

Freemasonry In Ghana: 1859 To Present

By

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

On

November 30, 2002

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Introduction

Worshipful Master and Brethren:

I am honored to be speaking in my own Lodge this morning. I wish to thank our Worshipful Master, Worshipful Brother John Shroeder, PM, for according me the privilege of addressing my brethren.

The Worshipful Master was very kind to leave open the choice of a subject. This, however, turned out to be a mixed blessing, as I struggled to come up with a suitable subject. With my interest in the practical application of the precepts of the craft, I agonized for a while as I sought to avoid any subject that might lend itself to tendentious treatment. After considerable contemplation, I decided to cover a subject that is far removed from the cornucopia of themes that I have written about in the past. I settled on "Freemasonry in Ghana: 1859 to Present"

Writing on this subject was a challenge because of the limited primary sources for review in these United States. More especially, I was handicapped by the fact that my research did not include a visit to Ghana to interview individuals and examine such Lodge documents that may be available, notably from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Notwithstanding these shortcomings, I believe this presentation is a worthy exercise for both the Lodge and me. For me the dispassionate examination of Freemasonry in Ghana, the country of my birth, has been rewarding. It is the first time I have spent time on this subject and, no doubt, it will not be the last. I hope in future to prepare what I consider a more comprehensive paper, incorporating research conducted in Ghana.

For the Lodge, I trust that short of physically traveling with you to Ghana, my choice of subject will arouse in you some curiosity about my country of birth and perhaps cause you to read about it. After all, having me in the West, you may wish to know more about me to determine whether you want to elect and install me in the East at the end of this year. More importantly, I hope, by this subject and its treatment, I am able to shed light on some aspects of Masonry as they obtain outside these United States. Ergo, if this presentation encourages you to learn about Ghana or other African countries and also to investigate the Masonry experience in other parts of the world, particularly in developing countries, my goal would have been met.

My interest in the subject has been satiated over the years by reading and interviews with Masons in good standing in Lodges in Ghana.¹ The effect is that I have become intimately aware of the great strides made in the Craft in Ghana, especially during the past 27 years. While the nature, character and practice of Freemasonry in Ghana may differ in certain respects from what pertain in the Commonwealth of Virginia, it must be noted that the commonly accepted mysteries of Freemasonry are safely lodged in the repositories of faithful breasts in Ghana. The ancient Craft enjoys considerable devotion and active practice in Ghana.

¹ Special thanks to W Bro. Victor Adegbite, a member of our Lodge and the founder of Fiat Lux Lodge No 1717 of Washington, DC. He has spent hours sharing his knowledge and insights about Freemasonry in Ghana with me. He also made available to me several publications from the many Lodges in Ghana of which he is a member. However, the views and opinions expressed in this paper are mine.

The number of Lodges in Ghana has grown 73% during the past 27 years. From a base figure of 61 Lodges in 1975, the country experienced a burst of growth to 107 Lodges by the beginning of the millennium. These Lodges work in 20 Masonic Temples located in the key metropolitan centers. There are currently approximately 5000 Masons working in the 107 Lodges in the country

The spectacular growth in Ghana has occurred at a time when Freemasonry's growth in the US has slowed down. Of course, this is only in proportional terms. In any event, there are other features of Masonry in Ghana that distinguishes it from what obtains in the US. Indeed, as it will become apparent, there are other distinctions. In fact let me hasten to point out that the Craft in US is more democratized, Lodges more geographically dispersed, and financial obligations required of Masons less onerous than in Ghana. On the other hand, Lodges in Ghana have the benefit of using three different rituals (English, Scottish and Irish Constitutions) thus affording Masons in Ghana a rich and deep Masonic culture that is unavailing to most Masons in the US because the practice in most states emphasizes one standard ritual.

Masonic Autonomy

There are other differences between the practice of Masonry in Ghana and the US. As another example, the institutional framework for the operation of the Craft in Ghana differs markedly from what is available in the US. While each state in the US is possessed of one majority local Grand Lodge, (and a minority Grand Lodge, of Prince Hall affiliated) Ghana does not have a local Grand Lodge to tend to the affairs of the many Lodges and Masons in the country.

Ghana is among a number of sovereign countries or states with a rich and long-standing Masonic tradition but without the benefit of Masonic independence. These countries, predominantly former colonies of Great Britain,

became exposed to English, Scottish and Irish Masonry during the colonial era and their Lodges continue to beholden to the Grand Lodges of England, Scotland, and Ireland. Thus, although, Freemasonry has thrived in Ghana for over 143 years, its Lodges remain under the suzerainty of foreign Grand Lodges based on the British Isles. These foreign Grand Lodges have the power to constitute Lodges, or withdraw Lodge charters to suspend or terminate their operations.

Given that Ghana became independent from the colonial rule of Great Britain in 1957, it would seem logical that its Masonic institutions would have asserted their right to self-determination by adopting home-rule. This has not happened. Consequently, 45 years after it became a self-governing polity, the country is not possessed of an indigenous Grand Lodge.

The absence of a home grown Grand Lodge has meant that Masons in Ghana have not, as yet, assumed the authority and power for enacting laws and regulations, specific to their unique circumstances, for the governance of the Craft and the attendant enforcement of them in the manner they see fit. Instead, Masons in Ghana owe allegiance to foreign authorities that exercise Exclusive Jurisdiction over their respective Lodges in Ghana and have the final word on who, when and how a Mason is made, how and for what duration one practices as a Mason, and when, why and how a Mason may be expelled from the Craft.

It is necessary to point out, though, that the failure to cut the umbilical cords that tie Freemasons in Ghana to Grand Lodges in the British Isles has not been for want of trying. Beginning in July 1962, a year after Ghana became a republic, various efforts have been made over the course of these 40 years to constitute a United Grand Lodge of Ghana, under which will be subsumed the various Lodges practicing in accordance with the English, Scottish, and Irish Constitutions. These

efforts have not borne fruit for reasons that are beyond the scope of this paper.

This lack of autonomy makes it difficult to discuss Freemasonry in Ghana as a unique experience molded by local traditions and interests.

Ghana

Ghana is approximately the size of Michigan or Oregon. The country is situated on West Africa's Gulf of Guinea, or the southern coast of West Africa, only a few degrees north of the Equator. Half of the country lies less than 152 meters (500 ft.) above sea level, and the highest point is 883 meters (2,900 ft.). The 537-kilometer (approximately 334-miles.) coastline is mostly a low, sandy shore backed by plains and scrub and intersected by several rivers and streams. A tropical rain forest belt, broken by heavily forested hills and many streams and rivers, extends northward from the shore. The climate is tropical. The eastern coastal belt is warm and comparatively dry; the southwest corner, hot and humid; and the north, hot and dry. The country is bordered by Cote d'Ivoire in the West, Burkina Faso to the North, and Togo on the East. The country's population is estimated at 20 million with 38% residing in the urban areas. The capital city is Accra. Ghana is a republic with a government that reflects a hybrid of aspects of the US Constitution and the British parliamentary system. The official language is English.

The Republic of Ghana, formerly the Gold Coast, is named for the Ghana Empire, which flourished between AD 400 and 1240 in West Africa. The actual name of that empire was Wagadugu, but it is commonly identified as Ghana, although the latter name, more accurately, was used as the title of its rulers. The empire was controlled by Sundiata in 1240 AD, and absorbed into the larger Mali Empire, which was in the ascendant under Mansa Musa, circa 1307. Geographically, the old Ghana may be

located 500 miles north of the present Ghana, and occupied the area between the Senegal and Niger rivers.

Some inhabitants of present Ghana, the Mande and Voltaic people of Northern Ghana-Mamprussi, Dagomba and the Gonja- trace their ancestry to the medieval Ghana. In addition, anecdotal evidence, including matrilineal customary practices and names such as Danso, connect the largest ethnic group in present day Ghana, the Akans (44% of the population), to the Mandikas of Senegal and Gambia who have strong links with the empire.

Gold Coast & the World

Before independence, from British colonial rule, on March 6, 1957, modern day Ghana was referred to as the Gold Coast. For over four hundred and eighty years, the Gold Coast was a noteworthy participant, more so than any other African country, in the trans-Atlantic international trade, which was to replace its centuries-old involvement in the trans-Saharan international trade. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Gold Coast exported a tenth of the world's supply of gold. During the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, it was one of the four largest centers for the infernal slave trade. For much of the twentieth century, it was the leading exporter of cocoa.¹ Other exports from Gold Coast included manganese, bauxite, diamonds and timber (mahogany).

The Portuguese, the first Europeans recorded to have reached Gold Coast, arrived in 1471 and by 1475, on the basis of the abundant supply of, and ready access to gold, named the place they dropped anchor 'Mina' or the mine (now Elmina). To facilitate trade in gold, ivory and slave, the Portuguese, in 1481 built a castle at Elmina, a coastal settlement less than ten miles from Cape Coast, a town which was later to assume greater importance. The Portuguese later

¹ Brian Lapping, *End of Empire*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1985, p353

constructed other forts along the coastline of Gold Coast.

More than one hundred and twenty-three years after the Portuguese set foot in the Gold Coast, the Dutch sought to supplant them. In 1598, the Dutch built forts at Komenda and Kormantsil. Then in 1637, the Dutch, began to seize Portuguese castles and trading posts and succeeded in 1642, with the capture of Fort St. Anthony in Axim, in finally driving the Portuguese from the facilities and arrangements they had developed in the area in the preceding 160 years. Later the English, Danes, Swedes and French attempted to uproot the Dutch and to dominate the trade in gold and slaves. By the beginning of the eighteenth century state monopolies from Britain, France, Denmark, Sweden and Brandenburg had built castles and forts to cover the 330 miles coastline.² By the latter part of 19th century the Dutch and the British were the two countries with active trading interests in the area. The Dutch, however, withdrew from The Gold Coast in 1874.

Before then, beginning in the 1830s, the British, through Captain George MacLean, President of the Joint Council of British Forts established an informal protectorate over many of the coastal states and provided them military protection and judicial administration. This arrangement was greatly enhanced and formalized by the Bond of 1844. Later in 1874, with the departure of the Dutch, Britain declared the coastal areas a crown colony. This arrangement was to endure until the colony was granted its independence in 1957. In the end, therefore, Britain effectively ruled the Gold Coast for over 113 years. The country became a Republic on July 1, 1960.

Freemasonry in the Early Years

Given that the British were in the Gold Coast for over a century, it would appear reasonable to surmise that they would have introduced

² Brian Lapping, *op. cit.* p 354

Freemasonry into Ghana. After all, the presence of Freemasonry in the English-speaking world was the consequence of Lodges being warranted under the English (Premier Grand Lodge or the Grand Lodge of the Antients), the Irish or the Scottish Constitutions.

However, there have been suggestions that Freemasonry came to Gold Coast in the 1740s probably through the influence of the Dutch, who by then had been active in the area for over 145 years.³ These accounts, though, have not been confirmed by authoritative sources. It is, nonetheless, conceivable that Masonic practice was introduced in the trading settlements along the coast of Gold Coast during this period. This view is not far-fetched, considering existing records indicate that in 1772, the Goede Hoop Lodge #18 was formed in Cape Town, South Africa with a charter granted by the Grand East of Netherlands. The Dutch, by necessity, passed through the Gold Coast ports and their functioning settlements there on the long and arduous voyages en route to South Africa. It would seem reasonable that the Dutch on the Gold Coast would have seized the opportunity and established their own Lodge or Lodges. As previously noted the Dutch had been in the Gold Coast beginning in 1598 and by 1642 had driven out the Portuguese and were enjoying supremacy in the area. Having enjoyed a stable existence on the Gold Coast for hundreds of years, it does not require a stretch of the imagination to expect them to have established Lodges for the benefit of their traders, military personnel and the support staff, during the first half of 1700s, before extending the same courtesy to the fledgling outpost in South Africa in 1772. It bears pointing out that Freemasonry enjoyed a dynamic growth during the eighteenth century as enthusiastic Masons rushed to set up Lodges in the four corners of the world. As it is well known, Freemasonry was exported from the British Isles to France and then Holland

³ Kent Henderson & Tony Pope, *Freemasonry Universal*, Vol.2, Global Masonic Productions, Australia., 2000, p. 11

beginning in 1726 and from there, by 1740 it had gained wide currency in many European cities. From these cities, it spread to other parts of the world through the efforts of traders, military personnel, clergy and public servants.

In any event, if the Dutch or any other group of European traders had established a Lodge or Lodges in the Gold Coast, it would have had very exclusive membership as it would have been restricted to the European traders, military personnel, missionaries and administrators. It would have excluded the indigenous population, even the elite among them.

In the end, available evidence would seem to credit the English for introducing the Craft to the Gold Coast in the mid-nineteenth century. It is, however, unclear if any attempt was made by the English to introduce Freemasonry into the Gold Coast during the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century. That wouldn't have been surprising since it is well known that many Lodges were established in many trading posts and at military installations in various parts of the British Empire during the period under discussion. However, weak record keeping during those years, further impaired by the competition between the *Modern and Antients* to establish Lodges in various parts of the world, suggest that accurate information is not readily available. Moreover, no Lodge currently exists with its origins dating to that period.

The fact remains, however, that in 1859, some 143 years ago, the Grand Lodge of England granted a warrant for the organization and consecration of a Lodge in the Gold Coast. This is known, in large part, because that Lodge, the Gold Coast (Centenary) Lodge No. 773, is still in operation. In fact, it is the longest surviving Lodge in Ghana and the oldest Lodge in West Africa. The Lodge meets in Cape Coast.

Interest in Freemasonry

Lodges in the Gold Coast started as the preserve of the expatriate community. The indigenous citizens were excluded. This attitude was gradually eased as indigenous individuals were accepted into senior positions in the colonial administration, commerce and in various professions. This development, which began in the 1880s, became pronounced beginning in the late 1920s and, more especially, following the end of the colonial administration in 1957.

It is easy to speculate that during the colonial era and, perhaps, and the period immediately after independence, the western educated indigenous men sought admission into Lodges to be able to share experiences with and befriend expatriates. The latter ordinarily occupied supervisory positions in all occupations and often remained distant from the indigenous population in general, and inaccessible even to the educated ones. As such, bonding with them could, in the view of some indigenous men, have certain advantages. It may even be further speculated that the educated indigenous men entertained the hope that membership in Lodges and the development of relationships with the expatriate members would facilitate career advancement and enhance individual position or status within the community at large. I do not believe that these considerations were the critical motivating factors in drawing the indigenous men to the craft.

It is my belief that the educated indigenous men embraced Masonry and continue to do so for reasons uninfluenced by mercenary or other unworthy motives. From the beginning, they were in bewildered awe of the Craft because of its exclusivity and seeming secrecy. Its members were the expatriate elite, and its practices were shrouded in mysteries. The Lodge members dressed in formalwear carrying small bags or cases as they ambled their way to meetings that lasted deep into the night, in

buildings with restricted admission. The members maintained a perceived absolute 'code of secrecy' and would reveal nothing to anyone, irrespective of the innocuousness of the information, not to their wives, other family members or friends. For many indigenous men, the Lodge meetings and the attitude of the Masons to their obligations reminded them of the traditional secret societies which were restricted to men who wore unique garbs for their meetings and held these meetings late at night at locations known only to its members and maintained a code of silence about every aspects of their meetings. They saw the Lodge as a modern and European alternative to their traditional practice, from which they were increasingly becoming alienated because of their western education and desire to adopt a European outlook. For some of the educated indigenous men, they saw the Lodges as the institutions to bring them together with their educated equals, local and expatriate, in the towns and away from the traditional societies in the villages. There was no longer the need to travel to the villages to bond with men in secrecy, men who lacked their newly acquired educational qualification and standing and what they perceived to be their European sophistication. For some of these men, realizing that they could now enjoy the benefits of a secret society, albeit after the European fashion, in the cosmopolitan centers, was important, as they sought to reinvent themselves. In this context, for those desirous of breaking with certain traditional practices, Masonry offered another outlet to realize this goal.

There was another reason for interest in the fraternity. The craft was also seen, for many years, as part of the Christian experience for men. This offered an added attraction to the educated indigenous men whose families had been converted to Christianity, a societal transformation that commenced with the arrival in the 15th Century of the first Europeans on what became the Gold Coast.

Once admitted into the fraternity, most indigenous men found a home. They took to the rites, ceremonies, rituals and spiritual character of the teachings of the craft. Having grown up in a society infused with ritual and spiritual ceremonies, Masonic practices did not require a state of consciousness beyond their command.

By and large few indigenous men, relative to the potential pool, were admitted into Lodges during the colonial period. Those admitted professed Christianity, were very well educated, held high office in the colonial administration and often were members of prominent families.

In part because of the practices of Lodges during the colonial era, admission to Freemasonry in Ghana has tended to remain restrictive and exclusive. Masons in Ghana have tended to be among the elite in the society. The democratization of the Craft in the US evidenced by the presence of different classes of men within the fraternity is not apparent in Ghana.

Since the country became independent in 1957, the Craft has counted among its members, Chief Justices, Justices of the Supreme Court, Court of Appeals and High Courts, prominent Attorneys, Chief and Kings, Cabinet Ministers, leading members of the Clergy, Academicians, Senior Civil Servants, Professionals, Entrepreneurs, etc. In the early 1960s, the District Grand Master of Ghana, Scottish Constitution was R.W. Bro. Sir Kobina Arku Korsah, the Chief Justice, and the first Ghanaian to hold that office. He retired as the District Grand Master in 1963.

The increased acceptance of indigenous men into the Craft, after 1957, led necessarily to the growth in the membership of existing Lodges and the warranting of new Lodges in various cities in the country.

Growth of Lodges

As previously mentioned, Lodges in Ghana receive their charters or warrants from the Grand Lodges of England, Scotland and Ireland. The first warrant issued for a Lodge in the Gold Coast, that is extant, was by the Grand Lodge of England. As noted earlier, this was in 1859 and it was for the Lodge now regarded as the premier lodge of Ghana, the Gold Coast Lodge No. 773. The second Lodge warranted by the Grand Lodge of England, in 1891, was Victoria Lodge No. 2392, which meets in Accra. The Grand Lodge of England warranted three other Lodges prior to the Second World War. Thereafter, the pace picked up and Lodges were established on the average of one per year. More recently, during the 1990s, the Grand Lodge of England has warranted eight Lodges in Ghana.⁴

The first lodge chartered by the Grand Lodge of Scotland, in 1921, was Lodge Progressive No. 1261, which meets in Cape Coast. The first Lodge chartered by the Grand Lodge of Ireland, in 1956, was St. Patrick Lodge No. 793, which meets in Accra. No more Lodges were chartered under the Irish Constitution until the 1970s. Since then, sixteen of these Lodges have been chartered.

It is to the credit of the Masons in Ghana that the growth in Lodges has not led to undue competition or friction among the three Constitutions. The 107 Lodges work together with remarkable harmony, though, in varying numbers, they owe their allegiance to the Grand Lodges of England, Scotland and Ireland. Indeed, Lodges often would not receive the petition and initiate a candidate without submitting his name and particulars to other Lodges to ascertain if any Brother knew of any Masonic reason that will preclude the candidate from admission.

⁴ Kent Henderson & Tony Pope, *Freemasonry Universal*, Vol.2, Global Masonic Productions, Australia., 2000, pp. 26-27

Altogether, there are 57 Lodges under the English Constitution, 33 Lodges under the Scottish Constitution, and 17 under the Irish Constitution. The Grand Lodge of England designates the lodges under the English Constitution as Private Lodges; the Grand Lodge of Scotland recognizes them as Daughter Lodges; and the Grand Lodge of Ireland refers to those under its Constitution as Subordinate Lodges.

Specialized Lodges

For many years now, admission to membership in Lodges cannot be denied on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, and national origin or for other non-Masonic reasons. Accordingly, candidates may be proposed for almost all Lodge irrespective of the Constitution under which it is holden. As a matter of fact, many Masons hold plural memberships in Lodges holden under all three Constitutions.

There are, however, specialized Lodges, for which membership is restricted to a particular class of individuals. These include Research Lodges; Old School Lodges for former students of a particular high school or University; Professional Lodges for individuals from certain professions; and Installed Masters' Lodges for Installed Masters.

The Research Lodges include, Lodge of Research, No.1671 (SC), and Helicon Lodge of Research No.9599 (EC). The Old School Lodges include, Mfantseman Lodge No. 7863 (EC), Adisadel Lodge No. 7791 (EC), Prempeh College Lodge No.9216 (EC), Accra Academy Lodge No.1699 (SC), and Achimota Lodge No.1522 (SC). The Professional Lodges include, Bankers Lodge, Commerce and Industry Lodge No. 8666 (EC), Public Service Lodge No. 8587 (EC), Legon Lodge No.8266 (EC), University of Cape Coast Lodge No 8804 (EC), University of Technology Lodge No. 7792 (EC) and Militia Lodge No. 8723 (EC). Among the Installed Masters' Lodges are Meridian Lodge of

Installed Masters No. 9386 (EC), and Oman Lodge of Installed Masters No. 9428 (EC).

Supervision of Lodges

Each warranting Grand Lodge has institutional arrangement for the local administration of its Lodges. In the case of the Lodges chartered by the Grand Lodges of England and Scotland, these responsibilities are carried out by their respective District Grand Lodges; the Lodges under Irish Constitution are governed by the Irish Provincial Grand Lodge. At the head of the District Grand Lodges are District Grand Masters and for the Provincial Grand Lodge is a Provincial Grand Master, all appointed by their respective Grand Lodges.

The local entities are not sovereign. They have very limited discretionary authority. Almost all their actions, including the formulation of local by-laws and the disciplining of Masons, are subject to the approval of the Grand Lodges on the British Isles.

Location of Lodges

Lodges in Ghana are located predominantly in the main urban areas. They are not widely dispersed throughout the country. For instance, two of the ten administrative regions of the country, the Upper East and Upper West regions, with total population of 1.5 million, do not have any Masonic Lodges. In three of the other regions, Western, Brong-Ahafo, and Northern, with an aggregate population of almost six million have 12 Lodges, all located in the capital cities. Another region, Volta, with a population of almost two million has two Lodges, one in the capital city, Ho, and the other in a major commercial town, Keta. In contrast, the Eastern region with a population of a little over two million has nine Lodges located in seven cities and towns.

Indeed, the Lodges in Ghana are concentrated in a few cities. Accra, in the Greater Accra region,

and the national capital, has twenty-five Lodges under the English Constitution, representing 44% of the national total; eighteen Lodges under the Scottish Constitution, or 55% of the total; and four Lodges under the Irish Constitution, or 23% of the total.⁵

Cape Coast, the capital of the Central Region, where Masonry was first introduced in Ghana, has five Lodges under the English Constitution; two under the Scottish Constitution and one under the Irish Constitution. Kumasi, the capital of the Ashanti region, has eight Lodges under the English Constitution; four under the Scottish Constitution; and one under the Irish Constitution. Sekondi-Takoradi, the capital of the Western region has, four Lodges under the English Constitution; two under the Scottish Constitution; and one under the Irish Constitution.

In sum, Lodges under the English Constitution are located in fourteen cities and towns. Lodges under the Scottish Constitution are to be found in ten cities and towns. Lodges under the Irish Constitution are in fourteen cities and towns, predominantly, in small towns.⁶

Certain Features of Masonic Practice

The Lodges under the English Constitution practice the English Emulation ritual. The Lodges under the Scottish Constitution use either the Modern Scottish Ritual. The Scottish Lodges may also confer the Mark Master

⁵ 2001 *List of Lodges*, issued by the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia to its Constituent Lodges.

⁶ English Constitution Lodges are located in Accra, Abetifi, Cape Coast, Elmina, Ho, Keta, Koforidua, Kumasi, Saltpond, Sekondi, Sunyani, Tamale, Tarkwa, and Winneba. Scottish Constitution Lodges are in Accra, Akim Oda, Cape Coast, Dunkwa-on-Offin, Koforidua, Kumasi, Obuasi, Sunyani, Takoradi and Winneba. The Irish Constitution Lodges are in Accra, Akwatia, Apam, Cape Coast, Foso, Kumasi, Mampong, Mampong-Akwapim, Mpraeso, Obuasi, Odumasi-Krobo, Saltpond, Sekondi, and Winneba.

Degree. The Irish Lodges use the standard Irish ritual.

Most Lodges have four to six Stated communications in a year. This is in contrast to the practice of our Craft Lodges that typically have Stated communications once or twice a month for the whole year, in addition to any number of Special or Called communications for the conferral of degrees. Masons in Ghana, as in our Jurisdiction are also required to attend Lodge of Instruction, rehearsals and various Committee meetings.

The dress code for all Masons in Ghana, unlike in the US is formal. For stated communications, they are encouraged to attend in formal eveningwear, tuxedo, with white gloves. Increasingly, however, many Masons are attending meetings in black business or dark suits. Masons are required to purchase their regalia, (aprons, sashes, jewels etc.) which are imported from the British Isles and reflect the Constitution of the Lodge where they are to be worn. Unlike our practice in the US where aprons are made available to us outside the Tiler's door to borrow and use for meetings, Masons in Ghana attend Lodge bearing their own regalia in their Apron cases.

Festive Boards, catered dinners, of several courses, follow stated communications. The dinners or Festive Boards are punctuated with the practice of "taking wine" and toasts. "A Masonic Fire" or the singing of Masonic tunes or favorite songs may follow some of the toasts. The cost of dinning, not inexpensive considering the per capita income in the country, is borne by individual Masons. The Festive Boards are considered as after-Lodge proceedings, thus part of the Masonic experience of the evening, and all Masons are encouraged to attend.

Being a Mason in Ghana is an expensive undertaking. The fees for the degrees, festive board expenses and the annual dues represent a

significant percentage of the income of professionals and senior public servants. Moreover, Masons are expected to import regalia, books and other Masonic supplies from the British Isles, which leaves them at the mercy of the foreign currency exchange rate fluctuations. The Lodges themselves also endure this experience, as they have to import their paraphernalia and other supplies from the same commercial establishments on the British Isles. This economic factor, perhaps, explains in part, the slow progress made in democratizing the fraternity and also in establishing Lodges in many more towns in Ghana.

Relations with the Political Authorities

During the colonial era, and for most of the years following independence, Freemasonry has thrived in Ghana while attracting little or no hostile attention from the government in power. This happy equilibrium was disturbed during the early years of the 1980s. The military government of the period promoted an anti-Masonic frenzy that led to attacks on Lodges and Lodge buildings, resulting in some cases in wanton destruction of property. In addition to its adverse pronouncements, the government attempted to confiscate Masonic buildings and other properties. This unfortunate development lasted until 1984, when, after considerable effort, the government rescinded the adverse proclamations previously issued against Freemasonry in Ghana and adopted the hands-off attitude that had been embraced by previous governments. Masons in Ghana, once again, were left free to practice their Craft without undue interference from the government or fear for their safety.

Conclusion

The Craft has taken firm roots in Ghana. It will no doubt continue to grow and spread to all corners of the country. Hopefully, the fraternity will become democratized and rank among its members, men of diverse backgrounds and

socio-economic standing, embracing all God's children. I am partial to and have a particular admiration for the composition of the Lodge Rudyard Kipling rhapsodies in his elegant poem, "The Mother Lodge." I wish all Lodges, Grand Lodges and Masonic Jurisdictions were composed after such a fashion.

SELECTED SOURCES

1. *Masonic Research*, (series) publication of Lodge Research No. 1671, S.C. , Ghana
2. Kent Henderson & Tony Pope, *Freemasonry Universal*, Vols. 1 & 2, Global Masonic Productions, Australia., 2000
3. *List of Lodges* issued annually by the Grand Lodge of District of Columbia to its constituent Lodges. (1990-2001)
4. Brian Lapping, *End of Empire*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1985
5. World Wide Web references including Web pages on Ghana
6. Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia

PERSONAL NOTE:

CAPE COAST, GHANA, MENTIONED HONORABLY IN THE FOREGOING PRESENTATION, IS THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE PRESENTER. THIS COASTAL CITY HAS BEEN CELEBRATED FOR ITS PEDIGREE IN MATTERS MASONIC AS ILLUSTRATED BY THE EXCERPT BELOW. ALSO IDENTIFIED BELOW IS ACCRA, THE CAPITAL CITY OF GHANA.

NOTES ON MASONIC “FIRE” BY: BRO. YOSHIO WASHIZU

(Excerpt from Vol. 111, 1998 *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum Transactions*)

Masonic “FIRE” is an old custom, which may be derived from that of firing after toasts. The original practice was modified by our Masonic ancestors to suit their needs.

The custom of gun-fire salutes after toasts already existed in the 17th century. Dr. Richard Kuerden (or Jackson) MD (1623-1690?) of Preston in Lancashire, compiled a *Brief Description of the Burrough and Town of Preston* (1682-6), in which he described a celebration of the Preston Gild Merchant thus:

“. . .the Mayor, with his great attendance is received in the streets by his guards of Souldiers and Companys of Trade, he makes his procession to the Church gate barrs, where he and his attendance are entertained with a speech made by one of the chief Schollers of the School, a Barrel or Hogshead of nappy Ale standing close by the Barrs is broached, and a glass offered to the Mayor, who begins a good prosperous health to the King, afterwards to the Queen, the Nobility and Gentry having pledged the same; at each health begun by Mr. Mayor, it is attended with a volley of shott from the musketiers attending; the country people there present drinking of the remainder.”

Here is another example of the 17th century custom of toasting associated with gun-fire. In February 1694 Captain Thomas Phillips, in his account of the voyage of the ship ‘Hannibal’, referred to a similar practice thus:

In this garden [of **Cape Coast** Castle on the West Coast of Africa] Captain Shurley and I entertain'd the agents, factors, and other officers of the castle at dinner before our departure . . . where we enjoy'd ourselves plentifully, having each of us six of our quarter-deck guns brought ashore, with powder, &c., and our gunners to ply them; which they did to purpose, and made them roar merrily, firing eleven at every health.

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Two months later Phillips and some other officers dined with the native chief who occupied Christiansborg Castle,¹ having captured it from the Danes. When they were ascended, the Chief drank to them in a glass of brandy and all the guns in the fort were discharged. After dinner he 'drank the king of England's, the African company's, and our own healths frequently, with volleys of cannon.' (Christiansborg is in **Accra**)

Some believe, however, that such a practice has nothing to do with the origin of the term, Masonic 'fire,' but that it is rather the conversion into reality of what is really a metaphor.

It is unknown exactly when Masonic 'fire' started. Anderson recorded in his *New Book of Constitutions* (1738) that Desaguliers, the newly installed Grand Master, 'reviv'd the old regular and peculiar Toasts or Healths of the Free Masons' on June 24, 1719. We do not know what those 'old regular and peculiar Toasts' were like and whether or not the 'firing' was practiced then. It is in French exposures published in the late 1730s and the early 1740s that we find the earliest reference to the practice of Masonic 'fire.' For example, here is an extract from the Reception d'un Frey Macon (1737):

. . . this ceremony [initiation] ended, & this explanation given, the Candidate is called Brother, & they seat themselves at Table, where they drink, with the permission of the Worshipful Grand Master [the W.M.] to the health of the new Brother. Each has his Bottle before him; when they want to drink, they say, give the Powder, everyone rises, the Grand Master says, *charge*; the Powder, which is the Wine, is poured into the, glass; the Grand Master says, lay your hands to your firelocks [arms], and they drink to the health of the Brother, carrying the glass to the mouth in three movements; after which, & before replacing the glass on the Table, it is carried to the left breast, then to the right, & then forwards, all in three movements, & in three movements it is set down perpendicularly on the Table, they clap their hands three times & each of them cries three times Vivat.