

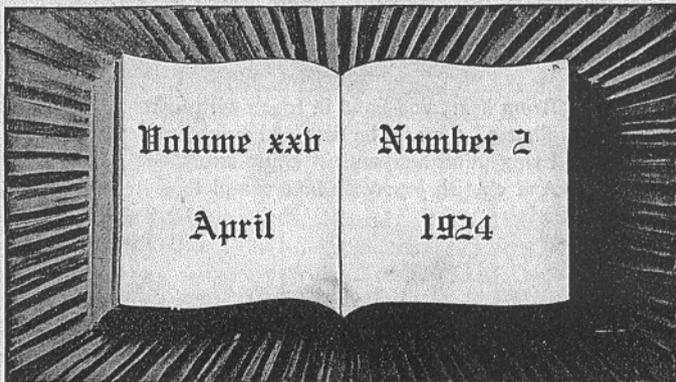
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Iowa Masonic Library



HOW IOWA GOT ITS RITUAL

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There is no more fascinating field of Masonic research, than that which seeks to delve into the history of our Ritual. From whence came it? Who have shaped it? What changes has it undergone? These and similar questions at once occur to us. We all are aware that the Ritual differs somewhat in each Jurisdiction in the United States, and while we may not freely discuss in print, such variations, we can portray the forces and personalities which have influenced these differences. In fact, such an inquiry must begin with the development within each jurisdiction, gradually working our way back, until we lose ourselves in those years of unrecorded history of our institution, which no man may hope to unveil.

Sixty years ago, during the decade from 1860 to 1870, the outstanding question upon the Tracing Boards of Grand Lodges in this country, was that of Uniformity of Ritual. Beyond doubt, the Ritual, especially in those Grand Lodges formed since 1825 was indeed in a deplorable state. This was partly due to the long period of inactivity during the Anti-Masonic excitement (1825-1840) and partly to the "confusion of tongues", resulting from bringing together brethren of many States; as emigration pushed further West. Still another complication was the inherent tendency of many professional Lecturers to leave their personal imprint upon the Ritual, by the introduction of some fanciful innovation.

Crises usually produce leaders. As there was raised up a Webb, in 1797 to perform his great work, so now Rob Morris saw the situation confronting Masonry and realized that it faced a crucial problem. Next to Webb, we owe far more to Morris than any other American Mason, for our present day Ritual, far more than we realize. Morris visited hundreds of Lodges, he knew more about the vagaries of the rituals in use than any man. With the advice of prominent Masons of his time, he launched a national *organized* movement, under the designation of "Conservators of Symbolic Masonry" to restore to use, the old Webb Lectures. Waiving any consideration of the means and methods he employed, his efforts resulted in the awakening of an interest in the Ritual, not experienced since the days 'of Webb. Grand Lodges at once set about piecing up their chains of title to their Rituals seeking to trace them back somehow, to Webb and even Preston. The controversy was waged in not a few jurisdictions with a bitterness and rancor; we of today find it hard to understand. The newer jurisdictions undertook to acquire the most authentic versions of the old Webb Lectures. For it is self-evident that Uniformity presupposes the existence of a definite, explicit standard to which to refer.

In no other jurisdiction, did this question receive more careful, thorough, intelligent study than in Iowa. And considering the thought and attention given it, there was a minimum of acrimonious debate. While the narration of this history will especially appeal to Iowa Masons, those of every other jurisdiction will find it of equal interest.

The first lodge in this state was formed under letters of dispensation issued by the Grand Lodge of Missouri, November 30, 1840. Three, other lodges were later organized under the same authority and the four lodges organized a Grand Lodge for the Territory of Iowa, January 8, 1844. In December, 1846, Iowa was admitted to the Union as a State.

Pre-Grand Lodge Days

Prior to the formation of a Grand Lodge, we learn from minutes of the four lodges chartered by Missouri, that several schools of instruction were held (e. g. August 1, 1842, by Alex. T. Douglass, St. Louis, Grand Visitor) by the Grand Lodge of Missouri. Whether the Ritual used from 1844 to 1859 was in any way shaped or influenced by the work adopted by the Grand Lodge of Missouri is not known.

Two points of interest might be mentioned. It was the practice to open on the first, second and third degrees in order to reach the third. A brother in one of the four old lodges was commissioned to design and paint a "Master's Carpet".

Early Grand Lodge Days 1844-1859

From 1844 to 1859, there is no specific evidence as to just what work was used, although, as we shall later show; uniformity of ritual received earnest consideration from the very first. During these fifteen years we should say that the work used probably reflected the early Masonic training of several individuals, prominent in the organization of the Grand Lodge. These men were Ansel Humphreys, T. S. Parvin and J. R. Hart-sock, all of whom served as Grand Masters.

Humphreys was made a Mason in Village Lodge No. 29, Collinsville, Connecticut, and served as Master of several Connecticut lodges for a long term of years. Parvin was made a Mason in Nova Caeserea Harmony Lodge No. 2, Cincinnati, Ohio. Hartsock was the first person initiated in the first lodge formed in Iowa.

Humphreys was a pupil of Cross. We quote his own statement made about 1864. "About 45 or 46 years ago, I received the Work and Lectures from Brother Jeremy L. Cross. A short time before I received them from him, he had got them from Webb in person. A short time after lecturing with Cross, I lectured and compared all the work with President Hector Humphreys of Yale College, who had also obtained his work directly from Webb, and assisted Cross in getting up his 'Masonic Chart'. I spent all college vacations with President Humphreys, during a period of four or five years and sedulously and correctly obtained from him the work. I after-wards compared the Work I had obtained from Cross and Humphreys with that taught me by Brother Barney, in person, and found that it was word for word, the Work as taught me by Barney, and that they all three said that they had obtained their work directly from Webb, and they all taught precisely and literally the same Work.

". I afterwards compared Work with Brother John Snow and his Work was also exactly that taught by Cross, Humphreys and Barney. Snow was a pupil of Webb, and he and Snow came west together, and Webb, for a time, made Snow's house his home at Worthington, Ohio. (Official History Grand Lodge of Iowa Vol. 1, P. 221-222.)

Parvin's contributions we believe were indirect in nature. So far as we can discover, he has left behind no evidence of his participation in the question, but it is highly improbable that a man of his character and ability would not, at least, have lent his council and advice in so important a matter.

Hartsock, although initiated in the Territory itself, claimed to have received Light from several sources. In a controversy between these last two, Parvin, writing in the Western Freemason, in 1859, said: "If Brother Hartsock obtained the true Webb work in 1842 or 1844 from Brother Nye of Vermont, as he says in statement seven, why did he lay aside that work and the many innovations connected with it, and in 1846 secure the services of Stephenson of Virginia, to obtain from him, another and a different work?"

Hartsock was extremely active from 1845 to 1859 in disseminating his version; Which was apparently not the "Webb work" as will be seen later. In fact, his contemporaries termed it the "Hartsock work".

At the convention called to organize the Grand Lodge Iowa in 1844, the following resolution was adopted:

"The Grand Master shall cause the work and lectures of the first three degrees of Masonry to be exhibited before the Grand Lodge at each Grand Communication."

The Grand Master accordingly appointed Hartsock to exemplify the first, B. S. Olds the second and Humphreys the third degree. No information is available as to what work was used. Hartsock was further commissioned to visit the lodges and exemplify the work. He reported in 1847 that he "found the work very erroneous in some of the lodges but I have endeavored to set them right according to the best of my judgment and the light that I had obtained from older brethren".

On November 13, 1848, Grand Master Humphreys opened at Burlington the first school of instruction called by the new Grand Lodge, personally instructing the representatives of the ten out of sixteen lodges represented.

Morcombe, in writing the official "History of the Grand Lodge of Iowa 1844 - 1865" says: "It would appear that the work as taught by P. G. M. Humphreys, held place as standard for many years". Personally, we question this statement. Even though uniformity of work in those days presumably did not imply the strict verbal conformity it does today, we think under each Grand Master from 1844 to 1859 there was a wide latitude in the work, depending on whether they favored Humphreys' version, Hartsock's or some other. For example in 1853, Grand Master Humphreys said, "I found the work of the lodges as uniform as I could expect. Indeed I am not acquainted with a single state where there is anything like the uniformity that exists here. I am no great stickler for identity of expressions in every respect, believing it impossible to attain a sameness of word in our ritual either by individuals or by the same person at all times. The work in substance as to manner and form I have sought to preserve". At the session of the Grand Lodge in 1857, Grand Master Sanford exemplified the three degrees and the work as exemplified was adopted "as the authorized work of this jurisdiction" and it was resolved "that the work as now adopted in the three degrees shall be obligatory on the subordinate lodges throughout this jurisdiction". Nothing is known regarding the work thus adopted.

In 1858 and 1859, Grand Master Hartsock gave much attention to the subject. In the latter year he reported he had exemplified the work in 116 lodges. He further said: "I shall exemplify the work again at this session in all the degrees and if said work should be confirmed by you it will stand as the established work and not be subject to be changed, as the majority of lodges are in possession of and are willing to conform to it". This was of course the so-called "Hartsock work" he was seeking to have adopted and evidently was not the work referred to in the resolution of 1857. Uniformity of work existed in theory only and unanimity of approval as to just what the uniform work should be was lacking.

First Steps Toward Securing an Authentic, Definite Standard

At the 1859 session of Grand Lodge, E. A. Guilbert, then Junior Grand Warden, who had been made a Mason in Illinois in 1851, offered a resolution as follows:

"Whereas, no attempts heretofore made . . . to disseminate a uniform system of work . . . have succeeded, and whereas frequent changes are by no means either meet or proper Resolved that it is the sense of this Grand Lodge that no time should be lost by the Grand Master in acquainting himself with the old Webb work for the purpose of communicating the same in schools of instruction to the various lodges over which he rules."

Since Hartsock at that time was Grand Master, it is evident that his version was not considered the accepted version of the old Webb work.

As a substitute, John Scott, then Senior Grand Warden, offered a resolution in part as follows:

"1. Resolved, as a general regulation, that a permanent committee of three be appointed whose first duty as such shall be to procure the ancient work.

"3. Resolved that said committee shall be the *custodians of the work*."

This last resolution was adopted and as a result, a committee of three, John Scott, E. A. Guilbert and W. B. Langridge, were elected as the first *Custodians of the Work*. They at once proceeded to procure the most authentic version of the ancient Webb work and in so doing, they engaged the services of Samuel Willson of Vermont, who had received the Webb Lectures from John Barney in 1818. Willson, who at that time was Grand Lecturer of Vermont, attended by invitation the session of Grand Lodge held at Burlington in 1860. On being welcomed to a seat in that body he said:

"I left the east and traveled to the west at the invitation of your *Custodians of the Work* and have spent some two weeks with them in giving them the old Webb lectures as I received them from John Barney in 1818. I am now happy to say to you that I consider your Custodians competent to give you any information relative to these lectures and work and I respectfully refer you to them for any information you may desire upon the subject." (Volume II, Part 11, p. 20-History of Grand Lodge of Iowa.)

In addition to thus communicating the Lectures and Work to the Board of Custodians, during the Grand Lodge session at Burlington (1860), the Board of Custodians, ably assisted by Rob Morris exemplified the Lectures and Work, before Willson and Grand Lodge, whereupon Willson endorsed the exemplification. "He, Willson, reported further that he had recently had an opportunity of comparing his work and lectures with those of Brother Rob Morris and he found that the lectures were identical but that they differed in Work and he modestly says 'and the difference is this, that Brother Morris is a much better workman than I am and he who seeks true Masonic knowledge may deem himself extremely fortunate if he falls unto Brother Morris' hands'." (History Grand Lodge Iowa Vol. II, Part 11, P. 20.)

As a result of all this, the Grand Lodge adopted the following resolution: "Resolved, that the Grand Lodge now as heretofore declares its unalterable adherence to the ancient Webb work and having the fullest confidence in the evidence furnished that the work as exemplified by the Custodians and under their direction by Brother Morris and Willson (is the ancient Webb work) does hereby adopt the same as the work and the only work hereafter to be taught in this jurisdiction." (History Grand Lodge Iowa, Vol. II, Part 11, P. 21.)

Notwithstanding that the Grand Lodge had at last adopted an authentic and explicit standard, the question was not yet settled. In 1865, at the session held at Marshalltown, the Board of Custodians presented majority and minority reports, which were of such nature as to be ordered omitted from the published proceedings. Included in the majority report were four resolutions, which were later adopted, the first two of which follow:

"1. Resolved, that this Grand Lodge reaffirms the decision of 1860 at the session at Burlington, adopting the 'ancient Webb work', as taught by Brother Samuel Willson, Grand Lecturer of the Grand Lodge of Vermont.

"2. Resolved, that the Grand Lodge and the brethren of this jurisdiction are required to conform their Work and Lectures to those of Brother Willson."

The Conservators-1860-1865

In order to intelligently understand the situation, reference must be made to the Conservators. We have already seen that Samuel Willson and Rob Morris jointly assisted at the exemplification of the Work and Lectures at Burlington, in 1860, and we have recorded Willson's statement regarding Morris' proficiency in the true Webb Lectures. Iowa was strongly represented in the Conservators' association. In 1862, there were 129 individuals within the jurisdiction affiliated with that movement. Only Illinois, Indiana, New York had greater enrollments. No less than 65 cities and towns of the state were represented. The three members of the Board of Custodians, Guilbert, Scott, and Langridge, were Conservators. For that matter, Samuel Willson was then himself a Conservator. Guilbert's association with Morris, undoubtedly impelled him to introduce the resolution he did in 1859, which we have quoted above.

Neither Webb nor Willson had ever prepared any standard floor work: The famous "Willson Notes" consist only of a series of questions and answers for each degree and each section of the degree. In conferring the degrees, the practice was to improvise, or permit each Officer to use his own language, so long as it conformed roughly to the Lectures. This practice prevailed in Iowa until 1882, as will be seen later. This is why Willson always differentiated so carefully between the "Lectures" and the "Work". Now Morris had incorporated in "Written Mnemonics", the Conservators' textbook, a specific procedure and language for every part of the ceremonies. Much of it he perfected himself, some of it of course, he simply refined and wrote in a better phraseology.

Since Willson had so cordially approved, in 1860, Morris' part in exemplifying the Ritual at Burlington, there is no doubt but that the Board of Custodians, with utmost sincerity, from 1861 to 1864, imparted the Lectures and Work contained in "Written Mnemonics". As opposition against the Conservators increased, towards the end of this period, and grew more bitter, it became apparent to the Custodians that Morris' version of the Webb Lectures, as embodied in "Written Mnemonics", did not correspond verbatim with Willson's. These differences were, on the whole, negligible, such as substituting the word "Masonically" for "morally". Accordingly, E.

A. Guilbert visited Willson at Vergennes, Vermont, in May, 1865, to correct through personal conference, such errors. On his return, he reported that "The changes were not then known to the Custodians (although recent comparison with the original Notes have made them manifest) . . . The corrections are mainly verbal and quite unessential except in a very few instances".

In September, 1865, W. B. Langridge (who was Deputy Grand Secretary from 1857 to 1876) also made a trip to Vergennes and with the utmost care transcribed a copy of the "Willson Notes which copy, duly certified, is now in the Iowa Masonic Library, as the standard, of reference for all time, as to what Willson did teach.

1865-1882

From 1865 until 1882, the Ritual received little attention.

1882-1922

In 1882, at the annual communication, Grand Master Van Saun said: "It seems to me that the Grand Lodge has never adopted any floor work, but simply the lectures as given by Brother Samuel Willson of Vermont. If the Grand Lodge has at any time adopted any floor work what is it, where is it and who has it? The answer would naturally be, the Board of Custodians. The Custodians would probably say 'We have attempted to obtain, retain and disseminate so far as has been in our power, the work which would most nearly conform to the lectures as communicated to and adopted by the Grand Lodge'." The Grand Master further recommended that "the Board of Custodians be required to communicate to this Grand Lodge for its adoption a floorwork". (History Grand Lodge Iowa, Vol. 11, Part 11, P. 23.)

Accordingly the Board of Custodians, consisting then of Guilbert, Allen, and Rothert, proceeded to comply with this request. They asked the Grand Master, who could give the task the time to "reduce the work and lectures to a form, having as its basis the lectures given by Brother Samuel Willson in 1860". No changes were made in the Lectures themselves. The original phraseology was scrupulously preserved. On September 2, 1882 the Board of Custodians completed their work and reported fully to Grand Lodge in 1883 at which time Grand Lodge ratified their acts, thus finally establishing a definite explicit standard for the Ritual.

A careful comparison made of the Iowa Ritual and "Written Mnemonics", discloses the hitherto unknown fact that the Work arranged by the Custodians in 1882 follows almost precisely that contained in "Written Mnemonics", as arranged by Rob Morris.

Since 1882, various minor changes have been made in the Ritual, to eliminate inaccuracies in the lectures or to improve their grammatical construction, such for example, as changing the height of the two columns from 35 cubits to 18.

Maintenance and Dissemination of Ritual

The Ritual is in charge of a Board of Custodians, responsible to Grand Lodge, who have the power to commission District Lecturers, after thorough examination as to their proficiency. These District Lecturers are charged with the responsibility of holding District Schools of Instruction. This plan was adopted about 1900, after constant experimentation, ranging from personal instruction by the Grand Master, in the early days, down through Committees, Grand Lecturers, etc. In 1897, so unsatisfactory had all previous efforts been that consideration was even given to issuing an official cipher.

The present method is so successful that Uniformity of Ritual is a fact and not a theory.

Monitors

About 1847-1848, Grand Lodge adopted C. W. Moore's "Trestle Board". When Grand Lodge adopted the Webb Lectures in 1860, it recommended the Webb "Monitor" to subordinate lodges.

At the 1922 communication, the Grand Custodians were authorized to prepare an official Iowa Monitor, which is now in the hands of the lodges. Ciphers are prohibited.

Conclusions

It was not until after almost 40 years that Iowa actually adopted a definite standard for its ritualistic work, and it was nearly 20 years more (1900) before, by trial and error, a satisfactory method was arrived at for maintaining and disseminating this standard ritual.

Thus, we can say that Iowa today preserves and perpetuates as nearly the pure version of the ancient Webb Lectures, so far as it is humanly possible to determine what these were, as any other Jurisdiction in the United States. That it obtained these Lectures from Samuel Willson directly, and that it has adopted and utilized the Work as arranged and taught by Rob Morris. Iowa brethren visiting Connecticut and Vermont lodges will find their rituals almost identical with Iowa, since all three are derived from the same sources - the Willson Lectures and the Morris Work.