

Brethren,

In my first presentation we began the discussion of the WHY for our Brethren to have as their “elevator speech” if someone asks them about the Craft, for our new Candidates to better appreciate and fully embrace the Craft as members, and particularly for new Candidates who are younger in order to speak to them in a mutually-engaging manner. We walked through 600-years of history that began with common citizens having no direct connection with their Creator, no property rights, no legal protections, and little prospect for self-improvement shackled by a brutal class system. How the Masons though the benefits of what we now call networking, gained the benefits of education and governance. Groups of like-minded men, of varying classes, politics and religious beliefs hoping for a better tomorrow met in secret and found common ground and a mutual respect for one another. This set the stage for the Petition of Right (1628) and the Habeas Corpus Act (1679) which gave most English citizens a voice in government and before the Courts in what became the foundation for the English system of common law. In my next presentation on Equality we pictured ourselves in Lodge with Bro. Rudyard Kipling, with unity between races and classes. Kipling did an excellent job at presenting a picture members who care little for the color of each others' skin or their religions or the trappings of wealth.

The Canadian justice system guarantees everyone due process under the law. Our judicial system is founded on the presumption of innocence in criminal matters, meaning everyone is innocent until proven guilty. Canada's legal system is based on a heritage that includes the rule of law, freedom under the law, democratic principles and due process. Due process is the principle that the government must respect all of legal rights a person is entitled to under the law.

Take an examination of the Book of Constitution of the Grand Lodge of Canada in the Province of Ontario, specifically Sections 409 through 427 as we see that Due Process at Work with rules of evidence, trial by peers, and even an appeals process. Examine further and you find the Ancient Charges of a Freemason which underpin it that draw their existence from the Regis Manuscript of 1390, the oldest Masonic document in existence. So we see the origins of judicial process, in use within a Masonic Lodge before they were practiced widely in common society outside its doors.

Society would wait for Petition of Right, (1628) petition sent by the English Parliament to King Charles I complaining of a series of breaches of law. The petition sought recognition of four principles: no taxation without the consent of Parliament, no imprisonment without cause, no quartering of soldiers on subjects, and no martial law in peacetime. Similarly, the Habeas Corpus of 1679 required accused criminals to be examined by a court about its detention and, that way, prevent arbitrary imprisonment. Both are grounded on the fundamental premises of Due Process and Procedural Fairness. Simply put, an innovation of the Craft for equal treatment, on the Level if you will whether high born or common, and regardless of other distinctions of race or religion.

Look to the significance of Bro. John Graves Simcoe's contributions in that regard. What might ask what guided him? There is an old saying that 'All are equal before the law'. To understand Justice we can turn to John Graves Simcoe, who had been Initiated into Union Lodge 307 UGLE in 1773. While in England as a Member of Parliament, he gave anti-slavery speeches in the House of Commons. And when he was picked to be the first Lieutenant Governor of Upper Canada, he made it clear: he saw no place for the practice in his new province. “The principles of the British Constitution do not admit of that slavery which Christianity condemns,” he wrote before he officially took his post. “The moment I assume the

Government of Upper Canada, under no modification will I assent to a law that discriminates by dishonest policy between natives of Africa, America or Europe.”

Lieutenant-Governor John Graves Simcoe convened the first meeting of the Legislative Assembly of Upper Canada at Newark (present-day Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ont.). The building in fact was the Masonic Lodge, the oldest lodge in Ontario. Held from Sept. 17-Oct. 15, the first session of what was the first provincial parliament introduced a limited form of representative government to the newly created colony of Upper Canada, which includes present-day southern Ontario as well as the area north of the Great Lakes. He succeeded in his first legislative session to pass bills establishing British civil law, trial by jury, the use of British Winchester standards of measure, and a provision for jails and courthouses.

And indeed, one of the most notable things Bro. Simcoe did when he got to Upper Canada was to introduce a bill to end slavery in the province forever. In July 1793, his “Act Against Slavery” became the very first slavery-abolishing law ever passed anywhere in the British Empire. To this day he’s celebrated as the man who ended slavery in Upper Canada — more than 40 years before it was abolished across the Empire and 70 years before the Emancipation Proclamation in the United States.

Indeed between 1819 and 1831, Black veterans of the War of 1812 were granted farming land of at least 100 acres, from Lake Simcoe as far north as Craighurst and as far west as Georgian Bay. They were treated “free and fair”, legal and property rights in a first by a major global power. There can be no justice until there is recognition of the dignity of a person, and the right to their property against unlawful seizure.