

**ARIZONA
SUPPLEMENT**

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Thoughts on the Council

I have always had a special place in my heart for the Cryptic or Council degrees of the York Rite. The first thing I noticed when I took my Council degrees in Winslow some 20 years ago was that Hiram Abif was alive again. I was not prepared for this, but I later learned that things in Masonry are seldom revealed to the candidate in their chronological order. (No kidding!) As I started to participate in my local Council, I began to love the language of the Council opening. If the blue lodge degrees had the overtones of 18th century legalisms, the council degrees were Charles Dickens or Nathaniel Hawthorne. My favorite line is, "To blow the silver trumpet at dawn and eve of day, when the sun's first and last rays guild the mount tops". The Council degrees are indeed poetic without any hint of things such as "cowans or eavesdroppers". The drastic difference of the cadence and nuance of the language of the Council Degrees suggests to me that they are of very different origins than the first three degrees of Craft Masonry.

After I received the side degree of "Super Excellent Master" and the appendant degree of "The Order of the Silver Trowel", I began to have an even greater appreciation of Cryptic Masonry. All the Council Degrees are plays: short dramas with good stories. All the Cryptic degrees are concise and portray some of the highest aspects of human nature: loyalty, steadfastness, industriousness, wisdom, and trust in God. Whoever assembled these degrees did a very good job. Unlike other Masonic bodies, no one ever suggests revising any of these degrees. Most serious Masons regard the Degrees of the Council as some of the most beautiful of the entire Masonic system.

All this being said, the Council degrees do not carry the same weight as the Master Mason Degree or the Holy Royal Arch. However, the information of these degrees provides vital insights to the serious Masonic student. Freemasonry would certainly be missing a great deal if the Council Degrees became lost in the mists of time as did many of the degrees of the 18th century. This actually could have happened had it not been for the work of an early American Mason, Jeremy Cross, who conferred the Council degrees for a fee on Masons throughout the United States during the early 1800's. If the Council degrees had remained side or courtesy degrees of the Scottish Rite, they could have been easily dropped at some point and shelved, only to become items of interest to Masonic academics.

The Cryptic Degrees are still not a universal requirement to become a Knight Templar. This is a shame and diminishes the Council in some respects as not the equal of the Chapter or Commandery. It is interesting to note that the Council Degrees are part in the Royal Arch Chapter in Virginia where the Cryptic Degrees precede the Royal Arch Degree.

We should be proud that Arizona requires the Council Degrees as a prerequisite for becoming a Knight Templar. I hope all Arizona Companions of Cryptic Masonry will wear their purple coats with pride and reflect on the lovely Masonic heritage that their Councils are preserving for the Masons of the future.

Peter H. Johnson, Jr.
Most Illustrious Grand Master
Grand Council of Cryptic Masons of Arizona

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