

Levi L. Stevenson

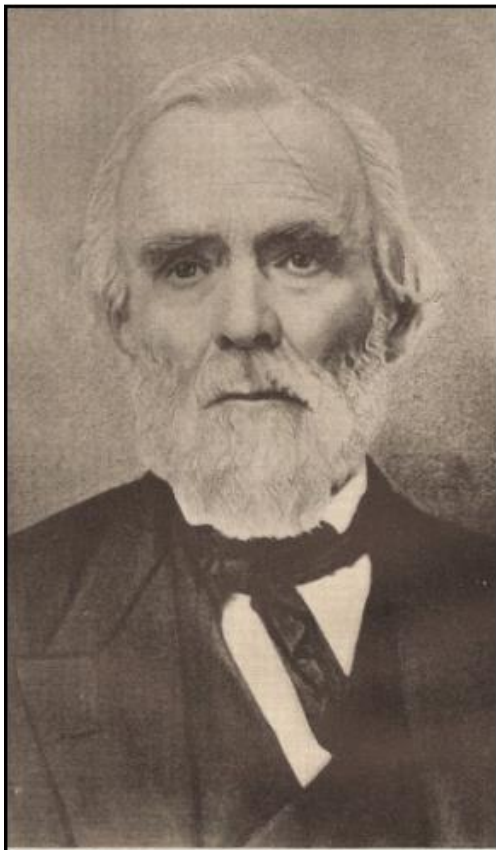
28th Grand Master, 14th Grand High Priest, Most Illustrious Grand Master

Walter M. McCracken

Virginia Research Lodge No. 1777

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Levi Lamb Stevenson may well be the greatest of Virginia's Past Grand Masters of Masons. Those whom we regularly honor have usually made their mark in one or more of the branches of state or federal government. Stevenson made his in Masonry, all the way.



He was initiated on March 31, 1814, in Staunton Lodge No. 13, and passed and raised the following month. His first term as Master began in 1819, and through 1854 he served six terms. From 1836-1839, he served the Grand Lodge of Virginia as Grand Master.

Stevenson received the Capitular degrees in Union Royal Arch Chapter No. 2 of Staunton on March 7, 1816. In 1820 he was High Priest, and through 1844 served three times. There may have been more, but the minutes for 1829-1836 are missing. He presided over the Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Virginia as its Grand High Priest for two years, from 1830 to 1832.

Mt. Wor. Levi L. Stevenson

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James Cushman came through Virginia in 1820 teaching the Royal and Select Master Degrees and forming Councils. Valley Council No. 7 was warranted in Staunton June 12, 1820, with Levi L. Stevenson as Thrice Illustrious Master. He was out for one year, then returned to serve from 1823 until the Council Degrees were turned over to the Chapter in 1843, a total of twenty-one years. From the organization of Grand Council in Richmond in December 1820 he served as Most Illustrious Grand Master until its dissolution in 1841.

He was not so active in the Commandery, and we are not sure when or where he was knighted, or where he served as Eminent Commander. One author has him knighted in Richmond, another in Winchester. One has him a Past Commander of the Commandery in Norfolk, another of No. 5 in Portsmouth. The Proceedings list him in 1845 as "Eminent," a member of Warren Encampment No. 3, Harper's Ferry, and at that assembly, in December, he was elected Grand Senior Warden and appointed Grand Lecturer. In December, 1846, he represented No. 5, was called "Sir Levi," and was elected Grand Lecturer. In December, 1848, he was called "Most Eminent," and listed as Grand Lecturer. In February, 1849, was still listed as Most Eminent, and was duly elected Grand Senior Warden again. He was also reappointed as Grand Lecturer.

At the December, 1849, Assembly, he was replaced as Grand Senior Warden, but was reappointed Grand Lecturer. In December, 1850, he was called "Most Eminent," and listed among the Past Grand Commanders of No. 5, although not on their roster, and there was some confusion with Appomattox No. 6. He signed the minutes as "Grand Captain General, p.t." In January, 1852, the new meeting time, he was again titled "Most Eminent" and listed among the Past Grand Commanders from No. 5. December, 1852, he was listed the same, and was also on No. 5's roster. In 1854 and 1855, he was not present, but was listed the same. No. 5 stopped listing him in the '60's. At the December, 1869, Conclave he was listed on the roster of Stevenson Commandery No. 11, as "Sir Knight," although not present.

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In 1870, he was present as a Past Commander (the terminology all changed in 1856), representing No. 5, although not on their roster or Stevenson No. 8's, and titled "Very Eminent." In 1871, Stevenson No. 13 listed him as a Past Commander. His last Conclave was December 12, 1872, when he was present as Grand Generalissimo, p.t., representing No. 8 (not as a Past Commander this time, but Deputy Grand Commander). He signed the minutes as "Grand Generalissimo," and No. 8 merely listed him as "Sir Knight."

Despite the fact that Levi L. Stevenson was not as active in the Commandery as he was in the Lodge, Chapter and Council, probably due to there being no Commandery in Staunton until 1869, when he was 82 years old, he was yet more active than most.

William Mosely Brown wrote: "Levi L. Stevenson, from the Masonic standpoint, easily among the top dozen men who have been identified with Virginia Masonry since its beginning; who rendered the most outstanding service to the fraternity in the Old Dominion . . . Virginia's greatest Masonic ritualist and teacher."

In this line, he was Grand Lecturer of the Grand Lodge of Virginia 1828-1873; Grand Lecturer of the Grand Lodge of North Carolina 1836-1873, and their ritual was called "The Stevenson Work;" Committee on Work of the Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Virginia 1839-1856; Grand Lecturer of the Grand Chapter of North Carolina 1853, etc.; and Grand Lecturer of the Grand Commandery Knights Templar of Virginia 1845-1850. The Council minutes are skimpy, but there is no doubt that he taught that ritual too.

So he was the 28th Grand Master of Masons, the 14th Grand High Priest, the only Most Illustrious Grand Master, and also Grand Senior Warden of the Grand Commandery, serving the latter body as Grand Captain General, Grand Generalissimo and Deputy Grand Commander, pro tem.

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Levi Lamb Stevenson was born November 11, 1787, at Liberty, near Frederick, Maryland, the son of William Stevenson. He was a Captain during the War of 1812, which began June 18, but came to Staunton in 1813. Two years later he married Elizabeth Dunlap, daughter of Robert Dunlap (whose father emigrated from Scotland and settled at Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, just before the Revolutionary War) and Margaret Kerr; by whom he had four daughters and two sons.

Margaret Ruth, born November 2, 1816, married Chesley Kinney January 8, 1835. Robert W. married Caroline Anderson. John D. married Hannah Letcher, and became a Brigadier General, C.S.A. Isabel Ann married Robert Porterfield Kinney, grandson of General Porterfield, on June 6, 1844. Caroline V. married Michael Harman, the Colonel of the 55th Virginia Infantry Regiment who became a Brigadier General, C.S.A. And Elizabeth G. married Brigadier General George W. Getty, U.S.A. Levi Stevenson left some thirty grandchildren.

Brother Stevenson worked as a tailor, with a succession of partners and firms, and the court house records are full of petty law suits to collect money from him and his firm. Even V.M.I. sued him for uniforms. We also have a record of his slave ownership. In 1819 Levi Stevenson was Mayor of Staunton, and through the years he was involved in many civic activities. For some years prior to the Civil War he was Postmaster of Staunton, a post he continued under the Confederate Government.

When the Commandery formed at Staunton in 1869 took his name, and never considered any other, the old man, then 82, was overjoyed. He died less than four years later on August 20, 1873, almost a 60-year Mason. His funeral was held in Trinity Episcopal Church, Staunton, where he had served as a vestry-man, and where his children had been baptized and married; and his remains are interred in the churchyard. All the

Staunton Masonic bodies were represented, as well as visiting Masons from Charlottesville, Lynchburg, Richmond . . . in fact, from the entire state. A mounted escort of Knights Templar escorted the body to the Church, and Masonic Services were held at the grave.

Eulogies and Resolutions were delivered by the Grand Master and the Grand High Priest, and by many Lodges and Chapters. Members of St. Tammany Lodge No. 5, for example, were ordered to wear mourning for thirty days in honor of his memory . . . as one of Virginia's great Masons and ritualists of all time.

On December 17, 1891, a Dispensation was granted Stevenson Royal Arch Chapter No. 19 at Big Stone Gap, and a Charter was granted October 12, 1892. We thus have both Chapter and Commandery in his memory.

Here are some further tributes to him:

Levi L. Stevenson was regarded by many as among the brightest Ritualistic Masons on the continent – *John Nichols, P.G.M., North Carolina.*

Levi L. Stevenson was an effective as well as continuous teacher of the Ritual of Masonry in Virginia – *Jas. M. Clift, Grand Secretary, Virginia.*

Levi L. Stevenson stood firm. He kept the faith. – *Clift.*

Levi L. Stevenson was the best Ritualist Virginia ever had. – *Clift.*

Stevenson was a model as a workman and a Mason. – *Committee on Grand Master's Address, North Carolina.*

Stevenson made accuracy and neatness mark every Masonic act. – *Committee.*

We cannot fail to recall the wonderful work this distinguished Companion did when he was Grand Lecturer – during a time when uniformity of ritualistic work seemed so remote as to be almost and when the anti-Masonic sentiment reached forth its hatred to cool Masonry's altar-fires. – *Grand High Priest, reporting Stevenson's death to Grand Chapter of Virginia in 1873.*

While his monumental work in Freemasonry was in the Craft, Stevenson made a contribution in the (so-called) Higher Bodies of Freemasonry, in both Virginia and North Carolina, which shall never be forgotten and which will be difficult to equal.—
J. Ray Shute, Jr.