

## Landmarks 101

As a Mason you have probably heard the term “Landmarks” and how important they are to our fraternity. This is certainly true for the Master of the Lodge and every Past Master, as our Constitutions, in Part 5, Article 99 states in part:

*99. Master’s Pledges – Every Master, before being placed in the chair, shall, in addition to a full compliance with the prescribed order and ceremonies of installation, solemnly pledge himself to observe all the old-established usages and customs, and to preserve the **landmarks** of the fraternity, and most strictly enforce them within his own Lodge.*

What you may not of heard is what they actually are. Unfortunately, they are not as easy to define as we would like.

The words Landmark and Landmarks are used sparingly in our earliest documents and even after the formation of the Grand Lodge in 1717, the terms were used but not defined nor any Landmarks listed. It’s not until 1858 when Albert Mackey took up the task that we get a definition and a definitive list of them. His list of 25 is the most commonly used and recognized, but they are by no means universally accepted. One of the big problems with this list is that many of them do not even meet his own definition of what a Landmark should be, but we’ll get into that later. Others since Mackey have also defined them and made up their own lists, one of the most notable of which is Roscoe Pound. His definition and list consist of only 7 Landmarks. Also like Mackey, Pound’s list contains a few that do not match even his own definition.

A quick look through our Constitutions and Regulations for the Grand Lodge of New Brunswick will show how important the Landmarks are to our jurisdiction. The Grand Lodge is given the power and authority to enact laws and regulations and alter and repeal them “*always taking care to preserve the antient landmarks.*” But what are those Landmarks that we must preserve? Reading through our book of Constitutions you will find Mackey’s 25 Landmarks listed near the beginning, which would seem to answer that question. But there is a problem – here is a quote from an eminent New Brunswick Mason, who has been both the Grand Secretary and the Grand Historian of GLNB. In regards to a discussion about the Landmarks and in particular about those listed in our Constitutions he wrote:

*“As Ed has just pointed out this jurisdiction has never formally adopted MacKey's Landmarks as reflected in our Constitution, they magically appeared in the 1948 printing of our Constitution. A search 5 years previous and 5 years following in both the Grand Lodge proceedings and the minutes of the Board of General Purposes fails to show where there was any motion to formally adopt these Landmarks.”*

So it would seem the New Brunswick jurisdiction actually does not have an officially sanctioned list of Landmarks to adhere to. That's actually not as strange as it might sound. We are by no means the only jurisdiction in this situation, even the United Grand Lodge of England has never defined or listed the Landmarks. In the United States, of the 50 State Grand Lodges that I have information on, 29 have not recognized any official Landmarks, another 6 may or may not have some, their exact situation is unclear, and only 15 actually have some list of officially sanctioned Landmarks. Of those 15, there is a great variation in what they consider their Landmarks. About one third of those 15 have adopted Mackey's list of 25 but the rest range from Michigan's 3 to Kentucky's 54. A number of the remaining 35 State Grand Lodges are like us, they list the Mackey Landmarks, but have never made them official.

Here is Albert Mackey's definition of a Landmark: *“those ancient, and therefore universal, customs of the order, which either gradually grew into operation as rules of action, or, if at once enacted by any competent authority, were enacted at a period so remote, that no account of their origin is to be found in the records of history.”* As his list of 25 Landmarks has become almost the standard by default, I will give a quick list of them as follows:

1. Modes of recognition
2. Division of symbolic Masonry into three degrees
3. Legend of the 3rd degree
4. Government of the fraternity by a Grand Master
5. Prerogative of the Grand Master to preside over every assembly of the Craft
6. Prerogative of the Grand Master to grant dispensations for conferring the degrees at irregular times
7. Prerogative of the Grand Master to give dispensations for opening and holding Lodges

8. Prerogative of the Grand Master to make Masons at sight
9. Necessity for Masons to congregate in Lodges
10. Government of lodges by a Master and 2 Wardens
11. Necessity of tiling lodges
12. Right of every Mason to be represented in all general meetings of the Craft and instruct representatives
13. Right of every Mason to appeal from his Lodge to the Grand Lodge or General Assembly of Masons
14. Right of every Mason to visit and sit in every regular Lodge
15. No unknown visitor can enter a Lodge without first passing an examination
16. No Lodge can interfere in the business of another Lodge or give degrees to brethren of other Lodges
17. Every Freemason is amenable to the laws and regulations of the Masonic jurisdiction in which he resides, even though he may not be a member of any Lodge
18. Candidates for initiation must be men, un mutilated (not a cripple), free born, and of mature age
19. Belief in the existence of God as the Great Architect of the universe
20. Belief in a resurrection to a future life
21. A "Book of the Law" is indispensable in every Lodge
22. Equality of all Masons
23. Secrecy of the institution
24. Foundation of a speculative science upon an operative art, and symbolic use and explanations for the purpose of religious or moral teaching
25. These landmarks can never be changed

If you would like to read them through for yourself at some future time, you can find them on the GLNB web site, in the resources section.

I mentioned at the beginning of this presentation that some of Mackey's Landmarks were in conflict even with his own definition, here are some examples. Let me remind you of

a critical part of his definition “... were enacted at a period so remote, that no account of their origin is to be found in the records of history.” Now let’s have a closer look at just the first 3:

1. *The modes of recognition* – these were actually changed several years after the formation of the Premier Grand Lodge in 1717 because the originals had become compromised by a published exposé of Masonry.
2. *The division of symbolic Masonry into three degrees* – actually there were originally only 2 degrees, the third degree was not added until some time in the 1730’s.
3. *The legend of the Third Degree* – when first created the 3<sup>rd</sup> Degree was actually a story of Noah and his sons and had nothing to do with Hiram Abiff or the Temple of Solomon, that change came about several years later.

These first three are by no means the only examples of his Landmarks conflicting with his own definition. My personal favourite is number 25 “*That these Landmarks can never be changed*” – these 25 did not even exist before Mackey created them in 1858 so how could there have be one that says the previous 24 can never be changed existing since before recorded history?

We all agree that Landmarks are an important part of Freemasonry and they should not be changed, we just don’t agree on what they actually are. We are left in a somewhat confused state as to what laws and regulations we can enact because of this lack of a definite guide. Maybe the only way to know if you have changed a true Landmark is when other jurisdictions threaten to withdraw amity because of that change.

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