

CLANDESTINE

December 1935

Every Master Mason knows that he must not visit a clandestine Lodge, or talk Masonically with a clandestinely made Mason, but not all Master Masons can define clandestinism. The dictionary (Standard) gives “surreptitious, underhand” as synonyms for the word, and while these express the Masonic meaning to some extent, they are not wholly clarifying.

Mackey (History of Freemasonry) states:

The (Anderson) Constitutions declare, Section 8, that where a number of Freemasons shall take upon themselves to form a Lodge without a Grand Master’s Warrant, the regular Lodges are not to countenance them nor own them as fair brethren, and duly formed. In other words, a Lodge formed without a Warrant from the Grand Master (we now say Grand Lodge) is “clandestine”, and so a “clandestine Mason” is one made in a Lodge without a Warrant. Even this definition will not wholly serve; many old Lodges began and worked for a while without a warrant, yet were never clandestine. “The Lodge at Fredericksburg” in which Washington was initiated, had no warrant or charter until long after the First President was made a Mason.

Haywood states of the several terms used to indicate those with whom Masons may not officially have converse:

A cowan is a man with unlawful Masonic knowledge; an intruder is one with neither knowledge nor secrets, who makes himself other-wise obnoxious; a clandestine is one who has been initiated by unlawful means; an irregular is one who has been initiated by a Lodge working without authorization.

An “irregular” Mason is sometimes unfortunately confused with a “clandestine” Mason: unfortunately, because some men are irregularly made Masons even today—usually in all innocence.

George Washington was initiated before he was twenty-one years of age; according to modern ideas, this was an “irregular” making, but there was never a taint of clandestinism attached to “The Lodge at Fredericksburg.” North Dakota permits the reception of a petition of a man under age, although he must be of age when he is initiated; that their law differs from other laws does not make the North Dakota minor, who receives his degrees after he is twenty-one, either irregular or clandestine. In a Jurisdiction in which all the membership must be notified of the degree to be conferred and upon whom, the Worshipful Master may forget to list one candidate in his monthly circular; if the unpublished candidate, regularly elected, is initiated, it is an “irregular” making, and the Grand Master may well order him “healed” by being

re-instituted, but no power could make such a Mason clandestine.

When a Lodge makes a Mason of one not freeborn, not of “mature and discrete age” one who is a bondman, in his dotage, a Mason is made irregularly, but not clandestinely.

When the Mother Grand Lodge separated into two, in 1751, each termed the other clandestine, and this polite name-calling continued even in this country, between Lodges begun here under authority of the two rival Grand Lodges in England. The following is from “Washington’s Home and Fraternal Life” published by the United States government:

According to the Proceedings, Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, February 3, 1783:

“A petition being preferred to this Grand Lodge on the 2nd of Sept. last, from several brethren of Alexandria, in Virginia, for a war-rant to hold a Lodge there, which was ordered to lie over to the next communication, in consequence of Bro. Adam, the proposed Master thereof, being found to possess his knowledge of Masonry in a clandestine manner, since which the said Bro. Adam, having gone through the several steps of Ancient Masonry in Lodge No. 2, under the Jurisdiction of this R. W. Grand Lodge, further prays that a warrant may now be granted for the purposes mentioned in said petition.

“Ordered That the prayer of said petition be complied with, and that the Secretary present Brother Adam with a warrant to hold a Lodge of Ancient Masons in Alexandria, in Virginia, to be numbered 39.

“Bro. Robert Adam who was then duly recommended, and presented in form to the R. W. Grand Master in the chair, for installation as Master of Lodge No. 39, to be held in the borough of Alexandria, in Fairfax County. Virginia, and was accordingly installed as such.” The word “clandestine” falls with unhappy significance upon modern Masonic ears, but it did not in those days mean quite the same thing as it does to Masons of this age. Prior to the “Lodge of Reconciliation” and the formation of the United Grand Lodge of England in 1813 the two Grand Bodies of England, the “Moderns” (who were the older) and the “Antients” (who were the younger, schismatic body) each considered the other “clandestine”. Brother Adam’s Mother Lodge is not known, but as he lived for a time in Annapolis, where a “Modern” lodge worked, it is probable it was here that he received the degrees which the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania (“Antients”) considered “clandestine.” Transition of Masons from Lodges of one obedience to those of the other was neither infrequent nor difficult, so that “clandestine” could not then have had the connotation of irregularity and disgrace which it has with Freemasons of today. Today the Masonic world is entirely agreed on what constitutes a clandestine body, or a clandestine Mason; the one is a Lodge or Grand Lodge unrecognized by other Grand Lodges, working without right, authority, or legitimate descent, the other is a man “made a Mason” in such a clandestine body.

More widespread than effective, more annoying than dangerous, only continual vigilance by Grand Lodges keeps clandestinism from becoming a real problem to legitimate Masonry. Clandestinism raises its ugly head periodically in many Grand Jurisdictions, and in some states it is always more or less of a trouble. Either now, or in the immediate past, some clandestine Freemasonry has afflicted Arizona, California, Colorado,

Missouri, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, West Virginia and the District of Columbia, a list too long to minimize altogether by saying that clandestine Masonry is too weak to do much harm. Arizona and California suffer to some extent from clandestine Mexican bodies. Colorado and adjacent states have had with them for some thirty years a curious organization known as The American Federation of Human Rights, with headquarters at Larkspur, Colorado, which is the seat of “co-Masonry”, an organization purporting to make Masons of men and women alike. Missouri has a number of spurious Italian alleged Masonic organizations, and the “Masonic Chauffeurs’ and Waiters’ Club” with headquarters in Chicago.

In 1929 there was filed in the office of the Secretary of State of New Jersey a certificate of incorporation of “The Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of New Jersey,” under which certificate the incorporator claimed the right to: “Practice and preserve Ancient Craft Masonry according to the Ancient Charges, Constitutions and Land Marks of Free Masonry, to create, organize and supervise subordinate Lodges of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons, granting to them dispensations and charters, empowering them to confer the degrees of Masonry known as Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft and Master Mason and to do all things necessary to carry into effect the objects and purposes of this incorporation.”

The regular Grand Lodge instituted suit in the Court of Chancery against this spurious Grand Lodge with the result that in 1932 there was entered a decree restraining and enjoining this “Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of New Jersey”, its officers, agents, members and employees,

1. From using the name or designation “The Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of New Jersey.”
2. From using any name or designation containing the words “Free and Accepted Masons,” or word “Mason,” or “Masons,” in conjunction with either or both of the words “Free and Accepted.”
3. From practicing, or pretending to practice Ancient Craft Masonry, according to the Ancient Charges, Constitutions and Land Marks of Free Masonry; from creating, organizing or supervising subordinate Lodges of Free and Accepted Masons in the State of New Jersey, or pretending to do so, from conferring or pretending to confer the three degrees of Masonry known as Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft and Master Mason, or any of them. In New York are now, or have been recently, as many as fifteen different spurious Masonic organizations.

North Carolina is not now troubled, but twenty years ago won a case in court against the Cerneau bodies.

Ohio has the “National Grand Lodge of the Independent Order of Free Masons for the United States of America”, but has been successfully fighting it in the courts.

Pennsylvania has had troubles with spurious Ohio bodies and some of her own, but her vigilance is such that these do not get very far in deceiving the public. For instance, in 1927 was heard the case of Phillips against Johnson. A portion of the opinion in that case reads:

This was a proceeding in mandamus instituted by the realtors to compel the Secretary of the Commonwealth to register certain emblems and insignia, such registration having been refused by the Secretary of the Commonwealth. The Right Worshipful Grand Lodge of the Most Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons of Pennsylvania and Masonic Jurisdiction Thereunto Belonging and the Pennsylvania Council of Deliberation were permitted to intervene as defendants, no objection being raised thereto by the plaintiffs. On the trial of the case a verdict in favor of the defendants was returned by the jury. The plaintiffs moved for a new trial which was refused by the court.

South Dakota once had an Italian spurious body, but it has disbanded. Texas has to contend with the clandestine Mexican bodies. Utah has had some experiences, but her most famous contribution to the history of clandestine Masonry was the trial of the notorious McBain and Thompson. That Masonic fraud was there exposed and the perpetrators sent to jail. M. W. Sam H. Goodwin, Grand Secretary, writes of this:

Grand Lodge has not entered the arena against clandestinism, but a great battle against clandestinism was brought to a successful conclusion in the Federal Court, Salt Lake City, and the chief promoters of the Thompson Masonic Fraud (three in number) heard a jury declare them guilty, on ten counts, of using the U. S. mails to defraud.

Grand Lodge did not get into this, neither did any other Masonic organization. But Masons furnished the funds which made that trial possible. It was necessary to send investigators across the water to look up records in France and to interview certain important witnesses in Scotland, and to secure their promise to come over for the trial. Utah brethren furnished the money for this work, also for the expenses of the three men to come and return, as the U. S. does not pay to bring witnesses from the outside. The men engaged in this fraud were each sentenced to serve two years in Leavenworth and to pay fines of \$5,000.00 each. This destroyed the organization—so far as I am aware, no fragment of it is left.

The Scottish Rite Bodies published a book of some 260 pages and index, giving an accurate and most interesting account of Thompson's methods, and of the trial of the case. A spurious Grand Lodge of Thompson extraction was, and perhaps still is, alive in Wyoming. The District of Columbia has had to contend with various would-be incorporators who desire to attach themselves to legitimate Freemasonry, but has always been successful in heading off clandestines who desire legal status under papers of incorporation.

In many States Prince Hall or other varieties of so-called Negro Masonry is in existence, but this variety of clandestinism is seldom if ever harmful to regular Masonry. As a general rule, the legitimate Grand Lodges of the southern States do not quarrel with the so-called Negro Lodges, although they are clandestine. Grand Secretary James M. Clift, of Virginia, puts the general attitude very clearly in writing about colored Masonry in the Old Dominion.

He says:

The Negro (Prince Hall) Grand Lodge, organized just after the war between the States, can hardly be said to be clandestine, as it in no way interferes with Lodges in Virginia.

As matter of fact, the then Grand Secretary of Virginia, Dr. John Dove, aided the leading colored members of this organization in establishing it in Virginia, believing it would be helpful to Negro citizenship. His text book was used as their guide for some years. No recognition could be given them, but so far it appears that Dr. Dove's conclusions were correct.

Occasionally, however, clandestine Negro Masonry gets in trouble with regular Grand Lodges. Colorado, in common with many other States, has for years had colored "Masonic Lodges" which usually give regular Masons no trouble. A few years ago a colored man there organized "Masonic Lodges" and a "Grand Lodge of Masons", which became a rival of the old colored "Grand Lodge". These organizations became involved in litigation in which one sought to restrain the other from the use of a name which in essence was the same as the name of the regular Grand Lodge. If a decision had been obtained, one of these Negro organizations would have had the legal right to use the name of the regular Grand Lodge A. F. and A. M. of Colorado and the use of the Masonic emblems. The danger lay in the fact that if such a decision had been rendered, some degree-monger and organizer of spurious "Masonic Lodges" might have obtained control of the successful colored "Grand Lodge" and converted it into a clandestine Grand Lodge for white men, and his organization would have been fortified with a decision of the court that it was entitled to the name of "Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons" and the use of the Masonic emblems. The regular Grand Lodge of Colorado therefore intervened in the suit. After trial, the District court issued a writ of injunction, permanently restraining and enjoining both the Negro organizations and their subordinate Lodges from using the names "Mason," "Freemason," "Masonic," "Free and Accepted" (together with various other names), and the name "The Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Colorado," and the members from using, displaying and wearing emblems and insignia of Freemasonry. This decision would be of value to Colorado in case it should become necessary for that Grand Lodge to enter into litigation with clandestine Masonic organizations.

In a majority of States legislation has been passed making it an offense against the law to use the emblems of a fraternal organization without a right, or to adopt and use the name of a pre-existent fraternal, charitable, benevolent, humane or other non-profit making organization. Some of these laws are very elaborate, others are less specific, but in States where such legislation has been invoked by regular Masonry against usurpation by clandestine bodies, the courts have upheld, or are now in process of upholding, the regular and recognized Grand Lodges of the nation against those who would profit at their expense. Clandestine Masonry of today is wholly profit-making, begun and carried on by individuals who have nothing but duplicity to sell to their victims. Unfortunately, many honest men have been persuaded to pay fees for the "degrees" of such spurious organizations, in the innocent belief that they were becoming regular Masons. Some pathetic cases form a part of the literature of clandestinism. The charity of Masonry, however, is usually extended to the honest victims of misrepresentation, and such "Masons" may apply, and, if they can pass the ballot in a regular Lodge, their misfortune in innocently entering a clandestine body seldom acts as an objection to their receiving the blessings of genuine Masonry.