



# Masonic Mavericks

A Spotting Guide for Freemasons

John W. Bizzack, Ph.D.



# MASONIC MAVERICKS

## A SPOTTING GUIDE FOR FREEMASONS

JOHN W. BIZZACK, PH.D.

© 2021 BSF Foundation and John W. Bizzack

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

BSF Foundation, Lexington, Kentucky



# MASONIC MAVERICKS

## A SPOTTING GUIDE FOR FREEMASONS

JOHN W. BIZZACK, PH.D.

JULY 2021

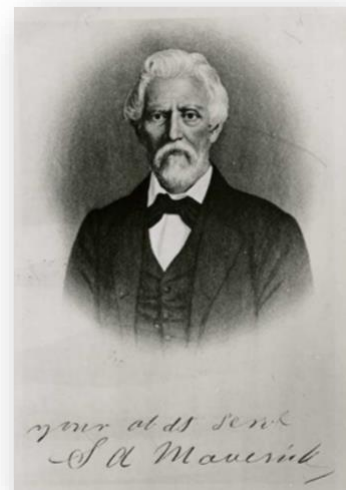
---

When we hear someone referred to as a “maverick” we might first think of the American Western dramatic television series with comedic overtones that aired from 1957-1962, or the 1996 American Western comedy film based on the same story line. Some may know the word because it is the name of a professional basketball team based in Dallas, a hockey team in New York, the call sign of a fighter pilot in a popular 1986 film, or the name of the model of a 1970 Ford automobile.

The meaning of many words in our language may change over time with popular usage and slang. The evolution of the meaning for words and even phrases is known as semantic change or drift.<sup>1</sup> That semantic drift gives us several meanings for *maverick*.

The word is, however, purely an American word, and comes from the name of an early Texas rancher who refused to brand his calves—Sam Augustus Maverick. His thinking was that if all the other cattle owners branded theirs, then those without a brand belonged to him. At the time, people thought this controversially pioneering decision was courageous, and soon afterwards his surname came to be applied to both independently minded people and cows like his. Maverick was a lawyer, politician, land baron, signer of the Texas Declaration of Independence, mayor of San Antonio, and his name is the true source of the term “maverick.”<sup>2</sup>

Semantic drift took the word from a reference to an unbranded, lost, or motherless calf to something more. We find the word used today to refer to a person thought of as a free spirit, independent minded, a non-conventionalist, and even a renegade. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, our language settled on the term being commonly used to refer to individuals who prefer to blaze their own trails — people often viewed and found to be pioneering, direct, and even visionary in their display of independence in their thoughts and actions.



---

<sup>1</sup> Andreas Blank, "Why Do New Meanings Occur? A Cognitive Typology Of The Motivations For Lexical Semantic Change", Koch, Peter (ed.), *Historical Semantics and Cognition*, Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> David Wallechinsky, Irving Wallace, "People Who Became Words: Sam Maverick (1803-1870)," *The People's Almanac Series*, 1975. Paula Mitchell Marks, "Turn Your Eyes Toward Texas: Pioneers Sam and Mary Maverick," Centennial Series of the Association of Former Students, Texas A&M University, Number 30, College Station, Texas, Texas A&M University Press, 1989.

## MAVERICKS IN MASONRY

In the September 1966 issue of *The Missouri Freemason*, a unique and interesting use of the term appeared in an article titled, *Masonic Maverick*.<sup>3</sup>

A search for the use of the term in Masonic books, articles, essays, presentations, and proceedings found no references or even a citation prior to the 1966 article, or since.

The writer, Donald G. McAtee, Master of Canal Zone Lodge in 1964, elaborated on men by whom he was “indelibly impressed,” to whom he considered *Masonic Mavericks*—men who “wanted intelligent answers to intelligent questions.”<sup>4</sup> He wrote about how, under the leadership of such men, Masonic

*... why are we constantly  
singing the praises for the kind  
of work men are expected to do  
all the time, even in those  
instances when the work is not  
good work at all?*

meetings were “good, sharp, interesting” and “well-attended” (including officers), and the men on the sidelines were “wide awake and alert.” His short article made the case that those in leadership positions who led in ways that not only created interest-holding meetings, but who also created instructive, and purposeful environments that generated thinking Masons, were indeed mavericks because they were so few in number.

McAtee believed many lodges were like a Mutual Admiration Society, creating a false sense of security when all they heard from their leaders was congratulations and what a fine job every man did who showed up to make it a “Great night for Masonry.” He refers to how the “High Sultan of the Mutual Admiration Society” too often stands and declares that “This is by far the best degree work I’ve seen,” etc., etc., even when the work is poorly done.

He points out what we all know: good work deserves recognition, and recognizing those who perform good work increases morale within an organization. However, why are we constantly singing the praises for the kind of work that men are expected to do all the time? Even more astonishingly, why do we give praise in those instances when the work is not good work at all? Some say that is because many leaders wish to be popular, and that popularity is difficult to maintain when honesty about such work is expressed. Others add that too many leaders know nothing about “good work,” therefore their standard of assessment is lower, so everything that merely gets by is “good work.”

We know that leaders have compliments to bestow, but they are most effective when they are earned by those doing more than merely that which is expected of them—more than just good work. Compliments for the younger man who is striving to improve, who tries his best to measure up and is showing steady improvement are always legitimate whether in public or private. As McAtee notes, when those who perform badly are consistently given high tribute anyway, a significant false sense of security is

---

<sup>3</sup> Donald F. McAtee, “Masonic Mavericks,” *The Missouri Freemason*, September 1966.

<sup>4</sup> The Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts for 1912 shows in the Tables of Districts for 1913 and the Canal Zone Lodge was Under Dispensation by the District Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. In February of 1916 the Board of Directors of the Grand Lodge gave the Grand Master authority to send someone to the Canal Zone to give attention to such matters connecting with the lodges there as were demanding early consideration, <https://district.panamacanalmasons.org/a-brief-history-of-masonry-in-panama>, accessed March 2021.

embedded in the culture of the lodge and destroys any situational awareness with the notion that everything is going fine, when actually the Temple is falling apart at the seams.

Men who have been, or are today, in leadership positions in any organization know very well how powerful the lure is to over-flaunt the quantity of what is done in certain aspects of their work, and to parade that quantity as if it were *the* key performance indicator of how successful the entire organization is. When that happens, what is really highlighted is how little such leaders know about what actually measures success.

In Freemasonry, it is always going to be easier to measure how many new members petitioned and were admitted in one year versus a previous year, how much more money was raised for this or that event or lodge cause than another, or how many attended a certain meeting or function, than it is to correctly

**We hear a lot about what the idea of Freemasonry can do for a man. We hear a lot too about the variety of ways jurisdictions and their subordinate lodges believe they can best convey the idea of Freemasonry. If they were all “the best” why would not the entire fraternity have already gravitated to that one “best” way?**

evaluate the *quality* of fraternal communion. So, it has become a habit in lodges to measure our system by quantity then quickly praise our accomplishments, only reinforcing the idea that those measurements define the success of Freemasonry. There have always been members and leaders who prefer to find ways of accurately measuring quality, and who want more than to merely go along for the ride. Those are men in the group that McAtee refers to as *Masonic Mavericks*.

McAtee argues that the men who challenge, or who risk a little contention by asking questions or expressing opinions and views (especially when backed up with facts), will always be considered Masonic Mavericks. They are found in many lodges, however, as he states, more of them are needed, along with a lot more effort driving men toward Masonry, as opposed to focusing only on mechanics and

structurally unbalancing what was historically designed to provide a system of moral science in which all of its features fit seamlessly.

We hear a lot about what the idea of Freemasonry can do for a man. We hear a lot too about the variety of ways jurisdictions and their subordinate lodges believe that they best convey the *idea* of Freemasonry. If they were all “the best” why would not the entire fraternity have already gravitated to that one “best” way?

We encourage members to speculate about most things Masonic and most do so with little fundamental instruction about those things on which they are encouraged to speculate, then assemble. Doing so gives members the chance to make the *idea* and *system* of Freemasonry whatever they want it to be. Some claim that such liberty is the “beauty of Freemasonry,” while others flatly deny that conclusion, which also make them mavericks in the fraternity.

A list of such men dates back to the earliest times of organized Freemasonry. There may be members who read this today and recognize themselves as mavericks in the fraternity, and they likely know others who

carry that designation. In fact, if you are reading about Masonry at all, you can be included on the list of Masonic Mavericks.

One of the most prolific Masonic writers in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, H.L. Haywood, tells us a lot about Masonic Mavericks, although he did not use that term. He said that such men tend to find time to cultivate their knowledge about the factual history, philosophies, and actual aim and purpose of the fraternity. Some even become veterans of study. The Mason who bothers to do so, may also recognize the description that Haywood gives of these men because of their effort. He says, “[Their] Masonic knowledge is to other men’s as an ocean is to a creek.”<sup>5</sup>

*Is there not, however, a good reason,  
for all members to at least know what  
they are talking about regarding  
Freemasonry?*

He continues describing such men as those who have not permitted themselves to be led into making hasty conclusions, or listening to those who were not competent to teach. They are men who allowed nothing to bind them except truth, and recognized that there will be those who say one thing and others who will say the opposite, and who realize that it is Freemasonry itself that finally decides between them. As Haywood notes, such men do not make the truth, they seek it, and “They have done no violence to knowledge and know there is nothing more sacred than a fact.” They never permit themselves, or another, “by sophistry or ignorance, by plausible or specious cynicism to bring Freemasonry into doubt or dispute because of their respect for what is honorable and truthful.”<sup>6</sup> These members are not shy in questioning, nor are they intimidated by a culture formed by thoughtless conformity to mechanics, that rigidly, and without inquiry, devotes itself to the status quo, even when the status quo perpetuates failure.

These are the men, not many, but a few, who did not stop short their Masonic journey only minutes after being raised as Master Masons to merely then follow the path of others who also believe that by doing the same thing, they have learned all that is needed to become a Freemason. These are men who seek the substance of Freemasonry rather than numbering as just another member of the fraternity.

Some will always say that not every Mason is interested in advancing his Masonic knowledge to a level beyond exposure to ritual, or to devote time to the many areas of study about Freemasonry, and many are content, whenever they do attend lodge, not to engage at all. That is a glaringly accurate statement. Is there not, however, a good reason, for all members to at least know what they are talking about when they discuss Freemasonry?

## **MAVERICK SPOTTING GUIDE**

Masonic Mavericks are scattered throughout all jurisdictions. They have always been part of the fraternity; however, their numbers have never been as large as those who may have been or are in the low-speed pursuit of nothing in particular about the fraternity.

---

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> H.L. Haywood, *The Newly-Made Mason, Newly Made Mason: What He & Every Mason Should Know About Masonry*, reprint published by Macoy Publishing & Masonic Supply Co. 1993.

If you still do not recognize Mavericks in your jurisdiction, you may consider the following Spotting Guide. Although far from exhaustive, it may serve as a quick reference.

Masonic Mavericks might include men who:

- ✓ Speak about Freemasonry's true customs, and objectives. They are not known to engage in theological diatribes, or only in judicial discussions of the mechanical nature of our rules and regulations.

- ✓ Speak fluently to the issue of how the fraternity may *constructively* advance itself, and how by doing so, can more effectively build character and influence others.

- ✓ Dress with reverence when attending Masonic meetings, and do not distort the external versus internal concept as means to justify an unkempt appearance in lodge.

- ✓ Consistently insist upon the high qualities of petitioners, and stand by the fact that Freemasonry was never intended for the masses, but only those morally and mentally endowed with the ability to practice its age-old, and time-tested principles and teachings.

- ✓ Voice the fact that our precepts are still as valid as they ever were, and fully recognize our exemplification of them is far from adequate.

- ✓ Learn, practice, and place a high value on the lesson of the 24-inch gauge, and find strength in the habit it creates in all three categories when consistently applied.

- ✓ Know that the voice of leadership in Freemasonry cannot be silent; they acknowledge with candor that conditions can be improved and that there is no

finish line to the work of self-improvement, and they are not perplexed as to what can and should be done to achieve that goal.

- ✓ Strongly advocate the streamlining of meetings, and see the reality that reading minutes adds nothing to Masonic knowledge, nor do "net gains" in membership measure the success of a lodge, much less the idea of Freemasonry.

- ✓ Assess lodges by what is practiced, not what a lodge professes to be.

- ✓ Understand, and can speak with knowledge and authority about, what each ritual and lecture teaches.

- ✓ Know and talk about the importance and need to better understand and study the social patterns of the external social changes that affect and directly influence the course of the fraternity.

- ✓ Know and speak in opposition (without the slightest hesitation) to members who prefer to drape the fraternity with what they choose to make it, as opposed to what it was designed to be and do.

- ✓ Recognize that for Freemasonry to mean anything to man, and he to it, that a man must spend some time with it.

- ✓ Understand that leadership at all levels of Masonic organization is a behavior, not a position.

✓ Talk confidently about, and fully recognize, that for the Institution of Freemasonry to intelligently chart a course for the future, it is the idea of Freemasonry that must be in the forefront of instruction and Masonic education and must be more uniformly provided to all who are admitted.

✓ Recognize and speak to the long-standing fact that to deliver on the promise of the idea of Freemasonry, lodges must effectively compete for men's minds and attention, and actually instruct and teach beyond our degrees about how to reconcile duty to others with duty to oneself.

✓ Speak passionately about how lodge cultures cannot expect those admitted to remain involved and engaged in their lodges if a candidate's transformation to Master Mason is treated as the end, rather than the beginning, of his instruction.

✓ Know and speak assertively about the fact that qualified men in 21<sup>st</sup> century will re-discover Freemasonry and be more likely to pursue admittance, only when the Institution and its culture discovers and joins the 21<sup>st</sup> century when it comes to their organizational processes, management, and leadership.

✓ Recognize that no matter the location, it is the external appearance of their lodge building that reflects the personality of its users and shows the

value they place on what transpires inside that building.

✓ Speak frankly and openly to those who ask about Freemasonry, and candidly share with those who do ask what they have personally gained from their membership.

✓ Are not always intellectuals, or are even inclined to be scholastic in their pursuit of Freemasonry. They do, however, make a passionate commitment to do what they declared they came to Freemasonry to do—learn to subdue their passions and improve themselves through Freemasonry.

✓ Recognize, and are not shy about making it known, that if the Institutions surrounding Freemasonry do not appropriately plan and adjust accordingly to current conditions in order to preserve their aim and purpose, the idea of Freemasonry, as an Institution, will become even more of a stranger to the public than it is today.

✓ Find the romantic history of the fraternity interesting, but speak to its factual history and realities surrounding its current condition, and find that by being honest in doing so, there is never a need to withdraw their words when it helps to prevent men from accepting error in place of truth.



✓ While their numbers may be small, they have found truth in the reality that there is strength in fewness.

✓ They maintain their character even in what seems unapproachable circumstances, unwelcome settings, and at times, unfriendly surroundings. Armed with perspective, context and facts and a genuine commitment to make daily advancements in their Masonic knowledge, they persevere today, just as those who came before them in this small group have always done.

*The charge to make an advancement in one's Masonic knowledge is not necessarily about reading a Masonic book every day — it is about practicing the tenets every day so that an already good man can see how in earnestly doing so, he becomes a better man.*

The charge to make an advancement in one's Masonic knowledge is not necessarily about reading a Masonic book every day — it is about practicing the tenets of Freemasonry every day, so that an already good man can see how, through earnest effort, he becomes a better man. To do that, one must first know and understand the context of those tenets and how best to introduce and practice them in and outside our lodges. That fact is fodder for the Masonic Maverick.

Mavericks recognize each other wherever they may travel. It is easy to identify someone with the same perspectives who seeks to share the broader gains of not only the regular practice of applying the precepts of the Craft as designed more closely, because there are so few.

In the final analysis, Masonic Mavericks stand out among the herds as they always have, just like Sam Maverick's unbranded cattle. If you happen to be a Masonic Maverick, you clearly recognize that what you do is in the spirit of fraternity and good-will, and with the wish to render to the Order some small return for the profit received from association with it.