

A Presentation On The Bermuda Peppercorn Ceremony

By

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Presented to A. Douglas Smith, Jr. Lodge of Research, #1949

On

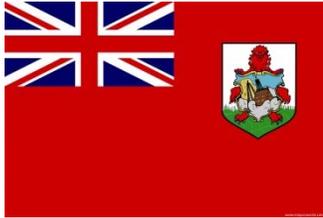
June 29, 2013

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Opening (Slide 1)



Good morning Worshipful Master and greetings Brethren of A. Douglas Smith Jr. Lodge of Research and visitors. It is indeed a pleasure to have been asked here today to give a talk on the Bermuda Peppercorn Ceremony, the annual payment of rent for the Masonic Temple of Lodge St. George No. 200, on the roll of The Grand Scotland. (Slide 2)

The Old State House



This event is the only public Masonic event in Bermuda, where the Masons appear in full regalia. Lodge St. George is the oldest Scottish Lodge outside of Scotland, and the oldest Lodge in Bermuda still operating under its original charter. What I shall talk about this morning is what the Peppercorn Ceremony is, how it came to be, and a little history on both Bermuda and Lodge St. George.

The Peppercorn Ceremony is held annually, on the Wednesday nearest to St. George's Day (April 23rd) in St. George's Bermuda. While not an official holiday, St. George's Day is the feast

day of Saint George, the patron saint of England. The day is celebrated by various Christian churches, and by the several nations, kingdoms, countries, and cities of which Saint George is the patron saint. Saint George's Day is celebrated on April 23rd, the traditionally accepted date of Saint George's death in AD 303. The ceremony marks the annual fulfillment of the terms of the contract between the Government of Bermuda and Lodge St. George, No. 200, G. R. S. dated July 5th, 1816. In which, the Government gave Lodge St. George, in perpetuity, the right to occupy The Sessions House, later called The Old State House, (Slide 3) in free and common socage, for their purposes, for the annual consideration of one peppercorn.



For approximately 150 years the satisfaction of the terms of the contract were a relatively private affair between the Government and Lodge St. George, but in the 1960s a decision was made to combine the payment of said peppercorn with the Governor's state visit to St. George's, the island's first capital. (Slide 4)



This made for a quite splendid affair, complete with Regimental band (Slide 5) and soldiers on parade,



(Slide 6) 21 cannon salutes



(Slide 7) on the arrival of the Governor by horse and carriage,



(Slide 8) dignitaries in top hat and tails,



(Slide 9) Freemasons in their regalia,



(Slide 10) and about all the pomp and circumstance you could ask for.



So what is a peppercorn contract? (Slide 11)



In English law, and other countries with similar common law systems, (Slide 12) a legal contract requires that both sides provide consideration. In other words, if an agreement does not specify that

each party will give something of value to the other party, then it is not considered a binding contract, and cannot be enforced in court. This requirement does not exist in contracts with civil law systems.



Several hundreds of years ago it was common English practice to see peppercorn payment being used in legal contracts for rent, as a nominal rental sum for property, land or buildings. Where a rental contract is put in place and the owner of the property wishes it to be rent-free, it is normal to charge say, one farthing, one penny, one shilling, one pound sterling, or indeed one peppercorn, as rent. Again, this is because, if the owner wants to lease the property, they must charge some rent, so that consideration exists for both parties. At the time, spices were rare and expensive, (Slide 13) therefore peppercorns were acknowledged to have value.



The notional collection of the annual peppercorn rent helps to maintain a formal landlord and tenant relationship between the two parties, precluding the risk of a claim for adverse possession from the tenant arising, were no consideration to be paid for an extended period.

The Old State House (formally The Sessions House), St. George's, Bermuda

Bermuda's first inhabitants were shipwrecked (Slide 14)



not far from what was to become the town of St. George's on July 28, 1609 (Slide 15) on a voyage to Jamestown, Virginia.



(Slide 16) The British settlers at the fort in Jamestown had struggled to adapt to life in the "colonies" since establishing a presence in 1607, but they had not fared well and almost from the beginning the settlers were on the brink of starvation and of losing the entire encampment.



(Slide 17) Jamestown Island (although technically a peninsular) is a swampy area, and its isolation from the mainland meant that there

was limited hunting available as most game animals required larger foraging areas.



More than half of the men were "gentlemen." Gentlemen in England were not expected to work. They lived on family money. These men were unprepared for the hardships of starting a colony. They brought only their best clothes.

The settlers quickly hunted and killed off all the large and smaller game animals that were found on the tiny peninsula. In addition, the low, marshy area was infested with airborne pests, including mosquitoes, which carried malaria, and the brackish water of the tidal James River was not a good source of water.

Many settlers died from drinking untreated water and over 135 settlers died from malaria. The settlers also suffered from saltwater poisoning which led to infection, fevers and dysentery. Britain had sent two supply missions in 1608, but both were under-supplied and had additional settlers on board exacerbating the situation. Britain then sent a third supply mission (Slide 18) consisting of nine ships in the spring of 1609.



That fleet was headed up by Admiral Sir George Somers, (Slide 19) who was travelling on the flagship the Sea Venture.



This fleet was caught in a hurricane that lasted three days, and the flagship "Sea Venture" was deliberately run aground on the reefs of Bermuda to prevent her from sinking. (Slide 20)



All 150 aboard the Sea Venture survived the storm and subsequent grounding on the reef, and made it safely to shore. They spent the next nine months building two small ships, the "Deliverance" (Slide 21) and the "Patience", and on completion, the majority of those shipwrecked mariners continued on to Jamestown in May of the following year.



A contingent of permanent settlers returned in July of 1612 to join those left behind, and colonized the island for Britain. One of the first stone buildings to be constructed was a fortification and headquarters in the town, built from local limestone using a mortar of lime and turtle oil. In 1620, Governor Nathaniel Butler

commandeered this building, and undertook a massive renovation lasting three years, to create Bermuda's first seat of Government. (Slide 22)



This one room building became the center of all Governmental activities for the next 195 years. It served (concurrently) as Bermuda's Houses of Parliament, Courts of Law, Government Offices and Governor's Council.

By the early 1800s, Bermuda was growing and so was the Government, and quite frankly the Government had outgrown the little one room building. Whole separate buildings were really required to house the Government of the day, but all the available land in the immediate vicinity of St. George's was already owned and built upon. The only viable option was to build buildings at some distance from the main Sessions House, which brought with it its own strategic issues. St. George's had been for almost 200 years, the center of the universe for Bermuda. When history books speak of things that happened in Bermuda during those first 200 years, they are really saying they happened in St. George's. St. George's is located on the eastern end of the long narrow island, measuring about a mile and a half wide at its widest point, and about 25 miles long. (Slide 23)



Strategically speaking, having the seat of Government located at the extreme end of a long narrow island means that people from elsewhere on the island had to travel by horse, boat or walk, possibly the entire length of the island if they had need of visiting the Government Offices. A trip by horse could easily take the whole day. The Government of the day realized this and decided that perhaps now was the right time to consider relocating the seat of Government.

At that time there existed two towns, the capitol St. George, and Hamilton, and two villages, Flatts and Somerset. (Slide 24)



The town of Hamilton had several points in its favour, as a contender for the new seat of Government. It was located pretty much in the center of the island; there was an abundance of land to be had, (Slide 25)



where Government buildings could be erected, and the town could develop around those buildings, unlike St. George, where the town had already developed around the one small building, and now no further expansion was possible. And lastly the town of Hamilton had a much better harbour for Bermuda's already booming sea trade.

So in 1815, the seat of Government, (Slide 26) was

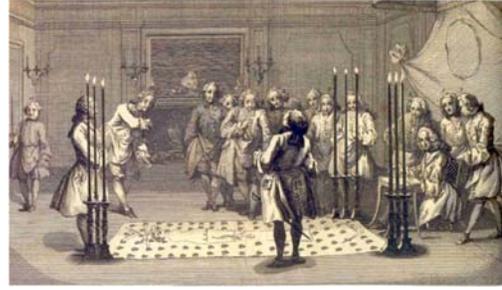


moved to Hamilton, which was then declared the capital, and the State House was evacuated in favour of newly built Houses of Parliament, Government offices and Courts of Law. (Slide 27)



Just what to do with the much revered old building that had served them so well, was not so clear. They did not wish to sell the building, as the majesty of the Houses of Parliament looms large in psyche of the British. Clearly they could not rent it, and risk it being used for nefarious purposes. Nor could they just abandon it, allowing it to fall into disrepair, and eventually crumble. What they wanted was a steward for the building, someone who would look after the building, maintain it, and keep it in its present condition, all the while, in true Governmental fashion, without costing the Government a penny.

Enter... The Freemasons. (Slide 28)



In the early 1800s, Freemasonry was in its heyday. Freemasons were everywhere. My God, you turn over a rock ... there's a Freemason under there! The Government decided that the perfect steward for the Old State House would be the Freemasons. The organization had been around for hundreds of years and by all appearances would likely be around a few hundred more, and what better stewards could you ask for? A society, whose tenets were Virtue, Morality and Brotherly Love.

It was quickly and unanimously agreed that this could indeed be the solution to their dilemma. In all fairness, I must offer this next piece of information in the spirit of full disclosure... All parties to the Governmental decision to approach the Freemasons, (Slide 29) were themselves, Freemasons... but we won't dig any further into that!!



There was at that time in the town of St. George a small Lodge, Lodge St. George, who as luck would have it, had no Temple of their own. The Government could not have asked for a more perfect match, and plans were immediately put in motion to approach Lodge St. George.

History of Lodge St. George, No. 200, G. R. S.

In the mid-1700s Freemasonry was alive and well in the islands of Bermuda. (Slide 30)



There was a very active lunar Lodge, chartered under The Grand Lodge of England, situated in the village of Somerset. A number of the members of this Lodge were from St. George's, at the other end of the island. On Lodge nights, they would row "by the light of the moon" the 20 miles to attend Lodge. (Slide 31)



Would that our members today were so eager to attend Lodge. Eventually these brethren, felt it would be advantageous to have a Lodge in the old town itself, so in early 1797 petitioned The Grand Lodge of England for a Charter to form a Lodge in St. George's.

After waiting an inordinate amount of time with no response from England and no receipt of a Charter, it was suggested that perhaps they should petition The Grand Lodge of Scotland, (Slide 32) which they subsequently did.



In late 1797, a Charter was received from the Grand Lodge of Scotland dated August 7th, 1797. The English Charter was to arrive six months later, but by then Lodge St. George was already operating under its Scottish Charter. (Slide 33)



Lodge St. George had no formal temple or meeting place, and met wherever was convenient, in member's homes, stores, or other venues. Bermuda is fortunate in that three Constitutions call Bermuda home; (Slide 34)



The United Grand Lodge of England (1717), The Grand Lodge of Ireland (1725) and The Grand Lodge of Scotland (1736). It is common in Bermuda for Masons to be members of more than one Constitution. I am a member of all three

Constitutions, in addition to the Grand Lodge of Maryland.

In the early 1810s, Lodge St. George decided to build a proper temple. Land was purchased in the town of St. George, and a corner stone was laid for the prospective temple. However, construction languished on building the new temple, and by 1816 the new temple was yet to be constructed. It was at this point that Lodge St. George was approached, by the Governor and senior members of the Government of the day. The Government offered the now empty former Sessions House, (Slide 35) to



the Freemasons of Lodge St. George for their use, in perpetuity, as long as they agreed to maintain it and keep it in its present condition, for the annual consideration of one peppercorn. Lodge St. George probably took no longer than a blink of an eye to agree to that proposal, and a contract was drawn up and signed on July 5, 1816 granting use of the State House to the Freemasons of Lodge St. George, for the annual consideration of one peppercorn.

The Peppercorn Ceremony

The Peppercorn Ceremony is "officially" from 11:00am to 12 noon, but much surrounds the actual ceremony itself. At Lodge St. George, a traditional Codfish and Banana Breakfast has been in full swing since 8:30am for all participating Masons and their guests. (Slide 36)



Around 9 AM units of the Bermuda Regiment began assembling. This would include putting the cannons in place for the 21 gun salute. (Slide 37)



The Bermuda Regiment, act as coordinators and marshals for the event. Around 10am the band of the Bermuda Regiment arrives at the Town Square, along with a contingent of troops that will be inspected by His Excellency The Governor, upon his arrival. (Slide 38)



Also at 10 AM Lodge St. George tyles and opens the Lodge. (Slide 39)



They immediately "adjourn" the Lodge, until their next regular communication. The Lodge is left "open" until then, where the first order of business on the agenda is to "close" the Lodge, followed immediately by "opening" the Lodge. Strange practice!

By 10:30 AM various dignitaries are starting to arrive and are seated in the VIP seating area. (Slide 40)



A narrator (himself a Mason and Grand Lodge Officer) is giving a commentary and explanation to both the public and assembled guests, over the public address system, on the history of Lodge St. George, and the circumstances and history of the Peppercorn Ceremony. He also takes the opportunity to inform the assembly of the good works done by Masons and Masonic Organisations, worldwide.

By 10:45, the Bermuda Regiment is asking for the members of Lodge St. George to make their way to the Town Square. (Slide 41)



The Brethren assemble outside the Old State House, forming two or more rows of Brethren. (Slide 42)



They are led by a Scottish Piper down onto the Town Square, where they take up their position in the center of the Square.

Just before 11 AM, the final dignitaries arrive, the members of the Corporation of St. George, (Slide 43) The Mayor of St. George, (Slide 44)



The Premier of Bermuda, and finally (Slide 45) the His Excellency, The Governor.



On his arrival, the Governor is immediately whisked away (Slide 46) to inspect the troops, following which, he takes up his place on the dais.



Awaiting him on the dais are the Accountant General, the Mayor of St. George's and the clergy from St. Peter's Church, the parish church, and oldest Anglican church in the western hemisphere.

(Slide 47) The members of the Corporation of St. George are then introduced to the Governor,



(Slide 48) and the Mayor is invited to speak.



Following the Mayor's remarks, (Slide 49)



The Governor addresses the assembly. At the end of his address, he demands that the annual rent be paid. (Slide 50)



The Right Worship Master (Scottish Masters are referred to as R. W. M as opposed to just W. M.), and the Treasurer (bearing the peppercorn in a plastic box, on a silver dish, on a red cushion), accompanied by the Lodge Deacons make their way to the dais. (Slide 51)



The R. W. M. makes a brief pronouncement stating that the payment of this peppercorn satisfies the terms of the 1816 contract to allow the Lodge to hold the building in free and common socage.

(Slide 52) He then directs the Treasurer to pay over the peppercorn.



As an aside, for many years the Accountant General was a Grand Lodge Officer of the United Grand Lodge of England, and prior to handing over the peppercorn, it is customary for the RWM and Treasurer to greet the Accountant General with a handshake. Seen here with yours truly back in 1996. Although not easy to see, that handshake may look familiar to you. On more than one occasion, a fortuitous snap of the Royal Gazette photographer's camera during said greeting between the Treasurer and the AG, later appeared on the front page of the Royal Gazette. There in all its glory, filling a goodly portion of the front page, was a very "in focus" Masonic handshake. Luckily, no one saw it for what it was. Thankfully that cannot happen today, as the Accountant General is a woman.

(Slide 53) Once the peppercorn is handed over, the RWM and his entourage returns to the center of the Square.



The Governor announces to the Mayor, that following the Blessing by the Rector of St. Peter's Church, he would be demanding the keys to The Old State House, in order that he and the Cabinet of Bermuda may hold a brief meeting in the original room where once, all such meetings were held. (Slide 54)



The Rector reads a blessing, (Slide 55)



and the Masons file off the Square to the accompaniment of the Piper. When they arrive back at The Old State House, (Slide 56)



the serving officers form up the steps leading into the Lodge Room, and greet the Governor and Cabinet as they arrive for their very brief meeting. Following that the Mayor of St. George holds a "Garden Party" (Slide 57) where wine and finger food is served, to which all invited guests are welcome.



The Masons and their guests, having been invited, descend on the Garden Party like a swarm of locusts. (Slide 58)



After the Masons have drunk all the Mayor's wine, or around 1pm (whichever comes first) the Masons and their guests, (Slide 59) head off for a local restaurant which they have reserved for the afternoon.



There they spend the rest of the afternoon with good food (and more drink) and a good time is had by all. That pretty much wraps up The Peppercorn Ceremony until the next year, when we do it all over again.

(Slide 60) Lodge St. George has occupied the Old State House since 1816, and has met regularly every month for the last 197 years, which makes them the building's longest tenants.



They have conducted Lodge business throughout two World Wars and for every one of those 197 years, a single peppercorn has been presented to the Accountant General on behalf of the Government of Bermuda. An annual receipt for payment is supplied by the Government, and hangs on display in the Lodge room. The year 2016 will see the payment of our 200th peppercorn, and it promises to be a grand event with numerous visiting Masons both local and overseas. All are welcome at the Peppercorn Ceremony, and the "after-party" is not to be missed.

(Slide 61) Today, the payment of the peppercorn, while still an official obligation, is considered an opportunity to allow the general public to get a glimpse of those secret Freemasons in their funny

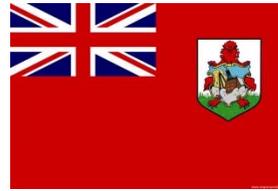
aprons and regalia, and offers an opportunity for them to ask questions about Freemasonry, and for us to respond with truth and help dispel the myth and conspiracy theories.



The members of Lodge St. George could simply just walk into the Government offices and pay their peppercorn at the cashier's window, but the opportunity to further the knowledge and education about Freemasonry, and provide a unique visitor experience as part of our tourism effort, is surely not to be missed. (Slide 62)



This has been a brief look at a Masonic ceremony, held in public, by a historically ancient Lodge, in full Masonic regalia that have been part of the fabric of life in Bermuda for almost 200 years. Thank you for inviting me to speak, I hope it has been of interest to you. I will entertain any questions you may have. (Slide 63)



Right Worshipful Brother Leslie T. Center,
HSGW
Past Grand Superintendent, Bermuda District
The Grand Lodge of Scotland, A. F. & A. M.