



The Empty Chair Degree 1875

This program was adapted for U.S. Freemasonry
in 2001 by Milo D. Dailey, PM, PDM, MPS
For the Frontier Army Lodge of Masonic Research #1875
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The first Mason honored by this U.S. program was a British Freemason who was killed in action in the U.S. Army on the northern plains. John Holt Beever is the first known Mason to give his life in uniform in service in the region then known as Dakota Territory which in the earlier 1860s extended westward to the Rocky Mountains from the Minnesota and Iowa borders north of the Nebraska border. It included significant portions of the states of Wyoming and Montana as well as North and South Dakota.

Bro. Beever's name remains in this ceremonial as a reminder of the mission of the Frontier Army Lodge of Masonic Research. That mission is to research and memorialize regular members of the Craft in the frontier period from 1860 through 1890, especially in the northern plains and in the original Dakota Territory.

Performance in recognition of other Brother Masons, or of unknown Masons whose role in the Craft and service is not currently known, may have their names or stations appropriately substituted for Bro. Beever's name.

Empty Chair Degree 1875

This unofficial ritual may be exercised at a regularly tyled Lodge, or may be utilized as part of an open Lodge or similar setting among Masons, friends and family.

The Vacant Chair

A vacant chair may be brought into the Lodge or meeting room by processional, or may be placed in advance between the Altar and the chair in the west; or in any appropriate place in a non-Masonic meeting or banquet room.

In an outdoor setting, it may be brought to the assembly preferably accompanied by appropriate music or again, in an appropriate position among those gathered.

Furniture, accessories and other items required for the ceremonies:

An altar, Bible, square and compasses, gavel for the Worshipful Master, a black-draped chair, and white Mason's apron, preferably a lambskin are required. Masons involved in the ceremony may wear aprons if allowed in their Grand Lodge jurisdiction. All or none of the officers should wear aprons. All Masons should wear white gloves. The Master and Wardens must wear white gloves. A sprig of evergreen for each Brother is **mandatory**.

Opening the Degree

At the appropriate time, *the SW or appropriate officer* would announce:

+ W.M., there is an alarm at the outer door.

+ **W.M.:** _____ (Appropriate officer by title), you will attend to that alarm and see who seeks admission at this (Lodge ... Assembly of Brethren).

+ **(Appropriate officer):** Worshipful Master, Comrades and Brothers who have fallen in service of their country seek admission here, not in person, but through their spiritual presence that they seek our continued remembrance.

It also through the special memory of our fallen Brother, John Holt Beever, Lieutenant, United States Army, that Brethren fallen honorably in all wars be remembered.

(If a civilian, the lines should read:

Worshipful Master, Brothers who have served their fellows and fellow man seek admission here, not in person, but through their spiritual presence that they seek our continued remembrance.

(It is through the special memory of our fallen Brother, _____, that these Brethren, and Brethren fallen honorably in all wars be remembered.)

W.M.: My Brother, bid the entry of our fallen Brothers and the opening of our hearts to their memory.

(If a processional, a color party carrying the empty chair enters the room. The perambulation of the Lodge, room or meeting space is from the west to the north, across even between the WM and an altar, if there be one; before the Junior Warden, then to place it before the Worshipful Master in the east, and facing west.)

(If there be no processional with color guard, the chair, draped in black, is placed by appropriate Brothers at the verbal request of the Worshipful Master)

W.M.: + (Raps gavel) Brother Senior Warden

SW: (Stands) Worshipful Master

WM: Brother Senior Warden, it is my order that in recognition of our fallen Brother's presence, and his status as a Master Mason, that the apron of a Brother Master Mason be positioned as it would be were our Brothers present in body as well as spirit.

You, or a Brother who has honorably served his country in uniform, will approach the seat of our Brothers' memory, and perform the honor.

(The SW or appointed Brother shall approach the East to receive the Member's Apron from the W.M. The Brother so designated, as well as the WM and SW, should all be wearing such white gloves as would be used by the Lodge in Masonic funeral rites.)

(If a designated Brother, he marches at funeral pace to the chair, standing to the north side, facing the Senior Warden.)

-- Either the SW or the designated Brother may perform the speaking part --

SW (or designated Brother): The Lambskin, or white apron, was the first gift of Masonry to our departed Brother.

It is an emblem of innocence and the badge of a Mason. It is more ancient than the Golden Fleece, or Roman Eagle, more honorable than the Star and Garter.

This emblem I now offer and secure for the seat of our deceased Brother, in recognition of his, and his Masonic companions dedication to the highest ideals of the Craft in the greatest of vicissitudes in service to their fellows.

(Apron is placed on the seat of the chair, SW or designated Brother turns again to the West.)

SW (or designated Brother): By this act we are reminded of the Masonic ideals of our fallen Brother and his fellows.

We see in clear vision the Noble thoughts, generous impulses, words of truth, acts of love and deeds of mercy.

The Masonic Apron represents these highest aspirations of a Brother in all ways, as each Brother knows they give to man his only genuine happiness, his lasting satisfaction.

To these precepts our Brother willingly and gladly subscribed.

(The appointed Brother or SW now marches at funeral pace to his own seat.)

WM: +(*Rap to seat officers all but himself*)

WM: Our Brother _____ (_____), having given himself freely not only to the obligations of the Degrees of Masonry, but also to the obligations of service to his ideals as his lights showed them, thereby garnered the honors of his peers in service, his superiors and those who looked to him for leadership.

(If there are awards or symbols of service, the WM then says and acts: I now place these honors as decorations to his Masonic Apron.)

It is said a Man is made a Mason first in his heart.

The Mason may have earned honors before, or after he is raised to the Sublime Degree. But as the world sees, those honors do not decorate his Masonry, but rather highlight the spirit which made both a Mason and a man of service.

(W.M. may posit the medals or other objects on the apron, or call up an appointed brother as above to place the medals.)

(After medals are placed, the WM or appointed Veteran faces West.)

W.M.: These honors of mankind for our Brother, whether in material or purely from the heart, represent mankind's decoration upon a life of honor and service.

(W.M. or appointed Brother returns to his place.)

Chaplain repeats the following prayer:

Most Gracious God, Great Architect of the Universe, Author of all good, and Giver of all mercy, pour down, we implore Thee, Thy blessings upon us, and grant that the solemnity of this occasion may bind us yet closer together in the bonds of Brotherly Love.

May the present instance of mortality forcibly remind us of our approaching and inevitable destiny, and weaning our affections from the things of this world...

Fix them more devotedly on Thee, our only safe refuge in the hour of need, and grant, O God, that when the summons shall come for us to leave our transitory Lodge on earth, the light which is from above shall dispel the encircling gloom...

And that departing hence with faith in Thee, in full hope of a resurrection and in charity with all men,...

We may, through Thy favor, be admitted to Thy Celestial Lodge on high, to partake in everlasting reunion with the souls of our departed friends and Brethren, the just rewards of a pious and virtuous life.

Amen

Brothers: So Mote it Be

(-- Here comes a short recognition of the Brother's life: by the appropriate officer)

W.M.: As we have recognized our Brother(s), and especially _____ (Our Brother _____) let us take this also as both an affirmation of his virtue and recognition of our own frailty.

W.M.: Brothers, will you reenact with me the Masonic Service to a Brother raised to a higher Lodge by first forming a circle around the vacant chair of our Brother and Brothers?

(The WM walks to the chair to head a circle of Brothers around the chair, as circumstances permit, each with an evergreen sprig in his hand.)

(The Worshipful Master will then take the Evergreen in his hand and say:)

WM: This Evergreen is an emblem of immortality.
Beyond this world of shadows, man has a glorious destiny, since,
within this earthly tabernacle of clay, there abides an imperishable immortal spirit,
over which the grave hath no power nor death dominion.

(After the WM has deposited his evergreen on the Apron, the other Brethren in order of rank if appropriate, or simply in moving the circle as a line at the order of the W.M., each places his evergreen upon the apron with his right hand as he passes on the south, and returns to his place in the circle, facing inward.)

W.M.: Brethren, prepare for the Funeral Honors.

*(FUNERAL HONORS will then be given in the following manner:
The Brethren will extend their hands toward the grave, palms up,*

W.M.: We consign his body to the earth.
(The Brethren then cross their arms on their breast, the left uppermost, the open palms resting on their shoulders)

W.M.: We cherish his memory here.
(The Brethren will then raise their hands above their heads, looking upward,

W.M.: We commend his spirit to God who gave it.

Worshipful Master: Gracious God, rest this our Brother, who has walked here with us. Everlasting life give unto him, and if it be Thy will, lead him through the gates into the Eternal City. Amen.

(Response:) "So mote it be."

W.M. informally dismisses the Brothers, and returns to the Oriental Chair or podium.