

# OUR RITUAL

The History of Achieving Uniformity  
of Masonic Ritual Work in Nebraska

by W.:Bro.: Francis E. White  
Grand Secretary Emeritus



Nebraska Ritual Work...From whence did it come?

A Historical Perspective of the Roots of Masonic Ritual  
by M.:W.:Bro.: Tom Hauder



Notes on the Book, *“The Masonic Conservators”*

by M.:W.:Bro.: Ray V. Denslow



Edited by  
M.:W.:Bro.: Russ Reno  
2018 Grand Historian



OFFICE OF THE GRAND MASTER  
LINCOLN, NEBRASKA  
NOVEMBER 11, 2018

I often hear brethren say, “Masonry means different things to different people.” Yes, that is true concerning some aspects of our fraternity. But it is *one thing to all of us: **Masonry is the world’s oldest fraternity of gentlemen founded on the code of ethics of the stonemasons who built King Solomon’s Temple.*** This was the theme of my address to the Craft following my installation as Grand Master of Masons in Nebraska on February 3, 2018. It is the enduring foundation of our fraternity and is as relevant today as it was to the men recorded in this book who embraced our ritualistic work and time-honored legend that defines our identity as Freemasons. It is also the theme of this book.

My trusted mentor, Past Grand Master, and 2018 Grand Historian Russ Reno envisioned this chronicle of Nebraska’s Masonic Ritual upon reviewing Masonic documents bequeathed to him by our mutual friend W.Bro. Lynn Alexander. M.W.Bro. Tom Hauder, another adroit researcher and personal mentor of mine, assisted in the development of this book, and added an important overview of Freemasonry’s road to construct our ritual. In addition, M.W.Bro. Scott Krieger, Grand Custodian, reviewed the following pages based on his many years of extensive knowledge of our ritual work. M.W.Bro. Russ is well qualified to edit this intriguing historical work, as he also authored the *Sesquicentennial History of the Grand Lodge of Nebraska, 1857-2007*, the definitive reference for all significant facts concerning the general history of Nebraska Masonry. No doubt the work you now hold in your hands will be its counterpart for Nebraska’s rich Masonic ritual heritage.

This book offers insight into the principled allegories establishing Freemasonry that have endured for centuries. Our fraternity has always embraced learning lessons from the past. Within these pages you will rediscover why we’re different from the countless other community organizations men could devote their precious time to. Each lodge *does* those things a little differently, but *every lodge is exactly the same* in its fundamental Masonic foundation in the Legend of Hiram Abiff.

Through his insightful research and writing, M.W.Bro. Russ has illustrated for you the foundation of Masonry as a legend depicting a lifelong journey. There’s the journey each of us made in the first section of each degree, the journey up the flight of winding stairs into the Middle Chamber, and most importantly, the ultimate journey each of us made in our role as Hiram Abiff. Everything else we do in this fraternity can be found in the time-honored tale of that journey, and each of us swore an obligation to live that legend. Through this landmark chronological saga, you embark on the journey our ritual began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and continues today.

I am convinced the tenets of our fraternity are as relevant today as they were over 160 years ago when our pioneer forefathers constituted our Grand Lodge, continuing through the timeline this monumental book portrays. I am further convinced there is a generation of men looking for *exactly* what we were chartered to offer. It’s all here in the pages that follow.

This fraternity was built on the backs of men who joined Masonry *for* Masonry. Besides this book, where is that best proscribed? In the Legend of Hiram Abiff. That is our heritage, my Brothers. **Masonry**

*is the world's oldest fraternity of gentlemen founded on the code of ethics of the stonemasons who built King Solomon's Temple.*

Fraternally,



A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Patrick D. Barger". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, stylized "B" at the end.

Patrick D. Barger  
Grand Master of Masons in Nebraska

# Introduction

Imagine the year is 1857 and spurred by a railroad brochure promoting the Nebraska Territory, you decide to move there. You leave behind many loved ones including your Masonic lodge where you served as Master.

Arriving in Omaha City, you first head to the Masonic lodge where you decide to affiliate. Since they recently organized, and have few members, you're asked to assume an office. The Master is from Ohio, the Senior Warden from Massachusetts and the Junior Warden from Illinois.

At the meeting, the Master opens with unfamiliar words and the Senior Warden is not certain what to say in reply. One Deacon carries his rod upright and the other at a 45-degree angle. It seems no one knows what they're doing. Actually, they all do, at least according to how they performed their Masonic ritual "back home."

Your Worshipful Master calls everyone together to decide how each officer will perform his part. For the most part, deference is given to the way each officer performed it in their previous lodge. Down the road, a lodge there takes the same approach but with the Master from Iowa, the Senior Warden from Missouri and the Junior Warden from Kansas, their work is different than that of your lodge. Across the territory, the scene repeats itself as more lodges open.

When the Grand Lodge is formed later that year, the leadership wants to standardize the work. How to get these disparate approaches congealed so there is uniformity in the work in every lodge seems like an impossible task. It will require compromises that few want to make, and will take years.

That's what the founders of Freemasonry in Nebraska faced. How they arrived at the work used today is an epic story complicated by efforts nationally to have a variety of approaches approved. Prestige and money were at stake, which made the decision emotional and challenging.

Fortunately, three brothers followed this drama which is presented in these pages.

- **W.:Bro.: Francis E. White (1848-1926).** A member of Plattsmouth Lodge No. 6, he was raised in 1869, just 12 years after the founding of the Grand Lodge of Nebraska. He personally knew the brothers who pushed for the uniformity of our ritual work and experienced the final solution as a newly made member of our fraternity. Even though he had retired to California, in 1932 he wrote the following history about the evolution of Nebraska's ritual work. His history was found among the Masonic treasures of W.:Bro.: B. Lynn Alexander, Past Master of Lancaster Lodge No. 54, after his passing in 2014.
- **M.:W.:Bro.: Tom Hauder (2013 Grand Master).** Respected for his research ability, knowledge of the fraternity and undying commitment to Masonic education, he prepared the presentation included here for a meeting of the Sts. John Lodge of Education NO. 331. It recaps the growth of our ritual before the Nebraska Territory and the United States of America, and traces its pathway to the doorstep of the Nebraska Grand Lodge. His presentation is a must-read and arrives first in this publication as a primer for the detailed history by W.:Bro.: White. As Grand Master, M.:W.:Bro.: Hauder recommended a change in the bylaws that was adopted allowing lodges to change their proficiency requirements with the approval of the Committee on Work. Many lodges opted to return to the "long form" questions and answers that had been abandoned in 1989.
- **M.:W.:Bro.: Ray V. Denslow (1885-1960).** A Past Grand Master of Missouri, Denslow is a renowned Masonic author. In 1931, he published a book about the Masonic Conservators' movement to standardize Masonic ritual nationwide. A significant part of the story of ritual work in Nebraska is tied to the Conservator movement, which caused consternation across the United States. His book is summarized here.

Be certain to read the extensive Endnotes which include comments, reports and resolutions from the Grand Lodge of Nebraska's Proceedings as our forefathers worked their way through the challenges over the years to bring uniformity of work to Nebraska. They sometimes hint, provide out-right examples, and give us background about what happened behind the scenes. – *Editor*

# Nebraska Ritual Work...From whence did it come?

by M.:W.:Bro.: Tom Hauder

The two biggest myths in Freemasonry are:

1. The Ritual never changes.
2. The Ritual used in my jurisdiction is the “right, ancient, true, correct, only, original... ad nauseam... ritual.”

Nothing could be further from the truth. In general, the origins of ritual are very hard to trace. There have been many different versions since the organization of Grand Lodge Freemasonry in 1717 and when that ritual was transplanted to the new country of the United States of America, things took an even wilder turn.

As most Masons are aware, the ritual varies from state to state in the U.S. and also from country to country. While we all agree on the ideas that Masonry teaches, there is quite a difference of opinion regarding the actual words, movements and other details that go into making Masonic ritual.

A general study of the genesis of ritual is certainly worthwhile, but we will instead focus on the history of the ritual used in Nebraska and how it came to be “standard.”

## Background

Ritual in the beginnings of Freemasonry was quite simple and varied considerably between lodges and countries as grand lodges had not yet been established. The first rituals seemed to consist purely of a catechism of sorts that was often shared with the candidate around the festive board table set up in the middle of the lodge room.

As Masonry grew and became more of an intellectual pursuit, the rituals were expanded and became more like what we use today. However, prior to the formation of the first Grand Lodge of England in 1717, there was little similarity between rituals from different lodges. This became even more complicated when the Grand Lodge of England separated into the Ancients and the Moderns in 1751. This resulted in quite a bit of confusion not only in America but in England and Europe as well.

The basic issue that caused the divide was one of determining the future of the Craft as either a social club or a fraternal organization based on the operative lodges. The Moderns wanted to “modernize” the ritual and put much less emphasis on it in the fraternity. The group that became known as the Ancients (*sometimes Antient*) felt that the ritual was untouchable and that any changes from the ritual being practiced at that time would be straying from the Landmarks of Freemasonry.

These opposing views resulted in the separation of the two groups. The Moderns retained control of what was known as the Grand Lodge of England and the Ancients established their own Grand Lodge known as the *Most Ancient and Honourable Society of Free and Accepted Masons according to the Old Constitutions* (*n.b., These are not the only two “Grand Lodges” during the early days of Grand Lodge Masonry, for example, there was a Grand Lodge at York and a Grand Lodge at Liverpool*).

Around 1764, a lodge of Scottish Masons from Edinburgh in London transferred their affiliation from the Ancients’ to the Moderns’ Grand Lodge. A member of that lodge, William Preston, was a well-known lecturer on Freemasonry and had been working several years collecting, sorting and standardizing the various Masonic rituals extant in England, Scotland and elsewhere at the time. He met with friends once or twice a week to try out his new lectures and ritual modifications and this work resulted in the publication of *Illustrations of Freemasonry* in 1772. This book, the first printed material on Freemasonry (other than “exposés”), was a collection of lectures and other information regarding the history of Freemasonry. Preston’s book was wildly popular, and ran to 12 editions in his lifetime. (*n.b., Preston was suspended / ejected from the Moderns over a dispute regarding himself and some of his lodge brothers marching to Church services in full Masonic regalia. After a period of time, this was rescinded but not until much discord was resolved in the Craft.*) While Preston’s *Illustrations* was a step forward in standardizing Masonic ritual, it contained no



**William Preston**

esoteric material, which was still being transmitted mouth-to-ear, or was obtained by reading one of the many exposés that had been printed.

The Grand Lodge of England (Ancient and Modern) had recombined in 1813 and, as part of the settlement, attempted to create a standardized ritual for all its lodges. This effort stretched into 1816 with little success other than to balance the lecture and ritual portions. Diversity in ritual work continues to this day with as many as 100 different rituals being used, in addition to the recommended standard ritual published by the United Grand Lodge of England.

### **Ritual Work in America**

Freemasonry followed men from other nations to North America and took hold in our nascent country as it had across England and the European continent. However, the spread of Freemasonry was complicated by several factors:

1. Who issued the Charter? Depending on whether the Grand Lodge of England (Ancient or Modern), the Grand Lodge of Ireland or the Grand Lodge of Scotland issued the charter, the ritual used in a lodge might vary greatly.
2. The rapid expansion of the United States into the interior of the country meant that many Grand Jurisdictions were chartering lodges at a fast pace to keep up with the growth of the country. Overproduction of lodges and Masons lead to poor quality work that was seldom managed.
3. Due to the immense size of the U.S. states, it was nearly impossible in that time period for a grand lodge to afford to send out Custodians to monitor the quality of work. Even if the grand lodges had the money, the difficulty and slow pace of travel would have still rendered it nearly impossible.
4. As many Masons were on the move settling new territory and wanting to enjoy the advantages of Masonry in their new cities, a new lodge might consist of Masons made in a variety of different lodges from the East and under a variety of ritual schemes. What ritual to use was an important question and absent any real guidance from the Grand Jurisdiction, each lodge would settle on a ritual or combination of rituals that seemed to work for them.
5. There was much work and discussion about whether to have a national Grand Lodge like England, Scotland, etc. with an overall Grand Master (Geo. Washington was proposed as the first Grand Master of the U.S.). Or, if each state / territory would be sovereign.

These factors led to confusion in the Craft. As men traveled about and wanted to visit lodges, it was often impossible to determine if he was a “true and lawful” Brother or just someone who was trying to take advantage of the support Masons give one another.

The issue of recognition between jurisdictions also became contentious based on which grand lodge gave them their charter and what kind of work they were doing. Moreover, some states and territories had lodges chartered by several different states (*Nebraska's first lodges, for instance, were chartered by three different states*) and again, the question of ritual became a point of argument when setting up a new Grand Jurisdiction.

### **Early Attempts at Uniformity of Work**

By the late 1700s to early 1800s, this issue was at the point that U.S. Masonry in general began discussing adopting one version as the official work nationwide.

In 1797, Thomas Smith Webb had published a Masonic book, *Freemason's Monitor or Illustrations of Masonry*, which contained what Webb claimed was the original and true work as published by Preston. While it was very popular, it was not the only Monitor for Masons published at this time. (*n.b., The Grand Lodge library has several other Monitors from other authors.*)

The work published by Webb is considered to be an abridgement, revision and rearrangement of the actual Preston lectures. It is thought that Webb received the Preston Lectures from an English brother named John Hammer who had received the lectures from Preston in the Lodge of Antiquity and had paperwork to confirm his qualifications.



**Thomas Smith Webb**

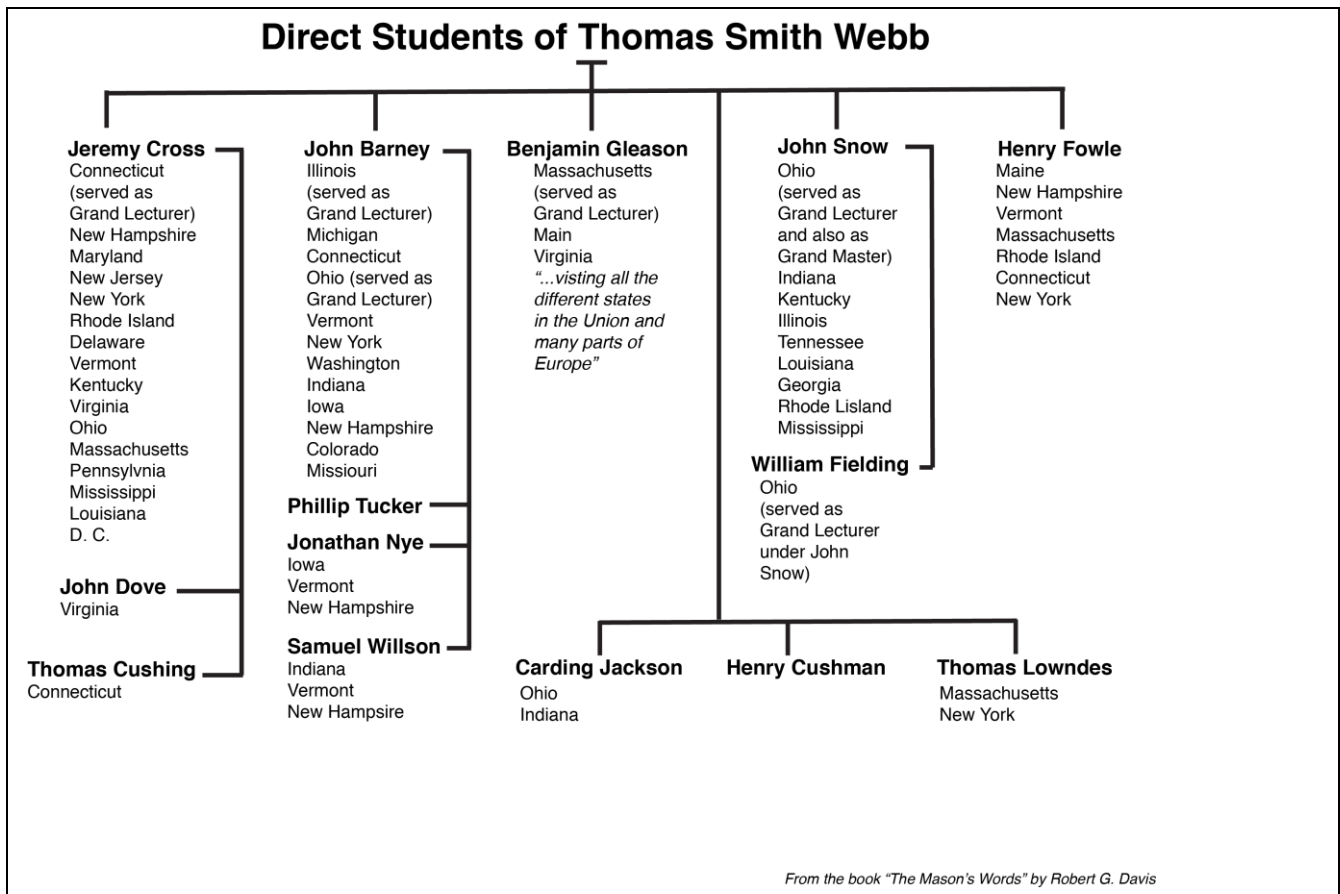
Webb was so impressed by the Preston material that he later obtained a copy of Preston's *Illustrations* when it became available in America. Webb felt this sort of guide would be indispensable to American Masons but that the Preston work was too cumbersome to be easily adopted by American lodges. Although Webb's first edition of his "Monitor" very closely followed Preston's work, with each edition Webb and his group revised, added or otherwise adapted the Preston work to what he thought would be more effective in American lodges and added concepts from other Masonic ritual work that was available to him for study. For example, Webb is probably the author of the 2<sup>nd</sup> section prayer in the Master Mason degree. He also wrote the detailed memorialization of the working tools for the Master Mason degree based on other existing non-Preston work, and removed all reference to the "Monarchy."

This revision / alteration work was not always well received and there was considerable argument in the Masonic world about the Webb work and its authenticity to Preston's work. Webb's work did become the most popular work in the U. S. and he trained several "roving lecturers" to spread the work about the country in the hopes of creating a unified work for Masonry.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was again a renewed call to create a national Grand Lodge.

Despite the less than successful outcome in England to standardize the ritual, it had become a hot topic among Masons in the U. S. No one seemed to be on the fence about the idea. They were either strongly for it or strongly against it. It seems the revolutionary spirit was still alive in Masons!

The main drivers for this idea of a national standard ritual in the U.S. stemmed from the recent fervor over the Morgan affair and the resulting start-up of the Anti-Masonic political party that sought to mitigate the influence of Freemasonry in America. These influences caused a near destruction of the Craft in the U. S. with many men abandoning the Craft and grand lodges barely surviving in many states and territories. (*n.b. One of the outcomes was to only allow the lodge to do business in the Master Mason degree to block those that had dropped out before being raised during the Morgan affair from coming back.*)





A serious endeavor to create a standardized ritual for all grand jurisdictions was attempted in 1842-1843 in Baltimore, Maryland. Representatives from Connecticut, Virginia, Rhode Island, Maryland, New York, South Carolina, District of Columbia, Massachusetts, Alabama and New Hampshire attended. The purpose of the Baltimore Convention was stated to bring together all jurisdictions in the U. S. for the purpose of standardizing the work and other issues of recognition and consistency.

The convention elected noted Masonic lecturer John Dove of Virginia as president. Dove was a student of Jeremy Cross who was a student of Webb.



*John Dove*

He opened the conference with a direct mission for the attendees:  
*“Brethren...for the first time in the history of the United States of North America, the Craft have found it necessary and expedient to assemble by their representatives, to take into consideration the propriety of devising some uniform mode of action by which the ancient landmarks of our beloved Order may be preserved and perpetuated...”*

Thus, the aim of the convention was twofold:

1. Produce a uniformity of Masonic work in North America and have it adopted by all American Grand Lodges.
2. Recommend any other administrative matter that would promote Masonry worldwide.

These outcomes were to be published in a Masonic Trestle Board or Manual for use by the Craft throughout North America. Committees were formed to work out the standard lectures and esoteric work, which was then performed for the conference in an attempt to get agreement with the newly created work. This did not go smoothly and the issue of sovereignty of the grand lodge of each state was so important that it overshadowed many of the ideas being presented for a unified work.

Ultimately, the conference was a total disaster.

When a consensus was finally reached and the process of printing the outcome began, politics, egos and other less savory traits of humanity came into full bloom and the printed Trestle Board was disavowed by many participants in the conference including Dove. In 1846, another attempt at a unifying conference was held but with only six grand lodges present, it was felt that they could have no lasting effect on American Masonry.

The result of all of this discord was to encourage other Masonic ritualists and writers to publish their own version of Masonic workings. A few smaller details that were discussed and proposed were adopted by some of the jurisdictions, but the desired unity of work was unfulfilled.

### **Rob Morris and the Masonic Conservators**

Despite the failure of the Baltimore Convention of 1843 to solve any of Masonry’s problems with Masonic work, the idea of a need for consistent work was still high on most Mason’s list. Enter Rob Morris and the Masonic Conservators.

Most Masons know of Brother Rob Morris as the U.S. Masonic Poet Laureate or as the creator of the Order of the Eastern Star. But he was much more than that. “Bro. Morris was an author, editor and publisher of many Masonic books. In addition, he started a National School of Masonic Instruction. He is said to have visited nearly 2,000 lodges and conferred with more than 50,000 Masons.” (*The Masons, Robert Davis; pg. 265*)

In June 1860, Brother Morris decided the time was ripe for him to create an organization he called the Masonic Conservators and attempt from a grass roots level to achieve a consistent work and influence the grand jurisdictions to adopt the work as Morris had it.

Morris started by sending invitations to a select group of eminent Masons to join what he called an “association of experienced and devoted Masons.” The plan was to appoint one Conservator in each lodge who could then appoint two deputies. There would then be an area and national hierarchy, all of which would report to the Head Conservator (Morris). Each Conservator or Deputy was to keep the work that Morris was teaching secret. The aim of this group was the dissemination of what Morris called “the genuine work and lectures of the first three degrees as arranged by Preston and taught by Webb.”



Morris thought that through this organization, any changes or discrepancies in the Webb work that had occurred since Webb's death could be corrected and a consistent ritual could be achieved.

To aide his Conservators in doing the work as he had it, he created a very complex cipher book to track the secret work and proposed that a system of schools of instruction be held in lodge by Masonic lecturers trained in his system and that the Conservators would work to achieve acceptance of the Morris system as the "standard" ritual in their jurisdiction.

As might be imagined, many grand jurisdictions did not take kindly to Bro. :. Morris creating a secret organization for the purpose of influencing the work of a grand lodge. They saw his work as a direct challenge to the sovereignty and power of the Grand Master and the grand lodge. There was also the issue of money as Morris charged for his materials and for membership.

Another problem for Morris was not being able to prove where he had gotten the work he promoted. Morris claimed to be using the purest form of Webb work that he had gained from Vermont from Bro. :. Samuel Willson, but Willson and others who were trained either by Webb or one of his students denied that Morris had the correct work. This information spread rapidly in the Masonic world and many grand lodges enacted Morris and the Conservators out of business. During the last three years of the organization, Morris spent the majority of his time fighting the accusations.

And so by 1865, the Conservator movement was over, work was still inconsistent between states / territories and nothing had really been solved on the issue of consistent ritual across the U. S.

*(Editor – See the following section titled, "Notes from the Book 'The Masonic Conservators'" for more information about the Conservators in Nebraska.)*

## **Nebraska**

So where was Nebraska in all of this controversy?

Nebraska had lodges chartered from three grand jurisdictions (*Iowa, Illinois and Missouri*), not all of which adopted the Morris version of the Preston Work. The Grand Lodge of Nebraska was then chartered in 1857 from three different Grand Jurisdictions: Illinois, Iowa and Missouri. In fact, Missouri used the Barney or Baltimore work and expended considerable effort to discredit Morris and his work.

In Nebraska, being greater in size, the issue of managing the lodges and keeping the work "pure" was a much bigger problem than even in the smaller Eastern states. It was a well-known issue that the deputy grand custodians were not visiting their lodges and that work in the state was poor and inconsistent at best. Moreover, our first Grand Master, M. :. W. :. Bro. :. Robert Jordan, was raised in Ohio and therefore would have been most conversant with the Ohio work at that time.

During M. :. W. :. Bro. :. Jordan's first term as Grand Master of the newly chartered Grand Lodge of Nebraska, his address pointed out specifically the non-uniformity of work and the desire to adopt some form of the work for all lodges in the territory that was in keeping with the generally accepted work being used in the majority of the rest of the country at that time.

It is recorded that M. :. W. :. Bro. :. Jordan exemplified the work that should be adopted by Nebraska and recommended adopting Cornelius Moore's *Craftsman* as the standard work. The Grand Lecturer was charged with disseminating this work to the lodges in Nebraska as soon as possible to assure adoption of this work.

This is the last mention in any documentation of the Moore work and it is likely that due to a variety of challenges and the new Conservator movement that the work was never truly adopted by Nebraska lodges.

As Masonry moved forward in Nebraska from 1858, there were numerous attempts to adopt a standardized work including the recommendations of the Baltimore Conference of 1843, which also floundered. By 1863, it was agreed that the Webb-Preston work should be adopted by the Grand Lodge as the standard ritual. But, whose version of the Webb-Preston work should be adopted; the work used by Vermont and other New England states that had access to direct students of Webb, or the version of work promoted by Morris and the Conservator movement?

Several prominent Nebraska Masons, along with several Grand Lodge officers, had joined the Conservator movement and had even attended the national school of instruction given by Bro. :. Morris in 1860, and were pushing for the wholesale adoption of the Morris work.

## **List of Nebraska Conservators**

### **BROWN(S)VILLE:**

Furnas, Robt. W., Gr.Sec.10:881

### **NEBRASKA CITY:**

Redfield, S., G. Sr. W. 1:12

Gillette, Lee P., Gr. Lec., 6:334

Brown, Henry, P. D. G. M. 3:342

Hill, Wm. E. 3:888

### **OMADI:**

Wilkinson, G. W., G. J. D.

Hallack, J.H

### **OMAHA CITY:**

Armstrong, Geo., G.M.

### **PLATTSMOUTH:**

Wheeler, D.H., G.Sr. W. 1:1160

Duke, E.T., 3:1161

Marshall, Jno. W. 6:1162

The Grand Lodge of Nebraska set up a committee to study the work performed in Nebraska and other states to make a recommendation of which work should be adopted as the standard work of Nebraska. As could be expected, there were disagreements about the legitimacy of the Morris work vs. the Webb-Preston work and the Nebraska members of the Conservators worked hard to convince the Craft that the Morris work was pure and loyal to the actual Webb-Preston work. In fact, the committee assured the Grand Lodge that the Morris work was “substantially the same as the Preston” work. With this assurance on their part, over disagreements, Nebraska adopted the Webb-Preston work as influenced by the Morris work by 1874. Although it was recognized that the work adopted was most likely a blend of the true Webb-Preston work and the Morris work, it was considered to be uniform enough with other jurisdictions and the 18-year quest for a standard ritual was finally at an end.

## **Conclusion**

The quest for the “original and true” work has been going on since the beginning of Masonry. It was sufficiently complex that Preston spent considerable time collecting and documenting the rituals in use in England and Scotland in an attempt to find common ground. His work resulted in a popular set of lectures but even those changed over the years.

Masonry’s transplantation to America brought even more change to the ritual through rapid expansion of lodges, poor or non-existent quality control of the ritual and various attempts to create a standard version of existing work.

But what about Nebraska? From whence did our work come?

Tracing the path of Nebraska work results in a picture like this:

1. Preston created a popular set of lectures and ritual in England.
2. The Preston work was then modified (shortened and rearranged) by Webb in the U.S.
3. There were a number of other non-Preston works available in the U.S. that were in use in different jurisdictions and likely spread west with the expansion of the country.
4. Rob Morris created his own version of the Preston-Webb work and attempted to get it adopted by all jurisdictions through the Conservator organization.
5. After several tries, Nebraska adopted a version of work that was allegedly the “true” Preston-Webb but admitted that some of the work was mixed with the Morris work.
6. Changes have been made to the lectures and the ritual since the final adoption in 1874 to the present day.

# Notes on the Book

## *“The Masonic Conservators”*

by M.:W.:Bro.: Ray V. Denslow

In June 1860, prominent Freemasons around the country noted for their official position or ritualistic ability received a letter marked “Masonically confidential” announcing a new association forming with the intent to disseminate the ancient and genuine lectures as arranged by William Preston and Thomas Smith Webb.

It came from M.:W.:Bro.: Rob Morris, noted Masonic poet, author, lecturer and founder of the Order of Eastern Star. In it, Morris praised the recipient, requested he keep the letter confidential and asked him to return the letter in 10 days with his signature indicating he wanted to participate. In return, Morris sent another letter explaining the features of his plan, which was called the Conservator Movement, leading to uniformity of Masonic work across the U.S.

Morris spent years searching for and claimed he found the “genuine Old Work” of Freemasonry, which was called the Preston-Webb work.

About 3,000 Masons from every jurisdiction became Conservators during its five-year existence.

His plan included:

- Starting schools of instruction in every lodge.
- Instructing Masons in the work.
- Strengthening the ties that bind Masons together by adding Conservators of the Work.
- Detecting and exposing imposters.
- Encouraging mutual acquaintance, conference, counsel and sympathy among Conservators.
- Opening the way for a more intimate communion between the Masons of Europe and America.

One Conservator would be made in each lodge who could appoint two deputies. The Chief Conservator (Morris) had general control and management of the Association.

“In those states where the Grand Lodges have established systems of lectures more or less differing from Webb’s, the Association will endeavor to effect its great and important objects by instructing one or more intelligent Masons in every lodge, as above mentioned, and then bringing the influences of truth, consistency, and uniformity to bear upon the Grand Lodge themselves. And no measure will at any time be adopted which is opposed to that filial affection and duty which are due the Grand Lodge, or which is contrary to its Constitutional Regulations, and the landmarks of Masonry.”

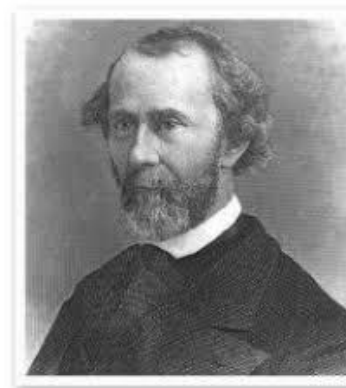
The enclosed questionnaire asked:

- If the plan struck him favorably.
- If he wanted more details about the plan.
- If he would join in the “enterprise.”
- If he would treat “sacredly confidential” documents sent to him.

Morris asked the recipient, as a man of honor, to keep his communication confidential. Conservators used a sprig of evergreen to identify themselves as part of the Association. Their letters frequently ended with, “yours in the sacred sprig.”

The plan included:

- A few discreet, zealous and intelligent Masons would hold the plan. Strictest secrecy would be observed so that the Craft at large would know nothing of the Association.
- National harmony in the work was the goal. Conservators were expected to persuade others about the work Morris proposed.



*Rob Morris*

- This work would be presented at every Grand Lodge's annual communication.

Conservators also received a newsletter. Eventually, the newsletter caught the attention of non-members and Grand Lodges, which created concern about brothers who belong to the Association. Each Conservator paid a \$10 membership fee, with the total equivalent to \$911,000 in 2018 dollars, but some fees were never collected and the outbreak of the Civil War meant Southern brothers paid in worthless Confederate dollars. Denslow, the author, stated he did not believe Morris personally profited from this endeavor.

He devised a cipher called "Mnemonics" using a jumble of figures and letters arranged in 18 columns and 25 rows. To read it, a "spelling book" and instructions were necessary.

To accomplish his goals, Morris set a five-year time limit at which time the Association would be dissolved.

He attacked a previous attempt at uniformity of work that arose after the Baltimore Convention of 1843, which resulted in the "Baltimore Work" and a monitor.

Also, every state had approved the work its lodges used, which they called the "only true work." Itinerant lecturers traveled to lodges to teach the work taught to them. However, each lecturer made changes appealing to them, so the work in each state was different.

Complicating the situation was the anti-Masonic movement from 1826-1836, which broke down three-fourths of all U.S. lodges. No work was performed for 10 years or more, and most Masons forgot the ritual work and had few resources to learn it. Some had notes, but few held the complete course of work.

In 1848, Morris began conferring with elderly Masons about the original words. He discovered that while no two Masons agreed on every point, they agreed as a whole. This became the basis of his Preston-Webb work.

Much of the objection to the Conservators was because of the Mnemonics cipher. Morris used "Moral Philosophy" for the Entered Apprentice Degree, "Science" for the Fellow Craft Degree, and "Religion for the Master Mason Degree." Nothing in the book appeared related to Masonry.

The Grand Lodge of New Hampshire claimed the book was inaccurate and asked Samuel Willson, Grand Lecturer of Vermont, for his knowledge on Morris' work. He replied that Morris visited him in 1857, and supplied him with a cipher that Morris copied. Willson later discovered it had as many as 50 omissions and other mistakes he, himself, made in copying the cipher. In addition, Morris made more mistakes and misread many passages. In fact, he said, Morris never could read it all. He said Morris based Mnemonics on the copying of his inaccurate cipher.

In his newsletter, Morris listed states that had adopted his Webb-Preston work: Kentucky, Iowa (June 1861), Nebraska (June 1861), Indiana (May 1861), North Carolina (November 1860), Michigan (January 1861), Alabama, and others.

At the same time, he noted that brothers who found out they were not invited to join his group began voicing their disapproval of the Association. They said the Conservators' efforts should have started from the Grand Lodges, and that Morris was scheming for his personal benefit. Morris replied that his nearly 12 years of labor on the project were practically unrewarded. All he gained was a poor living for his family, premature aging, ill health and debts. Also, receipts from Conservators didn't equal his expenditures.

Nevertheless, criticism mounted starting in 1862:

- **Kentucky** appointed a committee to investigate the Conservators and recommended the Grand Lodge act to banish the organization.
- In **Maine**, the Grand Master spoke against anyone selling books (referring to Morris' books) "at a large price."
- At the **Michigan** annual communication in 1863, the Grand Lodge did not agree with the Grand Master's admiration for "this new and improved work." It passed a resolution that prohibited encouraging, promoting or permitting the delivery or teaching any Masonic lectures or work not sanctioned and authorized by the Grand Lodge.
- **In May of that year, the Grand Secretary of Illinois appeared before the Grand Lodge of Missouri and spoke to the character of efforts of Conservator Masonry. After hearing him out, a special committee offered the "renunciation oath," which was adopted unanimously. It required the brother to declare he had never belonged to the Conservators' Association and denounced the system and all connected with it. (Editor – This led Nebraska Masons stationed in Missouri during the Civil War to request of the Grand Lodge of Nebraska the**

*creation of Monitor Lodge, a traveling lodge, because some of the soldiers were Conservators. They attended local lodges but were confronted to take the oath, which they would not do.)* **The oath was deemed too drastic and the next year it was softened. Missouri's Grand Secretary sent circulars to lodges describing the change. One instance was noted in 1865 when a District Deputy Grand Master prohibited brethren in Nebraska City (which was chartered by Missouri) from visiting lodges where they performed Conservator work. The Nebraska Territory Masons liked Morris' Webb-Preston work better because it was shorter. The oath was repealed in 1868 after Morris gave up the Conservator Association in 1865.**

- **Colorado** strongly condemned the Conservators.
- The **Kansas** Grand Master called the work of the Conservators "dangerous innovations, productive already of much discord and bad feeling, and calculated...if not discountenanced, to do irreparable injury to the fraternity."
- The Grand Lodge of **Maryland** adopted resolutions terming the Conservators an unauthorized organization and called its members clandestine, and the use of Mnemonics was a shameful departure from Masonic propriety and a violation of obligations.
- **Minnesota** called the Conservators movement un-Masonic and hurtful, and that neither Morris' benevolence, patriotism, misfortunes nor his poverty were an excuse for his actions.
- After the Grand Master of **New Jersey** saw the Webb-Preston work performed, he forbid his officers to allow the work in lodges. "I have always considered the system a dangerous one to the fraternity. It is not right that one man, however good he may be, should be entrusted with the control of thousands of his fellows."
- The Grand Master in **Ohio** reminded brethren that legislation prohibited the introduction of new ritual "systems."
- In **Oregon**, the Conservator movement was condemned in resolutions, and brothers were warned that Conservators there were subject to discipline for any that did not withdraw their membership.
- **Vermont** passed a resolution directing Masters to permit no brother to lecture in their lodge, or sell or dispose of any ritual not sanctioned by the Grand Lecturer.
- A bitter fight in **Iowa** saw the Grand Lodge discountenance and disapprove of the Conservator Association of which the Grand Master was a devoted Conservator.
- **New York** passed a resolution stating the printing and publication of any ritual was a "shameful departure from Masonic propriety and a violation of Masonic obligation" and was condemned.

Morris and his Conservators responded for the cause of uniformity and authenticity. In his newsletter, Morris wrote that the Conservators would abide by the authority of their Grand Lodge and would perform the accepted work of their jurisdiction. But, they also would continue learning the true work, make friends for it while pointing out defects of the other, and never cease attempting to have it adopted.

He professed the right of all to join any association, to take any degrees they pleased and that each Mason was the only judge of the propriety of doing so.

Morris called the assails of Grand Lodges unjust, un-Masonic and diabolical "merely because we do not choose to take into our Association certain classes of men who are crowding and disgracing our lodges."

True to his promise, Morris dissolved his Association in June 1865, five years after it started.

His farewell to the Association appeared in its official magazine (Voice of Masonry, Vol. III). He expressed his pleasure about the progress made, and the "harmonious combination of 3,000 Masons" in the face of opposition.

Morris alluded to William Preston's success in gaining acceptance of his ritual by organizing a society outside the Grand Lodge's control to distribute his work. Thomas Smith Webb also successfully issued a monitor corresponding with Preston's work, which was provided outside of Grand Lodge authority, he said.

Among the 3,000 Conservators were 28 Grand Masters and Past Grand Masters, many Grand Secretaries and other dignitaries bent on restoring the ancient rituals.

Meanwhile, other office holders armed with information from illegitimate sources denounced the Association in un-Masonic, un-Christian language.

He continued, “No man of sensitiveness who joins the Masonic order expects to be called a liar, a villain, and a thief, and it is not strange when such language is employed by those elevated to high places that he should turn away wounded, insulted, silent and disgusted.”

Morris listed the Association’s accomplishments:

- The public was then aware of a surviving old system of rituals.
- The Conservators movement drove several other works “that had so long disgraced the fraternity.”
- The movement exposed “what unsuspected and most dangerous powers” lie with Grand Secretaries.
- The next group that attempts to restore the purity of rituals will have an easier task thanks to the Conservators because they showed that the conscience and heart of the Craft is sound.
- The movement resulted in establishing a national uniformity of work to a degree 10 times greater than previously experienced.

In his parting paragraph Morris asked his friends to not allow any man to vilify his Masonic reputation, and to let the animosities of the past be forgotten.

Proving that 3,000 distinguished Masons wielded some influence, the ritual of several states today closely follow Morris’ Mnemonics. But, the Conservators were doomed by brothers who had spent many hours learning other work who would not permit changes to the ritual.

The Civil War likely prevented the dispute between the Conservators and others from becoming even more bitter.

Also, some jealousy could be expected among those not selected to join the Association, especially when they were Grand Secretaries, Past Grand Masters and lecturers.

In the concluding chapter of the book, Denslow said, “We cannot believe the Association guilty of any ulterior motive. Morris was a refined, tender-hearted individual who had spent most of his life in Masonic fields; he was undoubtedly the best posted Freemason of his time; he had widely traveled, and had an excellent reputation as a lecturer and teacher.”

He died a poor man, which speaks to the charge that he profited by his Masonic activities. “Labor such as Morris gave necessitated payment; our fraternity insists upon the doctrine of reward for the laborer. Why condemn Morris?”

*(For more information about Nebraska’s Monitor Lodge and ritual during the Civil War, see Endnote v.)*

**Francis E. White**  
**Secretary Emeritus**  
**Grand Lodge, A.:F.: & A.:M.: of Nebraska**

Francis E. White, the author of this 1932 history of Nebraska's ritual, was born in Yorkshire, England in 1848. Seven years later his parents emigrated to the U.S., and in 1857 moved to Plattsmouth, Nebraska Territory.

A successful grain dealer, he was appointed Nebraska's U.S. Marshal by President Grover Cleveland. White also was elected to the Nebraska State House of Representatives in 1887, 1889 and 1891.

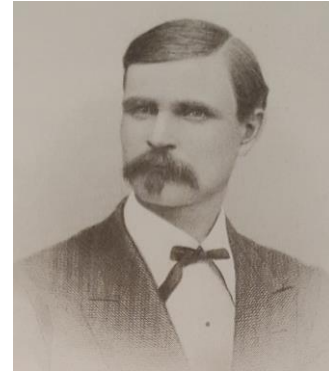
White was raised a Master Mason in Plattsmouth Lodge No. 6 in May 1869, and served as Master from 1873 to 1879.

At the same time, White served as: Grand Secretary of Grand Lodge (1899-1925), Secretary of The Nebraska Masonic Home, Grand Secretary of the Royal Arch Masons, Grand Recorder of the Knights Templar of Nebraska, Grand Recorder of the Royal and Select Masons, and Secretary of the Nebraska Veteran Freemasons.

Today, he is especially remembered by Nebraska Masons for his generosity in selling his Plattsmouth home in 1903 at a significantly reduced price, which became the first Nebraska Masonic Home. He offered his house to the trustees at "whatever price they wanted." A payment of \$5,000 was settled on (equivalent to \$143,000 in 2018), an amount estimated to be one-third the home's actual value.

In 1926, he moved to Hollywood, California, where he died in 1945 at age 97. At the time, Grand Secretary Lewis Smith honored White by stating, "His influence will be felt by Brothers yet unborn." \*

\* *The Nebraska Masonic Home 1903-2003* by John E. Carter, page 15 (2002).



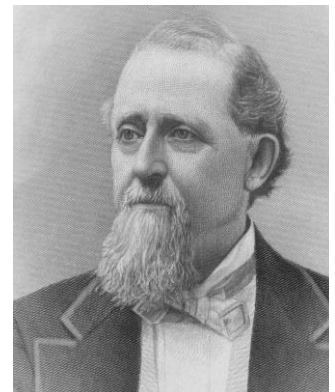
**W.Bro.**  
**Francis E. White**  
**Gr. Secretary Emeritus**

## OUR RITUAL

**by Francis E. White**  
**Grand Secretary Emeritus**  
**(June 1869-June 1925)**  
**Grand Lodge of Nebraska**

At the first annual communication of the Grand Ledge of Nebraska, which was held at Nebraska City, beginning June 2d, 1858, Grand Master Robert C. Jordan in his address<sup>1</sup>, among other things, presented two subjects as being among those claiming the attention of the different grand lodges in the United States: one, uniformity of work; and the other non-affiliated members. On the former subject he said that "the members of the fraternity in our jurisdiction hail from nearly every state in the Union, and unfortunately there exist(s) some important variations in the work."

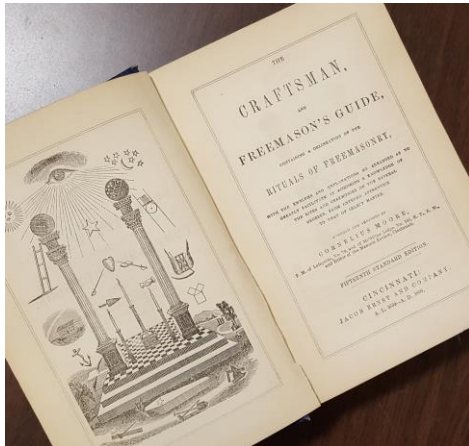
He added: "A uniform system of work is one of the most desirable objects to be attained and, in our present juvenile state, I imagine it can be accomplished." He recommended an exhibit of the work of all the lodges to be made at the session, and the merits of the work examined, corrections made, and a uniform mode adopted and made obligatory on all lodges then in existence and for all future lodges created. The subject was submitted to a select committee of three. Later on, the record reads: "The Grand Master instructed in the third degree." (*Editor – No mention is made of*



**Past Grand Master**  
**Robert C. Jordan**



the first and second degrees.) Continuing in the record, on the next page we find the report<sup>ii</sup> of the select committee on the subject of uniformity of work:



***Cornelius Moore's Craftsman.***

“That they have had the subject under consideration, and would recommend that the manner of conferring the first three degrees, which our M.: W.: Grand Master has so fully illustrated in our presence, be accepted and introduced throughout the subordinate lodges of Nebraska by the Grand Lecturer as soon as practicable; and would furthermore recommend the speedy introduction, adoption, and using of Cornelius Moore's Craftsman throughout the lodges.”

The report of the committee is signed by H.N. Cornell, J.H. Maxon, and C.D. Keller. The question naturally arises: Did the Grand Master instruct in the other degrees? Also, what work did he have? As he came from Ohio, and was Master of Aurora Lodge No. 48 at Portsmouth in 1849-50, it is fair to assume that he had the work used in the lodge over which he had presided. As no mention is made of anyone else giving instruction, it is fair also to assume that all of the work was such as was given by M.: W.: Robert C. Jordan.

Mention is made in the report above quoted of the Cornelius Moore's Craftsman; but as it is not referred to again in the Proceedings, it probably did not come into general use in the Grand Jurisdiction.

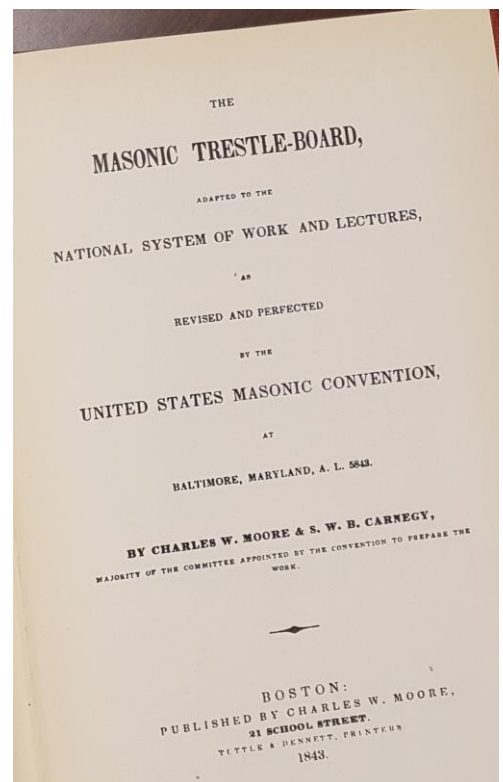
George Armstrong was appointed Grand Lecturer at this session.

In 1859, the only mention we find relating to the ritual is the following resolution<sup>iii</sup> offered by Robert W. Furnas, Grand Secretary:

“Resolved, That the representatives here assembled are hereby empowered and authorized to enforce, in their respective lodges, the work as by this Grand Lodge adopted.”

George Armstrong was re-appointed Grand Lecturer at the session.

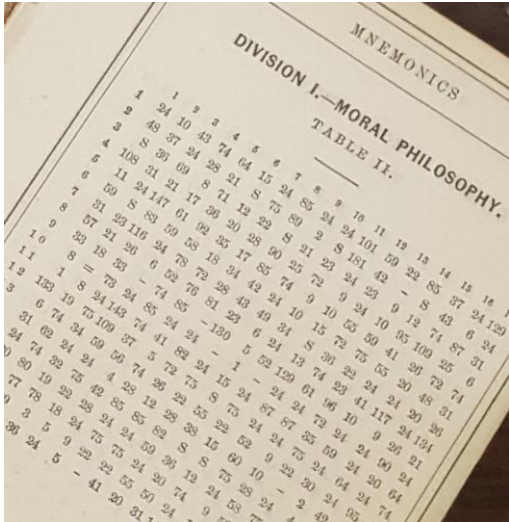
It seems that at the time our Grand Lodge was organized there may have been many attempts at uniformity of work; that was natural. But two of these seem to have been considered in Nebraska. The first one we will note may be termed (*as taken from a report<sup>iv</sup> made by Robert W. Furnas, O.H. Irish, and John G. Gosse, committee*) as “an attempt to revive an exploded system ‘The Baltimore Work of 1843.’” The report goes on to say that the attempt seems to be confined for the present to Illinois and Missouri. Of the Baltimore work, the committee stated that it had been arranged in 1843 by a committee, none of whom could afterward agree as to what it was, and that no one would now claim that “there is a ghost of a chance for the ‘Baltimore Work’ ever to become the work of this country.” This subject is referred to indirectly in a letter<sup>v</sup> from Lee P. Gillette and G.W. Wilkinson in petitioning for what was later to become Monitor Lodge U.D. (*First Regiment, Nebraska Volunteers*), with the United States Army in the Civil War. The letter is dated, July 13th, 1863, and says among other things: “They have also ‘come down’ on Rob Morris and the ‘work’ as taught by him.’ We, with “brethren from Iowa, have refused to sit in Missouri lodges for reasons given.” And the petition gives as one of the reasons: “The Grand Lodge of Missouri has passed resolutions requiring all who visit their lodges to take an extra oath, which in our opinion does not in the least appertain to Masonry.” The oath referred to, as we understand it, related to the kind of work taught by or to be taught in the Grand Jurisdictions from which the visitor came. We again quote from the report of the special committee on work, headed by Brother Furnas in



***The ‘Baltimore Work’ of 1843.***

1864, in regard to the ritual: "It would seem, by the wild and reckless legislation in Missouri, that the Conservators are undermining all that is holy in the Masonic institution." Our work, as will be shown later, came at least partly from the Conservators. There is ample proof that some of the brethren who were actively engaged in the building up of Freemasonry in Nebraska were members of the Conservators. A brief statement of the Conservators follows:

Robert Morris, perhaps with others, founded an association to keep the work of the three degrees of Ancient Craft Masonry pure, and it is reasonably certain that the members solemnly pledged themselves to teach only the



***Mnemonics cipher by Rob Morris.***

work that was called the Webb-Preston work. Presumably Brother Morris prepared and furnished to the members a system of letters and figures whereby the work as prepared would be known only to those who had received instruction. This was called MNEMONICS. In addition, there was a separate book known as the Vocabulary.

That the Nebraska work was largely the Morris MNEMONICS, the following seems to indicate:

- 1st. Brother Wilkinson in a letter to Grand Master Wheeler dated September 5th, 1863 (*in connection with the affairs of Monitor Lodge, U.D.*), asks him to send a Vocabulary, as he is at a loss for a few words -- says he has a "Blue Book." The "Blue Book" was the MNEMONICS, and the Vocabulary a separate one.
- 2d. Grand Master Wheeler in his address<sup>vi</sup> in 1864 speaks very highly of the Conservators, saying that their purpose was said to be the introduction of the ancient Webb-Preston work, and that the Grand Lodge had twice formally and solemnly affirmed its faith in that work as the only ritual extant which corresponded with that used by our Masonic fathers.
- 3d. Brother Furnas as chairman of the committee to report on the Webb-Preston work speaks very highly of it and its popularity, saying, "If the Conservators, as they claim, teach the Webb-Preston work (*as is most likely from the admitted facts that [P. C.] Tucker was one of the founders and Morris its chief*), that only proves the popularity of the work."
- And 4th, again quoting from the report of Brother Furnas's committee:
  - "These three periods in the history of our rituals, then, are clearly defined, viz.:
  - 1st. Their preparation by William Preston.
  - 2d. Their reception by Thomas Smith Webb.
  - 3d. Their communication to John Barney."

Now to explain how this Grand Lodge and many of its members received the work. In 1857, Bro.: Morris, then a Grand Officer of Kentucky, and a most laborious investigator into Masonic history, acquired these rituals in person at Vergennes, Vermont, from Bros.: Samuel Willson and P.C. Tucker. To this we have not only Bro.: Morris' own testimony, but the published testimony of Bros.: Willson and Tucker, placing the matter beyond dispute.

In the summer of 1860, Bro.: Morris held a national school of instruction at Cleveland, Ohio, very numerously attended from all sections of the Union. This was the last in a series of ten sessions held by him in different parts of the United States at which many thousands of Brethren heard the lectures and witnessed the rehearsals. At Cleveland, three of our Nebraska Brethren were present, viz.: Bro.: S. Redfield, Grand Warden; Bro.: L. P. Gillette, Grand Lecturer; and Bro.: F. Pearman, now deceased. These Brothers acquired the work, according to Bro.: Morris' certificates, with literal accuracy, and brought it here where we have since acquired it.

Our present Grand Master, Bro.: D.H. Wheeler, informs us that he recently called upon Bro.: Morris in New York, where his own belief in these facts was amply confirmed, and there are many of us in Nebraska who have heard through other witnesses the same testimony to the correctness of our work. The above is sufficient proof that:

- (a) The original work as taught by Grand Master Robert C. Jordan and others up to the year 1860 was not what was known as the Webb-Preston work; and
- (b) That after the summer of 1860, the Webb-Preston work was the only work authorized by the Grand Lodge.

It might be well to give a little information as to the brethren interested in the ritual up to and at the time when the brethren received the work at the national school of instruction in 1860.

- M.: W.: Robert C. Jordan, Grand Master -- the first. Elected at the organization of the Grand Lodge in 1857, again in 1858, and again in 1859. Master of Capitol Lodge No. 3, Omaha.
- Brother Addison R. Gillmore, a member of Nebraska Lodge No.1, then located at Bellevue, afterward affiliated with Capitol Lodge No. 3. He speaks very highly of Grand Master Jordan's work, saying: "It is appropriate for me to allude to the invaluable services of our Past G.: M.: Robert C. Jordan, in his unceasing labor and zeal in establishing and maintaining a system of work in truthful harmony with 'the Ancient Landmarks of the Order into Capitol Lodge, No. 3.'"
- Lathrop B. Kinney, Master of Nebraska Lodge No. 184 (*later No.1*) at the time the Grand Lodge was organized and served as the first Grand Junior Warden. Brother Kinney assisted in conferring the first Entered Apprentice degree by a lodge of Nebraska Freemasons. The degree was conferred on Peter A. Sarpy in the hall of Bluff City Lodge No. 71, of Council Bluffs, Iowa, Jan. 5th, 1856.
- David Lindley, Master of Western Star Lodge No. 2 of Nebraska City, at the formation of the Grand Lodge, and the first Grand Senior Warden.
- Lee P. Gillette, member of Western Star Lodge No. 2, Nebraska City, and Grand Lecturer in 1859 (*the second one*).
- George Armstrong, Master of Capitol Lodge No. 3, at the time of the organization of the Grand Lodge, and the first Grand Secretary and Grand Lecturer; also the second Grand Master. (*1860*)
- Robert W. Furnas, first Master of Nemaha Valley Lodge No. 4, Brownville. Grand Secretary 1859, 1860, and 1861. Grand Master 1866-1867. Chairman of a special committee to report on the ritual (*work*) in 1864. The report begins on page 365 of Volume 1 of our Proceedings, and should be read by everyone interested in the ritual, especially the Grand Custodian and his assistants.
- Mahlon G. Wilkinson, Master of Omadi Lodge No.5, Dakota City, in 1858, and probably while the lodge was under dispensation. Elected Grand Junior Warden in 1858.
- George W. Wilkinson, of the same lodge, Grand Junior Warden pro-tem in 1859. Brother G. W. Wilkinson was with the first Regiment Nebraska Infantry United States Volunteers, and when Brother Gillette was absent from the regiment on duty Brother Wilkinson says, "all the care of the Lodge (*Monitor, U.D.*) falls on me."
- Daniel H. Wheeler, of Plattsmouth Lodge No. 6, Plattsmouth, Grand Master in 1863-1864.

It seems safe to say that of these brethren, Brothers Jordan, Armstrong, Gillmore, Kinney, and Mahlon G. Wilkinson may not have been members of the Conservators as the record does not seem to mention that organization until 1869 when the three Nebraska Brethren were present at the national school of instruction held by Brother Morris in 1860, as noted before. There is ample proof that the following brethren did belong to the Conservators:

- From Western Star Lodge No. 2, Brother Sylvester Redfield, Grand Senior Warden pro-tem 1860, and Grand Lecturer 1862, was one of the three brethren to attend the Cleveland meeting in 1860. Also from the same lodge Brother Lee P. Gillette, Grand Lecturer for many years, attended the national meeting above referred to.
- From Brownville Lodge No. 4, Brother Robert W. Furnas.



**Past Grand Master  
Robert W. Furnas  
(1865-1866, and  
Nebraska Governor  
(1873-1875).**

- From Omadi Lodge No. 5, Brother George W. Wilkinson.
- From Plattsmouth Lodge No. 6, Brother Daniel H. Wheeler. In his address as Grand Master, he speaks very highly of the Conservators, and his visit to Brother Morris in New York is mentioned in Brother Furnas' report, as above noted. There is proof in the archives of the Grand Lodge that he was a member of the Conservators.<sup>vii</sup>

The six lodges named so far in this article were all located on the west bank of the Missouri River, and the only means of transportation, aside from horses, mules, and cattle, was the steamboat. So far as the record goes, it shows that all the active members of the Fraternity were working together in perfect harmony for uniformity of work, and there is no evidence that at any time was any other work considered except what is known as the Webb-Preston work.

There are interesting articles in Gould's History of Freemasonry, in Mackey's History of Freemasonry and in his encyclopedia<sup>viii</sup>, about The Conservators, the "Webb-Preston" work, and about William Preston and Thomas Smith Webb. The articles are too long to copy, and too important to condense. Some of them are not entirely favorable to the subjects named.

Of Preston's work, Brother Furnas says: (*Vol. 1, page 365*) "Our own opinion (*gathered from all the Masonic history we can find*) is that he originated very little, but pieced together the fragments that had come to his hand, and perhaps supplied a few missing links. At all events, his work was generally adopted, and in 1813 it is known that all the British lodges were working it." Of the Preston work as acquired by Thomas Smith Webb, he says (*idem*): "About the year 1795, Thomas Smith Webb, then a resident of Albany, N.Y., received the Preston work in its purity. There is ample reason for believing that he thus acquired it – all but the actual secret and unwritten portions, which are very brief – through notes in cryptic character."

The report of Brother Furnas, so often referred to, traces the Webb-Preston work direct from Preston to Webb, and so on. Many names are given of prominent Masons who were interested in obtaining and promulgating the Webb-Preston work. Some writers express the opinion that it should have been called the American Rite, and much credit is given to Webb for his work, both ritualistic and monitorial. Of him, Mackey says in part: "He was what Carson properly calls him, the ablest Masonic ritualist of his day -- the very prince of Masonic workmen." And of Preston he says in part: "It is however, as a distinguished teacher of the Masonic ritual, and as the founder of a system of lectures which still retain their influence that William Preston more especially claims our attention."

So far, what we have written have been a few facts taken from the printed record, with conclusions mostly drawn from these facts and what they and the circumstances connected with them seem to warrant. What follows will be more from the printed record.

In 1860, George Armstrong was elected Grand Master and Lee P. Gillette was appointed Grand Lecturer, and a little more interest seems to have been taken in the ritualistic work. Grand Master Armstrong in his address<sup>ix</sup> in June 1861, gives considerable space to the subject of the Work, part of which we copy:

"... Before closing, Brethren, I must urge upon your attention the great importance of securing a uniformity in the work of the several lodges...As the result of these investigations, I understand that the lectures and symbolic instructions as taught by Thomas Smith Webb, and known as the "Webb work," is accepted by most of the Masonic bodies of the United States...The facilities for traveling between our scattered lodges deprive us of the advantages which our eastern Brethren enjoy in attending Masonic schools of instruction. But much can be effected in the uniformity of work by receiving instruction only from those who are themselves proficient, and who are master workmen well skilled in drawing designs for the Craft to work by."

Do not overlook the fact that three of our brethren had attended the national school for instruction held by Brother Morris in 1860. The committee to which this portion of the address relating to work was referred said<sup>x</sup> in part:

"...that the committee deem uniformity of work of the first importance; and while the members of the Grand Lodge have not had sufficient opportunity



**Past Grand Master  
George Armstrong  
(1860-1862).**

to witness the exemplification of the work recommended by the M.:W.: Grand Master and taught by the Grand Lecturer to express fully its views in all particulars, yet considering the fact that the work has been adopted by most of the Grand Lodges of the United States, and for the purpose of securing some system of work, and recommend its adoption.”

The report of the committee was unanimously adopted. A resolution was also adopted empowering the representatives present to enforce in their respective lodges the work “as by this Lodge adopted.”

George Armstrong was re-elected Grand Master and Lee P. Gillette was re-appointed Grand Lecturer.

In 1862, Grand Master Armstrong, in his address<sup>xi</sup>, reported progress on uniformity of work, and said that in the absence of Grand Lecturer Gillette, on duty with the Nebraska regiment of volunteers, Brother Sylvester Redfield had acted in his stead, but that only two or three lodges had the benefit of his services “from the pecuniary inability of the Brethren and the lack of Grand Lodge funds for that purpose.”

Continuing, he said:

“The system of work which is now so generally recognized as the true and ancient work, and which was adopted at our last communication for the regulation of the Craft of this jurisdiction is strictly followed and adhered to in ‘Western Star,’ ‘Capitol,’ and ‘Plattsmouth’ lodges, and in several of the others some progress has been made in its elucidation. I trust that during the coming year still greater exertions will be made by the Brethren to acquire a perfect knowledge of our beautiful ritual. The more I see the ‘Webb Work’ exemplified – the more I learn of its history, and examine the unbroken chain by which it has descended to us from the early fathers through Webb, Gleason, Fowle, and Barney, to the venerable Wilson of Vermont, who still lives to supply the link between the present generation and the past – the more am I satisfied that it is the genuine American Craft Masonry, and commend your wisdom in adopting it.”

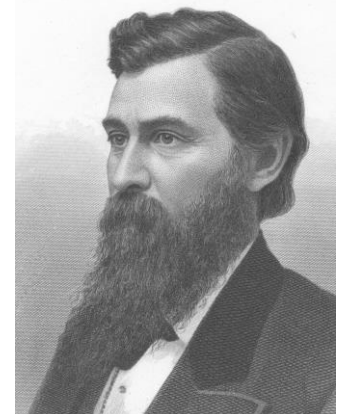
The Grand Master recommended the use of *The Freemason's Monitor* (Webb's) considering it the best book of its kind for the use of the lodges, and “perfectly agreeing in its phraseology with the esoteric instructions we are seeking to restore.” Being impressed with the importance of early securing uniformity of work in Nebraska, he hoped that every officer of the Grand Lodge and every representative of the subordinate lodges would use his best effort to that end. He said that the language, landmarks, symbols, and principles of Masonry are universal; that they were peculiar to no nation, and that the ritual by which they are explained and inculcated should also be universal. This part of the address was referred to a select committee of three, and they reported<sup>xii</sup> that they heartily concurred in the great importance attached to the subject by the Grand Master. They recommended the adoption of *The Freemason's Monitor, or Illustrations of Masonry* by Thomas Smith Webb as the textbook to be used by the lodges of the jurisdiction, and the report was adopted.

George Armstrong was re-elected Grand Master, Brother Gillette was elected Deputy Grand Master, and Brother Sylvester Redfield was appointed Grand Lecturer.

At the opening of the Grand Lodge in June 1863, the first six Grand Officers were absent, some of them on military duty, and the Grand Lodge was opened by M.:W.: Robert G. Jordan, Past Grand Master. No mention is made of the work in the address of the Grand Master. In fact, he stated that he did not have time to prepare an official communication to the Grand Lodge, and his duties connected with his position as an officer in the Second Nebraska cavalry made it impossible for him to attend. He mentioned as his only official act the issuing of a dispensation for a new lodge at Bannack City, Idaho Territory. During the session, Past Grand Master Jordan offered a resolution<sup>xiii</sup> in which it was stated that “this Grand Lodge with much pleasure reiterates the opinion expressed at the last annual communication in favor of what is termed the ‘Webb work,’ fully believing it to be the true and ancient work practiced by the Fraternity in America a century and more ago,” and requesting and ordering every lodge in the jurisdiction which had not already adopted the work to do so at its early convenience “not only for its antiquity and beauty, but that strict uniformity in the work of the several degrees may be one of the peculiarities of the Grand Lodge of Nebraska.”

Daniel Wheeler was elected Grand Master, and Elias C. Adams was appointed Grand Lecturer.

In 1864, Grand Master Wheeler gave considerable space in his address to ritualistic matters and, among other things, referred to the fact that four or five



**Past Grand Master  
Daniel Wheeler  
(1863-1864).**

Grand Masters of other grand lodges had spoken in a deprecating manner of the formation of a society styled “The Conservators,” whose purpose was said to be the introduction of the ancient “Webb-Preston work.” Continuing, he said:

“As this Grand Lodge has twice formally and solemnly affirmed its faith in that work as the only ritual extant which corresponds with that used by our Masonic fathers, it is unnecessary for me to allude to this subject further than to say that any measure proposing to extend and strengthen the establishment of that ritual deserves your favorable consideration.”

And, he questioned the right of any members to interfere with the right to combine into societies for a good purpose. On motion, this portion of the address was referred to a committee of five: Brothers Furnas, Goodlett, Irish, Adams, and Goss. Brothers Furnas, Irish, and Goss signed the report for the committee, and it was presented on the afternoon of the first day. As it is full and complete, and covers a little more than three pages of rather fine print, the work must have been done in advance; at least the collecting of the evidence must have taken much time and study. We have copied some of the report earlier, and will add the following:

“In the year 1859, Bro. : Elisha D. Cooke, who spent several years traveling and visiting British lodges, testified that the work in the old lodges of Scotland and Ireland was almost literally the same that is taught here under the name or term ‘Webb-Preston,’ and this is the same that has been adopted and re-affirmed by the Grand Lodge of Nebraska.”

The conclusions of the committee are as follows:

“Our conclusions, then, are these:

- 1st. That the work of Nebraska is that which Barney received from Webb in 1815; Webb from Preston about 1795; Preston from his predecessors about 1775;
- 2d, That no other work practiced in this country has a genealogy that will bear a moment's consideration, or claim the attention of a reflecting Mason;
- 3d, That nothing which has been elicited in the discussions of this subject has shaken our confidence in the work heretofore adopted by this Grand Lodge.”

The report of the committee above referred to, and what we have given heretofore, show that the only work that was considered or referred to by name was the Webb-Preston work, and the effort of the Grand Lodge was to enforce uniformity of work by adopting it and compelling lodges to learn and enforce it, both monitorial and ritualistic. Near the close of the session of 1866, a resolution was passed appointing a committee of five “with a view to the establishment of a uniformity of work for lodges of this jurisdiction, and report at the next meeting of this Grand Lodge.” The committee consisted of Brother George Armstrong as chairman, and Brothers D.H. Wheeler, G.S. Foglesong, G. W. Bratton, and W.E. Hill.

Robert W. Furnas was elected Grand Master, and George Armstrong was appointed Grand Lecturer.

In 1867, the committee just referred to reported<sup>xiv</sup> in nearly two pages of printed matter. Reference in it is made to the report of 1864, saying: “The report in question, while it sustained and reasserted the wisdom of the previous action of this Grand Lodge, your committee admit, exhibited unwarranted zeal in tracing the recognized ritual from the fountain head – Webb – down through more modern and less certain channels, and seemed to involve our Grand Lodge in the fruitless and ill-tempered controversies between the Morris Conservators on the one hand and the Baltimore Conventionists on the other. We do not think the Craft in Nebraska have any heart or sympathy in the partisan contentions of the latter-day fathers of Masonry.”

There is much more in the report worth reading, but nowhere does it change or modify any former action of the Grand Lodge in regard to the Webb-Preston work, and it closes by disclaiming any sympathy for or any participation in the contention, while declining to follow the example of other Grand Bodies in issuing anathemas against the adherents of one or the other system. The following resolution was included in the report:

“1st, Resolved, That the action of this Grand Lodge at its annual communication in the year 1861, by which the ritual known as the “Webb Work” was adopted for the direction of the Craft in this jurisdiction, is hereby re-affirmed, and it is enjoined upon the Masters of the several subordinate lodges to conform thereto.”

The report was carried over to the next annual communication, and a motion was made and adopted that a committee be appointed, of which the Grand Lecturer should be the chairman, to exemplify the work of this Grand



Lodge as reported by the committee on work the previous day, and the second day of the next session. Brother Armstrong, Grand Lecturer, and Brothers Foglesong, Hill, and Reed comprised the committee. Orsamus H. Irish was elected Grand Master, and Byron Reed was appointed Grand Lecturer. A resolution was offered requesting the Grand Lecturer to visit the lodges at least once each year for the purpose of giving instruction in the work. This was referred to the Committee on Ways and Means, which approved it, and offered an amendment to Section XVIII of the bylaws, requiring the visits, and providing for the payment by the Grand Lodge of a sum not to exceed \$100 per annum for his services, and five cents per mile for each mile traveled.

In 1868, William E. Hill of Nebraska City was appointed Grand Lecturer, and the following resolution was adopted:

“Resolved, That the Grand Lecturer be and he is hereby instructed to prepare himself, with suitable assistance, to exemplify the work of this Grand Jurisdiction before the Grand Lodge at its next session.”

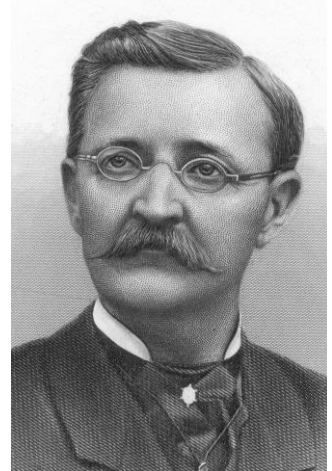
A similar resolution, passed the year before, did not produce results.

The period from 1857, the formation of the Grand Lodge, to 1868 seems to have been one of earnest endeavor to acquire the generally accepted work in use in the Grand Jurisdictions of the United States, and to enforce the use of it on all of the lodges then in existence.

The foregoing includes all reference to the work in Volume I of the Proceedings, as well as some of the most important items verbatim. What follows will not go so much into detail, as the so-called Webb-Preston work was firmly established, and efforts were made to enforce it in all lodges. In 1869, Harry P. Deuel, Deputy Grand Master, who had acted as Grand Master during the absence of Grand Master Irish, in his address<sup>xv</sup> urged procuring uniformity of work, saying that scarcely two lodges worked alike in the details. He suggested the adoption of the plan of having a Grand Lecturer and several assistants, “they receiving the work from him,” dividing the state into districts, and requiring each custodian to personally visit each lodge throughout his jurisdiction. During the session, an amendment<sup>xvi</sup> to the law was presented defining the duties of the Grand Lecturer; also another amendment requiring a certificate of proficiency from the Grand Lecturer before a dispensation for a new lodge could be granted. Both amendments were laid over until the next annual communication. They read very much like our present law (1932). The portion of the address of the Deputy Grand Master relating to work was referred to a committee of three, also the amendments to the law above referred to. An amendment<sup>xvii</sup> to Article 7 of the constitution was offered and sent down to the lodges for consideration, providing for the election of the Grand Lecturer and fixing the term of office at five years; also providing in case of a vacancy for the Grand Master to fill the same by appointment until the next session of the Grand Lodge. A resolution was adopted for the appointment of a committee of five to meet at a time and place to be designated by the chairman to compare and adjust the work and arrive at uniformity, and to remain in session from day to day until their work should be completed, the result to be presented at the next session, and the work exemplified before the Grand Lodge. The committee consisted of Brothers Wheeler, Furnas, Jordan, Hill, and Catlin. C. F. (Charles T.) Whitmore, was appointed Grand Lecturer.

In the report of the Committee on Foreign Correspondence under Minnesota<sup>xviii</sup> reference is made to the Webb-Preston work. Part of it reads like the report made to the Grand Lodge in 1864, of which Brother Furnas was chairman. The tracing of the history of what we know as the Webb-Preston work goes a little further than ours, and the conclusions reached are the same. Under Vermont,<sup>xix</sup> there is much on the same lines, only it is much longer. In this it is shown that the committee believes that the MNEMONICS of Brother Morris is a corruption of the Webb work, and that the work of Webb is contained in the original key in the possession of Past Grand Lecturer W. Samuel Willson, and the Vermont committee submitted a copy in cypher and said:

“We therefore commend to the careful consideration of the Grand Lodge the original Barney lectures as copied by the Assistant Grand Lecturer, believing, from all the examinations, comparisons made and proofs



**Past Grand Master  
Harry P. Deuel  
(1869-1870).**



submitted, that it is the original work as practiced in England and taught in this country by Thomas Smith Webb.”

The report consists of about six pages of fine print.

In 1870 Brother Wheeler, chairman of the committee appointed to exemplify the work reported the committee ready, but the record reads: “The hall being closed and oppressively hot, it was decided not to proceed with an exemplification.” The Committee on Work offered a report,<sup>xx</sup> which was adopted, dividing the state into five Masonic districts and providing for the appointment of a committee of five, with the Grand Lecturer, to be a Board of Custodians of the work. The resolution provided for the duties of the Board, terms, appointment, compensation, etc. The name, District Custodian, is given to the members of the Board, and the name Grand Lecturer retained, as heretofore. The following resolution was adopted:

“Resolved, That the thanks of this Grand Lodge are due, and are hereby tendered, to Bros : D. H. Wheeler, M. Dunham, R.W. Furnas, W.E. Hill, J.N. Wise, C.W. Lyman, C.T. Whitmore, and Grand Master H. P.

Deuel for their untiring and incessant labors the past week in perfecting the ‘Work’ of this jurisdiction.”

In the report<sup>xxi</sup> of the Committee on Foreign Correspondence for 1870, something good is printed under Arkansas and Minnesota about the Webb work, its history, etc. Both reports say of one brother who had received the work with Brother Webb, side by side, that the brother “could repeat the lectures on the three degrees as he and Brother Webb received them from Bro. : Eason, a thousand times, without the variation of a word.” Brother Eason came over from England to America as Provincial Grand Lecturer.

In the address of M. : W. : Harry P. Deuel, Grand Master (1871) he reported appointing Brother Charles F. Catlin Grand Lecturer to succeed Charles T. Whitmore who had left the jurisdiction. A resolution to have the work exemplified etc., at this session was “laid on the table.” A select committee on work reported<sup>xxii</sup> progress as a degree of proficiency had been attained considering the obstacles encountered: “Masons from the different states of the Union, each of whom have their own peculiar notions as to what the ‘Ancient Work’ is.” And the committee urged the representatives of the lodges to assist the Grand Lecturer and Custodians in teaching and promulgating the work. Brother Charles F. Whitmore, formerly Grand Lecturer, made a report<sup>xxiii</sup> of the work done by him during the time he served as Grand Lecturer, saying among other things: “I found all lodges anxious to have uniformity of work and willing to conform to the established work of Nebraska.” A full-page resolution relating to the work, calling for several new features in teaching promulgation, expenses, compensation, etc., was laid on the table, as was another one relating to filing a report of the expenses of the Grand Lecturer and the Custodians. The record reads: “The work of the Order, as adopted and taught by this jurisdiction, was exemplified,” after which the Grand Lodge was closed.

William E. Hill was Grand Master in 1872, and recommended in his address that two schools of instruction be held during the year. Brother Hill said that he had witnessed the exemplification of the work in one or more of the degrees in nearly all of the lodges, and that he had exemplified some of them himself; that many of the brethren have the work nearly correct, and that all that was necessary to make it uniform throughout the jurisdiction was to provide some well-arranged plan whereby they can have an opportunity of learning it in the two schools above recommended. The Grand Lecturer, George H. Thummel, and the four members of the Board of Custodians – Wheeler, Reed, Furnas, and Atkinson – approved.

Brother Thummel was appointed Grand Lecturer March 1st, 1872, by Grand Master Hill, and reappointed at the session in 1872.

In 1873, Grand Master Hill spoke very highly of the benefit from the school of instruction held by Grand Lecturer Thummel, assisted by Brothers Atkinson and Hill, and hoped they would be continued for he was more than ever convinced “that this is the best way to communicate the work and make it uniform.” The committee to which this portion of the Grand Master's address was referred made a report which was not printed, but which presumably recommended abandoning the system of custodians of the work, as later in the session a motion was made by Past Grand Master Furnas and adopted that the report be amended by striking out the portion relating to abandoning the present system, etc., and recommitting the report with instructions to amend it in accordance with these views. Two schools of instruction were ordered held during the coming year, the time and place to be designated by the Grand Master and Grand Lecturer.

William E. Hill, Past Grand Master, was appointed Grand Lecturer.

In 1874, Grand Lecturer Hill made a report, as did Custodians Wheeler, Atkinson, and Pinney. They show much work done in the way of schools of instruction at Omaha and Lincoln, with numerous visits to lodges, and expressed the opinion that many of the lodges can now confer the degrees closely approximating the correct work. P.G.M. Hill said: "It is true that if the Grand Lecturer or Custodians could and would visit all the lodges, and stay with each from three to six days, it would be far better than Schools of Instruction, but this cannot be done."

Past Grand Master Hill was reappointed Grand Lecturer.

With the close of the year Masonic 1874, it can be said that a system of promulgating the work as adopted was in force, and it has continued with but minor changes since that time. The years 1875 to 1880 inclusive show no effort to change the work, and it is very generally understood that no changes of importance have been offered or carried out since then. What the brethren were trying to get in the way of work from 1857 to 1875, and what they believed they were getting, was what is known or was then called the Webb-Preston work. Whether the work they did get was partly from Robert Morris' MNEMONICS and partly from other sources is not important. Their effort seems to have been all on the lines of getting a work that was in general use throughout the United States, and one that would be satisfactory and so acceptable to all of the brethren in our jurisdiction that it could and would be uniform throughout it, and this they accomplished after about eighteen years of patient and persistent labor.

When Past Grand Master Robert E. Furnas was appointed Grand Custodian to succeed Past Grand Master James A. Tulleys, deceased, Brother French asked that a committee examine him as to his proficiency in the work adopted and known as the Nebraska work. The committee consisted of Past Grand Masters Thummel, Mercer and Young, and the Grand Secretary. The mode of procedure adopted by the committee was to let Brother French recite the work, all except the monitorial part. If Brother French gave it as the four members of the committee had it, no interruption was made; if it did not agree, a stop was put on the recital and the difference considered and adjusted. Few changes were made in the work as recited by Brother French, and the few were of minor importance. At the conclusion of the recital, Brother French was given a certificate.

The work as taught by Brother French is well known to thousands of our members. At the meeting above referred to, Brother Thummel stated that he had learned the work through or with Past Grand Master William E. Hill, who had also been Grand Lecturer, Brother Thummel having served as Grand Master and Grand Lecturer also. Brother Mercer had served as Grand Master and was interested in the work, and later served as Assistant Grand Custodian. He stated that he had received his work from Lee P. Gillette, Grand Lecturer in the early days of the Grand Lodge. Brother Frank H. Young had served as Grand Master and was known as a ritualist, probably receiving the work from Past Grand Master Tulleys, Grand Custodian, as they were close friends. The Grand Secretary received what he had of the work from Past Grand Master Daniel H. Wheeler, who was at one time Custodian of the work in one of the districts. Trace out the names of Grand Masters and Grand Lecturers, and you will find they were all interested in the work, and working together for uniformity in the lodges of the jurisdiction.

As to the sources or the name of the work, Mackey, in his Encyclopedia,<sup>xxiv</sup> says in part about the Prestonian lectures, "In America they were generally altered by Webb and are no longer practiced there" (*in the United States*); and about rituals that "while the ceremonies or ritual have varied at different periods, and still vary in different countries, the science and philosophy, the symbolism and the religion of Freemasonry continue, and will continue to be the same wherever true Masonry is practiced."

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Francis E. White". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

**Francis E. White**

---

## Endnotes

<sup>i</sup> **1858 – Address of Grand Master Robert C. Jordan on uniformity of work.**

Of the different subjects at present claiming the attention of the different Grand Lodges of the United States, are uniformity of work and non-affiliated members; and a few words relative thereto cannot be inapplicable to our present circumstances. We are aware that the members of the fraternity in our jurisdiction hail from nearly every state in the Union, and unfortunately there exists some important variations in the work. A uniform system of work is one of the most desirable objects to be attained; and, in our present juvenile state, I imagine it can be accomplished. I propose that an exhibit of the work of all the lodges be made at this session, and a careful examination made into the merits of the work so exhibited, corrections made, and a uniform mode adopted, and made obligatory on all lodges now in existence, and all future lodges to adopt the same before permission is granted to assemble and confer degrees. By adopting this or some other judicious remedy, we may, and I trust will, avoid the difficulties the older Grand Lodges have had to encounter, and in some instances have abandoned without hope of securing a permanent and uniform system of lectures.

<sup>ii</sup> **1858 – Report of select committee on uniformity of work.**

*To the M.:W.: Grand Lodge of Nebraska:*

The select committee appointed by the Grand Master, make the following report: that they have had the subject under consideration, and would recommend that the manner of conferring the first three degrees which our M.:W.: Grand Master has so fully illustrated in our presence, be accepted and introduced throughout the subordinate Lodges of Nebraska by the Grand Lecturer, as soon as practicable; and would furthermore recommend the speedy introduction, adoption, and using of Cornelius Moore's Craftsman throughout the lodges.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

Committee:

H. N. Cornell

J. H. Maxon

C. D. Keller

<sup>iii</sup> **1859 – Robt. Furnas resolution on lodges enforcing the work.**

Bro.: Furnas offered the following resolution, which was adopted:

*Resolved,* That the representatives here assembled are hereby empowered and authorized to enforce, in their respective lodges, the work as by this Grand Lodge adopted.

<sup>iv</sup> **1864 – Committee report by Robert W. Furnas, O.H. Irish, and John G. Gosse.**

*To the M.:W.: Grand Lodge of Nebraska:*

The genealogy of what is called here "The Webb-Preston Work" has been thoroughly traced out, and in our opinion admits of as direct proof as it is possible for any esoteric system to do. No man who understands the peculiar structure of the Masonic arcana (*partly esoteric or concealed, and partly exoteric or public*) will expect the same directness of proof that is applicable to an ordinary subject. But all the evidence that under the circumstances could be asked for, can be given; we give it in a connected form and as much abbreviated as possible. For convenience the subject may be divided into four parts:

1st. *The lectures were arranged by Preston.* About the year 1775, William Preston, of London, applied himself to arrange the lectures into systematic form. It is impossible at this period to say *how much* of the *ritual* he supplied. Our own opinion (*gathered from all the Masonic history we can find*) is that he originated very little, but pieced together the fragments that had come to his hand, and perhaps supplied a few missing links. At all events, his work was generally adopted, and in 1813 it is known that all the British lodges were working it. We are informed that

---

Preston originated a society for the purpose of teaching and perpetuating his work. He (*Preston*) operated entirely outside of Grand Lodge influences.

In the year 1859, Bro.: Elisha D. Cooke, who spent several years traveling and visiting British lodges, testified that the work in the old lodges of Scotland and Ireland was almost literally the same that is taught here under the name or term “Webb-Preston,” and this is the same that has been adopted and re-affirmed by the Grand Lodge of Nebraska.

2d. *The Preston work was acquired by Thomas Smith Webb.* About the year 1795, Thomas Smith Webb, then a resident of Albany, N.Y., received the Preston work in its purity. There is ample reason for believing that he thus acquired it – all but the actual secret and unwritten portions, which are very brief – through notes in cryptic character, a method that has always been in use for transmitting such things from generation to generation, and which some twenty years later was officially endorsed by the Grand Lodge of Maryland, in the publication of “Cole’s Masonic Library.”

Webb began to promulgate this work first by the preparation of a Monitor, which conveyed all the exoteric portions, and suggested the remainder in a way that the instructed craftsman could well understand. Webb followed up this publication by preparing lecturers who should impart the esoteric or unwritten portions. Amongst these the best known were Gleason, Fowle, Snow, Barney, Cushman and Cross, each of whom had the work now called “Webb-Preston,” and communicated it orally to lodges and (*with the restrictions before named*) in cryptic character to their confidential friends. Webb himself gave but little time to instruction. He was immersed in business, in which he suffered great reverses. He was therefore compelled to confine his Masonic labors chiefly to correspondence and the instructing of lecturers.

3d. *The Webb-Preston Work was acquired by Barney.* About the year 1815 John Barney, a Vermont lecturer, went to Boston and acquired the work directly from Fowle (a deputy of Webb’s) and indirectly from Webb himself, who from day to day heard his recitations and pronounced them correct. The history of this matter has been carefully noted down, and is attested to by a still living witness, Bro.: Samuel Willson, Grand Lecturer of Vermont, and by one who died in 1861, Hon. P. C. Tucker, Grand Master of Vermont. The latter, in his addresses of 1859, 1860 and 1861, gives in great detail the entire transaction, and leaves upon record irrefragable testimony to the genealogy of the “Webb-Preston” rituals. As a part of this testimony, a set of cryptic notes, still preserved by Bro.: Willson, is alluded to, which were made in 1815, and do unquestionably reflect the teachings of Webb himself. With those notes *many* in this Grand Lodge are familiar, and can bear witness that they correspond almost exactly with the work now practiced in this Grand Lodge jurisdiction.

These three periods in the history of our rituals, then, are clearly defined, viz.:

1st. Their preparation by William Preston.

2d. Their reception by Thomas Smith Webb.

3d. Their communication to John Barney.

Now to explain how this Grand Lodge and many of its members received the work. In 1857, Bro.: Morris, then a Grand Officer of Kentucky, and a most laborious investigator into Masonic history, acquired these rituals in person at Vergennes, Vermont, from Bros.: Samuel Willson and P. C. Tucker. To this we have not only Bro.: Morris’ own testimony, but the published testimony of Bros.: Willson and Tucker, placing the matter beyond dispute.

In the summer of 1860, Bro.: Morris held a national school of instruction at Cleveland, Ohio, very numerously attended from all sections of the Union. This was the last in a series of ten sessions held by him in different parts of the United States, at which many thousands of Brethren heard the lectures and witnessed the rehearsals. At Cleveland three of our Nebraska Brethren were present, viz.: Bro.: S. Redfield, Grand Warden, Bro.: L. P. Gillette, Grand Lecturer, and Bro.: F. Pearman, now deceased. These Brothers acquired the work, according to Bro.: Morris’ certificates, with literal accuracy, and brought it here, where we have since acquired it.

Our present Grand Master, Bro.: D. H. Wheeler, informs us that he recently called upon Bro.: Morris in New York, where his own belief in these facts was amply confirmed, and there are many of us in Nebraska who have heard through other witnesses the same testimony to the correctness of our work.

---

In the Proceedings of various Grand Lodges we see much said in deprecation of a society call Conservators. It would seem, by the wild and reckless legislation of Missouri, that the Conservators are undermining all that is holy in the Masonic institution. How unfounded is this fear may be inferred from the fact that such a man as Philip C. Tucker was one of its founders, and that in its membership are numbered many thousand of the most noted names in our Order. We allude to the subject here because this matter of Webb-Preston rituals has been intentionally mixed up by some with the matter of Conservators, as if the two were inseparable – we do not view them as having any connection with each other. If the Conservators, as they claim, teach the Webb-Preston work (*as is most likely from the admitted facts that Tucker was one of its founders and Morris its chief*), that only proves the popularity of the work; but we, Nebraska Masons, ask no odds of Conservators, and care nothing for the reckless assertions of Anti-Conservators. We received our rituals upon different testimony from that, and we know the truth of that which we affirm. The only opposition the Webb-Preston work is meeting outside of the Conservator muddle grows out of an attempt to revive an exploded system styled “The Baltimore Work of 1843.” This attempt seems to be, at present, confined to Illinois and Michigan, and we apprehend it will go no farther. It is so feeble a subject in itself, and so far passed from the memory of the men of this generation, that we only need say concerning it, in a few words, that a convention at Baltimore in 1843 arranged a system of work in the space of eight days, then went home. After getting home no two of them agreed as to what they had done; a manual was published professedly reflecting the labor of those eight days; the president of the convention denounced the “book” a swindle. A few Grand Lodges professedly adopted the Baltimore work, but have long since dropped all that was “Baltimore” out of it, and the only tangible results of the convention are a bitter personal quarrel between the two leaders of the convention, and a handsome fortune acquired by the party who got up the manual in question. Certainly no sane man examining this subject will claim that there is a ghost of a chance for the “Baltimore work” ever to become the work of this country. In this *report* we have made free use of the writings of the following Brethren, viz.: Thomas R. Austin, Past Grand Master of Indiana; Francis Darrow, Past Grand Master of Michigan, who is exceedingly full and conclusive in his remarks; Thos. H. Benson, Jr., and Edward A. Guilbert, each Past Grand Master of Kentucky, whose exhaustive reviews of this theme cover hundreds of pages; J. A. Williams, of Kentucky, a most learned and elegant writer; P. C. Tucker, Grand Master of Vermont, whose untimely death in 1861 can never be too much deplored by those who value sound rituals; Elisha D. Cooke, of Kentucky; Samuel Willson, Grand Lecturer of Vermont, who got his work *orally* from Barney; John Sheville, of New Jersey, and many others.

Our conclusions, then, are these:

1st. That the work of Nebraska is that which Barney received from Webb, in 1815; Webb from Preston about 1795; Preston from his predecessors about 1775.

2d. That no other work practiced in this country has a genealogy that will bear a moment’s consideration, or claim the attention of a reflecting Mason.

3d. That nothing which has been elicited in the discussions of this subject has shaken our confidence in the work heretofore adopted by this Grand Lodge.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

Committee:

R. W. Furnas

O. H. Irish

J. Q. Goss

**<sup>v</sup> The following is from the book, “The Masonic Conservators” by M.:W.:Bro.: Ray V. Denslow and published by the Grand Lodge of Missouri which contains the letter and explains the concerns of Monitor Lodge in attending Missouri lodges.**

A means of identification between members of the Conservator movement was provided: “A Conservator, in addressing another one by letter should enclose a sprig of evergreen, which is one of the peculiar emblems of this order, referring to fidelity.” Considerable correspondence between Conservators bears the postscript “yours in the sacred sprig,” referring to the sprig of evergreen.

---

An example of this is to be found in the volume *Civil War and Masonry in Missouri* in the chapter describing the formation of Monitor (*Nebraska*) Military Lodge, a lodge made up largely of members of the Conservator Association, as the correspondence reveals, verified later by the publication of their name in official bulletins of the Association.

“In a conversation with Grand Secretary Lewis E. Smith of Nebraska, the writer was informed of the existence of a Nebraska military lodge, which, for several months, held its meetings in the hall of Masonic lodges in the State of Missouri. The story of this interesting lodge was first brought to the attention of the brethren of Nebraska in a pamphlet issued by former Grand Secretary Francis E. White, in 1917. The lodge was never chartered and was attached to the ‘First Nebraska Volunteer Infantry,’ which, during its stay in St. Louis, was converted into the ‘First Nebraska Cavalry;’ the regiment consisted of 3,307 men, which was one-ninth of the entire population of the State of Nebraska in 1860. Companies “A” and “B” of this regiment were sworn into service June 11, 1861; other companies were soon afterward added, until it finally consisted of ten companies – seven from Nebraska, two from Iowa and one from Missouri. The regiment was to engage in military duty in the State of Missouri, during which time we find it at Ironton, St. Louis, Rolla and Pilot Knob. It engaged in battles of Ft. Henry, Ft. Donelson, Shiloh, Corinth and many other smaller engagements. The three officers recommended for appointment in the petition for dispensation were Lee P. Gillette, W.M. (and Grand Lecturer of the Grand Lodge of Nebraska), Bro.: R. R. Livingston, Colonel of the First Nebraska Cavalry, and S.M. Curran.”

On July 13, 1863, Brothers Gillette and Wilkinson addressed a letter to the Grand Secretary, writing from Pilot Knob, Mo.

“Dear Brother: Enclosed herewith you will find a petition for a traveling lodge. You will see by reading the paper why we ask this favor. They have also ‘come down’ on Rob Morris and the ‘work’ as taught by him. We, with brethren from Iowa, have refused to sit in Missouri lodges for reasons given.

“The petition is perhaps informal as we had no forms to guide us.

“If the Petition is granted, we will at once send a formal petition, also the amount of money required by our Grand Lodge Bylaws.

“We address you not knowing who is our Grand Master, and ask you to do us the favor of attending to this matter for us. With kind regards we are,

“Yours fraternally.”

The letter contained a petition signed by a number of members of Nebraska lodges, it stated: “The undersigned Master Masons in good standing in the several lodges to which they belong, having the good of Masonry at heart, respectfully petition you, the Most Worshipful Grand Master of Nebraska, to issue us a dispensation to meet and work as a traveling lodge of Master Masons, and to do all lawful business pertaining to Masonry.

“We are induced to make this application for the following reasons, viz.:

“First. We are placed in a situation where we cannot meet with a regular organized lodge for months together.

“Second. The Grand Lodge of Missouri has passed resolutions requiring all who visit their lodges to take an extra oath (*renunciation oath against the Conservators*), which in our opinion does not in the least appertain to Masonry.

“Third. We have many in our Regiment who are anxious to become members of our Ancient and Honorable Order whom we consider to be good and true men and who will do good work in our order with pleasure to themselves and honor to our fraternity.

“We respectfully recommend the following named brothers to act as our officers:

“W. M. Lee P. Gillette; S.W. R. R. Livingston; J. W. M. Curran, Western Star Lodge No. 2, Nebraska; S. M. Curran, Capitol Lodge No. 3, Nebraska; R. R. Livingston, Plattsouth Lodge No. 5, Nebraska; F. L. Cramer, Nodaway Lodge No. 140, Iowa; J. P. Murphy, Nodaway Lodge No. 140, Iowa; Wm. L. Jaycox, Taylor Lodge No. 156, Iowa; R. C. Jordan, Capitol Lodge No. 3, Nebraska.”

To the casual reader the letter of Brother Wilkinson and Brother Gillette would be of no more than passing interest, but it so happened that the period from 1860 to 1866 was a period in which the “Masonic Conservator” was being discussed from one end of the territory to the other – and in Missouri most unfavorably. The Conservator movement grew out of an attempt on the part of a well-known Freemason, Robert Morris of Kentucky, to establish a

---

uniform system of work; in order to accomplish this purpose he organized the Conservator Association, enlisting in its support as many of the active workers in the various Grand Lodges as was then possible. He proceeded to issue a cipher ritual which contained the complete Masonic work and lectures of the three degrees. Membership in the Association was secured by the payment of \$10 which included a copy of the book of Mnemonics, and a key, known as the vocabulary or spelling book. Missouri took prompt steps to suppress this clandestine and irregular method of propagating the Masonic ritual, and the controversy grew so heated, that no person was admitted into a Masonic Lodge in Missouri who did not take the oath of renunciation.

This explains our Nebraska brethren's statement that Missouri "was down on Rob Morris and the work" and that the Grand Lodge of Missouri "had passed resolutions which did not in the least appertain to Masonry." The membership of these brethren in the Conservators Association is again verified in a letter written by Bro.: Wilkinson to Grand Master Wheeler:

"St. Louis, Mo., Sept. 5, 1863

"Brother Wheeler: Will you please send me a vocabulary? I have the 'Blue Book' but no vocabulary, and I am at a loss for a few words.

"Brother Gillette has been absent from all our meetings since we have had work, and all the care of the Lodge and the work falls on me, for none of them can do it. When Brother Gillette is here he meets with the Lodge and does the work, but at all other times I have the care of the Lodge; Lt. Donovan of Plattsmouth has had the first degrees but not the lecture.

"We feel grateful to you for your many favors.

"Fraternally by the Green Sprig."

**<sup>vi</sup> 1864 – Grand Master Daniel H. Wheeler's address and comments about the Conservators.**

I observe in the Proceedings of four or five Grand Lodges that Grand Masters have spoken in a deprecating manner of the formation of a society styled "The Conservators," whose purpose is said to be the introduction of the ancient Webb-Preston work. As this Grand Lodge has twice formally and solemnly affirmed its faith in that work as the only ritual extant which corresponds with that used by our Masonic fathers, it is unnecessary for me to allude to this subject further than to say that any measure proposing to extend and strengthen the establishment of that ritual deserves your favorable consideration. We do not find that Grand Lodges generally have business upon their "*Trestle Boards*" at all comparing in importance with that of uniformity of work, and why any should make it their business to interfere with the right of their members to combine in societies for a good purpose surpasses my comprehension. I cannot but think that some motive less pure and noble than that which Masonry inculcates lies at the bottom of these attacks upon Conservators.

In these remarks I allude particularly to the states of Illinois, Missouri, Michigan and New Jersey. When the subject has been discussed, and resolutions adopted prohibiting Masons from joining a society, which I am credibly informed consists of more than three thousand members, including many Grand and Past Grand Masters, will the candid, unprejudiced student of Masonic history attribute such legislation to entirely disinterested motives? Will he not rather draw the conclusion that the re-election of certain officers, or the maintenance of certain parties in power is the main-spring of it? I candidly confess that such is the conclusion irresistibly forced upon my mind – one fact tends to confirm it, viz.: That while the entire Masonic press have published and teemed with their attacks upon the "Conservators' Association," only one Masonic paper has copied our resolutions of 1863, approving of the "Webb-Preston work." Fortunately, it is not a matter of the least importance to the maintenance of the "Webb-Preston work" whether the Conservators' Association lives or not. The Grand Lodge of Nebraska will, I am sure, not feel impelled to build up or cast down any Brother's reputation by taking part in this unfortunate and unnecessary quarrel.

**<sup>vii</sup> Footnote provided by the author, Francis E. White.**

In the very valuable book "The Masonic Conservators" written by M.: W.: Ray V. Denslow, Grand Master of Masons of Missouri, the following are listed as the Conservators in Nebraska:

BROWN(S)VILLE:



---

Furnas, Robt. W., Gr. Sec., 10:881

NEBRASKA CITY:

Redfield, S., G. Sr. W., 1:12

Gillette, Lee P., Gr. Lec., 6:334

Brown, Henry, P.D.G.M., 3:342

Hill, Wm. E., 3:888

OMADI:

Wilkinson, G. W., G.J.D.

Hallack, J. H.

OMAHA CITY:

Armstrong, Geo., G. M.

PLATTSMOUTH:

Wheeler, D. H., G. Sr. W., 1:1160

Duke, E. T., 3:1161

Marshall, Jno. W., 6:1162

**Chapter XII. Membership of the Conservators, which explains the numbering, is as follows:**

“The membership of the Conservator Association was, during its history, approximately three thousand. Morris, in a statement issued in 1866, asserted that the whole number of Conservators on his records was 2,795.

‘to which might be safely added five hundred made in the Southern States after the closing of postal communications in 1861, and therefore not reported.’

“The Chief Conservator informs us that the list included thirty-six Grand and Past Grand officers, six Grand and Past Grand Secretaries, as well as many other leading Masons of the United States and foreign countries.

“We have arranged, from the five Conservator lists, a condensed list of the membership arranged by state and city; the name will be found followed by two numbers, the first of which is the Conservator’s name of the individual member, the latter number, the order of his membership. The list will be greatly illuminating to those who care to go further into the results of Conservator activity in the various states, especially the effect upon the ritual.”

<sup>viii</sup> **Mackey’s Encyclopedia of Freemasonry:**

**Conservators of Masonry (summarized).** About the year 1859, a Mason of some distinction in America professed to have discovered, by his researches, what he called “the true Preston-Webb Work,” and attempted to introduce it into various jurisdictions, sometimes in opposition to the wishes of the Grand Lodge and leading Masons of the state. To aid in the propagation of this ritual, he communicated it to several persons, who were bound to use all efforts – to some, indeed, of questionable propriety – to secure its adoption by their respective Grand Lodges. These Masons were called by him “Conservators,” and the order or society which they constituted was called the “Conservators’ Association.” This Association, and the efforts of its chief to extend his ritual, met with the very general disapproval of the Masons of the United States, and in some jurisdictions led to considerable disturbance and bad feeling.

**Webb-Preston Work.** The title given by Dr. Robert Morris to a system of lectures which he proposed to introduce in 1859 into the lodges of the United States, and in which he was partly successful. He gave this name to his system because his theory was that the lectures of Thomas Smith Webb and those of Preston were identical. But this theory is untenable, for it has long since been shown that the lectures of Webb were an abridgment, and a very material modification of those of Preston. In 1863, and for a few years afterward, the question of the introduction of the “Webb-Preston work” was a subject of warm and sometimes of intemperate discussion in several of the Western jurisdictions. It has now, however, at least as a subject of controversy, ceased to attract the attention of the Craft. One favorable result was, however, produced by these discussions, and that is, that they led to a more careful investigation and a better understanding of the nature and history of the rituals which have, during the nineteenth century, been practiced in America. The bitterness of feeling has passed away, but the knowledge that it elicited remains.

---

**William Preston (summarized).** This distinguished Mason was born at Edinburgh on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August, 1742. He was sent to school at a very young age, and having completed his preliminary education in English under a celebrated teacher. He entered high school before he was six years old, and made considerable progress in the Latin tongue. From high school he went to college where he acquired a knowledge of the rudiments of Greek.

After the death of his father, he retired from college, and became the secretary of a celebrated linguist and worked for his brother who was a printer. As the linguist lost his sight, Preston read to him, translated works, and corrected proofs for the press. Following the man's death, Preston moved to London in 1760 where he worked for the king's printer during the best years of his life as a corrector of the press while also devoting himself to other literary vocations. Other literary men relied on him for suggestions of style and language.

It is, however, as a distinguished teacher of the Masonic ritual, and as the founder of a system of lectures which still retain their influence, which claims our attention. After his lodge's application was not successful, the lodge leaders received a dispensation from the Grand Lodge of Scotland to create their lodge. Preston was made a Mason in 1762 under the Dermott system. However, eventually he "went over" to the legitimate Grand Lodge.

A brother turned Preston's attention to the lectures. Wherever instruction could be acquired, Preston was the director, and with a retentive memory, he became a competent master of the subject. To increase his knowledge, he conversed with the most experienced Masons from foreign countries. He got together with his Masonic friends once or twice a week to illustrate the lectures, which prompted discussions about mutual improvement.

With the help of his friends, he arranged the first lecture, and met with the Grand Officers and other prominent Masons. He delivered an oration, which met with their approval, and then proceeded to complete the lectures. When they were completed, Preston issued proposals for a regular course of lectures and publicly delivered them in 1774. For years afterward, he also attended schools of instruction and stated meetings to propagate the knowledge of the science, which had spread beyond his expectations, all with the sanction of the Grand Lodge,

After a dispute between the Grand Lodge and the Lodge of Antiquity No. 1, which he had joined, Preston took the side of his lodge and he and others were expelled. Ten years later, a Grand Lodge re-investigation of the situation prompted his reinstatement.

He organized the Order of Harodim, a society to teach the lectures he had prepared, which attracted the most distinguished Masons of the day.

Despite his recognition for his ritual work, Preston is best known for his work titled *Illustrations of Masonry*. Numerous editions followed and it expanded beyond 300 pages.

**Thomas Smith Webb (summarized).** Webb was born in Boston in 1771, and is the founder of the system of work known as the American Rite. During his schooling, he became proficient in French and Latin. His profession probably was printer. Webb joined a Masonic lodge in New Hampshire and in his early years of membership committed to becoming a Masonic teacher. In 1797, he published his first edition of *Freemasons' Monitor*, or *Illustrations of Masonry*. In its preface, Webb acknowledges his indebtedness to William Preston for observations on the first three degrees, but he stated that he differently arranged Preston's distributions of the sections which proves that the Prestonian system was not followed in the U.S. This should be a sufficient answer to those later claimed an identity between the lectures of Preston and Webb. He moved to Rhode Island and became Grand Master. Prior to his move and afterward, Webb continued his work in Masonic instruction. Webb's influence on Masons in the U.S. was profound, and his *Monitor* is widely used. He was the ablest Masonic ritualist of his day – the very prince of Masonic workmen.

<sup>ix</sup> **1861 – Address of Grand Master George Armstrong about uniformity of work.**

...Before closing, Brethren, I must urge upon your attention the great importance of securing a uniformity in the work of the several lodges. Since the organization of this Grand Lodge, our Brethren in the East have been exerting themselves to effect this desirable result throughout the states. The most skillful of the Craft have consulted together; venerable Masons have compared with each other the designs placed on their respective trestleboards by the Masters from whom they received their first instruction in the art, and the traditions handed down from the fathers have been examined and studied, for the purpose of arriving at and determining what constitutes the true work. As the result of these investigations, I understand that the lectures and symbolic instructions as taught by

---

Thomas Smith Webb, and now known as the “Webb work,” is accepted by most of the Masonic bodies of the United States. By the many schools of instruction which have of late years been established throughout the country, where this work is taught, the Craft are becoming enlightened in Masonic science; and the mysteries of our art, by the uniformity of exemplification, and the simplified, though thorough and comprehensive mode of imparting instruction, are rendered more inviting and attractive to those who are seeking after its hidden beauties, or studying the erudition of its expressive signs and symbols. The facilities for traveling between our scattered lodges deprive us of the advantages which our eastern Brethren enjoy in attending Masonic schools of instruction. But much can be effected in the uniformity of the work by receiving instruction only from those who are themselves proficient, and who are master workmen well skilled in drawing designs for the Craft to work by. The services of our Worshipful Grand Lecturer, Bro. : Gillette, should be secured by the lodges as often as possible. I can vouch as to his proficiency in the work now recognized and accepted by the Masonic Fraternity generally.

**<sup>x</sup> 1861 – Committee report about uniformity of work.**

*To the M. : W. : Grand Lodge of Nebraska:*

The committee on Masonic Jurisprudence, to whom was referred that portion of the M. : W. : Grand Master’s address as relates to uniformity of work, respectfully report that the committee deem uniformity of work of the first importance; and while the members of the Grand Lodge have not had sufficient opportunity to witness the exemplification of the work recommended by the M. : W. : Grand Master and taught by the Grand Lecturer to express fully its views in all particulars, yet considering the fact that the work has been adopted by most of the Grand Lodges of the United States, and for the purpose of securing some system of work, and recommend its adoption.

Respectfully submitted,

Committee:

H. C. Blackman

J. F. Kinney

D. H. Wheeler

**<sup>xi</sup> 1862 – Address of Grand Master George Armstrong Address on progress toward uniformity.**

Some progress has been made in effecting a uniformity of work in the subordinate lodges. Our Grand Lecturer, who holds a commission in the Nebraska Regiment of Volunteers, having been absent the greater part of the year, Bro. : S. Redfield, at my request, has acted in his stead; but only two or three of the lodges have had the benefit of his services from the pecuniary inability of the Brethren and the lack of Grand Lodge funds for that purpose. The system of work which is now so generally recognized as the true and ancient work, and which was adopted at our last communication for the regulation of the Craft of this jurisdiction, is strictly followed and adhered to in “Western Star,” “Capitol,” and “Plattsmouth” lodges and in several of the others some progress has been made in its elucidation. I trust that during the coming year still greater exertions will be made by the Brethren to acquire a perfect knowledge of our beautiful ritual. The more I see the “Webb Work” exemplified – the more I learn of its history, and examine the unbroken chain by which it has descended to us from the early fathers, through Webb, Gleason, Fowle, and Barney, to the venerable Willson of Vermont, who still lives to supply the link between the present generation and the past – the more I am satisfied that it is the genuine Ancient Craft Masonry, and commend your wisdom in adopting it. Then let the Masters of our lodges, in drawing their designs for the Craft, consult the trestle boards of these accomplished artists, and let the Brethren generally avail themselves of the services of those who are qualified to give instruction in accordance with these designs.

A great auxiliary in securing a uniformity of work will be found in the adoption of a uniform text book. Masonic handbooks are almost as numerous as the lodges, and differing materially as they do in the arrangement of the work, in the illustrations of the emblems, and, in many instances, in the forms of expression, are calculated to confuse and mislead, rather than assist in the elucidation of the true work. *The Freemason’s Monitor* I consider the best book of the kind that could be adopted for the use of our lodges, being conveniently arranged and illustrated, and perfectly

---

agreeing in its phraseology with the esoteric instructions we are seeking to restore. It contains, also, a synopsis of Masonic law, a variety of useful forms, odes, etc., indispensable to the Master and his lodge, and invaluable to every brother desirous of improving himself in Masonry.

Impressed with the paramount importance of early securing a uniformity of work in Nebraska, I cannot leave the subject without again expressing the hope that every officer of this Grand Lodge, and every representative of a subordinate lodge present will put forth his best efforts in its accomplishment during the next Masonic year. The language, landmarks, symbols, and principles of Masonry, are universal. They are peculiar to no nation, sect, or condition. That the ritual, by which all these are explained and inculcated, should be equally universal, is a proposition that would seem self-evident to the mind of every intelligent Mason. We have, as yet, but commenced the erection of the Masonic edifice in our young territory. The Craft, as it were, are yet toiling upon the Mosaic pavement of the ground floor. Then let the designs of our master workmen be skillfully drawn, and the perfect ashlar made ready and adjusted by the tools of the Fellow Crafts, that, as the building shall be raised perpendicularly, its several parts may be cemented and fitted together with that exactness which characterized its great exemplar.

<sup>xii</sup> **1862 – Report of Committee in review of Grand Master George Armstrong’s address.**

*To the M.:W.: Grand Lodge of Nebraska:*

Your committee, to whom was referred that portion of the Grand Master’s address relating to the uniformity of work, respectfully report:

That they heartily concur in the great importance attached to the subject by the M.:W.: Grand Master. We have adopted a system of work, which, after an open and fair exemplification before Grand Lodges, and Lecturers of acknowledged ability, has stood the test of analysis and criticism which no other system has been able to withstand. Believing that the use of a uniform textbook would contribute in a great degree to the securing of a perfect uniformity of the Webb-Preston ritual in this jurisdiction, we would recommend the adoption of the following:

*Resolved*, That the “Freemason’s Monitor, or Illustrations of Masonry, by Thomas Smith Webb,” be adopted as the textbook to be used by the Subordinate Lodges within the jurisdiction of this Grand Lodge.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

Committee:

L. P. Gillette

J. W. Marshall

S. D. Bangs

<sup>xiii</sup> **1865 – Committee report on Grand Master Daniel H. Wheeler’s address on uniformity**

Bro.: Jordan offered the following, which was adopted:

*Resolved*, That this Grand Lodge with much pleasure reiterates the opinion expressed at the last annual communication in favor of what is termed the “Webb work,” fully believing it to be the true and ancient work practiced by the Fraternity in America a century and more ago, and we earnestly request and do hereby order that every lodge under the jurisdiction of this Grand Lodge which has not adopted the said work be required to do so at their earliest convenience, not alone for its antiquity and beauty, but that strict uniformity in the work of the several degrees may be one of the peculiarities of the Grand Lodge of Nebraska.

<sup>xiv</sup> **1867 – Report of committee on uniformity.**

*To the M.:W.: Grand Lodge of Nebraska:*

At your last annual communication the undersigned were appointed a committee pursuant to the following resolution:

*Resolved*, That a committee of five, including the Grand Lecturer, who shall be chairman, be appointed with a view to the establishment of a uniformity of work for lodges of this jurisdiction, and report at next meeting of this Grand Lodge.

Your committee were unable to determine from the resolution, the exact nature of the duties required of them, whether it was designed that they should determine and exemplify before your body what is generally received as

---

the true and ancient work, or whether they should consider and recommend the most effectual measures for securing in the several lodges a more perfect conformity with the ritual heretofore approved by this Grand Lodge.

Six years ago, the Grand Lodge of Nebraska adopted the “Webb Work,” more properly styled the “Ancient York Work,” as the genuine work of Ancient Craft Masonry.

Having satisfied ourselves, then, of the authenticity of that work, we have since been pursuing our labors upon the Masonic edifice, unconscious of any disposition on the part of the master-workman to interfere with or change the designs then placed on the trestle-board for the guidance of the Craft. And your committee confidently hopes there is now no desire to remove this early landmark of Masonry in Nebraska. A report subsequently made to the Grand Lodge in 1864, on the subject of the work, has, it seems, excited the fears of some that this Grand Lodge had manifested a design to change its action in this regard, and has been the cause of much remark, and possibly distrust, among the Fraternity abroad, and sister Grand Lodges. But we are satisfied all these fears and suspicions are groundless. The report in question, while it sustained and reasserted the wisdom of the previous action of this Grand Lodge, your committee admit, exhibited unwarranted zeal in tracing the recognized ritual from the fountain head – Webb – down through more modern and less certain channels, and seemed to involve our Grand Lodge in the fruitless and ill-tempered controversies between the Morris Conservators on the one hand and the Baltimore Conventionists on the other. We do not think the Craft in Nebraska have any heart or sympathy in the partisan contentions of these *latter-day fathers* of Masonry.

Having satisfied ourselves in the first years of our existence of the legitimacy of our work, we are content in more mature age to adhere to the traditions transmitted to us through unquestioned sources, and thus be enabled to travel and be recognized as Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons.

The custodians of the unwritten work in every jurisdiction, however much they may differ in their manner and form of imparting it, claim much to have it correctly transmitted from Webb to them, and yet, they differ in many particulars. These differences, unhappily, have brought about discussions which have led to janglings, discord and confusion among the workmen.

This deplorable state of affairs, your committee are of the opinion, is the result of the departure of Webb’s successors from his mode of imparting Masonic instruction. When he received his Masonic catechism from his English teacher – Preston – over seventy years since, it was recognized as the true ritual by every Grand Lodge in the United States, excepting that of Pennsylvania, and it was imparted to the subordinate lodges throughout the land by his pupils – Gleason, Cross, Barney, Cushing and others; and the venerable Samuel Willson, the contemporary of Webb and his pupils, still lives to bear testimony to the authenticity of the ritual as preserved in the state of Vermont, in which he was formerly Grand Lecturer.

Through these mediums have been transmitted to us those identical and beautiful didactic lessons of our ancient brethren, which are now expounded and elucidated in the lodges throughout this jurisdiction.

In conclusion, your committee would recommend the adoption of the following resolutions:

1st *Resolved*, That the action of this Grand Lodge, at its annual communication in the year 1861, by which the ritual known as the “Webb Work” was adopted for the direction of the Craft in this jurisdiction, is hereby reaffirmed, and it is enjoined upon the Masters of the several subordinate lodges to conform thereto.

2d. *Resolved*, That this Grand Lodge disclaims all participation in, or sympathy with, the contentions between ritualists, which have so long disturbed the harmony among the brethren; nor do we deem it either consistent with our Masonic obligations, or necessary to our jurisdictional dignity, to follow the example of other Grand bodies in issuing anathemas against the adherents of one or the other systems of labor.

Desiring to be discharged from the further consideration of the subject, we respectfully subscribe ourselves.

Committee:

Geo. Armstrong,  
Geo. D. Foglesong,  
D. H. Wheeler,  
Wm. E. Hill,  
Geo. W. Bratton

---

<sup>xv</sup> **1869 – Grand Master Orsamus H. Irish’s address urging procuring uniformity of work.**

There is a subject which I would suggest be brought before this Grand Lodge which I think is of great importance to the Craft. It is in reference to procuring a uniformity of work throughout the state. Scarcely two lodges work alike in the details, and I earnestly suggest that the Grand Lodge remedy this evil. Our sister state of Iowa, I understand, has adopted the plan of having a Grand Lecturer, and several assistants, or Custodians of the Work, they receiving the work from him. Dividing the state into districts, they require of each custodian to personally visit each lodge throughout his jurisdiction, and instruct its officers. Brethren petitioning for dispensation are required to send the Master proposed, to the custodian of his district, and exemplify, or learn the work. When found correct he gets a certificate, without which a dispensation cannot be granted. I am informed that it works well. Perhaps with our limited number of lodges it could be arranged that the Grand Lecturer visit each lodge: the details, however, I leave with you, sincerely hoping that the Grand Lodge will take action in regard to the matter.

<sup>xvi</sup> **1869 – Amendment defining duties of the Grand Lecturer.**

Bro.: C. F. Catlin offered the following amendment to section 17 of the bylaws of this Grand Lodge, which, agreeable to the provisions of Section 22 of same, lies over until next session of the Grand Lodge:

**Duties of Grand Lecturer**

It shall be the duty of the Grand Lecturer to attend all the communications of the Grand Lodge. He shall, under advice and with the concurrence of the M.:W.: Grand Master, cause the work of the several subordinate lodges to be uniform, and upon all questions of difference of opinion in the discharge of his duty, the decision of the M.:W.: Grand Lodge, when in session, and of the M.:W.: Grand Master, at all other times, shall be final. He shall visit each and every subordinate lodge within the jurisdiction at least *once each year*, and shall devote to them all the time that may be necessary in order that the Worshipful Master, Senior and Junior Wardens and Senior Deacon, at least, shall be *thoroughly* instructed in the established work of the jurisdiction, and are fully qualified to confer the several degrees of Masonry in accordance with it; and to see that all error and irregularities be rooted out, and for this purpose it shall be his *duty* to exemplify the work of each degree as taught by him, whenever it is possible to do so; and if it shall come to his knowledge that any officer or lodge within the jurisdiction shall ignore or refuse or fail to comply in every respect to the uniform and established work adopted by the Grand Lodge of Nebraska and communicated by him, it shall be his duty to instantly report the same, either to the Grand Lodge or the Grand Master, as aforesaid, for their immediate action. It shall also be his duty to be present at the opening and organizing of lodges U.:D.:, and impart to them all necessary instruction, unless he shall be satisfied, by previous examination, that the officers of said lodge are fully competent and qualified to perform all the duties connected with the lodge. The Grand Lecturer shall have authority to appoint a deputy to assist him in the discharge of his duties, for whose acts he shall be personally responsible to the Grand Lodge. And for these services shall be paid by the Grand Lodge, upon the presentation of his bill, accompanied by a written or printed certificate signed by the Worshipful Master and Secretary of each subordinate lodge, to the effect that he has faithfully performed all the duties of his office as herein described, the sum of — dollars for each and every day occupied in the discharge of the duties of his office, and mileage at the rate of — cents for each and every mile actually traveled; and each subordinate lodge shall defray all his necessary expenses during his sojourn with them.

<sup>xvii</sup> **1869 – Amendment for Election of the Grand Lecturer.**

Bro.: Catlin offered the following amendment to the Constitution, which was duly seconded, and under the rule is spread upon the minutes, and submitted to the subordinate lodges.

Amend Art. 7 of the Constitution by adding to it the following:

Except that of the Grand Lecturer, who shall be elected by ballot as above, to serve for the term of five years from the date of his election, or until his successor shall be duly installed. In case of the death, absence, or inability of the Grand Lecturer, it shall be the duty of the Grand Master to fill the vacancy by appointment until the next session of the Grand Lodge, when another shall be elected to serve during the remainder of said term.

---

<sup>xviii</sup> **1869 – Committee on Foreign Correspondence: Minnesota.**

The report of the committee on Foreign Correspondence is from the pen of that bright star, Bro.: A. T. C. Pierson, Past Grand Master. He reviews the Proceedings of thirty-six Grand Lodges. In his criticism on the report of our “Committee on Uniformity of Work” at the session of 1867, he says:

The Proceedings contained the report of a committee on Uniformity of Work, appointed in 1866. It appears that,

“Six years ago, the Grand Lodge of Nebraska adopted the ‘Webb Work,’ more properly styled the ‘Ancient York Work,’ as the genuine work of Ancient Craft Masonry.”

Rather refreshing that, styling the Barnet, Wilson, Mnemonic, printed work, the “Webb Work!” But more refreshing is the styling of it the “*Ancient York Work.*”

Will the committee please inform us how many degrees were recognized in York?

Have they forgot the changes made in the first and second degrees by the Grand Lodge of England? Are they aware that Webb made still more changes?

But another proposition. They say:

“When he received his masonic catechism from his English teacher, Preston.”

Webb never saw Preston; and the demonstration has been published time and again and again that their systems were entirely different. Webb never claimed that the systems were the same. To serve certain purposes the claim was first set up about a dozen years since, and refuted as soon as made. The Grand Lodge of Nebraska, or any other Grand Lodge, has a right to adopt any work that suits them, but we beg that the truth of history be retained.

From which it appears our good Bro.: Pierson takes exceptions to the statements of our committee.

This same subject of *work*, it seems, has been discussed in Bro.: Pierson’s own jurisdiction, Minnesota, and in order to arrive at the authentic “Webb Work and Lectures,” the subject was referred to the “Board of District Deputies,” of Minnesota. The Board met and “*were very much aided in their investigations by Bro.: A. T. C. Pierson, Past Grand Master, who kindly tendered them the use of all the evidence in his possession.*”

In their report to the Grand Lodge, the Board of Deputies use the following language:

“The work which the Board have agreed upon is substantially what is known as the “Webb Work,” as taught by Past Grand Lecturer Samuel Willson of Vermont, and as received by him from Barney.

And being fully satisfied that Willson is “the true link from Webb and Barney down,” they deem it proper for the information of the Grand Lodge to submit some of the evidence which has led them to such a conclusion.”

The Grand Master of Vermont, M.: W.: Philip C. Tucker, in his address in January 1859, “traces the genealogy” of the Preston-Webb Work in the following language. We omit the *tracings* of Bro.: Tucker, as they are too long to reproduce here. We simply give the conclusions of the Board of Deputies, as follows:

From the evidence quoted, and other evidence, the Board are satisfied that the history of our rituals may be clearly defined into three periods, viz.:

1st. Their preparation by William Preston.

2d. Their reception by Thomas Smith Webb.

3d. Their communication to John Barney, who communicated them to Grand Lecturer Willson of Vermont, who is still alive.

The conclusions of the Board of Deputies, then, which are fully concurred in by the Grand Master, are these:

1st. That the work as agreed upon, is that which Barney received from Webb, in 1815; Webb from Preston about 1795; Preston from his predecessors about 1775.

2d. That no other work practiced in this country has a genealogy that will bear a moment’s consideration, or claim the attention of a reflecting man.



---

3d. That nothing which has been elicited in discussions of the subject since agreed upon, has shaken the confidence of the Board in their belief that the “Ancient Work” is that which they are now prepared to exemplify before this Grand Lodge.

How is this? The Board of Deputies had Bro. Pierson’s assistance, and yet their conclusions agree with the conclusions of our own committee.

<sup>xix</sup> **1869 – Committee on Foreign Correspondence: Vermont.**

At the session of 1866, the Grand Lodge appointed a committee on “Work and Lectures,” for the purpose of obtaining from Bro. Samuel Willson, Past Grand Lecturer, the work and lectures of Thomas Smith Webb. The committee submitted at this session a lengthy report of their doings. Notwithstanding the length of their report, we reproduce it, believing that it will prove interesting to the brethren. The committee met Bro. Willson at his residence in Vergennes, on the sixth day of December last, and after a careful examination of the evidence presented by him, submit the following statement:

*First, Bro. Willson presented to us the original lectures of John Barney, as communicated to him, with the following history: “In August 1817, John Barney was sent by Friendship Lodge at Charlotte to learn the lectures of Webb. After some time spent in studying the lectures under the instruction of both Webb and Gleason, he returned and commenced lecturing before the lodges in the vicinity of his residence, and in December 1817, was authorized as lecturer by the Grand Lodge of Vermont. Soon after, Barney was employed by twelve of the members of Dorchester Lodge, at Vergennes, to instruct them in the work and lectures, and during his stay, made the house of Bro. Willson his home, and was for several years before when at Vergennes, the guest of Bro. Willson. At the time of his first visit, and while holding a lodge of instruction, Barney gave to Willson the original cypher copy of the lectures which was before us. A literal of the manuscript will be presented by one of the committee at this session.”*

To substantiate the authenticity of the Barney lectures, we present the following, which, although of some length, we do not feel at liberty to abbreviate, desiring to place before the Grand Lodge all the facts and evidence on record, which throw light on the origin and promulgation of the work and lectures in Vermont:

“I took the first step in Masonry in Faithful Lodge in Charlestown, N.H., in 1815. Soon after, I left that state and settled in Vergennes, Vermont, June 3, 1816. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of December, 1816, I took the second, and on the 26<sup>th</sup> of December 1816, I took the third step, and became a member of Dorchester Lodge. Between December 1816, and October 1817, I partially learned the ritual as Bro. J. L. Cross had taught it here in 1815. Soon after the session of our Grand Lodge in October 1817, John Barney applied to Dorchester Lodge for employment as a lecturer, authorized by our Grand Lodge. Application being made to our lodge for that purpose, some of the members objected; because Cross had been here so recently, they thought it unnecessary. Consequently, about a dozen young men, myself among them, made up a sufficient sum to employ Bro. Barney for, I should think, from eight to twelve days. For my share, I took Bro. Barney in my family as a boarder. This last circumstance was the cause of Barney’s making my house his home, which in Vergennes, until he removed from Vermont.

“At this time the inquiry was made, how we should know if his were the true Webb lectures as nothing else at that time was orthodox, and nothing else would satisfy. Cross and Barney differed in some few particulars, and Cross had his admirers, and Barney his, which led to frequent discussions. Many of these differences, perhaps all, I can point out at this time. These discussions led Barney to make the following statement, which I have never before heard, doubted or called in question:

“Barney stated that when he called on Webb to obtain the lectures, Webb said that he was engaged, but referred him to Gleason, who, Webb said, would give them precisely as he himself would do. Barney replied that his brethren had furnished him the means to obtain the Webb Ritual, and nothing else would satisfy them. Webb replied that he would occasionally hear him recite, and would review the whole before he left, and that he accordingly did so. This statement of Barney’s satisfied the Grand Lodge of Vermont, and Dorchester Lodge, and has never been called in question in Vermont to my knowledge. *Barney never saw Fowle or Snow to my knowledge.*

---

“I have copied Preston’s and have a copy of Gleason’s of 1805 from the source from when he obtained his. I know that there are some slight differences between whence he obtained his. I know that there are some slight differences between Gleason’s Ritual of 1805 and that of 1817, but that they are dissimilar in principle and language, I positively deny, and challenge the proof. Between 1805 and 1817 Webb made several changes in his *Monitor*. These were generally improvements, and any one acquainted with Preston’s Ritual can readily see how these changes in the Ritual between the above dates would naturally occur, and have no hesitation in saying that these changes are also improvements. We trace our Ritual through Gleason to Webb directly to 1805 and 1817, without the slightest ground for doubt or uncertainty, and that there are yet living a small remnant who are ready and willing to verify the truth of the foregoing.

“Bro. : Willson further informed us that Barney was approved as a lecturer by a committee of the Grand Lodge, of which Bro. : Gallup of Sheldon, one of the most intelligent Masons of the state, was chairman. He also believed that Barney never made any changes while in Vermont, and never but two after he left the state, and those while lecturing in New York and Ohio, and those unimportant; and that the manuscript copy of Barney he submitted, was written mostly by Barney, and partly by Willson – dictated by Barney – and it was examined and corrected by them together. The most prominent members of the school at Vergennes in 1817 were Peter Welch, Seth Geer, Nathan Griswold and Amasa Belknap, and that Philip C. Tucker learned the lectures of Willson, and when called upon for information always referred all visitors to Willson to instruct them.”

Peter Welch died at Essex, New York, in 1864 and previous to his death, made the following statement:

“Vergennes, July 23, 1864.

“I, Peter Welch, do hereby certify that I was a member of John Barney’s School of Instruction in the fall of 1817, and that Barney then and there stated that he obtained the lectures of Gleason, and that Webb examined him thoroughly, and pronounced him perfectly correct. I learned the lectures of Barney at that time quite perfectly, and have retained them up to this time so far as to be able to detect any change of importance in their rehearsal. I am not aware of any change in these lectures in Vermont since I first learned in 1817. I have generally held some office in Dorchester Lodge, until I recently removed from the state. I have been what may be called a working man (*i.e.*), I have generally participated in the active duties of the lodge. I have been familiarly acquainted with Samuel Willson since 1817, and have often seen him work; he has strictly followed Barney’s teachings in both.

“I have read a letter published in the *Voice of Masonry*, a periodical published in Chicago, Illinois, dated March 1863, signed by Samuel Willson, most of which I know, and all of which I believe to be true. I was familiar with Willson’s original key, which is now before me, made by Barney in 1817, and I know it has not been altered in any particular.

“[Signed] Peter Welch.”

The statement of Nathan Griswold, long a citizen of Vergennes, and a member of Dorchester Lodge, was next submitted:

“This is to certify that I took the first two degrees of Masonry in the spring of 1818, in Dorchester Lodge, then No. 3, now No. 1, and that I very soon learned the lectures of Samuel Willson and others, who had then recently learned them of John Barney. I soon became an active working Mason, and from that time have been a member until the present hour. I have held the offices of Junior and Senior Deacon, Junior and Senior Warden, and Worshipful Master. Some of these offices I have held for several years. From the time I first became a Mason until the present time, I have often seen a manuscript cypher of the lectures which has always been on standard from that day to this. The cypher is now before me, and I know it has not been altered, and I have often worked with Bro. : Willson and lectured with him, and know that he has not changed his lectures since 1818, and that his lectures conform exactly with that cypher, and this cypher has always been referred to and considered as our standard. I have seen Barney several times, and have always understood that Willson obtained his cypher from Barney, and that Barney obtained his lectures of Webb and Gleason. This authority has never been called in question until very recently, to my knowledge.

“Nathan Griswold

“Vergennes, January 20, 1866.”

---

The next document submitted was a copy of Gleason's lectures in manuscript, which bears the following memorandum:

"A certified copy of Gleason's Manuscript Lectures, with very few alterations, certified to Bro. : Philip C. Tucker by Bro. : Joseph Covell, Past Junior Grand Warden of the Grand Lodge of Maine, who obtained it of Gleason himself."

Accompanied with an additional note as follows:

"Copied from a copy of Gleason's Lectures (*verbatim, et literatim*), certified to by Joseph Covell of Jay Bridge, Maine.

"Attest:

S. Willson, S.L.

"Original copy 1805, copied in 1859, by S. Willson."

This copy confirms Bro. : Barney's and Willson's lectures.

The incomplete manuscript of Bro. : Seth Geer, a member of Dorchester lodge, was submitted. This document contains the following certificate:

"Vergennes, October, 4, 1863.

"The within written by Seth Geer in 1817 and 1818. I saw him do some part of it, and have often seen it since that time, and have been familiar with it, and know what I affirm. It was given to Nathan Griswold by the widow of Seth Geer, after his death, and was given to me by Griswold some three years since.

"It was never finished, but as far as it goes is generally correct. Geer made this at the time I made mine (*i.e.*) at John Barney's dictation. The one confirms the other.

"Samuel Willson."

This includes the first two degrees, and there is abundant evidence of his handwriting. Seth Geer was a member of Dorchester lodge, was Master and active working Mason and familiar Lecturer.

The letter referred to by Welch is substantially the statement made by Bro. : Willson to the committee. A copy of the lectures made by Geer under Barney's instruction, was before us, although an imperfect copy, having been mutilated, but so far as it went in the first two degrees, corroborated the Willson-Barney key.

The next paper submitted was the original manuscript copy of the lectures belonging to the late Past Grand Master Haswell, made from Jeremy L. Cross in 1815. Although much worn was perfectly legible. The papers were filed in the handwriting of Philip C. Tucker. "Old minutes and correct work from E.A. to R.&S. Master, borrowed December 6, 1865." In authentication of these papers as being in the handwriting of Bro. : Haswell, a certificate of a member of Bro. : Tucker, familiar with the style and penmanship of Hon. Nathan B. Haswell, from the long and familiar correspondence existing between them, and had no hesitation in stating that the documents were written by him. These papers were received by Bro. : Tucker the year following Grand Master Haswell's death, from his grandson, W. H. Root, in a box filled with Bro. : Haswell's masonic papers, and have been called the "Haswell paper." Bro. : Willson stated to the committee in reference to the Haswell notes that the first knowledge he had of them was about the year 1822 or 1823. He was at Burlington with Bros. : Tucker and Haswell, in the lodge. They three rehearsed the lectures, during which a discussion arose between Haswell and Willson about a certain point, and reference was made to these notes. He then understood, and had always, that they were taken from Cross by Haswell himself, and not from Barney, and believed Bro. : Tucker to be under the same impression, although was not certain that Bro. : Haswell ever told him so, but he knew the manuscript to be in Bro. : Haswell's handwriting, and knew it to be the key that was consulted on that occasion. He was again in consultation with these brethren at Burlington, in 1847, in reference to these lectures, and these notes were referred to. He also stated that there was so little difference between Bros. : Tucker, Haswell, Pott, of Middlebury, and himself, that they always worked in a lodge together without any collision or discussion, only as to the use of a few words. He though Cross undoubtedly taught the true

---

work originally, with the exception of a few glossary words, and that his lectures, as taught in 1822, were mainly correct; at any rate, the instructions received by Bro. Haswell from Cross were very nearly the same as the Webb-Barney lectures. He took a copy of these lectures in 1863, in which we found the following memorandum:

“The following is a true copy of the original manuscript in the handwriting of N. B. Haswell, P. G. Master of Masons in Vermont, except I have omitted superfluous letters from prudential motives, but this does not change the reading of a single word nor vary the sense. I think Haswell made the original from Jeremy L. Cross in the year 1815. Haswell showed it to me many years ago.

“S. Willson, S.L.”

He next presented a manuscript copy of the Haswell lectures, made by Bro. L. D. Stone, for many years Worshipful Master of Friendship lodge, at Charlotte. The copy by Stone was one made from a copy of the lectures made from Haswell’s original manuscript by Bro. G. S. Sinclair, which Bro. Willson believed corresponded, very generally, with the original, and accompanied with the following letter:

“Charlotte, December 27, 1855.

“Venerable Friend and Brother:

“I am sorry to inform you that I have not as yet heard from my friend, G. S. Sinclair, in relation to the copy of Bro. Haswell’s lectures, which I herewith send to you. I shall write him again, and may possibly hear from him in season for the Grand Lodge; if I do, I shall certainly inform you. I can truly say that he told me it was a true copy of the lectures in Bro. Haswell’s possession, but in drafting this copy from his, some ten years since, and being myself uninstructed in the mysteries of Masonry, I am sure I have made some mistakes, but in the main matter it is correct.

“Fraternally your friend and brother,  
“L. D. Stone.”

A letter was presented as corroborating the Webb lectures from Bro. W. B. Langridge, of Iowa, addressed to Bro. Willson under date of October 19, 1866, of which the following is an extract.

“The Vinton notes compare in some respects very nearly with yours; in others they differ very materially. They are not properly notes so much as full reading. They are full of signs and contracted words, but we did not seem to have even learned the idea of the cypher in which yours and others is written. The history of them is about this: Vinton was one of the earliest of Webb’s pupils; he went South, lectured, and was the author of one funeral ode, ‘Solemn Strikes the Funeral Chime.’ He taught in North Carolina, and to some few lodges, furnished a copy of his lectures. He died in Bowling Green, Kentucky, and was buried by the Masons. After his death, in his trunk was found this copy of notes and some other papers, which told who and what he was. His teachings are probably those of Webb’s teachings. It is supposed this copy was made about 1798. There is the date and no water mark in to tell anything about it. The Snow lectures is a copy of John Snow, made from his verbal communication. They are almost *verbatim* with Gleason’s. I find none so good, pure English – so well worded. He also says: ‘Your account of the Haswell notes is very interesting and very satisfactorily; also valuable as it gives a clear argument for believing it to be the genuine thing it is claimed to be.’”

A letter was also presented from Past Grand Secretary, Bro. John Hollenbeck, in corroboration of the history of Barney’s procuring the lectures, and the evidence of their being correct. The testimony of one so familiar with the facts, and so well known in Vermont, can but carry great influence with it:

“Burlington, December 21, 1865.

“R. W.: Sir and Brother:

“In answer to yours of the 8<sup>th</sup> instant, I would say Bro. John Barney was made a Mason in and joined Friendship Lodge No. 20, now No. 24, in the year 1810, of which I was Secretary in 1816, and he was generally

---

present at the lodge meetings up to the time he went to Boston to learn the lectures, where he spent some time. I do not recollect how long he was gone. His family lived in the same village where I resided, and when he returned from Boston, he was appointed Senior Deacon of our lodge, and when at home punctually attended our meetings and meetings for instruction, and quite a number of young Masons were taught by him; as our lodge by vote employed him for lecturing. I learned the lectures of him on the first three degrees. Bro. :. Aaron B. Webb and many others learned the lectures of him. I was told by him that he learned the lectures of Bros. :. Gleason and Webb. Friendship Lodge paid him, for obtaining the lectures and teaching its members, about twenty dollars.

“I was knowing to his visiting Vergennes for that purpose. I always understood that he taught the true Webb-Preston lectures, which were the same as taught by you to the Fraternity in Vermont. After Bro. :. Barney went west to teach said lectures, I have no knowledge of him except so far as I obtained it from masonic publications, except I was informed by Brother Tucker that he went west into different states. He slightly varied his lectures to suit the various versions insisted on by those who employed him.

“With great respect,

“Truly and fraternally yours,

“John B. Hollenbeck.”

W. Samuel Willson,

*‘Grand Lecturer of the Grand Lodge of Vermont.’*

The foregoing statements and letters cover the whole point of history of the introduction and promulgation of the Barney lectures in Vermont. Perhaps no more reliable authority can be found to substantiate the introduction of any series of lectures into any jurisdiction, than the reliable proof we have presented, and they give conclusive evidence that we once had the true Webb lectures direct through John Barney. As to the corruptions and alternation that have been made through the changes which the institution has passed since their first promulgation, there must, in a measure, ever be a doubt which no evidence, however satisfactory to your committee, can dispel from those who have not had the opportunity of comparison. We had before us the Barney, Cross, Snow and Haswell lectures, all in the main corroborating each other, with the evidence of those who worked under and were familiar with them all, that the variations were so slight that no discussion or difficulty prevented the parties using, under either system, from harmoniously working together without scarcely a variation, which proves conclusively that there was but one real system, and uniformity prevailed, and no one who carefully compares one with the other, can doubt for a moment that Webb’s lectures, as taught by John Barney in 1817, were a standard in all respects which could not be surpassed. From the contentions of modern days, it is very plain that corruptions or alternations have crept in which prevent working side by side in the quarries without much confusion, in what was once, and should be, a common and intelligible language, whether he be an aged Craftsman or a young apprentice just commencing his labors upon the temple.

There was before the committee a copy made by Bro. :. Willson, which he has for many years called his standard, until perhaps 1856, in which he has noted additions by him. Since these will be fully pointed out as the work is exemplified before the Grand Lodge by the member of the committee to whom was assigned the transcribing of the original Barney key, if any of the Masons of the state have cyphers of Willson’s lectures as made by him previous to 1856, they will find them, with very slight alternations, to agree almost *verbatim* with the original of the John Barney lectures in Bro. :. Willson’s possession.

Your Past Grand Lecturer informed the committee that he did not know that the work Mnemonics, so called by Rob Morris, was claimed to be a copy of his lectures until some six months after it appeared in print, and that he has never since so considered it. Some of your committee have knowledge of the fact that Bro. :. Willson, from the first, ever claimed there were errors, and grave ones, in them, and after patient and careful investigation and comparison, proclaims and points out more than one hundred changes, some of them vital and essential, made by Morris in his work called Mnemonics.

---

Therefore your committee, after careful and patient investigation of the facts presented, and full examination of the corroborating testimony submitted to them, can come to no other conclusion than that Gleason, Snow, Cross and Haswell, and Willson, in his amended copy, have all made their own changes and interpolations, and that the original Barney lectures, as formerly taught previous to 1856 by Willson, are a transcript of the teachings of Thomas Smith Webb, and the others, although in all essential points they agree, are a mixture of the teachings of these several authors, compiled by each one to suit their own tastes and prejudices, and that the Mnemonics, compiled by Rob Morris, are but a review of these various authors, making, perhaps, Bro.: Willson's amended copy the basis, prepared in accordance with his own taste and designs, and hence the great discordance which has arisen in the work in this jurisdiction.

We therefore commend to the careful consideration of the Grand Lodge the original Barney lectures as copied by the Assistant Grand Lecturer, believing, from all the examinations, comparisons made and proofs submitted, that it is the original work as practiced in England and taught in this country by Thomas Smith Webb, and trusting that all preconceived opinions and prejudices will be thrown aside in the consideration of this question, and that the Grand Lodge will harmonize upon these lectures as taught to our fathers, and discard all other which, perhaps, embodying the principles, yet are, at the same time, expressing in their variations the personal opinions and varied tastes of the several compilers.

Your committee, after the performance of the laborious duty assigned them, in view of the facts and testimony which have been placed before them, having as thoroughly investigated the subject as can be done at this late period, when but a remnant of the men who had knowledge of the introduction of the work and lectures as taught by Barney in Vermont, believe that the lecture of Thomas Smith Webb are contained in the original Barney key in the possession of Past Grand Lecturer Samuel Willson, and a literal copy of which in cypher is herewith submitted, was the ancient work in Vermont from 1817, and is the best standard that can be found, and that the work called Mnemonics, by Rob Morris, is but a corruption, with such interpolations from other compilers with additional changes by himself, and that the lectures presented by your committee should be adopted by this Grand Lodge as the standard in this jurisdiction. We believe that the further use of printed keys or notes, under whatever name, should be abandoned at once by all good Masons and lodges. We have endeavored, carefully and impartially, to arrive at facts and conclusions having only in view the truth of history, and the well-being of Masonry in our own jurisdiction, leaving other parties to arrive at their own conclusions in the premises.

In justice to Bro.: Samuel Willson, Past Grand Lecturer, we would say, that we believe him to have been faithful to all the trusts reposed in him by the Grand Lodge of Vermont during his long service, and that he is entirely innocent of the corruptions and speculations of Rob Morris, and trust that in his declining years he may look back upon his labors as the custodian of the work with that pleasure which is ever the reward of the faithful servant, with the assurance that his brethren of the Grand Lodge appreciate his labors and kindly acknowledge the debt of gratitude they owe to him for his valuable services in their behalf.

#### **<sup>xx</sup> 1870 – Committee on Work report dividing the state into five districts.**

*To the Most Worshipful, the Grand Lodge of Nebraska:*

Your committee on Work, to whom was referred the resolutions introduced by Bro.: Wise, relative to uniformity of work, have had the same under consideration, and would present the following as substitutes, and recommend their adoption:

*Resolved*, 1. That the state of Nebraska be and it is hereby divided into five masonic districts, to be constituted and composed as follows; viz.:

The first district shall consist of the counties of Cass, Saunders, Lancaster and Seward.

The second, of the counties of Otoe, Johnson and Gage and Lafayette Lodge No. 24, in Nemaha County.

The third, of the counties of Richardson, Pawnee, and Nemaha Valley Lodge No. 4, Hillsdale Lodge No. 29, and Peru Lodge No. 14 in Nemaha county.

The fourth, of the counties of Sarpy, Douglas, Dodge and Lincoln.

The fifth, of the counties of Washington, Burt, Dakota and Cuming.

---

*Provided*, also, that should any new lodges be instituted in counties not herein enumerated, they shall be assigned by the Grand Lecturer, with the advice and consent of the M.:W.: Grand Master, to such districts as he may deem proper.

*Resolved*, 2. That the M.:W.: Grand Master shall appoint, at the present session for the Grand Lodge, a committee of five, who, together with the Grand Lecturer, shall constitute a “Board of Custodians of the Work,” to hold their office for five years after the first appointment. One of the brethren so appointed at first shall be for one year, one for two years, one for three years, one for four years, and one for five years; the order of their retiring to be decided by drawing lots; the Grand Master each year appointing one brother in place of the one retiring. Said appointments shall be approved by the Grand Lodge. In case of death, absence, or inability to fill said office, the Grand Master shall appoint some competent brother to hold the position until the next succeeding communication of the Grand Lodge; and then, if the appointment be approved by the Grand Lodge, said appointment to hold the balance of the unexpired term.

*Resolved*, 3. That as soon as the Grand Lecturer shall have perfected himself thoroughly in the work, he shall call a meeting of the Custodians at such convenient time and place as may be agreed upon by them, for the purpose of imparting a knowledge of the work and lectures to the Custodians.

*Resolved*, 4. That the District Custodians shall visit each lodge within their respective districts, after giving sufficient notice of the time, and shall there hold a school of instruction and exemplify the work.

*Provided*, That in cities and towns where two or more lodges are located, it shall only be necessary to hold one school of instruction.

*Resolved*, 5. That the Grand Lecturer, with the advice and consent of the M.:W.: Grand Master, shall have the supervision of the work, and it shall be his duty to see that the work and lectures of the Grand Lodge are thoroughly taught and practiced throughout this jurisdiction by the subordinate lodges.

*Resolved*, 6. That the District Custodians shall not enter upon their duties until they shall have received from the Grand Lecturer a certificate stating that they are fully qualified and authorized to impart the lectures and work. Each District Custodian shall render a full statement to the Grand Lodge, at each session, of their official doings during the year.

*Resolved*, 7. That no dispensation shall hereafter be granted for a new lodge, unless the W.:M.: therein named shall have first received a certificate from the Custodian of work for the district in which such lodge is located, certifying that said person so named is fully competent to confer the several degrees in accordance with the work adopted by this Grand Lodge.

*Resolved*, 8. That the said District Custodians and Grand Lecturer shall receive, as compensation for the time actually devoted to their official duties, the sum of two dollars per day, and mileage at the rate of ten cents per mile traveled by the shortest practicable rout, to be paid by the lodges.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

Committee:

D. H. Wheeler  
R. W. Furnas  
W. E. Hill  
M. Dunham  
C. W. Lyman

<sup>xxi</sup> **1870 – Report of the Committee on Foreign Correspondence under Arkansas and Minnesota.**

*Arkansas:*

The Grand Master presents the affairs of the jurisdiction in a brief and cheering address, giving some interesting incidents of his recent travels, illustrative of the spirit of Masonry, and what he had observed in regard to the uniformity of the work, referring especially to the work in Minnesota, where, it is claimed, the Webb-work, as obtained of Bro.: Willson, of Vermont, is strictly exemplified:

---

Finding that this work differed in some of its details from what we call the Reed-work, adopted by this Grand Lodge in 1850, I determined to make one more pilgrimage to Father Reed before he departed for the better land, and ascertain from him more accurately than I remembered, the source from which he obtained his work.

He gave us substantially the following history of his work:

“Bro. Eason came over from England to America as provincial Grand Lecturer. Bros. DeWitt Clinton and Washburn sat side by side with Bro. Webb in learning the lectures from him, and he (Bro. Reed) obtained the lectures from Bro. Washburn. He was told by Bro. Clinton, after he became a Mason, that Bro. Washburn could repeat the lectures on the three degrees; as he, and as Bro. Webb, received them from Bro. Eason, a thousand times without the variation of a word.”

After all that I have seen and heard, I am satisfied that the Reed-work is as near the Webb-work, and as near the true ancient work, as it can now be obtained, and that if this work was well understood, and skillfully exemplified, in all of our subordinate lodges, the Masonry of Arkansas would equal the Masonry of any other state.

*Minnesota:*

...the following is quoted from the Grand Master of Arkansas, on the matter of work:

“In my recent travels, I endeavored to ascertain in what points, and to what extent there is a want of uniformity in the work and lectures of the three symbolic degrees. I have found, from conversations with well-informed Masons of different states of the Union, and with intelligent brothers who have visited the countries beyond the seas, where the York Rite is worked, that there is everywhere a substantial uniformity in the modes of recognition, and in the fraternal pledges. Indeed, it is wonderful to see how nearly Masons of all countries speak the same traditional and unwritten language, and how similar the vows which they have assumed. There is no material want of uniformity in the work and lectures of the Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and first and third sections of the Master’s degree. In the dramatic representations of the historical incidents of the second section of the third degree, and in the rehearsals of the legendary circumstances of the great tragedy on which it is founded, there is a want of uniformity.”

And says thereof:

And the learned brother might have added, *because it is of American origin.*

Also, from the same:

“A committee of the M. W. Grand Lodge of Minnesota obtained the true work, as they believed, of the Master’s degree. I had the pleasure of seeing this work exemplified at St. Paul, in August last. It was well and skillfully done, and impressively taught all the beautiful lessons intended to be inculcated by the degree, and especially its second section. But I am sure that if the illustrious Brother Webb could have been called from the spirit land to witness this illustration of *his* work, he would have smiled at some of the historical incidents dramatically presented on the occasion.

Many years ago, Brother Reed, of Ohio, was a prominent masonic lecturer; his “fame spread both far and wide; it was conceded that he gave the genuine Webb-work. Grand Master English received the work from Bro. Reed many years since. He says, finding that the work in Minnesota differed from that of the Webb-work as taught by Bro. Reed, “I determined to make one more pilgrimage to Father Reed before he departed for the better land, and ascertain from him more accurately than I remembered, the source from which he obtained his work. Brother Reed is seventy-two years of age, has been a Mason for half a century, and, though physically infirm, his mind is still vigorous, and his *iron* memory, as he calls it, unimpaired.



---

“He gave us, substantially, the following history of his work: ‘Brother Eason came over from England to America as Provincial Grand Lecturer. Brothers De Witt Clinton and Washburn sat side by side with Bro.: Webb in learning the lectures from him, and he (Bro.: Reed) obtained the lectures from Bro: Washburn. He was told by Bro.: Clinton, after he became a Mason, that Bro.: Washburn could repeat the lectures on the three degrees, as he and as Bro.: Webb received them from Bro.: Eason, a thousand times, without the variation of a word.’”

**xxii 1871 –Committee on Work report on progress of proficiency.**

*To the Most Worshipful, the Grand Lodge of Nebraska:*

Your committee, to which was referred that portion of the M.:W.: Grand Master’s address relating to the uniformity of work, beg leave to report that it affords them no slight pleasure to say that, notwithstanding the many obstacles that have heretofore been in the way of uniformity of work in this state, a degree of proficiency has been attained which augurs well for our future, considering the fact that the membership of our lodges is chiefly made up of Masons from the different states of the Union, each of whom have their own peculiar notions as to what the “Ancient Work” is. Your committee, however, hope that the several subordinate lodges will cheerfully assent to the work as adopted by our Grand Lodge, and readily accept the same.

Everything considered, the progress we have made and are making, should satisfy the most skeptical of a final accomplishment of this desired end.

We would, therefore, most fraternally ask the representatives of the various subordinate lodges in his jurisdiction to assist in teaching and promulgating the work now being exemplified by the Grand Lecturer and Custodians of the work.

Your committee, in the further consideration of their duties having reference to the appointment of a Grand Lecturer, would most respectfully offer the following:

*Resolved,* That the appointment of Bro.: C. F. Catlin, Grand Lecturer, by the M.:W.: Grand Master, is eminently fitting and is hereby ratified and approved by this Grand Lodge.

Committee:

J. W. Moore,  
Geo. B. Graff,  
A. G. Hastings

**xxiii 1871 – Grand Lecturer’s report about his work.**

*To the Most Worshipful, the Grand Lodge of Nebraska:*

I beg leave to make the following report of my official acts as Grand Lecturer during the past year. As I understand, the regulations of the Grand Lodge require the Grand Lecturer to instruct the Custodians of the work, and they visit and instruct the subordinate lodges. The Grand Lecturer being expected to visit lodges only at the request of the Grand Master or lodges. At the request of the Most Worshipful Grand Master, I left Omaha August 22d, to visit North Platte Lodge No. 32, install the officers of the lodge and instruct them in the adopted work. I was also instructed to visit Schuyler Lodge U.:D.:, deliver their dispensation and get the lodge into working order; then go to West Point, install the officers of Jordan Lodge No. 27. In accordance with the above request, I visited the several lodges mentioned and to the best of my ability performed the duties required of me, spending as much time as possible at the several points.

October 23d, I was requested by Schuyler Lodge U.:D.:, to visit them for the purpose of settling a little misunderstanding between the officers and members in regard to the ballot. The officers claiming the right to cast the ballot without reference to the other members of the lodge mentioned in their petition for dispensation; also, the officers claiming the right to initiate over the objection of brethren present. As requested, I visited the lodge and endeavored to settle the difficulty, and in a measure quieted the confusion. But not feeling quite satisfied with the result of my visit, I requested M.:W.: P. Deuel to visit Schuyler Lodge with me, and, if possible, finally settle their

---

difficulties, or take up their dispensation. We visited the lodge, and after hearing both sides of the question, settled the existing misunderstanding, and left the lodge in better feeling, and working harmoniously.

In the several lodges visited I have exemplified the work in one or more of the degrees. I found all lodges anxious to have a uniformity of work and willing to conform to the established work of Nebraska. And let me here remark that the present system of teaching the work does not seem to meet the requirements of this jurisdiction. The Custodians are selected from the business portion of our people, and find it almost impossible to leave their business to attend to the duties of their office. In my opinion, it would be to the advantage of this Grand Lodge to have but one teacher of the work, and pay that one sufficient salary to enable him to perform the duties without loss, pecuniarily, to himself; but with the present state of the finances of the Grand Lodge it seems impossible to adopt this plan. I have, during the year, received visits from Masters and Wardens of lodges for the purpose of receiving instruction in the work, and, so far as able, have endeavored to give the required instruction. It was my intention to have visited every lodge in the jurisdiction during the year, but have been unable to do so on account of being unable to spare money for my necessary expenses.

I have with this report submitted a bill of expenses incurred in the discharge of my duties, which will not cover one-half of the actual expense, but feeling that the Grand Lodge would not expect a large account from me have made it as light as possible. I have received no reports from the several Custodians of the work. I presume they will submit them to the Grand Lodge. Bro. : D. F. Powell has been quite active in the discharge of his duties since his appointment, and will undoubtedly furnish a report of his work.

I left Nebraska on business, intending to return as soon as possible, and did not deem it necessary to explain to my friends why I went, or where I was going. In that I did wrong, I wrote the Most Worshipful Grand Master on my way east, that I should return as soon as possible, also gave my reasons for going and the object, and requested him to attend to the duties of H. : P. : of Omaha Chapter until my return. By that letter the Grand Master knew, or would expect, that I should return. I wrote him again after reaching my old home in Vermont, telling him that I would surely be at the session of the Grand Lodge, and I have fulfilled that promise. I feel very much hurt by the portion of the Most Worshipful Grand Master's address, which alludes to my having left the jurisdiction in a manner unbecoming a Mason. I would therefore most humbly ask the Most Worshipful Grand Master, and members of this Grand Lodge, to expunge that portion of which I complain, and thereby give me a chance to set myself right before the brethren with whom I have labored in the cause of Masonry for the last five years.

Fraternally,

C. F. Whitmore

*(P.S. – The Jurisprudence Committee requested the Grand Master to expunge the words, "...in a manner unbecoming a man and a Mason.")*

<sup>xxiv</sup> **Mackey's Encyclopedia:**

**Prestonian Lectures.** About the year 1772, Preston submitted his course of lectures on the first three degrees to the Craft of England. These lectures were a revision of those which had been practiced, with various modifications, since the revival of 1717, and were intended to confer a higher literary character on the Masonic ritual. Preston had devoted much time and labor to the compilation of these lectures, a syllabus of which will be found in his *Illustrations*. They were adopted eagerly by the English Fraternity, and continued to be the authoritative system of the Grand Lodge of England until the union in 1813, when, for the sake of securing uniformity, the new and inferior system of Dr. Hemming was adopted. But the Prestonian lectures and ritual are still used by many lodges in England. In America, they were greatly altered by Webb, and are no longer practiced there.