

MASONIC REGALIA

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I think we would all agree that fundamental to Freemasonry is the ritual, but what also makes Freemasonry distinctive is its regalia and Lodge officers.

The most recognized and widely-known piece of Masonic regalia is, of course, the Masonic apron. There are highly decorated aprons worn by the Grand Master and Grand Lodge Officers, and there are a variety of aprons worn by Grand Lodge Committeemen, and by District and Lodge officers. These aprons are useful in that they identify the position or office of the wearer. But the most important apron is the plainest – the lambskin or white leather apron – we receive in the Degree of Entered Apprentice. While it identifies the wearer as a Mason, its real purpose is internally rather than externally directed. It admonishes us to keep our character as spotless as the apron we receive, and to honor, by example and practice in our daily lives, the moral principles of Freemasonry.

Second only to aprons as recognized Masonic regalia, are the officers' jewels. Actually, the wearing of a badge of office or a symbol of one's authority around one's neck was a common practice in many

cultures, dating back long before the Middle Ages. But as Masonic ritual became better defined during the 18th century, the wearing of jewels as badges of office became a general practice in Freemasonry and continues to this day. Variations in these jewels and in the stations and names of the officers are related to the different ritualistic traditions coming from England, Scotland, and Ireland.

In England and Canada, Lodge officers are ranked in a rather rigid hierarchy: Principal Officers, Assistant Officers, and Secondary Officers. But in most U.S. jurisdictions, the Lodge officers are simply differentiated between those who are “elected” and those who are “appointed.”

We are, of course, familiar with the jewels worn by the “Principal Officers” – the Master, Wardens, Secretary, and Treasurer; and the “Assistant Officers” – the Deacons, the Stewards, and the Tiler.

Less familiar may be the jewels of the so-called “Secondary Officers” who are appointed by the Master to assist in the normal functioning of the Lodge. In a number of Grand Jurisdictions, these may include a Lodge Musician or Organist whose jewel is a musician’s lyre; a Lodge Lecturer or Instructor of Work whose jewel is an open Ritual Book; a Lodge Director of Ceremonies whose jewel is crossed staffs; a Lodge Orator whose jewel is an open scroll; a Lodge

Historian whose jewel is an open scroll with a quill pen laying on it; a Lodge Education Officer whose jewel is the Square and Compasses with a lamp of knowledge superimposed in the center; a Lodge Marshal whose jewel is crossed Marshal's batons; and a Lodge Chaplain whose jewel is the Holy Bible. Believe it or not, there is even a potential officer position and designated jewel for a Lodge Electrician – a jewel with three lightning bolts.

In English and Canadian Lodges, and in Pennsylvania, the Immediate Past Master sits at the Worshipful Master's left hand. He helps guide the Master through the transaction of business at stated meetings, and has a particular role to play in the ritual. While considered to be a "Secondary Officer," the Immediate Past Master is not appointed, but holds that office by virtue of having served the previous year as Worshipful Master. His jewel is a normal Past Master's jewel; which is, variously, either the Compasses, Square and Quadrant; the Compasses and Quadrant only – which we use in Virginia – or even the 47th Problem of Euclid, which is the emblem used in English and Canadian Lodges, and in Pennsylvania.

The "Assistant Officers" we are most familiar with are the Deacons, Stewards, and Tiler, and we are familiar with their jewels.

There are a few facts of interest about the Tiler, who is the outer guard of the Lodge, and his counterpart the “Inner Guard.” First, we should be clear that the Tiler guards but does not control the door. The door is controlled by the Tiler’s counterpart, who is located just inside the Lodge room.

The Tiler always carries a drawn sword as the primary implement of his office and not surprisingly his jewel is a single sword that hangs vertically, point down, from the end of the collar.

In Grand Lodges that have an Inner Guard, for example, Grand Lodges in England and Canada, he like the Tiler, is always armed. His jewel is the crossed swords, but in the early days, he was armed with either a sheathed sword, as contrasted with the drawn sword of the Tiler; or a sharpened trowel. Inner Guards today usually carry a small, ceremonial French dagger called a “Poignard.”

In Virginia, the function of Inner Guard is performed by the Junior Deacon. But whether a Lodge has an Inner Guard or a Junior Deacon, his primary job is to control the Lodge’s door from the inside, and to announce latecomers.

In many Grand Jurisdictions there are other so-called “Assistant Officers” who are appointed; usually to understudy the primary officer

or to pay a special honor to a Brother. These include an Assistant Secretary and Assistant Treasurer whose jewels are those of the Secretary and Treasurer with the words “Assistant” superimposed over them. There are no specific jewels designated for an Assistant Chaplain or Assistant Tiler.

In many Grand Jurisdictions, gloves are a third prominent part of Masonic regalia.

Operative Masons in the Middle Ages did not wear gloves when they worked on carving or erecting stones but, at that time, the wearing of gloves, along with a hat, were among the unique badges of office that identified the Master Overseer or Master Architect to the members of the Craft who worked on a particular building project.

It was the Speculative or gentlemen Masons of the 18th –century who started the practice of wearing gloves during portions of Lodge meetings where degree work was being conducted, and when marching in any type of public procession. Of course, that was a time when wearing gloves was in fashion among the gentry; so they were status symbols to an extent.

By the 1730s, white gloves, like the white apron, had come to be regarded in our developing ritual as emblems of innocence, and were

seen as the unique badges of a Master Mason. Every Master Mason owned several pairs of gloves, and Entered Apprentices were then expected to present several pairs to selected members, such as the Master and Wardens and his sponsors upon being received into a Craft Lodge. At the same time, he also was required to present a new pair of gloves to his wife or lady friend.

In England and in some North American Grand Lodges, gloves are still regarded as essential items of Masonic clothing. This apparently was once the case in Virginia, but today, while officers in some Virginia Lodges still wear gloves, this practice has been relaxed to the point that most often gloves are only worn on formal occasions such as funerals and the annual installation of officers. Of course, our Grand Lodge officers generally wear gloves at stated or emergent communications of the Grand Lodge.

Finally, let me mention a fourth item of Masonic regalia – the sash. Throughout much of the 18th and in the early decades of the 19th century, the wearing of sashes was a generally recognized part of Masonic regalia.

This was particularly true in Virginia. Indeed, in the 1794 portrait of Worshipful George Washington that hangs on the wall in many of our Lodges, we see him wearing not only the apron, collar, and jewel

of a Past Master, but also a sky-blue colored Masonic sash. By the time of the War Between the States, it was regarded as quaint and outmoded to wear the sash and its use began to decline, and then disappeared.

So why are we discussing Masonic regalia? Because it shows that while our practices have changed somewhat over time and differ somewhat between Masonic Jurisdictions, the core of what makes us Freemasons remains intact. And because our regalia is so recognizable and so clearly marks us as Masons, it is to our advantage to use it as part of our efforts to establish a higher profile for the Lodge within the community. It is recommended that Lodges assemble and march in their regalia during Fourth of July and other community parades. This is fun for the Brethren and their families and instructive to the community in which they live.