



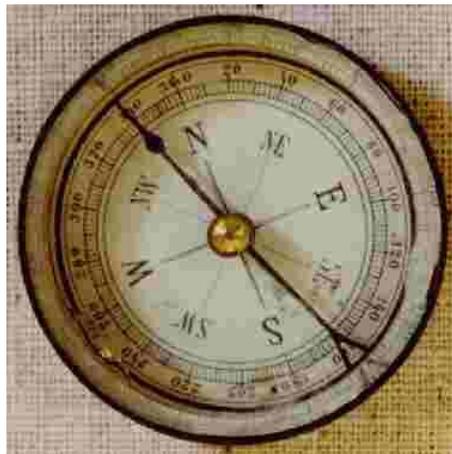
# THE COMPASSES

*“From the Square to the Compasses”*

William Miklos, May 23, 2010



- *Practical* DEFINITION OF THE TERM COMPASS
- In old English, the word was a Verb: to compass. Its several meanings included “to measure a distance.”
- In Latin, it translates as “to measure a distance by pacing it out.”
- Today, it is a noun and there is no know reason for the transformation. Current usage: “to include” or “pace out.” This verb loss of direction is puzzling...
- Another approach would be to describe the compass as a circle because all the steps in making it were “together” or of the same distance from a center.



- Recognized as a “ship’s compass” or a navigation device used since The Qin Dynasty (221-260 B.C.) In addition, it is one of the world’s oldest devices still in use.
- Magnetic compasses of some kind have been in use in the Mediterranean from at least the early at the 12<sup>th</sup> century and, yet, very little is known about these early compasses.
- Development created more use and better accuracy. The first recorded person to use the compass in navigation was Zheng He (1371-1435) from the Yunnan province of China who made at least 7-ocean voyages between the years 1405 and 1433. This was a full sixty years prior to the discovery of the New World by Columbus.
- The compass allows ships to maintain a steady and navigable course. This is accomplished by taking bearings of visible objects with a compass. This allows the navigator to fix his position on any charts they may have.

- Usually a compass is made of metal and consists of two parts connected by a hinge. The radius of a circle can be adjusted by changing the angle of the hinge.
- A real, pair of compasses is needed in order to draw visible illustrations.
- Architects were taught the use of the compasses in order to create the necessary mathematics or order of a particular edifice.
- Compass and straightedge are utilized to illustrate the basic principles of *plane geometry*. These are the essential building blocks of all edifices, large or small. This basic tool easily would have been one of the most essential tools used by our operative brethren. The “secret” of its use most likely was closely guarded and “taught” as a man progressed from apprentice to master mason.
- However, why limit the use of compasses to buildings? They are also useful for measuring distances on a map (using two spikes). The name of this instrument is “dividing compass.”

- Therefore, the distance between two points can be accurately measured.
- “By this science the architects enabled to construct his plans and execute his designs...the geographer to give us the dimensions of the world and all things therein contained...By it also the astronomer is enabled to make his observations and fix the duration of times and seasons, years and cycles. “

## SPECULATIVE COMPASSES

- Modern Freemasonry has dropped the old usage of the word. Compass is just that. Compasses is no longer a customary description of the particular instrument (an example is how Chris Hodapp uses the simple word to describe the meaning of the compass in his work, Freemasonry for Dummies, page 139).
- So, what is in a word or, for that matter, the spelling of that word?

- Would the spelling of the word Compasses differentiate between the uses at sea and in speculative masonry?

OR

- Euclid was the first to demonstrate a new principle in his second proposition (Book I of Elements). He set forth the idea that a compass can be used to proof an abstract creator of perfect circles. The “collapsing compass” is a circle having been drawn from a given point with a given radius. It disappears and cannot just simply be moved to another point and used to draw yet another circle of equal radius (unlike our real compasses). Such a collapsing compass can be used to transfer distances, providing that said compass could do anything a real compass could.
- In the May-June 2010 issues of Scottish Rite Journal of Freemasonry Southern Jurisdiction, we find an interesting article.
- That article written by Robert G. Davis 33°, G.C. states that he had moved from the “square to the compasses.” This particular

event occurred while he was part of a Scottish Rite class all of whom were assembled to partake in the mysteries of the Scottish Rite. He made note that “cast” were using the “*old ritual*” at the time. Part of the Senior Warden’s ritualistic duties in the 4° ceremony are to say, “I have passed from the square to the compasses.” The Venerable Master then *removes the square from the candidate* saying, “Walk uprightly and turn not aside into the inviting paths of error. You now have passed from the square to the compasses; the Geometrician passes from the straight lines and angles by which he measures the surface of the earth, to the great curves and circles by which he calculates the movements of the stars. Begin now to climb the skies of spiritual knowledge, for there are Truth and the Lost Word is found.”

- In craft Masonry, we find that the 3° ceremony has a similar saying in that the candidate is placed on notice that the compasses is above the square. In fact , his attention is called to both square and compasses in all three degrees as the compasses is moved from a lesser light position to one of more light. Is that not what the Worshipful Master so states?

- So what is it about the compasses that makes it so special and different from the square?
- Why is the passage “from the square to the compasses” so important?
- Referring back to Mr. Davis’ article, he notes, “That the presiding officer had encouraged the candidate to soar from his own earthy preoccupations toward the higher spheres of spiritual knowledge.”
- Or, put another way, “The compasses allows us to shed light on our own duty, that duty we owe to ourselves to leave the profane world we know, to look inside ourselves and discover that previously undiscovered country, or our own “Holy of Holies” that of our inner soul! This would allow us all to lead a moral life, that imperative duty of circumscribing our passions and keeping our desires in due bounds”.
- How is this concept manifested in craft masonry? Simply put, when the candidate is admitted on the points of the extended compasses in the 3° he is told that there are

dual meanings, one of which represents the three basic tenants of Freemasonry, that of Brotherly Love, Relief, Truth, and, that these are contained in the points of an extended compasses!

- It has been noted that in ancient China the square and compasses are almost always together. The sixth book of the philosophy of Mencius, in China notes the following words; “A Master Mason, in teaching his apprentices, makes use of the Compass and the Square. Ye who are engaged in the pursuit of wisdom must also make use of the Compasses and Square.” Please note the following: THE COMPASS IS BEFORE THE SQUARE AS ALL MASTER MASONS SHOULD KNOW.
- The “Book of History,” a Chinese classic dating almost two thousand years ago, notes that we find the compasses employed without the Square: “Ye officer of the Government, apply the Compasses.”
- By what other means has the compasses made manifest to our brethren?

- All of our ceremonies allude to receiving further light in Masonry as the Compasses begins one leg at a time to rest upon the square. Eventually, the full compasses is resting on the square and the candidate is informed that he is has “received all the light that can be conferred upon him.”
  
- In further study of our ceremonies we notice that the honoree of Grand Honors is escorted into the lodge by the deacons who create compasses over their head by their interlocking rods. That is also true when the flag of our nation is presented. Is this intended as a form of light or illumination? I believe so, as did William Preston when he stated, “Why are all the compasses restricted to the Grand Master?” (William Preston and his Work PP 198). Does this statement imply the Grand Master, by virtue of his many years in the craft, achieve some form of greater enlightenment?
  
- Does the compasses represent light then?
  
- It has been noted that craft lodges are Oblong Squares and built upon the square, “representing the earth and over it the arches

the sky, which is a circle. Therefore, both the earth and Heavens are brought together in the lodge, defined as the earth where man goes forth to his labor and the heaven to which he aspires. Simply stated, the light of Revelation and the Law of Nature are like the two points of a compasses within which our life is set under a canopy of the Sun and Stars.”  
(Masonic Service Assoc. of North America short talk bulletin 1924).

- In the first degree, the compasses are resting below the square, symbolically noting that the Entered Apprentice is a man who is crude, profane and ruled by his natural state. As a Fellowcraft, he learns about the light and is given the first firm steps toward enlightenment, as he has been taught the use of the square, “to square his actions.” Is that not what the Senior Warden states in the opening ceremony of the Fellowcraft degree?
- Can we say that a perfect square can only be accomplished by use of the compasses because it is a figure that can only be drawn within a circle or about a circle?

- Finally, the new Master Mason “receives all the light.” What does that really mean? Both points of the compasses are now resting above the square and this symbol now becomes the most recognized symbol in the world. Again, we ask, what does it mean?
- If the Master Mason “is properly instructed he will rest one point in the innermost center of his being and with the other draw a circle beyond which he will not go, until he is ready and able to go further.” (Short Talk Bulletin May 1924) “Against the littleness of his knowledge he will set the depth of his desire to know against the brevity of his earthly life the reach of his spiritual hope.” This is how the Master Mason will set his life, within the bounds of the extended compasses.
- It is the Compasses which help the Master Mason maintain his balance in obedience to the Greek Maximum, “Think as a mortal,” that is, remember the limits of human thought.
- An old mystic once espoused, “God is a circle whose center is everywhere and its circumference nowhere.”

➤ TO KEEP OUR PASSIONS IN DUE BOUNDS  
TOWARDS ALL MANKIND.....

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