

Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Free Masonry

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It is stated by the Mother Supreme Council of the World in the Southern Jurisdiction, United States of America that the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite as we know it today first evolved on the continent of Europe. It was then known as the Rite of Perfection, consisting of degrees numbered from the 4th to the 25th, and governed by the Secret Constitutions of 1761. Lodges of Perfection in this Rite, transmitted from France through the West Indies to the American mainland, were established at New Orleans, Louisiana, in 1763; at Albany, New York, in 1767; at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1781-82; and at Charleston, South Carolina, in 1783.

The Grand Constitutions of 1786 provided for an extension of the Rite to 33 degrees, governed in each country by a Supreme Council of the "Thirty-third and Last Degree." Its provisions were cited at Charleston in 1801 in establishing the first Supreme Council ever opened, agreeably to these Grand Constitutions. This occurred on May 31, 1801, by Brothers John Mitchell and Frederik Dalcho. All regular Supreme Councils and their subordinate bodies are today descended directly or indirectly from this Mother Supreme Council.

The Name

The Supreme Council of the 33d degree for the United State of America was the name announced in a manifesto of December 4, 1802. The word "Scottish" was not used in any of the early documents. The exception was in the manifesto of 1802. Here the French

word Eccosais (Scottish) was used in the names of several detached degrees. Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite did not appear until after 1832. Beginning with the administration of Albert Pike in 1859 it came into general use. It was 1846 before a Supreme Council was established in Scotland.

The Grand Constitutions of 1786 provided for two Supreme Councils in the United States. In 1813 the Supreme Council at Charleston authorized and established the Supreme Council for the Northern Jurisdiction. The Charleston body became the Supreme Council for the Southern Jurisdiction. The fifteen states north of the Ohio and east of the Mississippi Rivers were ceded to the Northern Jurisdiction. The Southern Jurisdiction retained jurisdiction over all other states and territories.

A Supreme Council elects its own members and is self-perpetuating. It charters all subordinate bodies called Valleys and Orients. These bodies must observe the Statutes, orders, and regulations of the Supreme Council, or the Grand Commander when it is not in session. Otherwise, they are autonomous.

The Active Members of the Supreme Council, limited to 33, are titled Sovereign Grand Inspector Generals. There is normally no more than one in a state or territory, and is the highest ranking officer of the Rite in his jurisdiction in the absence of the Grand Commander. His powers are similar to those of a Grand Master. Where there is not an Active Member, a "Deputy of the Supreme Council" is appointed by the Grand Commander and holds this office at his pleasure.

There are three decorations: The Grand Cross of the Court of Honor is the highest decoration. It is rare and is conferred only on 33° Scottish Rite Masons for exceptional and extraordinary services. Inspectors General 33°, Honorary, are nominated by

Sovereign Grand Inspectors Generals and Deputies. These may then be elected by the Supreme Council while in executive session. Those elected are entitled to wear a white hat. Knights Commander of the Court of Honor is an investiture bestowed upon members deserving of recognition. The nominations and election follows the same procedure as noted above. This rank is peculiar to the Southern Jurisdiction. Its recipients may wear red hats.

Subordinate Bodies

There are four sets of bodies: The Lodge of Perfection which confers the 4th through 14th degrees; Chapter of Rose Croix, conferring the 15th through 18th degrees; Council of Kadosh, conferring the 19th through 30th degrees; and the Consistory, the 31st and 32nd degrees. Applicants must be Master Masons in good standing and must retain their membership in their lodge. Their petitions must be endorsed by two 32 degree members, and be elected unanimously.

The manifesto of 1802 declared: "The Sublime Masons never initiate any into the blue degrees, without a legal warrant obtained for that purpose from a Symbolic Grand Lodge." From the beginning the Supreme Council has acknowledged the supremacy of the Grand Lodges over the first three symbolic degrees. No regular Scottish Rite Body in the Southern Jurisdiction has ever conferred them. However, some Grand Lodges permit the Scottish Rite ritual to be used for the first three degrees.

The Degrees

The degrees as practiced earlier were revised by Albert Pike during his reign as Grand Commander from 1859 to 1891. While retaining the original titles, substance, and sequence, out of his own great knowledge of ancient philosophies, he added substance to the degrees which enhanced their importance. The Southern Jurisdiction has continued

to use the "Albert Pike" degrees. Other jurisdictions also use them, but not as universally. These degrees are usually conferred in one of two ways: In a class once a week over a period of time, usually in the spring and autumn; or at a "Reunion" over one or two days. In large jurisdictions this is almost a necessity. No portion of the degrees must be memorized, but all are urged to witness their conferral as often as possible.

The Supreme Council of the Southern Jurisdiction recognizes 37 Supreme Councils throughout the world. It has relations with six Grand Lodges in countries where no Supreme Council exists.

The Scottish Rite in Virginia

The Scottish Rite was introduced into Virginia shortly after the organization of the Mother Supreme Council in 1801. But it was not until 1824 that a formal charter was granted to a Virginia body.

John Dove wrote at length about the coming of the Scottish Rite to Virginia. He credits Joseph Myers, who settled in Richmond for business reasons with the building of the Rite. "In his leisure hours Myers amused himself by imparting all or any of these degrees of the Rite Eccosais to such Master Masons as he deemed worthy. Several are now [1853] here who received these degrees in this way from Bro. Myers, we ourselves being of the number."

Apparently, several Brethren in Lynchburg received the degrees in this manner and led them to petition for the right to confer the degrees of the Scottish Rite in Virginia. Permission was received on November 16, 1824, and the "Grand Consistory of Virginia," with its seat at Lynchburg, was chartered by the Supreme Council of the Southern

Jurisdiction. The Virginia leader was James Penn, who may be designated as the "Father of Scottish Rite Masonry in Virginia."

The Virginia Grand Consistory became inactive, but was revived on May 19, 1845. Then it was after 1870 before it showed signs of enlarged activity. During the period 1845-70 it was John Robin McDaniel who remained the mainstay of the Scottish Rite in Virginia. For 31 years he was an Active Member of the Supreme Council. He likewise presided over all of Virginia's Grand Bodies.

McDaniel's report to the Supreme Council in 1878 covered the early years of the Rite in Virginia. It also noted the chartering of Libertas Lodge of Perfection No. 5 in Richmond by the Grand Consistory of Virginia. Within his report he noted:

"Virginia, in common with most if not all the Southern States, is still laboring under financial embarrassments, tending to retard the progress of Masonry generally, but particularly the propagation of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite. It is gratifying, however, to see that wherever it obtains a foothold, and has been worked, it is highly appreciated, and its beauties and influences acknowledged, because it gives to a greater extent true Masonic information, much of which is not attainable elsewhere."

He later added:

"The Grand Consistory of Virginia now has of its obedience three Lodges of Perfection, a Chapter of Rose Croix, a Council of Kadosh, and there is a well-founded hope during the year 1878 to add three other Lodges of Perfection, another Chapter of Rose Croix, and another Council of Kadosh; and, in 1879, a particular Consistory, if it be the pleasure of the Supreme Council to authorize the establishment of the same."

The Lodge of Perfection in Norfolk was flourishing, he claimed. With the establishment of a Lodge of Perfection in Richmond in 1878, the center of Scottish Rite influence shifted from Lynchburg to the capital city. John F. Mayer, 33°, and Charles A. Nesbitt, 33°, for many years Inspector General and Deputy to the Supreme Council, respectively, resided in Richmond. This helped the Richmond Bodies to grow gradually. Today the largest membership of any of the Virginia Valleys is in Richmond.

Grand Commander Albert Pike communicated the 4th to the 14th degrees to more than 30 Master Masons of Richmond and vicinity on December 18, 1878. Two days later John L. Roper Lodge of Perfection No. 5 was instituted. St. Albans Hall was the center of Masonic activities in Richmond at that time, including the Scottish Rite. But on January 5, 1879, the Lodge of Perfection voted to move to Masons Hall, the home of Richmond Randolph Lodge No 19, and Richmond Chapter No. 3, Royal Arch Masons.

Around 1882, the Grand Consistory of Virginia seemed to have discontinued its work leaving the administration of the Scottish Rite to the supervision of the Supreme Council and the Sovereign Grand Inspector General, or the Deputy to the Supreme Council. During this same period, the Cerneau Rite reached its height in Richmond, Bristol, and other Virginia cities. The fight between the Supreme Council and the Cerneau Rite was long and bitter. Pike found it necessary to expel several Virginia Masons for affiliating with the Cerneau bodies.

Other bodies were formed, but the membership remained small. In 1889 there was a membership of 31 in Richmond, and correspondingly small in the other cities. With the death of Albert Pike in 1891 all bodies throughout the Southern Jurisdiction were adversely affected. But Mayer, Nesbitt, and James M. Clift continued to work for the Rite. In 1921 they saw the fruits of labor rewarded when Richmond occupied its own Temple

in 1921. Richmond now has a newer and grander Temple, the only one of the Scottish Rite bodies to own one.

In Virginia there are now eight Lodges of Perfection, and the same number of Chapters of Rose Croix, Councils of Kadosh, and Consistories. They are located in Richmond, Norfolk, Roanoke, Alexandria, Lynchburg, Danville, Portsmouth, and Newport News. There are about 8,000 Scottish Rite Masons. James M. Clift, Past Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Virginia, and the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons, held the 33rd degree longer than any other Virginian, from 1901 to his death in 1945. Today [1982] the head of the Scottish Rite in Virginia is Most Worshipful and Illustrious Brother L. Douglas Delano, Deputy to the Supreme Council.