

THE CRYPTIC FREEMASON

THE ORIGIN OF THE CRYPTIC DEGREES

BY RICHARD A. EPPLER, EDITOR

This is the first of several articles describing the Origin of the Cryptic Degrees as we now know them – Royal Master; Select Master; and Super Excellent Master. While early forms of these degrees originated in Europe during the eighteenth century, and arrived in America individually, they were not assembled into the Council of Royal and Select Masters – a York Rite Body – until the first and second decades of the nineteenth century in the United States of America.

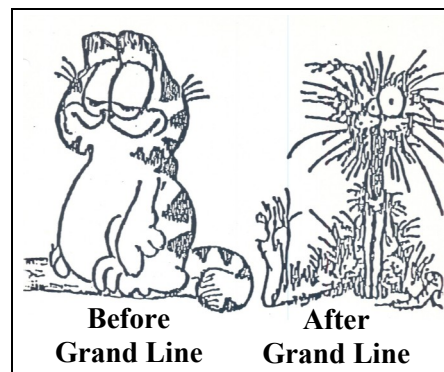
The Council Degrees of Royal Master and Select Master are often called Cryptic degrees, because the degrees are concerned with a subterranean crypt or vault where treasure or valuable secrets are preserved, so that they can be subsequently found, often centuries later. Legends about a crypt or vault under the temple mount are very old. One legend, which is found in the Talmud, a Jewish commentary on the Torah dating to around 100 AD, describes a vertical crypt of nine arches one above the other, and attributed to Enoch. The other legend told by Philostorius (born about 365 AD) describes a horizontal crypt consisting of a large cavern reached by a narrow passage. These legends subsequently appear in some of the Old Charges. These legends were expanded and adapted for Masonic degrees by the Chevalier Michael Ramsey and his friends in the Emperors of the East and West in France and Germany during the eighteenth century (1730-1750).

This suggests that the source of the Cryptic Degrees is the same as that of the Scottish Rite. As they have come down to us, however, there is one important difference. In the Cryptic Degrees we talk about the horizontal crypt erected by King Solomon during the construction of the first temple, while the Scottish Rite thirteenth degree talks about

the vertical crypt erected much earlier by Enoch.

In our next issue of the Cryptic Freemason we will discuss the origin of the degree of Royal Master in the Columbian Grand Council of Royal Masters in New York City. This organization, which evolved years later into Columbian Council #1, Royal and Select Masters of New York celebrates its 200th Anniversary this year on September 10th. The following issue will introduce you to Philip Eckel and his Grand Council of Select Masons, the source of our degree of Select Master. The winter issue will introduce you to Jeremy Ladd Cross and his fellow degree peddlers. Then, a year from now we will discuss the formation of the first Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters. We hope you will benefit from learning a bit about our Cryptic heritage.

NOTE: In reading about the activities of our forebears, there is one caveat you need to keep in mind. The regulations governing Masonic procedure and practice, with which we are all familiar, were formulated in response to the Morgan affair during the 1840's and 1850's. Prior to that time, things were much more informal. The activities we will discuss were perfectly proper at the time they occurred.



BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP IN GENERAL GRAND COUNCIL

BY: GEORGE C. SELLARS, DEPUTY GENERAL GRAND MASTER

FIRST OF TWO ARTICLES

What does General Grand Council do for my Council or Grand Council? This is a question that is sometimes not answered directly or properly. We will attempt to answer that question and clarify the many aspects of the activities of General Grand Council. Everything that it does has the individual Cryptic Mason in mind, working to make his membership more valuable.

There are presently over 1,100 Councils in the continental North America, Europe, Central and South America, and in the Pacific Theatre, who are members of the General Grand Council. One important concept it lives by is, the General Grand Council does not exercise any authority over the several Grand Councils, which govern the Councils in their respective jurisdictions.

First and foremost, Freemasonry needs cooperation, coordination, and unity on all levels. We do not believe there has ever been a time in our history when this meant so much as they do today! Although the tangible reasons may appear small, we believe collectively they mean a great deal.

We operate the General Grand Council on a Per Capita of \$1.00 (USA domestic) and \$1.50 (other Counties), which is small indeed when you look at the fees charged by other National and International Masonic Bodies. Nevertheless, the Per Capita enables us to do so many things. Look at what is being accomplished:

1. We support and maintain the Cryptic Room at the George Washington Masonic Memorial in Alexandria, Virginia. It is a showcase of the Cryptic World for all to witness, including non-Masonic visitors. This is a worthwhile program to support. All of us gain notice and stature from our presence with other Masonic organizations of the world.
2. General Grand Council has an extensive Awards program:
 - a. Medal of Honor Award given to one outstanding individual per Triennial.
 - b. The Mordhurst Medal given to any Grand Recorder who has served fifteen years or longer.
 - c. A Columbian Medal given to an outstanding Companion in each of the ten Regions, plus three given at large per Triennial.
 - d. An Adult Leadership Award, given one per jurisdiction per year.
 - e. The Cryptic Mason of the Year Award, given one each year, per jurisdiction, for an outstanding member.
 - f. A Lady of the Council Award, to recognize our ladies for their support and involvement in Cryptic Masonry.
 - g. The Most Illustrious Grand Masters Award, given each year to a retiring Grand Master of the Council. This includes a plaque, certificate, lapel pin and Permanent Membership Card in General Grand Council. Also, a Representative of General Grand Council is always in attendance at each Annual Assembly to assist in presenting the awards and make suitable remarks.
3. General Grand Council sponsors ten Regional Conferences each year in conjunction with the other York Rite Bodies, so that the entire Rite may be presented for all to review. These conferences present interesting programs and appear to be growing in interest and enthusiasm. These Regional meetings have many advantages, both for the membership and for General Grand Council.
4. The Cryptic Masons Medical Research Foundation is one of the most effective charitable programs of any Masonic organization, supporting research into Vascular Biology and Medicine. This is an internationally recognized program at the Indiana University School of Medicine, working to combat a wide range of diseases. So far the Companions have contributed over \$2.5 million to the endowment fund, which supports the research program at Indiana University.



FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR

BY RICHARD A. EPPLER

It is with a sense of both humility and opportunity that I undertake the task of editing the Cryptic Mason Magazine. Our goal is to make this a magazine of interest to all Cryptic Masons, not just to Grand and General Grand Officers.

To make this possible I need your help in the form of articles for inclusion in the magazine. My present thinking is that articles should be within the following parameters:

1. The title of the magazine is "The Cryptic Freemason". Hence, articles should in some way be related to, or concerned with Cryptic Masonry.
2. This is a magazine published quarterly, not a newsletter. The time from the submission of an article to its publication is a matter of months. Hence, topics should be of more than passing interest.
3. We serve an audience covering not only all of North America, but also several other parts of the world. Thus, I am particularly interested in articles from other parts of the world than my own in northeastern USA.
4. If you are reporting on an event, it should be of more than local interest. One suitable example is the 200th Anniversary of Columbian Council #1, the world's oldest continuously functioning Cryptic Council, which will occur later this year.

To get this activity off the ground I will be writing a multi-issue series on the fascinating origins of Cryptic Masonry – a Rite (that is, a series of degrees) developed here in America. The first in this series appears in this issue.

Do you have a topic concerned with Cryptic Masonry that particularly appeals to you? If so, would you be willing to prepare a 1-2 page article? Or, do you know someone who would be better able to write it? Either way, please contact me. We want

to offer the articles you want to read, and think other Cryptic Masons would also like to read.

I hope to hear from several of you soon.

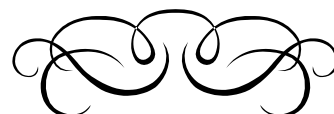
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~ Thought ~

Religious toleration, and separation of church and state are concepts we in the United States take for granted. We have difficulty understanding the violent intolerance that seems so pervasive in some parts of the world.

Yet, religious toleration is really a relatively recent concept. It certainly did not exist among the early settlers of this country. Most of the original thirteen colonies had state churches, and persecuted dissenters from the established church.

The concept of religious toleration arose in the discussions within very secret speculative Masonic lodges during the latter half of the seventeenth century. So radical was this idea at the time that the Masonic Lodges where it was discussed and practiced were securely tiled, and their very existence kept secret. It was not until a half century later in 1717 that the speculative Lodges felt safe in acknowledging to the world that they existed, and practiced religious toleration!



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