

Book Review

By Bro. Robert Blackburn, P.M.



2012

Robert E. Burt,
A Pennsylvania
Masonic Handbook:
The Personal Ahiman Rezon (Createspace
2011, \$ 9.95 USD)

A PENNSYLVANIA MASONIC HANDBOOK:

THE PERSONAL AHIMAN REZON

As travelling Masons soon learn, there is no single Masonic ritual - nor is there even uniformity in the Craft's symbolism. This varied tapestry can be a source of immense interest and inspiration for the avid Mason. It can also be quite confusing, for the lesser informed, when a lodge is structured differently or familiar ritual elements are altered or absent.

A Pennsylvania Masonic Handbook, as its title suggests, presents Masonic ritual and symbolism as it is worked within this Masonic jurisdiction. Masons are known to have been active in Pennsylvania from at least 1731. Prior to the American Revolution, there were both 'Modern' and 'Ancient' lodges operating within the colony. When the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania was ultimately formed in 1785, however, only Ancient lodges remained. This left an indelible impression of Pennsylvania Masonry and its ritual and structure is, indeed, quite different from that practiced in other U.S. jurisdictions.

Burt's book is designed primarily for the newly admitted Pennsylvania brother. It resembles in tone and substance Allen E. Robert's more general *The Craft and its Symbols*. The book moves through the basic concepts with which new Masons should be familiar: an overview of Masonic history; the layout and structure of the lodge; the substance of the three Craft degree; Freemasonry in Pennsylvania; appendant bodies. Burt's style is casual, much

as if he were instructing a junior member of his lodge. It is also sprinkled with various 'fun facts' that new members might find interesting.

A Pennsylvania Masonic Handbook, no doubt, will have limited appeal for a general readership. However, for those interested in Masonic ritual and at a distance from Pennsylvania, there is some very interesting and useful information contained within this book. Of particular note, and at variance with much of Masonry practiced in the U.S., is the lodge's officer structure, consisting of the Worshipful Master, Wardens, Treasurer, Secretary, Deacons, Chaplain and Tiler and three unique

chairs consisting of the Pursuivant and Senior and Junior Masters of Ceremony who are positioned in front of the Senior Warden. Sadly absent is a more complete discussion of the symbolism and ritual elements employed in Pennsylvania. Burt alludes to the brevity, simplicity, and uniqueness of his jurisdiction's ritual, but fails satisfactorily to develop this topic. Instead, the reader is presented with an overview of Pennsylvania work that largely parallels that found throughout regular Masonry. Still, for Masons who have not had the pleasure of visiting a Pennsylvania lodge, or who take interest in our varied Masonic heritage, Burt's handbook does offer some insight into one of America's oldest Masonic traditions.

