

HISTORICAL SKETCH  
OF THE ORDER OF  
THE EASTERN STAR



Just when or where the orders or degrees which grew into the present Order of the Eastern Star had their origin is more or less shrouded in mystery and legend.

It is definitely known that long before Rob. Morris published the ritual which is the foundation for the present Eastern Star work, there were degrees for women relatives of Masons in various places in Europe; and it was from the rites of some of these that Brother Morris adapted his degrees.

For our present purpose, it will suffice to call Dr. Morris the founder of the Order, and to date its origin from the time he started to work out his ritual in 1850 — making this organization a comparatively young one.

Describing the birth of his idea, Brother Morris, himself said:

“In the winter of 1850, I was a resident of

Jackson, Mississippi. For some time previous I had contemplated the preparation of a ritual of Adoptive Masonry, the degrees then in vogue being poorly conceived, weakly wrought out, unimpressive, and defective in point of motive, with but few exceptions.

"About the first week of February, 1850, being laid up with rheumatism, I gave this time to the work in hand. By the aid of my papers, and the memory of Mrs. Morris, I recall even the trivial occurrences connected with the work — how I hesitated for a theme, how I dallied for a name, how I wrought face to face with the clock that I might keep my drama within due limits of time.

"First, the name was chosen — The Eastern Star. Next the number of points, five, to correspond with the emblem on the Master's carpet — the signet of King Solomon.

"From the holy writings, I culled biographical sketches to correspond with my first four points, namely: Adah, Ruth, Esther, Martha. These were illustrations of four great congeries of womanly virtue. The fifth point introduced me to the early history of the Christian Church, where I found many whose lives and deaths

overflowed the cup of martyrdom with a glory not surpassed by any of those found in Holy Writ. This gave me Electa.

"The colors, the emblems, the floral wreaths, the esotery proper to these five heroines, were easy of creation. They seemed to fall ready-made to my hands. The composition of the lectures was but a recreation. I scarcely needed to look up my proof texts, so tamely did they come to my call."

The ritual was published in 1855 (when a Supreme Constellation was organized, and deputies appointed for the several States. By the end of that year, 75 charters had been granted. From this small beginning has developed the present great organization, with its million and a half members and its tremendous national and international influence — holding first place among the organizations of the world to which both men and women are eligible.

The Order of the Eastern Star is no part of Masonry, yet its work is co-operative with the great fraternity. Their aims, their principles, their tenets and their beliefs are one. Only certain relatives of Master Masons in good standing are admitted in the Order. This assures a

select group. Their membership extends beyond mere initiation and entertainment, into various worth-while activities of local uplift and fraternal assistance.

At first, there was much confusion and conflict. No two States had the same laws and rituals. But in 1874, Rev. Willis D. Engle proposed that representatives should be appointed by the several grand jurisdictions, who should meet in Indianapolis and iron out these difficulties. Thus the first General Grand Chapter met, in November, 1876, with delegates from the Grand Chapters of Indiana, Illinois, Missouri, New Jersey and California; and with the support of several other jurisdictions which were unable to send delegates.

A constitution was adopted, and a committee was appointed to present recommendations for a revision of the ritual. The next General Grand Chapter, meeting in 1878, perfected the organization, and adopted a uniform ritual. From that time on, the confusion diminished. Growth became more and more rapid.

Each State now has its own organization into Grand Chapters, which control the finances and affairs of that particular State.

The ritual and esoteric essentials are controlled by the General Grand Chapter, organized on November 16, 1876, whose supervision is practically world-wide.

Every Chapter within the United States adheres to the regulations of the General Grand Chapter, except New York and New Jersey, who chose to control their own methods and finances.

The General Grand Chapter likewise has control over the Chapters in Alaska, Canal Zone, Cuba, Hawaii, Canada, and overseas United States installations.

The Supreme Grand Chapter of Scotland is over many Chapters in Scotland, England, Ireland, South Africa and Australia.

All use the same ritual, and all are working along the same lines.

Work is centered on fraternal endeavor and care of dependents as well as loan and scholarship funds for boys and girls who desire higher education.

Louisiana was the first State to establish an educational fund.

Other States have educational funds, relief funds, and available funds for all manner of relief work among their dependent members.

In 1919, the headquarters of the Order were established permanently at Washington, D.C. Since that time, committees were appointed and funds accumulated for the purchase of a Temple to serve as international headquarters, offices for certain of the officers of the General Grand Chapter, for the storage of records, files, exhibits, etc. In 1934 a committee was appointed with the power to select, purchase and furnish a suitable building. The committee unanimously selected the famous Belmont Mansion.

With the dedication of this Temple, appropriately furnished, remodeled and renovated — all fully paid for — on February 24, 1937, this long cherished dream of the General Grand Chapter was realized.

“Across the sky our Star is gleaming brightly,  
A song of love now sings in every soul.  
Within our hearts tonight new dreams we’re  
dreaming,  
Tonight we’re moving nearer to our goal.”

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