

# Freemasonry in South Africa

## The beginnings

The Dutch East India Company,(The V.O.C.) sent Jan van Riebeeck at the head of a small delegation to The Cape of Good Hope to established a refreshment station in 1652.

It soon became one of the most important stopovers en-route from one end of the earth to the other. Travelers from all corners of the Earth, found them selves in Cape Town, this benign and comfortable harbour, bristling with ships of every navy, it enjoyed, fresh food in abundance, the best wines in the world, flowing freely in all the taverns, aptly known as “The Tavern of the seas”.

As the population grew, slowly at first and then in a rush, culture found a fertile community in which to take root, Churches, Schools and Theatres, were established. There were Balls at the Castle, fine manners became the order of the day, into this amalgam, Freemasonry started. Though many nations added ingredients to the melting pot, the source of the culture was very much Dutch and it is there that we must look for South African Freemasonry’s birth.

Freemasonry blossomed in Holland in a curious way.

A young nobleman at the age of 23 found himself at The Hague in 1731, His name was Francis Stephen and he had succeeded his father Leopold, as the Duke of Lorraine some two years earlier. (1)

He decided that he wanted to be a Freemason, where he got this notion from, we have no idea, but we do know that he got in touch with the Grand Master of The Grand Lodge of England, Lord Loyal.

Loyal was not going to let this catch get away, Francis was the first European Prince to be initiated into Freemasonry, if that was not enough he was already betrothed to Maria Teresa then aged 14 eldest living child of Charles VI of Germany (2)

Lord Loyal sent a delegation of six very senior masons to The Hague, headed by no less than Dr Theophilus Desaguliers the third Grand Master, and credited with drawing Royalty and Noblemen into the Order and with him The Earl of Chesterfield Young Francis Stephen was initiated and raised between 14 May and 24 June 1731. He was passed, (made a Master Mason) later in the same year, when on a visit to London.

His influence on masonry was immense not only in Holland but in the whole of Europe. He became a staunch supporter of Freemasons. Lodges started to be formed in Holland with noble men taking the helm, Count Vincent de la Chappelle was the first Grand Master.

In 1735 Francis surrendered his Dukedom of Lorraine under the treaty of Vienna, to King Stanislaus who was crowned on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1736 so that he could marry Maria Teresa . This may seem like an enormous sacrifice for love, but there were Grand plans a foot.

On the death of Gaston de Medici he succeeded to the Grand Duchy of Tuscany, in 1737. He immediately declared himself ‘The Protector of Masons and put his money where his mouth was .He freed the Masons arrested by the Inquisition and refused to let Pope Clements’s bull against Freemasons, be promulgated, in his Duchy

His wife Maria Teresa was crowned Empress of Austria in 1740 and she made him Regent.

In 1745 he was crowned Francis I of Germany. AQC37 +76 Gould vol VI p 161)

He and Maria Teresa were a powerful couple and very happily married, in spite of the fact that they disagreed strongly over Freemasonry. Family dinners must have been fun, often she and her ministers would clamp down on Masonry and Francis would have to undo the damage, more often than not he won, but on a few occasions he did not.

You can guess that he did not get to lodge much, but masons were glad to point to him as one of their own and included him when ever they could.

In the midst of this family life they had nine children one of which was the unfortunate Marie Antoinette the Queen of France Guillotined on 16 October 1793.

At first the Lodges in Holland were granted warrants from the Grand lodge of England, this situation carried on until 1770. The Lodges in Holland acted almost as if it were a Province of English Freemasonry (De GH xviii).After “ The Convention” of 2 March 1770 ‘The Grand Lodge of The United Netherlands’ was formed and they took control of their own destiny

The Dutch East India Company was a trading and colonizing organization founded under a charter granted by the Government of the United Netherlands, in The Hague on March 20, 1602. It was run by The Heeren XV11 (Lords17) (E of SA165) as a private company. When they established a refreshment station at the Cape in 1652, it was as a private enterprise. It was not their intention to develop it into a fully fledged colony, this happened almost in spite of themselves.

The Cape was lush, the climate gentle and held so much promise it was inevitable that it would blossom and grow. This growth started in 1657, when nine company servants “were allowed their freedom to establish private farms” (Dav 19). A few years later, the Governor, Simon van der Stel, granted land to a further 20 settlers and then a further 180 settlers in 1689. Adrieaan van der Stel who succeeded him was less enthusiastic and the process slowed down almost coming to a standstill. In 1750 the company started a new drive and was so successful that by the time that The Company’s rule came to an end in 1795 there was a population of 15000 in The Cape.

‘The Company’ (The VOC ) knew exactly what it was there for, to make money, and they were not too fussed, how and from whom. The British and the French were forever bickering at one another, some times they broke out into open warfare, mostly they were simply abrasive to one another, never-the-less The Company served them both, as well as the ships of any other nation who stopped in Cape Town and every one was comfortable with this arrangement.

Brittan was fairly relaxed in its relationship with Holland, and saw no need to interfere with arrangements at the Cape, even though ‘The Company’ employed French and Swiss Mercenaries to guard and police its interests. Many of these mercenaries stayed on to make homes for them selves; they brought families out to join them. Although the administration was very definitely Dutch, the Community was becoming decidedly French; they added elegance to the society to such an extent that it was often called Petit Paris du Sud.

The first suggestion of Freemasonry in the Cape Came from one Jacobus Cornelis Matthews Rademacher, a senior merchant with the company, he called at Cape Town when homeward bound from Java . Impressed with the possibilities of a lodge being started , he recommended on his return to Holland in 1764, that steps be taken to found a lodge. ( AACp 16)

As a result of his recommendation or simply because the time was ripe, one of the early moves made by the new Grand East of the Netherlands in Holland , was to appoint a ships captain, one, Bro Abraham van der Weijde as a roving ambassador for Freemasonry in the colonies, he described himself as “Second Deputy Grand Master and Plenipotentiary.”

When he arrived at The Cape on 24 April 1772, he did not allow grass to grow under his feet; he immediately set about forming a lodge. 8 days after landing, he held his first meeting. On 2 May , ten masons attended, three of whom were employees of the VOC, two days later he issued a Provisional Warrant For’ Lodge De Goede Hoop’ to hold meetings. The day after that, he drew up The Formal Petition for the establishment of the Lodge. The Charter was approved and received in Cape Town a few months later dated “ the first day of the ninth month of the year L 5772”( !772) Abraham De Mist took this to mean 1 November 1772, working from the Masonic year beginning on the 1st March.

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(1) (27 March 1729, De G.H.)

(2)( AQC 37,+76 Gould vol VI p161)