

A Lodge In Captivity

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We at MSA thank him for letting us share the story of "A Lodge in Captivity" with you. – Editor

Early History of Minden Lodge # 63

Warrant No. 63 was originally issued by the Grand Lodge of Ireland on January 20, 1736 to the 20th Regiment of Foot. On December 20, 1748 the Grand Lodge of Ireland issued a duplicate warrant to Lord George Sackville, Colonel of the 20th Foot as Worshipful Master, with Lt. Col. Edward Cornwallis and Capt. John Milburne as Wardens. Lord Sackville was later to become Grand Master of Ireland in 1741-52 and Cornwallis was a founder of Freemasonry in our neighboring jurisdiction of Nova Scotia, where he had established a Lodge in 1750.

To learn how Lodge No. 63 received the name of Minden requires a recapitulation of historical events in the middle of the 18th Century.

When Frederick the Great of Prussia, in 1740, seized the Austrian Province of Silesia, he set off a powder mine that had been laid by the world-wide rivalries of European powers and alliances. The struggle spread from Austria and Prussia to all of Europe and finally burst over the whole world.

In the war of The Austrian Succession of 1741-48 Maria Theresa, the young ruler of Austria, made two vain attempts to regain her stolen lands. Then in 1756, having won new support from the powers of Europe, she decided to try a third time. But before she and her allies could strike a blow, Frederick the Great of Prussia invaded the unfriendly, but neutral, land of Saxony and so himself began the 3rd Silesian, or Seven Years War.

When the conflict began, a diplomatic shift had brought a reversal of alliances, with Prussia now allied with her old enemy England. Maria Theresa sought aid in France against her real enemy, Prussia. France listened, hesitated, and then joined Austria. On one side were Austria, Russia and France and on the other Great Britain with its powerful navy and Prussia with its

well prepared army, plus the statesmanship of Pitt and the military genius of Frederick the Great.

In North America the conflict had begun the year before it broke out in Europe and is known to us as the French and Indian Wars. It was to have far-reaching effect, even on us today, for the most spectacular and most important victory in North America was the capture of Quebec in 1759 by General Wolfe, which sealed the fate of France in North America and resulted in her being ultimately forced to hand over all of her possessions in Canada to England.

In the same year, on August 1, 1759, the combined English and Prussian forces were engaged against the French in the memorable Battle of Minden.

The battle was actually fought at Todtenhausen (Germany) about 3 miles north of the old town of Minden and about 55 miles south of Bremen.

The 20th Foot, which had served in Germany from June 1756 under the Duke of Marlborough and Prince Ferdinand of Prussia, were in the British line and were very heavily engaged and suffered great losses, but their discipline, bravery and devoted gallantry, it is said, were never excelled in the long annals of British Service.

For their victory at Minden, the 20th Foot was decorated with the Laurel Wreath, emblem of victory, and dubbed "The Heroes of Minden". The name Minden was added to their colors and the Lodge, in memory of the regimental engagement, henceforth became known as Minden Lodge No. 63.

Masonic Relief

It is of interest to note in the history of Old Dundee Lodge No. 26, on the English Registry that the Lodge on St. John's Day, December 27, 1759, voted the sum of £21.0.0 (twenty guineas), a substantial amount of money in those days, to the widows and orphans of those slain in Minden and Quebec, the money being paid into the hands of Sir Joseph Hankey & Co. (Bankers), and a further £20.0.0 (twenty pounds) towards clothing the French prisoners.

The great Dr. Samuel Johnston wrote the introduction to the "Proceedings of the Committee for clothing the French Prisoners" and while there is no extant proof that Dr. Johnston was a member of Old Dundee No. 26 it seems more than co-incidental that Boswell remarked that Dr. Johnston would frequently go out "to take the air at Wapping" and Old Dundee No. 26 met at Wapping.

The Regiment in North America

The Regiment continued to serve in Germany until 1762 when it returned to England, and in 1775 was ordered to North America to take part in the attempt to subdue the Colonists which resulted in the War of Independence.

It is reported as having been in Quebec in 1776 and the following year at Ile aux Noix.

Recruiting for the war in America was laggard and the Crown, being short of troops, came to an agreement with Duke Charles of Brunswick by which the latter agreed to supply 4,300 men (3,964 Infantry and 336 Cavalry) under the command of Major General Frederick Adolph Riedesel. The force left Brunswick in two divisions in February and May 1776 and arrived in Quebec in June and September of that year and were placed under the command of General Bourgogne.

It was then that the friendship forged at Minden with the 20th Regiment was revived. When General Bourgogne had to surrender at Saratoga to General Gates on October 12, 1777 the Brunswickers and the 20th Foot were in the bag together. Von Riedesel had the colors removed from their poles, the poles were burnt, and the colors were sewn in the mattress of his wife's bed.

She, who was affectionately known to the troops as "Lady Fritz", slept on them throughout the captivity and the colors ultimately reached home safely.

At first all the troops were quartered on the Winter Hill near Boston but on the approach of the British Fleet in 1778, they were marched to Virginia. They arrived at Charlottesville in January 1779, after a long and difficult journey, as the winter was particularly severe. There they had to erect their own wooden barracks, as no provision had been made for their arrival.

It is from this point that events take a turn that is of significance to Masons, for in the Brunswickers were 9 Freemasons from the Lodges Jonathon and St. Charles, the remainder of 14 who are recorded as having left for America, von Riedesel, himself a Mason, having been exchanged in September 1779; and in the English prisoners was Minden Lodge intact and complete with its Irish Military Warrant No. 63. It was natural that the Brunswick and Irish brethren should soon become on friendly terms with each other and the Brunswick brethren visited the lodge meetings of Minden No. 63. The Irish Lodge, undoubtedly on the recommendation of the Brunswick brethren, initiated 4 candidates on January 4, 1780. Among them was Johannes Heinrick Carl von Bernewitz, at that time an Ensign, who was later to play an important part in the Masonic world in Brunswick. A further 3 candidates were initiated on February 22, 1780.

It is probable that few, if any of the Germans understood English sufficiently well to follow the ceremonies with ease and so it is natural that they soon felt the desire to work in German. A meeting was called on February 22nd to deliberate whether the Masonic Constitutions allowed them to meet, to undertake Masonic work and to elect a Master Mason as a temporary Worshipful Master. The minutes of that meeting were preserved by von Bernewitz and brought back from America by him and handed to Brunswick Lodge. The minutes are in the possession of Carl zur gekrönten Säule Lodge, Brunswick, constituted 1744, and the minutes read as follows:

"Actum Barracks bey Charlottevill
Albemarly County" in Virginien
XXII II 1780

i.e., 22nd February, 1780

Thirteen Brethren were present, including the three Candidates who had been initiated together in the Irish Lodge, six being Master Masons and the remainder Entered Apprentices. Ultimately Bro. Lieutenant and Regimental Quartermaster Rohr was elected Master. On accepting Office he stated that "he only did so in order to hold Lodges of Instruction, that he could undertake no initiations, and that as the Brethren considered him as their Master he would hold the Lodge in accordance with the Laws of the Order, without any responsibility on his part."

He thereupon opened the Lodge in the first degree, held a short address recommending Secrecy, Morality, Uprightness, Faithfulness, and Love (Menschenliebe) as the ideal of the Order, and appointed two Wardens, one Deacon and an Almoner. He continued by going through the lecture, and explained in German the obligations which the Brethren had undertaken in the English Lodge.

Before closing he asked whether any Brother had anything to report, whereupon an Entered Apprentice rose and recommended the case of a Sergeant in poor circumstances, blind in one eye, with a wife and two children, one of them with a rash and in a miserable state of health, and asked for relief as his barracks had just been burnt down. This was unanimously agreed to, and 118 paper dollars and three shillings were collected, and two Brethren were instructed to hand over the money to the "poor people".

The lectures were thereupon again gone through, and the Lodge closed "with the customary ceremonies." After this a "Table" Lodge was opened, which was conducted in the most perfect order, the Master as usual proposing the "Fires." These were four in number: 1, To our Master and reigning Prince Charles; 2, to Prinz Ferdinand; 3, to all regular and perfect Lodges on the "surface"; 4, To all Brethren in distress "the highest and high health fired with all honors." Finally, the "Table" Lodge was closed with all ceremonies, high XII, and all returning to their barracks contented.

Editor's note: (The story that has just been told relates to an existing Lodge, Minden #63, holding a meeting which included several Brethren not familiar with the English language. These Brothers, the Brunswickers, then held another meeting and elected one of their own as Master. No record exists of any warrant being requested or issued during this period of time, but this Lodge meeting was recorded in minutes now in the possession of Brunswick Lodge constituted in 1744).

The Brunswick Officers were allowed to rejoin the Army in Canada at the end of October 1780 and the Corps returned to Brunswick in 1783 when peace was signed at the Treaty of Paris.

The brethren of Minden No. 63, I believe, were held until the peace was signed, and the Lodge is known to have worked until 1786, but was included in the list of erased warrants in 1801 as Grand Lodge had heard nothing of it since the former date 1786. Considering that the regiment was almost continually on active service it is hardly surprising since it was in Holland in 1801, Egypt in 1803, Malta 1804, Naples 1805, Sicily 1806, Gibraltar 1807, St. Helena 1819 and India 1821. Obviously the Lodge survived, for on February 25, 1812 it was granted a renewal, free of charge.

We next hear of them in Kingston, Ontario where the Regiment arrived on September 25, 1847. On December 27, 1848 the brethren of Minden No. 63 met with the brethren of Kingston and vicinity to celebrate the Festival of St. John the Evangelist and to commemorate the centenary of the re-issue of their warrant. At 2:30 p.m. the members formed in Masonic order and were joined by the brethren of St. John's Lodge No. 491 (English Registry) and Leinster Lodge No. 283 (Irish Registry) and preceded by the band of the Regiment, paraded to St. George's Church to hear an eloquent sermon delivered by Rev. Mr. Brent. The brethren returned to the Lodge Room and adjourned until 6:00 p.m. when about 90 of them sat down to a sumptuous repast and entertainment at Mr. Bamford's Hotel. At 10:30 p.m. the brethren retired, delighted with the day's proceedings.

192 names were registered in Minden No. 63 up till the early months of 1851 and the end of this tale is contained in a letter to the Grand Lodge of Ireland dated December 8, 1868, that the Warrant, jewels, etc. had been lost in India during the mutiny.

But what of von Riedesel and Lady Fritz, who slept on the Regimental Colours in Virginia? The answer lies closer to home. On his release, Von Riedesel, prior to returning to his homeland, took up residence in Sorel (Canada) and it was there on Christmas Eve 1779 that Lady Fritz, seeing a pine tree in her garden outlined against the velvet blue of a starry night, conceived the idea of putting small lighted candles on her Christmas tree and thereby wrote a charming page of Canadian History by giving Canada its very first illuminated Christmas Tree, a sight so familiar to us all at the Festive Season.

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