

Ancient, Free or Accepted

By W.:B.: Rick Carver

All Freemasons, both A.F. & A.M. (which stands for Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, as well as F & A.M (which means Free and Accepted Masons) trace their allegorical history back to the building of Solomon's temple in the Holy Scriptures. By this fact and reason alone, it really should not matter whether you belong to an A.F. & A.M. Lodge or an F. & A.M. Lodge in the United States.

In the U.S., every regular Lodge is under the jurisdiction of its state Grand Lodge. Due to the fact that there is no recognized Grand Lodge of the United States, each state's Grand Lodge is therefore its own sovereign headquarters for that state's jurisdiction.

Freemasonry was exported to the British Colonies in North America in the 1730s. Its first charters were issued by English, Scottish and Irish Grand Lodges. Between 1751 and 1813, there were actually two Grand Lodges in England. The difference in A.F. and A.M. vs F. and A.M. states goes back to a disagreement between these two Grand Lodges in London at that time.

The Ancient Grand Lodge of England, or as it was also known, *The Grand Lodge of the Most Ancient and Honourable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons*ⁱ as they described themselves on their warrantsⁱⁱ, was a rival Grand Lodge to the old Grand Lodge of England. It existed from 1751 until 1813 when the United Grand

24 Lodge of England was created by officially combining the two. They
25 are now called the Antients, in contrast to the Moderns, the original
26 Grand Lodge who had moved away from the ritual of Scotland,
27 Ireland, and now the Antient Grand Lodge.

28 Although the Grand Lodge never spelled Antient using the letter *t*,
29 the convention was followed by the Moderns, and continues to be
30 used by United Grand Lodge of England. Some confusion arises
31 from the Ancients' own documentation. Their seals are inscribed
32 *Grand Lodge in London of Free and Accepted Masons According to*
33 *the Old Institution(s)*, while in their Masonic certificates, issued to
34 new members, they called themselves the *Grand Lodge of Free and*
35 *Accepted Masons of England according to the Old Constitutions*.

36 United Grand Lodge of England and the Grand Lodge of Scotland
37 currently style themselves as the *Grand Lodge of Antient Free and*
38 *Accepted Masons*, but the Grand Lodge Of Ireland is the *Grand*
39 *Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons*.

40 After the American Revolution, independent U.S. Grand Lodges
41 formed within each state. Most Grand Lodges in the U.S. recognize
42 each other and treat each other's members as valid Masons. Also,
43 all of the U.S. Grand Lodges recognize (and are recognized by) the
44 official Grand Lodges of England, Ireland, Scotland and the Grand
45 Lodges in most of Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, Thailand,
46 India, etc.

47 Grand Lodges of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons are chartered in
48 24 states including CO, CT, DE, ID, IL, IA, KS, ME, MD, MA, MN,
49 MO, MT, NE, NM, NC, ND, OK, OR, SD, TX, VA, WV and WY. Grand
50 Lodges of Free and Accepted Masons are chartered in 25 states,
51 including AL, AK, AR, AZ, CA, FL, GA, HI, IN, KY, LA, MI, MS, NH,
52 NJ, NV, NY, OH, PA, RI, TN, UT, VT, WA and WI.

53 The Grand Lodge of South Carolina is unique in that it chose the
54 title of A.F.M. or Ancient Free Masons. The District of Columbia is
55 F.A.A.M. or Free And Accepted Masons.

56 **Prince Hall Masonic Lodges**

57 Historically, many of the regular (mainstream) Grand Lodges did not
58 recognize the Lodges formed under the Prince Hall Grand Lodges. A
59 Prince Hall Masonic Lodge descends from a Lodge of black
60 Freemasons in Boston begun by a black man by the name of Prince
61 Hall.

62 Prince Hall Free Masonry began during the War of Independence,
63 when Prince Hall and fourteen other free black men were initiated
64 into Lodge # 441, Irish Constitution, attached to the 38th Regiment
65 of Foot of the British Army garrisoned at Castle Williams—now called
66 Fort Independence, at Boston Harbor on March 6, 1775. They later
67 applied for and received a Charter from the United Grand Lodge of
68 England.

69 After Prince Hall passed away, the Lodge ceased to function. Many
70 years later, Black Masons established their own Prince Hall Masonic
71 Grand Lodge and subsequently issued charters for subordinate
72 Lodges.

73 Today, many Prince Hall Masonic Grand Lodges are recognized by
74 the regular Grand Lodges. In other states, they are termed as
75 *affiliated*. Any Prince Hall Masonic Grand Lodge which is not
76 recognized by their regular counterparts are termed as irregular
77 Lodges.

78 All Prince Hall Lodges are F. & A.M.

79 **Lineage**

80 As previously mentioned, the original 13 States can track direct
81 lineage to the Grand Lodges of England, Scotland or Ireland. The
82 subsequently added U.S. States and territories have some additional
83 branches of Masonic lineage, and sometimes even cross ranks. For
84 example, Grand Lodge of Kansas F. & A.M.ⁱⁱⁱ received its Charter
85 from the Grand Lodge of Missouri A.F. & A.M. in 1863. Missouri
86 received its Charter from Grand Lodge of Tennessee F. & A.M. in
87 1821. Tennessee received its Charter from Grand Lodge of North
88 Carolina A.F. & A.M. in 1813. North Carolina received its Charter
89 directly from United Grand Lodge of England in 1787.

90 All this seems cut-and-dried information, and only is relevant when
91 ordering a Masonic ring or some piece of regalia that is correct for
92 your particular jurisdiction.

93 **Looking Deeper**

94 Dr. John Nagy, who tends to look into Masonic meanings at a
95 deeper level than many of us do, has done some research on this
96 subject. His findings are quite revealing.

97 *We begin by pointing out that the word free comes from*
98 *the word franche, whose original and now obsolete*
99 *meaning was "superior" or "excellent." Operative Masons*
100 *who wore the title "Free Mason" were its "Masterful*
101 *Craftsmen." The modern day label for such Brothers is*
102 *"Master Masons." Contrast this with those Masons who*
103 *were only beginning their education in the fraternity.*
104 *These newly made Masons were initiated, but had yet to*
105 *begin learning. These Brothers were "Accepted" but they*
106 *were far from being masterful in any way.*

107 *At the time the early Grand Lodges were forming, these*
108 *labels had nothing to do with what education these*
109 *Brothers were to engage in. It mattered not whether they*
110 *joined to learn the Operative or Speculative aspects of*
111 *the Fraternity. They were "newly Made", "newly*
112 *Initiated", "newly Entered" and, as the term clearly*

113 *implies, "newly Accepted". Our current modern day label*
114 *for such Brothers is "Entered Apprentices."*

115 *When you add the two original, now obsolete meanings*
116 *to the universally used Fraternal phrase "Free &*
117 *Accepted" Masons you begin to see that the phrase, as*
118 *interpreted by unknowing Brothers for nearly three*
119 *hundred years, was not intended to differentiate between*
120 *"Operative" and "Speculative" Masons. It identifies*
121 *"Superior & Initiated" Masons, or, in more modern terms,*
122 *"Master & Apprentice" Masons.*

123 *It's most enlightening and a bit frightening putting all the*
124 *pieces of this puzzle together. I've often heard*
125 *throughout my time as a member of the organization that*
126 *the mission of Freemasonry is to "Make" Masons. The*
127 *meaning of this phrase is very clear to those who have*
128 *examined existing literature. This phrase means*
129 *performing upon those who join only those designated*
130 *Initiatic Blue Lodge Ritual ceremonies approved by the*
131 *ruling Grand structure. Performing ceremonies is not the*
132 *Craft's sole mission, although at times, it certainly comes*
133 *across like it is. To make a significant difference to these*
134 *Initiated Brothers, the mission should also include*
135 *supporting and cultivating them to "Mastery." Barring this*
136 *additional mission from Craft activities, the impact of this*

137 *upon the Craft is perhaps what you see today — Accepted*
138 *Masons only.*

139 Dr. Nagy’s assessment makes an interesting conclusion. By the very
140 definition of the words—albeit now antiquated—a Mason can literally
141 be either a “Free” Mason or he can be an “Accepted” Mason, but it
142 would be grammatically incorrect for him to be held as both. He
143 cannot be both a Master and an Apprentice.

144 So why do we say this? Well, I am not sure that we actually do say
145 this when referring to an individual Mason. Anytime I have ever
146 heard A.F. & A.M. used it was superseded by a Lodge name and/or
147 number or the Grand Lodge itself. I have never seen it applied to an
148 individual member. Quite rightly, it is the Lodge that encompasses
149 the newest Entered Apprentice to the oldest Master Mason within its
150 ranks. The Lodge is quite literally made up of Apprentices, Masters
151 and all that lay somewhere in between.

152 It becomes the decision of each Masonic Jurisdiction to select its
153 own title, but the structure and the sanctity of each and every
154 Lodge of Masons remains universal regardless of which initials follow
155 its name. We are all Brothers.

ⁱ According to the Old Constitutions granted by His Royal Highness Prince Edwin, at York, 926AD, and in the year of Masonry 4926

ii J. Brown, *Masonry in Wigan*, Platt 1882

iii Kansas was originally chartered as Grand Lodge of Kansas F. & A.M. but voted to change to the A.F. & A.M. title about 5 years later.