

## ORIGIN OF ROYAL ARCH MASONRY

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I have chosen to speak to you today on the origin, or history of the Royal Art, or the Royal Arch of Masonry. Today we are passing through an era of preservation of learning more about protecting our heritage. Everywhere we turn we see old houses restored and tourists visiting places of our early history. So I have chosen to delve into some of the history of our Royal Art. This is not exactly my forte-but- "fools rush in where angels fear not trod", so I am rushing into a subject that I love but know so little about. The more I read, the more I listen to historians and the more I study, I find how little I know.

I have used the words Royal Art to bring out the fact that Masonry, as it is supposed to be practiced, is an art. In reading various books and encyclopedias, I find that many used that term from the beginning of Freemasonry. We, no doubt, get our beginning from the ancient mysteries. Mystery is defined as, and I quote, "that portion of the doctrine of any form of religion for which reason is unable to account, and which consequently is dependent upon faith". Everyone was not admitted into these ancient mysteries. In them we find singular unity of design. A purity of doctrine and a true philosophy not to be found in the popular theology of the pagan world.

In the public worship of these ancient nations, the forces of nature were defined. All the planets, the sun - moon - stars and other qualities of the universe, such as space, time and movements at one time or another were the object of public worship: thus the common people, who were prone to superstition, were not admitted to the mysteries.

In the mysteries only was taught the truth of primitive revelation: The existence of one great invisible God, eternal and infinite, who was the source of all things and was worshipped without superstition. The great pyramid of Gheza is a structure of universal interest to the student of Masonry because it is endowed with a symbolism as great as it is sublime and because it has stood for centuries, a silent witness of the truth and wisdom concealed in the ancient mysteries, and the elements are now preserved in the science of Freemasonry. I will not dwell on its uniqueness, as that is not my purpose in being here, but I will point out that it stands in the exact center of the universe, a most important place, where we must strive to keep Freemasonry.

As I have just told you, you can see that Freemasonry had its

beginning in the ancient mysteries. So Royal Arch Masonry had its beginning from the symbolic craft. It is an established fact that architecture and religion have been closely related. The implements used by the builder have become the emblems of truth. Thus, Freemasonry has adopted those things required in the rite of initiation as a drama of faith, as was used in the early days. It was the purpose of the ancient mysteries to teach those entering the secret orders a moral way of life. We find our rite of initiation today changed very little. We are builders, maybe not builders of houses but builders of human character. That is our purpose.

From these foundations, Royal Arch Masonry developed. We have no concrete knowledge of its actual beginning. We do know that as the need for the operative workman declined, the guilds started to admitting men of stature into their guilds. The operative practices changed to symbolic. Their craft became generalized into the principles we practice today. "The brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of God".

Such became the statutes of Masons and Freemasonry in the year 926 A.D. When "Old York Lodge" was chartered in England by King Athelstan, and in the city of York were enacted the old York Constitutions and it is reputed to have been copied by Dr. Anderson. These were approved in 1431 - 1461 during the reign of Henry VI as the Fundamental Law of Freemasonry. In 1717 the Grand Lodge was formed and in 1721 the old Constitutions were revised and its revision approved by the Grand Lodge in 172.

In 1738 a number of brethren, finding fault in this revision, seceded and started to make Masons without the sanction of the Grand Lodge. It was about this time that a disagreement occurred between the Grand Lodge of England and the Grand Lodge at York. The seceders took advantage of this division and assumed the name of Ancient York Rite Masons. This disagreement continued and more brethren seceded and declared themselves independent. They were called ancient Masons and those of the regular Grand Lodge modern Masons; because, as they contended, had adopted new forms and usages. They established a new Grand Lodge declaring that they were governed by the ancient York Constitutions.

This is some of the foundation of Freemasonry and that leading to Royal Arch, as we know it today. exactly when or where Royal Arch Masonry, per se, began is not known. Certainly some form of Royal Arch Masonry was practiced in the 1740s among the members of the Ancient York Grand Lodge or Atholl Lodge as it was also known.

The earliest record we have of Royal Arch Masonry is in

Ireland, known as the YOUGHAL INCIDENT of 1743 when the "Royal Arch" was carried by two Excellent Masters in a Saint John's day procession, which was sponsored by lodge no. 19, however the earliest minutes referring to a Royal Arch Mason is in the minute book of Vernon Lodge No. 123 at Coleraine County, Derry as follows: "April 16, 1752, at this Lodge, brother Thomas Blair proposed Sampson Moore, a Master and Royal Arch Mason to be admitted a member of our Lodge". There is another reference in the minutes of the Ancient Grand Lodge of England, dated September 1752. But it still remains that the earliest minutes dealing with the actual conferring of the Royal Arch degree is that in the minutes of the "Lodge at Fredericksburgh" dated December 22, 1753. Thus reads the minutes of that meeting -- "December 22, 1753 which night the Lodge being assembled was present:

Right Worshipful Simon Frazier,	Grand Master	} of Royal
Worshipful John Neilson,	Senior Warden	} Arch
Worshipful Robert Armstead,	Junior Warden	} Lodge

Transaction of the night:

Daniel Campbell	} Raised to the Degree of
Robert Halkerston	}
Alexander Woodrow	} Royal Arch Mason.

Royal Arch Lodge being shutt! Entered Apprentice Lodge Opened".

The number of those present are printed which I have omitted.

"A member was admitted".

Thus began Royal Arch Masonry in Virginia and this new Country called America.

Royal Arch Masonry has since played an integral part in the lives of Freemasons. The Mark Degree, the first in the Capitular Craft, is possibly the oldest of all. Records in Ireland make reference to the Mark as early as 1600. Whether it was really connected to Freemasonry is a matter of conjecture. We do know that in the early part of the 18th century a Mark Degree, of sorts, was being conferred. Shortly after the middle of the 18th century we read of several Mark degrees or ceremonies being conferred. They carried several names, such as, Mark and Link: the Fellowcraft Mark: and the black Mark. Later we find the Degree something like our present Degree, divided into two parts called Mark man and Mark Master or Mark Mason. The first being conferred on Fellowcrafts and the second on Master Masons.

The Degree of Past Master became a part of our Capitular Craft after the establishment of our Grand Chapter, and is still under the auspices of the Grand Lodge.

The Most Excellent Masters Degree is reputed to be an American Degree, yet we find references to Excellent Masters in England and Ireland regardless of its origin, it is part of Royal Arch Masonry.

The Cryptic or Council Degrees are conferred prior to the Most Excellent Masters Degree in Virginia and West Virginia, and after the Royal Arch Degree elsewhere. They certainly belong in the Capitular Craft because of the filling of the story of Royal Arch of Ancient Craft Masonry.

And now my companions this brings us to the degree of Royal Arch Masonry which continues the story of Freemasonry until its fulfillment. A beautiful story told allegory, teaching us and leading us to the path of glorious immortality.

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