

BALTIMORE CONVENTION, 1843

(This Bulletin is an abstract from the scholarly study made by R. W. Henry C. Chiles, Junior Grand Warden, Grand Lodge of Missouri, to whose courtesy and cooperation the ASSOCIATION is indebted for kind permission to adapt and use his work in this much abbreviated form.)

The "Baltimore Convention of 1843", held May 8 to 17, attempted to agree upon a "mode of work" to recommend to the various Grand Lodges, that Masonic ritual might become uniform throughout the nation.

The catechism form of lectures came to this country with Freemasonry. The system originally arranged by Anderson and Desaguliers was revised and "improved" by Martin Clare, Thomas Dunkerly, William Hutchinson and, most important, William Preston, who suggested, if he did not exactly teach, the esoteric parts of the "work" by illustrations of symbols and emblems, depicted on "floor clothes" or "carpets" - even today we retain a reference to "The Master's Carpet".

The Prestonian work was largely spread in this country by Thomas Smith Webb, who published his first "Freemason's Monitor" in 1797. He is supposed to have had the Prestonian work from a pupil of Preston's, John Hanmer. Almost every Jurisdiction (Pennsylvania excepted) adopted some or all of Webb's modifications of Preston. Webb's labors were greatly aided by Jeremy Cross, whose "True Masonic Chart" (illustrated by the Connecticut engraver Amos Doolittle) is the foundation of those often terrible examples of art seen today on Masonic charts and lantern slides.

In the early days of Masonry in this country a ritual, with every word prescribed, had not been evolved. According to Rob Morris: "The catechism being committed to memory the learner was supposed to possess the method of work, that is, the drill and drama. Or ceremony of Masonry, which was made literally to conform to the lectures."

Dr. Mackey, in his Lexicon said of the lectures: "These constitute the simple text of Masonry, while the extended illustrations which are given to them by an intelligent Master or Lecturer constitute the commentary, without which the simple text would be comparatively barren and uninstrutive."

A joint committee report recommending the adoption of the Webb lectures to the Grand Lodges of Massachusetts and New Hampshire, in 1806, stated: "In the three degrees every Master of a Lodge should be indulged with the liberty of adopting historical details, and the personification of the passing scene as most agreeable to himself, his supporting officers and assisting Lodge."

That "the lectures" meant a catechism which the Baltimore Convention wished to make uniform throughout the nation, is revealed in its official printed proceedings of Wednesday, May 8, 1843:

"The Chairman of the Standing Committee on work, stated that the Committee had, after mature deliberation, decided on the lecture of the first Degree, and proceeded to report, - Br. Moore citing the answers."

In the first quarter of the nineteenth century the establishment of Lodges rapidly followed the westward march of the pioneers. Many prominent, substantial and influential men became Masons. But the second quarter saw the Fraternity almost wiped out of existence. The excitement created by the disappearance of William Morgan, of Batavia, New York, in September, 1826, ripened into a nationwide and extraordinarily bitter anti-Masonic movement, a crusade which became relentless persecution.

Anti-Masonic newspapers, pamphlets, almanacs and addresses were distributed in large quantities. Itinerant lecturers traveled the country over, each striving to outdo the other in denunciation of the Institution. In public exhibitions before large audiences, crusaders purported to open "Masonic Lodges" and confer "Masonic Degrees" upon disreputable persons. Exposés, pretending to reveal the secrets of Freemasonry, were published.

These widespread persecutions nearly wrecked the Fraternity. A very large number of Lodges either gave up their Charters, or became dormant. Grand Lodges ceased to meet. Masonry was seriously affected everywhere.

During the years of the Morgan warfare against the Craft little Masonic work was done, and the older and more skilled members either died or lost their proficiency. Professional Masonic lecturers sought other means of livelihood. So that when the tide receded and petitions once more were presented to Lodges, the younger generation often received only imperfect instruction.

On the defensive, the Fraternity was obliged carefully to guard against cowans and evesdroppers. Evidence of membership of a would-be visitor was critically tested. Examining committees proceeded on the theory that the presumption of regularity was against the would-be visitor.

Under such conditions lack of uniformity of masonic work among the several Grand Lodges, or even among Lodges in the same State, was a formidable obstacle to fraternal intercourse.

Possible relief from these chaotic conditions it was thought might be found in uniformity of the lectures. Identification of members could thus be the more readily made and lodges could discontinue turning away visitors, among whom many must have been in good standing, even if unable to prove themselves.

In 1840 the Grand Lodge of Alabama requested all (Grand Lodges in the nation with which she was in fraternal intercourse, to send a delegate to meet in a general convention the first Monday in March, 1842, in Washington, D. C. "for the purpose of determining upon a uniform mode of work throughout all the Lodges of the United States, and to make other lawful regulations for the interest and security of the Craft."

As a result, representatives of Alabama, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, South Carolina and Virginia, convened.

On March 9, a committee of five; John Dove, Charles W. Moore, James Herring, William Field and Isaac E. Holmes, appointed "to revise and suggest a uniform mode of work" reported that, among its members, "there exists a satisfactory degree of uniformity", but because many Grand Lodges were unrepresented, it recommended that "every Grand Lodge in the United States appoint one or more skillful brethren to be styled Grand Lecturers, who shall meet and agree upon the course of instruction necessary and proper to be imparted to the Lodges and the Fraternity in their several Jurisdictions."

Following the adoption of this report, the Convention "Resolved, That should the Grand Lodges or a majority of them determine to adopt the recommendations contained in the report of the Committee, respecting the appointment of Grand Lecturers, that it be further recommended by this Convention that the first meeting of said Grand Lecturers be held in the City of Baltimore, on the second Monday in May, 1843."

The Baltimore Convention met Monday, May 8 1843, and remained in session (Sunday excepted) to and including Wednesday, May 17. Delegates and visitors were as follows:

Alabama, Edward Herndon, P.G.M.; District of Columbia, Nathaniel SeEVERS, G.L.; Florida, Thomas Hayward, P.D.G.M.; Georgia, Lemuel Dwelle, G.L.; Louisiana E. Cruben (a visitor); Maryland, Daniel Piper, G.L.; W. E. Wyantt, Chaplain of the Convention: Charles Gilman, G.M. (a visitor); Cornelius Smith, S.G.W. (a visitor); and Joseph K. Stapleton. D.G.M. of Grand Encampment (a visitor); Massachusetts, Charles W. Moore, G.S.; Missouri, Stephen W.B. Carnegy, P.G.M.; Joseph Foster, S.G.W.; Fred'k L. Dillon, P.G.S. (a visitor) and Hiram Chamberlain, G.C. (a visitor); Mississippi, John Delafield (of Memphis) G.L.; New Hampshire, Thomas Clapham; North Carolina, John H. Wheeler, G.M.; New York, Ebenezer Wadsworth, P.G.S.; Ohio, John Barney, G.L. and W. J. Reese, G.M. (a visitor); Rhode Island, William Field; South Carolina, Albert Case, G.C.; South Wales, Edward John Hutchins, P.P.D.G.M. (a visitor); Virginia, John Dove, G.S.

On the opening day Dr. Dove was elected president and Rev. Albert Case, Grand Chaplain of the Strand Lodge of South Carolina, Secretary.

On the second day, agenda were adopted declaring the objects and purposes of the Convention to be:

1. To produce uniformity of Masonic work.
2. To recommend such measures as shall tend to the elevation of this Order to its due degree of respect throughout the world at large.

To accomplish the first object, four Committees were appointed, viz:-

1. On the work and lectures in conferring the degrees.
2. On the funeral service.
3. On the ceremonies of Consecration and Installation.
4. On Masonic Jurisprudence.

To accomplish the second object, three Committees were appointed, viz:-

1. To report on the expediency of adopting a regularly authorized Masonic Trestleboard and further to report on the propriety of publishing a work of antiquarian research and learning on the origin and history of the Order, of such a character as shall exhibit the excellence and antiquity thereof in its true light.
2. To report on further measures necessary to carry out the programme of the Washington Convention of 1842, in reference to Grand Lodge certificates.
3. To report on the expediency of issuing a letter addressed by this Convention to the Fraternity throughout the United States on the general state of Masonry, etc.

The Committee "on the work and lectures in conferring the degrees" was appointed on the second day of the Convention, Tuesday, May 9, and consisted of Dr. Dove of Virginia, (Chairman), Moore of Massachusetts, Barney of Ohio, Wadsworth of New York, and Carnegie of Missouri. It made its first report the next morning. Except as to one member, a "satisfactory degree of uniformity existed."

The official printed proceedings of the Convention show fully all of the matter printed relative to the reports of this Committee: the Proceedings state:-

"The Chairman of the Standing Committee on work, stated that the Committee had, after mature deliberation, decided on the Lecture of the first Degree, and proceeded to report, - Br. Moore giving the answers."

Herndon, Past Grand Master of Alabama, offered the resolution: "That the Lecture on the first degree of Masonry, as reported by the Committee, be by this Convention now adopted, as the authorized work in that degree, to be recommended to the Fraternity throughout the Union." The proceedings then state. "After an animated discussion, the question was taken on the Resolution, and it was adopted, 14 to 1, the delegate from New York (Wadsworth of the Committee) dissenting."

On Thursday morning, May 11, "The Chairman of the Committee on Work, reported on the opening and closing ceremonies of the first degree," which was adopted.

Then, "The Chairman of the Committee on Work, assisted by Br. Moore, reported the Lecture of the second degree".

"Br. Wadsworth moved an amendment to the report, which was rejected." The resolution to adopt the report was then adopted.

Then, "The Chairman of the same Committee reported on the opening and closing of a Lodge in the second degree. After some discussion, in which several brethren took part, the report was adopted. Br. Wadsworth requested to be excused from serving longer on the Committee on Work. Excused, and Br. Herndon of Alabama substituted."

On Friday morning, May 12, "The Committee on Work presented a verbal report on the opening of the third degree" which was adopted.

Then, "The Chairman on the Committee on Work presented a verbal report on the 1st section of the lecture in the third degree", which was adopted "after a slight amendment."

At the afternoon session of the same day, "Br. Moore from the Committee on Work reported the second section of the lecture in the third degree. Br. Case moved an amendment, which was adopted." The report as amended was adopted.

Then, "Br. Moore from the same Committee reported the third section of the Lecture in the third degree", which was adopted.

At the afternoon session, Saturday, May 13, "The Committee on Work reported another section of the work of the third degree." "On motion the report was adopted by a vote of 12 to 1, Wadsworth of New York dissenting.

On Monday evening, May 15, "The Committee on Work exemplified the opening and closing of the Lodge in the third degree." And on Tuesday morning, May 16, "The lecture of the first Degree was given and repeated."

What was it that the Baltimore Convention adopted and recommended to the various Grand Lodges of the country?

In a letter written twenty years after the Convention, quoted in *The Builder*, June, 1916, R. W. Charles W. Moore said:.

"The work and lectures of the first three degrees, as adopted and authorized by the Baltimore Convention, in 1843, were, with a few unimportant verbal exceptions, literally as they were originally compiled by Bro. Thos. S. Webb, about the close of the last century, and as they were subsequently taught by him during his lifetime, and also by his early and favorite pupil, Bro. Benjamin Gleason, from the years 1801-2 until his death in 1847. * * * I had the honor to be a member of the Committee, and to report the amendments and the lectures as amended, to the Convention. This I did without alterations from the original; and these are now in my possession. They are mostly verbal, few in number, and not material in their results. The only change of consequence was in the due guards of the second and third degrees, which were changed and made to conform to that of the first degree in position and explanation. This was analogically correct."

To the Grand Lodge of Vermont Grand Master Phillip Crosby Tucker said, at the annual communication of 1861:-

"There can be no doubt then that the Lectures communicated by (Henry) Fowle to (John) Barney were the genuine Lectures taught by (Thomas Smith) Webb and (Benjamin) Gleason: the same which Gleason received from Webb in 1801 or 1802; the same which he taught as Grand Lecturer of Massachusetts from 1805; the same that I found among the Boston Masons in 1823 or 1824; and the very same which are taught there now."

A.L. Kress, in *The Builder* September, 1926, stated:-

"In 1760, what is now the EA sign was called the EA's due guard or sign. What are now the EA and FC DG's were unknown or at least not used as such. There was only one sign each in the EA and FC degrees. Some time about 1800 (the date is indeterminate) it occurred to someone to incorporate one movement or action to be known as the due guard, and the other as the sign. These were as follows: In the EA degree, what is now the due guard was then termed the sign and what is now the sign was called the due guard. In the FC degree, the two were given almost as now, except they were never given separately. In the MM degree, the due guard was given with the right hand only. In 1843, a convention was held at Baltimore, Md., to agree on a uniform ritual. Among other things, they reversed the procedure in the EA degree. What was then the due guard they made our present sign and vice versa. In the MM degree, they adopted the use of both hands in giving the MM due guard."

Under the title "Immovable Jewels" Dr. Mackey's *Lexicon* says:

"According to the old system in England, the immovable jewels of the Lodge are the Rough Ashlar, Perfect Ashlar and Trestle Board; but in this Country, by the decision of the Baltimore Convention, in 1843, they are made to consist of the Square, Level and Plumb."

Apparently only three major changes of importance were adopted by the Baltimore Convention. The third is seen in "The Masonic Trestleboard" the manual or monitor issued by the authority of the Convention (the same may be seen in many modern manuals and monitors) On Plate 3 appeared the following cryptic figures:

7 (3/4); 5 (3/2); 3.

An explanation by Dr. James W. S. Mitchell. P.G.M. (Mo.) in his magazine, "The Masonic Signet and Literary Mirror" for March, 1852, reads: "About the time of the rage of anti-Masonry various schemes and devices and non-essential changes were proposed, among which it was gravely suggested that all members of Lodges must be M. Ms., that the business of the Lodge should be done in the third degree, which would require all applicants to visit to prove themselves to be M. Ms. In some Jurisdictions this system was adopted, in others, the good old way was adhered to."

Doubtless the reasons which impelled the Convention to take this action were those which had moved it to adopt the other changes or amendments to prevailing words and practices.

However that may be, it seems clear that the Baltimore Convention adopted, with only three major changes of importance, the lectures as taught by Thomas Smith Webb, and recommended their adoption by the several grand Lodges then in existence.