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In Pennsylvania Cryptic Masonry the degrees of Royal and Select Master Mason together are known as the Degrees of Preservation; the Super Excellent Master Mason degree remains a necessary requirement for all those officers who wish to preside over their subordinate councils.

Time within the Cryptic Rite is designated as "Anno Depositionis" or A. Dep., meaning "in the year of the deposit", and is determined by using the year in which Solomon's Temple was completed as a starting point. Dates are calculated by adding 1000 years to our current date, viz. 2021 + 1000 = 3021 A. Dep.

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The "hidden degrees" of Royal and Select Master Mason, along with the Super Excellent Master Mason degree, complete the Circle of Perfection of Ancient Craft Masonry, deepening our understanding of the true Master Mason's word, and revealing how it was preserved within the Secret Vault. Let us therefore as Cryptic Masons, protect and preserve this important heritage of our Cryptic past.

- Depositum Custodi -



## The Cryptic Rite of Pennsylvania :

### Completing the Circle of Perfection of Ancient Craft Masonry



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This pamphlet is an extract from "A History of the Grand Council of Royal & Select Master Masons and the Cryptic Rite of Pennsylvania".

April 2021 A.D., 3021 A. Dep.



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The Cryptic Rite is perhaps the most beautiful of all the degree systems of Freemasonry, with its Degrees of Preservation and the lessons learned through the allegory of the Secret Vault. These Cryptic degrees are the Alpha and Omega of Freemasonry with the Royal Master Mason Degree being the first degree of Ancient Craft Masonry, and the Select Master Mason degree being the last. As such the wisdom and beauty of the Cryptic Rite are not to be missed by any true Mason wishing to complete his Masonic education by passing the Circle of Perfection of our beloved Craft.

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Most Masonic scholars today would agree that the Cryptic Rite of Freemasonry in Pennsylvania, consisting of the degrees of Royal Master Mason, Select Master Mason, and Super Excellent Master Mason had its true beginning here in America. After being brought here as honorary or "side degrees" of the Scottish Rite degree system (Morin's Rite of the Royal Secret), the Royal Master and Select Master degrees were both independently rewritten for the burgeoning Cryptic Rite, the Select Master degree by Philip P. Eckles in 1795, and the Royal Master degree by Thomas Lownds by 1810. Lownds is also credited with writing the Super Excellent Master degree (not the British degree of the same name) in 1817, and with linking the Royal Master degree to the Super Excellent Master Degree for the first time anywhere for the Cryptic Rite in his own Columbia Grand Council #1 Royal Masters of New York.

Both of the rewritten Royal and Select Master Mason degrees would be well accepted, and

Grand Councils for the separate degrees were established in many of the eastern United States.

In 1816 Jeremy Ladd Cross, named a Grand Lecturer representing the Grand Chapter of Maryland and Grand Lodge of Connecticut, and probably the General Grand Chapter of the United States, was given permission to disseminate only the Select Master degree within American Royal Arch Chapters. Cross, in pursuit of financial gain, instead self-enlarged upon this permission to include the Royal Master degree, conferring both degrees together by 1818, thereby forming them into a working system. Cross also began issuing warrants for Councils of Royal & Select Masters, while continuing to encourage both degrees to be conferred within Royal Arch Chapters as well as Cryptic Councils. This breach of fidelity would cost Cross his ability to confer his degrees in Pennsylvania and Ohio; in his diary Cross states that his degree work was banned in these two jurisdictions.

Nevertheless, these councils of Royal & Select Masters would flourish beginning in New York, and on January 25, 1823 the Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters of New York was formed. Subsequently, in January of 1827, this Grand Council issued a warrant for Hiram (possibly King Hiram) Council of Royal and Select Masters to meet in Cleveland, Ohio. The Cryptic Rite would also be well received there, and on January 6, 1830 the Grand Council of Royal and Select Masons of Ohio was formed. Four years later, a dispensation would then be granted for a Council of Royal & Select Masters to meet in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, however the records for this original Pennsylvania Cryptic council have been lost and nothing further is known.

The Cryptic Rite would nonetheless take root in Pennsylvania, and on October 26, 1847 a resolution was passed to form the Grand Council of Royal & Select Masters of Pennsylvania with three constituent councils: Washington #1, Mt. Moriah #2, and Lone Star #3. On December 30, 1854, this original Pennsylvania Grand Cryptic Council was reconstituted by its subordinate councils with new bylaws and new Grand Officers, and the Grand Council of Pennsylvania continues to meet annually to the present day.

Between 1867 and 1880, Cryptic Grand Conventions were held in various cities in the United States to attempt to achieve some consensus regarding the use of titles for Grand Officers as well as determine the status and proper place of Thomas Lownds' Super Excellent Master degree. As a further method of protecting the Cryptic degrees, on August 25, 1880 a General Grand Council of Royal & Select Masters was convened in Detroit, Michigan, but many of the existing Grand Cryptic Councils opted out of this new Cryptic oversight body, including that of Pennsylvania. Currently eight Cryptic Grand Councils within the United States remain "recognized" but unaffiliated with this Grand Council of Cryptic Masons International.

The capstone of Cryptic Masonry in America is the Order of the Silver Trowel, an honorary degree conferred upon current and Past Thrice Illustrious Masters of sub-ordinate councils, under the authority and auspices of the Council of Anointed Kings of the Grand Council of Royal & Select Master Masons of North Carolina, and a warrant issued under their 1931 agreement with the Supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Scotland.