

**T.F.S.  
Three, five, and seven**

**3 5 7**

By Ed Halpaus, Grand Lodge Education Officer.  
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**“Freemasonry: A force to be used -- not a form to be served.”** M.W. Brother Rod Larson

Dear Masonic Student,

Every now and again a question comes up regarding ritual and where it came from. Recently it came up again and as a result I went looking for a paper written quite a while ago by our late Brother, M.W. Brother Rod Larson. Rod was a very good Masonic Student and consequently he was quite knowledgeable about things Masonic. He was deeply involved with Masonic Education through his Lodge and the Grand Lodge. I always enjoyed visiting with him, and I always learned something because of my associations with him. He wasn't a young man when he died, but he did die to young in my opinion. Many of us wish he was still around. He was the kind of man anyone was happy to meet and get to know.

He wrote some fine articles on Masonry, and he was kind enough to share a few with me, (I wish I had more,) and one of them I published for him in T.F.S. back in February of 2005 – it's on the ritual of the Grand Lodge of Minnesota, I'm certain you will enjoy reading it again – or for the 1<sup>st</sup> time. - Ed

**“Masonry is worth investigation by the scientific mind; but if it contains nothing more than is expressed in the catechism of the day, if that is all there is in the system, it is not worth the attention of thinking men.”** A.T.C. Pierson, PGM of Minnesota

**Origins of the Minnesota Ritual**  
by M.W. Brother Rod Larson, PGM

In Minnesota until recent times we had the two handwritten copies of the ritual as presented to the Grand Lodge annual communication in 1863. A friend who had been chairman of the board of custodians told me that he had one of the copies when he was the chair and he trashed it when he was done. Duane Anderson told me that he had the other copy, but it could not be found when he died. Here is a paper that I wrote concerning "our ritual."

**Background**

The Minnesota ritual is of the form termed “The Preston-Webb Work.” William Preston (1742-1818), an Englishman, devoted much of his Masonic life to the study and perfection of the Masonic lectures. Preston "invented" nothing new ... he just took what existed and wrote it down into an organized fashion. However, his works were too long for most Masons

Thomas Smith Webb (1771-1819), an American, took Preston's lectures and added memorization aids, like the Master's Carpet. But he also shortened the work, somewhat.

In 1841 the Grand Lodge of Alabama had called for a General Masonic Conference (which was held in March, 1842) in order to come up with a "uniform work." This meeting became known as the Baltimore Convention.

John Barney was the most preeminent student of Preston-Webb, and worked as the "Lecturing Master" for the GL of Vermont. He later moved to Ohio, and was named Grand Lecturer of Ohio. The Baltimore Convention turned out a set of work called the Trestle-Board (or the Baltimore Work) which Barney used in his lectures in New York, Ohio, Michigan, Vermont, Connecticut, etc. [Ron Blaisdell, PM, MPS-Life Capital of Strict Observance No. 66 Grand Lodge F&AM of Michigan (<http://www.gl-mi.org/>)]

## **The Conservators**

Rob Morris, PGM of Kentucky, disagreed with the product of the Baltimore Convention and tried to remove the Trestle-Board as a "fraud" and have Grand Lodges revert to his lectures.

Rob Morris created a group he called the Conservators whose purpose was to disseminate what he considered to be the "True" form of the Preston-Webb work. It was scheduled to exist from 1860 to 1865. The Conservators were assigned in each jurisdiction and were authorized, by Morris, to sell their services to lodges for the purpose of teaching the Morris form of the Preston-Webb work. To assist the Conservators, Rob Morris had produced a unique ritual cipher which was contained in two books, called the Mnemonics and the Spelling Book.

There was much opposition to the Conservators attempts to introduce a uniform ritual in the United States, including Minnesota, and the subject was discussed at the Conference of Grand Masters.

## **Early Attitude about Uniformity in Minnesota**

When the Grand Lodge of Minnesota was formed; each lodge was free to use whatever ritual the members were familiar with. This practice was approved by the Grand Lodge. In 1861, A.T.C. Pierson's 6th year as Grand Master, he addressed the Grand Lodge on this issue, saying:

" . . . too little attention is paid in our lodges and by our members, to 'The Charges of a Free Mason'"

"Learning the Lectures does not make a Mason any more than committing to memory the whole bible would make a practical Christian, without acts. It is practical Masonry and Masons that we want, men that live Masonry . . . Brethren, in all the years that I have been honored with this high position, by your partiality, I have not sought to have my name associated with any Ritual, but have sought to inculcate the true teachings of our mystic association, to generate in the minds of the Brethren a love for the Order, . . . Whether the words 'Doors or Gates,' 'Fords or Passes,' 'In or At,' 'Of or The,' were used, has not troubled me." [Proceedings of the 1861 Annual Communication]

## **Minnesota Takes a Stand Against the Conservators**

In August 1861 M.W.G.M. Pierson issued a circular to all the lodges warning them against the "Conservators of Symbolic Masonry." He asserted that they were violating the Ancient Landmarks, infringing upon the sovereignty of the Grand Lodges, and attempting to subvert the principles of Masonry.

In the report of the committee assigned to consider the issue it was stated: "Forms of words may differ." "Resolved, That the lodges in this State are hereby prohibited from receiving the Masonic Work, Ritual, or Lectures, from any other than the constituted authorities of this jurisdiction."

Later in this annual communication a resolution was passed establishing a Committee on Ritual, to consist of five members who would report back at the next annual communication.

### Minnesota Chooses a Standard Ritual

The report of the Committee on Ritual was not ready in 1862 and in 1863 no mention is made of Ritual until the end of all the business when it was reported that "The M.W. Grand Master then proceeded to exemplify the work in the three Degrees as taught by him." It was then "Resolved, that the work [as exemplified] . . . be adopted as the work of this jurisdiction."

Now comes the interesting part: What ritual did they adopt? If I told you that they adopted the Conservator ritual you probably would not believe me, but that is what they did!

The "work" presented to the Grand Lodge had been prepared in two handwritten, plain English copies that were turned over by the Grand Master. (One of them is still in existence.) All of our subsequent work has preserved those handwritten words with very few minor changes. In 1981 Henry Van Geest (who was the Chairman of the Board of Custodians) showed me two books that he used to check the accuracy and spelling of the words in our ritual. These two books were the Mnemonics and Spelling Book of the Conservator Ritual!

In Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia it is stated that ". . . the rituals of several Grand Lodges closely resemble [the] Mnemonics." Minnesota did more than modify the Conservator Ritual to our own taste, after condemning it we then copied it word-for-word. Furthermore, we did not pay the author to use the ritual. We did not even give him credit -- we just stole it.

An aspect of this, which I think is very interesting, is that the Grand Lodges that adopted or openly used all or parts of the Conservator Ritual have subsequently made major changes to their ritual since that time. Contrarily, Minnesota, which purloined the same ritual, has preserved it with hardly a change.

### Rob Morris' Cipher

[Quoted from Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia, 1960 edition, pp127, 8]

The third major attempt to perfect Masonic cryptography was that of Rob Morris in the promotion of Conservators of Symbolic Masonry (q.v.) by which means he hoped to unify the ritual in the United States and preserve what he called the Webb-Preston work. Morris used two separate books, neither of which he considered meaningful without the other. One was called Mnemonics, which was the Masonic ritual in code, and the other was called the Spelling Book, which furnished the key to the code. Mnemonics continued for each appropriate section of the ritual a block of 17 columns of letters in 25 rows and, opposite that, a similar block of 17 columns of figures in 25 lines thus:

|                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 _ _ 17   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 _ _ 17   |
| 1. T r h j b c f _ _ _ | 1. 9 7 6 5 4 7 8 _ _ _ |
| 2. d d v s w k m _ _ _ | 2. 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 _ _ _ |
| 3. o c s r n g b _ _ _ | 3. 9 6 7 8 5 6 5 _ _ _ |
| 4. e a s r t k y _ _ _ | 4. 6 5 6 5 4 7 7 _ _ _ |
| 5. a v f r d s w _ _ _ | 5. 9 8 2 4 5 4 3 _ _ _ |
| _____                  | _____                  |
| _____                  | _____                  |
| _____                  | _____                  |
| 25. _____              | 25. _____              |

The left block was to be read downward, starting by taking the first letter T then finding the corresponding number in the right block, which is 9. By reference to the Spelling Book, which contained all the words used in the ritual, each bearing a letter and number, the reader found that T 9 was The. In the same way, he found that d 8 was degree; o 9 was of; e 6 was entered; and a 9 was apprentice. Hence, the first five words represented by column 1 were 'The degree of entered apprentice,' etc. In justification of this device, Morris stated: "It is the same as was employed by the Grand Lodge of England in 1728 when Masonry was introduced into France; in 1733 when Masonry was introduced into America; in 1795 when Preston transmitted his work and lectures to the United States, by Thomas Smith Webb, during the 24 years that he was engaged in promulgating this system; and by every Grand Lecturer whose name has become historical. It is a method practical, lawful, easy, and sure." But the Grand Lodges would not permit Morris to perpetrate his on the Fraternity.

"The rituals are merely auxiliaries in commencing the investigation of the recondite mysteries concealed in the ceremonies, allegories, and symbolisms of the craft." M.W.B. A.T.C. Pierson

**"The trust of a Mason is in the most high God, as a basis which can never fail and a rock which can never be shaken, and will sustain and protect him under all the trials, difficulties and dangers while traveling through this vale of tears."** Most Worshipful Brother Azariah Theodore Crane Pierson. Past S.G.I.G. of A.A.S.R. S.J.

**Words to Live By:** A single conversation with a wise man is better than ten years of study. Chinese Proverb

The Education Videos by our education committee can be viewed at:  
<http://www.youtube.com/glmned>

The latest Masonic Monday Question, and some of the past questions, can be viewed at [www.Lodgebuilder.org](http://www.Lodgebuilder.org) and at [www.mn-masons.org](http://www.mn-masons.org)

**Seek to mentor a Brother Mason: It's good for him, it's good for you, and it's good for Freemasonry!**