



# The Ashlar



September 2021

**Kempsville Lodge No. 196, A.F.&A.M.**  
**[www.kempsvillelodge.org](http://www.kempsvillelodge.org)**

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## The Common Gavel



“The Common Gavel is an instrument used by operative masons to break off the corners of rough stones, the better to fit them for the builder’s use; but we, as Free and Accepted Masons, are taught to make use of it for the more noble and glorious purpose of divesting our hearts and consciences of all vices and superfluities of this life, thereby fitting our minds, as living stones for that spiritual building—that house not made with hands—eternal in the heavens.”

Similar to the other Working Tools, the Common Gavel is only mentioned in the initial ceremony to the initiate.

There is no further explanation in later ritual, or in the lectures. This piece considers only the Common Gavel, not the Master’s gavel, or the Setting Maul.

The Common Gavel is one of the most powerful tools we have, however. What use is the Square or the 24 inch Gauge if we cannot take some action to square our actions or to improve our behavior regarding how we spend our time? Without the Common Gavel, we could measure our inadequacies, our “vices and superfluities” all we wanted, and quantify them in hours we spend on them in a day, but our self-improvement would be limited, at best.

There are some items in our lives that clearly could and should be eliminated by the application of this tool. These are the items in the Rough Ashlar of our lives that stick out prominently from the surface. Some behaviors, some attitudes do not need to be pointed out to us through the use of the Square and the Gauge. If we are in danger of bankruptcy, it is clearly in our best interest to revise our spending habits. It may be easy to break off these prominent features of our Ashlar with a few hard blows from the Gavel. However, there are some things that are less obvious, and much less easy to remove.

Let us consider an item that some would consider trivial: biting one’s nails. This is a minor vice, one that does not stand out like bankruptcy might. It will not yield to one sharp blow as a large outcropping of rock might. We must analyze ourselves and see that this small imperfection is affecting our lives, and that it must be removed. Then, it must be slowly chipped away at, flake by flake, with delicacy. The excising of habits such as this require a measured response, not a sudden shattering blow.

One must carefully consider what vice needs to be removed, and how best to remove it. Think also of the Ashlars. The Perfect Ashlar in many Lodges is polished to a reflective finish. How can this be accomplished with just a gavel? The blows must be very small indeed, for we have no other Tool to use to remove this extraneous material.

The Gavel can also be a consideration when we think of the Trowel. If the Trowel spreads the cement that unites us into a common mass, clearly it will be harder to fit those stones which are unsmoothed by the Gavel into the building. It will take much more effort and more mortar to join the building together if the stones are more uneven and do not fit together smoothly, and the resulting structure will not be as strong.

Without doubt by improving ourselves we improve the structure of Masonry and our community. Let us thus use the Common gavel in our lives in concert with the other tools to break off those rough corners, fitting ourselves to that Temple in Heaven, as well as our Lodge on Earth.

## From The East



You will see reference made to Sunday virtual meetings with our British Brethren, So I thought you might also enjoy a bit of early Masonic history on the topic.

The origins of Freemasonry are obscure. The creation of the Craft occurred over time between the first recorded gentleman joining an Edinburgh stonemasons' lodge in 1599 and the 1721 publication in London of The Constitutions of the Free-Masons by Scots Presbyterian minister James Anderson.

Freemasonry is fundamentally a self-improvement, volunteer association that teaches moral, intellectual, and spiritual lessons through three initiation ceremonies. Freemasonry's three degree are modeled after a craftsman's progress: Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Mason. Freemasonry was, and remains, open to all men of good reputation who profess a belief in Deity (referred to in lodge as The Supreme Architect of the Universe). By the 1750s a variety of Christian and non-Christians, European, and non-European men, and a few women, were members.

Freemasonry grew popular within cities as political, commercial, and intellectual elites gathered within a lodge. With aristocratic, and later royal patronage, Freemasonry evolved into the preeminent fraternal organization of the eighteenth century. The earliest records of American Masonic lodges are in Philadelphia. In 1732, Boston's St. John's Lodge was duly constituted by the Grand Lodge of England and remains the oldest lodge in North America. Interwoven with the British Enlightenment, Masonic lodges formed throughout Europe and the Americas. The network of Scots, English, and Irish Lodge helped knit the British commercial empire together.

Although American elites initially joined the Freemasons to keep pace with genteel English behavior, the fraternity contributed to the spread of the ideas and ideals behind the American Revolution. During the revolutionary era, Masons of note included George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, James Otis, and Paul Revere. While individual Freemasons actively participated in the American Revolution, Freemasonry, as an institution as well as its local lodges, remained politically neutral.

Brother Mike Denning, Worshipful Master

## From The West



On the night of Friday, July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2021, Kempsville Masonic Lodge No. 196 was burglarized and vandalized by an unknown perpetrator or perpetrators. Items stolen from our Lodge include

numerous Masonic items and regalia, commemorative pieces, small valuables of assorted purposes, and an American flag. In addition to the damage necessary to perform the burglary, countless measures were taken to convey spiteful intentions- these measures culminated in the defacement of numerous Masonic elements of our Lodge's construction. It was not until a few hours later, on the morning of Saturday, July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2021, that these losses were discovered.

In the ensuing hours, the Brethren of our Lodge, and that of Lodges near and far, fulfilled their Masonic obligations to help, aid, and assist. This support came in the form of verbal consolations, financial contributions, generous donations from personal Masonic collections, and even physical labor. For a few brief moments, speculative and operative Masons were unified in the amelioration of this travesty.

Observing our Brethren's physical efforts to reconstruct, rehabilitate, and restore our Lodge to its previous status has inspired a nostalgia among many of our ranks towards the early years of our Craft, when all Masons were both fraternal and workable. Perhaps it has reminded us of what is often considered (by historians both inside and outside of our Brotherhood) as our finest architectural achievement- the construction of King Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.

It is from this nostalgia that, in the opinion of this author, we may find a silver lining in the recent misfortune that has befallen us. Although the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed over two-thousand years ago, its memory has flourished, and it is now universally recognized as one of the most sacred and immaculate buildings in human history. In a similar manner, modern Freemasonry, although typically orchestrated in Lodges, is not dependent on the material assets that it possesses, but on the faith, hope, and charity of the Brethren who comprise it.

Brother John Settle, Senior Warden



## Remembering Brother Joe Salt



I share this photo of Brother Joe, who while serving in the US Navy and stationed at the US Naval Air Station on Bermuda (1970's), affiliated with and regularly attended St. Georges Lodge No. 266. This lodge claims to be "the oldest" Masonic Lodge on Bermuda.

Earlier in the week Brother Dennis DiMaggio visited with Joe in his home.

Joe's daughter, Dale was there and asked if it might be OK for her to log onto the Sunday Zoom meeting with our British Brethren, so Joe might hear the conversation. She did so on July 15<sup>th</sup>; she introduced herself and the purpose of her attendance (audio only, no video feed). Of course, they were welcomed.

At the top of the hour, as usual, we toasted our absent brethren. Worshipful Bob Stanek had just finished relating a "Joe story" he always told about his lodge of attendance while being stationed on Bermuda years ago. The tale told of how the "oldest lodge" on Bermuda was the oldest because the Masons only permitted the charter from the GL of Scotland to be delivered "first", holding back the other charter from UGLE until after the Scottish charter was received.

Moments later, Joe's daughter announced to our Zoom-group of Masons, that Joe had peacefully Passed to the Celestial Lodge Above. She was so very, very grateful that he was amongst his Brother Masons as he Passed, as was Joe's dear wife, Shirley.

This most solemn and heart-felt event touched all in attendance greatly. All the brethren immediately toasted Joe's life and Passing while in our "virtual" company.

What a wonderful fellowship we have with our brothers in England. We have received emails extending sympathy and condolences from England. Masonry is truly world-wide, and we are all brothers.

## Antique Lecture Charts



At their August Stated Communication, our good brothers of Princess Anne Lodge No. 25

presented Kempsville Lodge with 3 replacement antique lecture charts. They will replace the stolen charts taken from our temple during the break-in on July 2/3, 2021.

Please be appreciative of our close Masonic family, if you get a chance let everyone know how much we appreciate our Masonic brothers in all of our sister lodges.

**The Ashlar**  
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