

Wiser, Better, and Consequently Happier?

The Value of Industry

**Final Presentation for the 2018 Masonic Year at the 3,478th Stated
Communication of Lexington Lodge No. 1**

John W. Bizzack, Master - December 3, 2018

After the Constitution was written and adopted in 1789, Benjamin Franklin wrote a letter to a friend in France. In that letter comes a quote we often hear. He wrote,

Our new Constitution is now established and has an appearance that promises permanency; but in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.¹

We might add one more category and say, "... in this world, nothing can be said to be certain, except death, taxes, *and the things Freemasonry notes in its minutes.*"

- We can count the thousands of men who knocked on the West Gate of this lodge since 1788, and name those who became members.
- We can count the number of times the opening and closing has been given by the 242 Masters of our lodge over the past 230 years.

- We know the number of men initiated, passed, and raised.
- We know the dues rate for each era since 1788.
- We can, because of our record keeping, also cite with great specificity the cost of light bulbs for the hallways of the past four lodge buildings...

In addition, our records tell us

- who was suspended each year for non-payment of dues;
- who demitted;
- how many visitors attended each meeting - who they were; *and,*
- with an alarming degree of consistency, our past records help us determine how many times green beans were prepared and served for dinner...

¹ From Benjamin Franklin to Jean-Baptiste LeRoy, 2 October 1770, Founders Online, National Archives, last modified June 13, 2018, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Franklin/01-17-02-0140>. [Original source: The Papers of

Benjamin Franklin, vol. 17, January 1 through December 31, 1770, ed. William B. Willcox. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1973, pp. 235–237.]

We can only guess, however, how many men over the past 228 of our 230 years, dozed and snored as the minutes containing this information was read at our meetings.

We also find considerable ink dedicated in our records showing consistent affection for self-congratulations, never-ending platitudes, and rah-rah speeches - all of which feed a remarkable appetite for praising the *idea* of Freemasonry no matter what style or practices were in place at the time.

Yes, we can chronicle, document, recite, profess, claim, declare and announce many *things* with an astonishing degree of accuracy - because in American Freemasonry we have become skilled and proficient in simply noting a lot of *things*.

Now, there's nothing wrong with some back patting, congratulations or even rah-rah, when appropriate. We know that.

While these *things* we note are important (although we might question the need to account for all the green beans cooked and served), they do not provide us an answer to one question.

There is no record over the past twelve generations of any kind of useful or reasonable assessment through which to calculate or measure the effectiveness of what we came here to do.

We are therefore left to guess, offer our opinions, and pass on the subjective and anecdotal about whether our lodge has made its members *wiser, better, and consequently happier* as we are told in our ritual the institution of Freemasonry is designed to do.

So, in the absence of such a measurement, how do we know Freemasonry is working? How do we justify our expenses? How do we explain the time commitment made by

so few on behalf of so many? How can we stand upright and declare we've made *men wiser, better, and as a result, happier* in their lives?

There are Masons who believe the real measure of success of a lodge is counted by the number years a charter hangs on the wall. That, bothers, is an ill thought out measurement and fragile assumption.

So, Brethren, I regret to inform you we cannot answer those questions - at least through the kind of records and documentation the institution has so often been obsessed with recording and maintaining.

Now, we know some will say,

- "Sure, Freemasonry is working. Just look at the millions of men who are Freemasons!"
- Others will excitedly jump to their feet and shout "Of course, Freemasonry is working. Just look at the millions and millions of dollars Freemasonry gives away every day of the year to charity!"
- And, you can certainly count on someone throwing in some form of the statement, "Sure Freemasonry is working - it's always worked because we've done it the same way from the beginning."

Of course, we know "millions of men" referred to on the membership rosters in the United States only means that millions (or however many can accurately be counted today) are dues-card-carrying-members who paid their dues; therefore they make the list. It does not mean all are active or remotely involved in their lodges, much less

know, embrace, or even practice the aim and purpose of the Craft.

We might prefer to think that Freemasonry gives away “millions of dollars each day” – and there’s no doubt that Freemasonry has become a very benevolent society – however, depending on how the “millions a day” is claimed, that amount, at least in terms of actual dollars as it is often perceived, is an arguable figure.

Regardless, none of these or other similar and predictable responses offer a reliable measurement.

Nevertheless, there is indeed a way to answer the question about whether the lodge is making men *wiser, better, and consequently happier*. Furthermore, we can do so despite the robotic, sometimes inane record keeping for which Freemasonry has become so adept.

The way to do it is simple. All we have to do is look *around our lodge*.

Our registry of attendance is a treasure-trove of data waiting to be mined. When we take a hard look at each of the eras of this lodge, we find a pattern.

What we see in that pattern is a cycle and that cycle shows us that, on the average of every eighteen years, *for better or for worse*, the most active and involved members, establish the culture, and set the tone, thus the direction of the overall governance of the lodge. This has happened thirteen times over the past 230 years in our lodge.

Now, that may not be a startling discovery for everyone, but what might be a surprise to some is that each of the cycles corresponds directly with the level of fundamental and ongoing Masonic education offered in the years preceding and during those cycles. As fundamental

education beyond ritual became lax, so did our protocol, dress, practices, and assemblies.

When that occurred, lodge gradually leaned toward and subsequently assumed many features and characteristic of civic or service clubs. The change was not abrupt. In some cycles, the transformation was almost invisible, but little by little, the lodge turned into a place where men basically just assembled, held long business meetings, became mired in lengthy discussions of rules and regulations, and afterwards spent time in parking lot conversations debating what must have seemed a puzzling question: *why doesn't anyone seem interested in coming to lodge anymore?*

This does not mean the men in those cycles were lesser Freemasons, it simply means the majority of active and involve men making up those cycles interpreted the aim and purpose of the fraternity differently for a number of reasons.

In the study of social and organizational behavior, what occurred thirteen times is known as a paradigm shift – a shift in the model used in the practices of a group or organization. Paradigms shift gradually because new groups of people change their perceptions.

Today, we can look back through the eyes of a well-balanced examination of our history and see that it was fundamental and ongoing Masonic education, or lack thereof, that ultimately led to every large and small paradigm shift in this lodge.

Inside the paradigm shifts we find something else – we find what fueled the shift in one direction or the other. When this fuel was ignited, the entire culture of the lodge changed along with its practices. When it was not sparked, the culture and its practices remained the same.

Industry was and remains that fuel.

Think back. What have we seen throughout the lodge for the past few years?

We see the same men engaging in the labors responsible for creating the culture and practices of the lodge. That group adds to its corps a few new members each year.

- These are the men we find arriving early and staying late.
- We see these are the men, (whether officers or not) who volunteer.
- We see these are the men committed to the work of becoming reliable and proficient instructors.
- We see these men coordinating meals and events, setting out and caring for our regalia and property, preparing paperwork, greeting visitors, ushering, and touring prospective petitioners, preparing candidates for initiation, passing, and raising, carefully accounting for, and keeping up with our inventory and properties, delivering ritual and lectures, engaging in fellowship, and always dressed in reverence for what we do in lodge.
- We come to see these men as formal and informal leaders of the lodge – the ones who take responsible for not only the appearance, orderliness, and the friendliness found in our lodge, but ultimately its direction and governance.

Studying the organizational behavior of Masonic lodges and the men in them over past centuries lend tremendous insight into how and why American Freemasonry is

practiced in the variety of ways we see today.

The difference between the industrious and less industrious cycles in Freemasonry can be easily distinguished today. The distinguishing factor rest on the difference found in whether members are simply in love with the *idea of Freemasonry* or members are *students of Freemasonry* - students who uniformly understand the *idea* and focus their labors on the observance of the aim and purpose of *the idea*.

Each of us pull and find different things from what is offered by Freemasonry – as we should. But when our understanding of the *idea* of Freemasonry is uniform, our observance of it eventually changes the entire culture of a lodge and its practices.

So, back to the earlier question: *is our industry at this point in the eighteen-year cycle we are in contributing to making our members, wiser, better, and consequently happier as we are told Freemasonry is designed to do?*

Brothers, I submit to you the answer is yes – at least “yes,” when it comes to our active and involved members.

We may not always be able to articulate with eloquence and the degree of fluency it deserves or define it in detail, but when we look around our lodge *throughout the year*, it is clear that our uniform understanding of aim and purpose fuels our industry. If the active and involved members today were not sensing they were becoming *wiser, better, and consequently happier*, by being a part of it, there would be little to no reason they would be active and involved.

To know if Freemasonry is working in our lodge, all we need to do is look around and be mindful of what we are seeing.

The era we are in today began several years ago. A new course was charted sometime around 2009. It occurred slowly with a quiet deliberation and constructive focus. Many did not recognize it as a change in *culture and course*.

Now, here we are, some ten years into the thirteenth, eighteen-year cycle.

Our practices and approach to Freemasonry today might seem rather foreign to a member who has not been involved or attended lodge in a decade or more.

- Since late 2011, every new member of this lodge has been exposed to the uniform and fundamental Masonic education we provide in all three degrees through our Structured Degree and Proficiency Program (now in its sixth edition). Because of that alone, there is more uniformity in our understanding of the aim and purpose of Freemasonry.

- We've come to better understand our existence is not dependent on the number of names appearing our membership roster. We know there is no quota or level of membership required for Freemasonry to work as intended.

We value and place a premium on:

- adopting written, long-range planning programs;

- focusing our charity and relief efforts on the most worth community programs we can identify.
- We've found new ways of developing leaders and we've come to see how leadership is a behavior - not a position.
- We do more than declare men Masons-by-ritual.
- We emphasize the need to preserve our heritage, history, and relics; and,
- consistently provide ongoing Masonic education.
- We actively promote fellowship in and outside the lodge; and,
- have adopted a style of a more formal protocol and etiquette that projects the premium we place on being *students* of Freemasonry.

In short, what we do today is what the majority of our active and involved members want and prefer this lodge to offer.

As he left Independence Hall at the close of the Constitutional Convention of 1787, Benjamin Franklin was asked a question by one of the many men who stood outside the locked building waiting to hear what the Convention had accomplished. The man asked Franklin, "What sort of government did the delegates create?" Franklin replied, "A republic - if you can keep it." ²

Franklin's brevity is profound. In five words he said that constitutions and organizations are not merely founded, they are also unconditionally dependent upon

² Richard R. Beeman, "Perspectives on the Constitution: A Republic, If You Can Keep It," National Constitution Center, constitutioncenter.org/learn/educational-

resources/historical-documents/perspectives-on-the-constitution-a-republic-if-you-can-keep-it (accessed 16 April 2016).

the active and informed involvement of the people in them for their continued good health. And, that people must be informed, active, and involved in their government to make it work and last.

So, what is required if we expect *to keep* what has evolved in this latest eighteen-year cycle?

Well, the first thing about which we must be mindful is that nothing about our tenets, philosophies, and lessons of the Craft need any change at all. The *idea* of Freemasonry requires no tinkering.

However, how we deliver the promise of Freemasonry – how we organize, manage, lead, create opportunities for active involvement, nurture fellowship and emphasize learning about our aim and purpose is paramount. Important too is our personal appearance and the ambiance projected within our facility and lodge room in support of it all.

In short, the way to “keep” what we have will be found in our level of continuity that assures uniform understanding of what we came here to do, accompanied by the constructive industry put forth in exercising it.

Is our lodge up to that challenge?

Well, just because we’ve been here for 230 years does not stand as absolute proof that we’ll be here for the next 230.

Be that as it may, my personal view is that this lodge has the presence, a transmittable culture today, and the established and budding leadership required to carry it forward *beyond* the customary cycles.

It is indeed doubtful, brothers, that we will be in this lodge building in the distant future.

It is also doubtful our membership roster will ever again be counted by the hundreds.

But we don’t have to be in this building in the distant future – nor must we have hundreds and hundreds of names on a membership roster.

What we must have though is three things.

The first is continuity of our *constructive industry* in our lodge.

The second is members who embrace the fact that if Freemasonry is to mean anything to a man, and he to it, he must spend some time with it.

The third is an ongoing awareness that there is no finish line to the labor involved in *constructive industry*.

As this Masonic year ends, I continue to applaud you, brothers.

The labor put forth and the industry created and experienced over the past eleven years or so has clearly changed the direction of our lodge.

As the history of this lodge has proven time and again, those of you in the room tonight *are* or *will be* the members who will make up the core of our lodge culture and decide the course that governs our lodge.

You are the men most active and involved. It is through your level of Masonic education that your actions, decisions, choices, and individual and collective behaviors will determine *culture and course* for at least the next decade - perhaps longer.

In closing - I extend to you my warm Masonic wishes tonight as we move into the holiday season and final weeks of 2018.

Brethren, sometimes a standard *thank you* doesn't seem enough in certain situations.

Although I've expressed my appreciation on many prior occasions for the privilege of serving as Master of this lodge, being elected this evening to serve once again as Master continues to make saying only *thank you* not to seem enough at all.

So, I will express my appreciation for your support and confidence by saying and offering you my assurance that in the coming year, you can always expect to

receive my very best effort in serving as Master of this historic Lodge.

As we step into the 2019 Masonic Year, I continue to wholeheartedly encourage you to pursue and apply yourselves to the practices that drives our constructive labors – labors designed with the aim and purpose of better assuring we can offer a genuine opportunity for men to become *wiser, better, and consequently happier* through collective industry rooted in the uniform Masonic education of our members.