

Preparing for the York Rite

Meridian Chapter, U.D.
Royal Arch Masons of Oregon.

To be shared with a candidate after he has been balloted upon:

Congratulations on being elected to become a member of our Chapter by initiation! The purpose of this short booklet is to prepare you to receive the four degrees of *Capitular Masonry* and become an active member of the Chapter.

What is Capitular Masonry?

You've probably heard someone refer to the Degrees of Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft and Master Mason as the "Symbolic Degrees" or refer to the place where those degrees are conferred as a "Symbolic Lodge." The three degrees culminating with that of Master Mason are said to be *Symbolic* because they lay a complete foundation of symbolism upon which the rest of your Masonic education is to be erected. Remember the often repeated answer to the question "*What is Freemasonry?*"

"Freemasonry is a peculiar (**meaning particular**) system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by Symbols."

The foundation of this symbolism was laid when you received your degrees in Lodge. You began to build upon this foundation as you started to study and internalize the ceremonies and lectures of those degrees, particularly the Sublime Degree of Master Mason. In the Chapter, we confer four additional degrees, which shed light on the preceding degrees, and restore some pieces which at one time belonged to the Lodge but have since been removed through various circumstances of time. If our efforts to help your progress are successful, you may even one day discover *that which was lost*. Most Royal Arch Masons would agree that the original secrets of the Master Mason Degree (which alone can enable you to travel in foreign countries, work and receive Master's wages) can only be discovered by the assistance of the Royal Arch Degree.

As the three preceding degrees are referred to as *Symbolic*, so, in like manner, are these four additional degrees referred to as *Capitular*. The word Capitular properly means "of a Chapter" and the Capitular Degrees are the Degrees of a Chapter. Both of these words—Capitular and Chapter—come from the same root, which is the Latin *caput*, meaning head. This is particularly applicable as these Degrees all pertain to the *head*, or in other words, to the *completion* of the Temple, with each of the degrees exploring a

different aspect thereof. Remember, Masonry is concerned not only with King Solomon's Temple, which was made of stone, but also with the erection of that inner Temple which should exist within each of her votaries.

Brief History of the York Rite

The York Rite, which is also referred to as the American Rite, is actually a loosely associated series of several smaller rites, each having their own local and governing bodies. It consists of the Lodge of Master Masons, the Chapter of Royal Arch Masons, the Council of Cryptic Masons, the Commandery of Knights Templar, and various other allied organizations, whose prerequisites for membership include that of being a Royal Arch Mason or a Knight Templar. If you were raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason in the United States (with the exception of the ten Lodges in the 16th District of the Grand Lodge of Louisiana) you have already received the first three degrees of the York Rite. This is because the Grand Lodge system in the United States works what is considered to be the York Rite ritual for these degrees. While each Grand Lodge has slight variations from one another in their ritual, they are all ultimately derived from the traditional Masonry of early 18th century England, Scotland, and Ireland.

Scottish Rite, which is the other major branch of Freemasonry in the United States, is French in origin, owing its heritage to the Estienne Morin's Rite of the Royal Secret (also called the Rite of Perfection), and has its own version of the three Symbolic degrees, but it does not work them in the United States, instead ceding this authority to the Grand Lodge system which had already been well established prior to the 1801 formation of the Supreme Council of the Ancient & Accepted Scottish Rite, from which all other Scottish Rite bodies derive their heritage. An exception is found in Louisiana where the Grand Lodge permits some of its lodges to work the Scottish Rite version of the Symbolic Degrees.

As you may already know, the first Grand Lodge was formed in England in 1717. Another Grand Lodge was formed in 1751 by a group of Irish Masons who believed that recent changes made by the Premier Grand Lodge had deviated too far from the ancient customs of the fraternity. The new Grand Lodge they formed was

called the *Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of England according to the Old Institutions*, but is more commonly known as the *Antient Grand Lodge of England*. They referred to members of the Premier Grand Lodge as the “Moderns.” In 1813, the two Grand Lodges reconciled and came together to form the *United Grand Lodge of England*, adopting on that occasion 21 Articles of Union, the second of which states in full:

“II. It is declared and pronounced that pure Ancient Masonry consists of three degrees, and no more; viz, those of the Entered Apprentice, the Fellow Craft and the Master Mason, including the Supreme Order of the Holy Royal Arch. But this article is not intended to prevent any Lodge or Chapter from holding a meeting in any of the degrees of the Orders of Chivalry, according to the constitutions of the said Orders.”

As a result of this union, the Royal Arch, while being declared a genuine part of Ancient Masonry, was also separated into a fully appendant order, perhaps owing to the fact that many Master Masons who had been “Moderns” prior to the union were not in possession of the degree and did not wish to receive it, although it is also known that many Masons belonging to “Moderns” Lodges did receive the Royal Arch Degree, even before the union.

The Chapter of Royal Arch Masons in the York Rite preserves much of the ritualistic work which was originally performed by Craft Lodges working under the Antient Grand Lodge of England.

The Council of Cryptic Masons, known in some jurisdiction as the Council of Royal and Select Masters, is a York Rite body which has the Royal Arch Degree for its prerequisite. While the additional degrees it confers are clearly pertinent to Royal Arch Masons, they actually originated as side degrees which were once conferred by roaming *Sovereign Grand Inspectors General* (33°) of the Scottish Rite. Today, the Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite still has the authority to confer these degrees, but they have not exercised that authority, instead recognizing that the placement of these degrees within the York Rite is more appropriate, and have therefore allowed the formation of Councils and, in turn, Grand Councils to govern over and propagate these degrees.

The Master Mason Degree details the allegory of the tragic loss of the Ancient Master's WORD, the Chapter teaches about the eventual restoration of the WORD, and the Council teaches about its preservation. There are many other teachings contained in the York Rite degrees, but the allegory of the WORD is the consistent thread.

Unlike the Lodge, Chapter, and Council, the Commandery of Knights Templar does not confer any degrees of Masonry, but instead, confers the Illustrious Order of the Red Cross, and two Christian Orders of Chivalry, the Order of Malta and the Order of the Temple. These orders are placed within the York Rite because they have the Royal Arch Degree for a prerequisite, and while the 1813 Articles of Union do not declare them to be part of Ancient Masonry, the articles are carefully worded so as not to prohibit their practice. The ceremonies of the Order of the Temple are based on the historical Knights Templar, but the order today makes no claim to have descended from the historic Knights Templar.

Present Organization of the York Rite

As you already know, Lodges work under authority of a Grand Lodge, and in the United States there is a Grand Lodge in each of the fifty states and Washington D.C., as well as a Prince Hall Grand Lodge which shares concurrent jurisdiction in most states. Following the same pattern, the other major York Rite bodies are also organized into *Grand Chapters*, *Grand Councils*, and *Grand Commanderies* at the state level, each having a line of elected and appointed officers. The Grand Chapters and Grand Councils are each sovereign in their jurisdiction, but most of them also hold voluntary membership in the *General Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons International* and the *General Grand Council of Cryptic Masons International*, respectively. There are recognized Grand York Rite Bodies, however, which do not hold membership in "General Grand." The Knights Templar have a slightly different organization, being governed by a single sovereign body known as the *Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America*, under the authority of which all Grand Commanderies and constituent Commanderies in the United States are operated. York Rite Masonry also exists within Prince Hall jurisdictions, where it is often designated P.H.A. (Prince Hall Affiliated.) In spite

of being organized on a national and international level, all York Rite Bodies work under the Grand Lodge in whose jurisdiction they operate, and the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge is the highest office which can be held in the York Rite.

The Degrees of Capitular Masonry

The degrees of Capitular Masonry are sometimes conferred as part of a one-day class or “festival.” The fact that this booklet is being presented to you at this time indicates, however, that you are privileged to be receiving the degrees in the more traditional way: one at a time. Please remember that the quality of a man’s Masonry is not determined by whether he receives his degrees in one day, or over the course of several months or even years, but rather, by the devotion which he exerts towards the practice of his craft. You will be devoting time for several weeks to the study of each of these degrees as you receive them, and so it is, at present, necessary only to list them in sequence:

- 4° Mark Master Mason
- 5° Past Master (Virtual)
- 6° Most Excellent Master
- 7° Royal Arch Mason

Although a Chapter of Royal Arch Masons officiates in the conferral of all four of these degrees, only the Royal Arch Degree itself is actually conferred within a “Chapter.” The other three degrees are said to be conferred in a Lodge, but it is termed a *Right Worshipful Lodge* rather than a *Worshipful Lodge* as you have heretofore heard, and is presided over by a *Right Worshipful Master*. During the 4th, 5th & 6th degrees, you will find yourself to be quite familiar with the duties and titles of most of the officers, which are very similar to those found in your Lodge. In the Royal Arch Degree, however, the titles and stations of the officers are different. It is not important that you memorize the titles and duties of the officers right away. After all, you have three degrees to be concerned with before you even reach the Royal Arch, but there is no reason you can’t start to familiarize yourself with them ahead of time, and you may find this to be a useful reference as you will likely interact with several of these Brethren in the process of progressing through your degrees.

Comparison between Officers of Lodge and Chapter:

Chapter Officer

Corresponding Lodge Officer

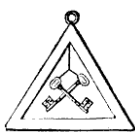
Elected Officers:

<i>Excellent High Priest</i>	<i>Right Worshipful Master</i>
King.....	Senior Warden*
Scribe.....	Junior Warden
Treasurer.....	Treasurer
Secretary.....	Secretary
Captain of the Host.....	Senior Warden* (and Marshal)

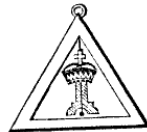
Appointed Officers:

Principal Sojourner.....	Senior Deacon
Royal Arch Captain.....	Junior Deacon
Master of the 3rd Veil.....	Master Overseer (<i>in a Mark Lodge</i>)
Master of the 2nd Veil.....	Senior Overseer (<i>in a Mark Lodge</i>)
Master of the 1st Veil.....	Junior Overseer (<i>in a Mark Lodge</i>)
Sentinel.....	Tyler

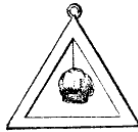
A few other officers may also be appointed by the High Priest, such as a Musician, a Chaplain, or Stewards, and the duties of these officers correspond with their counterparts in Lodge.



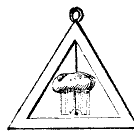
Treas.



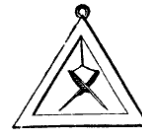
King



E.H.P.



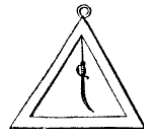
Scribe



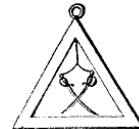
Sec.



C.o.H.



R.A.C.



Sentinel



P.S.

M.3.V.

M.2.V.

M.1.V.

* The King's duties correlate with the administrative functions of the Senior Warden, and he is qualified to preside over the Chapter in the absence of the Excellent High Priest, whereas the Captain of the Host has duties corresponding with the ritual functions of the Senior Warden (such as Purging the Lodge during opening ceremonies). For this reason, the Captain of the Host is an elected officer; He is not, however, qualified to open a Chapter in the absence of the three principal officers.

York Rite Etiquette

It will be useful for you to know in advance some matters of etiquette pertaining to York Rite Masonry. For completeness, and to make this useful for your future reference, some of the items covered here will be quite detailed. For now, just try to take in the basic concept behind each point rather than memorizing the details.

1st) In all York Rite bodies beyond the Lodge, the position of attention is to stand with the body erect, on the step of the degree, with the arms dropped casually to the sides.

2nd) The position of reverence is used only during prayer, during reading of scripture, or during the opening or closing of the Volume of Sacred Law. It is made by standing with the body erect, the feet comfortably apart (nearly shoulder-width from each other), with the arms crossed over the breast, the left arm uppermost.

3rd) As instructed in the Lodge, we should reverently bow our head upon any mention of the name of God.

4th) When addressing the presiding officer, you should rise to your feet and give the Due Guard of the degree upon which the body is presently opened. Once you have been acknowledged, give the Penal Sign of the degree distinctly, stating the title of the officer you are addressing, and stand at the above described position of attention while speaking.

5th) Upon entering a meeting which has already been opened: Once admitted, approach the altar and salute the presiding officer with the Due Guard and Penal Sign of the degree upon which the body is presently opened. Once acknowledged, you may take your seat. If you find it necessary to retire from a meeting before the closing ceremonies, approach the altar and follow precisely the same procedure prior to retiring. Never open the door for yourself when entering or retiring from an open meeting. It is the duty of the Junior Deacon in Lodge, of the Royal Arch Captain in Chapter, of the Steward in Council, and of the Warder in Commandery, to open the door, and it is improper to be done by any other person.

6th) Never directly address another member during a business meeting without first obtaining permission from the presiding officer to do so.

7th) Always speak clearly and loud enough to be heard by all present, but never so loud that your voice will be heard beyond the doors of the room.

8th) Never hold a private conversation during an open business meeting—not even if you whisper. Your attention should always be focused upon the current proceedings. If you missed something which was spoken, or need something to be clarified, you should rise and address the presiding officer. The chances are likely that someone else will also benefit from the same clarification.

9th) The gavel is used in the same manner as in the Lodge. One rap calls the meeting to order and also seats the craft, if standing. Two raps cause all officers to rise. Three raps cause the craft to rise. One rap is also used to indicate that a motion has been passed, or that some order of business has been completed or ratified, as well as to dismiss the craft at the end of the closing ceremonies.

10th) Royal Arch Masons refer to one another as *Companion*; to Current or Past High Priests as *Excellent Companion*; to Elected Grand Chapter Officers and District Deputies to the Grand High Priest as *Right Excellent Companion*; and to the current or any past Grand High Priest as *Most Excellent Companion*. You may hear these terms used between members of the Chapter as you begin to socialize with them, but **you should continue to address members of the Chapter as “Brother”** (and they will address you likewise) **until you have received the Royal Arch Degree**. Even after receiving the Royal Arch Degree, the term *Companion* is proper to use only in the context of the Royal Arch Chapter. When meeting on any of the preceding degrees, and particularly in Lodge, the term Brother should still be used as the standard mode of address.

11th) Cryptic Masons also refer to one another as *Companion*, but to Current or Past Illustrious Masters as *Illustrious Companion*; to Elected Grand Council Officers and district representatives to the Grand Illustrious Master (Called Masters of the Arches) as *Right Illustrious Companion*; and to the current or any past Grand Illustrious Master as *Most Illustrious Companion*. Officers of the General Grand Council of Cryptic Masons International are referred to in each case as *Puissant*, rather than *Illustrious*.

12th) Knights Templar refer to one another as *Sir Knight*; to Current or Past Commanders as *Eminent Sir Knight*; to Elected Grand Commandery Officers and District Supervisors as *Very Eminent Sir Knight*; to the current or any past Grand Commander and to Elected Officers of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the U.S.A. as *Right Eminent Sir Knight*; and to the current or any past Grand Master of the Grand Encampment as *Most Eminent Sir Knight*. Once again, the title Sir Knight is only used in the context of Commandery, and you should continue to refer to these individuals as Companion when speaking in the context of the Council or Chapter, and as Brother, when speaking in the context of the Lodge.

Preparing Yourself for the Mark Degree

It has probably been a while since you received the Master Mason Degree, and the Entered Apprentice Degree may seem like ancient history. Before receiving the Entered Apprentice Degree, your mentor, or the committee sent to visit with you was supposed to have provided you with certain instructions to help prepare you for initiation. In Oregon, these instructions are found in a booklet entitled “On the Threshold” which is printed by the Grand Lodge. If you don’t recall these instructions, or if they were never given to you, now would be a good time to acquire a copy of this publication and review them. The May 1926 Short Talk Bulletin entitled “Truly Prepared” includes similar instructions —

When you go, go clean in mind, in body and in heart. Take from your mind and cast away forever all thought that there is a “lodge goat” awaiting you, or that your friends are going to “have fun with you.”

There are fun-loving organizations which cast aside solemnity and spend most of their evenings in laughter and play. But in a Lodge of Master Masons, never! There is not a word spoken or an action performed which can hurt your dignity or your feelings; there is no torture, physical or mental, to degrade you or Freemasonry. There is no “horse play” or other unhappiness awaiting you.

What is done with you has a meaning; the part you play is

symbolic, and intended to make a “deep and lasting impression on your mind” of truths, the full understanding of which make you a better man. Put all fear from your mind; remember that it is among friends you go, and that the first question they asked you was of your belief in a common Father; men do not start thus who begin to play a joke.

Go clean in body, as you would go clean to a christening or a baptism. Nor resent this instruction here; there is intended no insinuation that you are not always clean, but go made clean expressly for this ceremony; though you have but just come from the bath for the evening, go once more and bathe with the thought that you are preparing now for a great step, that the water which laves your body is also, symbolically, cleansing your mind and your heart. Put on your freshest linen, and let its spotlessness be symbolic of that spotlessness your thoughts should have. For if you neglect these things you will be sorry, afterwards; what Freemasonry does to you is done to you, not your brethren that will be, and Freemasonry will mean more to you as you approach her Altar humbly and purified.

The Grand Lodge of Free & Accepted Masons of Wisconsin provides the following counsel in a publication entitled “Seeking Light in Masonry” —

Be clear in mind. Come with your mental faculties free from anything which might impair your ability to accept and assimilate the solemn truths you are about to contemplate.

Be pure in heart. Put away evil thoughts of every kind. If you have done anyone wrong, seek honestly to redress it. Set aside any prejudice against any other person.

Be prayerful in spirit. Whether or not it is your daily habit to pray to a Supreme Being, pray on the eve of your initiation. Ask for His blessing upon what you are about to do, for wisdom that will help you to understand, and for strength of purpose that will make you steadfast.

Be confident of your intentions. Be sure that it is still your sincere desire to proceed upon the quest for light and knowledge. It is vital that you know, before you cross the threshold, that there is no proper place in Freemasonry for the half-hearted or unstable.

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We strongly advise that you take the time to go through all of the above procedures again (or, for the first time) before presenting yourself to receive the Degree of Mark Master Mason. In fact, it would not be a bad idea to repeat these steps in connection with each additional degree you receive. As you wait in the preparation room on the evening of your degree, do not discuss anything with your attendant that would tend to distract you from focusing on what you are about to do. Try to stay calm and relaxed and reflect upon the steps you have taken to prepare yourself for this very significant and solemn event.

The First Section of the Mark Master Degree will serve as a prologue. You will be clothed as a Fellowcraft, and will represent, or will observe, a Craftsman repairing to the Temple with work for inspection. After this prologue, an explanation of the ceremonies will be given, and you will be returned to the place whence you came to be prepared and introduced at the door of the Lodge, as in the preceding degrees. There will be no hoodwink used in this degree. Upon your admission, the regular ceremonies of the degree conferral will begin, which require no explanation at this time.

Immediately after receiving your degree you may find it useful to write your initial feelings and thoughts in a personal journal so that you can refer back to them at a later date. As a Master Mason, you should already have a good understanding of what is proper to be written about a Degree, but be reminded: So long as you are careful in keeping your obligations and do not write anything that might reveal the Due Guards, Signs, or Words of the Degrees, you should feel free to record your thoughts and feelings.

Thank you for taking time to meet with us today and review these instructions. This booklet will be left with you so that you may make future reference to it. If you have any questions about what has been discussed, about what to expect, or about York Rite in general, we will do our best to answer them or to find answers for you. We look forward to seeing you on the evening of your advancement to the degree of Mark Master Mason. ■

You are requested to appear for your Mark Master Degree on:

_____ at _____
DATE TIME

This degree will be held at:

LOCATION

The Excellent High Priest of our Chapter this year is:

NAME OF HIGH PRIEST

Your mentor for the Capitular Degrees will be:

NAME OF MENTOR

Your mentor can be reached at:

PHONE

EMAIL