

Masons and Texas - History and Heritage

The Masons of Texas have much for which to be proud, for it is said that the history of Texas and Masons are so interwoven that they can't be separated. The first known Mason to come to Texas was Major Zebulon M. Pike, in 1806-07. Masons were among the first Americans to migrate to Texas about 1821. At the age of 27, Stephen F. Austin, a Master Mason, accepted and successfully carried out his father's deathbed request to settle three-hundred families on a land grant he had obtained from Mexico. Austin was authorized by Governor Antonio Martinez to carry on the colonization under his father's grant. Martinez warned Austin that the Mexican government was not prepared to extend administration over the colonist and that Austin must be responsible for their good conduct.

By the 1830's, the settlers from the United States outnumbered the Texas Mexicans and the Mexican dictator Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna imposed measures to reverse this trend. The settlers rebelled, and the Mexican government outlawed Masonry in Texas on October 25, 1828 because of the political philosophies of Texas Masons. In 1828, Austin and six other Masons met to form a Masonic Lodge in Texas; however it was never chartered. In March 1835, five Master Masons met beneath an oak tree in Brazoria and petitioned Grand Master John H. Holland of Louisiana for a charter to form a lodge in Texas. By the end of 1837, three lodges had been chartered in Texas by the Grand Lodge of Louisiana. On December 20, 1837, President Sam Houston presided over a convention of representatives of these three lodges and elected Anson Jones the first Grand Master of Masons in Texas.

Freemasonry was not so much the instrument of political change, as it was simply the most natural forum for the exemplification of those principals and tenets that free men hold most dear. On March 1, 1836, Sam Houston and 58 other delegates rode into Washington-on-the-Brazos for a Convention to declare independence from Mexico. Twenty-two of these delegates were Masons. The Convention appointed Sam Houston Commander-in-Chief of the Texas Army. Eleven of the twenty-five on the committee appointed to draw up a Constitution of the Republic were Masons. The men who led the revolution and formed the government were, by and large, active Masons whose Masonic philosophy was the inspiration behind their deeds.

Between 1838 and 1845 the Texas Grand Lodge issued charters to twenty-one more lodges, and membership increased from seventy-

three to 357. In addition, there were probably some 1,100 Masons from other jurisdictions living in Texas at this time. From the Texans' resolve to gain independence from Mexico, to the annexation by the United States, Masons took most of the major parts. Although constituting only 1½ percent of the population, Masons filled some 80 percent of the republic's higher offices. Every president and vice president of the Republic of Texas was a Mason, as was the first governor. Every chief justice of the Republic was a Mason. Fifteen Masons were in the first House of Representatives and seven were in the first Senate, and eleven in the executive branch. Thirty-one governors of Texas were Masons, and two of the governors also served as the Grand Master of Masons in Texas. Many cities and towns, and 102 Texas counties were named for men who were Masons. Schools, buildings and awards are named for them. The first public building in a new community was often a two story Masonic Lodge, with the first floor serving as a school classroom or meeting hall.

Masons have a good reason to be proud of their heritage and involvement in the history of Texas, and they continue to affect the course of Texas history today. Masons of Texas practice the tenets of the Fraternity, to assure "the world at large may be convinced of its good effects."

- Based on information from the Grand Lodge of Texas Library and Museum, Waco Texas. Written by Loyd O. Addy, Sr., Grand Lodge of Texas History Committee.