

**EARLY HISTORY OF
THE GRAND CHAPTER OF ROYAL ARCH MASONS
AND GRAND COUNCIL, ROYAL AND SELECT MASTERS
IN VIRGINIA
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There may be conflicting stories and dates in this paper. This is due to the fact that the history of the Grand Chapter and Grand Council has conflicting stories and dates.

THE GRAND CHAPTER

The Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons, in the Commonwealth of Virginia, was formed in May 1808 in Norfolk, Virginia. The Chapter in Norfolk contacted Union Chapter in Staunton, Richmond Chapter in Richmond and Dumphries Chapter in Dumphries about the possibility of forming a Grand Chapter in Virginia. The first assembly of these Chapters was held on Monday May 2, through Saturday May 7, 1808 in Mason's Hall in Norfolk. During this week the Grand Chapter of Virginia was organized. There were three original Chapters that were Chartered at the formation of the Grand Chapter. They were Norfolk United Royal Arch Chapter No. 1 in Norfolk, Union Royal Arch Chapter No. 2 in Staunton and Richmond Royal Arch Chapter No. 3 in Richmond. These three Chapters were chartered on May 5, 1808 and are still in existence and working Chapters at the present time.

The membership of these Chapters as of October 1, 1989 were as follows:

Norfolk United No. 1	414
Union No. 2	61
Richmond No. 3	154

These are not the only Chapters in the early history of Royal Arch Masonry in Virginia. Royal Arch Masonry was practiced in Virginia during the most part of the 18th century. The Chapter degrees were worked at that time under the authority of a Master's Warrant in the symbolic lodges.

Norfolk Lodge No. 1, originally started as the Royal Exchange lodge. It met in 1732 in Royal Exchange tavern. It was established by English Constitution on December 22, 1733. It was numbered 172. On June 1, 1741 it was chartered by the Grand Lodge

of England. In 1777-1778 it aided in the formation of the Grand Lodge of Virginia. On October 28, 1786 it was designated Norfolk Lodge No. 1 by the Grand Lodge of Virginia. On December 29, 1790 it was chartered by the Grand Lodge of Virginia.

Naphtali Lodge No. 56 was also in Norfolk. It was chartered on December 11, 1798. It became extinct in December 1849. These two lodges worked the Royal Arch degree. On February 19, 1805 the Chapter work of these two Lodges merged to form the "Grand United Royal Arch Chapter of Norfolk". Robert Brough was elected as the "Most Reverend High Priest". Robert Brough was also the Worshipful Master of Norfolk Lodge No. 1 in 1805. In May 1808 he was elected the first Grand High Priest of the newly formed Grand Chapter of Virginia. He served as Grand High Priest in the years 1808 - 1809 - 1812 and 1813 and as Grand Master of Masons in Virginia in 1813 - 1814 and 1815. He died in Norfolk Virginia October 3, 1823.

Union Royal Arch Chapter began at the Mason's Hall in Staunton, Virginia on December 1, 1790. In the year 1790 the lodge at Staunton petitioned the Grand Lodge of Virginia for permission to confer the Royal Arch Degree. Permission was granted at the Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge on October 30, 1790 to the lodge at Staunton to form a separate organization for that purpose.

Richmond Royal Arch Chapter No. 3 began on March 12, 1792 in Mason's Hall in Richmond Virginia. This Chapter still meets in Mason's Hall where it has met since it was formed.

Richmond Union Mark Lodge was formed on June 12, 1805 and operated as an independent body until April 16, 1822 when it merged with Richmond Royal Arch Chapter. This is one of three Mark Lodges which operated independently in Virginia.

There was a Royal Arch Chapter in Winchester which was organized August 26, 1799 while the lodge in Winchester was still under the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania. This Lodge and Chapter did not become a part of the Grand Lodge and Grand Chapter of Virginia for a number of years because it was nearer for them to travel to Philadelphia than to Richmond.

There was also a Chapter at Dumfries in Prince William County. At the annual convocation of Grand Chapter held in Mason's Hall in Richmond in 1822, the Grand Chapter adopted a resolution to write a "fraternal letter" to Dumfries Chapter and request them to unite with the Grand Chapter. The Chapter was also requested to send representatives to the next Annual Convocation of Grand Chapter. The letter was also to state that until they did join Grand Chapter that all Masonic converse with the Chapter would be considered irregular.

The Grand High Priest convened a special Convocation of Grand Chapter on Friday, December 13, 1822 and received Jeremiah Elkins, the High Priest and a delegation from Dumphries Chapter asking for Dumphries Chapter to be received into the Grand Chapter. A resolution was adopted at that time showing that Dumphries Chapter was in existence before the formation of Grand Chapter and that it was friendly in its formation but could not attend the meetings of May 5 thru 7, 1808 at the formation of Grand Chapter or any of the subsequent "Conventions". A resolution was adopted to grant a Charter to Dumphries Chapter and to assign them No. 20 without fee, just as all of the other pre-organization Chapters had received. The records of this Chapter have been lost.

The first Royal Arch Degree work recorded in the world was done in Fredericksburg lodge No. 4 in Fredericksburg, Virginia on December 22, 1753. This is the lodge of George Washington who was initiated there on November 4, 1752.

FIRST RECORDED MINUTES OF THE ROYAL ARCH DEGREE

"December 22, 1753. Which night the lodge being assembled was present:

Right Worshipful Simon Frazier	G.M.}	
Do John Neilson	S. Wardn}	of
Do Robert Armistead	J. Wardn}	Royal Arch
		Lodge

"Transactions of the night

Daniel Campbell	}	
Robert Walkerston	}	Raised to the Degree of Royal Arch Mason
Alex Wodrow	}	

"Royal Arch Lodge being shutt, Entered Apprentices Lodge Opened present:

Right Worshipful Dan Campbell	G.M.
Do John Neilson	S.W.
Do Robert Walkerston	J.W.
Alex Wodrow	Secretary
Robert Armistead	Treasurer, pro Tem
Robert Spottswood	
Simon Frazier	Visiting Bro

"John Benger was admitted as a member of this Lodge."

Another Lodge of interest to Royal Arch Masons was "Cabin Point Royal Arch Lodge No. 8 which was Chartered April 15, 1775." It was located at the courthouse in King George County. It became extinct on December 12, 1818. The record of the Royal Arch degree having been conferred in this lodge was in the form of a certificate bearing the date of October 4, 1783. "William Lambert" was admitted by us to the "Super Excellent degree of Royal Arch Mason."

James Cushman was born on December 22, 1776 at Topsham, Maine. He visited the Grand Lodge of Virginia in Richmond on December 15 - 17, 1819 at their Annual Communication. He either conferred or took a part in exemplifying the Symbolic Degrees at Grand Lodge and for his services the Grand Lodge paid him a fee of \$50.00.

On January 17, 1820 he attended the Annual Convocation of the Grand Chapter Royal Arch Masons of Virginia and exemplified the Ritual of the Capitular Degrees according to the teachings of Thomas Smith Webb. He persuaded the Grand Chapter to change its Ritual to the one he exemplified. The Grand Chapter voted to change the Ritual. This Ritual is still in use at the present time by Virginia Royal Arch Masons. For his efforts he received a fee of \$15.00 and was appointed as the first Grand Lecturer of the Grand Chapter.

It is believed that although the Grand Chapter has never affiliated with the General Grand Chapter that this Ritual is the same Ritual that was written for them. The General Grand Chapter has since changed their Ritual. In Virginia the Ritual is not written with the exception of some parts of some of the lectures, the prayers and charges. It is taught mouth to ear. There is also a catechism or lecture for the Royal Arch Degree but it is known only by a few companions.

The following resolution was rejected in Grand Chapter on November 17, 1990.

Whereas: The quality of the Royal Arch degree work continues to decline in Virginia; and,

Whereas: It is believed that this problem could be alleviated by committing the ritual to writing;

Therefore, be it resolved that: The Committee on Work shall, as soon as practicable after this resolution be passed by the Grand Chapter, commit to paper (and/or computer disk) the entire ritual of the Royal Arch Chapter, as conferred in Virginia;

Furthermore: The only copy of the Ritual will be retained by the Grand Secretary, for use by the Grand Lecturer and Grand High Priest.

Reason: As stated above. the ritual suffers as the pillars of the Royal Arch continue to age and pass on. By committing our ritual to writing, we ensure that it will be perpetuated beyond the length of an individual's life or memory.

Ex. Rodney J. Van Houten PHP

Mt. Ex. Bernard B. Belote, Jr. PGHP

Note: The ritual of the Grand Lodge is also taught mouth to ear and is not written.

MARK LODGES

There were three independent Mark Lodges in Virginia. They were Richmond Union, Chartered June 12, 1805, Dumphries date unknown and Eastville Chartered in 1820.

At the present time there are 79 subordinate Chapters including one Research Chapter in Virginia. The total membership as of October 1, 1989 was 11,317. There are 22 districts in the State.

The Grand Chapter and subordinate Chapters in Virginia enjoy a very excellent relationship with all other bodies of Masonry in Virginia, the ladies organizations and the youth groups.

THE GRAND COUNCIL

The Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters in Virginia was organized in Richmond on December 8-9, 1820. It was the second oldest Grand Council in the world. The Grand Council of Connecticut is the oldest. Many Virginia Masons are quite unfamiliar with the term "Cryptic Degrees" at the present time because they are conferred within the Royal Arch Chapter and are referred to as the "Council Degrees" only.

Jeremy Ladd Cross boarded the Steam Boat from Washington D.C. to Fredericksburg, Virginia at sun up on December 3, 1817. He left the Steam Boat at dusk and traveled several miles to Fredericksburg where he spent the night. He left at 3:30 A.M. the next day by stage and arrived at Richmond at 8:00 P.M. on December 4, 1817 a total distance of 100 miles.

He attended the Grand Lodge Annual Communication from December 8 thru 10, 1817. On Friday, December 12, 1817 he attended a Royal Arch Chapter where three were exalted. During

the month he talked to Royal Arch Masons about the possibility of forming a "Council of Select Masters". On Thursday, December 25, 1817 after talking with Royal Arch Masons, he lectured with Companions and established a "Select Masters Council". This was Hiram Council No. 1.

COPY OF WARRANT ESTABLISHING HIRAM COUNCIL No. 1

SELECT MASTERS IN RICHMOND, VIRGINIA

"To all to whom these presents may come greeting:"

KNOW YE,

That by the High Powers in me vested by the Thrice Illustrious and Grand Puissant in the Grand Council of Select Masters, held at the City of Baltimore, in the State of Maryland, North America: I do hereby constitute and empower the within named Companions to form themselves into a Regular Council of Select Masters; and I do appoint my worthy Companion, John Dove, to be the first Thrice Illustrious Grand Master; George Fletcher to be the first Thrice Illustrious Deputy Grand Master, and Benjamin H. Brady to be the Principal Conductor; and I do grant them full power, with their constitutional number to assemble, open and confer, the Degree of Select Master, and do all other business appertaining to said degree, for which this shall be their sufficient warrant until revoked by the Grand Puissant. And I further direct said Council to hold its meetings in the city of Richmond and State of Virginia.

Given under my hand at Richmond, this twenty-fifth day of December, A.D. 1817, of Discovery 2817.

JEREMY L. CROSS

"CERTIFICATE"

I hereby certify, that having been duly authorized by the Grand Council of the State of Maryland, held in the city of Baltimore, to establish and organize Councils of Select Masters in any State in the United States, where there was not already a Grand Council formed; I have by the high powers in me vested by the aforesaid Grand Council, established the following Councils of Select Masters, and granted them a warrant of constitution.

JEREMY L. CROSS

The Richmond Companions paid a fee of \$40.00 for this warrant. The same amount was also paid by the other Councils established in Virginia.

On Friday, December 26, 1817 he left at 3:00 A.M. for Fredericksburg and arrived at 9:00 P.M. On Wednesday, December 31, 1817 he left Fredericksburg at 3:00 A.M. and arrived in Dumphries at noon. During the next several days, January 1, thru 5, 1818 he attended Lodge, Chapter and a Mark Master Masons lodge and visited some of the brethren. In the evening of Tuesday, January 6, 1818 he established a Council of Select Masters in Dumphries and presented them with a warrant similar to the one presented to Hiram Council No. 1 in Richmond. The whereabouts of the warrant for the Council in Dumphries is unknown. On Wednesday, January 7, 1818 he left by stage and went to Washington, D.C. thus ending his only known visit to Virginia.

In 1818 or 1819 James Cushman became Cross's chief emmissary. He came to Virginia as recorded in the Grand Chapter section of this paper. He brought with him to Virginia authorization from the "Thrice Illustrious Deputy Grand Puissant, Jeremy L. Cross" to organize Councils of Select Masters. Seven more Councils were formed as a result of his visit to Virginia. They were Norfolk No. 3, Portsmouth No. 4, Petersburg No. 5, Lynchburg No. 6, Valley No. 7, Williamsburg No. 8 and Winchester No. 9. Correspondence was made to all of the Councils in Virginia about the formation of a Grand Council. representatives of seven of the Councils met in Mason's Hall in Richmond on Friday, December 8, 1829 to form the Grand Council.

In 1820 the following letter was written to all of the Councils in Virginia.

Winchester, November 10th, 1820

T.I. Companion,

Having ascertained that there are nine councils of Select Masters in the State of Va., and, of course, have it in their power to form a Grand Council, I have thought it advisable to open a correspondence with the other Councils informing them that our worthy companion Philip A. Klipstine will be duly authorized by this Council to enter into any arrangement of the kind with the representatives of the other Councils. He will be in the City of Richmond during the session of the Grand Lodge & Grand Chapter of Va. at which time and place, if it meet your approbation, you can appoint a rep've with like powers. The advantages of having a Grand Council in our own State have no doubt fully appeared to you, it is therefore unnecessary for me to say anything further in the subject. You will please immediately on the receipt of this

communicate your views on the subject to this and the other Councils.

Yours Sir, with great respect.

M.E. John Dove, T.I.G.M.
Richmond Council No. 1

GEO. REED

The representatives of seven Councils met in Mason's Hall, Richmond under Cushman's guidance and encouragement. Preliminaries to the actual formation of Grand Council, including correspondence with all the Virginia Councils was done during the following weeks.

After the formation of Grand Council the proceedings were ordered printed and 5 copies sent to each of the subordinate Councils with instructions to attend the next Annual Assembly of the Grand Council to be held in 1821 and "Deposit with the Grand Recorder their present Charters or Warrants of Dispensation, and receive from the Grand Council their new Charter which was to be numbered according to priority of their present Charter or Warrants. This was to be done at no cost to the Councils except for the cost of "Engrossing".

There was only 7 recorded assemblies of the Grand Council. They were held December 1820 - December 1821 - February 1828 - December 1828 - December 12, 1829 - 1830 - January 17, 1839.

Between the Annual Assemblies of 1821 and 1828 five additional Councils were formed. They were formed by James Cushman who had received the fee of \$40.00 from each Council. He had not turned the money over to the Grand Treasurer by the 1828 Assembly. He was ordered to do so forthwith, however he had not done so when the Annual Assembly was convened in December 1828. When he could not pay the money he was bonded with a note to pay the money at the 1829 Annual Assembly but at that Assembly the debt was ordered cancelled because he had died between the 1828 and 1829 Assembly. The bond and note was ordered "sent by the Grand Recorder, with an appropriate letter of condolence to his bereaved widow and orphans".

There was a total of 15 Councils in Virginia. Cryptic Masonry was very uncertain in Virginia from the beginning. As time passed, questions arose in the minds of the Virginia Companions. If these degrees were a part of the American Masonic System or just side degrees? Did they actually fit into Ancient Craft Masonry especially Royal Arch Masonry? Were they legitimate to make or enact a law? Had they degenerated from any previous "high standing", which they had possessed, because they had been "peddled" through much of the country by lecturers such as Cross and Cushman?

With these uncertainties and the growing lack of interest throughout Virginia for the Cryptic Rite, the Grand Council as early as 1828 approved the following resolution:

Resolved, that Companions John Dove, George Ives and William Mitchell, Jr. be, and they are hereby appointed a committee to correspond with the Grand Chapter of Virginia, and with other Grand Chapters and Councils in the United States, upon the propriety of the several Grand Chapters taking under their cognizance the degrees of Royal and Select Masters, and of consequence, the propriety of the abolition of the Grand Council and all subordinate Councils, and report their proceedings herein to the next Grand Annual Convocation of the Grand Council of Virginia, and that the Grand Treasurer pay the expenses of such correspondence.

The report of this committee is not recorded in either the 1829, 1830 or 1839 proceedings of the Grand Council.

At the Annual Assembly of the Grand Council held on December 17, 1841 the chief business transacted was the adoption of a set of resolutions terminating the Grand Council and its subordinate Councils as separate bodies and merging them under the jurisdiction of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Virginia. The Grand Council resolutions constituted a sort of "coup de grace" for the already moribund system of Cryptic Masonry as it had been operating in Virginia for 21 years.

Resolved, That from this day, the Grand Council of Virginia resign all authority over the degrees of Royal and Select Master: Provided, the Grand Chapter will take charge of the same and make suitable regulations for the preservation thereof.

Resolved, That all funds, books, papers, etc. belonging to the Grand Council, be placed under the care and direction of the Grand Chapter: Provided, they accept the proposition above made.

Resolved, That all funds, books, papers, etc., belonging to the Subordinate Councils, be placed under the care and direction of the Subordinate Chapters nearest their place of location: Provided, the Grand Chapter shall accept the above proposition.

As soon as these resolutions were communicated officially to the Grand Chapter of Virginia, that body lost no time in taking the following action:

Resolved, That the Grand Chapter accept the proposition made by the Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters, and that the degrees be hereafter conferred under the authority of the charters issued by this Grand Chapter.

Resolved, That hereafter the degrees in Subordinate Chapters be given in the following order, to wit: Mark Master, Past Master, Most Excellent Master, Royal Master, Select Master, and Royal Arch.

Resolved, That the Subordinate Chapters under this jurisdiction, so far as they have abilities and numbers, be instructed to confer the degrees of Royal and Select Master upon all their members, who have not received them, without fee.

A resolution adopted in Grand Chapter in 1845 changed the order of conferring the degrees to the order used at the present time which is:

Mark Master - Past Master - Select Master - Royal Master - Most Excellent Master - Royal Arch Degree.

In conferring the "Council Degrees" a Royal Arch Chapter is first opened and then dispensed with. Then a Council of Select and Royal Masters is opened, the degrees conferred and the Council closed. Labor is then resumed in the Royal Arch Chapter and the Chapter closed. This is done with the Mark Masters, Past Masters and Most Excellent Masters Degrees also

There is no written ritual in the "Council Degrees" in Virginia. The only parts that are written is the Charge in the Select Masters Degree and I Kings, VI: 27 in the Royal Masters Degree. There is no charge in the Royal Masters Degree.

Following is a report from the proceedings of the Grand Chapter of Ohio which was presented at the Grand Chapter of Virginia in 1845.

"The Select Degree was introduced into the Masonic family in this country, by Mt. Ex. Philip Eckel, of Maryland, one of the most distinguished and enlightened Masons of his day - he presented it to the Chapters of that State, who have since, and up to the present time, invariably conferred it before the Most Excellent Master, and consider it, in the language of the present Deputy Grand High Priest of the General Grand Chapter, the link which connects these without the veil to those who are within it. The Royal Master has ever, in that jurisdiction, been conferred as a mere honorary degree. Mt. Ex. Companion Eckel, assisted by others, conferred these degrees upon a distinguished Lecturer, (Jeremy Cross) who pledged himself to impart them to every Royal Arch Chapter which he might visit in his official character.

"Some years after, the Masons of Baltimore learned with astonishment, that Councils of Royal and Select Masters had been

established in various parts of the United States, by some self-constituted authority; under the influence of mortification occasioned by the betrayal of their confidence - stimulated by Masonic zeal they traced their illegal action to the Lecturer before named, who was arraigned for trial - first before the General Grand Chapter of the United States; but failing to appear, the case was committed to the Grand Chapter of Maryland, who twice summoned the offender before them, and he failing to appear, was Suspended or Expelled from all benefits of Masonry contumacy. These facts present, as far as it can be written, substantially the case as it has been frequently stated by the present Deputy Grand High Priest of the General Grand Chapter of the United States and many other eminent Masons of Maryland to the Chairman of your Committee. Believing, therefore, that the body from which the degrees emanated was best qualified to judge the proper location and conference of these degrees, and feeling assured that there was no legal authority in the Councils which have been established, the Grand Council of Virginia determined not to be a party in perpetuating error so gross a character, surrendered the degrees to the keeping of the Grand Chapter of Virginia, and that Body, following the example of the Grand Chapter of Maryland, ordered them to be conferred before the Royal Arch."

The "Council Degrees" as conferred in the Royal Arch Chapters in Virginia are conferred free of charge to this day. There is never a charge for the Council degrees in Virginia. If a Royal Arch Mason from another jurisdiction affiliates with a Virginia Chapter who is not a member of a Council of Royal and Select Masters, the Council Degrees must be conferred on him at the earliest date possible and he is not considered a member of the Virginia Chapter until this is done.

The advantage of having the Chapter and Council Degrees together is that all Royal Arch Masons that are members of a Chapter in Virginia are also members of a Council. Also the Degrees are more in chronological order. This is also the reason for conferring the Select Masters Degree before the Royal Masters Degree.

The disadvantage is that Grand Chapters and Chapters in some jurisdictions do not recognize the Virginia system as being members of a Council and will not admit Virginia members in their Councils without a Council dues card.

The back of our dues cards state:
This is to certify, that the Chapter named is authorized to confer the Capitular and Cryptic Degrees under authority of the Grand Chapter, Royal Arch Masons in Virginia

Signed by the Grand Secretary

This is the only proof that a Virginia Royal Arch Mason has that he has received the "Council" Degrees.

When admitting a Royal Arch Mason from another jurisdiction who is not a member of a Council in a Royal Arch chapter in Virginia the signs of the "Council Degrees" are omitted.

West Virginia also has the Chapter and Council Degrees together and in the same order as Virginia. This originated in West Virginia when that jurisdiction was still a part of Virginia. The system in West Virginia did not change but their ritual has changed.

JEREMY LADD CROSS

Born at Haverhill, New Hampshire June 25, 1783

Died January 26, 1860

He received the Select Masters Degree from M.E. Philip Eckel in Maryland and had authority from him to use the ritual and form Councils in jurisdictions that had no Grand Council. It is believed that he received the Royal Masters Degree in New York.

THE SUPER EXCELLENT MASTERS DEGREE

The only record of the super Excellent Masters Degree being conferred by a Virginia Council or Royal Arch Chapter was in Washington Council No. 6 in Lynchburg on February 1, 1838.

The Super Excellent Degree was not a part of the Council when the Grand Council merged with the Grand Chapter and it has not become a part of the Chapter Degrees since the merger.

Occasionally a Council from North Carolina is invited to Virginia to confer this degree or the Companions from Virginia attend a Council in North Carolina to receive the degree.

In the afternoon of the second day of Grand Chapter of Virginia the Anointed High Priests Degree is conferred on all High Priests. This degree is required to be considered a Past High Priest and be eligible for appointment as DDGHP.

After the Anointed High Priests Degree is Conferred the Thrice Illustrious Masters Degree is Conferred on all who served as High Priest during the preceding Capitular year.

References:

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By: John Dove PGHP PGSec of the Grand Lodge and Chapter