

MASONRY BEYOND THE THIRD DEGREE



Produced by the Supreme Council, 33°, S.J., USA



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AFTER JOINING THE FRATERNITY, a Master Mason soon discovers the amazing wealth of additional opportunities to learn about and to participate in Freemasonry. While there is no Masonic degree more important than that of Master Mason, there is a long tradition—almost as old as Freemasonry—of “high degrees” that expand upon and elaborate the teachings and lessons of the first three degrees. Enthusiastic Masons eager to learn and to participate more are prime candidates for Masonry beyond the Third Degree.

The Beginnings of “High Degree” Masonry

When the premier Grand Lodge was formed in London in 1717, Freemasonry had only two degrees: Apprentice and Fellow/Master. It was not until some eight years later, in 1725, that we have evidence from a minute book of a distinct Third Degree, that of Master Mason—the first “high degree” added to the basic Masonic ceremonies. This addition to Masonic ritual was absolutely confirmed in 1730 with the publication of Samuel Prichard’s exposé, *Masonry Dissected*, which gives the Master Mason Degree in full with many recognizable features. Thus the Master Mason Degree began a tradition of “high degrees” that expanded upon the legends of and added greater philosophical depth to Masonry

Like so much early Masonic history, the origins of degrees beyond the Third are hidden in

mist. There's evidence that by the early 1730s in England there were "Scotch Masons" or "Scots Master Masons," a step after the Master Mason Degree (and apparently unrelated to Scotland). By 1742 in Berlin there was talk of "higher or so-called Scottish Masonry." In 1743 the Grand Lodge of France adopted a regulation limiting the privileges of "Scots Masters" in lodges. It's clear from these few mentions that something was going on behind the scenes with "Scottish Masonry," but we're not quite sure what. These developments were happening at the same time the Royal Arch was gestating before its birth in 1754. It's even possible that the Royal Arch and Scottish Masonry came from the same sources. We just don't know.

What we do know is that the *hautes grades* or *high degrees* found fertile ground when they were introduced to French Masonry. In 1745, two years after restricting the prerogatives of Scotch Masons, the Grand Lodge of France gave them special privileges, and more privileges and authority followed in 1747 and 1755. In contrast, the Royal Arch first appears in lodge minutes in Virginia in 1753 and England in 1758 with little official notice by the respective grand lodges. By 1766 with the French publication of *The Most Secret Mysteries of the High Degrees of Masonry*, we know that an elaborate sequence of High Degree or "Scottish" Masonry is being worked in France.

The Invention of Stephen Morin

In August 1761 Stephen Morin received a patent from the Grand Lodge of France "authorizing and empowering him to establish perfect and sublime Masonry in all parts of the world, etc., etc." Morin was a wine merchant from Bordeaux and set up business in Santo Domingo in what is now the

Dominican Republic in the Caribbean. Morin is little remembered for his wine business, but his Masonic activities have gained him lasting fame.

It took Morin about 15 months to make it from France to Santo Domingo, arriving in January 1763, because his ship was captured by the English and he was taken to England. While we know that he arrived with authority over the High Degrees, we don't know how many or which High Degrees he controlled! What we do know is that he met a Dutch merchant, Henry Andrew Francken, and made him a Deputy Inspector General sometime between 1763 and 1767. Francken in turn traveled to Albany, New York, and created there a Lodge of Perfection (4°–14°) in 1767.

In addition to creating the Albany Lodge of Perfection, Francken at least three times copied all of his degrees into books: 1771, 1783, and an undated version. The “Francken Manuscripts” contain the earliest English versions of 21 degrees from 4°, “Secret Master,” to 25°, “The Royal Secret or Knights of St. Andrews—the faithful guardians of the Sacred Treasure,” a 25-degree system with the first three degrees conferred in Blue Lodges. This should establish conclusively that Morin worked a system of 25 degrees, right? Well, only if the degrees that Morin gave to Francken are the same ones that he received in France!

There is growing evidence that Morin took whatever high degrees he had received in France and refashioned them into the Order of the Royal Secret (sometimes called the Rite of Perfection), creating additional degrees as needed. The governing document, the “Constitutions of 1762,” has been discovered by Masonic scholar Alain Bernheim to be a slightly modified version of the constitution of the Grand Lodge of France. Morin

apparently acted to create a new Masonic body with himself as the only “Grand Inspector.”

The First Supreme Council: Charleston, 1801

However the 25-degree Order of the Royal Secret came into being, it proved popular. These French high degrees, unlike the American York Rite, were spread by traveling Inspectors who conferred them for a fee. It wasn't necessary to wait for enough Masons in a town to receive the high degrees somewhere else and for them to apply for a charter; the itinerant Inspector could take care of everything as soon as he arrived. Eight bodies of the Royal Secret were formed in America before 1800, from New Orleans to Albany. The weakness of the Order proved to be the unchecked system of Inspectors General.

Each Inspector General could confer the degrees on Master Masons, establish local bodies, and create new Inspectors—all for an appropriate fee. There were no guidelines on cost, no limitation on numbers, and no restriction on how many more Inspectors an Inspector could create. By 1800 there were over 80 Inspectors General, and the system was moving toward chaos.

Then on May 31, 1801, the first Supreme Council of the Thirty-third Degree, the Mother Council of the World, declared its existence with a motto of “Ordo ab Chao” (Order from Chaos). It announced a new 33-degree system of high degrees that incorporated all 25 of the Order of the Royal Secret, and added eight more, including that of 33°, Sovereign Grand Inspector General. This new organization declared control of high degree Masonry in America.

The new Supreme Council had a written constitution and a plan for organizing and managing

the bodies under its control. The problem it faced was how to rein in the roving Inspectors General. The solution was shrewd and depended upon convincing the Inspectors to voluntarily yield allegiance to the Supreme Council. Any Inspector of the 25° would be given authority to confer up to the 32° (the extra seven degrees would make his product more attractive to his customers), if he turned in his old patent and agreed to follow the rules of the Supreme Council. This strategy was reasonably successful, and independent Inspectors General soon disappeared.

The Second American Supreme Council: New York, 1813

The Charleston Supreme Council had organized itself according to the “Grand Constitution of the Thirty-third Degree,” purportedly written by Frederick the Great of Prussia in 1786. The Constitution provided for one Supreme Council in each country, except that the United States of America could have up to two. The decision to create a second American Supreme Council was unexpectedly thrust upon the Supreme Council in Charleston.

Antoine Bideaud, a member of the Supreme Council in Santo Domingo, fled to New York to escape the slave revolt on the island. While there he came across five Frenchmen who were interested in the high degrees. For a fee of \$46 in 1806 (about \$565 in 2000), Bideaud conferred the degrees upon his customers and formed them into a “Consistory” of the 32°—all without the knowledge of the Charleston Supreme Council.

The same year that Bideaud was creating his Consistory, Joseph Cerneau, a French jeweler, moved from Cuba to New York City. He had

a patent from an Inspector of the Order of the Royal Secret that gave him limited powers in Cuba, but that didn't stop him from setting up his own consistory in New York City.

Emmanuel de la Motta, the Grand Treasurer from the Charleston Supreme Council, arrived in New York City in 1813, examined the two competing factions, and decided against Cerneau. De la Motta regularized Bideaud's group and transformed them into the second Supreme Council for America. The Cerneau Supreme Council continued as a competitor until it united with its northern rival in 1867.

The Innovation of Fraternal Theater

In the early- to mid-1800s the Scottish Rite did not have the wide popularity of the York Rite, which may have explained the small number of regional bodies for the Scottish Rite. As Freemasonry emerged from the anti-Masonic period (1826–1841) and as men once again joined the Masons and the rites, the American Scottish Rite made a bold innovation in the presentation of its degrees: they started conferring degrees as theatrical events before candidates as an audience rather than as a participatory ceremony.

We don't know why this innovation was made. Perhaps the increasing number of candidates was more than a single body in a large town could handle. Perhaps members wanted to enhance the initiatory experience with scenery and costumes. We do know that rather than increase the number of bodies in a city, the Scottish Rite chose to increase the number of men who could receive the degree at one time. The result was an explosion of Scottish Rite theaters that allowed

their thespian members to participate in theatrical spectacles.

By 1859 there is a report of the Scottish Rite degrees being presented in a theatrical setting. By 1864 the Cincinnati Scottish Rite had installed a raised stage and boasted of “rooms, painting, scenery, wardrobe, properties, &c., &c., necessary for conferring the ... degrees.” This change in performance venues came at the beginning of and continued through the “Golden Age of Fraternalism” (1870–1919) when Americans were interested in all things fraternal.

Theatrical staging spread faster in the north than in the south, but it was a movement that couldn't be stopped. American Scottish Rite bodies erected stages, painted and purchased scenery, and bought costumes to put on their degrees. Now when King Solomon stepped forward to speak, it wasn't necessary to imagine his exotic dress or magnificent throne room—he stood there in purple robes with a crown, surrounded by his guards and advisors in an oriental palace of stunning opulence.

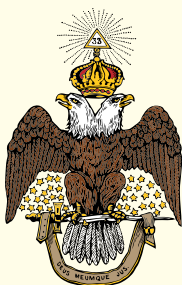
Success bred success, and Scottish Rite bodies tried to outdo each other in putting together lavish stages and extravagant production. Theatrical supply companies competed to provide scenery, costumes, makeup, and lighting. Larger cities might have stages with 100 or more drops, full lighting, a wardrobe room, a property room, and crews to keep everything running. The single center of Scottish Rite per city now became an advantage with plenty of members available to fill all of the supporting jobs in a major production, including kitchen crews, orchestras, and choirs. The conferral of Scottish Rite degrees two to four times a year became major events,

with hundreds of members and candidates gathering together. After witnessing the degrees, new members eagerly signed up to take part themselves, and the cycle continued.

The Scottish Rite Degrees

The American Scottish Rite is a collection of degrees that build upon the legends of the Blue Lodge. The rite offers a total of 30 degrees beyond 3° Master Mason. The names of the degrees vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction, as sometimes do the dramatic contents. However, what is constant is the idea of progressive ethical awareness and self-knowledge through self-reflection and dramatic allegories.

The Scottish Rite degrees give insight to the expansion of Masonic legends. The Lodge of Perfection, 4°–14°, is concerned with events following the murder of Hiram Abiff: burying him; capturing and punishing his murderers; finding a new master builder; and discovering treasurers buried under King Solomon's temple. The 15° and 16° explain the return of Zerubbabel from Babylon to rebuild the temple at Jerusalem. The 17° and 18° center around re-instituting the word under the Law of Love as taught by Jesus and other religious reformers. The 19°–30° culminate with the Degree of Knight Kadosh, a spiritual knighthood similar to the Knight Templar, and develop the Scottish Rite's myth of Masonic succession from crusading knights. In the 32°, Master of the Royal Secret, the candidate is taught equilibrium in the SJ and fidelity in the NMJ.



FURTHER READINGS
Available from the
Supreme Council, 33°, S.J.

Heredom, transactions of the Scottish Rite
Research Society

Is It True What They Say About Freemasonry?,
by Arturo de Hoyos, 33°, and S. Brent
Morris, 33°, G.:C.:

*Pillars of Wisdom: The Writings of Albert
Pike*, by Rex R. Hutchens, 33°, G.:C.:

Symbolism of the Blue Degrees of Freemasonry:
Albert Pike's ESOTERIKA, ed. Arturo
de Hoyos, 33°

*Valley of The Craftsmen: A Pictorial History,
Scottish Rite Of Freemasonry In America's
Southern Jurisdiction, 1801–2001*

*Vested In Glory: The Regalia Of The Scottish
Rite Of Freemasonry, S.J., U.S.A.*, by Jim
Tresner, 33°, G.:C.:

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Morris, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Freemasonry*
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