

DID YOU KNOW...?

Question: Why does the ritual use so many repetitions, such as "duly and truly", "worthy and well qualified," etc.?

Answer: I found several "word-pairs" in Masonic ritual that make for an interesting study; "duly and truly," "worthy and well-qualified," "free will and accord," "parts and points," "hele and conceal." At first glance it may seem that these are so arranged just for emphasis. In Middle English writing, especially in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when Freemasonry was in the process of formation, England had two languages. One was Norman-French, the other Anglo-Saxon. To make sure something could be understood, word pairs were very much in use, a word of similar meaning was taken from each language to make sure the true meaning was fully understood.

The apparent redundancy of expression in a number of places in Masonic ritual can be traced back to the middle ages. The perpetuation of such usage today, when clarity of thought and understanding might be said as well by using one word, is one of many proofs that Freemasonry delights in clinging to ancient and venerated things.....simply because they are ancient and venerated.

Question: What are the "Old Charges?"

Answer: The first book of Freemasonry, printed in 1723, is known as Anderson's Constitutions. In it appear six "Old Charges" which are a statement of the old laws of operative masonry concerning a member of the craft and his conduct. These six Old Charges are titled: Of God and Religion, Of the Civil Magistrate Supreme and Subordinate; Of Lodges; Of Masters, Wardens, Fellows and Apprentices; Of the Management of the Craft while Working; and Of Behavior. The last Old Charge is concerned with behavior: "in the Lodge while constituted; after Lodge is over and the Brethren not gone; when Brethren meet without Strangers, but not in a Lodge; in presence of Strangers not Masons; at Home and in the Neighborhood; towards a strange Brother." Many "Books of the Law-Constitution, Codes, etc.--of Grand Lodges print these Old Charges. They can also be found in Mackey's Encyclopedia and in the 'Little Masonic Library'.

Question: What is the significance of the tracing Board?

Answer: The earliest reference I have been able to find, is in the minutes of the Old King's Arms Lodge, No. 28, London. On Dec. 1st, 1735, the Lodge resolved.... 'that the Foot Cloth made use of at the initiation of new members should be defaced'. The Lodge was ten years old at the time, and the Foot Cloth was probably worn out. The Tracing Board, or "Floor Cloth" evolved from the early custom of drawing on the floor of the Lodge, a collection of symbols relevant to a particular degree. Originally, it was the Tyler's duty to draw the designs in Chalk and Charcoal, and the Candidates duty at the end of the ceremony to wash out the design with "mop and pail."

Later the designs were drawn or painted on "Floor Cloths" for more permanent use, and the collected symbols became the basis for the speculative interpretation of the ceremonies, which were eventually standardized as the Lectures on the Tracing Boards.

As to the significance of the Tracing Board's; in the course of time the "Lodge Board" became "the Lodge" and acquired a quality of sanctity. The Lodge stands on "Holy Ground" and none were allowed to stand or walk on it. Finally, when the Consecration ceremony came into use, the essential elements of consecration, Corn, Wine, Oil and Salt were poured on "the Lodge", i.e. on the Tracing Board.

Question: What are the Landmarks of Masonry? How many are there?

Answer: The best definition of the term when applied to the Craft is: 'A Landmark is an element in the form or essence of the Society of such importance that Freemasonry would no longer be Freemasonry if it were removed'. With such strict definition it would be difficult to compile a list that genuinely conforms to that standard. The U.G.L. of England does not have a list, though many lists have been compiled [ranging from five to nearly fifty items] and adopted by various Grand Lodges.

The best known list in the Western Hemisphere was prepared by Albert Mackey. His list of 25 items was adopted by several USA jurisdictions, even though the majority of them could not possibly pass the strict test which he had himself prescribed. The following six Landmarks are found in the jurisdictions that have actually adopted Landmarks:

1. Belief in God, as the G.A.O.T.U.
2. Belief in the immortality of the soul.
3. The V.S.L. is an indispensable part of the Lodge. No Lodge may be opened without it, and it must remain open and in full view while the Lodge is at labor.
4. Every Mason must be male, free-born and of lawful age.
5. Every Mason, by his tenure, expresses his allegiance to the Sovereign or Ruler of his native land.
6. The Landmarks of the Order can never be changed or repealed.

There is a reference in the Archives of the Grand Lodge of Virginia relating to a time in May of 1970 when then Grand Master William Thomas Watkins referred to....the landmarks of Masonry giving the Grand Master power to make a Mason at sight' (Landmark #8). He did so when he made Harry Flood Byrd, Jr., a Mason at sight in Winchester, Virginia. Brother Byrd was then elected to membership in Winchester-Hiram Lodge 21. This act of the Grand Master caused quite a stir within the ranks of Masons in Virginia. Since that time the Grand Lodge has quietly rescinded its recognition of Landmarks, and at the present time Virginia does not acknowledge the existence of any Landmarks of Masonry.

Question: Is there any documented account of the date or year when Masonry, as we know it today, was first practiced?

Answer: The essence of this question lies in the words "Masonry, as we know it today." Our present system was virtually standardized in England from 1813 to 1816, from materials that had been in existence since the 16th century, materials which had been gradually amplified and later overlaid with speculative meanings, especially during the second half of the 1700's.

I believe it would be virtually impossible to prove the existence of more than one single ceremony of admission during the 1400's. A two-degree system came into use during the early 1500's and in my research I viewed a copy of the Lodge minutes dated 1598 from two Scottish Lodges, showing the existence of two degrees, the first for the "Entered Apprentice," and the second for the "Master of Fellow Craft". I found clear evidence that they had both been in use for quite some time.

Outside the Lodge, the Master was an employer and the Fellow Craft was an employee; but inside the Lodge they shared the same ceremony, which was conferred only upon fully-trained operative masons. This point is very important when we come to consider the inevitable appearance of a system of three degrees.

The earliest minutes recording a third degree in a Masonic Lodge is dated March 25, 1726 at the second meeting of Lodge Dumbarton-Kilwinning, now Lodge No. 18 on the register of the Grand Lodge of Scotland

Question: Is there a distinction between Masonic oath and Masonic obligation?

Answer: The "oath" is the "So help me, God" at the end of any solemn promise made with hand upon the Book of the Law. The "obligation" is the substance of the preceding promises. "Oath" is thus symbolical of man's fear of God; "obligation" signifies the promises and agreements made preceding the oath.

Question: Why do we celebrate St. Johns Day?

Answer: St. John the Baptist, whose "day" is set aside as June 24th and St. John the Evangelist, whose "day" is December 27th, are our Patron Saints of Masonry. While most Master Masons are aware of the celebration of these two days, few may realize why it is cause for celebration within their lodge.

After being admitted into the Masonic fraternity, we hear references made about Masonic Lodges being dedicated to the Holy Saint's John at Jerusalem. The Lodge of St. John was the primitive Mother Lodge, held in Jerusalem and was the place from whence we came as we took our first steps in our Masonic journey.

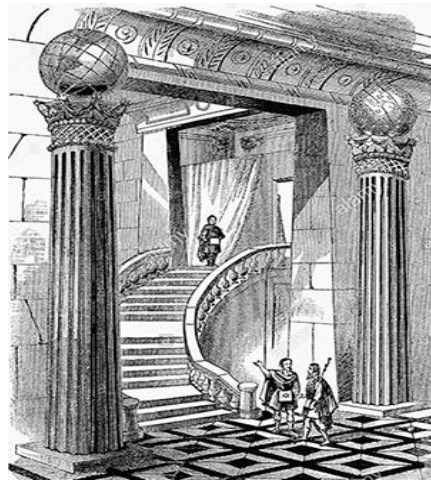
A segment of the obligation in each degree contains a similar reference. A portion of the Entered Apprentice lecture mentions the theory that St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist are perfect parallels in Christianity and Masonry represented by two parallel lines placed so they are touching the outer circumference of a circle.

If you stop to think about it, the symbolism of the point within a circle is actually quite easy to follow. The Point represents an individual Brother, and The Circle is the boundary line of his duty to God and to his fellow man, beyond which a brother should not allow his passions, prejudice, or interests to betray him.

Little is known about either of the Saints John in the Masonic sense. What we do know is that: St. John the Baptist was a stern and morally just man. John the Baptist is probably best known for his survivalist instincts, (as we read in the Scriptures of his living off of locusts and honey) and for his zealous virtue in keeping God's laws.

St. John the Evangelist, also known as John the Apostle, is said to be the disciple whom Jesus dearly loved. He is probably best known as a teacher of knowledge, the author of the Gospel book of John, the book of Revelation in the New Testament, and later wrote the 3 Epistles in the Bible. He was the only one of the 12 disciples who did not forsake Jesus at the hour of his death. He is remembered as a gentle teacher of brotherly love and was the last surviving apostle, and believed to have died at a very old age (90+) in about 101 A.D. at Ephesus, Turkey.

There is no historical evidence that either of the Saints John were ever members of the Craft of Stonemasons, but because of their righteous lives and their strength of character, both of these Godly men have been adopted as the Patron Saints of our gentle Craft.



'The Winding Staircase – A path to improving yourself in Masonry'

Tuckahoe Lodge No. 347

6-19

Researched and presented by: Douglas M. Messimer, PM, Tuckahoe Lodge 347, Richmond, VA

Sources:

Archives of the Grand Lodge of Virginia, with assistance of the Grand Secretary.

Digital Archives of the Grand Lodge of England.

Grand Lodge of Scotland –Archives.

History of the Grand Lodge of Ireland, p. 97.

Freemasonry at Work, pp. 91-3.

With permission, adapted from several writings of Rt. Ex. William Adrian Brown, Missouri Lodge of Research.