



Camden City Lodges

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A Brief History

by WB Don Elfreth, Collingswood-Cloud Lodge No. 101

[Ed. Note: WB Don originally prepared this piece as a brief oration for the March 2012 Official Visit of the District Deputy Grand Master to Collingswood-Cloud Lodge. Time-sensitive references and other minor details have been updated for its present presentation in the 18th District Light, and where possible and suitable, some new information has been added.]

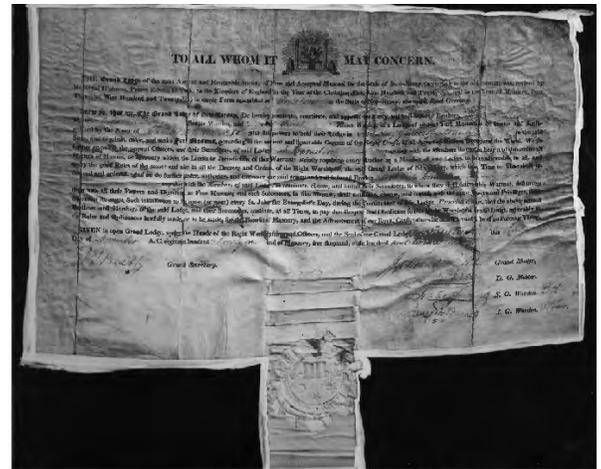
It is often said that Americans' historical memories are short. This may or may not apply to American Freemasons; but I, for one, do not believe it does. Many or most of us belonging to The Grand Lodge of New Jersey appear to have a deep curiosity and a desire to know about our Masonic past. Unfortunately, our Masonic historical records — our primary source materials — are sometimes dispersed, missing, vague, not comprehensive, or not easily accessible. Thus, some of what we know, or believe that we know, about our past Masonic selves is incomplete or perhaps even incorrect.

For myself, only entering the Craft in 2006, many substantive changes to our area Lodges occurred before I was initiated. This brief essay concerns the origins and fates of the original Camden City lodges belonging to the Grand Lodge of New Jersey and comes about due to conversations I have had with other Brothers. I do not represent this as a comprehensive review, by any means, because I am in no way a subject matter expert. Rather, my hope is to encourage better and more thorough discussions of our older, many now defunct, Lodges among the Brethren of the 18th District, especially those who are far more knowledgeable in this matter than I. I admit quite frankly that the following review may be incomplete, was compiled from non-primary sources, and may include some small errors of fact.

To the best of my ability to ascertain, there were eight Lodges originally chartered in Camden City:

- Camden 15 (originally Camden 45)
- Ionic #94
- Trimble #117
- Mozart #121
- Universal #216
- Parkside #217
- Mizpah #245
- Henry S. Haines #253

Camden Lodge was constituted in Camden City as Camden #45 in 1821. The Lodge met at several locations over the years, including Camden City Hall during its early history, Vauxhall Gardens, and the old Camden Masonic Temple at Fourth Street just below Market. It died off around 1842, apparently a victim of the anti-Masonic backlash caused by the Morgan affair. It was re-warranted in 1850 as Camden #15, and later became mother Lodge to



Though barely legible in this reproduction, this is the Charter of Camden Lodge No. 15 when it was re-warranted in 1850



Florence #87 (1868), Ionic #94 (1869), and Trimble #117 (1871). From this, and later events, as we shall see, Camden #15 was a Lodge to which many of our 18th and 29th District Lodges, both extant and defunct, have an historic tie.

Ionic #94, constituted in 1869 in Camden City, is listed in secondary sources as the mother lodge for Merchantville #119, Mozart #121, and Haddonfield #130.

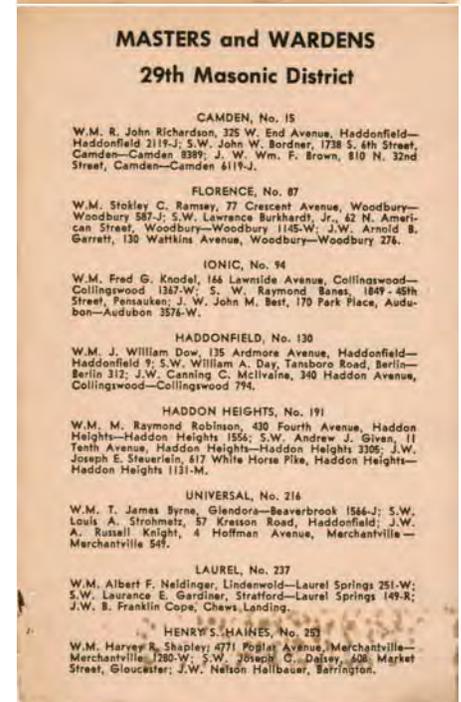
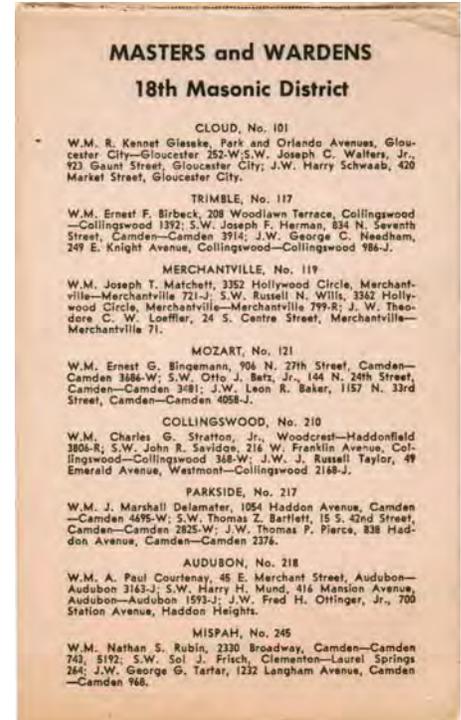
Trimble #117 was constituted in Camden in 1871. It was named after MW Joseph Trimble, GM for New Jersey for a number of years in the late 1850s. From 1913 thru 1968, it met at the old Camden Masonic Temple.

Mozart #121, was constituted as a German-speaking lodge in 1872 in Camden City, and for most of its time in the city met in Wildey Hall at Fifth and Pine Streets.

The socio-economic collapse of Camden City and the consequent decline of most of its neighborhoods, which occurred in just a few short years culminating around 1971, led to all eight Lodges moving to the surrounding suburbs. Parkside #217, constituted in Camden in 1920 (the same year as Audubon #218), ended up meeting at the Collingswood Masonic Temple until 1988, when it merged with Audubon Lodge. Camden #15 merged with Cherry Hill #297 (originally Delaware Township #297 in 1961) to become the short-lived West Jersey #15, which later merged with Haddonfield #130 to become Haddonfield-Cherry Hill #15. Mizpah Lodge #245, constituted in 1923, ultimately left Camden to merge with Haddon Heights #191. Ionic, Trimble, and Universal #216(constituted in Camden in 1920) all ultimately left Camden and eventually ended up sharing space at the West Jersey Masonic Center [WJMC] with Cherry Hill #297 and Camden #15, which itself moved out of the city. WJMC became the home of USS NJ #62's after Ionic, Trimble, and Universal merged to form that Lodge in 2004. Henry S. Haines #253 (constituted in Camden in 1925) met for many years at Audubon Temple and moved to Haddonfield Temple in 1990. Mozart also spent time at the WJMC, moved to the Collingswood Temple in 2011, and now meets at Audubon, as does Collingswood-Cloud since the sale of Collinswood Temple.

Most recently, in 2010, Haddonfield-Cherry Hill #15, Mizpah-Haddon Heights #191, and Henry S. Haines #253 all consolidated together to form Rising Sun #15, which now therefore incorporates the original Camden, Cherry Hill, Haddonfield, Mizpah, Haddon Heights, and Henry S. Haines Lodges, and their various merged formats along the way.

Of the eight old original Camden City Lodges, only Mozart #121 now



Masters and Wardens of 18th and 29th District Lodges in 1940

still exists unchanged or unmerged. It is my sincere hope that this last remaining Camden City-originated Lodge continues to be strong, thriving, and viable to carry on that historical connection.

From a historical perspective, the establishments of Trimble, Ionic, and Mozart were part of the great post-Civil War expansion of Freemasonry. Universal, Mizpah, Parkside, and Haines appear to be part of another great expansion of the Craft which occurred post-World War One. Only Camden Lodge existed prior to the decline of Freemasonry following the Morgan affair. The fate of the original Camden City Lodges reflects the post-1970s contraction of American Freemasonry. Freemasonry, nevertheless, remains in Camden City, as Prince Hall Masonry's Oriental Lodge No. 1, established 1847 has served the city for many years.

As mentioned at the outset, this is not a complete study of this subject and, through the eye of Masonic education, may only qualify as anecdotal at best. Still, all the origination dates mentioned have been carefully conformed to Ed Smith's in depth *The History of Freemasonry in New Jersey 1787-1987*, and many well informed Brothers have contributed to the winding tale of mergers and movements related herein. I hope this serves as a catalytic inspiration for more further study by others, and invite our future Masonic the scholars to share their knowledge with us. I know it will be deeply appreciated by the Brethren. 



Camden Lodge once met in the old Temple Theater at 415 Market Street. As reported in the May 2017 issue of the 18th District Light, the two above photographs of that edifice, taken from the same vantage point, present us with a conundrum as yet unresolved. Was the building originally constructed with the cupola that appears in the photo on the right, or was the cupola added subsequently. Sadly, we've never been able to date the photographs to answer that question.

The Tyler Who Saved Christmas

© 2016 by David A. Frankel

(with apologies to *'Twas the Night Before Christmas*, by Clement Clarke Moore)

'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through
the lodge,
Not a Mason was stirring, 'cept old Tyler Hodge,
The old Tyler perched on the lodge roof with care,
Defending the lodge 'gainst approach from the air.

The Temple, you see, was a building of brick,
And up t'wards the sky a tall chimney did stick,
And old Hodge, he figured, that chimney might
cause,
Some flawed navigation by one Santa Claus!

He knew the old chimney was blocked down below,
Where a cold barren fireplace no longer glowed,
He feared old St. Nick just might make a mistake,
And descend down that chimney, not knowing it
fake.

And OH! what a mess if St. Nick should get stuck,
All the kids in the world would be clean out of luck!
So Hodge stood his post bravely into the night,
His eyes scanning upwards to spot Santa's flight.

The hour was late and the moon risen high,
When a flicker of movement caught old Hodge's eye,
The jingle of bells was a sign crystal clear,
That jolly St. Nicholas was indeed near.

His head on a swivel, Hodge looked round and
round,
But nowhere in sight could those sleigh bells be
found,
And just when he thought it a trick of his mind,
Eight reindeer appeared with a sleigh right behind.

Santa soared o'er the eaves, to his team gave a
whistle,
Looping up and around they came down like a
missile,
Then pulling up short, with a crack of his whip,
Santa settled his reindeer and sleigh in a zip.

Slinging his bag o'er his shoulder, he ran
T'wards the chimney, where Hodge stood with
sword in his hand,
Barring the way to that jolly old elf,
The Tyler yelled, "Nick, I save you from yourself."

With a look of surprise St. Nick drew to a halt,
While Hodge frantically told of the brick chimney's
fault,
With a quick nod of thanks Santa turned on the dot,
Leapt into his sleigh, his whip cracked like a shot.

Now, DASHER! Now, DANCER! Now, PRANCER
and VIXEN!
On, COMET! On, CUPID! On, DONDER and
BLITZEN!
The reindeer took off and soared into the sky,
But not before Nick gave a wink of his eye!

And old Hodge beamed with pride, for he knew in
his heart,
That he had now played a most critical part,
In the story of Christmas, at least for that year,
Though he knew it unlikely that people would hear.

In that he was right, for his tale was ne'er known,
By the children who since have gone on and grown,
But one night in the lodge a strange letter was found,
Which the Secretary read, and us all did astound.

From Santa himself, from the very North Pole,
The exploits of Hodge, the missive extolled,
So I'm telling this story to people who might,
Never know a Freemason saved Christmas one
night!



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WB Martin Bogardus

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AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 LODGES
PART II



A FILM BY TRISTAN BOURLARD
Thursday, Jan. 17, 2019 - 7:00 PM
Haddonfield Masonic Temple
16 Kings Highway East
Haddonfield, NJ
Open to All: Masons & Friends
Light Refreshments Served
at 6:30 PM
Presented by Collingswood-Cloud & Rising Sun Lodges | CURATED BY WB MARTIN BOGARDUS

A Joint Program of
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Who was the original 'Widow's Son'?
It depends on who you ask.

This documentary explores the origin of the
third degree and the 'lineage' of the Craft.
Sourced from some of the earliest manuscripts, and
exploring certain facts not often brought to light,
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Thursday, March 21, 2019

Haddonfield Masonic Temple | Light Refreshments
16 Kings Highway East | served at 6:30pm
Haddonfield, NJ | Screening begins at 7:00pm

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History is Full of Conspiracies and Lies
The Truth Will Be Revealed

On an Indian Reservation there is a secret... a powerful relic...
something which Jews, Muslims, and Christians alike have tried for
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The CIA will kill for it... hundreds of innocent people have already died
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artifacts of all time. History will never be the same!

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Thursday, July 18, 2019

Haddonfield Masonic Temple
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Tony Robinson Investigates the historical accuracy
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hidden truths about Freemasonry.

OPEN TO ALL - PLEASE JOIN US
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2019

Haddonfield Masonic Temple
16 Kings Highway East
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MOVIE STARTS AT 7:00 PM



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EXPLORE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE THREE DEGREES OF FREEMASONRY
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THURSDAY, OCTOBER 17, 2019

Haddonfield Masonic Temple
16 Kings Highway East
Haddonfield, NJ
Light Refreshments
served at 6:30pm
Screening begins at 7:00pm