

## **Southern California Research Lodge F & AM**

### **Our Ancient Grand Master's Staffs, The "Rule Of Three" and The Lost Word**

A Paper Presented by Brother Charles L. Roblee December 7, 1985

(Explanatory notes. The following paper was authored in 1984, revised 1985, and presented in Silas H. Shepherd Lodge of Research No. 1843 annual meeting on December 7, 1985.) It is adapted from and suggested by, "The Hidden Secrets of a Master Mason" by S. Brent Morris, F.P.S., in Vol. 34 The Philalethes Magazine, 2, pp. 11-13 (April 1983), and "The Lodge, The Mason and the Forty-Seventh Problem" by Mervin B. Hogan, M.P.S., in The Philalethes Magazine, 1, pp. 19, 23 (February 1983). Also, Why by the Square? by Silas H. Shepherd F.P.S., in Research Pamphlet No. 23 (November 15, 1925). Wisconsin Grand Lodge Committee on Masonic Research.)

#### **The Number Three Permeates Symbolic Masonry**

The sacred number 3 is repeatedly used in Symbolic Masonry; particularly in the Third Degree.

One of the primary tenets of the Craft specifies that a minimum of three Master Masons is required to open constitute a Lodge of Master Masons.

The Master Mason is informed that three grand columns or pillars support the Masonic Lodge; they being known as the pillars of Wisdom, Strength and Beauty. The pillar of Wisdom represents Solomon, King of Israel, whose wisdom contrived the building at Jerusalem the Temple to the most high God of Israel. The pillar of Strength relates to Hiram, King of Tyre, who supported and strengthened Solomon in this glorious undertaking. The pillar of Beauty, assigned to Hiram Abif, the widow's son, whose creative skills and original workmanship beautified adorned the Temple.

Among the numerous legends which grew out of the building of the Temple is one that involves King Solomon, King Hiram and Hiram Abif as the established administrative and executive authority in charge of the planning and construction of the Temple.

#### **Three Grand Masters, Three Staffs, Three Colors**

Tradition states that each of these three Grand Masters had a staff or rod of office, and that each staff was of an exact known length. That of the First Grand Master was five units, that of the Second Grand Master was four units, and that of the Third Grand Master was three units in length.

By unanimous consent of these three Grand Masters, it was accepted that the three of them had to meet and agree to assemble their three staffs in a 3-4-5 right-triangle before an authorized executive session pertaining to the Temple could be convened.

Each Grand Master's staff was of a distinct and distinguishing color. King Solomon's was yellow. King Hiram's was red and Hiram Abif's blue. These are the three principal colors of nature's rainbow, as well as being the three primary light colors which when combined produce white light.

To the mind of man from time immemorial, the noble metal gold has always typified the radiant glory of the sun. When man worshiped that life giving sphere, divine light and wisdom were always denoted by gold. Since gold is represented by the color yellow, the latter is esteemed as the most exalted of colors.

The sun is associated with the Worshipful Master in Freemasonry since this heavenly orb rises in the East to announce and illuminate the day, while the "Master rises in the East to open and govern his lodge." So it is fitting to assign the color yellow to the office of Master; yellow being also a symbol of WISDOM.

Red, crimson, or scarlet are words commonly used rather interchangeably for essentially the same shade of color. It has long been a symbol of fire, one of the four elements of the ancient world. Red

signifies ardor, dignity, fervency, love and weal; all characteristic attributes of strength and support. Shades of this color comprise the spectacular displays of nature in the skies of the West as the sun is setting at the close of the day Red is appropriately associated with the office of Senior Warden as the symbol of STRENGTH.

What About Blue?

Air was the second of the ancient world's four elements (fire, air, earth and water) and was denoted by the color blue.

This widely used color symbolizes many things including benevolence, constancy, fidelity, friendship, hope, immortality, perfection and eternal froth - among many others.

Blue is the color of the vaulted heaven in its endless expanse whereby it effectively suggests the beauty and universality of Masonry. It is truly the color of the Craft and identifies with each individual Mason.

The candidates learn that as a lone pilgrim on the arduous path of life he is greatly restricted by the multitude of limitations inherently imposed upon him as a "Widow's Son"; that is, lacking the protection, benefits of his male parent. The Junior Warden in the South at the meridian of the day relates to the color blue as the symbol of BEAUTY.

### **Three to Make a Square**

In his essay, "Why by the Square?", written in 1925, Silas H. Shepherd wrote:

"We may only speculate how some of our primitive ancestor have found that by placing one straight stick on the ground in an easterly and westerly direction and then placing another across it in a northerly and southerly direction they conceived the idea of crudely dividing the surrounding land into four equal parts.

"From this crude beginning and by continued effort they eventually discovered that by measuring of three units of length on the stick that extended north and four units on that which extended west and adjusting them so that a stick of five units in length connected these measured distances that each of the four figures were exactly of the same angle. Such is a probability of the earliest use of the square."

The Mason's Examination of 1723 alludes to the "Rule of Three." "If a Master Mason you would be, Observe you well the Rule of Three."

Scholars have supposed that this refers to a method of giving the Mason's Word. However, we can imagine that this refers to the rule whereby the Master and Wardens of a lodge each take a staff (of lengths 3, 4 and 5 units) and put them together to make a right angle.

With this in mind, the Hiramic Legend suddenly has an entirely new interpretation. Suppose that the only way our ancient Grand Masters knew to make a right angle was to put together their staffs. That they didn't understand the proportions required, only that their staffs had this "secret" property".

Consider, the numerous times it was necessary for the right angle to be established or set in the building of the Temple. At that time, there may have been no such instrument as what today is known as the "square " Certainly there were no surveyors to establish proper angles and lines. Therefore, by the use of the Grand Masters' staffs was the only way to establish a true right angle.

If, upon the death of Hiram Abif his staff was lost, then indeed the Master's secret would be gone forever. Solomon and Hiram of Tyre could never again hope to make new squares by this method.

"Alas, poor Hiram!"

[From The Wisconsin Masonic Journal, October 2006, Silas H. Shepherd Lodge of Research No. 1843]