

THE PILLARS OF OUR LODGE

Steve Lancaster
St. Andrews No. 18

While visiting various lodges around the state, I have noticed that the placement of the pillars within the lodges, with our particular lodge being unique, are not uniform, and I thought it would be interesting to do some research about the evolution of the pillars in Freemasonry and why they are situated differently in some lodge rooms.

The earliest mention of pillars in Freemasonry comes from the Romano-Jewish author Flavius Josephus, whose book *Antiquities of the Jews* wrote that Adam predicted "that the world was to be destroyed at one time by the force of fire, and at another time by the violence and quantity of water." Adam's son, Seth, along with his son, Enoch, built two pillars, one of brick, and the other of stone; that in case the pillar of brick should be destroyed by the flood, the pillar of stone might remain. The pillars were said to be hollow and that all of the knowledge of man should be stored inside to preserve it for future mankind.

King Solomon's Temple was built and had two immense pillars cast of bronze; which were ornately decorated with capitals of chains and pomegranates, and were placed on the porch at the entrance of the temple. One column was named Jachin, meaning "God Will Establish" and the other was named Boaz meaning "Strength." All of this is discussed in the Fellow Craft lecture. There has been some speculation about their placement, either left or right based upon entering or leaving the temple. The writings of Josephus states that upon ENTERING the temple, Boaz was on the left and Jachin on the right. The Bible (NLT) states in 1st Kings, Chapter 7, Verse 21: "Hiram (Hiram) set the pillars at the entrance of the Temple, one toward the south and one toward the north. He named the one on the south Jachin, and the one on the north Boaz." Hiram Abiff, the Master Builder, had them cast hollow, "The better to serve as a safe deposit for the archives of Masonry against all conflagrations and inundations," as stated in the second-degree lecture.

As we move forward to the more modern era of speculative masonry, the placement of the pillars grows more diverse. Most early lodges did not have buildings that were dedicated only to Masonry. Their most common meeting place was in taverns. When a candidate was going through the degrees, Tylers would draw the Trestle Board, as it was called, upon the floor, which was usually made of clay tile, with chalk and charcoal. Hence, these three substances, chalk, charcoal and clay symbolized the three qualifications for the servitude of an Entered Apprentice: freedom, fervency, and zeal. The Trestle Board drawings included the pillars as well as other Masonic symbols that were specific to each degree. Masons would stand around these drawing and instruct candidates in their meanings. After the degree work was finished, it was usually the duty of the candidate to remove all trace of the drawings with mop and pail to keep cowans and eavesdroppers from knowing the secrets of the Craft. This practice was later replaced by tracing cloths, which contained all the Masonic symbols specific for each degree, which were rolled out on the floor as candidates went through the degrees.

When lodges moved from taverns by buying buildings that had rooms dedicated to Masonry, some manufacturers started making fixtures that were permanent and did not have to be removed or

hidden, this included pillars, columns and altars. When the first lodges were established in the American colonies, most were without authority or warrant of sanction, and had no rules about where to place the pillars. Eventually both the Grand Lodge of England and the Grand Lodge of Scotland created the offices of Provincial Grand Master to oversee the organization of colonial lodges in an organized manner. Some colonial lodges did not want to be subject to what they considered “Foreign Jurisdiction,” and joined neither and went on to create their own Grand Lodges, the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania being one of the first of these.

The first permanent lodges in England placed their pillars directly in front of the Master’s Station. Some 18th century American lodges placed the pillars between the wardens, where the Senior Warden sat in the Northwest corner of the lodge and the Junior Warden sat in the Southeast. This arrangement is replicated in the Table Lodge. Many modern lodges still have the pillars situated like this even though the position of the wardens has changed. Some lodges now place the pillars on either side and in front of the Senior Warden in the West, while others, like the Alexandria – Washington Lodge Number 22 in Alexandria, Virginia, have the pillars in the South on one side of the Junior Warden’s station. There are also some that place the pillars in the Northwest corner on either side of the preparation room door, while even some portions of the world have none at all.

In conclusion, it is my opinion that with all of this chaos of how lodges were started in America, based upon multiple jurisdictions, and with there being no standardization of a template on how the lodge room should be set up, that there is not a right or wrong way to place the pillars a lodge room as long as they are west of the Master, and in a position so that candidates can pass between them, thus gaining access to the Middle Chamber of King Solomon’s Temple, a custom we have modified but still carry out. Our lodge, St. Andrews Lodge No. 18, with the pillars being directly in front of the Masters station, is in an acceptable position, being set up like the early lodges in England.

SOURCES

- Henry Pirtle, Kentucky Monitor
- Robert G. Davis, The Mason’s Word
- Mack S. Door, Globes, Pillars, Columns and Candlesticks