

## CHANGES IN MASONIC ARCHITECTURE

by Frater James A. Marples, VII<sup>o</sup> ,  
Life Member, Nebraska College S.R.I.C.F.



1921

*Wichita, KS Scottish Rite Temple*



1950

The ancient stonemasons, who are said to be the forerunners of Speculative Freemasonry (or at least had significant influence upon the evolution of modern Freemasonry) took great pride in that their work was "well-formed, true, and trusty". Back then, Architecture wasn't the Art Form it is today; rather, it was a "Necessity" to shield people from inclement weather and to provide sturdy places of abode or gathering-points for people to meet, collectively.

In bygone years, the Masonic Fraternity has taken great pride in constructing elaborate and magnificent Masonic Halls. However, they often began from humble beginnings. Nowhere else is this trend more illustrative than the evolution of Masonic Lodge Halls in Wichita, Kansas.

The first Masonic Lodge in the city was Wichita Lodge #99 A.F. & A.M. It was organized due to the efforts of Mystic Tie Lodge #74 in nearby Augusta, Kansas. The City of Wichita was incorporated July 21, 1870. Less than 30 days later, Bro. Morgan Cox and others applied to Mystic Tie Lodge #74 in nearby Augusta KS for consent to form a Lodge in Wichita. Consent was given. The Charter for Wichita Lodge #99 in Wichita was granted Oct 11, 1871. Bro.: Morgan Cox was the first Master.

Its first Lodge meeting-place was in the upper-level of a livery-stable at Main and Third Streets. That upper-floor housed the Masonic Lodge as well as the Methodist Church and Baptist Church and the Public School. It was also intermittently used as the meeting place of a Lodge of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F. Lodge). Later, with better prosperity and further expansion in succeeding years, each entity obtained its own independent quarters. Yet, it is nice to see how much "Harmony prevailed" in that humble livery-stable. As the decades of the 1870's and the 1880's wore-on, the full complement of York Rite Bodies were gradually Chartered. Wichita Chapter # 33 of Royal Arch Masons; Wichita Council #12 of Royal and Select Masters; and Mt. Olivet Commandery #12 of Knights Templar. Plus, a motion was made to create a second Blue Lodge to serve the city. That was Sunflower Lodge #86, which received its Dispensation in 1888 and its Charter in 1889.

In the year 1886, two or three Scottish Rite Masons put advertisements in The Wichita Eagle newspaper to try to drum-up interest. At first, there was no reaction. About a year later, a small handful of men responded to a similar newspaper ad. Finally, the wheels of progress began to turn. This tangible display of genuine interest finally convinced Illustrious Brother and Sir Knight Erasmus T. Carr, 33<sup>o</sup>, the Sovereign Grand Inspector General (SGIG) for The Supreme Council 33 of the Southern Jurisdiction USA, serving the Orient of Kansas (and also in his capacity as Grand Recorder of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of Kansas at the time) to take a personal interest in Wichita's viable potential for having a sustainable Valley of The Scottish Rite. Bro.: and Sir Knight Carr



wanted both Rites to have a high probability of survival in the communities in which they were located. Elmo Lodge of Perfection #9; Wichita Chapter of Rose Croix #5 ; Wichita Council of Kadosh #5; and Wichita Consistory #2, eventually received their Charters to operate in the year 1888. Obtaining a Charter is one thing. Finding quarters to hold meetings and confer degrees was a different matter.

At first, the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite (A. & A. S. R.) Bodies met in rented quarters in an upper-room in an old building on East Douglas Ave, not far from the infamous "Eaton Hotel", where noted prohibitionist Carrie Nation wielded a hatchet and threw a billiard-ball, partially smashing a painting of a nearly nude "Cleopatra" painted by Wichita artist John Noble (who, incidentally, painted a gigantic portrait of Sovereign Grand Commander Albert Pike, 33<sup>o</sup> and a Knight Templar, which currently hangs at the bottom of the main stairway at the Wichita Scottish Rite Center, prominently near the front door).

Nearly all visitors can see that welcoming portrait, before they see much of anything else!!

In its earliest rented quarters on East Douglas Avenue, the Wichita Scottish Rite had to work in cramped quarters. Boxes stacked together covered by a muslin cloth composed the makeshift Altar upon which The Holy Bible, Square, and Compasses and other ritualistic paraphernalia rested. Later, the Wichita Scottish Rite purchased the former Baptist Church and renovated it for Lodge purposes. "The Wichita Eagle" edition of Friday, July 31, 1891 said that "the interior is so altered one would have difficulty in recognizing (it was once) the old Baptist Church." Membership gradually grew to the point that the Masons outgrew these quarters and hoped for a larger building.

In 1895-1897, a terrible financial recession hit the Nation. The elaborate Y.M.C.A. building made from native Kansas limestone along with some Indiana limestone (and which resembled a Castle) was in debt. "The Wichita Eagle" of Friday December 10, 1897, stated that, "The Scottish Rite Consistory today received a telegram from the owners at Philadelphia, accepting the Consistory's offer to purchase the Wichita Y.M.C.A. building for \$20,000. The building will be remodeled for use as The Scottish Rite Temple." Originally, the Y.M.C.A. had asked for \$32,000 which was rejected. W.H. Sternberg donated a great deal of his own personal money toward renovations of the interior. The building even had a swimming pool in the basement of the building, which was later covered-over and used for office space and storage space.

Bro.: Sternberg gave generously and wasn't repaid for his efforts until many years later.

He was one of the four (4) key members credited with "saving" The Wichita Scottish Rite from going extinct, as had happened with the dissolved Lodges of Perfection at Marysville; Clay Center; and one at Salina (which was eventually revived under a new name and with a new Charter). Sternberg was later partially repaid for his Services and the other three prime motivators were Bro.: Jeremiah H. Cole, 33<sup>o</sup>, and a Knight Templar; Bro.: J. Giles Smith, 33<sup>o</sup>; and Bro.: Henry Wallenstein, 33<sup>o</sup>, G.C. (Grand Cross) and a member of Cryptic Masonry. [Wallenstein was Jewish and took an immense interest in the York Rite Bodies, joining Wichita Chapter #33 of R.A.M. and Wichita Council #12 of Royal & Select Masters, over which he presided as Illustrious Master in the year 1912].

"The Wichita Scottish Rite Cathedral" (as it was then called) was officially dedicated on May 23, 1898. It still serves as the current meeting place for the Wichita Scottish Rite. An addition to the northern portion of the building was planned in 1907 and it was completed in 1908. More than a million Coffeyville, Kansas, bricks were used in the construction, along with several hundred tons of Towanda, Kansas stone were used to "harmonize with the exterior materials of the original building". The architect was C.W. Terry of Wichita and Associate Architect Charles Thompson of Little Rock, Arkansas. The great organ was built by M.P. Moller of Hagerstown, Maryland. Two other members who assisted greatly were Brothers Thomas G. Fitch, 33<sup>o</sup>, and a Knight Templar and Bro.: Bestor G. Brown, 33<sup>o</sup>, and a Knight Templar. Both men had served as Grand Master of The M.W. Grand Lodge of KANSAS as well as Right Eminent Grand Commanders of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar --- and Illustrious Brother Thomas Fitch eventually became Sovereign Grand Inspector General (SGIG for Kansas). Their tireless promotion of both the York Rite and the Scottish Rite was invaluable to the city of Wichita becoming a Masonic powerhouse.



Bro.: J. Giles Smith was made a Mason in another Mystic Tie Lodge, but it was Mystic Tie Lodge #398 in Indianapolis, Indiana. His further involvement in the York Rite is unknown. However, he was a steam-fitter/gas-fitter by trade. He also joined the Indianapolis Indiana Scottish Rite Valley and quickly rose to become an Officer in that Valley. Upon his removal to Wichita, Kansas, he transferred to Wichita Lodge #99 A.F. & A.M.; and lastly became a Charter Member of Wichita's 3rd Blue Lodge, the new Albert Pike Lodge # 303, which received its Charter in 1895. Bro.: J. Giles Smith retained his membership in the Scottish Rite in Indianapolis, Indiana, in the N.M.J. (Northern Masonic Jurisdiction) until his death in 1909. Interestingly, a former member of the President Abraham Lincoln's Cabinet (co-incidentally with the surname 'Smith') Bro: Caleb Blood Smith, 33<sup>o</sup>, the former Secretary of the Interior, was given a Dispensation from The Supreme Council 33<sup>o</sup>, of the (N.M.J.) to establish Bodies of the Scottish Rite at Indianapolis, Indiana. Bro.: J. Giles Smith served as Grand Captain of the Guard in the Adoniram Lodge of Perfection, in Indianapolis. It is unclear whether Masonic Brothers Caleb B. Smith and J. Giles Smith were related-by-blood.

As noted earlier, Bro.: J. Giles Smith was one of the 'founders' of the Wichita Valley of the Scottish Rite in the Southern Jurisdiction, U.S.A. For his "signal services", Bro.: J. Giles Smith received BOTH the Knight Commander of the Court of Honor (KCCH) AND the 33<sup>o</sup>, directly from the hand of Sovereign Grand Commander Albert Pike, 33<sup>o</sup>, and a Knight Templar, during the Biennial Session in the year 1888 held at Washington, D.C. That was a real rarity to receive both honors at the SAME Biennial Session. J. Giles Smith was Created a Noble of the Mystic Shrine in Isis Shrine Temple at Salina, Kansas, in the mid -1890's, which then had jurisdiction over half of the State of Kansas. He was suspended for Non-Payment-of-Dues on two occasions, but affiliated in time to become a Charter Member of Midian Shrine Temple in Wichita, Kansas, which received its Dispensation to operate in 1909. Sadly, Noble J. Giles Smith died later that same year in 1909. He never lived to see Midian Temple obtain its Charter in April 1910.

By the year 1912, The Wichita Valley of the Scottish Rite had grown to exceedingly high membership numbers. And, in raw numbers, **Wichita was the Largest Scottish Rite Valley in the entire Southern Jurisdiction.** As an interesting side note, the Indianapolis Brethren where Bro.: J. Giles Smith originally belonged, styled their Building as "The Indianapolis Scottish Rite Cathedral," and co-incidentally the Indianapolis Valley eventually became the **LARGEST Scottish Rite Valley in the N.M.J. in terms of sheer numbers of members.** One cannot help but wonder if Bro.: J. Giles Smith, 33<sup>o</sup> was sort of a "fraternal Locomotive" who "got things done" for both Valleys...in two separate American Jurisdictions of the Scottish Rite. He may well be one of the best unsung Heroes of Scottish Rite History in America. The new (and current) Wichita, Kansas, Scottish Rite Building is so spacious that in the year 1916, it was reported that 1,200 people were fed at the annual, "Colonel Sam Amidon, 33<sup>o</sup>, Christmas Dinner." Albert Pike Masonic Lodge #303, met for many decades inside the Wichita Scottish Rite Temple and at one time that Blue Lodge was "the Largest Lodge in the World" with over 3,000 members. Of course, its numbers have fallen-off drastically in recent years; and that Blue Lodge now meets at a different building (inside The Kansas Masonic Home) on the west side of Wichita.

As previously noted, The Wichita Scottish Rite Building has a limestone exterior. It underwent an extensive renovation beginning in the year 1964 after nearly six decades of use. Since I was born in 1963, my parents said that they "carried me in their arms" when the building was displayed immediately after the renovations ended (I believe that was in 1965).

Over the years, the building has housed many 'tenants', including "The Cessna Aircraft Employees Masonic Club" (of which my late father Bro.: and Sir Knight John William "Bill" Marples, Sr., 32<sup>o</sup>, and a Knight Templar, was a life-member. He started working at Cessna in the year 1955, having joined Masonry a decade earlier in 1945. With The Wichita Scottish Rite building being on a corner-lot at 332 East First Street (on the North-west corner of North Topeka Avenue and the junction with East First Street) in the heart of downtown Wichita, it occupies a prime piece of real-estate.

It is hard to fathom that this same Masonic Building, with only a few additions and minor alterations to its Architectural design (still in active use today) actually had members who originally traveled to meetings, Degree-work Reunions, and other events on-foot; or on



horseback (or by use of horses & buggies). Later a trolley-line ran on North Topeka Avenue right next to the building; and now, today's members may park their automobiles or their motorcycles outside. After I joined the Wichita Scottish Rite, I became an officer in Wichita Council of Kadosh #5. I rose up the Chairs, eventually becoming "Master of Ceremonies" of that Body. There was many night, after a Stated Meeting ended that I mentally questioned, "What would it have be like to go out to my parked horse and buggy, and head home-bound after a meeting?" On mild Spring evenings, that thought was appealing. On, harsh Winter nights, I began to appreciate the sacrifices our early Brethren made...in simply attending Lodge regularly, when I trudged the winter snows and envisioned the horses hitched/parked by the Building a Century-earlier, patiently waiting for their owners to finish their meetings, so they could trot back home to "their own places of abode."

Today, as a person stands at that special corner of First Street and Topeka Avenue in Wichita and gazes upward to the roof of the Wichita Scottish Rite, one sees a flat "turret". The building has rounded contours and its top level is reminiscent of a European Castle. However, that "turret" was not always 'flat'. It once had a conical roof. In the early years, a Templar-like black-and-white Beauceant Flag with the letters A.A.S.R. (of course, standing for: Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite) blew majestically in the breezes. In the latter 1930's, a storm caused damage to the tower and it was decided by the membership that the cone-shaped tower be eliminated in favor of a flat slate-roof. Today, the "turret" is flat, and "The Stars and Stripes" of our American Flag now wave proudly in the Kansas winds.

The building has an extensive Auditorium with beautiful stained-glass window imagery. Its "theater-boxes" and balconies are reminiscent of the Victorian Era. In many ways, the building has had a few cosmetic changes. However, the nice thing about this (and other old Masonic Halls) is that it remains largely unchanged and is regarded with high-esteem as a "Pillar of the Community." **May we all do our utmost to protect those Landmarks wheresoever they may be dispersed. Let us cherish the Architecture which gives us and other Brethren shelter; and may we equally cherish the virtually unchanged fraternal circle of friendships inculcated therein by "the mystic tie of Masonic Brotherhood". So Mote It Be.**

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Sources / Recommended Readings / Exhibits :

- Archives of The Grand Lodge of Kansas A.F. & A.M.
- Archives of The Masonic Grand Lodge of Indiana
- Archives of The Supreme Council, 33<sup>o</sup> of The Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry; Southern Jurisdiction U.S.A.
- Archives of The Wichita Scottish Rite Masonic Center.
- Archives of The Wichita York Rite Masonic Center.
- Archives of Mystic Tie Masonic Lodge # 398, Indianapolis, Indiana.
- Archives of Mystic Tie Masonic Lodge # 74, Augusta, Kansas.
- Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry by Dr. Albert G. Mackey, M.D., 33<sup>o</sup> and a Knight Templar.
- Book: "To Shine In Use: One Hundred Years of Progress of The Wichita Scottish Rite by Dr. and Bro.: Alvin Morris, 33<sup>o</sup>. (Permission to use excerpts of the book granted to Frater James A. Marples by the late Bro.: Alvin Morris before he died.)

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About the Author:

Frater James A. Marples, VII<sup>o</sup>, is a Perpetual Life Member of Mulvane Masonic Lodge #201 A.F. & A.M. in Mulvane, Kansas. He is a Life Member of The International Peace Gardens Lodge of Freemasons (Canada-USA) and also an Honorary Member of Golden Rule Masonic Lodge #562 in Willard, Ohio; as well as an Honorary Member of Nelson Masonic Lodge #77, in Nelson, Nebraska, which has recently consolidated with the Superior Masonic Lodge at Superior, Nebraska.

Companion and Sir Knight Jim is a Life Member of the Wichita York Rite Bodies (Wichita Chapter #33 R.A.M.; Wichita Council #12 R. & S.M.; and Mt. Olivet Commandery #12 K.T.). He is also a Life Member of the Lincoln Nebraska Scottish Rite Bodies; The Robert-the-Bruce Association (California); The George Washington Masonic Stamp Club; Masonic Order of the Gordian Knot (Indiana); Masonic Order of the Sword of Bunker Hill; Kentucky Chapter #134 of National Sojourners and Heroes of '76; North Texas York Rite College #118 of Sherman, Texas; and Nebraska College S.R.I.C.F.

He is a Regular Member of The Allied Masonic Degrees; Grand College of Rites; St. David Conclave of The Red Cross of Constantine; Shawnee County Kansas Square and Compass Club; and Holyrood Council #61 of Knight Masons (Nebraska).

