

Jeremy Ladd Cross: Father of the Cryptic Rite in America?

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Much can be said of America's early masonic influences in terms of leaders who set the course for where our Craft now stands- names like Thomas Smith Webb¹, and later Albert Mackey and Albert Pike, elevated the ritualistic and philosophical endeavors of our order. These men coupled with the political influences of those like DeWitt Clinton² elevated not only the Craft Lodge- but the various Rites and appendant Bodies which grew from it. Perhaps one of the less mentioned- yet quite noteworthy of these early American masonic sages, Lecturers, and the like was Jeremy Ladd Cross. His impact while broad could lead many in one form or another to name him perhaps as the "Father" of the Cryptic Rite in America, and his actions in his lifetime spurred much interest in our work.

As with his occasional "partner in crime", Thomas Smith Webb, Jeremy Ladd Cross was a New Englander by birth, born in New Hampshire in 1783³. Cross later became an apprentice to a Hatter, yet this profession seemingly did not stick in the great length of his life, practicing for a short while and traveling about doing so. What did stick with Cross was his interest in freemasonry and in that he found a profession as a Lecturer, sometimes among those referred to as Itinerant Lecturers and on occasion even "Degree Peddlers".



Cross was initiated, passed and raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason in St. John's Lodge in 1807, and served that Lodge as Junior Deacon before later demitting⁴. During this time, he seems to have taken to the study of masonic ritual as a fish does to water, and in November of 1813 was certified as a Lecturer on the work by the Grand Lodge of New Hampshire. Several years after becoming a Lecturer Cross began to undertake the degrees of the American Rite and in March of 1815 was exalted in a Royal Arch Chapter in Vermont. The next year he would arrive in Rhode Island and there in Providence begin his connection with Thomas Smith Webb as a student and later cohort in working to spread the American Rite. Along his travels Cross received the Orders of Masonic Templary in Boston as they then existed. This conferral was at least perhaps in some form irregular as in 1818 he was

¹ Webb's work on behalf of Craft Ritual and later Capitular and Templar Masonry built the groundwork for the present time, a majority of which's ritual he heavily revised or propagated. "His" ritual is the standard base among the majority of Craft Lodges in the United States.

² Governor of New York, Clinton was as Past Grand Master of that Jurisdiction, First Grand Master of the Grand Encampment of Knights Templar USA, and first General Grand High Priest of the General Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons. Clinton's term as Governor was during the William Morgan Affair, and beyond the state he was regarded well in national politics. Clinton himself signed the initial Royal Arch Chapter and Dispensations for Missouri's first American Rite body, Missouri Chapter No. 1, now St. Charles Missouri No. 1.. The Charter noted still being in their possession.

³ Haverhill, New Hampshire-June 27th, 1783

⁴ <https://www.travelingtemplar.com/2013/03/the-father-of-cryptic-rite.html>

'healed' by St. Johns Commandery of Providence Rhode Island and then received the Order of Red Cross. He later moved his Chivalric membership to Washington Commandery⁵. Crosses involvement with the Scottish Rite is perhaps the foggiest of his masonic relationships and his connection to spurious Supreme Councils at various times would today perhaps make his 33rd Degree be questioned perhaps in its regularity although later the likes of Ill. Albert Pike supported its regularity.

Cross's exact introduction to the Cryptic Rite is not totally clear but there is a general sense that he likely obtained the Royal Master Degree in August of 1815, while in Hopkinton, NH visiting what was then the newly organized Tyrian Council of Royal Masters⁶. At a later point traveling through the Mid-Atlantic Cross arrived in Baltimore and received the work of Select Master from Philip Eckel⁷. The conferral with Eckel seemingly also provided Cross with authority and knowledge of the full scope of ritual then conferred by Royal Arch Chapters at the time, or for the most part so(the inclusion of the Royal and Select Master degrees as side degrees or otherwise was a topic of contention over time- but by no means standard in practice or inclusion across jurisdictions or the United States.) Cross then does as many Itinerant Lecturers of the time did, setting out, using the credentials of his instructors (Webb and others) as well as word of mouth reputation to visit with masonic bodies and grand bodies conferring the ritual. His journey across the young nation goes from Maryland through the then center of the country with stops in Kentucky, Ohio, Indiana, and spurs off to Pennsylvania, Virginia, Louisiana, and Mississippi-not including the region of his youth with visits to Vermont, New Hampshire and New Jersey. On these travels Cross not only passed on craft ritual instruction, but the work of the Royal Arch, and the Royal and Select Master Degrees. Interestingly Cross differed from Eckel, who had conferred the Select Master degree on him. Cross conferred the Cryptic Degrees only on Royal Arch Masons. Eckel in his practice saw it as a preparatory step to the Royal Arch Degree and conferred the work on Mark Master Masons.⁸ In 1817 Cross is again in Maryland and there meeting with Eckel again, he now receives some form of authority allowing him to charter and organize councils of Select Masters. This authority is a profound step forward and key to organization beyond just conferring a degree here or there. It provides an income stream as well as a scaffold for growth and perpetuation in Crosses future efforts. Cross later moves to Connecticut and settling there he affiliates with a local Lodge in New Haven, Hiram Lodge No. 1. It is at the local Council, Harmony that he then goes on to serve as Illustrious Mater for a span of 8 years. It was even during his time in New Haven that he continued to use Eckels patent moving through New England spreading Cryptic Masonry and establishing Councils.

While in Connecticut Cross seems to have begun an active and more dialed in push for the Cryptic Rites growth and by 1818, he is seemingly conferring degree work and thereafter working to establish councils outright as well as being among those who recommended to the Grand Chapter of the State that a Grand Council should be formed and given authority over the Royal and Select Master Degrees. Cross continued to travel as a Lecturer, employed by those who could pay, and keep a roof over his head and food on a plate, moving across the young nation he passed on the ritual of the Council and empowered those itinerant Lecturers he felt

⁵ Stationed at New London, CT

⁶ <https://www.travelingtemplar.com/2013/03/the-father-of-cryptic-rite.html>

⁷ Eckel received the work in New York at a General Grand Chapter -Royal Arch Masons Convocation

⁸ Cryptic Masonry Education Course, R. Davis, Pg. 16

could do the most with it. One disciple, John Snow, originally of Baltimore established councils in Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois. Another student, John Barker took the work to the South, starting in South Carolina. Inevitably Cross served as a perpetuator and pusher of the Cryptic work, teaching and empowering others in its spread, and devoting his attention to the elevation of the labor of the Select and Royal Master Degrees from the shadows to a brighter stage per say.

Perhaps what most masons know Jeremy Ladd Cross' name from is the Masonic Monitor he published called the *True Masonic Chart or Hieroglyphic Monitor* in 1819. This monitor presented a thorough resource and became a bulwark of many Grand Jurisdictions as they sought to ensure uniformity. The popularity of the text and the associated efforts with it created both a continues income, but a need for attention that Cross practically gave up general travel as a lecturer.

Jeremey Ladd Cross seemingly never made it to Missouri itself, but his labors carried ripples toward our jurisdictions. Accounts show that Brothers Thomas Smith Webb and Jeremy Ladd Cross, met with Missouri Masons in 1816. The Missouri Masons came in contact with Webb and Cross while in Cincinnati and Louisville. Webb and Cross were there working in the ritual of the chapter, yet we know that those brothers who met with them carried away a vast trove of knowledge. Reports tell us that the Missourians who were present "Obtained and carried home with them a correct knowledge of the Master Masons, Royal Arch, and Royal and Select Masters' Degrees". This 1816 report is mixed with information contrary to the matter saying that Joseph Foster⁹ was the first Missourian to receive the Cryptic work, and he receiving it from Jacob Cushman, one of Cross's several pupils¹⁰. Cross' connection does not end here though. In 1851, at the Grand Lodge of Missouri's Annual Communication a letter was received and read from Bro. Jeremy Ladd Cross, It would appear that not just the letter was sent as in recognition of that letter and its contents the following was adopted:

Resolved, That the Grand Lodge of Missouri cordially accept the valuable present of Bro. Cross-"The Masonic Chart or Hieroglyphic Monitor"- and that they be adopted as the text-book by this Grand Lodge, for the benefit of the subordinate Lodges in the work and lectures. Adopted.¹¹

This adoption did not seem to stick and was never enforced or seemingly acted upon in a large-scale manner.

In later life Jeremy Ladd Cross settled in New York. Perhaps too busy in travel or taken to not wishing to overly settle Comp. Cross had never married and had no children otherwise. Time passed and he returned to New Hampshire and his hometown where he worked to revitalized the Lodge there and carry Masonry onward. On January 26th, 1860 he passed at the age of 77, an achievement in itself in that time. He was laid to rest in Haverhill and his tombstone notes he was "Right Worshipful Grand Lecturer" and does include a Scottish Rite 33rd Emblem.

⁹ Later a member of Hiram Council #1, Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Missouri A.F. &A. M., First Grand Recorder of the Grand Council of Cryptic Masons of Missouri

¹⁰ Cryptic Masonry Education Course, R. Davis, Pg. 24

¹¹ Grand Lodge of Missouri Proceedings, 1851

Jeremy Ladd Cross is among the nations early masonic giants, and to him and Thomas Smith Webb, a great deal is owed for the proliferation, organization, and perpetuation of the York (American) Rite as it now stands. While often referred to as the “Father of the Cryptic Rite” in various publications and discussions, his relation to that concept is perhaps foggy, and we can each weigh his labors on the great scales of time and to our own eyes determine if such an epitaph is true.