

Unity Lodge #58, A.F. & A.M. Thorndike, Maine



<<First Name>> <<Last Name>>
<<Address 1>>
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<<Town>> <<State>> <<Zip>>

April 12, 2018

Greetings Brother:

<<Raised this month wording>>

Coming events:

April 18, 2018, Our stated communication. 6:30 pm pot luck supper, 7:30 pm meeting.

April 21 Maine Masonic College program “Entered Apprentice Degree: an opening door to the Brotherhood of Masons and their purposes and beliefs”, Star in the West Lodge, Unity 9AM-12P

April 26, Fellowcraft degree at Siloam Lodge in Fairfield. 6:30 supper.

April 25, 12th district Masters and Wardens meeting after a 6:30 pm supper at Augusta to meet the candidates for Grand Lodge office.

May 1, Grand Lodge annual communication at Portland Masonic Building. 9 AM opening.

Sebasticook Lodge in Clinton has public breakfasts the 1st and 3rd Sundays 7-10 am.

Please notify the secretary if your address changes..

Thank you to those who have paid their dues.

Stated meeting are on the third Wednesday of the month at 7:30 with a 6:30 supper
Bruce Hutchins, Secretary, 1053 Halldale Rd, Montville ME 04941. tel/fax 382-6226, email bruce@hutchinsbrothers.com
District Calendar <http://east.our.calendars.net/glme/glmedist12>
<http://unitylodge.hutchinsbrothers.com/>

The Masonic Ritual in the United States:
History vs. Tradition

By Bro. A.L. Kress, Pennsylvania
<http://www.masonicdictionary.com/american.html>
TRADITION OF THE WEBB-PRESTON LECTURES
Part 1

There is a persistent and generally accepted tradition throughout the United States that Thomas Smith Webb somehow or other modified, abridged, altered, or rearranged the Preston Lectures, and that this was the genesis of our present ritual. I accepted the story myself at first, but it did not require much research to convince me that somewhere along the line tradition and fact controvert each other.

I shall first of all examine the origin of the tradition itself. It was not until about 1860 that our Grand Lodges evinced any great interest in the ritual and its genesis, which interest was largely stimulated by Rob Morris. As I have pointed out before, the ritual was in a somewhat chaotic condition from 1840 to 1860. Intelligent Masons everywhere were seeking for "the old ritual." Rob Morris was the leader in this search. In the course of his travels in 1857 he visited Philip C. Tucker, of Vergennes, Vermont, who had been made a Mason about 1824. Morris had made a practice of conferring with the older Masons - those made prior to 1830 - checking and comparing their versions in an effort to piece out "the old ritual." Tucker informed him that Samuel Willson, also of Vergennes, had in his possession an old manuscript cipher, which Willson had made in November, 1817, of the Webb Lectures as he had received them from John Barney at that time. Barney in turn had received them from one of Webb's "direct disciples" in Boston, and claimed to have rehearsed them before Webb himself. Morris was elated over this good fortune, examined the cipher and accepted the Barney-Willson Notes - now in the possession of the Grand Lodge of Vermont - as embodying the most authentic version of the old ritual then in existence.

As a result of Tucker's association with Morris and Morris' insistent effort to revive the old Webb Lectures, Tucker made three addresses before the Grand Lodge of Vermont in 1859, 1860 and 1861 respectively, which were extensively quoted by other writers. In his address in 1859 Tucker sought to present a complete narration of the history of the ritual. He said, in part:

"About the year 1800 - twelve years after the publication of Preston's Illustrations - an English brother whose name I have been unable to obtain came to Boston, and taught the English lectures as they had been arranged by Preston. The Grand Lodge of Massachusetts approved them, and they were taught to Thos. S. Webb, and Henry Fowle, of Boston, and Brother Snow, of Rhode Island, about the year 1801..... I think, upon these facts, I am justified in saying, that the lectures we use are the true lectures of Preston. Webb changed the arrangement of the sections, as fixed by Preston, for one which he thought more simple and convenient, but as I understand, left the body of the lectures themselves as Preston had established them." (1)

These portions of his address were evidently challenged by a member of the Craft - whom I believe to have been Mackey, though I have not yet located his article - which prompted Tucker to again discuss the matter in his address of 1860. He qualified his previous statements somewhat. I quote this address at greater length:

"In my address of last year I endeavored to condense what little information I had about the Masonic lectures, and that attempt has been, in general, quite favorably noticed by the Craft. In one distinguished Masonic quarter, however, some parts of my address on this subject seem to have met with disfavor. One particular thing found fault with is, that I thought myself justified in saying that the lectures in use, recovered through Webb and Gleason, were the true lectures of Preston. I certainly did not mean to say that they were identical in length with those of Preston. I had already said that Webb changed the arrangement of Preston's sections, but that he had left the body of the lectures as Preston had established them. Perhaps I should have said the substance instead of the 'body' of those lectures. I now state, what I supposed was well understood before by every tolerably well-

informed Mason in the United States, that Webb abridged as well as changed the arrangement of the lectures of Preston. I believed that I knew then, and I believe I know now that Webb learned and taught the Preston lectures in full as well as that he prepared and taught his own abridgement of them. I have a copy in key, both of Webb's abridgement and of Preston in full, which I have reasons wholly satisfactory to myself for believing are true transcripts of both those sets of lectures as Gleason taught them..... Again I am criticized for saying that Gleason visited England and exemplified the Preston lectures, as he had received them from Webb, before the Grand Lodge of England, whose authorities pronounced them correct, and I am charged with taking this from 'hearsay', and my critic places no 'faith in it.' I received that statement from the highest authority - from one who knew - and I wrote it down at the time. There are existing reasons why I do not choose to gratify my critic by naming that authority at this time, and I leave the Craft to judge whether my statement of the fact upon undoubted authority is not worthy of as much credit as any Reviewer's doubt about it. I do not possess anything in writing or published of Gleason's, as to his lecturing before the Grand Lodge of England, but that Masonry abroad did not ignore the lectures, as Gleason taught them, we have his own published letter to prove." (2)

Tucker then reproduces a letter from Gleason to C.W. Moore which was published in the second edition of Moore's Masonic Trestleboard, which as evidence is of no value.

Morris, likewise, was diffusing a similar legend in his writing and addresses. In October, 1858, at Louisville, Ky., for example, he said: "The lectures I shall teach you are those which Thomas Smith Webb prepared some sixty years ago, from the Ritual of William Preston. There are no others in the United States that have any claim to your respect." (3)

C.W. Moore, of Boston, was another to pass along the tradition. In December 1858, in an address at Boston, he remarked in part as follows:

"Among the Past Masters of this lodge we notice the name of the late Benjamin Gleason, Esq., who was the associate and co-laborer of the late Thomas Smith Webb, in introducing into the lodges of New England, and subsequently into other sections of the country, what is known as the Prestonian system of work and lectures..... It was the 'work' of Masonry as revised by Preston, and approved and sanctioned by the Grand Lodge of England, near the close of the last century..... The verbal ritual as revised by Preston, was brought to this country about the year 1803 - not by Webb, as we have recently seen it stated, never went abroad - but by two English brethren, one of we think, had been a pupil of Preston, and both of whom had been members of one of the principal Lodges of Instruction in London. It was first communicated to Webb, and by him parted to Gleason..... The system underwent some modifications (which were doubtless improvements) in its general arrangement and adaptations - its mechanism - soon at its introduction into this country; but in all other respects was received, and has been preserved, especially in the lodge of older jurisdictions, essentially, as it came from the original source of our Craft Masonry." (4)

So far as I have been able to discover, these earliest narrations we have of this tradition. If any brother knows of an earlier reference or can point to the use of the term "Webb-Preston Lectures" anywhere prior to 1858, I hope he will call it to my attention. The tradition rests upon the unsupported assertions of Tucker, Morris and Moore. None of them possessed any first hand information, nor produced any facts to confirm their assertions. Tucker attempted to, but his proofs are based only on inference. It hardly seems worth my while to refute any portion of their statements, as I shall show later on that the Webb Lecture could not possibly be an adaptation of the Preston Lectures.

to be continued