

Make Your Mark

The Mark Master degree has in it very specific, practical advice on how a Mason should live and work. We don't know how old the Mark Master degree is. We do know that a mark was used in ancient times to identify a producer of work. "Make your mark!," "Put your stamp on it" are English expressions that were once very common. We now have Professional Engineers, Professional Surveyors, Medical Doctors and others that stamp or mark or sign their work. They know they are staking their reputation and integrity on their stamp, mark or signature.

Companies, organizations, countries and groups use trademarks, logos, symbols and flags to identify themselves. We often recognize a country, product or organization not by a written word or sentence but by a symbol. Military groups take great pride in their clasps, badges, devices and crests. In the Olympics, we recognize the country of the athletes by their flags.

A person seeing the Square and Compasses expects the person wearing it to have certain qualities. In the United States, the cattle brand has been proudly used to show ownership. States have books of brands, which correspond to a book of Marks.

In the days of the Caesars some slaves were branded, as if they were cattle. Marks or identifiers are used to show a quality or character.

I remember listening to a Mark Master whose father was not a Freemason, but was a stone mason. His father took him to the Colorado State capital. By stretching his arm in back of one of the outside columns, the son could feel his father's mark. His father could point to that column of the Capitol and say "I built that."

In the Mark Master degree, the individual is allowed to select a mark that is of his own design. It is a pleasant feeling to enter a hallway of the Masonic Lodge in Boulder, Colorado and see a display of the marks of local Mark Masters. The Mark Master degree teaches us to do good work so that when it leaves our desk, table, laboratory, shop or office we can say with justifiable pride, "I did that." The mark has been used to identify work or show acceptance of work or legalize written papers. Some legal papers still have a place for a person to make his or her mark.

The Square and Compasses is a group symbol or mark. This symbol or mark on a man projects an image to those people who see it. That image can be positive, indifferent or negative. How it is perceived depends on the immediate and long time actions of the individual Mason and Masons as groups. Many of us every day accept or reject products and services according to the trademark, logos, mark or name of the company or person. "Who made it?," "Who signed for it?" and "Who stands behind it?" are common questions we use to evaluate a product or service.

The three Great Lights of Masonry are the Volume of the Sacred Law, the Square and Compass. They must be on the altar for a Lodge to be open and work. The Square teaches us to square our actions with all people, and the Compasses teach us to keep our passions under control or within certain boundaries. The Volume of the Sacred Law is reverently and constantly referred to in Masonic teaching and is therefore called the Great Light of Masonry. It is open during regular Lodge functions and is not hidden from the view of the Master of the Lodge, so that its light can permeate all corners of the Lodge. With a few exceptions, no person stands or passes between the open Volume of the Sacred Law and the Master and hereby hides or obscures the Great Light. The Volume of the Sacred Law is the centre of the Masonic Lodge and everything revolves about the Volume of the Sacred Law.

Masonry uses and encourages everyone to read and study the Volume of the Sacred Law, but does not interpret it for any person. Each person must hear, read, study and interpret the Volume of the Sacred Law for himself.

A young Fellowcraft found a building block and was attracted by its beauty. Without claiming it as his own work, he presented it for inspection. Because it was a different shape and did not have a recognizable mark on it, it was tossed aside as a useless stone by the Overseers. In addition, the young Fellowcraft was not paid and was in trouble for submitting work that was not his. When we are building our Temple do we ignore or toss away prayer, supplication, gratitude, humility, concern or other attributes that emphasize the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. We, as fallible people, have ignored qualities that the Chief Architect has determined as being essential for each of us.

The working tools of the Mark Master are the mallet and the chisel. As Mark Masters we need to chip away arrogance until it becomes compassion, turn excessive pride into humility, convert selfishness to unselfishness and change personal strength to supplication. This is a reminder of the first degree where we are told about the rough stone becoming a building block for the Temple.

The Mark Master degree is different than the first three degrees, in that during the conferring of the degree, the Holy Bible is read from at the Altar. The parable in Matthew (chapter 20, verse 116) is used to emphasize that the owner of the vineyard can do with that which is his as he pleases. We are all workers in the vineyard of God. We, as individuals, do not start or finish on an equal basis with anyone else. We can think that our burden is heavier, that we have toiled longer or the heat of the day is hotter on us than anyone else. We can complain of bad breaks or unfairness, but we must know and accept that our attitude towards the problem is more important than the problem. Each of us has different abilities and we will be expected to perform differently. We are unique in that there are many situations that someone else might be better equipped to handle, but that person isn't there. So, we might be the best equipped person for that situation at that time and place.

As mentioned earlier, the Mark Master degree is a practical degree. It does not teach history, or attempt to teach a set of rules. Instead it emphasizes a few simple profound truths, which are:

1. Never claim work or actions that are not yours.
2. Be willing to aid poor, distressed brothers.
3. Remember that the owner of the vineyard can do with that which is his as he pleases.
4. Constantly evaluate your attributes (keystones) so that they are the ones that the Chief Architect has in mind for each of us.
5. Our personal Mark and the Square and Compasses should always be the sign that we can be depended upon at all times to be of assistance to all mankind.

Lyman J. Cox (Colorado)
Royal Arch Magazine Summer, 1988 Vol. 16 No. 2

Submitted by Ex. Comp. Adam Meldrum
Sept. 15, 2020

Ref: The Tony Aspeslet Cyber Library
Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Alberta