

# THE WARDENS

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The office of Warden is very old; older, probably, than any reference we will ever find in documents relating to the Craft. All through our organization the influence of the Guilds of the middle ages may be traced; occasionally with ease, more often by the methods of a "higher criticism" which reads analogies by inference and a logical interpretation of the spirit of the document. That Freemasonry derived its Wardens from the Guilds, however, needs no very critical labor to suggest.

The Guilds of the Middle Ages acted under Royal Charters or Warrants, or similar instruments given by more local authority. This legal protection enabled them to work with more freedom, for the good of all, and gave the chartering authority some semblance of control. In the "libre Albus," or White Book of the City of London 1419, we find the "Oath of the Masters and Wardens of the Mysteries," which was applicable to any Guild - weavers, metal workers, Masons or others. It Reads:

"You shall swear, that well and lawful you shall overlook the art or mystery of \_\_\_\_\_ of which you are Masters and Wardens of the Mysteries, for the year elected. And the good rules and ordinances of the same mystery. approved here by the Court, you shall keep and cause to be kept. And all the defaults that you shall find therein, done contrary there to, you shall present to the Chamberlain of the City, from time to time, sparing no one for favour, and aggrieving no one for hate. Extortion or wrong unto no one, by colour of your office, you shall do; nor unto anything that shall be against the estate and Peace of the King, or of the City, you shall consent. But for the time that you shall be in office, in all things pertaining unto the said mystery, according to the good laws and franchises of the said City, well and lawfully you shall behave yourself. So God you help, and the Saints."

The Harleian manuscript, the probable date of which is 1660, states that:

"For the future the Sayd Society, Company and Fraternity of Free Masons shall be regulated and governed by one Master and Assembly and Wardens as the said Company shall think to choose, at every yearly General Assembly."

It seems strange to modern ears, but it is a fact that the Wardens of a lodge, prior to some date between 1723 and 1738 were always chosen from the Fellows of the Craft.

In the first edition of "Anderson's Constitution," published in 1723, under the "Manner of Constituting a New Lodge, as practiced by his Grace the Duke of Wharton, the present Right Worshipful Grand Master, according to the ancient usages of Masons," we read: "The new Master and Wardens being yet among the Fellow-Craft." After the

newly elected Master is installed he calls forth “two Fellow-Craft, presents them to the Grand Master for his approbation,” and when that is secured they are duly installed as Wardens. At that early date a Deputy Grand Master could be chosen from the ranks of the Fellows. The 17<sup>th</sup> Regulation states: “If the Deputy Grand Master be sick, or necessarily absent, the Grand Master may choose any Fellow-Craft he pleases to be his Deputy “pro tempore.” In 1738, when the Book of Constitutions was published, the Wardens, Tiler, Assistant Treasurer and Secretary had to be Master Masons. Perhaps no ancient usage and custom of the Fraternity is more universal than the government of lodges by a Master and two Wardens. Mackey lists this requirement as his Tenth Landmark, and whether they have adopted Mackey’s twenty-five Landmarks or not, all Grand Lodges recognize the Wardens as essential in the formation, opening and governing of a lodge.

The three principal officers of a lodge are universally recognized in the ritual as the essential elements of which a lodge must consist. Only the uninstructed Mason regards the stations of the Senior and Junior Wardens as but stepping stones to the East; necessary waiting posts to which the ambitious must stand hitched for a year before proceeding on his triumphal journey to the Oriental Chair! Not only are the wardens essential to every Entered Apprentices’, Fellow Crafts’ or Master Masons’ Lodge, but they have certain inherent powers, duties and responsibilities. Mackey sets these forth substantially as follows:

“While the Master may use others than the Wardens in conferring of the degrees, he cannot deprive the Wardens of their offices, or absolve them of the responsibilities.”

The government of a Masonic lodge is essentially tripartite, although lodges may be legally opened, set to labor and closed by the Master in the absence of the installed Wardens, the chairs being filled by temporary appointees. The Senior Warden presides in the absence of the Master, and the Junior Warden in the absence of both the Master and Senior Warden.

No other brethren in the lodge have this power, privilege or responsibility. The Warden who presides in the absence of his superior officer may, if he desires, call a Past Master to the Chair to preside for him; but, no Past Master, in the absence of the Master, may legally congregate the lodge. That must be done by the Master, the Senior Warden in the Absence of the Master, or the Junior Warden in the absence of both.

Mackey further states that while the Senior Warden takes the East by right in the absence of the Master, the Junior Warden does not take the West by right in the absence of the Senior Warden. Each officer is installed with a ceremony which gives him certain duties; a Warden in the East is still a Warden, not a Master. It is the Master’s privilege to appoint brethren to stations temporarily unfilled. The Master, whether elected and installed, or Senior Warden acting as Master in the real Master’s absence, may appoint the Junior Warden to fill an empty West. But the Junior Warden cannot assume the West without such ap-ointment. On the contrary, in the absence of the Master, the Senior Warden, when present, is the only brother who can assume the East and congregate the

lodge. Thus runs the general law, usually adhered to. As has been noted in other Bulletins, Grand Lodges may, and not infrequently do, make local regulations contrary to the Old Constitutions, the Old Charges, even the Landmarks - the fundamental laws of Masonry. If a Grand Lodge rules that in the absence of the Master and both Wardens, the oldest Past Master present may congregate, open and close the lodge; then that law is correct for that Grand Lodge only; but it not in consonance with general Masonic practice, nor with the fundamental laws of the Fraternity.

The Wardens are found in all bodies of Masonry, in all Rites and in all countries.

Both its derivations, and its translations give the meaning of the word. It comes from the Saxon "weardian," to guard, to watch. In France, the second and third officers are "Premier" and "Second Surveillant;" in Germany, "Erste" and "zweite Aufseher;" in Spain, "primer" and "segundo Vigilante;" in Italy, "primo" and "secondo Sorvegliante," all the words meaning to overlook, to see, to watch, to keep ward, to observe.

Whether the title came from the provision of the old rituals that the Wardens sit beside the two columns in the porch of the Temple to oversee or watch; the Senior Warden the Fellowcrafts and the Junior Warden the Apprentices; or whether the old rituals were developed from the custom of the middle ages Guilds having Wardens (watchers), is a moot question.

In the French Rite and the Scottish Rite both Wardens sit in the West, near the columns. In the Blue Lodge the symbolism is somewhat impaired by the Junior Warden sitting in the South, but it is strengthened by giving each Warden a replica of the column beneath the shade of which he once sat. It is interesting to note that these columns once went by another name. Oliver quotes an inventory of a Lodge at Chester, in 1761, which includes "two truncheons for the Wardens."

Truncheons or Columns, they are the Warden's emblems of authority, and their positions are of great interest. The column of the Senior Warden is erect, that of the Junior Warden on its side when the lodge is at labor. During refreshment, the Senior Warden's column is laid prostrate, while that of the Junior Warden is erected, so that the craft may know, at all times, by a glance at either the South or the West, whether the Lodge is at labor or refreshment. The government of the Craft by a Master and two Wardens cannot be too strongly emphasized to the initiate or too well observed by the Craft. It is not only the right but the duty of the Senior Warden to "assist the Worshipful Master in opening and governing his lodge." When he uses it to enforce orders, his setting mallet or gavel is to be respected; he has a "proper officer" to carry his messages to the Junior Warden or elsewhere; under the Master, he is responsible for the conduct of the Lodge while at labor.

The Junior Warden's duties are less important; he observes the time, and calls the lodge from labor to refreshment, and from refreshment back to labor in due season, at the orders of the Master. It is his duty to see that "none of the Craft convert the purposes of refreshment into intemperance and excess" which doubtless has a bibulous derivation,

coming from days when “refreshment” meant wine. If we no longer drink wine at lodge, we still have reason for this charge upon the Junior Warden, since it is his unpleasant duty, because he supervises the conduct of the Craft at refreshment, to prefer charges against those guilty of Masonic misconduct. Only Wardens may succeed to the office of Master (not so in Nevada). This requirement (which has certain exceptions, as in the formation of a new lodge) is very old.

The fourth of the Old Charges reads:

“No brother can be a Warden until he has passed the part of a Fellowcraft; nor a Master, until he has acted as Warden; nor Grand Warden, until he been Master of a Lodge, nor Grand Master, unless he has been a Fellowcraft before his election.” There is wisdom in the old law; there is wit in the modern practice of electing the Junior Warden to be Senior Warden. No man learns to be Master of a lodge by sitting upon the benches and observing. No brother’s fitness to be Master can be observed by brethren unless he is tested. Brethren learn, and are tested as to how they learn and perform, by serving as Wardens, before they aspire to the Oriental Chair.

A privilege equally high is that of the Wardens in most Jurisdictions; representing the lodge with the Master at all communications of the Grand Lodge. Certain Grand Lodges disenfranchise the Wardens, the Grand Lodge consisting only of the Master of constituent lodges and the officers and past officers of Grand Lodge.

Prior to the formation of the Mother Grand Lodge of England, in 1717, it was the prerogative of every Mason to be present at the General Assembly and to have his voice in its affairs. When the Grand Lodge was brought into being by the “four old lodges” of London, the interests of all were entrusted to the Masters and Wardens.

Preston states that “The Masters and Wardens of all regular particular lodges upon record” form the Grand Lodge. Of the action of Grand Lodges which deprive the Wardens of membership in the Grand Lodge, Mackey states:

“I cannot hesitate to say that this is not only a violation of the ancient regulations, but an infraction of the inherent rights of the Wardens and the lodges.”

This appears to many as going too far. If the brethren of the old General Assembly could give up their rights to a voice in its deliberations, and entrust their interests to Masters and Wardens in a Grand Lodge, it seems not unreasonable that these Masters and Wardens, as a Grand Lodge, have a right to deprive themselves of membership when the good of the whole requires it. The Warden’s is a high and exalted office; his duties are many, his responsibilities great; his powers are only exceeded by those of the Master. He is a good Warden who so acts in his South or West as to command for himself the respect of the brethren, rather than demanding it because of law and custom.