

Strange and Infamous Masons

by Nelson King FPS

This time, we have something just a little bit different in the way of Masonic Education. I know, some of you loathe those two words. As soon as you hear them, I can see the hair on the backs of your necks stand up, and I can hear you saying, "Oh, no! Not this again! I hope he keeps it short. My goodness, who wants to hear the same old stuff, time after time." Well, good news, Brethren! It's not the same old stuff. It's new old stuff. For I have always believed that Masonic Education does not have to be dull, or boring. Why even some of it can be amusing or even down right funny, and to prove it, to night we're going to talk about Strange or Infamous men who were, or may have been, Masons. We begin with a Frenchman.

The Chevalier Charles D'Eon of France was born on October 5 1728, and was given the name Charles Genevieve Louise Auguste Andre Timothee D'Eon de Beaumont. He was obviously born of a noble family. He became a Freemason in 1766 in the Lodge of Immortality, No. 376, which met at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, in the Strand, London, England. He served as Junior Warden in 1769 and 1770. He had many talents; he was an expert fencer and soldier, and an able diplomat who successfully negotiated the Treaty of 1763, ending the Seven Years War in which Austria, France, Sweden and Saxony were united against Frederick the Great of Prussia [who was joined by England]. So what, you say? Nothing strange about him so far. Well, let's look a bit further. He unfortunately had an effeminate appearance, and occasionally masqueraded as a woman. His enemies in France accused him of being a woman masquerading as a man. Masons wondered whether a woman had been initiated into the Craft. The controversy about his sex caused considerable gambling, and speculation got out of hand. Finally an insurance company filed a petition to have the matter adjudicated. Witnesses testified that he was a woman. About this time he accepted an offer of Louis XVI to receive a generous pension, on condition that he return to France, and resume the garb of a woman. From this time on, with rare exceptions, he wore women's clothes. When he died on May 21 1810, a competent physician performed an autopsy and clearly proved that D'Eon was a man after all.

Let's now return to England and an English Reverend sir.

The Reverend William Dodd was an English Freemason, who was born in 1729, and died in 1777. He was the first Grand Chaplain of the Grand Lodge of England, in the year 1775. He delivered the oration at the dedication of Freemasons' Hall in London in 1776. He was also the author of many books and literary papers including "Beauties of Shakespeare." Weakness of character in money matters caused him to be tried for the crime of forgery. He had the effrontery to sign the name of the Earl of Chesterfield, in the matter of 4200 pounds sterling. He was convicted of forgery and executed. The affair created great public commotion and attempts were made both by the City of London, and by 30,000 people who signed petitions to the King to commute the sentence. But [to show how severe English Criminal law was at the time] the sentence was carried out. It was one of the last public hanging in England. Not a good ending for a man of God and a Mason.

Now from an Englishman to a Scottish American.

Matthew McBlain Thompson was born in Scotland, and was a member of two Scottish Lodges and a Past Master of one of them. He also affiliated with King Solomon Lodge, No. 22, in Montpelier, Idaho

when he settled there in 1881. He later demitted from this lodge. He returned to Scotland, but in 1898 he came back to the United States, where he created the "American Masonic Federation." He promoted the sale of all sorts of "Masonic" degrees by mail, and through paid solicitors or salesmen; they were sent out to organize lodges and grant degrees throughout the United States. [By the way, reduced rates were given for large groups and many joined his special Craft.] In 1915 one of his salesmen was arrested in St. Louis, Missouri, and the postal inspector there decided that it was time to break up the gang. He assigned inspector M. G. Price to the case; he spent two years gathering evidence in the United States and also far off in foreign lands. Judge Wade of the United States District Court for Iowa, a non-Mason, presided, and none of the jurors was a Mason. Matthew McBlain Thompson and two others were found guilty of using the U.S. Mails to defraud the public, and were sentenced to serve penitentiary terms of two years and to pay a fine of five thousand dollars each. In those days this was a lot of money.

Now, let us look at another American.

In 1847 An American visiting England introduced himself as a Major General George Cooke, LL.D., Chancellor of the University of Ripley. He joined Prince of Wales Lodge, No. 259. He became a devoted supporter of the Masonic Charities, and actually became vice-president of the Girls' School, and a life Governor of the Boys' School and a member of the Benevolent Institution. The Grand Master conferred on him the rank of Past Grand Warden, and appointed Cooke his personal representative to the Grand Lodge of New York. A fund was started to place his bust in Freemasons' Hall.

Yes, he certainly seems to be the type of man who would become the ultimate Mason, generous, devoted, benevolent, humane and philanthropic, an indisputable humanitarian. Undeniably the type of man the Craft needs.

But after he had returned to the United States it was discovered that Cooke was a medical quack. He was immediately stripped of all his Masonic honours, and all the money that he had contributed to Masonic Charities was returned to him.

Now let me tell you about a mad Englishman.

Joshua Norton was born in England on February 4 1819. He engaged in a number of business enterprises in Africa, and emigrated to San Francisco in 1849. He immediately entered the real estate business and accumulated considerable wealth. When he tried to corner the rice market, he lost everything. In order to cheer him up, his friends started to call him "Emperor." On September 15 1859 he proclaimed himself Emperor of the United States. He donned a blue uniform with brass buttons, epaulets, and a military cap. Instead of sending him off to have his head examined, everyone humoured him because of his pleasant and cheerful disposition. He rode the streetcars free, attended theatres without charge, and was supplied with the necessities of life by those around him. When he ran short of cash, he simply drew drafts on his Imperial Treasury. He issued Royal Proclamations that were designed to better the human race. On Sunday he always attended a church. He played no favourites, but visited them all. Merchants and financiers consulted him on business matters and apparently he gave them sound advice on these matters.

So what does this have to do with Masonry? Well he was a member of Occidental Lodge of San Francisco, and for a time he lived in the Masonic Temple; some of his proclamations emanated from it. When he passed away on January 8 1880, he was given a Masonic Funeral. Fifty-four years later his grave was moved and a monument was erected over his new grave.

Now to a Scottish Canadian. This is one of my very favourite short but true stories. The story of man who loved his Lodge, and who [I think] also loved his pocketbook.

Miles McGuigan was a member of the 81st Regiment of Loyal Lincoln Volunteers and a member of Merrickville Lodge, No. 55, in St. Lawrence District in Ontario. When he died, it was his last wish that his

body be dissected, and then placed in the Merrickville Lodge for future work in the Third Degree. His wishes were carried out, and his bones remained in the Merrickville Lodge until the Lodge Room and building were gutted by fire in 1959.

So Brethren, now let's hope that you have been amused and entertained with these short episodes in the lives of some of our Masonic brethren. Not your ordinary run-of-the-mill Masons, that's for sure. Not all ideal role models! But interesting! Believe it or not, this is Masonic Education.

This file is copyright The Philaethes Society and all rights including any redistribution rights are reserved by the copyright holder. Permission to quote from, redistribute or to otherwise use these materials must be obtained from the copyright holder directly by contacting The Philaethes, Nelson King, FPS, Editor, 2 Knockbolt Crescent, Agincourt Ontario Canada, M1S 2P6. Tel: 416-293-8071 Fax: 416-293-8634 or nking@freemasonry.org

This article was reprinted from The Philatethes and is the copyright of the author Nelson King. FPS, from whom permission was granted to the Webmaster to reprint here.

[\[up\]](#)