

Masonic Perspectives

A Second Look at Aspects of Controversial Topics In American Freemasonry



ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Masonic Perspectives is a project created by Past Masters John W. Bizzack and Dan M. Kemble intended to bring the writings about controversial topics of the past in American Freemasonry and provide readers a second look and contemporary perspective on the topics to serve as a catalyst for further discussion. This project is a joint venture of Lexington Lodge No. 1, Lexington, Kentucky and William O. Ware Lodge of Research, Covington, Kentucky.



In this edition - A look at the dramatic and situational ironies in Freemasonry and the writings of prominent Masons in the latter half of the 20th century who offered signs of the clear danger of Masonic history repeating itself.



|COMMENTARY ESSAY

John W. Bizzack, Past Master, Lexington Lodge No. 1

Disturbing Reminders Redux

Is Our Past Prologue?

John W. Bizzack, PM, Lexington Lodge No. 1,
Lexington, Kentucky - November 2019

Part I

The “Class Distinctions”

HL. Haywood is one of the most prolific Masonic writers of the 20th century. His several works have provided Freemasons with better knowledge of the fraternity, its history, philosophy and aims. Haywood was editor of the *New York Masonic Outlook*, 1925-1930. A member of Publicity Lodge No. 1000, he served as Grand Representative of the Grand Lodge of Michigan to the Grand Lodge of New York. Born in 1886, at the age of three, he was reading fifth-grade level books, and graduated from high school at the age of thirteen. One of his most cherished achievements was that he had taught or lectured on every major college campus in the United States.¹

Haywood noted that in Freemasonry there are men who are veterans of Masonic study, who know it within and without, and their knowledge of Freemasonry is to other men's as an ocean is to a creek. He pointed out that Masons can lose Freemasonry for themselves, miss it or spoil it, or limit it too narrowly by forming conclusions about it too hastily, or by having too fragmentary knowledge of it, or about trusting too much the second hand.²

In his classic work, *The Newly Made Mason*, his distaste for Masonic illiteracy was made clearer when he offered a second obligation for the initiate:

I hereby solemnly and sincerely promise the square that as a beginning Craftsman and in the Masonry of the mind and as a newly made Mason, I will not permit myself to be led into making hasty conclusions. I promise and swear that I will not listen to those who are not competent to teach me. There will be nothing binding on me except the truth. If there be those who say one thing and if there be others who say the opposite thing, I will consider that it is Freemasonry itself which finally is to decide between them. We do not make the truth, we find it.³

¹ Grand Lodge of the State of the New York, The Gateway Painting, <https://nymasons.org/site/the-gateway-painting-by-paul-orban-1930/>

² H. L. Haywood, *The Newly Made Mason*, Richmond, Virginia: Macey Publishing and Masonic Supply Co., Inc., 1973, (1st Edition 1948), p.v.

³ *Ibid.*

Haywood was not a lip homage Masonic writer nor one to traffic in, add to, or litter myth debris in its literature. He stuck to the facts: no fluff, no spectacular historical fantasies about knights, Egyptians, or a long-lost secret knowledge, and addressed the many facets of the fraternity that too often go unchecked. Haywood provided the factual account of how the fraternity works, what its purpose is, and the valid history of the fraternity.

One of Haywood's most perceptive observations was how the early grand lodge attempted to better establish the infant fraternity by recruiting aristocracy and eagerly embracing professional men and the gentry class in England. The desire to have a "noble brother" at their head and among their ranks was not an act of snobbery but followed the custom of societies in the nation to have a sponsor of the ruling class to act as the figurehead in high places.⁴ In 1721, John Montague, Duke of Montague became the first Grand Master of Grand Lodge of England. He was followed in 1722 by Philip Wharton, Duke of Wharton, the first and last Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England who had never sat as Master of a lodge.⁵ Dukes, Counts, Viscounts, Lords, Earls, and the Prince of Wales have since shared the title of Grand Master. As every notable admission into the fraternity was heralded from the beginning in print with an aura of elitism, it soon attracted scorn, ridicule, and finally, physical parody in and outside the fraternity.⁶

A weak administration in a fledging fraternity ultimately led to changes in custom and ritual – some, perhaps, deliberately. In the end, the minority who were not of gentry class, did not have the influence despite their proportion of numbers. The changes in custom and ritual were believed by many to be of fundamental importance to the purpose of Freemasonry. As a result of the changes and with many lodges filled with aristocrats, some ceased to be Lodges and became purely social clubs, and Freemasonry was replaced by more light-hearted conviviality and a change in the ambience of the fraternity.⁷

For decades, the opposition grew to the Craft imposing upon the majority the innovations of class distinction, exclusiveness, restriction of Masonic offices, emasculation of ritual, and replacement of Masonic teachings with social functions. Further fueling the dissention, a crop of disgruntled former Masons published few exposures, the most successful being Pritchard's *Masonry Dissected*, in 1730. As this contained a recognizable representation of all three degrees, with the secrets that would supposedly ensure admission to a Masonic Lodge, the Grand Lodge of England made changes to their ritual and passwords which took them out of step with the new Grand Lodges in Ireland and Scotland.⁸

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Phillip, Duke of Wharton, Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon A.F. & A. M. http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/biography/wharton_p/wharton_p.html, accessed June 2016.

⁶ Douglas Koop, *The Genesis Of Freemasonry: An Account Of The Rise And Development Of Freemasonry In Its Operative, Accepted, And Early Speculative Phases*, The University of Sheffield. Published by Q.C. Correspondence Circle Ltd. in association with Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076. London, October, 1946.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon *The Formation of the Grand Lodge of the Antients*, I. R. Clarke, *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, vol 79 (1966), p. 270-73, accessed 28 June 2016.

The ruling class was seen by those not a part of it as a special-interest group, which eventually gave rise to and were subject to continual criticisms of the Masonic hierarchy by those not considered in that class.⁹ As Haywood, and later Masonic scholars and researchers would tell us, the cumulative result was the chasm opening between Masons of the so-called upper class and those thought of in the lower class – a division down the middle of the majority in the fraternity, and the minority of the special interest group.¹⁰

That split was inevitable between those viewed as “innovators” (those changing the process and custom) and a faction who wished to preserve the old processes and customs, pure and unimpaired. In short, the minority viewed the innovators as not practicing what was preached about meeting on the level and parting on the square.

In 1751, a group of unaffiliated lodges of mainly Irish membership formed the Grand Committee of what would become the Most Ancient and Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons according to the Old Constitutions, now known as the Ancients. This society adhered to what it believed to be an older and more authentic ritual than the original Grand Lodge of England.

Under the influence and leadership of Laurence Dermott, who was Grand Secretary from 1752 to 1771, and deputy Grand Master intermittently thereafter, this new grand lodge grew rapidly. Some believe that it was Dermott who was the “moving spirit” in sustaining the schism that lasted for four decades between the Grand Lodge of England, deemed the *Moderns*, and the *Antients*.¹¹ Haywood goes so far as to say that if there were a list of the greatest Masons of that century, with names like Desaguliers, Preston, Thomas Smith Webb, to name a few, then Dermott belongs on that list because “he ranks second in achievement to none of those names.”

Haywood also tells us that due to resentment of the exclusiveness apparent in the Grand Lodge in London and the disapproval of the innovations adopted, not only did Irish immigrants withdraw but English Masons did too at a rate of ten to one. Hundreds or more of independent lodges never part of the Grand Lodge of England agreed and refused to recognize the so-called *modernization* of Freemasonry. Eventually, sharing the sentiment, the Grand Lodges of Scotland and Ireland withdrew their recognition of the Grand of Lodge England.

The schism between the two grand lodges ensued for two generations of Masons – forty-five years. Finally, the “innovators,” the Moderns, blinked and in 1789 appointed a committee to approach the Antients to determine if reconciliation could be achieved. This was a slow process since even visitation

⁹ NOTE: Discussion of this circumstance at a Masonic study group in 2014 at Lexington Lodge No. 1, Lexington, Kentucky explored how one reason for such rapid expansions in early American Freemasonry, may be attributed to idea that more lodges were necessary so that more would have a voice and vote in jurisdictional matters – a topic worthy of additional research.

¹⁰ See *Early Grand Lodge Freemasonry*, Christopher Murphy, Editor and Shawn Eyer, Executive Editor, Freemasonry, London, Irish and Antient Lodges, by Dr. Richard Berman, page 241-279., Plumbstone, 2017.

¹¹ Henry Leonard Stillson, *History of the Antient and Honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons and Concordant Order*, The Fraternity Publishing Company, Boston and London, 1907.

was forbidden in an attempt to lock out rivals, although there were Brethren belonging to both factions who may have been working from within for a remedy.¹²

It was not until 1809 when the Grand Lodge of England apparently took a second look at what they had done and resolved to no longer continue in force the measures which were “resorted to in or about 1739 respecting irregular Freemasonry” and directed lodges to revert the “Antient Landmarks of the Society.”¹³

PART II

Dramatic and Situational Ironies

When we step back and examine the evidence from the vantage point of hindsight, which all Masons should do when it comes to our factual history, the cause and results of the Great Schism emerge more clearly. Haywood certainly saw it in the 1940s, PGM William Neil Love, Alberta, Canada saw in the 1980s.¹⁴ Many Masonic researchers and scholars have since hinted or drawn attention to it, but few have adamantly expounded on the similarities of the dramatic and situational irony in what happened three centuries ago and what has happened in American Freemasonry since at least the early 1800s.¹⁵

Has American Freemasonry been led into making similar errors by a majority of individuals who have, perhaps in some cases, unconsciously “innovated” to such an extent over decades, that it changed the fraternity to once again appearing to be more service club than Freemasonry – and sacrificing a healthy level of constructive exclusivity for which it was designed?

The following four points alone, suggest that may be the case.

1. **The Craft is somewhat divided by the introduction of innovations.** Examples:
 - a. Half of the jurisdictions in the U. S. conduct business only on the MM Degree now, but all did so after the recommendation, which carried no force of law, of the 1843 Baltimore Convention. Every grand lodge jurisdiction in the United States adopted that recommendation. The reversal of that position by nearly half of U. S. Grand Lodges did not start to take place until 1988. Since every regular Masonic jurisdiction in the world opened on the Entered Apprentice degree until the 1843 Baltimore Convention recommendation, it is difficult to accept this action was not an innovation. Only 6% of

¹² William N. Love, Some Disturbing Reminders, 23, May. 1981.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ See William N. Love, Some Disturbing Reminders, 23, May. 1981.

¹⁵ **NOTE:** *Dramatic irony* is inherent in speeches or a situation of a drama and is understood by the audience but not grasped by the characters in the play. *Situational irony* is an outcome that turns out to be very different from what was expected. Webster's Grammar Handbook, Webster's Computer Dictionary, Webster's Dictionary, Webster's Thesaurus, Merriam-Webster Mass Market; Revised edition, (July 1, 2004).

- the grand jurisdictions in the world today do not open on the Entered Apprentice degree – all 6% of those jurisdictions are in the United States.
- b. Members of at least one jurisdiction in America seek to pass legislation that prevents legislation from being introduced that has previously failed, thus restricting free discourse and discussion on topics affecting the Craft.
 - c. Is it divisive that concordant bodies compete for a member's time, energies, and interest to the extent they are forced to choose their loyalties?
2. **The image and perception of the Craft has changed in the eye of the public.** Examples:
- a. The purpose of the fraternity is often viewed by public and members alike as charity being its foremost cause for existence.
 - b. The condition of and selling of Masonic buildings has altered the public's view of the fraternity.
 - c. The relevance of the fraternity in society today is consistently questioned.
 - d. Interest in the principles and values of Freemasonry have waned throughout society in general.
 - e. Does the alteration of the time-honored tenet of no-solicitation by some jurisdictions weaken the strength of fewness in the fraternity?
3. **Forms and customs have been altered and changed and objectives of the Craft diverted.** Examples:
- a. Music in lodge;
 - b. Processions, formal purging of the Craft, formality of protocol;
 - c. Elegance of dress and attire;
 - d. Reflection Rooms/Chambers of Reflection;
 - e. Limited or no Masonic education during stated communications;
 - f. Strict adherence to progressive line rather than the election of members on merit; and
 - g. Absence of Festive Boards and Table Lodge practices.
4. **The presence of what may be perceived within the Craft as a special interest group, although now a majority and dominating most of the fraternity, who believe what their lodges now reflect the best practices of Freemasonry and that concordant bodies support is more of a focus than blue lodge involvement.**

In some ways these points parallel what occurred in early Freemasonry, particularly the emasculation of ritual that we see today in lodges that are unable to satisfactorily perform opening and closing ceremonies and who cannot deliver ritual without persistent prompting. Further parallels are the replacement of Masonic teachings with social functions, fund raising and “fun” degrees, all

contributing to features of a social club more than a philosophical and educational fraternity, as is observed in the early decades of organized Freemasonry in England.¹⁶ As Love noted,

“A close examination of the proceedings from around the continent reveals just how much the gimmick department of Masonry is extending itself in an obsessive search for novelties to entertain and distract rather than to educate and inspire.”

Some lodges are known to go to any end to dream up some novelty or other distraction to avoid tackling the task of building individual character. Is there a brother who can honestly deny this sort of thing has and continues to happen?

Love goes on to make the observation and asks questions:

There is a great urge for eager individuals to drag their Brethren out of their proper lodge rooms to try to perform our dignified and [and what should be] serious ceremonies in abandoned quarries, barns, open fields, mountain tops, in the woods, etc., anywhere but in the dignified atmosphere of a formal lodge room. Is this progress? Is this what some people mean by “keeping up with the times?” Many brothers take a look at the low attendance in meetings, the preference of so many for the appendant bodies, the lowering of discipline and propriety to accommodate a permissive Society; the general lack of understanding among so many of our brothers and of what Masonry is really all about; and the myriad of gimmicks and substitutes for the teachings of the lessons of the Craft, and are convinced that the order often seems an empty shell. Or, to put it more bluntly - an order of members who don't practice what they preach. Our degrees – like our lapel pins and titles – come to easily and too often. The socializers and innovators of today [and of the past century] who work so enthusiastically to redirect Masonry's role have introduced a twist never dreamed of by their predecessors who brought about the first “Great Schism.” It came with the advent of the service club idea, and the modern efforts to divert Masonry's objectives into service club activities. We have been urged daily to launch our Lodges into projects, campaigns, charity drives, and other visible community projects – a big shift from our traditional emphasis on individual charity to institutional charity.

Love drives home the point with which many brothers today agree: Masonic lodges are no more equipped to do service club work than the service clubs are equipped to practice Freemasonry. What can possibly be interpreted from the thousands of documents, books, essays, research

¹⁶ Jan A.M. Snoek, *Researching Freemasonry: Where Are We?* Center for Research into Freemasonry and Fraternalism. A working paper presented at the opening of the first International Conference of the History of Freemasonry in May 2008 in Edinburgh, and Jan A.M. Snoek and Henry Bogdan, *The History of Freemasonry: An Overview*, Handbook on Freemasonry, Henrick Bogdan and Jan A.M. Snoeke, Editors, Brill, Lieden/Boston, Vol. 8, 2014, 13-14.

publications, and factual early history of Freemasonry to illustrate that the architects of organized Freemasonry ever intended the fraternity to become remotely like a service club?

Many prominent Masons believed in the latter half of the 20th century what is still believed today: there is a clear danger that history is about to repeat itself. As Past Grand Master of Indiana Dwight L. Smith warned nearly fifty-years ago, and with whom many serious-minded Masons in the past and today agree - the tail is wagging the dog.

Smith's hard-hitting observations in the 1960s continue to be considered by many Masons as equally accurate today as in Smith's time. In his classic, *Whither Are We Traveling*, he took an unpopular stance when he wrote:

What can we expect when we have permitted Freemasonry to become subdivided into a score of organizations? Look at it. Each organization dependent upon the parent body for its existence, yet each jockeying for a position of supremacy, and each claiming to be the Pinnacle to which any Master Mason may aspire. We have spread ourselves too thin, and Antient Craft Masonry is the loser. Downgraded, the Symbolic Lodge is used only as a springboard. A short-sighted Craft we have been to create our beloved Fraternity a condition wherein the tail can, and may, wag the dog.¹⁷

Some may choose to believe the trends noted in this essay are not well-enough established to be of real concern. There were those forty, fifty, and sixty years ago who felt the same, but here we are today with things continuing beyond the definition of a trend.

For those who are undisturbed that the innovations we have watched unfold continue to be institutionalized in American Freemasonry as they have, then complacency is in order.

Only the cynically misinformed would believe that any innovator in the past or today has or continues to act with insincerity. As Haywood wrote, "Neither a Grand Lodge nor any of its lodge members had any intention of undermining the foundations of Freemasonry... and their intentions, such as they had [have], were [are] in their own eyes completely innocent. The changes in American Freemasonry were gradual ones and influenced by a myriad of societal, economic and norms of several eras. Who could possibly believe that there was any intention of any innovator to undermine the foundations of Freemasonry? It is, however, easy to believe that there have, and continue to be, many members who have not gained a knowledge of the foundations of Freemasonry – that evidence is quite easy to document from our past, and today.

Ill-considered innovations so innocently but so easily introduced may prove exceedingly difficult to uproot and labor to do so will put further strains on the Craft that can take years to dissipate.¹⁸ No matter, there will be at some point (and that point is steadily advancing) a reckoning that

¹⁷ Dwight L. Smith *Whither Are We Traveling*, Indian Freemasonry, ten chapters first appearing in February 1962.

¹⁸ Love.

will begin when American Freemasonry, as an institution, is forced to deal with the unpleasant situation avoided until now.

That situation will likely come first in the form of serious financial distress due to the inability of the fraternity to replace members as quickly as they are lost.

Perhaps, because goodness is the principle at the core of the purpose of Freemasonry, it is difficult to view the institution finding itself at the mercy of any kind of reckoning, but the fact is neither the fraternity nor its members can afford to ignore the implications of our past being our prologue to such a reckoning.

As a smaller active membership becomes a reality, along with the necessity of a long overdue collective and balanced introspection of the institution, future leaders will be expected – perhaps with no choice because of dwindling finances – to reshape much of the fraternity’s operation while maintaining the principles of Freemasonry. Will those leaders and the members of the Craft who elect them also recognize the underlying reasons such reshaping that paved the path making it possible for history to repeat itself?

That question has been asked several times in past decades and continues to be ask often today, as well. Some believe a valid and balanced look today at American Freemasonry tells us we have neglected the serious introspection necessary and effective actions required to avert any level of reckoning or to prevent history from repeating itself, while others steadfastly maintain the state of the American fraternity today is in good shape.

Soon than later, historians will answer the question.