

Pioneers of Our Early Rituals



April 14, 2012

Catawba Lodge No. 248

Mack Sigmon
Junior Grand Steward,
Secretary - Board of Custodians



Wilkerson College Lodge



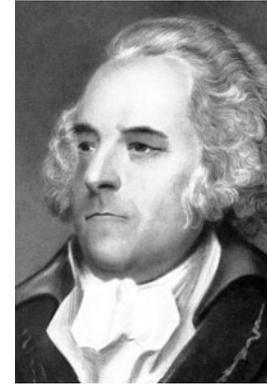
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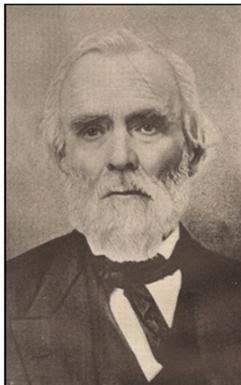
M .:. W .:. Thomas Smith Webb



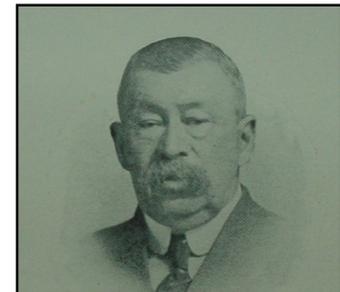
Presented by:
W .:. Mack Sigmon



William Preston



M .:. W .:. Levi L. Stevenson



Charles F. Bahnson



Pioneers of Our Early Rituals

Agenda

- **What is a degree?**
- **How our ritual evolved**
- **William Preston**
- **Thomas Smith Webb**
- **Levi L. Stevenson and Charles F. Bahnson**
- **History of the NC coded ritual**
- **Summary**



What is a degree?

References to the three grades, apprentice, fellow and master in the mason trade have been identified as early as 1390 maybe even 100 years earlier. Grades are not to be confused with degrees. Best know is the Regius Poem or Manuscript which is the oldest of the Gothic Constitutions (extending from 1150 to 1550). Also known as the Halliwell MS dated approximately 1390. This MS contains 15 articles for the Master and 15 points for the craftsman. It was cataloged in the British Museum as Poems of Moral Duties. Dr. Brantley, Grand Historian, mentions this document in his presentation of the early beginnings in Freemasonry. Many of the articles and points referenced in this MS can be tied to lessons taught in our three catechisms.

By a degree in Freemasonry we mean some esoteric (non-monitorial, non-written) ceremony, no matter how brief, which advances the member or candidate to a higher rank, including the communication to him of particular distinguishing words, signs, grips, tokens or other esoteric matter.

To be considered a degree it must represent different accomplishments of symbolic masonry.

Modern Masonic usage of the word degrees relates to ceremonies of admission or advancement in the craft.



How degrees evolved...

- Masonic trade organizations date back to 1356 in London with records indicating a receiving of a Grant of Arms in 1472
- References made in the early 1500's of a two degree system coming into practice. Lodge minutes from Scotland in 1599 confirmed two classes, 1st -EA, 2nd FC
- 1696 yielded the first set of three texts describing a ritual with all indicating the second and highest degree in Scottish lodges was for the Master/Fellow Craft (within lodges considered equal, outside of lodges considered same as employer/employee)
- 1696-1714... it was confirmed that the 2nd degree consisted of an oath, obligation, undescribed signs, five points of FS accompanied by unspecified word. It was also proved during this same period that the 3rd degree derived from certain parts of previous 2nd degree. Some of these documents in conjunction with later texts proved the three degree system was formulated by splitting the original 1st degree in order to form the 1st and 2nd degree. The original 2nd degree became the new 3rd degree.
- No suggestion of actual degrees were found prior to 1717, prior references indicated people being made masons, however in 1711 a Manuscript from Trinity College - Dublin was referenced a brief catechism that implied three degrees
- 1717... the Premier Grand Lodge of England was formed, two degrees only
- 1723... the First Constitutions were issued with general regulations - it confirmed that 2nd degree or senior degree was the Master/FC. Also described both biblically and masonically by Dr. Anderson in the constitutions of 1723 was the Hiram legend.



How degrees evolved...

- 1723 ... the first printed exposure was published in a London newspaper that also implied three degrees entitled "A Mason's Examination"
- 1725... the earliest record of a third degree did not come from a lodge but from the minutes of a London Musical Society of gentlemen founded in February 1725 by eight freemasons. All members of this society had to be freemasons. This society dissolved in 1727
- 1725... publication "The Whole Institution of Freemasonry Opened" was one of the first evidences of the Hiram legend
- 1726... a book became available for sale entitled "The Whole History of the Widows Son Killed by the Blow of a Beetle". Also in 1726 the Graham MS referenced the story of Noah's sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth and the story of a raising in detail. Considered by some as the earliest description and possible beginning of the Hiram legend as we know it today. This MS was also considered to be one of the earliest Masonic catechisms.
- 1726... One of the earliest lodge records of a third degree was Dumbarton Kilwinning Lodge No 18 in Scotland which was recorded in their minutes of January 29, 1726
- 1730... Bible first mentioned as part of lodge furniture. Also Samuel Prichard's "Masonry Dissected" was published and from that point Hiram legend became widely known but adoption by lodges was slow. This publication also gets credit for the first evidence of a three degree system
- 1745... A three degree system was in place but not considered an effective ritual

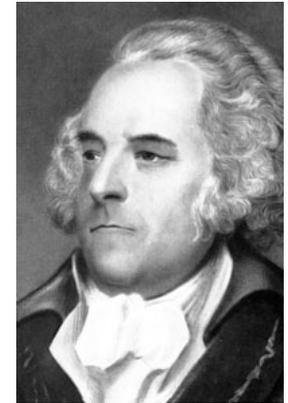


How degrees evolved...

- 1765... William Preston began his personal research and correspondence with Freemasons at home and abroad to learn all he could about Freemasonry
- 1769... revisions to the rituals began by Rev. Wellins Calcutt and William Hutchenson of England
- 1772... William Preston completed his rewrite of the three degrees in two years from its inception, however, his work was considered too long by most
- 1797... Thomas Smith Webb published his first "The Freemason's Monitor or Illustrations of Freemasonry"
- 1813... The Ancient and Moderns combined Grand Lodges in England
- 1825... First post union of the two Grand Lodges ritual became available in print entitled "An Exposure of Freemasonry" written by Richard Carlile, July 8, 1825
- 1831... Richard Carlile published "The Manual of Freemasonry", republished in 1836 and 1843
- 1838... George Claret published what was considered the first respectable ritual but without official approval
- 1843... Webb monitor adopted by the Baltimore Convention as an attempt to gain a uniform ritual in the US



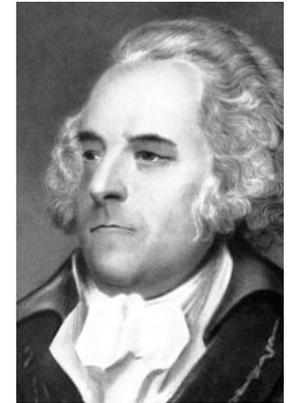
William Preston



- Born in Edinburg, Scotland in 1742...Died at the age of 76 in 1818
- His father was well educated and as such William Preston began his studies early. He entered high school before age six. As such he possessed an unquenchable desire for knowledge
- Repaired to London in 1760 after working for Thomas Ruddiman where he worked as a printer and served as an editor for the London Chronicle for many years enhancing his writing skills
- Soon after his arrival in London a number of sojourning Brethren from Edinburg resolved to institute a Freemasons' lodge. After being denied an application from the Grand Lodge of Scotland, they applied to the Ancient Grand Lodge of London. A Lodge was granted dispensation on March 2, 1763. It was constituted as Lodge No 111 on or about April 20, 1763. It was constituted a second time on November 15, 1764 taking the name Caledonian Lodge No. 325. It is still in existence today as Lodge No. 134
- Appears he was initiated in London as the second person initiated under that dispensation but the exact date is not known.
- Was a frequent visitor to other lodges and became a member of the Grand Lodge of England serving on its Hall Committee. Later appointed Deputy Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge
- In 1774 he visited the Lodge of Antiquity No. 1 and on June 15, 1774 he was elected a member and Master at the same meeting.



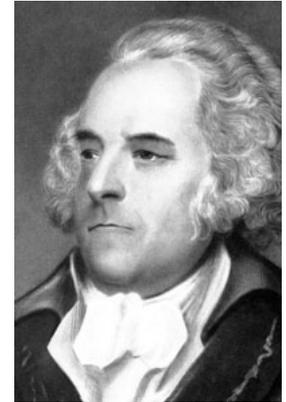
William Preston



- The Modern Grand Lodge of England had forbidden lodges and members from appearing in public possessions in regalia. On December 17, 1777 the Lodge of Antiquity attended a church service on St. John's Day a short distance from the lodge. Some members protested attending and as result only ten attended, these masons donning gloves and aprons in the church. After the service they decided to return to the lodge without removing their Masonic clothing. As Master, Preston was expelled from Masonry for these actions.
- A new Grand Lodge of England South of the River Trent was then formed. The controversy with the Grand Lodge of the Moderns was settled in 1787 and Preston was reinstated with all of his previous honors and dignities restored.
- Preston then organized the Order of Horidim, a Society of Masonic Scholars in which he taught his lectures and it was through this medium that his lectures came to America and became the foundation for our Monitors.
- He spent a lifetime of service to the craft devoted largely to the study and perfection of the rituals and Masonic lectures. He was an excellent ritualist and some of his work was the most beautiful ever created with one small problem. They were long! It was stated that the 12 parts of his third degree lecture took a half-day to recite.
- Credited more than any other person with the English language that exists in our ritual



William Preston



- Preston began his research in 1765. Completed his work in 1772 and published his first book entitled “Illustrations of Masonry”. At his own expense he employed lecturers to travel throughout the kingdom to place his lectures before the lodges.
- At his death on April 1, 1818 it was discovered that he left money with the stipulation that the interest from this fund be set aside for the delivery of the Preston lecturers of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd degrees once each year. The appointment of the Preston Lecturer was left to the Grand Master. These were abandoned in the 1860’s after being superseded by the lecturers of Hemming
- Grand Master of England in 1819 indicated that uniformity in ritual and lecturers was not desirable for masonry, but Preston’s lecturers were delivered from 1820-1862. Lecturers at that time were delivered in a question/answer format. Later they were rearranged and delivered in a narrative format.
- Revised in 1924 with substantial modifications
- To this day the Prestonian Lecturer is chosen by a special committee of the Grand Lodge of England
- It is considered an honor to be chosen as a lodge to receive these lectures. The chosen lodge charges admission and the lectures are sold. Fees collected go to charity
- Prints of the original lectures are scarce.



Thomas Smith Webb

- Webb was born in Boston, MA on Oct 13 or Oct 30, 1771 from parents who had emigrated from England. Sadly he died at the young age of 48 on July 6, 1819
- Described as the William Preston of American Masonry
- Initiated December 24, 1790
- Worked as printer and book binder, moved to Albany 1792 where he became a charter member and 2nd Master of Temple Lodge No. 14
- There he met John Hammer who was well versed and skilled in Masonic rituals, especially the Preston lectures
- With Hammer's assistance Webb promptly set about condensing and rearranging the work for more practical use. Webb admired the work of Preston but felt his rituals were too long.
- The efforts of his work resulted in his monitor entitled *The Freemason's Monitor or Illustrations of Freemasonry*. This was first published in 1797 when Webb was age 26. His 2nd edition was published in 1802
- This was the first Masonic work of its kind in the US
- His *Freemasons Monitor* was adopted by the Baltimore Convention of 1843.
- He is also known as the Founding Father of the York Rite in the US. He became one of the first High Priests of Temple Chapter Royal Arch Masons at Albany.

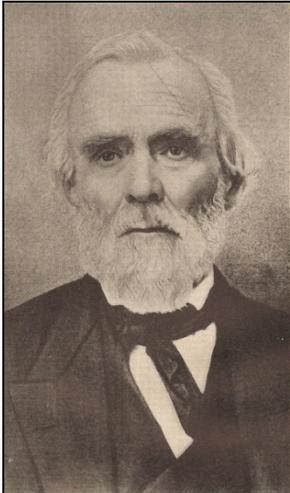


Thomas Smith Webb

- Webb was chairman of a convention in Boston on Oct 24, 1797 which organized the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons for the northern states of America.
- Moved to Providence, RI in 1801
- Became Grand Master of Rhode Island from 1813-1815
- Held several high grand offices in the York Rite bodies
- Died of a stroke of apoplexy or cerebral hemorrhage on July 6, 1819
- His reputation suffered at the hands of Albert Mackey who had no respect for one who did not believe that freemasonry was simply a new edition of the Ancient Mysteries
- In his later years he went into the profession of wall paper and weaving of cotton goods
- Like Preston, Webb sought not to create but to embellish, abbreviate or rearrange what was already working. He never wrote any rituals but rearranged and shortened some sections of Preston's work to fit the lifestyle of North America. He kept intact 64 pages of Preston's work without edit.
- Some liked his work while others despised his work



Levi L. Stevenson



LEVI L. STEVENSON
Grand Master Grand Lodge of Virginia, 1836-37
Grand Lecturer Grand Lodge of North Carolina,
1836-1873; Grand Lecturer Grand Lodge of Vir-
ginia, 1828- (?) ; 1845-1873.



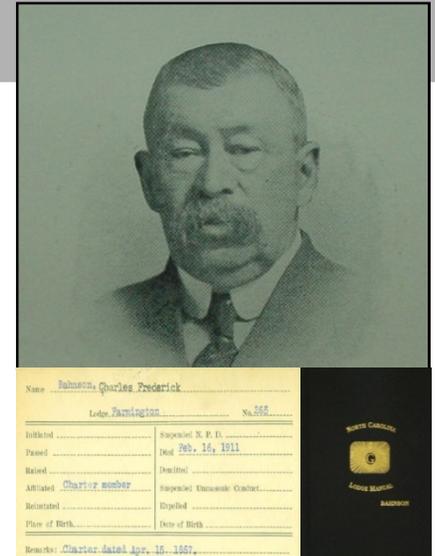
MASONIC APRON OF LEVI L. STEVENSON
Grand Lecturer Grand Lodge of North Carolina
1836-1873

- Most Worshipful Levi L. Stevenson was born November 11, 1787 and served as Grand Master of Virginia 1836-1837.
- Also served as a Grand Lecturer for both Virginia and North Carolina from 1836 until his death on August 20, 1873 and was one of several Lecturers to serve North Carolina which began appointing Lecturers in 1818
- Virginia history however indicates he served as a Grand Lecturer of Virginia from 1843-1852 which is different as described in the Proceedings of the GL of NC in 1932
- 1849... NC originally adopted the work of MW Levi L. Stevenson
- In 1868, the Grand Lodge of NC delegates also re-adopted the “Stevenson” work as the official Work. Past Grand Master Stevenson of Virginia was present at the meeting and exemplified the Work but did so in such a manner that it was not satisfactory, causing the sitting GM to appoint a committee to study the Work as taught by Brother Stevenson originally adopted in 1849. After a ten-twelve day review, where the Work was examined in complete detail, the committee agreed upon the Stevenson Work to be presented at the next annual communication to be held in 1869. MW Stevenson would pass away four years later at the age of 86.



Charles F. Bahnson

- Born in Pennsylvania in 1840 one of eleven children
- Came to NC when his father became a pastor at Bethania, NC and who later became Bishop of the Moravian church
- Bahnson moved to Salem, NC at the age of nine. He trained as a jeweler and later worked in Philadelphia
- He served in the confederate army as an assistance quartermaster
- Following the war he married and had three children
- Lived in Farmington, NC where he worked both as a farmer and jeweler
- He began his masonic career at Mocksville Lodge No. 134 and later affiliated as a charter member of Farmington Lodge No. 265.
- He was serving as an assistant Grand Lecturer when his manual was adopted in 1893
- In his address to the Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge on January 10, 1893, Grand Master Hezekiah A. Gudger announced that within the past year, in pursuance of permission granted by the Grand Lodge of 1892, Assistant Grand Lecturer, Charles F. Bahnson, prepared a manual adapted to the work of this Grand Jurisdiction. Grand Master Gudger endorsed the manual as submitted and recommended its use by the brethren. As we all know, this manual is still being used today.
- Bahnson became the Grand Lecturer in 1908 and served in that position until his death in 1911
- As did Webb with Preston, Bahnson modified and rearranged Webb's work to suit our jurisdiction needs. We are indebted not only for what he provided us but also for what he did not include concerning our monitorial ritual



History of the NC coded ritual

The Official Standard of the Work (OSW)... in summary

- The Grand Lodge delegates at the 1942 Annual Communication adopted Regulation 283, which was described as The Official Standard of the Work and Vocabulary and our first OSW.
 1. **1942 version, later revised and a supplement became available in 1949**
(At that time we had Stated and Special communications, not Emergent. Short form for third degree was added in the 1949 supplement)
 2. **1966 version, later revised and a supplement became available in 1993**
(Emergent Communication replaced Special Communication. Grand Lodge Ritual was added to 1966 version. In 1993 the new supplement added the separate Emergent Entered Apprentice and Emergent Fellow Craft degrees)
 3. **2001 - current version (became available for sale in 2002)**
(Combined 1966 OSW and 1993 supplements and eliminated the Grand Lodge Ritual)



.....summary

- **As of 2001 the Webb form ritual was used in fifty Grand Lodges of the US**
 - **Thirteen Grand Lodges did not have any type of cipher ritual**
 - **Two jurisdictions had rituals written in plain English (CT, IL)**
 - **Two states, KY and LA had multiple rituals**
 - **Pennsylvania did not use a Webb formed ritual (Old Ancients)**
- **The US rituals have preserved most of the early rituals passed from Preston to Webb while most English versions were altered beyond recognition according to Harry Carr, Past Junior Grand Deacon of the Grand lodge of England**



Questions??



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Wilkerson College Lodge



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