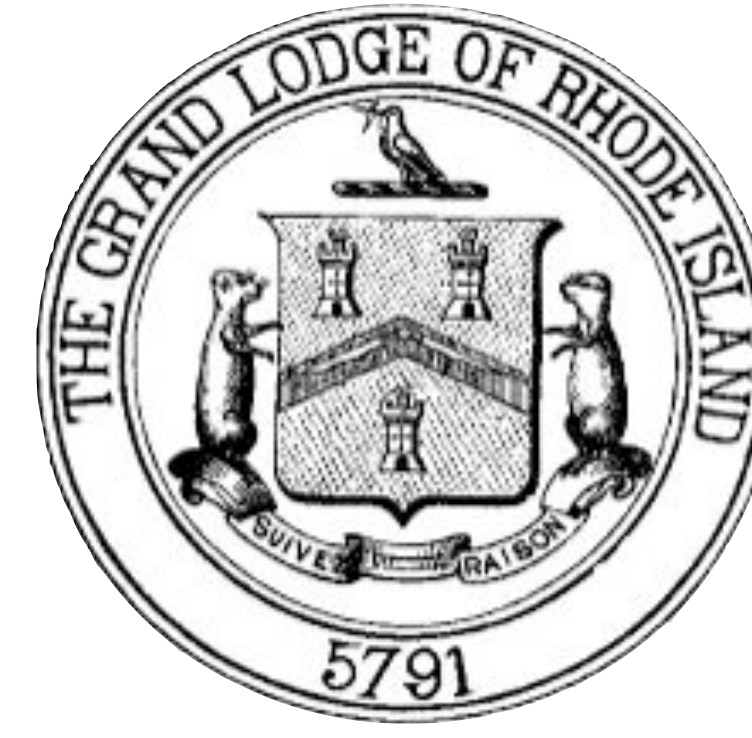


# The Grand Lodge of Rhode Island



## The Beginning

The Touro Synagogue located in Newport is the oldest synagogue on the American continent. In a historical pamphlet, recently put out by the Touro Synagogue Congregation, there is a note that is rather interesting:

"The first documentary evidence of the presence of Jews in Newport dates from 1658. In that year the document reads: "Wee mett att ye House of Mordecai Campannall and after Synagog Wee gave Abm Moses the degrees of Maçonrie." This not only points to the early settlement of Jews in Rhode Island, but it is the basis for the theory — which has been questioned by some — that the craft of Masonry was first introduced into America through the early Jewish settlers in Rhode Island, who seemed to have worked the degrees after religious services which were held in private houses.'

## Early History

Thomas Oxnard Provincial Grand Master of New England and Grand Master of Massachusetts granted the petition for the constitution of St. John's Lodge of Newport, December 27, 1749, the first in the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations. Brother Caleb Phillips was appointed first Master of the Lodge. According to tradition, the meetings were held during the early period of its history, in the "Council Chamber" of the "Old State House" (and now used as a Court House) which on this account holds special claim to the regard of the Fraternity in Rhode Island.

The institution of the Lodge in Newport very naturally created an ambition for one in Providence and this hope firmly and steadily grew to its fulfillment on February 17, 1757, when St. Johns Lodge of Providence was organized, the Charter for such organization bears the date of January 18, 1757 and was issued by Jeremy Gridley, the Provincial Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts.

The formation of the Lodge in Providence added enlivened strength to the feeble progress of the Newport body and the two mutually labored for the upbuilding of the Craft until 1765 when the Newport Lodge lost its Charter, which was not revived until 1790, while the Providence body became dormant from 1769 to 1778.

## Noteworthy Events

During the dormancy of these old Lodges, our Craftsmen were still active on a limited basis. Many interesting and exciting events occurred in which our patriotic Craftsmen engaged the British in their quest to become an independent nation.

On July 19, 1769 Craftsmen were responsible for the destruction of the British revenue sloop "Liberty" at Newport, this being the first overt act of violence offered to the British authorities in America.

On June 10, 1772 the British revenue schooner Gaspee was burned in Narragansett bay, by a band of citizens, nearly all members of St. Johns Lodge of Providence, disguised as Indians, under the leadership of Capt. Abraham Whipple, causing the first blood-shed of the Revolution.

On March 2, 1775 practically the same active colonists burned tea in Market Square, Providence; the town crier urged every citizen to bring and cast into the fire the "useless herb."

On June 15, 1775 the first naval engagement of the Revolution occurred, between the Colonial sloop commanded by Capt. Abraham Whipple and a tender of the British frigate "Rose"; in which the tender was chased onto the Conanicut shore and captured. In recognition of this patriotic act Capt. Whipple was made Commodore of the Rhode Island Navy, which at that time was of considerable account, and later made Admiral by Congress.

On June 22, 1775 Brother Nathaniel Greene was chosen Brigadier-General and on August 9, 1776 made a Major general by Congress, second in command to Washington.

On April 5, 1776 general George Washington visited Providence for the first time and was loyally received.

On July 9, 1777 the capture of the British General Prescott by Col. William Barton (member of St. Johns Lodge, Providence) on the Island of Rhode Island was considered a most daring act.

## Return to Labor

Because of local conditions, the Providence Lodge was able to recover much more quickly than the one in Newport, but it is a matter of record that many members of the Craft in Newport joined King David's, established June 7, 1780, by the Right Worshipful Moses M. Hays by authority which he obtained from the "Right Worshipful George Harrison, Esq., Provincial Grand Master of New York." Ten years later the two Lodges, King David's and St. John's No. 1, was preserved and made applicable for the revived and united body. Thence followed the formation of the Grand Lodge of Rhode Island.

With the end of the revolution came a revival of Freemasonry and by the urgency of the brethren in Providence, St. John's, Newport was renewed by the election of the patriot Peleg Clarke as Worshipful Master on October 19, 1790.

The movement for a Grand Lodge now went on with vigor and an agreement as to the methods and measures were soon concluded by mutual cooperation.

## The Grand Lodge Becomes a Reality

The plan formulated by the Committees for the proposed organization received the formal approval of St John's Lodge, Newport on March 14, 1791 and of St. Johns in Providence on April 6, 1791. By the plan thus adopted the first Grand Master was to be chosen from the Lodge at Newport, the Deputy Grand Master from the Lodge at Providence. The other officers were to be equally divided between the two districts. The first District consisted of the counties of Newport, Washington and Bristol, and the second of the counties of Providence and Kent. The two Lodges were to have the appointment of Grand Master alternately. The first officers were to continue in office until 1793. Under the terms of this agreement the Lodge at Newport elected Most Worshipful Christopher Champlin, Grand Master and the Lodge at Providence elected Right Worshipful Jabez Bowen, Deputy Grand Master.

On Monday the 27<sup>th</sup> of June 1791, "being the day affixed on for the celebration of the Feast of St. John the Baptist" a number of brethren representing the two Lodges met in the State House at Newport and proceeded to organize a Grand Lodge in accordance with the plan that had been approved.

The Right Worshipful Moses Seixas presided and installed the officers who had previously been designated for the several stations. When the organization had been completed, the newly installed officers, with members of Grand Lodge and visiting brethren, marched in procession to Trinity Church, where a discourse having appropriateness to the occasion, was delivered by the Rector, Rev. William Smith, and a collection was taken which sum it was ordered "should be invested in wood and distributed to the poor of this town during the ensuing winter." The brethren who formed the Grand Lodge of this State and those Masonically associated with them at that time, plainly signified their respect for religion and for the practical charity so much emphasized by the teaching of Freemasonry. Thus, in brief, we relate the story of the formation of the Grand Lodge of Rhode Island. Two Lodges only united in the movement.

The formation of the Grand Lodge immediately stimulated enthusiasm in the Fraternity in Rhode Island and the closing years of the eighteenth century brought a large measure of prosperity and the Craft began to develop and thrive upon a firmer more substantial foundation.

A total of 48 Lodges have been chartered in the state since the founding of the Craft. Current membership is over 4000 brothers with a new resurgence in interest in the Craft. The last several years every lodge has raised multiple candidates some in excess of 20 each year. We are strong and again growing and invite you to visit our state.



## Rhode Island's "Moon Lodges"

A check of Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia informs us that in the past, Moon Lodges were necessary as the population was more rural and there were no electric lights even in the cities. In the 18th century, the almanac was a common household authority and Freemasons, like others, measured their time and to some extent regulated their activities by it. Lodge By-laws often fixed the stated meetings on, just before or just after the Full Moon, thus, making 13 stated meetings per year.

There was a very practical reason for fixing meetings around the night of a Full Moon for, in rural communities, which predominated in the 18th century, there would be no natural illumination to guide the members to and from lodge over several miles of rough road.' While many Grand Lodges have since legislated Moon Lodges out of existence, others have clung to the old custom, preferring the inconvenience caused by confusion as to just when the moon is full, to sacrificing what has had the force of an "ancient usage and custom." It is interesting to realize the first mention of Moon Lodges was in the Cooke Manuscript of 1410, one of the oldest documents belonging to the Masonic Craft. It is understood moon lodges were first mentioned in a ritual in "The Whole Institute of Masonry," published in 1724. By 1767 there were five numbered lodges governed by the moon operating under the Grand Lodge of England. By the year 1776, this amount had increased to nine of 499 lodges in England, which included the Provincial Lodges located in the English Colonies abroad.

Quite often we hear a remark about 'the good old days'. When moon lodges began, there were no illuminated two or four lane blacktop highways and very few gravel roads. Most consisted of two dirt ruts leading through bush and fields and seldom in a straight line. While the main roads may have been gravel, the side roads and town's roads had dirt roads. There was no train or bus service, nor any cars for that matter. After dark a candle or coal oil lamp was used for illumination: no electricity. Today Rhode Island's Moon Lodges still meet by the light of the Full Moon, but thankfully we now have electricity and the roads are all paved yet our tradition still carries on!



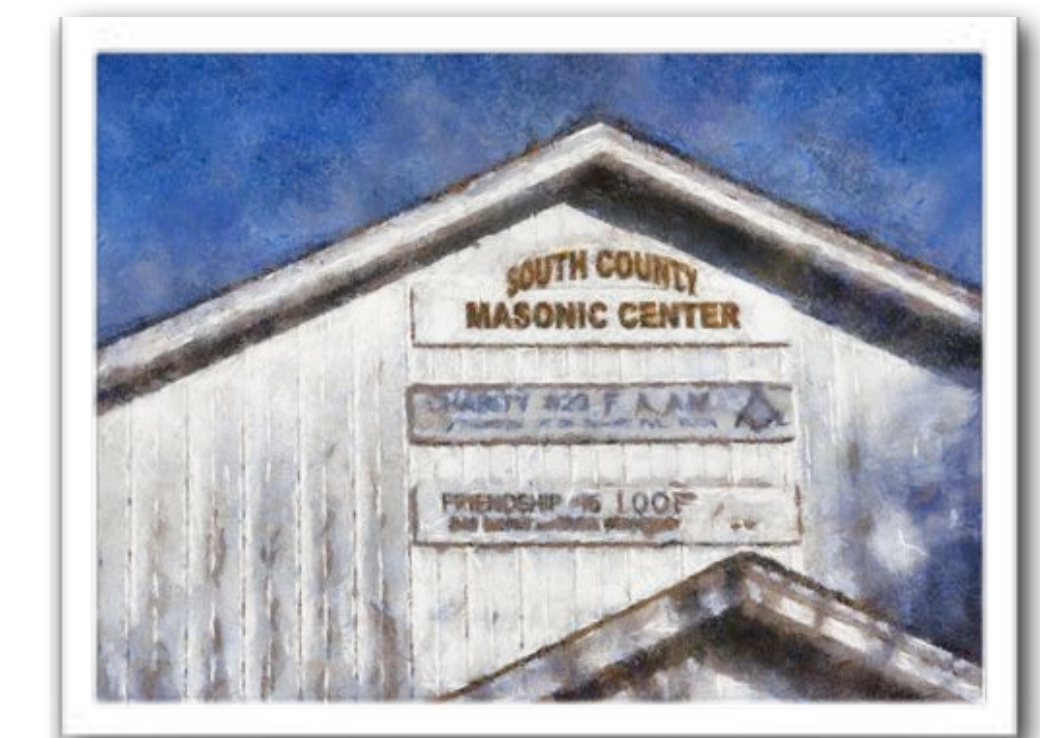
Mount Moriah No.8  
Established June 25, 1804  
Meets Friday on or before Full Moon



Ionic No.28  
Established January 1, 1870  
Meets Saturday on or before Full Moon



Friendship No.7  
Established May 5, 1800  
Meets Saturday on or before Full Moon



Charity No.23  
Established November 27, 1865  
Meets Thursday on or before Full Moon