The background of the entire page is a dark blue, textured damask pattern. The pattern consists of repeating, symmetrical floral and foliate motifs, including acanthus leaves and stylized flowers, arranged in a grid-like fashion. The lighting creates a subtle relief effect on the pattern.

Fables *for* Freemasons

John W. Bizzack and Dan Kemble
Master Fabulists

Fables for Freemasons

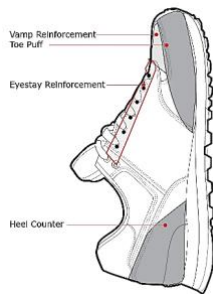
LEATHER SHOES

John W. Bizzack and Dan M. Kemble

We don't think much about polishing our shoes these days. In fact, interest in durable leather footwear has been declining for quite some time. The preference for the more casual convenience offered by a variety of informal footwear continues to alarm the leather and the old shoe industry.

Droughts over the past decade have affected, and will, for years to come, continue to affect the cattle market, where most leather is produced, which, of course, affects costs in the manufacturing of leather shoes. Also, the onset of more ethically conscious shoppers demanding more alternatives to leather has led designers to utilize fake leather, as well as to companies switching to various other materials to signal their environmental awareness.

Manufacturers have had a tough time coming to terms with the reality that today there is a significantly smaller population have an interest in much of anything leather. Studies show that fewer people are even aware that the leather shoe industry exists.



Since the 1990s, a rising popularity of what is more universally referred to as “sneakers,” seems to have snuck up on the leather footwear industry and redefined not only what has become the prevalent footwear but what has become socially acceptable foot-attire in almost all groups and for most all occasions.¹ Comfort, convenience, and versatility being the main factors, many more consumers look for shoes, that were once thought of as athletic footwear instead of leather shoes that when properly made and cared for, last

much longer.

It is unlikely that the leather shoe-making industry will ever be restored to the prestige for which it was once known. The Oxford, Spray, Trousler Crease, Wingtips, and the Madison model, while still available, have all fallen sharply in demand. Some shoe experts believe that the rigid devotion to old manufacturing practices (even when proven unproductive) continue to steer the industry.

Elmer “Buster” Brown, Chief Financial Officer and Secretary of The American Shoemaker Federation (ASMF), believes the low prices charged for their product has sent a message to many potential customers that the quality of their workmanship is inferior when compared to the more colorful, better-known styles, and highly regarded sneaker designs found today. Brown, a long-time luminary in his field, has for decades warned that it has become too expensive to maintain the large plants once used to make good shoes of the past, better—a phrase for which the industry was once well-known.

Brown's position is often challenged by those who think low prices are a landmark of the industry and that the entire trade must adhere to that landmark, cross their fingers, and hope for the best.

In reality, however, no one in the trade is found to be seeking changes in the principles of the industry, but

¹ The origin of the footwear we know as sneakers had its beginnings in an 1862 book titled, *Female Life in Prison, By a Prison Matron*. In the first volume of the two-volume set of books written by Frederick Robinson about prison life for females in England in the 19th century, Robinson uses the word “sneaks” to refer to the shoes the guards (matrons) use in the prison. The following is a quote from the original text: *The night-officer is accustomed to wear a species of India-rubber shoes or goloshes. These are termed “sneaks” by the women.* (Female Life in Prison, 1862).

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instead changes in the way the product is made.

The hard truth is that the leather shoe industry has been in serious trouble for more than just a few decades.² Although interest seems to spike following wars, or as one observer commented, “Whenever men seemed less busy in the world,” such spikes have always given way to steady, unrelenting decline for various reasons.

Many industry researchers report that during those spike years, shoes were rushed into and through production, and the quality of the material soon came into question. Manufacturing reports show that corners were cut, and the erstwhile quality craftsmanship put into making already good shoes better, began to suffer in subsequent decades.

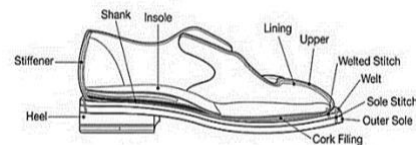


Many shoemakers and much of the leadership responsible for the work have yet to fully understand the true extent and rippling effect of the post war sales patterns. One think-tank devoted to examining this and ancillary problems in business believes the problem is rooted in the lack of training and instruction given to those who are set to labor in the industry. The think tank has also consistently pointed out for decades how lowering standards in the field in hopes of capturing more of the market share has, over time, only contributed to the first problem. As proven in many fields, the quality of what is manufactured is more important than the quantity produced.

The over reliance on the flawed, but widely held, assumptions that little to no training and instruction and lowering standards in the production of quality leather footwear would keep the field alive, flies in the face of valid market research that clearly shows the opposite. The same research also revealed that not all of those who sought quality leather footwear and chose to wear them, subsequently took care of their shoes.

As if that wasn't enough bad news for those in the leather shoe industry, we find that the growing emergence of counterfeit shoe polish had harmed the regular shoe polish market and hampered its growth.³ The substitute ingredients in those imitation products were substandard in comparison to the older brands of polish. This continued to lessen interest in the old leather footwear by potential buyers, and their attention shifted to the sneaker world.

By the 1980s, the industry attempted to boost their appeal and draw more buyers to their many outlets around the nation. Today, many can see that the early efforts and slogans used during that period that were designed to appeal to prospective buyers were out of touch with the interests of the potential buyers. “You'd Make a Good Wearer of Leather Footwear,” and “Ask1(a leather shoe wearer) 2Become One,” simply did not get the attention necessary to offset the steady decline in buyer-interest.



At this point in leather shoe history, it is clearer that the problem was attacked from the wrong end because the lack of market interest was, as it always had been, a reflection on what a growing majority considered to be actual quality. By the year 2000, numerous outlets were closing or merging with other outlets. No matter,

² “The Decline of the American Shoe Industry,” *New York Times*, May 5, 1985 <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/09/16/opinion/l-must-all-of-our-shoes-be-made-abroad-004186.html>, and <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/05/28/business/shoe-industry-s-struggle.html>, accessed April 30, 2021.

³ Allied Market Research, <https://www.alliedmarketresearch.com/shoe-polish-market-A06455>, accessed, April 30, 2021.

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the decline continues. Shoe store sales in the United States were down 87% from just the year before.⁴ Many believe this is due to the failure of the leather shoe attire industry to keep its fingers on the pulse of potential buyers, while others stand with the research and common sense that as the industry lowered their production standards, they simply made too many shoes that pretended to represent quality.

By the second decade of the 21st century, the quality shoe industry began promoting itself in an entirely new way.

“Get out there and let people see you wearing leather shoes” became a popular slogan. Subsidizing that campaign was the push to play on the idea that grandfathers, fathers, uncles, and older brothers had once worn quality footwear, so, the tradition should continue.

Another idea showcased the many famous leather shoe wearers from the past — Presidents, authors, actors, sports figures, explorers, aviators, generals, industry giants, celebrities, and frontiersmen. Relying on patriotic sentiment, the fact that George Washington wore leather shoes or boots was prominently highlighted. That plan, however, eventually broke down as new generations, who were less educated about American history in the first place, no longer related to the names on lists of famous leather shoe and boot wearers. This idea also lost steam as it became clearer in later years that not all of the names that appeared on lists actually wore quality leather shoes.

Some, however, believe there is good news for the leather shoe and polish industries. Although all standards of legitimate measurement show a marked decrease in the interest in leather-based shoe wear, the Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Department of Commerce, has told us “A bounce back is anticipated!”⁵ Unfortunately, those today who rah-rah that promising news are doing what has always been done in the industry: using old data and thinking to maintain the status quo. In this case, the rah-rah relied on the Bureau’s 1929 report on shoe and boot manufacturing as their evidence.

By the second decade in the 21st century, it was painfully clear that the long-time industry motto of the designers and manufacturers of quality leather footwear, “We make good footwear better,” appealed to fewer shoe wearers than ever before. Some in the industry considered that loss of market to be the end of the quality leather shoe industry.

To bolster sales, some manufacturers thought that practically giving away their shoes at what became known as One-Day-Shoe-Sales would save their market. Although thousands took advantage, proof that the process reintroduced the value of quality to the industry remains dubious. Moreover, it was observed that those who rushed to claim their shoes at these “sales,” wore the shoes only for a brief time before they returned to the lesser quality shoes that they were used to wearing.

At the core, however, of all future debate remains the challenge that has always faced the industry: how to pass the craftsmanship to each subsequent generation to effectively practice the making of quality leather shoes for future wearers. Not only do few today wear quality leather shoes, but fewer have learned how to make them. In addition, quality materials seem scarce.

⁴ Allied Market Research.

⁵ A.B. Batmann, Chief, Shoe and Boot Design, Commerce Reports, Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce, Department of Commerce, Shoe and Leather Manufacturers, No. 15, April 15, 1929, 179.

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The once busy plants that produced thousands of quality leather shoes are quieter today. Many of the old facilities have been repurposed.

Remnants of the eras when quality leather footwear carried prestige and were embraced as products of excellence can still be found, but mostly at estate sales, nestled in private collections, exhibited in museums, and sold on eBay.

Nevertheless, the power of the idea of quality leather footwear has not completely faded with the times but it is clear today that not every person who might want a pair will make use of them or wear them long, if received.

But the vision of Elmer “Buster” Brown, Jimmy Cordovan, Matthew Edwardian, Regis Florsheim, Thomas Machan, and other forefathers of quality leather shoe manufacturing continues. The strength of the industry is found in fewness and in the hands and care of those who appreciate the true value that quality provides and who exercise the common sense necessary to preserve that quality.



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COLD STOVES

John W. Bizzack and Dan M. Kemble

As a harsh winter storm approached, a man who had wandered deep into a thick forest began to realize that he was unprepared to battle the storm that closely followed him. Anxiously, he searched for shelter from the howling and bitter northerly wind that numbed his body as the heavy snow whirled around him and covered his tracks. Lost and wandering deeper into the darkness of the night, the man sensed that the storm was worsening.

Shielding his eyes from the unrelenting gusts of wind, he saw the outline of a small clearing in the forest and a cabin that could provide him with the refuge he desperately sought.

Heartened, he trudged toward the door, raised his hand, and knocked. The door slowly opened on its own and he stumbled inside a dark room, then closed the door against the wind and chill that chased him. Exhausted, he fell to his knees.

He shivered uncontrollably and as he tried to catch his breath, he scanned the near-dark room and saw another faint outline on the east wall that was an iron stove. He fell forward onto his hands and began to crawl toward the outline as he shouted repeatedly, "GIVE ME HEAT! GIVE ME HEAT!"

He removed a glove and reached out and touched the stove and found that it was cold. His cries withered into a whisper and then a mumble. Consumed by the darkness and frozen by the cold, he took his final breath as dawn was approaching.

That morning the storm broke. An old traveler made one of his frequent visits to the cabin that he had built years ago to serve as a shelter for travelers, or those who became lost in the forest because of their wandering.

As the old man opened the door, the light of the morning cascaded across the room. And there, on the floor in front of the cold stove, he saw the lifeless body of the man who had spent his final hours shouting, "Give me heat!"

He gave a quick glance at the shelf on the east wall next to the stove and saw that the candles and jar he had filled with matches were still there. The bundles of kindling that he had placed at the south wall of the cabin were not disturbed and the cords of firewood that he had carefully stacked were exactly where he had left them. Undisturbed too were the blankets on the chair near the stove along with the unopened tin of biscuits that sat on top of them.

The old traveler was saddened by the circumstance before him, but unsurprised. He was aware of the nature of some men to expect rewards without putting forth the effort to achieve them. The man on the floor next to the stove found what he was seeking but then put forth no effort after his discovery to apply himself further so that what he discovered could be used for its intended purpose.

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THE SOLUTIONIST

John W. Bizzack and Dan M. Kemble

Steward H. Mason retired after a brilliant career that spanned more than a half century. He solved complex problems and provided lasting solutions for the fields of science, business, organizations, governments, industry, the military, academia, and communities large and small.

Many people considered Steward a design engineer. Others thought of him as a technologist, consultant, an organizational efficiency and behavioral architect, but he referred to himself only as a *Solutionist*.

He never charged a fee for his services unless the solutions he provided were put into place and proven successful. The fortune he amassed was proof of his extraordinary skill - a fortune that he, in turn, had donated the majority of to the relief of the poor and distressed.

Steward H. Mason was, indeed, a good man. He spent his life in the service of others in ways that made the lives of an untold number of people better.

There was only one organization in his long, successful career that he was unable to help and it troubled him because the historical intent and purpose of this organization was founded on the most powerful and impressive idea he had ever heard. That idea was resilient, time tested, and strikingly relevant to the world if, that is, those who were in love with the idea would actually understand it and be capable of teaching it.

He had been approached by many men in that organization over the years seeking his services. Each time he found that what they were looking for was not assistance in finding *lasting* solutions, but, rather, quick ones.

Steward saw this happen in other organizations that slowly drifted from their original aim and purpose and became infected with the thinking that bigger was better instead of first making better their capacity to become bigger. The organization failed each time it had allowed its membership to swell to stunning heights because each time the unbridled expansions resulted only in an equally stunning decline. The going up proved not worth the coming down because on each occasion the organization moved closer to a pale and elementary shadow of itself.

The light of the powerful idea on which this organization was based dimmed not only to much of its membership, but also in the eye of the public. The organization responded by hoisting their banner higher and opening its doors wider and adjusted their long-standing rules so that it was easier to become a member. Their practices became more casualized and the original idea on which they were founded was explored less in their assemblies. There were new programs each year that were designed to generate interest, involvement, and foster the appearance that the organization and *all* its members were industrious but that too failed to halt the decline, although each new program seed like a good idea at the time.

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The hubris born of how the organization measured and defined its success proved a lingering problem. Their gauge was the mistaken reliance on the number of names that appeared on their membership roster. When the folly of that same logic was applied to the stunning and steady decline that followed each increase in membership, it would have to also mean that their organization was no longer “successful.”

As the organization walked into the arms of time, too many members and much of their leadership blamed the unrelenting decline on conventional scapegoats. “Men nowadays were just too busy,” they decried. Social erosion within the larger society was also often pointed to as the cause of the lethargy that enveloped the organization.

The institution’s arrogance-based looking inward for any possibility that the organization may share at least a part of the responsibility for the decline and, the lack of all inclination to address such possibility, neutralized all solutions Steward could provide.

Notwithstanding, Steward offered solutions to the groups over the years – solutions that matched ones voiced previously by luminaries and some leaders within the organization since the late 1700s. But like those of the past, his too were put aside by the mainstream leadership of the group and the organization remained focused primarily on solving the decline by doing what they had always done: admit more members.

There were, however, as there had always been, small pockets of the organization that evolved into in what became known as “Islands” floating in what was also referred to as the “Sea of Ordinary.”

Recognizing that the external should match the important labor and undertaking that happens internally, the isles slowly restored deteriorating facilities in which they conducted their business. Driven by a distant heritage where they had learned from study, to embrace the power of the old idea of their group, they only opened their doors to admit as more members those who were determined to be capable of devoting and committing the time necessary to also explore, learn, and practice the power of all aspects of the central idea of the organization – not just a few parts. A protocol befitting their pursuit of the idea was conveyed at each of their meetings, in solemn and impressive ceremonies. Uniform instruction of new and existing members, was institutionalized by means of applied consistency. They elected and appointed members to official positions of leadership based on merit, and sensibly planned beyond a year at a time creating an ample budget that was sufficient to accommodate the perpetuation of the tasks required for their worthy pursuit.

A doctrinal change would be necessary for the mainstream culture to achieve that which was accomplished by the islands, and such a change was impossible as long as the mainstream subscribed to doing what they had done in the past and then expect better results. Steward, recognizing that reality, backed away from the mainstream and devoted his time to those islands where men meant business in their pursuit of lasting solutions.

As Steward predicted, the mainstream eventually fell below the critical mass required to sustain it. The mainstream continued the same path and practices and was unable to overcome the increasing mortality rate in the organization by using only methods of the past to attract men to it. Such men and who would retain their membership or actively be involved in the group for only a few years.

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What was left standing was a small, but better suited, model grounded in the historical design, aim, intent, and purpose of Freemasonry. The irony that the solution had been there and had been voiced in each generation since its inception of the Institution was not missed by those who applied themselves to their work.

A foundation upon which the scale of any future expansion and growth was now more firmly anchored by an unswerving and constructive commitment to excellence in the exploration and strict observance of a powerful idea.

Fables for Freemasons

THE WIDGET TALE

John W. Bizzack and Dan M. Kemble

The oldest and largest manufacturer of widgets in the world could not stop the steady decline of customers. In response, widget leadership, supported by the majority of those who labored in the widget factories, began decades of tinkering with the original design that drew customers.⁶

They changed the color of their once popular widgets, reduced the already low cost of widgets, added new appendant widget designs, and made it easier to obtain widgets. Wanting to become more visible to the marketplace, they began to affiliate with and sponsor large and small public relief and charitable programs and adopted new promotional and marketing slogans and campaigns directed to the pool of prospective buyers who continued to steadily lose interest in the once well-known manufacturer, *and* the widgets they had long produced. Nothing worked.

Widget plants lost widget makers and eventually had to merge with other widget plants or simply turned in their business license and closed their doors. The core of widget maker leadership and many of the workers viewed the declining interest in their product because of people being too busy to use widgets anymore.

Economists studied the matter. Documentaries and films about the once popular widgets and the industry were produced from time to time. Tours were given of the massive widget plants that were constructed in the salad days of widget making. Most of those formerly busy factories were now infrequently used or had been repurposed.

Stories, both invented and only partially factual about the product and the impact that widgets had on the world, saturated the Internet. The widget experience was also the subject of countless books, the bulk of which were written by those who worked in the widget organization, widget luminaries, and the historical figures and famous people who were once widgeeters themselves.

Neither these writings or new marketing programs that were designed each year to boost interest in widgeeering led to a revival of interest in the widget market. As more buyers returned their special widget rings for refund, the size of the important demographic to which most widget buyers belonged declined significantly and the next potential generation of widgeeters showed little interest in the product.

Pockets of devoted widgeeters around the nation saw a twofold problem. First, the quality of materials used to make widgets had deteriorated and many of the plants in which widget production took place had been taking shortcuts to the manufacturing of the product. Second, the instructions necessary to master the use of the widget were abbreviated. In some cases, buyers opened the box and found no

⁶ "The Widget Tale" is an excerpt from *21st Century Conversations About Freemasonry: A Candle in the Dark*, Section IV, BSF Foundation, 2021, John W. Bizzack and Dan M. Kemble.

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instructions. The corporate office notion that widgets were for everyone, and that everyone could figure out how to use them without instruction, proved to be wrong. Contributing to the frustration of many buyers, even the widget helpline failed to provide the assistance necessary to inspire the buyer or improve the level of a significant level of customer satisfaction.

Although the popularity of the widget continues to decline, the idea is forever enshrined by the many repurposed buildings that were once used to manufacture the product. Widget remains in the public eye today because of auction sites on the Internet, eBay, and estate sales, which continue to ensure availability of collectables that that were manufactured the earliest days of widgeeering.

Although widget enthusiasts are fewer in number today, a comeback and the swelling of interest in widgeeering like the ones that took place in the early and mid-19th century, and twice in the 20th century, is hopeful. If such a time should come, the prediction is that the quality of the materials used will improve and there will be better instruction about how to use widgets provided to customers.

Studies today are not much different than those of the past that tell us that such advancements will more likely lead to an overall widgeeering experience of days past. And that this improvement will lead to a more stable customer base from generation to generation – a base that that will sustain the extraordinary idea of widgets into the distant future and on the larger scale the widget deserves.

Should that happen, it would indeed be a great day for widgeeering.