



# The History of Swiss Masonry and of the Grand Lodge Alpina of Switzerland

## The Beginning

Freemasonry is first mentioned in Geneva in 1736. Having been informed that a 'free masonic society' had settled there and that a man named Hamilton was at its head, the Geneva authorities summoned him and forbade him to affiliate any citizen of the city. George Hamilton, an Englishman and former banker had gone bankrupt in Amsterdam in 1721 and had retired to Geneva in 1729. Darnley, as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England in 1737, appointed Hamilton as Provincial Grand Master for Geneva, although he hadn't any Masonic activity any more. Later on, documents of Geneva authorities pointed to the existence of a half-dozen Lodges in 1744; one met in Jeanne-Marie Bourdillon's house; his cousin, Leonard Bourdillon's Lodge, was created in 1749. However, during the next twenty years, no document mentions any Masonic activity in the city.

## The Grand Lodge of Geneva

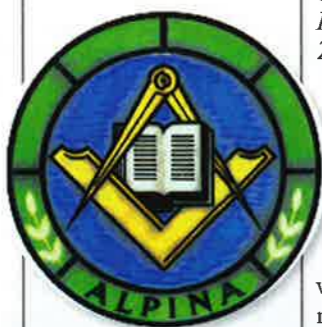
The Grand Lodge of Geneva, not stemming from the Grand Lodge of England, was constituted in 1769; in 1773, 16 lodges (14 situated in Geneva) were included in this new jurisdiction. Over the next six years, seven new Lodges were created. With about 25,000 inhabitants, Geneva had at that time a higher Lodge density than today!

In 1771, Geneva citizens created two Lodges in Zurich: St Jean du Levant (or East of Constantinople, where a community of watchmakers were established) and *Pera Discretion*. In 1772, this Lodge joined the Rite of Strict Observance and in February 1776 officially left the Grand Lodge of Geneva.

As indicated in a document of Grand Lodge dating December 1774, almost all its officers and Grand Masters held additional degrees. The first Chapter of Rose Croix was established in Geneva in 1770, by Brethren initiated in Edinburgh, London and Berlin. The chapter was probably related to the Lodge La Prudence, one of the oldest in Geneva.

Between 1781 and 1795, political troubles brought chaos to the lodges' activities, but a Grand Orient of Geneva was created in 1790. In 1796, the Masonic activity flourished anew. In 1798, the French armies invaded Switzerland. In 1799, the Grand Lodge of Geneva was again active, but attempts to unite with the Grand Orient of Geneva failed; in order to maintain the confusion, the Grand Lodge took the new title of the Grand Lodge of Geneva, known as the Grand Orient. In 1800, this title was changed again to the Provincial Grand Lodge of Geneva. This jurisdiction suspended its activities in 1810. Four years later, Geneva joined the Swiss federal state: and the chapter of an autonomous Masonry in Geneva closed.

Dr Michel Jaccard



Top: GLAS Logo.

Above: Maurice Zahnd GM Grand Lodge Alpina of Switzerland.

## The Swiss Confederation of the Eighteenth Century

The first lodge situated on Swiss territory, known as La Parfaite Union des Étrangers, (the Perfect Union of Foreigners) was founded in 1740 in Lausanne (which at that time belonged to the canton of Bern) and received a patent from the Grand Lodge of England (No 187). Two lodges were also active in Bern in 1744. Unfortunately, in 1745, the Bern government decided to prohibit any Masonic activity.

Up to 1814, the date of Napoleon's first abdication, Lodges were created elsewhere on Swiss territory, mainly under English, German and French influences:

*Les Trois Etoiles Flamboyantes* (The Three Flaming Stars) in Neuchâtel (1743)

*La Concorde* (Harmony) in Zürich (1740?)

*Zur Freiheit* (Freedom) in Basel (1744)

Most of the lodges were short-lived. The ceremonies were often carried out in French, the *lingua Franca* of the elite. The rites used were either the Strict Observance (for the German part) or early versions of the French Modern Rite (for the French-speaking part), but there were probably exceptions as well. Since Swiss mercenaries (soldiers and officers) were often enlisted abroad, the influence of military lodges cannot be underestimated, noticeably during the Napoleonic era.

## Swiss Masonry in Search of Unity

The Congress of Vienna fully re-established Swiss independence and the European powers agreed to permanently recognise Swiss neutrality. The treaty also allowed Switzerland to increase its territory, with the admission of the cantons; Valais, Neuchâtel and Geneva. In 1815, the Swiss lodges were affiliated to three distinct jurisdictions:

- The *Grand Orient National Helvétique Romand* (for the French-speaking part), founded in 1810 and grouping exclusively craft Lodges. The additional degrees were under the supervision of another organ, 'The *Directoire Suprême Helvétique Romand*'.
- The *Directoire Écossais de la Suisse* (mostly for the German part), founded in 1779, practising the Scottish Rectified Rite stemmed from the Strict Observance. This *Directoire* included the first three degrees and the additional degree of the rite.
- The lodges created under the influence of the *Grand Orient de France* during the French occupation (especially Basel and Bern) are :The Lodge of Basel decided to join the *Directoire Écossais de la Suisse*; The *Esperance* (Hope)

of Bern chose to obtain a patent from the United Grand Lodge of England. The lodge also obtained a 'green light' to constitute a Provincial Grand Lodge for Switzerland.

However, Swiss Masons sought unity. Both the Provincial Grand Lodge and the Grand Orient National Helvétique negotiated towards union. In 1822, the Grande Loge Nationale Suisse (Great National Lodge of Switzerland) was created. Discussions then began with the *Directoire Écossais de la Suisse*. The situation was more complex, since the *Directoire* also supervised the additional degrees of the Rectified Scottish Rite. An agreement was finally reached in 1843. The Grand Lodge Alpina of Switzerland (GLAS) was established in 1844. This new jurisdiction included fourteen Lodges. During the nineteenth century, other Swiss Lodges, which were first reluctant to adhere to this new obedience, progressively joined the GLAS. During the second part of the nineteenth century, creation and disappearance of Lodges occurred. A Scottish Rite Supreme Council was established in 1876, as a separate unity, but in excellent amity with the Grand Lodge.

## The Twentieth Century

Swiss masonry enjoyed a rather prosperous existence, but this enjoyable situation changed with the coming of Fascism and Nazism. The blow was delivered by Arthur Fonjallaz, born in the French-speaking part, who first pursued a successful career in the Swiss Army, achieving the rank of brigadier general and taking up a post as lecturer of Military Sciences and War History at the Swiss Institute of Technology in Zürich (ETH). Colonel Fonjallaz was, however, relieved of his duties in 1933 after it came to light that he had been a member of the governing board of the fascist *Heimatwehr*, as well as the *National Front*, both of which were noted for their fascism and virulent anti-Semitism.

Fonjallaz also took an early interest in politics. He was a strong supporter of Italian fascism as a result. He soon founded the Swiss Fascist Federation, which received 2 million lira a year from Mussolini. A devoted follower of Mussolini, he spoke of the power of the rhetoric of *Il Duce* in glowing terms:

*As Mussolini began to speak presenting the goals of fascism, we Swiss understood immediately the significance of this man and responded to the radiant power of his personality. We were all directly convinced that such a leader could do more for world peace than hundreds of politicians.*

With the massive support of Mussolini funds, he then set up a 'Helvetic Action against Secret Societies' which was particularly geared towards opposing Freemasonry. Taking advantage of the initiative process, Fonjallaz attempted to pass an amendment to the Swiss Federal Constitution banning the practice of Masonry, but this was defeated in 1937.



The GLAS had to invest enormous sums and many human resources to counteract the Fonjallaz propaganda. Many brothers, afraid of eventual prosecution by factions on the extreme right, left the lodges. Within the next ten years, about half of the Alpina members resigned. A fair recovery was not observed until 1950. In the 1950s however, several hundred brethren, aiming to have closer relations and reciprocal visits with the lodges of the Grand Orient de France, left the Grand Lodge and created the Grand Orient of Switzerland. This was a painful event for Masons of the French-speaking part of Switzerland, in contradiction with its Helvetic culture of consensus. However, Swiss Masonry has happily followed a regular and enjoyable existence since.

Swiss lodges practice the AASR, the Scottish Rectified Rite, the French Modern Rite, the Schroeder and the Emulation rite. The overall number of brethren of the GLAS is over 3500, the Grand Orient de Suisse and the Grande Loge Féminine de Suisse, about 500 hundred each.

## The Swiss Alpina Research Group (ARG)

The SRG is an association founded in September 1985 in Bern (Switzerland), whose aim is to unite Master Masons interested in doing research in various domains: symbolism, ritual, philosophy, history, literature, arts, as well as exploring the future.

The SRG was officially recognised by the Grand Lodge Alpina of Switzerland (GLAS) in 2002, as the unique research body in the country. As an independent body, it functions autonomously and involves close relationships with other research Lodges in Europe and overseas.

The SRG is officially coupled with the Quatuor Coronati Research Lodge in Bayreuth, Germany since 1992. It has also been an associate member of the Australia and New Zealand Masonic Research Council (ANZMRC) since 2004.

From the very beginning, the SRG has sought to function in the three official languages spoken in Switzerland. Its working language is presently French, whereas the two other tongues (German and Italian) occupy a secondary role for the moment. However, English is frequently in the limelight and much sought after.

Dr Michel Jaccard, PWM, Past WM of the ARG was invited to present the Lecture Tour for the Research Lodges in South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, and Hong Kong in the autumn of 2015, endorsed by the Australian and New Zealand Masonic Research Council (ANZMRC). His book *Continental Freemasonry - Philosophy, Developments and Worldwide Impact*, is available at [info@masonica-gra.ch](mailto:info@masonica-gra.ch)

Grande Loge Suisse Alpina can be found at [www.freimaurer.ch](http://www.freimaurer.ch)

Groupe de Recherche Alpina can be found at [www.masonica-gra.ch](http://www.masonica-gra.ch)



Above: Courtesy of freimaurer-wiki

Left: ARG logo.

Below: Courtesy of knifecountryusa

