

History of the American Canadian Grand Lodge in Germany

Freemasonry in Germany has a long and proud heritage, tracing back to possibly 1733. We are certain a lodge in Hamburg was formed in late 1737, and in the following year Frederick the Great (1712-1786), then 26, was made a Mason at a special communication of that lodge held in the city of Brunswick. When he acceded to the throne of Prussia two years later he openly declared himself to be a Freemason. His endorsement and protection of the fraternity was a factor in fostering its further growth and development.

In later years many of Germany's great and famous men were ardent Freemasons, including, among others, such men as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Masonry in Germany, during its first two hundred years, witnessed the establishment of a number of Grand Lodges, the result of various 'systems' evolving from schisms.

In 1937, two centuries after the establishment of the Lodge in Hamburg, the Nazi regime in Germany declared the Masonic fraternity an enemy of the state. Masonic records and property were confiscated by order of the authorities; many members were sent off to concentration camps, perhaps for no greater crime than being Freemasons.

With the rise of Nazism it was dangerous to wear any emblems identifiable with Freemasonry. The Grand Lodge of the Sun (a pre-World War II Grand Lodge) adopted a little flower, the Forget Me Not as an emblem, to reduce the risk of exposure. The very name itself, 'Forget Me Not', was significant of the desire to keep Freemasonry alive in the heart and in the mind. In the cities and concentration camps throughout Europe this

tiny flower identified those 'sons of light' who refused to allow the Light of Masonry to be extinguished. Thus did a simple blue flower evolve into what became a very meaningful emblem of the Masonic fraternity; as a lapel pin, the Forget Me Not eventually became the most widely worn pin among German Freemasons.

Soon after the close of hostilities and the fall of the Nazi regime, the Masonic Light was about to be rekindled in Germany. When the Remagen Bridgehead was established over the Rhein River during the final phases of WW II, Allied soldiers crossed over into Germany, and Freemasonry went in with them. When the German surrender was complete and the sword was once again returned to its sheath, Freemasonry began to make its presence known in the form and manner, and in the spirit and tradition exemplified by American, Canadian, and British Freemasonry.

Slowly and inexorably amidst the ruins and destruction of an entire country, Freemasonry began to emerge from darkness into light. Step by step, having overcome the distrust often associated with secret meetings, the Three Great Lights began to be displayed. Slowly, first in one area, and then in another, military authorities granted permission to meet, and German Freemasonry resumed work in earnest.

It was truly an epic moment and the culmination of years of hard work, when on the 19th day of June 1949, in the St. Paul's Church in Frankfurt, the United Grand Lodge of Germany burst into existence. The selection of the 'Paulskirche' was perfect. St. Paul's was the site of the first unification of the German states one hundred years earlier in 1848, when the first German National Assembly convened within its hallowed halls. It was here at this historic occasion on June 19th, 1949 that Most Worshipful

Brother Dr. Theodor Vogel (1901-1977) was elected to serve as the first Grand Master of the newly formed United Grand Lodge, AF&AM of Germany. Brother Vogel was the principal architect who had taken upon himself the lion's share of the work involved in unifying the remnants of German Freemasonry. His dream had now become a reality as one German Grand Lodge after another agreed to his design for unification, and in 1949 his efforts were rewarded when, for the first time in the history of German Freemasonry, most of the lodges in Germany were represented by one Grand Body, the new United Grand Lodge, AF&AM of Germany. He then began the long and arduous task of seeking and obtaining recognition from the Grand Lodges of the world.

The final unification of the Craft lodges in Germany became a fact when, in 1958, the new 'Magna Charters of German Freemasonry' was adopted by the general assemblies of the United Grand Lodge, AF&AM of Germany and the Grand Land Lodge of Freemasons in Germany (FO), and the "United Grand Lodges of Germany -Brotherhood of German Freemasons" was established, thereby unifying all remaining elements of Freemasonry in Germany. The vital role-played in this period in the history of German Freemasonry by M.W. Bro. Vogel was once again documented when he was again elected in 1958 to serve as the first Grand Master of the new United Grand Lodges of Germany (VGLvD).

Needless to say, the newly formed VCLvD had a long and arduous road ahead. From an approximate worth of nearly 200 million marks in 1933, their total assets had been reduced to about 100,000 marks following WW II. Masonic properties had been destroyed or confiscated. It is truly surprising and a testimony to the zeal and enthusiasm of German

Freemasons that, despite these many adversities, Freemasonry was able to prosper and eventually take on a new lease on life. An inherent fear, the result of fifteen years of adverse Nazi propaganda and resulting negative public opinion, Church opposition, as well as the cost of maintaining membership, were massive stumbling blocks that had to be addressed, and were major factors that kept many Germans from petitioning for membership. The difficulties that had to be overcome can only be appreciated when one considers the extremely adverse conditions, which prevailed during the reconstruction decade following World War II.

British Freemasons, in previous years, had established a Square and Compass Club in Cologne November 1921, and the Rheinland Masonic Society in December 1922. Soon after World War II ended, Square and Compass clubs sprang up in almost every major area of military concentration in Germany.

One such club, located in Frankfurt, soon petitioned the Grand Lodge of Oregon for permission to establish a Lodge. The petition was granted and on 11 July 1946 the Oregon Military Lodge U.D. was consecrated in the presence of some sixty-six Brethren. They were empowered to make Masons but were limited to hold their meetings on military installations, first due to the then existing occupation circumstances; in later years to avoid conflict with the time-honored principle of sovereign territorial jurisdiction. Oregon Military Lodge thus became the first American lodge to operate in Germany. Its successor in Frankfurt, Oregon Military Lodge No. 936 (under the American Canadian Grand Lodge within the VGLvD) is still very active.

On May 25th, 1947, a charter was issued to the Berlin Square and Compass Club by the Grand Lodge of Rhode Island authorizing establishment of Berlin Lodge U.D. Their petition for charter had been submitted by Bro. J. Taylor Wilson, who was a member of a lodge in Rhode Island, and well known to the Grand Master. Thus the second American Lodge was established in Berlin. This lodge still exists, under charter by the VGL and under the jurisdiction of the ACGL.

Soon after the formation of the lodge in Berlin, Bro. John A. Holbrook, Past Master of Siloam Lodge #32 in Connecticut, together with twenty other Brethren in the Stuttgart area, petitioned the Grand Lodge of Connecticut and received a charter as the Stuttgart American Lodge U.D. The uniqueness of the Stuttgart Lodge was its 'traveling or circuit charter', which enabled the Master to open his Lodge anywhere in Germany and confer degrees. The lodge made visits to Square and Compass Clubs all over Germany; an ideal situation for the Brethren scattered and located in isolated areas. During the next nine years, Stuttgart American Lodge raised some 1,750 Master Masons. One interesting account describes how fifty-four Brethren boarded a plane at Rhein Main Air Base and flew to Bremerhaven to raise a Brother to Master Mason, using the same "traveling charter" which had previously been used by the Stuttgart Lodge to pass this same Brother to Fellowcraft at a meeting in Heidelberg. Those Brethren were obviously "travelers" in the truest sense of the word. The history of Stuttgart Lodge is closely related to the story of one special Brother, R.W.Bro. P. M. Rasmussen, who was destined to become the first Provincial Grand Master of the American-Canadian Provincial Grand Lodge in Germany. Brother Pete, as he was affectionately called, was a Past Master (1932) of Wheaton

Lodge #269 (Illinois) when he was called to active duty in the United States Navy after Pearl Harbor. At the close of the war, he found himself in Heidelberg as a civilian employee. He became acquainted with the Master of the German Lodge in Heidelberg, “Ruprecht zu den Funf Rosen”, and was instrumental in assisting that lodge regain possession of its building. Brother Pete interceded with the local military government officials in Heidelberg; as the story is told, twentyfour hours later the building was indeed returned to its rightful owners, by the city authorities.

Brother Rasmussen, a civilian employee of the Occupation forces, was transferred to Stuttgart in August 1947; just three months after the Stuttgart lodge received its charter. Through chance, on his very first visit to Stuttgart Lodge, Brother Rasmussen was elected secretary of the lodge. By the end of that year (six months after the lodge was chartered) its Master, W. Brother Holbrook, was rotated back to the United States. Since Wor. Bro. Rasmussen met all the prerequisites, he was immediately elected to serve Stuttgart Lodge as its Master, an office he held in that lodge for the ensuing nine years, during which period some 1400 degrees were conferred. When recognition of VGL was assured, the Stuttgart lodge’s charter was returned to Connecticut.

Another lodge, “Ort Bavarian”, operating in southern Germany for a time under dispensation of the Grand Lodge of Texas, was apparently disbanded and its charter returned when recognition of the VGL was extended.

The first group to directly petition the VGL for a charter was the Kaiserslautern Square and Compass Club in 1954. Upon the advice of Brother Rasmussen they petitioned the VGL in mid-1954, and were soon

granted a charter as a Deputy Lodge under sponsorship of the German Lodge Galilei 810, and were numbered '810A' as a result. One year later, when the lodge received its permanent charter, it retained the originally assigned number, and has ever since been called Galilei Lodge No. 810A.

The first American to receive all three degrees in an American Lodge chartered under VGL, Bro. Cameron Saylor, was initiated on 19 July 1954, passed on 30 August 1954, and raised as a Master Mason on 25 September 1954. His dues card, numbered '1', issued in 1954 indicates Brother Saylor's dues were \$9.00 annually. Brother Saylor was suspended on 31 December 1989 for non-payment of dues. He was around 71 at that time.

In rapid succession eight other Lodges were chartered by the VGL, AF&AM and all nine American Lodges were represented in Essen at the VGL annual communication (Konvent) held in September 1955. It was during the course of this convention that M.W. Bro. Vogel, Grand Master, informed those Masters present that he was forming an American District with Bro. Rasmussen appointed District Deputy Grand Master for this new district. It was also at this time that M.W. Bro. Vogel presented Bro. Rasmussen with the VGL Medal of Honor in recognition of his services to Masonry in Germany. This District was the nucleus of what was later to become the American-Canadian Provincial Grand Lodge. Seven years and nine months later there were forty-two lodges composed of Americans and Canadians dispersed throughout Germany, with Bro. Rasmussen serving as Grand Land Lodge Inspector. (The former VGL, AF&AM had changed its name to Grand Land Lodge when it was superseded by the new United Grand Lodges of Germany in 1958).

There were many inherent problems that needed to be resolved, and these became evident in time, such as the language barriers, administrative translations, the large volume of work, not to mention the psychological and the cultural differences between the Germans and the American Canadians. These, and other factors, induced the Americans and Canadians to seek some sort of independence and to obtain representation in the VGL Senate. In 1962 the Masters of the American and Canadian Lodges met in June at Chiemsee with M.W. Bro. Mueller Boerner who had succeeded M.W. Bro. Vogel as Grand Master, and were successful in obtaining representation on the VGL Senate (the governing body of the VGL) and the right to form themselves into the American-Canadian Provincial Grand Lodge. In September of the same year, at the Konvent of the VGLvD held in Frankfurt, a Warrant was presented to R. W. Brother Peter M. Rasmussen formally proclaiming the establishment of the new 'Provincial Grand Lodge' and attesting to his appointment as Provincial Grand Master.

As this brief account of the initial development of the American Canadian Provincial Grand Lodge is published some eighteen years after its founding, many changes have taken place, including two name changes, the first changing Provincial to Land, and then simply deleting the word Land completely. It would be impossible to recount, within the confines of a brief review such as this, the further development of the ACPGL since its founding. That must be the subject of another publication, and covered in greater depth. Among the more immediate problems which had to be addressed by the fledgling ACPGL were the formulation and adoption of a constitution, organization of its administration, and establishment of

revenue for the Provincial Grand Lodge, to name but three of the more obvious areas which required immediate attention.

All was far from smooth running. A major crisis had to be addressed in July 1967, when the very existence of the ACPGL was seriously threatened. It was in that period that work was begun on a complete revision of the Constitution, and completed the following year with the adoption of the new CODE at the Annual Communication in Bad Homburg.

One of the more serious problems existing prior to the adoption of the Code was the question of voting rights, a question that has, in recent years, again been the subject of considerable discussion. The establishment of the rule, one-lodge-one-vote, was accomplished by decree of the VGL, and incorporated within the Code.