

Masonry has several different ways of working. This is sometimes confusing to a visitor, yet the essentials are universally the same.

This divergence arises from many causes or reasons apparent in its development from an Operative Craft to a Speculative institution.

Some writers assert that the oldest account of Masonic ceremony is that of a ritual being prepared by Elias Ashmole, a celebrated antiquarian at Oxford in the 17th century, which was adopted by the Lodges in England. This is disputed by others.

What the old ceremony was we do not know, but it is claimed by recognized authority that it consisted of only one form, and that the designations "Entered Apprentice," "Fellow Craft" and "Master Mason" were simply the names of the different classes of workmen, and did not refer to different ceremonies, as there was but one - that of Initiation.

Who divided the old ceremonies into three degrees is not known, but that they were extant in London in 1725 is well established.

The rivalry among the Free Masons in England, 1717 to 1813, was the principal cause of differing ceremonial, and led to non-intercourse between the Lodges.

The Grand Lodge of England and the Grand Lodge of the Ancients had each their own particular way of working. The Masons of Ireland and Scotland had each their own methods. They were all active in spreading Free Masonry to the Continent and the Colonies in America, and naturally there followed divergences in Masonic instruction.

In the latter part of the 18th century, and near its close, another addition was made to Masonic ritualism in America by John Hammer and Thomas Smith Webb. Hammer was an English Free Mason who came to America in 1793.

Smith Webb was a bookbinder, made a Mason in "Rising Sun Lodge," New Hampshire, in 1790, when 19 years of age; initiated December 24th, and passed and raised on December 27th. For such procedures the Lodge lost its Charter.

In 1796 when "Temple Lodge" at Albany, N.Y., was instituted, John Hammer was Worshipful Master, and Thomas Smith Webb, Senior Warden. These men took the Prestonian lectures, which had lately come out from England, and, further dramatizing them, formulated what they called the "York Rite," taking the name from the Grand Lodge of the Ancients, which at that time assumed the title, "Ancient York Masons." This is generally called by well informed Masons, the "Webb Work." Hughan, writing of the term, "York Rite," says: "There is no such Rite, and what it was no one knows."

If by the term, "York Rite," is meant the work of the "Grand Lodge of All England," organized at York in 1751, then the ceremonies of the Masons under the Grand Lodge of England at London is York Masonry. Hughan, Sadler and Oliver said that the work of the Grand Lodge at York was similar to the London Grand Lodge.

The Webb work cannot consistently be called the American work, as Rituals of many of the States differ from each other materially.

At the union of the English Grand Lodges in 1813 the Rituals of both were abolished, and a new Ritual formulated called "The Union Degrees." These are not strictly followed, as in England there is the "Oxford Ritual," the "West End Working" and others. Scotland is different, and Ireland shows a wide divergence from both.

It is not likely there ever will be a universal manner of working, though it might well be the same in any one particular jurisdiction of a Grand Lodge.

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