

Fellow Craft Degree

Since we are talking about the Second Degree, it may be worth thinking about its beginning. A common misconception is that the Third Degree was invented early in the 18th century. This is not correct. Some form of speculative Freemasonry existed in the mid 1600s. It is not certain what form the ceremony took but it probably followed the operative format since lodges needed a copy of the Old Charges to enable them to meet. By the end of the 17th century we know that, at least in Scotland and the north of England, there were two ceremonies. We have a short description of them in the Edinburgh Register House MS which is endorsed with the date 1696. Some scholars consider that the First Degree ceremony, in their terms a “making”, was invented for the use of non-operatives in an operative lodge and that the second ceremony, the Masters' Part, was the real ceremony in which an operative became a full member of the lodge. The Masters' Part contains a description which is clearly the Five Points of Fellowship. It did not include the Hiram Legend. Bro. Harry Carr believed that this legend, with many others now used in other Orders, were a part of the traditional tales told in operative lodges. Others disagree.

Whatever may be the case, the Hiram Legend was introduced to the then Second Degree early in the 18th century. In the early 1700s, most lodges only worked the ceremony of “making”, which was a very brief ceremony, followed by the recital of a series of questions and answers which went round the lodge. Over the years the number of the questions increased substantially, but most of them have a definite early flavor. Few Masons bothered to take the Masters' Part and few lodges worked it. By about 1730 it had become more common and about this time the present Fellow Craft degree was developed. We do not know why. There are a number of theories which would take too long to explain here.

One thing is fairly certain. The ceremony and the questions that went with it were developed by people of the Enlightenment. A large number of them are devoted to subjects like Geometry, Creation and the liberal arts and sciences, subjects unlikely to have been studied by operatives, except in a very practical way.

[From the *United Masters lodge No. 167, Lodge of Masonic Research*, June 2008]

A friend is always loyal, and a brother is born to help in time of need — Proverbs 17:1 [Submitted by Curt N. Balmer, P.G.C., Harmony Lodge No. 8, Newton, NJ]