

The College of Clermont AND The Masonic Chapter at Clermont

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1719 JETON JOHANNES BISHOP OF CLERMONT

This year 2013 marks 450 years since the founding of the former Jesuit College of Clermont (now known as The Lycee Louis-le-Grand preparatory school) which was founded in the year 1563 in the heart of the "Latin Quarter" of Paris, France. When first established: it was a Jesuit College. Today, it acts as a secondary school of 800 pupils and also offers a post-secondary curriculum of 900 pupils.

The little words "of", "from", and "at" often have similar meanings; yet they can have separate connotations. Back in the 1700s, there was (simultaneously) this Jesuit College of Clermont". About the same time, there was a Masonic Chapter conferring various so-called "higher Grades" of Freemasonry (mainly degrees which we would recognize in today's modern rituals of The Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite). Additionally, different versions of Templar Masonry were conferred prior to the Rose Croix and Kadosh Degrees. The then-King of England James ("Jacob" or "Jacobus", in Latin) was forced into exile in France. Hence, came the nickname "supporters of the Jacobite cause." He was of the Royal House of Stuart.

As noted The Jesuit College of Clermont was founded in the year 1653 and is located in the heart of "The Latin Quarter" of Paris. Today, the college is now a public secondary school, and re-named "The Lycee Louis-le-Grand preparatory school". Photographs of its front entrance reveal an archway above the doorway with an over-sized Keystone at the top of the arch. Many of its former pupils have become statesmen, diplomats, prelates, and renowned scholars. The noted Freemason Voltaire was himself a student there. Notably, several famous Freemasons were students there: our Bro.: the Marquis de Lafayette and another famous Freemason, Bro.: Frederic Auguste Bartholdi, the sculptor of "The Statue of Liberty."

Education was highly prized at the College of Clermont, and "Freedom of Thought and Conscience" was inculcated.

I find it interesting that The Jesuit College of Clermont was established 350 years ago in 1653. Just ten years later, a commemorative medal was struck in 1663, in France, honoring Pierre Seguier, Duke of Villemont (1588-1672). On the reverse side of this medal was pictured the Pascal Lamb atop a closed book with seven seals on a table or altar covered by



a carpet decorated with fleurs de lis; and the LEGEND: HIC. OMNIA. IVRE. RESOLVIT (He resolves everything by law".

In the year 1719, came the installation of a new Catholic Bishop of Clermont: Jean-Baptiste Massillon. He was born on 24 June 1663 and died 28 September 1742. He gained a wide-reputation as a preacher, and his funeral oration at the funeral of King Louis XIV of France is considered a classic because Bishop Massillon reached down, snuffed-out a lit candle and proclaimed: "Dieu seul est grand" (Only God is great). That was a clear rallying-cry to the populace who, up to that very moment, regarded their King as 'King Louie The Great'.

Switching to the Masonic Chapter at Clermont, it was a Chapter of so-called "Advanced Degrees". The Templar, Rose Croix and Kadosh degrees or orders had already been conferred loosely in Lodges. However, the Masonic Council at Clermont was devised as a convention; albeit with what we would call in today's modern nomenclature a hybrid of a "Masonic Manifesto" with a "Grand Masonic School-of Instruction". It was an attempt to formulate and combine "Masonic Law with a Masonic Degree Hierarchy", supposedly [allegedly] based on ancient (Masonic and Templar) evolution & traditions. It was founded on 24 November 1754 by the Chevalier de Bonneville. Conflicting historical accounts vary with the number of Degrees actually conferred under this system. I would like to emphasize that he did not 'found' nor create these Degrees, but more correctly-stated: he propagated these so-called "Advanced Degrees" in Masonry. Elements of their primitive origins stretch back to an unknown date.

Karl Gotthelf Hund, Baron von Hund und Alten-Grotkau, was the second man in a 3-man 'trio' who influenced the promotion of "Advanced Degrees" in the Paris area. Baron von Hund founded "The Rite of Strict Observance" in 1751. He promoted a Templar-lineage for modern Freemasonry. I find it quite noteworthy that, at the age of 20, Baron von Hund was an advisor to the Habsburg Empire.

The third man in the 'trio' was Chevalier Andrew Michael Ramsey (1681-1743). He was raised a Calvinist, but converted to Catholicism in 1709. He was one man who DID have some legitimate credentials behind his name. According to the archives of The Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon: "Andrew Michael Ramsey was admitted as a member of the Royal and Military Order of St. Lazarus of Jerusalem, giving him the authentic title of "Chevalier." James, the Old Pretender, was persuaded to grant him a Certificate of Nobility in 1723, and five years later succeeded at having an official certificate of nobility registered at Edinburgh." In 1724 he traveled to Rome as tutor to Charles Edward, The Prince of Wales, but returned to Paris within the year. In 1730, he was initiated into Freemasonry. He, too, promoted a Templar origin of Freemasonry's beginnings. However, Ramsey was less vocal than the Baron von Hund. In addition the Chevalier Ramsey's death prematurely stifled whatever impact he otherwise might have had on the Fraternity. Nevertheless, he did influence the Masonic Degree-structure later developed in Sweden and on the European Continent by his writings which were published posthumously.

Both major Masonic Rites in America: The York Rite (inclusive of the Blue Lodge, Royal Arch Chapter, Cryptic Council, and Knights Templar Commandery) and the Ancient & Accepted Scottish Rite (especially with its Rose Croix and Kadosh degrees being conferred in Britain inside Templar Encampments "since Time Immemorial") had precious and strong foundational ties to Britain and especially England. Still, it must be noted that BOTH RITES had tendrils of each of their root systems in France. The modern Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America was instituted in the year 1816 with New York Governor, DeWitt Clinton as its first modern Grand Master. In the early years even up to the mid-20th Century, a Masonic candidate advanced by taking the chivalric degrees of a) Red Cross; b) Knight Templar; and c) Knight of Malta --- in that order of progression. That was to honor the ancient requisite that no Templar be previously a member of any knightly Order. That arrangement worked perfectly well in honoring ancient Traditions.

Examining origins further back in time, we know that the ancient Knights Templar, had one Grand Master, namely Jacques DeMolay, burnt at the stake after torture and a feigned confession under duress in France in the year A.D. 1314. Tracing history back



further, the very first Knights of the ancient Order of the Temple (Knights Templar) were French Knights, under the leadership of Hugh de Payens and Geoffrey de Omer

It is generally accepted that under Chevalier Ramsey's system, there were initially six Degrees in number, beginning with the three degrees of basic Craft Masonry, with notably, the 5^o being Illustrious Knight Templar. Later, the Baron von Hund formulated the "Rite of Strict Observance", which he promoted in Germany. It is no coincidence that during this time, Rosicrucian Societies (both legitimate and illegitimate) began to spring-up across Germany and the rest of the European Continent. A few modern Masonic scholars speculate that the Masonic Chapter at Clermont was named after the French Grand Master, Louis de Bourbon, Comte de Clermont. That speculation only splits-hairs (splitting microscopic hairs) since the gentleman was "Count of Clermont." Other sources suggest that the Masonic Council Clermont was actually located (at various times at Clermont --- in the Auvergne region) at Paris itself, and at Lyon, France. It was claimed to have "dissolved", but I think the more appropriate term would be that its degree-structure diffused itself all across the European Continent ---similar to a series of pyrotechnics displays. A single "Roman Candle" might be initially a glimmer of light hurling upwards until it explodes into a great burst, blossoming into an even more numerous bursts, constituting an ever wider widespread Fireworks extravaganza

The Masonic Chapter had a relatively short-lived existence (in Clermont-Ferrand, listed as one of the oldest cities in France). Although the Masonic Chapter at Clermont eventually dispersed, although not disbanded (most of its members flocked to the metro-Paris area 'proper'). Whereas, the Jesuit College of Clermont thrived (in one form or another) and still exists as an Educational center today. However, it is obvious that the College of Clermont and the Masonic Chapter at Clermont did indeed have some overlap. It is much more than mere coincidence! I would describe it as akin to the Acacia Fraternity (or other college fraternity) located within close proximity to a University.

Just as with every college or university fraternity: All fraternity members are students **at** the school or University; but, not all University students are members **of** any given fraternity. That, again, demonstrates the little/subtle difference between the tiny words "**at**" and "**of**". Those two little words have befuddled Masonic Scholars and non-Masonic Scholars for years and years.

As an interesting side note: I have been told that (as previously mentioned): The Jesuit College of Clermont is now a secondary or preparatory-school within Paris, France. It is now known as "The Lycee Louis le Grand" in Paris. A student at the school, Rhita Mourtada told me that on the school-grounds (campus) is an old, old Chapel with "crazy old stained glass windows" (quoting her directly). I have been attempting to obtain photographs of these windows and their designs. To date, I have had no reply. Therefore, that aspect may have to wait until a future Presentation.

According to legend, the Chevalier Ramsey made a request to Roman Catholic Cardinal de Fleury that Freemasonry be accepted in France. There is some evidence that the good Cardinal wished to overturn a widely ignored Louis XV published edict against Freemasonry. The disgruntled Louis (in frustration) used his leverage with Pope Clement XI to publish his papal bull "in Eminenti Apostulus Specula" on 17 April 1738, which was also widely ignored in France. But sadly, that set-the-stage for subsequent papal bulls by future Pontiffs who mistakenly used that papal bull as a precedent.

Fortunately the Bishop of Clermont, Bishop Massillon was a fair-minded man. He knew the blessings of friendship, fraternity, and harmony. He sought to put an end to stormy turbulence that marked that era. He urged people to avoid the stormy Seas of strife. He was also a cleric who knew the value of Symbolism.

As noted earlier, Bishop Massillon was a preacher, yet he had a broad-based appeal to the public. His Episcopal Coat-of-Arms is represented by the traditional Bishop's hat with dangling tassels; above a crown; above a circle or oval depicting "a golden kingfisher bird swimming or sleeping on a silver Sea of calm-waters, with the blue-sky above." On the left was the official ecclesiastical headgear, the Bishop's pointed mitre hat; on the right was the Bishop's shepherd's hook or crozier. Interestingly, in the year 1719, Bishop Massillon commissioned a medal to be struck marking his Installation as Bishop of



Clermont. It had the above depictions on one side. On the reverse was a sailing-ship battling rough seas, with the Caption: "ODI PROCELLAS ET PROCUL ARCEO" and the year 1719. Loosely translated, this means: "Hate the Storms, and keep far-away from them." I examined the medal closer and saw that above the sails of the sailing ship was an image of that kingfisher bird in-flight, high in the skies, struggling to make-its-way it the headwinds.

In later years, Freemasonry faced headwinds in France. Some of its members lost their moral compass. The Grand Orient of France even went to the extreme of twisting "Religious Freedom" into a competitive battle with "Liberty of Conscience" and for a time it allowed Atheists to join its ranks. Such actions were condemned by the vast majority of Grand Lodges in the United States, Canada and England, resulting in our honorable Masonic Bodies declaring any Atheist groups to be spurious and clandestine. France later bowed to this polite peer-pressure to save Brotherly Harmony. Yet, many of Masonry's detractors point to this sad saga. Just as any College or University is a "Center of Learning", so it is for our fraternal order of Freemasonry. We learn honorable lessons literally by Grades or by Degrees. It is my firm belief that the Jesuit College of Clermont and the Masonic Chapter at Clermont were once overlapped in pleasant harmony. Yet, just like the Bishop's Coat-of-Arms, and the kingfisher bird in mid-flight, the mainstream Masonic orders sought to avoid the political storms, by taking the "high-road" (usually a quiet road). Meanwhile, "spurious so-called Masonic groups" delved into arrogant and defiant behavior by taking a "low road" that is unworthy of any legitimate Mason. The Jesuit College of Clermont was dependent upon its professors; the Church was dependent on its clerics; and the Chapter at Clermont was dependent upon its members. The QUALITY of any group is dependent upon the HONOR of the individuals involved. Further, the INTEGRITY of any entity, continually and perpetually influences the REPUTATION of the group as a whole.

Let us remember the 450 years of The College of Clermont. It still exists as a lower grade preparatory-school, but thankfully is still a "center of learning". Let us, as Masonic Rosicrucians be thankful for our honorable heritage as "Masonic scholars who are eager to learn". So Mote It Be.

Sources/ Recommended Readings:

- Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry by Dr. Albert G. Mackey, M.D., 33^o, and a Knight Templar.
- Personal Facebook e-mail transmission message between Lycee Louis-le-Grand student Rhita Mourtada of Paris, France, to Frater James A. Marples, VII^o, dated 03 March 2013 at 12:53 PM.
- Heraldic Coat-of-Arms information of Bishop Jean-Baptiste Massillon, supplied to Frater James A. Marples by the archivist of the Archdiocese of Clermont, France via Michel Ochsenbein, internet technician for the Archdiocese on 14 December 2012.
- Voltaire (1694-1778): Masonic Record: Initiated April 7, 1778 in "Loge de Neuf Soeurs"(Lodge of The Nine Sisters), Paris, France. His memorable quote: "I die adoring God, loving my friends,, not hating my enemies, and detesting superstition." ***Courtesy of The Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon Archives.
- Gilbert Lafayette (1757-1834).... known in-full as: Marie-Joseph-Paul-Yves-Roch-Gilbert du Motier, The Marquis de Lafayette.....or simply as "Lafayette": Masonic Record: Initiated into a "Military Lodge" pre-1777. Made a Knight Templar. Visited South Carolina Commandery #1, Charleston, South Carolina. Briefly a member of the Cerneau Scottish Rite (deemed irregular by other Scottish Rite Bodies). Late in his life the Grand Lodge of Tennessee made him an "honorary member" in recognition of his Masonic Service". His wife hand-crafted one of George Washington's Masonic Aprons.
- Frederic Auguste Bartholdi (1834-1904): Masonic Record: Initiated 1874 in "Lodge Alsace-Lorraine", in Paris, France. Designed the Statue of Liberty for the centenary of the American Revolution; but in was not completed until 1886.
- The Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon.
website page : http://www.freemasonry.bcy.ca/biography/hund_k/hund_k.html
website page: http://www.freemasonry.bcy.ca/biography/ramsay_a/ramsay_a.html



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He is a Regular Member of The Allied Masonic Degrees; Grand College of Rites; St. David Conclave of The Red Cross of Constantine; Shawnee County Kansas Square and Compass Club; and Holyrood Council #61 of Knight Masons (Nebraska).

