

Where was the place of origin of the Royal Arch Degrees in the United States, then known as the “colonies”? There are no records or Lodge minutes of any working Chapter until 1751. There are no references to the Royal Arch Degrees in any Masonic record until then. During the next sixty years there is an abundance of records recognizing it’s huge popularity, developments and recognition including it’s acceptance in the United Grand Lodge in 1813 as an integral part of the Craft Degrees.

The first record referring to the Royal Arch is contained in the minutes of the Grand Committee for the organization of the Grand Lodge of Ancients. These minutes were for March 4, 1752 and stated that “Thomas Phelan and John Mackey, known as ‘leg of mutton Masons’, had initiated many persons for a dinner or supper, and those whom they had pretended to make ‘Royal Archmen’ had not the slightest idea of that secret.”

The first unquestioned minutes of a Lodge recording the conferring of the Royal Arch Degree, are those of the Lodge at Fredericksburg, VA for December 22, 1753.

The minutes state that it was opened as a Royal Arch Lodge (not as chapter) and “shutt” as an Entered Apprentice’s Lodge. The officers of the Royal Arch Lodge were a Grand Master and a Junior Warden, not a High Priest, King and Scribe. The same titles were used by the Lodge at York and in France.

The extreme simplicity of the ritual is indicated by the fact that two officers and one member were sufficient to confer the degree. The candidates were passed, not exalted, and they were three in number. It is doubted that any regulation existed at that time as to the number of candidates that may be “passed” at one time.

At the time of this conferral the Lodge at Fredericksburg was not a chartered lodge but rather a self constituted Lodge acting under “immemorial right”.