

SOUTHWEST ROYAL ARCH SCHOOL
PRESENTED: JULY 12, 1994

BY: WALTER S. PENNINGTON, JR.

PHP of Norfolk United Royal Arch Chapter No. 1. He is presently serving as its Secretary. PDDGHP of the Second Capitular District.

I was exalted in Norfolk United Royal Arch Chapter No. 1 on April 1, 1954. That year Bill Plummer put me in line, and told me that I was expected to learn a degree a year, so that when you reach the Council you should know how to confer all six degrees.

So, in the summer of 1955 I started to go to school-first to Valley Royal Arch School in Harrisonburg, Virginia at James Madison University where we had our meals on the second floor of a building, with tablecloths and linen napkins, and Mennonite girls served us our meals. Then in August I went to the Southwestern Royal Arch School in Blacksburg Virginia at VPI in the old dormitories next to the drill field. The restrooms would be on one floor for the men and another floor for the ladies. At this time at both schools it was a family affair-with wives and children coming to the school also. John Walters Royal Arch chapter No. 68 always went to Harrisonburg and Norfolk United Royal Arch Chapter No. 1 went to Blacksburg. However, when any of Norfolk URAC No. 1 went to Valley Royal Arch School, John Walters RAC No. 68 would count them in their affairs. Both of these schools had around 250 or better in attendance. At VPI the Blue Lodge also had school at the same time the Royal Arch had school.

At the time I went into line at Norfolk URAC No. 1, we had seven, including Past High Priests and companions in line that could confer all six degrees and take part in any one of them. Ralph Fountain, Solomon Marshall, Bill Plummer, Charles C. Rawls, Porter Mason, Wayne Carnahan and Willie Bradshaw. Only Willie Bradshaw is still with us today. I never learned more than the first five degrees. Sometime in the late 50's Grand Chapter changed the wording-that you only had to learn ONE degree. When this happened Norfolk URAC No. 1, for the most part, companions in line learned only ONE degree. Exceptions were Fred J. Schmoele, Jr. and Harrison Hugh Green. They learned them all. Last year at our school, Randall W. Johnson of Great Bridge RAC No. 82, had his certificate ready to frame as he had been certified for all six degrees.

About three years ago, Grand Chapter passed the proposal that you did not have to learn a degree, only how to open and close the Chapter. When this happened, school appears no longer necessary when one does not have to learn a Degree.

So at this point, Norfolk RAC No. 1 cannot confer any of the degrees in the Chapter. When we have a candidate, we have to request some other Chapter to confer the degrees.

When Mt. Ex. Richard Sheppard and Mt. Ex. Howard F. Coleman, moved the school from VPI in Blacksburg to Ferrum College in Ferrum, Virginia, we thought that with a bath between each two rooms, and air conditioning we would have over 100 each year in attendance for school. This has not happened in the five years we were in Ferrum. Each year it has come down, never being 100 and this year it was 45. We had 10 instructors and only 5 students. Before you can hold the school you have to purchase liability insurance which for the School time is \$300.00, and we paid the way for the instructors. Grand Chapter at one time gave each School \$1,200.00, then they cut it to \$800.00, and then they discontinued it all together. Out of all of the Chapters we only had support from 20 Chapters out of 79 or about 25%. At the school this year we had 12 from the Second Capitular District and all of the Chapters in the 2nd District supported the School.

Because we have such a small membership attending the School from the entire state, Ferrum, said that we could not have the third week in July anymore. Another organization with 150 would be there next year as they have a growth expectation to 300. So, they would only allow us the first week in July-the time of the holiday of the 4th of July. This is what we presented to the School. Option 1-close the School; Option 2-use the first week in July 1995 and Option 3-go some where else. After discussion the ones attending voted to close the School, pay all of the bills, and the records audited by the Auditing committee, and the remaining treasury of the School be invested in a certificate of deposit in a financial institution insured by an agency of the United States Government. This certificate shall be in the name of the Grand Chapter, Royal Arch Masons in Virginia and delivered to the Grand Treasurer of the Grand Chapter, Royal Arch Masons in Virginia with the restriction that it shall be renewed automatically with the accrued interest capitalized to the new certificate. The certificated is further restricted in that it and its accumulated revenue shall remain on deposit until such time as the Grand Chapter Royal Arch Masons in Virginia shall determine that these funds should be invested in a School to train companions in the beautiful ritual of our organization.

It is sad to close this Southwestern Royal Arch School-which this year was the 103rd Annual meeting, but when the Companions do not attend to learn the ritual, and the monetary support is no longer extended, the School can no longer support itself. I enjoyed serving the School as its President and am sorry that it had to close during my watch. Thank you for allowing me to serve you.