

Exploring the Tracing Boards

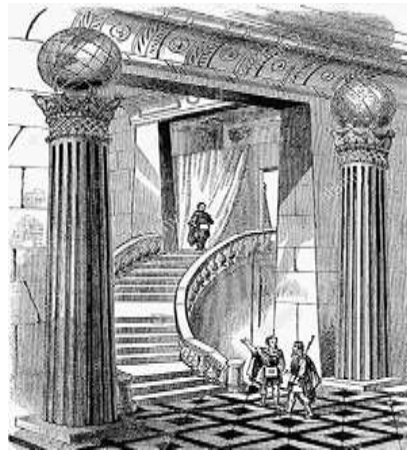
Did you know that early on, lodges did not have their own buildings and had to meet at other locations such as back rooms in taverns? This led to logistic issues and there were many “lodge in a box” setups that were used to turn whatever physical location was occupied became a true lodge. During ritual work we are able to move representations of topics into place in our building because we have that structure and storing the pillars and items are not a challenge. How did our predecessors deal with this?

One way this was done, was during ritual work. Certain images and designs were scribed on the floor of the meeting space in chalk. Since these designs were traced in chalk, we get the origin of the later designs that we are familiar with today, because they were literally tracing on boards. The candidate was then usually tasked with cleaning up the designs afterwards to carry on his commitment to secrecy.

Some lodges actually had rugs designed to hold these images so that they could be laid out on the floor during ritual work but they still had to be cryptic enough not reveal masonic secrets. Since these rugs were not cheap, this led to the practice of squaring our corners while walking about the room. This allowed the rug to be maintained in good order as candidates were conducted through the ritual. This practice has stuck for anytime we are moving about the room in an official manner.

While we do not currently use tracing boards in our lodge during ritual, I feel that they may still have a place in helping candidates and members with refreshing the ideals presented during each degree. After looking at a few examples of tracing boards, like the stamp in Wor. Doug’s presentation last month, the more you look the more you may see and remember.

I don’t have a pun to end this lecture; instead, I have a pop quiz. How many of you have seen a tracing board? The answer is all of you. A portion of one is the image on this lecture series, and the paintings on the western side of our north wall are tracing boards. And now I will disappear without a trace.....uno, dos.....



‘The Winding Staircase - A path to improving yourself in Masonry’

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