

Grand Chapter of Columbia
Order of the Eastern Star

HISTORICAL SKETCH of the ORDER of the EASTERN STAR

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Tradition tells us that the fraternal system known as Free Masonry has existed from time immemorial. The modern system of Masonic government, however, dates from the year 1717, when the Grand Lodge of England was formed.

"By the laws of that ancient Order, women are not eligible to its degrees. But woman's heart beats responsive to the same inspiration that prompts man to noble deeds." Today this inspiration has its fulfillment in the Order of the Eastern Star, the hand maid of Free Masonry. A valuable history of the Order of the Eastern Star has been written by W.D. ENgle, and many of the following notes are taken from this work.

Looking back through the history of the O.E.S. and the principles on which it rests, it is found that in France in the year 1730, there was established an organization known as "Adoptive Masonry." These lodges admitted Masons and their female relatives and were quite popular. So much so that in 1774 the Grand Orient of France

the governing body of the country, established the "Rite of Adoption," and set forth rules and regulations for its government. It was required that each adoptive lodge should be placed under the charge of and held under the sanction of and warrant of some regularly constituted Masonic lodge. The Master of the lodge or his deputy was the presiding officer assisted by a woman president or mistress. The work in these adoptive lodges consisted of four degrees: apprentice, companion, mistress, and perfect mistress. The first was introductory or preparatory in character. The temptation of Eden and the unhappy results of woman's first sin featured the second. The third was based on the legend of the building of the tower of Babel, the confusion of tongues, and the dispersion of the race; this symbolizing a badly regulated lodge. The ladder of Jacob was then introduced to represent the various virtues necessary for a well regulated one. The Perfect Mistress degree was founded on the passage of the children of Israel through the wilderness, symbolizing the passage of men and women through this to another and better world. Apparently the French Adoptive Rite was brought to this country by French Army Officers during the Revolutionary War, but there is no evidence that it was a success here. Its ritual was published in French, Spanish and English, but the degrees were combersome and the lodges were failures.

However, the idea of conferring side degrees for women with Masonic connections was not to be dropped. A great demand sprang

up for these degrees which was supplied by the manufacturing, I might say, and conferring in an informal manner a great many degrees. "Eastern Star," "Holy Virgin", "Heroine of Jerico," "Mason's Daughter," "Kindred Degree," "Good Samaritan," "Ark and Dove," "Maids of Jerusalem," "Sweet Briar," "Daughters of Zion," "Daughters of Z Zelophadad," "Daughters of Bethlehem," "Cross and Crown," "Order of the Amaranth," were the names of some of the degrees or systems of degrees. With the exception of the "Eastern Star" these degrees have ceased to be conferred, and our study will be confined to this alone.

The General Grand Chapter at its session in 1880 proclaimed Brother Robert Morris to be the founder of the Order of the Eastern Star. August 31, the birthday of Bro. Morris, has been set apart as the festal day of the Order. Robert Morris is known as the Poet Laureate of Free Masonry, and during his lifetime was probably the widest known Mason in this country, if not in the world. He received the degrees of Masonry at Oxford, Miss., in 1846. Moving to Kentucky, he became Grand Master of Kentucky in 1858. It is said that during his lifetime he received 143 Masonic degrees, honors and orders. He organized and opened the first Grand Lodge in the Holy Land, being the first Master of Royal Solomon Lodge of Jerusalem. He was an extensive traveller in this country and in Europe and the Holy Land.

If confidence could be placed in certain statements of Bro. Morris, whose labors in bringing the order into prominence exceed those of

any other person, we could easily ascertain the truth as to the origin of the Order. But the statements are made without corroborative proof and have been contradicted by Bro. Morris himself. In one place he says: "I wrote every word of the original lectures and composed the songs. For twenty-eight years I have been communicating it as my own origination. I am the founder of the system and no one can show any proof of its existence prior to 1849."

And yet in another publication he says: "My first regular course of lectures was given in Nov. 1850, at Colliersville, Tenn. At Colliersville, I likewise conferred the degrees of the "Eastern Star" and "Good Samaritan." Both of these degrees I had received some years before." Many more inconsistent statements are to be found and the fact seems to be that Bro. Morris received the Eastern Star degrees at the hands of a Giles Hillyer about 1849. From the evidence obtainable, it must be admitted that Bro. Morris did not originate the ritual of the order, but that, receiving the degrees by communication, and taking the ritual used before he took up the occupation of a Masonic lecturer, he embellished it and adorned it and started the order toward systematic organization. Certainly, as it at present exists in this country, Bro. Morris was the master builder, and as such his recognition by the General Grand Chapter was well merited.

Between the years of 1793 and 1901 there were printed and sold twenty-five different rituals of the Order. The oldest known ritual was called "The Treasures of the Ancient and Honorable Order of the

Eastern Star as collected and arranged by the committee and adopted by the Supreme Council in convocation assembled May 1793."

Apparently no serious attempt was made to perfect any national organization and but little is known out side the ritual itself. In 1855, Bro. Morris inaugurated a Supreme Constellation, claiming that "no such attempt upon a national basis has been heretofore made in America." Its ritual called, "The Mosaic Book of the American Adoptive Rite," published in 1855, was the product of Bro. Morris' pen,

The Mosaic Book stated that: "The Supreme Constellation was at the organization of the rite, a self-assumed body, and will so continue during a period, sufficiently protracted, to test the merits of the American Adoptive Rite, and afford experience as a basis of its improvement. The constitution and edicts of this body constitute the supreme law of the Order, both to its individual members and to constellations; and its acts will establish precedents for the parlimentary usages etc. of the Order." Of this body Bro. Morris was the "most enlightened Grand Luminary," and all the officers were men.

It was claimed by the members of the Supreme Constellation that Bro. Morris pledged himself to desist conferring the Eastern Star degrees except in constellations; but that two weeks after making this pledge he issued a circular, which he sent over the country, offering to forward to any Master Mason in good standing, the necessary information to enable him to confer the degrees upon remitting to him

a fee of three dollars. The Supreme Constellation then repudiated Br. Morris for his lack of good faith and attempted a reorganization under the name of "Supreme Council of the Ancient Rite of Adoptive Masonry for North America" and adopted rituals from an European system. It attempted to maintain an existence as late as 1876, but really had no substantial being.

Upon the disruption of the Supreme Constellation the records and seal remained in the hands of the Secretary, but the supply of charters was in possession of Bro. Morris. In 1860 he set about reorganizing "Families of the Eastern Star," issuing to them charters of the old form. The Recorder of the Family was authorized to sign his name as Grand Secretary adding p.t. (pro tempore) to the signature. There really was no organization and the only head was Bro. Morris. Something over one hundred families were organized between 1860 and 1867 but no record was preserved. Sunbeam family No. 83 of Mt. Vernon, Indiana, organized in 1866, continued and became Sunbeam Chapter No. 1 under the Grand Chapter of Indiana.

In 1868 Bro. Morris resolved to devote the rest of his life to Masonic exploration in the Holy Land. Robert Macoy of New York claimed that, at this time, Bro. Morris turned over to him all the prerogative he had assumed. Macoy had previously acted as Grand Secretary and as such attempted to keep up the semblance of a supreme body. In 1876 he assumed the title of Supreme Grand Patron.

Another attempt was made in 1873 to perfect a national organization with Macoy as Supreme Grand Patron and Robt. Morris as Supreme recorder but this body lasted less than a year.

In May, 1874, the Grand Chapter of Indiana was organized and wrote into its constitution sixteen landmarks, fifteen of which were reproduced from existing Adoptive Rite rituals. The sixteenth, in regard to the rights of male members, started a movement which resulted in the total destruction of the Supreme Grand Chapter and of Bro. Macoy's control of the Order. Apparently the interest of both Bro. Macoy and Bro. Morris in the Order was a mercenary one, that of using their official positions to print and sell rituals, charters and other Chapter supplies. While both Macoy and Morris conferred the degrees of the various orders upon individuals, their efforts were more concerned upon the formation of chapters, obviously from the greater revenue to themselves. These chapters were formed and to a large extent left to shift for themselves, no doubt due to the many futile attempts to form a national body. The local chapters felt a lack of confidence in the men who fostered national bodies for personal gain, and gradually drew themselves together, grouping by states. Thus, the idea of a Grand Chapter for each state grew and was perfected into a system following that of the Masonic bodies.

On October 30, 1867, sixty delegates from fifteen lodges met at Adrian, Michigan. This meeting resulted in the organization of the Grand Lodge of Adoptive Masonry, the first Grand Chapter of O.E.S. history. The Grand Worthy President, equivalent to our Grand Matron was made the executive head of the Grand Body. The work of several rituals was exemplified and that known as the Tatem Manual adopted. This was revised in 1869 and in 1870. Robert Macoy attacked the

Grand Body for infringement in using his ritual, claiming it private property. This was satisfactorily adjusted almost entirely in favor of the Grand Chapter, however, and in 1876 the revision known as the Michigan Ritual was adopted. This was a very beautiful work and Michigan deserves great credit for cheerfully giving it up for the ritual of the General Grand Chapter in 1878. The first Grand Matron of the Order was Martha G. Lindsly, the first Grand Patron, David Bovee.

In 1876, Grand Chapters existed in Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Mississippi, California, Vermont, Indiana, Connecticut, Nebraska, Illinois, Missouri, Arkansas and Kansas, in order of their seniority. On the invitation of the Grand Chapter of Indiana, representatives of California, Indiana, Missouri and New York met in Indianapolis, Indiana, Nov. 15, 1878. On the following day organization was completed by the formation of the General Grand Chapter. Robt. Morris was unable to be present but sent his hearty approval of the movement. The executive head was the Most Worthy Grand Patron, until the session of 1888, which transferred this power to the Most Worthy Grand Matron. In 1880 the Most Worthy Grand Patron invited Bro. Morris to be present and on this occasion he was elected an honorary member of the body and his natal day, August 31, was made the festal day of the Order. Bro. Morris had never joined a subordinate chapter and it is not shown that he ever did so, yet this meeting declared him to be the founder of the Order. He attended the meetings in 1886 and was loyal to its interests until his death, July 31, 1888.

Bro. Macoy's position was one of intense opposition to the General Grand Chapter, largely because of the curtailment of income. As Past Grand Patron of New York, he thoroughly dominated the Grand Chapter of New York and prevented its co-operation in the organization of the General Grand Chapter. His influence is still felt in that the Grand Chapter of New York does not yet work under the authority of the General Grand Chapter.

The first M.W.G.M., 1876, Elizabeth Butler, of Illinois.

The first M.W. G.P., 1876, John D. Vincil, of Missouri.

The first M.W.G. Secretary, Willis D. Engle, of Illinois.

I have said that there have been twenty-five rituals in use at sometime or other. In all these the first four degrees are the same as now. The fifth or Mother's degree of the present was known in the oldest rituals as th "Mason's Wife's Sister," later "Christian" and finally "Mother's." The Thesauros made use of the terms - initiating, passing, raising, exalting and perfecting as applied to the ceremony of the various degrees. The names of the heroines have been the same in all. The colors are the same except our yellow, which in the Thesauros was orange.

The thinking mind cannot but get inspiration from the lessons of the colors as given in the Mosaic Book:

"BLUE, which is the hue of distant mountains under Judah's fair sky, reminds one of the two months' stay made by Adah in the mountains, while fortifying her mind against the terrors of a violent death."

"YELLOW, which is the hue of the barley fields on the plains of Judah, reminds me that, in that place of harvest, all her prayers were answered, her faith rewarded, and her trust in God vindicated."

"WHITE, which was the hue of the silken robe of Esther, reminds me that, in the spotless purity of Christ alone, I can expect to find favor at the throne of God."

"GREEN, which is the hue of spring, and covers every grave as with a mantle, reminds me that, as Lazarus came forth at the breath of the Lord Jesus Christ, so shall I, in the springtime of the Resurrection, be summoned from my grave by the same commanding voice."

"RED, which is the hue of blood and wine, reminds me to dispense with my temporal means to the poor, even as the Redeemer gave His heart's best blood to save me from Eternal death."

The reasoning mind cannot but see the force of the beautiful sentiments of our Ritual. "Blue is the color to which popular usage has assigned the representation of that which is true and faithful. When the blue ray is made to fall for some time on the needle it acquires polarity and points true to its mysterious attraction in the chambers of the north. It teaches us to be true and faithful to all our obligations as members of the Eastern Star."

"Yellow, or Gold, one of the primitive colors, and reflecting the most light after white, is used to signify something pleasing or valuable, as a 'heart of gold', or 'the golden chain of friendship.' To us it is symbolical of the ripened grain in the field of Boaz, in which Ruth was an humble gleaner."

"White is the color which has ever been regarded as an emblem of purity and innocence. It is a result of a union and reaction of all the primary rays of light, hence it is metaphorically used to signify a collection of those graces and virtues which adorn and dignify the character. To us it is emblematical of the spotless purity of the character of Esther."

"Green is the most widely diffused of all the tints which adorn the material world, and is the symbol of memory and eternity. The evergreen which lifts itself over the grave of some loved one, seems to respond to our sighs with an instructive language: 'He is not dead, but sleepeth - thy brother shall rise again.' To us it is a symbol of the immortality of the soul."

"Red, one of the primary colors, is the one by which fervency and love have ever been represented. In the prismatic spectrum the red ray is the most calorific, and the least refrangible of all. It teaches us that our covenant of love should be ardent and never turn from its purpose, and is symbolical of the fervency of Electa in her noble generosity toward the poor and persecuted of her race."

I have enlarged upon the colors because I really believe that our own ritual does not bring out as fully as might be the beautiful lessons intended to be represented by the color points.

The emblems have not been always the same as at present. The emblems of the first degree were at first, simply the sword, in four of the rituals. Morris, in a later ritual, added the veil, but without explanations. All others give the sword and veil. The color of

the veil has never been definitely decided. Some states use light blue, some dark blue, some black, while many do not specify. One state uses none. Colorado, by custom, uses light blue, but no official action has been taken. The General Grand Chapter prescribes "a veil" simply.

The second point has been represented by the sheaf in all but one ritual and in that "two barley parcels" were prescribed. The emblems of the degree of Esther have been the "crown" only in two rituals; "the crown, robe and scepter" in one; and in all others "the crown and scepter."

One ritual represents the fourth degree with "the open Sepulchre," one by "pillar rent," one by "a shattered shaft and green sprig," and all others by the "broken column." "Grasped hands" is the emblem of the mother's degree in one ritual, "clasped hands" in one, "joined hands" in three, "clasped hands, cup and cross" in one; "cup and clasped hands" in one, and in all others, "the cup."

Morris' Manual was the first to mention floral emblems specifying Violet, Sunflower, White Lily, Sprig of Pine, and Red Rose. Macoy uses the same except the substitution of a "pine leaf" for "sprig of pine." The General Grand Chapter adopted violet, yellow jessamine, white lily, fern and red rose.

The emblems in the center of the star are explained in the General Grand Chapter ritual and four others, including those of Morris, but are omitted by Macoy. The sentiment of these is allusion to "Christ who is the light and key to the Eastern Star and who is

the Word of God; the Lily of the Valley, the Son of Righteousness, the Lamb of God, and the Lion of the tribe of Judah."

Robert Morris designed a signet which was used by him in his Family organization and other bodies created by him. The bodies chartered by Robert Macoy used the Macoy signet. The general Grand Chapter adopted a different one still, being that designed by the first secretary, W.D. Engle.

The introduction of a grip was really accidental. W.S. Wolf was conferring the degrees in Concord, N.H., in 1862. A lady, whose husband was a Mason, rose and said; "Brother Wolf, you have forgotten to give us a grip." Brother Wolf's quick wit was equal to the emergency and he gave the grip which has since been incorporated as a part of the work.

The Symbolism of the Eastern Star is a subject by itself. The system of the triangles, the winding of the labyrinth, the five pointed star, the pentagon, the emblems, the colors, the words, the mottoes, the passes, and all founded on the mystic Rule of Three and Five. The five-pointed star, the Symbol of Masonic Light, also known as "The Star in the East," is always placed with one point extending downward indicating the position of the Star of Bethlehem.

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