

THE ROSICRUCIAN'S CHALK ---- THE MASON'S SKIRRET

by JAMES A. MARPLES, VII^o,
Life Member, Nebraska College, S.R.I.C.F.

The planet Earth has soil, water, and air of different levels of purity, as well as a multitude of other substances which can either add diversity of or toxicity to our planet. When we think of the word "chalk" many people might think of chalk used on a teacher's black-board or chalk-board. Another person might envision "the White Cliffs of Dover" in County Kent in England. Chalk is fairly resistant to erosion and often used as a marking material. I recall when I was in high school --- I normally played trumpet in the marching and concert band, but I remember a few times using a spreader-cart to put chalk on the principal yard-lines of the football-field.

Chalk (as limestone or similar substances) is often used by farmers to reduce soil acidity by raising pH levels in order to make soils more favorable for productive growth. A more productive acreage leads to better yields and increased harvests, which means a more bountiful food supply. It is highly likely that Father Christian Rosenkreutz (the founder of our Rosicrucian Society) was acquainted with the desirable properties of chalk as agricultural "tool".

As Masons, we are familiar with a wide variety of "Working Tools." Yet, there is one, in particular, which is seldom heard of in America, but is nonetheless a useful and unique companion to better-known symbolic instruments. It is the skirret (or, skirrit).

Illustrious Brother Albert G. Mackey, 33^o and a KT, in his Encyclopedia of Freemasonry defines the term: "In the English system the skirret is one of the working tools of a Master Mason. It is an implement which acts upon a center-pin, whence a line is drawn, chalked, and struck to mark out the ground for the foundation of the intended structure. Symbolically, it points to us that straight and undeviating line of conduct laid down for our pursuits in the Volume of the Sacred Law."

To better visualize the composition of this tool: Gardeners often use a spool of string, twine or wire spinning from a spool with the reel attached to a handle to mark out lines between rows of planted seeds. This is useful to lay-out lines which are slightly above ground level. To actually "mark" the earth, a line must be scratched or chalked. Sometimes a workman will "pluck" or "snap" a tightly stretched chalked-string which would make an imprint of the line. By doing so, the marked outline remains even when the string is gathered-up and re-wound on the spool for future use. I have often heard old-timers use the expression that something was perfectly straight when it was : "straight as a string."

What makes the skirret so special is that it is used before the foundation of a building is laid; and therefore, the skirret is generally used before the other working tools.



A skirret allows a person to see the precise location for the foundation. Consequently, the surrounding ground can easily be designated for other purposes. Initial use of the skirret enables changes to be made to the mark rather than later, to change the finished foundation of stone or concrete.

As Freemasons, our foundation is our own individual character. On that foundation, we build the superstructure of honesty, integrity, loyalty, compassion, and brotherhood.

As American Masons, let us, like our British Brethren, remember to pick up this unique working tool, the skirret, and regularly use it to mark out the foundation of our character. As Masonic Rosicrucians, let us be mindful that there are many "tools" such as chalk/limestone, which can be a "tool" in the conventional sense of aiding in the building of structures --- but they can also be a "tool" for enhancing food, medicine, and other substances which literally help sustain our lives. By deeply studying the skirret as a tool (and remembering the substances used in connection with it (such as chalk), we should continually be mindful that seemingly trivial substances such as chalk can have a multitude of magnificent uses. Chalk can change the character composition of soil, and when separately used in a different application in conjunction with the skirret -- it can help denote changes we need to make to alter the composition of our character "for the better."

SOURCES / RECOMMENDED READING: *

- Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry by Albert G. Mackey.
- The Masonic Skirret... shorter-version article by James A. Marples. Published in The Scottish Rite Journal, Washington, DC.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

James A. Marples, VII^o, is a Perpetual Life Member of Mulvane Masonic Lodge #201 A.F. & A.M. in Mulvane, Kansas. He is also a Life Member of the El Dorado Kansas York Rite Bodies; the Lincoln Nebraska Scottish Rite Bodies; The Royal Order of Scotland; The Robert-the-Bruce Association; National Sojourners; Heroes of '76; North Texas York Rite College; Masonic Order of the Sword of Bunker Hill; and Nebraska College SRICF.

He is a regular member of the Shrine; Grotto; High-12; Holyrood Council #61 of Knight Masons (Nebraska); and the Red Cross of Constantine.

Editor's note: See also <http://www.mastermason.com/lodge850/Reading/skirret.htm> for further information describing the skirret.

