



ROYAL ARCH MASONRY – Part 2

The first attestation of the conferment of the Royal Arch degree dates from the 4th of March, 1752 in England, while in the United States of America this degree was conferred for the first time in Virginia's Fredericksburg Lodge on December 22nd, 1753, little more than one year after the lodge was created. It is the same lodge that conferred the Master Mason degree to George Washington four months earlier on August 4, 1753.

A Royal Arch Lodge had not been named "Chapter of Royal Arch Masons" until 1792, the notion of Chapter being used predominantly after 1794. It was rather a problem of membership, members not knowing whether they are part of a Symbolic Lodge or a Royal Arch Chapter, and this was due to the lack of a classification of the formations and the fact that these "Chapters" were operating under the auspices of the Grand Lodge and, implicitly, of the Grand Master.



The Excellent Companion Thomas Smith WEBB is often considered the "father" of the York American Rite Freemasonry who, through his personality, time and inexhaustible energy is credited as founder of the General Grand Chapter of the Royal Arch Masons, now the oldest Masonic body in America.

In 1797 Brother Webb occupied the dignity of the High Priest of the Chapter "The Temple" in Albany, New York. The Chapter, functioned under a Symbolic Lodge without any authority to confer capitular degrees, and without being able to effectively share the teachings of the Royal Arch Masonry. Masons of the Royal Arch have become increasingly popular especially in the last years of the 18th century. In many situations, the Chapters had almost begun to create their own Capitular Masonry based on what they saw and remembered, or simply from their own imagination and wisdom. Several powerful New England Chapters identified this issue and wanted the creation of a body to govern them, with the task of creating new Chapters, defining the jurisdiction of each, define general leadership policies, to uniform administrative procedures, identifying and standardizing a unique ritual and implement all of this in the Royal Arch Masonry.



On September 11, 1797, the Chapter "St. Andrew" empowered its High Priest to write to Brother WEBB about the opportunity to unite the Chapters. This request was Brother Webb's starting point for organizing Chapters in what was to be called the Grand Chapter. Until October 24th, 1797, the documents are attesting the empowering of Chapter Delegations to participate to the "First Conference for the Grand Chapter". During this Conference, a meeting was convened to take place next year in Hartford, to which all New England Chapters would be invited to participate, with the aim to establish the Grand Chapter and unify the capitular work in all of these Chapters.

Traian POPESCU
Grand High Priest