

BROTHER, CAN YOU SPARE 0.67 SECONDS?

John W. Bizzack

The song, *Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?* was composed for a 1931 Broadway musical called *New Americana* and originally performed by a man playing a sort of American "everyman." According to lyricist E.Y. "Yip" Harburg (who later penned *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*), the song was meant to capture the confused feeling of the Great Depression. "He's bewildered. Here is a man who had built his faith and hope in this country," he says of the character. Once everything begins to dwindle, the character cannot accept that the bubble has burst, but he still believes. He still has hope that things will turn around. "He just doesn't understand what could have happened to make everything go so wrong."¹

Trained historians gather and weigh different pieces of evidence to understand how and why things change over time.

By examining primary sources, documents or recollections from the studied period, material artifacts, and previous scholarship, historians work toward provisional interpretations of what was happening at a given time and why. Doing this involves pinpointing causes and outcomes, considering different contexts and periods, and interpreting the available facts.

The primary sources, artifacts, and previous scholarship surrounding organized Freemasonry and its three-hundred-plus-year existence offer quite a data bank. Since the philosophies on which Freemasonry is grounded are rooted in ancient times, long before they were organized in the methodologies of the early 1700s, tracing those influences requires more data.

Each decade of the history of organized Freemasonry was influenced by the climate surrounding the social, moral, economic, political, and religious discourses of the time. It was also influenced by wars, political and pious attempts to extinguish it, ongoing interpretations by each generation to understand its intended purpose, and ripples created by its administration about the Fraternity's leadership that governs Freemasonry as an organization.



¹ Timothy E. Scheurer, *Born in the U.S.A.: The Myth of American Popular Music from Colonial Times to the Present*, University Press of Mississippi, 2012.

When learning about Freemasonry, the past can prove more important than the present, if only because there is more of it. But too often, we find a condescending rather than humble attitude toward our history, which impairs its ability to teach us.

The keystones in an arch transfer the mass of the structure's weight to the base of the arch, making it possible for the structure to stand. Knowledge of our history and Freemasonry transfers a mass of truths that make it possible for members and their leaders to understand better how and why the Fraternity arrived where it is today so the good can continue and the bad can be removed.

The technology that enables searching for and gathering historical information and the history of Freemasonry is comparatively easier to use than what was available twenty years ago. Such data live in massive Masonic libraries, other repositories, and museums. Having easier access to that data, a luxury many past historians and the average Masons did not have, makes studying Freemasonry and its history easier than ever for members and the public.

Some Masonic apologists and pundits claim that the alarming decline in membership started in 1959. The failure to retain the members' interest was because men were busy and had more options to devote their time to. Options may have increased, but Masons must have been just as busy 160 years ago. In 1860, Charles W. Moore wrote, "The fatal source from which all Masonic ignorance proceeds: *I have not time*, is the puerile cry of many a worthy man, who might otherwise become a bright and intelligent Mason."² The cry of "I have not the time" remains common. When men determine they have no time for Freemasonry after becoming members of the Fraternity, the prospect of them becoming 'bright' Masons, as Moore calls them, dwindles.

Technology makes it easier for part-time amateur historians and new or veteran Masons to discover facts and information about the Fraternity and Freemasonry.

The technology providing access to the extensive body of invaluable resources available today tends to collapse and invalidate the 'I have not the time' reason many members have used as an excuse for failing to learn about even modest facets of Freemasonry. Some busy men are members of the Fraternity. However, members fail to manage their time and thus do not expand the knowledge they acquired when quickly ushered through the degrees where they learned told about the organization they wanted to join.

A search of the Internet for *Freemasonry* takes only 0.67 seconds. Considering the blink of an eye lasts between 0.1 and 0.4 seconds and the heart beats once in 0.8 seconds, such a search is remarkably fast.

Such a search also generates nearly eight million links. Not every link is valid, useful, or worth the 0.67 seconds required to retrieve it. Still, with that many options, the odds are in favor of the interested Mason, young or old, finding reliable information about which he is curious.

If not, he can easily contact another member better acquainted with Internet search techniques for assistance.

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² Charles W. Moore, "Application and Lethargy Contrasted," *The Masonic Review*, 22, Cincinnati, C. Moore, 1860, 359.

After all, 89.4 percent of the male population in the United States have email addresses, and 85 percent of male adults own a smartphone.³ The odds are good that more than a handful of Masons could provide answers or help find sources to answer a member's question.

The same applies to the old-fashion approach of making a phone call. The average time of a cell phone call is three minutes and twenty-nine seconds.⁴ Surely, three to four minutes out of a day will not completely derail

The technology providing access to the innumerable and invaluable resources available today tends to collapse and invalidate the 'I have not the time' reason used by many members over the years to explain why they do not apply themselves to learning even

any member's busy life. That, of course, is assuming they bothered to learn much about or apply the lesson of the twenty-four Inch Gauge—the first working tool provided to all Entered Apprentices.

One should not forget about Facebook, with its reported 2.89 billion monthly active users. Again, the odds are incredibly high that there is a Facebook Mason in that extraordinarily high number of active monthly users who can help answer a question or point a brother toward credible resources to address his inquiry.

Of course, a member could attend Lodge and ask his question, but that would require him to... well, go to Lodge if email, texts, social media, and cellphones are out of the question.

Time management is the lesson of the twenty-four Inch Gauge. Those who included that symbol and analogy in the early periods of organized Freemasonry knew that for Freemasonry to mean anything to a man and he to it, he must spend some time with it. It only takes 0.67 seconds to start the process—just a fraction of the time it takes the eyes to blink or the heart to beat once.

Brother, can you spare 0.67 seconds?



³ Statista, *Male Population in the United States with Email Addresses*, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/628372/us-email-usage-reach-by-gender>, accessed, December 1, 2021.

⁴ *Ibid.*