

Royal Arch Masonry in Massachusetts

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The Grand Chapter Of Massachusetts

The Royal Arch Degree, and several other Capitular Degrees, were worked from an early date in Massachusetts.

Saint Andrews (craft) Lodge (No. 82, Scotland), in Boston attempted to secure a warrant to confer the Royal Arch Degree from the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1762, with no response. Several Royal Arch Masons of Saint Andrews, together with several members from the British 29th Regiment of foot (Irish Masonic Charter), stationed in Boston, formed a Royal Arch Lodge in 1769. They conferred the Four Degrees of a Royal Arch Mason, and Knight Templar. After the British regiments left Boston, Saint Andrews Royal Arch Lodge remained. It assumed the designation as a Chapter between 1792 and 1794. This Chapter conferred the Irish form of the Royal Arch, but incorporated the Mark degree into their system in 1793.

Another early Massachusetts Chapter was formed at Newburyport on June 28, 1790, by Hue Duplessis, an English Mason. This Chapter utilized the Royal Arch Ritual written by Thomas Dunckerley in England.

The Saint Andrews Chapter and Newburyport Chapter began to interchange visits, and in April 1794 each conferred their Degrees upon the members of the other chapter. A

committee was appointed to establish a standard ritual for their work. The committee decided that the Dunckerley ritual was "more universally known", but the Irish system was "Most Sublime and Valuable." Therefore, they should utilize the Dunckerley system and include several parts of the Irish ritual.

These two Chapters considered the feasibility of forming a Grand Chapter for Massachusetts in 1796. Newburyport formed a committee on January 1, 1797 to instruct delegates for the formation of a Grand Chapter.

At the same time, Thomas Smith Webb, High Priest of the new Temple Chapter in Albany, New York, visited Boston and presented a proposal for forming a "Grand Convocation" of all chapters that would be interested in uniting under one authority. This sidetracked the original plan of Massachusetts Chapters.

Formation Of General Grand Chapter

Acquiescing to Webb's proposal delegates from Newburyport Chapter (Massachusetts), Saint Andrew's Chapter (Massachusetts) and Temple Chapter (New York) met in convention at Mason's Hall, Boston on October 24, 1797 and made arrangements for a Grand Convocation to be held in Hartford, Connecticut on January 24, 1798. This Boston convention is considered to be the initial session toward foundation of, what is today, the General Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons, International.

A circular letter was mailed to existing chapters throughout the Northeastern States, inviting them to send delegates to the Hartford convocation. Therefore, delegates from nine chapters, representing Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New York, assembled in Hartford on the appointed date.

The January 1798 Grand Convocation organized the "Grand Royal Arch Chapter for the Northern States of America". A constitution was adopted declaring sovereign jurisdiction over the states of Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York.

Under the constitution, this Grand Chapter assumed control of the Mark Master, Past Master, Most Excellent Master, and Royal Arch Degrees. In addition to assuming control of the Degrees, this action stabilized the titles of the degrees to those in use today.

The constitution assigned sovereign power to the (General) Grand Chapter and stipulated that each state represented was to establish a "Deputy Grand Chapter" for their subordinate jurisdiction. The Grand Chapter, under the constitution, assumed authority over all territory not controlled by a Deputy Grand Chapter.

The Massachusetts Chapters therefore, made a major contribution toward formation of the larger body, while originally planning to establish a Grand body only for their state.

Degree Work

In 1812 the custom of exemplifying the work of the Degrees was first inaugurated in the Grand Chapter of Massachusetts. In 1818 the first "Grand Visitor" was appointed. In 1818 his title was changed to Grand Lecturer. Most Excellent Stephen Lovell ably filled that position for many years, and at least one of the degrees was exemplified annually in the Grand Chapter. On December 11, 1849, by a previous request of the Grand Chapter, the General Grand Chapter of the United States held a convention in Boston for the purpose of "rehearsing and explaining the work and the lectures". At its conclusion the Grand Chapter voted unanimously to "adopt the work as this day exhibited."

On March 12, 1850 a Preamble and Resolutions were adopted, and no material changes have since been made in the work of any of the Degrees by this Jurisdiction to the present time.

The present custom of exemplifying all the Degrees in Grand Chapter each year was adopted in 1849 and was the basis for the formation of the Grand Chapter Exemplification Degree team which continues to this day. They are also available for festivals and any time a chapter feels the need for assistance in the conferring of degrees on candidates.

In addition to these annual exemplifications each District has each year under the Deputy of the District conducted an Exemplification of at least two of the Degrees under the supervision of a Grand Lecturer. Additional instruction is also given throughout the year in many cases by the Grand Lecturers. Accuracy, uniformity, and intelligent rendition are maintained and not the least of the benefits resulting is that of association and comradeship throughout the state.

Organization

Currently there are approximately 13,000 Royal Arch Masons in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. There 73 Chapters and include a Research Chapter and one in Santo Domingo. The Chapters are organized into fifteen (15) Districts, each with a District Deputy Grand High Priest appointed by the Grand High Priest as his personal representative. The DDGHP's term of office is two years.

The Grand Chapter of Massachusetts holds Quarterly Convocations in March, June, and September with the Annual Convocation in December. With the exception of the September Convocation, the convocations are held on the Tuesday before the second Wednesday of the month which is the day before the Quarterly Communications of the

Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. The September Convocation is usually held in the Masonic Temple of a subordinate chapter, the other convocations are held in Boston.

The Grand Chapter maintains an office in the Boston Masonic Temple which is the home of the Grand Lodge. The Grand Secretary is a paid position and he also has a secretary to assist in the administrative functions of the Grand Chapter. The Grand Secretary also functions as the Grand Recorder for the Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters of Massachusetts. He also edits and publishes the Grand Chapter/Council Newsletter.

The Grand Chapter officer line is not a "progressive line." The Grand High Priest is nominated by a committee consisting of the Past Grand High Priests. They make their selection from the permanent members of Grand Chapter i.e., Past Deputy Grand High Priests, Past Grand Kings, and Past Grand Scribes. The Grand High Priest is elected each year by vote of the voting members of Grand Chapter and traditionally serves a three-year term. The voting members of Grand Chapter consist of the permanent members of Grand Chapter and the High Priest, King, and Scribe of the subordinate chapters. The other elected officers of Grand Chapter consist of the Deputy Grand High Priest, Grand King, Grand Scribe, Grand Treasurer and Grand Secretary. The Deputy Grand High Priest, Grand King and Grand Scribe serve for one year. All remaining officers are appointed by the Grand High Priest and with the exception of the District Deputies serve for one year.

The Grand Captain of the Host is also appointed by the Grand High Priest and he serves as his "Marshal" or traveling companion. He serves the Grand High Priest for his complete term of office. As a reward for his service he is nominated for the office of Grand King the year he completes his service as Grand Captain of the Host and runs unopposed and therefore becomes a permanent member of Grand Chapter.

Traditionally each elected Grand Officer is honored by a reception hosted by his own chapter. This usually consists of a dinner, fraternal visit by the Grand High Priest and what can be best described as a "Roast" of the particular officer.

The Grand High Priest can only make "Fraternal Visitations" at the request of the subordinate chapter. These visits can be purely social, at a regular or special convocation to observe work, present medals, honor years of membership, or anniversaries. An "Official Visit" is only made to remove a Chapter's charter.

District Deputy Grand High Priest's Functions

As I indicated previously, the District Deputy Grand High Priest is appointed by the Grand High Priest and serves two years. The outgoing DDGHP generally recommends a Past High Priest from his District as his replacement. Traditionally this office rotates among the chapters when it is at all possible; however, it is his own selection and the individual chapters do not vote on the companion to be put forward as in Virginia.

The District Deputy Grand High Priest is the personal representative of the Grand High Priest in his District. He also can only visit when invited with the exception of his scheduled Visits. He is required to make one fraternal and one official Visit to each chapter. At the Official Visit he is to inspect the Charter, By-Laws, Records, and the Book of Marks. He will also observe the exemplification of degree work.

The reception of the DDGHP of Grand High Priest is very formal. All members of the suite must wear tuxedos, white gloves, jewels, and aprons. The suite assembles outside the Chapter Room. The Chapter is opened by the Chapter Officers, business conducted and then before eight o'clock the Chapter's Captain of the Host ascertains if there are any distinguished visitors to be received. He then escorts the District Deputy Grand Captain of the Host west of the Altar who announces the presence of the DDGHP and suite. The

High Priest then selects a reception committee generally consisting of the Past High Priests with the senior Past High Priest present as chairman of the committee. The Captain of the Host forms a committee which retires to the ante room. The Committee returns to the Chapter Room as an escort to the DDGHP and Suite. The chairman of the committee escorts the DDGHP through the lines to the East and introduces the DDGHP to the High Priest. The DDGHP then introduces all the members of the suite and upon conclusion is offered the gavel of authority and the oriental chair to preside. At an Official Visit, he conducts his business, observes the Chapter's Degree work, makes his remarks, and then retires from the chapter room with his suite. At a fraternal visit he may stay in the chapter room and on occasion close the Chapter.

The District Deputy Grand High Priest is expected to attend all Grand Chapter Convocations, and attend as many other functions as possible. He also should be prepared to conduct installation ceremonies for all Chapters in his District. He also Plans and coordinates the Annual Affirmation Day church Service conducted in his District in support of Grand Chapter's annual program.

Typical Chapter Activities Monthly Notice

Each Chapter sends out a monthly notice which contains the events for the month, a message by the High Priest, announcements of the regular convocation and the work of the evening, a list of names and other information for all candidates, and a list of the Chapter Officers.

Degree Work

All Degree work is done in tuxedo or costume. The Past Master's Degree is quite different than Virginia. The Royal Arch Degree does not contain the "rough and rugged roads." All ritual is published in a cypher book, which includes lectures (Catechisms) for each Degree that are not required to be learned by the candidates.

Convocations

All Chapters must hold nine regular convocations and one annual. No convocations in July and August, normal business is conducted at the regular convocations to include Degree work. Degree work may also be conducted at Special Convocations.

Leominster Chapter

Present membership of 150, dues are \$13.00 plus \$3.00 for Grand Chapter. The Chapter received its Charter in 1923. Very active membership and usually attendance runs about 25 to 30. Generally a dinner is served every regular convocation. Traditionally the Chapter presents each exalted companion with a diploma and red handkerchief for his lapel pocket. The Chapter is well known for its excellent ritual work and travels to other chapters to perform Degrees for their candidates.

In conclusion, although there are some differences between Massachusetts and Virginia the basic teachings and spirit of companionship is the same. Remember, "If our work in Masonry has taught us but one thing, and brought but one result, and that result be the forming and cementing of true and lasting friendships – then our labors about the Altar of Masonry will not have been altogether in vain."

Editor's Note: Dan Pushee is a Past High Priest of Leominster Royal Arch Chapter, Leominster, Massachusetts.

References

The York Rite Of Freemasonry, Frederick G. Speidel, 1978, pages 33-34.

GRAND ROYAL ARCH CHAPTER OF MASSACHUSETTS 150th Anniversary Program, March 7-8-9, 1948, Boston, pages 16-17-18.