

# JEREMY LADD CROSS

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*by James R. Case, Historian Grand Council of Conn. R. & S.M.*

Delegations of Royal and Select Masters from nearby Councils will conduct a pilgrimage, on or about Saint John's Day in June 1983, to the grave of Jeremy Ladd Cross in Haverhill, New Hampshire. I here the 'Father of the Cryptic Rite' was born 200 years ago on June 27th.

Reputable Masonic historians and encyclopedists credit this 'famous Masonic author and lecturer' with having a 'wide spread influence on the practical workings of Freemasonry'. A few detractors have maligned Cross as a 'charlatan', a 'degree peddler' and one who 'made his Masonry a very nice paying investment'.

Occurrences which took place 125 years ago cannot be judged by today's standards, rules and regulations. A close review of his diary and letters, and more attention to chronology, brings out the high-spots in the career of this 'plain New Hampshire lecturer', the subsequent disseminator of the Royal and Select Masters degrees, combined in the present 'Cryptic Rite', a term he never used.

As a country boy with scant schooling, Jeremy went down to Portsmouth, the political, social and commercial metropolis of the state, learned the hatters' trade, and encountered his first set back in business, having made an unfortunate choice of a partner.

He was twenty-three years old in 1807 when he applied for membership in prestigious old St. Johns Lodge, of which the Master was Rev. George Richards, an accomplished ritualist. Cross served some time as Junior Deacon and, late in 1813 took a dimit and began a circuit of northern New Hampshire and adjacent Vermont, as a journeyman in his trade. He never went back to his mother Lodge.

He was carrying a certificate from the Grand Lecturer which attested his proficiency in the ritual. The version then in use had been agreed upon by conferees from New Hampshire and Massachusetts some years earlier.

Cross was instrumental in the revival of interest in North Star Lodge at Lancaster; was paid his shekel in Aurora Mark Lodge at Bradford; was arched in Champlain Chapter at St. Albans, Vermont; and acquired the Select Masters degree (and perhaps others) during an extended sojourn at Hopkinton. He became highly proficient in all the degrees which he had regularly received or may have been favored with, in return for his 'instruction in the degrees of the Lodge'. He had knowledge of the Past Master's degree and the order of High Priesthood, but not acquired through election.

With savings from his trade and lecturing, in May 1816 Jeremy set out for Providence, where Thomas Smith Webb was then active in Lodge, Chapter and Encampment (later Commandery).

His objective was to 'perfect himself in the work of the Chapter'. During a stop-over in Boston he records that he lectured before and received the 'sanction' of grand lodge officers.

Delegates from Massachusetts and Rhode Island were about to sail for New York, where the General Grand Chapter was to meet. Cross went along with them as a visitor, having no credentials. During the session he made the acquaintance of Philip Eckel of Baltimore and John Hart Lynde, Deputy Grand High Priest in Connecticut, among others. He is said to have visited Columbian Council, and to have obtained the degrees of the Ancient and Accepted Rite but those matters are not documented. Of greatest importance was a certificate of a sort over the names of all the General Grand Chapter Officers, which was printed in the introductory pages of the 'True Chart' he issued three years later. The fact of its being in print implied more than the document stated.

Cross continued to Philadelphia where Webb, John Snow and others had gone to persuade Pennsylvania to join a coalition of Grand Commanderies, an attempt which failed. Cross was refused permission to lecture in Pennsylvania, where he reported finding 'ignorance and obstinacy'. Undaunted, he crossed the river into New Jersey, visiting lodges there and in Delaware enroute to Baltimore.

Here he conferred with Eckel, who invoked 'the authority in me vested' and gave Cross permission to confer the degrees of Royal and Select Masters on any group of the essential nine Royal Arch Masons wherever he traveled, found a welcome and was successful in recruiting.

Striking out for the west he visited several places in Pennsylvania and Ohio. A visit to Lexington, Kentucky coincided with the presence of Webb and John Snow perfecting the organization of a Grand Chapter for the state, and a local encampment of Knights Templar. Cross found the atmosphere congenial, prolonged his visit, lectured and communicated the Council degrees. He visited Madison, Indiana and St. Louis and then proceeded down the Mississippi.

At Natchez he spent twelve days and installed the officers of a Chapter which Benjamin Gleason had congregated earlier in the year. Pointedly he reported he did not confer the order of High Priesthood as he 'did not possess it regularly'. He was never elected to the top office in Lodge, Chapter or Commandery.

In New Orleans he was 'received and acknowledged by the Consistory, presented with a full and perfect set of all the degrees, their histories, accompanied with the drawings, emblems, seals, etc.'

On May 27, 1817 Cross was back in Baltimore and now obtained 'authority' to issue warrants to Councils he had organized or might establish in the future. In a letter to Eckel he wrote "There are so many of these little Degrees that are given by anyone and in any place which are of no consequence that the Brethren have but little confidence in this unless it has the appearance of some kind of sanction, and I think those who receive it would not make sufficient application to perfect themselves in the History Work and Lectures unless there was an inducement held out for an office in the Council' .

After a years absence and a brief visit to the old homestead, in August he was again in hospitable Hopkinton and then to Boston where he established a Council and obtained the degree of Knight Templar in an 'irregular encampment'. At Providence he perfected himself in the degrees of the Chapter with Webb and 'rehearsed' the degrees of the Lodge with grand lodge officers, Webb then being Grand Master. At Hartford he found the Grand Master and Grand Secretary 'lacked Masonic fire' so on to New Haven, where he conferred with Lynde about employment by the Grand Chapter of Connecticut.

Again he headed south, going to New York city by steamer, and then across New Jersey and Delaware, leaving warrants in several places and thus earning his passage money. He arrived at Richmond early in December, attended a meeting of the 'working committee' of the Grand Lodge and, on Christmas Day established a Council with John Dove as TIM. He mentioned a hotel bill of \$8.75 for three days keep.

On his way north he organized a Council at Dumfries, was at Fredericksburg for observance of St. Johns Day in December, visited the Lodge at Alexandria and at Washington learned that Lynde had died. He continued to Connecticut in expectation that their agreement would be honored. Waiting for Grand Chapter in May, he made a swing around eastern Connecticut, warranting six Councils, noting that in New London he 'rcd \$55 for 7 days work'. At Norwich he made the acquaintance of James Cushman, of whom more later.

He now chose New Haven as his place of residence and made his first business arrangements when he 'Agreed with Amos Doolittle to engrave RA aprons and go 1/2 on expense and profits'. After a tour of western Connecticut he attended meetings of the Grand Lodge and Grand Chapter.

Cross became a Grand Lecturer in 1818, following appointment by the Grand Chapter of Connecticut, each Chapter having been assessed \$20 to cover four days instruction. In 1819 he and Cushman were appointed Grand Visitors, now to act under direction of the grand officers, with a prescribed limit to their expenses. For the next few years Cross sat pro tem in different chairs at Grand Convocations, reporting his activities as one of three Grand Visitors. His last appointment was made in 1823 and no mention is made of him in Grand Chapter records after 1826. However, his 'True Chart' had been recommended and he was a committeeman on such business as aprons, procurement of jewels, robes and certificates. Inexplicably his name is not on the membership list of Franklin Chapter in New Haven.

At Grand Lodge in May 1818 he was appointed Grand Lecturer, an assessment of \$10 was made on each lodge, with a recommendation that other (rival) lecturers not be employed. A year later his accounts were 'liquidated' and he was directed to act thereafter under orders from the Grand Officers. He is listed immediately following the Grand Secretary among those present in 1823, and was installed while the office of Grand Lecturer was proposed in a revision of the constitution, it was omitted from the final version adopted in 1824, after which the name of Cross does not appear in reports of Grand Communications. He had affiliated with Hiram Lodge in 1818 but became a charter member of Adelphi Lodge when it was organized in New Haven in 1923. He was never elected to any station in either, or any lodge as far as known.

With less than a decade of official recognition Cross had acquired the 'R.W.' and 'G.L.' which appear on his headstone. His reputation was firmly established and there is plenty of evidence to show that he continued to lecture and instruct for the rest of his life. A pertinent echo of sentiment among delegates to Grand Lodge appears in the minutes of the session in 1842, when the appointment of a Grand Lecturer was proposed, considered and negatived, experience with a former grand lecturer having been unfortunate.

Cross had continued to 'sell' the degrees of Royal and Select Master and had warranted as many as eleven Councils in Connecticut before delegates assembled on May 18, 1819 and organized the first Grand Council in the world, which has continued its existence and independence to the present day. Cross is not recorded among those present at the organization meeting. He did serve as TIM of Harmony Council in New Haven for eight years.

In Templar circles 1818 was an important year for Cross. In September he had visited Providence, was 'healed' in St. Johns Commandery and received the Order of Red Cross. On October he affiliated with Washington Commandery at a meeting in New London. Here an arrangement was made with Henry Fowle, Deputy General Grand Master, for publication of a 'Templars Chart', the silent partner to have one third of the profits. Such was his ability to memorize that a short time later he was able to communicate the work in 'the valiant Orders of Knighthood' to Cushman who later was active in Virginia Templary. Although New Haven Commandery was organized in 1825, Cross did not affiliate. His few visits were connected with the design or procurement of a uniform.

In December 1819 the 'True Masonic Chart or Hieroglyphic Monitor' was copyrighted. The foreword admitted that few changes had been made in earlier texts of 'illustrations' by Preston and Webb. But Cross included forty pages of pictured emblems and from that time his Monitor became so popular it ran through sixteen editions in which Cross had an interest. Webb had died in 1819 but his name and that of Cross were used for years on pirated or 'improved editions' of their monitors.

The 'Monument' with such components as the 'Weeping Virgin', 'Broken Column' and 'Father Time', often attributed to the inventive genius of Cross and Doolittle, definitely was not. The text of the lecture is in the cipher notes of John Barney in the ritual as he obtained it from Gleason at Boston in 1817. An earlier and much better engraving appears on a wall chart published by 'Comp. H. Parmalee' in Philadelphia under the title of 'Masonic Mirror and Symbolic Chart' and for which a copyright was secured in August 1818.

Cross did not abandon his lecturing entirely but was going into business in a big way. He had earlier sold aprons from a Providence maker and arks from a Hartford builder. Now he began to develop a system of production in New Haven. His True Charts were being shipped all over the country which then had little Masonry west of the Missouri and Mississippi rivers. He supplied satin as well as leather aprons, robes, capes and accessories. Doolittle printed diplomas and Select 'flaps'. From some of Cross' letters we learn about prices and the extent of his business.

John Barker was another disciple of Cross. He went to Charleston, South Carolina for his health, became active in Masonic circles and was appointed an agent of the Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Rite. Leaving Virginia and North Carolina to Cushman

Barker traveled throughout the south and disseminated the degrees of Royal and Select Masters in several locations, the Supreme Council having jurisdiction over the degrees which were then considered detached or 'floating'. Barker knew that Cross had numerous documents and miscellanea from the Consistory in New Orleans, and worked out an exchange, whereby Cross turned them all over to the Supreme Council and in turn was rewarded with membership and a 33d degree patent. Cushman as courier also received the degree. Cross himself was never in Charleston.

Cross did not lecture in Massachusetts lodges as Benjamin Gleason served there officially, nor in Rhode Island where Webb lived several years. In Vermont neither his book nor his work found favor. Pennsylvania was inhospitable, Maryland was Eckels territory. Except in New York city, Cross deferred to Salem Town, although Wadsworth, Eno and Hayes were named among his protégés. Ohio and points west were left to Barney. This distribution of territory which existed, perhaps was prearranged, gave rise to the idea that a 'Lecturers' Union' existed. One disgraceful action in which collusion is apparent was the vicious campaign against David Vinton.

The anti-Masonic frenzy, sparked by the disappearance of William Morgan from Batavia, NY in 1826, fostered by designing politicians and uncomprehending ordained critics of the fraternity, had its effect on Cross and his supply business. New Haven was the citadel of Freemasonry in Connecticut and braced against the storm, but Jeremy felt that New York city was a more fertile field, a better shipping point from which to satisfy the great demand in the southern states, and a more favorable place for a man going into business as wholesale paper dealer and publisher.

Cross signed the 1832 'Declaration of Principles' widely publicized in Massachusetts and Connecticut. He then moved to New York city, 'entered into mercantile employ' and prospered. He is listed in the city directory in 1834 and omitted 20 years later, having retired to Haverhill in October 1853. His parents were dead and he lived with a spinster sister in the old homestead. Cross never married, although his diary occasionally hints at an interest in some charming female, apparently never pursued or perhaps nor reciprocated. He left a considerable estate.

In New York city Masonry did not suffer as much from the Morgan incident as from personality differences within Grand Lodge circles and among the most contentious and disruptive was Henry C. Atwood a 'favorite pupil of Cross'. His ambitions and trouble making extended to the Ancient and Accepted Rite, and Cross was persuaded to bring out his 33d diploma and accept the spot as titular head of the 'Atwood' Council. Other respectable individuals who had been named without being consulted did not serve. Within a year Cross was superseded, having insisted on Royal Arch membership as a pre-requisite for admission, and Templar Knighthood for advancement.

Jeremy took his Masonry into retirement with him, encouraged the reactivation of Grafton Lodge in Haverhill, installed and instructed the officers and was a regular attendant until a few months before he died on January 26, 1860. His headstone memorializes a Right Worshipful Grand

Lecturer and features an emblem of the 33d degree. All very complimentary to a 'modest, devoted and influential Mason.' Still more so is the epitaph which reads 'A Pattern Son and Brother', one who was truly 'amiable, distinguished and exemplary'.

Notes and further reading.

The 'History of the Cryptic Rite' by Hinman, Denslow and Hunt, prints the diary of Jeremy Ladd Cross in the appendix. Reprints of the Proceedings of the several Grand bodies in Connecticut are basic references. Histories of the Rite in North Carolina and Virginia are interesting reading. Authorized histories of the Scottish Rite, both South and North, as well as Folger's, are not always in agreement. An 'illustrated' twenty page biographical pamphlet by Brother Case, compiled for the Grand Lodge of New Hampshire in 1958, is out of print. Entries in Masonic encyclopedias vary in length and content.

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