

Landmarks of Masonry

-Scott Rowe

The Landmarks of Masonry are one of the most interesting and debated facets of the craft. They stir controversy because unlike the written work of the rituals, the landmarks were never actually recorded at the inception of Masonry.

Nevertheless they are assumed to be as inviolate as the work itself and their preservation, and adherence to, are the duty of every Grand Lodge and for that matter every Mason. Naturally over time, well meaning Masons have attempted to put the landmarks to page and of the many interpretations those of Albert Mackey and Roscoe Pound are considered the clearest definitions. The controversy begins because even those two brilliant men differed somewhat in the way they expressed them.

Roscoe Pound summed up the Landmarks in 9 more generalized points while Albert Mackey felt it was necessary to separate the actual landmarks into 25 distinct items. Both explain very clearly how Masonry should be conducted, but at the same time expose none of its actual secrets. The following version of Mackey's is slightly modified because of the restrictions of space in this article but fully cover what both he and Pound separately understood to be correct:

Landmark First: Modes of Recognition.

Landmark Second: The Division of Masonry into Three Degrees

Landmark Third: The Legend of the Third Degree and the story of Hiram Abiff.

Landmark Fourth: Government of the Craft by a Grand Master elected from the body of the lodges.

Landmark Fifth: The prerogative of the Grand master to preside over every assembly of the Craft

Landmark Sixth: The ability of the Grand Master to grant dispensation for the conferring of degrees at any special or irregular meeting.

Landmark Seventh: The power of the Grand Master to grant the opening or holding of any lodge.

Landmark Eighth: The supreme power of the Grand Master to infer the degree of Mason on site.

Landmark Ninth: The importance and the necessity of Masons to meet in lodges.

Landmark Tenth: The governing of a lodge meeting by a Master and his two Wardens.

Landmark Eleventh: The necessity that any lodge be duly tiled when congregated.

Landmark Twelfth: The right of every Mason that he may attend any General Meeting of his Craft and to instruct his representatives of the same.

Landmark Thirteenth: The right of any Mason to appeal from the decision of his lodge to Grand Lodge or a General Assembly of Masons.

Landmark Fourteenth: The right of every Mason to sit in any regularly assembled lodge anywhere.

Landmark Fifteenth: No visitor may enter lodge unknown to the Brethern, without someone vouching for his proof or having passed the customary examination as per Ancient Custom.

Landmark Sixteenth: No lodge may interfere in the business of another lodge or grant degrees of Masonry to other lodges' members without specific permission.

Landmark Seventeenth: Even if a Mason is not a member of any lodge where he resides he must be amenable to the laws of that jurisdiction.

Landmark Eighteen: Certain qualifications of a candidate are understood to be a Landmark.

Landmark Nineteenth: A belief in the existence of God as the Grand Geometrician of the Universe.

Landmark Twentieth: A belief in the resurrection to a future life

Landmark Twenty-first: The Book of the Law shall be a part of the furniture of any lodge.

Landmark Twenty-second: The equality of all Masons

Landmark Twenty-third: The secrecy of the institution.

Landmark Twenty-fourth: The foundation of speculative science upon an operative art, and the use of the tools of that art as symbols to for moral or religious teaching

Landmark Twenty-fifth: That the above landmarks can never be changed.

There is little debate about the methods Masons are taught to recognize each other and since the inception of Masonry these methods have not changed. Although the exact wording may change due to language variations around the world the division of Masonry into three distinct degrees and the importance of the legend of Hiram Abif have always been a mainstay of the Craft.

The Fourth through Eighth landmarks show the importance of having one Grand Master. The office of Grand Master was actually an appointment deemed necessary even before the creation of the first Grand Lodges and ensures that only one person, properly elected, may have the final power to make important changes.

The Ninth through Thirteenth Landmarks preserve the sanctity of the lodge as a meeting place and clearly states the rights and protections of every Mason.

Landmark Fourteenth is what makes Masonry a universal science which goes beyond borders and social strata. No Mason may be denied the right to visit any other lodge and by definition this encourages all masons to travel and enjoy the benefits of friendship and social intercourse all over the world.

Landmark Fifteenth is a sensible method of proving the worthiness of any visitor to enter a Masonic Lodge. It is not meant to mean an affront to that visitor but only a test before a warm welcome.

Landmark Sixteenth and Seventeenth help ensure the peaceful coexistence of adjacent lodges while preventing the disruption a non member might bring from introducing the by-laws of another jurisdiction of which he calls his mother lodge.

Landmark Eighteenth assumes for reasons that were felt to be important to our early founders that all candidates for admission come free born, of mature age and good report. In fact these simple requirements are the only stipulations and no others are asked or stipulated, excepting of course that the order is limited to men only.

Landmarks Nineteenth through Twenty-First spell out the requirements that are expected of every Mason and are reaffirmed by the oaths taken in each degree. Without the belief in a Supreme Being the very act of taking such vows would be blasphemous. Because the Book of the Law may vary by jurisdictions it could be more properly said to be whatever Book of divine

wisdom is preferred in each country whether that book be a Bible, a Koran, or the Torah. Masonry makes no claim on which Book is correct.

Landmark Twenty-second is extremely important because it states that Masons are all equal. We are taught that Masons come from all manner of rank, fortune and circumstance, but in a lodge we are equal in the sight of the Supreme Being and each other.

Landmark Twenty-third, the necessity for secrecy, has caused a great deal of misconception about Masonry in the general public which from time to time believes that the society harbours dangerous political or dangerous moral beliefs. Although obviously neither the actual fact nor the intention, the very act of secrecy helps ensure the teachings are only made available to approved candidates and under the proper teaching.

Landmark Twenty-Fourth explains the speculative art of Masonry is taught with operative tools. These tools and instruments remain the same and only their description may have been embellished since the very beginnings of Masonry.

Landmark Twenty-fifth states almost redundantly that the above Landmarks cannot be changed.

One well known dictionary has four basic definitions for the word landmark. It can be considered as a prominent identifying feature of a landscape, a fixed marker that indicates a boundary line, an event marking an important stage of development, or a building or site with historical significance worth preserving.

In a sense the landmarks of Masonry can actually be described by any one of the four above definitions. They are a prominent feature and the glue which binds the Craft together, they indicate a set of boundaries within which all Grand Lodges are expected to operate, they mark the culmination and perfection as we believe it to be of Masonic development, and like any historical building or site they are deemed by Masons to be worth preserving.

Indeed a system of teachings that has stood the test of time through centuries of political and religious change has thus proven the validity of its beliefs and the effectiveness of these Landmarks.

It should inspire us as Masons to ensure that this is passed on to future generations in a pristine a form as it was presented to us.

Masonic Landmarks show us how to do that.