

Early Origins of Weston Council No. 2, Royal & Select Masters

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The history of Weston Council's origins and initial years is in many ways scattered as with other early bastions of the Cryptic Rite in Missouri. What does exist from Weston though paints a picture of a vibrant effort for the early Grand Council, and more so for the American Rite in general, spreading its lessons and fostering what exists now in the present.

Weston as a Missouri "frontier" city, was a thriving place of prominence in northwest Missouri, flourishing along the Missouri River, and home to various prominent freemasons of the mid-1800s. The city was home to a Lodge, Royal Arch Chapter, and one of Missouri's earliest Commandery's of Knights Templar. Inevitably railroad expansion overtook the river traffic and time swayed growth toward St. Joseph to the north and Kansas City to the south rather than the river town.

Weston's cryptic origins differ from Hiram #1 in St. Louis through the impact of Royal Arch Masonry & associated chapters conferring cryptic work rather than an outside Grand Council forming a council. In 1844, the General Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons recognized the degrees of Cryptic Masonry as being part of their own, and under their issued Royal Arch Chapter charters authorized the conferral of the Royal and Select Master Degree. Taking advantage of such authority, the local Royal Arch Chapter in Weston, Weston No. 4, then operating under a charter issued by the General Grand Chapter, began conferring the degrees of Cryptic Masonry. Later at varying levels the attitudes shifted, and the General Grand Chapter changed direction, withdrawing its permissions and authority to confer the Cryptic Degrees. This change in policy left the Companions of Weston Chapter No. 4 R.A.M. in a lurch with no "regular" approval to work the Royal and Select Master Degrees but seemingly a fondness for them. The Companions of Weston Chapter taking stock of things moved toward their best option & sought to petition the Grand Council of Illinois with the hopes of becoming "official" in their work. In October of 1863 the Weston companions were heard and as a result they were chartered as Weston Council No. 15, Grand Council of Illinois.

Among the early members were George W. Belt, who would serve as Missouri's first Grand Commander of the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar of Missouri, and James N. Burnes, a member of the US House of Representatives. These two brothers traveled the next year to St. Louis and represented Weston Council at a convention for the formation and



M. I. Comp. George W. Belt

organization of a Grand Council. This gathering was sponsored by St. Louis Council No. 7 (Later Hiram No. 1) and was held in the Masonic Hall in St. Louis on May 21, 1864. At these proceedings Companion Burnes was elected Deputy Grand Master (then called Deputy Grand Puissant) and Companion Belt was appointed Grand Marshal (Belt later serving as Grand Master of the Grand Council in 1868). While both Belt and Burnes were prominent masons and thus such preferment may be expected, it is worth noting that at least one history of the Grand Council comments that “with only three councils and ten official stations there were plenty of appointments to go around.”¹

The organization of the Grand Council of Missouri saw Weston No. 15 renumbered and accepting its place in the Grand Council of Missouri from that point on as Weston No. 2. Helping to fan the flames of the slowly growing movement of Missouri Cryptic Masonry.

Interestingly as with many early masonic bodies things always seem a bit mixed and lost at times. In 1868 the Council reported it had never received or had lost its charter from the Grand Council of Missouri, yet still had possession of its Illinois dispensation. The next year it noted that it had no seal for official use and instead had been using that of the Commandery, Weston No. 2 K.T, for official purposes. Strange perhaps, and even more so when we see that records for its first return bore the seal of Weston Chapter Royal Arch Masons.

The Council, while seemingly built on interested and dedicated soil struggled in the 1870s as many Councils in Missouri did, Weston did not file a return for 5 years of a 6-year period. This sad state of affairs pushed the Grand Council at the Grand Masters order to move to arrest the charter and clear any outstanding debts. Such action seemed delayed from when it was initially ordered and finally was executed in 1878 at the direction of MIC William R. Penick, who informed the Grand Council that the charter had been revoked, and the Grand Recorder had issued demits to all in good standing- yet this instruction found challenge in itself as the books of Weston Council could not be found. To remedy this lapse a resolution had to be drafted and then put forward basing the Weston companions demits on good standing status as of the last reported Annual Return in the hands of the Grand Recorder.

¹ The Story of Missouri Councils, R. Denslow, Pg. 6c