

The use of the Apron comes down to us from the earliest civilizations. Adam and Eve wore aprons made of leaves.

Nearly all primitive peoples wore loin cloths. After other articles of clothing were used by civilized nations, the apron was still worn in religious ceremonies as a symbol of purity. It was adopted by nearly all the temple worshippers of which we have any account. Egyptian and Assyrian priests wore an apron, as did the Persians, Hebrews, Grecians, Romans and Christians.

It is the emblem in the National Flag of Persia. Its sculpture is found in the ruins of primitive American civilizations. Prelates and bishops wear it when performing Christian rites. It is worn by many tradesmen to protect their clothing.

Ancient Operative Masons wore an apron made from the skin of a lamb or kid. It was left large enough to cover the front of the body; the skin of the neck was turned up in a flap to protect the upper chest; the skin of the front legs formed thongs to tie behind, and the rest hung down in front almost to the ankles.

When Masonry became speculative it adopted the apron as its ensign or badge. Its size was reduced, and, instead of the plain lambskin, they began to have their aprons adorned with drawings and paintings, gold and embroidery; each in his own way, according to fancy. This practice began about 1780.

Then the professional decorator stepped in with engraved plates to print designs upon the leather. The skin of the legs was removed and strings of tape or ribbon sewed on and left long enough to be crossed at the back and brought around to the front and tied under the flap, leaving the ends to hang down in the centre; the ends were decorated with tassels.

Next, broad silk strings were used, with worked ends or metal tassels. Then other methods of fastening around the waist became popular, and the tasselled ends were sewed on the apron; and, lastly, the tassels and ribbons were moved away from the center to the sides to make room for badges or emblems, and the aprons became as they are now.

The practice of each brother having his apron decorated as he desired proved of historical value. From the aprons in the libraries of Grand Lodges we learn many things of which we have no other record.

The aprons of the Grand Lodge of the "Ancients" and those of individuals, tell us that they conferred seven degrees in some of the old Lodges. These included the Royal Arch and Templar degrees.

At the union of the two English Grand Lodges, in 1813, this was ordered stopped, and the colors of trimmings selected were Royal Blue and Garter Blue; yet some of the Lodges in England wear aprons trimmed with red. This is true of the three time-immemorial Lodges, three of the four old Lodges which assisted in forming the Modern Grand Lodge of England, as well as Grand Masters' Lodge No. 1.

The Entered Apprentice wears a white lambskin without any ornamentation or color, as a type of innocence in his first hour of sacrifice when he dedicates himself to a way of life where honor and fidelity, purity and integrity are the mainsprings of his words and actions, and the ground work of white never leaves the Free Mason's apron.

When he wears it as a Fellow Craft, two rosettes of blue are placed at the bottom, indicating that the second step has been taken in the journey. Then when he becomes a Master Mason, another blue rosette is placed upon the flap, showing a triangle symbolizing the Divine Triangle, the Great Symbol of the number three, which pervades all natural law and is found everywhere in human history, as representative of three in one, "The Divine Trinity."

The compasses and square are placed in the rosettes showing that he is a skilled workman.

When he is installed Master of a Lodge, the rosettes are removed and levels take their places, showing that he is foreman or overseer of the work and proves the various parts of the building by the level.

When he becomes a companion of the Royal Arch there is a change in the color of the trimmings, the white ground remaining the same, indicative of purity. Red, one of the royal colors, is added. This is the color of conquest, the color of the blood of the Martyr. The red and the blue underlying it give the purple. Thus the four colors of ancient worship are symbolized -- white, blue, red and purple; all the priestly colors, the same as those of the Hebrew Tabernacle in the Wilderness.

The symbols on the apron are also changed. The single levels of the Worshipful Master's apron are removed and three levels forming the Triple Tau of the Patriarchs or Ancient Cross are placed within the Sacred Triangle, indicating that it is the Cross of the Divine Life that has made the wearer conqueror; that the lost is found; that truth and integrity combined with sacrifice have overcome evil.

The wearer of the apron is no modern symbolism but as old as humanity itself. It may be decorated and embellished; colors and symbols may be added as the brother advances in Masonry, but the fact of his being clothed with it in the first instance is the highest honor that can be bestowed upon him by mortal hands.

Wealth, education, social position, ecclesiastical or political eminence, or even the occupancy of a throne are all dross in comparison to purity, which the white lambskin symbolizes.

The Masonic apron is presented to the initiate by the Master of the Lodge or by some one deputized by him. It is the gift of the Lodge, presented on behalf of universal Free Masonry. The brother is not only a member of the Lodge initiating him or any other Lodge which he may afterwards become affiliated with but of the whole Craft universally. For Free Masons the whole world over are bound together in the bundle of life.

No Masonic door is finally closed to him who worthily wears the apron of a Free Mason, and no true Masonic heart is untouched by friendship for a worthy brother.

There are several forms of charges given on the presentation of the apron, but they all have the same purpose of impressing upon the mind that the lambskin or white leathern apron is an emblem of Innocence, the badge of a Mason, and a bond of brotherhood, and, when worthily worn, will give pleasure to the wearer and honor to the fraternity.

The apron is never worn except when at labor.

Spots or stains upon the ancient workman's apron were no disgrace, but rather a sign of his faithfulness in the discharge of his duties, but his clothing under the apron, by its protection, was kept pure and clean. So should the Speculative brother keep his character free from spot or stain caused by unfaithfulness to his vows of secrecy, fidelity and trustworthiness.

In some jurisdictions the apron is worn under the coat. That is not the place. The apron should be worn outside of all other clothing. It was originally there; why change the practice?

#### PRESENTATION OF THE APRON

My brother, I now present you with the lambskin or white leather apron.

It is an emblem of innocence and the badge of a Mason; more ancient than the Golden Fleece or Roman Eagle; more honorable than the Star and Garter when worthily worn, or any other order which can be bestowed upon you by King, Prince, Potentate or any other person, unless he be a regular Mason.

It may be that, in the coming years, upon your head may rest the Laurel Wreath of Victory; pendant from your breast may hang jewels fit to grace the diadem of an Eastern potentate; nay, more than these with light added to coming light, your ambitious feet may tread round after round of the ladder that leads to fame in our mystic circle; and even the purple of the fraternity may rest upon your honored shoulders, but never again from mortal hands, never again until your enfranchised spirit shall have passed upward and inward through the pearly gates, shall any honor so distinguished, so emblematic of purity and all perfections, be conferred upon you as this which I now bestow.

It is yours. Yours to wear through an honorable life, and at your death to be deposited upon the coffin which shall enclose your lifeless remains and, with them, laid beneath the clods of the valley.

Let its pure and spotless surface be to you an ever-present reminder of a purity of life and rectitude of conduct, a never-ending argument for nobler deeds, for higher thoughts, for greater achievements.

And when at last your weary feet shall have come to an end of life's toilsome journey and from your nerveless grasp shall fall forever the working tools of life, may the record of your life and actions be as white and spotless as this fair emblem which I place in your hand tonight.

And when your trembling soul shall stand naked and alone before the Great White Throne, there to receive judgment for the deeds done while here in the body, may it be your portion to hear from Him who sits as the Judge Supreme the welcome words; "Well done, good and faithful servant, thou has been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things. Enter thou into the joy of the Lord."

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