

The York Rite Sovereign College of North America

Jackie Lee Harrison

Virginia Research Royal Arch Chapter No. 1753

January 20, 2007

I have been asked to talk briefly about the York Rite Sovereign College of North America, the key word being brief. The York Rite Sovereign College of North America came into being in the city of Detroit, Michigan on January 6, 1957. It was the result of a meeting called by Richard W. Lewis, PGHP of Michigan, and was attended by the heads of the four Michigan York Rite Grand Bodies and a number of distinguished Masonic leaders from other States. These founders, responding to a need which had long been recognized in the York Rite, outlined the structure and purpose of the new organization and arranged for its incorporation. The first York Rite College was constituted on June 15, 1957 in the City of Jackson, Michigan. From here, the new organization spread rapidly from coast to coast and from North to South. There are presently 183 Colleges in the United States and Canada, with over 14,000 members.

The purpose of the York Rite Sovereign College of North America as set forth in its Constitution and By-Laws, are as follows:

- To foster a spirit of cooperation and coordination among each of the Bodies of York Rite Masonry.
- To assist in worthy efforts to improve the ritualistic and dramatic presentation of York Rite Work.
- To conduct an education program in order to inculcate a greater appreciation of the principles, ideals, and programs of York Rite Masonry.

The York Rite Sovereign College of North America – Jackie Lee Harrison

- To build up a love of country and to aid and support genuine Americanism.
- To reward outstanding service to York Rite Masonry by award, honors, and other methods of proper recognition.
- To support Charitable and Benevolent Endeavors of Freemasonry.

The York Rite Sovereign College of North America exists primarily to be of service to the York Rite of Freemasonry. Constituent colleges must declare fealty to the Grand Lodge of their respective jurisdictions. The prerequisite for membership, which is by invitation only, is good-standing in all four York Rite Bodies: Lodge, Royal Arch Chapter, Council of Select and Royal Masters and Commandery of Knights Templar or Preceptor (Canada). Note: In Virginia and West Virginia the Council of Select and Royal Masters are within the Royal Arch Chapter. They do not have a Grand Council.

Since the primary object of every College is to foster a spirit of service and to promote and support the York Rite in every way possible, it is no surprise to find many of the leaders of the Craft numbered among its ranks. Here they find a common ground from which they can act for the welfare of all York Rite Bodies without special favor to any. Colleges have been active in the organization of York Rite Festivals, degree teams, drill corps and many other functions, which serve to assist, coordinate, and unify the Rite.

The Sovereign College three awards that it promotes for outstanding service:

- The Gold Honor Award may be awarded any Mason for unselfish and faithful service in any branch of the York Rite. The recipient need not be a member of a College, nor is it required that he be a member of all the other York Rite Bodies
- The York Rite Service Award is awarded to a member of the College who serves, but who desires to work and help in the back ground only.

The York Rite Sovereign College of North America – Jackie Lee Harrison

- The Order of the Purple Cross is the highest honor, which the College can present, and is conferred upon those members of the College who have distinguished themselves by their service to humanity or the Rite. Currently there can be only one recipient for each per year.

The Reference for the following information is a pamphlet published by the York Rite Sovereign College of North America. "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave: even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve." Matthew 20: 26-27-28.

The York Rite College is based on the Legend of York; the following is taken from the Regis Manuscript, circa 1390:

"This craft came into England, as I tell you, in the time of good King Athelstan's reign; he made then both hall, and also bower and lofty temples of great honor, to take his recreation in both day and night, and to worship his good with all his might. This good lord loved this craft full well, and purposed to strengthen it in every part on account of various defects that he had discovered in the craft. He sent about into all the land, after all the masons of the craft, to come straight to him, to amend all these defects by good council, if it might so happen. He then permitted an assembly to be made of Divers Lords in their ranks, Dukes, Earls and Barons, also Knight, Squares and many more, and the great Burgesses of that city, they were all there in their degree; these were there, each one in every way to make laws for the state of these nations. There they sought by their wisdom how they might govern it; there they found out fifteen articles, and there they made fifteen points."

The York Rite Sovereign College of North America – Jackie Lee Harrison

The York Rite takes its name from the Ancient English City of York, around which cluster many Masonic traditions tell us Athelstan, who reigned more than a thousand years ago and was the first King of all England, granted the first charter to the Masonic guilds. Here, in 1705, a Grand Lodge in London, to whose constitution of the Grand Lodge of England later appealed as the true source of authentic Freemasonry. Though early disappearing from the Masonic scene, this Grand Lodge left an indelible impression upon the institution, and its name – York – will survive as long as Freemasonry continues.