

HIGH TWELVE FOR AMERICAN FREEMASONRY

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Recognizing there is a problem exists is the first step toward solving it.

Problems, big and small, are all around us, if, that is, we choose to notice them. Interestingly, the big ones that one might think could not possibly go unnoticed and addressed, are the ones that have too often lingered for generations. But when we are more driven by how we think things are, or ought to be, and not by the facts or truth staring us in the face, that happens.

In the study of organizational behavior, it is not uncommon to find old and new institutions that are quick to react to external influences affecting them in a negative or positive manner.

It is further not uncommon to find another shared feature: even when the external influence is positive, the response is not always the one that constructively advances the organization. Conversely, when negative the internal response is not always one that advances the organization.

There is a third feature that is not an uncommon reaction. When a negative affect is recognized, organizations give little thought, if any, to looking internally to see if there is anything at all that they have done, or continue to do, that exacerbates the external affect. And without a truthful inspection of even the remote possibility then that is the case, opinion begins to drive and govern decisions in response to the external problem no matter the facts.

Perhaps, in keeping with the use of symbols in the teachings of Freemasonry, a solution might be an

addition to our tracing boards: the image of a mirror. That might help us to remember that the external causes of problems that spell trouble for the fraternity are not always the sole root of the problem. Several times since the late 1700s we have seen what happens when we choose not to take a truthful, long, hard look in the mirror. The most recent lesson began near the middle of the 20th Century.

There are many writings, including those documented in our own official records, that chronicle the fact that the fraternity repeatedly deals with many of the same problems that have existed for nearly two-hundred years. When reading about them, it is striking how easily they can be mistaken as an overview of the current problems with which the fraternity continues to struggle.

Impairing the fraternity's capacity to resolve the same old problems is a well-known, and at least a 150-year-old characteristic of much of its membership: an unawareness of the factual past problems, what caused and led to them, and why they were not effectively addressed prior to, or as soon as there were recognized as a problem. Those things can be learned by reading, and by ensuring that what is learned from doing so is taught and sufficiently understood. The first step in recognizing the problems that exist today, so they can be solved, is understanding the problems of yesterday that have continued to linger and remain the problem today.

PART 1

It should be significant to Masons that it was the custom of Hiram Abif to inspect the work at the Temple every day at noon, when the harsh light most clearly revealed defects and weakness in the structure, and while the Craftsmen has been called from labor to refreshment. He did not hesitate to draw designs on the trestle board to remove defects and improve and strengthen the building.

It is High Twelve for the American fraternity, and past time for a thorough inspection and for the very same reasons we are told that Hiram conducted his. Such an inspection, when regularly and properly conducted, can then help in determining what must be done to strengthen and enrich the Institution. And as we inspect, let us tell ourselves the truth, even though truth may hurt.

SKIMMING THE SURFACE

No matter the glories of its past, the fraternity has shown unmistakable signs of decay for multiple decades, starting with what many somehow believe is the lone measurement of that decay: steady membership loss.

While that measurement is one important way to gauge the effectiveness, and even public perception, of the fraternity and Freemasonry, it is far from the lone cause for the decay.

Robert D. Putnam's 2000 book, *Bowling Alone*, presents a carefully argued study, and is a major work of social research. The book makes the case that the bonds connecting Americans to one another have eroded sharply since 1950 and continue to do so. Regardless of its one-time high status and reputation in society, the Institution of Freemasonry was hardly at the time or today, immune to the consequences of the erosion.

What Putnam's book did for the already overwrought fraternity was confirm what many members had long thought about the 2,261,992 decrease in the number of Master Masons since 1959,¹ and the general observation that there were fewer younger men in the ranks or seeking admittance and, proportionally, even fewer members attending and participating in their Lodges as they had prior to 1959.



¹ Masonic Services Association, Membership Totals Since 1924, The Masonic Service Association compiled the membership numbers of Master Masons in the United States Grand Lodges from 1924 through 2017. These figures are based upon MSA records obtained from Grand Jurisdictions and do not necessarily correspond exactly with those published by other sources. A table reflecting the membership was posted on the MSA web until 2018. All numbers reported by the MSA represented dues paying members in good standing. No central repository exists that collects national data on, member deaths, demits, suspensions, expulsions, failure to advance or distinguishes between active or non-active members. It should be noted that the MSA numbers represent only Master Masons, not all Entered Apprentices or Fellow Crafts who were members or left the fraternity after being made a member.

Published in 1989 was a paper titled, *What Are the Causes of Decline in Masonic Membership and What Remedies Can be Suggested to Stop the Trend*.² The paper was far from the first on the topic, but this particular work illustrates, in its examination of the losses, the mind-set and proclivity at the time to attribute causes of membership decline to external factors beyond the control of the fraternity. The paper pointed the finger at the economic condition of the country and one sociological change described by the author, in particular. He claimed that he convincingly proved in his paper that “the change in the husband-and-wife relationship in the current generation expressively over the last ten years and is the dominant cause contributing to the decline in Masonic membership.” He also cited as a cause of the decline the decrease in the proportion of men to the total population.

The paper has its points and may not be entirely wrong, but it continued to miss what a hard look in the mirror, and truthful internal inspection, would reveal.

In 1958, thirty-years earlier, a paper titled, *Attendance at Masonic Meetings* voiced what many Masons also believed. Although the paper scratched only the surface of what a long look in the mirror and honest internal inspection could reveal, it was at least a start. What was stated, however, and known by many, did not conform to the thinking of most of the leadership of the period with regard to the causes of declining membership. That thinking was that all problems facing the fraternity came from the external society. So, while it was published in a prestigious Masonic publication, what it pointed out did not spark a wave of fraternity-wide support to do much about it, any more than similar writings had previously.

One year before the membership decline steadily fell for the next seven decades, the writer offered what he found to be the cause of the lack of lodge attendance and involvement based on his forty-eight years of membership, regular attendance, and active involvement, then ultimately becoming Grand Master of his jurisdiction: *boring, tedious, uninteresting meetings*.³

Fitting with other findings in the writings and minutes around the nation, the paper condemned the endless meetings “where everyone who ever held a title must be introduced, saluted, and listened while he tells how glad he is that he came.” He noted the evenings that were filled with vocal and instrumental “musical numbers presented by tots who should be home in bed and are put on only because they are the son or daughters of the Master or Secretary.” He strongly suggested that Lodges “end the froth, the vaudeville, and boring features.”

Other writings of the same period spoke to the need for Lodges to improve on and better ensure ritual and ceremonies were done properly, cease the interminable reading of wordy minutes and of every detail of every piece of paper reaching the secretary’s desk since the last meeting, long winded introductions of every visitor and Past Master in attendance, stop trying to create entertainment for those who do attend, and focus on the real business of a Lodge: teaching the principles of Freemasonry.

In 1943, a Master of a prominent Lodge with over five-hundred members was so intent on providing entertainment at Stated Communications, that he called for a standing Entertainment Committee that would

² Paul W. Crossenbach, “What Are the Causes of Decline in Masonic Membership and What Remedies Can be Suggested to Stop the Trend?” *Masonic Literary Harvest*, Missouri Lodge of Research, Ovid Bell Press, Fulton, Missouri, 1989, 173.

³ Arthur Strickland, “Attendance at Masonic Meetings” *Masonic Literary Harvest*, Missouri Lodge of Research, Ovid Bell Press, Fulton, Missouri, 1989, 170.

produce “enjoyable Lodge meetings.”⁴ On one evening that year, a puppet show was scheduled. In comparison to other years for that Lodge, that particular year produced the least number of attendees than in the prior fifteen years and meetings commonly lasted until 11:50 p.m. No Masonic education was presented that year, but that was in the tradition of the previous several years. And, reported as what seemed the most important business of the year, was the motion to cancel dues obligation for fifty-year members (that predictably passed). The names of fifty Entered Apprentices who had not advanced appeared on the membership roster.

Evidenced by many writings from the late 1970s and into the late 1980s, there were Masons who had already pinpointed what Putnam would later confirm that affected membership. Social erosion was hardly deniable or a secret. Unfortunately, many of these works, and presumably discussions at Lodges and other Masonic assemblies at that time belabored that observation to the point that it became the most generally accepted single reason accounting for why the fraternity could not replace membership at the same pace of loss. That thinking was so widely embraced, that many saw no other reason to bother looking elsewhere for even a smidgen of internal responsibility for the losses.

NOTHING TO SEE HERE, FOLKS

By the time Putnam’s book was released in 2000, his findings, already something of a Masonic mantra embraced to help offset the shock of not seeing the extraordinary long lines of petitioners at the door as experienced from the mid-1940s through 1959, so easily overshadowed other possible explanations that were also very real, but not as easy to accept as the social erosion explanation.

One could almost hear a huge sigh of relief jump off the pages of the writings of some members at the time who eagerly welcomed and seized upon Putnam’s social research as further proof that there was nothing unsatisfactory or anything wrong when it came to the fraternity. After all, other membership-based organizations were also reeling from external social erosion.

Misery does loves company, and many of these writings had a comforting effect for the lesser informed because their theme sounded a lot like what is often heard by some police and firefighters in films to dissuade a crowd from forming at the site of an accident: “There’s nothing to see here, folks. Move along.”

The attitude that there was “nothing to see here” only contributed to the existing wide-spread idleness that choked the life out of suggestions calling for a thorough inward inspection that could, if truthfully conducted, bring to light the internal erosion that coincided with the external.

It should be pointed out that referring to the erosion of *the fraternity* is in no way a suggestion that the principles of Freemasonry eroded along with it. Those principles may not interest as many as we would like to think, but the

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⁴ *A Summarizing History of Lexington Lodge No. 1—1789–2017*, Lexington, KY, Preservation Committee, Cameron C. Poe, Donald H. Combs, Brian T. Evans, Jeremy D. Patches, John W. Bizzack, Chair, Editor, 2019.

truths found in them, continue to stand and be as applicable as they have been through the ages.

One can easily argue that it is not Freemasonry that has, in terms of public awareness, lost its once high perch, but the fraternity that represents it and is charged with ensuring its effectiveness. That argument can be based on well-researched findings that show that when the fraternity began to unmoor itself from the historical intent, aim, and purpose of Freemasonry, rust began to form. Evidence of that unmooring in the final quarter of the 18th Century began when Freemasonry in America was barely fifty-years old.⁵



"The Petition", John Ward Dunsmore, 1926. A painting that portrays the December 27, 1779, meeting of American Union Lodge No. 1 assembly at Arnold's Tavern, Morristown, New Jersey (see footnote 5).

While Putnam's important work cannot be discounted as an aspect of the fraternity's membership woes and lack of public awareness of the fraternity today, ignoring internal factors as additional aspects reduces the social erosion phenomenon to the status of scapegoat.⁶ And the acceptance of external social erosion as the principle reason for the condition of the fraternity forsakes and imperils Masonic teachings that charge and encourage members to seek truth.

The abandonment also suggests a reason why the idea of an honest, internal inspection to identify defects in an effort to improve and strengthen the building, as we are told that Hiram did every day at noon, can be so easily relegated to the back burner. Not as many members as we would like to think believe the necessity for introspection applies to those charged with leadership, and the operational matters involved in running the fraternity. That charge and encouragement applies to leading. But that would suggest members are not receiving (or retaining) effective instruction or developing leaders who demonstrate their understanding of

⁵ "The Petition," *Master Mason Magazine for Freemasons* 2, no. 9, New Jersey, March 1927, 137. (On December 27, 1779, American Union Lodge No. 1 met in Arnold's Tavern in Morristown, New Jersey. The lodge Master, Colonel Jonathan Heart, noted that one of the purposes of meeting was to take into consideration "some matters respecting the good of Masonry." Mordecai Gist, a continental army general from Maryland, was given the floor where he presented a petition to form a general grand lodge for the United States. The petition depicts, at least in the eyes of those involved and supporting it, the state of Freemasonry portraying its condition as lacking "a source of Light to govern their [Freemasons] pursuits and illuminate the path of happiness." The petition notes "many irregularities and improprieties," and related how they had manifested into the "present dissipated and almost abandoned condition of our lodges in general, as well as the relaxation of virtue amongst individuals." In the final paragraph, Gist called for an immediate departure from the current oversight of grand lodges to "save us from the impending dangers of schisms and apostasy." In closing, the petition stated: "To obtain security from those fatal evils, with affectionate humility, we beg leave to recommend the adopting and pursuing the most necessary measures for establishing one Grand Lodge in America, to preside over and govern all other lodges of whatsoever degree or denomination, licensed or to be licensed upon the continent, that the ancient principles and discipline of Masonry being restored, we may mutually and universally enjoy the advantages arising from frequent communion and social intercourse.")

⁶ A scapegoat is one of two kid goats. In the Bible, (Leviticus 16:21–22, New Revised Standard Version) one of the two kid goats was sacrificed and the living "scapegoat" was released and cast away into the wilderness, taking with it all sins and impurities, to carry away the sins of the community.

Freemasonry with the skills necessary to ensure their Lodge is receiving good and wholesome instruction. If that is accurate, then the question begged becomes: “What are we doing in Lodges, if we are not instructing and reaffirming the principles of Freemasonry?”

Obviously, the loss of members through death represents a natural attrition in all member-based organizations that cannot be escaped. However, the substantial number of members who drop their membership by non-payment of dues is a major reason that certainly justifies an honest internal review. This column, reported in all in the records of our Grand Lodges, represents men who were once interested enough to pay an initiation fee, take the time to go through and learn (at least to the satisfaction of their lodge) the three degrees and lectures, but who no longer consider the organization worth annual dues, which, in most cases, were then and remain today, ridiculously low.

We see how so few lodges can boast of attendance at their meetings higher than six percent of their members. And by that regular absence of the other ninety-four percent of members one can safely say that most of them have shown by “voting with their feet” that our meetings are not worth their time. The existence of that vast majority of members alone shoot holes in the idea that the fraternity plays no culpable role in its own decay. In addition to external social erosion, there are reasons these two categories should haunt the fraternity.

One is that it strongly suggests that we have admitted too many who were not suitable for membership. The second reason hurts because it suggests that what the fraternity professes it offers is oversold and does not live up to what men expect to find. A third, and possibly the most dreaded haunt by those who believe the answer is always “All we need is more members,” is that Freemasonry is truly not seen as being that pertinent to their daily lives as it was once was by petitioners in previous generations, thus leading to the possible conclusion there are actually fewer good men (under the fraternity’s definition) than believed. It could, of course, be a combination of all these things punctuated by the fraternity and its leadership unmooring itself from other of the requisites required to ensure the effectiveness, and even the perpetuity, of Freemasonry.

There is always a threat that a truthful internal inspection might reveal things we would rather not hear or acknowledge. But is threat as great as taking the whistling past the graveyard approach, or worse, pretending that there are no festering internal problems that gnaw at the organization?

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As if the non-payment of dues and lack of attendance crowd was not enough to at least arch an eyebrow, when we learn that 56% of members are not engaged or involved after receiving their most recent degree⁷ the reality of that troubling percentage alone compounds the haunting of the other three realities.

Furthermore, we find contradicting the notion that the external society erosion has simply bled into the fraternity (because we find so many members who testify to the reluctance of qualified members to become officers), the common occurrence of occasions when members with less than sufficient experience and skill

⁷ William O. Ware Lodge of Research, Covington, Kentucky, *Characteristics of an Ideal Lodge*, 2019.

(and sometimes with only months of membership under their belt) are nominated, then elected to positions of Master and Wardens of their lodge. There are also members who can also attest to the regularity of poorly conducted meetings, and still others who verify that there are officers who neither know the work well nor propose to learn it.

We can shrug all this off and say “There’s nothing here to see. Let’s move along,” like has been done in too many Masonic circles over the years, but there really is something here to see.⁸

⁸ NOTE: Space allows only a few citations. William H. Upton, “A Plea for the Teachings of Freemasonry,” in L.S. Myler, ed., *Jewels of Masonic Oratory*, Akron, Ohio, self-published, 1898, 78, Alexander Piatigorsky, *Freemasonry, The Study of a Phenomenon* London. Harville Hill Press, 1997, 164. Henry Coil Sr., *Conversations on Freemasonry*, Richmond, Macoy, 1976, 59. Dwight Smith, “Whither Are We Traveling,” *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, 76, 1963, 34, Albert G. Macey, “Masons Who Read and Masons Who Do not Read,” *The Master Mason*, 1875, Bob J. Jensen, “The Baltimore Convention of 1843,” *The Guardian*, Vol 1, 3, March 2008, Dale Sabin, “Kakistocracy,” *The Sprig of Acacia*, Vol. 12, 2015. J.W. Norwood, Master, Lexington Lodge 1, 1915, *Personal Notes*, Special Collections, Frankfort Historical Society, Frankfort, KY, examined in 2013, Lynn Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880-1930*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton Univ. Press, 1984, 40-41, J. W. 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HOW FUTURE HISTORIANS WILL VIEW THE EFFECTS AND AFTERMATH OF THE AGE OF BOWLING ALONE ON FREEMASONRY AND THE AGES IT SPAWNED

There is no reason to expect that historians will fail to see with much clearer eyes than many Masons of the past, as well as those of today, what actually happened in and to the American Fraternity. The internal trail will be easy to follow because of the massive volumes of writings by Masons and expanding research by social scientists, academics, and from the official publications of our jurisdictions—all of which are already so easily accessible by technology to those Masons interested enough to take a look. In addition, those who do not even consider themselves historians—Masons and non-Masons alike, have, for multiple decades, already effectually identified and written about the internal side of the matter.⁹

The findings of future historians will likely be pretty much the same as those who have chronicled the truth since the 1850s or so. What may astonish future historians though, is that such glaringly obvious problems could go on so long without effective resolution. Some may, if for no other reason than the existence of such volumes of writings and research, just consider that those writings and research were the inspections demanded, but simply went unheeded. The warnings came with such regularity to dozens of generations that literally tuned out the writings not just because so few read about Freemasonry and the fraternity at all, but that so few believed they needed to deal with anything that had to do with the internal.

In short, the findings by future historians who will examine the past seven decades can be anticipated to read something like this.

Part One Of A Two Part Series

THE INTERNAL VS. THE EXTERNAL Freemasonry: The Story Of The Ages

DATELINE: *Sometime in the Coming Years*

While it may be referred to and thought of as the Age of Bowling Alone, a more conclusive title for the plight of the fraternity surrounding American Freemasonry since the 1950s and into at least the first twenty-years of the following century might also be called the Age of Relaxation, Postponement, Age of Shrugging, Can Kicking, or Dithering.

The good work of Masons throughout the country is apparent in all Ages that came before the 1950s and irrefutable evidence exist that there were good men in lodges that continued to pursue and practice the historically intended aim and purpose of the Craft and so after the 1959 as well.

At the mid-20th Century mark, however, the fraternity experienced an anomaly resulting in an unanticipated explosion of membership that had never been seen before, or since. The membership rolls were swollen by that influx last for a decade and a half—an increase for which neither membership, nor its leaders, or its structure were close to being prepared.

Becoming quickly accustomed to the massive influx of petitioners (some of whom were qualified, as were some who were not), membership so

Moscow in Winter,” lecture, First Biennial Australian and New Zealand Masonic Research Council, Melbourne, Australia, 1992, Delmar D. Darrah, History and Evolution of Freemasonry, Charles T. Pownor Co. Chicago, 1954.

⁹ *Ibid.*

steadily and rapidly ballooned the ranks that it appeared to many in the fraternity that the long lines had no end. Unanticipated consequences, however, began to become apparent in the early 1960s when the quickly bloated membership began to decline.

There was a reduction in time devoted to instructing, and commissioning not only each man's Masonic experience but also obscuring the clear path toward *becoming* a Freemason, not merely being made a member of the fraternity. Regrettably, the instruction and orientation were already weak and the even more accelerated pace of admitting members and sending them forth on a largely unmarked path, weakened the understanding of the aim and purpose of Freemasonry.

Some lodge membership rosters during this period reflected the names of over 1,000 or more members, whose facilities could barely seat 70.

As the volume of members admitted continued to increase, the volume of qualified leaders with skills to lead such a overstuffed corps of men who were correspondently less instructed in the art and arts of Freemasonry or how it might best be delivered, also began to decline. The cycle continued to naturally produce unprepared members and leaders who mirrored the previous ones with too few exceptions.

Like a talented but aging rock band that loses its recording label as fan and crowd appeal falls off from the lack of hits, the fraternity slowly found itself facing the same disinterest.

Unable to fill larger stadiums, the band was ultimately reduced to playing in small clubs as revenue, along with the distinction once held with the public, faded because fewer sought tickets to performances.

Rather than recognizing that the public taste in music was changing and that perhaps looking internally for additional reasons the band's fan base was in decline, they attempted to appeal to a wider audience by lowering ticket prices to their performances, making their shows briefer, and in lackluster fashion, continued down the same

mechanically-grounded path that caused their fall. No matter, they attempted to look and act like the generations they were so desperately hoping to capture. They replaced much of the original members with younger players who turned out to be even lesser musicians than the originals and who attempted speed their classic songs and adopted the slogan, *Making Good Music Better*. The performances remained dull, listless, and proved incapable of replacing fans at the same pace in which they were being lost.

After a painfully unsuccessful attempt at comeback, they were no longer able to sustain the band or generate the wide audience they once enjoyed, so the band dissolved. National reviews wholeheartedly agreed with their decision and collectively declared that the band no longer sounded as good as their original records.

The band was quickly consigned to the less in demand music genre known as Golden Oldies, where, ironically, a much smaller potential audience would, years later, become a new following of the band's music and later would contribute to a resurgence of interest in their music to future generations.

A smaller audience was found but one that was committed to the band's style of music and performance. Although far from the record level of fans once enjoyed, the band found there was strength in fewness.

That quaint allegory might sum it up for some but an aging rock band that loses its appeal, is hardly the same as an organization whose history is linked to the formation of a nation, the improvement of lives throughout the world and countless acts of kindness, relief and goodwill bestowed on communities and its own distressed members. Nor is it comparable to of a group whose existence influenced many men from all walks of life who were committed to the genuine pursuit of living its precepts.

In recent years, the fraternity began to collectively discover that becoming a Golden Oldie has benefits. The smaller, more wieldy organization that became better instructed, and regularly

inspected, proved what has been observed through the ages: bigger is not always better.

Since the 1960s, the fraternity grappled with more than the unstoppable natural attrition of its older members. Suspicions were confirmed by the experience of 1970s through the 1990s and beyond that a bulk of those admitted either quickly faded away or did not participate or involve themselves in the work of the fraternity.

At the same time and somewhat invisible was the growing number of many of the newer members who sought something different from their Masonic experience than what had been offered for decades. Their search ultimately sowed seeds of change.

The principles of Freemasonry did not change at all, but the culture of the fraternity did. The influence of those newer members, although never a majority, began mixing more with some veteran members who were already seeking this kind of change, but who had not been a majority either.

The uptick in the interest of those seeking admittance has not returned membership to the anomaly level of the mid-20th Century surge, nor is it expected to because the West Gate of the fraternity is guarded much better than it was during the surge and in years previous to it.

The increased awareness and interest in Freemasonry did not this time lead to the highly infectious, overly effervescent hurrahs from leadership for their efforts to just sustain the status quo. The focus of leadership and the new majority of members found new purpose and ways to exercise the level of care that is bestowed on them to ensure the life and effectiveness of Freemasonry.

Since there are now fewer members clinging to what were merely habits of the past, the pursuit of the no-finish-line-labor necessary to return the Institution to the true definition of extraordinary purpose enjoys the long-sought foundation to

extend itself well into the future and is liberated from the problems experienced in the past.

Part Two Of The Two Part Series

THE INTERNAL VS. THE EXTERNAL

Freemasonry: The Story Of The Ages

There was no light switch that was suddenly turned on that illuminated the fraternity in more recent years. Many of the writers of that period referred to what was happening as a *candle in the dark* that started to glow more brightly.

As the flame grew, it lit the way to the less bright areas of the factual history of how American Freemasonry actually unfolded and brought to that light the lessons from the past. These lessons illustrated what while the external did indeed affect the fraternity, just as the Age of Bowling Alone had explained, the fraternity also came to grips with the fact that it was also the internal that was as culpable as the external.

The fraternity, now more widely recognizing and accepting the utter necessity of truthful internal examination easily identified the periods when the train on which fraternity was riding began to run out of track.

The membership surge anomaly was certainly a precursor, but the fraternity's response to the inevitable membership decline that followed was determined to be as serious of a downfall.

Rather than looking internally for adjustments to the consequences from the Age of Bowling Alone, the fraternity chose to simply cast a wider net to draw more members.

The fact that many forgot, at least in this context, that it is the internal, not the external that Freemasonry regards.

The response was the Age of Relaxation, when it became the opinion of leaders, and many others in the fraternity that making it easier to be made a member would turn the tide of decline. Age

qualifications were lowered. The definition of a good man seemed to subliminally shift to meaning all men were basically good, and therefore had a lot to contribute to Freemasonry. The long-standing rule that solicitation of potential members was prohibited found itself pushed to its threshold. Short forms of Masonic ritual, lectures and proficiency returns that are intended to demonstrate that a candidate is knowledgeable enough to be moved on to the next degree, were diluted and made less than they already were (which was weak). Many practices were simply more casualized. The inclination to abbreviate in these years seemed to sweep the fraternity, except in one instance. Ironically, this one is the most grumbled about practice that has dissuaded men from time immemorial from attending lodge: long business meetings that had the tendency to produce more mechanical Masons than Freemasons.

By the final decade of the 20th Century, the trend to abridge most everything was manifested in the concept of what became known as One-Day Classes. These “instant Freemasonry” events were adopted and spread to several jurisdictions.

The classes, where a petitioner could cut down on the already brief attention that candidates were given by being rushed through degrees, accelerated the process even more. This further diluted the intended progressive science of Freemasonry by cramming into one day all that some believed was necessary for a man to *become* a Freemason. Becoming a Freemason meant primarily watching the degrees being performed. This initiatic experience, although bringing in many new members at once, was seen by the majority of jurisdictions that did not adopt (or dropped later the initiative) as cheapening the experience.

Often billed and promoted as an approach for men who were too busy to pursue the customary path,

the one-day class concept was rejected by most all jurisdictions. Many who attempted to do it, did not continue. By 2015, no valid evidence was found that majority of men who entered Freemasonry in this manner continued their journey.¹⁰

The mistaken premise revealed made that the conclusion that men who were too busy pursue Freemasonry would automatically become less busy after a one-day exposure, and involve themselves in the fraternity, was fallacious. Some who experienced the one-day approach did pursue Freemasonry, of course. But valid research later demonstrated the approach was no more successful than the customary process, especially when it came to retention.¹¹ Research trumped opinion. The fraternity was not going a good job, of keeping the interest of its members no matter how a man was admitted into its ranks.¹²

What the one-day approach did offer, without question, was the instant addition of more names to rosters, and presumably more revenue, at least for a time. Only a glance at membership in the fraternity since the one-day approach confirms that it not only failed, but failed spectacularly; the gains experienced as a result were statistically insignificant. It would require another doctrinal shift to repair.¹³

Another irony surfaced. The customary approach of rushing candidates through the three degrees, as practiced since at least the early 1800s in most jurisdictions, proved only to make all who passed through them a member, not a Freemason. And records illustrate that the fade-away and lack of participation problem was a long-standing one. Argued by Masonic writers and some leaders since the 1850s, is that the hurried way that ritual and lectures were delivered were clearly not convincing enough for the majority of candidates to be inspired to pursue Freemasonry. As often

¹⁰ Michael A. Halleran, *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, San Francisco, 2015, 28.

¹¹ Mikel J. Stoops, *Membership Retention: A Matter of Value*, a presentation at the Rubicon Masonic Society, 21st Century Conversations About Freemasonry Virtual Education Series, October

25, 2021 (based on August 2021 research titled, *Comparing The Data Associated With Those Taking The Traditional Path. To Become A Master Mason And Those Given Shortcuts.*

¹² Stoops.

To Become A Master Mason And Those Given Shortcuts.

¹³ Halleran, 30-31.

pointed out, another reason for the lack of motivation that could not be ignored was that the common admittance of men who were not qualified, much less committed to do more than be made a member, also played a role.

None of these reactionary doctrinal shifts in membership practices proved to create a resurgence in public interest, must less membership. The slow realization of the reality that the fraternity was failing to engage its members, no matter how a candidate was admitted, his age, solicited or not, instructed, and despite many of the other designs that appeared on the Masonic Trestleboard at the time, began to fuel the doctrinal shift necessary to address the care and effectiveness. In short, the evidence finally mounted up and could no longer be ignored.

More universal recognition that the policy of lowering standards to accommodate those who do not raise theirs has never proven an effective strategy, was the genesis of another coming doctrinal shift to stop the ordinariness that so easily slips toward mediocrity.

Although the West Gate actually did need new guards, the poor preparation provided to members about Freemasonry was the proximate result of electing and appointing leaders who were consistently unprepared for the task. Poor preparation nourished a general acceptance in the culture already primed for low-bar-expectations of unproductive leadership. Poor attendance beget poor programs and, of course, poor programs further contributed to poorer attendance.

The lowered bars contributed to the rust that, over time, further concealed the fundamental reality of the necessity of that *quality* care that Freemasonry demands if it is to be effective. The quality care ebbed, and the distortion of the real words Masons had used, such as excellence, distinction, merit, and exceptionalism, suit, as did the even more casual approaches to the nuts, bolts, and apparatuses designed to, again, best ensure the quality care of Freemasonry.

The Age of Relaxation amounted to a tacit confession that acknowledged the fraternity was

on throes of desperation. The lowering of standards did not prove to help any more than having higher standards that were not generally practiced or enforced.

Historical analysis today agrees with many past Masonic writers, scholars and qualified outside observers that the consequences of the Age of Bowling Alone was not the sole culprit in the decline of the prominence of Freemasonry or its capability to retain members. The steady waning was not only attributable to the ways and means the fraternity delivered and presented Freemasonry, but the predictable way it responded to the effects of the Age.

That realization eventually spurred later research that affirmed the position of early (and later writers) showing that had strict admittance standards been consistently upheld, the fraternity may have realized sooner that there were just fewer men to start with who were actually qualified for Freemasonry. The Age of Bowling Alone helped make the shallowness of that pool more conspicuous, but it took decades for many in the fraternity to recognized that was a piece of the puzzle they had missed.

The inevitable consequence was a smaller fraternity, but one that ultimately rediscovered that there was indeed an actual strength found in fewness, as long the fewer men were genuinely qualified, and the leadership they elected collectively upheld their part in solidifying that strength by practicing Freemasonry.

As the 20th century approached its final decade, the culture of the Masonic fraternity experienced a revival of interest in its true aim and purpose, and more easily recognized that the former chief concern to just enlarge its membership was far from as important as ensuring its West Gate was consistently guarded. A realization dawned that it members were provided the inspiration to continue to pursue the precepts of Freemasonry and consistently motivated to understand the truths which its rituals and ceremonies are intended to impart and inculcate. These factors are essential to Freemasonry if it is going to

accomplish the charge of cultivating social, civic, and spiritual values among men. The apparatuses to facilitate that challenge must consistently, too, be inspected.

Many believe the “aha” moment for the fraternity came when the true meaning of the advice that one of its prominent leaders in the

1960s bestowed in two words a reply to the question about what approach the fraternity might take to resolve the issues confronting it. Dwight L. Smith, the respected Past Grand Master of Indiana, famously said: *practice Freemasonry*.¹⁴

The End

PART II

¹⁴ Dwight Smith. See note 4.

CARE FOR A DEEPER LOOK?

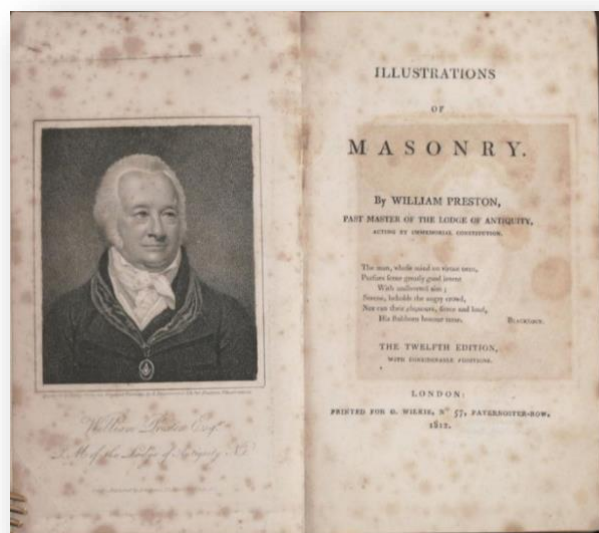
Influenced to teach the knowledge of his time, 18th Century Scottish author, printer and lecturer, William Preston, couched his work in the flowery and elegant language then in style, which today some claim is too difficult for modern men to understand. The language is obviously not the vernacular with which all men are closely acquainted, familiar and use today, so reading Preston does involve the requirement, dreaded by some, of thought. Quite acceptable, since people began to read, is that if something read is not understood, ask someone who might understand. The only problem with that, is if the person who is asked does not understand it either, nor found someone who did when he asked for clarification.

The way around this is simply not to read; a remedy with which many Masons have no especially when it comes most topics related to Freemasonry. Another way is to keep one's fingers crossed in hopes someone will just tell us all about what we are trying to learn and do not know. The latter is entirely dependent upon the secondary hope that the teller knows the topic and subjects well enough to explain it. If not, that process creates the potential that what may be passed on is watered down or simply incorrect, which becomes of less value if passed on that way for generations.

Preston highlighted the philosophical nature of Freemasonry through a series of lectures in his 1772 book, *Illustrations of Masonry*.¹⁵ The book was reprinted several times throughout the nineteenth century, which suggests there was demand. His writing today is viewed as helping to organize Freemasonry in the United States in context. Preston not only believed that Freemasonry is a progressive moral science, but that it should have an educational value in giving its votaries more knowledge of the liberal arts and sciences.¹⁶

It was no coincidence that before, and in, Preston's time few men went to or had access to schools. His position was that Masons should know something about architecture, physiology, liberal arts and sciences, and geometry, so his book contributed to a community of men who did not have such a background and who found Masonic Lodges, where lessons in ethics, civics, religion, human relations as well as astronomy, music, rhetoric, logic, and arithmetic were topics of interest.

Often presented as truth, but without a formal presentation of actual evidence, is our common belief and notion that men in our advanced culture today are much more well-versed on those particular topics than those prior to and during Preston's time. Accordingly, the question comes up about whether Preston's lectures are really as useful to men today as they were two centuries ago.



¹⁵ William Preston, *Illustrations of Masonry* (1772) J. Wilkie, publisher, 2nd edition, 1775.

¹⁶ Colin Dyer, *William Preston and His Work*, Shepperton, United Kingdom, Lewis Masonic, 1987.

Considering that there is a category of members who believe that King Solomon's Temple was built in England, every defender of the Alamo was a Mason, liberal arts and sciences means an education that encourages the acceptance of opinion as fact, astrology is the same as astronomy, Freemasonry descended from ancient Egyptians, the primary purpose of Freemasonry is to serve as a public charity, stated communications are intended to be a time for fun and frivolity, or that just knowing passwords and grips is all that is necessary to *become* a Freemason, the question of whether Preston's lectures are really useful to men today should not be a question at all. Should every member at least be able to speak with some level of confidence about the symbols on our tracing boards, and be proficient enough to distinguish which tracing board represents each degree?

Some assembly of the profound truths, lessons and philosophies found in Freemasonry is required. There is actually more to it than being rushed through the degrees and carrying a membership card.

Obviously, many members do not fall into that category referred to, above, however, does not the fact that such a category exists at all in an organization like our fraternity raise enough concern to ask what *is* what being taught in our Lodges? Sixty-four percent of Masons believe the current practices of their Lodge reflect the best way in which to practice Freemasonry.¹⁷ It is nice to see that so many possess a high level of confidence in their lodge, however, when conditions show us the deficiency of awareness of so many aspects of Freemasonry, that sixty-four percent level should be cause for alarm.

In general, the fraternity has managed to parade unthinkingly through the latter part of the 20th Century, and the first two decades of the 21st with a false confidence and organizational attitude with respect to how and what we do, or do not do, in our fraternity. especially when it comes to admitting qualified candidates, providing wholesome instruction, and culture building through Freemasonry. Behaviorally, we act as if we believe that these factors have little to no effect on the future of the fraternity. Is there really any wonder why, except by those refuse to face the reality, that Freemasonry has slipped from the minds and souls of many of its member today, not to mention from public consciousness?

We have heard it said that the 21st Century will rediscover the fraternity when the fraternity finally discovers and joins the 21st Century. It may seem that we are close to joining if we measure that statement strictly by the Internet presence of our jurisdictions and lodges, the thousands of Masons with Facebook pages, the promotion of apps for Masons, blogs, podcasts, instant Masonic news from some sources, eye catching covers of Masonic publications, and videos with colorful, state-of-the-art graphics. While the age of information offers an unlimited number of images of Masons styling with their baseball caps on backwards and the unending inventory of T-shirts emblazoned with Masonic symbols and catchphrases, we should be willing to examine whether such exhibits provide the best visual images of the fraternity.

This, however, is where truth begins to hurt. Prospective petitioners may be drawn to Freemasonry because of the modern glitz, perhaps even the fashion styling to some degree, but for many others, once they discover that what is behind that curtain is not what initially drew them Freemasonry, or what they were looking for, they add to the group that fades away or maintains their membership without ever attending a Masonic event again.

We see a situation today that is similar to Preston's time when most men were not products of a secular educational school system, thus largely unexposed and uniformed of many topics and subjects. Masonic

¹⁷ William O. Ware Lodge of Research, *Characteristics of an Idea Lodge Survey*, Covington, KY, 2019.

lodges offered exposure to some about those things. Today, the 1830s movement to create a public fund investment in education that would benefit the whole nation by transforming children into literate, moral, and productive citizens by establishing free public education¹⁸ seems to be falling short and failing most of its students.¹⁹

Only twenty-six states require classes in civics in order to graduate from public high school. Eight states have no requirement at all. Emphasis on civic participation and character as goals of education are scarce.²⁰

Diminished, too, is the teaching of skills required for critical thinking, the very thing that best ensures that people can be more vigilant in helping to safeguard themselves from sloppy, misguided and unduly-influenced thinking that will assail them for the rest of their lives in the form of propaganda, advertising, marketing, politics, the Internet, social media, bad films, books, and television and other non-critical thinking people. Sadly, critical thinking skills are not high any state's public education list, if they appear at all. While we do continue to find that some of the fundamentals that are taught in secular education, the extent of which, however, might surprise you, as well as some of the content. The number of people today, especially those under forty-years old, who think Europe is a country, speaks to the level of understanding many seem to have regarding not only history but geography.

Alarming too is the sense that citizens who are ignorant about essential scientific, civic, and cultural knowledge, seem also to think such subjects do not matter. Accompanying that growing sense is the emergence of an anti-intellectualism attitude, and or thinking that too much learning can be a dangerous thing. The idea resulting that there are no such things as evidence or fact, just opinion, continues to fuse itself in a particularly insidious way.²¹

The idea that fundamental education today is no longer essential in this age of technology because so much information is at our fingertips (and available in seconds) has gained popularity. But that popularity is somewhat slowed down once it is recognized that all that information spewed through our technology platforms is not always dependable or accurate—especially as we come more to realize that social media as a formal education tool, stinks. Technology has yet to find a way to clearly designate and classify what is actually dependable or accurate knowledge without the bias that accompanies poorly established opinion, which can, intentionally or not, can distort, disguise, and be accepted as truth by many. That might be because there so little teaching of a particularly fundamental part of education: critical thinking.

¹⁸ Center on Education Policy, George Washington University. 2020 publication, *For the Common Good: Recommitting to Public Education in a Time of Crisis*, available at www.cep-dc.org. (In the 1830s, Horace Mann, a Massachusetts legislator and secretary of that state's board of education, began to advocate for the creation of public schools that would be universally available to all children, free of charge, and funded by the state. Mann and other proponents of "common schools" emphasized that a public investment in education would benefit the whole nation by transforming children into literate, moral, and productive citizens)

¹⁹ John Hood, *The Failure of American Public Education*, Foundation for Economic Education, 1993, https://fee.org/articles/the-failure-of-american-public-education/?itm_source=parsely-api&gclid=EAlaQobChMlzaG-58nk9AIVgwilCR18LQM7EAMYASAAEgJNp_D_BwE, accessed December 14, 2021, Julie L. Casey, *Stop Beating the Dead Horse: Why the System of Public Education in the United States Has Failed and What To Do About It*, Things Press, 2014, Matthew Lynch, *The Educational Assembly Line: How Social Promotion and Academic Retention Ruin Public Education*, Praeger, 2015, Ulcca Joshi Hansen, *The Future of Smart: How Our Education System Needs to Change to Help All Young People Thrive*, Capucia Publishing, 2021. Kate Barrington, *The 15 Biggest Failures of the American Public Education System*, Public School Review, <https://www.publicschoolreview.com/blog/the-15-biggest-failures-of-the-american-public-education-system> accessed, December 1, 2021, Charles Ungerleider, *Failing Our Kids: How We Are Ruining Public Schools*, McClellan and Stewart, 2003.

²⁰ GC, Education Policies by State, <https://generationcitizen.org/mapping-the-civic-education-policy-landscape>, accessed December 1, 2021.

²¹ Susan Jacoby, *The Age of American Unreason*, Penguin, 2018.

We seem to have come to adore the technologies that tend to undo our capacities to think, and Freemasonry is up against a growing population that is distracted by trivia, and a popular cultural life that seems to seek a perpetual round of entertainment that encouraging instant gratifications that short circuit meaningful discourse.²² Those who thought back in the 1960s, that television was a bad influence, had not seen anything yet.

It appears that society, even with all its modern advances in just the past thirty years alone, has moved backwards and closer to the need for what Preston sought to provide in Masonic lodges.

If anyone finds that difficult to believe, listen to how many people speak the English language today with a minimalist approach that has come to be widely acceptable. The problem of trying to say more and more with fewer and fewer words lead to becoming rather inarticulate. If you do not see the evidence, engage in a

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conversation that requires critical thinking and reasoning, the use of simple arithmetic without a smart phone, or take a quick survey of what is considered to represent the highest form of entertainment, literature, music, and the fields of science and history.

How people carry on conversations today, write, and approach their topics, what they know about factual history, geography, the

earth (the universe for that matter), economics, and exercise the abridged forms of logic and reason we commonly see on television, film, the Internet, and certainly social media, is a warning flag that tells us how little people today actually know, and sadly, how much they may think they do know. Inequalities in knowledge have always reinforced other inequalities in life, and today that fact is more glaringly apparent because of our condensed approach to thinking and our diminished desire to learn in order to actually cultivate knowledge.

Obviously, Masonry cannot educate men on all subjects any more than secular education can. Man's knowledge today is too broad, too technical, and expands too rapidly. In fact, the Knowledge Doubling Curve tells us that human knowledge doubled approximately every century, but by 1945 it was doubling every 25 years. And by 1982, it was doubling every 12-13 months. We are told that on average, knowledge today is doubling every 13 months, and that we are quickly on our way, with the help of the Internet, to the doubling of knowledge every 12 hours.²³

Nonetheless, and as always, the truth stands that the greatest enemy of knowledge is not ignorance, but rather the illusion of knowledge.²⁴ We find illustrated today in so many places, including the fraternity, that which could be the very reason that the idea of an truthful internal examination of our practices, and the way we attempt to provide Freemasonry, is repugnant to some.

WHAT IS NOT DOUBLING AS FAST

What has no reports or research to show any evidence of it doubling, much less stabilizing, is knowledge of duties men owe to their Creator, to their fellow men or to their institutions—civic, religious, educational, and

²² Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Penguin Books, New York, 1985.

²³ Buckminster Fuller, *Critical Path*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1981. D.R. Schilling, 2013. "Knowledge Doubling Every 12 Months, Soon to be Every 12 Hours." Accessed 10 February 2021. <http://www.industrytap.com/knowledge-doubling-every-12-months-soon-to-be-every-12-hours/3950>.

²⁴ This quote is often attributed to physicist Stephen Hawking and the Librarian of the U.S. Congress, Daniel J. Boorstin.

fraternal. The decrease of such knowledge takes us away from reason, responsibility, morality, and even reverence for life.

Should Freemasonry not concentrate on human relations, the relentless search for truth, explore and teach the practical application of the basics of secular education, and probe those areas that explore the age-old question of what happens when we find that one duty may conflict with another? Should Freemasonry strive to inspire members to step up to face instead being influenced to do the opposite?

AND SPEAKING OF DUMBING DOWN...

It has suggested in some circles since the 1990s, that editing our ritual to reduce it to what we consider modern language would somehow accelerate interest in Freemasonry and make its philosophies easier to understand and thus, presumably increase involvement of members in Freemasonry. This is no kind of a solution to what ails the fraternity. It is, in fact, as backward thinking as the notion that Freemasonry can be interpreted as whatever members simply wish it to be.

One would think there would already be an ample number of members who are qualified to teach and explain our ritual to new members, and that all lodges do that. After all, improving men *through* Freemasonry is the work of stepping up to learn, not watering down those things that may be thought by some to be a challenge to understand. How can a man improve himself by constantly remaining in his comfort zone?

Should not our rituals and philosophies be the means to an end that actually serves and assists mankind in solving the problems that beset him? The idea and recommendation, especially by Masons to, in effect, dumb down ritual, lectures or to casualize any other part or parts of the historical intent of Freemasonry is further evidence that the fraternity is way overdue for that High-Twelve inspection. As said by Robert. G. Davis, "To distinguish ourselves among men and organizations, we first have to perceive in our own minds that we have something to do which will ultimately set us above the average." Davis also said, "Shame on us for thinking otherwise or allowing any part of Freemasonry to become mediocre."²⁵

We certainly have enough organizations today committed to one selfish interest or another or smugly satisfied that they have already discovered the ultimate truth in some field. There are precious few dedicated to pursue truth with an open mind and without those selfish motives.

²⁵ Robert G. Davis, *Mediocrity in Freemasonry, Shame on Us*, <https://www.thelaudablepursuit.com/articles/2015/8/2/mediocrity-in-masonry-shame-on-us>, Accessed August 2015.

History has repeatedly demonstrated that groups of men who together think out responsible answers to human problems wield an influence for good far beyond their numbers. In short, men coming to Freemasonry to learn and practice its historical aim and genuinely doing that on a daily basis would, by any standard, be quite helpful in better ensuring ‘influence for the good,’ if, that is, they all stuck with it and did not leave or fade away a couple of years or so following their admittance. But then again, truly learning and putting what is learned into regular practice, has never proven a smooth and easy road nor a consistently achieved hallmark established by each generation admitted into the fraternity.

At some point we will be forced to admit, and not just give lip service, to the fact that not every man who knocks has the ability or even wishes, at least at first, to develop that internal gyroscope that compels him to strive to live by a firm set of principles whereby reason and old-style restraint promote an atmosphere of fellowship and brotherly love, in and outside the Lodge room. We have either admitted too many who are not qualified, or we are not living up to the intended design of the Masonic Institution.

Evidence supporting either case is certainly traceable to the close of the 18th Century, then conspicuously rears its head in the Morgan Affair of the 1820s, as well as in the aftermath and consequence of the most devastating anti-Masonic period this country has, and hopefully, will ever see. Masons who do not know what it is to which these periods refer, serve as an example of what is wrong. How can any member-based organization thrive without its votaries being aware of, and possessing knowledge about, its factual history, its intended purpose, its true successes, and failures so that the latter can be reduced and the former sustained?

Freemasonry may mean different things to members because building any human institution is a continual evolution juxtaposed against events in the world, and too often submissive to the most common thinking of the population from which it must attract members.

How can any member-based organization thrive without its votaries being aware and knowledge about its factual history, its intended purpose, its true successes, and failures so that the latter can be reduced and the former sustained?

External societal changes ensure that there will always be a natural inclination for the fraternity, like any many other member-based organizations, to think it must change with society in order to survive. Since the fraternity depends on its members coming from the ever-changing society, the assimilation of those admitted

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under the poorly thought-out notion that Masonry is for all men, has, under that view, ultimately and consistently influenced the direction of the fraternity, thus the understanding of Freemasonry, as opposed to Freemasonry influencing the direction of all who have been admitted.

Freemasonry does not need external society influences. Its true principles stand on their own. Unfortunately, the fraternity that that is supposed to deliver those principles is rarely able to withstand the barrage of external influences. The quality of elected leadership in the fraternity is inevitably the thin line that either defends against unnecessary external influences or surrenders to them. Moreover, those who elect leadership cannot escape accountability.

If there was anything miscalculated by those who were instrumental in organizing the Institution of Freemasonry, it was their supposing that it was a simple matter to realize and pass on their ideals, even to good men.

THE SUFFOCATING ASPECT OF COPACETIC THINKING

Once the majority of those involved in any vocation start to believe that everything to do with their work is copacetic the possibility of a truthful inspection taking place to validate such belief will naturally seem unnecessary, and unvaryingly suffocate such a notion.

In 1897 the Grand Master of one American Grand Lodge proposed such an inspection, and in 1899, a subsequent Grand Master appointed a committee to do just that. So, a committee chaired by a Past Grand Master from the previous decade was appointed and included two other long-standing members, who then embarked on a year-long inspection of the work throughout the jurisdiction. A full report was prepared and distributed to the Craft at the 1899 Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge. It was not a shining moment.

The findings portrayed an organization that was suffering from the neglect its duty to consistently guard the West Gate and electing members to various leadership position based on many things other than merit. Violations of the jurisdiction's constitution were discovered, including the failure of many lodges to ensure all that all candidates returned degree proficiencies—a wider spread occurrent than anticipated. The report found inefficient lodge management, and leadership that was ignorant of the fundamentals of Masonry. This condition was responsible for and attributed to, the grievous errors, as well as omitting necessary information from proceedings, and more. Recommendations and resolutions to adopt what could have addressed in deference that the inspection brought to light, were made part of the report presented to the body of the Craft. One of the recommendations was to establish inspections each Masonic year. Following the

presentation, a motion from the floor was made to “postpone the matter indefinitely.” The motion was duly seconded and the motion to postpone was adopted.²⁶ The motion was never again brought to the floor.

Characteristically, there was no context given about the motion to postpone. The official Grand Lodge record is completely silent on the matter. No discussion is noted as to why the motion was made, nor any discussion documented, or vote tally.

So, 122 years later, we are left to conclude that the majority of the body of the Craft in that jurisdiction was not sufficiently concerned or disturbed by the findings of the year-long inspection or even how it portrayed the state of the fraternity in that jurisdiction, and that everything was, copacetic.

Although there is no reference to, or suggestion by the wording in this historic event that says there was disharmony during that meeting, no narrative was needed. One can, if aware of the condition of the fraternity for decades prior to this 1899 report,²⁷ easily sense the tension in the room during the presentation of the finding and the immediate motion from the floor that followed its conclusion.

The meaning of *postpone* was redefined that day to mean *permanent delay*. A truthful inspection of this kind is not found having ever been brought up again in proceedings since 1899, nor has there been a recommendation to perform one.

In the history of civilizations, we see how mankind has a prodigious capacity for denial and delusion. Should the fraternity no longer be able to ensure the intended effectiveness of Freemasonry, a truthful inspection one day will show those that it was those very capacities that greatly influenced it.

Often it is asked, that if the lessons of Freemasonry are so beneficial, why are they taught behind closed doors? The answer lies in the very nature of man. That which is open to constant view becomes commonplace and attracts little attention. That which is hidden is sought for, searched for, becomes attractive and creates interest.

If the behind close door lessons are not inspiring the search for what is hidden or the work of lodges is not attractive, and create interest, then what lodges are doing might easily lose its appeal to the very nature of man.

So, to those today who are actually committed, and persistently demonstrate by their behavior and actions—not just by words—that desire to journey forward, learn, adhere to, and integrate the principles of the Craft into daily life, your path is indeed precisely what ritual tells us: *a laudable pursuit*. Those afforded that opportunity but who choose to treat Freemasonry as an event rather than a process, remain in darkness.

²⁶ John W. Bizzack, “The Postponement: Masonic Misstep or Squandered Opportunity?” *The Plumbline*, The Quarterly Bulletin of The Scottish Rite Research Society, May 2021.

²⁷ See *The History of Freemasonry*, Rob Morris, 1859.

AFTERWORD

Customarily, researchers, scholars, and general writers over the centuries (Masons or not) have often been gentle, even with their most blunt

remarks, analyses, assessments, and overviews of the very real and even perceived shortcomings that are observed, documented, and reported about the fraternity.

The thread that runs through the most common points explored, describes situations and conditions over the past

170 years that can confuse audiences, because the terms Freemasonry and the fraternity appear interchangeably and create the impression that they are the same. There is a difference. Clarifying the difference is easy when we think of Freemasonry as being a genius system, through which men can improve themselves, and the fraternity the system that tries to administer it effectively.

Mistakes, errors, miscalculations, serious blunders, and missteps have certainly been made; however, we must remember that even good men have their flaws.

It is impossible for the fraternity to consistently make great decisions without first confronting reality. Leaders of the fraternity who continue to manufacture their own reality instead of acknowledging the brutal facts, create a recipe for mediocrity. Starting with an honest effort to determine the truth of any situation, the right decisions often become self-evident. The

discipline to confront the most brutal facts of past and current reality simply does not exist in most leadership positions. This is might not a formula under which member-based organizations prevail.

In the absence of truthful, regular inspections at High Twelve, realities are left to the whim of the leadership elected. The dimension of the leadership necessary today may be greater than at any time in the factual history of the American Masonic Fraternity. The leaders of the early 1800s, and in the aftermath of the anti-Masonic period that followed, had their work cut out for them,

too, but they had only a little over a century of the past with which to deal. Today's leaders have almost three-hundred years of entrenched breakdowns to overcome.

Since the early 2000s, the metaphor of a bus has been used extensively to illustrate that, no matter how dire a circumstance may be in an organization, there is way to raise the anchors that hold even the good organizations

back.

The first step is making sure the right people are on the bus. The right people must be in key seats before figuring out where to drive the bus. Having a busload of people who accurately determine the correct course of action, and who can effectively perform necessary functions of leadership, no matter what comes next, proves critical.²⁸

The Institution of Freemasonry is not going to constructively advance until the fraternity responsible for administering it does the same.

Unless men admitted into its ranks have something to contribute to Freemasonry, and the

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²⁸ Jim Collins, *Good to Great*, Harper, 2001.

men assigned to investigation committees by Masters consider that the petitioner should be, in every instance, a person with whom the investigator personally would want to associate, and has no doubt that he would be an active and interested Mason, not just a pin-wearer or joiner, the probability of advancing the fraternity beyond where it is today, remains questionable.

Freemasonry is not omnibus²⁹ and neither are the leadership seats in the fraternity where the ultimate responsibility for the care and administration that oversees the life and effectiveness of the Craft rests.

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²⁹ The word, *omnibus*, is a clipped form of the Latin adjective form, *omnibus*. In Latin, omnibus is originally 'for everybody.'