

THE LANDMARKS OF THE ORDER

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What are the Landmarks of Freemasonry, and should they be a part of our constitution?

Henry Coil, in his *Masonic Encyclopedia*, carefully details the history of this American invention, noting that there is no mention of landmarks prior to 1723. Anderson's *Constitution* of 1723, not following the *Old Charges*, was already being arbitrarily selective about what rules to follow and clearly did not consider them landmarks. A reference in 1744 to landmarks, in context, refers to the modes of recognition and no more. In 1774 William Preston wrote much about the landmarks without bothering to define them other than as granting the original four lodges in London the prerogative to ignore the dictates of Grand Lodge.

The first attempt by any Grand Lodge to define the landmarks was at the union of the English Grand Lodges in 1813 when they defined them as the making, passing, raising and instructing of candidates — no more. In 1823 the short-lived Wigan Grand Lodge in England adopted a list of fifteen landmarks, the first time any list was attempted, although it limited itself to defining the rights and authority of Grand Lodge, lodges and the Grand Master. Dr. George Oliver wrote *Historical Landmarks* in 1846 but in two volumes failed to clearly define the landmarks, although he considered Trinitarian Christianity to be one of them. He later created a list of twelve landmarks: 1. Elementary; 2. Inductive; 3. Ritual; 4. Personal; 5. Those connected with the Cardinal Points; 6. Scientific; 7. Historical; 8. Typical; 9. Doctrinal; 10. Practical; 11. Obsolete; and 12. Spurious. He failed to explain what all that meant.

The first Grand Lodge attempt to define landmarks was in Missouri in 1850, basically defining them as the *Old Charges*. In 1852 the Grand Master of California defined his right to make Masons at sight a landmark but was overruled by his Grand Lodge who resolved that he had no such authority. In 1856 the Grand Lodge of Minnesota, then three years old, included in their constitution a list of 26 landmarks, one of which was the prerogative of the Grand Master to make Masons at sight. The same year Rob Morris weighed in with his list of seventeen landmarks, most of them addressing different issues, with one ambiguously stating that “the official duties of Masonry are esoteric,” whatever that means.

The third to invent landmarks was Dr. Albert G. Mackey, who published his list of 25 “ancient, universal and immutable” landmarks in the *American Quarterly Review of Freemasonry* in 1858.

1. The modes of recognition.
2. The division of symbolic masonry into three degrees.
3. The legend of the third degree.
4. The government of the fraternity by a presiding officer called a Grand Master.
5. The prerogative of the Grand Master to preside over every assembly of the Craft.
6. The prerogative of the Grand Master to grant dispensations for conferring degrees at irregular times.

7. The prerogative of the Grand Master to give dispensations for opening and holding lodges.
8. The prerogative of the Grand Master to make masons at sight.
9. The necessity of masons to congregate in lodges.
10. The government of the craft, when so congregated in a lodge by a Master and two Wardens.
11. The necessity that every lodge, when congregated, should be duly tiled.
12. The right of every mason to be represented in all general meetings of the craft and to instruct his representatives.
13. The right of every mason to appeal from the decision of his brethren in lodge convened, to the Grand Lodge or General Assembly of Masons.
14. The right of every mason to visit and sit in every regular lodge.
15. No visitor, unknown as a Mason, can enter a lodge without first passing an examination according to ancient usage
16. No lodge can interfere in the business of another Lodge, nor give degrees to brethren who are members of other Lodges
17. Every freemason is amenable to the laws and regulations of the masonic jurisdiction in which he resides.
18. Qualifications of a candidate: that he shall be a man, unmultilated, free born, and of mature age.
19. A belief in the existence of God.
20. Subsidiary to this belief in God, is the belief in a resurrection to a future life.
21. A "Book of the Law" shall constitute an indispensable part of the furniture of every lodge.
22. The equality of all masons.
23. The secrecy of the institution.
24. The foundation of a speculative science, for purposes of religious or moral teaching.
25. These landmarks can never be changed.

Mackey subsequently claimed in 1874, in his *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, to have been the first to enumerate the landmarks. He provided no proof for his assertion that these landmarks were unwritten customs which had been in use from time immemorial. Both Albert Pike and Robert Freke Gould, acknowledged masonic authorities, note that there is no agreement on what constitutes a landmark and, in their own writings debunk, point by point, Mackey's claim that his "landmarks" have any antiquity or universal acceptance. Over the next half-century at least six more lists were published, ranging from H. B. Grant's list of fifty-four landmarks to Roscoe Pound's list of seven. Another set of seventeen vaguely presented landmarks can be found throughout volume III of the 1946 edition of Mackey's *Encyclopedia*.

Over the years many American jurisdictions adopted various of these lists. As many more masonic writers have insisted that the landmarks are unwritten and cannot be set down.

The question must be asked: if Freemasonry grew and prospered for more than a century without anyone's knowing what landmarks were or whether there were any at all, of what importance can they have in our jurisdiction?

Mackey's landmarks were not a part of the first four editions of our *Book of Constitution*. They first appeared in the 1895 edition on pp. 79-80. The *Proceedings* of Grand Lodge in 1894 and 1895 make no mention of a resolution or decision to attach Mackey's landmarks to the *Book of Constitutions*. In 1904 they were attached to the first edition of the *Book of Forms and Ceremonies* on pp. 49-50 and subsequently reattached to the 1910 *Book of Constitutions* on p. 106. They continued to be included, generally before the *Old Charges*, until 1972, when they were included on pp. 112-113.

Mackey's landmarks were not included in the 1977 *Book of Constitutions*. The Grand Secretary, RW Bro. David M. Taylor, determined that, not having been adopted as such, they were not a part of the *Constitutions* and taken individually were either already in the *Constitutions* or were not accepted practice in this jurisdiction. He therefore directed the printers to omit them.

In 1981 Grand Lodge adopted a resolution to include the landmarks in the *Book of Constitutions*, and strike a committee to consider endorsing them. In 1982 Grand Lodge adopted the recommendation of the report of a Special Committee on Landmarks to include Mackey's landmarks with a preamble explanation that they were not endorsed by Grand Lodge. [*Proceedings*, p. 130-31] The 1982 *Book of Constitutions* included Mackey's landmarks, again on pp. 112-113. Over the years the actual wording had been tinkered with but they were still in essence Mackey's landmarks. There were no reprints of the *Constitutions* until 1991 when the text was reset and the format changed to a six-ring vinyl binder.

The 1991 *Book of Constitutions* did not contain Mackey's landmarks. The Grand Secretary, MW Bro. Bill Stirling, concluded that including Mackey's landmarks, even with the preamble, gave them an unjustified air of authority that they did not warrant and the new format gave him the opportunity to omit them. Major revisions of the *Constitutions* in 1996 and 2014, both omitting the landmarks, were later adopted by Grand Lodge.

There are those brethren still who assign Mackey's landmarks a greater value than they deserve. Although they do not represent any historical authority but merely reflect the opinion of one antibellum American author, the counter argument is made that the phrase "ancient landmarks" is a part of our ritual language, so it requires definition.

The problem is reaching agreement on what are the landmarks. There are at least seven lists available and many other variations have been proposed, or adopted by other jurisdictions. Before any list of landmarks could be adopted in this jurisdiction, several issues need to be addressed: numbers 8, 20 and 25 of Mackey's list are controversial, numbers 4, 12 and 16 are ill-defined, numbers 8, 9 and 14 are contrary to our *Constitution*, number 18, as worded in our 1982 *Constitutions*, is ambiguous, and number 25 is clearly wrong.

The so-called landmarks are an historical curiosity and an important study for any serious masonic student. But they have no place in our constitution. If you are not convinced, read the entry on landmarks found on pages 358 through 370 of Coil's *Masonic Encyclopedia* (1961, 1996).