

## Passing the Chair – an American Landmark

Under Canada (1906) which he kindly notices to the extent of four pages, he says: "It has been our understanding that the Past Master originated as an honorary degree in the blue lodge, so long ago that its history cannot be traced, and that at the time of the first introduction of the Royal Arch as a separate degree the usage was established to confer it only upon Past Masters."

That, it must be confessed, was our understanding, too, for a long period, and that was the understanding that Webb, no doubt, seized upon to jack up his introduction of the degree into the system. But people will go poking into worm eaten lodge chests and musty cupboards and discover things that take the gloss off little fairy tales like that. Research has shown that the Royal Arch was not generally conferred as a "chair degree" within the period, say, from 1740 down to the union. That it had been done in occasional instances is also established by certain writers, but the contention that the degree, if it was then a degree, was only conferred upon those who had passed the chair, has very little to rest upon now except a few ancient certificates and the ritualistic statement of the Webb era.

Webb, it must be remembered, was the great luminary of his time, but his orbit was necessarily limited. There was no Correspondence circle to extol or criticize, and the brilliant intellects that were to scintillate a hundred years later in the lands where "poor Lo" then held almost undisputed sway, Canada and Oregon to wit, had yet to be awakened. A wonderful genius was Webb, and he accomplished wonderful things in days when everything moved slowly. His great ambition to alter "the original plan" and fabricate a system which should be all American, was aided by a prevailing sentiment born of the little unpleasantness of a few years previously, and which had its outbreak in the place of his birth. His co-workers, cherishing that feeling, looked upon their leader with an admiration which posterity perpetuates. The schemes of his fertile brain and the creations of his facile quill were alike lauded and accepted. What mattered a brief digression from historical accuracy or the introduction of a glaring anachronism? Nothing, so that it was different from the imported article, and in that respect he achieved success. He lived to see the results of his remarkable labors grow and spread beyond any chance or suspicion of failure, and his system to-day is his monument.

"Passing the chair" is, as Comp. Hudson says, an American landmark, and we are quite willing to let it go at that, and agree with him.

### **Sources:**

Proceedings of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Canada at the annual convocation, 1907, report on Foreign Correspondence – OREGON