

Our Stations and Places
Masonic Officers Handbook
by Henry G. Meacham
Revised and Expanded
by Michael R. Poll

Our Stations and Places

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Dedication

*To the Seekers of Light and the souls
with a hunger to grow.*

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Foreword

In 1938, Henry G. Meacham published the first edition of *Our Stations and Places*. This present work is that first edition revised and expanded for best use in today's Freemasonry. The goal remains the same as in 1938; to provide assistance to Masonic Lodges, through their officers, by the means of a clear and useful officer's handbook.

The original edition was written specifically for Lodges under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of New York. This edition was revised so that it can be put into use by Lodges under any jurisdiction. The present edition was also expanded with the addition of a chapter on the various Lodge Committees and a collection of papers directly relevant to the subject of Lodge improvement and understanding.

Our Stations and Places is a tool. Like any tool, it is only as beneficial as it is used. If you have the desire to be of service to your Lodge and the willingness to apply your creative mind to the improvement of your Lodge, then wonderful things can happen. The sky and your imagination are the limits.

This book is part of the Cornerstone Masonic Education Series along side of the Worshipful Master's parliamentary tool, *Robert's Rule of Order: Masonic Edition* as well as *Masonic Words and Phrases* and *Masonic Questions and Answers*.

We sincerely hope that you study and put this handbook to use in your Lodge. Your singular effort to improve your Lodge is vitally important to the whole of Freemasonry. Each single effort builds a solid foundation for the success of all of our Lodges.

Fraternally,
Michael R. Poll
Spring, 2007

CHAPTER I THE WORSHIPFUL MASTER

We often hear about the duty and prerogatives of the Worshipful Master, and of things that he can do "to activate the particular group of Brethren who compose his Lodge." We also hear sighs, "If I were only young just for tonight," and thereby express rather aptly the state of mind of those who feel they have not taken advantage of all the opportunities presented during their lifetime. If they could only be given a second chance, things would be so very successful.

We are living in the present, however, not in the past. What we do should be for today and the future, and it is important that we turn our minds to some of those problems that a Warden must consider if he is to be a "good Master," problems that the Master must understand if he would possess those qualities of knowledge and leadership so essential to a successful Mastership.

Turn to the pages of your Grand Lodge Monitor to the chapter generally titled, "Prerogatives and Duties of the Worshipful Master." You will read something close to this in the introduction :

"By the prerogatives of the Worshipful Master the inherent right and authority he possesses by reason of the position he occupies, giving him as it does, extraordinary powers and privileges, which belong to the presiding Officer of few other associations. In all instances his decision on points of order is final in the Lodge for it is a settled principle of Masonic law that no appeal can be taken to the Lodge from the decision of the Master. The Grand Lodge, or the Grand Master alone, can overrule his decision on any point of order."

“The prerogatives of the Worshipful Master are so numerous and varied that only some of the principal ones are here presented.”

We must wonder how many Masters and Wardens have read the above, how many have studied it. The statements there made represent an important stone in the foundation of Masonic knowledge and a careful perusal of his duties and prerogatives as given in this part of your Monitor is most essential to anyone who is anxious to be a success in the East.

Opening the Lodge

Let me quote the third duty as herein given:

“To open his Lodge at the time specified in the By-laws, and do it at a suitable hour.”

It would seem safe in asserting that a no small amount of the failure of Brethren to attend Lodge may be ascribed to the lateness of the hour at which the Master calls his Lodge to order - in spite of the fact that the By-laws of the Lodge say when Lodge shall be opened. To cause Brethren to stand about for half or three quarters of an hour, waiting for Lodge to be opened when there seems to be no apparent reason for tardiness, does not encourage members to attend. It shows a considerable amount is lack of concern for both the Lodge and the Brethren. Most people have a pretty fair sense of time and punctuality, and many can be irked by being forced wait for the Master who, through slackness, fails to observe the much needed factor of punctuality.

The conduct of the Worshipful Master often sets the tone for the conduct of the Lodge. A Master who governs his actions responsibly and with the Lodge's best interests in mind can inspire like attitudes in the membership.

We may consider the Master a vitally important part of the educational department of the Grand Lodge.

The Work

“To render the ritualistic work of the Lodge and the Brethren therein.”

The Master should be in fact Master of the Work, competent to render every part thereof and therefore may be compared to the principal of a school. While he may not, himself, teach every candidate that comes into his Lodge, he must make certain that the education given each new Brother is a quality education.

The Master alone is responsible to the Grand Lodge for of his Lodge, and he must be himself competent to instruct his Brethren. A Master who is not competent in the Work teaches that no one needs be competent. The example set by the Master sets the tone for the Lodge.

But what does it mean to be competent in the Work? Is “the Work” the words of the ritual alone and is the limit of the Master’s responsibility to know the words much as an actor is required to know his lines in a play?

Our Art can be understood as taking an imperfect human and attempting to teach him methods of improving his life. To represent this goal, we use the symbolism of working the Rough Ashlar into a more Perfect Ashlar. If the Master does not understand the meanings behind the words of the Work, then all he can teach is empty words. We might as well have a video of the ritual with a computer generated Master in the East. The Work will be letter-perfect, but the video will be unable to answer questions or give any additional explanations to aid in understanding the Work. The Work will not be done.

One who accepts the office of Master should be well versed in both the proper words of the Work as well as the meaning of the words and various symbols. Only then can he be considered competent in the Work.

Notification and a Summons

One of the standard prerogatives gives an interesting distinction between a "Notification" and a "Summons." Let me quote:

"The distinction between 'Notification' and a 'Summons' is so great that it is strange how many overlook it. The former issues from the Worshipful Master or the Lodge, and is practically an Invitation. It is at the option of the Brethren receiving it to attend the meeting or not, as he pleased. But a 'Summons' comes directly under the province of his Order of Business, and for its neglect he may be disciplined and punished. To disobey a summons is a serious Masonic offense."

Take your mind thus to the work of the Second and Third Degree, particularly to that of the Second Degree, that you may observe how this matter of the summons is definitely emphasized. It is stressed purposely in order that a strong impression may be made on the mind of the candidate - and it should be equally emphatic to all of the Brethren.

The important distinction between a Notification and a Summons should be clearly understood, and a Warden who fixes it in his mind is taking an important step in the direction of a proper understanding of his duties as Worshipful Master of his Lodge. The Master who has fortified himself with a knowledge of this distinction, and who is duly impressed with its importance, cannot fail to impress upon the minds of his Brethren their responsibility in connection with a Summons.

The Minutes

It would be wise, too, that the Master of the Lodge and the Secretary read the ninth duty. Let me quote:

“To exercise Supervision over the minutes, that nothing improper be recorded, and nothing essential to a complete record be omitted”

It is the Worshipful Master who should supervise all aspects of the lodge operation, yet in some lodges we see the Secretary “running the show.” This shift of authority might be explained by the normal length of office of each position. Most lodges allow a Worshipful Master to serve only one term (normally of one year) at a time, but the Secretary is often elected to that position for a number of years. It is not so uncommon to see a Secretary holding his office for a time longer than the Worshipful Master has been a Mason. In reality, the Secretary is often the more experienced officer. In some cases, if the Secretary did not exercise his experience, the business of the lodge would suffer under an inexperienced Master incapable of properly fulfilling his duties.

A lodge does not benefit from a Worshipful Master ignorant of his duties or from a Secretary operating under the belief that the Worshipful Master is his subordinate. In both cases, the answer is education.

CHAPTER II COURTESIES OF THE EAST

“Courtesies of the East” - a phrase uttered by many Masters at least once at every meeting during the year. We might wonder if the phrase is not so often used as to lose its significance in the mind of the one employing it.

The question arises because the Spirit of the phrase is too frequently departed from, not so much in the matter of welcoming Worshipful, and Right Worshipfuls to the East, but in the entire business of making welcome Brethren who come to render the Lodge a definite service which they have been asked to perform.

Anyone who travels to more than a few lodges can discover cases of what amounts to down-right incivility - due without any doubt to thoughtlessness. One recent instance came to me of a Brother who journeyed twenty-five miles to give an address at a meeting of a Lodge. Not only was he not invited to come early and be the guest of the Master, or the Lodge, at dinner; not only was an offer not made to pay his expenses, but, reporting at the suggested hour of nine, he was kept in the ante-room until ten o'clock, when, after a perfunctory expression of thanks, the following statement was made: that undoubtedly, owing to the lateness of the hour, he would probably want to be getting home, and therefore could feel free to curtail his remarks.

Happily this instance is not representative of a condition existing universally among our Lodges, but it is a condition that is far too prevalent, and should not exist in any Lodge. Anyone who has served several years in the chairs of his Lodge should have become sensitive to those amenities which should make a visitor happy for the giving of his effort.

Another instance of which I am aware has to do with a busy clergyman who took time out to travel twenty miles one evening to deliver an address in a Lodge, only to be met by an examining committee who "put him through the paces." Questions were asked that had no possible bearing on the man's admissibility into a Masonic Lodge, and, when the visitor was given permission to ask some Masonic questions on his own part, not only did the committee not answer his questions, but the committee introduced him to the Lodge with statements that attempted to hold him up to ridicule. It was later pointed out that the committee did not know that he was the visiting speaker. Instead of that being an extenuating fact, this only emphasizes the point that *every* visitor should expect, and receive, every possible courtesy from the East (as well as those acting on behalf of the East). Again in this case, no suggestion was made by the lodge to compensate him for expenses involved in getting to and from the Lodge.

In another kind of case, a Brother - in very considerable demand as a speaker - was asked to give one of his addresses to a lodge. The Brother remained in town for the occasion, ate alone - having received no invitation to dinner - and showed up at the Lodge at the appointed hour of nine o'clock. He was received in the Lodge and sat on the sidelines until after eleven o'clock, when, after a long session of business was completed, the Master announced: "And now, Brethren, Brother has a message that he wants to deliver to us." That terse remark constituted his presentation to his audience. Likewise, this particular night a soloist had been asked to come and render two or three numbers. Although singing was his vocation, he was permitted to come to town, also buy his own dinner - and then, with the speaker, permitted to withdraw at the conclusion of the event. And afterwards, also with the speaker, he was not to receive so much as a line of appreciation for his efforts.

Other similar cases could be related, but these are sufficient to indicate how extraordinarily lacking some Worshipful Mas-

ters are in the simplest amenities of life to visitors. It is not enough to assume that, since all are Masons and Brothers together, the ordinary courtesies of human relationships need not be observed. It is an old joke that members of families can ride roughshod over the sensibilities of one another. In the best of families it is not done, and, if a Lodge considers itself a family, the Master should at least conduct the affairs of the Lodge on the assumption that it is a fine family.

A few simple principles may be laid down on the governing of such cases. In the first place, the speaker, entertainer, or otherwise, should receive a letter expressing the Master's appreciation at least a week before the meeting date. The letter should cover all arrangements; should contain an invitation to dinner, giving the hour and place, and an offer of transportation to and from the meeting. Also included in the latter should be whether the dress is to be formal or business clothes, and the place in the evening's program that the visitor is to occupy should be covered. In addition, an offer should be made for the covering of the visitor's expenses. If the guest is from out of town, then his room should be provided. If the lodge does not have to funds to pay such an expense, then a collection should be made of the members at the time of the meeting to help the visitor with this expense. If the visitor is local, then some gift should be given to him from the lodge as a "thank you" for his effort.

If the speaker does not accept the invitation to dinner, but is to show up at the Lodge at a certain hour, full instructions should be left with the Tyler that the Master or the committee be notified immediately upon his arrival. If he is not to be brought directly into the Lodge, he should not be allowed to cool his heels alone in the anti room, but a committee member be sent out to greet him and remain with him until his entrance into the Lodge.

Nor should the visitor be permitted to enter the Lodge alone, but should be given the consideration of an escort, with a fitting presentation, and taken to the East to be presented to the Lodge in a courteous and kindly manner. Greetings by the Master do

not have to be fulsome, but they can be sufficiently cordial to make the visitor feel at home and welcome. It costs nothing to be friendly. Often the manner in which a visiting speaker is received spells the difference between a good address and an indifferent one. In other words, a speaker in coming to a Lodge should be made to feel that he is the attraction, as he undoubtedly should be, of the evening.

One must regret that a statement of simple principle or courtesy should be necessary. In the olden days the Operative Mason spent an apprenticeship of seven years in order to learn the principles of his Craft. Today, Speculative Masons spend a lifetime in perfecting the human temple through the development of character and personality. Training in such points as the above, is not to be achieved, I suppose, in a year, or two years, but it is an ideal to be pursued. I know of no place in a Mason's career that affords a so perfect a training school as the Mastership, and the Master who fails to make the most of his office as a school, among other things of deportment, misses vastly more than he can afford to miss.

CHAPTER III THE SECRETS OF THE CHAIR

The glowing radiance of the Masonic Temple in the little town shone brightly that January night. The single blue light over the entrance beckoned to the groups making their way to their Mecca - the Lodge room. The Brothers wore their heavy clothing, for the weather was intensely cold. Occasionally a pair of snow-shoes could be seen tucked under the arm of the bearer - not needed now on the cleared walks of the town, but necessary in the deep snow of the surrounding hills. Singly and in groups they came, stamping the snow from their feet as they enter the building, then ascending the stairs to the upper floor, where wraps were removed, snow-shoes stacked in the corner, and fingers toasted at the glowing stove.

The buzz of conversation and the peals of laughter evoked from time to time by good-natured banter grew in heartiness as new groups filtered in. It was a scene familiar to each Brother present. And yet something seemed different tonight. Maybe it was the presence of a number of Brethren who attended Lodge but once or twice a year. Be that as it may, all seemed expectant, as if something unusual was about to happen.

It was Installation Night!

A sudden hush as the gavel fell! Groups broke away to the chairs on the sides. Officers took their respective stations and places. Lodge was opened in due form with the Worshipful Master officiating in the East for the last time. Routine matters were attended to, and under the heading of "New Business" the East announced that Officers for the ensuing year would be installed. The Worshipful Master announced, too, that the Master-elect, prior to his installation, would be invested with the

Secrets of the Chair. In view of the Master and the Past Masters, but out of view of the other Members, the investiture of the Master-elect took place. Then the Worshipful Master installed his successor and the other Officers of the Lodge.

This picture of installation night is given to show that the retiring Master validates his successor by investing him with the Secrets of the Chair before installing him - and, of course, this may be accomplished by a group investiture as is done in so many jurisdictions. It is this simple investiture to which I wish to call attention. Many members of the Craft labor under a misconception concerning this ceremony. Some say that if the Master-elect of a Lodge has had the Past Master Degree in a Chapter of Royal Arch Masons he does not need to be invested. Nor does it stop there, for Past Masters' Associations have been known to exemplify what they call the "Past Master Degree," believing that this is identical to the investiture. This condition exists, not because of a willful disregard of a time-honored practice requirement, but because of a possible lack of authentic information concerning it.

This branch of Masonic education is too frequently neglected by Worshipful Masters. The installation of the Worshipful Master should always be preceded by his investiture.

For as long as Freemasonry has been an organized Fraternity it has been deemed needful to put each Master, before his installation, in possession of what are known as the "Secrets of the Chair." These "Secrets" consist of information and minor ritual, where none but actual Past Masters, or Masters, vouched for as such, are permitted to witness or hear.

In Symbolic Masonry there are only three Degrees – Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Mason. Where it has been taken over by Capitular Masonry and conferred under its jurisdiction only, the "Past Master" Degree is used to legitimize the

candidate for the Royal Arch Degree, as it was required that none could receive the Degree of Royal Arch except Past Masters. In Masonic writings, the Past Master of a Symbolic Lodge is known as an "actual" Past Master, and he who receives the Degree of Past Master in a Chapter of the Royal Arch body is known as a "virtual" Past Master. To use the ceremony of a Degree of a dependent body is simply to subordinate Symbolic Masonry to a dependent body - an act utterly wrong in principle and entirely useless in regard to any possible Constitutional requirement.

It is always difficult to be able to put one's finger precisely on the spot whence spring fallacies common to human organizations. Possibly Mackey, in his "Encyclopedia of Freemasonry," is partly to blame for the wide-spread misunderstanding of this point. In that useful work, under the caption of "Past Master," Mackey says:

"Past Master. An Honorary Degree conferred on the Master of a Lodge at his installation into office. In this Degree the necessary instructions are conferred respecting the various ceremonies of the Order, such as installations, processions, the laying of corner stones, etc. When a brother who has never before presided, has been elected Master of a Lodge, an emergent Lodge of Past Masters, consisting of not less than three, is convened and all but Past Masters retiring, the Degree is conferred upon the newly elected officer."

In this Mackey is entirely wrong. Above all things the chapter work is not, and must not be, used at the Installation of a Master-elect. No Chapter Mason who has not been installed as Master of a symbolic Lodge would be permitted to be present when the Secrets of the chair are imparted to the Master-elect. After that quiet ceremony the installation in the Lodge room proceeds when any Master Mason in good standing may be present. What should be emphasized to the Craft is this: Sym-

bolic Masonry is one thing and Capitular Masonry is another. Above all else, Symbolic Masonry is the foundation upon which all dependent bodies have to rest. He who is a Master Mason possesses the ranking Degree of the Craft. If he takes on anything else by virtue of his membership in the Lodge, that is, of course, his privilege, and only because he is a Master Mason. He can no more bring his Chapter work into the Lodge, or take to himself any privilege because he is a member of that body, than he could bring in any of the features or titles belonging to the many other bodies depending for their membership on the mother body, namely, Craft Masonry.

Such are the facts. Let us not be misled. Let us take the time to search out the truth and for all time dismiss from our minds the travesty of the "Past Master Degree."

Not long ago a Past Grand Master said that one of the great dangers of the Craft lay in the self complacency of its members. He was right. We are too content to sit idly by and let the other Brother bear the burden. All cannot be leaders, but all can work, and above all each of us can have a firm reason for our Masonic membership. Let us not be self-complacent with regard to this important Masonic ceremony. All of us, particularly if we are past Masters, should make it a point to be sure that all new Masters are being properly invested with the Secrets of the Chair.