

MASONIC PERSPECTIVES

A Second Look at Aspects of
Controversial Topics in American Freemasonry

John W. Bizzack and Dan M. Kemble

A Joint Project by Lexington Lodge No. 1, The Rubicon
Masonic Society, and the William O. Ware Lodge of Research



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EDITION I

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Masonic Perspectives is a project created by Past Masters John W. Bizzack and Dan M. Kemble intended to bring the writings about controversial topics of the past in American Freemasonry and provide readers a second look and contemporary perspective on the topics to serve as a catalyst for further discussion.

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THE FUTURE OF FREEMASONRY

The Builder Magazine

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Herbert Hungerford

In the April number of *The Masonic World*, Bro. J. E. Morcombe, the editor, has an arresting article under the title *Freemasonry at the Crossroads*. It is one that should have the widest publicity, for, in spite of the assertions by those who love to prophesy smooth things, there is a crisis in the affairs of the Craft.

The keynote of the article is given in the first paragraph, in which Bro. Morcombe quotes a Past Grand Master of California:

I expect that Masonry will continue to exist for a long period of time - forever, as the usual phrase goes. But I am not so sure that it will hold its present high place in the estimation of men ...

This recalls a dictum of Albert Pike, in reference to a state of affairs somewhat similar to that with which we are now faced, which existed some years after the Civil War. He said that "Masonry, by its nature intended to be exclusive, had become popular."

We all know the really extraordinary influx into the Fraternity that began just after the World War, and which reached its peak in 1921, in which year very nearly 300,000 men became members. The article in *The Builder* just a year ago entitled *Where Are We Drifting?* may be recalled. In the second of the charts there given the curves of gains and losses indicated that in a year or two they would meet. This forecast has been fulfilled. In some Grand Lodges the year 1929 has actually shown a net loss of members, and others are at a standstill.

This condition is not peculiar to the Masonic Fraternity. It is known, and Bro. Morcombe in his article gives the figures, that other fraternal organizations are faced with the same conditions, and even more intensely. And not only fraternal societies, but clubs and churches are feeling the pinch of slackened interest and loss of members.

Statistics of membership give a somewhat superficial test of an institution's condition. Members there must be, obviously, but without knowing the quality little of value can be deduced from the quantity. Masonry has in the past attained a high reputation in the world, but this reputation was not in the least founded on the number of men who were Masons, but on their character. It was because in every community it was observed that many of the best men, the men most respected, the men most trusted, were of the Craft, that Masonry gained the reputation it has enjoyed. And reputation cannot long survive the conditions which give rise to it.

It is obvious, because it is common human nature, that as soon as any state or condition is highly esteemed in the community there will be a greatly increased desire to attain to it. In proportion as a society is highly esteemed, and membership in it is regarded as a distinction, so will the number increase of those who desire to join it for the benefits it will bring them personally. In other words, the more an institution prospers the greater the number of parasites who seek to attach themselves to it. The condition is inevitable, human nature being what it is.

It is those who give who make an institution, whether it is a society, a church, or a nation. It is those who take without giving who reduce it to weakness. The parasites can hardly be wholly eliminated, but when their number grows to be too great the organization, or organism, is weakened, becomes sickly, and may even die.

We in America have been bitten by the lust for size, for numbers, for wealth. Freemasonry has in every country and in every period reflected in its own way the external environment. Some things it yields to, others it opposes, but whichever it be, it would not so act but for the existing conditions. The things that are accepted as a matter of course in the environment inevitably outnumber those which are resisted. That we should be gratified by increase in our numbers is natural, and such increase is not in itself evil so long as the level of qualification is maintained. But to maintain the standard means that increase in numbers must be set on one side as an aim. It is not something to be sought for, but if it comes, it must come of itself.

It is an undoubted fact that it has become altogether too easy for men to enter our lodges. The standard has been lowered; and though in theory any brother may undertake the task of raising it through the ballot box, in reality he is helpless. In most lodges it would be impossible, even could he devote his whole time to it, for a brother personally to satisfy himself of the qualifications of every applicant. Besides even those who feel the situation most keenly are necessarily affected by the actual conditions. They inevitably feel that it is hard to reject a man who is no whit worse than many who are already in the lodge. The effect is cumulative and increases in geometrical proportion. And while it may be true that candidates should not be accepted for negative reasons, because there appears nothing overt against their being received, but that there should be something positive, something in their life and character that fits them for initiation, yet it is most difficult to act on this principle, for it has come to such a pass that most Masons actively resent the rejection of any petition they have presented to the lodge and regard it as a personal injury. For one brother, or even a group, to attempt to act in this way would mean in most cases a disruption of the harmony of the lodge. It is a choice of evils.

These obvious conditions, that all thinking brethren deplore, do not stand alone, they are all really symptoms, by-products of the way in which the Craft in America has developed, incidents of its evolution. It is this that makes it so difficult to find a remedy. Most expedients that are offered do not

touch the deep-seated root of the evil. Perhaps there is now no cure but the operation of natural laws. If the represent tendencies continue the Fraternity will lose its prestige, many will drop out, fewer will seek to join, and finally, it may be, a fresh start can be made.

Yet we can hardly be satisfied to wait for this process, which may end in death rather than cure. We must strive as we can to improve matters. There are thousands of Masons who are Masons in fact as well as in name, and could they work unitedly much might be accomplished. Much more is being accomplished as a matter of fact than we know, even as Elijah learned there were men in Israel who had not bent the knee to Baal. The problem is gradually being realized, most Grand Lodges are now actively trying to do something to meet it. The first necessity is to realize that the body is sick, the next to diagnose the disease. After that there may be some hope of a cure if the right treatment can be found.



WHERE ARE WE DRIFTING?

Statistics Show Some Interesting Trends in Modern Masonry. They Are Graphically Presented in the Article Which Follows. The Light Thrown on Our Present System of Admissions Is an Important Contribution to the Craft

The Builder Magazine - May 1929, Volume XV, Number 5

R. J. Meekren

What is the actual condition of the Masonic Fraternity in America today? We know that it has well over three million members, and there is undoubtedly a certain prestige given by such huge numbers. But in itself this does not tell us much of real value. Those who have read, even occasionally, the Reports of our Grand Lodges during the past ten years know that there has been a great expansion since the War. They will also be aware that there has been considerable, though vague, uneasiness in regard to the increasing losses due to members dropping out of the organization. Some Grand Lodges have been so impressed by these fears that they have introduced regulations restricting the freedom of the individual Mason by denying him the right to dismission from his lodge, permitting him only to transfer his membership. Whether justified or not, this is undoubtedly an innovation in the "body of Freemasonry," although those who advocate it do not seem to realize the fact. But though such drastic attempts to stop the leaks are being made or advocated, no one seems to have any very clear comprehension of the amount of these losses and their relation to the total membership.

It is a very curious thing that this lack of definite knowledge should exist, and all the more curious in view of the fact that American Grand Lodges as anywhere available in the Masonic world. Whenever dual or plural membership is suggested it almost always happens that the first objection advanced against

it is the alleged difficulty it would cause in keeping accurate membership rolls. But such records are hardly worthwhile for their own sake and as an end in themselves.

As a preliminary essay in what is almost a virgin field of investigation, I have prepared the accompanying charts to show certain relationships between the gains and losses in membership over a period of fifteen years. The basic figures used for this purpose have been taken from the tables that have been compiled annually since 1913 by Bro. George A. Kies, Grand Secretary of Connecticut, and published annually in the Proceedings of that Grand Lodge. Without this foundation to build upon it is doubtful whether I should ever have had the courage to undertake this task, even had time been available. Bro. Kies, therefore, should have at least half of whatever credit may be due.

As has already been mentioned, the official rulers and leaders of the Craft have very Frequently expressed grave fears in regard to losses from various causes, especially those by suspension for non-payment of dues. Rather less frequently, doubts have been voiced as to whether the growth in the last decade has not been altogether too rapid.

There are four avenues of loss, one of which is inevitable, that is death. The other three are dimission, suspension and expulsion. The first chart shows the relationship between these last. The graphic method of showing the relationship of varying figures is now so frequently used that most people are more or less familiar with it. The curves A and B show respectively the dimissions and affiliations for each year, according to the scale of numbers on the perpendicular axis. It must be borne in mind that on such a scale only round figures can be used. But this does not affect the general accuracy of the result so far as showing the relationship between them is concerned.

One thing is apparent immediately upon inspection of these two curves, A and B. that they very closely parallel each other over the whole period. It will be noted that in 1916, and again in 1923, the distance between them increases. This distance represents in each year the difference between the number of Masons demitted and those affiliated. It is quite possible that economic and other external causes would account for this divergence of the curves at these two periods. The normal reason for dimission is change of residence. Whenever conditions lead to a general movement of population, such divergence is naturally to be expected. Whether the later divergence that appears in 1927 can be wholly accounted for in this way is not clear. For that we must wait and see. But on the whole, we may conclude that the relationship between dimission and affiliation appears to be quite normal, and the difference no greater than should be naturally expected.

The curve E shows the expulsions. While 674, the total for 1927, is altogether too many - it means that in over 600 lodges there has been careless investigation, or too little courage in denying admission to unfit applicants, yet relatively the figures are so small as to have little significance in a broad survey. And while the number has nearly doubled in the fifteen years, the rate of increase has been much less in proportion than the rate of growth. This is certainly not a discouraging feature.

The curves C and D show the relationship between suspensions and reinstatements. As in the case of A and B. the distance between these two curves shows the balance of the number of Masons suspended over those reinstated in any given year. We see there was an increase in these from 1913 to 1915, and then, after some fluctuations, a decrease. Roughly, only with larger numbers, the suspended increased at much the same rate as the dimitted Masons until 1918-1919, when they began to decrease. There is no doubt

that a proportion, perhaps a larger proportion - there is no means of determining - of suspensions are due to the same cause as dismissals. Brethren move to another locality but neglect to keep in touch with their lodge. It is especially noteworthy that while 1921 showed the smallest balance of unaffiliated Masons in any year after 1915, the number of reinstatements was actually greater than the suspensions. The year 1921 was a remarkable one in several ways. It is one of the indications of the relation between dismissals and affiliations being on the whole a normal one, that this year shows no greater balance of dismissals over affiliations than appears in 1925, when suspensions were rapidly increasing and, as will be seen, accessions were still more rapidly falling.

The rapid increase of suspensions is undoubtedly a very unhealthy symptom and should be carefully considered in the light of the curve of admissions in Chart II. Though here a word of warning must be given. The difference in scale must be taken into account. Were the curve A in Chart II drawn to the same scale as in Chart I, the peak in 1921 would be roughly six times as far from the base line as the curve of dismissals in the same year in the latter chart, which would take it a long way out of the page. The greater numbers involved in Chart II necessitated the reduction of scale. The larger scale was used in Chart I in order to show more distinctly the trend and fluctuations of the different curves.

Turning now to the second chart, the curve D shows the total losses through the three causes dealt with in Chart I. The interesting fact which strikes us first is that from 1913 to 1926 this line falls well below C, the curve of the losses by death during the same period. The death rate serves the purpose of a standard of comparison. The dotted straight line drawn through C shows that deaths have very steadily increased, which is a necessary consequence of the increase in membership. The year 1919 shows a sharp increase, due doubtless to the influenza epidemic. But the following years show a decreased rate which about balances it. Comparing this with curve D we may perhaps be justified in assuming that losses from other causes have not been critically serious. But unfortunately, the year 1927 shows them to be greater than the losses by death. This may be no more than a temporary fluctuation, but it must be noted that since 1921 these losses have tended to increase too steadily, and too sharply, to be an altogether encouraging sign.

But confidence is somewhat restored by the curve of accessions, the line A. These have been so much greater than losses from all sources that, in spite of the latter, the membership has rapidly increased. Yet it is not an altogether healthy curve. It looks like - altogether too much like - a fever chart. The tremendous number of admissions from 1919 to 1921 could not possibly be normal. At least after this "temperature" there would be a period of indigestion, if nothing worse.

It is curious to note that the peak in 1921 was also, as already observed in dealing with Chart I, coincident with the lowest net loss in dismissals and a slight gain as between suspensions and reinstatements. These phenomena, it may be assumed, were all due to much the same causes, whatever they were. The same influences that led to the unparalleled influx from the outside into the Craft, led also to the renewal of lapsed memberships.

The Curve B is plotted from the total net losses from all causes, and here again cause for misgiving is shown. From 1921 on, these losses have been tending ever upward as shown by the dotted line; while, ignoring the steep drop after 1921, there has been, from 1923 on, an even sharper trend downward in accessions. This points to the two lines meeting, or even passing, in 1930; which means in effect that the Masonic birthrate will fall below the death-rate, and the organization come to a standstill, or start on the downward grade, so far as membership is concerned.

Chart III shows the cumulative gross increase over the same period. In this the scale has been still further reduced, as we are now dealing with millions instead of thousands. This increase has been roughly 2,400,000; an average of 160,000 a year, or a little more than half of that for 1921.

In this chart the four curves are all divergent (with the exception that D is not uniformly so). This is because they show the successive totals in each year from 1912, and not merely the number for each year by itself, as in the first two charts. The greatly reduced scale also tends to iron out the annual fluctuations. The divergence between A and B shows the cumulative totals of losses from death, that between B and C the actual number of unaffiliated Masons, that between C and D the total of the suspended and expelled, while the space between D and the base line represents the number of members in good standing in excess of 1,400,000. If the base were to show zero it would have to be drawn as far below its actual position as the curve D is above it in 1923. When this is taken into account (and to visualize it a sheet of white paper with a base line ruled on it at the right distance might be laid on the page) it will be seen that the losses by non-affiliation and suspension form only a very narrow fringe or border to the area showing total membership. In short, they do not give much support to alarmist views.

Coming now to the consideration of the curves in detail, we find that in 1927, in round numbers, 2,460,000 candidates had been admitted into the Order since 1912; while in the same period 444,000 Masons had deceased. In the last-named year, 1927, there were 68,000 unaffiliated Masons - not a very large number when compared with millions - and 192,000 who were under sentence of suspension or expulsion; which number is too large. According to this there were in good standing 3,157,000 Masons. This figure is between 80,000 and 90,000 less than those usually given. But there are many ways in which this discrepancy could have arisen. It must be remembered that returns come into each Grand Lodge at different times and there always has to be a certain amount of approximation. As these curves have been plotted from the positive data it is not probable that they are very far from giving the correct totals.

These curves bring out certain features that are not so easily observable in the two previous charts. They confirm the inference that the number of unaffiliated Masons is on the whole a normal one. Naturally there must always be some unaffiliated Masons - unless every Grand Lodge followed the novel method of forbidding dismission altogether. The greater the total number of Masons, the greater must be the actual number of those who, for one or other of a multitude of good and legitimate reasons, desire to leave one lodge and join another. As this must take, at the least, several months in each case, there must always be a balance of those who are for the time being unattached. The regularity of the divergence between B and C shows conclusively that this proportion has not increased, if anything it appears to have somewhat lessened, when it is compared with the divergence between A and B. For the loss by death must in the long run be about the same among Masons as for the community at large, and thus it gives us a norm by which to judge the other losses.

The curve D does not show quite the same regularity as C, for after having diverged rather too rapidly from 1913 to 1919 it then begins to approach C, and in 1920, 1921 and 1922 runs almost exactly parallel to it, which means that the total remained stationary during those years. But after 1922 it begins to diverge again more rapidly than ever. Whether or not this is merely temporary, a result of the "indigestion" following the orgy of the years 1920 to 1923, remains for the future to show us.

This preliminary and hasty survey at least shows a very promising field for further investigation and research, in which the statistics compiled annually by each Grand Lodge may be made to give up their

real significance. Every institution, as every individual, exists in time. A wider realization of this fact is one result of the popular interest in the mathematical theories of relativity propounded by Einstein. As has been well said, history is not the bare record of a series of isolated facts but the representation of a process. We cannot understand any situation unless we have some idea of how it came to be. Without some knowledge of the past it is impossible to even guess at the future. The apparent conclusion to be drawn from this consideration of the history of the growth of the Masonic Fraternity in recent years is mixed. There is no cause for alarm apparently, yet we cannot say that it is wholly healthy and as we could desire it to be.

APPENDIX

As it may be convenient for reference, the round totals as used in preparing the graphs for the article are here given, as taken from the Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Connecticut. Except in the case of expulsions, all figures below the hundreds have been omitted, and in some cases those higher than that have been approximated; as for example, 983 may be estimated as practically one thousand.

One thing may be gathered from this table which was not represented in the charts, and that is the relationship of the number of lodges to total membership. The average membership per lodge in 1927 was somewhat under 200, in 1913 it was a little over 100. This again is a characteristic and not reassuring symptom. The average number of suspended Masons to each lodge is very nearly twelve.

Year	Raised	Died	Demitted	Affil'd	Suspended	Reinstated	Expelled	Membership	Lodges
1913	92,280	21,636	22,660	20,700	14,400	6,498	384	1,519,000	14,114
1914	104,300	22,700	25,300	22,300	17,700	7,200	400	1,607,000	14,145
1915	104,000	22,300	25,800	22,200	19,100	6,900	450	1,681,000	14,698
1916	109,700	25,200	30,200	21,400	20 000	9,600	470	1,749,000	14,712
1917	117,600	25,800	29,000	23,800	19 000	9,800	400	1,822,000	14,800
1918	130,200	26,600	26,500	21,900	20,700	9,000	350	1,932,000	14,920
1919	153,000	35,300	26,400	21,200	15,900	10,800	300	2,037,000	15,069
1920	218,700	31,100	23,800	15,500	13,100	12,700	300	2,238 000	15,168
1921	293,300	29,600	46,500	43,300	12,400	12,800	300	2,521 000	15,426
1922	263,000	29,300	46,700	42,600	15,300	10,000	500	2,721,000	15,696
1923	185,400	32,400	45,000	38,700	22,600	9,600	700	2,872,000	15,951
1924	173,300	32,900	40,700	36,000	26,900	10,200	670	2,978,000	15,997

1925	170 600	35,000	40,600	37,600	30,600	11,100	700	3,009,000	16,257
1926	147 900	34,600	40,900	36,100	40,200	11,600	640	3,131,000	16,400
1927	138,500	38,800	38,000	30,900	47,900	14,200	674	3,243,000	16,470

COMMENTARY

~ **John W. Bizzack**

Hungerford's article, *The Future of Freemasonry*, was written 90 years ago. What he wrote about was not just what was going on in American Freemasonry in 1929 but rather what had been going on much longer. He points out that by the early years of the century, a crisis in the affairs of the Craft was apparent, just as it was apparent then with respect to membership loss and lack of interest in other fraternal organizations, societies, clubs, and churches. Hungerford identifies and acknowledges that the Fraternity in America had grown too quickly. "Parasites," as he refers to them, attached themselves to the Fraternity during this period of rapid expansion much like what had occurred in the early 1800s, prior to, during and following the Civil War, Age of Fraternalism, and again leading up to World War II and afterwards. He notes America was "bitten by the lust for size, for numbers, for wealth" and Freemasonry reflected its external environment. He also aptly notes that by 1929 it had been made too easy for men to become members (both points noted once again in 1962 by Dwight L. Smith, Past Grand Master of Indiana, in his classic writing, *Whither Are we Traveling?*) His conclusion is that if no cure is found the fraternity will lose its prestige and once it did, many would "drop out" and "fewer will seek to join," thus offering, what he calls a "fresh start" for American Freemasonry. Hungerford would be surprised to learn that the pre and post years of World War II would do the same thing to the fraternity that occurred following World War I with respect to rapid expansion of membership, the ease by which a man could be admitted as a member, and that prestige has continued to decline as well over the past 90 years. It would probably not be a surprise to Hungerford, however, that his prediction that fewer would join the fraternity has come true, in part, for reasons he forewarned.

~ **Dan M. Kemble,**

In his article, "The Future of Freemasonry," Professor Herbert Hungerford writes, "The first necessity is to realize the body is sick." By any objective standard, American Freemasonry is gravely ill. Just as Professor Hungerford warned, our failure to maintain exclusive standards of membership has filled our Lodges with "parasites" who have drained the Fraternity of its vitality. Despite having lost over three-quarters of our members in the last fifty years, despite the inability of Lodges to perform the most perfunctory ceremonies with any degree of competence, and despite the shabby and worn-down appearance of our

buildings and members, the leadership of American Freemasonry remains in denial with respect to the crisis that exists. What Professor Hungerford perhaps did not foresee was the time when the leadership of American Freemasonry would be drawn from the parasite class that he identified. American Freemasonry has little hope for improvement as long as its leaders come from this pool of men. Tinkering with Landmarks, organizing ATV rides and conferring midnight outdoor electrocution degrees are of questionable value in their own right. Seeing them as even a part of the cure for what ails the Craft is absurd. The immediate need in American Freemasonry is for its leadership to acknowledge that, as an institution, it is sick and in need of treatment. The only treatment plan that will cause the condition of our Fraternity to begin to improve is the slow process of replacing men who are members in name only with quality men who are actually fit for Freemasonry. Professor Hungerford offers wise counsel. American Freemasonry desperately needs to take heed.

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READING MASONS AND MASONS WHO DO NOT READ

Albert G. Mackey - 1875

I suppose there are more Masons who are ignorant of all the principles of freemasonry than there are men of any other class who are chargeable with the like ignorance of their own profession. There is not a watchmaker who does not know something about the elements of horology, nor is there a blacksmith who is altogether unacquainted with the properties of red-hot iron. Ascending to the higher walks of science, we would be much astonished to meet with a lawyer who was ignorant of the elements of jurisprudence, or a physician who had never read a treatise on pathology, or a clergyman who knew nothing whatever of theology. Nevertheless, nothing is more common than to encounter Freemasons who are in utter darkness as to every thing that relates to Freemasonry. They are ignorant of its history - they know not whether it is a mushroom production of today, or whether it goes back to remote ages for its origin. They have no comprehension of the esoteric meaning of its symbols or its ceremonies, and are hardly at home in its modes of recognition. And yet nothing is more common than to find such socialists in the possession of high degrees and sometimes honored with elevated affairs in the Order, present at the meetings of lodges and chapters, intermeddling with the proceedings, taking an active part in all discussions and pertinaciously maintaining heterodox opinions in opposition to the judgment of brethren of far greater knowledge.

Why, it may well be asked, should such things be? Why, in Masonry alone, should there be so much ignorance and so much presumption? If I ask a cobbler to make me a pair of boots, he tells me that he only mends and patches, and that he has not learned the higher branches of his craft, and then he honestly declines the offered job. If I request a watchmaker to construct a mainspring for my chronometer, he answers that he cannot do it, that he has never learned how to make mainsprings, which belongs to a higher branch of the business, but that if I will bring him a spring ready made, he will insert it in my timepiece, because that he knows how to do. If I go to an artist with an order to paint me a historical picture, he will tell me that it is beyond his capacity, that he has never studied nor practiced the computation of details, but has confined himself to the painting of portraits. Were he dishonest and presumptuous he would take my order and instead of a picture give me a daub. It is the Freemason alone who wants this modesty. He is too apt to think that the obligation not only makes him a Mason, but a learned Mason at the same time. He too often imagines that the mystical ceremonies which induct him into the Order are all that are necessary to make him cognizant of its principles. There are some Christian sects who believe that the water of baptism at once washes away all sin, past and prospective. So there are some Masons who think that the mere act of initiation is at once followed by an influx of all Masonic knowledge. They need no further study or research. All that they require to know has already been received by a sort of intuitive process.

The great body of Masons may be divided into three classes. The first consists of those who made their application for initiation not from a desire for knowledge, but from some accidental motive, not always honorable. Such men have been led to seek reception either because it was likely, in their opinion, to facilitate their business operations, or to advance their political prospects, or in some other way to personally benefit them. In the commencement of a war, hundreds flock to the lodges in the hope of obtaining the "mystic sign," which will be of service in the hour of danger. Their object having been attained, or having failed to attain it, these men become indifferent and, in time, fall into the rank of the non-affiliates. Of such Masons there is no hope. They are dead trees having no promise of fruit. Let them pass as utterly worthless, and incapable of improvement.

There is a second class consisting of men who are the moral and Masonic antipodes of the first. These make their application for admission, being prompted, as the ritual requires, "by a favorable opinion conceived of the Institution, and a desire of knowledge." As soon as they are initiated, they see in the ceremonies through which they have passed a

philosophical meaning worthy of the trouble of inquiry. They devote themselves to this inquiry. They obtain Masonic books, they read Masonic periodicals, and they converse with well-informed brethren. They make themselves acquainted with the history of the Association. They investigate its origin and its ultimate design. They explore the hidden sense of its symbols and they acquire the interpretation. Such Masons are always useful and honorable members of the Order, and very frequently they become its shining lights. Their lamp burns for the enlightenment of others, and to them the Institution is indebted for whatever of an elevated position it has attained. For them, this article is not written.

But between these two classes, just described, there is an intermediate one; not as bad as the first, but far below the second, which, unfortunately, comprises the body of the Fraternity.

This third class consists of Masons who joined the Society with unobjectionable motives, and with, perhaps the best intentions. But they have failed to carry these intentions into effect.

They have made a grievous mistake. They have supposed that initiation was all that was requisite to make them Masons, and that any further study was entirely unnecessary. Hence, they never read a Masonic book. Bring to their notice the productions of the most celebrated Masonic authors, and their remark is that they have no time to read-the claims of business are overwhelming. Show them a Masonic journal of recognized reputation, and ask them to subscribe. Their answer is that they cannot afford it, the times are hard and money is scarce.

And yet, there is no want of Masonic ambition in many of these men. But their ambition is not in the right direction. They have no thirst for knowledge, but they have a very great thirst for office or for degrees. They cannot afford money or time for the purchase or perusal of Masonic books, but they have enough of both to expend on the acquisition of Masonic degrees.

It is astonishing with what avidity some Masons who do not understand the simplest rudiments of their art, and who have utterly failed to comprehend the scope and meaning of primary, symbolic Masonry, grasp at the empty honors of the high degrees. The Master Mason who knows very little, if anything, of the Apprentice's degree longs to be a Knight Templar. He knows nothing, and never expects to know anything, of the history of Templarism, or how and why these old crusaders became incorporated with the Masonic brotherhood. The height of his ambition is to wear the Templar cross upon his breast. If he has entered the Scottish Rite, the Lodge of Perfection will not content him, although it supplies material for months of study. He would fain rise higher in the scale of rank, and if by persevering efforts he can attain the summit of the Rite and be invested with the Thirty-third degree, little cares he for any knowledge of the organization of the Rite or the sublime lessons that it teaches. He has reached the height of his ambition and is permitted to wear the double-headed eagle.

Such Masons are distinguished not by the amount of knowledge that they possess, but by the number of the jewels that they wear. They will give fifty dollars for a decoration, but not fifty cents for a book.

These men do great injury to Masonry. They have been called its drones. But they are more than that. They are the wasps, the deadly enemy of the industrious bees. They set a bad example to the younger Masons - they discourage the growth of Masonic literature - they drive intellectual men, who would be willing to cultivate Masonic science, into other fields of labor - they depress the energies of our writers - and they debase the character of Speculative Masonry as a branch of mental and moral philosophy. When outsiders see men holding high rank and office in the Order who are almost as ignorant as themselves of the principles of Freemasonry, and who, if asked, would say they looked upon it only as a social institution, these outsiders very naturally conclude that there cannot be anything of great value in a system whose highest positions are held by men who profess to have no knowledge of its higher development.

It must not be supposed that every Mason is expected to be a learned Mason, or that every man who is initiated is required to devote himself to the study of Masonic science and literature. Such an expectation would be foolish and

unreasonable. All men are not equally competent to grasp and retain the same amount of knowledge. Order, says Pope-Order is heaven's first law and this confess, some are, and must be, greater than the rest, richer, wiser.

All that I contend for is that when a candidate enters the fold of Masonry he should feel that there is something in it better than its mere grips and signs, and that he should endeavor with all his ability to attain some knowledge of that better thing. He should not seek advancement to higher degrees until he knew something of the lower, nor grasp at office, unless he had previously fulfilled with some reputation for Masonic knowledge, the duties of a private station. I once knew a brother whose greed for office led him to pass through all the grades from Warden of his lodge to Grand Master of the jurisdiction, and who during that whole period had never read a Masonic book nor attempted to comprehend the meaning of a single symbol. For the year of his Mastership he always found it convenient to have an excuse for absence from the lodge on the nights when degrees were to be conferred. Yet, by his personal and social influences, he had succeeded in elevating himself in rank above all those who were above him in Masonic knowledge. They were really far above him, for they all knew something, and he knew nothing. Had he remained in the background, none could have complained. But, being where he was, and seeking himself the position, he had no right to be ignorant. It was his presumption that constituted his offense.

A more striking example is the following: A few years ago while editing a Masonic periodical; I received a letter from the Grand Lecturer of a certain Grand Lodge who had been a subscriber, but who desired to discontinue his subscription. In assigning his reason, he said (a copy of the letter is now before me), "although the work contains much valuable information, I shall have no time to read, as I shall devote the whole of the present year to teaching." I cannot but imagine what a teacher such a man must have been, and what pupils he must have instructed.

This article is longer than I intended it to be. But I feel the importance of the subject. There are in the United States more than four hundred thousand affiliated Masons. How many of these are readers? One-half - or even one-tenth? If only one-fourth of the men who are in the Order would read a little about it, and not depend for all they know of it on their visits to their lodges, they would entertain more elevated notions of its character. Through their sympathy scholars would be encouraged to discuss its principles and to give to the public the results of their thoughts, and good Masonic magazines would enjoy a prosperous existence.

Now, because there are so few Masons that read, Masonic books hardly do more than pay the publishers the expense of printing, while the authors get nothing; and Masonic journals are being year after year carried off into the literary Academia, where the corpses of defunct periodicals are deposited; and, worst of all, Masonry endures depressing blows.

The Mason, who reads, however little, is it only the pages of the monthly magazine to which he subscribes, will entertain higher views of the Institution and enjoy new delights in the possession of these views. The Masons who do not read will know nothing of the interior beauties of Speculative Masonry, but will be content to suppose it to be something like Odd Fellowship, or the Order of the Knights of Pythias - only, perhaps, a little older. Such a Mason must be an indifferent one. He has laid no foundation for zeal.

If this indifference, instead of being checked, becomes more widely spread, the result is too apparent. Freemasonry must step down from the elevated position which she has been struggling, through the efforts of her scholars, to maintain, and our lodges, instead of becoming resorts for speculative and philosophical thought, will deteriorate into social clubs or mere benefit societies. With so many rivals in that field, her struggle for a prosperous life will be a hard one.

The ultimate success of Masonry depends on the intelligence of her disciples.

COMMENTARY

~ John W. Bizzack, PM

Evidently disgusted by the lack of determination in American Freemasonry to educate its votaries during the twenty-year period between 1849 and 1874, Mackey wrote his stinging 1875, enduring essay, which reads as if it could have been written in any later decade of that century right on up to today. Clearly, Mackey believed—and with good reason—that Freemasonry as it was intended would disappear unless its members learned about Masonry, practiced it, and passed on their knowledge.

We find in ***Masonic Knowledge a Necessity*** published in the September 1923 edition of *The Builder Magazine*, *To carry on our work as Masons without a clear understanding of what we are about and how to do it, is as impossible as to run a business, with no understanding of trade or commerce.* Another clear reference to the literacy level in American Freemasonry nearly half century after Mackey's essay.

In the September 1928 edition of the *Masonic Services Association Short Talk Bulletin* we read in *Future of Freemasonry*, *"Without giving them [members] an intelligent and authentic knowledge of what Masonry is, or what it means, with no definite objects beyond fellowship and philanthropy - is for Masonry to lose, by ignorance or neglect, what has been distinctive in its history and genius, and invite degeneration, if not disaster. Otherwise, our Lodges will become mere clubs, like a thousand other such organizations - useful and delightful in their degree, but in nowise distinctive - far removed from the original meaning and intent of the Craft.*

Almost 70 years later, we find yet another Mason writing nearly the same words. Sadly, it seems that the only ones to read the words of the are those who least needs to hear them. In 1996, *Michael S. Kaulback* wrote a Short Talk Bulletin entitled, ***The Value of Masonic Libraries***. In the article, he wrote of the Masonic Library in Boston, which at that time had over 100,000 books on Freemasonry and half as much again on other topics. He lamented: *Our Masonic Libraries are begging for Masons to make more use of them, but the sad truth is that the vast majority of Masons do not read or study about the Fraternity or its history.*

Multiple dozens of essays, presentations, books, and commentaries since Mackey's observations over the past 175 years point out the same problem. The hundreds of Masonic periodicals, magazines and chronicles that began to appear in the late 1700s did not disappear from of the lack of paper, but rather readership.

In William H. Upton's, *A Plea for the Teachings of Freemasonry*, in *L.S. Myler's Jewels of Masonic Oratory*, in 1898, we find what might be surprising to some Masons today. The lack of reading and education of Masons, along with other corresponding problems stemming from it, made two of Freemasonry's luminaries of the era, Albert Pike and Robert Freke Gould, seriously question the requisites for perpetuity of mainstream American Freemasonry.

The lack of consistent, well-grounded Masonic education, whether in the form of members studying and reading on their own or whether it is presented and offered in lodge rooms, is indeed at the root of most of the problems infecting Freemasonry for the past 220 years or longer.

Mackey penned his gloomy prognosis for Freemasonry based on his experience and observations of what he saw taking place in Freemasonry. He highlighted the depth of indifference toward understanding and

learning about the Craft, and like many later writers, correctly forewarned that *if not checked and becomes even more widely spread, much of the fraternity would deteriorate into social clubs or mere benefit societies*. His forecast was no more heeded than was the same later projections made by Masonic writers and scholars who saw the same troubling problem continue.

The importance of Mackey's essay is not found in just telling us that little, with regard to the topic, has changed in American Freemasonry for the past 175 years, and that Masonic literacy in the mainstream was regrettably inadequate when he wrote that essay. Today, the significance and importance is that his observations contribute toward the answer to the question, "What happened to American Freemasonry?"

Mackey's insightfulness is aptly summarized in the twelve words of the last sentence of his essay: *The ultimate success of Masonry will depend on the intelligence of her disciples.*

~ Dan M. Kemble, PM

The Grand Lodge of Vermont, on its website, estimates that over 100,000 books have been written on the subject of Freemasonry. To paraphrase Winston Churchill (our Masonic Brother), "Never has so much been written to be read by so few." The irony in the fact that so many books have been written about Freemasonry, when so few Masons actually read about their own Fraternity, is palpable.

We are told from the time that we first set foot in a Masonic Lodge that Freemasonry exists to "make good men better." Ideally, Freemasonry's focus on self-improvement addresses the whole man. A component of improving the whole man is improving one's self intellectually. The path to intellectual self-improvement lies in reading and contemplating the experiences and ideas of others – not just with regard to Freemasonry, but about a variety of subjects.

Freemasonry arrived in the American colonies in the 1730s. American Freemasonry appears to have never engaged its members in the intellectual way that English Freemasonry of that period did. A review of the early history of the Grand Lodge of England reflects an endless stream of the publication of books, pamphlets, articles, counter-pamphlets and counter-articles all discussing the various aspects of Freemasonry. Some of this writing has stood the test of time quite well and remains recommended reading for contemporary Freemasons.

Perhaps it was the shortage of printed material in the New World that stunted the development of American Freemasons' inclination to read about Freemasonry. More likely, the rapid expansion of Freemasonry in the American colonies and the fledgling United States made reading about the meaning and philosophy of Freemasonry inexpedient. Lodges and Masons were too busy organizing and conferring Degrees to be burdened with the task of attempting to understand the Order to which they obligated themselves. While early American Masons may have been morally fit for Freemasonry and may have conscientiously learned and communicated its ceremonies, they were less successful in the development of an appreciation for the Craft in an intellectual sense.

An early consequence of the lack of intellectual depth in American Freemasonry was the Morgan Affair. It is likely that a Craft more intellectually grounded in the philosophical meaning of Freemasonry would not have fallen victim to its own zeal in the manner in which it did.

Not long after the Morgan Affair, Dr. Mackey (1807-1881) began to publish his writings about Freemasonry. Mackey wrote on a host of topics, generally of a legalistic nature – jurisprudence, parliamentary procedure, and, of course, his fabricated list of Landmarks.

A contemporary of Mackey's was Rob Morris (1818-1888). Morris, also a prolific writer, had a more romantic bent in his writings about Freemasonry. While he was equally inclined to write about jurisprudence and even offered his own (quickly forgotten) list of Landmarks, Morris was also a poet and, in the 19th Century, was considered the poet laureate of Freemasonry. Morris also wrote, in a quite uneven fashion, about Masonic history. His book, ***William Morgan: Or Political Anti-Masonry, Its Rise, Growth and Decadence***, published in 1883, is a nonsensical account of the Morgan Affair and has no value other than an illustration of Masonic fable making. On the other hand, his ***The History of Freemasonry in Kentucky***, published in 1859, is a useful account of the early history of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky.

Mackey and Morris paved the way for other American Freemasons to write about Freemasonry during the second half of the 19th Century, throughout the 20th Century and into the early years of the 21st Century. The 21st Century has witnessed the publication of some of the most significant books ever written about Freemasonry by authors such as Andrew Hammer and Kirk White. Unfortunately, despite the emergence of gifted writers who have graced Freemasonry with thoughtful and insightful studies, the disinclination of American Freemasons to pursue the intellectual aspect of their Fraternity has been unwaveringly consistent.

The consequence of American Freemasonry's failure to engage intellectually with its own history and philosophy is readily apparent in the Fraternity's gradual drift from its purpose of self-improvement to its current identity as a charitable and service-oriented organization. Although the drift was gradual, there is now a "great gulf" of Biblical proportions separating the practices of contemporary Freemasonry from its original aim and purpose.

Dr. Mackey, and his friend Rob Morris, would likely be saddened, but hardly surprised, at the state of contemporary American Freemasonry. Mackey warned about such a fate and Morris was certainly astute enough to foresee the consequences of Masonic illiteracy.

If there is any cause for optimism, it rests in two factors. First, a growing number of men now coming into American Freemasonry in the first half of the 21st Century seem somewhat more inclined than their predecessors to discover the historical and philosophical roots of the Order. Second, because of the technology now widely available to virtually everyone, the writings of Mackey and Morris, or of Gould, Coil, Darrah, Newton, Denslow, Hammer, Jackson, White and hundreds of other competent Masonic authors are accessible to anyone with the inclination to search for them.

Mackey's comment that the fate of Masonry depends on the intelligence of its disciples remains unarguably true. Perhaps the 21st Century will see an awakening of American Freemasonry to its intellectual heritage. A failure to do so will continue its current drift into oblivion.

MASONIC PERSPECTIVES

A SECOND LOOK AT ASPECTS OF CONTROVERSIAL
TOPICS IN AMERICAN FREEMASONRY

EDITION III

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The Decline Of Freemasonry: A Data Analysis - Lance Kennedy - 2019

<http://freemasoninformation.com/tag/death>

Our fraternity is dying. While I will not diagnose the causes or cures for our ailing condition in this article, it is necessary for every Mason to come to terms with our present state. This awareness was the goal of this article and I hope you will take a moment to soberly ponder the very real possibility that Freemasonry in the US will go the way of the Elks or Odd Fellows, that is into the fraternal graveyard.

I want to make it abundantly clear that the body-Masonic is dying. I know you want me to stop waxing poetic and get to the data, so without further ado I will present you with my basic findings. I have taken for my analysis the raw data compiled by the Masonic Service Association of North America (MSANA) of the totals of Masons in United States Grand Lodges for the fiscal years indicated [1950-2020]. According to the MSANA, these figures are based upon the MSANA's records and do not necessarily correspond exactly with those published by other sources.

So What? The Dynamic of Masonic Membership – Greg Stewart 2010

<http://freemasoninformation.com/2010/07/so-what-the-dynamic-of-masonic-membership/>

We can, at this point in time do nothing to turn this trend around. No matter how many open houses, public lectures, marketing campaigns, sports sponsorships, television commercials, radio spots, billboards, or finite programs promoted by individual lodges or Grand Lodges will stem the hemorrhage. Even if the blue lodge started giving away memberships, it's doubtful that we could find enough people who even remembered who the Freemasons are, and even fewer who would want to become one. The damage is already done, and we are now in a free fall that threatens to erase the remains of North American Freemasonry. This means the closure and roll back of individual state Grand Lodges. This will mean the selling of more Masonic properties and assets, and the selling or divesting publicly of our privately funded billion-dollar institutions.

This means the end of Freemasonry as we know it today.

There's a Hole In Our Bucket – Stephen Dafoe -2008

Journal of the Masonic Society Issue 2, 2008

Every mason has heard the expression "but we've always done it that way before." The fact that it is used as the butt of Masonic jokes serves as proof positive of its longevity and power in maintaining a status quo. But, as we have seen by what the MSANA numbers don't show us, the status quo is draining our buckets. As the allegory of my restaurant editorial showed, the reason things suck in many lodges is because the men who show up month after month like things that suck. They do so because they enjoy the bland food; not the shoe-leather roast beef and off-color green beans, but the Masonic meal that is largely comprised of recitation of minutes, tedious debates over how funds are dispersed and arguments over when and how to salute the Worshipful Master. Clearly these are not the things that appeal to the men who are leaving our ranks. If they were, they'd be with us still. But instead of spending our energies trying to retain them, we devote our efforts to finding their replacements.

For as long as I have been a Freemason, we have been trying to fill a bucket that has a sizable hole in it. Like Henry in the famed children's song, we have whined through the infinite loop of reasons why we can't fix the bucket and like Jack in the classic nursery rhyme, have rolled down the hill, our empty

bucket tumbling behind us. Like children on a bus trip we have done our rendition of 99 Bottle of Beer by repeating the same pattern ad nauseam, as one by one our members – like the bottles of beer on the wall – vanish.

Unfortunately, we are not doing a good enough job identifying what it is that the men who are joining are looking for, which is – in almost all cases – that which they cannot get any place else –

FREEMASONRY! They are looking to be educated in the Masonic Craft, in the art of being a gentleman in a world that has largely forgotten what one was, and in how they can be part of – to quote my jurisdiction's ritual – “the society of men who prize honor and virtue above the external advantages of rank and fortune.” In short, they want to be taught the things about themselves and the world in which they live that only Freemasonry can teach them. If we cannot teach them because we do not know these things ourselves, then we must learn alongside them. Then, and only then, can the hole in our Masonic bucket be truly repaired and we can return to that growth that once allowed us to select men who would most benefit from Freemasonry's teaching and most benefit Freemasonry by their character and their conduct.

It will not be an easy task fixing this half-century old hole in our Masonic bucket; but it will not be possible at all until we accept that a failure to do so is the cause of our decline and the harbinger of our demise.

The Missing Mason – John L. Belton 1999

<http://internet.lodge.org.uk/index.php/research/93-library/research/234-the-missing-master-mason?fbclid=IwAR1XTqKDDFLKyhK-K0Ux3I5ihK8nV2IBGrnkP-xTmEMdfNp5FV53EfzREoQ>

We all need to remember that Freemasonry is a voluntary occupation, that it competes with work, family, partners, television and all those other ways that leisure hours can now be spent, many of which have become more common during the last half century. If those who join do not find it to be "Value for their Time and Money" then they will leave. While things can be suggested and proposed, even forced into Lodges ONLY a wholehearted acceptance by the Lodges members that they have SMART Objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Timed) will produce any reasonable chance of commitment and success. This will require "Internal Openness" not only about the scale of the problem itself, but about what has been done and what might be done. The whole matter of the severe shortage of internal openness by Masonic Authorities will require further attention.

Those who do become Masons stay as members of the Craft for a very significantly shorter period of time than they ever did in the past - about 20 - 30% of the time they did half a century ago!!

COMMENTARY

~ John W. Bizzack, PM

Without some knowledge of the past, it is impossible to even guess at the future.

Kennedy's remarks and his look at the Masonic Service Association of North America (MSANA) membership record data, offers some knowledge of the past. The hype surrounding his examination as soon as he published it, however, tells us something of the past too -- a lot of Masons act as though this information is something new. Although the MSANA data is often the source of many citations (especially since the 1980s as the membership decline created the undercurrent of alarm in Masonic writings) that suggests few Masons have been concerned enough about it to do more than wring their hands at the worrisome decrease in membership that began in 1959. MSANA, despite the various ways grand jurisdictions report their membership, has collected the data since 1924. Kennedy's review was from 1950-2020.

In the May 1929, Volume XV, No. 5 issue of *The Builder*, R.J. Meekren, wrote ***Where Are We Drifting?*** His chart-filled paper threw light on an interesting trend that should have alerted modern Masonry but did not. As his study sample he used the jurisdiction of Vermont and found that suspensions were much the same rate as demits but suspensions then began to outdistance demits. His examination covered a sixteen-year period (1913-1929) – twelve years before the MSANA began compiling membership records.

A cursory look at Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky during this period corresponds with Meekren's findings: suspensions and demits exceeded loss of membership by death. The years Meekren examined was punctuated with a rapid increase in membership following World War I, an increase very similar to that which took place just prior to and more than a decade following World War II.

If jurisdictions at that time were losing more members to suspensions and demits than to natural death, what was (or was not) taking place in American Freemasonry that made those members lose interest or fade then disappear from membership? We might speculate on the answer to that question today, but trends like these strongly suggests that rapid expansion of membership into Freemasonry during certain periods of his history in the United States (1800-1826, 1855-1870, 1875-1898, 1900-1926) has never proven a good idea and predictably followed by membership decline. The reasons? Again, pedestrian members may speculate and wring hands but when depth is added to the examination, we find that American Freemasonry has a tendency to become obsessed with numbers to measure its success as if that is all that is necessary to ensure the perpetuity of its aim and purpose and proclaim fruition of a genius system of self-improvement.

Kennedy tells us it is necessary for every Mason to come to terms with our present state. He's correct, but that opportunity to do so was available early in the last century as well and it was unheeded – just as many previous writers who have encouraged a call to action.

A continued decline in membership into the coming decades is inevitable. It is **the reasons** for the decline with which American Freemasons should be coming to terms if it is to sustain itself and find strength in its fewness. A good place to start would be a collective examination of how the promise of Freemasonry has been offered and delivered in the past, perhaps finding therein the right path for it to return to the philosophical and educational institution as originally envisioned.

Greg Stewart's examination a decade before Kennedy's observations in his 2010, *So What? The Dynamic of Masonic Membership*, sums it up when it comes to looking at membership decline. He notes, "Even if the blue lodge started giving away memberships, it's doubtful that we could find enough people who even remembered who the Freemasons are, and even fewer who would want to become one. The damage is already done. This means the end of Freemasonry as we know it today."

Stephen Dafoe's, *There's a Hole in our Bucket*, written a couple years before Stewart's hard-hitting article points out those things that are of little interest to members and makes a list of several offerings we find common in lodges today. He then notes, "Clearly these are not the things that appeal to the men who are leaving our ranks. If they were, they'd be with us still. But instead of spending our energies trying to retain them, we devote our efforts to finding their replacements." Dafoe's point reinforces American Freemasonry's obsession with numbers more than fulfilling the promise of the Craft.

Almost a decade before Dafoe, John L. Bolton offered his 1999 findings and perspective in *The Missing Mason*. In his writing he notes, "Those who do become Masons stay as members of the Craft for a very significantly shorter period of time than they ever did in the past - about 20 - 30% of the time they did half a century ago!!" Once again, we find data that warns us of the disquieting and beleaguering problem: we cannot retain those members we have for various reasons, which should be telling us that we are either admitting men who are not suited for the fraternity or we are not offering what the fraternity promises. In either event, we've still done very little in a collective fashion today to address whichever problem it is, so we continue to fight our history.

As S. Brent Morris has written, few have heard but nearly everyone knows about the distinctive warning sound of a rattlesnake. So, we can debate the way to read and interpret data. We can argue about the causes and historical influences on the changing membership numbers. We can do many things, except pretending that it is not happening and then passing on the matter to the next generation. But we do.

~ Dan M. Kemble, PM

Texas Freemason Lance Kennedy asserts that, “our Fraternity is dying.” To a great extent, the accuracy of this statement depends on what the word “Fraternity” means. If Kennedy means that Fraternity is defined as organized Freemasonry as we currently know it, he may well be correct. It is well known that Grand Lodges have consistently lost membership, in significant numbers and almost without interruption, for the last sixty years. Clearly, the continuation of this trend will eventually bring an end to our current structure of Freemasonry.

But is Freemasonry dying? If Fraternity is defined as Freemasonry in general, then not only is it not dying, but it is incapable of dying.

Chris Hodapp, author of *Freemasons for Dummies* and host of the blog by the same name, frequently writes that Freemasonry is an idea. Hodapp’s point is that ideas do not die and, accordingly, the idea of Freemasonry will not die. The idea of Freemasonry, obviously, is older than organized Freemasonry. It existed prior to the formation of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717 and will likely outlast the hundreds of Grand Lodges that exist around the world today.

Freemasonry teaches us to observe nature. By doing so, we observe the cycle of life, death and regeneration that occurs around us constantly. The elements of this cycle are not only interrelated, but are interdependent as well. Death is necessary to sustain regeneration and new life. Could it be that organized Freemasonry finds itself in the same cycle? Is it possible that to be born to new and greater life, organized Freemasonry as we know it must first die?

As Occidental College professor Lynn Dumenil points out in her study, ***Freemasonry and American Culture*** (1987), because of over-lapping membership, the focus of organized Freemasonry was fundamentally altered in the early years of the Twentieth Century by the influence of service organizations such as the Rotary, Elks, Lions Clubs, Odd Fellows and all of the other organizations born in the Golden Age of Fraternalism. Most of those organizations have run their course and exist today, if at all, in a greatly attenuated condition. Organized Freemasonry’s immunity to such a fate has rested, largely, on its spiritual and philosophical underpinnings, which distinguish it from the other organizations. As organized Freemasonry moves farther away from such underpinnings, its immunity is compromised. Its dwindling membership rolls indicate that it, too, is headed for the same destiny as its sister organizations, a point re-emphasized in Greg Stewart’s, ***“So What? The Dynamic of Masonic Membership.”***

But is that necessarily a bad thing? The death of organized Freemasonry may well be necessary for the idea of Freemasonry to be reborn in its beauty and splendor.

Stephen Dafoe is unarguably correct when he writes that men coming into Freemasonry

“... are looking to be educated in the Masonic Craft, in the art of being a gentleman in a world that has largely forgotten what one was, and in how they can be part of – to quote my jurisdiction’s ritual – “the society of men

who prize honor and virtue above the external advantages of rank and fortune.” In short, they want to be taught the things about themselves and the world in which they live that only Freemasonry can teach them.”

If organized Freemasonry ever had the power to teach such things, it has long since lost it. The idea of Freemasonry, however, possesses the power and the vitality that it has always had and is more than capable of providing men that which they seek. The challenge for Masonic leaders, as the structure of Freemasonry inevitable changes in the coming years, will be to harness the power of the idea of Freemasonry without becoming lost in the entropy that exists to some extent in all institutions.

If, in fact, our Fraternity is dying, let it be the death of a thoughtless and soulless organization that has forsaken its spiritual and philosophical mission. May it be reborn to a new life again as a brotherhood of men who seek improvement, and, in the consequence of such improvement, improve the world about them and draw nearer to their Creator.

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GRAND DELUSIONS

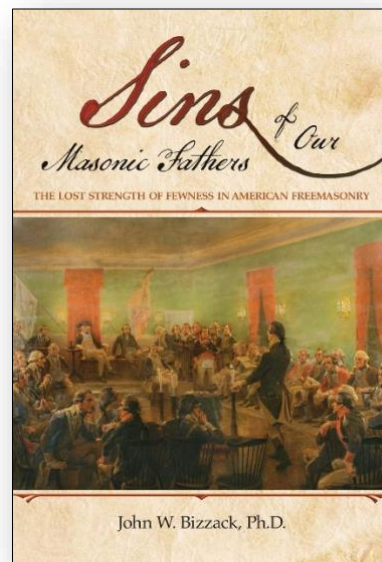
One of the Great What-Ifs of Masonic History

John W. Bizzack

Excerpt from
Sins of Our Masonic Fathers
The Lost Strength of Fewness in American
Freemasonry

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The organizational structure and its culture consequences inherited by twenty-first-century Freemasonry often seems immovable to the point that even the suggestion of a balanced examination of other possibilities involving our structure evokes robust, sometimes heated, opposition. This is not a recent characteristic found in American Freemasonry, but one that settled in only decades following the formation of lodges. Scottish Freemason and writer, Peter Taylor, describes the reason for this stemming from unintentionally imposing a “horrendous superstructure on a very elegant organization.”¹ The superstructure he refers to is grand lodges.



We became used to the idea very early in American Freemasonry that each state is a Masonic jurisdiction entitled to its sovereignty over all regularly chartered lodges within the sphere of their authority. Any American Mason who believes that will change in the distant future shows his unawareness of the deeply embedded authority Masons have vested in their grand lodges since the first was formed.

Masons created grand lodges, and remain its only source of fuel; they are not some massive bureaucracy that just mysteriously appeared and brought with them a surplus of rules, regulations, edicts, and guidelines. The institution—a democratically-governed body—is a product of the intelligence of its members, who, through the power of the ballot and majority vote, elect its representatives. It is a fair process, but not always one with a consistent track record of balance nor is it a process that pleases every Mason. The men elected to lead and manage grand lodges have different levels of skills, Masonic knowledge and experiences, perspective, and commitment affecting their levels of effective leadership and administration. Expecting that not to vary in one, or all lodges, much less grand lodges, is naive.

The first detailed regulations for governing lodges and controlling the grand lodge were those found in Anderson’s original constitution. Ireland and Scotland soon followed with some variations all establishing many precedents that continue in American Freemasonry today. Lodges outside the British Isles and, to

¹. Peter Taylor, “Membership Problem,” *Pietre-Stones Review of Freemasonry*, accessed January 3, 2018, <http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/taylor.html>.

some extent, those within, were under the immediate direction of provincial grand masters. At the outbreak of the revolution in 1775, the Moderns had provincial grand lodges in New England, New York, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia; the Ancients had the Provincial Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania and, in 1781, warranted one in New York; and the Grand Lodge of Scotland had the Provincial Grand Lodge for Boston.² Grand lodges in South Carolina and Virginia were formed during the revolution. Following the Treaty of Paris in 1783, establishing the independence of the thirteen states of New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia, grand lodges were formed—each proclaiming full sovereign power within their defined jurisdictions.

The spirit and interests of the people in the new nation were predominately local. States viewed themselves as fully independent entities making up the country. Freemasons, at the time, being only a part of that general community, were inclined to conform to that trend; and, when it came to the formation of grand lodges, Masons saw themselves as state and not as a national entity.³ Local Masonic pride asserted itself, marginalizing the idea there should be one national grand lodge.

Concerns about increasing irregularities and the lack of unanimity to more universally extend and strengthen American Freemasonry were apparent at least five years prior to the 1783 Treaty of Paris.⁴ In 1779, in the middle of a political revolution, a handful of New England Masons believed one general grand lodge of American then and for the future was a better solution. Their movement resulted in an idea that took seven decades to run its course—the idea that American Freemasonry would be better off with one grand lodge overseeing the Craft instead of one in each state.

Local Masonic pride, seasoned by the taste of state sovereignty, doomed early whatever merit such an early idea may have offered. The condition of Freemasonry in America depicted by proponents of that idea did not sway the majority of existing grand lodges to embrace it. Even the enormous popularity of two men—although decades apart, who were nominated to head such a proposed general grand lodge, George Washington and later, Henry Clay—did not persuade that majority either.

The decades-long periodic movement to form a general grand lodge started with and in American Union Lodge 1, which was first chartered in Massachusetts in 1776, and functioned as a military lodge for seven years. It should be no surprise the idea of a national grand lodge—a central command, as it were—would be a natural and comfortable structure for a lodge largely made up of members who were military men.

On December 27, 1779, the lodge 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.

Gist eloquently outlined the case, reading the petition to over eighty Masons reportedly present that evening, many of whom were distinguished officers in the American army. Some reports of the evening, which began to appear with regularity in Masonic journals in the latter years of the 1800s, note that Washington was in the room.

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

². *Ibid.*, 41.

³. *Ibid.*, 41.

⁴. David McGregor, "Contribution to the Early History of Freemasonry: *Freemasonry* at Morristown during the Revolutionary War," *New Jersey Master Mason Magazine for Freemasons* 2, no. 9, March 1927.

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.” Gist went on to say the most effective way to correct these “impending dangers” was to appoint a Grand Master in and over the Thirteen United States of America.”⁵ Gist’s used the words “in and over” suggested to some historians the proposed grand master might also be authorized to create a grand lodge of America. However, later research untangles that notion and determines that such a proposed position of Grand Master would only have the authority to preside over and govern Masonic conventions and the warranting of lodges in new territories, but no authority to oversee sovereign grand lodges.⁶

Contrary to Masonic myth, Washington was not nominated that evening for the position of grand master of a grand lodge of America. A committee was appointed to take the subject into consideration; and as might be expected because of the nature of the lodge itself, Masons from each division of the army were appointed members. Gist was elected president when the committee was called in convention and documents were drafted to send to the different grand masters in the United States. The convention “delicately forbore” in the document to mention Washington as their choice for general grand master, but it was well understood that such was their wish.⁷

Interestingly, 147 years later, the seed of another Masonic myth was planted after a painting that commemorated the debut of the American Union Lodge meeting, and later appeared in Masonic publications. Renowned artist John Ward Dunsmore—a New Jersey Mason—created the fifty-nine by forty-three image in 1926 he named “The Petition.” The image appeared first in the March 1927, issue of the New Jersey edition of *Master Mason Magazine for Freemasons*.⁸ Dunsmore, exercising his artistic license, identified men in the painting as present who, in fact, were not. He also inserted and identified Alexander Hamilton, Washington’s chief staff aide during the revolution and later first secretary of the treasury, sitting in the Northeast Corner of the lodge that evening. Hamilton’s image in the painting contributed to the unsubstantiated belief he was a Freemason.⁹

The well-deserved allegiance of distinguished military Masons of the period when it came to Washington cannot be ignored, of course. It should hardly be surprising that they offered a solution of a centralized grand lodge with him at the helm to address the troubles facing the fraternity. Washington’s popularity was considerable, but not at its peak with everyone in the newly declared independent nation. Historians

⁵ The Petition: New Jersey Edition of Master Mason Magazine for Freemasons 2, no. 9 (March 1927): 140.

⁶ Mark A. Tabbert, “George Washington, General Grand Master of the U.S.A, or Not?” Reflections on 300 years Of Freemasonry,” ed. John S. Wade (London: Lewis Masonic, 2017), 208, and discussion with author on October 22, 2018.

⁷ Henry R. Rugg, ed., *The Freemason’s Repository* 4 (Providence R. I. Freeman and Co., 1884–1885), 290.

⁸ Ibid, *The Petition*: New Jersey Edition of Master Mason Magazine for Freemasons 2, no. 9 (March 1927): 137.

⁹ Masonic writer and the historian of the Grand Council of Connecticut Royal and Select Masters, James R. Case, ended the belief Alexander Hamilton was a Mason in 1955. Case reported in his essay, “The Hamilton Bi-Centennial” that a man named Hamilton did indeed visit the American Union Lodge in 1779 and 1780, but it was Lieutenant John Hamilton of the first Maryland regiment and member of Lodge 6 in Maryland. Hamilton was a later member of Military Lodge 29. Case also noted in his essay, “Since the appearance of the Halsey story, the identification of Alexander Hamilton as a Freemason has been made a matter of record in many articles and publications. The 1946 edition of *Mackey’s Revised Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* goes so far as to state that it was Alexander who was present at Morristown, ‘identified because [he was] the only one of that name then holding a commission in the army.’ This broad statement can readily be refuted by reference to Heitmann’s Register of Continental Officers where no less than twenty-two Hamiltons are listed. The DAR [Daughters of the American Revolution] Ancestral Register contains at least forty Hamiltons and SAR [Sons of the American Revolution] records have more than twice as many. The Hamiltons were extensively patriotic.” Denslow in *10,000 Famous Freemasons* also discredits information about Hamilton being a Mason, but aptly points out that Phillip Hamilton, Alexander Hamilton’s youngest son who was an assistant district attorney in New York, was indeed a Mason—a member of Albion Lodge 26, and Master of the same in 1829.

will have to continue to guess at whether this movement would have gained momentum at a later time with Washington's name attached, or if he had openly accepted the nomination at some particular point.

The movement started by these loyal military officers did not gain traction, but the 1779 event would not be the last time Masons in America proposed such a model. Over the next seventy-four years, the idea of establishing a general grand master of the United States, grew into the all for a general grand lodge of America. Such a movement was put forth another nine times—the last occurring in 1859, with an average of nine years between them.

The average number of times such a proposal arose during those seven decades and the passing of at least three generations of Masons offers insight into the perceived state of American Freemasonry during those years by a segment of its members as a result of the individual sovereignty practiced by multiple grand lodge jurisdictions. The fact that each serious proposal failed also affirms the deeply rooted power of established grand lodges.

- The 1779 proposal led to a convention in February 1780 in Morristown, New Jersey, with delegates from that state, New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland. In January 1780, Pennsylvania passed three resolutions to pursue the matter and organize a formal committee to draft a plan. By this action, Pennsylvania co-opted and superseded the military's Masonic proposal. Pennsylvania's prerogative to take the lead was affirmed by the convention and soldiers who participated.¹⁰ However, the purpose of the convention failed.
- In 1790, the matter was renewed by the Grand Lodge of Georgia, but "Pennsylvania became an opponent of the measure, and declared it to be impracticable," which again led to the failure of the proposal.¹¹
- Again in 1799, the Grand Lodge of South Carolina proposed and recommended a convention to be held in Washington for the purpose of forming a "Superintending Grand Lodge of America." Interestingly, the reasons assigned in their proposition were printed in a circular to all other grand lodges "to draw closer the bonds of union between the different lodges the United States and induce them to join some systematic plan whereby the drooping spirit of the Ancient Craft may be revived and become more generally useful and beneficial." Apparently sympathetic to the cause, several grand lodges acceded to the proposition for holding a convention for that purpose, but did not express wide support, although they committed to send delegates. The convention, however, did not assemble.¹²
- In 1803, the proposition was made again—this time by the Grand Lodge of North Carolina—and was met with "a like want of success."¹³
- In 1806, the subject of a general grand lodge was presented to all grand lodges for a convention in Philadelphia to be held in 1807, and again in Washington in 1808. Although widely discussed, neither was convened.¹⁴
- In 1811, another proposition was presented by the Grand Lodge of North Carolina for a convention in Washington. It too was unsuccessful, and there was no convention.¹⁵

¹⁰ Mark A. Tabbert, "George Washington, General Grand Master of the U.S.A, or Not?" *Reflections on 300 years Of Freemasonry*, ed. John S. Wade (London: Lewis Masonic, 2017), 208, and discussion with author on October 22, 2018.

¹¹ *A United Grand Lodge: The American Freemason's New Monthly Magazine* 4, no. 1, July 1859..

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

- In 1812, North Carolina, “which seems to have been earnest in its endeavors to accomplish its favorite subject,” made the same proposal again. But the effort, like all that preceded it, proved abortive; and no convention was held.¹⁶
- In 1822, Maryland recruited the famed orator and statesman, Henry Clay, as their champion, and to preside over a convention that year [Clay was grand master of Kentucky in 1820]. The appeal “fell upon unwilling ears” of only seven grand lodges that were represented by fourteen delegates. Despite its eloquent and well-known president, the movement failed again; and the idea of what was called a “Supreme Grand Lodge of the United States” never went into operation. The formation of its constitution was its first, last, and only act [Clay demitted from the fraternity in 1824]. The Grand Lodge of Ohio was the first to declare opposition at this convention when their representative exclaimed that their grand lodge “would in no event consent to a Supreme Grand Lodge of the United States.”¹⁷
- In 1848, the Grand Lodge of New York recommended each grand lodge “should frame the outline of a General Grand Lodge Constitution, such as would be acceptable to it, and send it with a delegate to a convention to be held in Boston in 1850.” New York and Rhode Island submitted such an outline along with the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia. The convention never met.¹⁸

In 1850, a strong statement from the Grand Lodge of Texas numbed the movement when it expressed what they believed the general sentiment of grand lodges, and said: “The formation of a General Grand Lodge will not accomplish the desired end. The same feeling and spirit than now lead to difficulties between the different grand lodges would produce insubordination and disobedience of the edicts of a General Grand Lodge.”¹⁹

- In 1853, Lexington, Kentucky, hosted a convention attended by friends of the proposal and its measures during a session of the General Grand Chapter and Encampment. The meeting did little except to invite a meeting of a “fuller convention whose delegates should be clothed with more plenary powers to assemble at Washington in January 1855.” That meeting occurred, and nine propositions styled as Articles of Confederation were accepted and put forth as ratified, and to take effect as soon as they were approved by twenty grand lodges —“and the concurrent decision thereon two-thirds of the whole number would be held authoritative and binding.” This would have made the ratification of Masonic law if only thirteen of the twenty grand lodges voted for its adoption. With no principle of vitality to keep it together, the approbation was never received, and the proposed confederation failed to assume a permanent form.²⁰
- In 1857, the Grand Lodge of Maine made their proposal and called for a convention to be held in Chicago in 1859. Courteously responded to, several grand lodges planned to attend. The convention was held, but resulted in another failure.²¹

What would have happened had two-thirds of the grand lodges ratified the 1855 convention? First of all, the confederation league had no power to enforce its decisions, and was a voluntary organization expected to oversee voluntary organizations—never a good mix. The debility of its premise would likely have led to its early death. Second, even with this weakness, had all grand lodges that voted fallen in line with it,

¹⁶. *Ibid.*

¹⁷. *Ibid.*

¹⁸. *Ibid.*

¹⁹. *Ibid.*

²⁰. *Ibid.*

²¹. *Ibid.*

the seven that did not may have eventually joined too, or possibly have formed their own grand lodge to oversee the ones who did not ratify the proposal.²²

What if there had been a Grand Lodge of America from the beginning instead of the formation of sovereign state grand lodges? Would ritual have evolved with uniformity? Would Masonic education be consistent and focused on development of men and leadership within the fraternity? Would a national grand lodge have created a practical plan through which to realistically address expansion rates and enforce an assurance of lofty standards?

Some may argue it would have done all those things, and the state of American Freemasonry today would be different and perhaps would have circumvented some or much of the anti-Masonic era and handled the rapid influx of members following World War I and II in a more constructive way.

No matter the various tentacles of speculation stemming from the hypotheticals, the effects of the Civil War on the mood of the Masons and their grand lodges for nearly five years of national conflict cannot be discounted as a principle reason the movement, after 1859, did not continue with its previous regularity. The ravages of the war along with the divided consciences of men whose patriotic duties split the nation offered no time for Masons to dwell on the virtue or need for one or dozens of grand lodges in America. The same reasoning may apply to the ill-fated attempt during the early days of the revolution in 1779. In any event, membership increased with a great rapidity following the Civil War through early twentieth century, and there is no record of any similar movement spoiling the glee of seeing the fraternity proliferate and prosper as it did.

George Washington supposedly declined the offer.²³ Clay may have wanted it too much in 1820. The question of “[w]hat if Washington had accepted the nomination?” leads to an interesting conversation, and sometimes a more impassioned debate among Masons.

Regardless, due to suspicions of grand lodges (jealous for their own prerogatives and influenced by the early ideas and later political doctrine of states’ rights), the appetite for an overarching, central Masonic authority was an unlikely initiative from the start. The real or perceived condition of American Freemasonry nor even the nomination of a prestigious and widely respected man like Washington, and later Clay, added momentum to such an idea.

Envisioning the formation today, much the less the acceptance of a national grand lodge against the backdrop of over two-and-three-quarter centuries of culturally embedded sovereign authority, is, in every aspect, implausible. As if that was not enough, we look at such an idea in the past through the eyes of presentism today. Peters’s definition of grand lodges as a “horrendous superstructure,” and Richard A.

The sin of our Masonic fathers is not failing to form a general grand master or national grand lodge in the early days of the fraternity in this country, but the seeming indifference to acknowledge and recognize the underlying issues that spurred movements to form one.

²² Although the 1843 Baltimore Convention carried no authority over all grand lodges or power to enforce its decisions, every grand jurisdiction in America ultimately adopted the convention’s recommendation that all business be conducted only in the Master Mason degree—changing the practice that had been in place for over a century. The premise, however, that all grand jurisdictions would become subservient under one national grand lodge was a much different issue.

²³ Tabbert notes that there is no evidence that Washington was ever asked about the position of General Grand Master, and no evidence that he ever declined the opportunity; Tabbert, “General Grand Master,” 203–13.

Graeter's comparison of their bureaucracy to that of a giant hair ball, serves to magnify the scope of the missteps one national grand lodge would likely had had or later created.²⁴

If such a grand lodge was ever going to have a chance to offer and accomplish what its proponents claimed it would, the birth would have taken place as a result of the first maybe second or third attempt to form one. The perceived solution to the problem of "restoring ancient principles and discipline of Masonry, correcting "many irregularities and improprieties," and the "present dissipated and almost abandoned conditions" of lodges, "relaxation of virtues," to "save" Freemasonry from the "impending dangers of schisms and apostasy," simply came too late in the evolution of the organizational structure of American Freemasonry. The fundamental premise of the past and often heard today that a national grand lodge would ostensibly "draw closer the bonds of union between the different lodges the United States and induce them to join some systematic plan" did not then or today incite enough interest of the body of the Craft to do so.

The sin of our Masonic fathers is not failing to establish a general grand master or form a national grand lodge in the early days of the fraternity in this country, but the seeming indifference to acknowledge and recognize the underlying issues that spurred movements to form one. As each of the clumsy attempts failed, the reasons they surfaced in the first place and continued to do so for decades, were ignored. Perhaps, instead of conventions to form a national grand lodge there should have been a well-planned convention to examine *why*, even after being repeatedly quashed, any movement at all continued for the next seventy-three years.

This deficit of any judicious assessment, or even a call for one for almost three-quarters of a century, suggests American Freemasons continued to wear the hoodwink that often caused them to step on rakes. The blindness to rippling effects and unintended consequences was and continues to be a distinctive characteristic of Masonic organizations. Judging the effectiveness of lodges and grand lodges in delivering the promise of Freemasonry by what they profess versus the results of what they practice is found in the story of movements to form a national grand lodge. Whether a rake is still lying on the ground ready to be stepped on again will be clearer to serious historians in the future.

While we like to think of the Masonic fraternity as being a "great world-wide international, closely-related group of men, bound together by solemn vows, with the sole idea of their advancement," we know that is not the case. Missouri's past grand master, Ray Denslow, an outspoken, independent thinker conditioned by his deep understanding of, and wide connections in Freemasonry, believed that what we like to think the Masonic fraternity as being was far from the truth. Denslow's writing and influence did much to keep the rank and file of Masonic leadership from accepting error in place of truth.²⁵ Through his often painful but necessary criticisms, he pointed out many times how Freemasonry, while worldwide, was not that closely-knit group, but an organization of several hundred individual sections separated by state and national boundaries, by religion, creeds, and racial issues—its work no more done than that of a newly raised Master Mason.²⁶ As he also pointed out, that means there will always be a field for Masonic endeavor. He noted with clarity that while there are reasons for not having a national grand lodge, there is no reason why Freemasons cannot unite as a national organization for the consideration of things vital to Masonic life and policy—not doing so falls well into the category of a Masonic sin.

²⁴ Richard A. Graeter, in his 2007 "Reform Freemasonry" essay, explains how policies and procedures in grand lodges have built up over time based on the lessons of past successes and failures, and then become the accepted model, pattern, or standard of the corporate mindset making every new policy another hair for the bureaucratic hairball—hairs are never taken away, only added. The fundamental weakness is that there is no room in the corporate hairball for original thinking or primary creativity; Richard A. Graeter, "Reform Freemasonry," *Reform Freemasonry*, accessed August 2017, <https://reformfreemasonry.com/>.

²⁵ Lewis C. Cook, preface to *The Masonic World of Ray V. Denslow* (Missouri Lodge of Research, 1964), xii.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.

Some argue that American Freemasonry is united as a national organization. However, the debate continues about whether “some systematic plan” ever existed or later emerged as a result of those nine movements to establish either the position of general grand master or form a national grand lodge, or through the official recognition standards/practices and work of today’s conferences and associations. Regardless, the idea of a general grand master and or national grand lodge, no matter the factual condition or complex issues that continue to confront Craft as a whole, lies moldering in its grave.

COMMENTARY

~ John W. Bizzack, PM

Since this chapter excerpt appeared in *Sins of our Masonic Fathers*, I have been asked my personal views about whether a National Grand Lodge of America would be workable today. In a previous commentary in this series, I quoted Pulitzer Prize recipient and American historian, David D. McCullough, who said, *History is who we are and why we are the way we are*. The points made in *Grand Delusions* is my answer to what has become a frequently asked question.

If a national grand lodge was ever going to emerge and enjoy and modicum of success in the United States, its only hope would have been if it were formed out of colonial Freemasonry or by at least by the second call to consider forming one - not later. We can read into General Gist’ 1779 petition what was already weakening the institution of Freemasonry at the time. By looking at what was going in during the other eight times the proposal was made over the next eighty years, we can today see the reasons such a proposal continued to surface about once every decade.

Our history is certainly telling in that we see how an indifference unfolded from grand lodges to even acknowledge and recognize there was underlying issues spurring the nine movements over four generations of Masons. Generally speaking, if there is telltale evidence of some event, the event is probably occurring. In this case, the event occurring over eighty years was the continuation of what Gist outlined in his 1779 petition: *many irregularities and improprieties, and presently dissipated and almost abandoned condition of our lodges in general, as well as the relaxation of virtue among individuals and apostasy*. Later, when the need was noted for “some systematic plan whereby the drooping spirit of the Ancient Craft may be revived and become more generally useful and beneficial,” that too fell upon “unwilling ears” and ignored by opponents. Regardless, once established, the model of sovereign grand lodges successfully sidelined and marginalized any widespread appetite for a one national grand lodge, dooming any telltale evidence that it might be worth the time to at least find out why the idea kept surfacing.

Our history about this topic is clear. Power, especially sovereign power, triggers self-interested behavior and influences moral reasoning.²⁷ Those opposing the earliest proposals (and later ones) who failed to consider or even think about calling for a collective, balanced examination of the grounds this issue put forth, is another reason the movements did not die for eighty-years and took the understandable distraction of the Civil War to make the subject fade into history. The failure to investigate the issues at least once over eighty years it persisted, is hardly what a serious Mason might consider an action that was for the good of the Order. History is indeed *who* we are and certainly explains *why* we are the way we are.

We should toss out the recurring question about whether a national grand lodge is workable today, and simply look at the reasons it was doomed after the first proposal in 1779. Therein, we find the clear answer to that question and many others.

~ **Dan M. Kemble, P. M.**

John Bizzack traces well the several attempts to establish a national grand lodge in the United States. The hostility to such a proposition has been so strong that no serious effort to address the matter has occurred since 1859. The Conference of Grand Masters of Masons of North America dates to roughly 1925. While the Conference can make recommendations, it has no binding authority on the participating jurisdictions. Its sister organization, the Conference of Grand Secretaries in North America, which dates to 1928, similarly has no power to bind any participating jurisdiction. These organizations serve as clearing houses for positions on grand lodge regularity and the occasional program offered to reverse Freemasonry's waning fortunes.

Henry Wilson Coil, in *Conversations on Freemasonry*, described the early efforts to form a national grand lodge. Coil observed that such an effort was doomed from the beginning. In Coil's view, the thirteen original states distrusted each other almost as much as they distrusted Great Britain, from whom they had won their independence. Asking the grand lodges of those states to trust each other enough to form a national grand lodge and cede to it their sovereignty was an immediate non-starter.

If a student of American history posed the question, "What would the United States be like today, had it continued to be governed under the Articles of Confederation," one response would be to point in the direction of American Freemasonry. The chaos that marked American government under the Articles is replicated in the uncoordinated, piecemeal and parochial acts of the grand lodges operating in the United States.

It is often said that power corrupts. Fortunately, that statement is not always true. In every instance, however, power reveals. In the instance of North American Freemasonry, the

²⁷ Laura M. Giurge, et al., *The Leadership Quarterly*, April 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2019.03.003>, accessed June 2019.

revelation is that no grand lodge, as currently constituted, has any intention of willingly surrendering any of its sovereign authority.

The differences that exist between grand jurisdictions are striking. Arkansas and West Virginia are essentially rogue jurisdictions that compete for the title of “the North Korea of American Freemasonry.” Georgia and Tennessee have expelled Masons for exercising their lawful rights as citizens as guaranteed by a decision of the U. S. Supreme Court. A handful of grand jurisdictions from states once a part of the Confederate States of America still refuse to recognize the regularity of Prince Hall Masonry. Not every grand lodge in the United States recognizes every other grand lodge. Establishment of a national grand lodge in 1779 would have, perhaps, prevented such incongruities. Their existence at this time make the likelihood of a national grand lodge remote in the extreme.

Will shrinking membership rolls bring about a climate change in North American Freemasonry, making the idea of a national grand lodge more palatable? Only time will answer that question. The Grand Lodge of Kentucky saw 46 lodge consolidations in the ten-year period beginning in 2009 and ending in 2018. If that trend is representative of what is happening in other grand jurisdictions, and if it continues into the future, it is certainly reasonable to expect that there may come a time when grand lodges will at least consider consolidating.

Should the unlikely occur – if the loss of membership on a national level forces a reconfiguration of grand lodges – how will American Freemasonry move forward? American Freemasonry desperately needs strong and capable leadership to redirect its path. There are few signs that such leadership now exists in the current landscape. North American grand lodges jealously guard their sovereignty and will surrender it only when no other option remains.

MASONIC PERSPECTIVES

A SECOND LOOK AT ASPECTS OF CONTROVERSIAL
TOPICS IN AMERICAN FREEMASONRY

EDITION VI

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Masonic Perspectives is a project created by Past Masters John W. Bizzack and Dan M. Kemble intended to bring the writings about controversial topics of the past in American Freemasonry and provide readers a second look and contemporary perspective on the topics to serve as a catalyst for further discussion.

This project is a joint venture of Lexington Lodge No. 1, The Rubicon Masonic Society, and William O. Ware Lodge of Research, Covington, Kentucky.



THERE'S NO SUCH THINGS AS BAD PUBLICITY...

Are We Dumbing Down the Mysteries of Freemasonry?

P.T. Barnum, the 19th century American showman and circus owner, is often credited with saying, "There's no such thing as bad publicity," although hard evidence to link that quotation to him is difficult to establish. The Irish poet and playwright, Oscar Wilde, is cited as saying, "The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about." The notion that no publicity can do harm, however, is certainly open to question – especially when it comes to Freemasonry.

COMMENTARY

In 2005, Joshua Gunn, an Associate Professor of Communication Studies and an Affiliate Faculty with the Department of Rhetoric and Writing, both at the University of Texas at Austin, wrote about publicity and Freemasonry. His essay, *Modern Occult Rhetoric: Mass Media and the Drama Secrecy in the Twentieth Century*, was published in *Heredom*, Vol. 15., in 2007. A version of his essay appears again in the Summer 2008, *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, Michigan State University Press under the title *Death by Publicity: U.S. Freemasonry and the Public Drama of Secrecy*.

Gunn contends that Freemasonry has marketed itself to the public in such a way as to marginalize, perhaps diminish the mysteries of the Craft, and argues, that it is the mysteries of the Craft that has and continues to draw men to the fraternity. His essay is an important catalyst for further discussion

He offers examples from the past as well as today to defend his analysis. Two of the most interesting stems from comments made by Albert Pike and Rex L. Huchens. Pike, expressed his worry that the philosophical mission of Freemasonry was increasingly eclipsed by Masonic sociability and charity.²⁸ Rex R. Huchens, author of the 1990 *Bridge to Light*, published by The Supreme Council Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, wrote his concern about the Scottish Rite steadily moving away from instruction on philosophy and continues to place a greater emphasis on its charitable endeavors.²⁹

Gunn expands his examples of "too much publicity" in his analysis of such later writings such as, Christopher Hodapp's, *Freemasons for Dummies* and *The Complete Idiots Guide of Freemasonry* from S. Brent Morris, asserting both (and books by other authors) represent the "antithesis of the mystery-effect of the strange symbol. Each book attempts to evaporate the aura of mystery that surrounds the Craft in the language of transparency and contemporary argot." Furthermore, he writes that such offerings "downplays the centrality and function of mystery central to Masonic philosophy."

To support his thesis, he writes the difference between privacy and secrecy this way: *A promise is a private thing, a concern that which can be made public, but is not done so out of respect. A secret remains private, however, because one is obliged to keep them that way.* Gunn believes the strategy of

²⁸ Albert Pike's *Esoterika: Symbolism of the Blue Degrees*, Scottish Rite Research Society, 1888, reprint 2005.

²⁹ Rex R. Huchens, *Pillars of Wisdom: The Writings of Albert Pike*, Washington, D.C. The Supreme Council, 33°, 1995, p. 57

transparency that seems to have been adopted by the fraternity more than a decade ago in hopes of revitalizing interest in the Craft fails “to think more carefully about the function of the secret in relation to the most important ritual practice that sustains the Order: the Masonic obligation.” He ends his essay by noting:

Because the secret is so central to our bond, Masons need to seriously reconsider the guiding assumption of recent publicity: that an increase in membership will lead to a stronger, more robust fraternal order. Because of the way in which the ideology of publicity seems to work, perhaps a smaller, more dedicated membership would be better for the fraternity and its philosophy? Regardless of one’s position on the size of the Order, this essay nevertheless urges Masons to think twice about disowning secrecy or insisting that Masonic secrecy is merely privacy. In this age of the drama of publicity and surveillance, our obligation to secrecy—and therefore to each other—is all that we have.

Gunn’s points are worthy of notice, of course, and while he is correct in his observance of an absence of wide-spread critical thinking in Freemasonry, that absence is not found in the authors of particular books that, as he contends, “evaporate the aura of the mystery that surrounds the Craft.” He is certainly correct in to point out Pike’s and Huchen’s concerns for that is exactly what has and continues to happen. In fact, Pike’s concern was addressed with Masonic scholar Robert Freke Gould in 1889, about the requisites for perpetuity of mainstream American Freemasonry being questionable even at that time.³⁰ One can only wonder if he and Gould were including in their shared concern that so few Masons read about and actually study their Craft if that was also part of their concern beyond the conspicuous drift at the time from a philosophical and educational institution toward a club check-full of programs and projects.

If it were not for past exposures and books like the ones Gunn contends provide too much transparency, it may be there would be even less interest in Freemasonry today by not only the public but its members.

The double-edged sword of Internet has taken Freemasonry where no Mason in the later part of the 20th century could imagine it would have gone, much less earlier Masons. The surplus of drivel found there about Freemasonry can easily outdistance the valid information and legitimate research. Although distinctly muddled, there is certainly a “transparency” already by virtue of the freedom of anyone posting anything about any thought or any interpretation they may have about the fraternity, its operation, philosophies, and yes, even its “secrets” – awash with images and illustrations. If anything, it is the Internet that has erased any aura of mystery about Freemasonry for the serious -minded researcher or student of the Craft, and fueled the antics of the loosely confederated, conspiracy-minded blockheads who can type.

Of all Masonic related ironies, the fact that early exposures from 1724 through around 1827 provided more history about the fraternity’s workings than did its own official writings or those of the earliest writers, with the exception of Andersons Constitution and the Ahiman Rezon, it is difficult to believe

³⁰ William H. Upton, “A Plea for the Teachings of Freemasonry,” in L.S. Myler, ed., *Jewels of Masonic Oratory*, (Akron, OH: self-published, 1898), 78.

presenters, films, documentaries and authors of particular Masonic books in the 21st century have given away all the mysteries of Freemasonry.³¹

The transparency of Freemasonry these days, whether from books, opening lodges for tours, public installation ceremonies or the result of even the often-shuddering nonsense found on the Internet, chat rooms, blogs, and social media (often posing as knowledge), about it has not damaged the institution more than the of Masonic illiteracy and unenlightened level of too many of its members. This is not a condition recent to the fraternity. The consequence of such has been written and complained about since at least the mid-1800s, and warnings abound of its consequences. Besides, there is little to no valid evidence that the loss of interest of the public in Freemasonry or that Masonic members is related to a level of loss of esoteric tradition that existed at some imaginary point in the 19th or 20th century.

The problem stemming from the fate awaiting the fraternity is coming to a head this century in American Masonry. We have become, since the early 1800s, too accustomed to the false standard of measuring the success of Freemasonry in this country by counting the number of names of membership rosters. Today, and in the coming decades, we stand face to face with the troubling result of the continued loss of our philosophical and educational mission by allowing the intended design of institution to be increasingly eclipsed by projects and programs rather than dissemination of Masonic ideals.

³¹ Christopher Kylin. *A Partial List of the Exposures of Freemasonry*, 1994. "To compile this list the following were consulted: "History of Freemasonry", by Robert F. Gould, Volume III, page 475, ff., "Encyclopedia of Freemasonry", by Albert G. Mackey, et al., and "Those Terrible Exposures!", Short Talk Bulletin Series, Masonic Service Association, Vol. XXX, No.7, July 1952, Washington, D.C.; also used personal collections and the National Union Catalog "A Mason's Examination" in the "The Flying Post or Post Master", April 11 & 13, 1723. "The Grand Mystery of Freemasons Discovered" London, 1724. "The Secret History of Freemasonry" London, 1724 "The Whole Institution of Free-Masons Opened" ?, 1725. "The Grand Mystery of the Free Masons Discover'd, Wherein are the Several Questions Put to Them at Their Meetings and Installations, also Their Oath, Health, Signs, Points to Know Each Other by, etc." London: (A. Moore?), 1725. "The Grand Mystery Laid Open, or the Free Masons Signs and Words Discovered," 1726. "The Mystery of Freemasonry" in the "Daily Journal of London", Aug. 15 & 18, 1730 in the "Pennsylvania Gazette" Dec. 5 to 8, 1730. "Masonry Dissected" by Samuel Pritchard, London, 1730, several later editions, German translation, 1736, French translation, 1737. "The Secrets of Masonry Made Known to all Men by Samuel Pritchard, London 1737. "The Mystery of Masonry, London, 1737. "The Mysterious Receptions of the Celebrated Society of Freemason London, 1737. "Masonry Further Dissected" by Samuel Pritchard (?) London, 1738. "Le Secret des Franc-Macons" par l'Abbe Perau, Geneve, 1742. "Catechisme des Franc-Macons" par Leonard Gaganon (Louis Travenol) Paris, 1745, several editions, under different titles "L'ordre de Franc-Macons Trahi et le Secret des Mopses Revele" Amsterdam, 1745, German translation, Dutch translation, several subsequent editions. "La Macon Demarque"?, 1751. "The Freemason Examined" by Alex Slade, London, 1754. "The Secrets of the Free Masons Revealed" by "a disgusted brother" London, 1759. "A Master Key to Freemasonry"?, 1760. "The Three Distinct Knocks"?, 1760. "Hiram, or the Grand Master Key" London, 1764. "Solomon in All His Glory" ?, 1766. "The Freemason Stripped Naked" by Charles Warren, London, 1769. "Receuil Precieux de la Maconnerie Adonhiramite" by Louis Guillemain de Saint Victors, Paris, 1781. "Ritual der Verbesserten Freimaurerei, Enthaltend die Ceremonien bey der Aufnahme" von Johann Joachim Christoph Bode, Weimar, 1788, expanded edition, Weimar 1792. "The Master Key" by I. Brown, London, 1794. "A Masonic Treatise, with an Elucidation on the Religious and Moral Beauties of Freemasonry, etc." by W. Finch, London, 1801. "The Cat Out of the Bag" London, 1824, 1825. "Manual of Freemasonry" by Richard Carlisle, ?, 1825. "Illustrations of Masonry, by One of the Fraternity Who Has devoted Years to the Subject," William Morgan, Le Roy, New York, 1826. "Illustrations of Masonry, by One of the Fraternity Who Has Devoted Years to the Subject, with an Account of the Kidnapping of the Author," second edition., <http://web.mit.edu/dryfoo/www/Masonry/Misc/exposures-list.ht>, accessed May 2017,

To rephrase Oscar Wilde's "The only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about," we might say, when it comes to the issue of Masonic publicity and transparency, *the only thing worse than members not knowing our philosophical and educational mission, is not talking about it*. That certainly appears to be what we have not collectively done for multiple decades even though all the information to learn more about Freemasonry and practice it has been widely available for more than just in recent years.

How many generations of Freemasons has there been who thought nothing at all could be said to or about Freemasonry to anyone except another member? We can see how staying mum worked out, can't we?

John W. Bizzack

MASONIC PERSPECTIVES

A SECOND LOOK AT ASPECTS OF CONTROVERSIAL
TOPICS IN AMERICAN FREEMASONRY

EDITION VII

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Masonic Perspectives is a project created by Past Masters John W. Bizzack and Dan M. Kemble intended to bring the writings about controversial topics of the past in American Freemasonry and provide readers a second look and contemporary perspective on the topics to serve as a catalyst for further discussion.

This project is a joint venture of Lexington Lodge No. 1, The Rubicon Masonic Society, and William O. Ware Lodge of Research, Covington, Kentucky..



PAPER I

THE DECLINE OF FREEMASONRY IN AMERICA

W. E. Gutman – 2008

http://www.skirret.com/papers/decline_of_freemasonry.html

In an article entitled, *The Amazing Shrinking Fraternity*, published in the winter 1993 edition of the *Connecticut Square & Compasses*, then Grand Master Ken Hawkins warned against the alarming decline in Masonic membership in America. His admonition was long on conjecture, short on remedies. He merely echoed with disquieting glibness the oft-invoked defense that the practice of "non-solicitation" and the failure to engage in "aggressive recruitment" are at the root of the problem.

The causes for such nationwide erosion, in this writer's opinion, are far subtler and more complex, and may require an earnest reappraisal of our collective rationale, our practices, our self-image, indeed our very reason for being.

I responded to Bro. Hawkins's article with an essay of my own. Entitled, *The Amazing Well-Worn Alibi*, it was first barred from Connecticut's *Square & Compasses* (but promptly published by *The Trowel* in Massachusetts). Clearer heads prevailed, as did First Amendment principles, and it eventually ran in the *Square & Compasses* when a member of the Connecticut Grand Lodge Publications Committee threatened to resign if it didn't. A few diehards were appalled by the title of my article. Many more found my diagnosis, not to mention the bitter antidotes I prescribed, hard to swallow. Eventually, the clamor died down. Those who had found merit in my arguments retreated behind a cloak of silence and indifference. And membership continued to drop.

Fifteen years later, membership is down nationwide. Participation in Masonic activities is in decline. Attendance is low or spotty in most Lodges. A shortage of worthy and well-qualified candidates has inhibited the orderly flow of succession from chair to chair, thus forcing the "recycling" of past masters to keep the chairs suitably warm. We've become a refuge for the geriatric set.

Attempting to revive a comatose organization by boosting membership alone is tantamount to dispatching freshly recruited and untrained reinforcements to a battle-weary unit that has lost its will to fight. Imagine applying a Band-Aid to a severed jugular. In the long term, a successful transfusion depends far more on the wholesomeness of the plasma than on the volume of blood pumped into the veins.

While I agree that a stronger fraternity can exert a more positive influence on society, I reject the notion that strength can only be derived from numbers. If a chain is as strong as its weakest link, then strength must be equated with quality, not quantity.

More recently, as he prepared to ascend to the Grand East, Connecticut Grand Master-to-be Charles Yohe wrote me, pleading that I join the Publishing Committee. In his letter, Bro. Yohe lamented the sharp decline in Masonic membership and appealed for a unified, energetic statewide effort to remedy the problem. He asked me for ideas.

I responded, offering a candid analysis of the situation and outlining specific steps which I thought would help re-energize American Freemasonry from an anemic and sluggish band of brothers into a strong and energetic force for world good. I added that Freemasonry in America had lapsed into irrelevance, that it had become an anachronism when it ceased to be an instrument for social reform, when it turned inwardly

and changed from an alliance of enlightened illuminati to a bastion of religious and political conservatism out of tune with Freemasonry's roots and fundamental philosophy.

I further commented that, inspired by the nobility and true Masonic spirit of America's founding fathers, I yearned for a dynamic Fraternity, a body of men committed to enriching their intellects, feeding their minds, not just their bellies. I said that I looked to an organization dedicated to upholding holistic principles, eager to get involved, not afraid to speak out against injustice, corruption and political chicanery. I warned that so long as Freemasonry remained an insular, closed circuit, self-serving institution, it would not thrive. I asserted that unless we attract men who are truly interested in helping improve society, the Fraternity would slowly fritter away. I suggested that Blue Lodge, Scottish Rite and Royal Arch Masonry should be fused into a single Masonic educational process — as they are in Europe and much of the world — and not three separate bodies. I suggested that it ought to take a year between degrees and that elevation to a higher grade should be based — like in operative lodges of yore — on performance and the completion of a master work — not merely on rote memorization of the ritual. I contended that every Temple should be its own Lodge of Research and Lodge of Instruction, and that every Brother should be encouraged to write and deliver lectures that stimulate the gray matter. Lastly, I dared propound the notion that medals, certificates, citations, ribbons, plaques and other accolades of which Masons are so fond, ought to be reserved for extraordinary service to community, nation and the world — not for such intra-mural distinctions as longevity as a Mason, a spotless Lodge attendance record or cooking a great spaghetti dinner....

Predictably, Grand Master Yohe never replied.

As I see it, the issue is not attracting more Masons but making Masonry more attractive to Masons. This requires turning Masonic proceedings into meaningful, stimulating, relevant happenings in Lodge, while extending Masonic principles and objectives beyond the Lodge. There is nothing more baffling to an Entered Apprentice or a Fellowcraft, or even a newly-raised Master Mason than to sit in a nearly empty Lodge, however impeccable the ritual might be. Nor is there anything more disconcerting than a Lodge solely dedicated to mass-producing Masons but which is otherwise afflicted with inertia and ritualized boredom.

If there is a correlation between diminishing visibility and decreasing membership, it is perhaps because, after having been initiated, new Brothers are often left suspended in a vacuum. They've paid their dues. They've become small cogs in an immense engine laboriously engaged in keeping its own wheels turning, a sort of Rube Goldberg perpetual motion contraption out of sync with its own driving force. But the intellectual nourishment, spiritual stimulation, social and philosophical dimensions so vital to Freemasonry, are virtually nowhere to be found.

Since I was raised, 20 years ago, I have seen many Brothers elevated to the Sublime Degree. Many attended a couple of meetings then discreetly vanished, never to be seen again. Did these men fail to find in the Masonic experience what they sought — or were led to believe they would find? Or were they simply unfit? Were they disillusioned or utterly uninspired? Is there further light at the end of Hiram's resurrectional tunnel or just a faint glow of what was?

Owing a European Masonic heritage (my father was raised in one of the Temples of the Grand Lodge of France) I admit to having been imbued with a different perspective when I applied for membership in America. I came armed with the belief that there must be a more glorious aim, a higher purpose, a loftier calling, a grander design in Freemasonry than a couple of monthly meetings, a slate of swiftly adjourned Stated Communications and a belabored and half-hearted degree conferral or two.

What I sought was a challenge, a journey toward self-fulfillment and higher learning shepherded by able guides, in the company of neophytes eager to apprehend the history, lore and character of the Craft. What I hoped to find was a body of men willing to take a stand on issues of cosmic importance, brave enough

to speak out against injustice, to share ideas, to impart knowledge, to foster true universal brotherhood, to shed Light — not just to receive it — to vie for new insights, not just bask in the brilliance of yesteryear's Masonic constellation.

Yes, we are in good company: George Washington, Ben Franklin, John Hancock, Paul Revere, Lafayette, Mozart, Bolivar, Garibaldi, Jonathan Swift, Goethe, Roosevelt, Truman, etc. We seem to venerate these men as though their notoriety, wisdom, creative genius and courage were "Masonically" transferable through some generational osmosis. **THEY ARE NOT!** If a child should not bear the burden of his ancestors' misdeeds, nor should he revel in his father's fame. He must seek his own paths of glory. The Brothers I name were men of action, builders, shakers, movers, mavericks, gadflies, thinkers and creative geniuses long before they were asked in whom they put their trust. It is they who enriched Freemasonry — not the other way around. They all believed in a better tomorrow, a more just, progressive and nobler human society. All were inspired by other thinkers and mavericks and revolutionaries — Moses, Isaiah, Amos, Solomon, Jesus. The revolution is not over. So long as there is injustice and suffering, inequity and persecution in the world the spiritual revolution must go on. No one, in my view, is better equipped to wage it than Freemasons.

Produce more Masons? Go forth and multiply? We are Masons, not rabbits. No man should father children he cannot love, protect, educate, guide and inspire. No organization should recruit more members until it can satisfy the needs and aspirations of its present constituency. No institution should place its own corporate welfare above the welfare of each individual member.

A sustainable and thriving membership should be the culmination, **NOT** the basis for a healthy Masonic family. Fellowship should be the consequence **NOT** the motive for joining the Craft. A passionate quest for truth should be, at all times, the inspiration and vocation of every Freemason. Yes, the club needs more members. Let's first spruce up the clubhouse — from the inside. And let the faithful breast, the attentive ear and the instructive tongue be the true measure of our eminence.



PAPER II

ADAPT OR DIE:

ON THE DECLINE OF MEMBERSHIP IN THE MASONIC FRATERNITY

Michael Harding – 2017

http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/adapt_or_die.htm

As all Masons are acutely aware, membership throughout the masonic organization has been declining for some time. Blue lodges are closing or consolidating with other area lodges, Scottish Rite Valleys are selling their large buildings and moving to much smaller buildings or are going mobile by conducting meetings in area blue lodges or hotels and event venues. The York Rite and even the much-heralded Shrine temples are downsizing as well.

My own lodge once boosted a membership of over 400 members. Today membership rests just under half that number and is declining by 5 members per year on average. Estimates show my lodge will cease to be financially viable by 2030 if not sooner. The state Grand Lodge as a whole is declining by 1200 members per year and will cease to be financially viable by 2050 if not sooner. Since the year 2000, nearly 20 lodges have either closed or consolidated with other lodges, due to declining membership.

To date, no one at the local, state, or national level has presented any real solutions, ideas or plans to resolve the issue or at least curb the tide of the accelerating membership decline. The few solutions that have been proposed tend to only deal with current membership retention rather than a solution or even recognition and acceptance of the problem.

However, this problem is not unique to masonry. All membership-based organizations, from churches, sports leagues, scouting, professional associations, labor unions, chambers of commerce and other civic groups are all experiencing accelerating membership declines with numbers of new members not keeping pace with aging memberships and a general lack of relevancy in today's ever-increasing time starved lifestyles.

Long time lodge members constantly complain about how the new members are not attending lodge regularly, participating in degree work and their overall lack of involvement. They gripe about how the members of the current generation lack the same sense of duty and responsibility to the lodge that they had.

In short, time is running out and the best time to fix a problem is before it becomes an emergency. We need to accept the realities of the needs and interests of today's generations and those to follow. If we don't meet their needs, someone else will. "Educating" them on our causes will not work. As much we

may disagree, they are not concerned about our causes. They are only concerned with what will benefit them and how they can make an impact that they view as beneficial to the causes they support and care about.

They are not interested in joining an organization because it is the right thing to do. Their primary motivators are benefits for themselves and the community. They want to be part of something bigger than themselves and want to make a difference in world and have a personal impact on it. Nothing is more important to them than their family, friends, and the social network they have developed due to similar interests. Given the opportunity, they will choose to spend their precious time within their network than in ours.

Any organization that attempts to separate the man from his family, his community or his social sphere and does not engage with the man in those environments and activities will be met with resistance, complacency and will soon have no place in their world. They have little interest in spending hours away from their family and their other interests to pursue learning rituals, lectures, degree work or even our traditional fundraisers.

Faced with this dilemma, we have we have only two options: *adapt or die*.

Our only option is to embrace this changing environment as an opportunity and not view it as an obstacle to be beaten back so we can return to the good ole days.

Faced with this opportunity, how should we best advance into this new era and connect with new potential members? How do we reach them when they are ready to explore new opportunities to better serve their community and expand their network?

1. Embrace technology

This is a generation that gets the news from Facebook and Twitter. They watch Netflix and YouTube instead of television. They do not have a newspaper subscription and have no home phone. They use their smart phones to connect with the world and have never used a phone book or even written a check. They do their banking online. They order pizza and pay for it over the internet all while tracking its delivery in real time. This is a connected generation that expects information to be available when they want it. They refuse to be tied to a specific place and device to consume knowledge and information. They connect to their social network within minutes of waking and remain connected until minutes before retiring in the evening.

2. Improve communications

We need be more connected to our members and our communities with information of value, using whatever communication technology is available. We need to connect often and more transparently. This generation is used to getting their news from the internet. They discover new activities and events on the internet. They connect and share ideas with others using internet-based communications. If we are not where our customers are, we will not reach them.

3. Engage the membership

I once heard a wise past grand master say, “the problem with young Masons is they are always wanting to do stuff”.

That axiom could not be more true of today’s generation. Today’s crop of younger masons and potential members are more socially active in different ways than generations past. They crave relevance and meaning all while staying active and ever changing. We need to find ways to engage new members with their entire families and their friends in meaningful activities and bring everyone together as a

community, not just a group of men working to bring in other men into our never-ending circle of lodge degrees and stated meetings.

We need to segment our membership into groups and tailor our vast offerings to those different segments in ways that best suits that group.

4. Rethink everything

From our initial contact with a new candidate to their raising, we need to rethink our processes and find new and exciting ways to make the experience of the Masonic initiation more rewarding and meaningful. A newly raised Master Mason should not be left to their own initiative to seek ways to be more involved in the lodge, engaged with the membership and active in the community. We need to be sure new members, their families and their friends find our lodges to be not only inviting, but also beneficial in their lives...spiritually, intellectually, and socially.

Summary

We do not have much time left before our ship takes on more water than we can successfully bail out. With the accelerating pace of decline, the time to act is now. We need to start embracing, communicating, engaging, and rethinking at the local, district, state and national level.

I have heard many respected members convey the notion they would rather focus on quality than quantity and I couldn't agree more. However, they fail to recognize the basic laws of nature, economics, and statistics and that without sufficient quantity, there will be no pool of quality individuals from which to develop the next generation of masonic leaders.

The institution of Masonry has faced challenges in the past with declining membership and was forced to fundamentally transform in order to survive.

We are facing another such event horizon. I think we would be well advised to embrace this opportunity to guide its transformation into a better, stronger and more inclusive fraternity that we can all be proud to call our own.

In the end, it ultimately remains our decision to evolve and progress or to ignore and stay the course. Either way, the status quo will not hold, and our beloved fraternity will be transformed.

We can only hope that our actions will create an organization that is thriving in future years rather than one that our children read about in the history books as the great fraternity that once was.

PAPER III

TWO TRAJECTORIES FOR AMERICAN FREEMASONRY: CONSOLIDATION OR IMPLOSION

LANCE KENNEDY – 2018

<http://freemasoninformation.com/2018/12/two-trajectories-for-american-freemasonry-consolidation-or-implosion/>Two Trajectories For American Freemasonry: Consolidation Or Implosion

Once upon a time, there were two cities. One city was called Detroit and the other Pittsburgh. Both cities experienced untold prosperity during the first half of the twentieth century. Detroit became the nation's automotive manufacturing hub while Pittsburgh was "Steel City," America's forge. For decades the two cities prospered, but in the late-1960s the global economy changed, and the cities and their region, the Steel Belt, began a rapid decline.

The Steel Belt became the Rust Belt as its population dwindled and economy dried up. Detroit lost over 56 percent of its population between 1970 and 2016 while Pittsburgh lost 42 percent during the same period. The two cities were dying, that is declining at a rapid pace that left unabated would result in total ruin. Their citizenries wondered what could be done to reverse the trend. One city chose one path, while the other chose another, and the results tell the tale of their respective implosion and redemption.

I promise to return to this tale, but in the meantime, I ask your leave to venture back into our ongoing discussion regarding the decline of Freemasonry.

...any organization that is struggling with its identity, losing members, and bleeding revenue must immediately focus on excelling at its most basic function.

I am writing this article on the heels of my recent piece entitled "Freemasonry is Dying." In the first week after being released the article received over 20,000 individual views and hundreds of shares across Facebook and other social media platforms. am humbled by the numerous messages sent to me from like-minded brothers from around the world. I wish to thank every brother who read the article and helped begin a conversation about what must be done to reverse our downward trajectory.

More than a few brothers replied to my analysis one way or another, many writing articles of their own, which I applaud. Some agreed with my contention that "Freemasonry is dying," while others argued that the Craft will hit an equilibrium and level off in terms of absolute membership, so there is really no need to fret. Still others claim that I am incorrect in my assertion that the Craft may be on a terminal decline and in fact, we have already hit our nadir.

I find it hard to argue that an institution that has lost 75 percent of its membership in fifty-nine years is not dying, but others may disagree. In 2044 there might be a handful of Masons left, but I would not consider the Fraternity to be really living, but rather walking dead. all, there are numerous historic examples of mystery traditions that thrived for a period then disappeared without a trace, two examples

being the Eleusinian Mysteries and the cult of Mithras. Why think Freemasonry is immune from their fate?

Now that the dust is settled, voices have calmed, and passion subsided, I wish to clarify what I wish to achieve by writing my last article as well as address the two trajectories before us as a Fraternity, one of intentional consolidation and another of haphazard implosion.

My clarion call that “Freemasonry is dying” was intended to shake the reader to his core with the raw data gleaned from the Masonic Service Association of North America’s (MSANA) database. The MSANA’s data, comprised of roughly three-thousand data points, show a steep decline in our membership since our numerical apogee in 1959. Not only has the absolute number of Masons declined, but the percentage of the population claiming Masonic membership has declined as well.

While I warn of the dangers of our shrinking membership, I have also been blunt about my aspirations for a smaller, more elite Craft that has shed itself of the excesses of the post-World War I and World War II eras (see “10 Propositions for Texas Freemasonry”). This seeming contradiction is not one in the slightest. I am not concerned that there are fewer Masons today than in 1959 or any time for that matter. My concern lies with the fact that we are attempting to hold together an aging infrastructure with fewer and fewer men, and wasting our time and treasure in the process.

As our numbers decline, which will continue to do so for the next decade or more, we must come to terms with the fact that an organization built to function with over four million Masons cannot do so with less than one million men. Not only an organization that requires many men to operate, but one that has largely refused to recalculate its pricing and overhead since the mid-twentieth century.

We cannot maintain the infrastructure of 1959 in 2018 let alone in 2030. We certainly cannot do so with dues based on incomes from the 1960s (e.g., \$120 per year) and endowments (i.e., lifetime memberships) priced in the \$500 to \$1000 range.

Now that I have smashed my data-encrusted sledgehammer over your head, and the heads of tens of thousands of other readers, I want to impart my honest conviction that the way to Masonic deliverance is by rapid and intentional consolidation.

As promised at the onset of this article, and since I am a man of my word, I will return to the tale of the two cities called Detroit and Pittsburgh, which holds important lessons for our fair institution. In 2013 New York Times columnist Paul Krugman asked the following question in an article titled “A Tale of Two Rust-Belt Cities”: “[I]s the crisis in Detroit simply a function of the industrial decline of the U.S. heartland, or is it about internal developments within the metro area that have produced a uniquely bad outcome?”

The author states that both Detroit and Pittsburgh possessed “iconic monolithic” economies and both cities’ metropolitan areas experienced comparable declines in their labor markets from 1970 to 1990. From 1990 to as late as 2006, “the eve of the Great Recession — you could argue that there wasn’t a whole lot of difference in aggregate performance between greater Pittsburgh and greater Detroit.” However, after 2006, Detroit’s economy plummeted while Pittsburgh weathered the storm.

Krugman concludes his column with the following statement, “It’s hard to avoid the sense that greater Pittsburgh, by taking better care of its core, also improved its ability to adapt to changing circumstances... If you like, sprawl killed Detroit, by depriving it of the kind of environment that could incubate new sources of prosperity.”

A study released by the Brookings Institute in 2013 substantiates Krugman's thesis. Greater Detroit topped the list of metro areas with the most decentralized, that is sprawling, labor forces. In 2013, only 7.3 percent of greater Detroit's non-farm workers were within 3 miles of its central business district (CBD), while 77.4 percent of its workers were over 10 miles from its core. In comparison, 25.2 percent of Pittsburgh's workers were within 3 miles of its CBD while 45.2 percent were over 10 miles away. "Now, Lance," you may ask, "what about other sprawling cities like Dallas or Los Angeles? They haven't seen the same decline as Detroit." You are correct, however, unlike Dallas or Los Angeles, Detroit was hemorrhaging people as it sprawled. To quote one writer, "[Detroit] was drawing existing residents from the center to the periphery. Homes in the central city were abandoned — and the tax revenues that came from those households evaporated. Detroit, unlike some of its wealthy suburbs in Oakland County, only saw one side of this migration — the losing side. And it was poorly equipped to deal with the fallout."

What I glean from these articles is that after a period of long-term decline sets in, or rather the beginning stages of death, which we call dying, a city or an organization is left with the paths of Detroit or Pittsburgh. We can choose to be like Detroit and attempt to maintain a sprawling edifice, figurative or literal, while simultaneously experiencing a shortage of revenue. The alternative is to follow the path of Pittsburgh and take care of our core at the expense of the periphery. In short, any organization that is struggling with its identity, losing members, and bleeding revenue must immediately focus on excelling at its most basic function. In Masonic terms, the initiatic process, or rather, making Masons.

What I will now prescribe is the bitter pills of truth that so many refuse to swallow:

1. We must accept the fact that Freemasonry is in extremely unhealthy condition, losing membership at a rapid pace, and attempting to maintain an infrastructure designed for a much larger membership base. In other words, accept that we are dying, though we are not yet dead. Any attempt to soften this conclusion is a practice in euphemism.
2. We must make the difficult decision to cut off and remove recognition from any and all organizations that do not make Masons or support the initiatic experience, namely the Order of the Eastern Star, DeMolay, Rainbow Girls, and the like. These institutions must stand or fall on their own merit. Other appendant bodies must be evaluated on an individual basis.
3. We must consolidate lodges in areas experiencing rapid decline. Such consolidation must occur in urban as well as rural counties. Most counties need only one lodge. In most areas multiple adjacent lodges saturate the market and create negative competition for fewer and fewer initiates.
4. We must sell off buildings requiring millions of dollars to repair, especially those that are used once or twice a year, and when used are filled at half-capacity. For example, if a Grand Lodge's building is in disrepair and requires \$18,000,000 to restore, the Grand Lodge should make the determination that the building is a liability on its balance sheet and cut its losses. The Grand Lodge could purchase a smaller structure for its administrative uses and rent a hotel and conference center for its communications.
5. We must demand that our constituent lodges meet certain minimum standards of dress, ritual, and general decorum. Our populations are increasingly professional and urban. They demand a certain level of formality and rigor. For example, Texas' population is roughly 85 percent urban and 15 percent rural. It is essential that we meet the needs of the areas where we can see the greatest potential growth.
6. Finally, we must understand the needs of the men of Generation Z. So much focus has been placed on what Millennials want, and rightly so, since they are the largest generation in the United States. However, the oldest members of Generation Z are now eighteen years old and are now eligible for membership in our Fraternity. After hundreds of conversations with young Masons, my guess is that the next crop of initiates will want similar things out of the Fraternity as Millennial men, namely the mysteries delivered in a formal, mystical, and demanding manner.

Our Fraternity may be dying because of external factors, but our condition was clearly exacerbated by internal ones. While we may be dying, we are not yet dead, and there is a way out of our present malaise.

The way is to follow the example of the City of Pittsburgh by acknowledging our decline, consolidating down to our most basic core, and doing our most simple functions extremely well. The alternative is to be the fraternal version of Detroit, sprawling, mismanaged, constantly experiencing budget shortfalls, and failing to deliver the most basic services.

We have two paths before us. Which shall we choose? I echo what Dickens wrote in his *A Tale of Two Cities*, “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way...”

COMMENTARY

~ John W. Bizzack

AWAKENING FROM A LONG NAP

The decline in Masonic membership in America has, since the 1960s been the source of much handwringing. The steady decrease since 1959 has been referred to as “alarming” so many times in writings and presentations that it has become part of the Masonic lexicon. Considering the reality that each time membership has rapidly accelerated it also followed a pattern of decline, is it really all that “alarming” today? Only a cursory review of Masonic literature, writings, and presentations since 1875 alone is necessary to see the real alarm that begs sounding. That alarm is not the decline itself, *but the reasons for it*. The reasons have been examined, observed, talked about and warnings so often sounded that phrases like “we must,” “we should,” “it is imperative,” “we have to,” and “we can no longer,” has lost their punch.

Is it possible American Freemasonry could be so inobservant? When considering that when attention is given today to what has been happening for nearly 150 years causes a stir, the answer is, yes. The answer suggests too many today are unfamiliar with the story of our past or have been nonchalantly napping, waiting for someone else to do something on a matter that has been warned about for multiple decades.

When it comes to the rise and fall of membership, the story of American Freemasonry’s past is not a complex puzzle. We can, if we look, identify the fundamental causes for the eras of decline: an obsession with counting names on a membership roster and allowing that obsession to become a false measurement of the success of the fraternity; loss of exclusivity from opening too wide the West Gate, and failure of lodges to instruct.

Gutman, in his 2008, *The Decline Of Freemasonry In America* was certainly not the first to bemoan about the topic of declining membership — most of which are usually long on conjecture but short on remedies. Gutman offered remedies, but there were no takers even after he was

asked to provide them. Chances are his remedies were seen as too radical for the hand-wringers – probably because he firmly rejected the notion that strength can only be derived from numbers.

As he pointed out, *the intellectual nourishment, spiritual stimulation, social and philosophical dimensions so vital to Freemasonry, are virtually nowhere to be found.* Many would say that his point remains painfully accurate. Gutman also points out, *No organization should recruit [employ] more members until it can satisfy the needs and aspirations of its present constituency, strongly suggesting Freemasonry should have stuck with Section V. of Andersons Constitutions of 1723: A Master should take not an apprentice unless he has sufficient employment for him.* It is quite a challenge to substantiate the claim that more members are needed today when we see 56% of all men currently on the rolls of subordinate lodges have never meaningfully participated in the activities of their Lodge since having received their most recent Degree.³²

In the 2017, *Adapt or Die: On the Decline of Membership in the Masonic Fraternity*, Michael Harding tells us, *To date, no one at the local, state, or national level has presented any real solutions, ideas or plans to resolve the issue or at least curb the tide of the accelerating membership decline.* A look at the *Notes* section following these Commentaries, is a very short list of books, articles, essays, observations, commentary, and presentations that have told us since 1875 not only the problem, but the solutions to not only the declines, but the reasons they occur and continue. The list in the “Notes” section is only a taste – a small portion of what has been offered in the past - and after they were given momentary attention, most were relegated to dusty Masonic library shelves (if they ever made there in the first place). So, it should not be surprising there are Masons today who are starting to pay attention but think this issue is something recent. It has been a long nap.

Harding offers his remedies to “best advance into this new era and connect with new potential members.” He’s right. Those are certainly of fundamental importance. Ignoring them or only providing what was provided to the previous generations offers American Freemasonry merely more of the same of what has occurred for the past multiple decades.

Lance Kennedy in his 2018, *Two Trajectories for American Freemasonry: Consolidation Or Implosion*, returns to the theme of his sister writings which trumpets alarm by declaring, “Freemasonry is dying.” He notes that his intent with such trumpeting was “intended to shake the reader,” which it did for what he says is at least 20,000 who viewed his previous article along with “hundreds of shares across Facebook and other social media platforms.” Kennedy is to be applauded for what he refers to as his “clarion call.” A lot of nappers do need shaking. Those writings, however, to which he refers also suggest a couple of other things.

It appears there is many in the Craft who are unaware of the factual data collected by the MSANA since 1924 and believe that declining membership leading to a smaller fraternity means Freemasonry itself is *dying*. Regrettably, this suggests many still subscribe to the notion that the success of Freemasonry, perhaps its very existence, is dependent on the size of its membership roster – the same old false standard of measurement infecting mainstream thinking since the

³² *Characteristics Of An Ideal Lodge Survey Results & Analysis*, October 1, 2019 William O. Ware Lodge of Research, Covington, Kentucky.

early 1800s, accounting for most of the eras of rapid expansion, resulting in, as previously mentioned, loss of exclusivity from opening too wide the West Gate, and failure of lodges to instruct.

Kennedy's strongest point is made when he writes, *I am not concerned that there are fewer Masons today than in 1959 or any time for that matter. My concern lies with the fact that we are attempting to hold together an aging infrastructure with fewer and fewer men and wasting our time and treasure in the process.*

His six remedies are certainly a welcome addition and offers a much-needed contemporary perspective. In the **Notes** section of this papers there are many writers and observers from the past who agree with his remedies in one way or the other. The problem is, as it was the late 1800s and through the 20th century, that much of the Craft is still napping. Many who are not napping have found the practicality in learning about the past and finding the reasons *why* we are in the state we are in, which makes the topic of declining membership neither surprising nor alarming. In fact, working to become a smaller fraternity with more members committed to the aim and purpose of Freemasonry may be the new *laudable pursuit* underwriting those constructive labors of the Craft now occurring in a number of jurisdictions and organizations like the Masonic Restoration Foundation offering a rudder for the future.

Washington Irving's *Rip Van Winkle* is an interesting symbolic tale similar to what may be construed as what has and is finally happening in American Freemasonry (waking up). When Van Winkle awakens after twenty-years of sleeping high on a mountain, he discovers shocking changes: his musket is rotting and rusty, his beard is a foot long, his clothes tattered, and his dog is nowhere to be found. Freemasonry has been napping at least ten times longer than Van Winkle but shows promising signs that it is slowly starting to come out of its slumber.

The Internet and other social media platforms today help awaken many more Masons to the fact that American Freemason is on the road to a reckoning in the not-too-distant future. A reckoning - an involuntary restructuring of how we deliver the promise of Freemasonry with no other option except to allow the fraternity to continue to drift into the kind of institutional coma from which it may never awaken - is where the remedy so long sought will most likely be found. It is certainly reasonable to anticipate such an era of reckoning to arrive in stages. The first stage begins to exhaust the fiscal capabilities of lodges and many grand jurisdictions as redundant programs, and a variety of projects become impractical to continue at past and current levels. That stage is simply Economics 101. Some believe we are already in that stage and witnessing, although at glacial speed, the paradigm shift.

Regardless, as the era moves forward, there is no reason to believe suspensions, demits, and those prone to fade away will not continue to do so for much the same reasons as in the past. Cultures change slowly, but as the fraternity gets small in number, shifts will eventually occur in members attitudes along with long-standing mainstream thought. Writers, researchers, scholars, and observers will turn to past literature, records, and documents to seek the reasons *why* American Freemasonry is where it will find itself. Perhaps, this time, at least under the

circumstances, doing so will help prevent further seeding the idea that the fraternity needs millions of members to be successful. Should solid leadership arise from that era, American Freemasonry will find its intended strength in a structure that better ensures its votaries are more educated about the Craft and Lodge rooms a place for training men in character with more of a chance, in due time, to find the strength intended to be found in fewness.

Trumpet sounding today, clarion calls, and broadcasting legitimate alarms, about the future of American Freemasonry should be welcome, but we should keep in mind that it is not the idea Freemasonry itself that has the problem but the institution surround it.

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~ Dan M. Kemble

Brothers Gutman, Harding and Kennedy are at least forty years late to the party, but it is nice to know that others, outside of the institutional Grand Lodges, are finally paying attention to the uninterrupted loss of members experienced by American Freemasonry in the past sixty years.

Here's a question that very few have asked, including the Brothers identified above: As our membership has declined, what is it that we have really lost? The harsh reality is that, except for money and skilled tradesmen, the answer is probably not much.

It is unarguably true that the 1940s and 50s saw unprecedented growth in the Masonic Fraternity. What did the massive increase in members bring to Freemasonry? First, more members meant more money. As membership grew, revenues from dues grew as well. Lodges and Grand Lodges could afford to go on prolonged building sprees (which they did), never expecting the dramatic reduction in membership levels. Second, within the large increase of members were tradesmen who could (and did) perform such labor for the Lodge as carpentry, plumbing, roofing and electrical work. Lodges and Grand Lodges benefitted from such labor, either receiving the services at no charge or at greatly reduced rates. Again, the benefit of increased membership was financial in nature.

Lodges and Grand Lodges in this period were beehives of industry, with never ending projects to expand and improve physical surroundings. But the industriousness was without proper foundation. Masonic education, beyond learning ritual parts, was not a part of the expansion of Freemasonry in the middle of the 20th Century. Consequently, the men who came into the Fraternity, who paid dues, built buildings, fried fish, flipped pancakes and delivered ritual all did so without ever holding a genuine understanding of the ultimate aim and purpose of Freemasonry.

In truth, Masonic education was not a priority of Masonic leaders of the 1940s and 50s. All of the Fraternity's energy and resources was funneled into Degree work and building maintenance. In terms of being grounded and well educated in the history and philosophy of Freemasonry, we are probably no worse off than we were in 1960.

As the members that we gained in the 1940s and 50s have passed from the scene, what we miss most is their annual dues payments and their skilled tradesmanship. We do not miss their intellectual and philosophical insights because, in general, they neither possessed nor imparted any.

Alarms are being sounded now because membership has dropped to the point that Lodges (and Grand Lodges) can no longer afford the costs associated with building maintenance. Lodges once noted for the pageantry of their ritual now struggle to find enough men to fill the required chairs for the opening and closing ceremonies. It is the absence of warm bodies and the decline of revenues that has caused institutional Freemasonry to take notice of the Fraternity's fragile state.

For much of the 20th Century, the practice of Freemasonry has been a hollow experience. The frenzy of activity masked the emptiness of the core. As the pace of the activity has slackened, the extent of the emptiness of the core has been revealed.

Freemasonry has become hollow because it has become unmoored from its philosophical and spiritual foundation and has thus drifted along with the current of the times. It has become fixated on form, but offers very little substance. When newly raised Masons discover the dearth of substance offered by their Lodges, their interest in the Fraternity is generally extinguished. The evidence of this is apparent in contemporary Freemasonry's low membership retention rates.

The paradox, of course, is that Freemasonry as it was designed to be practiced, is anything but hollow. The power of the philosophy of Freemasonry to transform lives is just as vital now as it was 300 years ago. It is indeed dismaying to view the extent to which American Freemasons have reduced this robust institution to a pale shadow of itself, all brought about by the failure to understand the potential that they held in their hands.

If Freemasonry is to be revived, it will not be through the addition of well-meaning programs, technological development or embracing social causes. The only avenue for the revival of Freemasonry is to practice it as it was intended – and that is as a philosophical and spiritual Order intended to improve men, one man at a time. Those men so improved, in turn, improve the communities in which they live.

The question facing Freemasonry at this critical point is whether it has the will to address the hollowness that exists at its core. The leadership of institutional Freemasonry probably has neither the inclination nor the ability to implement any significant changes to the status quo. Attempts to cause institutional Freemasonry to address any of its apparent failures is likely to elicit the ham-handed response that Bro. Gutman experienced following the release of his essay, "The Amazing Well-Worn Alibi." Institutional leadership is far too entrenched in self-importance, grandiose titles and the perception of power, to ever willingly sacrifice any of its prerogatives, even if such sacrifice is necessary for survival. Just as Freemasonry improves men one man at a time, institutional Freemasonry will likely only be improved one Lodge at a time.

In the meantime, membership rolls will continue to decline, revenues will decrease and Lodges will be forced to consolidate. Lodges and Grand Lodges will find themselves in the position of having to do less with less. As overall membership approaches pre-Civil War levels, those men, and those Lodges, who now practice Freemasonry as it was intended will be in the best position to shape the future of Fraternity.

Alarms about Freemasonry's shrinking membership are appropriate, and all Freemasons should be gravely concerned about the future of the Fraternity. Freemasonry's future lies in its historical, philosophical spiritual foundation. To look elsewhere merely perpetuates the mistakes of the last sixty years.

MASONIC PERSPECTIVES

A SECOND LOOK AT ASPECTS OF CONTROVERSIAL
TOPICS IN AMERICAN FREEMASONRY

EDITION X

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Masonic Perspectives is a project created by Past Masters John W. Bizzack and Dan M. Kemble intended to bring the writings about controversial topics of the past in American Freemasonry and provide readers a second look and contemporary perspective on the topics to serve as a catalyst for further discussion.

This project is a joint venture of Lexington Lodge No. 1, The Rubicon Masonic Society, and William O. Ware Lodge of Research, Covington, Kentucky.



FRATERNITY

Norman Broadwill Hickox, PM,

From The Master's Lectures Delivered in Evans Lodge 524, Illinois, 1923

To man ever grasps the full significance of the principles of Freemasonry simply by receiving the degrees. Because a great deal of our ritual has come down from the past—because there is much therein that is symbolical—because the circumstances under which the degrees are conferred are not conducive to clearness of thought—and finally because many lodges are all too careless in conferring the degrees, are only some of the reasons why every lodge should be a school for instruction on the subject of Masonic spirit and methods.

The results of our failure in this respect are manifest. First, we have what may be called Masonic illiteracy. There are a great many who have received our degrees who have no clear idea as to what a Freemason actually is. Surely Masonry either stands for something definite—or it does not. If it does mean anything distinctive, then every member of a lodge should have clear ideas on the subject.

The man who comes into Freemasonry takes up a life work, and this very fact emphasizes the necessity for making the lodge a school for Masonic instruction. Brotherhood is a profession, comprising both a science and an art, but who can acquire a profession in three brief evenings and by learning a few paragraphs of lectures?

At least four years of strenuous study, in addition to a considerable preparatory course, are necessary these days for a man taking up a profession such as law, medicine or engineer. Can we expect to turn out quailed Freemasons in the manner of some modern get-rich-quick advertisement? The impossibility of such a thing is self-evident, and the imperative necessity for persistent diffusion of Masonic intelligence among members of the Craft is no less apparent. It should also be emphasized that Freemasonry must do something in the way of spreading of its principles to the world at large.

When an institution acquires a certain cheapness and popularity it is usually declining or being ushered out of the world. Numbers have never made for quality, and the quantitative standard, so noticeable in Freemasonry today, must be repudiated, if what Freemasonry can do for the world is to be accomplished. The theory that the more members made, the better for the world, is a fallacy. Our institution cannot be greater than those of whom it is composed.

As may readily be observed from the attendance upon lodge, Freemasonry today, to some among us, does not even share the distinction of being in an eminently dignified club. The conception of Freemasonry that is worthy can only be attained as Freemasons turn seriously, of their own free will and accord, to question and discover for themselves the nature and mission of Freemasonry.

Freemasons themselves must change their attitude toward the fraternity. Their interest and devotion to the Masonic principle is by no means as great as it ought to be. Professions of brotherhood in a Masonic lodge are of no more value than professions of religion in a church, unless they are acted upon.

What possible excuse can we offer to posterity for an arrested development? While we can boast of our numbers, our wealth, and the character of our membership, why are two million of us, individually so strong, so impotent as a group?

Our greatest weakness is the failure of many Freemasons, through indifference, lack of time, environment, or opportunity, to familiarize themselves with the glorious history and traditions of our Order. Raised to the sublime degree, then hurried through the higher rites, many glean but the slightest knowledge of the meaning of Freemasonry. They proudly wear the emblems, with some dim conception that they stand for something intangible—that they demand a respect—and cannot but give them a superior standing in the mass.

But ask these brethren to explain the symbolism of the emblems, or put to them a few pointed questions: What does Freemasonry stand for? What is it doing today? What has it ever done? and they are lost for reply. They do not know.

Let me give you a definition which has been selected many times by eminent Freemasons as best answering such questions:

"Freemasonry is the activity of closely united men, who, employing symbolical forms borrowed principally from the mason's trade and from architecture, work for the welfare of mankind, striving morally to ennoble themselves and others, and thereby to bring about a universal league of mankind, which they aspire to exhibit even now on a small scale."

Other dangers which threaten us today are not far to seek—they lurk at our lodge room doors. Their remedy involves no profound wisdom, no revolutionary measures.

Trooping through the doors of our preparation rooms we find an ever-increasing company composed of those from whose Faces is missing the stamp of high intelligence, in whose eyes the torch of education has lighted no fires, and whose halting steps are led by friendly suggestion or quickened by the hope of gain.

Have committees forgotten to report whether these have sufficient education and intelligence to understand and value the doctrines and tenets of Freemasonry? Was it demanded of them if they came unbiased by improper solicitation and uninfluenced by mercenary motives? When they answered the inquiry did, they know that truth is a divine attribute and the foundation of every virtue? Has not bitter experience yet taught us that it is better that no work man be added to the roll than ever one unworthy foot allowed to cross the threshold.



TAKING STOCK IN AMERICAN FREEMASONRY

J.A. Evans, M.D., P.M.

Address Given to the Toronto Society for Masonic Study and Research, 1930

Ex nihilo, nihil fit – Latin: Out of Nothing Comes Nothing

The world flatters itself that it has improved greatly over past generations and gives numerous undebatable examples to prove the contention. It may be true. It undoubtedly is true in some cases. But it may not be in all.

No man can gain an adequate knowledge of any business unless he has spent years of patient study and consideration of the basic principles and details of that business. In this connection, we know that every well-managed business concern, at stated periods, usually once a year, stops its operations for a brief period to do a little inward searching. This process is called "stock-taking" and it would prove of inestimable value if every person, institution and even the world itself, if such were possible, were to "take stock." The Craft is no exception.

Freemasonry of to-day is not exactly what it was two centuries ago. This no person can deny. Has the change been a true advance or has it been a retrograde movement? Masonry should "take stock" and make an honest attempt to answer this question fairly and frankly, and then be guided accordingly. But before this Herculean task can be undertaken, there are certain factors and conditions that must be given due consideration.

Masonry can give, to a still greater degree, instruction, and it must be admitted frankly and fearlessly that in the one thing in which it is possible for Masonry to excel, it has failed, and failed dismally at that. This is not a pleasant thought but there is no use in playing ostrich, when there is work to be done. The whole argument boils down to one basic truth, *Masonry, to fulfil her mission, must educate her members.*

We hear it said, on all sides, that the Craft is clamoring for instruction. Actual experience proves this to be scarcely in accordance with the facts. Masons are no more clamoring for instruction than is the average healthy schoolboy on a perfect summer's day. Those who have no mental appetite or whose mental stomachs rebel against this nourishment are in the wrong place and would be better out, for Masonry can do little for them. While Masons are not clamoring for instruction, the necessity for instruction is being shouted from the housetops and he must indeed be deaf who does not hear it.

Merely passing the required examinations in a school, college or university does not constitute real education any more than being walked through a Masonic ritual. Work is the duty of the Mason; he is presented with the working tools and he must use them. No one else can do it for him. And it depends upon

how conscientiously he uses those implements, how perfectly he will shape his ashlar. The rough ashlar will forever remain a rough ashlar, if the Mason sits idly by and does not use those tools in the manner in which they are intended to be used. By no other means than by work can the Mason prepare his stone for the building.

Candidates must be made to undergo real initiation not merely symbolic initiation as so many do, and which accounts for the long and growing list of suspensions and demits seen each year. The governing bodies are worried over this growing number of demissions, and well they might because it shows unequivocally the failure of initiation as practiced. The cause is clear, the solution as definite, failure to accept and act accordingly will simply mean a continuance of the disease which is eating at the very vitals of the Fraternity. Banquets and song, platitudinous speeches and hurrahs never made anything, and cannot make Masonry. Work, and lots of it, work properly directed, work along educational lines, educate the membership, make Masonry really mean something and a new day will dawn. But to educate the members, educators must be found. Education, like charity, must begin at home, the uneducated officer cannot instruct the new initiate. There is an apt though trite saying, "To train a dog it is necessary to know more than the dog." And do not forget the old Latin proverb: "Ex nihilo, nihil fit." [The phrase ex nihilo also appears in the classical philosophical formulation ex nihilo nihil fit, which means "out of nothing comes nothing". When used outside of religious or metaphysical contexts, ex nihilo also refers to something coming from nothing]

One of two things often happen, or worse still, both. The ceremonies may be run through by officers whose elocution is, to say the least, faulty to an extreme, and as expressionless. The ceremonies, through pressure of time, are not given "in extenso," for the banquet waits. There are speeches to be made, toasts to be honored and music. Our brother is attracted in spite of it all and realizes dimly how beautiful it could be. On the other hand, the rendition may be excellent. The candidate is unquestionably impressed, and he feels that there is a reasonable hope of his finding that of which he is in search. He gets up his work and is given the remainder of the degrees, often rushed through at an emergency or called meeting. Still hope leads him on, he is willing to work. The sublime degree is rushed through and he is finished, graduated, a full-fledged Master Mason, able to look after himself and left to his own devices, no instruction, no advice, no help given.

He flounders, he becomes discouraged, feels disillusioned and fails to attend the meetings. But at some later date we find this same brother a very active member of some other organization, devoting those same energies he would so gladly have devoted to Masonry. He should never have been lost, the fault is with the lodge. Many dozens are lost in this manner, the best types of men, the very men Masonry cannot afford to lose. A little Masonic education given right at this time would act almost as a specific for this malady. Backslapping won't cure it.

What then is Masonic education?

Many Masons appreciate the value of knowledge but lack the necessary energy to knuckle down to the hard work necessary to acquire it. These rush through degree after degree, hoping that by some magical means, supreme knowledge will be given to them as a gift from the gods, and thus enable them to reap the full benefits of knowledge without having to subject themselves to exertion of any kind. But the receiving of degrees does not necessarily mean development. True a man must be mentally poverty stricken if he does not receive some benefit from witnessing the beauty of the various degrees found in Masonry, but that is

not real education because there is not sufficient effort put forth by him to give rise to any development. Such persons are mentally lazy.

No man can become a champion boxer from merely reading a book on the art. Personal effort is necessary, and that is just where people fail by the thousands, that is where the leadership has failed. Masons must be compelled to put forth a personal effort and any Mason who is unwilling to make this effort can never obtain any development. This compulsion must come from the governing bodies. They will become very unpopular, at least temporarily, but if any governing body is going to evade its duties on the plea of unpopularity, then that organization can immediately proceed to the Mortician and make arrangements for its own interment. The danger to Masonry is from within, a dry rot, not from outside sources. These latter need not cause us one moment's trepidation, but the former is a very real source of apprehension to every intelligent Mason. The results are already becoming unquestionably manifest.



FREEMASONRY'S NUTS AND BOLTS

Walter M. Callaway, Jr.

Short Talk Bulletin was written by Worshipful Brother Callaway, Editor of The Masonic Messenger, official publication of the Grand Lodge of Georgia, in fulfillment of the requirements for admission into the Society of Blue Friars, an honorary association of Masonic writers in 1975

The fraternal machinery of Freemasonry is made up of many component parts including nuts and bolts. From time to time the machinery requires inspection.

There are many Masonic mourners going about the streets today who are singing sad songs about the impending demise of our ancient Brotherhood. We are being warned that Freemasonry must adapt its philosophy and its ways to fit the times, that we must be relevant to the world today. Some claim that "in the interests of time" the ritual must be shortened to the point of emasculation; some of the lectures should be abolished because they are time-consuming.

Lodge and Grand Lodge officers, with some exceptions, became enamored of the sheer force of numbers of new members, there has been almost a mystique about the size of membership. One may read all the written material on the philosophy of Freemasonry ever printed without once finding that size of membership is a laudable goal of the Craft, or that a Lodge with one hundred members is necessarily a better Lodge than one with only fifty members. The energy expended by those who moan over our losses of membership would be put to better use if those mourners made an in-depth study of why we lose so many members we already have.

Why do so many permit themselves to be suspended for non-payment of dues? Why do so many members never return after they have been raised? Why do so many Entered Apprentices never return after that degree? Such an investigation, I think, could produce facts which might be embarrassing to the Lodge and its leadership.

If there is a heel of Achilles in the structure of Freemasonry, or in the practice of Freemasonry, I should say that it lies in the failure of the Lodge to hold the interest or to educate the newly raised candidate in the degrees of Freemasonry. From the time he is raised, he is given a few instructions on the floor of the Lodge and is then dismissed to the sidelines by the Master with a perfunctory parting shot, "Come back as often as you can. You'll get out of Freemasonry only what you put into it!"

Such a statement is not true and tends to mislead the new Brother into thinking that Freemasonry is a sort of tit-for-tat arrangement. The Master should inform the new member that he must stand his examination on the Master's catechism; then he should inform him that there exists out there a great wide world of Freemasonry and that he, the new Brother, should learn all he can about his Fraternity, that he should participate in it, that he can profitably spend the rest of his life learning a little at a time something about the Craft and what it stands for, that it extends far beyond his Lodge, his state or his own country. He should be informed that the Ritual is a necessary means to an end and should not be regarded as the sum total of Masonic knowledge.

It is my personal view that it is quite impossible for a man to advance in Masonic knowledge without at the same time becoming a better and more useful member of the craft. Can a citizen study the lives and times of our founding fathers without becoming a better patriot?

All this is not to say that it is to be expected that each Freemason who reads Masonic books will become a Masonic scholar. But at least he should read enough to know some of the basic facts of the origin and general philosophy of Freemasonry. He should learn to tell the difference between fiction and fact in Masonic literature.

There are many component parts in the whole system, all of them important. But let us not forget the common nuts and bolts; they too are important.

COMMENTARY

~ John W. Bizzack

FLOGGING A DEAD HORSE?

Hickox 1923 message, “The theory that the more members made, the better for the world, is a fallacy. Our institution cannot be greater than those of whom it is composed,” was not talking about American Freemasonry in just the year he wrote it but the decades previous.

His entire lecture tells us that even prior to the 20th century, the problems facing the institution was the lack of Masonic literacy among its members – a message corroborate by an abundance of writings about the same thing found in Masonic journals and periodicals from around 1870 and well into the 1900s. It is reasonable to believe Hickox hoped his message would constructively influence the direction of Freemasonry.

In 1930, when J.A. Evans said, “This is not a pleasant thought but there is no use in playing ostrich, when there is work to be done. The whole argument boils down to one basic truth, Masonry, to fulfil her mission, must educate her members.” Like Hickox, Evan’s previous twenty-years of Masonic experience that told him Masonry had not fulfilled her mission, much less had taken stock of the fact it had not. It is reasonable to think he too was hopeful his message (one he gave often) would take root and constructively influence the direction of Freemasonry.

Forty-five years later, Callaway’s 1975, paper came when American Freemasonry was beginning to feel the loss of 590,533 members – a steady decline that started fifteen years earlier. He said, “The energy expended by those who moan over our losses of membership would be put to better use if those mourners made an in-depth study of why we lose so many members we already have.” The fraternity has yet to take stock of itself in a valid and balanced way to sufficiently, much less convincingly, answer that question. Was Callaway hopeful his message would constructively influence the direction of Freemasonry? Of course.

Some in the fraternity today believe all the presentations, writings, and discussion about the issues confronting Freemasonry over the past thirty-years alone (not to mention those of the past 150 years or so – if they are even aware of them) is mere grumbling or complaining. Others believe such writing are a waste of time producing no outcome - like flogging a dead horse. Considering the repetitiveness of so many writings in the past and today on the same matters confronting the Craft, it does appear the outcome of the efforts to paint the picture, generate interest to address what begs confronting and spurring action has not been worth it since the same issues continue to exist.

I suspect; however, Hickox, Evans and Callaway knew their labor was not going to lead to a major re-adjustment in American Freemasonry to any further extent than those before or after them who wrote about the same thought their labors would. The labors of all who have pointed out what needs confronting has, however, provided historians a clearer picture of issues that explains, at least in part, many of the ups and downs experienced by American Freemasonry, and more.

Henry W. Coil, in his 1973 book, ***Comprehensive View of Freemasonry***, ends by speaking to Freemasonry in its broadest sense. He notes, "Freemasonry despises ignorance but does not proscribe the ignorant; it fosters education but proposes no curriculum." He also notes, "Members are free to express their own opinion, even as to what Freemasonry is and ought to be and invites him to improve it if he can."

The "invites him to improve it if he can" part is not referring to or suggesting innovations to the principles of Freemasonry. Coil was talking about the passion a member may have to improve how Freemasonry is administered, operated, and can best deliver its promise to its members. Evans, Hickox, and Callaway were but a very few Freemasons in their eras and today whose labors were and are intended to improve Freemasonry by calling attention to the need to educate its members, confront issues and practices that lessen the exceptionalism of its principles, and point the fraternity in the direction of the fundamental mission of Masonry.

The writings, presentations and labors of men who share Coil's insightful wisdom are far from grumblers or complainers. Some have been and are scholars, formal leaders, influential in their Masonic careers, and impossible to be thought of as casual in their membership. No matter their perch, then or now, these observers constructively contribute and offer more than those who seek to merely preserve the status quo of the administration, operation, and method of the delivery of Freemasonry to members, and therein lies a delicate balance.

Improving Freemasonry is not about changing or modifying its philosophies and tenets as many seem to think. Improving Freemasonry is all about finding ways that best ensure the manner in which the simple, yet profound principles is best delivered to its members. It is clear, if one takes the time to examine the true story of how the institution of Freemasonry unfolded in America and all that has and continues to influence it, that the fraternity has yet to adopt a way to accomplish an agreed upon "best way."

As Evan's strongly suggested 89 years ago, "stock-taking" would prove of inestimable value to the institution of Freemasonry. Assessing whether our approach is doing that today remains open to serious debate.