

# Brotherhood: Freemasonry in Geneva

Principles of Freemasonry include:

- . a belief in God, according to one's religion,
- . education,
- . community service, and
- . personal integrity.

Often considered a secret society, Masonic beliefs and many rituals have been published.

The organization of Masonic lodges dates to the late 1500s in Scotland, with the first Grand Lodge meeting in London in 1717. The earliest known American lodges were in Pennsylvania in the 1700s. Several founding fathers were Masons, including Benjamin Franklin, John Hancock, and George Washington.



George Washington was not the only prominent Mason in American history. Nine signers of the Declaration of Independence, thirteen signers of the Constitution, and fourteen presidents were Masons.

Religious and political anti-Masonic feelings have been present since the beginning of Freemasonry. Some religions feel Masonic teachings and rituals oppose their beliefs. Some citizens also feared that Masons in powerful positions, like judges and politicians, would put loyalty to the Masons above civic duty.

Freemasonry began with the actual craft of stone cutting and laying, which was based on geometry. Masonic symbols include the square and compass, trowel, and mason's work apron.



## Freemasonry 101

Fraternal organizations have their own terms. Here are basic definitions for non-Masons:

The three degrees: Masons are **initiated** as an *Entered Apprentice*, **passed** as *Fellow Craft*, and **raised** as a *Master Mason*.

Communication: A meeting, in the sense of gathering together (communing, communal).

Grand Lodge: The governing body for a region, i.e. the Grand Lodge of New York.

Concordant groups: After the third degree, one is eligible to pursue higher degrees through other groups, in addition to his lodge membership.

- . Scottish Rite: This group offers up to 33 degrees of Freemasonry
- . York Rite: This has 10 degrees, including Royal Arch Mason and Knight Templar.
- . Shrine: Open to any Master Mason
- . DeMolay: Youth group for boys
- . Jewel Triangle or Rainbow Girls: Youth group for girls
- . Order of the Eastern Star: One of numerous groups for women

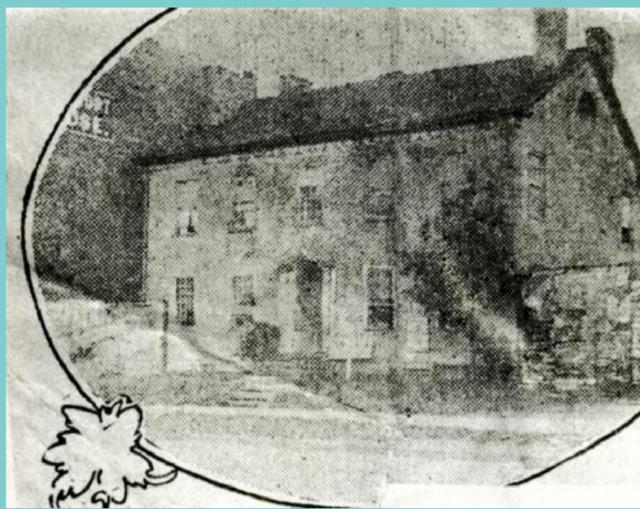
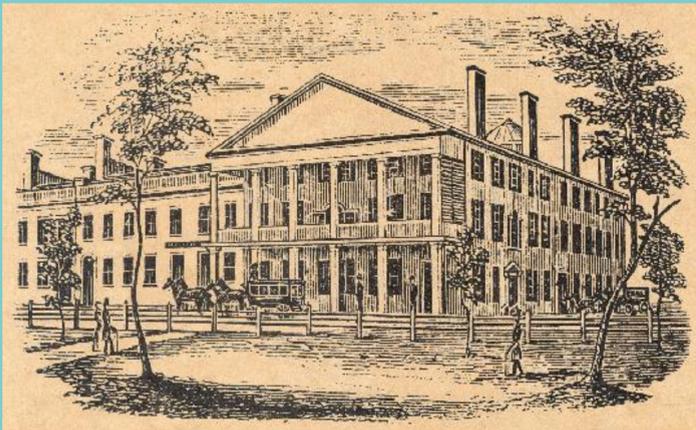


# Early Years in Geneva

Geneva Freemasonry began in 1807 with the chartering of Ark Lodge No. 160. There were earlier lodges in Canandaigua, Palmyra, and the Town of Seneca. Palmyra's Mt. Moriah Lodge No. 112 was the sponsoring, or mother, lodge for Ark Lodge.

The early Ark Lodge members came from Phelps, Oaks Corners, and beyond as well as the village. Lodge meetings were held in a variety of locations, including Geneva Hotel, a schoolhouse, and a brother's home. In 1827 the lodge dedicated its first permanent building on the village square, now Pulteney Park.

A highlight of the early years was the 1825 visit to Geneva by brother Mason the Marquis de Lafayette. The French general's return to America spawned souvenirs such as this pitcher, with Washington's image on the other side.



Left to right are three of the Ark Lodge meeting places: Geneva Hotel, Brother Pearly Phillips' home, and possibly the 1827 Masonic temple. (Their building was to the right of the Presbyterian Church but it is unclear if this 1870s photo shows the Masonic hall or a later building.) Royal Arch Masons formed a Geneva lodge in 1809, and shared the Masonic temple.



The charter members of Ark Lodge ranged in occupation from lawyer to farmer. All were active in politics, the state militia, or their churches. Philetus Swift, (left) a miller from Phelps, was the first Worshipful Master (president) of the lodge. He was elected to multiple terms in the State Assembly and Senate, and was an officer in the War of 1812.

# The Morgan Affair and the Anti-Masonic Party

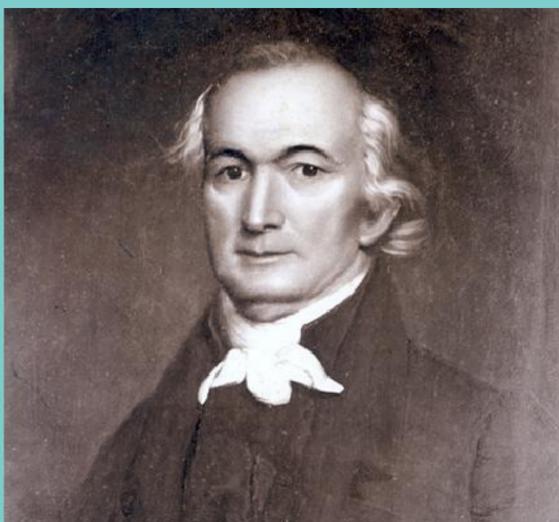
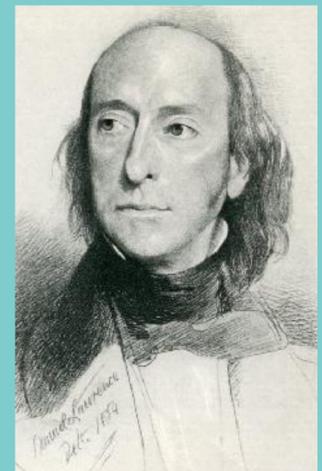
In 1826, Freemasonry nationwide suffered a major setback. After announcing his intention to publish Masonic secrets in 1826, William Morgan was abducted in Canandaigua. He was last seen near Fort Niagara and was presumed drowned by Masons. Four men were tried and convicted of the kidnapping, but the public was unsatisfied.

The investigation into the event revealed that virtually all New York State officeholders were Masons. The Anti-Masonic Party (1828 – 1838) was formed out of fear that Masons were trying to run the country. It was the first “third party” and introduced nominating conventions and the concept of party platforms. While the Anti-Masons had some success in state elections, they never won a national election and became part of the Whig Party by 1838.



There are many stories about the disappearance of William Morgan (1774 – 1826?). The shortest, and hopefully most accurate, one is that he wrote *Illustrations of Masonry* to reveal Freemasonry's secret rituals. It was to be published by David Miller of Batavia. Arrested in mid-September 1826 in Batavia for a bad debt, Morgan was taken to jail in Canandaigua. A man showed up at the jail to pay the debt. Upon his release, Morgan and the man went together to Niagara. Morgan was never seen again.

Attorney Charles Butler moved to Geneva in 1824. He was the Ontario County Assistant District Attorney. In 1827, when four men were brought to trial for Morgan's kidnapping, District Attorney Bowen Whiting, a Mason, asked Butler to prosecute the case to avoid conflict of interest. Their convictions set Butler on the way to legal fame in New York State. Butler built the original portion of the Prouty-Chew House in 1828, and later moved to Chicago.



The Freemasons were seen by some as an elite class of politicians, judges, bankers, and businessmen making decisions in secret. The Anti-Masonic Party capitalized on this. They opposed Andrew Jackson (a Mason) and his policy of patronage and hands-off economic approach, and favored protective tariffs and improving infrastructure. Robert S. Rose, left, represented Geneva in Congress as an anti-Mason from 1829 – 1831.

Locally, Ark Lodge was reduced to thirteen members. Of 490 lodges in New York State, Ark Lodge was one of 40 lodges to survive the anti-Masonic years. In 1829 they sold their temple to the Presbyterian Church. They met in secret for a few years, then moved to a building on William Street in 1831. The Royal Arch Mason Geneva Chapter did not survive, surrendering their charter in 1831; they were revived in 1846.

# The Golden Years 1845–1956

In the 1840s Freemasonry rebounded and the surviving New York lodges were renumbered; Ark Lodge 160 became 33. As Geneva grew steadily in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, so did the lodge; in 1927 it peaked at 671 members. Fraternal organizations in general were popular. Brotherhood and ritual offered reassurance in a changing world.

Geneva Masonry grew beyond the Ark and Royal Arch Mason lodges. Geneva Lodge 965 was chartered in 1919. Concordant groups included Knights Templar Commandry, Order of the Eastern Star, Order of Amaranth, Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, and Mystic Order of the Veiled Prophets of the Enchanted Realm.



Ark Lodge moved numerous times in the 19th century. In 1899, the Hoffmann Building on Seneca Street (left) was built as a permanent home. The former Dutch Reformed Church on South Main Street was bought in 1918. It became home to Ark 33, the new Geneva 965, the concordant groups, and the Masonic Community Club.



Jewel Triangle installation, 1955, with Queen Patricia Lee in foreground.



Community service is important to all Masonic groups. DeMolay members delivered Christmas packages to the needy in 1954.



Temple Dedication Executive Committee, 1918, left to right: Willis Loftus, George Stubbs, Charles Root, Charles Guile, and Charles Darrow.



Installation of Geneva Lodge officers, 1955.

# The Modern Years

In 1956, the closing of Sampson Air Force Base began a decline for both Geneva's economy and Freemasonry. Industries closed or moved away, the city's population decreased, and there was less interest in joining fraternal organizations. Ark and Geneva Lodges have each dropped below 100 members, and many of the concordant groups are gone. However, the Masons are still active in Geneva and are still initiating new members.

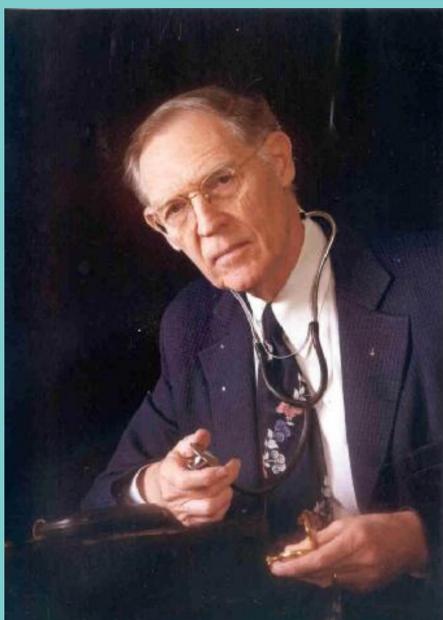
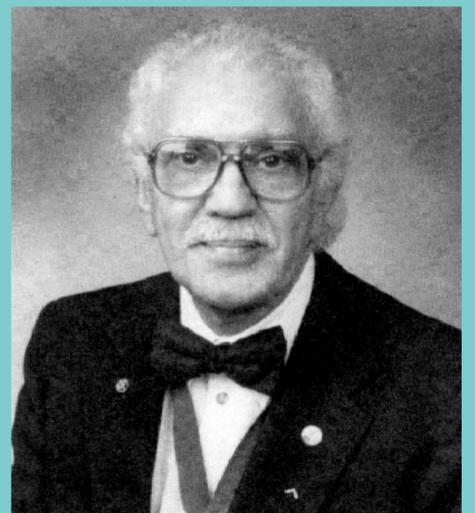


Officers of the Royal Arch Masons in 1964. The Royal Arch Masons currently have about 30 members in Geneva and share space with Ark Lodge. The other remaining concordant group, Knights Templar, has moved to Phelps and merged with other area commandries.



In 1988 declining membership and increased expenses forced the sale of the South Main Street temple. In 1990 the Masonic Community Center of the Finger Lakes was completed on Routes 5 & 20 west of Geneva. It was to serve area lodges who were having trouble maintaining buildings; the building was not supported and it was sold in 1996. Ark Lodge currently meets in a building on Border City Road, and Geneva Lodge is on South Exchange Street.

Syrian Americans have belonged to Ark Lodge since the early 20th century. Worshipful Masters have included Thomas Baroody, Mitchell Abraham, Harry George, Tom Abraham, and Anthony Khouri (right). Their involvement led to a Geneva tradition of Syrian Brotherhood Nights. Syrian American brothers filled the ceremonial chairs for that evening, and a Syrian dinner was held before the communication. This event continued until the 1980s.



A history of Geneva Freemasonry would not be possible without Dr. John Stelter (1911–2007). Ark Lodge's historian from 1955 until his death, Dr. Stelter was a Shriner, a Knight Templar, a Royal Arch Mason, and belonged to many more concordant groups. He was an avid researcher and writer of Masonic history and did much to document the story of Ark Lodge.

Dr. Stelter practiced medicine at 180 Genesee Street, was on the Geneva General Hospital staff, and served the Geneva City School District and Hobart College. On top of Freemasonry and medicine, he was involved in the Geneva Historical Society, American Legion, Rotary Club, Hydrant Hose Fire Company, and the Finger Lakes Council of the Boy Scouts of America. Dr. Stelter was a living example of the principles of Freemasonry.