

Chapter I

*The Beginnings of
Freemasonry in North Carolina*

MASONRY AMONG THE PIONEERS

It can be said with a great deal of confidence that the beginnings of Freemasonry in North Carolina are lost in the mists of antiquity. During the first hundred years or so of North Carolina's history as a colony of England—say from 1654 to 1754—there were, without doubt, many English, Scottish, Irish, French, German, Swiss, and other European Masons who settled in North Carolina. There may even have been a few instances toward the end of that first century of settlement when small groups of pioneering Masons organized themselves into lodges, held meetings, and enjoyed Masonic fellowship out here on the farthest fringes of western civilization. If such instances actually occurred, they would necessarily have been somewhere along the shores of the Albemarle or Pamlico Sounds or the lower portions of the eastern rivers—the only European-inhabited areas of North Carolina up to the middle of the 18th century.

Certainly there were other social organizations in these regions whose origins went back to the late 17th century and the time of the dual sovereigns, William and Mary, or the reign of good Queen Anne. There were a few Quaker congregations, for example, that went back even before that and a few very old Anglican churches that were already well-established when the

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Stuart Era ended with Queen Anne's death in 1714. North Carolina at that time had but two or three settlements that could fairly be called towns, but Masonry could have flourished, as it would in later years in North Carolina, even in places far removed from any town or village.

The historian searches, however, in vain for written evidence—let alone proof—of Masonic activity in North Carolina earlier than the decade of the 1750's. Until that time, it seems likely that individual Masons, including, it is said, the early colonial governors, George Burrington and Sir Richard Everard (Ca. 1724-1731),⁷ probably found too few of their European brethren close by to give serious thought to the formation of frontier lodges. It was not, after all, until 1733 that even so old and established a town as Boston had its own Masonic lodge.

THE LEGENDARY BEGINNINGS

Legend fills in colorfully for us where historical records fail. Down on the Cape Fear River, where so many enduring things had their beginnings, tales are still told of the grand old Mother of North Carolina lodges that is said to have prospered for some twenty years while George II still ruled the British Empire and pirates roamed the coastal sea-lanes in quest of booty. This was "Solomon Lodge" at Masonboro Inlet, eight miles southeast of Wilmington. The town of Wilmington, indeed, was still a rustic hamlet known as Newton, or New Town, in 1735 when Solomon Lodge is said to have been organized.

The story of Solomon Lodge has been given its most impressive form by late 19th and early 20th century antiquarians of the Lower Cape Fear who first began to salvage the remnants of the oldest legends of the region. Though never written down up to that time, these legends were an ancient part of the folklore of the Cape Fear country. Some there were in and about Wilmington in those days who could remember the old house that once stood hard by the water's edge at Masonboro Inlet and which had from time immemorial been known in the vicinity as the old Masonic lodge. One who had lived as a boy in that very house described it in 1911, long after it had been consumed by fire, as having been a very old one-and-a-half-story pine-log building covered over with heavy cypress shingles. Underneath the 25x30-foot structure was a brick vault where, ac

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William Hooper. North Carolina Signer of the Declaration of Independence, member of St. John's Lodge No. 1, Wilmington. (NC. Dept. of Cultural Resources).

According to the legend, “the Masonic archives were preserved.”² On the inside walls, etched into the sea-shell lime plaster, were strange and indistinct figures thought to have been the mystic symbols of early Masonry. In “a little upper room” of this picturesque old house, peering out from its grove of cedars, William Hooper, a Signer of the Declaration of Independence, and Robert Howe, the swash-buckling major-general of the American Revolution, were said to have taken their first vows of Masonry.³ To make the story complete, the names of some of the members of the Hooper family were scratched on some of the window-panes. Inevitably, it was suggested that Masonboro Inlet must have derived its name from its association with the old lodge that long ago held its meetings there. Preliminary research into the Masonic records of the English Grand Lodge indicated that fraternities known as Solomon Lodge had been chartered in the 1735 at both Wilmington and Charleston while Thomas Thynne, Viscount Weymouth, occupied the office of English Grand Master.⁴ To this point, then, the literary evidence appeared to confirm the oral tradition and Masonboro’s Solomon

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Lodge seemed to have secured firmly its limb on the family-tree of American Freemasonry. The legend gave rise, in time, to a handsome painting representing the old lodge-house in its prime and to official listing in publications of the North Carolina Grand Lodge as the initial Masonic organization in the province.⁵

More recent study, alas! has cast over the legend of Solomon Lodge a dark shadow of skepticism. Recent and more thorough examination of the English records has confirmed the charteting in 1735 of Solomon Lodges at Charleston and Savannah—but not at Wilmington or elsewhere in North Carolina.⁶ A tracing of the ownership of the property where the old lodge is said to have stood fails to confirm its association, prior to 1758, with anyone known to have been active as a colonial Mason.⁷ No evidence has been unearthed that tends to link the name Masonboro with the Masonic order. Nor is it allowable that William Hooper, who was but twelve years of age when Solomon Lodge is thought to have been discontinued (in 1754), was ever a member of a lodge at Masonboro. (Robert Howe had just turned twenty-one in the same year). After the ravages wrought to legend by these findings, all that remains of the tradition of a lodge at Masonboro is the recollection of an old house, burned in the 1890's, in which Masonic meetings of some chapter may at some earlier time have been held. And then, again, maybe not.

But the story about a lodge at Masonboro Sound may not be so easily dismissed, for the Solomon Lodge legend is intertwined with that of another prehistoric lodge that is thought to have stood at or near the same site. This was “Hanover Lodge”, and old lodge believed to have been founded by veterans of the French and Indian War (1756~1763).⁸ The substance behind the tradition is that Caleb Grainger, who purchased land on the inlet in 1758, had served as a captain with a North Carolina unit which saw active duty in that war. There is reason to suppose that Grainger was among the North Carolinians who were enrolled in the Army Lodge chartered by the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts during the conflict.⁹ When Grainger died in 1765, his will was found to express his desire to be buried with Masonic honors.¹⁰

Even though there appear to be some interesting parallels between fact and legend, there seems to be no more than the flimsiest data to support the theory that Caleb Grainger was a

founder or a member of a chapter known as “Hanover Lodge”. That such a lodge might have been formed, that it might have received a charter or warrant from the Grand Lodge of South Carolina or Scotland—these are remote possibilities but not the stuff of which history is composed. Hanover, like Masonboro’s Solomon Lodge, must await the lucky discovery of some, as yet, unknown record before either deserves a niche in the hierarchy of North Carolina lodges.

Still less can be said in support of a notion that Highland Scots, freshly arrived at Cross Creek on the upper Cape Fear River, in 1736 organized a Masonic lodge which, for many years afterward, fostered the Craft in the interior wilderness of the colony.” Here again, it is certainly not beyond the realm of possibility that such a lodge was created and that it received a charter, as has been alleged,²² from the Grand Lodge of Scotland. But not for several decades can it be said with any confidence that a Masonic lodge operated in this region, where now the town of Fayetteville is located. It was, therefore, probably not for a full hundred years after Nathaniel Batts had settled on the banks of Albemarle Sound, and raised there the first English house on the North Carolina mainland in 1655, that North Carolina Masons can safely be said to have organized their first lodge.

THE HISTORICAL BEGINNINGS

From the turgid depths of oral tradition, made treacherous by the cross-currents of local pride and indistinct recollections, it is a relief to emerge onto the firm shore of literary documentation. In March, 1754, Henry Brydges, Marquess of Carnarvon and Grand Master of Masonry in England, warranted a lodge to be known as “St. John’s No. 213” at the town of Wilmington, North Carolina. On June 27, 1754, the English Grand Lodge acknowledged receipt of payment for the constitution of the new lodge and within a few months, perhaps early in 1755, organized Masonry was a historic reality in the province of North Carolina.²³

Nothing, unfortunately, is known of the activity and very little about the membership of North Carolina’s first known lodge during the early years of its operation. A “Masons Lodge” in Wilmington was valued in the 1758 Tax List at 140 pounds sterling, twelfth in value among the twenty-two structures in the

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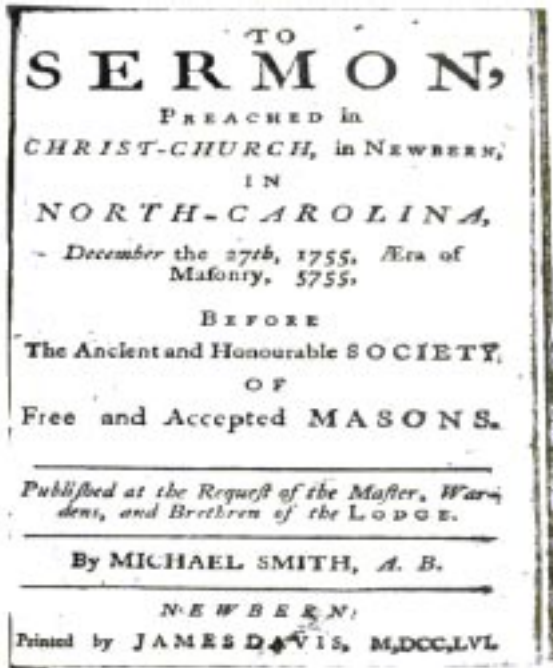
town.⁷⁴ The will of Joshua Toomer of Wilmington, dated August 22, 1761, requested of his “Brethren the Freemasons” that they attend his funeral “with their jewels and aprons”.⁷⁵ These scant records, all that remain of the work of St. John’s Lodge for more than a quarter of a century, are valuable, nevertheless, in establishing the ongoing existence of the lodge in the years after it was chartered. No doubt the outstanding member of St. John’s in these early years was Cornelius Harnett, a native of Chowan County, who had been brought up on the Cape Fear and who was destined for years of greatness; as we shall later see, in the course of the American Revolution. Harnett was Worshipful Master of the lodge in the days of the Stamp Act Riots at Wilmington in 1765 and 1766, episodes in which he played a leading part. It was Harnett who issued the warrant for Royal White Hart Lodge in Halifax in 1764.¹⁶ But there are no lodge-minutes or other papers from which the story of St. John’s may be reconstructed prior to those of the year 1788.

There is, finally, a possibility that a mid-18th century lodge existed for a while at what is now Hillsborough. Richard Caswell, later a Grand Master of Masons in North Carolina, appears to have been living in Orange County, at or near the county court house, in 1752 when he was first apprenticed to the Craft.⁷⁷ Some twenty years afterward, he was required to take the obligations again at New Bern because he had “passed the different degrees of Masonry formerly tho not in a regular constituted lodge.”⁷⁸ There is, however, no further evidence of Masonic activity in Orange at that early date.

THE NEW BERN BRETHERN

Two days after Christmas, 1755, an Anglican parson delivered a sermon at the town of New Bern which was subsequently published in pamphlet form by North Carolina’s earliest printer, James Davis. The pamphlet, only one copy of which is known to exist, bears the title: “Sermon, / Preached in / Christ-Church, in Newbern, / in / North-Carolina, / December the 27th, 1755, A Era of / Masonry, 5755, / Before / The Ancient and Honourable Society / of / Free and Accepted Masons.” The title-page also provided the information that the pamphlet had been published “at the Request of the Master, Wardens, and Brethren of the Lodge.”⁷⁹

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Michael Smith's Sermon. Title-page of sermon proves operation of New Bern Masonic Lodge at least as early as 1755. (UNC Photographic Service).

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The pamphlet indicates a lodge so firmly established that one is tempted to speculate that New Bern's Masonic Lodge had been in operation for quite some time, possibly even longer than the one at Wilmington. The sermon was delivered by the Rev. Mr. Michael Smith, "Their most affectionate Brother", whose star-crossed career was soon to gain him notoriety on both sides of the Atlantic.²⁰ Smith was a native of County Meath, Ireland and a graduate of Trinity College in Dublin. He had served as curate in Hertfordshire, England before migrating with his family to South Carolina in 1752 and becoming the established minister in Georgetown County. Unfortunately, the ill winds of gossip began to flutter about Parson Smith within two years and he had scarcely returned, in the Spring of 1756, from his trip into North Carolina before his vestry accused him of having given himself up to loose women, "Gaming, Luxury, Dancing, & Wantonness...Cards...Billiards" and any number of other unbecoming practices.²¹ By skipping about from parish to parish in North and South Carolina for the next several years, Smith managed to stay one step ahead of efforts by the Church of England to dismiss him, but he was finally defrocked in 1760.

The adventures of Michael Smith before and after his Masonic sermon in New Bern in 1755 give a special note of pathos to a passage from his excellent discourse there:

with Regard to that Epidemical vice of *Scandal*," the reverend gentlemen had counselled his New Bern brethren, "which too frequently rages in most infant Settlements: Were we all from this Moment resolved to discountenance it wherever we met it; were we resolved, at all Events, to rescue an unhappy Brother from the Lash of that merciless and deaddoing Weapon, a *Slanderous Tongue*: Or if it is not possible to bring him off entirely unhurt, yet by mentioning some of his good Qualities, (for the worst of Men are not entirely destitute of such) we may heal up some of his Wounds, and perhaps be a Means of restoring his Soul to its proper Health

But there could scarcely be enough charity in all of North America to bear the strains laid upon it by Mr. Smith.

The New Bern pamphlet also provides the names of the Master and Wardens of the Masonic Lodge in the year 1755. The former was Dr. Andrew Scott, a native of St. Georges County, Maryland who was perhaps the most able and talented

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medical man of his day in North Carolina. Scott was almost the only practicing scientist in the colony, having already been engaged in collecting and forwarding to English naturalists samples of the flora and fauna of North America, and later becoming one of the pioneers of small-pox inoculation in the South. (His collections of botanical specimens still form a part of those of the British Museum).²⁷ Assisting Dr. Scott as Wardens were John Clitherall and Joseph Carruthers, New Bern businessmen. Senior Warden Clitherall is distinguished in the history of North Carolina as being one of a very small number of colonists to send his son—James Clitherall—to Scotland for a university education. James studied under some of the greatest physicians in the world at Edinburgh University before settling in his own successful practice at Charleston.²⁴ In 1755, as in later years, the New Bern fraternity included some of the most remarkable men in North Carolina.

TWO MORE EARLY LODGES

While there is little or no historical reason to doubt that Wilmington and New Bern were the sites of the earliest lodges in North Carolina, no such certainty attaches to the question of which lodge comes next in the order of precedence. The candidates for this honor, one of which still operates, are Crown Point Lodge, also called “the First Lodge of Pitt County”, and Royal White Hart Lodge in the town of Halifax. Both of these early lodges can be traced back to at least the year 1764.

On December 10, 1764, the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts entered upon its accounts the receipt of two pounds, sixteen shillings from a lodge in Pitt County, North Carolina in payment for its constitution.²⁵ This lodge, then, the thirtieth to receive authorization from the Massachusetts body, was chartered at some time prior to December, 1764, probably within a few weeks prior to the receipt of the payment in Boston. The organization of the lodge in Pitt County proved, however, to be a slow process and it was not until June 24, 1767 that it held its initial meeting. A report of this meeting, together with a list of twenty-four officers and members, was forwarded to Boston later in the summer and duly entered in the proceedings of the Grand Lodge.²⁶ Perhaps under the impression that he was dealing with the only lodge yet established in North Carolina—certainly the only one to have applied for recognition in Massachusetts—

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Crown Point Lodge Document. Thomas Cooper, Master of “the First Lodge in Pitt County”, issued this certificate for Clement Holliday, a member of the lodge, on March 27, 1768. (Bill Owens).

Grand Master Henry Price on December 30, 1767 issued a deputation appointing Thomas Cooper, who was Worshipful Master of the Pitt County lodge, as “Deputy Grand Master of North Carolina”.²⁷ Since all previous deputations of authority from England had been to South Carolinians authorized to preside over Masonic affairs in both of the Carolinas,²⁸ Thomas Cooper’s was the earliest issued for North Carolina alone. There is no record, however, of his having exercised the powers thus conferred upon him and no new lodges are known to have been created in North Carolina between 1767 and the beginning of Joseph Montfort’s tenure as Provincial Grand Master in 1771.

“The First Lodge of Pitt County” is said to have held its meetings at the inn of Colonel Shadrack Allen, a native of Crown Point, New York, whose place was located about fifteen miles southeast of what is now Greenville and on the public road between Halifax and New Bern.²⁹ It was the same inn at which George Washington would stay on his Southern Tour in 1791. In the possession of the North Carolina Grand Lodge is a letter of recommendation for Clement Holliday, dated March 27, 1768 and signed by Thomas Cooper, Senior Warden Peter Blinn, and Junior Warden John Simpson. The letter certifies that Holliday had been initiated in the three degrees of Masonry as a member of the Pitt County lodge and that he “has the three grand principles at heart”³⁰ Besides Cooper, Blinn, and Simpson, the leaders of this lodge included Treasurer Richard Evans, Esq., Secretary James Hall, Esq., Stewards Thomas Hardy and James Hill, and Tyler Richard Richardson. James Glasgow, for many years Deputy Grand Master of North Carolina in later days, was also a member.³¹

Crown Point Lodge had been chartered, then; before December 10, 1764 and probably in October or November of that year. But the problem of historical origins of these and other lodges is compounded by the chaos that existed in the 18th century in the matter of chartering. A group of brethren seeking to obtain authority for a lodge in this colony might apply to England, the Scottish Grand Lodge, the Worshipful Master of the Wilmington lodge, or to any of several provincial grand lodges in the American colonies, including especially those of Massachusetts or South Carolina.³² Or, as likely as not, a lodge might even operate without any charter whatever—what in Masonry is called a clandestine lodge. So we have almost infinite possibilities for the creation of lodges, clandestine and legitimate, below Wilmington, on the upper Cape Fear, over in Orange County, or elsewhere.

Crown Point Lodge was in all probability preceded in actual operation, and perhaps in chartering as well, by a lodge which met at Marsh Store in Halifax County, five miles southwest of the town of Halifax.³³ This early lodge, like its successor which was chartered in 1764, was known as Royal White Hart Lodge. It appears to have gone out of existence as the newer one in Halifax town was created, but, for some reason, it was not until a full thirty years later, in February, 1794, that the lodge in

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Halifax town directed Jesse Read, former treasurer of the old lodge at Marsh Store, to turn over the “Jewells and apparattus” of that lodge and to offer an “opinion respecting the premises” (presumably the Halifax brethren sought title to the old lodge hall).³⁴ As early as April, 1765, however, a committee was formed in the town of Halifax “with full power to settle and make division of all moneys or matters belonging to the former White Hart Lodge, and to settle the proportions due to each lodge on such terms as they should deem just and equitable u The present lodge at Halifax was warranted by Cornelius Harnett, “Grand Master” of St. John’s in Wilmington, on November 1, 1764,³⁶ and therefore may have preceded the Crown Point Lodge in that regard.

THE LODGE-ROOM AT HALIFAX

Royal White Hart Lodge in Halifax, like virtually all of North Carolina’s 18th century lodges, held its meetings in rooms rented from local inn-keepers or in private homes. From its first meetings in April, 1765, and for three years afterward, this lodge met at Anthony Troughton’s tavern, Peter Copeland’s, Daniel Lovel’s, and Thomas Wild’s before finally settling for a long stay at William Martin’s Ordinary.³⁷ Martin had a large two-story house, built and formerly owned by legislator Alexander Elmsley as his place of residence.³⁸ Here, at “the Sign of the Thistle”, the lodge was convening in late 1772 when a gap first appears in the lodge-minutes, and here the brethren were still in session when the minutes resume in 1783.³⁹ Thus, it seems that all meetings of the lodge for a period of fifteen years—less an interruption during the latter part of the Revolutionary War— were held at Martin’s.

There is, however, a remarkable story—one hesitates to label as a legend what is really a simple mistake—that Royal White Hart from its earliest days has always met in the present lodge-building in Halifax. This notion, unfortunately, has been parlayed into the claim that the present hall is “the oldest Masonic building in the world.”⁴⁰

The mistake is attributable to a misreading of early minutes of the lodge. At a meeting of Royal White Hart in April, 1769, Joseph Montfort presented his brethren with a deed for lot number ill in the town of Halifax. The fourteen members present pledged a total of ninety-eight pounds sterling toward

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“improvements” on the lot and commissioned Brother John Thompson to supervise the work, “so that the accommodation thereon may serve for various purposes, particularly that of a Masonic Hall and Assembly Room.”⁴¹ This initial plan was, however, abandoned, probably because it was found that the house on lot III was too decayed to repair, and five months later the lodge, meeting at Martin’s, ordered Brother Thompson to auction off the lot, together with “the ruins of a certain old house on the Lott.”⁴² Thompson subsequently reported that he had sold it to Brother Joseph Long for thirty pounds, ten shillings.⁴³

A new effort was made. Before the end of 1769, the lodge designated a committee headed by Montfort to plan and prepare estimates for “a neat & commodious Mason Hall” and to propose a scheme for financing it.~ Later minutes contain no further reference to this committee and the lodge continued to meet in private rooms for more than half a century thereafter. On December 15, 1821, the brethren of Royal White Hart finally convened “at their new Hall”, a building designed and constructed by architect Jarrard Weaver.⁴⁵ It is this hall, now more than 150 years old, in which the lodge has met ever since.

A WORTHY BROTHERHOOD

The members of Royal White Hart Lodge in these dawning years represented a cross-section of the planting, business, and professional men of Halifax and the outlying Roanoke countryside. They also reflected the cosmopolitan makeup of those North Carolina towns where the shipping interest was a major factor in the economy. Dr. Frederick Schulzer, the first Master of the lodge, was a German physician who had apparently taken his Masonic degrees in Europe before emigrating to North Carolina.⁴⁶ Attorney James Milner was a handsomely educated and affluent Scot whose private library of 621 volumes was by far the largest and best in the colony.⁴⁷ Merchant Alexander Telfair was a prosperous Scotch merchant-shipowner with several stores in the upper Roanoke region. He was also a state legislator and a confidante of Thomas Burke and other leading men of the province.⁴⁸ Others, men like Squire John Campbell,⁴⁹ the former Speaker of the Assembly, from Coleraine, Ireland (and one of the most influential men in North Carolina), Hertford County merchant Joseph Dickinson,⁵⁰ and Bute County tavern-keeper Jethro

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Sumner, lived too far away for regular attendance but tried to keep up their Masonic obligations while awaiting the establishment of lodges closer to their places of residence.

Most of the Halifax brethren were strangers to the region— and many of them from Scotland—who had not lived long enough in North Carolina to lose their exotic dialects and alien accents. In most instances, the outsiders were of great credit to Royal White Hart and an asset to the Halifax community. James Auld, for example, successor to Joseph Montfort as Clerk of the Halifax court, was a zealous Mason who came here from Dorchester County, Maryland in 1765 and whose diary offers a rare glimpse of a North Carolina community in colonial times. Auld joined Royal White Hart shortly after settling at Halifax in May, 1765 and it is interesting to glance at his journal for its comments on the town and his Masonic brethren:

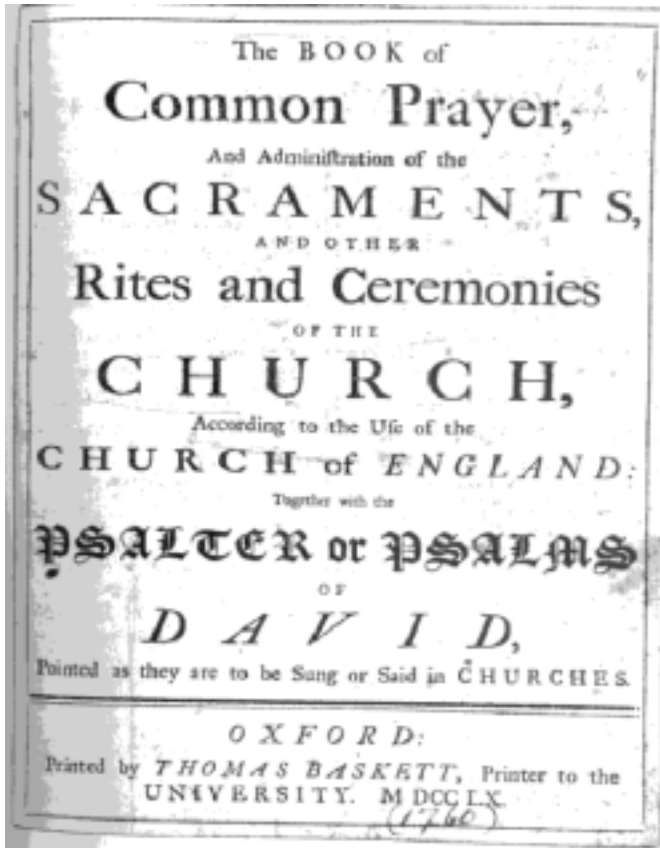
I... put up at the house of Jos. Montfort Esq.', wrote Auld, 'Sc afterwards settled in Town and took the county clerkship of him and kept a store. Here I remained untill June following when I went to Maryland on a visit to my friends & returned in abt. three week to Halifax & occupied the Clk's Office Sc kept store for ...J. Montfort untill the Augt. foll, then ret'd. to Maryland again and removed my family to Halifax... where we arrived on the 25th Day of Sept. 1765 there Settled in Town abt 2 yrs had a son born us called James 30 Nov. 66 dyed 21 Jany. and bought a house Sc settlement on Miii Swamp abot. March 1767....⁵¹

In the meantime, Auld had been initiated into Royal White Hart Lodge in July, 1765 and attained the degree of Master Mason in October.⁵² He was elected Secretary of the lodge in June, 1766 before moving to Anson County where he was to have a distinguished career in his later years.

ROYAL WHITE HART AT WORK

If the colonial brethren at Halifax could not afford a lodge building of their own, they could at least outfit their rented quarters in such a way as to lend elegance and dignity to their proceedings. One of the first recorded acquisitions of the lodge was a Bible, ordered in 1767. ~ A "Book of Common Prayer", printed at Oxford, England by Thomas Baskett in 1760, is still among the prized possessions of the lodge.⁵⁴ The brethren soon

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Halifax Prayer Book. Printed in Oxford, England in 1760, this was the Book of Common Prayer used by Royal White Hart Lodge before the Revolution and long afterward. (UNC Photo Service).

afterward added a silver seal, a copy of the most recent edition of Anderson's *Constitutions* (the leading work on Masonry), and a Master's Chair which was built for the lodge by Richard Hall, a local craftsman.⁵⁵

Lodge meetings in those free-wheeling days of "Tom Jones" and "Moli Flanders" were not all somber speeches and pious ceremonies; they included a generous portion of merriment as well. It need not surprise us, therefore, that the most impressive order placed by Royal White Hart in these early years was one that was agreed upon at the St. John's Day Festival on December 27, 1767. The Treasurer was ordered at this meeting to send to England for six dozen pint glasses, all with "worm'd stalks", three dozen punch glasses, three and a half dozen quarter-decanter, three two-quart decanters, and four one-gallon bowls of Bow China, all items to have enameled upon them the words:

"Halifax Lodge No. Carolina."⁵⁶ The mind's eye conjures up visions of many a quiet night in old Halifax stirred by the exuberant melody of the brethren departing homeward from Brother Martin's tavern.

An extraordinary relic of the colonial days of Royal White Hart is one of the items ordered, in that meeting of 1767, which still survives. It is one of the four Bow china bowls, now recognized as "the only known product of the Bow factory in London made specifically for the American market...."⁵⁷ Having survived the rigors of almost two centuries of use, the bowl was rescued by a Halifax lady from a refuse pile behind the lodge-building within recent years.⁵⁸

The obligations of charity were taken seriously at Royal White Hart and there was often some sort of fund-raising underway for the benefit of a distressed brother or in the name of some worthy cause. At their third meeting in 1765, the members agreed that they should have a paling put up around the grave of John Linton, a deceased brother,⁵⁹ and not long afterward they made similar arrangements for the grave of William Alexander, another former Mason.⁶⁰ In the winter of 1767, they voted relief for a traveling Mason named John Callaghan who was stranded in Halifax without funds⁶¹ and later they took up a collection for the benefit of Christopher Bromage, another itinerant brother.⁶²

As the lodge could be generous toward those it considered to be deserving of assistance, so also it could be severe with those



Bow China Bowl. One of four bowls ordered by Royal White Hart from the famous china factory at Bow, England in 1767. Regarded as “the only known product of the Bow factory ..made specifically for the American market (Bradford L. Rauschenberg).

who were guilty of transgressing the virtues encouraged by the Craft. In the Spring of 1765, the lodge discovered that its own Treasurer had been guilty of “Immoral Irregular & scandalous Behaviour ...by Willfully taking all steps to cheat and Defraud” not only his own creditors but the lodge as well. Moreover, he was found to be “Persisting in this scandalous Behaviour in spite of all friendly and Brotherly Persuasions and Admonitions.” Its patience exhausted, the lodge voted to expel the miscreant “in the most Solemn Manner for ever from this Lodge ..as a most abandoned Person—unfit ever to be countenanced by any true and faithful Brothers and Brethren through the world.”⁶³ When Royal White Hart expelled a brother, he was likely to stay expelled.

BUFFALO LODGE

In addition to those early lodges already mentioned, there was at least one other lodge whose origins are traceable to the era prior to 1771 when Joseph Montfort became provincial Grand Master. This was Buffalo Lodge, located on Buffalo Creek in what is now Warren (then Bute) County. Organized in 1766, Buffalo Lodge was led by Masons who are said to have been previously associated with Blandford Lodge in Petersburg,

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Virginia or other older North Carolina lodges to the east. Jethro Sumner and Thomas Bell had formerly been members of Royal White Hart, while others, perhaps, had belonged for a time to St. John's Lodge at New Bern before joining the swelling westward migration across North Carolina and toward the western mountains. Conducting business in its first months only in the first degree, Buffalo Lodge was soon operating in all three Masonic degrees and holding meetings as often as four times a month to accommodate applicants and promote fraternal harmony.⁶⁴ Planter William Park (first Worshipful Master), Patewells Milner (apparently a brother of James Milner of Halifax), John Christmas, William Johnson, Solomon Alston, Secretary Thomas Machen, and Tyler James Burke were other notable members of this lodge.⁶⁵

It is one of the happy ironies of Masonic history that the first minutes of this ancient lodge, long thought to have been lost, were discovered in 1916 lying in a pile of debris in an old Warren County barn. Only by this stroke of fortune was the work of some thirty-four of North Carolina's earliest Masons preserved from oblivion.⁶⁶ Such instances, rare though they are, offer hope that the story of early Masonry in this state may someday be known much more fully than it is now.

MASONRY IN THE DAYS BEFORE JOSEPH MONTFORT

The work of Joseph Montfort, representing the high tide of Masonry in colonial North Carolina, will concern us in the next chapter. Before we turn to a consideration of that great work, however, it is worth noticing that Montfort had been provided with a sound foundation upon which to build. The lodges at Wilmington, Halifax, and New Bern would endure as permanent outposts of the Craft and those at Buffalo Creek (the forerunner of Johnston-Caswell Lodge) and Crown Point were training-grounds for Masons who would afterward be important in other lodges and in the founding of the Grand Lodge of North Carolina in 1787.

Aside from their influence upon the later development of Masonry, it is not hard to imagine that the exacting discipline of the Craft itself, its unrelenting pursuit of charity, virtue, piety and integrity, was helping to foster a better citizenship among the North Carolina colonists, a greater harmony and social intercourse among the leaders of the province. In due course,

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this discipline and harmony would be called upon to undergo severe challenges, but the Craft was to emerge from its days of peril more solidly entrenched in the life of the people of North Carolina than it had been in colonial times.