



The Steamboat Captain Who Changed The Course of Kentucky Freemasonry

John W. Bizzack, Ph.D.

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BSF Foundation, Lexington, Kentucky



The Steamboat Captain Who Changed the Course of Freemasonry in Kentucky

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ABSTRACT

History does not give us a clear account of the thinking behind the man who, in August 1851 while attending the 51st Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky in Lexington, Kentucky, made a motion that continues to affect the course of Freemasonry in Kentucky today. The work of recording details about history as it is happening is not often the driving force behind recording minutes and the compiling of proceedings in many organizations. As often found in proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, business is properly noted for posterity but commonly we find little to no information about the discussion or context regarding why an issue or topic was brought up, debated, rejected, or passed —leaving future interpretations at the mercy of other documents and recordings, if they can be located. To better understand what was behind many decisions that charted the early course of the fraternity, additional research about the era and what was going on in the rest of the Masonic world is necessary to find context and clarify why some motions, actions, resolutions, and decisions were made when they were made.

We must work harder today than ever before because we are dealing with a generation that is drinking from a well that we didn't dig and eating from a tree we didn't plant. We must educate our members on our heritage [history].

~ James C. Joiner, Chair, Masonic Education Committee, Grand Lodge of Kentucky, 2003.¹

CONDENSED BACKGROUND

The Baltimore Convention of 1843 had long lasting and important effects on Masonry in the United States and introduced many innovations to American lodges. The convention was held in Baltimore from May 8 until May 17, 1843. Of the twenty-three grand lodges in the United States at the time, sixteen were represented.²

¹ Proceedings, Grand Lodge of Kentucky, Committee on Masonic Education, 2003, p.198.

² Bob J. Jensen, The Baltimore Convention of 1843, The Guardian, 1:3 (March 2008). The 1843 convention was held from May 8 until May 17, 1843. Of the twenty-three grand lodges in the United States, sixteen were represented. These were: Alabama-- Edward Herndon, POM; District of Columbia- Nathaniel Seevers, Grand Lecturer Florida, Thomas Hayward, PDGM Georgia-- Lemuel Dwell, GL Louisiana-- E. Cruben (a visitor) Maryland Daniel Piper, GL; W.E. Wyant; Chaplain of Convention; Charles Gilman (visitor); Cornelius Smith S.G.W. (visitor); and Joseph Stapleton D.G.M of the Grand Encampment (visitor). Massachusetts- Charles W. Moore, G. Secretary Missouri, Stephen W.B. Carnegie, PGM; Joseph Foster, SGW; Fred K. Billon, PGS (visitor); and Hiram Chamberlain, GC (visitor) Mississippi- John Delafield New Hampshire- Thomas

The idea of the Convention originally included examining the standardizing of ritual among all grand lodges, exploring the establishment of a general grand lodge, and developing a plan for the various grand lodges to solve mutual problems through future conventions.³ The results of the convention, however, did not meet the expectations of many of the organizers.

THE AGE OF MECHANICS

To best understand how a fraternity changed course after arriving in the colonies and in direction it did in the early and mid-1800s, context is essential about three specific events: the anti-Masonic period, The Morgan Affair, and the 1843 Baltimore Convention and the next decade prior to the Civil War.

The ritual, always one of the most important parts of the system of Freemasonry, often brought strong feelings among its members to the surface. The original Rituals of Anderson, Dunckerly, Preston and others were changed slightly as they evolved until 1797 when Thomas Smith Webb wrote his "Freemasons Monitor."⁴ These adaptations and others that came from degree peddlers (traveling lecturers) and the exposures written about Masonic ritual spread across the United States in the early 1800s.⁵

By the 1830s and early 1840s, when labor resumed at a more regular pace following the initial aftermath of the anti-Masonic period and the trial of Masons indicted for the kidnapping of William Morgan in Batavia, New York, only a few members remembered the work. Those Masons who remained members can only be presumed to have retained the ritual and ceremonial work, yet we learn that the younger generation received very poor instruction, and visitations between lodges and grand lodges were very difficult.⁶ We have to presume that at least those surviving members of the period had some philosophical understand of the aim and purpose of Freemasonry. We can see today, however, that while that be a fact, another fact is that the veteran Masons as well the younger one saw a serious need to restructure the rules, and for the next several decades much of the fraternity focused on its mechanics.

In his important paper, *The Baltimore Convention*, Bob J. Jenson tells us when and how that tone was set:

In 1839, the Grand Lodge of Alabama voted to request all Grand Lodges to send a delegate to the City of Washington for a meeting on the first Monday in March 1842. This meeting would be held "for the purpose of determining upon a uniform mode of work throughout all the Lodges of the United States and to make other lawful regulations for the interest and security of the Craft." This convention was held on

Clapham, North Carolina- John H. New York- Ebenezer Wadsworth, PGS Ohio- John Barney, GL and W.J. Reese, GM (visitor) Rhode Island- William Field South Carolina--Albert Case, GC South Wales- Edward John Hutchins PPD (a visitor) Virginia-- John Dove, GS.

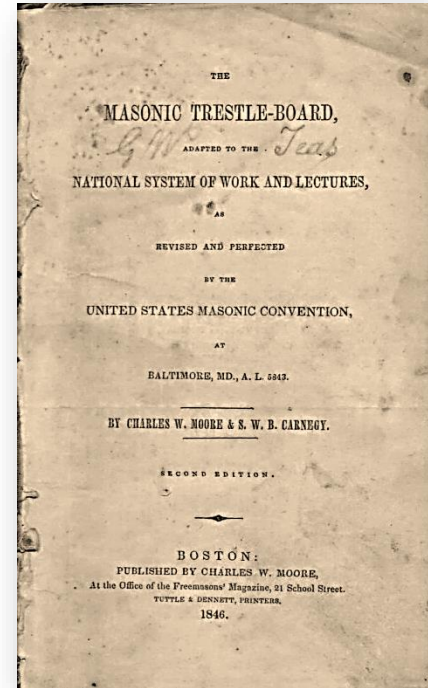
³ The Grand Lodge of Kentucky did not send a representative to attend the convention.

⁴ Bob J. Jenson, "The Baltimore Convention," *The Philalethes*, October 1994.

⁵ *Ibid.* From Jenson: "There were variations that made for disputes among Masons in visiting different lodges than their own. Many grand lodges adopted various forms using traveling lecturers, or as they were sometimes called, "degree peddlers." Many of these men made their living visiting lodges. For a fee, they would teach the lodge members whatever system of ritual they themselves believed was correct, or often some version of the Webb work. With no written ritual, the variations were many. The arguments must have been frequent, and as men moved westward they took their favorite ritual, sometimes with their own modifications, thus further confusing the situation. March 9, 1822, a group of freemasons, who were members of Congress, instigated a move for unification. They' " called for a general grand lodge and for a conference to be held in Washington, D.C. in February of 1823. Strong opposition by Pennsylvania, New York and Kentucky stopped this plan before it was put into action."

⁶ *Ibid.*

March 7, 1842 in the Central Masonic Hall in Washington. Ten grand lodges were represented. These were Alabama, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, South Carolina, and Virginia. Michigan was not seated, as it was determined that the delegate was not chosen under constitutional principles. Those present generally agreed that it was desirable to stop all irregularities in the ritual and to remove all materials foreign to the ritual. But first they needed to come to an agreement as to what the standard work should be. They knew of Webb, Gleason, Snow and others who had manufactured a system that was called "ancient work." However, many in attendance did not believe this to be the best system. After due consideration, it was decided, not enough grand lodges were represented, and there was not enough time to formulate a uniform ritual acceptable to everyone. They voted to ask each grand lodge to appoint a well-versed mason and style him as grand lecturer. This grand lecturer would report to a convention to be held the following year. The convention then resolved that should a majority of the grand lodges adopt the appointment of grand lecturers; their first meeting should be held in the city of Baltimore on May 8, 1843. They also recommended each grand lodge give a certificate of good standing to each member and all business would be transacted on the third degree. It was felt that Entered Apprentices and Fellowcrafts were not members of the Lodge and not entitled to the franchises of members. The 1843 convention was held from May 8 until May 17, 1843.⁷



The convention was actually called The National Masonic Convention. Since the event took place in Baltimore, at some point Masonic writers began referring to it as The Baltimore Convention of 1843.⁸



One specific recommendation that arose from the Convention proved to have long lasting, and, unfortunately, ultimately injurious effect. That recommendation restricted the transaction of lodge business to the Master Mason degree only, thereby preventing Entered Apprentices and Fellow Crafts from participating in lodge meetings. The recommendation was, like all the rest made at the Convention, non-binding, but was ultimately adopted by all American grand lodges. The recommendation suggested that Entered Apprentices and Fellow Crafts were not members of a Lodge and not entitled to the franchises of Master Masons. Since 1998, in recognition of the fact that the practice of conducting business only on the Master Mason degree had long outlived its alleged need and purpose, a narrow majority of the grand jurisdictions in the United States

⁷ Jenson.

⁸ C.W. Moore and S.W.B Carnegie, *The Masonic Trestleboard, Adapted to the National System of Work and Lectures as Revised and Perfected by the United States Masonic Convention at Baltimore, Maryland*, Tuttle & Dennett, Printers, Published by Charles W. Moore, Boston, 1843, 5.

have rejected what, at one time, seemed like a good idea. At least twenty-six grand jurisdictions have now returned to the practice of transacting business in the lower degrees, which had been the case in the United States prior to 1843, and has always been the case in the rest of the Masonic world.

On the morning of the last day of the Convention, the Master Mason Degree was exemplified. Then, while the President, John Dove of Virginia, was absent from the hall, "Brother [S.W.B.] Carnegie took the chair," and a resolution praising Dove was unanimously adopted. Albert Case of South Carolina was also thanked for his work as secretary. The concluding session was held in the afternoon of May 17th. The Convention approved a letter, read by the Secretary, Albert Case, to be sent to "the Masonic Fraternity of the United States." Each paragraph contained the flowery language of the day pleading with the Freemasons of the country to unite in love, friendship, and brotherhood.⁹ It was that dramatic letter that got the attention of all Grand Lodges in the United States and many of their members, although not every Mason of the day was in agreement with each of the recommendations from the Convention.

This letter, called upon all Lodges "to exercise their powers and cleanse the sanctuary" of "unfaithful Masons." It concluded by asking all Freemasons to "Be true to your principles, and the great moral edifice will stand beautiful and complete. Together, Brethren, be true and faithful."¹⁰

As later reports and writings verify, this was about as close as the Convention delegates got to speaking to the matter of ensuring *what* was instructed in the Craft's "great moral edifice" was also as specifically outlined and detailed as were the newly recommended "rules." Despite the strongly embraced sovereignty that each existing Grand Lodge (and those established after 1843) it was remarkable how most adopted most all the recommendations made by delegates from only 16 of the 23 existing grand jurisdictions at the time.

ROUNDING OUT THE AGE OF MECHANICS: THE LIST MAKERS

Freemasonry survived for 139 years without any published list of landmarks. That changed in the mid-1800s when attempts were made to identify and list them, but the only attempts were by American Freemasons. There is some uncertainty as to when and by whom the first list of Masonic landmarks was written, but it is generally accepted that Albert Mackey was the father, mother, and instigator of the Landmarks, rounding up twenty-five "rules" which, in his opinion, represented Masonic thought of the time.

No doubt Mackey was honest in his belief, but when he was writing these rules, he did not have before him the learned research of Masonic scholars in England.¹¹ Mackey invented his list and foisted it upon an unsuspecting American Craft. Soon after, there was a headlong rush by "scholars" to create lists of landmarks and thus fill in what they perceived as a nagging gap in Masonic tradition. Right behind these creative writers came the grand lodges, each trying to outdo the other in adopting the "true" list of fundamental landmarks of Freemasonry.¹²

Mackey's first list was compiled in 1855, but not published until 1859. In 1856, Rob Morris, who became Grand Master in Kentucky in 1859, published his list. The honor of the first list

⁹Jenson.

¹⁰ Jenson and Moore, Carnegie.

¹¹ 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.

¹² S. Brent Morris, "Landmarks and Liabilities," *Philaethes*, 44: 3 (June 1991).

published, however, goes to the Grand Lodge of Minnesota. In January 1855, a new constitution was proposed in that jurisdiction, which was adopted in January 1856. Section 8 of that constitution listed 26 items that were enumerated as having the force of “Ancient Landmarks of the Fraternity.”¹³

The reason for the emergence of lists from Mackey, Morris and the Grand Lodge of Minnesota is worth examining beyond the presumption that it was a coincidence that a newly formed grand lodge and two Masonic scholars thought it was time to note them. Whether any of the three understood that doing so would lead to the creation of multiple additional lists is unknown, but clearly an importance was being placed on defining and enumerating landmarks during this period. Interestingly, perhaps because it was the first time such landmarks appeared, their arrival began to take on the appearance of laws to many Masons, rather than simply reflecting the traits and characteristics of the institution. The list makers did not stop with what was handed to them. H.B. Grant, Kentucky’s long-time Grand Secretary created 54 landmarks in 1889. In 1911 Roscoe Pound, whittled them all back to 7. In the 1950s the Commission on Information for Recognition of the Conference of Grand Masters of Masons in North America embraced only 3 “ancient landmarks”.¹⁴ In 2019, The Grand Lodge of Kentucky after 219 years of existence, decided to adopt 7 Landmarks.

When we consider the accelerated comeback of Freemasonry from the anti-Masonic period that preceded it (1826-mid-1840s), we find the most likely reason the sudden appearance of the first three written lists of Landmarks in the mid to late 1850s. The explanation may simply stem from the initiative of a new grand lodge to create such a list – a list that influenced two Masonic scholars to expand it in hopes of establishing clarity of guidelines for regulating American Freemasonry in the aftermath of the storm from anti-Masonic period. That comeback evolved into the second period of rapid expansion.¹⁵ This unending search for a suitable list that would appeal to or to which all Masonry would subscribe, was clearly a feature of the Age of Mechanics.

For some American Freemasons, however, it seems that the simplest solution to the questions surrounding landmarks is to just formally adopt Mackey’s product and be done with it. That would easily solve the problem that having them enumerated to begin with has created. But like most simple-minded solutions, it is more wrong than right to do so. There is a naïve satisfaction in having an absolute list of guiding principles, and a childlike comfort in being able to assert what can never be changed. Naïve satisfaction and childlike comfort, however, should not be the guiding forces of Freemasonry as it faces the rigors of the twenty-first century.¹⁶

Today, while there is a growing awareness of the heritage of American Freemasonry in academia

¹³ Hunt, *The Landmarks of Freemasonry*.

¹⁴ The Conference of Grand Masters of Masons of North America, Standards of Recognition adopted for our guidance when this Commission was formed in 1952. These are the guidelines used to evaluate Regularity of a Grand Lodge, and thereby determine whether it is worthy of consideration for Recognition by our member Grand Lodges: Legitimacy of Origin, Exclusive Territorial Jurisdiction, except by mutual consent and/or treaty, Adherence to the Ancient Landmarks – specifically, a Belief in God, the Volume of Sacred Law as an indispensable part of the Furniture of the Lodge, and the prohibition of the discussion of politics and religion.”

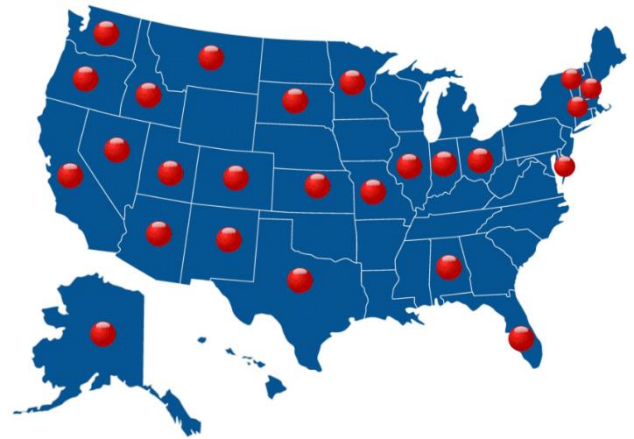
<http://www.recognitioncommission.org/publish/2004/06/10/the-standards-of-recognition>, accessed January 2021.

¹⁵ Lexington Lodge 1, “Discussion of the Landmarks of Freemasonry,” Masonic History and Study Group, June 27, 2013, Lexington, Kentucky.

¹⁶ Ibid.

WHY WAS THE IDEA THAT ONLY LODGE BUSINESS ONLY WHEN OPENED ON THE MASTER MASON DEGREE THOUGHT TO BE GOOD IDEA AT THE TIME?

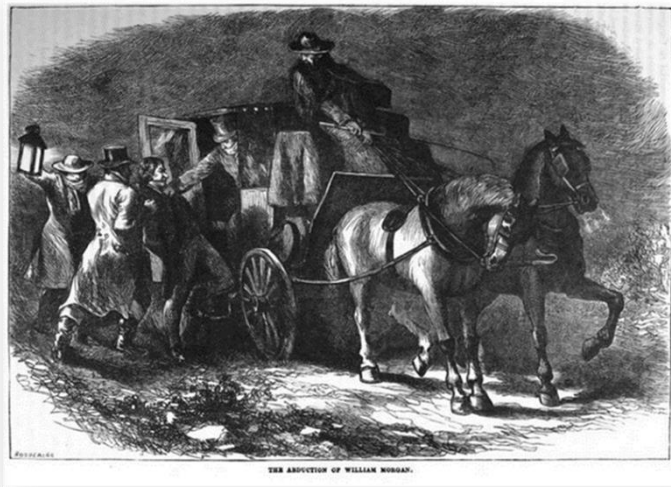
Twenty-four American Grand Lodges today continue to deny Entered Apprentices and Fellow Crafts participation in lodge in a way that the rest of the Masonic world views as rearward. The twenty-six grand lodge jurisdictions) that have (since 1988), rejected the incongruity of the Baltimore Convention idea, and allow their lodges to open and conduct business on the Entered Apprentice Degree do so with certain restrictions on voting, holding office, etc.



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To better try and understand why restricting business to the Master Mason degree was thought of as a good idea at the time, context about anti-Masonry sentiments and specifically what happened in 1826 is critical.

Fueling the flames of the already rising anti-Masonic sentiments in America, was the 1826 kidnapping by Masons in Batavia, New York, who may or may not have been a Mason, but held himself out to be one. This episode later came to be known as The Morgan Affair. Five years of legal investigation and prosecution on the matter of Morgan's disappearance left a trail of: 20 grand juries and 15 trials; 54 Freemasons indicted, 39 brought to trial; and 10 convictions, but none on the charge of murder. Defendants confessed to abducting Morgan and holding him against his will for days – but no one confessed to killing him.¹⁷ No defendant offered a reasonable or believable explanation, or any evidence either for why Morgan was never seen alive again after he was kidnapped.



The Abduction of William Morgan
New York, USA, 1826 (c1880). Artist: Hooper
A print from *Cassell's History of the United States*,
by Edmund Ollier, Volume III, Cassell Petter
and Galpin, London, c1880

Ultimately, the anti-Masonic hysteria led to a discredited Freemasonry and portrayed the Institution as a dangerously subversive social and political organization. Anti-Masons published and publicized Masonic practices, rituals, grips, and passwords for all degrees, making it difficult to determine who was and who was not a Mason. The broad publicizing of such information also made it more possible for posers to be admitted to lodge meetings and, if inclined, to seek relief in some form. During the anti-Masonic period (about 14 years), Many lodges met infrequently, some surrendered their charters, and many members were lost due to resignations, suspensions, and death. By the early 1840s, the number of members who remained and remembered the work, much less the observant practices integral to Freemasonry were significantly reduced.

During the period, many were no longer eager to join the fraternity, much less be known as a Freemason. As an Institution, the reputation of Freemasonry was on its way to being destroyed in America. The number of Masons in the United States during the acknowledged heyday of the anti-Masonry period, dropped from 100,000 to 40,000. Six of every ten Freemasons left their lodges – many who moved to new towns and states claimed they had never been Freemasons.

New York alone, the center of most anti-Masonic sentiment and the location of The Morgan Affair (Batavia), went from 20,000 members to 3,000 and from 480 lodges to 82. The Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania surrendered its charter in 1834, conveying its property to trustees, and did not reincorporate

¹⁷ Stephen Dafoe, *Morgan: The Scandal That Shook Freemasonry*, Cornerstone, 2014.

until 1859. In Kentucky, the number of lodges dropped from 66 to 37 as membership rolls were cut in half.

Kentucky Past Grand Master Rob Morris conspicuously attempted to minimize the effect of the Morgan Affair on the state, and wrote in his 1859, *History of Freemasonry in Kentucky*, that “Kentucky did not seem to have much enthusiasm for the anti-Masonic politics that followed the disappearance of William Morgan in Batavia, New York, in 1826 and took little official notice of the Morgan Affair. The state took its losses of lodges and members in stride as they weathered the storm.”¹⁸ Illustrating the poor shape that Kentucky Freemasonry was in because of the aftermath of Morgan and in a must more honest moment, Morris also noted that “If the torment had not subsided when it did, within another ten years, the Order in Kentucky would have died out from sheer neglect.”¹⁹

Morris provided valuable insight into the state of Kentucky Freemasonry at the time. Regardless, within ten years of the Morgan Affair, even though experienced lecturers, ritualists, and those who were most knowledgeable about the Craft were long gone, as Kentucky embarked once more on an accelerated expansion, new lodges were chartered at an amazingly fast rate exceeded only by New York.²⁰

In 1843, Kentucky Grand Master Henry Wingate delivered a four-page address. His address was the first time any reference was made to The Morgan Affair in grand lodge records. Wingate never mentioned Morgan or New York. Instead, he spoke to the issue of rapid expansion of membership, stating:

Amidst the perils and privations attendant on the border life of our pioneer fathers, Masonry struck root early, and grew in our fertile soil luxuriantly as the native products of our loamy plains. But that growth was, perhaps, too rank and unpruned for the best interests of the Craft: the entrance was not guarded with proper vigilance. The elevated standard of Masonic morality was, in too many instances, practically lowered. Many of the members were deficient in the very forms of Masonry and seemed not at all to enter into its spirit and real character.

He called the rapid expansion “numerical strength,” but noted it had weakened the Craft’s adhesive principles. He made a strong demand emphasizing the “absolute necessity” of subordinate lodges ensuring that men become “perfect in the lectures of each degree” before they were permitted to advance to higher ones. He warned that “without this too much neglected precaution, our lodges will be filled up with men who do not properly understand, cannot appreciate, and will not do honor to Masonry.”

Perhaps taking a cue from the recently concluded Baltimore Convention, the delegates to the 1843 annual communication of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky approved a resolution that a lodge could elect its officers only while open on the Master Mason degree. Ironically, the resolution was offered and approved just before the adjournment of the Grand Lodge.

¹⁸ Rob Morris, *History of Freemasonry in Kentucky*. 1859.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* (The two positions seem to contradict one another, but students of the writings of Rob Morris often find him attempting to minimize the ravaging effects of the Morgan Affair in Kentucky and struggling to explain the losses of members and lodges during the period. Morris may have believed he had to write something about the Morgan Affair in relation to Kentucky, as there was no reference of mention of the event in the annual proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky from 1827 through 1842.)

²⁰ Dan M. Kemble, *Lodges Chartered in Kentucky, 1827 through 1858*, unpublished paper, William O. Ware Lodge of Research paper, 2021. (Kemble’s research shows that from 12 years after the Morgan Affair (1827) until 1858, Kentucky chartered 221 new lodges).

Interestingly, it was the 11th hour when the Baltimore Convention delegates raised and voted on the resolution that all business should be conducted only when the lodge is open on the Master Mason Degree.

This raises at least two questions worthy of consideration when it comes to this 1843 amendment that required officer elections to be held only when open on the Master Mason Degree. The first is, was the resolution deliberating held to the end of the proceedings in an effort to have it passed without close scrutiny or extended debate by the delegates? If there was some thought that the resolution might not be popular among the delegates present, then holding it until the very end of the convention may have been a strategic plan to secure its passage without a close examination. The second question one wonders if this amendment was passed by the full assembly of delegates or was done in a manner similar to current Grand Lodge practices where the vast majority of the delegates leave, but the Grand Lodge remains open and at labor pending the installation of the new Grand Lodge officers.

These questions lead to the additional questions as to the motive behind the amendment since it came only months after the Baltimore Convention recommendations. Was the election of officers amendment unrelated to the work of the Convention and merely the idea of someone present at the 1843 Annual Communication? Was the amendment an effort to forestall the practice of transacting business only on the third degree as recommended by the Baltimore Convention, or thirdly, was the amendment a preliminary effort to prepare the Craft to ultimately be restricted to conduct all its business on the Master Mason degree?

In 1850, just seven years later, Grand Master James M.S. McCorkle delivered his address to the Craft which appears in the Annual proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky. Proudly, McCorkle proclaimed: “The genius of Masonry had risen again!” That statement was in reference to the aftermath of the Morgan Affair, which he called “a storm, terrible in our annals,” creating the “spirit of desolation” that “spread her blighting influence over us, and many lodges ceased to work.” In fact, a staggering 118 lodges were chartered in Kentucky between 1844 and 1854 when Carroll’s resolution was made, so work had picked up, significantly.²¹ Because of the flood of new lodges and new Masons, possibly attributable to the aftermath of the Mexican War and the spirit of Westward expansion that followed, Carroll’s resolution may possibly have seemed to be a good idea at the time. But why?

Perhaps, it was easier for lodges in rural and isolated communities to muster only 3 men for the transaction of lodge business than be concerned about the necessity of having 7 men present as required by the Entered Apprentice degree. Because of the 1843 amendment mandating that officers only be elected on the MM degree; it could have been also merely to conform the transaction of business to a single degree. The paucity of Grand Lodge records (then, as now) renders it impossible for the modern researcher to determine the actual motivation.

Freemasonry’s comeback, however, was indeed something of which to be proud and McCorkle roused that sentiment in his address, but the rapid proliferation of members and lodges soon began to look exactly like the previous obsession with expansion that took place across the nation around 1800. The overconfident assumption that the second wave of expansion would make up for the lost membership and

²¹ Dan M. Kemble, William O. Ware Loge Research. An unpublished paper: *Rapid Proliferation of Chartered Lodges in Kentucky from 1827-1858*, 2021.

lodges—even at the risk of lacking appropriate oversight and support—was a powerful lure and once again, Freemasonry fell victim to the notion that the success of fraternity could be measured by the number of names on membership rosters.

Adopting the idea that opening and conducting lodge business only on the Master Mason degree which would automatically exclude Entered Apprentices and Fellow Crafts from lodge meetings, seemed to make sense to Masons of the era. Although poorly thought out, perhaps it was their rationale that the new procedure might help to prevent a repeat, at least in part, of what led to The Morgan Affair. If so, then the ghost of William Morgan continues to haunt much of American Freemasonry through this unthinking policy reaction to that long-lasting, regrettable event. Perhaps the recommendation was thought to be a reasonable vehicle through which to address and lessen the problem of men masquerading as Masons who sought some form of relief from the fraternity, as experienced by many lodges in that period. This recommendation coincided neatly with another much more reasonable recommendation from the Convention: the adoption of dues cards as a form of proof a man was a member of the fraternity in good standing — somewhere.

No matter, it is difficult today to see the situation in the same way men of the era did, so their “good idea,” was perhaps a solution at the time, but failing to see the 1843 perceived solution as a liability today, is imprudent. It also tells us that too many in the fraternity today continue to support procedures that have long proven archaic, inefficient, and bereft of initial purpose.

ENTER THE STEAMBOAT CAPTAIN

Dempsey Carroll, a Maysville, Kentucky Mason, may have been moved by Grand Master McCorkel’s attempt to re-galvanize Kentucky Masonry in his 1850 address. Perhaps Carroll was familiar with not only the Baltimore Convention recommendation but had experienced the problem of posers and pretenders approaching his own lodge in Maysville, Kentucky and saw the recommendation as a way to offset the problems. Because of the lack of context reported in Annual Proceedings or addressed or other writings of the period, we may never know for certain.

Carroll’s name is spelled differently in Masonic and community records, which makes it difficult to find a lot of information about the steamboat captain. Nevertheless, we at least know his family was from Westmoreland County, Virginia. His father, Dempsey, was contracted by the Continental Army to provide meat to the soldiers from 1780 to 1783.²² In 1839 records, Dempsey Carroll’s



Dempsey Carroll

*Image provided by
William O. Ware Lodge of Research,
Covington, Kentucky*

²² *My Kindred Families*, Nancy Carrell, <http://mykindred.com/cloud/TX/getperson.php?personID=12892&tree=mykindred01>, accessed October 2019.

profession was noted as “steamboat captain” as was his brother Edward.²³ Carroll married Calestia Bland in 1847.²⁴

By 1851 the thirty-eight-year-old captain had already served as Master of Confidence Lodge 52, in Maysville. He was elected to that position twice. He served as Junior Grand Warden in 1836 and Grand High Priest of the Grand York Rite of Kentucky in 1846. He was also a Trustee of the Masonic College of Kentucky in LaGrange and served as Chair on the Grand Lodge Committee for Lodges Under Dispensation in 1854.

There was no progressive line in the elected grand line chairs when he was elected to what was then called the position of Junior Grand Warden. That position was the only grand line office to which he was ever elected. Regardless, Captain Carroll was clearly engaged in the fraternity at many levels for 20 or more years.

At the 52nd Annual Communication, as representative of his lodge, Dempsey Carroll entered a resolution by way of amendment to the constitution which started the process that led to Kentucky adopting the rule that subordinate lodges could open and do business only on the Master Mason Degree. His resolution read: “That all business of the Subordinate Lodges shall be transacted in the third degree of masonry, except the initiation or passing of candidates.”²⁵

Before Carroll’s resolution was adopted, several changes were made. A brother, identified in the Proceedings only by the last name of Sumerwell, offered the following resolution:

Article 59, also the amendment to the constitution adopted at the last meeting of this Grand Lodge, on page 33 of printed proceedings, and originally proposed by Bro. Carrell [sic], be stricken out, and the following be adopted in lieu thereof: "All business of, the subordinate Lodge shall be transacted in the third degree of masonry, except the ceremony of initiation or passing of candidates, or acting on a charge preferred against an E. A. or F.C. Mason."²⁶

Sumerwell’s resolution was laid over until the next convocation and was taken up in 1854 and rejected. In its place, a resolution was offered by R. G. Stuart that passed. That resolution read:

Resolved, That, the by-laws of this Grand Lodge requiring all business of the Subordinate Lodge's to be transacted in the third degree be so amended as to-authorize the Subordinate Lodges to receive petitions for initiation and ballot on the same in the first degree; and receive and ballot petitions for passing in the second, degree; and that any brother-guilty of an offense shall be tried in his respective degree, and that all other business shall be transacted in the third degree.²⁷

²³ Ohio Valley History, Volume 11, Number 3, Fall 2014, 84.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

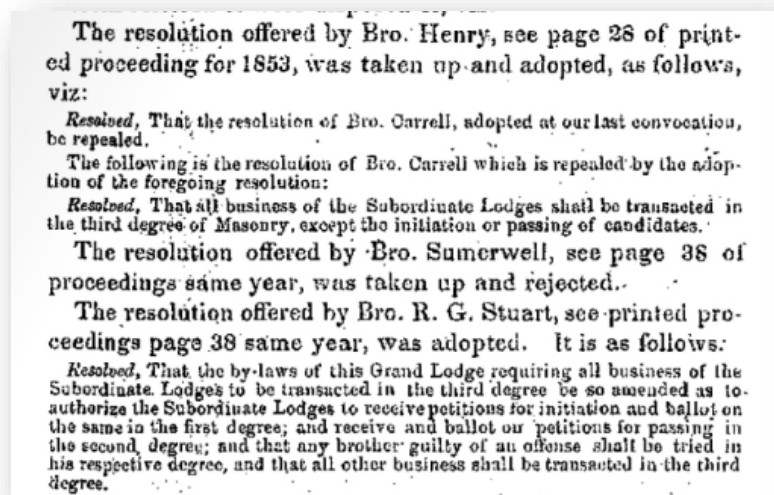
²⁵ Annual Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, 1854,44

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁷ Annual Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, 1854, 44.

Carroll presented one other unrelated amendment to the jurisdiction's constitution in 1854. Aside from the motion itself, there is no other information in the records of the Grand Lodge that offers context as to why he made it. The captain's motion was to strike the article that authorized Past Masters "collectively, one vote."²⁸ The amendment was not passed.

On page 24 of the 1855 Proceedings, we find Carroll's name for the final time in Grand Lodge records. A resolution was adopted posthumously recognizing his service to Freemasonry.



1854 Proceedings, Grand Lodge of Kentucky, 44.

The Grand Secretary was instructed to transmit and copy of the resolution to his family. Carroll died in August 1855 at age forty-four. According to Kentucky Death Records Carroll's death was due to dropsy.²⁹ His wife, Calestia, remained a widow the rest of her life. Their child, Jane, died four years after Carroll.

From 1843 until Carroll's motion in 1854 to adopt the non-binding recommendation of the Baltimore Convention, any member of the Kentucky Craft could have brought a similar resolution to the floor, but no one did. Kentucky was one of the last jurisdictions in the United States to adopt the poorly thought-out recommendation from the Baltimore Convention.

Carroll passed into Kentucky Freemasonry history with the special distinction of being the Mason who, for whatever the reason at that time, initiated the process to adopt a gratuitous, unconstructive rule that merely added to the growing, unbending mindset of a Masonic culture that would advance a rigid devotion to the status quo in years to come.

The fraternity had long been rushing candidates through the degrees and practicing an over-reliance on ritual to provide all the Masonic education many believed was necessary for a man to be made not just a member of the fraternity, but to become a Freemason. The adoption of the Baltimore Convention recommendation slowly strengthened that cultural mindset already feeding the mistaken idea that candidates should be rushed through degrees at the expense of providing more fundamental instruction and education about Freemasonry — including its factual history. Unsurprisingly, once adopted, the new rule began to fuel the widespread, convoluted logic that candidates now needed to be quickly moved through the degrees and raised to the degree of Master Mason so they could attend their lodges that were now required to open on that degree to conduct their business.

²⁸ Annual Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, 1854, 41.

²⁹ Kentucky. *Vital Statistics Original Death Certificates - Microfilm (1911-1964)*. Microfilm rolls #7016130-7041803, Kentucky Department for Libraries and Archives, Frankfort, Kentucky.

Fundamental instruction and Masonic education beyond ritual (never at an all-time high in the 1800s), particularly in the 1840s-1880s, not only failed then, but, in subsequent years to provide enough basic factual history about the fraternity as demonstrated almost eight generations later at a Kentucky Grand Lodge Annual Communication in 2018. During discussion time afforded to those who opposed legislation that would reverse the 1855 rule, a past master stood before the body of the Craft and argued that changing the rule would break with “tradition” — a tradition he said that has been in practice for “1,000 years” in Kentucky Masonry. Although clearly an absurdity, the assertion was considered part of the reason the legislation was ultimately defeated, opening the question of how many of those present believed that conspicuously evidence-troubled assertion.

SINCE DEMPSEY CARROLL'S RESOLUTION

Legislation has been presented in Kentucky seven times since 2002 to repeal the 1855 rule. All seven proposals failed. The earliest found in records was legislation filed in 2002 by Auburn Lodge No. 374.³⁰ Again, there was no record of discussion or context about the legislation included in the Annual Proceedings.

At the Annual Communication in 2017, a proposal came from Elvin Helms Lodge No. 926. The legislation read:

Any subordinate Lodge may, at its discretion, with the consent of a majority of the members present and duly noted in its minutes, elect to conduct all Lodge business on any of the three degrees of Masonry (Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft or Master Mason). Such election shall remain in force until the Lodge, with the consent of a majority of the members present and duly noted in its minutes, shall revoke such election. In all instances, only Master Masons shall have the right to vote. Unless a subordinate Lodge affirmatively acts to elect to conduct its business on the Entered Apprentice Degree or the Fellow Craft Degree, all Lodge business shall be done in a Lodge of Master Masons. The above provisions notwithstanding, conferring Degrees, examination of proficiencies and trials of members shall all be held in a Lodge opened on the Degree corresponding.³¹

³⁰ Auburn Lodge No. 374 submitted legislation in 2003 to allow lodges to conduct routine business in a lodge of Entered Apprentice Masons. The motion to adopt was seconded and rejected. The proposal read: “Section 104. Business. All lodge business shall be done in a lodge of Master Masons, excepting proficiency examinations and approval and work of the first and second degrees or the trial of Entered Apprentices or Fellow Crafts. Amend to read: Section 104. Business. All lodge business shall be done in a lodge of Master Masons, excepting proficiency examinations and approval and work of the first and second degrees or the trial of Entered Apprentices or Fellow Crafts. Upon the recommendations of the Worshipful Master, a Lodge may adopt, by majority vote of its Master Mason members in attendance, an annual resolution to conduct routine lodge business in a lodge of Entered Apprentice Masons. However, only its Master Mason members in attendance can ballot on petitions or cast a vote for an election of officers. SUBMITTED BY: Auburn Lodge No. 374, F.&A.M. I MOVE THAT THIS ITEM LAY OVER. The motion was seconded and rejected. This item will not lay over.” Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, 2003, 228.

³¹ Grand Lodge of Kentucky, Annual Proceedings, 2017.

What made this proposed legislation practical for the times is that it permitted each lodge to make their own decision as to what practice best fits their lodge without imposing restrictions on other lodges who may prefer, for whatever the reason, to open and do business on the Entered Apprentice or Fellow Craft degree.

The legislation laid over for voting in 2018. The vote was 195 (60%) delegates against allowing any lodge the option of a choice, and 135 (40%) were in favor of giving all lodges the option of a choice. The legislation failed to pass, and once again, the Craft in Kentucky declared that it was not prepared to do more than preserve what has become an unworkable practice that had outlived its usefulness — if there ever was a useful purpose. It should be noted, however, that each year the proposal was introduced since 2002, there was a gain of those in favor of the legislation to change the rule.

Notwithstanding the fanciful opinions and the anecdotal, a valid study, or records tracking the effectiveness of Carroll's 164-year-old resolution that all business of subordinate Lodges are transacted in the third degree has proven effective, does not exist. In fact, no such documents can be found anywhere in other jurisdictions where this recommendation of the 1843 Baltimore Convention was adopted.

To believe today that excluding members of the first and second degree from participating in lodge meetings somehow strengthens the fraternity is preposterous. If that exclusion truly strengthens the fraternity in some way, would not the other grand jurisdictions in the rest of the world scurry to change their practices?

Asking those who subscribe to that notion to explain how clinging to the 1855 rule does so, simply boils down to the ever-popular, evidence-troubled and corrosive, mindset: "We've always done it that way." That mindset is true, of course, if one conveniently discards the first 138-year history of organized Freemasonry, counts only from 1855 forward, and is unaware of the context behind the recommendation from the Baltimore Convention.

To believe today that by excluding members of the first and second degree from participating in lodge meetings where business is conducted somehow strengthens the fraternity is preposterous. If that exclusion truly strengthens the fraternity in some way, would not the other grand jurisdictions in the rest of the world scurry to change their practices?

Notwithstanding the fanciful, opinions and the anecdotal, a valid study or records that track the effectiveness of Carroll's 164-year-old resolution that all business of subordinate Lodges are transacted in the third degree has proven effective, does not exist.

In another display of contorted logic, we find the often-given argument: "Why change at all? It only takes a couple of months now to pass through the degrees and be raised a Master Mason — and then a member can attend lodge!" Illustrating and highlighting the extent to which status quo thinking consumes too many members, that reasoning endorses the long-standing problem that stems from over-reliance on ritual to provide all the fundamental Masonic education

necessary to members along with a disturbing lack of factual knowledge about the history of the fraternity.

In the absence of additional formal, trustworthy data that supports the effectiveness of the existing rule or proves additional cause for its repeal, advocates of such a change will have to continue fighting the history of the fraternity surrounding this issue — a history showing we often rely on sentiments rooted in sheer opinion rather than examining the broader issue in weighing what may be best for the good of the Order.

William Morgan, the delegates to the Baltimore Convention, and Dempsey Carroll were all unlikely players in the events that have directed the court of American Freemasonry for nearly 200 years. It is time now to allow them to pass into history. Kentucky Freemasonry, and the balance of American Freemasonry can only benefit from returning to the original intended practice of transaction business in any degree, affording men an adequate amount of instruction and education between degrees and rooting its members in the factual aim and purpose of Freemasonry. To fail to do so perpetuates an idea that long outlived whatever usefulness it once may have had.

POSTSCRIPT

There is one more theory on why Carroll initiated the process that led to Kentucky adopting the 1843 Baltimore Convention recommendation.

At the 1853 Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, the Committee on Lodges Under Dispensation gave their report. They reported that Excelsior Lodge, U.D. in Louisville, Kentucky had failed to report the identity of some officers during their meetings — a mechanical issue. They also noted that the lodge “open on the 3rd degree, and received petitions for initiation and passing, and vote on the same in that degree.” The report went on to note that “All petitions for membership and initiation should be produced in the first degree, and voted upon in that degree.”³²

We have also examined the work and by-laws of Excelsior Lodge, U. D., and find the following errors to-wit: They have failed at several meetings to report a Steward and Tyler and Treasurer. They open the Lodge in the 3d degree, and receive petitions for initiation and passing, and vote on the same in that degree, which work your committee is advised and believe is clearly wrong. All petitions for membership and initiation should be produced in the first degree, and voted upon in that degree; and they have failed to report the degree and the No. of Lodge of visiting brethren. With these exceptions, the balance of their work is well done. The errors above referred to, arose principally from the construction of the amendment to the rules of the Grand Lodge adopted at the last convocation, which, to some, is of dubious import. A charter is asked for. We therefore offer the following resolution, to-wit:

Resolved, That a charter be granted, under the name and style of Excelsior Lodge, No. 258, to be held in the city of Louisville, Kentucky; and that John H. Howe be first Master, Wm. B. Robinson be first Senior Warden, and Harry Reynolds be first Junior Warden thereof.

Annual Proceedings, Grand Lodge of Kentucky, Committee on Lodges Under Dispensation, 1853, 23-24.

This report discloses that the committee acknowledges that “all petitions for membership and initiation should be produced in the first degree,” therefore, it follows that business was done in that degree as well prior to 1853.

Excelsior Lodge was chartered that year and assigned the number 268.

³² Annual Proceedings, Grand Lodge of Kentucky, Committee on Lodges Under Dispensation, 1853, 23-24.

According to the Book of Constitutions, 12th edition in 1995, in 2005 Excelsior consolidated with Compass No.233.

Dempsey Carroll was appointed to the Committee on Lodges Under Dispensation in 1854. He first official act as a committeeman at the Grand Lodge Annual Communication that year was to make his resolution in support of the actions of Excelsior Lodge the year before when they were chastised for opening on the 3rd degree, and receiving petitions for initiation and passing, and then voting on the same in that degree.

It is likely that if for no other reason, Carroll's former officer position in the grand lodge in 1846 and his High Priest position in the York Rite in 1846 he would known about or perhaps even read about the recommendations of the Baltimore Convention and the widely distributed 1843 letter from the Baltimore Convention delegates — the letter calling for members to This "to exercise their powers and cleanse the sanctuary" of "unfaithful Masons, and to "Be true to your principles, and the great moral edifice will stand beautiful and complete. Together, Brethren, be true and faithful."

We will never know how the mechanical sense those recommendations may have appealed to Carroll since no discussion of philosophy of how Carroll's resolution advances the aim and purpose of the fraternity took place in the sparsely worded records of the Grand Lodge.

We are therefore left to logically conclude that much like what we see in this period (and later) is an exclusive focus on the mechanics of the fraternity. And as history shows, when an organization's focus is lost, a focus shifts to rules and regulations.

Like so many Masons of the time, Carroll was a mechanical Mason.