

THE YORK RITE COMPLETES LODGE EDUCATION

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PRESENTED: JANUARY 10, 1987

I want to discuss something of a historical nature. I did lead up to this by saying that I wanted to be a history professor. I have taught history and philosophy in college, and I find history to be a fascinating subject.

I want to discuss some interesting tidbits of Masonry when it went from operative to speculative in the early 18th century. It had but two degrees. That can be proven.

What I want to say to you this morning is based upon a lot of research. I spent some time over the Christmas holidays at the house of the Temple (Scottish Rite) in Washington, D.C., going through the library. I did not find all of this in Mackeys or Coils which are easily assessable and available to us, nor the little Masonic library that you can get from Maccoys. A lot of the information came from copies of ancient documents. One of the documents that I'm going to raise and bring to your attention today was written in the year 1690. It was concerning a few operative Masons who were very much concerned about maintaining the purity of the order.

The order was dying in 1690, and in London, England of all places where our mother Grand Lodge was founded. About 27 years later there was a document compiled listing two degrees. That of Apprentice and Fellows of the Craft. It was no such thing at that time as what we now call the Master Masons Degree and they were not termed degrees anyway. They were termed orders. The First order was that of a learner. He was taken under the wing of a Fellow of the Craft and was taught the trade and then later on he was obligated as a fellowcraft, and one of the points in the obligation was to train others. And as the order began to die there was in this particular document an allowance to bring in those who were not skilled in geometry, architecture, and the other sciences. And so as early as 1690 we have those who were not skilled in operative Masonry brought into the craft. Then in 1774, lodges that met in the Goose and Gridiron tavern on June 24, 1717, on Saint John's day, formulated themselves into the first Grand Lodge. Now six years later we read about brother Anderson in his constitutions, and in the Constitutions there is nothing mentioned of a third degree. But there was a practice that was going on at that particular time called passing the chair. Passing the chair simply means to install what we now know as a Worshipful Master. They were

called Masters then. The term Worshipful Master came from an Anglo-Saxon word Weorth-Scipe which means worthy. The Eastern Star perhaps has avoided a lot of problems by naming their presiding officers as Worthy Matron and Worthy Patron. That varying has thrown off the physical, mental and verbal abuse from religious bodies who say that we worship the Worshipful Master who sits in the East when the only one we should worship is God and we misunderstand where the word worshipful comes from. It comes from (weorth - scite) who is worthy. The Master was installed through the ceremonies of passing the chair and within a process of seven years.

By 1730 we have an involvement of a third degree called the Master Mason's degree. Most of the ritual in the Master Mason's Degree of 1730 to 1747 contains a number of elements of the Royal Arch Degree. There were several installations or conferral of degrees that required at least three candidates, two or less could not do it. Sounds familiar in the Royal Arch Degree doesn't it? Three or more candidates had to be involved. The story was rehearsed about the destruction of the Temple. Workmen coming back to help rebuild the temple and so on. Then there was a schism that took place in the 1750s that divided the craft in England and it became known as the Moderns and the Ancients. Sir Laurence Dermott became secretary of the Antient Grand Lodge of England in 1752 and composed what has been known as Ahim-Reson. He was the one who recounted that the moderns, who were the ones who initially started the Grand Lodge in 1717 had certain innovations in Masonry. The reason that they had these innovations was in order to accommodate those who were not skilled in the operative craft. One of the things that they did was to take out most of the ritual that has now become associated with the Royal Arch Degree. When they did that it was Dermott's responsibility to point that out and to, in essence call them a bunch of heretics. You have the division between the Ancients and the Moderns and there is still a slight semblance of that today, not in England but in America.

If I may be permitted, Excellent High Priest, I would like to give an illustration. With the assistance of Companions Bill Joyce and C. Frank Hicks Companion Corson demonstrated the opening of a Master Masons Lodge without taking up the pass-word. After the demonstration Companion Corson said. "Dermott says you can't do that, you've got to take up the pass-word because that is an innovation in Masonry". Now that is one of about 168 claims that he said that the so called mother Grand Lodge of 1717 created for the benefit of making things easier.

He really got hepped on the Royal Arch Degree and I am

going to make this assumption. I cannot prove this but in a lodge number 21 in Youghal, Ireland in 1743 we have the actual occurrence of the conferral of a Royal Arch Degree separate from a Master Mason's Degree. And it was only conferred upon Past Masters of a lodge. That, by 1756 Masonry as it was known then had five degrees. Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, Master Mason, Past Master and Royal Arch. When that came to America we had divisions among the many colonies. After the revolutionary war many of the Grand Lodges that were formed would either appeal to the mother Grand Lodge or the newly formed Lodge of Ancients for their ritual. One state that I think nearly blew it, is the state of Massachusetts. They have pretty much done so by changing the ritual. For in the state of Massachusetts they gave away 90% percent of the secrets of the Royal Arch Degree when they conferred the Master Masons Degree on a candidate. They have changed their ritual 30 some times in 25 years. So that by 1830 in the union of the Grand Lodge in England the state of Massachusetts had formulated their Master Mason's Degree simular to the way it is conferred in Virginia and in other states.

Now let me come full circle for just a moment. By 1778 there were five degrees. The installation or the service of passing the chair, became known as a degree. It was to be given in private ceremonies in Virginia and in many other states at that time to those present being only Past Masters. Following that if they so desired they were given the Royal Arch Degree and that practice has been kept for the last 200 years. Only Past Masters can receive the Royal Arch Degree and therein we have preserved the ritual in apeducative Masonry throughout all these years.

On December 22, 1753 there was an account in Fredericksburg Lodge Number 4, in Fredericksburg, Virginia at which night the lodge being assembled and there being present was Right Worshipful Simon Frazier, Grand Master, John Nielson, Senior Warden, Robert S. Armstead, Junior Warden, of Royal Arch Lodge. Transactions of the night: Daniel Campbell, Robert Halkerston and Alexander Woodrow were raised to the degree of Royal Arch, they having been passed through the chairs. In 1778 another incidence occurred. Simular but slightly different. Having passed the chair, worthy companion John J. Rutgerburg, Frederick Lodge Number 4, was raised to the sublime degree of Royal Arch, he having been installed as a virtual master of his lodge.

So in 1778 the virtual Past Masters Degree was formed. That is what I want to deal with for just a moment. You don't know this but when I visited for the first time a Chapter of Past Masters in the state of Virginia, I actually received

the actual Past Masters degree. When I received the virtual Past Masters Degree in a Royal Arch Chapter I received something totally different but yet Virginia and many of the other states have recognized it as legitimate. The pass words are the same, the ceremony is different. The ceremony that is performed in Virginia, West Virginia and Pennsylvania are the same ceremonies that are performed on actual Past Masters in the other 47 states. And so I have received the secrets that only Past Masters in other states know about actual Past Masters So what happened? Two things. Number one, since only one man can occupy the chair of Worshipful Master in one lodge and for one year, those who would become exalted as a Royal Arch Mason are few and far between. By 1778 Royal Arch Masonry was destined to die. Only a few would be admitted into its ranks and they would be actual Past Masters. So the virtual Degree of Past Master was created.

The second thing that happened was the creation of the Mark Degree. So you have six degrees. How do you deal with that? In 1792 it was dealt with. These three plus a fourth, the Most Excellent Masters Degree was put together to form Royal Arch Masonry. Capitular Masonry, which should have died but because we have some honest hard working, sincere Masons, Royal Arch Masonry was preserved. I believe that I have within my files proof that Ancient Free and Accepted Masonry as it exists today in America should have ceased to exist by the Civil war. Had it not been for at least 150 Master Masons who have passed through the chair, Capitular Masonry would not be in existence, and craft Masonry would probably be unrecognizable.

The challenge of this speech is two-fold. I don't think that you and I as Royal Arch Masons should be satisfied to see our newly raised brethren in the blue lodge be confronted by those who say, "here is a petition to the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, you can be a 32nd degree Mason at the exclusion of Royal Arch Masonry". I have attempted to prove to you today that York Rite Masonry is the only viable and acceptable completion to blue lodge Masonry. Scottish Rite Masonry is not. I am both a Scottish and York Rite Mason. Secondly, that our Scottish Rite Masons that are not York Rite Masons, should be encouraged to complete their Masonic journey through the Chapter, Council and Commandery degrees and orders. If they have not gone that route and say that they can't afford it, I think it is your's and my responsibility to at least help them financially if that need be to complete their Masonic journey. York Rite Masonry and particularly Capitular Masonry is the completion of a Mason's journey through Masonic education. If we could go back into a time capsule to 250 years previous, we would be full of Masonic light. By just going through three or actually five degrees.

How many blue lodge Masons are York Rite Masons? Only one third of those who are Scottish Rite. I do not down play and I do not bad mouth Scottish Rite Masonry, but I wish we had more Royal Arch Masons. I think that we need to be reminded of our responsibility to promote this part of the craft. No blue lodge Mason will complete his Masonic education and journey until he comes here. (In Royal Arch).

In closing let me read a paragraph from what I have found to be a very interesting pamphlet. That pure Ancient Masonry consists of three degrees and no more. They are the Entered Apprentice, the Fellowcraft, and the Master Mason's degrees including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch. This is what the United Grand Lodge said in 1813. I guess it would be an innovation in Masonry, hence probably I should be suspended for un-masonic conduct for advocating this but, I do believe that one day we ought to make it contingent that every Master Mason become a Royal Arch Mason. That he is only half of a Mason until he goes into the Royal Arch in the since of his journey and travel and education. I think that we have the key. Men, shall we get out and promote Royal Arch Masonry as being the completion of a man's journey through Masonry in his education and experience? If not, will the next century see Royal Arch Masonry flourish. I read a pamphlet concerning the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite by Harold Van Buren Voorhis. Many of you perhaps have read some of his work. He's quick to point out that Scottish Rite Masonry has increased 10 times in the last 30 years and Royal Arch Masonry has declined by 40% percent in 50 years. Lets stop that trend. You work in your blue lodges to promote this honorable society called Royal Arch Masonry.

Rev John D. Corson