



Freemasonry's Inattentive Ear

The Story of Unheard Calls
for Reveille to American Freemasons

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~ *To be ignorant of the past is to remain always a child* ~
Cicero – 63 BC.

CUTTING THE BRANCH ON WHICH WE SIT

How Freemasonry unfolded and evolved as an organization in the United States is an interesting story. One of the fascinating parts of that story is in how clearly becomes the answer to the question as to why much of the fraternity looks and behaves like it does today and faces the same issues as the ones troubling it over the past 160 years or more.

The story provokes thought, at least to the non-casual Masons who take the time to study the facts of the unfolding, because it makes clear what happens when a majority of an organization's culture takes an artless stance, then hones and passes on that stance through generations who cling to the belief that adequate fundamental instruction and education beyond passing through ritual is unnecessary.

The perspective and context are lost when the culture of an organization, which is usually the majority, is not able to really see their situation while they in the midst of it. This underscores the truth in the adage, *can't-see-the-forest-for-the-trees* when it comes to the institutions that surround American Freemasonry.

Learning how a culture proliferates such a rigid devotion to the status quo (which is where the core of chronic troubles are found) boosts the fascination with the story because it becomes clearer that the organization fails at doing what its philosophies are supposed to encouraged members to do: *practice introspection*.

Studying the story removes any doubt that that we have managed over the past two centuries to excise from the Craft those intellectual and philosophical standards that characterized it for most of its existence.¹ In other words, as an institution, we have cut the branch on which we sit.

The study of *organizational behavior* — a discipline with its roots in psychology, sociology, and business — examines the behavior of organizations and has been a practice of interest for human relationship

¹ Thomas W. Jackson, *North American Freemasonry: Idealism and Realism*, Plumbstone, 2019.

specialists and business managers since the 1760s when the Industrial Revolution demanded new manufacturing techniques and increased mechanization.²

When mixed with a dash of studying organizational *culture* — the process of examining how group members learn, and over time, repeat patterns, no matter the success of those patterns as a method of coping with internal and external organizationally-relevant problems — adds a whole new dimension to the study of the fraternity and the institutions surrounding it.³

A microscope is not necessary to see that a majority of the institutions that make up the American fraternity has, over generations and without much awareness by the bulk of its members, slowly unmoored itself from the historical primary tenets and teachings of Freemasonry. All that is necessary to see that is bothering to take a look at the scores of writings, presentations, studies, and research available from the past and that continues today.

What we do bother to look at contributes to a better understanding of *how*, and, in some cases, *why* the fraternity morphed into a procedure-loving organization that, in due course, imbalanced its features, then headed down an easy path toward becoming much like an ordinary service club, albeit one with a reputation of an enigmatic past. As a result, the general public is today less aware that the fraternity exists in than any other time since it was first organized in 1717. Considering the general public is where the organization must attract qualified members to survive, the scope of that problem demands attention.

Many reasons can be found for the dereliction. If a giant white board were used to connect the external *and* internal causes for it, one of dozens of diagram blocks on the board would read: *The organization does well or poorly according to the talents of its members to care for it at any given time, or one word: leadership.*

Another block, with straight and curved lines running from and to it, would read: *In the absence of fundamental instruction of its members, the fraternity has proven consistently unable to become more than what the majority of its members think it is supposed to be or want it to become — often with little relationship to its historical aim and purpose.*

The box at the center of the board would be circled with a bold, red outline, and linked to everything on the board. That block would read: *Failure to instruct its members collectively and consistently on the fundamentals of Freemasonry, and then regularly provide education to its members on the factual history, philosophies, and symbolism, of the Craft.*

WHERE THERE IS SMOKE

The idea of Freemasonry (its core philosophies, tenets, and moral lessons) has, as truth always will, remained the same over the centuries. How those truths may best be presented, offered, and delivered to those seeking to subscribe (and those already subscribing to them) has shifted and fluctuated in direct correlation with the intelligence of its members and their elected leaders to determine those “best” ways.

² A.M. Henderson, Talcott Parsons, Max Weber: *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. Collier Macmillan Publishers, 1947.

³ E.H. Schein, “Organizational Culture,” *American Psychologist*, 1992, 45, 109–119. doi:10.1037/0003-066X.45.2.109.

While some of what was thought to be “best” ways may have been good ideas, at least in their time, many have not proven to be best for the Order.

One might think that an understanding of the aim and purpose of Freemasonry would be patently apparent to those seeking admittance (and so the public) merely by the obvious goodness that grounds and surrounds its principles. Unfortunately, it does not work that way, but it stands a much better chance of being true if those principles are consistently and properly instructed to all admitted into the ranks.

Calculating the value of doing something the same way as the design and manufacturing of, say, mechanical gears that must run in a precise synchronized way if the system for which they are made is going to work at peak performance, is easy. It is quite another thing to calculate, much less quantify, the value of something the same way when it comes best ensuring that a system of moral instruction works at peak performance.

This is especially true if the workmen responsible for assembling the parts of a system or mechanism lack suitable instruction about their labors or are left to their own devices to interpret the operating manual and the work to be done.

This writing looks at the seemingly endless calls to curb and reroute the rather easily identified liabilities that accrue when there is an inattentiveness to *fundamental Masonic instruction beyond ritual* — the nuts and bolts and lifeblood of the fraternity.

The relevancy of the *idea* of Freemasonry in and to society is not in question, but it is clear that the appetite to actually pursue the authentic *idea* of Freemasonry has steadily waned for longer than some Masons today realize or consider.

In the past and today, the “attentive ear” that Masons are charged and encouraged to have has, in the collective sense, proven to be unresponsive, and at times, even curiously deaf.

If the past problems the Institution continues to face today had been effectively resolved, or fruitful remedies were in place at this time, there would not be so many writings about the same problems over the past 160 years.

If a Mason believes these statements to not be accurate, then put forth proof to support the opposite — keeping in mind that perception is not evidence and opinion is not proof any more than the usual subjective, anecdotal stories used in attempt to prop them up as such.

THE SHORT LIST

The bullet points presented later herein offer more than just a mere collection of assertions that Masons, scholars, and leaders have made over the past 160 years. Although a short list, it illustrates the consistency of the same persistent problems in the fraternity that have yet to be effectively addressed, and, like rust, until *effectively* addressed, will continue to corrode.

Regardless, some members over the years (and today) take the position that the longevity of the institution of Freemasonry alone proves that all past and current calls to address education and instruction

is merely “crying wolf.” Some leaders claim that all that is necessary is a focus on the mechanics of the fraternity: how to ballot, open and close lodge, knowledge of the constitution, simply visiting other lodges, etc. That belief suggests that if a member is aware of the constitution and what some call the “the basics,” then all else surrounding Freemasonry somehow falls into place. Unfortunately, that approach in Freemasonry is like describing the space shuttle as merely a thing that flies.

This short list found in the next section of this paper tells us that the condition of the fraternity has never been a secret. The state of and condition of the fraternity, as well as its organizational behavior in the United States, is strewn across the pages of its own records and countless writings about the fraternity by its members since at least the mid-1800s.

Members who are unaware of that fact have failed to either listen or read. When the organizational behavior of the fraternity is actually studied and understood in context, the pretentious belief that because the fraternity is the oldest in the world means that it is also the most successful fraternity in the world, is a crime against logic.

The thinking that the fraternity has no shelf life hit a significant bump in the latter part of the 20th century as the unstoppable decline in membership that began in 1959 got the attention of the majority of Masons and their leaders, and led to wide-spread handwringing for the next 60 years. It is easy to see how, in response, the fraternity regularly attacked the decline from the wrong end with another inherently incorrect belief: *all that Masonry needs is more members*. The dramatic irony in the belief is found in the reality that so few were aware of the internal reasons for the decline, which were no less significant than the external reasons.

At the core of each statement in the following section we find time and again that many problems were made possible by generations of members who were uninstructed and undereducated in the actual fundamentals of Freemasonry beyond what is offered from ritual. This lack of instruction goes far beyond the mechanics of ritual and governance.

Interestingly, the apathy toward, and rejection of, the critical importance of providing fundamental instruction and education beyond ritual seems to have correspondingly increased simultaneously with the decline in membership decline.

Regrettably, since most leaders emerge from that same mindset as the majority of membership, many bring with them into their high offices those same prejudices which, in the long run, fuel the apathy surrounding the stance that continues to spurn the reality that adequate fundamental instruction and education beyond ritual has been a perpetual problem.

Exacerbating that problem is the belief that more members on top of more members is all that is required to measure the success of the fraternity, even when those more members receive no more instruction and education than those who came before them.

No matter, Masons, scholars, and many leaders from each past era and through today have offered and continue to offer, salient perspectives, commentaries, research, studies, well-prepared writings, publish books, and deliver an untold number of presentations about their observations, assertions, findings, and recommendations. Some say that the effects of such efforts is, and continues, to be, similar to flogging a dead horse.

Those who may be familiar with what this short list and other similar statements or calls that could be added to it, are part of a rather historic Masonic group that might be simply called: *reading Masons* — a group whose numbers, in comparison to reports of the overall membership of the fraternity, has never been impressive, but who are, nonetheless a vital corps of members.

There is another group inside of that one with historic significance as well.

The second is made up of those who not only read about Freemasonry and its organization but who *hear* the messages and facts, and see the bigger picture, as it were, instilling in them a better understanding of not only how and why the problems persist, but the magnitude of the task of effectively addressing such problems. This second group learns the context of the factual history, philosophies, and structure of the fraternity, just like the first group, and is spurred from what they learn and then make laudable attempts to do something more constructive for the good of the Order than has been done in the past.

Disappointingly, membership in that the second group is also quite small.

The critical importance of both groups over the past centuries cannot be understated.

FLOGGING DEAD HORSES

- William Holloway addressed the Craft for a final time as he stepped away as Grand Master in 1846. His words were not only unheeded, but forgotten, yet stand in the record as the first time a Kentucky Grand Master condemned the practice of advancing members too rapidly through the degrees. He did so in a way that should have gotten much more attention than it did. His remarks were the basis for what would later be described as the consequence of rushing members through degrees: *semi-manufactured Mason*.⁴ Holloway stated, “In the main, the practice of advancing members too rapidly through the-degrees, cannot be too much condemned, and is an abuse to the Institution. They pass through the degrees hastily, without instruction and qualification. They leave the Institution, perhaps after a short sojourn, and speak of its forms and ceremonies as nothing. And, indeed, they are nothing to them, for they know nothing of the beauties of Masonry — for its signs and symbols are all a dead letter to them.”⁵
- At the 1848 annual communication of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, in his final address to the Craft, Grand Master, James H. Daviess, warned about the consequences of mass production of members who receive no further instruction than ritual, and agreed with claims that the Order was not living up to its potential. Daviess did not point a finger of blame toward all Masons or all lodges, but clearly directed blame on those members and lodges failing to properly educate their members beyond the rudiments of the rituals. He said, “...they have not been properly instructed; they have never understood the principles and objects of Masonry, and perhaps not enough of its forms to enter a Lodge without aid. They have received the three degrees, or rather, an outline of the forms and ceremonies of the three degrees, in one night, and leave the Lodge perfectly satisfied to learn no more; and what little they heard and saw; (sic) is all jumbled together in their brains in a confused mass, from which they never can derive either pleasure, profit or instruction.

⁴ Rob Morris, *The History of Freemasonry in Kentucky, In Relations to Symbolic Degrees*, 1859.

⁵ William Holloway, Grand Masters Address, Annual Communication Proceedings, Grand Lodge of Kentucky, 1846

They never learn even the object or purpose of Masonry, but go forth into the world, representing themselves as perfect ashlar, and are as rough and unpolished as they were before taken from the quarry. Every case of this kind result injuriously, both to the individual and to Masonry.”⁶

- In the 1849, 1850, 1852, 1855, 1856, 1859, and 1862, Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, seven of the thirteen departing Grand Masters during those years railed against the rushing of candidates through degrees, and the lack of fundamental instruction and Masonic education in subordinate lodges.⁷ None, however, put in place or made recommendations to correct the identified problems.

The Civil War interrupted the continuity, but in 1864, 1869, 1870, and again in 1880, the same railing by outgoing Grand Masters is found in the same context.

In 1898, the problems had become so broadly manifested that a special inquiry and report and recommendations were called for by the incoming Grand Master; but when that report was compiled and given the next year at the Annual Communication, a motion from the floor quickly passed that “postponed” further action — “indefinitely.” The Craft showed they had no appetite for any recommendations of any kind for change to the way they conducted what they believed to be the business of their lodges.⁸

Believing that Kentucky’s experience with the problems identified by nineteen Grand Masters was isolated or unique to that jurisdiction, is naïve.

- We find Rob Morris’s 1859 book providing one of the first histories of Freemasonry written in the 19th century and in it, more explanation of the basis for the previous expression of concern by Grand Masters is found.

His work offers insight about the expansion of Freemasonry in Kentucky and the West. He provides a better understanding of how troubling were the “half-forgotten traditions,” “lack of Masonic knowledge,” “slackened rules, and effects of “crowded membership” described during the first half-century of organized Freemasonry in the state, and their lasting impact. Learning from his work and remaining mindful of the 1800-1858 period — something too often overlooked by later Masonic writers - we begin to see clearly how through our factual history we can answer the question of who we are and why we are the way we are.

Much of the remainder of Morris’s work is largely a reprint of Annual Communication Proceedings. He was not content, however, with merely republishing the Proceedings — he added commentary, along with his personal observations as the work of the Grand Lodge unfolded over the first five decades of its existence. His remarks and analysis did not always glorify the organization in the manner as found in many Masonic histories, nor did he soften his assessment of the flaws he identified about the way Freemasonry was administered, managed, and led. The qualifications of its members (or lack thereof) and the general condition of the Kentucky fraternity did not escape his exacting critique.

⁶ James H. Davies, Grand Master’s Address, Annual Communication Proceedings Grand Lodge of Kentucky, 1848.

⁷ Grand Master Addresses, Annual Communication Proceedings, Grand Lodge of Kentucky, 1849, 1850, 1852, 1855, 1856, 1859, 1862.

⁸ Grand Master’s Address, Annual Proceedings, Grand Lodge of Kentucky, 1864, 1864, 1869, 1870, 1880, 1898, Annual Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, 1898, 17. The Committee On Official Visitation And Inspection, Grand Lodge Of Kentucky, F & A. M., Annual Communication, October 1899, 49-54.

- In 1860, Charles 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.”⁹

Moore’s observation in 1860 may surprise those who think that men during his time claimed they did not have time learn about Freemasonry. Many Masons today believe that sob grew out of the 1960 and 1970s when it was it was mistakenly, but widely proclaimed, and, perhaps, most cited and accepted as the primary reason membership and participation in lodge significantly dropped.
- In 1866, Myrix J. William gave a name to and labeled the problems associated with practices that were recognized in the 1840s and 1850s as a serious problem: the rushing men through degrees and the unjustifiable rapid expansion of lodges and membership.

In his final address to the Craft in 1866, Grand Master Williams warned: “... I feel it my duty to urge them [Lodges and members] to exercise great and increased caution in the reception of candidates for initiation. A want of care in this important particular though it may, by increasing the number of members, be looked upon as an evidence of prosperity, will in the end prove to be highly deleterious; it will be the *canker worm on the rose*, that seems outwardly so fair and flourishing, but bearing in its bosom the cause of its decay. Let me then urge you to guard well the outward door of the sanctuary.”¹⁰

Interestingly, following his address, as recorded in the Proceedings, the jurisdiction authorized 30 additional dispensations for new lodges in Kentucky.
- In 1872, John Edwin Mason, in a sizeable article in *National Freemason*, asked, “Is ignorance in Masonry a crime?” His writing is one of the first to appear that sternly scolds and blisters the fraternity in the later part of that century for its failure to provide adequate fundamental instruction, failing to better educate its members, and admitting unqualified men to its ranks — practices that only exacerbated the problem since the uneducated and unqualified members learned just as little about Freemasonry as the men who went before them.

He elaborates on his question, saying: “As ‘education makes the man,’ so it also makes the Mason. The obligation taken on the altar does not virtually make a man a Mason. The Masonic world acknowledges him as such, but if he has no knowledge of Masonry, and does not seek to obtain any, he is simply a fraud upon the Craft, and has no rights that Masons are bound to respect.

“He is a living monument of the folly, so common at the present day, of making Masons of all applicants, without regarding their mental qualifications. A wide distinction should be made between candidates for Masonry and the idiotic asylum.” He continues with, “The ignorance of such a man casts a stain upon Masonry. No such person can be considered a worthy candidate. His life was not only a blank to Masonry, but an actual disgrace.

“There are too many drones in the Masonic hive, whose negligence is only surpassed by their ignorance. They have passed through all the degrees, but never visit their Lodges, Chapters, Councils, or Commanderies (Preceptory). They howl once a year, when they pay their dues to the secretary, otherwise they do not disturb the harmony of the Craft. As they joined Masonry in

⁹ Charles M. Moore, “Application and Lethargy Contrasted,” *The Masonic Review*, 22, Cincinnati: C. Moore, 1860, 359.

¹⁰ Myrix J. Williams, Grand Master’s Address, Annual Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, October 1866.

order to benefit themselves (sic). They look upon Masonry as a popular Order, but should a storm arise and its popularity be shaken, these men would be the first to leave the ship. Then they would declare that they never had a good opinion of it. Such hypocrites are always ignorant men, and their ignorance is a crime in Masonry.”¹¹

John Mason concludes by saying: “We have also a class of sincere and enthusiastic Masons, who are not ignorant in one sense, yet they are in another. They have committed to memory the ritual, so they can confer almost any degree, and yet they know so little of the history, literature, and jurisprudence of Masonry, that any profane would make them blush for shame if he asked them very common questions. Their senseless gabble over the ritual makes the Craft call them ‘Parrot Masons,’ because they learn Masonry as the parrot learns a language.

“With contracted and narrow ideas about Masonry, they oppose the publication of anything on Masonry in newspapers or periodicals and have a cold chill whenever they see a word in print about Masonry. They have an idea that Masonry is something like a black coal-hole, in which no light should enter. They foster ignorance, by opposing everybody in the Order whose ideas are not as narrow as their own. They oppose Masonic books and papers, because they educate Masons to know more than they ever hope to possess. ‘Where ignorance is bliss ‘Tis folly to be wise.’

“All the above-named classes need more light, in accordance with the strict meaning of that term in Masonry. This light is simply more knowledge. The great question to meet now, face to face, is how this Masonic information can be imparted. It is, perhaps, the most important question now discussed by learned Masons all over the world.

“A diagnosis of this disease in Masonry has been made, the prognosis given, and now the remedy must be applied. There is a specific that stands ready to cure ignorance in any form, no matter how virulent. It is reading, study, and thinking. If Masons will only do their own thinking, and not hire it (sic) done by the job, there will be a radical change. If they will study Masonry as a science, they will glean rich gems from her precious mines. If they will read the history and literature of Masonry, they will be astonished to find so rich a harvest.”¹²

- In mid-1875, W.P.D. Bush, the publisher and proprietor of *Kentucky Freemason*, republished a commentary from *The Masonic Jewel*, another Masonic periodical of the era. In that article, the writer, referring to the rapid increase in membership of the organizations surrounding Freemasonry, as to “a tree without leaves showing no vitality.” And stated that, “An increase in members does not indicate that Freemasonry is healthy.”¹³ In Volume VIII – No. 7, he writes another blistering article, *Indifferent Masons*, and states, “...lay the blame on the half-heartedness and indifference of its workmen.”¹⁴
- In late 1875, Albert G. Mackey published an essay that was just as scorching as the ones appearing in *Kentucky Freemasons*. In *Reading Masons and Masons Who Do Not Read* (reprinted in its entirety more than 91 times since, thanks mostly to the Internet), Mackey lays out his case

¹¹ J.A. Evans, *Taking Stock in American Freemasonry*, An address given to the Toronto Society for Masonic Study and Research, 1930.

¹² John Edwin Mason, *National Freemason*, 1872, http://Phoenixmasonry.Org/Is_Ignorance_In_Masonry_A_Crime.Htm, accessed June 2019.

¹³ *Kentucky Freemason*, Lodges and Masonry, author not listed, H.A.M Henderson, ed., January 1, 1875, Vol. VII - No. 1, 14.

¹⁴ *Kentucky Freemason*, *Indifferent Masons*, H.A.M Henderson, ed., July 19, 1875, Vol. VIII – No. 7. 152.

and shows how the ultimate success of Masonry will depend on the intelligence of its disciples.¹⁵ As many who have read his essay have written and observed, Mackey's prophetic words were as true as the time they were written as they are today. Mackey clearly expresses his dismay at the level of Masonic illiteracy among his contemporaries — a Masonic illiteracy that obviously existed at least a generation before Mackey wrote the essay, which further confirms the fraternity was already comprised largely of members who knew little about their Craft by 1875. As easily confirmed because of records of similar later writings, the alarm was overlooked, disregarded, ignored, or all three, which easily occurs when Masons do not read.

- In 1898, William H. Upton called Masonic ignorance a “willful offense,” suggesting some men become members for the wrong reasons — or perhaps they join for the right reasons, but because of a lack of direction and instruction, “willfully” remain ignorant by failing to devote themselves to learning more.¹⁶
- The presence of requisites that ensures the perpetuity of mainstream American Freemasonry as an organization was questioned by Albert Pike in correspondence in 1889 to fellow Masonic historian Robert Freke Gould.¹⁷ Pike did not believe the requisites existed and that the philosophical mission of Freemasonry was, in his own time, increasingly eclipsed by Masonic sociability and charity. Considering the state of much of mainstream American Freemasonry today, with regard to the requisite that Masonry must not only educate its members but keep all aspects of Freemasonry in balance, Pike's 132-year-old view point stands.
- In 1911 Roscoe Pound, dean of the Harvard Law School and a distinguished Masonic scholar, said in a series of lectures that, “Nothing is as dogmatic as ignorance. A better and more general acquaintance with the history, philosophy, and legal traditions of the Craft is certain to make our law-makers more cautious, more intelligent, and more effective.”¹⁸ Pound, in other writings, elaborated on that theme, which tells us the law-makers were not more cautious, more intelligent, and more effective prior to 1911 and apparently had not improved during Pound's day. One can only speculate on what Pound's perspective about the same subject would be today, 110 years later.
- In mid-1911, J.W. Norwood wrote, “A Mason is one who understands and practices Masonry.” He then went on to reduce that definition, and said he wrote article to ensure the language used in his writing was not “too abstruse or too involved, or composed with too many large words, or has any literary defects painful to the understanding of the average member.” He even says he will

¹⁵ Albert G. Mackey, *Reading Masons and Masons Who do not Read*, 1875.

https://archive.org/stream/MackeyAGReadingMasonsMasonsWhoDoNotRead1874/Mackey%20A%20G%20-%20Reading%20Masons%20%26%20Masons%20Who%20Do%20Not%20Read%20-%201874_djvu.txt, accessed, January 20, 2021.

¹⁶ William H. Upton, “A Plea for the Teachings of Freemasonry,” in L.S. Myler, ed., *Jewels of Masonic Oratory*, Akron, OH: self-published, 1898, 78.

¹⁷ William H. Upton, “A Plea for the Teachings of Freemasonry,” in L.S. Myler, ed., *Jewels of Masonic Oratory*, Akron, Ohio, self-published, 1898), 81.

¹⁸ Roscoe Pound, *Masonic Jurisprudence*, issuu.com/momason/docs/masonic_jurisprudence, accessed 8 April 2016, 15, (Pound delivered several lectures before the Harvard Chapter of the Acacia Fraternity in the 1911–1912 school year. His “Masonic Jurisprudence” lectures were in five extensively detailed sections, later reprinted in the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts proceedings of 1916 and in *The Builder*.)

“gladly attempt to revise any future efforts and confine himself as far as possible to words of one syllable or use any other method known to science to reach the average member intellect.”¹⁹ Some believe Norwood’s article was in the spirit of levity, not sarcasm. Reading the remaining sections of his paper suggests it was both. Norwood desired at that stage in his long Masonic career, “to benefit other members by communicating to them some of the simple truths, which time spent in the lodge, and that study and analysis of the teaching hopefully there given to him [Masons] might enable him to acquire *some* knowledge about Freemasonry.” He went on to write that. “It should be impressed upon every member that he came into the Lodge to learn what Masonry consists of and then to become a worker therein with the expectation of finally Mastering the science. If this was not his purpose, then he entered the wrong Order,” He then quickly pointed out that “If that is not the purpose, then the member and Lodge would be far better if he would transfer to some other fraternal organization.”

- In 1922. W.L. Wilmshurst, in his *Meaning of Masonry*, is adamant that Masons falsely expect admittance into the fraternity to automatically provide all the understanding necessary to appreciate the intricacies and depth of the Craft. He referred to initiation but as a “formality,” and “not accompanied by study and practice, will result in a member’s eventual boredom.”²⁰
- In 1923 Norman Hickox pointed out that there were “a great many who had received our degrees but have no clear idea as to what Freemasonry actually is,” and, “No man ever grasped the full significance of the principles of Freemasonry simply by receiving the degrees.”²¹ He continued, “Trooping through the doors of our preparation rooms we find an ever-increasing company composed of those from whose faces is missing the stamp of high intelligence.” He then wrote “too many are made Master Masons, then hurried through the appendant bodies, that many glean but the slightest knowledge of the meaning of Freemasonry.” Hickox’s message also included a robust shot of reality: “The theory that the more members made, the better for the world, is a fallacy. Our Institution cannot be greater than those of whom it is composed.”
- In 1927, in notes found for an unpublished paper that was prepared by J.W. Norwood, we read, “We can rah-rah [the fraternity] till we run out of breath, but all the cheering has not, nor will it ever, change the Masonic culture that has entrenched itself deeply into the inner workings of our lodges at all levels. We have failed for too long, and with regrettable inconsistency, to elect the best to high offices in Grand Lodges and in our lodges. In doing so, we now pay the price today. The price will increase in the future because this lamentable problem can only repeat itself as we continue to admit men and under educate them about the purpose of Masonry. The only way this persistent problem changes for the better is when ballot-box traditions change.”²² If Norwood thought he price of placing unqualified men in leadership position too high to pay in 1927, one wonders how he would describe the price of the same practice 100 years later.

¹⁹ Joseph White Norwood, *Masonry for Beginners*, *The New Age*, July 1911, 591-594.

²⁰ W.L. Wilmshurst, *The Meaning of Masonry*, John M. Watkins, editor, London, 1959, 10th printing.

²¹ Hickox, Norman B, Fraternity, *The Master’s Lectures As Delivered In Evans Lodge, No. 524 Ancient Free And Accepted Masons Evanston*, Illinois Mason; 1st edition, January 1, 1923, 2nd Printing, 1961.

²² J.W. Norwood, 1915, Personal Notes, Special Collections, Box 4, Frankfort Historical Society, Frankfort, KY, examined in 2013.

- Harold J. Richardson, then Grand Master of Masons in New York, is quoted in the Proceedings of the Grand Lodge in 1927 that, “One fundamental problem with the fraternity is in the difficult the Craft continues to have to properly assimilate the new members into the Craft by the existing members.” The problem to which Richardson was referring was that the newly admitted were not finding what they sought or provided proper instruction by existing members.
- In the March 1929 issue of *The Builder*, Herbert Hungerford, informed in his extensive series, titled, *Masons of Tomorrow*, which ran in its entirety in that publication, that his writing was not criticism directed against the social activities of our fraternity. His objection, he said, is that “too few lodges devote any part of their program to anything but social and ritualistic matters and that the great popular education activities of our Order are thus side-tracked or omitted altogether.”²³ Hungerford went on to point out that human nature being what it is, it is inevitable that “the more an institution prospers the greater the number of parasites who seek to attach themselves to it.” The opposite is, of course, true as well. He pointed out that Freemasonry had, in every country and in every period, reflected in its own way the external environment, and that external environment in America, prior to The Depression in 1929, was a “lust for size, for numbers, for wealth.” Generously, he added, that the fraternity should be gratified by the increase in the numbers (in 1929 membership was reported as 3,295,125), and that “such an increase is not evil so long as the level of qualification is maintained,” which by all accounts up to then was not maintained.
In conclusion, Hungerford offered his vision that, “If present tendencies continue, the fraternity will lose its prestige, many will drop out, fewer will seek to join, and finally, it may be, a fresh start can be made.” The first three of Hungerford’s forecast have come to pass.
- J.A. Evans, in an address in a 1930 writing noted, “... it must be admitted frankly and fearlessly that in the one thing in which it is possible for Masonry to excel [instructing and educating its members], has failed, and failed dismally at that. The whole argument boils down to one basic truth, Masonry, to fulfill her mission, must educate its members.” Evans goes on to speak to a popular notion today that appears to have also been popular too 90 years ago when he gave the address — that “the Craft is clamoring for instruction.” Actual experience then, as he points out, is the same as today: the idea that the Craft is clamoring for instruction proves to be scarcely in accordance with the facts. Masons are not clamoring for instruction but the necessity for instruction is that which there is an undeniable clamor, and those who do not hear it must, as Evans states, “indeed be deaf.” And “As it should be clear after nearly two centuries of doing it, that the receiving of degrees alone does not necessarily mean development.”²⁴
- In 1962, Past Grand Master of Indiana, Dwight L. Smith wrote in this timeless essay, *Whither are We Traveling?* “Can we expect Freemasonry to retain its past glory and prestige unless the level of leadership is raised above its present position? There is nothing wrong with your Lodge, nor with Freemasonry, that good leadership will not cure.”²⁵ Smith asks, “If it [Freemasonry] is a

²³ Herbert Hungerford, “Freemasonry and the Progress of Science,” *The Builder Magazine*, March 1929, Vol. XV, Number 3.

²⁴ J.A. Evans, *Taking Stock in American Freemasonry*, An address given to the Toronto Society for Masonic Study and Research, 1930.

²⁵ Dwight L. Smith, *Whither Are we Traveling*, Indiana Freemason, 1962.

course of instruction, then there should be teachers, and if ours is a progressive science, then the teaching of a Master Mason should not end when he is raised. I am not talking about dry, professorial lectures or sermons – heavens no! That is the kind of thing that makes Masonic education an anathema. Where are the parables and allegories? Alas, they have descended into booklets and stunts. No wonder interest is so hard to sustain.²⁶

- We find from the Missouri Lodge of Research 1964 publication, *The Masonic World of Ray V. Denslow*, that Denslow, Past Grand Master of Missouri (1931-1932), spoke of leadership in the Craft this way: “We have worshipped ‘quantity,’ when we should have been working for ‘quality.’ Everywhere we find the Masonic press and Grand Master’s addresses priding themselves on the net increase [of members] for the year. We once has a patch of potatoes; we hoed them, we watered them, and we gave them every care that a potato could be given – and yet, when we started to harvest our crop, we found our potatoes to be all top. Just so with our 4,000,000 members; beautiful figures but what have we to show?²⁷ Denslow also strongly advocated in his addresses that Grand Lodges should be judged on what they practice, and not by what they profess.
- In 1973 Arthur H. Bentley clearly stated: “Most of us, I think, will agree that very little investigation is necessary to realize that we do indeed need to enlighten the minds of the candidates in Freemasonry upon the knowledge and understanding of the ceremonies through which they pass. In most cases the candidate is passed through his Three Degrees as quickly as the Book of Constitutions will allow and all he is required to do is to answer a set of formal questions to which he gives formal replies which he has learned to repeat by heart without really understanding one word of what he is saying.” He added that lodges do not find the time to devote to educational work,” and, “Because, in many cases, those who instruct are incapable or limited in giving the fundamentals because they too are products of the same process, we only aggravate the problem.”²⁸
- In 1975, Walter M. Callaway, Jr., editor of the *Masonic Messenger*, the official publication of the Grand Lodge of Georgia, tell us that, “If there is an Achilles Heel in the structure of the Freemasonry, or in the practice of Freemasonry, it lies in the failure of the Lodge to hold the interest or to educate the newly raised candidate in the degrees of Freemasonry.”²⁹
- In 1976, Henry W. Coil wrote that it cannot be carefully observed enough that Freemasonry will be or become what the great majority of the members think it is or want it to become, and the fraternity cannot exceed its aggregate average ability or capacity of its members to conceive and carry out the purposes of the Order. With great insight, he also noted that as Freemasonry

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *The Masonic World of Ray V. Denslow*, Selections From His Reviews Published in the Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Missouri, 1933-1960, Lewis C. “Wes” Cook, Editor, Missouri Lodge of Research, 166.

²⁸ Arthur H. Bentley, *Masonic Education*, Dormer Masonic Study Circle, Transaction No. 71, 1973.

²⁹ Walter M. Callaway, Jr., *Freemasonry's Nuts and Bolts*, A presentation in fulfillment of the requirements for admission into the Society of Blue Friars, 1975.

unfolded in America, the Institutions surrounding it have done well or poorly according to the talents of its members to care for it.³⁰

- In 1983, S. Brent Morris noted that it is possible for a brother to become a Master of his lodge without ever having seen or given any thought to program planning. Our meetings all too often become sad examples of the *triumph of procedure over substance*.³¹
- In mid-1988 the 21 members of the Masonic Renewal Task Force (Grand Masters, Past Grand Masters, heads of concordant bodies) held a meeting to consider projects and programs that would benefit the Craft, improve leadership, and help stem the tide of the problem of declining membership. They decided that, as a benchmark for any future planning, a survey was needed to ascertain the views of non-Masons and Masons alike. A leading professional firm was retained to plan and execute the survey and in 1990 the Masonic Renewal Task Force Survey 1988-1989 report and results were given to the Conference of Grand Masters of North America at its annual meeting.³² The survey revealed a number of findings that stung deeply. There was one statement of analysis, however, that should have gotten the full attention of the entire body of the Craft: “Based on the lack of public knowledge of the fraternity, it appears that we are in an organization largely *out of touch* with Mainstream America.”
- In 2004, Adam Kendall noted “Ignorance of intent and misguided purposes are the operative reasons behind the misinterpretations of our Craft. Many of our modern brethren have either forgotten or never have sought to know the inner work that is the framework Freemasonry. In short, they effectively settle for the easiest and most common denominator and the institution of Freemasonry and its philosophies, once considered respectable and sublime, becomes farcical—something about which one can joke and take lightly.”³³
- In 2008, Phil Starr quoted distinguished Mason Conrad Hahn, who observed that “The lack of education work in the average lodge is the principal reason for the lack of interest and the poor attendance in Masonry over which leaders have been wringing their hands for at least a century. We have come to depend on the ritual as the basis for Masonic knowledge.”³⁴
- In 2012, we find in George Peters’s collection of essays, “We must stop making the mistake of thinking that Masonic education is the memorization of ritual and the learning of protocol, rules,

³⁰ Henry W. Coil, *Conversations on Freemasonry*, Macoy, 1976. 5. (The Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum of Freemasonry in San Francisco is named after noted Masonic author Henry Wilson Coil, Sr., the author of eight books on Freemasonry including Coil’s *Masonic Encyclopedia* (1961).

³¹ A. Brent Morris, *The Siren Song of Solicitation – The case Against Easing Masonic Membership Practices*, presented to the Northeast Conference on Masonic Education and Libraries, May 13, 1983, Newark, Delaware.

³² Masonic Renewal Task Force Reports: Phase I Research (Attitudes of Non-Masons towards joining organizations such as Freemasonry.); Phase II Research (Attitudes of Masons toward Freemasonry), produced by, Barton-Gillet Co. of Baltimore, & Opinion Research Corporation, Published by Masonic Service Association, 1989.

³³ Adam Kendall, *The Misunderstanding of Purpose and Efficacy of Tradition Marks the Decline of Our Craft*, unpublished, 2012, (editor of the Scottish Rite Research Society publication, *The Plumbline*, and, at the time, the collections manager of the Henry Wilson Coil Library and Museum of Freemasonry at the Grand Lodge of California in San Francisco.

³⁴ Phil Starr, *Masonic Education*, Address to the District Grand Loge of Capentaria, September 12, 2008.

and regulations. How do we return [Freemasonry] to that place from whence we came?³⁵ Peters's, shares many observations and offers remedies to problems he identifies. He also makes the case that the organization began to "collapse from the top down," an attribute of the belief of many Masons who claim "Education ain't important." As he notes, the first step to improving the fraternity is improving leadership. He writes that doing so will be "the major contributing factor to turn the fraternity around."

- In 2013, referring to the response by some jurisdictions to the troubling decline members, Past Grand Master of Florida, Jorge Aladro, in a keynote address to the Craft at an Annual Communication reported: "It can easily be demonstrated that the one-day conferral was the 1990s solution to the membership problem, designed to increase numbers alone. The One-Day Class was brought to Freemasonry as a way to make wholesale Masons who were too busy in their lives to do it the traditional way. In other words, to resolve our membership problem we brought many men into the ranks that have no time to become Masons or practice Masonry."³⁶ "A glance at Masonic membership in North America confirms that these efforts [one-day degree conferrals] not only failed but failed spectacularly; the gains experienced as a result are statistically insignificant." But this is not to say that these doctrinal shifts came with no effects. The unintended consequences are clear: a devaluation of the order, a cheapening of the initiatic experience, and a break with centuries of tradition. Each of these consequences has created problems of its own, which may require yet another doctrinal shift to repair the damage."³⁷
- In 2014, Shawn Eyer called "Masonic Education" a fascinating phrase and went on to share his research into that phrase. He found no reference to it older than an 1831 anti-Masonic speech given in Boston, meaning that term, used as we apply it today, is of recent provenance.³⁸ As pointed out, "This begs the question as to whether there was any such thing as Masonic education until that term surfaced and developed its present connotation." Masons in the 18th Century would certainly have had a little more insight into the original intent of Freemasonry, "but though the writings of that period may be endlessly fascinating, Masonic education, *as a term*, simply did not exist" in early Freemasonry."³⁹ He offered the example that in Article 13 of the 1725 regulations of the old lodge at York, England, states: "An Hour shall be set apart to talk Masonry." "This did not dictate that brethren would engage in what might be termed as small talk, but that they ought to talk about Freemasonry – that is, to explore the Masonic tradition itself."⁴⁰ Another indicator is found in William Preston's definition of a lodge in his Apprentice lecture (1772) which says: Q: *What is a Lodge of Masons?* A: *Any number of Masons assembled for the express purpose of*

³⁵ George Peters, *The Power and Passion of Freemasonry*, Cornerstone Book Publishers, 2021.

³⁶ Jorge Aladro, Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Florida, Grand Lodge of Kentucky, "Keynote Speaker" Annual Proceedings, Louisville: 2013, 24-25.

³⁷ Michael A. Halleran, Past Grand Master, Grand Lodge of Kansas, "Quality Vs. Quantity: Membership Standards in The 21st Century Let Him Wait With Patience? How Solicitation, Recruitment and One-Day Conferrals Failed North American Freemasonry" *Proceedings of the World Conference of Regular Masonic Grand Lodges — the Official Journal of the World Conference of Regular Masonic Grand Lodges*. 2016, 445-452.

³⁸ Shawn Eyer, editor of *Philalethes: The Journal of Masonic Research and Letters*, made a presentation at the sixty-fifth meeting of the National Masonic Research Society in Iowa, 2014.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ William James Hughan, "The York Grand Lodge—A Brief Sketch," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, 13 (1900), 17. Shawn Eyer, "The Integral Nature of Masonic Education," *Philalethes*, 69:3 (2016), 14.

explaining Masonry”⁴¹ As Eyer so appropriately concluded, “In essence, there is nothing to reinvent in contemporary Freemasonry with regard to education, but everything to restore. Masonic education is no mere program. It is the lifeblood of the lodge!”⁴² Each of the four periods of American Freemasonry in which membership exploded and lodges were rapidly chartered did not collectively, much less successfully, carry forward the DNA of this lifeblood. “The fact that the term Masonic education or Masonic education program came into existence at all is evidence that we have not kept true to the ethos of our heritage.”⁴³

- Robert G. Davis in 2015 wrote, “After driving home from some Masonic event, degree, or function that has been woefully mediocre, how [can] our members can sit through such Masonic happenings month after month and still believe our fraternity is relevant and meaningful to men's lives? How honest are we in claiming we make good men better while persistently repeating practices and behaviors which are so distinctively average, or worse?” He then aptly noted, “Self-improvement involves some form of positive change.” He did not stop there, and added, “When nothing extraordinary, educational, insightful, compelling, intellectual, contemplative, spiritual, or fraternal occurs in our private, sacred, fraternal spaces, then we become only another ordinary, average, run of the mill, dime-a-dozen organization. It is hard to see how this kind of Masonry takes good men and makes them better.”⁴⁴ Davis also tells us that the corporate ignorance, which pervades the rank and file of Freemasonry is the direct result of numerous consecutive generations of Masons being taught only ritual language.⁴⁵
- Also in 2015, Thomas W. Jackson made clear that, “There are those in leadership positions today realizing that we cannot continue to practice failed procedures and expect them to succeed. There is a beginning of acknowledgement that what we have been doing for the past thirty to thirty-five years has been a failure. I will be very candid with some of my comments this evening, but I want it understood that I am not issuing a condemnation against our present-day leadership. We are the current product of an ongoing deterioration of commitment to the philosophical idealism of a great fraternity. It is, however, essential that our present-day leadership comprehend that it is their responsibility to reverse that deterioration. It is also important that we all realize that we cannot depend upon our past to support our present or our future. That ongoing parasitization has led us into a complacency that is now evolving into apathy.”⁴⁶ He added, “Is it our intent to persist in ignoring the intellectual qualities for which Freemasonry has been historically known, to violate the protocols upon which we have thrived for centuries and surrender our ethics to the demands of the present-day world, or do we restore those qualities through a commitment to

⁴¹ Colin Dyer, *William Preston and His Work*, Shepperton, UK, Lewis Masonic, 1987, 290.

⁴² Shawn Eyer, editor of *Philalethes: The Journal of Masonic Research and Letters*, A presentation at the sixty-fifth meeting of the National Masonic Research Society in Iowa, 2014.

⁴³ Shawn Eyer, “*The Integral Nature of Masonic Education*,” *Philalethes*, 69:3 (2016), 14.

⁴⁴ Robert G. Davis, *Mediocrity in Masonry . . . Shame on us!* The Laudable Pursuit, August 3, 2015.

<http://www.thelaudablepursuit.com/articles/2015/8/2/mediocrity-in-masonry-shame-on-us>, accessed March 22, 2021, (Davis is currently Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Oklahoma).

⁴⁵ Robert G. Davis, *The Mason's Words: The History and Evolution of the American Masonic Ritual*, Guthrie, Oklahoma: Building Stone Publishing, 2013, 3.

⁴⁶ Thomas W. Jackson, *What Do We Want to Be?* A Presentation to The Rubicon Masonic Society, 2015 Masonic Education Series, Lexington, Kentucky, Spindletop Hall, March 25, 2015.

succeed and to a revamped educational process?”

- Later in 2015, Richard A. Graeter, in *It's About Time for Dreams to Exceed Memories!* states, “If there is to be any hope for the future of Freemasonry, then we have to cut through the giant stifling hairball that we have wound around ourselves over decades so we can release the visionary leadership that I know is within each and every grand lodge. We constructed our Masonic hairballs over time, rule by rule, hair by hair, and now we are choking on them.”⁴⁷
- In 2017 the Supreme Council of The Scottish Rite Northern Jurisdiction commissioned the Cercone Brown Company, an independent research and marketing firm with national and international clients, specializing in mission-based organizations, to conduct a survey of two groups: Scottish Rite Membership and Non-Masons.⁴⁸ A total of 24,000 Scottish Rite Masons throughout the 15-state Northern Jurisdiction were surveyed, and according to their website, “more than 3,000” members responded (12%). The purpose of the study was to find a clear path for the renewed growth of the organization and Craft in the 21st century. The results of the survey were published in John Wm. McNaughton’s, *Reclaiming the Soul of Freemasonry*. The survey reported some impressive percentages asserting that 79% of respondents would be interested in joining an organization that enables him to become a better person while helping to improve the quality of life for others, and 72% of respondents would be interested in an organization where men form deep and lasting friendships, regardless of race, religion, culture or geography. The Synopsis of Major Findings tells us that, “When presented with the right messages—that of fraternity, integrity, compassion, and becoming a better man—the survey [of 1,000 non-Masons] revealed 57% of American men today would consider joining Freemasonry... but the experience has to be real, ongoing, and genuine once they join.”⁴⁹ Unfortunately, there is no mention of how many respondents replied out of the 1,000 reported surveyed, so the 57% figure is, as pointed out members who have reviewed the report, difficult to accept with just that information. The efforts of the Northern Jurisdiction and McNaughton to plan and report this survey are commendable and come at a time when such research is clearly important. The 12% response rate of 24,000 members of the Northern Jurisdiction is not as commendable. Although a 10% response rate is perfectly acceptable as a statistically significant sample, the research needs at least a perspective offered about why the other 21,000 who were surveyed did not bother to respond. The question is indeed relevant. In the absence of the Synopsis of Major Findings or author’s analysis to that question, we are left to determine for ourselves that 88% of those surveyed were too busy, apathetic, and/or do not engage with their fraternity, nor, perhaps, even read their

⁴⁷ Richard A. Grater, *It's About Time for Dreams to Exceed Memories!* A Presentation to The Rubicon Masonic Society, 2015 Masonic Education Series. November 18, 2015, Lexington, Kentucky, Spindletop Hall. (A “giant hairball” is the collection of policies and procedures that have built up over time based on the lessons of past successes and failures, which form a “Gordian knot of what is believe normal in an organization – a corporate and cultural mindset).

⁴⁸ The Path Forward, Northern Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite, Survey Synopsis of Major Findings, 2018, <https://scottishrite.nyc3.digitaloceanspaces.com/downloads/monh-path-promo-11.17-02.pdf?mtime=20191205111159>, accessed, March 25, 2021.

⁴⁹ *IBID.*

fraternity's own correspondence.

- In February 2018, at the Conference of Grand Masters in Louisville, Kentucky, The Scottish Rite Northern Masonic Jurisdiction presented what has been described as a “gift” to American Freemasonry: a whole new branded advertising and media campaign about Freemasonry that can be used as is, or tailored to suit a specific grand lodge jurisdiction. The campaign is designed to educate the public, and to inspire Masonic brethren about who we are and what we stand for as Freemasons.⁵⁰ The products are of considerably higher quality than promotional approaches in previous decades, and emphasize themes clearly designed by knowledgeable, experienced Masons, as well as by marketing experts.

The Series was embraced almost immediately by those in attendance at the Conference of Grand Masters but was later met with mixed reviews by other members of the Craft.

The less enthusiastic agreed that the campaign puts the fraternity in a positive light, but contend that the images and videos for the campaign suggest the entire fraternity is made up only of what the campaign portrays. The concern that potential candidates who see the campaign and believe that every lodge is exactly what is depicted in the Series and subsequently find that every lodge is not as depicted, is a legitimate concern. Countering to that concern is the fact that the campaign is about *showcasing the idea* of Freemasonry and is designed to be a contemporary public awareness tool and is not a recruitment gimmick.

No matter the quality or structure of a public awareness campaign, we must ask ourselves what is their purpose if not ultimately to induce men to join?

When compared to what may be thought of as public awareness campaigns in the 1970s and 1980s, which were little more than incursions that challenged the no-solicitation rule, the *Not Just a Man. A Mason* campaign is an exemplary model of 21st century design and marketing. And there is proof that works when executed properly.

In 2020 The Grand Lodge of Nevada experienced the greatest quantifiable success with the campaign and did so by contracting with a private firm to coordinate and manage it.⁵¹ In the six-month period the campaign was used (and in the middle of a pandemic), 3,430,322 impressions (views) of the material (radio, television, print ads, social media) were documented. Of those views, 80% came from social media postings directed toward a target audience that was overseen, arranged, coordinated, and managed by the public relations firm — not just thrown on a social media platform and forgotten. There were 8,867 visitors drawn to the Grand Lodge of Nevada interactive website, and 1,722 of whom provided their contact information requesting follow up to their inquiries and sought more information about the fraternity and Freemasonry. Follow up on each of the 1,722 visitors is taking place as of the time of this writing.

Other jurisdictions or single lodges that have used the materials have yet to report any level of quantifiable success. A few claim “it’s working,” but cannot offer any data as evidence.

The nagging concern that those who may inquire about Freemasonry after seeing or hearing radio, or perhaps television promotion regarding the campaign is that what they see or hear may not match what they find should they contact or visit a lodge. A sustainable membership and

⁵⁰ The Scottish Rite Northern Jurisdiction, <https://scottishritenmj.org/resources/njam>, accessed December 28, 2020, Christopher Hodapp, Freemasons for Dummies, Blog, Not Just a Man, A Mason, February 18, 2018.

⁵¹ Mark A. Marsh, Showcasing the Idea of Freemasonry in the 21st Century. A presentation at the Rubicon Masonic Society, Guest Night, Lexington, Kentucky, April 28, 2021, Marketing Committee Report to the Grand Lodge of Nevada, 2020, Numbers Summary, p1.

delivery of the actual promise of Freemasonry are two issues that are irrevocably intertwined. It will do little good to generate an increased interest in the idea of becoming a member of the fraternity if the experience that is actually provided does not live up to the promise that is promoted by any public awareness campaign.

In defense, of the *Not Just a Man A Mason* campaign one has to keep in mind that it is about the *idea* of Freemasonry. If an interested, qualified man seeks membership, he will decide if the lodge he visits, or perhaps in which he is admitted, provides him that which he seeks and whether Freemasonry lives up to its billing. All any legitimate campaign of this nature can do is inform the public that Freemasonry exists. If qualified men seek more information and wish to petition, then the responsibility is that of the lodge he visits or of which he becomes a member to ensure that he finds what he seeks.

The fraternity did not need to consciously generate public awareness of the Institution, or ever discuss the idea of relaxing standards or the no-solicitation rule, in order to increase the membership rolls until the latter half of the 19th Century. They did not have to. There was a consistently good public image because people saw Freemasons and understood who they were, and what they stood for. But, by the late 1960s, through the remainder of the century and into early decades of the 21st, the Masonic parade was rained out.

If the fraternity had pursued and continued in pursuit of its historical purpose and was successful in doing so, why would any public awareness campaign even be necessary? The formula that underwrites any public awareness campaigns is simple: if the public and the qualified men in it from which membership is drawn are not aware of Freemasonry, and the fraternity is not allowed to solicit members, how is the fraternity going to maintain a level of membership sufficient to ensure its perpetuity?

Perhaps not propping open the West Gate, providing adequate fundamental instruction and education, and throwing out the idea that bigger is better would have made it unnecessary to market the fraternity at all. If those things had occurred, the fraternity would undoubtedly have been a smaller in size, but likely a more purposeful fraternity for those seeking the heritage and promise of Freemasonry.

We find many members today who are surprised to learn that the same problems they see around them are the same as the ones that existed in the 19th century. Any surprise at all is another illustration of the poverty-stricken vacuum of self-awareness in which the fraternity has lived, and, to a large degree, continues to live. The factual history of the unfolding of the organizations surrounding American Freemasonry clearly illustrates the slow decay of substantive content as well as the atomizing interest and appetite that society shows today for the fraternity.

Perhaps those who are surprised must have, as they say, missed the memo. But that should not be surprising to any one either since there is ample evidence that so few read or apply themselves to study beyond what they are provided when passing through degree ceremonies.

- In early 2021, the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, building on the Nevada experienced, closely examined the *Not Just a Man, a Mason* campaign.⁵² The result was a document that offered the

⁵² NOTE HERE: DATA ON THE DECLINE OF MEMBERSHIP IN KY – THE 2014(?) SURVEY (Schwendeman- Morris) IN KY SHOWING HOW FEW MEN KNEW FREEMASONRY STILL EXISTED, ETC.

grand line, and those elected to positions of influence, a candid review of past public awareness practices, data regarding the level of public awareness of the fraternity in the state, and recommendations on how best such a campaign could be financed and advance state-wide public awareness. The document also examined, in depth, the difficulties of constructively influencing deeply embedded cultural attitudes and behaviors in the organization about matters surrounding public awareness and equated those challenges to bending granite.

A survey of Kentucky Masons by the Grand Lodge asking the primary question about the level of membership support for a statewide public awareness campaign by the Grand Lodge of Kentucky preceded the final document. To the surprise of many, 81% of the respondents agreed with the idea of a public awareness campaign.⁵³

Although it was determined that a budget line item would not be required to pay for such a campaign and the proposal's approach (and the need for such a measurable program) was not in disagreement, in the end, the plan it was not approved.

Efforts continue to develop the concept for Kentucky at the time of this writing.

- In 2020, Jackson wrote: "History is littered with the detritus of organizations whose leadership lacked the vision to maintain its significance to society and Freemasonry is not immune to the vicissitudes of these organizations. Freemasonry in the future will struggle much more than it has in the past as a result of internal challenges rather than external. No longer are the greatest challenges from government or religious leaders as it has been in other countries, it is from us."⁵⁴
- In 2020, Michael R. Poll, editor of the *Journal of the Masonic Society*, wrote in his Editor's Corner column that, "...many of our problems today are that we have allowed far too many into Masonry who should never have been allowed to join and led by too many who should never have allowed to serve in leadership. In other words, we have lowered our standards to the point that some of our members believe that we have no standards at all." He went on to say, "The problem comes when we do not acknowledge that we have failed. If we do not have the ability to see our errors, then we cannot acknowledge them so that we can move past them."⁵⁵ In an article in the same issue, Poll noted that he realizes the toll taken (today and in the future) by the tremendous gap in Masonic education, and follows up by saying, "Education has been absent for so many years in lodges that many senior Masons know only slightly more of the Masonic philosophy than non-Masons."⁵⁶

⁵³ A Public Awareness Campaign For 2022, White Paper. A unpublished paper prepared at the request of Right Worshipful Deputy Grand Master James H. Gibson, March 24, 2021. (A total of 982 replies were received out of the 10,000 recipients. Six of the 982 were empty responses, thus the total replies were 97), 39.

⁵⁴ Thomas W. Jackson, The State of Contemporary American Freemasonry, Presentation for the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, 2020 Education Committee Project Proposal, Lexington, Kentucky, August 16, 2019.

⁵⁵ Michael R. Poll, "Freemasonry's Money Back Guarantee," *The Journal of the Masonic Society*, Fall, 2020, 8.

⁵⁶ *IBID*, 21.

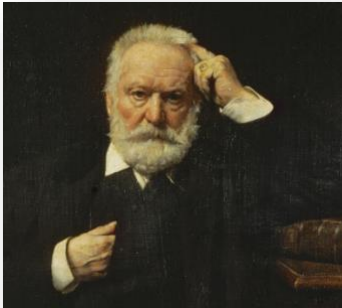
AN IDEA WHOSE TIME HAS COME

A quote attributed to Mark Twain, “*Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it,*” may, in some ways, offer a fitting analogy with respect to the fraternity.

No matter, it is grossly unfair to suggest that there has ever been an absence of devoted members calling to the attention of the Craft (and, specifically, its leadership) not only the vital need to change the organizational behavior of the fraternity and chip away at the granite-like culture that devotes itself to the status quo. Unlike Twain’s statement about the weather, there have indeed been members devoted to doing something about the fraternity doldrums. The trouble has always been that sound solutions take time and the attention span of the fraternity, when it comes to changes in organizational processes in general, has yet proven to be long enough to see them through.

What has and continues to face the fraternity will not wait for universal consensus.

French novelist Victor Hugo wrote in 1852, *Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come.*⁵⁷ His point seems to be proven again as members in the early 1990s began to find that there were many others in the fraternity that did not seek Freemasonry to remain in ignorance.



As Masonry marched into the 1990s, more members began asking questions about *why* they do what they do, and more thorough investigations of historical documents of the Craft provided answers: lodge practices were not as “traditional” as many Masons believed.

The next twenty years saw a number of lodges aspire to standards that were different than those the vast majority of lodges in America. The characteristics that began to define these lodges included formal dress, regular use of the Festive Board or Table Lodge, members taken more slowly through the degrees, Masonic education beyond ritual, and rituals and ceremonies presented delivered with a higher level of proficiency.⁵⁸ The idea resonated with many in American Freemasonry.

The arrival in 2010 of Andrew Hammer’s *Observing the Craft - The Pursuit of Excellence in Masonic Labour and Observance* unabashedly encapsulated that idea and gave the concept, as it were, a script — a script whose idea had come.

His work confidently summarized the philosophy that many, then and today, embrace. The book made it even more clear that way the fraternity operated was not working, and if the Craft sought to be true to all it teaches, those things that are not working must be put right.⁵⁹

Respectfully, Hammer writes that the book was not intended to “open up old schisms or to foster new ones, but rather to call for a renewed understanding of the diversity within the Craft which has always been with us.” He points out that there will always be members who choose to emphasize one aspect of the Craft over another and “it is only natural that free-thinking souls will find different paths within what is the same landscape of Masonry.” He goes on to confirm the book “steadfastly supports the definition of

⁵⁷ Victor Hugo, *Histoire d'un Crime* (The History of a Crime), written 1852, published 1877.

⁵⁸ Andrew Hammer, “The Concept of Observance.” Excerpt in part from *Observing the Craft - The Pursuit of Excellence in Masonic Labour and Observance*, Mindhive, 2010.

⁵⁹ Hammer.

the Craft as a philosophical society which demands of its members the highest standards in all areas of its labour.” The insistence on observing and maintaining those standards is what this author has termed, *Observing the Craft.*”

Hammer’s work provided ideas for what those standards are, and why it is believed that they constitute the “optimal form of observance, and how to conduct those Masonic labors.” Importantly, he points out that, “Masons have seen things differently than the perspective offered in this work. We do not wish to detract from their method of enjoying the Craft any more than we should have them detract from ours.”

The book’s Preface underlines another important reality—“A study of history demonstrates that when societies cease to value not only knowledge but also the discipline required to attain it, they put themselves in danger of self-destruction.”⁶⁰

Interestingly, the ideas Hammer puts forth are entirely consistent with the foundational document of the Premier Grand Lodge in England, *Andersons Constitutions of Free-Masons* (published in 1723), nor are those standards completely alien to the respective histories of American Grand Lodges. No matter, there were, and continue to be those who disagree with doing what was already part part of the factual history of our Institution. Ignorance of that fact tells us that those who object to anything that is different than what they are used to in the fraternity have no idea what the historical intent, aim, and purpose of Freemasonry was designed to be. That should be no surprise, however, since 67% of Masons do not know the significance of Andersons Constitutions.⁶¹

Through their earnest study and investigation of the factual history of the organization, and successes, the idea of what Pete Normand called the “Traditional Lodge Model,” albeit slowly, had expanded into the 21st century. Normand offered an overview in 2011 of the growing popularity of this type of lodge experience among young men entering the fraternity.⁶² It seemed that the time had finally come for something different in the way Freemasonry had been explained to its members, offered, and practiced in lodge. Freemasonry is not merely a club or a fraternity, anymore than the space shuttle is merely a thing that flies.

In the years following the release of *Observing the Craft*, numerous articles and references to the book and its ideas appeared in other Masonic writings, and saturated the Internet. During that time, Hammer had become a much sought-after speaker at lodges, conferences, workshops, Festive Boards, and other Masonic gathering. As Grand Orator of the Grand Lodge of North Carolina, he spoke at their 2015 Annual Communication and said:

The pursuit of excellence in Freemasonry necessarily means that one is placing the structural and philosophical integrity of our system above all other concerns that might be raised in relation to it. It means that neither a concern for numbers, fundraising, publicity nor expediency will cause us to alter our institution in such a way that it becomes just like any other. This, because that quality of surpassing, of rising up from within ourselves, is not and can never be served by subjecting our efforts to the benchmarks of ordinary commercial endeavors.

You did not join Freemasonry to remain in ignorance.

⁶⁰ *IBID*, xviii.

⁶¹ Characteristics of an Ideal Lodge, Survey and Analysis, William O. Ware Lodge of Research, 2018, Covington, Kentucky, 5.

⁶² Pierre G. "Pete" Normand, Jr., "A Return to the Traditional Lodge Model," Heredom, Vol. 19, 2001.

Freemasonry was never intended, and cannot be allowed, to make good men ordinary.”⁶³

The idea of actually observing the Craft continues to appeal to not only younger members, but a cadre of veteran members.

RUNNING THE RAILROAD

If Masonic education is to be effective, it must presuppose a foundation of a fundamental instruction and general knowledge has already been laid. Since most fundamental instruction since at least the mid-1800s has been underprovided, advancing Masonic education when it is entirely dependent on the inclination of the individual to acquire it, is, as the signalman coolly surveying a number of trains colliding, declared: “A hell of a way to run a railroad.”⁶⁴

We find many writings that speak to the issue of Masonic leadership and appropriately praise the worthy who demonstrated it. The dire consequences of those in offices that demand leadership, but who have not always demonstrated it raise the question of why one in a position of leading this fraternity would ever fail to full their responsibilities? While there are several reasons to explore, one is that they may think, because of the culture, they do not have the option to change anything about how their organization is run. Two, is that they know that change in the way things are run in their organization should take place, but somehow, for some reason, they cannot manage to execute a change. When that situation is repeated often enough, the railroad signalman’s statement comes to mind.

What is worth repeating is the fact that improving the organization of Freemasonry is not about changing or modifying its philosophies and tenants, as many seem to always think and use as an attack on change of any kind to operating practices. Indisputably, improving the organization of Freemasonry is about best ensuring how the profundity of this system can be most effectively delivered to its members—not just what some believe are its mechanics.

In 1925 William H. Gallagher, an Episcopal Priest and Grand Chaplain of the Grand Lodge of Michigan, who reportedly was affectionately known by thousands as “The Dominic,” wrote an article appearing in the *Masonic News*, published by the Detroit Masonic Temple.⁶⁵ He talked about visiting a restaurant in Boston where the waiter would approach the kitchen and yell out the order, “Apple dumpling without!” He was unfamiliar with the phrase and asked a waiter for a translation and was told that it meant, “apple dumplings without sauce.” Gallagher employed that phrase as a metaphor in the remainder of his article about the ignorance he encountered from Masons with little or no instruction and education. He gave plenty of examples that illustrated that too many Masons were like the apple dumpling without sauce: *incomplete*.

Gallagher wrote, “For nearly a century, the Institution of Masonry has neglected its devotees. There was

⁶³ Andrew Hammer, Grand Oration at the 2015 Annual Communication, Grand Lodge of North Carolina.

⁶⁴ Eric Partridge, *Dictionary of Catch Phrases: American and British, from the Sixteenth Century to the Present Day* updated and edited by Paul Beal, Scarborough House, Lanham, Md., 1992. This catch phrase is directed at more or (mostly) organized chaos and is from an American cartoon of the 1920s.

⁶⁵ William H. Gallagher, “Apple Dumpling Without,” *Masonic News*, Detroit Masonic Temple, Vol. VI, No. 1, January 1925.

little thought given to the equally necessary qualification—growth in knowledge [and] consequently, individual jurisdictions are responsible for the wide-spread ignorance of the great mass of Masons concerning the history, ritual, symbolism, philosophy, and underlying principles of our beloved Order.” He goes on to say, “That there has been shameful neglect no brother can successfully deny. After ten, fifteen or nearly a lifetime of years in the Order, there are brothers who know no more of the history, ritual, symbolism philosophy and underlying principles of Masonry than they did when they were raised to the sublime degree. Nor is it hardly their fault! The Lodges have devised no plan to awaken the desire for knowledge, nor satisfy that desire when aroused.”

AGAINST THE WIND

We can glean many things from Gallagher’s “apple dumpling without” story as well as the thirty other entries in the short list in this writing offered since 1846. Just seeing this short list compiled in one place tells us the fraternity is not particularly good at acknowledging, much less doing something constructive about, the problems arising from under instructed and under educated generations of members.

It has been 30 years since the roots of the idea of “observing the Craft” was put forth by men in the early 1990s and culminated into a “script.” That early idea was nourished and significantly advanced by Hammer’s 2010, book and today there are many more Masons who, rather than remaining mere spectators or passive participants in the ebb and flow of the fraternity, pursue excellence in every aspect and feature of the Craft. That pursuit, however, even after three decades, is still against the wind, which is a testament to how inattentive the ear of the mainstream culture of American Freemasonry actually is.

Unmoored from the historical primary tenets and teachings of Freemasonry, more decades are required for the fraternity to show significant signs of returning to the original idea whose time actually came in 1717.

Until then, the persistence of the deeply embedded but flawed thinking, embraced by too much of the Masonic culture that believes ritual and lectures are all the instruction a man needs to *become* a Freemason, will continue to fascinate those who study organizational behavior as it relates to the unfolding of the fraternity in America.

A FINAL WORD

We must acknowledge that one of the reasons for the decline in membership and interest in Freemasonry is because civic life changed in the 1960s, when society was characterized as more interested in sitting in front of a television, and, later, a computer screen. We must further acknowledge that many in the Baby Boomer generation avoided most everything that came close to representing the views of their parents and the increase in single-parenting played a role along with the expansion of the urban life and moves from the cities to the suburbs, as well the enormous increase in entertainment choices and opportunities that vie for our time, and that organized religious attendance began to decrease in the same period.

Do we not, however, find it at least a bit curious, even exasperating to a degree, that so few have ever acknowledged that there are internal, and not just external aspects occurring since the 1960s (and

certainly before) that contributed to the decline in members as well as the corresponding decline public's awareness that the fraternity still exists?

The internal operations of the fraternity in the past or today cannot be legitimately exonerated from having played a significant corresponding role in what has happened to American Freemasonry.

The past sixty years may prove to be a long-play version of reveille for American Freemasonry. What has gnawed at the core of the Institution has been on automatic replay for at least 160s years. Reasons for the fraternity's decline or ability to maintain, at the minimum, whatever a respectable membership level may be, and the loss of its once high perch in the eye of the public, is something that must certainly be shared with any of the external societal changes.

We do not see that line of thinking discussed much today (or at all) in many Masonic circles, despite the steady trumpeting of concern over the past 16 decades. Could it be that the majority of the Masonic culture does not read or use the attentive ear which they are they are charged to employ?

The official bugle call that signals troops to gather at a designated place is called, *Assembly*.⁶⁶ Hopefully, what emerged in the 1990s in American Freemasonry, was refueled in 2010, and perseveres today, will lead to that assembly call being brightly sounded once again. Whether the current or future generations will hear it, is yet to be seen.

⁶⁶Bugle Calls, <https://www.bands.army.mil/music/buglecalls>, accessed January 2021.