

Knight Masonry in the USA

By

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R.E. Grand Scribe, Grand Council of Knight Masons in the USA

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Foreword¹

It has been said, “Masons do it by degrees...” Many of those degrees are based on Biblical passages, and no story is more popular than the account of Zerubbabel and the building of the Second Temple. The story is recounted in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. As you will recall, King Cyrus ordered the rebuilding of Jerusalem and its Temple, but following his death the work languished because of the opposition of the inhabitants on the other side of the river. In an effort to solve the problem, the Prophet Haggai sends Zerubbabel, the Prince of the House of Judah, to Babylon to remind King Darius of the command of King Cyrus and of the promise that the youthful Darius had made to Zerubbabel that that if he ever became King, he would rebuild Jerusalem and its Temple. Upon arrival, the delegation is received in chains, but these are removed when Darius learns the identity of Zerubbabel. He then poses the famous question: “Which is stronger, Wine, the King, or Woman?” with the winner to receive a royal reward.

During the debate that follows, each of the possible answers is defended with language that is well chosen to flatter the King, entertain the listeners, and defend the position. However, Prince Zerubbabel adds a fourth and final answer to the question – namely that Truth is the greatest of all, thereby winning the debate. As his reward he asks King Darius to issue a Decree that any further interference with the rebuilding would be punished. With the

¹ Most of the quotations in this paper are taken from letters and documents (mostly unpublished) in the archives of the Grand Council of Knight Masons of the U.S.A. References are provided as footnotes when the source is not obvious in the text. While recognizing that the Grand Council has a worldwide jurisdiction, ease of reference has occasionally forced the use of the word “Ireland” to distinguish it from the Grand Council in the U.S.A.

opposition removed, the Temple is quickly completed. This is a simple and dramatic story, and *Coil’s Encyclopedia*² lists it as a part of one or more degrees in nearly a dozen rites including the Scottish Rite, the Commandery, the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Scotland, the Allied Masonic Degrees in England and the Knight Masons both in Ireland and the USA.

Unlike the Royal Arch degrees in most jurisdictions, the Royal Arch in Ireland deals with the refurbishment of the Temple by King Josiah, not the reconstruction under Zerubbabel. Early Irish Royal Arch chapters covered the reconstruction in the degrees of Knight of the Sword, Knight of the East, and Knight of the East and West, which were collectively known as the “Green” degrees. Chapters had duplicate sets of officers so that both the Red and Green Degrees could be conferred.³ About 1790 the Green Degrees became separated and eventually responsibility for the degrees migrated to the Great Priory (*i.e.* Grand Commandery). Because they are not Christian degrees, many Priors did not confer them, and a number of Masons feared the work would be lost. Following many years of work, in 1923 the “Grand Council of Knight of the Sword, Knight of the East, and Knight of the East and West” was established and assumed responsibility for the work. This has since become “The Grand Council of Knight Masons.” These degrees are also worked by a Council of Knights of the Sword under the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Scotland.

Otis Jones writes, [*In the late 1920’s*], “... many great Masons, mostly from North Carolina, but several from Virginia, ... became interested in Masonry on a world wide basis and formed the

² “Degrees V, 23” and “Zerubbabel.” In *Coil’s Masonic Encyclopedia*, 1961 edition

³ Voorhis reports that an apron exists dating from about 1800 that has Royal Arch symbols on the Red side and Knight Masonry symbols on the Green side.

Lodge #666 which became the Research Lodge of North Carolina, and was the first research lodge in the United States.⁴ The visit of Lord Cassillis, Grand Z (*i.e.* Grand High Priest) of the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Scotland, to North Carolina in 1931 furthered this interest. J. Edward Allen, John Raymond Shute, II, Frederick H. Bahnson, and a number of others received the degrees of Royal Ark Mariner and the degrees of a Council of Knights of the Sword during this visit. In February 1932, Ray Shute requested charters from Scotland for three Councils of Knights of the Sword and Lodges of Royal Ark Mariners, certifying that he would properly confer the degrees. Charters were granted on 21 March 1932 to Councils and Lodges named *Saint Andrew's in America No 1a* in Monroe, *Cassillis No 2a* in Raleigh, and *Howell No. 3a* in Charlotte. These Lodges continue to exist today as Councils chartered under the Allied Masonic Degrees; however, the associated Councils of Knights of the Sword disappeared when the AMD charters were accepted at the formation of the Grand Council of Allied Masonic Degrees in 1933.

I. Arrival

In 1934 Masonry was under attack in Europe. Germany was suppressing the order, and in Switzerland a plebiscite was scheduled on whether Freemasonry should be outlawed. A group of leading American Masons became concerned with these events and resolved to bring some of the lesser-known Masonic degrees to the United States. William Moseley Brown, Grand Master of Masons in Virginia, and J. Raymond Shute, II, Sovereign Grand Master of the Allied Masonic Degrees, were sent to Europe as the representatives of this group. En route to Geneva, while in Dublin, they met J.H. Hamill, the Grand Scribe of the Grand Council of the Degrees of Knight of the Sword, Knight of the East, and Knight of the East and West, who conferred these degrees on them on August 5, 1934. Shute recognized that these were the same degrees as conferred in the Scottish Council of Knights of the Sword. On their return, Shute inquired of Dublin on how to introduce the Irish work into the United States. Grand Scribe J.H. Hamill replied on October 19, 1934:

⁴ Jones, Otis. 1986. *Knight Masons, A History*. Page 11-12

Personally it would seem to me that the most direct way of introducing our degrees to America is for you and six or seven others who got the Scottish degrees to apply to us for a Warrant.

I would suggest that seven of you should sign one of the enclosed application forms and return it with a covering letter stating that the Illustrious Order of the Red Cross as conferred in your K.T. Commanderies and our degrees of Knight Masonry are quite different and distinct.

This last sentence contained the sticking point since the North Carolinians did not have authority to speak for the Grand Encampment.

On October 30, 1934, Shute submitted membership lists and names for three Councils: *Saint Patrick's in America* in Monroe, North Carolina, *Shamrock, Thistle and Rose* in Raleigh, North Carolina, and *Harp, Cross and Eagle* in Alexandria, Virginia. At the same time an application for a Provincial Grand Council was made with the following officers:

Provincial Great Chief J. Ray Shute
 Provincial Deputy Great Chief..... J. Edward Allen
 Provincial Sr. Grand Knight....Wm. Moseley Brown
 Provincial Jr. Grand Knight ... Luther T. Hartsell, Jr.
 Provincial Grand Scribe.....Clarence J. West⁵
 Provincial Grand Treasurer..... James W. Clift
 Prov. Capt. of the GuardFrederic F. Bahnson

In his covering letter he states, "...we have 51 sovereign Grand Lodges in U.S.A.; to attempt to secure any approval in any national movement such as this will run into state discussions that will do nothing but hurt the matter and my suggestion is that you let us proceed with this matter to the best of our judgment, as we know just how to handle the situation."

Hamill was not satisfied, and after reviewing a Knight Templar ritual provided by Shute, on February 20, 1935 he sent a letter to the Grand Encampment of the USA that ends, "I shall be glad to have an expression of opinion from your Knights Templar authorities with regard to the Illustrious

⁵ West and Clift were never recorded as members of Knight Masons.

Order of the Red Cross.” As Shute had suggested to Hamill, the Grand Recorder of the Grand Encampment was unwilling to give such an opinion and said that it was a matter for Brother Hamill to decide.

On May 25, 1936 J. H. Hamill, writing officially to Allen, transmitted warrants dated May 20, 1936 for three Councils: Council #26 in Monroe, Council #27 in Raleigh, North Carolina, and Council #28 in Alexandria, Virginia. He held up on the Grand Provincial Council until the three Councils actually came into being. He also asked that the designated Excellent Chiefs of each Council to come to Dublin to be installed and the Councils constituted.

Frederic M. Bahnson, designated to be Excellent Chief of Shamrock, Thistle and Rose Council #27 wrote J.H. Hamill in June 1936 concerning a planned trip to Europe in July. He suggested that while his family was visiting London he would go to Dublin, receive the degrees and be deputized to constitute the other Councils. Hamill’s response on July 1, 1936 was a cablegram:

GRAND COUNCIL HESITATES CONSTITUTION
IN ABSENTIA. EITHER 3 REPRESENTATIVES
FROM EACH COUNCIL PRESENT IN DUBLIN
OR COMMISSION FROM GRAND COUNCIL
MUST PROCEED AMERICA=

HAMILL

When his ship arrived in Southampton, Bahnson received a request from Hamill to visit Dublin. While there he paid the necessary warrant fees for the three new Councils and received the degree of Installed Chief. In reporting this to Allen, he suggested that funds be raised to invite the Deputy Great Chief and other officers to visit the U.S. as guests and confer the degrees. Allen recognized this suggestion as the best solution, although it would cost some money.⁶ The next twelve months were spent in planning the events of the following summer.

On April 17, 1937, J.H. Hamill wrote that a commission of R.E. Sir Kt. E. H. Burne, Deputy Great Chief, accompanied by V.E. Sir Knights. T. J.

⁶ Reported by J. Edward Allen in letter to J. Ray Shute dated July 30, 1936

Smalley, G.W. Hamill, F.E. Davies, A.H. Kirkpatrick and himself planned to come to America at the end of August or the beginning of September 1937 to constitute the three American Councils. J. Edward Allen, as Grand Commander of North Carolina, immediately sent an official letter to Dublin assuring them that a commission would be “heartily welcomed; that its purposes as stated are not in the least objected to but on the other hand that it is believed that the cause of Masonry in general will be promoted thereby.”

It was originally planned to locate *Harp, Cross and Eagle Council* at Alexandria, Virginia, with William Moseley Brown as Excellent Chief. However, Shute, Allen, and Bahnson determined that attempting to achieve a peaceful entry in more than one Masonic Grand Jurisdiction at a time would cause many difficulties. If all three Councils were in North Carolina and all the members were residents of that state, their combined influence in Masonic circles should be able to take care of those who believed that there were already enough Masonic organizations. In late May 1937, Shute proposed that the third Council be located in Allen’s hometown, Warrenton, North Carolina, and the Grand Council ultimately accepted this.⁷

The itinerary was planned in detail during the summer, with particular efforts being taken to assure that the wives of the visitors would be well entertained. Bahnson and Allen met them in Washington on September 9th and drove them to Winston-Salem with stops at the Luray Caverns and Natural Bridge in the Valley of Virginia. From there they went to the Great Smoky Mountains. Then they returned to the Oxford (Masonic) Orphanage where they were entertained at an outdoor picnic with the children. Then on to Warrenton and Washington, North Carolina for a formal dinner at the Hotel Louise with the customary (to the Irish) toasts back and forth. Then to the Masonic Lodge building in Washington, North Carolina where the degrees were actually conferred on 22 candidates and the Councils constituted on September 14, 1937.

Jones reports that “...each Council was presented with a copy of the old trowel used by the Knights of

⁷ Brown did not affiliate with a Council in the U.S.A. until 1952, and no Council was chartered in Virginia until 1968.

the Sword in Ireland in laying the corner stone of the Parliament Building by the Grand Master of Ireland, and more recently used by the Supreme Council of the 33rd Degree in Ireland. It had been in constant use for over 120 years before our Councils were constituted. The wooden handles on these trowels came from Speakers Platform of the Irish House of Commons.”⁸

The remainder of the year was occupied in assessing the results. There was a universal belief that there should be a Provincial Grand Superintendent to oversee the American Councils. The Grand Council agreed with the Americans in thinking of a nation wide organization but felt that the country was too large for a single Superintendent. Thus, on December 16, 1937 Frederic F. Bahnson was appointed Provincial Grand Superintendent for the USA, Southern Jurisdiction. The bounds of this “Southern Jurisdiction” would not be defined until 1946.

II. The Bahnson Years: 1937-1944

In a letter to Harold V.B. Voorhis in September 1938, Fred Bahnson expressed his philosophy as the Provincial Grand Superintendent:

As representing Grand Council I have held my approval of all the names proposed, as I feel we should not rush to increase of membership. Membership is by invitation only, and we are anxious to select the membership with such discriminating care that it will always be considered an honor to be, or to be invited to become, a member of this group. That means that by starting slowly, we can easily establish proper precedent, which should be almost impossible to acquire if we are less sure of what we do at the start.

There certainly was no rush to increase membership. Voorhis and Ward St. Clair had been proposed early in 1938, yet invitations were not extended until 1941. This inactivity led E.H. Burne, on the eve of his election as Great Chief, to write on September 6, 1940:

I have for many moons had in my thoughts my fine Brethren who hold in trust for our Grand Council 3 Warrants bearing good Irish names and many times I am asked how they are progressing. I would love to have something in the nature of a report that I could give to Grand Council at its November Meeting, which would give them an insight as to how the Brethren of the Order across the Atlantic are carrying on.

This stirred some action at the annual Masonic Meetings in Washington, D.C. On February 22, 1941. Harold V.B. Voorhis of New Jersey, Ward K. St. Clair and George O. Linkletter of New York and Clarence Brain of Oklahoma were initiated, and in July, Henry F. Evans of Colorado was added. Linkletter and St. Clair immediately set about starting a Council in New York. It was warranted on December 17, 1942 as Paumanok Council, No. 32, following a request submitted a year earlier, but was essentially inactive until 1945.

The entry of the U.S. into World War II and Bahnson’s ill health effectively ended activity by Knight Masons in America for the duration. Following Bahnson’s death on March 18, 1944, J. Edward Allen was appointed Provincial Grand Superintendent for the Southern Jurisdiction on September 13, 1945.

III. The Allen-Shute Years: 1945-1950

In 1945, Paumanok Council conferred the degrees on a class of six, and the following year added three more. In 1946, during the annual Masonic Week in Washington, D.C., the four Councils resumed the practice of a joint conferral of the degrees. Over the following three years, 51 members were added in this way. In addition, Paumanok Council initiated another 12 members at their meetings. Then in December 1949, J. Edward Allen resigned from all his Masonic activities.

This unexpected resignation had two consequences: 1) the Councils ceased to make new members for the next two years, and 2) it forced action on making Knight Masonry a nation-wide organization. On August 3, 1950, J. Raymond Shute, II was appointed Provincial Grand Superintendent for the Southern Jurisdiction, and Harold V.B. Voorhis was appointed Provincial Grand Superintendent for the Northern

⁸ Jones, *op cit.* P. 18

Jurisdiction. According to Voorhis, during the Masonic meetings in Washington in 1946, he and Allen drew a line across the United States defining the two jurisdictions. This map⁹ was provided by Voorhis to Shute and the Grand Council, and became the official alignment. At that time, the three original councils were in the Southern Jurisdiction, and only Paumanok Council No 32 in New York was in the Northern Jurisdiction.

However, Shute was under heavy pressure at work. In November he suggested to Voorhis that the two jurisdictions be merged and Voorhis take over as Provincial Grand Superintendent for the USA. Voorhis agreed, and forwarded the suggestion to Dublin. Upon Shute's resignation on December 31, 1950, the change was accomplished.

IV. The Voorhis Years: 1951-1967

Voorhis had the objective of strengthening Knight Masonry in the United States and spreading the membership and the Councils across the country. During the next 17 years a pattern was established. New members were regularly initiated - an average of more than 75 each year. To support these, six new Councils were chartered:

The Gateway to the West Council No 58	Pittsburgh, PA	19 Mar 1951
Kilwinning Council No 62	Zanesville, OH	17 Feb 1954
Erin Council No 63	Harrisburg, PA	22 Oct 1957
West Virginia Council No. 64	Clarksburg, WV	13 Dec 1958
Kincora Council No 70	Denver, CO	24 Jun 1961
Maryland Council No. 72	MD	23 Jun 1965

When the original Councils were chartered in North Carolina, the founders had insisted that there was no intention of breaking off from the Grand Council. However, by 1966, Bahnson was dead, while Allen and Shute were no longer active in Masonry. For the new leaders, the matter of independence from

⁹ The map is in the files of the Grand Council. It generally follows the boundaries of the Scottish Rite except that the western states are divided in half along the east-west state lines.

Ireland was simply a question of time. This led Voorhis on June 1, 1966 to write to the Councils:

At the next meeting of the Sir Knights in Washington, D.C. in February 1967, the matter of forming a Grand Council of Knight Masons in the United States will be discussed. I trust each Council will have their Excellent Chief, or a representative present to express an opinion.

By early July he had received enough response to cause him to write to the Great Chief, M.E. John H. Keers on July 2, 1966. In the letter he detailed the problems of administering a membership of over 1000 in ten Councils through a Grand Body so far removed from the U.S.A. After discussing the Annual Meeting in Washington, he concluded, "I am certain that at such a Convention meeting in 1967, we will form a Grand Council of K.M. for the U.S.A., issue them new Charters and elect Grand Officers." This initiated a period of tension as the Americans awaited the reaction of the Grand Council.

On July 14, 1966 a letter went to all Councils informing them that all the records had been transferred to Provincial Grand Scribe J. Landis Randall. Voorhis continued:

After sending in your Annual Return, do not initiate ANY new members until after our next meeting in Washington, February 1967. The reason for this is that we contemplate the formation of a Grand Council, Knight Masons for the United States. In such an event new Charters will be issued to our ten Councils, among other changes.

By the end of August he had completed the basic framework for new Grand Council. This included a draft set of Statutes, a slate of officers, and the preparation of forms for charters, certificates, and stationery. On September 1 a letter went to all Councils advising them of the status and requesting that they be in position to vote at the February meeting. The tension was relieved when on October 20, 1966 Grand Scribe James McC. Allen provided the official reaction to the proposed new Grand Council:

If our members in the U.S.A. consider that their interests can best be served by a Grand Council of their own, we will be pleased to facilitate them and launch it with the dignity it deserves.

V. Constituting a New Grand Council: February 18, 1967

The minutes record:

A Convention of the Provincial Grand Council of Knight Masons (Ireland) for the United States of America was called by the Provincial Superintendent R.E. Sir Knight Harold V.B. Voorhis for 3:00 p.m. on February 18, 1967 in the Hotel Washington, Washington, D.C. for the purpose of organizing a Grand Council of Knight Masons of the United States of America...

Sir Knight John Ballinger seconded a motion by Sir Knight Bird H. Dolby and the representatives unanimously approved the formation of the Grand Council of Knight Masons of the United States of America.

After adopting a Constitution and Statutes, they elected as the first Grand Officers of the Grand Council of Knight Masons in the U.S.A.:

M.E. Harold Van Buren Voorhis (4)	Great Chief	Gr.Ch.1967, 68
R.E. Henry Emmerson (4)	Deputy Great Chief	Gr.Ch.1970
V.E. Murray C. Alexander (1)	Grand Senior Knight	Gr.Ch.1969
V.E. William L. Ramsey (2)	Grand Junior Knight	Died 1970
V.E. J. Landis Randall (5)	Grand Scribe	Gr.Ch.(H) 1975
V.E. Edwin E. Gruener (5)	Grand Treasurer	Died 1968
V.E. Charles A. Harris (3)	Grand Senior Warden	Died 1980
V.E. Robert L. Grubb (1)	Grand Junior Warden	Gr.Ch.1971
V.E. William J.J. Fleming (7)	Grand Director of Ceremonies	Gr.Ch.1972
V.E. Harry W. Bundy (8)	Grand Priest	Died 1967
V.E. Bird H. Dolby (9)	Grand Steward	Died 1970

V.E. Andrew W. Drumheiser (5)	Grand Sentinel	Gr.Tr. 1968
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The newly elected Great Chief installed his officers, but postponed his installation until representatives from Ireland could accomplish it properly.¹⁰ Charters were then issued to nine of the U.S. Councils. The Grand Lodge of Ohio had a law that any new Masonic bodies in Ohio required approval from the Grand Lodge. Approval could not be obtained at that time, and Kilwinning Council No. 62 remained under their original warrant from Ireland.¹¹

Thus, at its Constitution the Grand Council of Knight Masons of the U.S.A. had nine active Councils and 872 members. At the Constitution meeting, Great Chief's Council No. 0 was chartered with Sir Knight DeWitt D. Sager of New Jersey as the first Excellent Chief. Its purpose is to receive in membership deserving Masons who live in areas in which no Council is chartered. Formerly, Paumanok Council had been receiving these as Associate Members, but this practice now ended and the Associate Members were enrolled as regular members either in Great Chief's Council or in some other Council as they desired. The actual paperwork to accomplish this occupied most of the ensuing year.

As his first official act, the new Great Chief admitted Ill. George A. Newbury, 33°, the Sovereign Grand Commander of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite, Northern Jurisdiction to membership in Great Chief's Council of the Knight Masons.

VI. The Grand Council of Knight Masons in the U.S.A.: 1967 - 2002

Getting Organized: 1967-1968

The records of the first year are filled with letters of the Grand Scribe, the Great Chief, the Grand Council in Dublin, and the American Councils as

¹⁰ Because of the expenses involved, at the suggestion of Great Chief J. H. Keers, he was installed on April 12, 1967 by the Deputy Great Chief, V.E. Henry Emmerson a Past Grand Senior Warden of the Grand Council.

¹¹ In spite of the optimism of the persons involved, approval was not given until 1996.

they rearranged their organization. It fell to the Grand Scribe, J. Landis Randall, to establish procedures and create forms for the administration of the new Grand Council. These activities included: devising subordinate Council by-laws, procuring regalia for the Grand Council and the new Great Chief, prodding the Ritual Committee to complete revisions to remove references to Ireland, procuring Council jewelry and regalia for sale to the American Councils, ordering new letterheads, charter forms, dispensation forms, membership cards etc., and answering questions from the Scribes of the various Councils including one who in November was still not sure if the Grand Council had been Constituted!¹²

In the midst of this activity, on June 7, 1967, a letter from Ireland informed the Americans that it would be necessary to return their original Warrants for cancellation. Otherwise the Councils would be liable for annual dues. Kincora Council No. 70 encountered a problem when the Scribe, Harry W. Bundy, who was also the Grand Priest, died on July 5, 1967 leaving the whereabouts of the Warrant a mystery. A Photostat copy was provided from the Grand Superintendent's records, and the Warrants were all canceled. New Charters were issued to the nine Councils in October.

On February 17, 1968 the Grand Council met in Washington to review the work of its first year. Voorhis summarized the accomplishments:

The new Grand Council closed (last year) to meet on February 17, 1968 with the necessary groundwork and business of organizing the Grand Council being placed in the hands of the Grand Officers. During the year 1967 new Charters were issued, proposed by-laws for the Grand Council were approved in Committee and the business of the Grand Council proceeded. During the year, dispensations for the formation of three new Councils were issued by the elected Most Excellent Great Chief Sir Knight Harold V. B. Voorhis and sent to the Committee on Charters and Dispensations for recommendation at the next meeting of the Grand Council. These Councils were Northern New Jersey Council UD located at Sussex, New Jersey, Southern New

Jersey Council UD located at Glassboro, New Jersey, and Virginia Council UD located at Arlington, Virginia.

This first year of the Grand Council of the United States was a year of organization. The Councils proceeded to work and new members were knighted. The Grand Council showed a respectable growth for a new Grand Council and great promise lies ahead.

Voorhis also suggested, and the Grand Council agreed, that Honorary Membership be conferred on M.E. Great Chief John H. Keers, R.E. Grand Scribe James McC. Allen, V.E. Deputy Grand Scribe Arthur Mowlds, and V.E. Provincial Grand Superintendent (N.I.) Robert W. Stuart, in appreciation of the fine way they had helped in creating the new Grand Council. Voorhis also appointed M.E. Great Chief Keers as Grand Representative.

The loss of Kilwinning Council and its 282 members had been offset by the affiliation of the 207 former Associate Members and the rapid growth of the Maryland Council, so that 916 members were reported at this meeting. In addition, Charters were issued the three new Councils, and two others were placed under dispensation. Sir Knight Dewitt D. Sager was elected Grand Priest of the Council. The Grand Officers were properly invested with their Collars and Jewels and the Grand Council moved ahead into its second year. Later in the year, Voorhis appointed James R. Case of Connecticut as the Excellent Chief of Great Chief's Council.

The year 1968 was marked by the death of two Grand Officers. The death of V.E. Dewitt D. Sager, Grand Priest on April 22 caused Grand Secretary Randall to comment, "The office has a spell on it to lose two in a row."¹³ Then on November 9, 1968 the Grand Council suffered a serious loss with the death of Grand Treasurer Edwin E. Gruener. As chairman of the By-Laws Committee he had labored diligently over the past year endeavoring to get the Councils to adopt reasonable by-laws.

¹² Voorhis' handwritten note was. "I don't understand this."

¹³ Randall letter to Voorhis 24 January 1969

Recognition: The Concordat

A major order of business for the Grand Council was to establish formal relations with the Mother Grand Council in Dublin. In January 1969 James McC. Allen, Grand Scribe in Dublin wrote:

We are anxious to complete our recognition of the Grand Council of Knight Masons of the United States of America and have been in communication with the Supreme Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons in Scotland to ensure that they will join with us in recognizing your Charters and Certificates.

He also provided a draft "Concordat" to be considered at the February meeting. Because a strike had caused delay in the mails, the letter was not received until March 3, 1969, thereby preventing any consideration at the February meeting. Voorhis replied, in his last letter as Great Chief, that he saw no problem with the Concordat and suggested that it be dated and signed.

Great Chief John H. Keers signed it at Freemasons Hall in Dublin on June 25, 1969, but the Grand Scribe delayed sending the approved document to the United States until October 9th when he was able to report that the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Scotland had also agreed to its provisions. On October 15, 1969, Great Chief Murray C. Alexander signed and the Grand Council of Knight Masons of the United States of America became an officially recognized independent Masonic body.

Although the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Scotland joined in the Concordat, for some reason there was no direct fraternal correspondence between the two Grand bodies until 1996. During the summer of 1996 this omission was rectified and Grand Representatives were exchanged.

Expansion and Growth

The Grand Council of Knight Masons of the United States of America has compiled some impressive statistics. On the average during its thirty-five years of life 290 new members have been added each year. The rate of growth has accelerated in recent years. On average, during each of the last 10 years three

new Councils were added and 390 new members were knighted. In the past, the major obstacle to growth is the necessity to have Grand Lodge approval in each state before any Council may be chartered. Under the generally accepted practice of Masonry in most of the United States, organizations that require Masonic membership of their members must receive Grand Lodge approval. It was this requirement that forced Kilwinning Council in Ohio to remain under their Warrant from Ireland when the rest of the U.S. Councils formed the Grand Council of the USA. Over the years the effect of this requirement is seen in the sudden proliferation of Councils in a new state. For example, California allowed no Councils of Knight Masons until 1991. Two were permitted in 1991 and two more in 1995. These Councils now have over 250 members. In Texas the effect is even more striking. No Councils could be formed before 1991. The objection was removed in 1991, and by 1998 ten Councils were at work with over 350 members. Councils are now active in 36 states and the District of Columbia.

The Constituting Officers Depart

At the Second Annual Meeting in 1968, Harold Voorhis concluded his report by saying:

If I am privileged to be again elected the Great Chief for a second term, so be it. I do not propose to continue perpetually in that office. I will be seventy-five years old next year and to be an example of an exception to one of my pet-peeves (an old fossil at the head of a Grand Body) is not what I contemplate.

And so at the Third Annual Meeting, a new slate of officers was installed. Because he would be serving as Sovereign Grand Master of the AMD, Sir Knight Henry Emmerson requested that he not be advanced, and Sir Knight Murray Alexander was installed as the second Great Chief of Knight Masons in the USA. By the sixth Annual Meeting in 1972, although J. Landis Randall and Andrew Drumheiser continued as Grand Scribe and Grand Treasurer, the original members of the Grand Council were no longer serving as officers.

In 1974 Randall began to feel the effects of a serious illness and on December 8, 1974 he submitted his resignation to be effective at the next Annual

Meeting. Andrew Drumheiser submitted his resignation as Grand Treasurer at the same time. Although Voorhis continued as Chairman of the Nominating Committee until his death in 1983, and Randall was member of the Ritual Committee until just before his death in 1978, after 1975, the founding Grand Council officers had little direct involvement in the activities of the Grand Council.

Ohio and the Concordat

Kilwinning Council in Ohio was unable to join in the constitution of the Grand Council because of opposition by the Grand Lodge of Ohio. In 1996, the Grand Lodge withdrew its objections to Knight Masons Councils in Ohio being chartered by the U.S. body. Ohio Masons may now request a warrant or charter from either the Grand Council sitting in Dublin or the Grand Council of the United States of America, while the three existing Ohio Councils can retain their current warrants. At the Annual Meeting in 1999, a charter was issued to Irish Council No. 67, and in 2001 a charter was issued to St. Clair Council No. 75. During the same period, the Dublin Grand Council has also chartered four new councils. Thus in Ohio we have the unusual situation in which two Masonic grand bodies are issuing charters in the same geographic jurisdiction.

VII. The Future

In the history of the Grand Council in the USA, there has yet to be a year in which membership decreased. At the 2002 Annual Meeting the Grand Council had 77 chartered councils with nearly 7200 members. Interest in forming new Councils of Knight Masons remains high. With Councils present in two-thirds of the states, there will undoubtedly be some slowing in this activity in the future. However, since February three councils have received dispensation, and two are pending decision by the Great Chief.

What do these and similar Masonic degrees offer that excites this interest? I would be lying if I did not say that some start because the group that founded a council has failed to “spread the wealth” and as a result the newer members break off so they too can have titles. In a very few cases I believe that the Charter Members have created a closed group, excluding many who should be invited, who then

request papers to start a new Council. Most generally, new councils have been formed because the geography made attendance difficult for a number of members. For example, in Virginia, King Darius Council meets alternately in Petersburg and Staunton. Masons from the Southwest rightly believe that a 300 mile drive is a long way to go for a meeting, even when several groups meet and there is a dinner. Thus, they have received dispensation for Fort Andrew Lewis Council UD, which will hold its meetings alternately in Salem and Abingdon.

Paul Bessel did a survey¹⁴ of what Councils of Knight Masons and AMD Councils actually do in their meetings. The results generally indicate that it depends on the interests and initiative of the leaders. Some are small research bodies, some confer degrees, some are supper clubs, some are charitable fundraisers, some are active supporters of Lodge and Chapter ritual teams, and some combine a number of activities. These bodies draw members from a wide area. Hence they are a forum in which Brethren from many lodges and Royal Arch Chapters and Commanderies meet together to do a little ritual, have a little food, and experience a great deal of brotherhood. This in turn can lead to an improvement in Masonry. If it fails to do so, the fault is not “too many Masonic organizations” but poor leadership in the organizations.

¹⁴ See <http://bessel.org/amdkm.htm>

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