

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a thick book. The scene is dramatically lit from the side, creating a strong highlight on the hand and the book's spine, while the rest of the background is in deep shadow. The lighting emphasizes the texture of the skin and the edges of the pages.

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BE READ BY SO FEW**

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DON'T BOTHER TO READ**

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Past Masters John W. Bizzack, Ph.D. and Dan M. Kemble, J.D.

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## MASONS WHO DON'T BOTHER TO READ

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**Y**ou may know the saying, *Reading is sowing. Rereading is the harvest.* If you were not familiar with the saying, you are now, because you read it. Chances are you read it twice, *harvested* the truth of the saying and further advanced your skill in conceptualizing concepts and ideas – all by reading.

We are in our sixth decade of swimming in reports, independent and government studies, surveys, editorials, writings from educators, social science researchers, and an inexhaustible list of opinion offered by pundits, all trying to explain *why* people do not read books anymore. There is something fascinating about trying to find the logic in the expectation that books and other writings about why people do not read anymore may be widely read by people who do not read books or writings anymore.

Many of such writings tell us that people not only do not read *books* anymore but read little of anything at all. At the top of most lists, we frequently find the explanation that *people are busy and have no time to read.*

That list-topping rationale is curious, since in 2020 alone there were 60 new print magazines launched.<sup>1</sup> Are we to assume that they were launched because no one reads anymore? Even more curious is that 300,000 new books were published by traditional publishing companies, and 2.7 million more books were on-demand titles produced by reprint houses specializing in public domain works. Presses like Kindle Direct Publishing platform print even more new books.

Thanks to technology engineers, advanced algorithm analysis now tells us that there is well over 130 million different books in the world today.<sup>2</sup> Of course, publishers are issuing new books each month, so a constant recalculation of that book count is necessary for an up-to-date figure. In the first three months of 2021, we are told that 580,579 books have been published worldwide.<sup>3</sup> If those figures seem confusing, we can look at U.S. Book Industry Statistics and Facts which tells us 675 million copies of print books were sold in the United States in 2019, and just use that number for the purpose of discussion.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Andy Meek, "Stop Saying Print Journalism Is Dead," *Forbes*, Dec 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Sources for that count come from the Library of Congress, WorldCat.com and other large repository of books inventories, after the removal of microforms, audio recordings, maps, t-shirts, and videos with ISBNs, the 16 million government document volumes from the estimate. (Ben Parr, *There Are 129,864,880 Books in the Entire World 2010*, Bowker.com: Bowker is the world's leading provider of bibliographic information, connecting publishers, authors, and booksellers with readers. Bowker provides tools and resources, such as the Books In Print® database and Identifier Services, accessed March 30, 2021, <http://www.bowker.com/news/2018/New-Record-More-than-1-Million-Books-Self-Published-in-2017.html>, BookScan—which tracks most bookstore, online, and other retail print sales of books (including Amazon.com) - 690 million print books were sold in 2019 in the U.S. in all publishing categories combined, both fiction and nonfiction (*Publishers Weekly*, January 13, 2020). The average U.S. book is now selling less than 200 copies per year and less than 1,000 copies over its lifetime. <https://ideas.bkconnection.com>, accessed March 20, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> The list of new books publication in 2019 globally is 1,668,333 million. <https://www.worldometers.info/books/>, The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), <https://en.unesco.org/>, accessed March 20, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> Watson, Amy, U.S. Book Industry Statistics and Facts, <https://docs.google.com/document/d/1r69ifBItOWR89jxca-W6SH3OF0jMMw3RG1hf4C2z4QM/edit>, accessed March 20, 2021.

While the publication format, distribution, and topics of books, magazines, and other writings may change, it is difficult to imagine a future in which books and writings do not remain an integral aspect of the lives of people around the world. It may seem, particularly over the past twenty-years, with the explosion of the Internet, the conventional way of printing and publishing is dying. In fact, we find that it is the model that is changing, making printed publications more viable, giving rise to many niche publications in an increasing loud digital space and environment today.<sup>5</sup> Many may not like it, but clearly, writing and publishing are evolving, and are creating modern ways to deliver content to the right audiences.

Logic tells us that just because so many books are published a year, it does not mean that all of them are worth reading or offer more than an entertainment value. Some, by any reasonable standard, would fall into the category of junk. Perhaps technology engineers will come up with a way to better to distinguish such books without a hint of unwarranted censorship, or judgmental bias.

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## THE LOVECHILD OF THE INTERNET

Another reason we are told that people do not read books, especially today, is that because of our current and growing over-reliance on technology and the gadgetry that accompanies it, we now live in the age of skimming. Books have no buttons or flashing lights, and are, therefore, less appealing.

The lovechild of the Internet is social media, and it comes in many forms, including blogs, forums, business networks, photo-sharing platforms, social gaming, microblogs, chat apps, and last, but not least, social networks. In 2020, seventy-one percent of the market population in America used one or more of these social reshaping features.<sup>6</sup>

We find that in just the past five years approximately 427,056 mobile gaming apps were available, with around 216 billion app downloads expected by the end of 2020.<sup>7</sup> Facebook reports that there are roughly 2.8 billion monthly active users as of the fourth quarter of 2020.<sup>8</sup> Instagram reports 1.16 billion active users in 2020.<sup>9</sup> Twitter reports 68 million active users.<sup>10</sup>

We also find on the list of reasons that people do not read, the complaint: *it is time consuming*. Are not the many forms of social media time consuming? Of course, they are, but social media offers buttons and flashing lights, which takes us to another reason we are told that people do not read: *they are distracted, and lack focus*. Could that lack of focus and distraction be a result of time-consuming forms of social media?

Perhaps an all-time favorite on the list is the one that tells us that *people do not read because they do not know other people who read*. This translates into a rationalization defense that goes this way: if one reads a book (or

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<sup>5</sup> Sacks, Bo, Precision Media Group, "Print Proud – Digital Smart: The Future of The Magazine Industry in the 21st Century," a presentation at the University of Missouri, April 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Tankovska, H., *Social media - Statistics & Facts*, 2021, <https://www.statista.com/topics/1164/social-networks>, accessed March 30, 2021.

<sup>7</sup> Number Of Available Gaming Apps At Google Play From 1st Quarter 2015 To 4th Quarter, 2020 <https://www.statista.com/statistics/780229/number-of-available-gaming-apps-in-the-google-play-store-quarter/>, accessed March 30, 2021.

<sup>8</sup> Number Of Monthly Active Facebook Users Worldwide As Of 4th Quarter 2020, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/264810/number-of-monthly-active-facebook-users-worldwide/>, accessed March 30, 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Business of Apps, <https://www.businessofapps.com/data/instagram-statistics/#8>, accessed March 20, 2021.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

something else) and there is no one with whom to talk about it, why read? That kind of thinking should be classified as a crime against logic.

It is difficult to find valid studies that prove that the educational system in our country has not failed miserably at teaching students to read or provided enough training in robust critical thinking to be able distinguish between what is true and what is not. Fewer than 20% of high-schoolers were aware that just one online photo does not prove something took place.<sup>11</sup> The average American reads at the 7<sup>th</sup>- to 8<sup>th</sup>-grade level.<sup>12</sup> Worse, nearly half of the nation's 191 million adult citizens are not proficient enough in English to write a letter.<sup>13</sup>

One might think that with as many books as there are that are published each year about what seems like every subject possible, that every adult should have already this year finished their reported average of two books per year that they will supposedly read - or at least visited a bookstore in person, or ordered their books on line.<sup>14</sup> Considering, however, that 50% of U.S. adults read at less than at an 8<sup>th</sup> grade level, we find 57% will not finish a book that they do start to read, that 42% of college graduates will never read another book after they graduate, that 46% cannot understand the labels on their prescriptions, and the average attention span is 8.25 minutes, we might well wonder exactly what it is that is being read.

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## DO MASONS READ?

There are other reasons on numerous lists we could address, but if you have read this far into this paper, then we should move on to what probably drew your attention to this writing in the first place: *Freemasonry*.

One population category in the U.S. that may read books and magazines, but not books or magazines about the organization to which they voluntarily chose to become members, is Freemasons.

It is illogical to believe that Masons do not read much about their fraternity because there are few books about Freemasonry from which to choose or are available - or that any selection of the multiple thousands of those books are not worth reading. Are Freemasons just too busy to read about their organization, its

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<sup>11</sup> Wineburg, Sam and McGrew, Sarah, Breakstone, Joel, Ortega, Teresa, "Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning. Stanford Digital Repository," 2016, <http://purl.stanford.edu/fv751yt5934>, accessed April 7, 2021.

<sup>12</sup> "Literacy, Numeracy, and Problem Solving in Technology-Rich Environments Among U.S. Adults: Results from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies 2012," Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies, or PIAAC, <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2014008>, accessed April 8, 2021.

<sup>13</sup> Breitstein, Michelle, *Illiteracy is America's Secret Shame*, Thrive Global, <https://thriveglobal.com/stories/illiteracy-is-americas-secret-shame-is-there-hope-for-our-children>, accessed April 8, 2021. Most studies discuss "strict literacy" – i.e., not being able to read the printed word. These studies show that 32 million Americans are illiterate, a statistic that has not significantly changed in 30 years. However, a study reported by the New York Times entitled "Half of the Adults in the U.S. Can't Read" revealed a growing "marginal illiteracy" problem, where 50% of Americans – "nearly half of the nation's 191 million adult citizens are not proficient enough in English to write a letter" and have difficulty in "practical matters that people face every day." They have difficulty with reading comprehension, filling out documents, understanding and summarizing facts in an article or writing a paragraph summarizing information. Almost all high school students in the United States do not graduate with a reading proficiency above a 5<sup>th</sup>-grade reading level. Combined, the studies show nearly 200 million Americans are illiterate or marginally illiterate, and the real number could be even higher.

<sup>14</sup> Statistic Brain Research Institute, Reading Statistics, <https://www.statisticbrain.com/reading-statistics/>, accessed March 20, 2021.

*Understanding why so few members read about their fraternity does help better explain why Freemasonry is no longer in the eye of the public and sitting on the prestigious perch it once enjoyed: too many Freemasons find it difficult to talk about, much less explain Freemasonry.*

philosophies, origins, factual history, its historical purpose, symbols, the laudable work it has done as an organization, and the notable advances in society because of its existence?

We are told reading is *too time consuming* and, clearly, reading does consume time, but in the case of Freemasons who are charged with advancing their Masonic knowledge, we have to wonder how they pursue that charge if the primary method of doing so is too time consuming. Aside from actively participating in their lodges (which roughly only 6-8% do – another factor that is found common to the 19th and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries), and since there is not a surplus of social media (especially apps) that focus on Freemasonry upon which Masons can rely, reading seems one of the logical paths to enlightenment in Freemasonry.

The often-reprinted 1875 essay, *Reading Masons and Masons Who Do Not Read*, by Albert G Mackey, confirms that in that year (and for what appears at least a generation prior), the fraternity was already comprised largely of members who knew little about their

Craft. Sadly, the prophecy laid out by Mackey in his 1875 writing was accurate. Validating Mackey's essay, we find the continuation of Mackey's concerns in Masonic journals and periodicals on into the 20th Century that bemoaned, and plaintively lamented the same disappointing state of the membership and condition of the fraternity that Mackey summarized in 1875.<sup>15</sup>

Could it be that Masons fit into that other category described earlier, and that Freemasons do not read about Freemasonry because they do not know other Freemasons who read about Freemasonry? That is not completely illogical, because there are so few Masons who do read about Freemasonry. But, still, a member could always seek out those who might read more about their fraternity if they earnestly were seeking more Light.

It should not be surprising that around 3% of Masons read about their fraternity since Lodges place so little emphasis on reading about the fraternity, nor do they typically encourage their members to do so.

Understanding *why* so few members read about their fraternity does help better explain why Freemasonry is no longer in the eye of the public and sitting on the prestigious perch it once enjoyed: *too many Freemasons find it difficult to talk about, much less explain Freemasonry*. Is that because so few read about their fraternity, and rely instead on what they observe (if they are in the rare group who actually participate in their lodge) and what they remember from being quickly ushered through degrees? That is a logical question.

The hard fact is that the fewer who know that Freemasonry exists, or what the *idea* of Freemasonry is, the fewer the qualified seekers of admittance into the ranks there will be in years to come. Contrary to what many members have believed since the early 1800s, the Institution of Freemasonry does not need millions of men

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<sup>15</sup> Mackey, Albert G., *Reading Masons and Masons Who do not Read*. This essay was originally published in Voice of Masonry in June 1875, then again in 1924 in The Master Mason magazine. Since 1924, Mackey's essay has appeared in number Masonic publications, multiple Internet site, and cited over 160 times in books, papers, and presentations from the 1980s-2002, 2022. [https://archive.org/stream/MackeyAGReadingMasonsMasonsWhoDoNotRead1874/Mackey%20A%20G%20-%20Reading%20Masons%20%26%20Masons%20Who%20Do%20Not%20Read%20-%201874\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/MackeyAGReadingMasonsMasonsWhoDoNotRead1874/Mackey%20A%20G%20-%20Reading%20Masons%20%26%20Masons%20Who%20Do%20Not%20Read%20-%201874_djvu.txt), accessed, January 20, 2021.

to be successful. Nevertheless, the posterity of the fraternity is dependent on at least enough members to cultivate its historical purpose – and at least acquiring enough new members in each generation to do the same.

The reality that public interest in Freemasonry has waned (and continues to do so) has faced American Freemasonry since 1959, when membership began to steadily decline each year through 2021. So far, despite clever attempts to swell the membership through programs that even occasionally skirt the no-solicitation of members rule, nothing has reversed that perpetual decline in membership. At best, American Freemasonry works to manage the decline, but does not always work to address the factual reasons behind the decline and correct them.

Yes, there are indeed a number of reasons other than the lack of reading-Masons for the decline, but there is one fact that does not go away by ignoring it: few Masons seem to read enough to be fully aware of how the patterns of the past that contributed to the present decline, remain largely in place and practice. That too has been the subject of many writings in the past, but few Masons bother to read about their fraternity,

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## **INTELLECTUAL LAZINESS**

There is one reason that also explains why people do not read – not just Masons - a reason that we do not often find on the many lists of such reasons: *intellectual laziness*. Using that term might raise eyebrows and cause some to think that even uttering the idea is somehow snobbish, condescending or reeks of elitist overtones. It does not, of course. Those who may think that should read more.

Intellectual laziness, in this sense, simply means that there are many people who do not want to be bothered with putting in the time and effort it takes to learn something they do not know – or bother with learning much at all about something they think they already know. Is it remotely possible that the many who spend countless hours with their televisions, and/or online, looking to be entertained with games and social media sites that do nothing to challenge the mind or enhance their own growth fall into that category? It does if one follows logic. Could it be that the Masonic culture does not cultivate the interest in its members to pursue more than what they observe in their lodges, or glean from being walked through the degrees once admitted into the ranks? There is certainly enough valid research, and numerous examples of this being the case (all in writing, of course). Perhaps because it is in writing that so few Masons know about it.

We are told that the unsophisticated level of critical thinking (skillfully conceptualizing ideas/concepts) in America today is overly influenced by television and social media and has created our modern America. This, we are told, is what happens when we give powerful communications tools to people who have not learned how to think. While that is not the only thing influencing modern America, that assessment is far from a crime against logic.

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## DELVING DEEPER

The estimate that 3% of the card-carrying Masons in America actually bother to read much about the fraternity stems from a basic formula. The formula usually includes adding the population of Masons who subscribe to Masonic publications and purchase Masonic related books, along with the number of members of research lodges that publish their Transactions and provide them to members, then comparing that total with the reported number of Masons in good standing.

While the basics of that formula stand, it is possible, of course, that the 3% figure might be larger – or smaller. For example, a researcher may believe that a Mason who receives a newsletter or bulletin because this name is on a mailing list, actually reads it. If the researcher includes the number of names on that list to whom those publications are sent, and also presumes that the content of the material is more than just announcements, advertisements, and what Masonic writer Stephen Dafoe, calls “grip and grin photographs,” should that category be included, and, if so, does it skew the percentage one way or the other?<sup>16</sup> Yes.

There is no current verifiable source that confidently reports that there are more than 1,000,000 members in good standing today. So, taking the totals of the categories usually used in conjunction with that 1,000,000-member figure, we find that troubling 3% claim which tells us only 30,000 members read about Freemasonry. That begs the logical question of what do the other 970,000 to learn more about their fraternity and Freemasonry?

If we think that 3% is too low an estimate let us speculate that the figure is 20% instead. That still means that only 200,000 of 1,000,000 members bother to read about their fraternity. That does not nullify the logical question of what those who are not in the 200,000 category (800,000) do learn more about their fraternity and Freemasonry?

We can play the statistical game all we want. When we do, we still have to ask, *how many non-reading Masons are too many, or how many, reading Masons are enough?* At what point do we say that it is alright that 30, 40, 50% do or do not bother to read about their fraternity? If we find such a percentage, and then declare it “good enough,” are we not also declaring that all a member needs to know about Freemasonry is what he can remember from being walked through the degrees and what he observes in his lodge, if that is, he bothers to attend.

If reading about Freemasonry is so important, why not just require members to read? That ridiculous idea attacks the issues from completely the wrong end, because, logically, lodges and members are supposed to make the delivery of the promise of Freemasonry and its practice interesting enough to its members to create a desire to advance their Masonic knowledge; and reading has always been, and will remain, the more productive option.

The 30,000 figure is troubling enough, yet more questions arise: *What do those 30,000 read? How often do they read?*

We can theorize that those 30,000 read their grand jurisdiction’s newsletter or magazine, but do those publications really count as the kind of reading that actually educates beyond the ritual? Hardly. Many

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<sup>16</sup> Dafoe, Stephen, “Reading, Writing, and Apathy: The Rise and Fall of Masonic Education,” *Heredom*, Volume 14, 2006, 161.



Masons do consider such publications useful to jurisdictions. Some are indeed well done. Many, however, believe the substance of most such publications to be disappointing. Illustrating that point, a relatively new Mason recently remarked that he found the experience of searching out and reading these publications to be as unfulfilling as reading *People Magazine* and expecting to learn something useful from it.

Masonic periodicals have to figure in, as do the Transactions of a number of research lodges. What about popular Masonic blogs? Should they count? Grand lodges and many of their subordinate lodge websites often offer links to sites where more extensive material is available to read, but we really have no data base that tells us whether those links are commonly visited in that way, much less whether their offerings read. Masonic libraries might be thought of as a valid source to find out how many Masons read. One well-known library with over 1,000 volumes in its inventory shows that eight books were checked out over a 24-month period by a population of 196 members. Presuming those eight members were not the same person. That would mean 4% of the lodge membership used the library over a two-year period. While 4% might suggest some advancement over the 3%, it is not as significant as one might hope.

Then there are the literally thousands of volumes of annual proceeding from all Grand Lodges. Admittedly, most are quite dry for the average reader, but they provide a gold mine to researchers. It would be very safe to assume most Masons do not regularly scour the Proceedings of their jurisdictional repositories for their reading pleasure. *The Builder Magazine*, considered by many reading Masons as the finest American Masonic journal ever published, remains available and every copy of its 15-year run (1915-2930), remains an outstanding resource. The bibliographies of thousands of individual editions printed by more than 675 Masonic magazines, newspapers and bulletins issued between 1811 and 2001 are also available.<sup>17</sup>

Those available sources alone would probably keep the average member busy for years. Further, there have been powerful contemporary Masonic writings since the 1960s - some more interesting and fact-filled than decades of previous Masonic writings.

While no certified account of the number of books published about Freemasonry is available, we find references that claim over 100,000 books have been written about the fraternity. There is no certified account either about the number of papers, articles, and essays on the topic that are available today. Because of the Internet, and the ease of accessibility to such writings, we can safely surmise that number to be much greater than the claim of 100,000 published books.

When we take a look at the reported 100,000 books, add up the papers, articles, and essays, throw in blogs, Grand Lodge publications and newsletters, pamphlets, and websites, and even annual proceedings, we still have to consider whether just because all of these writings are available, are they worth reading? Common sense tells us the answer. Not everything published about Freemasonry is a jewel, any more than is everything published about any other topic.

In some circles of twisted logic, it might be argued that if 3% of 1,000,000 card-carrying Masons read, then 30,000 of them may have read all 100,000 books. While that could be said, it would be stupid to believe that, not to mention a high-level crime against logic.

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<sup>17</sup> Watkins, Larrisa P., *American Masonic Periodicals, 1811–2001, A Bibliography of the Library of the Supreme Council*, 33, Southern Jurisdiction, Washington, DC: Oak Knoll Press, 2003.

It might be said, too, that every Mason reads the monthly or quarterly publication from his Grand Lodge, or that every article, paper, essay, or commentary (like this one) will be read because it is posted on the Internet or included in a Masonic periodical. Saying that, one might also be tempted to assert that each time a Mason reads something about Freemasonry, he advances his Masonic knowledge, which is tantamount to saying everything written about Freemasonry is worth reading and serves as a valuable education tool—another crime against logic.

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## MEASURING DISINTEREST

A recent measure of the Masonic culture's wide-spread lack of interest and appetite for learning more about the organization to which they belong (at least by reading) is found in a February 2021 education offering provided to 2,112 Masons in 25 jurisdictions.

The offering was the third edition of a publication that contained brief summaries and reviews of 83 Masonic books and essays covering a range of topics suitable for new and veteran members alike. The publication also offered an overview of the six most well-known Masonic journals/magazines available today and encouraged and invited recipients to attend and participate in virtual education meetings that have grown in popularity across the nation since May 2020 because of the pandemic restrictions.

The booklet offers and serves as a quick reference and fitting resource for a Mason's personal or lodge library, should they have one. Importantly, it also offers any Mason at least a starting place to determine which books or writings might interest him most without weeding through 100,000 titles.

The publication was not produced and made available for the purpose of collecting data, however, a look at the standard analytics from electronic mailings easily tells us how many recipients *opened* the email and then *viewed* the publication. This created quantifiable data. The data are not flattering.<sup>18</sup>

Of the 2,112 individuals to whom the material was sent, 8% (183) read the announcement and opened the attached booklet. A whopping 1,129 (53.5%) did not even look at the material. Can we assume each in the group of 53.5% had already read all 83 books and subscribe to the Masonic periodicals, and are aware of and attend virtual education meetings? That would also be a crime against logic. It does, however, follow that those who did not open or look at the material were simply not interested in such a resource, or in discovering material that interests them about Freemasonry. At least 300 of the 2,112 of the recipients were current or past officers of their lodge at various levels, including Master.

Seeing such numbers and suppositions about Masons who read and Masons who do not read again suggests that the likelihood of this writing being read is slim as well. Even with the wondrous reach of the Internet today, that likelihood seems no greater than it would have been in 1875.<sup>19</sup> This begs the question, *why bother to write about Freemasonry?*

The reasons would surely be considerably less than the reported number of published books about Freemasonry, but taking into account the steady turnout of publications for the past two centuries alone, a

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<sup>18</sup> *Bending Granite, An Inventory, Considerations, And Recommendations*. An Unpublished White Paper Prepared For Richard F. Short, March 21, 2021 (John W. Bizzack, Dan M. Kemble).

<sup>19</sup> Mackey.

lack of readership is of little concern to those who write about Freemasonry. That lack of concern narrows down the reasons.

A cursory review of Masonic books and writings tell us that authors prepare their work for a number of reasons, of course: catharsis; the urge to share; to express their positions, point of view, beliefs; and research - and some, simply, because they like to write. Perhaps it all boils down to a sense of seeking to entertain, educate, inspire, and to write what should not be forgotten.

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## WRITING ON THE WALL

Observational research may be all that is really necessary to substantiate the 3% figure that identifies the portion of Masons who read about Freemasonry.

We can easily observe the behavioral level of what those who are considered active and engaged members in their lodges. We can review the records of demits and suspensions for non-payment of dues. The woeful stammering and lost manner in which we observe many lodges open and close their meetings, the casual, sometimes cavalier way protocol is exercised in ceremonies and ritual, and returns of degree proficiencies, all reveal quite a bit, as well. Questions from men who have been members for decades (i.e., Why does the Master wear a hat? What do those symbols on these tracing boards mean? When raised to Master Mason does it mean we are also Templars? etc.) surely tell us more than we might wish to admit about non-reading Masons, as well as what a Lodge has supposedly instructed.

This is not the case in all lodges, of course, but we have to ask if 3% might also apply to the number of lodges whose members do not need to ask such questions, or in which we observe the other indicators.

Diagnosing the reasons that 3% is a believable benchmark is not difficult, and, there are members who clearly recognize that no man grasps the full significance of the principles of Freemasonry simply by receiving the degrees. Masons who travel and associate only with other members who do read and believe a premium should be placed on Masonic education and scaled in balance with other parts in the journey to become a Freemason – not just be made a member of the fraternity – sometimes fail to realize the true extent of the significance that non-reading Masons create in the fraternity. The nuts and bolts of Freemasonry are indeed much more complex, of course, than being walked through a degree. But the reality is that the majority of generations have learned to subscribe to and practice the opposite belief. Given such circumstances, it is folly for anyone think that increasing Masonic literacy can be quickly, easily, and effectively addressed with new rules, programs, and more studies that so few even know about, much less read.

There are multiple diagnoses since Masons began chronicling their journeys through the Craft. We find many examples in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (yes, in *writing*), confirming that diagnosing the ills of the

*Questions from men who have been members for decades (i.e., Why does the Master wear a hat? What do those symbols on these tracing boards mean? When raised to Master Mason does it mean we are also Templars? etc.) surely tell us more than we might wish to admit about non-reading Masons, as well as what a Lodge has supposedly instructed.*

fraternity and coining the reference “ignorant” Masons, took place long before the writings of scholars, researchers, the leadership and members that appeared in the 1970s.<sup>20</sup> The first 30 years of 20<sup>th</sup> century writings echoes the previous 25 years, and writings since the 1950s through today, do the same. Regrettably, few then, were read and that has not changed. To paraphrase Winston Churchill, “Never has so much been written to be read by so few.”

The prescriptions intended to address the non-reading population (which has often been characterized in Masonic writings as the *lesser informed*), have also been relegated to the proverbial Masonic dust bins because they are usually found in the same writings that provide the diagnosis (which are unread). One thing most all of the diagnoses have neglected to address is a feature today that has become as difficult to successfully address as is bending granite.

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 becoming even more widely spread, much of the fraternity would deteriorate into social clubs or mere benefit societies. He was including appendant bodies in this assessment. His forecast was no more heeded than were the same later projections made by Masonic writers and scholars who saw the same troubling problem continue. If Mackey’s warnings were the handwriting on the wall, the tragic reality is that no bothered to read the handwriting, or having read it, was able to interpret it correctly.

*To paraphrase Winston Churchill, “Never has so much been written to be read by so few.”*

Although he did not use the words *Masonic culture*, that was actually the very thing to which he was referring. It was then, and continues to be, a leading feature that the majority of our Masonic culture places less emphasis on the philosophical nuts and bolts and more on the mechanical and other parts that are merely ancillary aspects of the larger purpose of the fraternity.

Another thing that most prognosticators have failed to make clear is that if there is to be a remedy to this situation and condition, successful treatment will take a great deal of time to administer and dispense in a way that genuinely changes the breadth and scope of what is now embedded in the Masonic culture. Small groups of members who stand determinedly apart from that majority have always existed, and there is no reason to think they will not continue to exist, but there is no reason to be optimistic that they will, anytime in the near future, be able to lay valid claim to majority status. Regardless,

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<sup>20</sup> EXAMPLES: Charles M. Moore, “Application and Lethargy Contrasted,” *The Masonic Review*, 22, Cincinnati: C. Moore, 1860, 359; “Application and Lethargy Contrasted,” *The Freemason: A Weekly Journal of Freemasonry, Literature, Science and Art*, 30, July 1893; and *The Freemasons Chronicle*, A Weekly Record of Masonic Intelligence, 45:1147, 1897. Mackey, “Masons Who Read and Masons who Do Not Read,” 1875; Rob Morris, *The History of Freemasonry*, 1859; “A United Grand Lodge,” *The American Freemason’s New Monthly Magazine* 4, no. 1, July 1859; William H. Upton, “A Plea for the Teachings of Freemasonry,” in L.S. Myler, ed., *Jewels of Masonic Oratory*, Akron, OH, 1898, 7; “Urgent Necessity For More Research,” Editorial, *The Builder Magazine*, September 1923 - Volume IX - Number 9; Norman Broadwill Hickox, “Fraternity,” *The Master’s Lectures Delivered in Evans Lodge 524, Illinois*, 1923; J.A. Evans, “Taking Stock In American Freemasonry,” Address Given to the Toronto Society for Masonic Study and Research, 1930; Paul R. Clark, “Let Your Loins Be Girded About, And Your Lights Burning,” *The Builder Magazine* September 1924 - Volume X - Number 9; Charles Clyde Hunt, *The Landmarks of Freemasonry*, Cedar Rapids, IA: Laurance Press Company, 1943, 77; Delmar D. Harrah, *History and Evolution of Freemasonry*, 1954; Lewis C. Cook, ed., “The Masonic World of Ray V. Denslow,” Selections from His Reviews Published in the Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Missouri, A.F. & A.M. 1933-1960, Missouri Lodge of Research, 1964, 190; J.W. Norwood, Master, Lexington Lodge 1, 1915, Personal Notes, Special Collections, Frankfort Historical Society, Frankfort, KY, examined in 2013; Jacob Norton, “About Fictitious and Forged Masonic MSS,” *Masonic Review*, VOL. 72, 1890; R. J. Meekren, “Where are we Drifting? *The Builder Magazine* - May 1929, Volume XV, Number 5; J. W. Norwood, “Masonry for Beginners,” *The New Age*, July 1911, 31–32; Dwight L. Smith; Dwight L. Smith, “The Level of Leadership: Whither Are We Traveling?” *The Indiana Freemason*, Indianapolis: The Indiana Masonic Home Printing Office, 1962, 12; Delmar D. Harrah, *History and Evolution of Freemasonry*, 1954.

the genuine strength of the historically intended aim, purpose, and philosophy of Freemasonry has always been found in fewness.

If members find they have become better men by being part of the majority of what makes up the Masonic culture, is there anything wrong with that? If that is the case, then Freemasonry, at least as an organization, has worked, and is working, so to speak. If those in the majority are already convinced, they are better men for just being members, but have no interest in more, is there anything wrong with that? There is nothing inherently wrong with being a service club or a fraternal organization. Just don't mistake it for Freemasonry.

Masons like to say that our Masonic experience is our own – we can make of Freemasonry what we wish. That is certainly true as well – to a degree. But at what point does the Masonic experience cease to be Masonic?

Lodges, writings, fellowship, events, our collective and individual actions may hone our faith in those lessons with which we are familiar, but what about other lessons, the practices, the reasons for them, their history, the strong encouragement of the degrees to make an advance in one's Masonic knowledge, not to mention the simple joy of learning and continually discovering things through such lessons that can better our lives? Although there are many more, integral elements just those parts seem very much like planting a tree seed on top of a high, barren mountain, then never watering it.

*While reading may not be all the water needed to mature a Masonic tree seed, it is exceedingly difficult (and indeed a crime against logic) to believe that reading does not offer more opportunity for growth than not reading.*

While reading may not be all the water needed to mature a Masonic tree seed, it is exceedingly difficult (and indeed a crime against logic) to believe that reading does not offer more opportunity for growth than not reading.

If you are reading this final sentence and now better understand how that 3% figure has manifested and affected Freemasonry for nearly two centuries, you are among that small percentage of Masons who bother to read about Freemasonry.