

UNIFICATION OF THE AMERICAN A.A.S.R. SUPREME COUNCILS

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On August 27, 1761, a man by the name of Etienne (Stephen) Morin was issued a patent, supposedly, by two competing French Grand Lodges permitting him to confer the Blue Lodge degrees and with some provisions in that patent authorized by a French Grand Consistory also charged him to spread and multiply the degrees of the "Rite of Perfection," and "to create Inspectors in all places where the degrees were not yet established." Some historians have asserted that Morin was Jewish; however the late Henry C. Clausen, 33^o, states that Morin was Roman Catholic as were most of these French Masons. Inspector Morin's authority was cancelled by the Grand Lodge of France on August 17, 1766. He died in Jamaica, in 1771.

From Morin's original authority, patents were granted establishing the Masonic Rite of Perfection in the West Indies, Albany NY, New Orleans LA, Philadelphia PA, and Charleston, SC. The Grand Constitutions of 1762 provided the foundation for the Rite of Perfection, which composed the three Symbolic Lodge degrees, plus 22 additional degrees, for an overall total of 25 degrees. Inspector Morin first appointment was making Henry Andrew Francken a Deputy Inspector General. Bro.: Francken was authorized to make subsequent appointments which led to various men being successively appointed to confer degrees.

The Grand Constitutions of 1786, signed on May 1, 1786, supersedes all other constitutions and provides for a degree structure from one to thirty-three, under the title of Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite. That document is considered the fundamental law of the Scottish Rite. Inspector Morin came to the West Indies and was on San Domingue Island at the same time as another Masonic Brother, Col. John Mitchell in the late 1760s. There is a key link because in May 1801 several men met in Charleston SC to establish the first Supreme Council, 33^o. Its first Sovereign Grand Commander was the same Illustrious Brother John Mitchell. The proceedings of this event were essentially made known to the world on December 4, 1802, in a Manifesto to the Masonic World. Its eleven founders were composed of four Jewish men, two Roman Catholic men, and five Protestant men from various denominations.

Today, in the United States of America, we have two separate governing bodies of the Scottish Rite, which are in amity with each other. They each govern two separate jurisdictions of the Rite within our nation. First, is the aforementioned body styled, "The Supreme Council of the 33rd and Last Degree of the Ancient & Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry (A. & A.S.R.), Southern Jurisdiction of the USA" (which also gives itself



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the subheading of "Mother Jurisdiction of the World")--- whose "See" or headquarters was once Charleston, South Carolina; now located in Washington, D.C. The other body is styled, "The Supreme Council, 33°, of the Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite (A.A.S.R.) - whose "See" was once New York; now located in Lexington, Massachusetts.

The Southern Jurisdiction governs 35 US States and territories abroad. The Northern Masonic Jurisdiction governs 15 US States in the far northeastern part of our country...roughly east of the Mississippi River & north of the Ohio River and the Mason-Dixon line.

The two American Supreme Councils have similar, but not identical, names. One is the A&ASR; the other is the AASR. They have similar, but unique formats to their governing style. Likewise, they have similar, but unequal methods for honoring meritorious service by members. For instance, the honors category of Knight Commander of the Court of Honor (KCCH) does not exist in the Northern Jurisdiction of the United States.

As one might expect, the similarities promote true Masonic Brotherhood and Friendship leading to amity between the two Jurisdictions, which both confer the 33°. Conversely, the differences have sometimes led to disagreement, insecurity and aloofness. Back in 1982, when I joined the Scottish Rite (Southern Jurisdiction) I wrote a postal letter to then-Sovereign Grand Commander Stanley Maxwell, 33°, (of the Northern Jurisdiction) asking his views on the two Jurisdictions. I remember he wrote me a very friendly reply in which he extensively praised the common parallels, but also noted how the two jurisdictions have had to "agree to disagree" on some issues, in order to enable peace & harmony to prevail.

Even the issue of historical "legitimacy" caused a rift between the two Supreme Councils in the 1860s and 1870s in a dispute over territory. Albert Pike and Josiah Drummond were Sovereign Grand Commanders of the Southern and Northern Jurisdictions, respectively. Drummond held that the Grand Constitutions of 1786 (French version) stipulated that the two American Jurisdictions were akin to two separate nations.

***** The English translation of Article 5 of the French version, reads in part:

"There shall be but one Council of this degree in each Nation or Realm in Europe, two in the United States of America, as far as removed as possible from one another."

***** The English translation of Article 5 of the Latin version, reads in part:

"In each great nation of Europe, and in each Kingdom or Empire, there shall be but one single Supreme Council of this Degree. In all those States and Provinces, as well as



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the mainland as of the islands, whereof North America is composed, there shall be two Councils, one at as great a distance as may be from the other ..."

Pike scoffed at the French version, mocking it as a forgery. Pike held that the United States was ONE jurisdiction until creation of the Northern Jurisdiction. But Pike could not debate the point of Article 5 under the Latin version he deemed genuine. To an extent, Pike had to agree with Drummond that the Northern Jurisdiction had its rightful roots going back to The Grand Constitutions of 1786; but, to keep harmony, the Northern Council acknowledged that it derived its visible governing existence in 1813 when it was recognized by the Southern Council, 33°, SJ.

Perhaps it is human-nature to finely dissect and split-hairs over some issues. But, it should also be remembered that both Pike and Drummond were lawyers!!!! Pike had presided over his Blue Lodge, Chapter, Council, and Commandery. Drummond likewise presided over his Blue Lodge, Chapter, Council, and Commandery. In addition, Drummond was a past presiding officer in the General Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons International; and the General Grand Council of Cryptic Masons International as well. In an odd twist of fate, when Albert Pike died in 1891 while holding the high office of Provincial Grand Master of the Provincial Grand Lodge of The Royal Order of Scotland in the USA, he was succeeded in that office by none other than Josiah H. Drummond!!!

Putting the Pike-Drummond spat aside, it is interesting to note how the French Constitutions' twelfth article says: "The Supreme Council will exercise all the Masonic sovereign powers of which his Majesty King Frederick II, of Prussia, was possessed." Also in that ever-important Article 5: "every Supreme Council is composed of nine Inspectors-General, five of whom should profess the Christian religion."

It is fair to say that the Northern and Southern Jurisdictions may have squabbled like brothers in a human family; but more importantly -- both Jurisdictions have displayed an eloquence befitting kind and benevolent Brotherhood in the Masonic Family. Both the Northern & Southern Jurisdictions grew to colossal size in the mid 20th Century. Both separately built notable buildings and increased their offices, staff, libraries, publications, scholarships, charitable projects, and more.

Today, with the numbers of members declining and overhead costs increasing in both the SJ and NMJ, there has been a renewed interest in discussions which took place some years ago which proposed UNIFYING or MERGING the two American Supreme Councils. To do so, would require a mammoth effort. In the past, petty bickering and reluctance toward changes has stalled any progress toward this goal. However, I am pleased to note that the two Supreme Councils have agreed to hold a joint meeting in Washington, DC in the year 2007.



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This is the first step toward the noble goal of merging. If the effort ever goes beyond that token gesture, I believe that some REAL CHANGES will need to be made. Some changes which could be implemented now to save both jurisdictions considerable money, include the area of Publications: the SJ has its "Scottish Rite Journal" , and the NMJ has its "Northern Light." Those two should be integrated under some sort of compromise banner title such as "Scottish Rite News USA."

Scholarships and charitable projects should be re-evaluated to determine what is possible and feasible in today's world. The issue of landmark buildings, libraries, and offices gets a bit more dicey. No one likes the thought of moving away from the old gracious buildings of times-gone-by. And, it will be hard to tell the staff of secretaries, receptionists, etc., that offices will be closed and jobs will be lost. Similarly, Masonic Office holders (for the most part) enjoy holding office...and it is difficult to blend essentially two Boards-of-Directors into one. Very recently (Apr 22, 2006) the beloved Sovereign Grand Commander of the NMJ died. I offer my condolences to the family of Ill.: Bro.: Walter E. Webber, 33°. However, the point is: transitions do occur. I think it is important that both Supreme Councils be mindful that life is short and we must maximize our potential with an eye toward the future of Freemasonry...and in this case literally acting in the best interests of the "whole Scottish Rite".

I feel that the intent of Article 5 (in both the French version & the Latin version of The Constitutions of 1786) was to have Supreme Councils as far apart as possible -- so that they could centrally serve the needs of the membership. That being the case, I feel that a merged, unified or consolidated Supreme Council, 33°, would need to be re-located near the center of the United States. Existing buildings in Washington DC and Lexington, MA may have to be sold. Most likely there will be opposition to selling. As a last resort, I would encourage those buildings be donated to the US Park Service as museums. I feel that Article 5 needs to be read in a modern light: a new consolidated American Supreme Council should be centralized to the nation, and separated geographically as far as possible from the Supreme Council's of Canada, Mexico, Cuba, etc..

In my view, potential sites for a new headquarters should be (but not limited to) the vicinity of Lincoln, Nebraska; Hastings, Nebraska; Kansas City, Missouri; Des Moines, Iowa, Salina, Kansas, and other Midwest cities. Each of those cities has a rich Masonic history. Some (or all) have buildings with existing office space which would accommodate a consolidated Supreme Council relocating there.

Only time will tell if a consolidated American Supreme Council will be established. I hope that it will borrow a page out of Masonic history and constitute its name like the Supreme Council in England....which is styled, "The Supreme Council, 33 , of the Ancient and Accepted Rite for England and Wales and its Districts and Chapters overseas." The name "Scottish" is omitted, in deference to the distinction A & A Rite. The Rite governs many degrees, including the 18th degree of Knight Rose



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Croix. As Rosicrucians, many of us are acquainted with that degree and see similarities and differences between that degree and our Society of the Rose and Cross. As Masonic Rosicrucians, we are mindful that Fr. Christian Rosenkreutz had members go out in pairs, two-by-two in search of further knowledge. I find it striking that in the Grand Constitutions of 1786, was the provision for a pair of Supreme Councils in the United States. Each of them has governed well. Each Supreme Council has undergone many changes. Both Supreme Councils have endured the Great Depression and World Wars. The United States itself has expanded greatly during this period. If a member living in the year 2006, would describe all these changes to a member who lived in the year 1813 - it would leave the listener awestruck with disbelief. Lodges lit with electric lights instead of oil lamps? Annual returns submitted within seconds using a computer, instead of weeks by horseback? - In turn, the member from 1813 might describe the cherished position Masonry had; the high attendance of members at meetings traveling by horseback or on foot to attend Lodge; the struggles of building a Lodge and Treasury from scratch where there had been nothing; plus, the perseverance to weather the anti-Masonic Movement of the 1820s and '30s. Truly, a lot of wisdom has been acquired throughout the years. Will the two American Supreme Councils now come to an agreement on unity? I hope that they will act in the best interests of the "whole Scottish Rite."

Can we hope for a reconstituted and revamped Supreme Council of the A & A Rite for America? It is a distinct possibility. Time will tell, as to whether it becomes a reality.

Sources / Recommended Reading:

- Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry, by Albert G. Mackey, 33°.
- Guthrie Oklahoma Scottish Rite, "History of the Scottish Rite" (detailing origins)
- website: www.tracingboard.com/joseph_cerneau.htm
- website: www.srmason-sj.org/web/heredom-files/volume2/from-constitutions-and-regulations.htm
- website: www.srmason-sj.org/council/journal/jan02/sites.html
- Clausen's Commentaries on Morals & Dogma by Henry C. Clausen, 33
- Grand Constitutions of 1786
- Authentics of fundamental law for Scottish Rite Freemasonry, Henry C. Clausen, 33

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