

# Masonic Standard

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## Masonry's Tortured Ups and Downs Under Various Rulers in Cuba

*The vicissitudes of Masonry in Cuba form one of the most interesting histories in the career of that tempestuous island. It is particularly interesting to New Yorkers on account of the participation of M.W. John W. Simons, who helped bring order out of chaos in the early '70's. An exceedingly graphic history of Masonry's foundation and growth there has been written by Ill. F. de P. Rodriguez, chairman of the Committee on Correspondence of the Grand Lodge of Cuba and also Grand Secretary of the Supreme Council of Cuba which is under the jurisdiction of the Southern Supreme Council of the United States. It was published in the latest Quarterly Bulletin of the Iowa Grand Lodge, reads:*

The family compact twice entered into by all branches of the Bourbon kings, among them Charles III of Spain, indirectly brought Masonic light to Cuba. War between Spain and England was the immediate result of the compact, and in consequence thereof an English squadron appeared before Havana in July, 1762. After a regular siege the city surrendered on Aug. 14, the English taking possession of Cuba and holding it for 11 months. It was during this lapse of time that the first Masonic lodge which we know of in Cuba raised its columns among us. When the English evacuated Havana on July 6, 1763, the lodge went with them, no trace being left of it whatever.

Masonry is known to have existed in Haiti as far back as 1748, under jurisdiction of the Grand Orient of France. As a necessary result of the French Revolution, Frenchmen began to abandon Haiti for Cuba in 1798, carrying with them their Masonic lodges. Several of these were known to have existed in Cuba during 1802 and 1803. Some of these French residents of Cuba asked the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania for a charter, which was granted in 1804. The lodge was organized under the title of Le Temple des Vertus Theologiques, and established at Havana.

### Driven to New Orleans.

So stood all matters Masonic in Cuba until the invasion of Spain by Napoleon in 1808, when the Frenchmen had to move again, this time to New Orleans, La. Their lodges traveled with them, with the exception of Le Temple des Vertus Theologiques, which had many Cuban members. When the French arrived at New Orleans they tried to revive the old lodges, but succeeded only as to La Concorde and La Perseverance, this time chartered by Pennsylvania. These two lodges, together with three others, named Charite, L'Etoile Polaire, and Perfecte Union, founded the Grand Lodge of Louisiana in 1812.

From 1804 to 1822 the Grand Lodges of Pennsylvania, Louisiana, and South Carolina established 12 lodges in Cuba.

In 1818 three of the Havana lodges organized the Spanish Grand Lodge of the Rite of York; while the three lodges chartered by Louisiana, composed mostly of Frenchmen, changed their obedience to the Grand Orient of France. The same Grand Orient, in 1821, chartered a new lodge at Havana, La Constante Sophie, and ceded all its rights over the French lodges to the National Grand Orient of Spain; but as this Grand Orient never acknowledged the session the lodges so slighted organized in 1822 the Spanish-American Territorial Grand Orient of the Island of Cuba.

We had therefore in 1822 two sovereign Grand bodies in Cuba, besides some lodges chartered by Pennsylvania and South Carolina; but in 1822 the Grand Lodge and the Grand Orient united under the name of the Spanish Grand Lodge of the Rite of York.

For several years thereafter Masonry, although secret in Cuba, rose to brilliant standing. There were 66 working lodges in Cuba, Havana alone, with a population of 90,000, having 35, the membership the elite of our society.

### Death to Be a Mason.

In 1824 Ferdinand VII of Spain issued his famous decree against Masonry, death being the penalty for meeting in lodge. Under this decree several Masons were hanged at Granada, Spain, the next year. However, the royal decree was not enforced in Cuba until 1828, when the York Grand Lodge was officially dissolved. Members, nevertheless, continued meeting with the utmost secrecy, and without regard to fixed days. However, one after another the lodges stopped their work forever, as the danger was too great. Only two of those valiant groups kept on. They had to change their names, to mislead the authorities, and were located at Santiago, in the extreme east of Cuba. In 1858, considering the times to be better, the Masons corresponded with the Grand Lodge of South Carolina asking her to charter them into their Grand Lodge; but that ruling body advised them to petition for a new lodge. This they did, and the next year San Andreas Lodge 93 at Santiago was chartered, and this lodge, with the two former ones, founded the Grand Lodge of Colon in 1859. This became the actual Grand Lodge of Cuba.

The Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction of the United States, meanwhile sent Ill. Andreas Cassard (33°), a native of Cuba, but resident of New York, to establish in Cuba a Supreme Council of the 33°. Although the brother was not allowed to land at Santiago when he arrived there (having at a previous time conspired against Spain and been sentenced to death on that account), he delegated his powers to several others on his ship, and these afterward constituted the actual Supreme Council 33° of Colon, for Cuba.

Masonry started anew a most honorable career. In 1861 Amor Fraternal, the oldest of the actual lodges of Havana, was founded, the Master of which, Manuel Morenati, was a former member of Amor Fraternal Lodge of New Orleans. Matters went on smoothly for a short time, when new trouble overtook us on account of the Scottish Rite.

In 1862 the Supreme Council of the Southern Jurisdiction sent here Ill. Vicente A. de Castro, with the object of inspecting the bodies; but that brother, instead of confining himself to do his duty, began to found clandestine lodges and Scottish bodies, and out of them all a spurious Grand Orient named Cuba and the Antilles.

Although the Southern Supreme Council acted too late, in 1865, nevertheless that clandestine nucleus disappeared altogether in 1868. Soon afterward the Ten-Year War began in Cuba, and Masonry suffered accordingly. In 1869 the Grand Master, M.W. Andreas Puente, was forcibly taken out of his residence at Santiago and shot without any trial whatever.

However, lodges continued to do work, and many new ones were established. We went as far as Porto Rico, chartering Estrella de Luquillo Lodge at San Juan, the nucleus of the present Grand Lodge. At Costa Rica, Central America, Union Fraternal Lodge was also chartered.

In 1870 a most sensitive shock startled Havana. As the lodges met at their hall to hold a Lodge of Sorrow to the memory of Grand Master Puente, the place was raided by Spanish Volunteers (the local militia), and 52 Cuban Masons were incarcerated. They remained in jail for 100 days, when they were liberated by Gral. Prim, a regent of Spain, by petition of the Grand Orient of France.

### Coming of the Great Almeida.

The permanent seat of the Grand Lodge continued to be at Santiago; but as the most numerous and influential lodges were located at Havana and at other points in the western part of the island, jealousy arose. With the idea of soothing the spirits, a Provincial Grand Lodge was established at Havana in 1870; but to no avail, as the new body was not sufficiently inde-

pendent to please all.

That was the most critical moment of contemporaneous Masonry of Cuba, and it appeared as if disorganization was bound to result. A character was needed and it surged in the personality of Aurelio Almeida, undoubtedly the first Mason of Cuba. He stepped out and began his meritorious labor. He was a learned and energetic man, a lawyer and a gentleman. He tried to unite all the Masons, and as that was impossible consulted with two of the foremost American Masons, his particular friends, Richard Vaux of Pennsylvania and J. W. Simons of New York. Following their advice he got together 13 of the most enterprising western lodges, and in 1876 a new body under the name of the Grand Lodge of the Island of Cuba came to life. It was shaped entirely as an American Grand Lodge, and aimed from the outset to obtain the proper recognition of foreign Grand Lodges, something which had been formerly disregarded. Applications were sent abroad, the world over. Delaware was first to respond favorably. The last American bodies to become our friends were Illinois, Nebraska, and North Carolina, these 26 years after the first applications were sent them. The rest of the lodges of Havana formed another Grand Lodge under the old name of Colon.

### Three Grand Lodges Become One.

So we had for a time in Cuba three Grand Lodges, all springing from the same trunk, two at Havana and one at Santiago. Almeida's strong will worked very hard those days. He strengthened the Grand Lodge of Cuba, had the lodges render their work carefully so as to excel the rival lodges, kept on adding friends from the outside, and by and by succeeded in uniting the rival Grand Lodges of Havana. In 1880 they consolidated, and at last, in 1881, Santiago Grand Lodge came also. Since that glorious date our Masonry has continued united, strong, and beloved.

Although Spain did not recognize Masonry in Cuba, she in later times tolerated it, and after the formation of the Grand Lodge of Cuba in 1876 even encouraged the formation of clandestine lodges depending from the Spanish Grand Orient. However, such toleration and encouragement were merely a political measure of the Spaniards, and the lodges went out of Cuba with Spanish sovereignty in 1899. Nevertheless, a few lodges originally from Spain still remain; but they have no importance whatever and we pay no attention to them.

In 1883 the Grand Lodge of Porto Rico was formed by lodges originally chartered by us, a Provincial Grand Lodge being the preliminary step. The same thing happened at Vera Cruz, Mexico, where three lodges we had chartered founded a Grand Lodge (Gran Logia Unida Mexicana) in the same year. These Grand Lodges are, of course, as regular as any in the world.

After the peace that ended the Ten-Year War, in 1878, our Grand Lodge pursued for many years a blissful career until 1895, when the last of our wars of deliverance began. Gov. Gen. Calleja ordered then the suppression of Masonic meetings all through the country; but this order was not obeyed until his successor, the cruel and sanguinary Gral. Weyler, enforced the decree, when for nearly three years we again had great difficulties in meeting.

At last the dawn of liberty shone upon us, and, thanks to the American eagle, Spain evacuated our soil in 1899, our Grand Lodge coming out brighter than ever. Not only now in Cuba Libre, but since the beginning of the American intervention, we are happier than ever. We are already respected. The number of lodges owning their own quarters is considerable in the various cities and towns of the republic. Those of Havana have bought a beautiful three-story stone house, worth \$50,000, and are remodeling it for a Masonic Temple. The actual number of Cuban Lodges is 98 and the membership over 6,000.