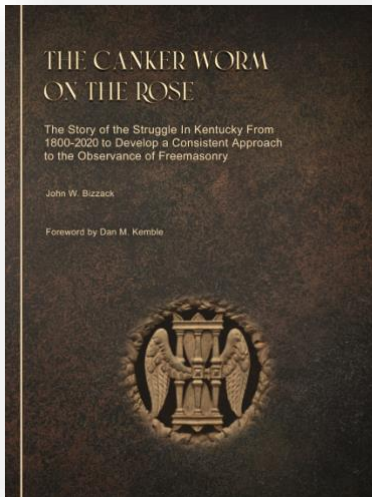


Excerpt from the 2023 Research Canker Worm on the Rose

(Available from Amazon and other Retail Book Sellers)



THE CANKER WORM ON THE ROSE

THE STORY OF THE STRUGGLE IN KENTUCKY
FROM 1800-2020 TO DEVELOP A
CONSISTENT APPROACH
TO THE OBSERVANCE OF FREEMASONRY

John W. Bizzack, PM

Foreword

Dan M. Kemble, PM

© 2023 BSF Foundation and John W. Bizzack

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, electronic, mechanical, photocopied, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright holder. Any opinion expressed in this text belongs solely to the author and do not necessarily represent the opinions or official positions of any regularly chartered Masonic Lodge or Grand Lodge.

BSF Foundation, Lexington, Kentucky



TABLE OF CONTENTS

FOREWORD BY DAN M. KEMBLE

PREAMBLE

INTRODUCTION

CAUSE

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

PART I

1800-1899 - THE STRUGGLE FOR UNIFORMITY

DIE CASTING

THE RESTYLING OF AMERICAN SOCIETY: THE DEFAMATION AND SCANDAL THAT SHOOK AMERICAN FREEMASONRY

THE SECOND RESTYLING

UNHEEDED LESSONS

PART II

THE SECOND CENTURY - THE STRUGGLE FOR UNIFORMITY

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

THE FIRST ATTEMPT TO ATTACK THE LONG-STANDING PROBLEM AT THE RIGHT END

THE RESTYLING CONTINUES

PART III

ENTERING THE THIRD CENTURY: THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

ANNEX A - 1843-1889

THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY "TO RECEIVE AND IMPART INSTRUCTION SHOULD BE PARAMOUNT AND PRIMARY OBJECT IN ALL OF OUR MEETINGS"

ANNEX B - 1900-2000

WE CANNOT DODGE THE TRUTH

"A GOOD PLAN BADLY WORKED IS AS INEFFECTIVE OR MORE SO,
THAN AN INFERIOR PLAN WELL WORKED"

ANNEX C

ENTERING THE THIRD CENTURY - THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES

AFTERWORD

A SHAMEFUL NEGLECT NO BROTHER CAN SUCCESSFULLY DENY

APPEAL

HARDLY A DROP IN THE BUCKET

ABLE NAVIGATORS

POSTSCRIPT

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

APPENDIX

1899 Report from the Committee on Official Visitation and Inspection, 1899 Grand Lodge Proceeding

FOREWORD

Dan M. Kemble

Past Master, William O. Ware Lodge of Research

In 1788, Kentucky was the frontier. The end of the Revolutionary War was the beginning of a great migration west. Kentucky was not merely the gateway to the West; it *was* the west; and as such it represented the hopes and dreams of the nascent American nation.

Like migrants everywhere and in every age, settlers in Kentucky brought with them their social customs and institutions. Included among those was Freemasonry.

Although the great wave of migration would continue to push west, the families who remained in Kentucky began to build a permanent society. Freemasonry was a part of that permanent society, and played a significant role in the formation of the civic and social institutions that transitioned Kentucky from its status as a county of Virginia to statehood in 1792.

Early citizens of the Commonwealth were anxious to establish a stable civil society that observed the formalities that existed in their previous homes. Likewise, Kentucky's earliest Freemasons desired the express permission of the Grand Lodge of Virginia to assemble together as Masons in their new home. That permission was granted in 1788, when the Grand Lodge of Virginia, itself founded only ten years earlier, chartered Lexington Lodge No. 25. By 1800, the Grand Lodge of Virginia had set to work four other Lodges in Kentucky.

The ceremonies and customs of Freemasonry have a specific form. Generally, that form has been passed on orally, necessitating frequent and close contact with more learned teachers of the Craft who are capable of passing judgment on the accuracy of the work of their pupils. An obvious danger in such an arrangement is, of course, the likelihood of deviations, or "irregularities," from the accepted forms.

The geographical distance between the Grand Lodge of Virginia and its five Kentucky Lodges made any idea of close inspection and instruction impractical. As a result, in 1800, the five Kentucky Lodges petitioned the Grand Lodge of Virginia for permission to form a new Grand Lodge – the Grand Lodge of Kentucky. Virginia's permission was promptly granted, and Kentucky's new Grand Lodge was set to work in that same year.

Kentucky's first five Lodges were located in the central part of the state, and it was possible for them to remain in contact and offer support to each other. Within its first decade of existence, however, the Grand Lodge of Kentucky embarked on a course ensuring that it would re-create the same set of conditions that caused Masons in Kentucky to be alarmed over "irregularities" that could not be effectively addressed by the Grand Lodge of Virginia. In its first ten years, the Grand Lodge of Kentucky chartered Lodges in Mississippi, Tennessee, Indiana and Ohio. The Grand Lodge of Kentucky had no more ability to properly supervise and instruct those far-flung Lodges, than the Grand Lodge of Virginia had with respect to its Kentucky Lodges.

The story of the growth and expansion of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky was mirrored in other states and in other Masonic jurisdictions. Put simply, Freemasonry in the United States grew faster than the institution surrounding it had the capacity to properly instruct, support and govern.

In *The Canker Worm On the Rose – The Story of the Struggle in Kentucky From 1800-2020 to Develop a Consistent Approach in the Observance of Freemasonry*, John W. Bizzack, Past Master of Lexington Lodge No. 1, traces the explosive growth of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky and explores the ensuing issues that the Grand Lodge, and all of Kentucky Freemasonry, faced as a result of unplanned and unrestrained growth.

Such a study is not necessarily new. Other Masonic writers have addressed similar aspects of this subject at different times. What is new about Worshipful Brother Bizzack's work, however, is that he allows the story of Kentucky Freemasonry to be narrated by those who actually made it.

Using over 170 years-worth of the recorded annual Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, Worshipful Brother Bizzack cites direct quotes from Grand Masters and corresponding Reports of Committees that directly address the negative results of over-heated expansion and the inability to provide proper Masonic instruction to newly formed Lodges and newly made Masons.

Grand Lodge proceedings are notoriously impenetrable. What Worshipful Brother Bizzack has managed to do here is go behind the endless array of lists, tables, financial reports, membership rosters, proclamations and self-congratulations that fill volume after volume. This work exposes the reality that the leadership of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky has been aware, at least since the 1840s, that any measurable degree of uniformity of work and practices is non-existent in Kentucky Lodges.

Further, Worshipful Brother Bizzack's work exposes the more disturbing reality that, in the last forty years, Kentucky Freemasonry has sunk into a deep denial of its actual condition, with only the rare Grand Master acknowledging a need for improvement in the processes and practices of Kentucky Freemasonry.

Like elsewhere, Kentucky Grand Masters are a product of the environment from which they came. It is, perhaps, unreasonable to expect that leaders will recognize that the very system from which they rose is flawed; or that they will do anything other than perpetuate that very same system.

Worshipful Brother Bizzack's study is a perfect complement to Professor Lynn Dumenil's *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880 – 1930*. Professor Dumenil traces the drift of American Freemasonry from a moral and philosophical society to a social and service club. Worshipful Brother Bizzack's treatment of Kentucky Freemasonry extends another ninety years, and, one can reasonably conclude, reveals that, at least at the institutional level, contemporary Freemasonry has surrendered all claims to any focus on moral and intellectual improvement.

What, then is to be made of this ground-breaking work?

If the facts presented in *The Canker Worm On the Rose* are incorrect, or if they are presented in anything other than the proper context, then let the evidence of such errors be presented, as Worshipful Brother Bizzack repeatedly invites his readers to do.

If, however, it is determined that the facts asserted are accurate, and that they are reported in their proper context, then *The Canker Work On the Rose* provides an accurate record of how (and why) Kentucky Freemasonry has reached its current circumstances.

Of all the issues currently besetting Kentucky Freemasonry, rapid expansion is not one of them. Perhaps Kentucky Freemasonry can find, in this time of declining membership, an opportunity to address the issues that arose from the several periods when membership grew too rapidly.

To address such issues first requires an acknowledgement that deficiencies exist in the orientation, instruction and mentoring of Kentucky Masons. Achieving such an acknowledgment will be a painful process, but only after it has been accomplished can any hope of improvement begin to be realized.

Worshipful Brother Bizzack's excellent work, *The Canker Worm On the Rose* reveals that Kentucky Grand Masters have frequently summoned the courage to acknowledge the "irregularities" found in our Craft. Whether contemporary Grand Masters will find that same necessary level of courage, or having found it, will then possess the will to effectuate any lasting improvements is an open-ended question.

In any case, John Bizzack's, *The Canker Worm On the Rose – The Story of the Struggle in Kentucky From 1800-2020 to Develop a Consistent Approach in the Observance of Freemasonry* is a significant addition to the written history of Kentucky Freemasonry, and American Freemasonry as well.

PREAMBLE

This research is not a call for uniformity of ritual in Freemasonry, nor is it a discussion of the **relative** merits of adopting (or not adopting) a uniform ritual.

This expository research explores an aspect of the factual history the Grand Lodge of Kentucky and its struggle to establish and maintain consistent standards in the face of unplanned and unrestrained growth, the over-heated expansion of Lodges, and the inability to provide proper Masonic instruction to newly formed Lodges and newly made Masons.

The clear purpose of expository writing is to educate the reader, investigate, evaluate evidence, expound on the idea, and set forth an argument. Narrated by those who actually made the history, this research into the unbridled expansion of Masonry in Kentucky tells the story of the untethering of the fraternity from its historical intent.

That story emerges throughout the Annual Proceedings of the jurisdiction, but nowhere is it clearer than in the official Address to the Craft given by Grand Masters at Annual Communications.

The Proceedings provide a portal in time, through which we can observe dramatic flights of oratory, a genuine affection for the Craft and the gentle art of Freemasonry, the slog through minutiae, and the occasional absurdity of a session of the Grand Lodge. In any case, the Proceedings provide the accurate historical record that **offers us** the context through which contemporary Kentucky Freemasonry may be understood.

You will hear Grand Masters repeatedly use the word, "uniformity" in their remarks. In the context of their analyses of Kentucky Freemasonry, the term "uniformity" refers to a concept larger than the debate over whether or not to use a single ritual (although that was certainly included). "Uniformity," as found in the Proceedings, refers to the Craft's overall approach to procedures and practices. In contemporary terms, we might use the word, "regularity."

Listen now, as a chorus of Grand Masters of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, beginning with Henry Wingate in 1843 and continuing through the present day, give voice to their observations, recommendations and predictions. Were these men prescient in their warnings? Let their record speak for itself.

THE CANKER WORM ON THE ROSE

THE STORY OF THE STRUGGLE IN KENTUCKY FROM 1800-2020 TO DEVELOP A CONSISTENT APPROACH TO THE OBSERVANCE OF FREEMASONRY

INTRODUCTION

In former times, the question of official visitation and inspection of lodges by Grand Lodges was deemed important to determine whether the work and affairs of lodges were properly conducted.

In 1788, when now Lexington Lodge No. 1, formerly No. 25 under the Grand Lodge of Virginia, was chartered, the Virginia jurisdiction was making efforts to solve the problem of how to ensure that the work and affairs of the other twenty-four lodges in the state were properly conducted.

By 1800, the Grand Lodge of Virginia had chartered five lodges within the boundaries of Kentucky, formerly the western most part of Virginia.¹ In 1792 Kentucky became a state. In September 1800, the five lodges in Kentucky held a convention and elected a Chairman and Secretary to prepare a letter requesting separation from the Grand Lodge of Virginia. The request was quickly granted, and the Grand Lodge of Kentucky was established as the first Grand Lodge organized in the United States in the 19th century, the first west of the Appalachian Mountains, and the twelfth Grand Lodge in the then-existing sixteen states.

The letter sent to the Grand Lodge of Virginia seeking approval to separate outlined the motives of the Lodges in Kentucky to do so. Among the reasons 223 years ago, we find:

Another inconvenience, not the least important with regard to Masonry is, that we cannot expect the presence of the Grand Master or visitors who may be appointed to inspect our work and feel that it is regularly conducted.

We have already had calls to the lament that lodges in this country could not be regularly and legally visited; a continuance in such a state, there is ground to fear, would give existence and permanence to the greatest irregularities.²

In close review of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky Annual Proceedings beginning in 1800 and continuing into the 21st century, we find great irony in the fact that the Grand Lodge of Kentucky suffered then, and continues today to struggle with, the same “inconvenience” noted in the letter, which consequently “gave existence” to “irregularities” that today continue to plague Kentucky Freemasonry. The preponderance of the evidence found in the Annual Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky tells us why.

¹ The first five regularly chartered Masonic lodges in Kentucky: Lexington Lodge No. 25 (1788), Paris Lodge No. 35 (1791) Georgetown Lodge No. 46 (1796), Hiram Lodge No. 57 (1797), Abraham Lodge (Under Dispensation from the Grand Lodge of Virginia in July 1800).

² J.W. Norwood, *Concise History Of Lexington Lodge No. 1, F. & A.M., November 17, 1788-1913 : Showing, Without Rhetorical Fog, The Spirit Of The Work In Lexington For The Past Century And A Quarter / Published By Order And Authority Of The Lodge, 1913, The History of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, 1900-1935*, Masonic Homes, 1943, *The History of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky 1800-1900*, Masonic Homes, 1900, Rob Morris, *The History of Freemasonry in Kentucky*, Louisville, 1859, J. Winston Coleman, *Masonry in the Bluegrass*, Transylvania Press, 1933, Charles Snow Guthrie, *The History of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky and the Men Who Made It*, Grand Lodge of Kentucky, 1981, John W. Bizzack, *How and Why Freemasonry Came to Kentucky, The Backstory*, Autumn House Publishing, 2013.

CAUSE

The question of cause is at the heart of all inquiry. Knowing and understanding cause on any topic, but particularly Masonic history, occupies a narrow bandwidth and demands relevance and context.

The inclination to ransack antiquity to discover links, the model for, and the origin of Freemasonry far outdistances the appetite that many Masons have for learning the factual history about how their Institution, and the idea of Freemasonry itself, unfolded once organized and spread across the globe, especially in America.

As noted in 1923, Louis Brock, the 1911 Grand Master of Iowa, reported:

The trouble with many of us is that we don't know what Masonry really stands for."³

Nearly 100 years ago, Brock, like the well-instructed and knowledgeable luminaries of his era, further observed:

Most of us are too often inclined to be content with the outward seeming, the mere surface of things. Or we may be satisfied to accept what someone else tells us about a thing, and to let it go at that. We are all apt to take things pretty much for granted and to saunter along our easy way until some new experience strikes us wide-awake to the fact that there is something beneath and beyond, that until then we had never known was there.

Brock also noted:

There is no one of us, from the youngest Entered Apprentice in the Northeast corner of the lodge to the most veteran member who would not be greatly helped by his taking his Masonry out, now, and then, dusting it off, and taking a good square look at it to either be reminded or learn what it [Freemasonry] really means.⁴

Brock's writing stands as yet another example showing that the concerns found in the fraternity today are not of recent origin, nor is the call to put aside desires to make the fraternity and Freemasonry all things to all men. But that was the case well before 1923, and continues to be the case today, as our own official records demonstrate.

In 2018 Past Grand Master of Oklahoma, Robert G. Davis makes clear:

We have to study Masonry before we can understand it. We have to discover there is an allegory before we can interpret it. We have to be informed of its history before we can comprehend its societal relevance. We have to detect its symbolic associations before we can grasp its spiritual nature. We have to contemplate its meanings before we can experience its insights. We have to be informed of its rules and laws before we can act within the due bounds of fraternity. We have to understand the meaning of manhood before we can grasp the unique power of fraternal association.⁵

Can any of that be done by opening the door wide and admitting into the ranks all who are curious, then rush them through degrees and leave them to their own devices to interpret and practice Freemasonry, and have a working knowledge of Masonic law and rules? Can we expect that those who were in this manner consistently provide the newly admitted more than they received when they were admitted?

The eminence of Freemasonry has yet to be proven sustainable by merely adding more members in this manner. Should there be evidence (not anecdote) to the contrary, then men today and in the future deserve to know what

³ Louis Brock, "Has Masonry Today Any Real Excuse for its Continued Existence?" *The Builder Magazine*, November 1923, Vol. IX, 11.

⁴ *IBID.*

⁵ Robert G. Davis, "What Came you Here to Do?" *The Laudable Pursuit* accessed August 14, 2018, <http://www.thelaudablepursuit.com/articles/2016/3/24/what-come-you-here-to-do>.

evidence exists supporting the notion that such a system regularly and faithfully produces Freemasons rather than members. The fraternity awaits that evidence.

This accepted doctrine, although unintentionally embedded in much of Freemasonry, has produced equally unintended consequences that has created matters of consistent concern for Grand Lodges. But the foothold of the general practice of producing members and leaders in this way for generations is not easily abated, especially when attacked from the wrong end. That wrong end is the continual attempt to provide to men after they have passed through the degrees the instruction that they should have received while passing through the degrees as a sensible pace. This practice only produces poorly instructed and underinformed members.

Even addressing the matter from the right end, first the duty to responsibly guard the West Gate must be consistently and unyieldingly in place. Those who assert we have diligently guarded the West Gate should prove it and present the evidence, not mere anecdotes to support their position.

ALL THINGS CONSIDERED

As Freemasonry began to rapidly expand in membership, and as lodges spread out across the landscape of newly formed Grand Lodges, our records illustrate that the organizational structure was not capable of supporting such fast growth. This limitation was not only because of the geographic distances that hindered regular visits, inspections, and the prevention of irregularities, but was compounded by the hasty admittance of many who were unsuited for membership, especially in a setting that did not provide proper fundamental instruction about the aim and purpose of Freemasonry. These consequences caught up with Kentucky Freemasonry only decades after its Grand Lodge was established, and was aptly referred to by the 1866 Grand Master as, “*a canker worm on the rose.*”⁶

No matter, Masons and their leadership continue to ask, “What’s wrong with our fraternity having high membership?” The answer, as it has always been, is, “Nothing,” as long as the high membership represents a well-instructed corps of men who know what Masonry is intended to be and really stand for. How is it remotely possible to believe a that massive corps of Masons can be properly observant of anything that they have not been taught or have not taken the time and effort to understand? Can a man be an observant Mason without understanding that Freemasonry is not just another club or society, nor intended to be anything other than a profound quest by man for participation in the nature and purpose of the Great Architect of the universe?

The consequences of doing otherwise were already seen, and had produced what the 1859 Grand Master branded, *semi-manufactured Masons from semi-manufactured lodges*. The danger from such “semi-manufacturing” was that it had produced a larger corps of Masons who were not well-instructed in the practice; and many who were part of that larger corps had already gained a foothold in the young culture of Kentucky Freemasonry. The model, over time, and left unsuccessfully corrected, continued to morph into even a larger segment of the membership.

Finding the answer to the question of *why*, requires broad searches well beyond the ornate language, cheers, aggrandizement, self-tributes and applause that is common and traditionally part of (and deserved in many cases) Grand Lodge Proceedings. Such an examination identifies patterns, trends, external society influences, and the persistently troubling problems that were not effectively addressed. These elements are found scattered through pages covering decades, not found just in a single calendar year or a result of a particular external historical event.

Such a close examination of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky Annual Proceedings shows that as more men were admitted, and more lodges were chartered without benefit of adequate inspection or the ability of the Grand Lodge to ensure a constructive level of uniformity in processes, administration, instruction, and ritual, more generations of Masons were made to feel, and eventually believe, that being made a Mason was an event, rather than a process. In

⁶ Canker worms feed on tree leaves and can lead to the complete defoliation of a tree. A mature, strong tree can survive a few seasons of complete defoliation, but overtime the continued feeding of the canker worm feeding can cause the branches and eventually the tree to die.

due course, those who were made members in this way, many of whom ascended into leadership roles at various levels, brought with them that feeling and mistaken belief. The unbridled expansion of lodges and members that took place in the first century of Masonry in Kentucky, and which continued into the second century, merely fueled that naïve belief.

Regrettably, as the 19th century ended, those who were made Masons in that way had slowly become a majority.

The strength of fewness in a well-instructed Craft was lost, and many Grand Jurisdictions today, not just Kentucky, continue to struggle to find ways to resolve the matters of consistent concern expressed for the past two and quarter centuries in official records.