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# TO LIGHT!



**Bringing Masonic Education To Light**

A Publication of the Grand Lodge AF & AM of Nebraska

## SALEM TOWN

When during the latter half of the Eighteenth Century in England it became a universal and accepted custom for Lodges to meet to listen to lectures and courses of lectures, they were able to choose from Cambridge and Oxford Universities, from the Royal Society, from eminent men visiting from abroad; and they could also draw from a class, never before or afterwards duplicated in any other country, of scholars who lived on their farms or estates in the country, among whom were the most learned scientists, scholars, and antiquarians anywhere in the world at that time. In America, Lodges followed the same plan, but here, there were no universities (Harvard and Yale were colleges), very few colleges, no high schools, and the men of parts who lived in the country had unfortunately grown up with a Yankee dislike for scholarship and the arts. The one and only learned profession (in those senses) was the ministry, therefore if a young man yearned to become an orator, a scholar, a leader, an educator he went into the pulpit, for which reason it was that the first colleges were denominational schools, and their presidents were clergymen as a matter of course.

Thus it befell that instead of listening to orations American Lodges listened to Masonic sermons; where a Mason's English compeer listened to lectures he listened to homilies. The Master's Station became a second pulpit; men went to Grand Lodge Communications as much to hear great Masonic preachers as to transact Craft business. But it would not do to belittle that pulpit oratory by underlining the word pulpit only; it was also "*oratory*"; the practitioners of it were among America's greatest men and it was they who founded and perfected so early in this land the art which gave us Daniel Webster and Henry Clay. And it was because their leadership was so sound that it lasted so long, even until these late years [1940's]; many men can still recall when the large metropolitan dailies published in full every Monday the sermons of such men as Swing, Brooks, Beecher, Talmage, Bushnell, and Robert Collyer.

The model and symbol of those preachers who were so devoted to Freemasonry that we may describe them as "Masonic preachers," and whose influence had so much power to shape the young Fraternity, was the Rev. Salem Town, a native of Massachusetts (born in 1779), who moved to New York, where he became Principal of an Academy (College President), a man of classical and thorough education, a Master of Arts and a Doctor of Laws, who was for many years Grand Chaplain of the Grand Lodge and the Grand Chapter and Prelate of the Grand Commandery. Like his senior in his calling, Thaddeus Mason Harris (also a native of Massachusetts), who had also been a great Masonic preacher, Town published a book, entitled A System of Speculative Masonry, an American counterpart of William Hutchinson's Spirit of Masonry. If a man desires to gain an insight into the inner springs and movements of American Masonry in the first half of the Nineteenth century he can find it in Town's book, and in Harris' Masonic Discourses.

From Famous Masons and Masonic Presidents by H.L. Haywood