

THE RITUAL OF THE GRAND LODGE OF OHIO

By M.W. Charles B. Hoffman, Chairman

The lodges in Ohio which formed the Grand Lodge in 1808 were at that time using the rituals of the respective Grand Lodges that had chartered them. Consequently, the ritualistic work varied with the number of Lodges. When Masonry was brought to the American Colonies from England, the ritual was still in process of formation in the mother country, which probably had much to do with the variation in the ritualistic work of the respective Grand Jurisdictions in America. The rituals of that early day were not written but were communicated only by oral instruction. To this day, there is no single official ritual for the Grand Lodge of England.

The proceedings of our Grand Lodge are silent on the subject of ritual until 1834 when Samuel Reed, the Master of Nova Caesarea Harmony Lodge No.2, started a movement in the Grand Lodge to make our ritualistic work uniform. Reed subsequently became Grand Lecturer and continued in that capacity until 1847 when he resigned. Brother Reed used and taught the work of Thomas Smith Webb, which he had learned from Brother Calvin Washburn, a Past Master of Nova Caesarea Harmony Lodge, who in turn, along with Brother Webb had learned it from Brother Eason, Provincial Grand Lecturer from England. The "Webb" work has continued to be the work of the Grand Lodge of Ohio.

However, in 1855, our Grand Master complained that there was a serious lack of uniformity in ritual in the various Lodges in Ohio, even in those meeting in the same buildings. This lack of uniformity was the apparent result of the ritual not having been committed to writing.

In 1856 the Grand Lodge passed a resolution forbidding unauthorized persons to visit Masonic Lodges in Ohio and give instructions in Freemasonry for pay.

In October, 1857, the old Grand Lecturer system was abolished and instruction in a revised ritual was entrusted to the revisers. Some controversy arose over the matter of "District Deputy Grand Masters"; their title was changed to "District Lecturer" and their powers restricted to instruction in the revised ritual.

In 1859 a ritual was adopted, and in 1860 a resolution by the Grand Lodge required all Lodges to comply therewith.

With all this effort to insure uniformity of work, results were not satisfactory. Grand Master Levi Goodale in 1891 addressed the Grand Lodge on the matter and recommended a plan in use at that time by the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts which had proved successful. This plan provided for a pen- and-ink copy of the official ritual adopted by the Grand Lodge to be placed in the custody of the Grand Master and at the expiration of his term to be turned over by him to his successor.

His recommendation was adopted, a committee appointed, the ritual prepared and written by Brother J. W. Iredell, Jr. and adopted by the Grand Lodge as the official ritual, in 1892.

It was soon discovered by the Grand Master that some more rapid means of conveying the new official ritual to the Lodges must be found and in 1893 Grand Master Allen Andrews authorized the printing of two hundred copies in code or cipher form, and in the same year additional copies sufficient to supply each Lodge with one were authorized; this was accomplished in 1895.

In 1921 a new issue of the cipher ritual was printed and supplied to the Lodges. This edition included a number of revisions most of which were in the instructions (or rubrics) for conducting the work. In 1942 a significant step was taken in the authorization of divided cipher rituals for use by officers and candidates in committing the work. Until 1948 the esoteric and the monitorial material had been supplied in separate volumes. Dissatisfaction with this inconvenience to our officers brought a steadily increasing demand for a change which resulted in the printing of a new issue that included both the esoteric work

in cipher code and the monitorial sections arranged in proper sequence. At the same time the number of rituals supplied each Lodge was increased from one to five. The original and only pen-and-ink copy of this ritual which had been prepared and adopted in 1892, remained in the custody of successive Grand Masters until 1944. Because of the evidences of wear, it was at that time placed in the custody of the Chair- man of the Ritual Committee for reference but was not to be taken from its place of safe-keeping except for the annual meetings of the Grand Lodge. In 1949 these latter restrictions were removed by the Grand Lodge.

Increasing evidences of wear and tear on this priceless volume prompted the Ritual Committee in 1956 to recommend that a typewritten copy of the ritual be made for instruction purposes, and that the original pen-and-ink ritual be kept in the Grand Lodge building at Worthington in the care of the Grand Secretary.

This recommendation was approved and the typewritten copy of the ritual, of which this history is a part, is the result.

Since the adoption of our official ritual in 1891, changes in its text have been firmly resisted, for ours is a ritual which is unique in terseness and beauty of diction. Any change, there- therefore, is more apt to weaken than to strengthen it.

The preparation of this typewritten copy posed a number of interesting questions to the Ritual Committee, all of them of minor import. For example, it was discovered that the pen-and- ink ritual contained two or three unquestionable errors in spelling; many "inconsistencies", if not errors, III punctuation; and a decided lack of uniformity in the use of capital letters. Neither have the revised editions of the cipher ritual been consistent with the original pen-and-ink copy nor with themselves.

The Ritual Committee has decided these points as seemed for the best interests of Masonry in *Ohio* and hopes their efforts, meets with general approval.

The actual work of typing was done both in preliminary and final form entirely by Rt. Worshipful Brother Harold W. Hall of Marion, a former District Deputy Grand Master and a member of the Ritual Committee.