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Riding the goat

by VW Bro. Trevor W. McKeown, Grand Historian

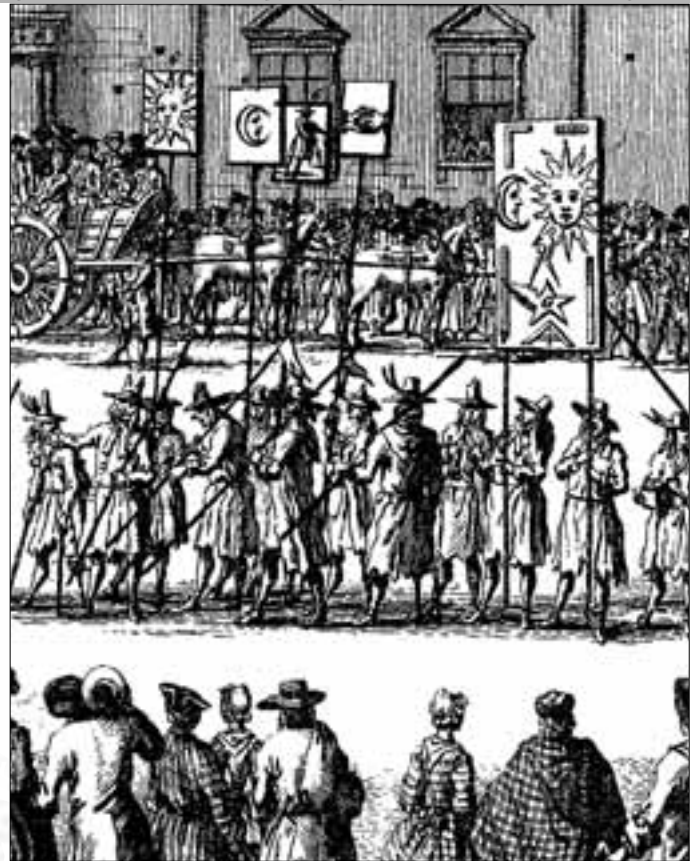
Popular belief has often identified masonic initiation with the riding of a goat. But where or when did the expression originate? Masonic historians have been at a loss as to the source of this myth, speculating as far afield as the horns on the four corners of the altar used by Old Testament Hebrews and echoed in modern Scottish Rite ritual, or the myth of the goat-headed Baphomet—allegedly worshiped by the mediaeval Knights Templar.

The goat has been both a positive and negative symbol throughout history. In depictions of Pan, and Bacchus, or Dionysus, the goat carried the favorable connotations of youth, merriment, freedom and love. As the attributes of these Greek deities became identified with the Christian Satan, the goat became a symbol for

excess, drunkenness, gluttony and licentiousness. Goats represent the souls of the wicked, according to *Matthew 25:32-33*. But this may be looking too deeply into what may have once been nothing more than a bit of masonic humour.

It either would have been a malicious slander, perpetrated in an anti-masonic attack, or it originated as a jocular euphemism. Certainly none of the early exposures of masonic ritual, such as *A Mason's Examination* (1723) or *Masonry Dissected* by Samuel Pritchard (1730), or the much later *Manual of Freemasonry* by Richard Carlisle (1825), make any mention of a goat. Nor is the goat found in Harry Carr's *The Early French Exposures* (1971).

Although there had been handbills and flyers attacking



Grand Procession of the Scald Miserable Masons by Bertoist. The Scald Miserable processions, organized by non-mason Paul Whitehead and Esquire Carey (surgeon to the Prince of Wales, and Grand Steward in 1740) as a parody of Freemasonry, were held in London on 19 March, 27 April and 2 May 1741. Horace Walpole reports that the Prince promptly dismissed Carey from his post.

Freemasonry throughout the eighteenth century, other than the three dozen, or more, ritual exposures published, the main attacks came from Augustin Barruel in *Mémoires pour servir à l'Histoire du Jacobinisme* (1797) and John Robison in *Proofs of a Conspiracy...* (1797). Neither suggested that a goat played any rôle in the masonic lodge. But they were, respectively, a cleric and an academic, and stories of goat riding may have possibly circulated in

other, earthier, social sets.

No, the earliest extant published report of a popular belief that freemasons rode goats comes from a freemason.

Albert G. Mackey, in his *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* (1873) cites the Rev. Dr. George Oliver in recording a common belief of the early nineteenth century that freemasons practiced some form of witchcraft:

"Doctor Oliver says, it was

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Riding the goat from page one

in England a common belief that the Freemasons were accustomed in their Lodges 'to raise the Devil.' So the riding of the goat, which was believed to be practiced by the witches, was transferred to the Freemasons; and the saying remains to this day, although the belief has long since died out."

Oliver cites Anderson's *Constitutions* of 1738: "the Freemasons in their lodges raised the devil in a circle, and when they had done with him, laid him again with a noise or a hush, as they pleased."

A few of the more inflammatory pamphlets of the mid-eighteenth century did accuse freemasons of satanic practices, but Mackey fails to provide any documentation for his claim that these were the source of the expression, "riding the goat." Mackey may record the expression as being common in 1873 America, but Oliver does not note its use in 1847 England.

The expression is also known outside of English-speaking Freemasonry. The Afrikaans of South Africa up to the present time refer to freemasons as "bok ryers" or "goat riders".

It is also a curious fact that another North American fraternal society, the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, claims to have actually used a goat in its initiation ritual. Prior to 1952, when the blindfolding of candidates was done away with, a range of pranks were played upon incoming members. Reports have it that a widespread practice was for each candidate to ride a live goat around the lodge room.

The Modern Woodmen of the World—created in Iowa in 1883—made use of a mechanical goat. A major promoter of the Modern Woodmen was Ed DeMoulin who started DeMoulin Bros. in 1890 to

When father rode the goat

The house is full of arnica
And mystery profound;
We do not dare to run about
Or make the slightest sound;
We leave the big piano shut
And do not strike a note;
The doctor's been here seven times
Since father rode the goat.
He joined the lodge a week ago —
Got in at 4 a.m.
And sixteen brethren brought him home
Though he says he brought them.
His wrist WAS sprained and one big rip,
Had rent his Sunday coat —
There must have been a lively time
When father rode the goat.
He's resting on the couch to-day!
And practicing his signs —
The hailing signal, working grip,
And other monkeyshines;
He mutters passwords 'neath his breath,
And other things he'll quote —
They surely had an evening's work
When father rode the goat.
He has a gorgeous uniform,
All gold and red and blue;
A hat with plunges and yellow braid,
And golden badges too.
But, somehow, when we mention it,
He wears a look so grim
We wonder if he rode the goat
Or if the goat rode him.

Edited by James Pettibone, 1902

cater to, and promote, the use of an ever-expanding list of initiation devices. The growth of the Modern Woodmen may have encouraged other North American fraternities to adopt similar practices. A 1915 published ritual of the Modern Woodmen has a list of all of the articles used in the ceremony, including a goat.

There was certainly no secret about the Woodmen goat. A special correspondence to the *LeMars Sentinel* newspaper on 12 September 1898 wrote: "Elam Chapman got so excited over riding the goat at the Woodmen Lodge last Saturday night that he forgot his wife and left her here in town, drove home alone and forced his way into the house through a cellar window and

had the key in his pocket."

A music school fraternity founded in Boston in 1898, *Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia*, "held regular fortnightly meetings, one of the main features of which was the initiation of new members by a mysterious process called 'riding the goat.'"

When one contemplates the picture of a 50 kilo goat carrying a 90 kilo mature man, or considers the logistics of keeping a live goat in an urban environment, one is left with the suspicion that anecdotes of goat-riding refer to one of Ed DeMoulin's contraptions and not to a live farm animal.

Literary references to riding the goat—in poem, song, prose and drama—abound in the nineteenth and early twentieth

centuries. The anonymous poem, *When Father Rode The Goat* is clearly intended as a jocular burlesque and not as an exposure of actual lodge practice.

A few examples will suffice to demonstrate the prevalence of a popular knowledge or belief in fraternal goat-riding. The anonymously written *Free Masonry Exposed* (1871) has a humorous account in which a wife demands to know what went on at the lodge. The husband, Mr. Bricktop, divulges to his wife, Emily Jane, the secrets of Freemasonry, including a ride on a goat during the "Fellow-Calf degree." The story ends with the revelation that the wife knew all along that her husband had been lying. This may have been the inspiration for an 1898 film entitled *Riding the Goat*. As the earliest published reference to riding the goat, it may well be the origin of all the stories.

By the turn of the nineteenth century riding the goat had truly entered the mainstream. Charles Francis Bourke's short story *Riding the Goat* was published in *The Cavalier* for 15 June 1912 and Frank Gee Patchin's 1910 novel for boys, *The Pony Rider Boys in Montana* included the chapter, "Chunky Rides the Goat":

"The kid's riding the goat," yelled Hicks. "He's initiating himself into the order of Know Nuthins. See him buck! See him buck!"

In 1922, Bud Fisher, creator of the comic strip *Mutt and Jeff*, wrote and directed a black and white silent cartoon short, also entitled *Riding the Goat*. The one-act play, *Riding the Goat* (1929) by May Miller [Sullivan], refers in the dialogue to a fictional fraternal lodge initiation, but also uses the title as a metaphor for initiation in life, as one grows and learns.

That there was ever a popular belief in masonic goat-riding has not been demonstrated. Like the

purported practices of the eighteenth-century *Gormogons* and *Scald-Miserables*, the story of the goat—although perhaps inspired by mediaeval superstition—may have only represented a literary burlesque intended to poke fun at Freemasonry, and was never a widespread belief.

In its humorous form it is clear that the story has been kept alive by freemasons and not by anti-masons.

It only remains to stress the masonic inappropriateness of any remark within hearing of a candidate suggesting that he will be riding a goat. ■

Leadership

By Bro. Chris Bonde

Becoming an officer in a lodge is the first step in learning how to run a lodge—besides learning many skills that may be used to run any other organization. However, you may also learn how to run your life. Regard each office as a particular part of your life, similar to the three ceremonies to become a Master Mason. The officers' duties have been developed for centuries, and are different from ordinary organizations. Many other societies and fraternities have similar proceedings. It is said that the other groups have copied the masonic procedures—if so, we have received a compliment.

Becoming an officer in a lodge is the the first step in learning leadership. Generally, the lodge officers' starting place is as a Steward. Some say that this is just a demeaning servitude position. If you think that the opportunity to serve others is below you then I suggest that you demit now.

Review that beautiful and remarkable Address to the Brethren, and look at the brethren whom you respect, as well as those that the community respects. Remember the words that Luke records of Jesus saying, 13:30

"Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last." and he records twice 14:11 and 18:14 "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted." The Steward is usually the first step on the path to becoming Master of the lodge. And hopefully master of one's self.

Each office is a step. Each office has distinct duties and moral lessons to learn. Do not skip a step, because if you do, you will skip a learning point hence be less equipped to be Master of your lodge and of your self.

Becoming an officer in a lodge is the first step in learning how to run your own life. This is just another way of learning what has already been explained to you in the three ceremonies in which you were initiated, passed and raised.

The goal of becoming an officer of your lodge is not to become a Past Master. Aim to be the best officer that ever filled the office that you currently hold. Then you can be happy that you did a job because it was to be done. Again, review the Address to the Brethren.

The goal of becoming an officer of your lodge is not to see how fast you can become a Past Master but how much you can learn, and how much you can do. Learn and do; do and learn. Both work together. ■

Excerpted from a presentation by Bro. Chris Bonde.

Partnership pins

We have distributed over 1,000 Partnership Pins in the last two months. These pins are proving very popular and more pins are on order. Our Grand Master, MW Bro. Isaac Brower-Berkhoven, is sure that they will be a popular item for years to come.

The cause is the Cancer Car

Project; the purpose of the pin is to show our involvement and to raise awareness of our partnership with the Canadian Cancer Society. If you see anyone wearing the Partnership Pin—the Canadian Cancer Society daffodil alongside the masonic square and compasses—you'll know they have purchased it from a freemason, or they are somehow connected with Freemasonry.

They can be purchased from Young & Naughty Ltd. in the Vancouver Masonic Centre (604-684-7746) or through our Grand Secretary's office. ■

Lodge notes

The masonic family was well represented at the annual Terrace Riverboat Days Parade with members from **Kitselas Lodge No. 123**, the Terrace Kitimat Shrine Club, Skeena Valley Lodge of Perfection, **Kitimat Lodge No. 169** and Kalum Chapter 37.

The annual Kitimat Masonic Gathering, organized by the brethren of District 12 and their wives, was held at the Lakelsa Lake Kin Kamp this past July with over forty members and their families in attendance for the full weekend and eighty for the Saturday afternoon and evening barbeque. A family event, with children of all ages, there was canoeing, fishing, horseshoeing, and many other games. One highlight of the weekend was a presentation on the Cryptic Degrees and Chivalric Orders given by RW Bro. Macintosh of **Kitselas Lodge No.123**. ■

Grand Lodge

Annual Communication 2007

Looking forward to our next Annual Communication, we see that it will be held in

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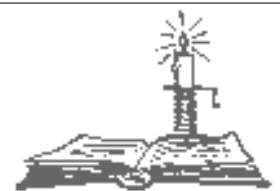
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*The Library
at
Grand Lodge*

Burnaby at the Metrotown Hilton on 22 - 23 June 2007. This is a five-star hotel, and there is a special rate for freemasons of \$125 per night. This is a terrific opportunity, particularly for brethren who live "in town" to treat their partners to a fabulous stay for a substantially reduced price in a first class facility. Plan now to come and stay so that you can enjoy your Freemasonry, support your Grand Lodge and share the fellowship of your brethren, while at the same time providing a unique and memorable experience for that special lady in your life that shows you appreciate her.

Don't forget the unwritten rule, if you fail to introduce your lady, it could cost you a new dress. Our Grand Master tells us that he speaks from experience and has, to date, purchased five dresses by forgetting his paramount duty, of introducing his wife. Don't you forget. ■

Politics & religion

In Freemasonry there are certain basic rules and principles called Landmarks, which cannot be changed, repealed or amended by any freemason, lodge, or Grand Lodge. They are an expression of that which belongs to Freemasonry's identity. If they were removed, Freemasonry would cease to be Freemasonry.

One of the most important of all these Landmarks is that which forbids us to participate, as freemasons, in any form of religious or political sectarianism. We cannot question a candidate as to his own peculiar beliefs in religion or politics. We cannot discuss such matters at any of our meetings. We must not take any kind of public action with regard to them in the name of the Craft.

A candidate must pledge himself to a belief in a Supreme Being and he must reverence

that particular Volume of Sacred Law which he regards as the rule and guide for his life. The doctrinal interpretation that he may place on these beliefs must, however, be left entirely to him. So also must he pledge himself to good citizenship; but this choice of political party through which he works for the realization of his ideal of good citizenship must be left entirely to him.

Tolerance has always been one of the tenets of the Craft. What do we mean by tolerance? Tolerance does not mean, by any stretch of imagination, that one belief is as good as another, or is as true as another, or is as valuable as another. Freemasonry does not advocate a general indifference to all beliefs; nor does it hold that all differences of opinion should be melted down into a drab compromise. As believers in toleration we, as freemasons, take the opposite position. We believe that one belief is truer than another, that one opinion is better grounded than another; and we want the truth to prevail. But we know that truth can never emerge unless man is left free to seek that facts for himself, to think for himself, to speak for himself, to confront life's realities for himself. Every human mind must be left free to observe the world for itself. This is the one way in which the truth about any of the great subjects of human life will ever be found. Tolerance, therefore, is a positive and constructive thing.

Politics means the discussion and determination of matters of public policy, matters of the utmost importance and the concern of all citizens. Every citizen, if he is a good citizen, will bring to bear on such questions his best judgment and will do whatever his duty demands toward putting into effect such policies as are determined upon.

That is good citizenship and Freemasonry demands of every member that he be a good



GRAND MASTER'S ITINERARY OCTOBER 2006

7	Sat	Hands Across the Border	Ferndale WA
11-13	W-F	Western Canada Conference	Canmore AB
14	Sat	District No. 8	Selkirk Lodge No. 55
15	Sun	Church Parade	Kimberley
16	Mon	Installation	Aviation Lodge No. 175
19	Thu	Railway Night	Acacia Lodge No. 22
20-21	F-S	Consistory	Vancouver
23	Mon	District No. 1	St. Andrew's No. 49
24	Tue	Coffee with the Craft	Victoria
24	Tue	50 Year Pin	Zion Lodge No. 77
26	Thu	District No. 4N	Prince George 178
27	Fri	Coffee with the Craft	Prince George
28	Sat	District No. 12	Kitimat No. 169
29	Sun	Church Parade	Kitimat

citizen. Just as there is a common ground which underlies all religions so is good citizenship that which underlies all political parties. A freemason may belong to this political party or that, may hold one opinion or another on matters of policy. He may not attempt to persuade brethren in lodge to see things from his point of view. He must be and remain a good citizen—law-abiding, faithful to his country, loyal to the civil powers and as quick to do his public duties as to discharge his private ones. ■

Excerpted from Ars Quatuor Coronatorum, Vol. 83, (1970).

Chaplain's corner

Before we review some Biblical references in the three degrees, two other matters need to be examined.

In some rituals, the lodge is described as "just, perfect and regular". The "just" refers to the justice embodied in the open Bible. If we believe that no harm can come to those who place their trust in God, then we submit to the justice

and mercy inculcated in the Volume of the Sacred Law.

All the rituals refer to our "traditional history". This language refers back to the *Old Charges*, the earliest masonic texts. It was common to make up commentary to explain unknown history or difficult stories. Much of our "traditional history" can be traced back to mediaeval sources, but even where there are antecedents, some legends, such as the eighteenth century Hiram Abif stories are strictly masonic. We are not diminished because these stories are not found in the Bible, rather these stories "are inventions conveying philosophical truth rather than records of historical fact. They are important to us not for any information they may provide, but for the lessons of life and death which we may learn from them." (*Beyond the Pillars*, 1973)

Our labour for the rest of this year will be to relearn some Bible stories, as compared to the traditional history, and see why they were chosen to illuminate the meaning of the degree work. ■