

## **The York Rite of Freemasonry**

by Glenison T. Jones, PSGM,  
Council of Nine Muses and Capital City Council #154  
Published in The Architect 1989

The name "York" is one of the oldest & most celebrated in both authenticated and legendary Masonic history. The Gothic Legends relate how the first national assembly of Masons took place at the city of York in the 10th century A.D. when King Athelstan granted the first royal charter to Masons.

The formation of the Ancients Grand Lodge in 1751 was said to have occurred as a reaction against modernizations which had been introduced into the Craft by the premier Grand Lodge, or Moderns. A secondary reason was to preserve the Holy Royal Arch degree which the Ancients claimed had been worked in their Lodges for many years & which the Moderns would not recognize.

As a result, lodges holding Ancient Warrants were given the right to work any Masonic Degree "of which they had knowledge". The records of the York Lodge indicate that in the mid 1700's they worked a 5 degree system of which the 4th & 5th were the Royal Arch & the Knight Templar degrees respectively. Most of the so-called higher degrees which existed in England in the early 1800's developed in this environment.

After the amalgamation of the two rival Grand Lodges into the United Grand Lodge of England in 1813, the Royal Arch was given an honoured place as the completion of the Master Mason degree of Ancient Freemasonry. The other degrees were left to fend for themselves. Over time some of these became strong enough to form their own grand bodies. All of the bodies which are now known as forming the York Rite take their membership from Masons who are Royal Arch Masons.

The bodies which comprise the York Rite in Canada are: the Royal Arch Masons, the Knights Templar, the Royal and Select Masters, the Red Cross of Constantine, the Allied Masonic Degrees, the York Rite College & the Holy Royal Arch Knight Templar Priests. I'll now tell you a little about each.

Chapters of Royal Arch Masons accept applications from Masons who have been Master Masons for 6 months or more. They control 3 degrees:

Mark Master Mason, Most Excellent Master & Royal Arch Mason.

The Preceptorries of Knights Templar require applicants to be Royal Arch Masons who believe in the Trinity. They have 3 degrees: the Orders of the Red Cross, Malta and the Temple.

The Councils of Royal & Select Masters also require applicants to be Royal Arch Masons. They control 3 degrees and a side degree. The degrees are Royal Master, Select Master and Super-Excellent Master.

The side degree which they control is the Lodge of Royal Ark Mariners.

The Conclaves of Red Cross of Constantine invites new members from Royal Arch Masons who believe in the Trinity. They have 2 degrees:

Knight of the Red Cross of Constantine, & Knight of the Holy Sepulchre and of St. John the Evangelist.

The Councils of Allied Masonic Degrees also invite new members who are Royal Arch Masons. They are mainly a study group but control 8 degrees, namely: St. Lawrence the Martyr, Secret Monitor, Knight of Constantinople, Architect, Grand Architect, Superintendent, Master of Tyre and Excellent Master.

The Colleges of York Rite College require all applicants to be Royal Arch Masons, Super-Excellent Masters and Knights Templar. They work the Knight of York degree & have as their purpose the assistance of its 4 prerequisite York Rite Bodies.

Tabernacles of Holy Royal Arch Knight Templar Priests, also known as the Order of Holy Wisdom, not only require all applicants to be Royal Arch Masons and Knights Templar, but they must be Installed Masters of a Craft Lodge as well. They confer 33 degrees by name, but in fact work only the last or Holy Royal Arch Knight Templar Priest degree.

In addition, each of the above bodies has other honorary degrees, some of which are available only to past presiding officers of that body.

Some of these are the Order of High Priesthood, the Royal Ark Mariners, the Order of the Silver Trowel, the Order of the Red Branch of Eri, Ye Ancient Order of Corks, the Masonic Order of the Bath, the Knight Grand Cross, the York Cross of Honour and the Purple Cross.

There is yet another society of Masons, which takes members who are Master Masons & who believe in the Trinity. The Societas Rosicruciana In Anglia does not fall into either the York or Scottish Rites. It has a system of 9 grades, 4 of which are worked in the local College, 3 at the Provincial level & the last 2 represent Grand College ranks.