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OF HISTORY, HERITAGE, AND EDUCATION

YGGDRASIL

ETERNAL ASH TREE OF THE MEDIEVAL NORTH

MARK DREISONSTOK, 33°
MANAGING EDITOR, *SCOTTISH RITE JOURNAL*

My doctoral studies at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., explored connections between English and German medieval literature, specifically how biblical and Northern pagan traditions interact in the Old Saxon *Heliand* and Anglo-Saxon works such as *Beowulf*, *The Dream of the Rood*, and the *Crist* poem. Along the way to writing my dissertation, I also encountered Scandinavian mythology, including narratives of Yggdrasil, the eternal Ash Tree of the Medieval North. I have since been impressed as to how Yggdrasil has also entered the symbolic vocabulary of Freemasonry.

In Norse mythology, Yggdrasil stands at the very center of the universe. It holds up the skies above, and its roots grow deep in multiple directions, penetrating variously into our world, into sacred rivers, and into the underworld of Hel. In his book *Tree of Salvation* (Oxford University Press, 2013), Fr. G. Ronald Murphy, S.J., professor at Georgetown University, further explains:

J. Augustus Knapp, *The Yggdrasil Tree*. Illustration in Manley P. Hall, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*. San Francisco: H.S. Crocker, 1928. Hall's caption to this image begins: "In Ginnungagap, the great cleft in space, All-Father created the huge world ash tree—Yggdrasil—the symbol of Life, Time, and Destiny." Source: House of the Temple Library



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Medieval artists in the North depict Yggdrasil on occasion as a stolid evergreen spruce, the highest of trees. Perhaps the most famous of the many functions of Yggdrasil is to provide protection, especially at the time of the end of the world, Ragnorak, the twilight of the gods. Yggdrasil, seeing and feeling the destruction of the whole world which the tree supports and protects, will open to the last man and woman, or boy and girl, to admit them and provide protection for them throughout the end of the world.

A new earth will emerge from the sea, eternally green.

The tree makes its appearance in the poetic and prose *Eddas*, the sacred writings of medieval Norse mythology. “Where is the chief or most holy place of the gods?” we read in the *Younger Edda* of Snorri Sturluson. “That is by the ash Yggdrasil [*sic*]. There the gods meet in council every day.” (Rasmus Björn Anderson, trans.)

In surveying in Masonic fashion various belief systems, several significant texts of Freemasonry have featured Yggdrasil and its sublime associations. One such reference occurs locally to Washington, D.C., for Arminius Lodge* published a German-language *Handbuch für deutsche Freimaurer* (Handbook for German Freemasons) in 1879. In this book,



J. Augustus Knapp, *The Tree of the Sephiroth*. Illustration in Manley P. Hall, *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*. San Francisco: H.S. Crocker, 1928. Hall likens the Yggdrasil ash tree to the Tree of Life of the Kabbalah. Hall’s caption to the above picture reads in part: “The [Kabalistic] tree of organized manifestation is not only a macrocosmic symbol but also the emblem of man himself, for he, too, is rooted in spirit; and to attain perfection he must ultimately retire through the four worlds into the seed of himself.” Source: House of the Temple Library

Hermann H. Gerdes, the Charter Master of Arminius Lodge, found in Yggdrasil with its roots, power, and life “eine schöne symbolische Darstellung der Frei-Maurerei,” that is, “a beautiful symbolic representation of Freemasonry, for the Mason’s secret is represented by this tree, as Humanity goes from darkness to light [...]” (translation mine). With the tree’s deep roots in the nether regions, the central position on earth, and its heavenly associations, Br. Gerdes suggests that Yggdrasil is an appropriate symbol for Freemasonry; both tree and Freemason strive to maintain an earthly focus, seek to maintain a central position in the life and affairs of the world, and look in awe upon the Supreme Architect (and Supreme Architecture) of the Universe.

The more widely known *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* by Albert Mackey also references Yggdrasil. Dr. Mackey writes:

[Yggdrasil is the] name given in Scandinavian mythology to the greatest and most sacred of all trees, which was conceived as binding together heavens, earth, and hell. It is an ash, whose branches spread over all the world, and reach above the heavens. It sends out three roots in as many different directions: one to the Asa-gods in heaven, another to the Frost giants, the third to the under-world. Under each root springs a wonderful fountain,

*Arminius Lodge is traditionally the German-speaking Masonic lodge of Washington, D.C., and is now exploring a new path in exemplifying Germany’s Schröder Masonic ritual.

endowed with marvelous virtues. From the tree itself springs a honey-dew. The serpent, Nithhoggr, lies at the under-world fountain and gnaws the root of Yggdrasil [sic]; the squirrel, Ratatoskr, runs up and down, and tries to breed strife between the serpent and the eagle, which sits aloft.

In addition to filling out details of the tree and its lore, as well as demonstrating the familiar conflict between a serpent below and ascending eagle wings above Yggdrasil, Dr. Mackey quotes the Rev. Dr. George Oliver, who “considers it to have been the Theological Ladder of the Gothic Mysteries.” With this phrase, Dr. Mackey and Dr. Oliver bring the Yggdrasil tree ever closer to Masonic symbology for by “Theological Ladder,” we are reminded of the three-rung ladder of Faith, Hope, and Charity in the First Degree as well as the Mystic Ladder with the rungs of the Seven Liberal Arts and Sciences in the Thirtieth Degree, Knight Kadosh, in the Scottish Rite degree system. Ladders which take us symbolically upwards represent how we ascend in terms of worldly, philosophical, and spiritual knowledge.

A Masonic purview of Yggdrasil occurs in Manley P. Hall’s *Secret Teachings of All Ages* (1928). In this scholarly work on diverse belief systems as well as Freemasonry, Br. Hall writes:

The Scandinavian world-tree, Yggdrasil, supports on its branches nine spheres or worlds, which the Egyptians symbolized by the nine stamens of the persea or avocado. All of these are enclosed within the mysterious tenth sphere or cosmic egg—the definitionless Cipher of the Mysteries.

Hall then connects this tree to the Kabbala, specifically the Tree of Life, of Jewish mysticism. The latter tree, he notes, “consists of nine branches, or worlds, emanating from the First Cause or Crown, which surrounds its emanations as the shell surrounds the egg,” thus showing the tree as a sort of archetype that transcends cultures.

An exquisite watercolor by J. Augustus Knapp commissioned for Hall’s *Secret Teachings of All Ages* labeled *The Yggdrasil Tree* depicts the expansive tree, an eagle above, a serpent below, and a male and female figure on cliffs on either side of the tree, perhaps the last (and first) man and woman of a doomed world who are enveloped in the tree and who will give birth to a new world. Hall begins his caption below the image thus:

In Ginnungagap, the great cleft in space, All-Father created the huge world ash tree—Yggdrasil—the symbol of Life, Time, and Destiny. The three roots of the tree are called the spiritual, the terrestrial, and the infernal.

In concluding this brief look at the curious entrance of the Yggdrasil Tree into Masonic writings by authors as diverse as Hermann H. Gerdes, Albert Mackey, George Oliver, and Manley P. Hall, we note that Yggdrasil expands Masonic thought in the direction of the natural world. Some of the most common and familiar symbols of Freemasonry are clearly man-made: the square, the compasses, and great edifices of architecture, most notably King Solomon’s Temple. All of these are tools that help us, metaphorically speaking, in our work to polish our rough ashlars into smooth ashlars.

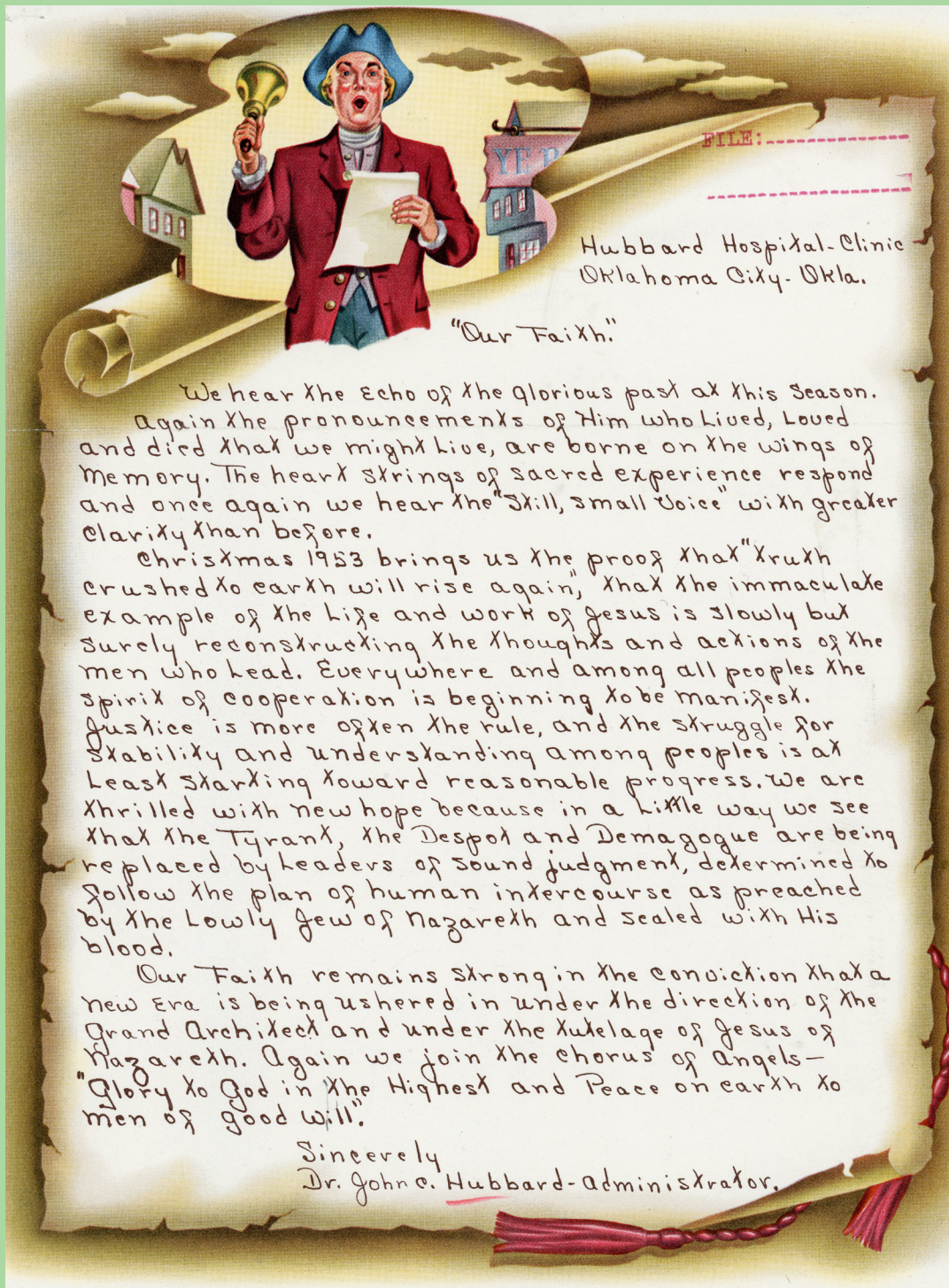
In contrast, Yggdrasil is a physical and living manifestation of the Divine order that spans throughout creation, from the underworld to the sky. It serves as the primordial meeting place for the gods, much as our own temples, Masonic and otherwise, do today. Additionally, it waits to provide shelter—both physical and moral—for humanity in its darkest hour, which Masonry has done, but which we only sometimes acknowledge. We thus see why the Yggdrasil tree serves to acknowledge a side for Masonic and human existence that our other symbols may not celebrate as clearly. In this way, Masonry’s use of Yggdrasil helps to show the diversity of Freemasonry and its all-encompassing view of human life as universality, worldliness, and ineffable spirituality. •

The above article originally appeared in the Voice of Freemasonry of Washington, D.C. It is reprinted in Amicus Illuminism and the Scottish Rite Journal by courtesy of the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia.



The Three Norns (Urðr, Verðandi, and Skuld, the Germanic goddess of fate) in front of the Yggdrasil Tree Source: *Heck’s Pictorial Archive of Art and Architecture* (1851). Public domain.

THE CHRISTMAS CORRESPONDENCE OF DR. JOHN C. HUBBARD, 33°



the world. Now most often taking the digital form of an email, efficient and instant to match our fast-paced modern world, we cannot forget the charm and care of the hand-written letters that were once delivered to our doorstep many years ago. Some are so beautifully detailed they were kept, archived, and became a part of the temple's history itself.

The year was 1956, and Ray Baker Harris, House of the Temple Librarian, and soon to be Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia, was eagerly anticipating the arrival of one letter in particular. What would then be the sixteenth year in which a hand-written letter on beautifully decorated paper would arrive on his desk from his Christmas pen pal.

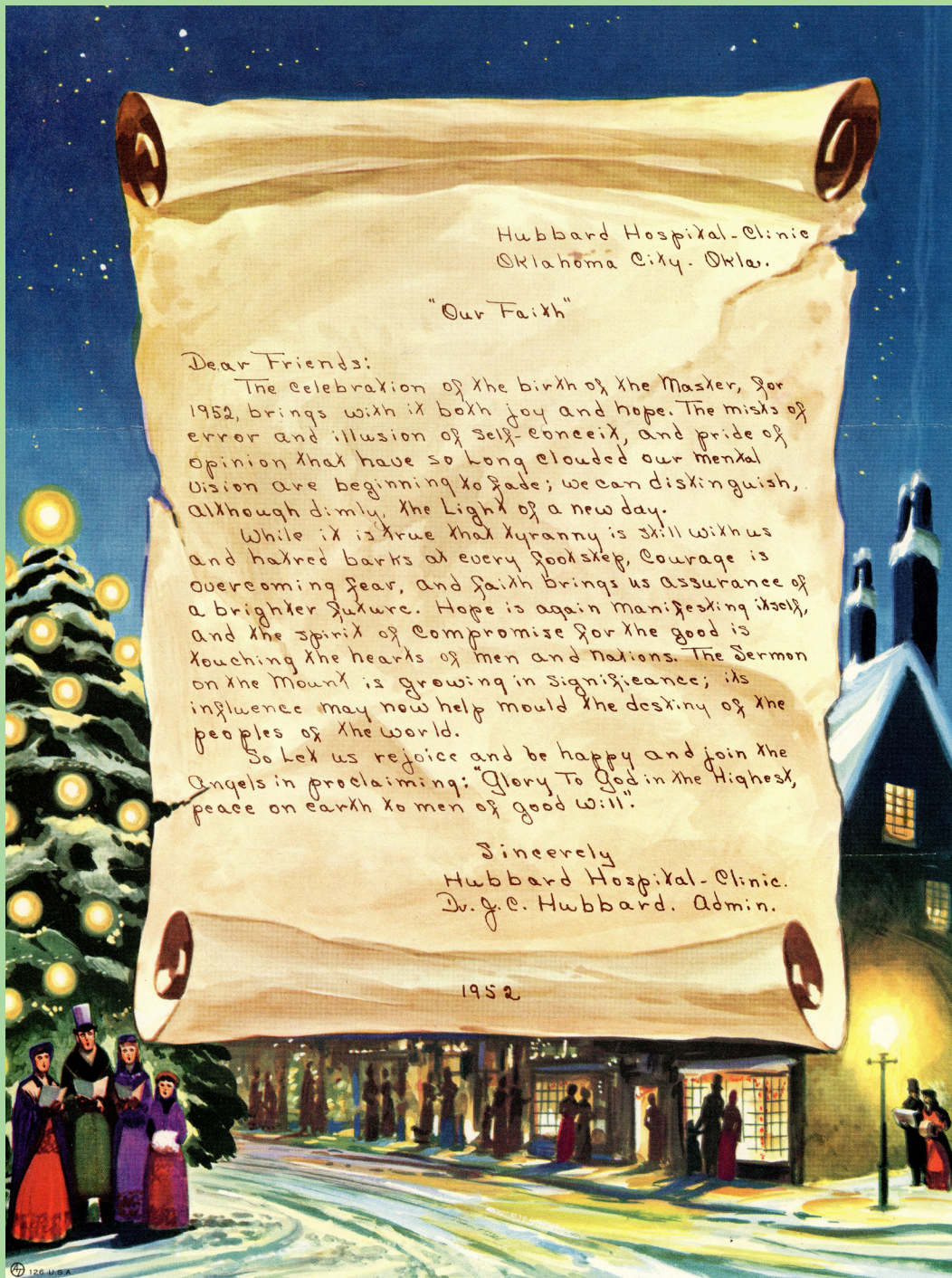
Dr. John C. Hubbard, 33°, came to be known for many things in his life: he was a father, a doctor, a soldier, an actor, a Freemason, and a leader. The following was said by J. Landis Fleming, "Here is a man who has made a notable success of

MADLINE BLOMBERG, HOUSE OF THE TEMPLE INTERN

Every holiday season brings a slew of well wishes and Christmas greetings to the Grand Commander and the House of the Temple Staff from all over

this business of living, because his life has been based upon a sound foundation and worthwhile values," stated the author of Hubbard's biography, *An Oklahoma Rebel*.

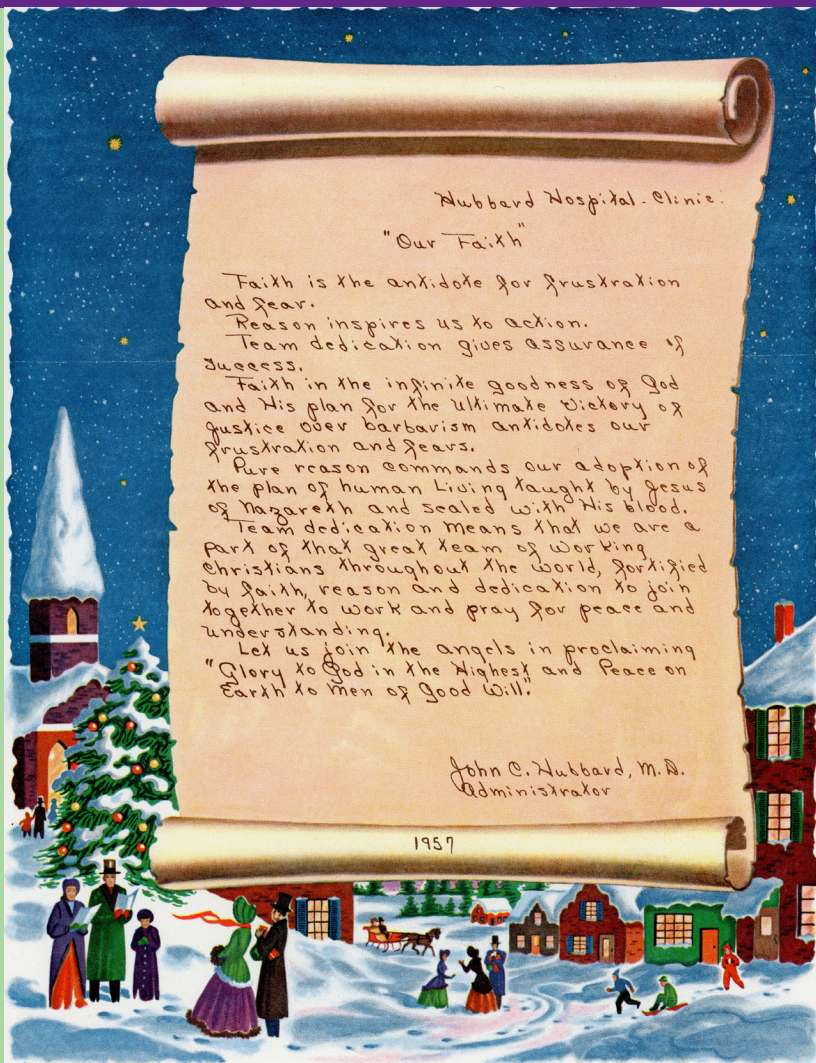
Aside from his legacy of the Hubbard Hospital and Clinic, the hospital he opened specializing in surgery and



physical therapy, he was very Masonically involved and quickly rose up the ranks of Masonic leadership. He joined the Scottish Rite and was awarded Knight Commander of the Court of Honor as well as Inspector General Honorary. He served as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the State of Oklahoma in 1948 and also was a member of the India Temple Shrine, Order of the Eastern Star, and the Philaethes Society. Additionally, he served as chapter Wise Master of the Rose Croix. (J. Landis Fleming, "Message of Masonry," in: *An Oklahoma Rebel*, p.116)

Later in life, while he was still acting administrator for his hospital and most active in his lodge, he began the tradition of sending annual Christmas letters. While the House of the Temple was presumably not the only recipient of these letters, each one was beautifully penned by Ill. Hubbard, reflecting on the year that had passed and sending well wishes for the holiday season and the year that followed. All of his notes were heavily imbued with the strength of Christianity and Masonic values to which he personally subscribed, as displayed in his 1947 letter: "Now we come again to that period of the year when we celebrate the birth of the Master of Men. Again His unchallenged philosophy of human living seeks a place in

DR. HUBBARD'S PROSE WAS ENCIRCLED BY A DIFFERENT CHRISTMAS-THEMED ILLUSTRATION EACH YEAR THESE MEMENTOS ACT AS TRIBUTES TO THE BEAUTY OF THE BROTHERHOOD THAT REMAIN ESPECIALLY CLOSE TO OUR HEARTS AT THIS SPECIAL TIME OF YEAR.



before Hubbard's passing. He kept some of their personal correspondence as well, to live forever in the archives at the House of the Temple. These mementos act as tributes to the beauty of the brotherhood that remain especially close to our hearts at this special time of year.

We shall keep Dr. John C. Hubbard's legacy alive this season by ending this little Christmas letter in the same way he ended so many of his:

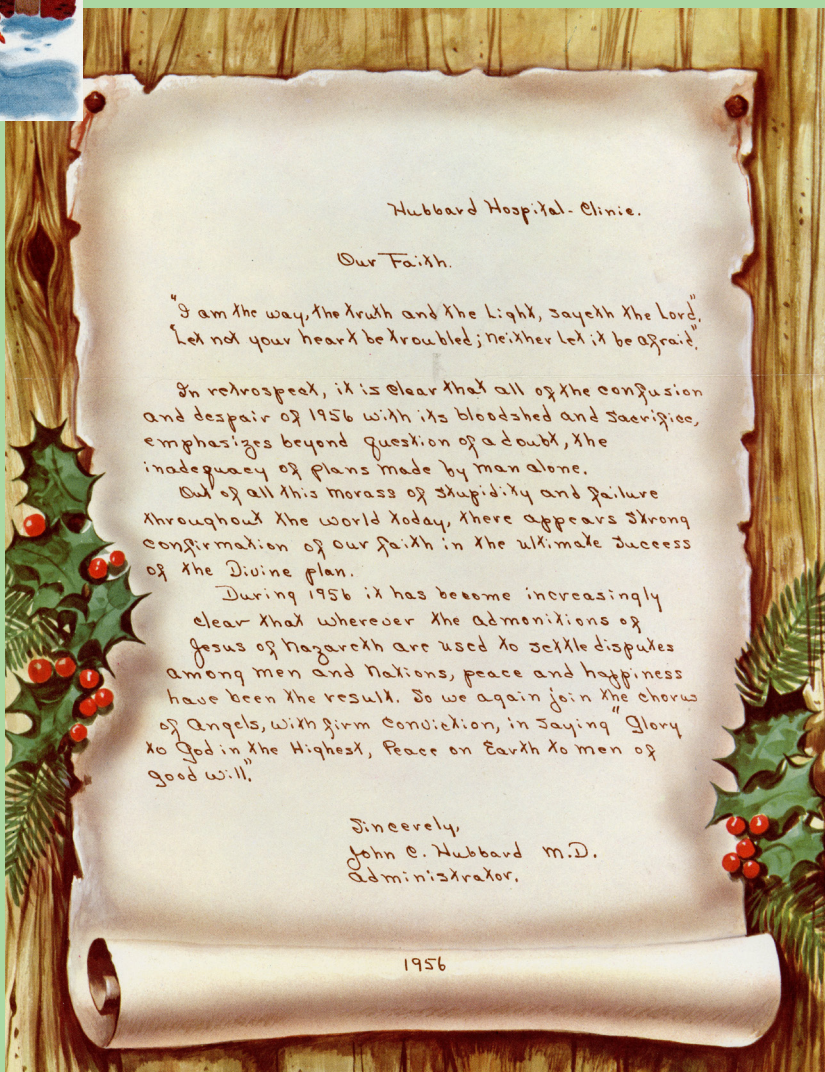
"Glory to God in the Highest, Peace on Earth to men of good will."

the hearts of men and inspires them to the performance of better living."

Dr. Hubbard's prose was encircled by a different Christmas-themed illustration each year. A scene of a decorated town blanketed in snow, featuring carolers and festive cheer-spreaders milling along the exterior of the letter. Others were placed on a faux medieval parchment or highlighted other traditional Christmas imagery.

This letter sending tradition sparked a friendship between Hubbard and Harris. The former, inspired by Hubbard's thoughtfulness, sent a grateful message back. The two continued a correspondence for many years, supporting each other's Masonic work in any way that they could. Hubbard, as contributor to the *Oklahoma Mason*, would consistently promote the House of the Temple's publication of *The New Age*, and Harris reviewed *An Oklahoma Rebel* favorably in *The New Age* book reviews. They were finally able to meet in person at the 1957 Biennial Session.

House of the Temple librarian Harris collected Hubbard's Christmas letters from 1940 to 1958, the year



Hubbard Hospital - Clinic.

Our Faith.

"I am the way, the truth and the light, saith the Lord.
Let not your heart be troubled; neither let it be afraid."

In retrospect, it is clear that all of the confusion and despair of 1956 with its bloodshed and sacrifice, emphasizes beyond question of a doubt, the inadequacy of plans made by man alone.

Out of all this morass of stupidity and failure throughout the world today, there appears strong confirmation of our faith in the ultimate success of the Divine plan.

During 1956 it has become increasingly clear that wherever the admonitions of Jesus of Nazareth are used to settle disputes among men and nations, peace and happiness have been the result. So we again join the chorus of Angels, with firm conviction, in saying "Glory to God in the Highest, Peace on Earth to men of good will."

Sincerely,
John C. Hubbard M.D.
Administrator.

1956

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WACO VALLEY.**

Hall, Manly Palmer. *An Encyclopedic Outline of Masonic, Hermetic, Quabbalistic, and Rosicrucian Symbolic Philosophy: Being an Interpretation of the Secret Teachings Concealed within the Rituals, Allegories, and Mysteries of All Ages.* King Solomon Edition. San Francisco: H. S. Crocker Company, 1928. [Donated and adopted.]

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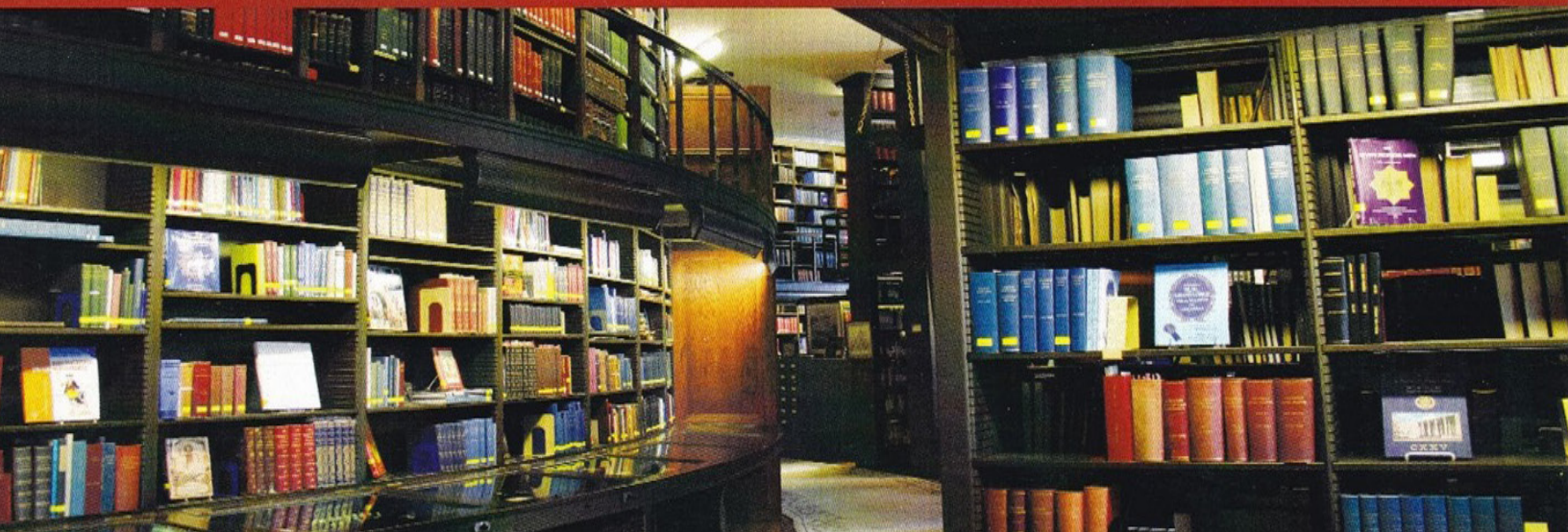
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SOVEREIGN GRAND COMMANDER OF THE
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A RARE GLIMPSE AT REVOLUTION:

The Pennsylvania Gazette in the Supreme Council Archives

B. CHRIS RULI, 32°, KCCH, ASSISTANT GRAND HISTORIAN

Earlier this year, while relocating our archive materials over to the new Archives Room at the House of the Temple, the author discovered a rather unique piece of American history—an original copy of the December 24, 1773, edition of the *Philadelphia Gazette*, which featured an early public notice concerning the Boston Tea Party. This special item had been boxed together with other, albeit more contemporary, newspapers as part of our antique newspapers collection. Admittedly, the publication's title first caught my attention, as the newspaper had been operated by famous Freemason and Founding Father Benjamin Franklin. Upon closer examination, however, I soon discovered the exciting story contained on the page. This is a clear instance that one never knows what one will stumble upon in our eclectic collection at the House of the Temple.

Perhaps the most obvious or striking feature of the notice is that it had been printed on one side as an addendum to the day's main paper. This suggests that the news arrived in Philadelphia so quickly and with such a great sense of urgency that the printer decided to print this special run immediately.

The notice, reproduced here in full, is well preserved, despite its age and a predecessor's attempt to keep the piece together with scotch tape. On the back of the piece, we find a brief handwritten note denoting the item's subject matter: "Dec. 24, 1773. The first seizure of Tea at Boston that began all our Troubles." (See p. 12.)

The item's provenance, or record of past ownership, is a mystery. A search of the Supreme Council's early transactions, which often included notes of notable acquisitions in the library and museum, did not uncover a mention of the paper. It is more likely the item was



This engraving depicting the Boston Tea Party appeared in W.D. Cooper, *The History of North America* (London: E. Newberry), in 1789, sixteen years after the *Pennsylvania Gazette* special edition highlighted in this article. Source: Wikimedia Commons

donated privately and may have been part of a larger collection donation. Nevertheless, the notice found itself nestled together with other antique newspapers in our periodical collection.

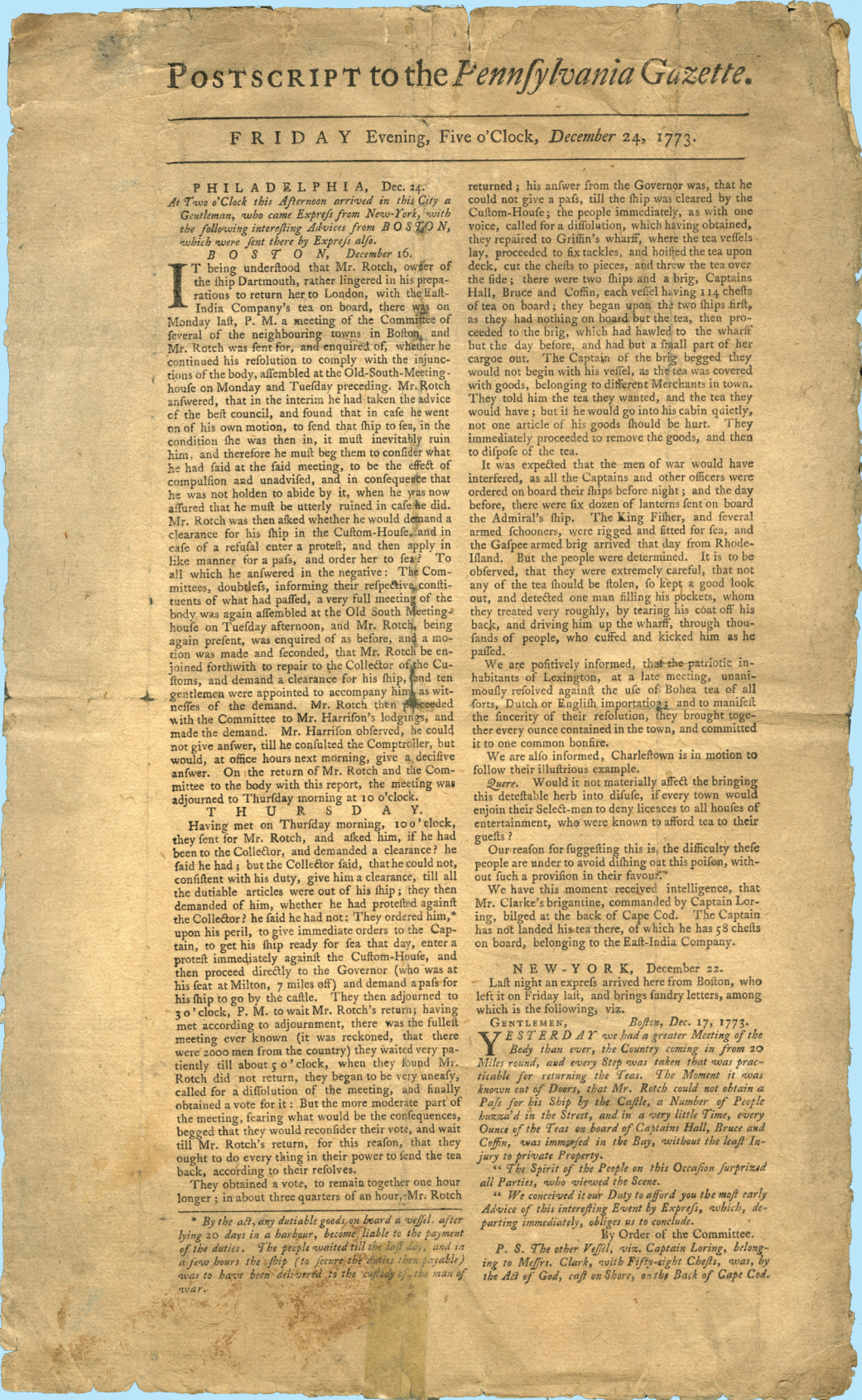
On the page's front, the events related to the December 16, 1773, Boston Tea Party protest of British taxation by the American colonists can be found on the top of the second column:

The people immediately, as with one voice, called for a dissolution, which having obtained, they repaired to Griffin's wharff, where the tea vessels lay, proceeded to fix tackles, and hoisted the tea upon deck, cut the chests to pieces, and threw the tea over the side; there were two ships and a brig, Captains Hall, Bruce, and Coffin, each vessel having 114 chests of tea on board; they began upon the two ships firsts, as they had nothing on board but the tea, then proceed to the brig, which had [hauled] to the wharff but the day before, had had but a small part of her [cargo] out. The Captain of the brig begged they would not begin with his vessel, as the tea was covered with goods, belonging to different Merchants in town. They told him the tea they wanted, and the tea they would have; but if he would go into his cabin quietly, not one article of his goods should be hurt. They immediately proceeded to remove the goods, and then to dispose of the tea.

The piece itself provides clues as to how certain contemporary Americans, then subjects of the British crown, thought about the events in "the port of Boston." Perhaps the most obvious or striking feature of the notice is that it had been printed on one side as an addendum to the day's main paper. This suggests that the news arrived in Philadelphia so quickly and with such a great sense of urgency that the printer decided to produce this special run immediately.

Speaking of printers, while Benjamin Franklin retired from the

printing business in 1748, the paper continued to operate through a business partner, David Hall. Franklin and his first business partner, Hugh Meredith, purchased



POSTSCRIPT to the *Pennsylvania Gazette.*

FRIDAY Evening, Five o'Clock, December 24, 1773.

PHILADELPHIA, Dec. 24.
At Two o'Clock this Afternoon arrived in this City a Gentleman, who came Express from New-York, with the following interesting Advices from BOSTON, which were sent there by Express also.

BOSTON, December 16.
IT being understood that Mr. Rotch, owner of the ship Dartmouth, rather lingered in his preparations to return her to London, with the East-India Company's tea on board, there was on Monday last, P. M. a meeting of the Committee of several of the neighbouring towns in Boston, and Mr. Rotch was sent for, and enquired of, whether he continued his resolution to comply with the injunctions of the body, assembled at the Old-South-Meeting-house on Monday and Tuesday preceding. Mr. Rotch answered, that in the interim he had taken the advice of the best council, and found that in case he went on of his own motion, to send that ship to sea, in the condition she was then in, it must inevitably ruin him, and therefore he must beg them to consider what he had said at the said meeting, to be the effect of compulsion and unadvised, and in consequence that he was not holden to abide by it, when he was now assured that he must be utterly ruined in case he did. Mr. Rotch was then asked whether he would demand a clearance for his ship in the Custom-House, and in case of a refusal enter a protest, and then apply in like manner for a pass, and order her to sea? To all which he answered in the negative: The Committee, doubting, informing their respective constituents of what had passed, a very full meeting of the body was again assembled at the Old South Meeting-house on Tuesday afternoon, and Mr. Rotch, being again present, was enquired of as before, and a motion was made and seconded, that Mr. Rotch be enjoined forthwith to repair to the Collector of the Customs, and demand a clearance for his ship, and ten gentlemen were appointed to accompany him as witnesses of the demand. Mr. Rotch then proceeded with the Committee to Mr. Harrison's lodgings, and made the demand. Mr. Harrison observed, he could not give answer, till he consulted the Comptroller, but would, at office hours next morning, give a decisive answer. On the return of Mr. Rotch and the Committee to the body with this report, the meeting was adjourned to Thursday morning at 10 o'clock.

THURSDAY.
Having met on Thursday morning, 10 o'clock, they sent for Mr. Rotch, and asked him, if he had been to the Collector, and demanded a clearance? he said he had; but the Collector said, that he could not, consistent with his duty, give him a clearance, till all the dutiable articles were out of his ship; they then demanded of him, whether he had protested against the Collector? he said he had not: They ordered him, upon his peril, to give immediate orders to the Captain, to get his ship ready for sea that day, enter a protest immediately against the Custom-House, and then proceed directly to the Governor (who was at his seat at Milton, 7 miles off) and demand a pass for his ship to go by the cattle. They then adjourned to 3 o'clock, P. M. to wait Mr. Rotch's return; having met according to adjournment, there was the fullest meeting ever known (it was reckoned, that there were 2000 men from the country) they waited very patiently till about 5 o'clock, when they found Mr. Rotch did not return, they began to be very uneasy, called for a dissolution of the meeting, and finally obtained a vote for it: But the more moderate part of the meeting, fearing what would be the consequences, begged that they would reconsider their vote, and wait till Mr. Rotch's return, for this reason, that they ought to do every thing in their power to send the tea back, according to their resolves.

They obtained a vote, to remain together one hour longer; in about three quarters of an hour, Mr. Rotch

** By the act, any dutiable goods, on board a vessel, after lying 20 days in a harbour, become liable to the payment of the duties. The people waited till the last day, and in a few hours the ship (to secure the duties then payable) was to have been delivered to the custody of the man of war.*

returned; his answer from the Governor was, that he could not give a pass, till the ship was cleared by the Custom-House; the people immediately, as with one voice, called for a dissolution, which having obtained, they repaired to Griffin's wharff, where the tea vessels lay, proceeded to fix tackles, and hoisted the tea upon deck, cut the chests to pieces, and threw the tea over the side; there were two ships and a brig, Captains Hall, Bruce and Coffin, each vessel having 114 chests of tea on board; they began upon the two ships first, as they had nothing on board but the tea, then proceeded to the brig, which had hauled to the wharff but the day before, and had but a small part of her cargo out. The Captain of the brig begged they would not begin with his vessel, as the tea was covered with goods, belonging to different Merchants in town. They told him the tea they wanted, and the tea they would have; but if he would go into his cabin quietly, not one article of his goods should be hurt. They immediately proceeded to remove the goods, and then to dispose of the tea.

It was expected that the men of war would have interfered, as all the Captains and other officers were ordered on board their ships before night; and the day before, there were six dozen of lanterns sent on board the Admiral's ship. The King Fisher, and several armed schooners, were rigged and fitted for sea, and the Gaspee armed brig arrived that day from Rhode-Island. But the people were determined. It is to be observed, that they were extremely careful, that not any of the tea should be stolen, so kept a good look out, and detected one man filling his pockets, whom they treated very roughly, by tearing his coat off his back, and driving him up the wharff, through thousands of people, who cuffed and kicked him as he passed.

We are positively informed, that the patriotic inhabitants of Lexington, at a late meeting, unanimously resolved against the use of Bohea tea of all sorts, Dutch or English importation; and to manifest the sincerity of their resolution, they brought together every ounce contained in the town, and committed it to one common bonfire.

We are also informed, Charlestown is in motion to follow their illustrious example.

Quere. Would it not materially affect the bringing this detestable herb into disuse, if every town would enjoin their Select-men to deny licences to all houses of entertainment, who were known to afford tea to their guests?

Our reason for suggesting this is, the difficulty these people are under to avoid diluting out this poison, without such a provision in their favour.

We have this moment received intelligence, that Mr. Clarke's brigantine, commanded by Captain Loring, bilged at the back of Cape Cod. The Captain has not landed his tea there, of which he has 58 chests on board, belonging to the East-India Company.

NEW-YORK, December 22.

Last night an express arrived here from Boston, who left it on Friday last, and brings sundry letters, among which is the following, viz.

GENTLEMEN, Boston, Dec. 17, 1773.
YESTERDAY we had a greater Meeting of the Body than ever, the Country coming in from 20 Miles round, and every Step was taken that was practicable for returning the Teas. The Moment it was known out of Doors, that Mr. Rotch could not obtain a Pass for his Ship by the Castle, a Number of People huzza'd in the Street, and in a very little Time, every Ounce of the Teas on board of Captains Hall, Bruce and Coffin, was immured in the Bay, without the least Injury to private Property.

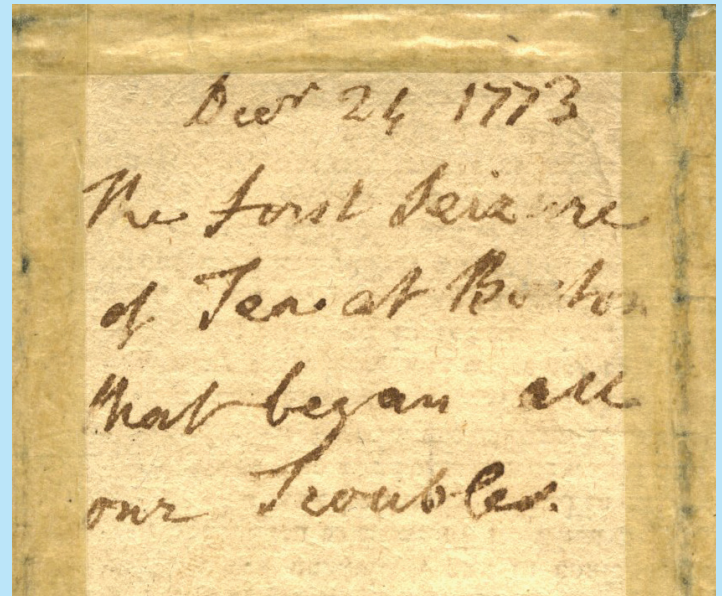
"The Spirit of the People on this Occasion surpriz'd all Parties, who viewed the Scene.

"We conceived it our Duty to afford you the most early Advice of this interesting Event by Express, which, departing immediately, obliges us to conclude.

By Order of the Committee.
P. S. The other Vessel, viz. Captain Loring, belonging to Messrs. Clark, with Fifty-eight Chests, was, by the Act of God, cast on Shore, on the Back of Cape Cod.

the paper in 1729. The paper's contents and reputation, most certainly aided by Franklin's then-growing reputation, made it a nationally popular source for news and commentary. Retirement did not, however, prevent Franklin from contributing to his former paper, which he did regularly, especially during the tumultuous War of Independence period when the *Gazette* publicly favored independence and promoted stories to that effect. Franklin contributed his famous "Join or Die" cartoon to the *Gazette*, which later became a major symbol of the cause for liberty.

The *Pennsylvania Gazette* ceased operations in 1800, a decade after Dr. Franklin's death. The paper's legacy and impact on national events, however, cannot be understated. Indeed, *The Saturday Evening Post*, still published today and one of the longest running magazines in the United States (and at one time one of the most popular and influential), traces its origins to the *Pennsylvania Gazette*.



On the reverse side of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* postscript appears a handwritten note: "Dec. 24, 1773. The first seizure of Tea at Boston that began all our Troubles."

Source: Archives of the Supreme Council, 33°, SJ

Sons of the American Revolution Medals at the House of the Temple

OLIVIA CURCIO,
HOUSE OF THE TEMPLE MUSEUM CURATOR

As we approach the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States, it is difficult to have any conversation about the Founding Fathers of this country without mentioning a Freemason. Not only are there many overlaps between Masonry and the War of Independence in historical figures like Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, and Paul Revere, but also revolutionary organizations like the Sons of Liberty met in many of the same buildings as Masonic Lodges, such as the Green Dragon and Shepheard's Tavern.

While not explicitly related to Freemasonry, the lineage society Sons of the American Revolution (SAR) celebrates similar ideals to Masonry and includes many Masons in its ranks. Many of the men that fought in the Revolutionary War were Masons, not just the Founding Fathers, and there were traveling lodges that met in the camps; as for their descendants, even if they are not Masons themselves, they hold many of the same principles dear.

The organization SAR was founded in 1889, on the anniversary of George Washington's inauguration, and it works to preserve history and promote patriotism. Similar to Freemasonry, the organization also focuses heavily on service and education, specifically about the events of the War of Independence and the battles that went on during it.

Another similarity of the SAR to Masonry is the use of medals and regalia, and the House of the Temple Museum has several SAR samples of medals in its collection. Many of these



Photography: Kia C. Boone



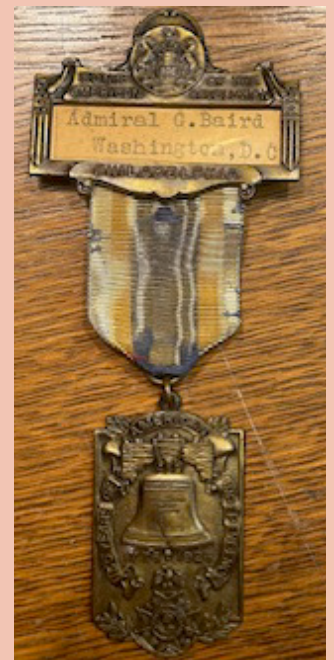
medals have the signature striped SAR ribbon of blue, gold, and white and are commemorative of its annual congress, a yearly meeting of its members. The medal for the 1913 SAR Congress, held in Chicago, features a depiction of Fort Dearborn, which had just celebrated the centennial of its destruction in the War of 1812. It also has a prominently featured seal of the SAR, which, being a Maltese Cross, greatly resembles many Masonic symbols.

The 1921 SAR Congress medal aptly features a buffalo on the top bar because the meeting was held in Buffalo, New York, that year. This medal also has a space on the top bar to add a name tag, an addition that became popular in medals around this time. It was also at this meeting that the SAR resolved to endorse the Star-Spangled Banner as the National Anthem, ten years before U.S. Congress adopted it.. One of



the latest SAR Congress medals we have in our collection is from the 1926 meeting, which was also the Sesquicentennial Celebration of U.S. Independence. The meeting was held in Philadelphia, so the medal features a relief of the city's famous Liberty Bell.

Looking to the past, it is clear that social and fraternal organizations have been integral to the fabric of American society since its inception and even helped to shape the nation as we know it. In this 250th year, we remember not only the Founding Fathers, but everyone that was a part of the American Revolution through their descendants that keep their memory alive.



ILLUMINATING MASONIC INITIATION WITH LIGHT FROM THE RECENT PAST

JONATHAN R CORBETT, MM, AND JOHN M. BOZEMAN,
PH.D.

The Holy Bible, the Great Light of Masonry, is not so called as mere poetic language. Nearly 2,000 years ago, Rabbi Akiba declared that the Torah was more than black ink on white parchment, but rather that its words were black fire on white fire. That is to say, the Word of God, which comes to illumine our lives, is another instance where the Primordial Light was brought into the affairs of men.

—Rabbi Eric A. Silver, 32°, “A Midrashic Inquiry into More Light,” *The New Age Magazine*, July 1986, p. 28

Blessed is the man who seeks and asks, his petition heard and passed, to be admitted to this Sacred Place!

A man of sound judgment, strict morals, upright conduct, and good report, he may ask to receive entry into the ancient and revered Order of Freemasonry, now in the Tercentennial era of its Revival. Motivated by a desire to reach enlightenment, the Mason seeks the Divine Light and understanding. Our intention here, drawing from the Jewish tradition and then working outwards, is to see how light has been understood in the pages of the Scottish Rite’s *New Age Magazine*, particularly during the 1980s, in regard to the ceremony of Masonic initiation.

The candidate’s journey begins with this arrival at the doors of King Solomon’s Temple. Initially in a state of personal and spiritual unknowingness, the candidate humbly approaches the doors. Cautiously, he steps forward, leaving his present place amid a world of darkness, to commence a journey of discovery within. With eyes no longer perceiving physical light but guided by the inner light of the soul and the Divine

Light above, he sets out on a wondrous and time-honored voyage.

After a time—months, in some cases, even years—of careful thought and consideration, the candidate, now prepared in his heart, transcends the darkness of the material realm and moves towards the Light of the spiritual world, with the aid of the Supreme Governor of the Universe.

This transition is wonderfully described by Rabbi Eric A. Silver, 32°, in his article “A Midrashic Inquiry into More Light” (found in the July 1986 edition of *The New Age Magazine*, the precursor to the current *Scottish Rite Journal*).



Light over the Mediterranean Sea at Nice, France. Natural light, spiritual light, and the Light of Creation are discussed in three articles on Light from *The New Age Magazine* from the 1980s. Photography: Jonathan R. Corbett, MM

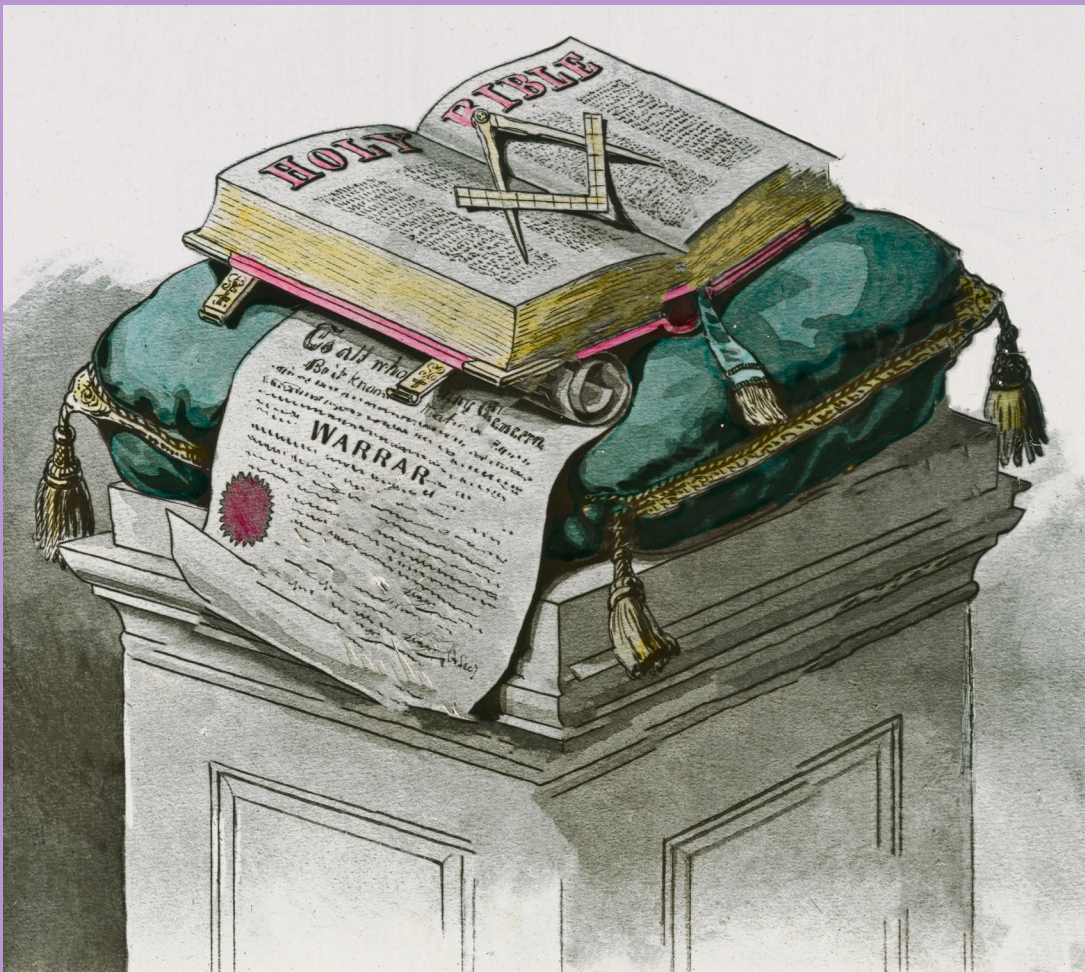
Rabbi Silver writes of a puzzle found in the first chapter of Genesis. Light is created on the first day of creation. Yet the sun and moon and stars were not created until the fourth day. How could this situation exist? The rabbi explains: the first light is not the physical light of day, but rather the Primordial Light of the Divine that illuminates not the eye, but rather our hearts and minds. Indeed, this is this Primordial Light shone upon Moses as he saw a bush burning in the desert with a fire that did not consume it.

This is the Light of which we speak during initiation: not the natural light of the sun, moon, and stars, but rather that Light which comes from the Three Great Lights of Masonry. Br. Louis H. Berkovitz, 32°, describes this admirably in “Light,” which appeared in the October 1982 issue of *The New Age*. Br. Berkovitz reminds us that the Three Great Lights—the Holy Scriptures, the Square, and the Compasses—illuminate our spiritual eyes, providing us with mental and moral illumination. This mental and moral clarity benefits not only the newly-initiated Brother personally but also the world in general, as the Mason’s daily contact with the

surrounding world helps spread Light to all who surround him, beckoning “all mankind to a better way of life.” (p. 19)

Interestingly, the nature of this illumination varies with context. Br. Maynard C. Pless, 32°, in the “Light that Does Not Fail” (*The New Age*, July 1986), views this light as a warm and welcoming glow, as if to say, “Come on in, tired and lonely Brother. Welcome to our Temple filled with fellowship, fraternity, and brotherly love.” (p. 23) Yet this light has its dramatic side, especially when encountered by the new Mason! Rabbi Silver, whom we met earlier, frames this aspect well:

When a new Mason perceives the Three Great Lights of Masonry on the altar, he is introduced to Divine Writ as transcending words; he comes to understand it as the Light which illuminated the universe in those first awesome moments—he sees the light, and indeed hears it as a thunderclap. In like manner, the sages continue, the inspiration of which King David used to compose his psalms was the light which God granted him. David saw the light and burst into song, and we, 3,000 years later, still sing his verse. (p. 28)



The Three Great Lights of Masonry: the Holy Scriptures, the Square, and the Compasses.

Source: Historic Glass Slide, Patmos-Solomon’s Lodge, Savage, Md.

In truth, Masonry includes both elements. Masonic initiation embraces the dramatic encounter with the Primordial Light, the moral and intellectual illumination embodied in the Holy Scriptures, the Square, and the Compasses; this encounter can easily be as shocking as moving from a dark room into full light. However, Masonry also contains the light of steadfastness—the illumination that comes from persistent inquiry over extended periods of time, long-term fellowship, and patience with one’s associates, both Masonic and non-Masonic. Both forms of Light, as Br. Louis Berkovitz points out, create for all mankind a better way of life.

A Book Spread out before You, to Make Friends

Matthias Stom, *A Young Man
Reading by Candlelight*. Oil on
canvas. Ca. 1630.
Source: Wikimedia Commons



The pleasantest of all diversions is to sit alone under the lamp, a book spread out before you, and to make friends with people of a distant past [...]

—Yoshida Kenkō, *Essays in Idleness*, 1330-1332 (Donald Keene, trans.)