



THE HOUSTON VALLEY HERALD

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION

FEBRUARY 24, 2022

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1

New “Journey Passport” Gets Trial Run in The Houston Valley

By ADAM B. OLIVIER 32°
Editor-in-Chief



Photo By: Brother Jason Rees 32° KCCH.

A new “Journey Passport” program was started to encourage members of the Houston Valley to take part in a variety of things that the Scottish Rite has to offer.

The passport includes thirty-three challenges ranging from attending certain Houston Valley events, being the top line signer on a Scottish Rite petition, and travelling to the House of The Temple in Washington D.C. After a passport holder finishes a task he must obtain the signature of a Master Mason to serve as proof of completion. Participating brothers earn a custom-made coin that is unique to the “Journey Passport” program for every six challenges they complete, and then one final coin for their thirty-third challenge.



One of the coins that can be earned, courtesy of Brother Jason Rees 32° KCCH.

“We are the test-valley for Texas,” said Brother Jason Rees 32° KCCH. “Other valleys in the Orient of Texas may adopt the passport if it is successful here. The passport program is designed to take you throughout the Valley of Houston, Orient of Texas, the Southern Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite, and ending at the House of the Temple.”

A version of this passport program was already underway at the Valley of Nashville in Tennessee. Brother Rees contacted the Valley of Nashville and received permission to use the program, which he said was altered to better fit the needs of Scottish Rite Masons in the Orient of Texas and the Houston Valley.

Any Houston Valley Scottish Rite Mason can obtain a passport from Brother Rees at stated meetings or at other Houston Valley events. All new Houston Valley members will receive the passport, while current members may purchase one for twenty dollars.



Image in *Herforder Rechtsbuch* showing “Vehmic Court” assembled to judge.

Historical Origins of the 21st Degree “Prussian Knight”

By ADAM B. OLIVIER 32°
Editor-in-Chief

Many of the stories or references made in the degrees in the Southern Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite could certainly come off as fanciful or even bizarre to members of the general public. While stories from Blue Lodge Masonry and the York Rite typically have biblical or Abrahamic origins, some of the Scottish Rite degrees offer a philosophic view of geometry or moral lessons on how a man should live his life, or how can find stability. While each of the degrees have unique and interesting qualities that stand on their own, only a handful compare to the uniqueness of the 21st Degree, “Noachite, or Prussian Knight.”

Before it was reformed by Albert Pike, the 21st degree originally focused on the building of the Tower of Babel from the Book of Genesis. Now, only a couple of references to this original version exist in the current ritual (including the word “Noachite” in the title). The current version of the 21st degree is not based on some secret organization guarding King Solomon’s temple in the heart of Jerusalem, or some philosophical order from the days of yore. It’s based on the old Vehmic Courts, or “Vehmgericht”, of the Holy Roman Empire (Germany).

The Holy Roman Empire was a complicated amalgamation of bishoprics, principalities, provinces, states, and monastic orders like the Order of St. John (today the Sovereign Military Order of Malta) and the Teutonic Knights which combined to make a unique confederation of German territories. One of the semi-standardized

mechanisms used to govern the medieval empire was the "Landgericht" which was essentially a local court. These courts came to be known as "Free Courts" in Westphalia. Even though they lost favor throughout most of the rest of the empire, they were retained in Westphalia and some of them turned into the Vehmic Courts we hear about in the 21st degree.

NOACHITE, OR PRUSSIAN KNIGHT
 TWENTY-FIRST DEGREE



Regalia of 21st degree in *A Bridge to Light* by Most Worshipful Rex R. Hutchens 33°, Grand Cross, KYGCH.

These courts were made up of free men, typically nobles or members of the elite of society, and gathered under the cover of darkness at night, normally in the ancient forests of Westphalia. While a legitimate secret order had been created, the Vehmic Courts did function as actual courts and were both respected and feared by the populace. The courts would issue warnings, summons, and regularly carried out executions after the freemen of the court heard a case. Ignoring a warning or summons could incur death for a suspect, and an equally worse fate would find them if they were found guilty.

There are some conflicting accounts of exactly how the courts functioned and executed the guilty, but I personally enjoy what has become popularized in at least the English speaking world:

Imagine a dark, cool forest in Westphalia almost a thousand years ago. The careful foot steps of men can be heard as they assemble next to an ancient tree that had been there since the days of the pagan Goths. Among the judges are a few noblemen, a bishop, and a respected local leader who serves as chairman. Under the light of the full Moon the men sit amongst the trees and wait for their suspect to arrive. While the more traditional courts of the land dealt with mundane matters, the Vehmic Court judges cases involving witchcraft, blasphemy, or the settlement of unique disputes. Regardless, after hearing the man's case and finding him guilty, he is sentenced to death by the court. The sentence is carried out immediately. To mark that execution as that of the Vehmic Court and not some bandits or vigilantes, the dead corpse is hung from a tree and a sword is stuck into the ground before him.

That "romantic" view of how this secret order operated may not be entirely true, or only true among some specific courts, but it nevertheless has been influential enough to make it into one of our degrees to help teach lessons on characteristics of a good man.

The Vehmic Courts began some time in the Dark Ages and saw its final end some time in the 1800s when the last judge is said to have died after the courts themselves were outlawed.

Photos From February Reunion



Thirty-one candidates.



30th Degree team.



31st Degree team.

Contributing to The Houston Valley Herald

The *Herald* is a new monthly newsletter for the Houston Valley of the Texas Orient of the Southern Jurisdiction of The Scottish Rite. Right now we are looking for contributors to our publication so that we can consider expanding to more pages in the future. If you have information, pictures, notes, notices, announcements, updates, or if you are interested in becoming a writer or proofreader, please email Brother Adam B. Olivier at:

adamolivier.cs@gmail.com