

FOLLOWING REASON IN FREEMASONRY

John W. Bizzack, Master, Lexington Lodge No.1, Chair, Research Committee,
William O. Ware Lodge of Research, Covington, Kentucky

January 2020

ABSTRACT

We call the natural ability to make sound judgments based on observable facts, common sense. As we are told in a quote often attributed to Voltaire, *common sense is not so common*. Keeping an open mind, no matter one's bias is a hallmark resting at the core of any research, especially research about American Freemasonry. Another guiding principle for research about Freemasonry and the institutions that surround it, is appreciating the reality that to attain truth is to be open to the possibility that we are simply not right about a lot of things because we do not take into consideration the original meaning or intent of actions, courses, and even simple mottos. The story behind the seal of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts is an example of what research can do when reason is followed. In fact, the term, *Follow Reason*, appears today as a motto on that grand lodge seal. Following reason is precisely what Masons in that state did in 1880 after a committee in 1857 presented a report that changed the original 1733 seal and motto.

A BRIEF LOOK AT MASONIC SEALS, ACCOUTREMENTS AND MOTTOS

The purpose of a seal is to make a mark on a medium that could not easily be replicated. Early forms were clay and wax, later, embossing seals that pressed designs into paper, then came stick-on seals, and in some cases, wrappers that covers the entire medium. All serve an official purpose: authentic a document or object or provide evidence of tampering. Many Masonic documents are considered to have no validity without the seal of the Lodge or Grand Lodge. Over time, seals evolved into use as logos, lapel pins, faces on clocks, license plates, rings, images on coffee mugs, hats, and other clothing.

Many Masonic seals bear symbols of the fraternity recognizable by most Masons everywhere, i.e., columns, checkered floors, square and compasses, beehives, the all-seeing eye of Providence, working tools, stars, the blazing sun, and so on. The Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania seal shows Apollo the Greek sun god, but also a god of pure streaming light, particularly of the light of heaven. Some design a motto into their seals representing anything from a reference to their state's history to an emblem that not all Masons understand. Often mottos appear in Latin.

Mottos on seals are interesting. Kansas' seal reads *Misteria Non Scripta*, meaning Unwritten Mysteries (or Rites). Masonic mottos also appear on patents, pins, stationary, engravings and Masonic gifts. *Ordo Ab Chao*, a motto of the Scottish Rite Thirty-Third Degree meaning, Order out of Chaos is well -known and often used phrase elsewhere. The United Grand Lodge of England motto is *Audi Vide Tace* - Hear,

See, Be Silent. Some jurisdictions have adopted a more religious tone. New Jersey's seal reads, *Holiness to the Lord*, as does New York's seal. Ohio's reads, *Virtute, Silentio, Amore*, for Virtue, Silence, Love." Tennessee's is *Cemented with Love*. Virginia's *Sic Semper Tyrannis* motto, meaning, "*Thus Always To Tyrants*", suggests that bad outcomes will or should befall tyrants. Of course, there's many with only the name of their lodge, year chartered, and name of their state decorated with one or more Masonic symbols.

Seals, or some form of them, slowly morphed into lapel pins commissioned for or by a Grand Master for his elected or appointed term. These pins are often passed out to the members of the jurisdiction and out of jurisdiction visitors as memorability and courtesy gifts. Most all have some Masonic symbol on them and traditionally bear a motto presumably recognizable to the Craft or phrases promoting the theme of a grand master's program or inspirational message he wishes to send during his tenure.

A vast inventory of Masonic-related paraphernalia and accoutrements comes today in the form of lapel pins, rings, other jewelry, hats, vests, jackets, patches, wallets, medals, name tags, key rings, swords, uniforms, ritual costumes, calendars, watches, auto-emblems, license plate frames, carry bags with emblems, banners, flags, pendants, tie clasps, polo shirts with emblems, ties, gloves and t-shirts with Masonic emblems (and more), is easily found by the Mason who wants to make known his affiliation and membership to the Blue Lodge or any appendant body or perhaps, display his passion for them. Such items can be acquired today through the Internet from vendors who custom design these trappings or offer them, along with more formal Masonic regalia, from suppliers around the world, particularly China and India.

Lapel pins are of special interest to Masons and typically seen on suit and sport coat lapels. Available in a wide range of metals, colors and designs of emblems, these pins come in a variety of designs, colors, and sizes ranging in size from those smaller than a dime to ones the size of a half dollar coin or larger. As with all such accoutrements, some are discrete, others quirky. Pins made prior to and during the Civil War are rare but exist in collections and other vintage Masonic lapel pins can be found in estate sales, auctions, yard sales, and antique stores.

If there is any doubt as to the extent and popularity of Masonic-related accessories among most Masons, all one has to do is attend an Annual Communication of a Grand Lodge anywhere in the country.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE SEAL OF THE GRAND LODGE OF KENTUCKY

Kentucky became the thirteenth Grand Jurisdiction in American in 1800. The first seal designed for the Grand Lodge of Kentucky was reportedly first seen in the 1802 Proceedings, although electronic data bases today of those Proceedings do not show the seal.

When formed in 1800, the Grand Lodge had five lodges all chartered by or under dispensation of Virginia: Lexington No. 25, as were Paris Lodge No. 35, Georgetown No. 3, Hiram Lodge No.46, and Abraham's Lodge (under Virginia dispensation).





On the second day of the Communication, a resolution was passed that the seal of Lexington No. 25 be used “until a proper one can be prepared for the use of the said Grand Lodge.” That seal was affixed to the first five, temporary charters issued to the original lodges.¹

Daniel Bradford, a Lexington printer, auctioneer, soldier, legislator, Transylvania University professor, past master of Lexington Lodge No. 1 and Grand Master in 1815, is credited with the design for not only Lexington’s seal, but the grand lodge seal.²

In 1814, the triangle and other emblems were added. The all-seeing eye was added in 1826.³ Since most of the members of the Grand Lodge at the time were Royal Arch Masons, the seal was crimson color, instead of blue as it later appeared. In fact, when the first design of regalia for the grand lodge was established at the 1800 Proceeding, the color chose for Kentucky grand lodge regalia was crimson.⁴



As the color and design evolved, the original Latin motto appearing first on Lexington No. 25’s copied seal, *Sit Lux et Lux Fuit*, referring to Genesis (I, 3), "Let there be light, and there was light," disappeared from the Grand Lodge Seal. No single, undisputable source is found that offers a reason the motto vanished from the seal. The A.D MDCCC inscription appearing at the bottom of the seal can be translated to mean *After 1800* or a form of saying, *Continuous Labor After 1800*.



LESSONS FROM THE SEAL OF THE GRAND LOGE OF MASSACHUSETTS

A poster of the images on the seal of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts appeared as the frontispiece in the 1915 Annual Communication Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky. There is no explanation as about why the image appears in or reference to it in the Proceedings, which is odd since no similar images from other jurisdictions appear in records of Kentucky Proceedings.

Nevertheless, the motto, *Follow Reason*, was and interesting phrase and the image of two beavers and what appears to be a coat of arms among the recognizable Masonic symbols are curious.

A search of records with references to the official seal of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, uncovered a 2012 document in which a report was reprinted from 1880. The document was an abstract of the Quarterly Proceedings in Massachusetts. The report was about a committee of the grand lodge in 1857



¹ 1800 Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky.

² Lexington Lodge No. 1, Summarization of the History of Lexington Lodge No. 1, Lexington Lodge No. 1 Preservation Committee, 2018

³ J. Winston Coleman, *Masonry in the Bluegrass*, Transylvania Press, 1933.

⁴ 1800 Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky.

and the urgings, grounded in poor research and evidently strong opinions used to sway the Craft of their jurisdiction to change the 1733 grand lodge seal and its motto.

Twenty-three years later, in 1880, another committee called, *Report of the Committee on Change of the Seal of the Grand Lodge* took issue with the 1857 report and *followed reason* to make their case.

The 1880 reported noted “The entire proceedings [in 1857] consisted of a series of errors and mistakes.” After that sentence they began to take apart the 1857 report, piece by piece, with well-researched facts and they controverted the principle arguments used by that 1857 committee that lead to the change, then expressed its hopes that the Grand Lodge would inquire into the matter, and if, in its judgment, the evidence warranted, to restore the old seal with the old motto.

That hope came to pass and the change back to the original design that followed was based on facts presented explaining the reasons the original images and motto was adopted in the first place in 1733 – something the committee members in 1857 nor the Craft who voted to change it seemed interested in discovering twenty-seven years prior.

The Craft, not knowing their own history at the time were easily hoodwinked by the urgings of a committee of members who were also apparently unaware of their own history. They proved equally uninformed about how to perform simple research on which to base their positions for change – positions appearing today underscored with emotional pleas and sarcasm. That committee did not follow the good counsel of their jurisdiction’s motto.

Like many Masonic documents of the past, there is no context surround the report. It may have been included in the 2012 file simply to preserve the information in a central source where facts about the seal could be easily found in the future. No matter, the events offer a valuable lesson and insight into the motto, *Follow Reason*.

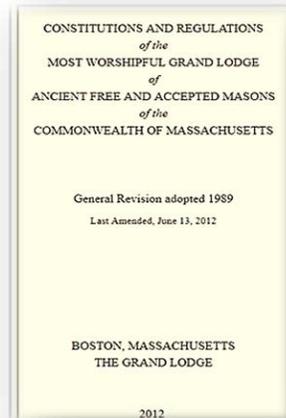
LIZARDS...

The Grand Lodge of Massachusetts claims to be the third oldest Masonic Grand Lodge in existence (after the United Grand Lodge of England and dates its own existence from the formation of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717, and the Grand Lodge of Ireland founded in 1725). Massachusetts interprets its 1733 warrant, creating Henry Price the Provincial Grand Master of New England, as the creation of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. The Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania and the Grand Lodge of Virginia dispute the claim.

The 1857 committee thought the animals depicted on the seal were lizards and pointed out how heraldry in England often used lizards on the coat of arms, so naturally, deriving authority from England to form a grand lodge of Massachusetts the report asserts the “lizards” were adopted, but improper and had nothing to do with Freemasonry.

In one of most cutting and blistering, yet polite response in Masonic writings – perhaps ever – is found in the response of the 1880 committee to that idea:

The supporters are lizards, — the “non-descript animals” of the committee of 1857. The supporters in our original seal, as in that of our Mother Grand Lodge, were beavers, builders and emblematic of industry. The committee are not prepared to say that the lizards bear



“nothing significant of Freemasonry,” for by so doing they might fall into the mistake of the committee of 1857 and of some Masonic critics whose opinions are entitled to less respect, namely, the mistake of assuming that our ignorance of the fact in question is equivalent to its non-existence.

The animals on the seal were indeed beavers, not lizards, representing “industry.”

After decimating what was referred to as ignorance in the remainder of the 1857 committee’s report, the 1880 report addressed the matter of the motto, *Follow Reason*.

The committee report pointed out the motto was a translation of the Montague Arms or Crest. Montague was John Montague, the 2nd Duke of Montague and the sixth Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England. Montague was also the first Grand Master who was not considered a commoner. The motto on the Duke’s personal Arms read *Suivez raison*, which might better perhaps be translated as *Follow Right*.



Regardless of interpretation of Latin, who could logically argue that *Follow Reason* is some sort of foreign concept to the philosophies of Freemasonry? Following reason leads to truth, and seeking truth is hardly a foreign notion to Freemasonry either – or shouldn’t be. Troubling is how the 1857 committee did indeed try to argue that point, but not logically or by following reason. Their report said this about the *Follow Reason* motto: “It has no special reference to the principles of the Order.

The absurdity of the arguments by the 1857 committee teaches a lesson about the dangers we too often see when opinions and personal perspectives are masquerade to others as facts and we fail to *follow reason*.

The 1880 committee address all the other “concerns’ of the 1857 committee accordingly and the original seal was readopted.

SUMMARY

We still do not have a valid explanation why the poster of the images on the seal of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts appears in the 1915 Annual Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky.

We can, particularly as Masons, speculate on the cause of its publication like we do about many things in our Craft, at least as long as we do not pass off such speculation as the only truth there is.

Perhaps, someone in control or with influence over the publication thought including it on the first page of the Proceeding that year might encourage those who saw it to *Follow Reason*. If that speculation is accurate, all we have to do is to take a balanced look at our fraternity since 1915 to see how that worked out.