

Freemasonry in Trinidad & Tobago

John Wheatley opens a door on Masonry in the West Indies

Trinidad and Tobago is a twin-island state located at the southern end of the string of Caribbean Islands. Christopher Columbus visited Trinidad in 1498, but found that others were there before him - namely, the Arawaks and the Caribs from the other Caribbean Islands and from the South American mainland. His reports back to the King of Spain make no reference to Lodges, Chapters or Priories, so we can safely assume that there was no Masonic activity on the islands. What he did find was a society of people whose morality was rather peculiar, whose history and background were very much veiled in allegory, and whose written history and communications were most definitely illustrated by symbols. Their rituals and ceremonies were only performed by the men, their womenfolk were strictly banned therefrom, and their sons had a rather traumatic initiation when they reached the age of puberty. These rituals and ceremonies consisted mainly of hostile visitations upon their neighbouring brethren, and the working-tool most favoured was the war-club which when properly applied to the forehead was very effective in laying one's adversary lifeless at one's feet. And as for the festive board held after such ceremonies, it is perhaps better not to go into details concerning the menu. Suffice it to say, a good time was had by all, except of course by those who that evening had involuntarily become the absent and departed brethren.

True Masonry came to Trinidad nearly 300 years later. A lodge in St Lucia called 'Les Frères Unis', formed in 1787 with a charter from the Grand Orient of France, found themselves under considerable threat and pressure due to the Revolution in France - St Lucia being a French colony in those days. The charter was brought to Trinidad in 1794, apparently in the nick of time as the temple in St Lucia was burned to the ground by a mob with the death of several of the brethren in that year. In Trinidad, the lodge met in a building located in 'La Rue Trois Chandelles', called so because of the three candles burning on the lodge gates on meeting nights (now Duncan St) in Port of Spain. In 1798, 'Les Frères Unis' Lodge was granted a charter from the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania. Fourteen years later, the war between Britain and America caused the lodge once again to reconsider its status, and they decided to apply to the Grand Lodge of Scotland for recognition, which was duly granted. Today known as Lodge United Brothers No 251 SC, the lodge is very strong and active, and proud of its chequered past. In fact it is the second oldest lodge outside of Scotland under that country's Masonic jurisdiction. Other Scottish Constitution lodges followed, and presently there are ten other lodges in Trinidad, and one in Tobago (See Box). There is one lodge in the neighbouring island of Grenada, Lodge St Andrew 1794 founded in 1992, which comes under the jurisdiction of the District Grand Lodge of Trinidad & Tobago SC.

The District Grand Lodge of Trinidad & Tobago SC was formed in 1958 when there were but six Scottish Constitution lodges in the country. The first District Grand Master was Bro Norman Brewster, and he was ably assisted by Bro Sir Hugh Wooding as his Deputy, and Bro William Dolly as his Substitute. These three stalwarts guided, prodded, pulled and pushed the fledgling District into an orderly and stable organization, laying the foundation for continuous progression over the years, resulting in the more than doubling of the number of Scottish Constitution lodges since it was formed.

There are today seven lodges under the English Constitution in the country (see Box). It was in 1968 that the six English Constitution lodges formed the District Grand Lodge

of Trinidad. Presumably, as no English lodge existed in Tobago, the founders decided to apply to the United Grand Lodge of England for jurisdiction only in Trinidad. The first District Grand Master was W Bro Arthur Emlyn. In 1997 the jurisdiction extended to Tobago, so that it is now the District Grand Lodge of Trinidad & Tobago EC (both the English and Scottish Districts have agreed that EC and SC must form part of their respective titles to avoid confusion).

A great closeness has developed over the years between the Districts, so that it has become a common practice for many masons in Trinidad and Tobago to share a common allegiance to both Districts, having joined a lodge in the other Constitution as well as retaining membership of the mother lodge. Frequent visitations occur on the individual and District level. Indeed, at the installation of the new Master in lodges of both Constitutions, the two District Grand Lodges are present, and it is the established custom to invite the visiting District Grand Master to address the newly installed Wardens in the lodge. Another area of close harmony is the Trinidad & Tobago Masonic Charitable Association, established in 1974 by Bro Dr DH Sinanan (District Grand Master SC) and W Bro W Boyd (District Grand Master EC). Since then, the chairmanship of this organisation has alternated annually between the two District Grand Masters.

Prince Hall Freemasonry in Trinidad is about 30 years old, and currently has four lodges under the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, with a total membership of around 300, of which figure I understand that only half are active members (See Box). Although the recognition of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts by the United Grand Lodge of England was effected a couple of years ago, the English and Scottish masons in Trinidad have only recently managed to make proper contact with them. It is hoped to develop this contact further, and to have reciprocal visits with them.

There are other Masonic organisations allied to the English and Scottish Constitutions. Under the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Scotland there is a District Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Trinidad & Tobago with 7 Chapters, 5 Royal Ark Mariners' Lodges and Councils, 5 Cryptic Councils, 2 Preceptories and Priors of Knights Templar. There is one Sovereign Chapter of Prince Rose Croix (18th Degree of Ancient & Accepted Scottish Rite). There is one Sovereign Council Grand Elect Knight KH (30th Degree of Ancient & Accepted Scottish Rite), a Provincial Grand Lodge of Trinidad & Tobago of the Royal Order of Scotland, as well as the Trinidad Aquarius Conclave of the Grand Imperial Council of Scotland. All of the above are Scottish-affiliated organisations. There is only one Chapter under the Supreme Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of England.

As one can see, there are three Masonic Constitutions here in Trinidad & Tobago, as well as many 'side degrees', and I am certain that if Columbus were to pass this way again, his reports back to Spain would definitely state that regular Freemasonry is very much alive and well in this part of the New World.

Lodges under the Scottish Constitution

- Lodge Eastern Star No 368, founded in 1854.
- Lodge Roslyn No 596, founded in 1876.
- Lodge Arima No 899, founded in 1899.
- Lodge Alexandra No 1044, founded in 1908.
- Lodge Caribbean Light No 1391, founded in 1937.
- Lodge Royalian No 1605, founded in 1964.
- Lodge Tobago Kilwinning No 1643, founded in 1968.

Lodge Felicity No 1681, founded in 1974.
Lodge Trinity No 1733, founded in 1980.
Lodge Hesperus No 1738, founded in 1981.
Lodge Bi-Centennial No 1812, founded in 1996.

Lodges under the English Constitution

Royal Philanthropic Lodge No 405, founded in 1831.
Royal Prince of Wales Lodge No 867, founded in 1861.
Royal Connaught Lodge No 3266, founded in 1909.
Saint Andrew Lodge No 3963, founded in 1920.
Naparima Lodge No 7108, founded in 1952.
Trinidad & Tobago Masters Lodge No 8057, founded in 1966.
Daniel Hart Lodge No 9028, founded in 1982.

Lodges under the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts

Cosmopolitan Lodge No 18
Alpha Lodge No 20
Harmony Lodge No 21
Dan Reuben Lodge No 33

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