

Lessons in Freemasonry

WHY NOT A DELEGATE?

Richard D. Snow, KYCH
New England Lodge No.4
Lodge Education Officer
February 5, 2008

One of the questions that surfaces periodically, especially when the subject of the formation of the Grand Lodge of Ohio is mentioned, is why James Kilbourne of New England Lodge was not accepted as a delegate at that first meeting on January 4, 1808. This question was referred to me in an email recently. To answer that question, one would have to delve into what criteria was necessary to qualify a representative from each lodge as a delegate to that first convention.

Background

James Kilbourne had organized the Scioto Company to make a settlement in the “western country.” However, before he could make that dream materialize, there were three factors that Kilbourne stipulated had to be resolved before his Scioto Company would make the sojourn from Connecticut. One, was the adoption of the Ohio Constitution, two, the western boundary of Ohio resolved, and three, final approvals from the families in Connecticut.

Toward Statehood

The movement to create the state of Ohio touched off the first sizeable political debate in the new territory. General Arthur St. Clair, the territorial governor, and many settlers from the New England states resisted, while Thomas Worthington and Edward Tiffin, both prominent settlers from Virginia, led the movement in promoting statehood. In November 1802, a convention was called to draft a constitution. Leaders from around the territory (Thomas Worthington, Rufus Putman, Samuel Huntington, among others) drafted a constitution in twenty-five days that would lay the groundwork for statehood. In March 1803, the constitution went into effect and Ohio became the seventeenth state to join the Union.¹ Thus, Kilbourne’s stipulation of statehood became a reality. The western boundary controversy was apparently resolved and forty families signed articles of agreement to move to Ohio the following September.

Forming the Grand Lodge

The first statehood convention was to be held in Chillicothe in January 1803. Apparently the brethren of Erie Lodge No.47, located in Warren, took advantage of the date and place to write letters to the six lodges working in Ohio at that time. These were American Union (Army) Lodge, Cincinnati Lodge No, 13, Lodge of Amity at Zanesville No.105, Erie Lodge No.47, New England Lodge No.48, and Scioto Lodge No.2. Many of the state delegates were also Masons, and the brethren in Warren seized upon an opportunity to also form a Grand Lodge at the same time the legislators were in session. Communications from Erie Lodge were then sent out to those working lodges and it is recorded in the minutes of New England Lodge on January 2, 1808 that a resolution was adopted for a committee to be formed. Further, that the resolution indicated that James Kilbourne and Ezra Griswold would be the appointed delegates.

¹Part of this paragraph is extracted from *Frontier Cornerstone* by Allen E. Roberts, 2nd printing, 1981,

The Objection

The delegates from those six lodges did meet and after exchanging credentials, objections arose as to the qualifications of those delegates from New England Lodge. The Ohio legislators were in session, so the Grand Lodge delegates adjourned to six o'clock in the evening the following day on January 5, 1808.

As these Grand Lodge delegates met accordingly, the objection again rose as to the qualifications of the brethren from New England Lodge. Brother Elias Langham of Scioto Lodge No.2 moved that the delegates from New England Lodge "be not permitted to take a seat in this Convention," whereupon the motion was passed and Kilbourne was not permitted to take a part in the proceedings. The question is, why?

There are two possible scenarios. One, that, Ezra Griswold did not prepare a formative letter from the lodge for Kilbourne to take to Chillicothe, or, two, that some other problem arose that Kilbourne was not made aware.

Some historians believe that Kilbourne did not have the letter with him and that it would take several days for the letter to arrive at Chillicothe. I don't believe this was the problem. The Convention met from Monday, January 4 through 6 o'clock in the evening of Saturday, January 8. If Kilbourne was missing a letter from the Secretary, it would almost be impossible for Griswold to receive notice from a courier from Chillicothe riding to Worthington, Griswold writing the letter then having the courier return with the letter to the Convention. This scenario does not seem plausible.

Eli Ackerman, in writing his May 1929 history of New England Lodge (61 pages) indicates a more logical reason for Kilbourne's rejection. Allen E. Roberts, in his *Frontier Cornerstone*, indicates the same reason as Ackerman. What could that reason be?

Conclusion

When perusing the minutes of June 28, 1808, the reason for the rejection becomes, I believe, quite clear.

When the Grand Lodge of Connecticut met at its second semiannual Convention, it issued charters on October 19, 1803 to the brethren that formed Erie Lodge (number 47 on the registry) and to Kilbourne who formed New England Lodge (number 48 on the registry). Even though these two lodges were chartered, they have to be instituted, i.e., there must be an election of officers which formerly institutes a lodge. Apparently, the brethren who formed Erie Lodge held their election of officers and were holding recorded meetings. That does not seem the case with Kilbourne and New England Lodge. There is no record of any meetings between the date New England Lodge was chartered and January 2, 1808. Either Kilbourne was not holding any meetings or, if there were, no minutes were recorded, or what was recorded, was lost. The next recorded minutes of New England Lodge does substantiate it being instituted.

The June 28, 1808 minutes indicate that Worshipful Brother Thomas Worthington, of Scioto Lodge, met with Kilbourne in his home and formerly installed the officers of New England Lodge. Thus, New England Lodge is formerly instituted. Kilbourne did not meet in session with the newly formed Grand Lodge held in Chillicothe in 1809 but was present during the Convention of 1810 and participated in a committee.

Have I answered the question of Kilbourne's rejection as a delegate on that first day of the organization of the Grand Lodge of Ohio? Not really, but my assessment as to the reason for the rejection is more plausible. There is nothing written in the Grand Lodge Proceedings of January 4th, or 5th as to why Kilbourne was rejected. However, one has to speculate that the reason he was rejected was that the lodge was not formerly instituted.