

## **Masonry and the Apron**

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The Lambskin Apron is the first Masonic possession we receive and the last one we have. It is presented to us when we become an Entered Apprentice and, after we receive the Master Mason's Degree, it is generally safely stored away at home ready for the day when we will lay down our working tools. If we have been a "True" Mason, it can be said that we wore it with pleasure to ourselves and honor to the Fraternity.

Most of the Brethren wear a plain white cotton apron provided by the Lodge, but this is a symbol of the presentation Lambskin Apron awarded them in the Entered Apprentice Degree. These cloth aprons should be kept clean and attractive, because they represent the purity and innocence of the Lamb and the uprightness of our conduct.

Masonic aprons come in all sizes and colors; however, what is truly important to Freemasons is the apron itself, not its size or shape. This is because the Masonic apron is the badge of honorable labor, and the right to wear it only goes to those who are deserving.

We know that the Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Mason, wear their aprons in different ways to show how far the Brother has progressed. In Virginia, Master Masons wear the apron on the inside of the jacket, when we are inside the Lodge, and outside of the jacket when we are wearing it outside the Lodge.

We can look at the apron from both historical and Masonic perspectives. The use of the apron in ritual goes back to the Biblical times of the High Priests. The apron was called an Ephod, which is defined as a linen apron worn in ancient Hebrew Rites; especially as a vestment for the High Priest. The Bible tells us that an Ephod is often referred to as a robe or skirt, which covers the body from the waist to the ankles. It was usually made of a white linen and some other material of other colors, had shoulder straps, and a bib. Elijah and John the Baptist wore aprons made of leather. Isaiah wore one made of hair-cloth and Jeremiah wore one made of linen.

In the Jewish community, only the superior orders of Priesthood were permitted to wear the ornate aprons which were made of blue, purple and crimson, and decorated with gold on fine white linen. The other Priests wore only white aprons. Similarly, Indian, Persian, Ethiopian, and Egyptian aprons were

made of the finest material available. Some were plain white and others were striped with blue, purple and crimson. Some of the aprons were adorned with gold, while others were decorated with elaborate tassels and fringes.

We are taught that the Masonic apron today originated from the apron worn by Operative Masons of the Middle Ages. They were thought to have been made from the skin of an animal, most probably a sheep. These aprons were large enough to cover the wearer from the chest to the ankles and held by leather straps passed around the neck. Another strap was attached to each side and this enabled the Mason to tie the apron around his waist. This type of apron was used for many centuries.

These aprons did not have the decoration, ribbons, tassels, or rosettes that many modern day Masonic aprons have. The additions of tassels to the Masonic apron is believed to have taken place around 1827 – 1841, when the strings were replaced by ribbons. The ribbons were passed around the body to the front and under the flap where they were tied.

Looking at the Lambskin Apron from a Masonic perspective, there are five distinct ideas why it is considered a Badge.

Firstly, in the book “Symbolical Masonry” by Brother H. L. Haywood, there is an interesting chapter on “The Apron Wherein

the Builder Builds,” which notes that the apron “was so conspicuous a portion of the costume of the Operative Mason that it became associated with him in the public mind and thus gradually evolved into his badge.”

Secondly, the apron, being made of Lambskin, is also a badge of sacrifice. The lamb in ancient times was not only a symbol of innocence, but was also a symbol of sacrifice. Thus, whoever wears the Lambskin must understand that he should always be ready to endure all the trials and tribulations he is destined to endure. A good example is the thousands of Freemasons who were incarcerated in the Concentration Camps during World War II simply for being Freemasons.

Thirdly, we look at the color of the apron. It being white is the symbol of being pure and reflects the most light. The Psalmist said, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord?” and in answering that question said, “He that hath clean hands and a pure heart.” Thus the apron represents the pledge of living a clean life, speaking the truth, knowing right from wrong, and being a faithful citizen.

Fourthly, we find that the apron is a Badge of Antiquity. In our ritual, it is interpreted that we inherit the apron from our past. We remember in our ritual the words, “more ancient than the

Golden Fleece and Roman Eagle.” In explaining the above phrase, the Order of the Golden Fleece is an Order founded in 1429 by Philip, Duke of Burgundy, and the Roman Eagle was a sign of the Imperial Power of Rome before the Christian era. Thus, the apron exhibits the greatness and glory of the past, while it still contributes to the human good and happiness of the present day.

Fifthly, the apron is considered to be a badge of honor and to be “more honorable than the Star and Garter.” The Order of the Star was created in 1351 by King John II of France at the beginning of the Hundred Years War. The Order of the Star resembled the English Order of the Garter in which five hundred of the best members of the French Chivalry would gather around the King. The Order lasted very briefly and their numbers were no more than one hundred. The Knights of the Star were very faithful, much like the Templars, and within five years they would all be dead as they vowed never to retreat or surrender to the enemy. The Order of the Garter was created by King Edward III of England in 1349 and was composed of the King and twenty-five Knights. This Order originated on the ideals of medieval manners in which a good Knight showed endless courtesies toward men and women of certain classes, although less respect was shown to those of the lower classes.

Freemasonry, in contrast, seeks to promote peace, the pursuit of knowledge, and courtesy to all men, and the Masonic apron reminds us that we, as Masons, stand for justice, equality of opportunity, and the brotherhood of man.

The apron is generally recognized as a Masonic symbol, and most often seen by the public at Masonic funeral services, public installations, and the laying of cornerstones. It is hoped that just as the apron is recognized as a Masonic symbol, the Master Mason, by his conduct and demeanor, will be recognized as a man who lives an upright and blameless life. Thus, to be pointed out as a member of the Craft is to be known as a man who is helpful and forgiving of his Brethren, who does no moral evil to any person, and who is courteous, tolerant, and charitable to all.