



History of Freemasonry

How Freemasonry began

In the Middle Ages, the term “freemason” was awarded to highly skilled stonemasons hired as free agents to build castles and cathedrals in England and Scotland. Because of the inherent danger of their work, stonemasons formed local organizations, called lodges, to take care of sick and injured members as well as the widows and orphans of those killed on the job. Lodge members met in temporary buildings, built next to the cathedrals, to receive their pay, plan their work, train new apprentices, and socialize.

The first Grand Lodge was established in 1717 in London. In 1718 English Freemasonry spread to France and Spain, and after 1729, to India, Italy, Poland, Sweden, other parts of Europe, and eventually the American colonies. In 1733 the first American lodge was established in Boston under the authority of the Grand Lodge of England. Of the 39 men who signed the U.S. Constitution, 13 were Masons.

Freemasonry in California

Freemasonry has been an integral part of California for more than 150 years. During the Gold Rush of 1849, thousands of settlers came to California in search of fortune. Those who were Masons brought their rich traditions with them, soon establishing some of California’s first Masonic lodges in the mining towns of the Gold Country. In 1850 – the same year that California became a state – the Grand Lodge of California was established in Sacramento.

Within 10 years, the number of Masonic lodges had grown from 11 to 130, while membership soared from 258 to more than 5,000. Over the years, the Masons have played a key role in shaping the history of California. To date, 19 California governors have been Masons, and at least four California Masons have been elected to the U.S. Senate. Today, the Grand Lodge of California has more than 60,000 members and about 340 lodges located throughout the state, making it one of the largest grand lodges in the world.

A legacy of philanthropy

Throughout their 150-year history, California Masons have remained steadfast in their commitment to helping others and serving the community, volunteering hundreds of thousands of hours and donating millions of dollars to support a wide range of charitable programs. Among the fraternity’s first charitable activities was helping victims of the great cholera outbreak in Sacramento in 1850. With a membership roll of roughly 300, California Masons raised more than \$32,000 within 10 months to help build and maintain a hospital at Sutter’s Fort.

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