The History of Royal Arch Masonry January 21 2004

No event in the history of speculative Freemasonry has had so important an influence upon its development as a system of symbolism as the invention of the ROYAL ARCH degree and its introduction into Masonic ritual.

The Masonic system of symbolism, as now constituted, presents us with a triple series of antagonisms:

1. that of ignorance and knowledge;
2. that of darkness and light;
3. that of loss and recovery.

ROYAL ARCH has to do with number 3 . that is the antagonism of loss and recovery when symbolized by death and resurrection, & where the ending of the present life and the beginning of future life is perfectly represented in the Master Masons degree.

But when it refers to the doctrine of Divine Truth, symbolized by the Word, which is lost for a while and then ultimately recovered, the 3rd degree fails.

The loss and recovery of the WORD constitute the foundation on which the entire system of Masonic symbolism is built. The Word constitutes the central point around which the whole system of Masonic symbolism revolves. Its possession is the consummation of all Masonic knowledge when lost, its recovery is the sole object of all Masonic labour.

This is the primary cause of ROYAL ARCH invention.

So originally the Master Masons Degree had the ROYAL ARCH true word. There is no evidence of ritual, only that the word was communicated in the last part of the degree. The word can be traced back as far as 1725. It can be seen prominently on tracing boards of that time. The WORD had not been severed from the 3rd degree in 1725. That came later, and it was severed and transferred to another degree.

There is more evidence of the true word in the 3rd degree in 1769 in several records of and around the late 1700's. It appears the Ancients took the word out of the Master Masons Degree and fabricated the English Royal Arch.

In order to look at how that happened, we need to look at a man named Andrew Michael Ramsay, know as Chevalier Ramsay, was born in Scotland in 1668. He went to Europe in 1710 and studied under several learned men. He became a member of several societies and was an officer of such as the order of Lazarus. He wrote on Freemasonry in the early 1700, influencing Freemasonry with his belief that it came from Palestine and the crusades. He connected Freemasonry to religion and knighthood rather than architecture.

Ramsay constructed the first Masonic system, which has since been called the "Rite" of Ramsay. The rite of Ramsay was 6 degrees

1. Entered Apprentice

2. Fellow craft
3. Master Mason
4. **Scottish Master or Ecossais**
5. Novice
6. Knight of the temple, or Templar

The last two do not interest ROYAL ARCH history. The 4th one does. It gave origin to the invention in England of the ROYAL ARCH and the great Masonic schism which followed.

Ramsay went to England in 1728. He was unsuccessful in getting his 6 degrees accepted but the allegorical symbol of recovery of the lost word awakened some in the fraternity to the fact that the symbolism, so necessary to complete the circle of symbology, was wanting. These awakened masons started to look at the legends.

The first attempt to expand the degree was moderate, trying only to supply the missing history of recovery. In 1738 the brothers began manipulating the Masters degree, to add the story of the recovery of the WORD. This tampering was met with censure, then with expulsion.

Thus, the Masonic world in England was divided into Moderns and Ancients.

The Ancients, the ones expelled, organized a NEW Grand Lodge and adopted a new ritual of FOUR degrees, the last being called the ROYAL ARCH. This was in place by 1753.

The 4th degree was confusing. It was an attempt to combine several continental degrees together without regard to the proper order of time or arrangement. The parts were poorly fitted, the anachronisms cumbersome. It was NOT Ramsay's legend.

Ramsay did not invent the ROYAL ARCH although he is frequently credited with it. His work led to it. His legend of recovery is not the current legend. His legend is now the legend of Enoch, and is the 13th degree of the Scottish Rite, know as the Knight of the 9th arch

There have been over 80 degrees containing the word Ecossais. They vary, except in that they all have communication of the true word and a legend of on its recovery. All have substantially the same word.

Our current legend seems to have some basis in Talmudic or rabbinical tradition. So Ramsay gave the doctrine but not the name or legend to ROYAL ARCH.

There is no trace of ROYAL ARCH in England before the great schism of 1738. It seems there was an organised body of past masters who conferred the degree, restricting it to those who had passed the chair.

There were not enough past masters and so the degree of Virtual Past master was introduced to allow Master Masons to advance to the degree.

The Moderns saw with envy the success of the Ancients, and correctly attributed the success to the recovery of the WORD and so formed a chapter for conferring the ROYAL ARCH

degree in 1765. The work was attributed to Thomas Dunkerley, although this is disputed by some.

Unlike the Grand Chapter of the Ancients, the Moderns Grand Chapter was independent and wholly unconnected to Grand Lodge. The presiding officers were Zerubbabel, Haggai and Joshua.

By 1791 there was a ROYAL ARCH Grand Chapter for the Ancients. We don't know when it started.

In1813, the Ancients and Moderns Grand Lodges united into what is today known as UGLE. The ROYAL ARCH degree was recognized formally as part of the York Rite.

On the union of the two Grand Lodges of Ancients and Moderns, the Supreme Grand Chapter was established. The Moderns ritual was preferred and adopted.

And so this tale of development, dissent, confusion and finally recognition was concluded.

But wait. In the USA the degree was instituted by both the Ancients and the Moderns as the influence of Britain was strong prior to the revolution of 1776.
The records of working chapters at the close of the 1800, and the beginning of the 1900, show that there was not the reconciliation seen in Britain in 1813. There existed a confusing variety in the ritual of the ROYAL ARCH and in the number and of preparatory degrees.
So many differences appeared as to clearly demonstrate they came from different sources. Ancient, Moderns, Grand Lodge of Scotland, Ireland, France and more.

America's principal officers are
High Priest
King
Scribe
Captain of the Host
Principal sojourner
R. A. Captain
3 Grand Masters of the Veils.

All that is common in the American Irish, Scottish is the recovery of the word. For example in the Irish chapter, the legend is based on II Chronicles Ch 34 verse 14, where Hilkiah finds a book of Law given to Moses. And so there is a brief history of Royal Arch Masonry