

JURISDICTIONAL CONTRASTS

The forty-nine Grand Lodges of the continental United States live in peace and harmony together, each recognizing all the others, each practicing the same principles, teaching the same truths, inculcating the same philosophies.

In minor details, ritual is different in all; larger matters differ in some, but in all the essentials are the same. Yet different climates, longitudes and latitudes; character of people, political ideas, State and Jurisdictional history have all made their marks on what may be termed, for want of better words, the "body politic" of the several Grand Lodges, with the result that diverse practices and different laws are found in several States. These present many interesting contrasts, some of which are here set forth. Each Grand Jurisdiction, necessarily and properly, is a law unto itself in its own affairs, is, as a matter of course, right in its own pronouncements.

Election customs differ widely, Grand Masters, Grand Wardens and Grand Secretaries are elected in all forty-nine Jurisdictions, but in Iowa, Massachusetts and Mississippi the Deputy Grand Master is appointed by the Grand Master. In Nebraska and Washington there is no Grand Treasurer. Only one Jurisdiction, the District of Columbia, elects as far "down the line" as stewards.

Grand Officers are not the same in all Jurisdictions.

All have Grand Masters, Deputy Grand Masters, Grand Wardens, Grand Secretaries, Grand Deacons and Grand Tilers. Some have other officers: in Some Jurisdictions are to be found;

Grand Auditor, Grand Orator, Grand Bible Bearer, Grand Chaplain, Grand Custodian, Grand Director of Ceremonies, Grand Historian, Grand Instructor, Grand Lecturer, Grand Librarian, Grand Marshal, Grand Master of Instruction, Grand Musical Director, Grand Organist, Grand Pursuivant, Grand Purveyor, Grand Sword Bearer, Grand Senior and Junior Stewards; and Grand Standard Bearer.

It is also to be noted that in forty-one Jurisdictions Wardens, Deacons and Stewards are "Senior Grand" and "Junior Grand," while in eight they are "Grand Senior" and "Grand Junior." In Missouri, Wardens are Senior and Junior Grand, while Deacons and Stewards are Grand Senior and Junior. Stewards in both Carolinas are neither Senior nor Junior, and in Georgia are First, second and Third Grand Stewards. New York has twelve Grand Sword Bearers, twelve Grand Stewards, twelve Grand Directors of Ceremonies. Massachusetts has District Grand Masters, not to be confused with District Deputies, which are officers in many States.

In a great majority of Jurisdictions, the appointive power is vested wholly in the Grand Master, but in seven some officers are appointed by Wardens or the Grand Secretary.

All Grand Jurisdictions elect annually; ten invariably elect a retiring Grand Master for a second term; two others often do. Massachusetts almost invariably elects the same Grand Master three years in succession. In times gone by Maryland reelected the same Grand Master year after year; only recently has that Grand Lodge had a living Past Grand Master. So far, M.W. Brother Gorsuch is the only living P.G.M. in the Grand Lodge of Maryland.

Iowa and Massachusetts choose Grand Masters for the ensuing year "from the floor." Neither Maine nor Delaware "advance the line" below Deputy Grand Master, although of course no law prevents it. Thus, in two Jurisdictions a brother does not have to serve as a Grand Lodge officer before being elected to the Grand East; in at least two he may serve in only one station before election as Grand Master. In some Jurisdictions the length of service runs up to as high as twelve stations in which an officer serves before becoming Grand Master.

All Grand Lodges but Michigan have some appointive Grand Officers. In eighteen Grand Lodges it is customary to elect the highest appointive officer to the lowest elective position; in twenty-nine Jurisdictions this is not done, the choice for the lowest elective position being open. Many Grand Lodges either permit or require nominations; some made openly from the floor; others secretly, in writing. In a majority of Jurisdictions, nomination is forbidden. Grand Lodge officers' titles vary. Forty-eight Jurisdictions call the Grand Master "Most Worshipful;" in Pennsylvania he is "Right Worshipful." Forty-six Jurisdictions call the Grand Secretary "Right Worshipful" - Arizona, California and Nevada denominate both Grand Secretary and Grand Treasurer, "Very Worshipful." Some Grand Jurisdictions, such as Connecticut and New Jersey, give "Right Worshipful" to all Grand Lodge Officers; others, such as the District of Columbia, give "Right Worshipful" only to the Deputy Grand Master, Grand Secretary and Treasurer; and Grand Wardens. In some Jurisdictions a Grand Secretary or Treasurer is Most Worshipful if he is a Past Grand Master - in Virginia where it is customary to appoint the immediate Past Grand Master as Grand Junior Steward, he keeps his title of "Most Worshipful." Thirty-nine Jurisdictions give the title won by service to the Past Officer for life; others allow him to keep it only if he filled an elective office; still others give a life title only to a Past Grand Master.

Most Grand Lodges meet but once a year, but there are exceptions. Massachusetts and Pennsylvania met quarterly, with an extra Communication on St., John's Day in winter; the District of Columbia meets semi-annually, with an extra Communication on St. John's Day in the winter; Maryland, New Hampshire and Rhode Island meet twice yearly. Grand Lodges meet every month of the year except July; three in January, six in February, five in March, three in April, eight in May, eleven in June, two in August, six in September, six in October, three in November and six in December.

In five Grand Lodges, Lodges are represented only by the Masters; in twenty-six by Masters and Wardens; in fifteen by Masters, Wardens and one Past Master; in two by Masters, Wardens and special representatives to Grand Lodge.

That a Lodge may instruct its representatives is an ancient right, specifically set forth in the Old Charges. But the Old Charge does not state that representatives must follow their instructions.

Masonic opinion is divided on the subject; twenty-one Grand Jurisdictions permit Lodge Representatives to disregard Lodge instructions and vote as per their consciences, thus making of Grand Lodge a deliberative body of Masonry, rather than a House of Representatives in which each delegate represents a constituency. To brethren familiar only with the form of petition used by their Lodges or, if in a Jurisdiction in which a standard Grand Lodge form of petition is mandatory, with that paper - the idea that there are as many varieties of ways to ask for the degrees as there are Grand Lodges may come as something of a novelty. Yet no two Grand Lodges use the same forms, ask the same questions.

Petitions may vary in size from that of Arkansas, a paper not much larger than a bank check, to those of Arizona, Maine, Michigan, North Dakota, etc., which cover four pages, and those of Tennessee, Utah, etc. which are legal sized documents.

In addition to the petition, and the formal committee reports, some Jurisdictions use also a questionnaire; in some this is filled out by the petitioner, in others by the committee. A majority of the petitions which ask many questions include the questionnaire as a part of the petition.

All petitions begin with some sort of declaratory statement; a few have also an "authorized statement" or exhortation, which must be read and assented to before the petition is signed.

Petitions are strictly alike in just five particulars; all require name, age, residence, occupation and a statement as to any previous application. Nine Grand Jurisdictions do not require the statement that the petitioner believes in God. This most emphatically does not mean that these Grand Lodges do not require a "belief" in Deity; merely that the Lodges in these States use other means than the petition to satisfy themselves upon that important matter. Several Grand Lodges ask leading questions regarding religious matters; California wants to know if the petitioner believes in a future existence; Mississippi, New York, and Oregon want a statement as to the belief in the immortality of the soul; Texas asks the petitioner if he believes in the authenticity of the Holy Scriptures, etc.

Various Grand Lodges ask questions as to the religious faith of the petitioner, his father's and mother's church, what religion his wife follows, of what church he is a member of or attends.

Certain questions are a direct reflection of local conditions. If a petitioner has resided less than five years in the District of Columbia, he is asked his previous residence, names and addresses of three persons preferably Masons, there acquainted with him, and, if known to him, by name, number and location of the Masonic Lodge nearest in all places he has lived during that five year period. The reason is that to Washington come thousands and thousands of men from other Jurisdictions to take up temporary or permanent residence as servants of the government. This Grand Lodge finds it essential to communicate with Lodges nearest the place a petitioner lived prior to his residence in Washington, that none who were refused for cause be balloted on without due knowledge.

Other interesting questions are asked by some Grand Lodges. "What is the nationality of your parents?" is asked by Washington State. "If you are not a citizen, what is your excuse for not taking out citizenship papers?" is desirable information in Michigan.

Oregon and Indiana are interested in whether or not a petitioner is a registered voter; Maine asks where and when the applicant last paid a poll tax. Overseas Lodge of Rhode Island naturally wants to know the war record, rank, date and character of discharge from the military or naval service of its applicants. six grand lodges want to know if an applicant is divorced; Oregon asks who sought the divorce; Georgia wants to know the reason. Some Grand Lodges ask if a petitioner lives with his wife, if previously married and if so, is previous wife living; others like to ascertain if domestic relations are congenial, how many children, their names and ages. Such inquires are directed primarily to learning what are the chances, if any, that petitioners children might become charges upon the Lodge.

Some Grand Lodge are interested in the petitioners fraternal associations other than Freemasonry; Rhode Island likes to know if the petitioner has held any political or ecclesiastical offices, and many ask searching questions as to the financial abilities of the applicant to pay his fees and dues, how much insurance he carries, how long it has been in force, if he has accident and health as well as life insurance, etc. Some add inquires as to present and past health , illnesses in last five years, names and addresses of physicians.

Some Grand Lodges cause a committee to express an opinion upon such matters as reputation for being a law abiding citizen, reputation for truth and honesty, habits which mat tend to degrade morals, financial reputation, has the petitioner gone through bankruptcy, character of his associates, is he engaged in the liquor traffic, a gambler, habitual user of profane or indecent language, etc.

California desires information as to whether the wife or family is in sympathy with the petitioner becoming a Mason.

The variation in law and custom governing dimitts, affiliations and visiting is so great that more than one Bulletin of this size would be required even to list them, but a few points may be noted. Dimit is spelled "dimit" in thirty-four Grand Jurisdictions; "Demit" in the others. Eight Grand Jurisdictions do not require a written application for a Dimit; the others do, except a few which will accept an oral application "provided" it is made in open Lodge. All require dues to be paid before a dimit is granted; some have other requirements, such as no other indebtedness to the Lodge, no one claiming right to file charges, a statement of the intention to affiliate with another Lodge. Oklahoma will not grant a dimit to a brother who is not proficient in the Master's Degree.

Half the Grand Lodges require a Lodge vote before a dimit is granted; half permit the Master to order a dimit if the precedent conditions are fulfilled; Arizona, only if the dimit is "non-recommendatory."

In most Grand Lodges a dimit may be granted on request; in Michigan, dimitts are given only to brethren who remove from the State; Montana "must" give a dimit to join another Lodge; if, however, the applicant desires to become a non-affiliate, he may or may not be given a dimit. Nevada only gives a dimit to brethren within her borders if they desire to affiliate with another Lodge, which is also true of New York, except if another desires to be "dropped from the rolls" (become a non-affiliate) he is entitled to a dimit in the Empire State.

In thirty-four Grand Lodges a dimit is unlimited as to time; in others a dimit is valid from three months to one year.

Visiting by an unaffiliated mason is a matter of much diversity. in eleven grand jurisdictions there is no limit as to the number of times, or the length of time, a non affiliate may visit. In some States the unaffiliated may visit for six months; in eight he may visit three times; in five he may visit once; in the District of Columbia, once in each Lodge. In three States an unaffiliated may not visit at all.

“Good standing cards” are required of would-be visitors in twenty- five States; in eighteen they are not asked for; one Grand Lodge leaves it “up to the Tiler.”

These pages are not intended to be a complete exposition of all the contrasts in Masonic laws, but merely an indication of the wide divergences of opinion, custom, and practice which exists in our far- flung Freemasonry. That forty-nine Grand jurisdictions live side by side, neighborly, friendly, in the complete harmony “which is the Strength and support of all well regulated institutions,” while so at variance in details, is a tribute to the strength as well as to the elasticity of the Mystic Tie.