



## About Past Master's

**Definition of A PAST MASTER:** One who has held the office of Worshipful Master in a lodge of Freemasons, or an alternate spelling, *passed master*; one who is expert, or adept. A second definition is that of a degree in Masonry instituted to try the qualifications of a Master Mason before becoming the Worshipful Master of a Lodge, and no Mason can constitutionally preside over a Lodge of Master Masons unless he has been admitted to this Degree. In many jurisdictions in the U.S. it is required that a candidate for the office of Junior Warden shall have received the Past Master's degree. In such a case it is usually done by Royal Arch Masons, acting by order of a Grand Master, or conferred by a degree team of Past Master's in a Blue Lodge, just as Tuckahoe does on an annual basis.

Therefore, we seem to have a singular anomaly existing in modern Freemasonry of two degrees bearing the same name and being somewhat identical in character, but which are conferred by two different bodies, under separate jurisdictions and for totally different purposes. The Past Master's Degree is conferred in a symbolic Lodge as an honorarium upon a newly-elected Master, and that ritual is generally part of the installation ceremony. In a Chapter, it is conferred as a qualification prior to receiving the Royal Arch Degree.

My research indicates the phrase "Past Master" was believed first used around the 1720's to designate the Past Masters' Degree - that is – part of the Hiram Legend. Not until late into the 1700's did the inner workings of the installation ceremony possibly take place.

At one time, the ceremony of putting a master into the Master's Chair in a lodge was of the barest kind. Prior to the 1750's there is no evidence of any type of 'ceremony' tied to the occasion. It was around this time when the "Antients" are believed to have introduced the Ceremony of Installation for a new Worshipful Master. The Ceremony of the "Modern" Lodges was believed to have been restricted to just advice, some hearty congratulations, and the reading of the Old Charges to the Master. So, while the ceremony of giving the Old Charges to the incoming Master goes back an unknown period of time, the 'ceremony' of the installation is only about two centuries old. The writer Hamilton, suggests the Installed Master's Degree is believed to have originated in England in 1768 and was at that time considered to be a 'scandalous subterfuge' to pass the chair in an attempt to meet the qualifications for advancement to the Holy Royal Arch Degree.

According to Macoy, the Past Master degree in the Royal Arch is out of place as it really belongs to the 'Blue' Lodge. He was also of the opinion the Installed Master receives the Degree of a Past Master. And here's more research to 'chew on' ... the Past Master of a Chapter of the Royal Arch is said to be only a "Quasi" or "Seeming" Past Master, and the "True and Legitimate" Past Master is one who has presided over Symbolic Lodges.

Anyone who has served in the East of any Masonic body, but more especially in the East of a symbolic lodge, has a special feeling of satisfaction and pride in his accomplishments in that office. It is only natural that he will also have a feeling of regret that he was not able to accomplish everything he had hoped during his term. He will also have second thoughts on how he handled some situations. Most of all, he has a deep and abiding concern for his lodge.

But, what about "life after service in the East?" What happens then? The answer will depend a great deal upon the individual and his attitude. There are some who relinquish the gavel with great reluctance ... and there are some who never seem to give it up. And, yes, there are a few (fortunately a very few) who walk away from the job and never appear to look back and seldom come back. Fortunately, the vast majority of Past presiding officers take on a status of "senior advisors" who greatly assist their successors in the government of the Craft.

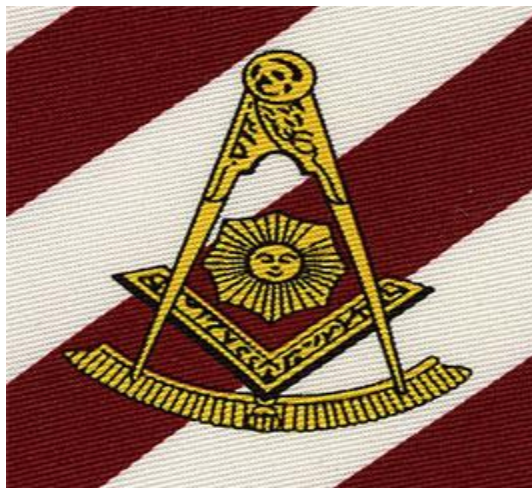
Many lodges take full advantage of the talents of these experienced leaders. They are used on "executive councils", as Trustees, Committee Chairs, coaches, and as pro-tem officers. So long as they are used to good advantage and are made to continue to feel needed and useful, they will continue to be great assets to the lodge. It is when they are ignored and "cast off" that they look around for other outlets for their talents.

That special kinship which Past Masters have with one another is evident in many ways. In many lodges it is customary for the Past Masters to sit together (frequently in the Southeast corner) where they have been likened to "buzzards sitting on a fence." It seems they want to be near the Secretary so that they can see and hear everything that is going on, and, of course they are ready, willing, and able to assist, prompt, or correct the Master if they see the need. If you were to eavesdrop on them, you might hear frequent comments such as, "During my year, we did such and so; 'or, "Remember when such and such happened?" And there is usually a good amount of reminiscing done. But, it is part of that special fellowship which Past Masters enjoy.

We frequently hear Past Masters referred to as the "backbone of the lodge." That just might be a gross understatement of fact. I could envision Past Masters may be described as the backbone of the entire fraternity. After all, ALL Grand Lodge officers are, first, Past Masters. It is their knowledge, experience, enthusiasm and interest which make any Grand Lodge "tick". Almost without exception, Past Masters are men of vision, who are continuously working for the good of the Craft, steering the course for its future. O.K., enough pats on the back!

The final paragraph of the January 1931 Short Talk Bulletin, "The Past Master," reads: "The honorable station of Past Master cannot be honored by the brethren if it is not honored by its possessor." Fortunately, almost all who have earned the title of Past Master continue to serve their lodges with distinction. It is a title which has been earned by their total involvement in lodge activities and by their personal sacrifices. As with all honors and titles, Past Masters find that there are new rights and privileges which go with the title. There are also additional duties and responsibilities...and new challenges.

Among the initial shocks that a new Past Master faces is that his telephone stops its constant ringing, that he now perhaps has time for a personal life and an opportunity to read and study. It is a wise Master who recognizes the talents of the Past Masters and who uses them to good advantage. They can serve as a “sounding board” for the programs and activities a master is considering. He can “pick their brains” for ideas and he can count on the Past Masters to give him the wisdom of their experience. The Master serves as the rudder, steering the course, but it is often the Past Masters who assist him to “keep it on an even keel.”



The jewel of a Past Master, in the United States, is a pair of compasses extended to sixty degrees, on the fourth part of a circle, with a sun in the center.



In England, it was formerly the square on a quadrant, but is, by newer regulations, the Master's square, with a silver plate suspended within it, on which is engraved the celebrated forty-seventh problem of Euclid. An exception to the general practice in the United States is that of Pennsylvania whose Past Master's jewel follows the English pattern.

Why are a Past Master's compasses, in his jewel, open at 60 degrees on a quadrant instead 90 on a square? The compasses open sixty degrees are in easy position to construct a square. The Master has worn the square while he presided; now, as Past Master, he is supposed to be in possession of the knowledge necessary to make a square, hence the position of the compasses and the quadrant. There are many geometric methods of erecting a square; the Past Master's jewel hints at one of the simplest and most used methods as best for the Past Master to employ in instructing his successor.

As we near our ninetieth anniversary in 2013, Tuckahoe Lodge is fortunate to have been led by 83 different Worshipful Masters, six of whom have served two times in the East; J.O. Harris (1923-24), Chuck Hilgenhold (1993 & 1997), Jack Cooke (2002-03), Rob Eades (1977 & 2004), Herbert Eades (2006-07), and Barry Faison (2009-10).

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*Another nugget from the Quarry...*