

American or English Ritual

Does our Grand Chapter follow the English form or the American Form of Capitular Masonry?

My first reaction to the question was the English form, as that is what I have always been told. While researching an answer to that question it no longer appears to be true. For if it were true then how did the Most Excellent Master and Past Master degrees ever get into our ritual as they are both elements of the American Rite.

Having never visited an American or English Chapter I must rely upon my masonic researches, but with more research comes more variations and even more doubt that we ever followed either form. It quickly became apparent that we do not follow either the American or English faithfully, there are simply far too many variations to definitively assign our ritual to one or the other. Our ritual does follow the American form, or did for about 30 years when the Past Master degree was dropped.

A Committee on Fraternal Correspondence noted some American Grand Chapters did question the titles of Zerrubabel, Haggai and Joshua that departed from "the true work as introduced and given to them by their forefathers", where the American form uses High Priest, Scribe and King for their Principals. At the same time the Grand Chapter of Pennsylvania (1798) used Z., H. and J. The American form of Capitular Masonry must have a source as well, and that is an avenue requiring more research. The Mark and Royal Arch degrees made their way here from England. The Most Excellent and Past Master degrees were American innovations, still more intrigue requiring still more research.

In reviewing our 1861 Grand Chapter proceedings, Thompson Wilson, Grand Superintendent of the London District, expressed concern that the veils were being used in the Exaltation ceremony and that we were therefore not compliant with the English ritual. In 1862 a committee ruled that the portion of the ritual concerning the veils was acceptable. The veils were dropped at the formation of the United Grand Chapter in 1817 and with the revisions in 1835 by the Supreme Grand Chapter of England to unify the work, the ceremony of the veils rapidly disappeared from English masonry entirely. At the same time the Americans felt we were more closely following the English, Irish, Scottish and French forms of the Royal Craft.

From the very first days of our Grand Chapter we have been using a modified version of Capitular Masonry. Taking the best practices, blending them into a form of the ritual that was acceptable to all. With further research the fact is, that throughout our masonic history there have always been variations on the ritual.

At one point The Ancient and Honourable Society and Fraternity of Freemasons in York, England practiced 5 degrees Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft and Mark, Master Mason, Royal Arch Mason and Knights Templar. The English system does not recognize the Most Excellent or Past Master (Virtual or otherwise) degrees of the American system. To further complicate the matter the American Union Lodge No. 1 started conferring the Mark, Most Excellent and Royal Arch degrees in 1792. These are only some of the examples from the past that show variations exist everywhere.

Each Grand Jurisdiction has put forth a form of Capitular Masonry and occasionally they refine their ritual as time and circumstance allows. This has given us here within the jurisdiction of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Canada in the Province of Ontario a ritual that is uniquely ours. A ritual that observes the same fundamental principles that are seen throughout Capitular Masonry everywhere, fidelity, fraternity and truth.

Rt. Ex. Comp. Brian Aikins
Phoenix Chapter No. 34
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Sources

Rt. Ex Comp. George Fairbairn, *inspiration by asking the question*

Rt. Ex. Comp. David Walker Past Governor General York Rite Sovereign College of North America

1861 and 1862 Proceedings of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Canada

The History of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Canada 1857-1958

(authorized by Grand Chapter)