

Butler Lodge Short Takes Volume V

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May 1, 2015

*A compilation of Masonic articles courtesy of Butler Lodge No. 254 in Butler, Missouri.
Publication dates are approximate.*

The Square and Compasses

The Square and Compasses is the single most recognizable symbol associated with Freemasonry worldwide. It has become synonymous enough with the institution that the symbol and phrase have become interchangeable. It is featured outside of Masonic Lodges, and is displayed on rings, coffee cups, and bumper stickers.

It's unknown how or why the symbol came to represent the fraternity. The earliest known reference to the Square and Compasses is John Davies' 1607 religious poem "*Summa Totalis*" (*All in All, in All and the Same Forever*):

"Yet I this forme of formelesse Deity,

Drewe by the Squire and Compasse of our Creed."

According to author Harry Carr, references to the Square and Compasses did not become common in Masonic works until after 1696.

Freemasonry uses symbols (often tools of geometry) to teach simple moral lessons, through allegory. To Freemasons, the square inculcates virtue and morality, and teaches

them to square their actions by the square of virtue. The common phrase "fair and square" originated from Freemasonry.

The compass is a drawing tool used to make precise circles and arcs. To a Freemason, the compass symbolizes his need to circumscribe his desires, and keep his passions in due bounds with all mankind, and to remind him of the three principal tenets of Freemasonry; which are brotherly love, relief, and truth.

The letter "G" actually has two meanings. The first is God (not Great Architect of the Universe, as some critics claim). The second is Geometry, the heart of Masonic allegorical philosophy. It is unknown when or where the letter "G" began appearing in conjunction with the square and compasses. Author Christopher Hodapp has suggested that it may have originated with a particular jeweler, who was designing a Masonic ring. In the most English-speaking lodges, a solitary letter "G" is featured above the Master's chair.

There is debate on whether or not the "G" in the center of the square and compasses is its own symbol. The combination is almost exclusive to North American lodges; English Masons do not use the three symbols simultaneously, and French Masons use the all-seeing eye between the Square and Compasses. Furthermore, it is not used—either solitary or in combination with the Square and Compasses—in countries where neither God nor Geometry begin with the letter "G."

The George Washington Bible

There is a common misconception – even among Freemasons – that former Presidents George H.W. Bush and his son, George W. Bush, are Freemasons. Although both are former members of the Yale fraternity Skull and Bones, neither are Masons. However, unlike other Masonic myths, there is a reasonable foundation for this belief: President George H.W. Bush took his oath of office on a Masonic Bible.

With the exception of its translation, a Masonic Bible is no different from a regular Bible. Like other group specific Bibles (like the Catholic Bible), Masonic Bibles contain both the New and Old Testament; however, it also carries an appendix of Masonic information and its relationship to specific scripture, a family information section to record baptisms, births, marriages, and other family tree information (including Masonic initiation dates.)

Although George H.W. Bush swore his oath of office on a Masonic Bible, this was not because he was a Freemason. The specific Bible used for the January 20, 1989 ceremony was actually the famous George Washington Bible, which Washington – who was a Freemason – swore his oath upon in New York City in 1789. Several other Presidents have sworn the oath of office on the Washington Bible, including the following: Jimmy Carter, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Franklin Roosevelt, and Warren G. Harding. Roosevelt and Harding were the only Freemasons of the four.

Although it is now referred to as the George Washington Bible, the actual Bible used in his first inaugural belongs to St. John's Lodge No. 1 of Ancient York Masons, and was giving to them by Worshipful Master Jonathan Hampton in November 28th, 1770, after a fire destroyed the previous lodge Bible. It is a printed King James version with several steel engravings portraying Biblical narratives, which was an expensive rarity at the time. When it was discovered that there was no Bible on hand for Washington's first swearing

in, Jacob Morton, the Marshal of the parade and Master of St. John's Lodge, retrieved the lodge Bible for the ceremony. Aside from being used to the inaugurals of several other presidents, the Bible was also used during Washington's Masonic funeral service, and was present at the dedication of the Washington Monument. The Bible is still used by St. John's Lodge and is displayed at Federal Hall on Wall Street, New York, when not in use.

The Myths of the One-Dollar Bill

The back of the one-dollar bill and its Masonic implications has been a topic of great interest for a very long time. Forests worth of paper have been have gone into books on the topic, and one internet search will yield thousands of results related to Masonry.

The two discs on the back of a one-dollar bill are both sides of the "Great Seal" of the United States of America. The right disc, featuring an eagle holding a bundle of thirteen arrows and an Olive Branch with thirteen leaves, is found on most official United States documents. The left disc, featuring a thirteen-tiered unfinished pyramid overlooked by a disembodied "all-seeing eye" and the Latin phrases "ANNUIT COEPTIS" and "NOVUS ORDO SECLORUM," is actually the reverse side of the seal and is not used in official documents.

The seal was designed by a four-man committee appointed by the Continental Congress (first committee of the seal). Ben Franklin, a notable Freemason and former Grand Master of Pennsylvania, was a member of this committee – he was also the only Freemason. However, there is no documented evidence suggesting Franklin was in any way responsible for the inclusion of an unfinished pyramid and all-seeing eye. It is believed that Pierre Eugene du Simitiere, the only artist in the group, was responsible. Pyramids, although associated with Freemasonry, are not unique to it; and the equilateral triangle around the eye is the oldest symbol of God in the Western tradition. Although the Eye of Providence is a prominent symbol in Freemasonry today (it appears on our apron flaps at Butler Lodge No. 254), there is no documentation that it was ever used in Freemasonry before 1797 – fourteen years after the seal's development.

The phrase "NOVUS ORDO SECLORUM", which has often been mistranslated by conspiracy theorists as "A New World Order," is actually Latin for "New Order of the

Ages," which celebrates the birth to the United States in 1776. The Great Seal was first put on the back of the dollar in 1935 by President Franklin Roosevelt, a Freemason, at the suggestion of his Secretary of Agriculture, Henry A. Wallace – another Freemason. It is very conceivable that Wallace might have been influenced by the Eye of Providence's use in Freemasonry to make the suggestion.

Some conspiracy theorists will claim that if you draw a Star of David over the reverse side of the seal, and are a little creative with its proportions, that five of the six points land on the letters M-A-S-O-N (although the very top of the Star points to nothing.) You can replicate this process with a square and compass as well, if you are once again creative with portions and ignore that the apex of the compass will point to nothing. Although it is conceivable that this was intentional by Franklin or another member of the committee, it can only be considered a coincidence as there is no documented proof. It is also possible to roll a dollar bill into a cylinder and see a Grey Alien (there's a great video of it on YouTube) and many other pointless things.