

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH  
650 Fisgard Street, Victoria, B.C.V. V8W 1R6  
1993-2

We are indebted with thanks to the Author and the Grand Lodge of Washington for the following paper

Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons. of Washington  
June 11, 12, & 13, 1992.

**"The Evolution of the Work."**

Report of the Grand Historian - Wor.Bro. Joseph E Moniot

The Work of Freemasonry, consisting of the rituals, lectures and ceremonies of the three degrees of Symbolic Masonry, has been the subject of an untold number of books and papers in every known language in which the Fraternity exists.

Considering the intricacies encompassed within the philosophies of Freemasonry, the evolution of the Work has had to endure the tinkering of both the great men in our history and those less gifted; those who would embellish the workings of the Craft with beauty and those who would make alterations, regardless of the impact thereon, to merely satisfy their own egos. Add those complexities of philosophy to the selfish ambitions of some writers, especially those in offices of great responsibility, who have insisted upon spreading misinformation; it is a wonder that, today, there is any form of stability or uniformity within our esoteric work at all.

For example; from the pen of a Grand Master, published in the "Masonic Review", in December, 1855:

"The question then arises, 'How can that uniformity be attained? There is but one rational answer to that inquiry ---- go to the fountainhead for pure water. All Lodges claim to be Ancient York Masons, and to derive their mode of Work from the Grand Lodge chartered by King Athelstan, at York, A.D. 926. That Lodge is still in existence, and from it the late Thomas Smith Webb compiled his Monitor (ritual). Their ancient records, charts and traditions have been handed down to the present age, and probably the ancient work is more pure there than elsewhere. At any rate, the most ancient records exist there, and the most ancient manuscripts can be found to illustrate the ancient work.

In Europe then, where can be found the York Rites the Scotch Rites and the French Rites is the place to learn what is ancient and genuine, and what is modern and spurious."

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To adopt a single Standard Work has been the goal of Grand Lodges since before Masonry came to America. However, no records being available of the day-to-day happenings within the individual Lodges of that time, only the Great Architect of the Universe knows what form the Work took when it was brought to this country by Henry Price, Joseph Montfort, Thomas Oxnard, Daniel Coxe and others commissioned as Provincial Grand Masters, much less the Work of the individuals who formed Lodges under the practice known as "in accordance with the usages of time immemorial". This researcher has seen no evidence that any of those commissioned were noted for their capabilities in the workings of the Ancient Art. Many historians have made references to the Work of that day as being a very simple ceremony, accompanied by lectures; but one must be careful of such

generalities.

Thomas Smith Webb (1777-1819) has been considered the forerunner among those credited for their efforts in achieving a Standard Work. As we are quite aware, it is not uncommon to hear our Work referred to as the "WebbPreston" Work and is so recognized in all sincerity.

A short biography of Webb was published in the "Masonic Review", a national Masonic publication at Cincinnati, Ohio, by its editor, Cornelius Moore, in June 1860. Albert Mackey used the same biography in his "Encyclopedia of Freemasonry" as have others.

This biography attributed to Thomas Smith Webb, his initiation into Rising Star Lodge at Keene, New Hampshire in 1792 (he was 21 years of age on 30 October of that year); his marriage to Miss Martha Hopkins of Boston; his advancement through the York Rite degrees from entered apprentice and all the degrees of Symbolic, Capitular and Chivalric Masonry up to the Knights of Malta; his removal to Albany, New York (where he opened a bookstore); and, I quote: "he carefully studied the rituals of the old Prestonian Lectures and saw the necessity of re-arranging them and reducing them to system and order"; writing, editing and publishing his "Freemason's Monitor" in 1797. All this in a period of five years and having reached the age of approximately 26 years.

The first edition of Webb's "Monitor" did not name Webb as the author, although it was printed and copyrighted by "Spencer and Webb". It merely stated on the fly-leaf; "By a Royal Arch Mason, K.T., ----- K.M., & c."

From the aforementioned biography of Webb by Moore, who claimed to have a copy of the 1797 (first) edition: "The author says in his preface that: 'The observations upon the first three degrees are principally arranged from "Preston's Illustrations of Masonry", with some valuable improvements. Mr. Preston's distribution of the first lecture into six, the second into four and the third into twelve sections not being agreeable to the present mode of working, they are arranged in the work according to the general practice.'" .

Now arises the question: "What was the Work that had been introduced into this country?" From the previous paragraph, Webb alludes to the lectures "not being agreeable to the present mode of working". That Work having been unwritten and disclosed only, "mouth to ear"; it would appear there is no answer.

However, since Webb had a copy of Preston's "Illustrations of Masonry" and, being the proprietor of a bookstore at Albany, he would, likely, have had access to one or more of the volumes that had been published in London in the 18th century, namely, "Masonry Dissected" by Samuel Pritchard (1730); "Three Distinct Knocks" by "W----O----V----n, (1760), Member of a Lodge in England at this Time"; and "Jachin and Boaz", "By a Gentleman belonging to the Jerusalem Lodge, etc." (1762) and others published in the 1760's as well. All these, no doubt, were intended to be exposes, describing the Masonic esoteric work with exacting (and to some early Masons, frightening) detail, going through several editions including those published in New York, Philadelphia, Albany and Boston, as well as Ireland and Scotland. The three mentioned above, being the most popular of the exposes, were widely advertised and sold. (in England from 6d. for M.D. to 1s..6d. for J. & B.)

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Could the combination of these so-called exposes, along with Preston's "Illustrations of Masonry" have been the pattern or model for Webb's "Freemason's Monitor"? Could the contents of these so-called exposes have been

more than happenstance, but the mirror image of the actual work that would have been, ideally, performed in that era?

In the Addendum of Mackey's "Encyclopedia of Freemasonry" by Charles T. McClenachan (1884), p.454 'Webb was a man of some talent,--- not equal, it is true, to Hutchinson or Preston; but one who had paid more attention to Masonry, and knew more about it, than any man of his times in this country, It is said, upon what authority I know not, but I think the fact is credible, that he visited England, and obtained instructions from Preston himself."

In none of Webb's biographies is there evidence that he had traveled abroad, nor do the biographies of Preston (1742-1818) indicate that Webb had been his student. It is unfortunate that such an allegation should have been included in a historical treatise, relied upon by so many, for over a century.

It is quite obvious that Thomas Smith Webb extracted entire pages and/or sub-sections of Preston's "Illustrations of Masonry" to form pertinent parts of his Monitor, thereby creating a digest containing nought but what he considered to be the essentials of the lectures of the three degrees.

Regardless of the manner in which Webb's "Freemason's Monitor" reached its published form in 1797, it is nearly identical to that which has been adopted and used within the Jurisdiction of Washington since 1888. How did it get here? Certainly not without having travelled over that "rough and rugged road" that has existed, over the nearly 200 years since it was first published.

Webb taught several brethren the lectures, as he compiled them, including Benjamin Gleason, Jeremy Cross, and John Snow, to name a few. Many others made claims that they had been taught by Webb, but time has generously forgotten them in the chronicles of history; with the exception of the most influential such as Benjamin Gleason .(1777-1847) who, in turn, taught John Barney (1780-1847).

There are, throughout the writings of those days, subtle hints and not so subtle statements that each of the students of Webb had made certain changes, the magnitude of which we do not know, in the manner in which they taught Webb's lectures. Each had written his own "key" to the lectures containing differences which detractors claimed were not in Webb's original, but each avowing that his "key" was the original true copy.

Among Webb's pupils, Jeremy L. Cross (1783-1861), author of "The True Masonic Chart and Hieroglyphic Monitor" (first published in 1819) was the one who could perform Webb's lectures with uncanny accuracy. He was an unlettered man, whose use of the English language, grammar and spelling were of the lowest form. He knew little of Masonic history, nor did he wish to do so. His one desire was to do the "Work" as he had learned it from Webb.

Heretofore, the lectures of the three degrees had been illustrated by crude drawings upon the floor of the lodge, rendered in chalk, charcoal or some other substance; which became known as the "tressel-board", "lodgeboard", "floorings" and, eventually, as the "Master's Carpet". When a candidate was to be initiated, one of the junior officers would be given the task of "flooring the lodge". After the ceremonies, the new Entered Apprentice Mason would be required to erase the diagrams. Originally the "floorings" were intended for the use of initiations only, but as time passed, diagrams were added to make the floorings suitable for use with all three degrees.

In time, the "floorings" gave way to pictorial designs on canvas and other

materials, and, subsequently to Cross' True Masonic Chart and Hyroglyphic Monitor" of 1819. The charts used in the work today are direct descendants of those of 1819.

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Gleason travelled extensively throughout the Eastern States and Canada speaking on the Prestonian lectures, as well as on Webb's shortened versions. He was the Grand Lecturer of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts for 37 years (1805-1847)

John Barney was appointed Lecturing Master of the Grand Lodge of Vermont in 1817; until, due to failing health, he removed to Ohio in 1826, where he became Grand Lecturer (1836-1843).

Thus the migration of the "Webb" Work to the west has been attributed to the efforts of John Barney. During that period there was some conjecture concerning the "Barney" lectures given throughout the western States that was clarified, to a certain extent, by the Grand Master's address to the Grand Lodge of Vermont in 1859: "Subsequently to 1818, Brother Barney went to the Western and Southwestern States. He was a man of feeble health at the time, and pursued Masonic lecturing as a means of subsistence. Upon his return to this State, a few years afterwards, he stated to his brethren here ---- as I have been credibly informed and believe ---- that he found different systems of lecturing prevailing at the West and Southwest, and that upon presenting the lectures he had been taught at Boston in 1817, to different Grand Masters, they were objected to; and that various Grand Masters would not sanction his lecturing in their jurisdictions, unless he would teach the lectures then existing among them; that desiring to pursue this occupation, he did learn the different systems of lecturing then existing in different States, and taught them in different State Jurisdictions, as desired by the different Grand Masters of each.

This circumstance accounts for the strange disagreement between the East and West, and Southwest, as to what are the true Barney lectures. They mean one thing in New England and another thing in the West.

It is vain for us to hope that perfect uniformity will ever be attained in the Masonic lectures; but much can be done in the various Grand Lodge jurisdictions towards bringing about a more universal and perfect system.

Bro. Thomas M. Reed, Gr. Sec., in his Report on Foreign Correspondence (Vermont, 1859) from which the previous excerpt was taken, added his own personal observation: "During the last ten or twelve years in our Masonic experience, we have heard no little discussion among old and young intelligent Masons, or those at least who presumed to know all the facts in relation to the "BARNEY" and "WEBB LECTURES. But we have never been able to arrive at any conclusion in our own mind as to what were really the Barney Lectures in contradistinction from any other system taught. All claim to have the Barney system verbatim et literatim yet the difference in their teaching is so remarkable, in some respects, that there is little or no similarity."

As has been previously seen, there has continuously been in insistence among the Grand Jurisdictions to prepare and perform a standardized Work nationwide. Webb's efforts along with those of Cross, Gleason, Barney, among others reflect those aspirations.

So it was with those ambitious efforts that the United States Masonic Convention at Baltimore, Maryland was called in May 1843. Ambitious, though it was, it could have hardly been called a success. Although the delegates ( 16 of the 28

Grand Jurisdictions) appeared to be in conformity on the results while the Convention was in session; there was a complete lack of agreement when it was over.

Three of the delegates, Charles W. Moore of Massachusetts, S.W.B. Carnegy of Missouri and John Dove from Virginia were assigned to prepare a report of the findings. Dove and Moore, being of jurisdictions where the primary philosophy was somewhat different (Webb's Freemason's Monitor versus one of Dove's own design) were at complete odds with one another. As a result, the approval of the report was withheld by John Dove and the Grand Lodge of Virginia. (suggested reading on this subject would be "Trestleboard", Masonic Book Club, 1978).

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Although the Convention could not have been called a success; there were four contributions made that have become standard in American Masonry and remain so today.

1. Due Guards and Signs.
2. Movable and Immovable Jewels.
3. Business of the Lodge being done in the Master Mason Degree.
4. Religious Universality.

Earlier in this report there was mention of the tinkering of the great Men and small, regardless of the results. It is now time to present the most prolific tinkerer of them all -- Robert William Peckham, more commonly known as Rob Morris, and his "Conservator Movement" formed for the purpose of (in his words) "The dissemination of the ancient and genuine Work and Lectures of the first Three Degrees, as arranged by Preston, and taught by Thomas Smith Webb".

There were a total of ten (10) reasons that he gave for the formation of his organization. Among them was; "Discountenancing all changes, innovations and errors of every sort introduced into the first Three Degrees of Masonry since the death of Webb in 1819." The remaining were all relative to teaching, assuring the traveling Mason the ability to enter and visit another Lodge, detecting impostors, etc.

The Chief Conservator (Rob Morris) would have the general control and management of the Association with one Conservator in each Lodge; a Deputy Chief Conservator for every Congressional District and a Vice Chief for every Grand Lodge Jurisdiction. Every Grand Master, Deputy Grand Master, Senior Grand Warden, Junior Grand Warden, District Deputy Grand Master and Grand Lecturer, who unites himself with the Association, is to be, ex officio, a Deputy Chief Conservator.

"In those States where the Grand Lodges have established systems of Lectures, more or less differing from Webb's, the Association will endeavour to effect its great and important objects by instructing one or more intelligent Masons in every Lodge, as above mentioned, and then bringing the influences of truth, consistency, and uniformity to bear upon the Grand Lodges themselves. And no measure will at any time be adopted which is opposed to that filial affection and duty which are due the Grand Lodge, or which is contrary to its Constitutional Regulations and the Landmarks of Masonry."

It was the hope of Rob Morris that he could enlist 3,000 Masons through-out the country at \$10 each to put his plan to work. The whole of the operation to be completed by June 1865.

As Chief Conservator, Morris designed and instituted a "Conservator Degree" based on Nehemiah 2:13 ----- "And I went out by night by the gate of the

valley even before the dragon-well and to the dung-port, and viewed the walls of Jerusalem, which were broken down, and the gates thereof were consumed with fire".

In addition to his "Conservator Degree", Morris prepared and published, in cipher:

WRITTEN MNEMONICS  
ILLUSTRATED BY COPIOUS EXAMPLES  
FROM  
MORAL PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Morris had issued, what could be called, a pilot copy of the booklet in 1858; thus the concept of his Conservator Movement was not a new idea to him.

His cipher contained columns and rows of alpha and numeric digits that appeared to be completely at random. In order to decipher it, the reader would be required to refer to an accompanying index and a "Spelling Book" One without the other was useless.

9.

Morris claimed he had received the Webb Work in May 1857, from Samuel Willson, Grand Lecturer of Vermont. He stated, in a letter to the Conservators in 1866: "Willson knew very little of the work, and was scarcely able to read his own notes with certainty, but the pedigree given of them by Tucker (Grand Master of Vermont), and the fact of their agreement with the evidence furnished by so many others, convinced me of their correctness and on mature reflection I decided to adopt them as my own." (The Masonic Conservators", Ray V. Denslow, published by the Grand Lodge of Missouri, 1931.)

In contrast to the foregoing, (and from the same reference) a Committee on Uniformity of Work of the Grand Lodge of New Hampshire in 1864 had quoted Samuel Willson, replying to their correspondence:

\*. "In 1857 Rob Morris visited Vermont for the purpose of ascertaining what were the true Webb Lectures. \* \* \* 'I loaned him a copy of my cipher (not the original) which unfortunately had several omissions through mistake. In copying this Morris made several mistakes and misread many passages. In fact he could never read it at all until I met him in Chicago in 1860, and I think he cannot read it now."

Why Morris had put such an ambitious time limit upon the life cycle of his Conservator Movement is not entirely explained nor would it have had a significant effect on its demise due to the disaster of the Civil War, compounded by the angry reactions of the several Grand Lodges.

As before mentioned, the desire for uniformity in the rituals had become the mission of many Masonic ritualists for generations. Webb, Cross and their adherents had, so far, been successful in slowly achieving that goal in the United States. A National Grand Lodge was thought by many to be the panacea in 1822. The Baltimore Convention was a valiant effort toward that uniformity in 1843. Thus the reasoning behind the implementation of such a plan as the Conservator Movement escapes explanation.

Of Rob Morris' address at his installation, as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, in 1858, his Grand Historian had this to say "He ridiculed the absurd attempts at tinkering with the Constitution by the inexperienced (\*) and recommended the adoption of the Webb Work and Lectures, also a disapproval, of the of the numerous and increasing innovations." (\*) "Yet he made changes in

arid additions to the ritual which he published in his Mnemonics, and admitted to me that he had done so." (The Masonic Conservators", Ray V. Denslow, p.38)

Beginning in 1860, the Conservator's work began to be exemplified at various Grand Lodge Communications. In his Conservator Magazine, he makes the statement: "Grand Lodge after Grand Lodge has adopted the pure Webb-Preston Ritual,. From the first members affiliated into the Association (June, 1860), to this date (November, 1861) we have increased to the great aggregate of nearly nine hundred members, embracing Grand Masters, Grand Secretaries, and many other dignitaries and persons of exalted learning, zeal and worth, whose elevation to the highest honors of the Craft is but a matter of time."

It should be noted that Morris did not refer to the Work of the three degrees as anything but the Webb-Preston Work. He did not add his name or the term, "Conservator" to the title. In his resolution for the adoption of the Webb-Preston to the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, while Grand Master, the words, "as taught by Morris"-, were stricken out.

Condemnations were not long in coming from various Grand Jurisdictions throughout the country, beginning early in 1862 and continuing through 1864. It was "open season" upon Rob Morris and his brainchild, the Conservator Movement. Resolutions were submitted and edicts issued ranging from mild rebukes to recommendations that the Conservators be considered "clandestine, treasonable to the institution and subversive to the sacred interests, honor, and perpetuation of Masonry".

Oaths of Renunciation were formulated in various degrees of severity and circulated, for members' signatures, throughout the country.

10.

The Grand Lodge of Kentucky, in 1864-65 passed resolutions to the effect that the Conservator Movement be "forever banished"; their books and cyphers forbidden, lectures and lecturers to have prior approval of the Grand Lodge, Masons and Lodges forbidden to hear unapproved lectures or work.

Morris, in "The Voice of Masonry, Vol. III" in 1865, wrote in defense of his Conservators, the following of Webb: " Thomas Smith Webb, of Albany, N.Y., a paper-stainer by profession, not a member of any Grand Lodge, nor at any time a Mason of any note, did, in the year 1797, issue a 'Freemason's Monitor', arrange a system of rituals corresponding with those of Preston and form a plan for their dissemination outside of Grand Lodge authority, By instructing intelligent men as Lecturers, he published many editions of his own work and much travel, also by arrangement of many new degrees in Masonry, he achieved a great success and to this day there is no higher comparison that can be applied to his system of lectures in this country than to affirm 'They are like those of Webb.'" (Sic.)

In another section of this same article by Morris, he continued: "The Conservator's movement, finally, has resulted in an establishing of a national uniformity of work to a degree ten times greater than has been experienced since the revival. of Freemasonry."

Despite the uproar; condemnation of the Conservator Movement and himself, personally, and edicts of the several Grand Lodges forbidding the use of Morris' version of the Webb work, he believed his Conservators to have been a complete success and that, he, alone, had accomplished the goal of uniformity in the rituals of Freemasonry.

To describe and explain the progression of the ritual in the Grand Lodge of Washington it becomes necessary to look back to November 25, 1852, when the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Oregon Territory, Berryman Jennings, issued a dispensation to form a Lodge at Olympia, Puget Sound, Oregon Territory and naming Thornton F. McElroy as Worshipful Master. Bro. McElroy's masonic history, prior to that time, is unknown. In the List of Officers and Members of Multnomah Lodge No. 1, at Oregon City, June 14, 1852, he was carried as a Master Mason and sat in that Grand Lodge as Junior Grand Warden, pro tem.

James W. Wiley, named Senior Warden, also has no recorded history. He was not shown as a member of any Lodge in Oregon Territory. He was a partner of McElroy in the printing business and must have been so vouched for by him.

Michael T. Simmons, Junior Warden, was raised in Willamette Lodge No.2, at Portland, June 13, 1851 (No.33 On their rolls).

Nicholas DeLin, Treasurer; Ira Ward, Sr. Deacon; Smith Hays, Tyler and FA. Clark, Jr. Deacon, pro tem, were all from Willamette No.2.

C.H. Hale, Secretary, pro tem, came from King David's Lodge No.62, of Maine (now at Lincolnville).

What was the source of the Work practiced by this fledgling Lodge in 1852? There were at least five sources; Oregon; whatever Grand Jurisdictions McElroy, J. W. Wiley and N DeLin had affiliated from originally; and the Grand Lodge of Maine. Monitors and cyphers did not exist. The pioneer Masons had all learned their work "mouth to ear". How long previous and how good were their memories, no one knows.

With the exception of McElroy, Wiley and Hale, they were not lettered men, Simons, Ward, Hays and DeLin were farmers, saw-mill and grist-mill owners and timber men; each with the capabilities, ambitions and cunning of men who lived by hard work and their wits.

11.

Unfortunately, as with the usual minutes of Lodges, little can be learned of the details of the operation of the Lodge itself. It was opened and closed on the three consecutive degrees of Masonry and the degrees were conferred in due and ancient form. No mention is made of lectures having been given or individual proficiencies having been performed. The ballot was spread for each candidate to receive the next higher degree and the rest is left to one's own knowledge of Masonic practices and customs.

The foregoing clearly describes the assortment of brothers who formed the early Lodges in the Territory. Chapter XXI of "Masonic History of the Northwest", compiled by P.G.M. William H. Upton, contains a section "Pioneer Masons of Washington", which includes the names and a small biography of each (if available) of the four Lodges that formed the Grand Lodge of Washington in 1858.

Up to that year, in Olympia Lodge No.5, the minutes reveal the membership included affiliated Masons from eleven Grand Jurisdictions from Maine to Georgia and through the central part of the country. There can be no question why the Grand Master (Louis Zeigler) reported in 1886; "Unfortunately, in the Lodges of our Jurisdiction, though few in number, is represented every known (some unknown) system of Masonic Work that was ever practiced on this continent."

It was at the same Grand Communication in June 1886, that a resolution was

passed to compile and print the first Monitor for this jurisdiction.

Of the two systems directly related to the Webb Work, and that by John Barney; it was agreed by a committee that the Barney Work was the closest to the original of Webb and was so selected. Why the Conservator Work was even considered, was, surely, that there were two members of Morris' Conservators Movement in the jurisdiction of Washington, one of them being the Grand Secretary, Thomas M. Reed. (Chap. XLI, "The Masonic Conservators", Ray V. Denslow.)

"The Washington Monitor and Freemason's Guide to the Symbolic Degrees" was first published and distributed in 1888.

The Grand Master has asked how our esoteric Work has changed in the past two hundred plus years. There are two answers to that question. The first is "Radically" and the second is "Very little."

"Radically" in that a visitor to a Lodge in another jurisdiction is immediately assailed by the great differences he sees and hears in the opening and closing ceremonies; positions of the officers except the Master; purging ceremonies; language; presentations of visitors; attitudes of prayer and the prayers themselves; etc. All these, to name just a few, are the results of the fallibilities of the human memory and the ambitions for self-aggrandizement that feed the egos of certain persons in positions of authority and power.

To clarify the second answer of "Very little", each of us should ask ourselves, "How many dialects exist in the American language?" Not English American. Prior to the age of television and the efforts of the communication industry to sanitize our language and eliminate all dialects from the "boob-tube", one could meet a brother and in a manner of moments recognize the State of his origin. If he were another Texan, you would know which county; if a New Yorker, probably the borough, all from local dialect. Why should there have been a difference just because Webb's Monitor had been written in New England as was the origin of his first Lecturers? Masons came from every corner of the country and brought their dialects, they hear the Work done in another's dialect and absorb into their own.

The primary essentials of our esoteric Work as laid out by Webb remain intact today. This writer has been allowed the use, through the generosity of many of the brethren, of nearly thirty Monitors and cyphers from all over the United States. All the individual elements of the degrees and lectures are there as Webb prescribed. Perhaps not in the same order in the various jurisdictions, wording is changed  
12.

around, cyphers are coded to local specifications, but the ritual is relatively intact. To visit another jurisdiction and to hear a degree being conferred there will be little difference unless it is done in a deep back-country dialect; then hopefully, the candidate will be of the same dialectic background.

Thank you, Grand Master, for the privilege of serving as Grand Historian.

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