

The Founding Freemasons of Vermont

By Steve Farrington, Grand Historian (2013)

WPM, RWPDDGM, MSA

*Come York or come Hampshire, come traitors or knaves,
If ye rule o'er our land ye shall rule o'er our graves;
Our vow is recorded—our banner unfurled,
In the name of Vermont we defy all the world!*

From John Greenleaf Whittier's poem; "Song of the Vermonters, 1779"

Being in Irasburg, Vermont it is appropriate that we look at the founders of Vermont and their Masonic Affiliation. It is interesting to note that many of Vermont's founders were also the founders of Vermont Freemasonry.

(It reminds me of a story – recount your visit to Abilene, TX..) In seriousness the real point of the story is not that Texas and Vermont were both independent republics, but they were also founded by men who were Freemasons. In Texas they were men like Stephen Austin, Sam Houston, Anson Jones, Lorezo de Zavala, Jose Navarro, and Juan Sequin. It also included 22 of the 180 men who fought and died at the Alamo including William Travis, Jim Bowie, David Crockett and James Bonham. Incidentally, there was also a Vermonter at the Alamo from Bradford, VT, Miles Deforest Andross.

Like the settlers of Texas men and their families moved up from Connecticut for new farm land or an opportunity to reestablish themselves, calling the new territory "New Connecticut (changed to Vermont in the Constitution of 1777). In those days people followed the river valleys from the coasts to land that was not so populated. Much of the New England had become settled since the 1600s including most of Connecticut, Rhode Island, Eastern Massachusetts, Southern New Hampshire, the coast of Maine. However, northern Maine and New Hampshire, western Massachusetts and most of Vermont represented the frontier, much like the frontier that existed west of the Mississippi in the 1800s.

A number of the men coming to New Connecticut from Connecticut and Massachusetts were already Freemasons and as communities were established sought to form Masonic lodges that were either chartered by Connecticut, Massachusetts, or Canada. The 1780's marked the start to Freemasonry in our state with the formation of five lodges during that decade; Vermont Lodge #1; Springfield, North Star Lodge; Manchester, Dorchester Lodge, Vergennes, Temple Lodge; Bennington, and Union Lodge Middlebury.

Two well known Vermont Founders Ira Allen and Thomas Chittenden were initiated in Vermont Lodge #1 on June 26, 1782 and finished their degrees in North Star Lodge after it was chartered in 1785. It wasn't unusual back then that lodges conducted their business on the first degree

Looking at the rosters of all the five lodges that were founded during the 1780s you would find that the leadership of each of them were also the leaders of their particular communities as well as comprising the leadership of the Vermont Republic that was in existence then. It is also interesting to note that some were members of more than one lodge, probably because they helped to start the other lodges of that period.

While we find travel from one end of the state to the other arduous today it seemed almost common place for them in those days. Although Vermont Lodge #1 had been chartered by Massachusetts under Grand Master Joseph Webb and Grand Senior Warden Paul Revere for the town of Springfield it tended to meet in Charlestown, NH across the river. Its membership included brothers as far north as Thetford, VT and as far south as Keene and Winchester, NH. Today it would not take that much to get in our cars and drive a couple of hours or less to reach Charlestown for a lodge meeting. Imagine then, in the 1700s, men coming from such distances on horse back and possibly venturing back again at night; it would be at least an all day trip. However, the men who led our lodges and the young Republic of Vermont would make such trips to serve in the many capacities they held.

Freemason Founders of Vermont

Who were some of our founding brethren who founded Vermont Freemasonry and the State?

Ethan Allen – was not the blustering heavy drinking braggart one might image him to be. He was a charismatic leader of vision and intellect. Unlike the other founders he was only an Entered Apprentice. He was the oldest of six children and at the age of twelve he was sent to live in the home of a Congregational Minister in Litchfield, CT along with some other young boys, to be given a classical education in preparation to being admitted to Yale University. Unfortunately, his father died and he had to return home to do what he could to keep the family farm going. In his time he wrote three books on deism and six pamphlets on philosophy and government. Well known among his writings is; “Reason the Oracle of Man.” Thomas Paine even referred to him in his own writings. Allen, his brothers Levi, Ira and cousin Remember Baker went to Vermont where they formed the Onion River Land Co to purchase and develop land under the New Hampshire Land Grants. They also formed an irregular group of militiamen known as the Green Mountain Boys to protect their efforts to promote more settlement in Vermont

against claimants from New York.. Ethan Allen became a legendary hero for leading troops that took Ft Ticonderoga and capturing the guns that were eventually used by the Continental Army and later serving with Benedict Arnold as one of the leaders of the ill-fated attempt to capture Montreal. He died in 1789 at the age of 51 of a possible heart attack.

Thomas Chittenden – Served as the first Master of Dorchester Lodge in 1791. However, having served as head of the Vermont Republic from 1778 to 1788, and then the first Governor of Vermont starting in 1790 and ending in 1796, he had to delegate his authority as Master of Dorchester Lodge to his Senior Warden William Brush. He was born in East Guilford, CT in 1730. Before coming to Vermont he was a Justice of the Peace in Salisbury, CT and served in the Colonial Assembly from 1765 to 1769. He served in Connecticut's 14th regiment from 1767 to 1773 rising to the rank of Colonel. Moving to Vermont in 1774 he became one of the first settlers of Williston, Vermont. He was a member of the commission negotiating with the Continental Congress during the Revolution to admit Vermont into the Union. Congress declined at that time so as not to offend New York or New Hampshire, especially during the conflict with Britain. This helped to prompt the other leaders of Vermont to form a convention at Windsor to establish Vermont as an independent republic. The first ever formed in North America.

Noah Smith – member of North Star Lodge, founding member of Temple Lodge and the first Grand Master of Vermont. He served Vermont as a Justice of the Vermont Supreme Court in the years 1789, 90, 98, 99 and 1800.

Col. Seth Warner – It is believed that Seth Warner during the course of his military career became a mason. His signature was found on the by-laws of Union Lodge # 1, now Mt. Vernon Lodge #3 the oldest lodge in New York , outside of the city. Col. Seth Warner was one of the commanders of the Green Mountain Boys before the Revolution. While serving in that capacity the New York authorities put a price on his head, but he was never captured. He was noted for commanding troops the capture of Fort Crown Point, the Battle of Longueuil, the [siege of Quebec](#), [the covering of the retreat from Canada](#), and his leadership at the battles of Hubbardton and Bennington. Although not directly related to Ethan Allen, both men were related to Remember Baker. His military experience went back to his serving in the army during the French and Indian War while a teenager. Warner learned some of the arts of medicine from his father who was a physician, and was a self-taught herbalist, which enabled him to attend to the ailments of his friends when not otherwise occupied. At 20, he moved to Vermont to help his father build on the land that he purchased near Bennington. On July 24, 1776 Warner attended a convention in Dorset, VT, one of a series of meetings held during the year that led to the formation of Vermont as an independent Republic. Warner and all but one delegate pledged “at the Risk of our Lives and fortunes to defend, by arms, the United American States against the Hostile attempts of the British Fleets and Armies, until the present unhappy Controversy between the two Countries shall be settled.” As a result of all his

military campaigns during the Revolution Warner suffered from ill health and returned to his former home in Woodbury, now Roxbury, CT., where he died in 1784 at the age of 41.

Col. John Chipman – Was one of the founders Middlebury, VT and Union Lodge serving as its first Master. Served as an officer with the Green Mountain Boys and was a part of the force that took Fort Ticonderoga. He served as Grand Master of Vermont Masons from 1797 to 1814.

Dr. Jonas Fay – Was one of the founding members of North Star Lodge in Manchester. In 1766 he was one of the early settlers of Bennington. Serving in 1772 as part of the peace delegation that met with Gov. Tryon of New York calling for the end of violence against Vermont settlers. That having failed, in 1774 he served as clerk of the convention of settlers that drew up resolutions to defend their cause and their leaders by force. In 1775 he accompanied the forces that attacked Fort Ticonderoga as military surgeon. He served as clerk at the Dorset Convention of 1776 to prepare a petition to Congress that Vermont serve the Colonial cause independent of New York. Following that he was Secretary of the Vermont Convention in 1777 that framed the constitution for the Republic of Vermont. From 1771 he represented Vermont as agent of the State to the Continental Congress. He was on the Governor's Council from 1778 to 85, and Judge of the Supreme Court in 1782.

Col. John Barrett – Was the first Master of Vermont Lodge #1 and later a charter member of Olive Branch Lodge in Chester. He served in the Revolutionary War under General Gates and had been charged with the building of a military road between Fort #4 in Charlestown to the base of Fort Independence in New York. He served as the Town Clerk of Springfield and represented that town in the General Assembly of 1778.

Col. John House – A charter member of Vermont Lodge and one of the original grantees of the Town of Bethel. After the burning of Royalton in 1780 due to an Indian raid he led a force of several hundred militia in pursuit of the raiding party.

Major General Roger Enos – a member of Vermont Lodge #1 was one of the commanders of Vermont soldiers during the Revolution and the father in law of Ira Allen. He was one of the Grantees of Waitsfield and later Enosburg for which the town is named. Enos moved to Vermont from Connecticut in 1776 settling on a farm in Hartford. But, due to his previous military experience was appointed a Colonel in the Vermont militia and later was made Brigadier General in charge of the Vermont militia in 1781. In 1782 he established defenses along Lake Champlain against British troops still stationed at Fort Ticonderoga to make sure they did not invade Vermont. Later after moving to Colchester and resigning his commission he served in the Vermont House of Representatives and was a member of the Board of Trustees for the University of Vermont.

Gen. Benjamin Wait – Was raised to the sublime degree of a Master Mason in Vermont Lodge #1 in 1784. He settled in Windsor in 1767 and for several years served as High

Sheriff of the County. Prior to coming to Vermont he served as an officer in the army during the French and Indian War participating in more than forty battles and skirmishes without being wounded. In the Revolution he received commissions from captain to colonel, and was later made Brigadier General in the Vermont Militia. He was one of the first settlers of Waitsfield for which the town is named, representing it in the Vermont legislature in 1795.

Israel Smith – Member of North Star Lodge. He served in the Vermont House of Representatives in 1785. Member of the 1789 Commission to settle troubles with New York. Served as Chief Justice of the Vermont Supreme Court in 1797. A member of Congress from 1801 to 1803. In 1803 he served in the US Senate until he was successfully elected the fourth Governor of Vermont in 1807.

Nathaniel Chipman – Member of North Star Lodge. He served as Lieutenant in the Connecticut 2nd Regiment from 1777 to 1778. Coming to Vermont in 1779 he started practicing law in Tinmouth and then served as State's Attorney in Montpelier from 1781 to 1785 and a member of the [Vermont House of Representatives](#) in 1784 and 1785. He was elected as judge of the [Vermont Supreme Court](#) in 1786 and chosen chief justice in 1789. On March 4, 1791, Chipman was nominated by President [George Washington](#) to be a federal judge on the newly established [United States District Court for the District of Vermont](#). He then resigned on January 1, 1793, to return to the Vermont Supreme Court and was again elected [Chief Justice](#) 1796. Following that he served in the US Senate from 1797 to 1803 and then in the Vermont House of Representatives from 1806 to 1811.

Anthony Haswell – Member of North Star Lodge. His was born in Portsmouth, England in 1756. Coming to Boston in his teens and apprenticing in a print shop it is believed that he became a member of the Sons of Liberty during the Revolution and help print pamphlets that were circulated by the organization. He settled in Bennington in 1783 becoming only the second printer in Vermont. He was soon appointed Postmaster General of Vermont. until Vermont joined the Union in 1791. He and partner David Russell founded the Vermont Gazette, and built Vermont's first paper mill. The Publishing in 1785 of Ethan Allen's book, "Reason, the Oracle of Man" brought him some notoriety. He open branch offices for his printing business in Vergennes, VT and Litchfield, CT, and later founded the Rutland Herald in 1792.

Stephen Jacob – Member of Vermont Lodge #1. The Stephen Jacob house still stands at 70-74 Main Street in Windsor and is owned by Historic Windsor, Inc. He was born in 1755 in Sheffield, MA one of eleven children. He graduated from Yale in 1778 and moved to Windsor, VT with his new bride in the early 80s. He became a very prominent lawyer with more than half the cases heard in any given court session being represented by him. After Vermont joined the Union President Washington appointed Jacobs Vermont's first Federal District Attorney, which he held from 1791 to 1797. Other positions he held while living in Vermont included serving as Representative to the

Vermont legislature; selectman, lister, moderator, and school trustee for the town of Windsor, clerk of the Vermont House of Representatives, Chief Judge of the Windsor County Court, Member of Vermont's Constitutional Convention of 1793, Governor's Council from 1796 to 1801, and many others.

Isaac Tichenor - Was a member of Temple Lodge in Bennington. Born in Newark, New Jersey in 1754, graduated from Princeton in 1775 and studied law in Schenectady, New York and moving to Bennington in 1777. He represented Bennington in the Vermont House from 1781 to 84, serving as Speaker in 1783. He represented Vermont to the Continental Congress in its claim to be admitted to the Union from 1782 to 1789. In 1791 he was elected to the US House of Representatives while also serving as Associate Justice of the Vermont Supreme Court from 1791 to 1794 and Chief Justice 1795 and 96. In 1796 he was elected to complete the unexpired term in the US Senate of Moses Robinson and then reelected in 1797 only to resign when he was elected Governor of Vermont.

Ira Allen - Initiated in Vermont Lodge #1 in 1782 and finished his degrees in North Star Lodge in 1785. He was born in 1751 in Cornwall, CT, the youngest of six sons, his brother Ethan being the oldest. He went to Vermont to serve as a surveyor for the Onion River Land Co. set up to purchase and develop land under the New Hampshire Grants. He served in the Vermont Legislature from 1776-77, and was part of the convention establishing Vermont as an Independent Republic. Militarily he served with his brother and cousins in the Green Mountain Boys joining with them in the expedition to capture Fort Ticonderoga and later the invasion of Canada.

Using his involvement in the Onion River Land Co. he purchased numerous tracks of land throughout Vermont making him not only the largest land owner in the state, but also one of largest land owners in New England, owning at one time over 200,000 acres of land. In 1780 he presented a memorial to the Vermont Legislature with a sum of money and 50 acre track of land in Burlington for the building of the University of Vermont.

Irasburg - Irasburg was established in 1781 when the land was granted to Ira Allen, and Roger Enos, and his family and others by the Vermont General Assembly. Ira later acquired the rights to the land from the other proprietors and deeded the town to his wife Jerusha Enos as a wedding gift.

Why should we care about the Freemasons who founded Masonry in Vermont while founding a state? Simply to understand our origins and heritage. Men came to Vermont either to reestablish themselves in terms of career, and to be their own person, or to seek their fortune. There was not television, ball games or country clubs to take up a man's social time, except for attending church or belonging to a social society. Freemasonry was a place to keep in touch with moral principle, while at the same time serving as the

Rotary Club, or Chamber of Commerce of the period. It was a center for networking and discussing the issues of the day. It also had a structure of governance and procedure that learned by its members could be applied to other formal activities that they might get involved with. As Dr. Stephen Bullock, the author of the "Revolutionary Brotherhood" once stated, "Masonic lodges were once looked upon as academies of leadership."

Today we admonish our members not to talk about politics or religion in the lodge in order to maintain harmony. However, in truth during that period of time that was known as the "Age of Enlightenment", in the United States as well as Europe, men did discuss the issues of the time. Being of like mind did not mean you always agreed with one another, but that you agreed to subdue your passions and not be disagreeable or disrespectful in your discussions, but to conduct yourself in a harmonious and brotherly way. By gathering in friendship and fellowship under more relaxed conditions I can't help but conjecture that some of the actions taken by Vermont's founders were initially conceived in the lodge, but acted upon not as masons but as citizens of Vermont.

It can therefore be said that the Masonic Lodge was and is a place for contemplation and evaluation of concepts both material and philosophical, testing their merit before one commits themselves to action in the real world.

References for this article:

Lee S. Tilotson's "Ancient Craft Masonry in Vermont"

Phoenixmasonry and Builders Magazine

Historic Windsor, Inc.

Wikipedia