

PRESENTER 1 – Past Grand Master William Ramsay McGhee (Scotland)

A Perspective of Scottish Freemasonry

Duration of presentation: 25 minutes. Duration of Q&A: 20 minutes.



Main topics of the presentation:

1. Scotland being the birthplace for modern freemasonry
2. The structure and international reach of Scottish freemasonry
3. Main charitable initiatives of the Grand Lodge of Scotland

Modern freemasonry, as we all recognise it today, irrespective of the constitution, has its origins in Scotland. Even though England and Ireland had Grand Lodges before, the Scots did not see any benefit in having a Grand Lodge (hindering of lodge autonomy).

Prior to the erection of the Grand Lodge (1736), there remains much evidence, that freemasonry existed in Scotland prior to 1598. In 1598, William Schaw issued the first of the now famous Schaw statutes, which set out the duties of all members to the lodge and to the public. More importantly, for freemasons today, Schaw drew up a second statute in 1599. The impact of these statutes was dramatic. Schaw's instructions to all lodges included the need to begin to keep written records, meet at specific times, test annually the members in the art of memory and enter apprentices in the lodge records.

Today's Scottish freemasonry exists in over 40 countries throughout the world. The structure is relatively simple. Sitting directly below the Grand Lodge, there are 32 provincial Grand Lodges throughout Scotland and 26 District Grand Lodges scattered across the globe. Provinces are at home in Scotland, Districts are out of Scotland. In addition, there are

4 Grand Superintendencies. A superintendency is basically where there are insufficient lodges to form a district, but they have sufficient to save them reporting back individually.

Scottish freemasonry has developed a distinct and unique character even by comparison with the other British Grand Lodges. The Grand Master of our constitution bears the unique title Grand Master Mason.

Many of the lodges in existence prior to 1736 were very much opposed to the idea of having a grand lodge as they feared it could remove the autonomy they enjoy. To preserve their traditions, those early lodges were permitted to retain their own procedures, regalia, and distinctive rituals. Having accepted that principle of independence of the old lodges, it was impossible therefore to deny it to the lodges founded after 1736 - that same degree of independence. Of course the rituals must contain the principle points of each degree, but the scope for elaboration is considerable with numerous interesting additions. Since Scottish lodges have the right to choose the colours of the lodge and regalia the meetings can be very colourful indeed while standing in the Grand Lodge of Scotland. All goes back to the fact that each lodge in Scotland has autonomy and they use whichever ritual they want. According to McGhee there are about eight different rituals in use at the moment.

The main charity project for the Grand Lodge of Scotland has been associated with Prostate Cancer Scotland. By the end of MW Bro McGhee's term as Grand Master Mason, they had donated a total of 1,125,000 GBP to the project. Involvement with prostate cancer as the most common cancer affecting men in Scotland (and likely highly ranked elsewhere) has been crucial also worldwide because of the research that has been funded by Scottish GL. As an example the introduction of robotic surgeries, which are not as intrusive as they formally were. They are now involved in two legacy projects:

1. The Prostack Initiative – to provide a special pack to all men with prostate cancer. Prostate Scotland consulted with patients and clinicians in the development of the pack contents to provide men with a range of useful items.
2. Prostate Champions – brethren who go out into the community and talk to a diverse range of organisations to raise awareness not only of prostate disease, but importantly to raise awareness of what freemasonry does in the community.

At national level a range of charities are supported. But also where natural disasters have occurred. In addition, each lodge regularly supports local, national and international charities according to their own means and ability. It is estimated that at least another half million pounds is raised annually by lodges for worthy causes that they support locally. Also they support what they call CHAs, the Children's Hospice Association in Scotland. There's nothing mandatory about any of the charities.

Charity story – William & Joseph John Morrow were to do a zip slide to raise funds for the Prostate Scotland. Joseph Morrow was a prior Grand Master Mason as well as a successor and also the Lord Lyon King of Arms and thereby heavily involved in the Queen's funeral arrangements. On the day of the event the Queen died and zip sliding had to be rearranged. Eventually still ended up raising around 50 thousand GBP with that initiative.

McGhee also spoke of the restructuring of the Grand Lodge of Scotland which was the most important change to take place during his term as Grand Master Mason. Having had the need to totally revise their constitution and laws. The three strategic objectives for the future are 1) to place membership at the heart of Scottish freemasonry 2) to grow Scottish freemasonry internationally and 3) to create inspiring communication and engagement as a major part of attending those objectives.

An interesting development that was mentioned – a new digital Grand Lodge Masonic Passport for every member of the Scottish Craft, providing member benefits and privileges according to role and connecting each member directly with grand lodge as part of a membership ecosystem.

WHAT WE LEARNED DURING Q&A

- More nuances about the diverse and colourful regalia used in Scottish masonry.

- Further details about various charity initiatives supported by the Grand Lodge of Scotland.
- Insights about life and developments in the overseas district lodges.
- The 5th International Scottish Freemasonry Conference is going to take place in Zambia next year and all conference attendee's were gladly invited to join.

PRESENTER 2 – Past Grand Secretary James W. Daniel (England)

The Context and Conditions of the UGLE's Recognition of the Grand Lodge of Estonia

Duration of presentation: 40 minutes. Duration of Q&A: 16 minutes.



After an opening in Estonian that garnered amusement, James W. Daniel followed with another humorous detail – he had been mistaken for a representative of UGLE (United Grand Lodge of England) who attended the consecration of the Estonian Grand Lodge on the 18th of May 1999 and was subsequently invited to speak about it. He was not present in 1999, however was happy and honoured that after pointing out the mistaken identity, he was still welcomed to come and give the addressing at the occasion to celebrate the 25th Anniversary of the Grand Lodge of Estonia.

Main topics of the presentation:

1. Provide insights from the perspective of the United Grand Lodge of England on the times when many Grand Lodges including the Grand Lodge of Estonia were established.
2. To help the conference explore how the values and principles of the Old Charges and Constitutions have maintained their significance over time.
3. To establish a connection between the Old Charges and Constitutions and the development of the Grand Lodge of Estonia.

The masonic background and journey of the 82-year-old Bro James W. Daniel is truly impressive. Initiated in the Apollo University Lodge Oxford as long ago as 1961. He also joined what is now called the Royal Somerset and Inverness Lodge No. IV - one of the four old lodges which founded the Premier Grand Lodge in 1717 and of which the author of the 1723 Constitutions, Dr. James Anderson was a member. He is half Scottish and also a Scottish freemason, which he became in Sri Lanka where he took his first Master's chair. Has done masonry in Germany and North America. Was a Secretary of a Lodge in Caracas, Venezuela. Also the 17th Grand Secretary of UGLE since 1717 and was in that office in 1999 when the Grand Lodge of Estonia was founded and when it was recognised by the United Grand Lodge of England in the year 2000. Before that appointment, he'd been the Grand Secretary General of the Supreme Council of the Antient and Accepted Scottish Rite for England and Wales, a Past Master of ... Research Lodge and a Fellow of the Royal Society Historical. Still a member of the External Relations Committee of our Board of General Purposes. Has written many papers about the relations with its lodges overseas and with other grand lodges and has a doctorate based on his research into English freemasonry in the British Empire in the latter half of the 19th century.

He spoke about the continuing relevance of the Old Charges and Constitutions today from an English perspective. Even when the Scottish Freemason James Anderson published the so-called Old Charges in 1723, part of the content was not appropriate to non-operative or speculative freemasons as practised in England. However, in spite of all the criticism to which Anderson and his book have been subjected, the remarkable influence of his Constitutions on the course of world history must be freely acknowledged. As must the part played in transmitting the principles and tenets of freemasonic history throughout the world. True to the ideals of the enlightenment, those principles and tenets included religious tolerance, meritocracy, high standards of interpersonal civility, scientific and artistic education and societal and personal self-improvement.

Today under the English constitution that is the laws of the United Grand Lodge of England - a Summary of the Antient Charges and Regulations is printed in the opening pages of our Book of Constitutions. While a new Master is being installed, he is being asked to admit to and promise to support these Charges and Regulations as Masters have done in all ages. This procedure is also familiar to the brethren in the Hackney Brook Lodge 14 in Estonia – as they follow the emulation ritual which is widely practiced by lodges under UGLE. Further echoes of Anderson's major work are also still to be found in the “Charge after initiation” which again is familiar to the HB14 Lodge in Estonia. So there is the proof if proof is needed that the Old Charges and Constitutions likely edited over the centuries are still relevant to English freemasonry today. Likewise to other international lodges whose practices are closely tied to English freemasonry.

We now have the foundation of regular freemasonry and what we consider to be the absolute basis of our tenants and principles. Grand lodges originally recognised each other in an informal way and allowed their members to visit. In the 19th century, however, masonic inter-jurisdictional relations became more complicated. Speculative freemasonry in its several forms was already spreading. Some grand lodges became politically engaged and or stopped demanding of their initiatives, a belief in the supreme being. And so at the end of the first World War, the Grand Master of the UGLE expressed a desire that the Board of General Purposes would draw up a statement of the basic principles of which this grand lodge could be invited to recognise any grand lodge applying for its recognition. The board's draft of the 8 basic principles of freemasonry for which the Grand Lodge of England has stood through its history was accepted by the Grand Lodge in September, 1924. And these have been printed in The Book of Constitutions and applied ever since. They do not mention Anderson's constitutions specifically, but are consistent with them.

Happily for us the Grand Lodge of Estonia met the challenge to conform with the principles of grand lodge recognition. Additionally the Grand Lodge of Estonia was recognised by UGLE after its creation for the following three reasons:

1. It was created by the regular Grand Lodge of Finland in 1991.
2. The Finnish Grand Lodge had been created by the Grand Lodge of New York in 1924.
3. That grand lodge had been an English provincial grand lodge until 1781 when it simply changed the name to become a Grand Lodge.

There were about 94 Grand Lodges, which UGLE recognised as of 1967, which was the 250th anniversary of the Grand Lodge of England when the Duke of Kent, the Grand Master of UGLE then and still today said that they (England) had little responsibility for the creation of most of the grand lodges, but they all followed the tenants and principles laid

down originally in Anderson's Constitutions and revised over the years. End of the Cold War and regaining of independence of Soviet countries prompted and enabled the formation or reestablishment of grand lodges in territories in which it had until then been banned. Among the 84 grand lodges represented in the 275th Anniversary of UGLE, two Grand Masters from grand lodges in recently independent countries in Eastern Europe – Czechoslovakia and Hungary - were particularly welcomed by his Royal Highness.

In 1991 Finland promptly established four lodges in Estonia. It subsequently formed these four lodges into its District of Estonia in preparation for the eventual establishment of the Grand Lodge of Estonia in 1999.

Most of the work of the Grand Chancellor's department in London today is concerned with checking that each new applicant grand lodge, particularly from South America and Central America meets the tenants and principles laid down by Anderson and later adjustments to the qualifications required by the Grand Lodge of England for recognition. At present UGLE recognises about 230 grand lodges.

While the number of English lodges has fallen from 8,500 in 1992 to 7,000 today and the number of members has fallen from 340,000 to 169,000 today, the number of regular grand lodges around the world recognised as such by the UGLE is higher than it has ever been, namely 235, all of whose roots, principles and tenants can be traced back to 1717 and 1723.

Next we celebrated the continuing history of regular freemasonry by singing a song which Anderson published in his 1723 Constitutions. Namely the “Enter’d ‘Prentices Song”.

WHAT WE LEARNED DURING Q&A

- English, Scottish and Irish grand lodges regularly hold tripartite meetings to discuss matters which affect freemasonry in the United Kingdom and Ireland. Going on since at least the 18 hundreds and very valuable.
- Charity side at UGLE still going very strong.
- Why largely due to the fragmented and abundant pool of hobbies and activities that people take up in their free time nowadays, the number of freemasons has decreased more than a double in the UK. And a strategy at works at UGLE to increase the membership and maintain the position in society.
- Examples how the grand lodge recognition is handled with authoritarian regimes and what other incidents have caused the suspending of official grand lodge relations.

PRESENTER 3 – Andreas Önnersfors (Sweden)

Freemasonry as a Tool in European Diplomacy History

Duration of presentation: 45 minutes. Duration of Q&A: 7 minutes.



Main topics of the presentation:

1. The organisation culture of freemasonry.
2. Peculiar case of Swedish Anglo relations around 1800 and the overlap in diplomacy and freemasonry in that era.
3. Lessons for the future reflections.

Since 1723 freemasonry voluntarily agrees upon certain rules that are followed across the globe and it manifests itself through patents, certificates, constitutions, and warrants. The most important thing that has happened is the development of the idea of authority – the territorial idea of authority or jurisdiction. It's a very complex and conflicting concept, but it is there and was certainly an innovation by freemasons who came up with that.

One of the most important messages when to think about the self organisation of freemasonry is that we have the Lodge as the most fundamental unit and that we have a tension between bottom up and top down understandings of freemasonry.

International relations are rather unregulated because of what was already said about the 8 important principles of grand lodge recognition. In practical terms, one could say that the main issue with the grand lodge recognition is the inter-visitation right on the individual level – individual member is precluded from visiting a lodge that is not recognised.

Freemasonry since 1723 became a school for government as Margaret C. Jacob has called it. So masonic logic prepared their members and practised important government functions and more specifically democratic functions according to Margaret Jacob. And why are more autocratic societies not inclined to support freemasonry? That is because some people come together, they form a large thing, they have their freedoms, they think that they're acting in accordance to

internationally agreed, voluntarily agreed norms. And that self-governance is the preparation for an active citizenship. So today we are talking about non-government organisations through society. But if you go back in history that starts in the 18th century, the freemasons are the first who do this. Who come up with rules and organise themselves. So it is not only the case that many masonic grand lodges were established before the sovereignty or a national sovereignty of a state, but it is also true that freemasonry sometimes has substituted for the absence of former governing structures.

One particular interesting episode of masonic diplomacy that played out in between Sweden and England around 1800. Interaction between Prince of Wales who was the then Grand Master of the Modern Grand Lodge and Duke Charles later King Charles XIII of Sweden with an intent to form a closer union between the two Grand Lodges. Closely based on the masonic principles we recognise from Anderson's Constitutions. That requires a little recap of the Swedish-Anglo relations during the 18th century until 1813.

Conflict of interest in the 1760s which is an example of an overlap between diplomacy and freemasonry. There was a man named Tullmann, who worked at the British Embassy in Stockholm and he said to the Swedes that their lodges are not regular because they were not established by London. A complex situation because Sweden was in the absolute belief that their Grand Lodge was established with true French patents and was a regular grand lodge. The problem of the recognition of the Swedish Grand Lodge was solved in the early 1770s by Swedish Grand Master Scheffer who wrote to London and explained to them how Sweden was established.

In 1790s there was the French Revolution and in the aftermath of French Revolution, freemasonry was accused to have orchestrated the French Revolution. In Britain there was a legislation passed to stem radical activism in the aftermath of the French Revolution – the Unlawful Societies Act. This legislation is clearly influenced by the growth of anti-masonic conspiracy theories. Two authors, Barruel and Robison, had written about the French Revolution and proofs of a conspiracy against all governments in Europe. The British government in this Unlawful Societies Act wants to regulate uncertainties that are related to voluntary association in the age of revolution and reaction. Freemasonry for the first time was part of the national legislation. First in Prussia, one year later in England. Prime minister Pitt might have targeted freemasonry because it belonged to the camp of his political opponents and conspiratorial paranoia was brought as pretension for infringements of civil liberties. In 1793 parties who we today would call journalists came together to establish the Freemasons' Magazine in order to control and influence the public opinion of freemasonry and portray in its most positive terms as a charitable society that's doing good for mankind and is intellectual and cultural.

But then comes in the Swedish diplomacy. Göran Ulrik Silfverhielm was a Swedish diplomat who was in service in Britain for a long time. Göran Silfverhielm was a part of the intimate circle of the Swedish freemasonry with Duke Charles who gave him a secret mission as a mason. He instructed Silfverhielm on all occasion to avoid the alleged supremacy or superiority with which English freemasonry generally wants to exercise over the Lodges of other countries. Sweden constitutes a particular province independent from the English and has no other interest than that which promotes a close friendship which is stated by the uniformity of the aims of its practises. Furthermore Silfverhielm was instructed by Duke Charles to regularly report to him about what is happening in England right now. He was provided with a cypher that is still preserved today in the archive of Swedish Order of Freemasons.

The importance of the letters between Silfverhielm and Duke Charles is that he informs him about the precarious state of English freemasonry at the point. Duke Charles instructs Silfverhielm to contact the Prince of Wales with a purpose to propose to him that a closer union should be formed. Silfverhielm is admitted to a meeting in Grand Lodge on 10th April, 1799 where he was well received and the Prince of Wales was instructed to write a letter back to Duke Charles. As an aftermath at a time when freemasonry was very close to being prohibited in Britain, exemptions from the Unlawful Societies Act were negotiated for freemasonry on the 2nd of May 1799. Not to forget the geopolitical aspects of that time as also the alliance against Napoleon is forged between Sweden and England.

In Swedish freemasonry of 1770s and 80s, freemasonry was identified as a means to exercise influence in European affairs by soft politics. The influence of the Swedish-English rapprochement led to normalisation of relations in the following decades. And it unintentionally or intentionally contributed to the exemption of freemasonry from prohibition and the infringement of freedom of assembly. Sweden was not any longer a great power, but the Swedish Duke Charles and also his brother Gustav III clearly identified freemasonry as a tool to make foreign elites interested in Sweden.

Some lessons for the future – what you get if you ask a generative AI model to produce the image of Freemasonry. It still looks very much that the freemasons are the evil guys. Do we nowadays own the perception of what a generative AI interprets a freemasonry to be? If we go back to the end of the 1700s, the 1790s we see that freemasonry is in a very serious crisis. It is accused of being used for revolution and for political ends. And in that situation the Swedish Grand Lodge certainly also inspired by geopolitical developments decided we need to support what is going on there. We need to support each other. Another lesson of course is that freemasonry can contribute to better relations between individuals as much as between cultures and nations. And taken back to what had been said before - the ethos of 1723 and the Constitutions. And then of course we need to continue to build bridges across obedience and discuss and address divisions as much as what unites us.

WHAT WE LEARNED DURING Q&A

- A short backstory of the role of Jacob Gustaf Pontusson De la Gardie in merging the Antient and Modern Grand Lodges of England in 1813.
- An interesting story told by another presenter James W. Daniel from his own firsthand experience about the Grand Sword of the Grand Lodge of UGLE and the meeting of the Duke of Kent (Grand Master of UGLE) and the King of Sweden during the 200th Anniversary of the Grand Lodge of Sweden.

PRESENTER 4 – David Ryan Jenkins (Estonia)

Freemasonry's Role in the History of Estonia

Duration of presentation: 51 minutes. Duration of Q&A: 17 minutes.



First half of Anderson's Constitutions book is actually a very grandiose Masonic history of the world. While for some reason many consider that part of Anderson's book to be of more questionable value, David Ryan Jenkins stated that he started to like the idea of examining how masons and masonry have affected the development of Estonian culture and the idea of nation.

Main topics of the presentation:

1. How a strong and sustainable ethnic culture in nowadays Estonia and Latvia were developed through the Enlightenment.
2. Local speech was formalised as a written language. Literature began to flourish along with theatre. Education in local language was cultivated. History became more valued and was preserved both in books and museums. Eventually laws were passed for the favour of local people, giving foundation for the building of an independent modern nation.
3. And all along – how freemasons played a significant role in shaping these miracles of their time.

Estonians form a very old and relatively independent culture and have kept their language and their culture intact within a relatively small homeland for many thousands of years. Freemasonry in our land has basically had two incarnations: roughly 1770 to 1820 and then again from the 1990s and going strong. The focus of Jenkins' presentation goes primarily on the impact of masons and masonry on Estonia and Livonia between 1770 and 1918.

By the beginning of the 18th century when freemasonry had started to spread across the world, Estonia and Livonia were formally part of the Russian empire. The Estonian people or as they referred to themselves "*maarahvas*" – the people of the land – were primarily just that. Serfs attached to the land physically in modern terms.

But it's important to note that even under the Russian empire, Estonia and Livonia retained an enormous amount of autonomy. Western cultural development in the Russian Empire was driven from the Baltic region, not the other way around. This multicultural autonomous region was a perfect space for the coming of freemasonry. The application for the founding of our first lodge Isis in Tallinn was in 1771.

When we talk about freemasonry, we cannot in any way get past the concept of freedom, and that concept was in no way universally understood at the time that we were discussing. In the 1770s, the bulk of ethnic Estonians were in bondage. Freemasonry was a tool and a catalyst for the change that has created the modern world. Masonry gave a format for discussion and friendship to decision makers from all different fields who otherwise perhaps did not agree on politics or economics, who otherwise would have remained at a perpetual distance.

Freemasonry, as we know is built on structure and symbolism. Therefore Ryan Jenkins explained it to be appropriate to take some of his presentation structure from freemasonry's ancient landmarks. These are figuratively speaking both immovable regulations as well as beacons leading to the light.

Not all of the first brethren in Estonia were Germans. There were a handful of Russians, Swedes and Scots who had located themselves in Tallinn. But there were ethnic Estonians as well. Society has always allowed for exceptions and we find brethren such as Carl Friedrich Karell, Otto Wilhelm Masing and Johan (or Johann) Michelson.

We should see how freemasonry has helped to ensure the sustainability of the Estonian culture and prepare the way for the foundation of the Estonian Republic. And while this most certainly was not the plan or even the desire of the brethren at the time, it was most certainly part of a higher plan.

At the end of the 18th century, the educated elite started to become interested in the local folk stories and songs of the people. Prior to that, most of the focus of the local language was only to translate religious texts, especially the Bible into local dialects so that the people could understand what was going on in church. Johan Godfried Herder - played a large role in starting to create interest in folk culture certainly among the academic elite. In his collection of folk songs the Estonian and Latvian texts were included. It was a very important first step in modern terms in creating a buzz amongst the academics for what had previously just been considered something that was very base. Herder has been called the Godfather of the Estonian National Discourse.

As interest in the Estonian language grew among the educated, it became more important to formalise it. It was a spoken language, not a written language. In order for Estonian to become a written language and not just a method to transmit texts translated into it from other languages, it was necessary to agree on rules as to how it should be written down. As of 1803, Friedrich David Lenz was the first professor of the Estonian and Finnish languages at Tartu University. And as a matter of fact, probably the first professor of both Estonian and Finnish anywhere in the world. He wrote several books on Estonian grammar and was also one of the founding members of the Learned Estonian Society, which has been one of the driving forces in the research and preservation of the Estonian language culture and history since the Awakening. O.W. Masing was a well-known pastor, linguist and author at that time. Amongst other activities and along with another Estonian brother, pastor David Friedrich Ignatius he published a weekly newspaper "*Marahwa Näddala-Leht*" that served to introduce a number of new words into Estonian vocabulary. Probably Masing's greatest service to Estonian language and literature is the development of a small but priceless mark – letter "Õ".

Work of theatre - August von Kotzebue - included for the first time Estonian language text on stage in several of his plays. Founded an amateur theatre in 1784 which became the first professional theatre in Tallinn in 1809 - the Revala Theater.

With language in place, national culture next needs education. The local elite did not give up on education, but they were forced to travel to Germany to get it. This did however, have the positive side effect of allowing many Baltic Germans to join German lodges. In 1802, after several years of negotiation, Tartu University was reopened. One of the main forces behind that was the university's deputy curator, J.F.E. von Ungern-Sternberg. As deputy curator, J.F.E. von Ungern-Sternberg, was actually based in Tartu and he was the one who worked to develop the day-to-day operations of the university and education in general. Through the work of the brethren, the university was reestablished and flourished. And just as a comparison, in the 19th century, Tartu University was one of 30 German speaking universities in the world. And of these Tartu was the first one in the Russian Empire and the 11th largest overall. So in its day, it was an extremely important centre of learning.

Now as we can see, after culture has demanded education, education demands research and resources. In order to facilitate education, you need to have information. In the 18th and 19th century that meant books. As books tended to be both expensive and very unwieldy in large numbers, academics needed to have libraries. The first director of the library at Tartu was Johan Karl Simon Morgenstern, who was also the first professor of rhetoric, classical philology, aesthetics, literature, and art history. He was the director of the library for 37 years and responsible for its development into a significant research library. And obviously also a brother.

As a well-rounded man and mason Morgenstern was also the founder of the Tartu University Art Museum. Another very important museum was founded upon the collection of brother Johannes VIII Burchard. In 1842, the Estonian Literary Society began collecting materials to found the first provincial Museum. Burchard's collection was added as part of the museum, which was finally opened in 1864. That museum was in turn the basis for the Estonian History Museum. The Estonian History Museum now includes the Great Guild building in Tallinn Old Town as well as Maarjamäe Manor, where the conference was held. After the dissolution of masonic lodges by Alexander I in 1822, many of the families chose to donate their masonic inheritances and archives to the Provincial Museum. New Soviet History Museum that replaced the Provincial Museum chose to destroy significant parts of their collections that did not align with Soviet ideology. Luckily, most of the Masonic collections were either transferred to other museums were strategically misplaced by archivists into collections that were acceptable to the Soviets and rediscovered after independence. And the basis of those collections were in fact the basis of the exhibition that we had upon the anniversary of freemasonry back in 2021 - the 250th Anniversary in Estonia.

While academic discussion on the justice of serfdom and human rights started much earlier, the first major step toward freedom for the peasants from the land was the Vigala Peasant law, which was signed in 1789. It was proclaimed by Baron VII von Uexküll at his Vana-Vigala Manor. The Vigala Law as it was known, provided for limited rights for peasants as well as the obligation to send their children to school. According to this law, they could now own their own movable property. A limited right of inheritance. Parents were also required to teach their children to read. Baron VII

also expanded the school network within the Vigala district. And when he became the civil governor of Estonia, he expanded the school system across all of Estonia.

In 1802 Codex of Rights (in effect in 1816) were given to the peasants across Estonia. These were colloquially known as “Iggaüks”. The laws were composed in a large part by Chief of the Knighthood J.G. von Berg and were finally implemented by the next Chief of the Knighthood Gustav Heinrich von Wetter-Rosenthal.

The 1816 Peasants Act was a fundamental change in the status of the foreign folk. “Eestimaa Talurahva Seadmisest” and “Eestimaa Talurahva Käsuraamat” ended serfdom finally and codified the rights for the people. As per those laws, a peasant could no longer be bought or sold, given or mortgaged individually or as a family. Peasants had the right to acquire movable and immovable property buying real estate. Before that, they were real estate and they were allowed to inherit property according to the law.

These laws were prepared in the second term as Chief of the Knighthood of J.G von Berg, who was also a member of the Peasant Commission and Chairman of the Provincial Legislative Committee. A similar law was approved in Livonia in 1816, although coming into effect only in 1819, and again in trend with the rest of the presentation, one of the main forces behind this law was Gustav Johan von Buddenbrock - Livonian Land Marshall, counsellor and mason.

Even as a beacon of democracy, the United States of America was unable to resolve the issue of slavery without a bloody civil war. France was obviously no different. But clearly looking at how the situation resolved itself in the United States, we should be especially grateful to our Baltic German brethren who were able to resolve the situation peacefully granting freedom for the local people in Estonia and Livonia without significant bloodshed.

The implementation of these laws in Estonia and Livonia were the foundation for the building of an independent modern Estonian nation, similarly to Latvia. While the ground had been prepared, the actual laying of the cornerstone would still have to wait for another hundred years. But freemasonry continued to develop outside the Russian Empire in that period and it still influenced the thought and helped to shift enlightenment ideas into reality in the region here.

WHAT WE LEARNED DURING Q&A

- Freemasonry in Estonia is at a very interesting stage in its growth right now. Right now we have the luxury of being sought after as we still have membership as a percentage of the adult male population very small compared to Finland or the UK. We have the luxury of choosing and we've seen a big uptick in younger brethren who have the habit of also inviting other younger brethren who are very active.
- There are probably around 20-25 books about freemasonry in the Estonian language.
- Currently no university in Estonia includes lessons about freemasonry.
- The Estonian freemasonry conducts a good mix of smaller and bigger charity projects through the Pelikan Foundation.