

### **An Introduction To Cryptic Masonry**

This manual replaces all former training manuscripts, books, manuals and guides for Grand Line Officers, District Officers and Constituent Council Officers.

It is meant as a resource for any Companion who wants to know about Cryptic Masonry; how to function effectively as an Officer or as a member of the Council; to maintain a proper education for such; and in addition, to enhance any Cryptic Council in its mission.

This manual does not contain everything so you may need to seek another resource or organization, or speak with someone on the subject matter of interest for further education and direction. Yet, this manual contains much information that will be beneficial to any Cryptic Companion.

Councils of Cryptic Masons form the center body of the York Rite of Freemasonry. A Master Mason may join a Chapter of Royal Arch Masons and receive the four degrees of that organization. After which he may seek further knowledge in Freemasonry and join a Council of Cryptic Masons.

### **Journey Of Seeking More Light In Masonry**

*(The following was contributed by M.:I.: John P. Nosal, Jr, Past Grand Master)*

You know the pleasure and gratification experienced on having been raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason. You have every right to lift up your head with pride in the knowledge that you are now numbered among the thousands of good men throughout the world who stand for continual promotion of Brotherly Love, Religious Freedom, and a Democracy which will bring Peace and Happiness to men of all Creeds and Nations.

### **Do Not Let Your Masonic Education Stop Here!**

The True Mason is continually seeking more Light and Knowledge, and when he asks for this Light and Knowledge he is often told by well-meaning but mistaken Brothers that "As a Master Mason he has received all there is in Masonry" and thus, while not being really satisfied, he believes this statement and the quest for Light ends.

The purpose of this document is to give a concise and connected view of the Light as it is developed in the several degrees of the York Rite, and it is hoped that these words of counsel and advice will make it clear to you that there are excellent reasons why you should complete your necessary Masonic Education.

To show the connection between Symbolic Masonry or Blue Lodge, Royal Arch Masonry or Chapter and Cryptic Masonry or Council, we must start with "The Circle of Perfection."

Initiates into the Select Master's Degree of Cryptic Masonry are said to have "Passed the Circle of Perfection." The circle gives us a ready illustration of a man's progress in the Masonic science. Let us then picture that circle, upon which is represented the science of Freemasonry or more precisely, the science of Masonic symbolism.

We can divide this circle into three portions or arcs. The first arc will be occupied by the Degrees of Blue Lodge or Symbolic Masonry. The second arc will contain the Degrees of Chapter or Royal Arch Masonry. The third arc will hold the Degrees of Council or Cryptic Masonry.

Now if a neophyte begins at a point of the circle and passes over one-third of its circumference, he will arrive at the Master Mason Degree. There he will discover that the consummation of his Masonic labor so far, is to know that which he has been striving for has been LOST, and that instead of the key to all Masonic Knowledge he has received only a SUBSTITUTE for truth.

Dissatisfied with only this, he must proceed in his further search, through another arc or third of the circumference of the Masonic circle. Thus he will arrive at the Royal Arch Degree, where here in the second arc, that key which had been lost in the first arc is FOUND. But the circle is not yet completed.

It is true that the neophyte now knows that the LOST has been FOUND. He knows WHAT he has obtained but not WHY or HOW he obtained it. The process by which this restoration was accomplished is still unknown to him. All the events of Masonic mythical history which form the links between the loss, the recovery, along with all the sublime symbolism connected with these events, are withheld from him.

To acquire this knowledge, he must pass through the remaining arc or last third of the circle. By arriving at the Cryptic Degrees, he consummates and perfects his knowledge of the representative symbol of Divine Truth. Thus, as a Cryptic Mason, does he pass the "Circle of Perfection" in Masonic science.

To promote a better understanding of the YORK RITE of Freemasonry, it is essential that we dismiss from our minds the idea of division or separation between these three Masonic Bodies that compose the York Rite. Such a separation is merely formal and for convenience sake.

The YORK RITE is a Whole -- not an aggregate of three Bodies.

You cannot stop on the way -- either with Blue Lodge, Chapter or Council, and claim to be a finished Mason. The work, as progressively taken, sheds light upon the prior degrees and no Mason can feel that he has everything to which he is entitled as an earnest seeker after truth until he has received all of them.

You should not be misled by the Brother who tells you confidentially, but mistakenly, that "the Blue Lodge is all there is."

These degrees taken together are full of the most important and beautiful moral lessons ever imparted to man. They are entitled, each alone and surely all of them together, to be respected and loved. As a Mason we strive on building upon the steps of our journey toward a place of perfection in that Heavenly Temple not built with human initiative but with Divine. All of the Symbolic, Capitular and Cryptic Degrees, taken as a whole, assist us with knowledge to making our imperfect lives more perfect to fit into that heavenly structure.

In order for us to comprehend Cryptic Masonry let us review our understanding of all the degrees of a York Rite Mason starting with Blue Lodge, continuing through Chapter and the Council Degrees and as Christian Masons that of the Commandery.

The following account of the York Rite is founded upon traditional and ethical elements and does not undertake a historical or critical analysis.

### **THE SYMBOLIC DEGREES**

(Conferred in Lodges Under the Jurisdiction of a Grand Lodge)

The Entered Apprentice is a bearer of burdens, the Fellowcraft a skilled workman and the Master Mason, a director of the work.

The Entered Apprentice Degree, the First degree in Freemasonry, admonishes the candidate to obey the rules and regulations and learn to practice secrecy. The background of this degree, like many others, is the building of King Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. The Entered Apprentice is taught symbolically to labor upon the building of the Temple, to subdue his passions, and to improve himself in Masonry. He receives here the beginning of the instructions which are to guide him in search of the secret of Freemasonry.

The Fellowcraft is instructed in the principles of Geometry. The different Orders of Architecture are explained to him and he is enjoined to study the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences, and to proceed on his journey toward the attainment of Masonic knowledge.

The Master Mason is taught numerous very important moral lessons governing his conduct in the world towards others; that he must answer and obey the rules of the order; must not cheat, wrong or defraud a brother or a lodge of Master Masons, but on the contrary must help, aid and assist a distressed brother, his widow and orphans. Preparation for the life to come is inculcated by beautiful ceremonies. The Temple is not yet completed, and those faithful craftsmen who have labored so long upon it are deprived, by the wickedness of others of that for which they have wrought. The candidate receives light as fully as it may come to him in the Symbolic Lodge, and a substitute for that which by further search he may hope to receive later, the real secret of a Master Mason. The building of the Temple symbolizes the perfection of our moral life and the continuous effort to erect within ourselves a spiritual building, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

### **THE CAPITULAR DEGREES**

(Conferred in a Royal Arch Chapter Under a Jurisdiction of a Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons)

The first of the four degrees in the Chapter is the MARK MASTER, and in it, the candidate is still symbolically laboring on an unfinished temple as in the preceding degrees of the Blue Lodge. He is taught the nobility of labor and that in the erection of his moral and spiritual temple he must determine and prepare the materials of which that temple is to be constructed and to have due care that in so doing the work which he shall present, bearing his mark, shall be such as to designate him as one worthy of admission to "that house not made with hands, eternal in the

heavens." This degree is perhaps as old as, if not older than any other Degree of Ancient Craft Masonry. It is so ancient, in fact, that its real origin cannot be traced exactly; but in 1598, in Scotland, Statutes were issued which required the Operative Mason to register his "Mark." No degree in Freemasonry can hardly be more interesting, more inspiring, or more instructive, than that of the Mark Master Degree.

The second of the four degrees in the Chapter is the PAST MASTER, and in former times no one was eligible for the Royal Arch except Actual or Past Masters of Lodges, which meant that very few could receive it, so the degree of Past Master was instituted whereby one might become a "Virtual Master" by means of the ceremony of this degree, and thus be eligible for exaltation to the Royal Arch.

The third degree in the Chapter is the MOST EXCELLENT MASTER, and recites the events surrounding the completion of King Solomon's Temple and its dedication with imposing ceremonies to the services of the Most High God; the very idea upon which Masonic Symbolism has been based. King Solomon offers a sublime invocation, and fire comes down from heaven and consumes the burnt offerings and the sacrifices.

The Brethren rejoice that their long labor is ended, lay aside their aprons, are greeted as Most Excellent Masters, and receive their reward. This ends the cycle of degrees having to do with the erection of King Solomon's Temple and brings us up to the sublime story, spanning centuries of time, set forth in the Royal Arch Degree.

The Holy Royal Arch Degree is known as the Summit of Ancient Craft Masonry. It was considered so important in our early history that none but actual Masters of Lodges were permitted to receive it. This degree brings to light that for which the Master Mason has searched. Whenever there is a loss there should be a recovery, and the Royal Arch Degree vividly portrays that recovery. Thus are connected together in the most intimate way the work of the Blue Lodge and the work of the Chapter, neither being complete without the other.

### THE CRYPTIC DEGREES

(Conferred in a Council under the Jurisdiction of a Grand Council of Cryptic Masons)

It is a peculiarity of the York Rite, whether intended or not by the authors, that the movement of the degrees is often inverse, and the historical connection reversed so that we apparently go forward in regular progression, the knowledge and light gained always reflects backward upon a path we have traveled before, and degrees that seemed complete when we received them are found to require the explanation of the subsequent degrees before they can be understood. That is what makes the infinite interest in the work, and causes the reflective Mason to continually study the sublime precepts and ceremonies of the order. This is especially true of the Cryptic Degrees, two of which historically preceded the Royal Arch Degree but which hold in reserve their valuable teachings until the candidate is ready to receive them with the most impressive effect.

In the ROYAL MASTER degree Hiram Abif is alive and speaks, imparting to the candidate the sublime teachings of useful labor on earth and a worthy end of life.

The tragedy of his untimely death is again brought forth with the great loss suffered by the Craft. This is one of the most beautiful degrees in all Masonry. It teaches the great lessons of right living here on earth of that superstructure necessary for the erection of our spiritual temple.

The Holy vessels are the proper symbols for this degree, for they were the work of one of the most skilled artisans of the day. They teach the necessity of having perfect bodies and minds to house man's immortal soul.

In the SELECT MASTER degree we have dramatized for us one of the incidents that occurred during the building of the Temple. It is closely connected with the Royal Arch Degree, and in fact it affords the explanation needed for its perfect understanding. The place of meeting represents a "Secret Vault" or crypt beneath the Temple. Our three ancient Grand Masters appear in charge of a very important work connected with the Temple. One of King Solomon's most particular friends is promoted to the work, in which only a limited number are employed.

The degree ends with the great tradition which runs through Freemasonry, and constitutes an explanation satisfactory in all details as to certain traditional happenings, a knowledge of which is necessary for proper understanding of the Story of Freemasonry. It teaches a wonderful lesson ---- that of overlooking the failings of those who through ignorance or curiosity may often overstep the bounds of propriety.

The Ark of the Covenant is the proper symbol of this degree. Its traditions, use, and symbolism are fully explained to the candidate, and those who do receive this degree are truly Select Masters.

The last or third degree in the Cryptic Rite is THE SUPER EXCELLENT MASTERS degree. The origin of this degree is unknown. It was not listed as a side degree of European Masonry in a catalog of over 700 known degrees which was published in the 19th century.

The earliest account of its conferral was on December 2, 1817 when Columbian Council No. 1, the Mother Council, of Royal Masters in New York City opened a Lodge of Super Excellent Masters. In the ensuing years, a number of Councils conferred this degree, while other Councils strongly objected to it having a place in the Cryptic system. The question was temporarily resolved, late in the 19th century, by making it an "optional" or "side" degree of the Rite.

Then at the Triennial Assembly of the General Grand Council in 1924, the degree was formally adopted as a permanent part of the Cryptic Rite and was to be conferred upon, or communicated to, all candidates. In actual practice today, most Grand Councils permit this degree to be conferred on an optional basis.

The Super Excellent Degree is one of the most dramatic and impressive in all of Freemasonry and is especially significant in that it is the only degree based directly upon the destruction of the Temple of Solomon. Whether you agree or not, there is no question as to its historical and Masonic value, teaching a great lesson in Fidelity. The degree requires the largest cast of characters of any of the degrees, and ends with a climax never to be forgotten. It teaches that while men may continue to build, the only permanent temple is that spiritual temple which each

erects within himself.

In colorful and spectacular manner, this degree portrays the fatal effects which follow the violation of sacred obligations.

The degree has its emblem, which are the Square, the Circle, and the Triangle, the symbolism of which is fully explained to the initiate. The degree constitutes the perfect drama, exemplifying one of the most tragic events in the history of the Jewish people.

### **THE ORDERS OF KNIGHTS TEMPLAR OR THE CHIVALRIC ORDERS**

*(Conferred in a Commandery of Knights Templar Under the Jurisdiction of The Grand Commandery Knights Templar of the State and The Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States of America)*

The Order of Knights Templar is the Christian branch of Freemasonry. It is founded upon the Birth, Life, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension of Jesus Christ as told by His biographies in the New Testament. There are Three Degrees which are referred to as Orders. The Order of the Red Cross, The Order of Malta, and the Order of the Temple.

A candidate for the Orders must be a member of a Symbolic Lodge, and a Companion of a Royal Arch Chapter in good standing and must be of the Christian faith. To a companion who is interested in a further study of Masonry the Commandery opens up a wide field of opportunity. The Ritual is most profound of all Masonic teachings and leaves the candidate with a deep sense of his individual obligations as a man, a Mason and as a Christian.

The ILLUSTRIOUS ORDER OF THE RED CROSS continues the story of the Royal Arch and deals with the period in Jewish history, during the reign of King Darius, when the Jews were returning to Jerusalem and the efforts to rebuild the Temple. A Grand Council was convened at Jerusalem to deliberate upon the unhappy condition of the country and devise means to secure the favor of King Darius and his consent to their preceding with the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and its Temple.

Zerrubbabel participated in this Council (he is represented by the candidate) and offered his services to travel to the Persian court and remind the King of his former promise to aid the Jews in this work. During an oral discourse in the Persian court, Zerrubbabel's was afforded the opportunity to speak concerning which is the most powerful, wine, woman, or king and in his deliberation he proclaimed the Almighty Force of Truth as the most powerful over wine, woman and king.

King Darius was so pleased that he told Zerrubbabel to ask what he would like and it would be granted him. Zerrubbabel then reminded the King of his vow to rebuild Jerusalem and restore the holy vessels which were taken from King Solomon's Temple, and to rebuild the house of the Lord. The King then makes a decree to fulfill his vow accordingly, and to perpetuate it he forms a new order founded upon TRUTH, the Order of the Red Cross, which is then conferred upon Zerrubbabel. The Order prepares the way for the transition from the scenes of Ancient Craft Masonry to Chivalric Masonry founded upon the Christian religion and the practice of

## **Christian virtues.**

Here we bid farewell to all the degrees having to do with the building of King Solomon's Temple, its destruction and the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem and the Second Temple, and we go forward to the period of the Crusades when the Order of Knighthood was formed to recover and protect the Holy Sepulchre and other sacred shrines within the birth land of Our Lord Jesus Christ and to protect the pilgrims who would go to visit them.

THE MEDITERRANEAN PASS AND ORDER OF MALTA is the first Christian order encountered by the candidate. The members represent soldiers of the Cross and the Order is dedicated to St. John the Baptist. The candidate humbly solicits to be admitted to the privilege of the Mediterranean Pass to enable him to safely undertake a pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre, and also to be enrolled as a Knight of Malta. In a beautiful and impressive ceremony, this order enjoins a strict adherence to the cause of Jesus Christ and the performance of those virtues emphasized in His teachings.

We now approach one of the grandest and most impressive orders in all of Freemasonry, which completes the York Rite. THE ORDER OF THE TEMPLE, takes its name and receives much of its inspiration from a chivalric and military organization of the 9th Century when the world was in a state of chaos, not knowing what was coming next. The candidate represents a Knight of the period that succeeded the Crusades, who has made a vow to visit the Holy Sepulchre, and is an aspirant to become a Knight Templar, the better to fulfill that vow. As a trial of his worthiness there is enjoined upon him seven years of preparation, beginning with an unarmed pilgrimage in the direction of the Holy Shrine. After having served six years of this preparation he is commanded to devote the remaining year of preparation to penance as a trial of faith and humility. Beautiful lessons of the death and ascension of our Savior Jesus Christ are inculcated and the candidate is at last received into full fellowship in the most solemn manner. The scene in connection with the final obligation is probably the most impressive (and the most likely to be remembered) in all of Freemasonry.

Templars of the present day are men who by their loyalty and devotion are making Templary the splendid Christian Order which has the respect and admiration of the public at large, and good fellowship and loyal friendships have made the Order stand for something of supreme value in life. Those who have labored for Templary find in it something friendly, comforting and satisfying. It is not entirely ritualistic; rather it is laid in the hearts of men who are working for the good of the Order. It is a high responsibility to be the successors in this modern world of an Order so ancient, so noble and so glorious.

Therefore, remembering that Brother who said that Blue Lodge was all that there is in Masonic education it can be readily seen that any Mason who does not take all the degrees and orders of the York Rite cannot possibly have a thorough knowledge of even the Symbolic Lodge, let alone the Chapter, Council and Commandery.

As one can see, the journey you began as an Entered Apprentice Mason was actuated by lofty motives and you were impressed with the truths and principles

which the first three degrees inculcate, yet the other half was not told you. The revelation of the lost word, the manner of receiving wages, and what were those wages, are still a mystery. Therefore, why be content with a limited education when with but slight effort you may acquire a full and complete knowledge of these and many other important truths that will inspire and impress you with that fervency and zeal that distinguishes the great leaders of our Craft.

Freemasonry is a progressive science. A Mason can only advance by taking every step. He must acquire and apply the knowledge available to him on each level and perfect his skills so that each stone designed for that Spiritual Building might be square, level and plumb.

### **ORDER OF MASONIC DEGREES IN THE YORK RITE**

As published in the General Grand Council Manual the following is the order in which the YORK RITE DEGREES would be portrayed if they were to be presented in their chronological order:

- 1.) The Portion of the Royal Arch antedating the building of the Temple (Chapter).
- 2.) The Entered Apprentice (Lodge).
- 3.) The Fellowcraft (Lodge).
- 4.) The Mark Master (Chapter).
- 5.) The Royal Master--First Section (Council).
- 6.) The Select Master (Council).
- 7.) The Master Mason (Lodge).
- 8.) The Royal Master--Second Section (Council).
- 9.) The Past Master (Chapter).
- 10.) The Most Excellent Master (Chapter).
- 11.) The Super Excellent Master (Council) and One section of the Royal Arch (Chapter).
- 12.) The Concluding Section of the Royal Arch (Chapter).
- 13.) The Red Cross (Commandery).
- 14.) The Order of Malta (Commandery).
- 15.) The Order of the Temple (Commandery).

### **THE CRYPTIC RITE**

*(This information is from the Publication by the General Grand Council of Cryptic Masons International 1996 and other historical documents)*

No rite of Freemasonry has come into its own so much as the series of degrees known as the Cryptic Rite, also known as the Cryptic Masons. Its popularity is well deserved for there are no more beautiful or meaningful degrees in all of Freemasonry than those conferred in the Council of Cryptic Masons.

One reason for its popularity is that it completes a story, a Masonic allegory. Freemasonry is very philosophical and teaches its ideals by allegory or story. This philosophy is moralistic and religious however Freemasonry is not a religion, nor a substitute for one. A requirement for membership in Freemasonry is a professed belief in God and eternal life. It is mandatory that a man profess a personal faith in



a Supreme Being prior to becoming a Freemason. Freemasonry never attempts to alter any one's beliefs nor does it offer a theology or plan for salvation. However, it does offer a moral plan for a man to use in this world, leaving him to look to his religion for salvation into the next world.

Ancient Cryptic Masonry centers on the story of the preservation, loss and recovery of the "Word". The Word represents man's search for life's purpose and the nature of God. Symbolic Freemasonry, as in the Lodge, teaches of the loss of the Word and hope for its recovery. Royal Arch Masonry, as in the Chapter, teaches its recovery. Cryptic Masonry, as in the Council, completes this story by teaching of the Word's initial preservation.

### THE ORIGIN OF THE DEGREES

As with much of Freemasonry, no one knows for sure how the degrees came to be but there are several theories. There is a "Baltimore theory," and a "Berlin theory," but the most likely one is the "Scottish Rite theory," and the most interesting is the "Stuart theory."

The Scottish Rite theory is that the Cryptic degrees were invented in France together with the other degrees that were included in the Rite of Perfection, which later were collected into what is today the Scottish Rite, and that the Cryptic degrees were brought to America just like the Scottish Rite degrees by Stephen Morin from France in 1761. When the Supreme Council for the Southern Jurisdiction of the U.S. was organized in 1802 in Charleston, the degrees which are now in the Scottish Rite were organized, while some "detached" degrees, including the Royal and Select degrees, which had previously been given were now dropped. Some of those who had received these degrees then conferred them on their own and established Councils in the process.

The Stuart theory is interesting and needs some explanation. The Stuart family ruled England starting in 1603, with a break from 1649 to 1660 after Charles I was executed by Parliament under Oliver Cromwell. The last Stuart to reign, James II, was forced to abdicate in 1688. After the Hanoverian family came to the English throne in 1714 with George I, the Stuarts invaded England in 1715 and 1745, by way of Scotland, which supported them, but both attempts failed. The Stuarts and their supporters lived in exile in France, which recognized their claim, and they continued to try to regain their throne for many years with the support of some in England. The Stuart exiles living in France in the early 1700's, sometimes called "Jacobites" from the Latin form of the name for James, were involved in Freemasonry. Some Masonic lodges in France and Italy were made up completely of Jacobites, and the grandson of James II, "Bonnie Prince Charlie" was definitely an active Mason. In 1745, the same year he attempted to invade England, he became the Grand Master of the Masonic Knights Templar, and also formed a Chapter of Rose Croix. The Jacobite Masons considered the death of Hiram Abiff to represent the execution by the English Parliament of Charles I, the father of James II, and the raising of Hiram Abiff to represent the coming restoration to the English throne of the Stuart Kings. The "Royal Master" was the Stuart claimant to the throne, who was called by some the "Pretender" to the throne (at first James II, then his son James III, and then the grandson, Charles), and the secret vault was

the place where the Jacobites plotted their return to power. The "Select Masters" were the closest companions of the "Pretender.". The ritual of the Select Master's degree can easily be seen to be that of a secret political movement, if one believes this theory.

So as you can see the origins of the degrees of Cryptic Masonry are shrouded in mystery. Yet, they have attained a substantial growth and one out of every two Royal Arch Masons is a Cryptic Mason.

Nearly two hundred years ago the degrees of Royal Master and Select Master appeared. Traveling Masonic lecturers throughout the East were conferring them upon Masons, while engaging in instructing in Craft (Lodge) and Capitular (Chapter) degrees.

The Select Master degree was probably first conferred in America about 1790 in Jamaica by Moses Cohen under what became the Scottish Rite. By 1792 Cohen was in the United States conferring the degree of "Select Master of Twenty-seven" on many Masons. The Royal Master degree was probably first conferred in America in 1810 in New York.

The Select and Royal degrees first came together in 1818 when Jeremy Ladd Cross started conferring them and establishing Councils of Royal and Select Masters. Cross and other Masons like him traveled extensively and spread these, plus other degrees, for a fee. At that time degrees were not institutionalized as they are now, and were frequently legally conferred and taught by traveling Masons who earned their living by doing that. They obtained their authority from Grand Lodges or Grand Masters, but traveled widely outside the States where they had been appointed.

Even one Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite included the degree of Select Master as one of its "detached" degrees. But, these beautiful degrees were not to remain detached for any length of time. The state of Connecticut bore the first Grand Council in 1819. In Virginia and West Virginia the degrees developed in the Chapter of Royal Arch Masons where they still remain. In the 1870's a General Grand Council was formed for the United States of America. Today this Grand Council numbers most of the Grand Councils in the United States, as well as the western section of Canada.

Who were the key figures in the spread of the Cryptic degrees in America? Jeremy Ladd Cross (1783-1861) was the originator of the Cryptic Rite as we know it. He lived most of his life in New Hampshire and Connecticut. His education, grammar, and knowledge of Masonry were poor but he had an excellent memory for ritual. He said, "When you memorize what I am teaching you, you will know as much about Masonry as I do." It was said that he always did the ritual in the same way, repeating the same instructions in the same words, varying neither gesture, step, syllable, or letter. Cross was a student of Thomas Smith Webb, the most famous American Masonic ritualist. Cross received authorization from several Grand Masters to travel and teach any of the degrees in Masonry in any state. He did this, making his living from fees for the degrees, plus selling his books and Masonic regalia, and in the process establishing Councils of Royal and Select Masters. James Cushman (1776-1829) was a chief promoter of the Cryptic Rite. He was from

Maine and Connecticut, and he also travelled widely to confer degrees. He was Grand Lecturer in several Masonic bodies and jurisdictions, and established many Councils as well as other Masonic bodies.

John Barker, from South Carolina, was a student of Jeremy Ladd Cross who was also active in organizing Councils in the 1820's, but under a warrant from the Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction, with which he had disputes.

Philip P. Eckel (1768-1831) was the foremost Mason in Maryland in the early 1800's. Originally from Germany, he came with his father to Baltimore around 1781. Eckel gave Cross the authority to confer and spread the Cryptic degrees, and Cross kept Eckel informed of his progress.

Until a few years ago, Cryptic Masonry was not a series of degrees which one had to take to meet requirements to join the Commandery of Knights Templar.

However, in recent years some states have made the Cryptic degrees a prerequisite of the Templar orders. It appears that even more Grand Commanderies will adopt this policy in the years ahead. At the present time the degrees are not required for the Grand Commandery Knights Templar of the State of New York.

### **THE VAULT AND THE MYSTERIES**

Biblical students and archaeologists know of the vaults or crypts beneath King Solomon's Temple. Masonic Degrees were probably not actually conferred in these vaults. However, such a legend does persist throughout Freemasonry. The legends, conveyed in this system of degrees form a beautiful allegory or story. The Masonic author, Albert G. Mackey, writing of the vault, says: "The vault was, therefore, in the ancient mysteries, symbolic of the grave; for initiation was symbolic of death, where alone Divine Truth is to be found. Freemasons have adopted the same idea. They teach that death is but the beginning of Life; that if the first, or evanescent Temple of our transitory life be on the surface, we must descend into the secret vault of death before we can find that sacred deposit of Truth, which is to adorn our second Temple of Eternal Life." This teaching is not unusual in Freemasonry since as was stated previously the requirements for membership include a professed belief in God and one's eternal life.

### **THE USE OF THE NAME CRYPTIC**

The degrees of the York Rite are classified as Symbolic (Lodge of Master Masons), Capitular (Chapter of Royal Arch Masons), Cryptic (Council of Cryptic Masons), and Chivalric (Commandery of Knights Templar). The Cryptic Rite or degrees derives its name from the setting of the degrees of Royal Master and Select Master in the underground crypt beneath King Solomon's Temple. The word cryptic means hidden, hence its use in describing these degrees. The last of the series of Cryptic degrees is not cryptic because it does not comply with the requirement of a vault scene.

It might be regarded as one of the Cryptic Rite's detached degrees for it has no connection either in history or symbolism with those of Royal Master and Select

Master, as shall be discussed later.

### **THE ROYAL MASTER DEGREE**

This is the first degree of the Cryptic Rite as conferred in the United States of America. Candidates who receive the degree are impressed with its dignified ritual and relevant teachings. It contains one section which is generally regarded as an outstanding display of symbolism and content of philosophy. The ritualistic presentations in the degree explain the articles contained in the Holy of Holies of King Solomon's Temple, including the Ark of the Covenant. A knowledge of which is essential to those who would fully understand the preceding degrees. The principal characters in the degree are Solomon and his royal assistants.

### **THE SELECT MASTER DEGREE**

The degree of Select Master has not always been associated with that of Royal Master. Jeremy Cross, a traveling Masonic lecturer, author, and educator of the early 1800's, is given credit by most writers for having combined the two degrees into one rite. There is strong evidence to support the theory that the degree came from a similar degree in the Scottish Rite called Intimate Secretary or Grand Tiler of King Solomon.

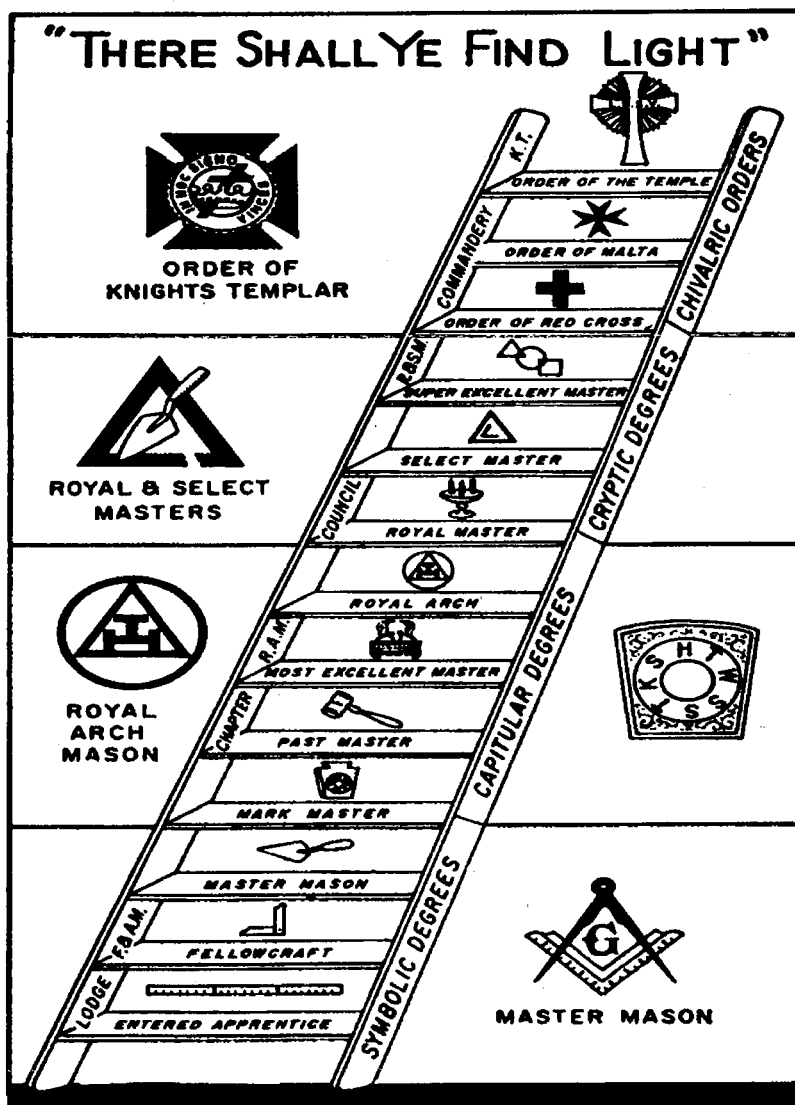
Regardless of its origin the legend of this degree is old. The scene of this degree is laid in the underground vault of King Solomon's Temple. The events which characterize the degree are stirring enough to make it one of intense interest. The ritualistic presentations contain the story to "complete the Circle of Perfection" in Ancient Craft Masonry.

### **THE SUPER EXCELLENT MASTER DEGREE**

As we have stated, the degree of Super Excellent Master is not a degree of the Crypt. But, it relates events that lead to the recovery of the lost Word. This degree beautifully tells of a period in history in which all Freemasons are interested, that period following the destruction of the first Temple. The essence of the degree is foretold in the presentation by the Principal Sojourner in the Royal Arch Degree when he makes reference "Zedekiah was one and twenty years old when he began to reign and he reigned for eleven years in Jerusalem, and he did which was evil in the sight of the Lord his God," etc. The degree of Super Excellent Master is one of the best devised, most impressive, and beautiful degrees. It is most enlightening and relevant to one's daily life. In a display of exciting events, Biblical characters come to life exemplifying the historical drama of the Holy Bible. Here Nebuchadnezzar rules again; Zedekiah proves the results of his wicked life; Ezekiel and Jeremiah prophesy the promises of Almighty God. The true Mason is ever seeking more Light or Knowledge, and when he asks for this Light or Knowledge he is often told by well meaning but mistaken brothers that "as a Master Mason" he has received all the light there is in Masonry". The unfortunate result is often that he suspends his quest for Light, even though still unsatisfied. Basic and indispensable as they are to the foundation to all Masonry, the Blue Lodge degrees comprise only the beginning, not the ultimate in Masonic Knowledge

– just as reading, writing and arithmetic are the stepping stones for all higher learning.

The York Rite of Freemasonry, also known as the American Rite, consists of the Symbolic degrees as conferred in the Blue Lodge, the Capitular degrees conferred in a Chapter of Royal Arch Masons, the Cryptic degrees conferred in a Council of Royal and Select Masters, and the Chivalric orders conferred in a Commandery of Knights Templar. Beyond the first three degrees, there are an additional ten (10) ceremonies, in each of which the candidate participates as a central character. While the several bodies are separately governed, together they form an aggregate which provides the only complete understanding of Ancient Craft Masonry. And the Cryptic Degrees are known to complete the circle of perfection of the Lodge and Chapter degrees. Indeed, the York Rite may be likened to the graduate school of Freemasonry.



## **CRYPTIC MASONS IN OTHER COUNTRIES**

The Cryptic Rite is widespread, although governing bodies exist in England, Scotland, Canada, and the United States. In England the Cryptic Degrees are controlled by a Grand Council of the Cryptic Degrees. In Scotland, the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter has jurisdiction over the Cryptic Degrees. It is interesting to note that while Scotland received the first three degrees of the Cryptic series from American sources, the degree of Thrice Illustrious Master, taken over recently in the United States, was of Scottish origin.

## **THE WORK OF CRYPTIC MASONS**

Freemasonry seeks to improve the community by improving the individual. Therefore, Councils of Cryptic Masons are found working with Lodges, Chapters and Commanderies giving more opportunities to improve one's skills in leadership, public speaking, interpersonal relationships, and administration. This empowers Masons to become better leaders in their careers, religious institutions, and communities. Councils also work with these and other Masonic groups in community service projects to demonstrate Masonic teachings as a way of life. The Masonic way of life is high on charitable endeavors that improves our quality of human life together.

The General Grand Council established the Cryptic Masons Medical Research Foundation to give Cryptic Masons an opportunity to turn Masonic philosophy into a living practice. Currently the Foundation is working with medical researchers to find agents to prevent atherosclerosis or more commonly known as hardening of the arteries. This work places thousands of dollars annually into the needed research to stop our nation's largest killer, atherosclerosis and heart disease.

## **THE CRYPTIC DEGREES**

*(Conferred in Cryptic Councils)*

It is a peculiarity of the York Rite, whether intended or not by the authors, that the movement of degrees is often inverse, and the historical connection reversed so that we apparently go forward in regular progression, the knowledge and light gained always reflects backward upon the path we have traveled before, and degrees that seemed complete when we received them are found to require the explanation of subsequent degrees before they can be understood. That is what makes the infinite interest in the work, and causes the reflective mason to continually study the sublime precepts and ceremonies of the order. This is especially true of the Cryptic degrees, two of which historically preceded the Royal Arch but which hold in reserve their valuable teachings until the candidate is ready to receive them with the most impressive effect.

## **ROYAL MASTER**

In this degree Hiram Abif is alive and speaks, imparting to the candidate the sublime teachings of useful labor on earth and a worthy end of life. The tragedy of his untimely death is again brought forth with the great loss suffered by the Craft. This is one of the most beautiful degrees in all Masonry, with lessons so

impressive that they are never forgotten. It is especially illustrative of the third and seventh degrees.

### **SELECT MASTER**

In this degree we have dramatized one of the incidents that occurred during the building of the Temple. It is closely connected with the Royal Arch degree, and in fact it affords the explanation needed for its perfect understanding. The place of meeting represents a "Secret Vault" or crypt beneath the Temple. Our ancient Grand Masters appear in charge of a very important work connected with the Temple. One of King Solomon's most particular friends is promoted to the work, in which only a limited number are employed. The historical object of the degree is to commemorate the deposits of an important secret or treasure. Certain secrets are imparted to the candidate, which make clear to him the preceding degrees. It is highly dramatic and of the greatest interest.

### **SUPER-EXCELLENT MASTER**

This degree has no connection either in history or symbolism with the Royal and Select Master degrees. It refers to circumstances that occurred during the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuzaradan, commander of the army of the King of Babylon, and the ceremonies are intended to represent the final destruction of the Temple and the carrying away of the captive Jews to Babylon as exemplified in the Royal Arch degree. The Super-Excellent Master degree is divided into three striking scenes. The first scene represents the Jewish captives at Babylon under the direction of Haggai, the Prophet. In the second scene King Zedekiah, of Judah listens to his false counselors and despises the warnings of the Prophet Jeremiah, and the vengeance of the Lord is poured upon him. Jerusalem is captured and its wicked King is taken with his sons before King Nebuchadnezzar, who causes the sons to be put to death before their father's face, after which he deprives the wretched parent of his eyesight and carries him in chains to Babylon. In colorful and spectacular manner, this degree portrays the fatal effects which follow the violation of sacred obligations.

### **A HISTORY OF THE CRYPTIC RITE**

*(Excerpted from "Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia" Copyright 1961)*

This is one of the smallest but one of the most important and certainly one of the most curious of all the rites. It might well be called the rite of Aeneas, because of its long wanderings. One of its oddities is that the two degrees of Royal Master and Select Master have associated with them a ceremony known as Super Excellent Master, which is not considered a degree, yet it is more dramatic than most Masonic degrees.

Another peculiarity is that there has long been a difference of opinion as to which of the two degrees should be conferred on the candidate first. They should both precede the Royal Arch, yet, in early days were often limited to Royal Arch Masons. The Super Excellent is the dramatization of an incident mentioned in the lecture of the Principal Sojourner in the Royal Arch Degree.

Both the Royal and the Select are of the type known as French Ecossais, Ninth Arch, or Secret Vault degrees and the name Cryptic was given them by Rob

**Morris as derived from the Greek crupe or the Latin crypta, meaning vault.**

**The assumption, often indulged, that the Royal and the Select were always associated is incorrect, for the Select, under the name Select Masons of 27, was contained in the rituals brought to this country by Stephen Morin about 1762 as a side degree of the Rite of Perfection, while Royal Master was not so included and is not mentioned in any preserved record until a much later date.**

**Hughan stated that Cryptic Masonry was worked in England from about 1760 but died out, though it continued in Scotland under one branch of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar. It evidently died out there also.**

**Attempts to fix the origin and trace the course of these degrees in the United States is rather baffling, not only because of the shifting control over them and sometimes the absence of any control, but particularly by the tendency of writers upon the subject to refer to the two degrees jointly as though they had always constituted a pair. The latter association of the degrees and the frequent reference to them as Royal and Select Masters naturally led careless writers into the anachronism of supposing their present relationship always to have existed. Writers also, instead of examining closely upon finding one degree mentioned, have used the term "degrees" or "Cryptic Rite" to cover up lack of definition.**

**Philip C. Tucker, Grand Master of Vermont (1847-1861) and Grand High Priest (1852-1857), said, " We have good authority for saying that as early as 1766 they were conferred in the city of Albany." He referred to the Royal and Select degrees and proceeded to state that they came from France and were soon introduced into Rhode Island, Massachusetts and Maryland and that the Grand Councils, Grand Chapters, General Grand Chapter, Lodges of Perfection, Councils of Princes of Rose Croix, and Supreme Councils of the Scottish Rite, all at different times, claimed control over them.**

**A committee of the Grand Chapter Royal Arch Masons of Vermont found in 1850 that the two Cryptic degrees were conferred in that state before Royal Arch Masonry was established there.**

**E. F. Schulz in History of Freemasonry in Maryland , Vol I, p.344, stated, "It is said that the Royal and Select degrees were conferred by Andrew Francken in Albany in 1769." No evidence has ever been discovered that either of the degrees was conferred at Albany until long after that year.**

**The Select Master degree, under the name, Select Masons of Twenty-seven, was conferred at Charleston, S.C. in 1783, and that is probably the earliest that either degree was worked in this country. One of the earliest investigations of the history of the degrees was made by a committee of the Grand Chapter R.A.M. of South Carolina to determine whether that body rightfully had the control over the degrees that it was then exercising. The report of the committee was dated February 26, 1829, and with it was found a note written by Moses Holbrook, chairman of the committee. The time of the investigation was late enough to permit the committee to fall into the common error of linking the two degrees together and thus to give Royal Master an apparent existence in the South earlier than the facts warranted. The report stated that, in February, 1783, Dr. Frederick Dalcho, Dr. Isaac Auld, Dr.**



James Moultrie, Sr. and Moses C. Levy (three of whom were still living in 1829) had received the degrees in the Lodge of Perfection at Charleston; that Joseph Myers, one of the Deputies who established the Council Princes of Jerusalem at Charleston, Feb 20, 1788, deposited in the archives certified copies of the "degrees of Royal and Select Masters from Berlin in Prussia"; that, from 1788, the Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite at Charleston had steadily conferred the degrees and that, in 1828, a number of councils of Select Masters were active.

The committee reported that it had seen and read the first copy of "the degrees" that had come to America and copies of old charters that had been returned when Grand Councils were formed. It appears that chairman Holbrook left a manuscript copy of the degrees of Royal Master and Select Master containing a note in his handwriting, dated March 15, 1830, quoting from "Brother Snell's book" as follows: "Supreme Council Chambers, Charleston, S.C., 10th Feb., 1827. I hereby certify that the detached degrees, called Royal and Select Master or Select Masons of 27 were regularly given by the Sublime Grand Lodge of Perfection (No. 2 in the U.S.A.) established by Brother Isaac Da Costa in Charleston in February, 1783, one of the original members of which, Most Illustrious Moses C. Levy, is still alive and a member of it to this day, without ceasing to be so for a day.

Brother Myers shortly after this (February 20, 1788) resided some time in Norfolk, Richmond and Baltimore previous to his removal to Europe, and he communicated a knowledge of the degrees to a number of brethren in those cities. The original copy is still in my keeping and agreeably to the obligations of the same, and the Grand Constitutions governing those degrees, viz., Royal and Select Masons of 27 it is correct and lawful to give them either to Sublime Masons who have arrived at the Knight of the Ninth Arch (13th) or to Companions of the 3d Arch (Royal Arch Masons).

In that short account some confusion of names is evident. Subsequent investigation has shown that the Charleston bodies did not possess the Royal Master degree in that early period, and it is unlikely that Myers had deposited a ritual of that degree in the archives, nor is it established that such degree came from Berlin or even Europe. After 1788, the Select degree was regularly conferred at Charleston and councils of that degree were active there in 1828. On the recommendation of the above mentioned committee, the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of South Carolina surrendered custody of the Cryptic degrees in 1829.

Dr. William L. Cummings of New York, who possesses one of the Stephen Morin rituals as well as one of the largest collections of rituals of degrees generally, avers that only Select Masons of 27 or the later Select Master was in use at Charleston in the 18th century and that Royal Master was never conferred with Select Master until after 1821 and then first in New York. That statement is confirmed by Mackey's History of Freemasonry (by W.R. Singleton) Vol. VI, p.1556, where, quoting Schulz (Hist. FM in Md., Vol. I, pp.335-344), it is stated that Holbrook was in error in 1829 as to Royal Master, since that degree was first worked in the northern states.

Savannah, Ga. is the next place where the Select Master degree is found, for Moses Cohen, on Nov. 9, 1790, issued to Abram Jacobs a diploma for Select Masons of 27

and the diary of Jacobs relates his visit to Savannah in 1792 and his conferring of that degree at various places in Georgia.

At Baltimore, Md., the Select degree and no other seems to have been in control of Philip P. Eckel and Hezekiah Niles acting jointly. An old document signed by them authorized a certain person to open and hold a chapter at Baltimore and recite: "Whereas, In the year of the Temple 2792 [A.D. 1792] our thrice illustrious Brother Henry Wilmans, Grand elect, Select, Perfect Sublime Mason, Grand Inspector General, and Grand Master of Chapters of the Royal Arch, Grand Elect and Perfect of the Master's Lodge and Council of Knights of the East, Prince of Jerusalem, Patriarch Noachite, Knight of the Sun and Prince of the Royal Secret, did by virtue of the powers in him legally vested, establish, ordain, erect and support a Grand Council of Select Masons in the city of Baltimore," etc.

Henry Wilmans was a native of the city of Bremen, Germany, and came to Baltimore in 1790. In 1793, he became charter master of Concordia Lodge and, in the same year, Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Maryland, succeeding to the position of Grand Master the following year. He died in 1795. The source of his authority over the Select degree is unknown, but doubtless it was simply the privilege of an Inspector General to confer side degrees. Mackey (Singleton) cited above, page 1557, concluded: "while the degree of Royal Master or Select of Twenty Seven may have been conferred in various places prior to 1792, yet we must conclude that the organization of a council of Select masons in Baltimore by Philip P. Eckel and Hezekiah Niles under the authority of Henry Wilmans was the very first organized effort to propagate the rite in this country.

Niles, writing in Ahiman Rezon in 1827, stated that he had been told that a regular chapter of the Select degree was held at Charleston many years before but had become dormant and that he was not aware that the degree was then worked anywhere other than Baltimore. The Royal Master degree is mentioned in only a few scattered references prior to the year 1804, when it is claimed that Abram Jacobs went to New York and conferred the degree upon Thomas Lownds. In Gould's History of Freemasonry, (Scribner) Vol. I, p. 300, it is stated that the earliest authoritative account of the working of the degree occurs in the records of Columbian Council No. 1 of New York in 1807. It has been stated, but also doubted, the Joseph Cerneau conferred the Royal Master degree upon Lownds in 1807, and J. Ross Robertson in his The Cryptic Rite, Toronto, 1880, declared that: "In 1808 the dispute between Gourgas and Joseph Cerneau commenced. Lownds sided with the latter and went over to him, taking, so Gourgas says, the Royal and Select Degrees.

The credit for organizing the first body of the Cryptic Rite must be given to Lownds. He formed, with others, of course, Sept. 2, 1810, the Columbian Grand Council of Royal Master Masons." This body, on Dec. 8, 1821, received within its fold a Council of Select Masters. On January 25, 1823, 'Columbian Grand Council' constituted itself a Grand Council for the state, and issued warrants as late as 1827." That seems to have been the first permanent association together of the two degrees and Columbian Grand Council appears to have been the first organized body of Royal and Select Masters anywhere. It began warranting subordinate councils in 1823.

**Dr. William L. Cummings is of the opinion that Royal Master and Select Master were conferred as companion degrees for the first time in 1810 and that Columbian Council No.1 worked only Royal Master until 1817, when the Super Excellent Master working was adopted; that in 1817, Lownds created a council of Select Master by conferring the degree on 10 brethren who were mostly members of Columbian Council No. 1 that a week later the new body merged with Columbian Council No. 1 and that the combined body conferred the three degrees or "orders" of Royal Master, Super Excellent Master and Select Master, apparently in that order. Lownds remained Master of Columbian Council No. 1 for several years, and it is said that, prior to the adoption of the Select degree, that body conferred several other side degrees, such as the Order of the Garter, the Illustrious and Invincible Order of St George of Capidosia, and Knight of the Round Table. The ritual of only the last named of the three side degrees has been preserved.**

**On January 25, 1828, at a convention called for the purpose, the Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters of New York was formed. Another Grand Council existed in 1854 which was composed largely of adherents of the schismatic St. John's Grand Lodge. It is said that Philip P. Eckel of Baltimore did not receive the Royal Master degree until 1819 and then from Wadsworth of New York. Schulz, in his History of Freemasonry in Maryland, Vol. I., p.344 states: "The Royal Master Degree was first known and worked in the Eastern States, while the Select was first known, and at a much earlier date, in the South and Middle States." In the United States, the Select Master and later the Royal Master degree were at first side degrees of the Scottish Rite and were often conferred by lecturers and by Deputies of the Southern Supreme Council, the two most prominent of whom were Jeremy L. Cross and John Barker. Cross received the Select degree from Eckel and Niles in 1816 and disseminated it through Pennsylvania, Ohio, Kentucky, Mississippi, Louisiana, Delaware, New York, New Hampshire, Vermont, New Jersey and Virginia.**

**He conferred the degree only on Royal Arch Masons, whereas Eckel and Niles deemed it introductory to the Royal Arch Degree and conferred it on Mark Master Masons. Cross formed a council of Select Masters at Windsor, Vermont, in 1817, Barker established councils in Alabama and Mississippi. In 1818, Cross received the Royal Master degree and conferred both degrees in Connecticut in that year, the first council of Royal and Select Masters there being New Haven No. 10. Grand Councils were formed as follows: Connecticut, 1819; Virginia, 1820; North Carolina, 1822; and eventually others.**

**In 1817, the Grand Chapter R.A.M. of Maryland authorized its chapters to confer the Select Master degree and ten years later it sent a circular recommending that other Grand Chapters assume control of the Select Master degree, although, as above stated, the Grand Chapter of South Carolina relinquish the Royal and Select in 1829.**

**The Grand Chapter of the District of Columbia took control of the Cryptic degrees in 1829, and in the same year, the General Grand Chapter R.A.M. of the United States resolved that the Royal and Select degrees were to be placed under control of the State Grand Chapters.**

**After 1827, there was a period of some years during which both independent Grand Councils of Royal and Select Masters and Royal Arch Chapters were striving for**

control or, possibly, coordinate control of the degrees and, at the same time, lecturers or even Deputy Inspectors-General (such as John Barney of the Charleston Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite) authorized both Councils of Royal and Select Masters and Councils of Princes of Jerusalem to control the degrees.

In 1847, the General Grand Chapter authorized chapters to confer the Royal and Select Degrees in states where no councils of that rite existed and, in 1850, the Northern Supreme Council, of the Scottish Rite issued a decree claiming the Royal and Select Degrees as its exclusive property in the North. The Southern Supreme Council did likewise in the South.

In 1853, the General Grand Chapter reversed its position and renounced its claim to the Royal and Select Degrees but, in spite thereof, the Grand Chapter of Maryland (until 1872) and the Grand Chapter of Virginia (from 1841 to the present day) retained them, as did the Grand Chapter of West Virginia after its formation. Other Grand Chapters took control of the degrees even after the renunciation of 1853, as follows: Texas from 1854 to 1907 ( and still has a somewhat closer relation between chapters and councils than elsewhere); Illinois from 1877 to 1882; Mississippi from 1877 to 1888; Kentucky from 1878 to 1881; Arkansas from 1878 to 1881; Wisconsin from 1878 to 1881; Nebraska from 1878 to 1886; and South Carolina from 1880 to 1881.

Another fact about which there has been some quandary rather than dispute is the order in which the degrees are usually conferred. As explained under DEGREES V, ROYAL MASTER, SELECT MASTER AND SUPER EXCELLENT MASTER, the Select Master should precede the Royal. No data are available on the history of the Super Excellent Master ceremony, which is perhaps the only place in any rite where a drama is performed as no part of any degree or a degree itself. It is not found in the lists of degrees existing when the European Continent was deluged with degrees, but neither is Royal Master or Select Master unless the latter is included in one of the doubtful lists of degrees of the Chapter of Clermont. On the whole, the Royal and Select Degrees are among the best in Freemasonry and the Super Excellent is one of the most stirring dramas in the whole galaxy.

The Cryptic Rite as now worked was reintroduced into England by charter from the Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters of New York in 1871, and the Grand Council for England was formed in 1873. Cryptic Masonry reentered Scotland by charter from the Grand Council of Illinois in 1878 and the Grand Council of Scotland was formed in 1880. As now worked in England, the Cryptic Rite consists of Most Excellent Master ( a short form of that degree as worked in American Chapters), Royal Master, Select Master and Super Excellent Master.

An event which may not only remove the isolation of the Cryptic Rite but may even strengthen and consolidate the York Rite was the decision of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar of the United States in 1958 to give State Grand Commanderies the option of declaring the Royal and Select Master degrees prerequisite to the degrees of the Commanderies. A number of Grand Commanderies, including California, have taken such action.

The General Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters of the United States was

slow in formation. In 1871, the Grand Council of Massachusetts took the initiative in calling a convention of representatives which met in New York City on June 12, 1872, with 14 Grand Councils represented. It was resolved that the Cryptic Degrees should be under the exclusive jurisdiction of Grand Councils and that no members should be recognized, except those who received the degrees in a Council of Royal and Select Masters or by authority of a Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite. This was a harsh measure, for the degrees had been quite generally conferred by Royal Arch chapters and, therefore, the resolution aroused considerable rancor, and operated to delay the ultimate objective.

At a second convention in 1873, it was resolved that the degrees should be conferred in the order of Royal Master, Select Master, and that the Super Excellent should be optional. Other conventions were held in 1873 and 1874. At a convention in Detroit, Michigan, Aug. 23, 1880, a constitution was adopted for a General Grand Chapter to become effective when ratified by 9 Grand Councils. By March 1, 1881, this had been done by the Grand Councils of New York, Minnesota, Ohio, Indiana, Maryland, Tennessee, Massachusetts, Alabama, Louisiana and South Carolina. Its first meeting was in Denver, Colorado, in 1883, with the above Grand Council (except Alabama) present and, in addition here were representatives from California, Florida, Kansas, Maine, Missouri, and New Hampshire. The Grand Councils of Georgia, South Carolina and Vermont indicated their adherence and Arkansas joined in 1886.

Remaining aloof from the General Grand Council were Connecticut, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Illinois, Texas, New Jersey, North Carolina, Kentucky, Iowa, Nebraska, Wisconsin and Mississippi. Virginia and West Virginia had no Grand Councils, the degrees there always having been conferred in Royal Arch Chapters. The Grand Councils of North Carolina, Iowa, Nebraska and Mississippi still retained the Chapter system, though all of them subsequently abandoned it. Wisconsin and Texas, though having Grand Councils, adopted systems peculiar to themselves in that the relations between councils and chapters were still intimate.

In 1889, the General Grand Chapter ameliorated the harshness of the resolution of 1872 by authorizing each State Grand Council to determine the status of Royal and Select Masters in their several jurisdictions. Late, all the Grand Chapters joined the national body except Connecticut, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Illinois and Texas and by 1948, Massachusetts had withdrawn and Michigan had joined.

In 1942, The General Grand Council resolved to recognize the Royal and Select Master Degrees as conferred in the Grand Chapters of Virginia and West Virginia. New Mexico had not, up to 1952, formed a Grand Council, though it has councils under charters from the General Grand Council as do Canal Zone, Mexico, Philippines, Hawaii and Alaska.

The Cryptic Rite, known to many as the Council of Royal and Select Masters, is able to trace its early development and provides interesting if not somewhat conflicting information. Early in this century, two volumes were published that expounded upon the theories of the origin of the Rite as well as its evolution. Providing much information, derived from many noteworthy Masonic authorities, and well documented, it nevertheless presents too many pages for the casually

interested Freemason. It is my intention to present a brief excerpt that may satisfy the curious of the Royal Craft and spark a desire to look further.

**Another History of the Cryptic Rite**  
**by Hinman, Volume II p. 654**

New York- In a history of this Grand Council presented in 1861, the committees say that Henry A. Francken, the founder of the Lodge of Perfection at Albany in 1767, introduced the degrees of Royal, Select and Super Excellent Master into this country, in New York, Massachusetts and Rhode Island.

In 1807, Joseph Cerneau conferred the Degree of Royal Master in New York, and established a Grand Council, under authority derived from the Grand Consistory in France, and the same year established a Grand Consistory there. The records of the Grand Council for the first three years are lost.

A charter was granted to Columbian Council No. 1, in 1810; in 1821, a Council of Select Masters in New York, founded by Eckel and Niles, united with the other, the members having been first healed. It then conferred the Super-Excellent Degree, but not very often till 1842, since which it has been regularly conferred.

In a charter granted in 1824, authority was given to confer the Royal, Select and Super-Excellent Master Degrees. In 1817 a charter was issued to Benj. Gleason and others, who had formed a Council in Boston; in 1824, a charter was issued for the second Council in New York; in 1824, one was issued to John Barney and others, in Sheffield, Massachusetts; in 1825, one for a Council at Greenwich, Massachusetts, the latter had been acting as a Council for some years.

This Grand Council held all Councils and Grand Councils deriving their authority from Cross or Cushman, to be clandestine; and accordingly, in 1841, refused admission to the Most Puissant of the Grand Council of Ohio.

When the schism of the Grand Lodge of New York occurred, in 1849, it happened that almost all the members of the Grand Council were of the Phillips party. In consequence, in 1854 another Grand Council was formed by three councils, chartered by Connecticut that same year. In 1860, the two united and formed the present Grand Council of New York. The old body had published no Proceedings before the union, and we have only those of the other body and of the united body." All writers have assumed that the 1807 Council was the Lounds Council whose records prove it was organized in 1810. That the 1807 Council may have given way to the Lounds Council seems to have been overlooked.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **If I want to join, what is the process?**

**You must be a Royal Arch Mason in good standing of a Chapter of Royal Arch Masons in the State of New York. You then must petition a local Council to join. You may either download the generic petition below or request one from a Cryptic Companion you know. If you do not have a Cryptic connection, use the Council Locator below to find a Council near you. Then email or write the Recorder of that Council expressing your interest in joining. Once you have submitted your petition to the Council, you will be visited by members of that Council, then the Council will vote on your petition and inform you of the result. If accepted, you will receive further instructions.**

### **What are degrees?**

**Degrees are similar to one-act plays, in which you play a key part by your attendance and your heartfelt desire to become a Mason. Degrees teach very beautiful lessons using a system of symbols and allegories. There is never any hazing or poor taste in the degrees. They are majestic and the Masons who work hard to exemplify the degrees want the best experience for you. The Cryptic Rite consists of three degrees: the Royal Master Degree, the Select Master Degree and the Super Excellent Master Degree. The first two are mandatory degrees and in New York State the third is an honorary one and not mandatory. See page 2 for further explanation of the degrees.**

### **How will I know what to do?**

**Your Council will consult with you in selecting a mentor who will assist you through the degrees and for your introductory period into the Council. The mentor is usually the first line signer of your petition. Your mentor will be proficient in his duties, and will be your guide throughout the process.**

### **What do I have to bring?**

**Your Council will communicate to you any special requirements that they may have prior to your taking the degrees. Every Council has an Initiation fee and your Council will notify you the amount that must accompany your petition and the balance that you bring to your First Degree. By now you have already met Brothers from your Lodge, or Companions from your Royal Arch Chapter who are members of the Cryptic Rite. You now only need to witness and participate in the Cryptic degrees for yourself. This experience will complete your circle of perfection of becoming a well-informed Master Mason in Freemasonry.**

### **What does it cost?**

**Every Council has a different fee structure. You must inquire about the fees and dues costs at the Council you wish to join. They will be only too happy to inform you!**

***WE DO HOPE YOU WILL EXPERIENCE THE CRYPTIC RITE!!!!***

## THE HISTORY OF BATH QOL

Submitted By R.:I.: William G. Vassily, Grand Lecturer Emeritus

There is an obscure reference in the Historical Lecture of the Royal Master Degree that should be explained.

*“Here the Shekinah, or Divine Presence, rested, and was visible in the appearance of a cloud over it. From hence the Bathkol issued, and gave answers when God was consulted. And hence it is that God is said in the Scriptures to dwell between the Cherubim; that is, between the Cherubim on the mercy seat, because there was the Seat or Throne of the visible appearance of His Glory among them.”*

Consulting several Masonic encyclopedias, there is no explanation of the term “Bathkol.” Other sources do go into rather long explanations. One of the problems is that the term may be incorrectly transliterated into English.

The “kol” part might be more properly spelled, “qol.” The Hebrew word, transliterated as Kol, as in “Kol Nidre,” means “all.” Kol Nidre means “All Vows.” The difference being that the accepted transliteration by most Bible scholars is that the first let of Qol is *Qoph* and the first letter of Kol is *Kaph* which are two different letters in the Hebrew alphabet. Perhaps it would be a little less confusing if we transliterated the term as “Bath Qol.”

The word as it relates to our work is made up of two Hebrew words: “*Bath*,” meaning daughter and “*Qol*” meaning voice. Collectively, the meaning of Bath Qol is – Daughter of Voice – the voice of God from between the Cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant.

The *Shekinah* being the presence of God. The visible appearance was a cloud, the representation of the aural presence was the *BATH QOL*, or voice of God.

From the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church we have this entry:

### BATH QOL

The term in Rabbinic theology for a voice from Heaven such as was believed to be a regular means of God’s communication with men. Such a voice is referred to in the New Testament at Christ’s Baptism. Mark Chapter 1, verse 11. “And there came a voice from Heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.”

In the Royal Arch Degree there is reference to God speaking to Moses at the Burning Bush. “And the angel of the Lord appeared unto them in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush.” As from Exodus, Chapter 3, verse 2.

There is a wonderful connection here in that many differing creeds rely on the ‘voice of God’ to explain many of their points of belief. By recognizing that God speaks to us, as is related to us in the Historical Lecture of the Royal Master degree, we as Masons realize our reliance on God’s guidance.



In our ritual we are admonished that we as individual Masons should be aware of God's influence in our own lives. Perhaps it is this same voice that we refer to in the Charge of the Degree of Entered Apprentice. "Care little for the jibes of men, but heed the sting of conscience."

How many times do we say, "Well, a little voice told me that was not the right thing to do." Could it be my Companions, that the voice of conscience that we know is always there to gently nag us to do the right thing, could very well be that voice of God, the BATH QOL!

### **THE HISTORY OF THE ORDER OF ISH SODI (New York)**

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"The Order of Ish Sodi became a reality in the state of New York through the suggestion of the then incoming Grand Master of Cryptic Masons of the state of New York at his installation in August, 1966, together with a recommendation to the Grand Council Royal and Select Masters of the State of New York that incentives should be adopted by the Grand Council to promote this order through the specific Efforts of the many interested Companions. It was felt that Companions would put forth additional efforts to win said Award if such were available. To a Cryptic Mason, the words, Ish Sodi, have a very significant meaning as they are derived from Hebrew words long known to the Jewish prophets and the fraternity. Thus, the Order of Ish Sodi was established in New York State in 1966 as one of the highest awards available to a Cryptic Mason who is willing to put forth a tremendous effort in the promotion of the Cryptic Rite so that he might receive some recognition for his efforts.

In that same year and following years, Cryptic Masonic bodies in other states adopted this same Order in their own right so there are other jurisdictions now which have a similar award based upon such rules and regulations as laid down by their respective jurisdictions.

It is recognized that the establishment of this Order did arise out of the work of the Past Grand Masters of the State of New York who felt that it would be of great value to the Grand Council Royal and Select Masters of New York as they had previously established the Charity Corporation for the Cryptic Rite. Actually, in 1959, M.:I.: George Pratt and M.:I.: George Wyman and the undersigned, in conjunction with many others, promoted the formation of a Charity Corporation known as the Grand Council Royal and Select Masters of the State of New York, Inc. for the purpose of providing a conduit for the collection and expenditure of Charity Funds of this Grand Council which would be most beneficial to their fellow man, and provide proper supervision in the expenditure of said Charity Funds. It was agreed when that Corporation was founded, that the Parkinson's Disease Research group would be a suitable recipient for the use of these funds, and thus money given by

the Cryptic Masons of the State of New York would help alleviate this dread disease.

Those instrumental in the foundation of the Charity Corporation were also most enthusiastic in the promotion of awards, especially for the order of Ish Sodi, and they gave their full support to the promotion of this Order.

Thus, the Order of Ish Sodi in the State of New York was established in the Cryptic Year 1966 as an award for those companions throughout the State who had reached that degree of perfection in the Cryptic Rite by giving their time, labor and effort, no matter what their station in life had been. It was the opinion of the Grand Master and the Grand Council that the award would be made to a Companion who, within the period of one Cryptic year, had presented five applications for membership in the Cryptic Rite of this State and whose applications were accepted on the basis that the applicants present the proper qualifications, and who, within the Cryptic year, receive both their Royal and Select degrees. Or in the case of a Companion who shall have performed such services for the Grand Council as a Cryptic Mason beyond the call of duty, and who was deemed by the then Grand Master to be entitled to this award because he had performed such outstanding services. These requirements for membership in this Honorary Order were well received throughout the breath of Cryptic Masonry and by Cryptic Masons everywhere.

In 1973, the Awards Committee of the Grand Council of the State of New York, with the approval of the Grand Council, added an additional award by establishing the award in this category to be know as the Meritorious Order of Ish Sodi. Thus a Companion, to deserve this award, must have presented and had accepted twenty five petitions for membership in the Cryptic Rite, commencing with the year 1966, when the original Order of Ish Sodi was inaugurated, but the number of petitions for this new and additional award need not be in any one Cryptic year, but can be during the lifetime of the individual commencing in 1966. However, as in the case of the original Order of Ish Sodi, the petitioners presented must have been accepted and received their Royal and Select degrees. This second step in the Order of Ish Sodi is the highest honor that anyone can receive in this particular branch of awards. At the same time, a Companion who may have received another award during the Cryptic year may also receive one of the Ish Sodi Awards.

In the case of one Companion who received an award, (Cryptic Mason of the Year – 1971), he had such an outstanding record that the then Grand Master also presented him with the Ish Sodi Award for having performed such outstanding services far beyond the call of duty, to the extent that the then Grand Master felt that this Companion should also receive the Order of Ish Sodi.

When a Companion receives the Order of Ish Sodi, he is entitled to wear and display as a neck piece a Broken Triangle suspended from a purple ribbon. No one is refused admission to the Order, nor can he be black balled by anyone, if he has complied with the requirements and has been elevated to the Order at the bequest of the then Grand Master. If a member of this Order has earned a second

recognition by the Order, he is then given the emblem by the Order without charge, but he must purchase this emblem in the first instance.

Recognition for the new Meritorious Order of Ish Sodi has been adopted, as above stated, and the Grand Council has received various suggestions as to what should be provided for such recognition. Companions have made various suggestions, but it is felt that the matter should be given further consideration and arrangements made for presentation of such award. However, no decision has been made to date pertaining to this new award as there are no known candidates entitled to the same to date.

The Emblem of the Order of Ish Sodi is closely associated with the teachings found in the Select Master degree, without which the history of the Royal Arch degree cannot be complete. It rationally accounts for the concealment and presentation of those essentials of the Craft which were brought to light at the erection of the Second Temple, and which lay concealed from the Masonic eye many years.

The expression Ish Sodi is derived from two Hebrew words, "Ish" and "Sodi." According to the Hebrew Union College, Jewish Institute of Religion of the State of New York, the word "Ish" means: council, counsel, circle of familiar friend, man of my intimate circle, assembly, company. According to Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, 1952, the word "Ish" is a Hebrew word for man. Therefore, the translation from the Hebrew to English would be "man of my company, man of my choice" or "select man." The Book of Job, Chapter IX, V.19, applies it in this sense when using "mati" a word synonymous with "Ish." He speaks of "Mati Sodi," which may be rendered "all men of my select." "Ish Sodi", therefore, in this degree means, " a man of my intimate council, a man of my choice." Such was the position of every Select Master to King Solomon. And thus those are not wrong who have interpreted "Ish Sodi" as meaning a "Select Master."

The term "Meritorious Ish Sodi" elaborates on the words "Ish Sodi", and indicates that the holder of such an honor will have performed such duties as would make him a Meritorious Select Man, or one who has performed even greater duties than those which would indicate he was entitled to the Order of Ish Sodi, Meritorious because of what he has done as the "man of my company, man of my choice" or "Select man", and extols him above those who have earned the original award.

As it is aid, in any group, there are always a few who rise above the others, and these Meritorious members of the Order of Ish Sodi will have been risen to that stage to achieve such honor by presenting twenty five applicants who have received their Royal and Select degrees. The members of the Order of Ish Sodi in the State of New York have banded together, have elected a President, Secretary, and Treasurer, and have met together, usually at a Grand Assembly, at breakfast, to join with other and especially with the new members of the Order. The Order has a short set of rules, and there has been some discussion of a ceremony for the initiation of new members, which appears to be customary procedure in other jurisdictions having the Order of Ish Sodi.

The present Grand Master and the present members of the Order of Ish Sodi have agreed that since they have earned this award, they should put forth their best efforts in assisting the Grand Council in the work of the Cryptic Rite throughout the state. The present Grand Master for the coming year has thus assigned them duties which will give each member of the Order of Ish Sodi an opportunity to enter the vineyards and quarries of the Cryptic Rite and assist the present Gran Master and future Grand Masters in the spreading of the Cryptic teachings and to cultivate and develop the Cryptic Rite through the work of the Grand Council in the State of New York. It is felt, and justly so, that these Cryptic Masons, who have earned this honor and are entitled to wear the emblem of the order of Ish Sodi, should be given this opportunity to promote the Cryptic Rite throughout the State of New York. This was the real purpose behind the foundation of the Order of Ish Sodi and now the Meritorious Order of Ish Sodi. They must justify the honors received by their good works."