

## **CERNEAU MASONRY AND THE GRAND LODGE OF A. F. & A.M. OF OHIO**

In the mid to late 1800s, a contest between two rival Scottish Rite bodies resulted in a split in the Grand Lodge of Ohio from 1891 until the turn of the century.

Joseph Cerneau, a French jeweler, was born at Villeblerin in 1763. In the early 1800s he immigrated to New York City, where in 1807, he established a spurious body under the title of "Sovereign Grand Consistory of the United States of America, its Territories and Dependencies." He claimed the right to organize bodies of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite in the northern part of the United States. His movement was denounced in 1813 by the legal Supreme Council sitting at Charleston, South Carolina. Cerneau and his adherents gave much trouble in the Scottish Rite for many years, and the bodies which he had formed were not entirely dissolved until long after the establishment of a legal Supreme Council for the Northern Jurisdiction which was formed in 1867.

In the mid 1890s there were four bodies claiming the right to confer the Scottish Rite degrees; The United States Jurisdiction, established by Joseph Cerneau; the Seymour-Peckham-Gorgas Cerneau Rite; the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction; and the Southern Masonic Jurisdiction. Many Grand Lodges refused to take any action regarding the legitimacy of these groups, holding that a Grand Lodge can know nothing about or recognize anything beyond the Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft and Master Mason degrees.

In Ohio, two of these bodies, the Cerneau group and the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction were vying for recognition by the Grand Lodge of Ohio as the legitimate body for conferring the so-called "higher degrees" in Freemasonry. This caused much turmoil between the brethren who supported the Cerneau organization and those who backed the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction.

The whole fight came to a focus when, on April 8, 1891, New England Lodge No. 4, F. & A.M. unanimously adopted the following resolution:

"Whereas, Ancient Craft Masonry teaches brotherly love, relief and truth; exhorting all Masons to befriend the needy, assist the distressed and aid the worthy, neither palliating nor aggravating the offenses of their brethren, judging with candor, admonishing with friendship and reprehending with justice, and above all, to zealously guard the ancient landmarks from infringement; and,

Whereas, Ancient Craft Masonry consists of but the three degrees of Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason, working only those three, claiming jurisdiction over only those three, and knowing no degrees besides those three; and,

Whereas, in violation of the ancient landmarks of the order, the Grand Lodge of Ohio, acting under the dictation of a foreign body, has undertaken to pass upon the legitimacy of twenty-nine degrees of so-called Masonry that the ancient landmarks of Blue Lodge Masonry do not recognize; and,

Whereas, We, upon our entrance into the order and before taking an obligation, were, assured at the altar upon which rested the sacred book of God, that it would not interfere with our religious, business or social relations; and,

Whereas, the despotic and unlawful course of said Grand Lodge does interfere not only with the privileges guaranteed to us upon our admission into the order, but with those guaranteed to us by the laws of the land, and prohibits us from joining associations

for our pleasure and profit, which are not antagonistic to the Blue Lodge, compelling us to cast aside independence, conscience and manhood; and,

Whereas, The said Grand Lodge for the benefit of those in power and not for the good of the craft, has been guilty of heinous methods, ways that are dark, and tricks that are cunning; attempting to take from us our inalienable rights guaranteed to us by the constitution, laws and usages of Masonry; denying to Master Masons the right of an impartial trial; by refusing counsel, the right of separate trial, the right to vote upon a brother's case by compelling lodges to vote for the expulsion of brothers who are member of said anathematized order under penalty of forfeiture of charter; the right of casting an untrammelled ballot; the right of visitation to sister lodges; the right of admission of representatives to the Grand Lodge; the right of members of lodges to choose their own officers; the right of members to hold office when chosen by their brethren; the right of members to exercise their private judgment as to what order or society they may choose to join outside of symbolic Masonry; by passing resolutions through disgraceful chicanery; ostracizing all who dare to raise their voice for personal liberty and inalienable rights; in short, by one fell blow of despotism and tyranny which would disgrace heathen China or inhuman Russia, setting at naught all the beautiful teachings and principles of Masonry, and, for the aggrandizement of the few, establishing a Masonic guillotine to cleave the heads of worthy Masons, whose only crime is honesty and sincerity; and,

Whereas, the members of this lodge, by invitation, went to attend the District Convention, held in Columbus, Ohio, February 12, 1891, but upon arrival, even after having been vouched for as worthy Master Masons, had the following test oath administered to them; "I do not hold membership in or allegiance to any Cerneau or other body claiming to be Masonic that has been declared to be clandestine by the Grand Lodge of Ohio," an oath destructive of, foreign to, and unauthorized by the landmarks of Ancient Craft Masonry; and,

Whereas, the Grand Master has written a letter ordering our officers to answer yes or no as to whether or not they belong to certain organizations outside and foreign to Ancient Craft Masonry, and threatening them with expulsion if they answer in the affirmative; and such acts and assumption of power are subversive of the rights of Master Masons, and not authorized by the constitution, landmarks and usages of Masonry; and,

Whereas, we live in an enlightened country, where personal liberty and civil rights are guaranteed beyond the power of any man or body of men to set aside or abridge; a country whose government is republican, whose ideas and doctrines are democratic, and whose very bulwark is freedom of action and protection of rights; and,

Whereas, the government of said Grand Lodge is antagonistic to personal liberty, contrary to our republican form of government, and subversive of civil rights; and,

Whereas, we have suffered obstructions, wrongs and insults; and have always taken the defensive side for the sake of harmony, never provoking quarrels, doing square and honest work, and giving no other cause of offense than the quiet exercise of our just and legal rights, we do not propose longer to forfeit our liberties, shackle our conscience or to be trampled upon by the despotic hoof of unlawful and tyrannical authority, but do declare our right of private judgment and personal liberty within the laws of the land. We want no Masonic Siberia, no Roman Proscription or Bloody St. Bartholomew. God made us men before Masonry made us Masons, and,

Whereas, the courts disclaim jurisdiction over the affairs of secret societies, and absolutely refuse to protect us in our rights; and,

Whereas, New England Lodge, No. 4, F. and A. M. is not only one of the pioneer lodges in the State of Ohio, but is staunchly loyal to Symbolic Masonry as handed to us and intrusted to our keeping by our fathers in Masonry; and is ready and willing at all times to aid and assist in disseminating and planting the pure doctrines which have been given us by those who have gone before us, and in transmitting to the latest Masonic posterity the same, unimpaired, unchanged, and in all their original purity and simplicity; but we cannot consent to be any longer a party to the untrue and unmasonic position and conduct practiced and pursued by the Grand Lodge of Ohio, under the dictation and control of a foreign element within it, which would be in violation of our vows to preserve the ancient landmarks of the order; and,

Whereas, the Grand Lodge of Ohio, through its representatives, has declared in legal documents that it has the right to withdraw its affiliation from its subordinate lodges for cause, thus conceding the same right to the subordinate lodge to withdraw its affiliation from the Grand Lodge; therefore be it

Resolved, that New England Lodge, No. 4, F. and A. M., being a duly constituted lodge, and as such, recognized by the Grand Lodge of Ohio, convened in just, perfect and legal form, hereby withdraws its affiliation from the Grand Lodge of Ohio, taking with it all its rights, powers and prerogatives and declaring itself free and independent. But in so doing, it also declares that whenever the Grand Lodge of Ohio shall rescind the unreasonable, unwise and unmasonic acts adopted by it under the influence of the aforesaid foreign element, and restores the ancient landmarks, and resumes the ancient customs, rules and usages of Freemasonry, New England Lodge, No. 4, F. and A. M., will be willing to affiliate with the Grand Lodge of Ohio.”

On July 28 and 29, 1891, at Worthington, Ohio, “The Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of the State of Ohio” was formed by New England Lodge No. 4 of Worthington, Bucyrus Lodge No. 139 and Crawford Lodge No. 443 of Bucyrus, Ohio. The latter two lodges had also withdrawn their affiliation with the Grand Lodge of Ohio. There were, at one time, at least 27 lodges affiliated with the new Grand Lodge.

The following is a list of lodges under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge, A. F. & A. M., taken from a book entitled, "Address to Men and Master Masons," by Justin Pinney, Grand Master, in behalf of the M.W. Grand Lodge, A. F. & A. M. of Ohio.

This Grand Lodge was formed in Worthington, Ohio on July 28 and 29, 1891 by several member lodges of the Grand Lodge of F. & A. M. who withdrew their affiliation from the said Grand Lodge of F. & A. M., during the Cerneau incident. The Grand Lodge A. F. & A. M. lasted only until the end of the decade.

Mt. Tabor.....Chillicothe, O.

Bismark.....Cincinnati, O.

Brighton.....Cincinnati, O.

Eureka.....Cincinnati, O.

Linton.....Cincinnati, O.

Washington.....	Cincinnati, O.
Alpha.....	Cleveland, O.
Progress.....	Cleveland, O.
Victor.....	Cleveland, O.
Lincoln.....	Cleveland, O.
Columbia.....	Columbus, O.
Franklin.....	Columbus, O.
Lincoln Goodale.....	Columbus, O.
Olentangy.....	Columbus, O.
Gem City.....	Dayton, O.
Vinton.....	Galloway, O.
Myrtle.....	Mt. Vernon, O.
Salem.....	New Salem, O.
Ahiman.....	Newark, O.
Surprise.....	Olmsted Falls, O.
Scioto Valley.....	Portsmouth, O.
Dumah No.7.....	Springfield, O.
Globe.....	Toledo, O.
Lessing.....	Toledo, O.
Lincoln.....	Toledo, O.
West Mansfield.....	West Mansfield, O.
New England.....	Worthington, O.

**Bibliography:**

“Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry and Its Kindred Sciences,” Albert G. Mackey, Masonic History Company, 1921.

“Address to Men and Master Masons,” Justin Pinney, Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of A. F. & A. M. of Ohio, 1897.