

# **Anno Lucis and the Anderson Constitutions**



H.A.F.O.V.A. Council No. 442  
Allied Masonic Degrees  
United States of America  
Alexandria, VA

Written and Presented by  
Venerable James M. Stevenson, Sovereign Master

We've all heard the term "Let There Be Light" in our Masonic Ritual. It is a phrase given to us in Genesis Chapter 1 of the Old Testament, representing the Creation of the Heavens and the Earth; the Biblical representation of the "Big Bang", or theoretical creation of our universe by the divine Hand of God. The event is symbolized in our ritual in the bringing of Masonic Light to a worthy candidate in Masonry. But when did this event actually occur? Think back to a time before the invention of carbon dating, pollen dating and the theory of Darwinism. How would one determine the origin of Reality itself? One possible answer lies on almost every Masonic bulletin ever printed containing a rather high four-digit number and two letters: "A.:L.:."

Many Masonic scholars and authors attributed this curious means of measuring time to probably one of the most famous men in Masonic history. On September 29, 1721, Brother and Presbyterian minister Dr. James Anderson, by order of the Grand Lodge of London, commenced his digest of the Old Gothic Constitutions, otherwise known as the Old Charges. This original document was said to have been written by Prince Edwin, in 926 AD, under the reign of his father, King Athelstan of England as the first published code of laws governing knightly and, arguably, Masonic behavior. In an effort to clarify what were perceived by the Grand Lodge of London to be errors in the old manuscripts, Anderson researched and attempted to update the document for "modern" use<sup>1</sup>. Though some have questioned the actual existence of the Old Charges to begin with, the resulting work of Brother Anderson, referred to as the "Book of Constitutions" of 1723, contained within it several references to the use of "A.:L.:." by adding 4000 to the current "vulgar" year<sup>2</sup>.

As I was researching this, it seemed far too unexplained as to why this date was chosen and what its intended significance was to the Craft. This is particularly due to the lack of such information in the copy of the "Book of Constitutions" that rests within the covers of our own Methodical Digest, as adopted by the Grand Lodge of Virginia in 1791 – supposedly, a direct copy of Anderson's original work. In fact, there doesn't appear to be any mention of "A.:L.:." or "Anno Lucis" anywhere in this historical text that I could ascertain. Not convinced, more digging was in order.

---

<sup>1</sup> Mackey's Revised Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, Vol.1 (1966) – pp. 145-146, "Book of Constitutions"

<sup>2</sup> A Freemason's Guide and Compendium – by Brother Bernard E. Jones

As I mentioned before, James Anderson has been credited with the calculation of the “Year of Light”. However, it is entirely possible that, sometime between 1650 and 1654, someone else already did the math. Irish Archbishop and theologian, James Ussher of Armaugh, attempted to examine the text within the book of Genesis and other unspecified historical documents in order to calculate how many years before the birth of Christ was the mystical Creation of the Universe. So certain of his results, Archbishop Ussher went so far as pinpointing the exact date of Creation as being at sunset on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 4004 BC – calling it *Anno Mundi – The Year of the World*. This calculation had since been introduced as a footnote within copies of the King James Bible in 1701 AD and, from that time forward, has become the cornerstone epoch of the Christian Creationism philosophy<sup>3</sup>. Twenty years later, enter James Anderson, who claimed that the chronological marker “A.:L.:” was calculated by adding an even 4000 to the current year, rather than 4004, a discrepancy that cannot be attributed to the English conversion from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar which didn’t occur until 1752. Thus began the curious paradoxical question, was Jesus Christ born in 4 BC<sup>4</sup>?



**Archbishop James Ussher of Armaugh**

Others had speculated that “By using the 4000 date, they [the Masons] could claim that their usage predated Ussher’s promotion of the theory that Jesus had been born four years earlier than claimed by Dionysius Exiguus, the sixth century inventor of the BC-AD time system”<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>3</sup> The Lodge Room – The Weekly Column: “Anno Lucis” – Dec 28, 2002 – by Brother Stephen Dafoe

<sup>4</sup> Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon – *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* – Transactions of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, London: “Anno Lucis *et al.*” – Nov 13, 1980 – by Brother Harry Mendoza

<sup>5</sup> Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon – “Anno Lucis” – Apr 2, 2001 – from *Kenning’s Masonic Cyclopaedia and Handbook of Masonic Archaeology, History and Biography*. A.F.A. Woodford, ed. George Kenning, London: 1878 (p.650)

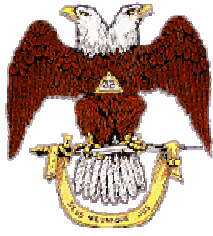
Possibly another byproduct of this discrepancy arose in later years when, in an effort to isolate the two chronological systems, several Lodges started arriving at their own meanings behind the Masonic 4000 A.:L.: versus King James' 4004 A.:L.:<sup>6</sup>

- 1732 – A document from Castle Lodge made reference to “Anno Lat. 5732”, an abbreviation for the phrase Anno Latomorum, “Year of Freemasons” or “Year of Freemasonry”
- 1735 – Salisbury Lodge wrote in their minutes Anno Lithotomorum, “Year of Masonry”
- 1752 & 1753 – A list of Lodges by the Grand Lodge of the Antients uses “Anno Lap.” or Anno Lapidariorum, “Year of the Stonecutters” (it would seem that the secret society by the same name in the popular television show “The Simpsons” is an appendant body of the Ancient York Rite!)
- 1777 – The first recorded use of Anno Lucis in England; the conferring of a certificate by the Grand Lodge of England to the Lodge of Alfred commemorating the occasion of the making of six Grand Lodge Officers members of that Lodge, dated the “15<sup>th</sup> Day of February Anno Lucis 5777”
- 1791 – The second recorded use of Anno Lucis in England; the granting of a Knights Templar “Patent of Constitution” in Dunckerley. However, this patent is dated “Anno Domini 1791 – Anno Lucis 5795” – conspicuously citing the 4-year discrepancy between the two dating systems
- 1814 – Beaufort Lodge No. 167 in Bristol is in possession of a document which makes reference to Anno Laotomiae, another “Year of Masonry” variant

---

<sup>6</sup> Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon – Ars Quatuor Coronatorum – Transactions of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, London: “Anno Lucis *et al.*” – Nov 13, 1980 – by Brother Harry Mendoza

Other Masonic organizations and appendant bodies have their own measures of time. For example<sup>7</sup>:



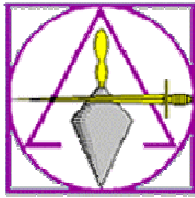
**Scottish Rite:**

**Anno Mundi (Mun-dee):** “Year of the World”

Akin to **Anno Hebraico (He-BRAY-i-ko):** "Hebrew Year"

Found by adding 3760 to the current year

Alludes to the Jewish interpretation of the creation of the world, a full 240 years later than when Anderson said the event occurred.



**Cryptic Masonry:**

**Anno Depositionis (Dep-uh-SISH-oh-nis):** "Year of the Deposit"

Found by adding 1000 to the current year

Alludes to the year that certain sacred treasures were deposited beneath the first Temple of King Solomon.



**Royal Arch:**

**Anno Inventionis (In-ven-ti-OH-nis):** "Year of Discovery"

Found by adding 530 to the current year

Alludes to the year that certain sacred treasures were discovered by the Craft at the building of the second Temple of King Solomon.

**Anno Benefacis (Ben-ah-FA-sis)** or

**Anno Bonefacio (Bon-ah-FA-sio):** "Year of the Blessing"

Found by adding 1913 to the current year

Alludes to the year that Melchizedek blessed Abraham, as mentioned in Genesis 14:19.



**Knights Templar:**

**Anno Ordinis (OR-di-nee):** "Year of the Order"

Found by subtracting 1118 from the current year

Alludes to the establishment of the original order of the Knights Templar.

...And these are to name a few.

---

<sup>7</sup> Mackey's Revised Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, Vol.1 (1966) – pp. 80-81, “Anno Bonefacio” through “Anno Ordinis”

Variations and permutations aside, it is evident that, despite obvious inaccuracies, conflicts and contradictions, the tradition of Anno Lucis and its cousins still lives on today in the trestleboards, patents and charters of every Masonic Lodge. It is an integral part of the ritual of our order and a testament to the traditional thinking that Masonry holds dear.

However, the confusion and strange mismatches in history of the origins of Anno Lucis give rise to a greater concern. We must be vigilant, my brethren, on the trappings of revisionist history, ranging from accidental ignorance to deliberate agenda. The two different possible origins of “A.:L.:” herein explained might one day give rise to one or more additional stories. It will be up to us within the walls of Freemasonry to draw upon our vast institutional memory and maintain the best possible accounts of what came before us without bias. History is our greatest gift to ourselves and to the world. Let’s be right about it.

---

Additional topical websites of interest:

The Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon A.F. & A.M.

<http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/Writings/annolucis.html>

[http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/aqc/anno\\_lucis/anno\\_lucis.html](http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/aqc/anno_lucis/anno_lucis.html)

The Lodge Room – The Weekly Column

<http://thelodgeroom.com/dec2802.html>

The Freemason – Masonic Dating

<http://members.rediff.com/risingstar/fmfeb00.htm>

Phoenix Masonry – Anno Lucis, The Masonic Calendar – Y6K Compatible

[http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/anno\\_lucis.htm](http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/anno_lucis.htm)