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THE ORDER OF THE EASTERN STAR

Check facts - some out of date

A worldwide fraternal organization, the Order of the Eastern Star, which is comprised mostly of women and dedicated to the peace, harmony, and brotherly love symbolized by the Star of Bethlehem, is widely active today in benevolence.

More than \$5,000,000 annually is spent for the maintenance of homes for older members and programs for children's aid and education. In some localities it acts jointly with the Masonic fraternity in operating combined Eastern Star-Masonic homes, orphanages and other projects. Some of these projects are: Rehabilitation, training awards for religious leadership, overseas gifts, and various types of research. Total membership of the organization throughout the world is approaching 4,000,000. It is said to be the largest "coed" fraternal order in existence.

There are very few communities of any size in the U. S. without a chapter of Eastern Star, where wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, and widows of master Masons, as well as Freemasons themselves, gather regularly and practice the characteristic precepts of faith in God, loving-kindness, charity, truth, and loyalty to kindred and friends.

The OES rests upon one fundamental and supreme reality: God. Every individual seeking admission is asked to acknowledge faith in God. The Order proclaims and practices the unity and love of God and visualizes the ultimate unity and love of mankind. It teaches that God is Love and that all love one another, act justly, be merciful, and walk humbly before Him.

The General Grand Chapter has world headquarters in its own International Eastern Star Temple at Washington, D. C. The Grand Chapter has jurisdiction over 46 statewide grand chapters in the U. S., as well as 8 in Canada, 1 in Puerto Rico, and subordinate chapters in Alaska, the Canal Zone, China, Japan, Cuba, Hawaii, Mexico, the Philippine Islands, and the Yukon, where there are no grand chapters as yet. 2 other jurisdictions in the US, those of New York and New Jersey, are independent. Of these Grand Chapters, 33 have educational loan funds with assets totaling close to \$5,000,000. No interest is charged on loans to students until the recipients leave school, and then the interest charged varies with the different jurisdictions, but none as high as 5%. Most are 4%.

There are also many scholarships offered. Many Grand jurisdictions join with other organizations in their welfare projects, such as exchange of teachers to and from other countries; donations for rehabilitation in veterans' hospitals, aid to children of veterans killed in War, upkeep of the Peace Garden on the American-Canadian border, etc.

Local chapters hold meetings regularly at which organization business is conducted, candidates initiated, social events planned and carried out, and the tenets of the organization put into practice. On the altar of every chapter room during meetings rests the open Bible. No sister or brother is asked to surrender her or his liberty of thought. Persons of all creeds can gather around the altars of the Order and "learn how to better get along with one another."

While the Order of the Eastern Star was started in Mississippi by Dr. Rob Morris in 1850, the origin of the idea itself, though differently expressed, will, like Freemasonry, always be shrouded in mystery. There are comparatively few authentic records available of the birth of the idea.

Dr. Morris came from a family of poets for 5 generations back. A native of a Boston suburb, he was educated in N. Y. and became a schoolteacher and a lawyer. Early in manhood he moved to the South, married, and made his home there. He was editor of a newspaper, and president of several colleges.

The author of the Eastern Star ritual is listed as having published 74 volumes of Masonic literature, in addition to the Universal Masonic Library of 56 volumes and lyrics and poems. Honorary membership is said to have been conferred on Dr. Morris by some 700 Masonic lodges. He was crowned poet laureate of Masonry by the N. Y. Grand Lodge on the proposal of Robert Macoy in 1894.

One of Dr. Morris' writings of 1854 is provided by a southern historian who quotes Dr. Morris as saying that he "spread abroad the knowledge of the Eastern Star . . . in border communities to ladies in home spun; in cities to ladies in satins." The same writer asserts that Dr. Morris published a ritual in 1855 under which he organized bodies known as Constellations, from which developed Families as they were called, and finally the Eastern Star. Not many years after writing the ritual Dr. Morris journeyed to

Palestine gathering material for lectures, previous to which he turned everything connected with his fraternal work over to Robert Macoy of New York, who was later Grand Master of Masons in New York. While overseas Dr. Morris became the first master of Royal Solomon Lodge #1 in Jerusalem.

During the several years Dr. Morris was absent from the country Mr. Macoy prepared a ritual based on the Morris version but elaborating the original with what has been described as wordy additions. When Dr. Morris returned from Palestine he found a "Supreme Grand Chapter" with headquarters in New York, headed by Robert Macoy, and discovered that there were several claimants to the authorship of Adoptive Masonry, now the Eastern Star. The organization was functioning in late 1868, with deputies appointed in several parts of the nation. Within 8 years more than 600 lodges of Adoptive Masonry were formed. But even before Dr. Morris' day the idea of a fraternal organization for women became manifest in several ways and localities.

Some writers, referring to Adoptive Masonry, claim that it originated in Russia in 1712, but other authorities say that the Russian version was an "order" in honor of Czarina Catherine, and had no connection with Freemasonry.

It seems certain, however, that Adoptive Masonry was started in the 1700's, probably in France, as was Female Masonry. Some students of early fraternal history voice the claim that Masons accepted Lodges of Adoption with "some enthusiasm" as a practical means of giving their womenfolk the benefits of fraternalism.

In 1774 the Grand Orient of France assumed control of the Lodges of Adoption, and set up rules and regulations with 4 degrees. A 5th degree was added in 1817. After recognition of the Lodges of Adoption by the Grand Orient, the lodges grew in popularity and membership. Some writers assert that these degrees, or similar ones, were brought to America by French soldiers during the French and Revolutionary Wars.

With the passing of time, however, Adoptive Masonry, Constellations, and Families gradually disappeared. But the idea of a great secret society for women lived on, and it remained for Dr. Morris to come up with the name Eastern Star and to develop degrees which became the basis for those of the present day. Later the name Order of the Eastern Star was adopted.

In an account of the establishment of the fraternity Dr. Morris is reputed to have written: "From the Bible I culled 4 biographical sketches to correspond with the first 4 points of the star" - Adah, Ruth, Esther, and Martha - which were illustrations of 4 collections of womanly virtues. "The 5th point of the star" - Electa - "illustrated the early history of the Christian church."

Colors, emblems, and floral wreaths appropriate for the 5 hercines, or "star points" were designed for the specially initiated alone.

Mrs. Morris and a neighborhood couple became the first to receive the Eastern Star secret work while the parlor of Dr. Morris' home was virtually that order's first chapter room. His home is now maintained as a shrine.

The order spread rapidly throughout the U. S. and then to many parts of the world. During this time, the various grand chapters, each organized to have jurisdiction over a state, adopted rules and regulations for their own jurisdictions, and it soon became evident that uniformity throughout the entire order would be a desirable objective. A general grand chapter was deemed the answer. Organization of a body of that name was effected at Indianapolis, Indiana, in 1876.

At that time there were 11 grand chapters in this country, 245 individual chapters, and 13,117 members. That same year the Grand Chapter of Massachusetts and the Grand Chapter of Maine were organized.

In addition to the General Grand Chapter, there are 3 other smaller sovereign bodies in the Order of the Eastern Star, one of which is the Supreme Grand Chapter of Scotland, organized in 1904, of which some members of the royal families are members. It has jurisdiction over Scotland, England, Ireland, Australia, India, New Zealand and South Africa, and meets twice each year.

The Independent Grand Chapter of New York, organized in 1864, which uses the Maccy ritual, and the Independent Grand Chapter of New Jersey, organized in 1870, using a modified form of the Morris ritual, are the 2 other sovereign bodies.

The Rev. W. D. Engle of Indiana is credited with being largely responsible for the formation of the General Grand Chapter, in that he apparently crystallized the plan and practically guided the new body for its first decade or so.

The first Most Worthy Grand Patron was the Rev. John D. Vincil of Missouri.

The International Eastern Star Temple, a triangular shaped building, was originally the Perry Belmont mansion. Built in Washington in 1909 it had attracted worldwide attention for its design. It was purchased at a very favorable price from the owner, a Master Mason who felt the Eastern Star would care for the building and retain its beauty.

The Temple was dedicated February 24, 1937. In it is located the office of the right worthy grand secretary of the General Grand Chapter, fireproof vaults containing the history of the Order, and a complete file of annual proceedings of every grand chapter.

In the large reception hall of the Temple is an oil portrait of Rob Morris. On the floor is the symbolic rug presented by chapters in China. 3 appropriately furnished suites are in the mansion, one for the most worthy grand matron, another for the most worthy grand patron, and the third for the right worthy grand secretary.

On the second floor of the Temple are the grand ballroom with its red brocaded walls and hand-carved oak woodwork; an equally lavish drawing room, and an Italian dining room, the ceiling of which was brought piece by piece from the Palace of the Doges in Venice.

Another room, known as the family dining room, has a ceiling described as "a beautiful symbolic mural painted by Mrs. Eugenie D. Saugstad, a member of the order belonging to a chapter in nearby Virginia." It depicts the 5 historical characters mentioned in Eastern Star work. These Bible characters are represented by figures resting on an ethereal cloud background. The white clouds are painted over a blue base in such a manner that they converge to make a central blue star.

Practical application of Eastern Star teachings, the keeping of the commandment given by Christ Jesus to love one another, the practice of benevolence, and the complete setup of the organization itself, combine to indicate the progress of members of the order everywhere in erecting within themselves a figurative temple - a "house not made with hands."

The everlasting building stones of this house are "living truth, charity, and loving-kindness, ornamented with a blue sapphire of fidelity for Adah; a yellow topaz

of constancy for Ruth; a white diamond of truth for Esther; a green emerald of faith for Martha, and a red ruby of love for Electa - a true temple of the Eastern Star."

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