Research Guide for Genealogical Researchers for the Masonic Archives in NC only

There are many places to try to locate your ancestor, which could make figuring out where and how to start feel overwhelming at first. Please keep in mind that the Grand Lodge Office will only provide historical information on deceased members. Information on members is not available until 50 (fifty) years after their death, unless proof of ancestry is confirmed by an immediate family member. Access is determined on a case-by-case basis.

If we are unable to locate a record in North Carolina, please let us know if they may have lived near the border, moved around, or were involved with the armed forces. It is possible that they could have been a member in another state. If you reach out to this office, we'd be happy to connect you with another jurisdiction's Grand Lodge Office for further research. Email info@glnc.us for a request of that nature.

Masonic records typically only have information on men who were members of the fraternity. In rare cases, women and spouses might be mentioned in artifacts such as scrapbooks, photo albums, etc. Official meeting minutes or proceedings, however, will only have information on members.

Historically, members had to be at least 21 years of age to petition Masonry. This age minimum was lowered to 18 years old around the year 2000.

If a man was a Mason, he was not required to wear a ring, pin, have a Masonic funeral, or have an emblem on his headstone. These are all at his individual election. Also, having one of these items may not necessarily mean a man was a Mason, as they could have been inherited, or been performed honorarily.

Up until the Civil War, the head of the state organization, the Grand Master, could 'make a Mason at sight,' meaning a man would not have to go through learning the three degrees or any of the ritual. There were not a lot of instances of this occurring, but there are exceptions to every rule. Tennessee still allows this practice, whereas North Carolina does not.

If you're looking for a man and you believe he may have been a Mason, please fill out the Historical Membership Request form below, and our staff will query our database to find out if he was a member in our jurisdiction. If we have a record, he was most definitely a Mason.

A bit about the layout of our membership records that contain names:

1) Records from 1755-1799 will be found in the back of the book Launching the Craft, by Thomas Parramore. This book was published by the Grand Lodge of North Carolina in 1975 for the jurisdiction's bicentennial. The author went through early lodge minutes and used attendance records to recreate the roster of members in the aforementioned time frame.

2) Records from 1787-1996 are in two places. A. The physical card database in the archives room of the Grand Lodge in Raleigh, and B. in the back of the Grand Lodge Proceedings until 1912 (these are scanned and online, links below). After 1912, the record became too large to print in the annual proceedings, and only membership cards for the catalog were created. About half of the cards include names of the members' parents & spouses (if married at the time of joining). We can search the cards for you via the Membership Request form. If you have many requests please reach out via phone so that we can set up a time for you to visit the archive to search in bulk.

3) Records from 1997 until present day are all digitized and are typically only available to family members of deceased Masons upon request.

Photos

A historic practice of lodges was to memorialize their past lodge presidents, or Masters. The Master of a lodge was elected for a one-year term and could be re-elected, which occurred frequently before the 20th century. After his term as Master concluded, a portrait was often hung in the lodge room to commemorate his legacy. If your ancestor was a Master of a lodge, his portrait may be in the lodge!

Several lodges have created and published histories that may include photos. These are in the Grand Lodge's Library. Some of these photos & histories have been digitized.

The North Carolina Lodge of Research

The NC Lodge of Research, or NOCALORE for short, was the first research lodge in the United States devoted to publishing scholarly articles on NC history, US history, Masonic History, and everything in between. Headquartered in Monroe, NC, the lodge published nineteen volumes of work from 1931-1949. These are available in the Grand Lodge library or for sale at https://www.grandlodge-nc.org/center-for-members/books-and-reading-materials

Cornerstones

The Grand Lodge maintains a listing of cornerstones it has laid from 1794 until present day. Most of these can be found in the Grand Lodge proceedings (minutes of the Annual Convention) or in historic newspapers. Many contain time capsules.

Links

Historic Membership Request Form
https://www.cognitoforms.com/grandlodgeofnorthcarolina/Masonicmembershiphistoricrequest

History of Masonry in NC Wiki Page
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grand_Lodge_of_North_Carolina

Newspapers for Lodge Meetings and Cornerstones
newspapers.com [ancestry or newspaper login required]
https://www.digitalnc.org/newspapers/
https://statelibrary.ncdcr.gov/research/online-resources CLICK NEWSPAPERS TAB
[Tons of NC Newspapers. NC State Library. State Library Membership required. Free.]

Grand Lodge Proceedings for the Annual Meetings (1787-2022) with Grand Master's Photo
https://www.grandlodge-nc.org/center-for-members/proceedings-and-past-grand-masters

Historic List of all Masonic Lodges in NC, extinct and current
https://www.grandlodge-nc.org/storage/wysiwyg/lodge_history_v20220302-lodge_table.pdf

Historic Map of all Lodges in NC, extinct and current
https://www.grandlodge-nc.org/center-for-members/library--museum/historical-list-of-lodges

DigitalNC Repository for Historic Lodge Minute Books and Scrapbooks
https://www.digitalnc.org/institutions/the-grand-lodge-of-the-ancient-free-and-accepted-Masons-of-north-carolina/

DigitalNC Repository for the Masonic Home for Children at Oxford, Granville Co., NC
https://www.digitalnc.org/institutions/sallie-mae-ligon-museum-archives-Masonic-home-children-oxford/

Earley Bridges' Greensboro Masonic Museum, Masonic Temple, Greensboro
https://web.archive.org/web/20220203215845/http://www.greensboroMasonicmuseum.org/
(Website has lapsed, so this is a cached version on the internet wayback machine)

State Historic Preservation Office map of historic surveys (listed and unlisted), HPOWeb
(Some Masonic lodges are on this listing, too)
https://nc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=79ea671ebdcc45639f0860257d5f5ed7

Our Current Statewide Publication, "*The Mason*"
http://www.epageflip.net/t/5206-the-north-carolina-Mason

Past Issues of "*The Mason*"
From 1875 it was "The Orphans' Friend"
Later called "The Mason"
https://www.digitalnc.org/newspapers/?view=holdings&contributor=the-grand-lodge-of-the-ancient-free-and-accepted-Masons-of-north-carolina

Prince Hall Grand Lodge Website
(Office in Durham)
https://mwphglnc.us/

Prince Hall List of Lodges in North Carolina (may not be current)
http://www.ellis-jones4.com/lodgel.htm

Books

History of the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of North Carolina and Jurisdiction, Inc. 1864-2000. Walkes, Joseph A. © 2005.

Launching the Craft: The First Half-Century of Freemasonry in North Carolina. Parramore, Thomas. Litho Industries. © 1975.

Freemasonry in Virginia (1733-1936). Brown, William Moseley, Masonic Home Press, Richmond, VA. ©1936.

History of Freemasonry in Tennessee (1789-1943). Snodgrass, Charles Albert. Ambrose Printing Co., Nashville TN. ©1944

The History of Freemasonry in South Carolina. Mackey, Albert Gallatin., South Carolinian Steam Power Press. Columbia, SC. 1861. 1st. Ed., 2nd ed. 1936, 3rd ed. 1998.

The Masonic Governors of North Carolina. Bridges, Earley Winfred., Oxford Masonic Home Press, Oxford, NC. ©1937.

Well-Springs of American Freemasonry, A Historian Looks at our Forty-nine Grand Lodges, Haywood, Henry LeRoy. The Masonic Service Association. ©1953
(This book has the genealogy of the American Grand Lodges in the front and back cover.

From Roanoke to Raleigh, Freemasonry in North Carolina, 1730-1800. Berman, Ric, The Old Stables Press, Oxfordshire, UK. © 2018.