



ANDERSON'S CONSTITUTIONS
An Address By Dr. Bing Johnson, 32°
Orator of the Montrose Lodge of Perfection
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This book is said to be the most important Masonic book ever published. This copy was published by the Masonic Book Club and is a fine example of the bookmaker's art. Look at the paper, printing and gold lettering. Only 333 copies were printed.

Anderson's Constitutions as it is commonly called is the foundation of law and is the bedrock of our Craft. It is to Masonry what the United States Constitution is to America. It is an amalgam of the Gothic Constitutions or Old Charges which were a collection of 130 documents written over a period of 600 years by English and Scottish Masons starting with the Regius Poem written about 1390.

Dr. James Anderson published *THE CONSTITUTIONS of the FREEMASONS* in London in 1723 and is the most important Masonic book ever published. The laws set forth have been the foundation of Masonic law throughout the world. It contained the first speculative Constitutions and Regulations which are considered fundamental even today. It was approximately 8 X 10 inches and contained 91 pages of text and has been reprinted in facsimile more often than any other Masonic book. He has been both praised and derided by some as unreliable, yet we are forced to rely on his words on the early history of the premiere Grand Lodge.

Anderson's work was accepted, respected, copied, explained and enlarged upon by Preston, Hutchinson, Oliver, and Mackey.

It was the first Masonic book published in the Western Hemisphere. *The PENNSYLVANIA GAZETTE* published by Benjamin Franklin announced its sale in the May 9 to May 16, 1734 issue for a price of 2s6 for the stitched and 4s for the bound edition which had been printed by Franklin. It was considered as fundamental law by a number of Grand Lodges. Copies of this edition are more rare than the original book by Anderson. Approximately 127 copies are known to exist.

Anderson was born about 1678 in Aberdeen, Scotland, the son of a glass worker. He was educated at Marischal College of Aberdeen where he received a Master of Arts degree and later a Doctor of Divinity in 1731.

In 1710 he became a minister of a Scottish Presbyterian Church on Swallow St., Piccadilly, London. He wrote many works, mostly about genealogy. In 1732 his principal work, *ROYAL GENEALOGIES, OR THE GENEALOGICAL TABLES OF EMPERORS, KINGS, PRINCES, FROM ADAM TO THESE TIMES*, was published. He had a tendency toward exaggeration which also was evident in his Masonic writing.

He probably became a Mason in Aberdeen Lodge. He stated that the Grand Master, the Duke of Montagu, said ‘~ the Grand Lodge finding fault with all the copies of the old *GOTHIC CONSTITUTIONS*, order'd Bro. James Anderson, A. M. to digest the same in a new and better method.’ On Mar 25, 1722 the Grand Lodge approved Anderson's History, Charges, Regulations and Master's song. He was appointed Grand Warden. *THE BOOK OF CONSTITUTIONS of the FREEMASONS* was printed Jan 17, 1723.

After 1723 Anderson seldom attended Grand Lodge and dropped out of the records until 1735 when he complained to the Grand Lodge that one Smith had

pirated his *CONSTITUTIONS of 1723* and that a new Book of Constitutions was needed. Three years later he issued his *CONSTITUTIONS of 1738*, purporting it to be the official publication of the Grand Lodge. Although it was 1754 before a new Book of Constitutions was issued. It was really no more than the one of 1738 with a new title page.

For the first six years of its existence the Grand Lodge conducted business with out a constitution, by laws, rules or regulations and with out even keeping minuets, since they didn't have a secretary until Jan 24, 1723. Anderson reconstructed the Grand Lodge Minuets from 1716 to 1723 And they were published in the *CONSTITUTIONS OF 1723*.

Dr. Anderson and his committee undoubtedly worked from one or more copies of the *GOTHIC CONSTITUTIONS* which mostly contained the legendary history of Masonry and Geometry, the two apparently being deemed the same.

Half of Anderson's book published in 1723 was devoted to his imaginary history of the Craft. While we would consider much of it nonsensical, it was not considered so at the time or for more than a century afterwards. The following example was accepted as authentic Masonic history up to the time of the Civil War "the Israelites, at their leaving Egypt were a whole Kingdom of Masons, well instructed under the conduct of their Grand Master Moses who often marshall'd them into a regular and general Lodge, while in the Wilderness, and gave them wise Charges, Orders and & c."

Anderson died May 28,1739. The following is from a newspaper account: "Last night was interr'd the corpse of Dr. Anderson, a Dissenting Teacher, in a remarkable deep grave. His Pall was supplied by five Dissenting Teachers, and the Rev. Dr. Desaguliers. It was followed by about a Dozen Freemasons who encircled the Grave; and after Earle had harangued on the Uncertainty of Life, & c, without

one word of the Deceased, the Brethren, in a most solemn Posture lifted up their Hands, Sigh'd and struck their aprons three times in Honor of the Deceased. It is ironic that our most important Masonic book, which sets forth the foundation of Masonic law is relatively unknown to most of us.

Information sources:

1. Anderson, J., Facsimile Pages of *THE CONSTITUTIONS of the FREEMASONS*, Benjamin Franklin's edition of Anderson's *Constitutions*, Masonic Book Club, V 2, 1971
2. Coil, H. W., *COILS MASONIC ENCYCLOPEDIA*, 1995, p 146-146. Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply Co., Inc.