonry for men with imagination, ingenuity and drive. We need lots of men like that. It just means that we're very conscious of what makes up our nature; and we cherish that nature and guard it against any possible influence to change it. If you have the good fortune to become a Mason - and I trust you will - you must be prepared to accept its teachings and principles, to obey its laws and regulations, and observe its ancient Landmarks.