

Names of three chief or presiding officers

Fifty years ago topics for discussion were not so numerous as at later periods, and subjects which nowadays engage the reviewers and absorb much time and considerable space had not sprouted to worry the good Companions of old. In this initial report, however, Illinois, with characteristic enterprise, started the controversial ball a-rolling by suggesting to the Companions of Canada, who had adopted the nomenclature of the mother Grand Chapter of England, that it would " be as well, or better, for them to conform the names of their officers to those in the United States " adding that " it would be pleasant to the Grand Chapters through this Union if this could be consistently done."

Companion Harris proceeded to demonstrate that consistency was exactly what the young Grand Chapter endeavoured to adhere to, in that particular regard at any rate, for he replied to the modest suggestion as follows:

"There is little doubt but that the more closely and uniformly the working of the Royal Craft can be assimilated the better for the Order; but believing, as we do, that our Companions in the United States took upon themselves at some period to change the names of the three chief or presiding officers, and to reverse their original position, have themselves departed from the true work as introduced and given to them by their forefathers. This fact can be easily ascertained by reference to many old documents still extant."

Companion Harris then quoted the rules and regulations adopted at the formation of the Grand Chapter of Pennsylvania in 1795, in which it was declared " that Ancient Masonry consists of four degrees— the three first of which are that of E.A. the F.C., and the sublime degree of Master, and the fourth, the Holy Royal Arch and reproduced Article 7 which defined a form of return to the general Grand Chapter, commencing " We, the three Chiefs," and signed, " Z., H., and J., Chiefs." He then concludes:

"Your Committee do not see how they can consistently recommend a change in our present system, and they would strongly urge upon our Companions in Illinois to examine this question, and if they find we are correct in the work we have adopted, they will be induced to restore the Royal Craft to its ancient purity."

"We hope, however, under all circumstances, our Companions will give us credit for adhering to the first pure system of Royal Arch Masonry, as first introduced both to the United States and Canada. It is also the same as acknowledged by England, Scotland and Ireland, our mother Grand Chapters, from whence it was first brought over to America."

Sources:

Proceedings of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Canada at the annual convocation, 1908 report on Foreign Correspondence – George Bennett, Chairman