

EDUCATION PRESENTATION

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Freemasonry: A Tie to Political and Police Corruption

Law enforcement and freemasonry have deep ties with which many are not acquainted. Each of us are familiar with the history of Freemasonry, as we are given brief lessons as we go through our degrees. When we join appendant bodies, we are given further lessons and the opportunities to learn even more through extensive libraries and resources. Freemasonry dates itself to the days of King Solomon, but modern, or speculative, Freemasonry has much newer foundations. Law enforcement as we know it today also has modern and relatively new foundations.

Since civilization began, there has been someone to enforce the rules of that society, whether it be through the head of a family, a village elder, or a council body. Sometime later these duties were transferred to the constable, a position often considered as the first law enforcement figure. According to Encyclopedia online, constables were first utilized in 5th Century France and later utilized in both medieval France and England. They not only exercised jurisdiction over civil and military actions, but his duties also extended to preserving the peace.

In the law enforcement community, what is known as modern law enforcement was established in the early 19th century when Sir Robert Peel established the London Metropolitan Police. Sir Peel established a set of principles to guide the Metropolitan Police, most of which are used by many law enforcement agencies today. One such principle of Sir Peels, states to “offer individual service and friendship to all members of the public without regard to their wealth or social standing.” Sound familiar? Another principal reads, “To recognize always the need for strict adherence to police-executive functions, and to refrain from even seeming to

usurp the powers of the judiciary.” Again, this similar to one of our earliest lessons in Masonry to wherein we are taught to be a quiet and peaceful citizen, true to your government...”

However, while Freemasonry and law enforcement expects its respective members to be just and upright, there has been some long-standing debate that Freemasonry has no place within law enforcement. According to the Esoteric Freemasons website, early police forces were founded by Masons. It has been argued that because these agencies were founded by Masons, they favored members who were Masons. This included filling vacancies, promotions, and even “looking out for” Masons who were not walking upright.

During the early days of law enforcement, “secret societies” were prevalent. The Ribbonmen, the Hearts of the Oak, the Orange Order (a Freemason off-shoot) are just a few examples of “secret societies” that existed at that time. The individual members of these “secret societies” often used their membership to their advantage, including joining police agencies and climbing the ranks within those respective agencies. Because of the advantages of these memberships, many police forces began making membership into these organizations as a violation of policy or a disqualifying factor in the individuals’ ability to become a police officer the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

However, one particular agency banned its members from joining any organization except the Freemasons. The Constabulary of Ireland and the Dublin Metropolitan Police were established by the Constabulary Acts of 1836. In an article written by Gregory Allen, he documented the oath of office for these agencies “contained the unfortunate qualification,”

“...that I will not join or belong to, any political society whatsoever or any secretly society whatsoever, unless the society of Freemasons. So help me God.”

While I could find no clear answer as to why only Freemasonry was the only allowed fraternal within Irish law enforcement, one suggestion may be relationship between Irish Protestants and the Crown, which had deep ties to the Catholic Church. There was a consensus among many in Ireland that there should be a Protestant Ascendancy, meaning the minority would rise and take power. This movement was founded by Ulster Protestants and resulted in the founding in the Orange Order after Protestant King William of Orange defeated Catholic King James II. In Ireland during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there was a civil unrest between its citizens and the Crown and secret societies were prevalent. However, with only one “secret society” being allowed to exist within the law enforcement community, only more divide and unrest could have arisen.

Now what is curious about this is that Sir Robert Peel also had ties to the Irish Constabulary. And when he learned of the re-written oath of office, Sir Peel wrote to his predecessor at the Irish Constabulary suggesting that he reconstitute the entire organization and disqualify all social and political organizations, in particular, “Orange Lodges.” Interestingly enough, he also suggested eliminating political activity in religious organization and emphasized focusing on team building and “esprit de corps.” His concern was that being a member of a member of any organization not specifically related to law enforcement might have an undue influence on the individual officer’s integrity and ability to uphold the law for all citizens. Being a law enforcement officer, I understand the premise behind his suggestions. It is important for law enforcement officers to be able to trust their fellow officers regardless of political or religious affiliations.

In the mid 1970's, Sir Peel's concerns began to surface when widespread corruption materialized in the London Metropolitan Police. Reports started being published about senior investigators with the Metropolitan Police who overlooking statutory infractions for the distribution of obscene material. The controversy developed when it was learned the distributors of these materials were members of the same Masonic lodges as the senior investigators of the Metropolitan Police, who were also taking bribes from these distributors.

Needless to say, criminal charges, reassignments, and other changes were made within that agency. One proposed change was the members of the Metropolitan Police Department had to openly declare their membership into Freemasonry, which was disapproved by the courts. Another change that was approved was that members had to declare a conflict of interest in the case that they were involved, which was a way of still creating a list of active Freemasons with the Metropolitan Police force.

While I found no research related to Freemasonry and law enforcement in the United States, both are not without controversy. As stated previously, we are familiar with the ties Freemasonry has with the founding of our country. But many might not be familiar with the story of William Morgan and his Masonic journey, which began in Batavia, New York, in 1820s. Morgan was working with a new Mason Samuel Greene as he was going through his ritual work. However, Morgan had become disillusioned with Freemasonry in New York because they had developed an extreme hold on local politics. Morgan resolved to do the unthinkable, reveal the secrets of Freemasonry with the help of a local bookbinder Thomas Webb

This of course did not go over well with the Fraternity or with local society. Morgan, a reported veteran of the War of 1812, was known as a man of integrity. However, he soon began to be persecuted, harassed and discredited. In 1827, several men were convicted of kidnapping

Morgan. Some of these men were known Masons and hinted that they had taken to Rochester and then to Fort Niagara, which appeared to be in opposite directions of each other. Other stories suggest he was taken to Canada and told not to return. Others believed that Morgan was killed, but no body was ever found. During that time, that most assuredly meant that murder was impossible to prove often meant that there would be no trial. Eventually, Greene would publish a memoir documenting the trials of Morgan. However, Morgan's works about the secrets of Freemasonry were never published.

The incidents surrounding Morgan's disappearance started an anti-Masonic movement not only in Batavia, but also throughout the United States, especially within the political realm. This movement resulted in a successful third major political party known Anti-Masonic Party and directed their efforts at keeping democracy and politics in the open instead "of the back rooms of a lodge." The movement was apparently successful which resulted in both a decline in Masonic membership, new lodges, and Freemasonry's presence within the political scene of the United States.

The interesting point here is that Freemasonry in the United States was extremely popular prior to the incident with William Morgan. One theory for this may be the fact that the Declaration of Independence was signed by 13 known Freemasons. (Side note: I found sources that documented as few as nine signers and as many as 21 signers of the Declarations of Independence as Freemasons.) The Constitution was drafted by a group of men which most assuredly were some of the same signers. Men of such character and resolve during the War of Independence also being Freemasons was probably the best recruiting tool for American Freemasonry, especially among those of influence.

But many felt that Masonry had become too influential in the political scene, which is what help prompt the Anti-Masonic movement, especially after the Morgan incident. However, politics, which focused much of its attention on commerce, was not the only concern. During late the 1820s and the early 1830s, America began to see a large influx of immigrants which caused civil unrest, crime, riots and public disturbances over work conditions. Although Americans, like the English, were wary about creating a police force. But, with the continued civil unrest and unjust practices and penalties imposed by commerce giants on employees, the public began to call for the formation of active full-time police forces, capable of operating outside the political influences of prominent official and community leaders. In 1838, the first police department in the United States was commissioned in Boston, MA, followed by New York, New Orleans, Cincinnati, and Philadelphia. Some sources cite the New York Police Department as the first commissioned police department in the United States.

These departments were formed out of the unpaid night-watchmen and constables. The investigators were usually senior constables and had been part of the “daytime” enforcement of those respective cities. However, the investigators were the least trusted of all the full-time officers because of their apparent susceptibility to corruption. While these agencies were initially designed to operate outside political influence, some only operated within those precepts, especially private police agencies such as the Pinkerton National Detective Agency.

During the early 19th century, the first major police reform process began first in Boston. The reform was aimed at basically removing politics from law enforcement so that it so remained impartial and enforced the rule of law without influences, similar to the Anti-Masonic movement’s attempt to remove backroom deals from politics. The second major police reform began in the 1960s and 1970s after the Civil Rights Movement. Interestingly enough, neither of

these reforms involved disqualifying or removing Freemasons from police service. In fact, in my research, I found no agencies that disqualify Freemasons from serving as sworn officers. But interestingly enough, I found several agencies that have or had Masonic Clubs associated with them, such as the NYPD's Police Square Club and the Pennsylvania State Police Masonic Degree Team.

In summary, while not under the most welcomed circumstances, Freemasonry helped foster the first major political reform in the United States. This political reform, known as the Anti-Masonic Movement, and the influx of immigrants further recognized the need for full-time police agencies in the United States capable of operating outside political influence. And while there continues to be corruption in both the political and law enforcement fields, Freemasonry no longer has a significant influence over either and thus has no known ties to the corruption associated with them.