

Lodge Opening Ceremonies
History and Comparison

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Lodge opening ceremonies are the most frequently practiced of all our rituals. One might think that since they are used at every meeting, this frequent repetition would make them one of the more stable and uniform parts of Masonic ritual. And in many ways they are. All Masonic lodge opening rituals contain certain key elements, namely the addressing of security matters, the rehearsal of officers' duties, and the formal opening itself. But within this broad framework there exists an enormous range of variation from place to place in the order, method, and wording of the various elements which compose this general outline. The variations exhibited in contemporary opening rituals speak to the traditional diversity of Masonic ritual practices from the fraternity's earliest days. It also may provide clues to the family tree, as it were, of the various Masonic jurisdictions since opening ceremonies, unlike degree work, do not seem to have attracted the attention of those who have periodically pressed for uniformity across jurisdictions in ritual practices.

Tracing the history of the opening ceremonies is much more difficult than tracing the development of the degree ceremonies, symbolism, and lecture material. Documentation is sparse. Openings either did not attract the attention of exposure authors the way degree and lecture work did, or the ceremonies were so much simpler that they hardly bear mentioning. Probably some of both reasons account for the lack of documentation. The earliest documentation of opening ceremonies I know of, is recorded in the exposure Three Distinct Knocks (TDK) of 1760¹, as given below:

<i>How to open a Lodge, to set the Men to work.</i>	
WM (to JD) What is the chief Care of a Mason? <i>- To see that his lodge is tyl'd.</i>	The senior Warden's Place in the Lodge? <i>- (JW) In the West.</i>
Pray do your Duty. (The JD goes and gives Three Knocks at the door; and if there is nobody nigh, the Tyler without answereth with Three Knocks : The JD tells the Master, and says;) <i>Worshipful, the lodge is tyl'd.</i>	WM (to SW) Your Business there? <i>- As the sun sets in the West to close the Day, so the Senior stands in the West to close the Lodge, paying the Hirelings their Wages, and dismissing them from their Labour.</i>
WM (to JD) The junior Deacon's place in the lodge? <i>- At the Back of the senior Warden, or at his right hand if he permits him.</i>	The Master's Place in the Lodge? <i>- In the East.</i>
Your Business? <i>- To carry Messages from the senior to the junior Warden, so that they may be dispersed round the Lodge.</i>	His Business there? <i>- As the Sun rises in the East to open the Day, so the Master stands in the East to open his Lodge to set his Men to Work.</i>
WM (to SD) The senior Deacon's place in the lodge? <i>- At the back of the Master, or at his right-hand if he permits him.</i>	(Then the Master takes off his Hat, which he always has on but at this Time, and puts it on again as soon as the Lodge is open; but all the rest keep theirs off, and he declares the Lodge open, as follows)
Your Business there? <i>- To carry Messages from the Master to the senior Warden.</i>	WM This Lodge is open, in the Name of God and holy St. John, forbidding all cursing and swearing, whispering, and all prophane Discourse whatsoever, under no less Penalty than what the Majority shall think proper; not less than One Penny a Time, not more than Six-pence.
The junior Warden's Place in the Lodge? <i>- (SD) In the South.</i>	(Then he gives Three Knocks upon the Table with a wooden Hammer, and puts on his Hat; then they all sit down, and begin their Lecture, as follows.)
WM (to JW) Your business there? <i>- The better to observe the sun, at high Meridian to call the Men off from Work to refreshment, and to see that they come on in due Time, that the Master may have Pleasure and Profit thereby.</i>	

Notice that this ceremony has but three basic elements, namely tiling, the rehearsal of duties, and a declaration that the lodge is open including an admonition to gentlemanly behavior. (I wonder how fines for whispering would fly these days?) Modern ritual includes all these elements, but also includes a purging, a prayer, additional dialogue, and the display of esoteric material including signs, raps, tracing boards, and the passing of words.

These “missing” elements may well have been practiced, but perhaps either not recorded or not known by the author. Keep in mind that ritual was far from standardized in those days, even among lodges of the same Grand Lodge. It is likely, however, that opening rituals of an earlier period were simpler, or at least different from this example. It is a straightforward matter to trace considerable development in degree work, symbolism, lecture content, charges, and obligations from the late 1600’s to the time that this ritual was recorded. It seems unlikely that opening ceremonies were somehow exempt from similar development.

Notwithstanding the lack of documentation, I have managed to trace the antecedents of one particular aspect of the opening ceremony, namely the rehearsal of the officers’ duties. This particular piece of dialogue first makes an appearance in Pritchard’s *Masonry Dissected* of 1730², not as an opening but simply as part of the dialogue lecture of the EA degree in that section discussing the form of a lodge.

Q: Where Stands your Master? A: In the East	Q: What is his Business? A: to hear and receive Instructions and welcome strange Brothers.
Q: Why so? A: As the sun rises in the east and opens the Day, so the Master stands in the East [with his Right Hand upon his Left Breast being a Sign, and the Square about his Neck] to open the Lodge and to set his Men at Work.	Q: Where stands the Junior Enter’d ‘Prentice? A: In the North.
Q: Where stands your Wardens? A: In the West.	Q: What is his Business? A: To keep off all Cowans and Eavesdroppers.
Q: What’s their Business? A: As the Sun sets in the West to close the Day, so the Wardens stand in the West [with their Right Hands upon their Left Breasts being a Sign, and the Level and Plumb -Rule about their Necks] to close the Lodge and dismiss the Men from Labour, paying their Wages.	Q: if a Cowan (or Listner) is catch’d, how is he to be punished? A: To be plac’d under the Eves of the House (in rainy Weather) till the Water runs in at his Shoulders and out at his Shoos.
Q: Where stands the Senior Enter’d ‘Prentice? A: In the South.	

Beyond this dialogue’s connection with the opening ritual, it is quite revealing of other changes in lodge arrangement and the roster of officers. This dialogue dates from the time when both wardens were in the west, and the office of deacon had not yet been introduced. Also notice that the junior EA fills the function of the Tyler, although he is not outside the door. This might be the precursor of the office of Inner Guard found in English lodges. The sign referred to in the author’s parenthetical comments is the sign of Fidelity, which is not used in NJ, but is instantly recognized in most jurisdictions around

the globe. So far as the Opening ceremonies are concerned, this piece of dialogue had migrated from lecture or test question dialogue to opening dialogue by the time TDK was written 30 years later. This dialogue, or an expanded version of it, is now included in every contemporary Masonic opening ritual that I know of, and is now found nowhere else but in the opening ceremony. It is not, however, the only dialogue from the Q&A lectures that has made its way into the opening ceremonies.

In the period after Three Distinct Knocks was written, there were a number of additions to the basic formula. William Preston mentions prayers and charges in the various editions of his *Illustrations of Masonry* published between 1772 and 1812. A very cursory description of the ceremonies is given in earlier editions, but the 1792 edition gives us enough detail to recognize a ceremony much closer to what we are familiar with today (excerpted below)³. Preston's *Illustrations* was not a full ritual, but rather a general guide and commentary, the prototype Masonic monitor. The key passages are in ***bold Italics***.

The ceremony of opening and closing a Lodge with solemnity and decorum, is therefore universally admitted among masons; and though the mode in some lodges may vary, and ***in every degree must vary***, still an uniformity in the general practice prevails in every lodge; and the variation (if any) is solely occasioned by a want of method, which a little application might easily remove...

From a share in this ceremony no mason can be exempted. It is a general concern, in which all must assist. This is the first request of the master, and the prelude to all business. No sooner has it been signified, than ***every officer repairs to his station, and the brethren rank according to their degrees...***

This effect accomplished, ***our care is directed to the external avenues of the lodge***, and the proper officers, whose province it is to discharge that duty, execute their trust with fidelity; and by certain mystic forms, of no recent date, intimate that we may safely proceed. ***To detect imposters among ourselves, an adherence to order in the character of masons ensues, and the lodge is either opened or closed in solemn form.***

At opening the lodge, two purposes are wisely effected: ***the Master is reminded of the dignity of his character, and the brethren of the homage and veneration due from them in their sundry stations***. These are not the only advantages resulting from a due observance of this ceremony; ***a reverential awe for the Deity is inculcated***, and the eye fixed on that object, from whose radiant beams light only can be derived. Here we are taught to adore the God of Heaven, and to ***supplicate his protection on our well-meant endeavours...***

The first paragraph contains the first suggestion we have that lodge openings now vary by their degree: "The mode in some lodges may vary, and *in each degree must vary*." We also find the addition of "Every officer repairs to his station"; reference to the detection of imposters (purging); and "supplicate his (God's) protection on our well-meant endeavours", none of which are mentioned in TDK. Preston suggests the following as a suitable prayer to be used in opening: "May the favour of Heaven be upon this our happy meeting; may it be begun, carried on and ended with order, harmony, and brotherly love. Amen."

Preston also highly recommends the inclusion of a recitation of "the ancient charges of the society" immediately after the opening and before the closing. He then goes on to give the text of these charges. Preston was scrupulous about not giving the actual wording of ritual unless it was something he largely wrote himself, or had already been

published elsewhere. So we may safely assume this list of “ancient charges” was his embellishment on a general model rather than any work actually practiced except by himself. It would be safe to say that Preston’s attitude toward ritual could be summed up as “more is better”.

Moving forward to the current day, the table on the next page compares the ceremonies of initially opening a lodge as performed in a sample of different versions of ritual from various jurisdictions. The same general outline of security, duties, and opening proper as found in Three Distinct Knocks can still be seen, along with the additions mentioned by Preston, as well as a wide variation in practices from place to place much as Preston had observed in the 1770’s.

One list of the various elements involved in lodge opening ceremonies can be found in Coils Encyclopedia⁴, which enumerates seven basic steps. These seven steps are: 1) Proper clothing of the members; 2) Purging the lodge; 3) Tiling the lodge; 4) Rehearsal of duties; 5) Master’s request or admonition for peace and harmony; 6) Invoking the blessing of Deity; 7) Proclamation that the lodge is open. Coil’s list works reasonably well for US rituals, but comparing Coil’s list with the table on the next page reveals that the list of items is not absolute, and especially that the order of some items varies considerably. Nevertheless, I will use this list as a convenience in discussing the various procedures employed in opening rituals.

Step one – proper clothing of the members – only applies to US rituals, and not all of them. Iowa and Massachusetts exclude any statement regarding the clothing of brethren. Standard English and Irish work calls for an orderly procession into the lodge by the officers and sometimes even the brethren. Everyone is already clothed before entering, so an order for clothing the brethren is unnecessary.

Step two – purging the lodge of all but Masons – is done in all versions of ritual, but can be done either before or after the lodge is tyled – or both in the case of NJ. This duty is always the business of the wardens, often assisted by the deacons. There are several different methods employed in purging the lodge.

Personal avouchment by simple recognizance is one method of purging. This method is no more than the wardens, deacons, or sometimes the brethren recognizing everyone present and knowing them to be Masons. But signs, words, and sometimes both often are used. If words are employed, then the Deacons acting under instruction of the SW collect the word from the brethren and deliver it to the east. English ritual as well as California, Ohio, Washington State, and probably others prove the brethren by the simultaneous display of signs, which is much quicker and easier than taking a word from everyone present. Irish ritual uses both words and signs, although the word method is used only if the SW does not recognize everyone in lodge. Most US jurisdictions employ two methods of purging, typically recognizance and a word. Even though California and others use signs in purging, the Deacons still carry a word from W to E at a later point in the opening unrelated to purging. I will come back to this matter later.

Table 1 - Comparison of Procedures involved in Opening a Lodge (all MM, except for Ireland & England)

NJ Official ⁵	NY Official ⁶	MA King Solomon ⁷	IOWA King Solomon ⁸	CA King Solomon ⁹	Ireland Official ¹⁰	England (Emulation) ¹¹
Clothing Brethren	Clothing Brethren	WM orders MrsI to organize the lodge		Clothing Brethren, Jewels given to Officers	Procession into lodge	Procession into lodge
Secure doors					Secure doors if necessary	
Purging #1 (R U Satsf th al pr r MMs?)		Purging Lodge (r al prs MMs?)	Purging #1 – (prcd to sf ursl tt al pr r MMs.)	Purging #1 (Satsf yrslf that al pr r MM)		
			Purging #2 – SW takes Gp & wd from D’s, who take from brethren	Purging #2 SW calls br to order (all give dg) [no §]		
Tyle Lodge (T enters, gives duty, receives swrd. & retires) (JD inf. T)	Tyle Lodge (JD inf. T, then JD gives duties of T. T never enters)	Tyle Lodge – (SW instructs JD to inf T)	Tyle Lodge (JD inf. T, then JD gives duties of T. T never enters)	Tyle Lodge (JD exits, inf. T, returns, then JD gives duties of T.)	Tyle Lodge (WM asks JW, JW instructs IG who communicates w T by knocks only & reports)	Tyle Lodge (WM asks JW, JW instructs IG who communicates w T by knocks only & reports)
	Purging #1 – SW instr JD to circumambulate & verify that he knows everyone present is MM)				Purging #1 – SW summons D’s, rec word, D’s take word from all.	
Purging #2 (Dialogue leading up to D’s collecting word)	Purging #2 – SW summons D’s, rec word, D’s take word from all.				Purging #2 – JW orders br’s to stand to order (all hold p§, & complete when WM completes p§)	Purging – WM orders brn stand to order – all hold p§, then ‘cut’ with WM
Rehearsal of Duties (Dialogue leading up to how many compose a lodge)	Rehearsal of Duties (Dialogue: r u a MM? Wht fst indcd u t bcm a MM? Wht wr u md a MM? Hw many cmps?) Duties of 5 or 7 given	Rehearsal of Duties (Dialogue: r u a MM? Wht fst indcd u t bcm a MM? Wht wr u md a MM? Hw many cmps?) Duties of 9 given (Stwd)	Rehearsal of Duties (Dialogue: r u a MM? Wht fst indcd u t bcm a MM? Wht wr u md a MM? Hw many cmps?) Duties of 3 given	Rehearsal of Duties (Dialogue: r u a MM? Wht fst indcd u t bcm a MM? Wht wr u md a MM? Hw many cmps?) Duties of 3 given	Rehearsal of Duties – no dialogue preceding. Director of Ceremonies gives WM’s duties.	Rehearsal of Dut ies – no dialogue preceding. All dialogue with W’s
				Dialogue leading to D’s bringing subs word & sign from SW to WM (Hav u evr trvld? Whence & whtr? Wht in srch of?)		
					Lodge declared open	Lodge declared open
Admonition of peace and harmony (repeat in full by SW only)	Admonition of peace and harmony (repeat in full by SW & JW – JW raises lodge)	WM orders lodge opened, but no admonition - (repeat in full by SW only)	Admonition of peace and harmony (repeat in full by SW & JW – JW raises lodge)	Admonition of peace and harmony (repeat in full by SW & JW)	Admonition of peace and harmony (during which DC arranges HB, S&C, assisted by D’s)	Admonition of peace and harmony (incl invocation of blessing from deity)
		MrsI arranges HB, S&C			Prayer	IPM only says ‘SMIB’
Giving Signs	Giving Signs			Giving Signs		
Giving raps (1,1,1 ; 2,2,2 ; 2-1,2-1,2-1)	Giving raps (2-1, 2-1, 2,1)	Give raps (1, 1, 1 repeated 3 times)	Give raps (3, 3, 3)	Give raps (1, 1, 1 repeated 3 times)	Knocks given by WM, SW, JW, IG (on door) & returned by T outside dr.	Knocks given by WM, SW, JW, IG (on door) & returned by T outside dr.
Lodge declared open						
Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer	Prayer		
SD attends to HB, S&C, then lights	SD attends to lights, then HB, S&C			SD attends to lights, then HB, S&C (no order fr E)	Brethren stand to order & complete when WM ack.	IPM attends to HB, S&C on WM’s pedestal.
	Lodge declared open	Lodge declared open	Lodge declared open	Lodge declared open		
JD Informs Tyler	JD Informs Tyler	JD Informs Tyler	JD Informs Tyler while SD attends to altar	JD exits, & informs Tyler		JD attends to tracing boards

Step three – tiling the lodge – despite its basic simplicity, also evidences variation in procedure. The NJ procedure of having the tyler enter the lodge is not typical. In most US rituals the JD communicates with the tyler through an open door, then recites the tyler’s duties after lodge is tyled and the WM asks “How are we tyled?” or words to that effect. In California, the JD exits the lodge and communicates with the tyler outside of the hearing of the lodge. Likewise in England and Ireland, the tyler does not enter the lodge, but neither is the door opened. Communication with the tyler is performed by way of knocks on the door with a different pattern of knocks for each degree. The knocks are given by the WM and repeated in order by the SW, JW, Inner Guard (on the door) and answered by the Tyler (also on the door).

Step four – rehearsal of duties – also exhibits considerable variation. In all US jurisdictions the rehearsal of officers’ duties is introduced by a dialogue between the WM and SW that ultimately leads up to the number that compose a lodge, and who they are. On a MM degree opening, some US jurisdictions recite only 3 officer’s duties. These jurisdictions typically recite 5 on a FC opening, and all 7 on an EA opening. New York officially has the option of doing either 5 or 7 and only opens on the MM degree. On all degrees Massachusetts enumerates nine officers’ duties including the Stewards along with the usual seven. England and Ireland do not preface the rehearsal of duties with a dialogue, but they do include officers peculiar to their jurisdictions, most notably the Inner Guard (IG) who performs the door guarding functions usually performed by the JD in US lodges. The descriptions of officers’ duties are similar across all jurisdictions, except of course where there are different officers. The reasons given for the placement of WM, SW & JW are also in close agreement across all jurisdictions following the form given by Pritchard in 1730, although there are differences in the description of their duties.

The exact order, and in fact occurrence of the final three steps composing the opening proper is not clear and consistent across all versions of opening ritual. In addition, there are several generally followed practices not mentioned by Coils, such as the giving of signs, the giving of raps, the arrangement of the HB, S&C, and the display of tracing boards. These items also vary in their occurrence in the final part of the opening ceremonies, and can be collectively described as the display of esoteric symbols.

Step five – what Coil’s calls the admonition for peace and harmony – is actually two separate items in one declaration. It typically comes immediately after the rehearsal of duties and in wording follows the same general form as given in TDK of 1760. It is the traditional opening statement consisting of a proclamation that the lodge is open followed by the admonition to peace and harmony or for gentlemanly behavior. It is typically communicated to the SW, who passes it to the JW, who then informs the brethren. In some rituals the statement is repeated in full by both wardens, while in others only the SW repeats it in full. The exact wording of the declaration and admonition can vary considerably. Massachusetts ritual appears to have only the declaration that the lodge is open, omitting the admonition altogether.

Step six – the invocation of the blessing of deity, in other words, the opening prayer – does not have a settled place with respect either to the admonition or to the final declaration that the lodge is opened. Most US jurisdictions have the prayer between the admonition and the declaration (following Coils order), but in NJ, the prayer follows the final declaration that the lodge is opened. In England the invocation of the blessing of deity is part of the WM's admonition for peace and harmony, and is followed by the phrase 'so mote it be.' The wording of the prayer also varies from place to place.

Step seven – the declaration that the lodge is opened – seems to be a peculiarity of US rituals. It also strikes me as a curiosity since step five, the ancient formula for opening and admonition, contains wording that makes it sound as if the lodge is officially open at that point. Indeed, English and Irish rituals do not use this final declaration that the lodge is open, relying entirely on the step five statement. It is an interesting puzzle to me that many opening rituals should contain two declarations that the lodge is open.

The display of esoteric symbolism is not mentioned in Coils, but is universal among opening rituals. The giving of signs as a separate step is widely practiced in the US, but is not in England or Ireland since signs already are given as part of the purging in those rituals. When done as a separate procedure, the giving of signs is before the raps or knocks, but after the admonition. In some places all signs up to and including the signs of the degree on which the lodge is being opened are given, while in others, only the signs of that degree are given. The giving of raps or knocks is a universal practice although the manner of giving raps or knocks varies widely by jurisdiction. This typically comes before the prayer in the US, but is after the prayer in England and Ireland.

Finally, there is the proper display of the HB, S&C. In terms of timing, this can occur as early as the admonition for peace and harmony (Ireland) or as the last item in the opening, at the same time that the JD informs the T that the lodge is open (Iowa). In most US jurisdictions, this is done by the SD, but can also be done by the Marshal (Mass.), the Director of Ceremonies (Ireland – assisted by both Deacons) or the Immediate Past Master (IPM) or the WM himself (England). In English lodges, there is no altar. The HB, S&C are displayed on the WM's pedestal. Thus it is more convenient for the IPM, who sits to the WM's left in the E or the WM himself to attend to the HB, S&C while the SD attends to the tracing board – an item not typically found in US lodges.

While on the topic of English opening ritual, it is important to mention that all official openings in English lodges are done on the EA degree, and all business is transacted on the EA degree. Lodge is raised to FC and then to MM only for the purposes of degree work on those degrees. The Irish and English opening ceremonies on the preceding table are all EA openings. The ceremonies of raising an English lodge to a higher degree are slightly more complicated than the simple changeovers performed in US lodges to bring a lodge from MM down to FC or EA. They resemble the EA opening except that the rehearsal of officers' duties is not repeated. Instead there is dialogue to demonstrate that the JW (not the SW) is indeed a FC or MM and therefore will recognize the signs given by the brethren to prove themselves FCs or MMs during the purging.

Not only are the order and procedures of the opening different among the various forms of ritual, even the wording will vary considerably. Nearly every line in each jurisdiction's opening ritual has a variant in another jurisdiction. In the interests of brevity, I will give a single example, namely the response to the question "where were you made a MM?"

- In a regular and duly constituted lodge of Free and Accepted Masons
- In a lodge of such
- In a true and perfect lodge of MMs
- In a just and lawfully constituted lodge of MMs
- Within the body of just and legally constituted lodge of MMs

These are differences without any substantive distinctions. They all amount to the same thing so far as their use and import are concerned. But the different varieties of phrasing in all of the ceremonies gives each individual ritual its own particular flavor and emphasis while still conveying the universal meaning of Masonry.

New Jersey's opening ritual has some unique features compared to the other openings I have been able to study. As previously mentioned, we have the Tyler enter the lodge and recite his own duties. But we also have a distinctive use for a particular piece of dialogue concerning the direction and purpose of Masonic travel. Nearly all opening ceremonies contain some additional dialogue appropriate to the degree about to be opened beyond the officers' duties dialogue. A sample of these dialogues for MM degree openings is given in tables 2 and 3 on the following pages.

Notice the MM opening dialogues usually are quite brief, and compare closely across US jurisdictions with the exception of NJ. Our dialogue is a good deal longer than that in most US openings due to the inclusion of the traveling questions. Most dialogues are used as the lead in to the traditional officer's duties dialogue. But in New Jersey, as in England (see table three), we use a dialogue to establish that the warden responsible for purging the lodge knows the proof which must be given for the purging. This and the tiling procedure appear to be unique characteristics of NJ's opening compared to other US forms of Masonic ritual.

This particular dialogue concerning Masonic travel is not unique to NJ's opening, however. It also is found in the MM degree opening rituals of California, Washington, and Ohio, but at entirely different point in the proceedings. In Ohio, this dialogue is performed immediately after the traditional opening statement and admonition (Coil's step five) as a preliminary to passing the substitute from W to E. The word is passed through two parallel lines of brothers arranged along the north and south of the room. In California, this dialogue is performed immediately after the officer's duties dialogue and before the traditional opening statement and admonition, also as a preliminary to passing the substitute, only here it is sent through the deacons directly from W to E. In all cases, this dialogue is a preliminary to passing a word. It is even used as such in English Emulation ritual, as can be seen on table three. But NJ's use is distinctly a purging given its placement before the officers' duties dialogue and that the pass, not the substitute, is given.

Table 2 - Dialogues used in MM Openings

New Jersey	Ohio¹²	Massachusetts	Iowa	California	New Brunswick (Can.)¹³
(tyles lodge)	(tyles lodge)	(tyles lodge)	(tyles lodge)	(tyles lodge)	(tyles lodge)
It is wl. (JD tks st.) Br S W - WM					
R u a M - I am	** B S W, a' y a MM - I a, W	Br SW, r u a MM - I am	* Br SW, r u a MM - I am	** Br SW, r u a MM - § I a	Br SW a y a MM? - I a
Wt mks u a M - My obs		Wt mks u a MM - M ob			W m y a MM? - M o
Wt fst indcd u t becm a MM - Tt I mt trv @ rec wgs as sch	Wht ind y t bec a MM - Tt I mt rec Ms wgs, tby bng bet enbl to sup m-s @ f, @ con t+ re % wr ds MM, thr wds a orps	Wt indcd u t bcm sch T obt + scs % a MM tt I mt trv i frm cnts; wk @ rc ms pa, + btr t enbl m t spt msl @ fml, @ cntrb mr lblrl t+ rlf % a dsts br MM, hs wd @ orps	Wt indc u t bcm aMM - In ord tt I mt rc ms wgs, @ b + btr en t spt msl @ fm, @ cnt t+ rlf % pr dst MMs, thr wd @ or	Wt indc u t bcm a MM - Tt I mt tr i fr cn, wk @ rcv MMs wgs, + btr ten m t spt msl @ fml, aid @ ast a dst wr br MM, hs wd @ ors	W i y t b a MM? - T o t S e o a MM t I m t i f C s w a r M s w s t b t e m t s m a f a t c m l t t o a d w b r MM, h w a O s
Hv u ev trv - I hv					
Whnc @ wthr - Fm E t W, @ fm W t E					
Wt wr u I srh % - Lt @ tt wch ws lst					
Wt ws lst - Th sc w % MM					
Dd u fd it - I dd nt, bt fnd a sbt					
R u nw i ps % + sb I a W sr					
Bng i ps % + sub nttls u t gv + pw % MM t al sch as r auth t rc i. *					
(Word passed – purging #2)					
Br S W - WM					
Whr wr u md a MM - In a rg @ dl cns :: % F @ A Ms	Wh wr y md a MM I a l :: % s	Whr wr u md a MM - In a tru @ pfc :: % MMs	Whr wr u md a MM - In a js @ lfl cns :: % MMs	Whr wr u md a MM - Wthn + bd % a js @ lgl cns :: % MMs	W w y m a MM? - I a T a P L o MMs
Hw mny cmps sch a :: - Th or mr	H mn cmp a :: % MM - Th o m	Hw mn cmps sch a :: - Th, fv, sv, nn or mr	Wt nm fnl cns s :: % MMs - Th o mr	Hw mn cm sch a :: Th o mr, W	H m c s a L? - 3 5 7 9 11 or mr
Whn cmps % sv, % whm ds i cns - + WM, S @ J Ws, Trs, Sec, S @ J Ds	W o th, % whm ds i c - T WM, S @ J W	Whn cmpsd % nn, % whm ds it cnst - WM, S @ J Ws, Tr, Sec, S @ J Ds, S @ J Sts	Wn cm % onl thr, wh wr th - Th WM, SW @ JW	Whn bt thr, % whm ds i cns - Of + MM, + S @ J Ws	W c o l l o w d i c? - T W M, S a J Ws, T, S, S a J Ds, S a J Ss, D o Cs a I G
+ J ds plc i + ::	T J W s	Th Sts st i + :: - At+rt @ lf % + J W i + S	Wh I + J Ws stn I + :: - In + S	Th J Ws st - In + S, W	Y d B r I G?

Table 3 - Dialogue excerpts from English “Emulation” MM Opening (Raising)

English Emulation MM Dialogue	
From Opening Ritual	From Closing Ritual
<p>Bro. J. W., are you a M. Mason? - I am, W. M., try me and prove me.</p>	<p><i>Bro. J. W., whence come you?</i> - <i>The W., whither we have been in search of the genuine Ss. of a M. M.</i></p>
<p>By what instruments in Architecture will you be proved? - The S. and Cs.</p>	<p><i>Bro. S. W., have you found them?</i> - <i>We have not, W. M., but we bring with us certain substituted Ss., which we are anxious to impart for your approbation.</i></p>
<p><i>Being yourself acquainted with the proper method, you will prove the Brethren M. Masons by Sns., and demonstrate that proof to me by copying their example. (Done)</i></p>	<p>(Ws. Demonstrate in center of lodge, JW returns to his station, SW faces WM and says) W. M. condescend to receive from me the substituted Ss. of a M. M.</p>
<p><i>Bro. J. W., whence come you?</i> - <i>The E.</i></p>	
<p><i>Bro S. W., whither directing your course?</i> - <i>The W.</i></p>	
<p><i>(to JW) What inducement have you to leave the E. and go to the W.?</i> <i>To seek for that which was lost, which, by your instruction and our own industry, we hope to find.</i></p>	
<p><i>(to SW) What is that which was lost?</i> - <i>The genuine secrets of a M. Mason.</i></p>	
<p>(to JW) How came they lost? - By the untimely death of our M., H. A.</p>	
<p>(to SW) Where do you hope to find them? - With the C.</p>	
<p>(to JW) What is a C.? - A point within a circle, from which every part of the circumference is equidistant.</p>	
<p>(to SW) Why with the C.? - That being a point from which a M. Mason cannot err.</p>	

Not all rituals use this traveling dialogue in their openings, however. Apart from New Jersey, I only have found it in Ohio, California, Washington State and English Emulation working. There may be others as well. Interestingly enough, these same versions of the ritual also employ signs rather than words in their purging, and either demonstrate or pass the substitute word as a separate part of the MM opening unrelated to purging. This particular assemblage of features is striking enough in its differences from the more usual run of opening ceremonies found in the US that I am tempted to consider them as a distinct family of opening rituals. At the very least they preserve aspects of a different ritual tradition than do most other US versions of ritual. It may well be that New Jersey's use of the traveling dialogue and its unique placement in the order of the opening ceremonies represents a blend of two traditions of ritual represented by England, Ohio, and the West Coast on the one hand, and the rest of the US on the other hand. Except for the use and placement of this dialogue, New Jersey's opening much more closely resembles the typical US form of opening.

One final curiosity concerning New Jersey's opening is why the opening ritual contains the traveling dialogue in the first place since there is no real reference to it anywhere else in our ritual. True, during the degree ceremonies the candidate is "re-conducted to the west whence he came". But if he comes from the west, then why does our opening dialogue state that we travel from east to west and then west to east? The answer to this little puzzle is to be found in a comparison with other rituals which preserve some degree dialogues that we no longer use in NJ.

In many jurisdictions when the procession in the first section of the MM degree reaches the east and the usual questions are asked, there is an additional dialogue between the WM and the candidate's chief escort. In this dialogue the WM asks where the candidate is traveling and what he hopes to find. The reply given for the candidate is from west to east, in search of the secrets of a MM, and might also include a question on why he is in search of these, and may conclude with a promise of assistance from the WM. Evidently the traveling dialogue in the opening ceremonies makes reference to this part of the degree work. The direction of travel, however, is not uniform. In the US, travel is from west to east. In English ritual (see table three) travel is from east to west, and then returning. Interestingly enough our traveling dialogue follows the English directions of travel, which again could represent a blend of traditions.

So in conclusion, I would summarize my findings as follows. Masonic lodge opening ceremonies have remained remarkably stable in their general form for as far back as they can be traced, at least to the mid 1700's. Within this general uniformity, however, several variants have developed in the order and form of the procedures and especially in the wording of the ceremonies. These variants are combined in different ways in the various versions of the ritual to produce the rich diversity of flavors of Masonic ritual that we observe today. Our own ritual in New Jersey shares in this diversity, resembling one or another rituals in various places, and containing some unique characteristics of its own. But who is to say which version of ritual is right? It is only in their embellishments made over the years that rituals vary. Their simple commonalities, including the essence of their meaning, are the truly ancient and original material that is truly "right".

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- ³ William Preston, “Illustrations of Masonry”, 1792 edition. Reproduction published by Kessinger Publishing, ISBN 0-7661-0064-2. Book III, Section II, page 31.
- ⁴ *Coil’s Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, Macoy Publishing, 1996, ISBN 0-88053-054-5, p. 457, entry under “Open”
- ⁵ Ritual Cipher, The Grand Lodge of the Most Ancient and Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons for the State of New Jersey. 2000. p. 1-10
- ⁶ Grand Lodge of New York, Gary A. Henningson Grand Secretary, *The Standard Work and Lectures of Ancient Craft Masonry*, revised 2001, pages 1-14.
- ⁷ King Solomon and his Followers #34, Mass. Allen Publishing, 1921. p 148-155
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- ⁹ King Solomon and His Followers, #38, CAL, Allen Publishing, 1947, p 119-124
- ¹⁰ Ancient Craft Masonry Rituals and Ceremonial (Ireland) , p 2-10
- ¹¹ The Perfect Ceremonies of Craft Masonry, The Unions Emulation Lodge of Improvement for M.Ms, Privately printed for A. Lewis, London, 1920. p 1-5
- ¹² King Solomon and His Followers #5, Ohio, Allen Publishing, 1921. p 60-64
- ¹³ The Ceremonies of Craft Masonry, Authorized by The Grand Lodge of New Brunswick, 1944 (copy #3781) p 127-130

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