

THE STRENGTH IN FEWNESS TO UNDERSTAND THE PRESENT, STUDY THE PAST—THE FACTUAL PAST

An Excerpt from *Bending Granite: Taking Stock of American Freemasonry*

John W. Bizzack

As noted in the introduction of *Bending Granite*, the collection of writings in this book grew from various projects and presentations made over the past two years. Many carry the same premise but are presented from different angles.

These writings outline how the fabric of Freemasonry is like a patchwork where pieces are missing, others have not worn well, some have been sewn in where they do not exactly fit, and how that has made American Freemasonry more of an ongoing development or an accumulation, rather than a creation. The *idea* of organized Freemasonry cannot be broken, but the Fraternity that surrounds it continues to use the patchwork as if it were the historical and intended purpose of the original idea.

These writings argue against the belief that because membership in the Fraternity has persistently declined since 1959, Freemasonry is dying. Those who put forth that contention merely apply the reversal of the same elementary arithmetic used by Masons in the past who excitedly asserted that Freemasonry was thriving whenever membership levels expanded. The *idea* of Freemasonry is not dying. The *Fraternity*, on the other hand, and the ways and means in which it continues to convey the *idea* of Freemasonry are what we should be concerned with, as it shows every sign of being on its last legs.

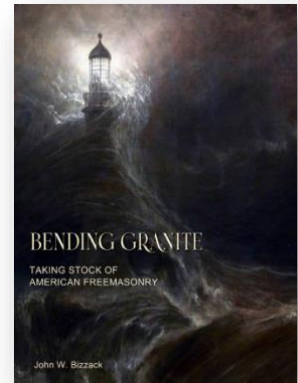
Like many other members, I have often been asked, *What brought you to Freemasonry?* and the common companion question, *What keeps you involved and interested in Freemasonry?* Usually, time and circumstance determine the length and depth of the answers I give. Generally, I keep my response brief and say that what led me to membership was an interest that evolved over time, allowing me to read my way, so to speak, into Freemasonry.

What actually kept me involved and interested was the liberty given to all members to visit Lodges. My career and work allowed me to travel around the state and the country and visit many Lodges, observe disparate practices, engage in deeper discussions about the Craft, its lessons, and their applications, and learn what other members believe Freemasonry is, and what brought them to that belief. Exploring massive Masonic libraries and discovering more about the factual history of the American Fraternity and how it unfolded against the backdrop of an ever-changing, larger, external society sustained my interest.

When time and circumstance permit, I add that had I sought membership earlier in my life, I likely would not have had the patience or interest to be as involved with what I found once I was made a member.

The background and context in those answers are not as brief.

Before I petitioned, in what spare time I had during my work and career-related travels, I often browsed used book and antique stores, trading posts, businesses offering various historical collectibles, and, occasionally, libraries. On one foray in Montana, I discovered a coffee-stained, well-worn, dog-eared copy of a small



pocket-sized book with some missing pages titled *Kentucky Monitor*.¹ Although most of the book was indigestible, it spurred my curiosity. I bought it for less than one dollar.

There were several Masons that I knew through my work. I found it peculiar that they found it difficult to converse about Freemasonry. They were, however, quick to offer me a petition for membership, and that, too, I found peculiar. But this would be only the first of many peculiar things I would discover about Freemasonry, particularly the Fraternity surrounding it.

While in Texas, a 1914 book, *The Builders: A Story and Study Of Masonry*,² came into my possession much the same way I found the book in Montana. Sometime later, I learned about a Kentucky historian of note whose 1933 book, *Masonry in the Bluegrass: 1788-1933*,³ was available at the University of Kentucky's Young Library. I became familiar with that rare work.

Reading these books elevated my interest in Freemasonry, but life, and its many responsibilities at the time, held my interest in check for years. I did, however, continue collecting and reading books about Freemasonry that I ran across.

Dwight L. Smith's, *Goodly Heritage: 150 Years of Craft Freemasonry in Indiana* (1968) led me to Charles Snow Gutherie's *Kentucky Freemasonry 1788 – 1978: The Grand Lodge and the Men Who Made It* (1981). A used copy of Henry W. Coil's *Coil's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* (1961) significantly expanded the scale of my interest. It enabled me to learn more about references and stories found in the other books and provided detailed summaries that explained many things noted in those early and later books that I added to my collection.

While on business in the 1990s in Washington, D.C., I visited and tried to absorb the George Washington Masonic Memorial, then found a copy of Margaret C. Jacob's *Living the Enlightenment: Freemasonry and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (1991), and shortly after that, I obtained a copy of S. Brent Morris's *Radical in the East* (1993). Later, I read Stephen C. Bullock's *Revolutionary Brotherhood* (1996). Each book seeded yet another level of interest, as did Alexander Piatigorsky's *Freemasonry: A Study of a Phenomenon* (1997) and "Colonial Freemasonry," an article published in the *Transactions of the Missouri Lodge of Research (1973-1974)*.

H.L. Haywood's *Symbolical Masonry: An Interpretation of the Three Degrees* (1923), along with Carl Claudy's, *Introduction to Freemasonry* (1946), and W.L. Wilmshurst's, *Meaning of Masonry* (1922),⁴ and almost the entire collection of every monthly issue of *The Builder Magazine* (1915-1928), acquired from an estate sale, made me much more aware of the breadth of the *idea* of Freemasonry. I developed more appreciation for the scope of the idea and historical intent and design of Freemasonry. Considering how it spread worldwide (particularly in the United States), it became clearer that to better comprehend its depth, experiencing it as a member was the next logical step.

My reading and neophyte level of research about Freemasonry up to that point were the steppingstones that led me to petition for membership. Nevertheless, my experiences in the first years following my admittance kept alive the question that I had when I began reading about it: was I missing something, or was something missing?

¹ *Kentucky Monitor, Complete Monitorial Ceremonies of the Blue Lodge*, Arranged by Henry Pirtle, Past Master, Grand Lodge of Kentucky Free and Accepted Masons, 1934.

² Joseph Fort Newton, *The Builders*, Grand Lodge of Iowa, First Printing, 1914.

³ J. Winston Coleman, *Masonry in the Bluegrass: 1788-1933*, Lexington, Kentucky, Transylvania University Press, 1933.

⁴ W.L. Wilmshurst, *The Meaning of Masonry*, P. Lund, Humphries & Co.; W. Rider & Son: London, 1922, H. L. Haywood, *Symbolic Masonry, An Interpretation of the Three Degrees*, New York, George H. Doran Company, 1923, Carl Claudy, *Introduction To Freemasonry*, The Temple Publishers, Washington, D.C. 1946. *The Builder Magazine*, National Masonic Research Society, Iowa 1915-1930.

Centered almost entirely on memorization without insight, the brief degree classes, I would later discover, were as dry and as modestly interesting as the business meetings I was later allowed to attend.⁵ And once permitted to experience the doings of an open Lodge of Master Masons, I found the hodgepodge of announcements, lengthy reports on bills to be paid, and the perfunctory reading of minutes being the core of what I would later discover was a long-standing, trite routine. This surprisingly stale process slowly smothered the early will to make attendance a regular habit. Regardless, I was regularly in attendance, although most evenings were business meetings and announcements and unexceptional. Aside from the opening and closing of the Lodge and occasional ritual work there was little Masonic seasoning.

Just as I had found it years ago, before I was made a member, that many Masons found it difficult to talk about Freemasonry, I found, before I began traveling and visiting other Lodges across the country, that Masons at the Lodge also found it difficult to talk about Freemasonry *with* another Mason. Ultimately, that led me to early friendships with the few in the Lodge interested in discussing Masonry. Those talks, however, were mostly with the most recently made members, who shared similar bewilderment.

My view of the *idea* of Freemasonry remained vibrant; however, my view of the Fraternity was much different from my impression before I was made a member. I recognized that the time I devoted during those pre-membership years to reading and layperson research kept my name from being added to a long list⁶ of those who, after being made a member, never meaningfully participated in or returned to Lodge. While my interest in, curiosity about, and appetite for Freemasonry persisted, my expectation that the Lodge would play a major role in fueling and sustaining it grew disappointingly dim.

My work continued to require regular travel, so I took advantage of every opportunity to visit Lodges in my home state and several Lodges in dozens of other states. I attended other Masonic-related events, gatherings, and conferences held across the country and developed more friendships with new and veteran members in all but a handful of states. While the variance of practices and processes remained peculiar, it did not surprise me as much as the disparity in what many members believed Freemasonry to be.

One of the veteran Masons I met during those travels was Thomas W. Jackson.⁷ Our association led to many long chats, visits, and conversations about Freemasonry, his extensive involvement in the Fraternity, and extraordinary travels to Lodges worldwide.

In one of the first marathon meetings and conversations with Tom, he recommended several books and publications. He arranged introductions to several veteran Masons in other states with whom he believed I should become acquainted (and Masonic organizations - not appendant bodies) in which I might consider membership. As time passed, I became more aware of and familiar with all of Tom's presentations and writings, including the twenty-seven years of his writing book reviews for the Northern Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite magazine, *The Northern Light*.⁸

⁵ Kentucky is one of the 26 jurisdictions in America that has yet to reject the recommendation of the 1843 Baltimore Convention it adopted in 1856 in Kentucky that made it an impropriety to open a lodge and do business on the Entered Apprentice Degree.

⁶ Research Committee, *Characteristics of an Ideal Lodge: Survey Results and Analysis*, October 1, 2019, William O. Ware Lodge of Research, Covington, Kentucky.

⁷ Thomas W. Jackson, 33°, died in 2021. He was known throughout the entire Masonic world. He served for twenty years as the Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, and as the Executive Secretary and Honorary President of the World Conference on Freemasonry. Jackson was one of the most well-traveled Masons of this or any other century and was a powerful advocate for the highest standards in every Masonic jurisdiction. He received countless awards and medals for distinguished service from at least nine Grand Lodges in the United States and nineteen international Grand Lodges, including Yugoslavia, Romania, South Africa and Russia. The *Thomas W. Jackson Award* is presented annually by the Valley of Rochester, New York to recognize individuals who have transformed the message of Freemasonry into an educational inspiration at a state, regional or national level. *The Organization of Masonic Arts* annually presents the Thomas W. Jackson Award for leadership to a worthy, outstanding Grand Master. In 2017, the nation of Brazil even issued a postage stamp in recognition of his service in promoting universal Freemasonry.

⁸ Thomas W. Jackson, *North American Freemasonry: Idealism and Realism*, Plumbstone, 2019, and *Masonic Perspectives: The Thoughts of a Grand Secretary: Collected Articles from the Pennsylvania Freemason*, Plumbstone, 2015.

I recognized my concern about missing something or that something was missing, so Tom offered a suggestion. He acknowledged the advice he was about to give was a paraphrase of Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza, one of the early thinkers of the Enlightenment who came to be considered one of the great rationalists of seventeenth-century philosophy: To understand the present, study the past. That advice set me on a several-year course to do just that.

My travels to Lodges and Masonic-related events and conferences in the United States continued. I became more aware and better informed how organized Freemasonry unfolded across the country against the backdrop of a newly emerging nation as it evolved from century to century. Understanding why so many differences exist from what I found in Masonry versus what I had read began to take shape with that context.

I began to review the history of my Lodge again with that context in mind. That led to other sources and findings that helped explain not only how the character of membership slowly changed but why. Moreover, that review led to the discovery of more writings and information about the history of the Lodge that had been either misplaced over the past two and a quarter centuries or so since the Lodge was chartered, lost through neglect, or destroyed by accident.

CHARTING THE COURSE OF STUDYING THE PAST

The history of the Lodge provided in the degree classes began and stopped at, “This is the oldest Masonic Lodge in the state.” A few older members would reference an extraordinarily condensed summary of the first few pages of J. Winston Coleman’s book that covered the years 1788-1933, refer to an oil painting of the first Master of the Lodge, and then a few particular photos in the Past Master Hall of well-known men like Henry Clay who had served as Master. Often that summary would also incorporate a comment that touted the fact that in the mid-1960s the Lodge membership roster reflected 1,665 names. Asking why, aside from death, that 77 percent of that membership number was no longer on the roster (and continued to decline) met with some responses worthy of consideration, but not all. One veteran member and former Past Master voiced the explanation that “No one really knows.” Many other members were content with that superficial analysis and apparently oblivious that it was one of the reasons.

Asking other veteran members where information about the history of the Lodge after Coleman’s 1933 book might be found proved unproductive. The little more than anecdotes, second, third, and even fourth-hand stories, and remarkably undisguised conjecture about Lodge history also closed the door on the often-suggested labor from others at the time: record interviews with veteran members for an oral history of the Lodge.

It was also suggested by several veteran members that if there was going to be a book written about the history of the Lodge, it should focus on all the “famous” men who, over the decades, were members of the Lodge. The consensus of those making that suggestion was that such a book would tell the “complete” story and, thus, attract more members. Peculiar, though, was how no one making that suggestion said they had sought membership in the Lodge because of a man who was famous and a Mason.

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Contemporary history books about the founding of Lexington and Kentucky mentioned the Lodge; however, the common source for the information cited was Coleman’s 1933 book. Older books about the area’s history that referenced or mentioned the Lodge were the same citations that Coleman occasionally cited as his

sources. There seemed to be no new sources except the Grand Lodge Annual Proceedings since 1933 and a book by another Kentucky Mason published in 1981.

Coleman's work is an important overview of the evolution of Masonry and several Masonic Lodges in Lexington and Central Kentucky, at least until 1933. A veteran writer, Coleman knew how to tell a story. While he did not bog his book down with details, he provided a series of backstories and sidebars about events and happenings. The book reflects the style of the times found in many books by Masons about Masonry in their respective locations. It is easily characterized as a "pat on the back" approach. Some describe such a book as "romantic" writing. Without Coleman's book, a great deal of information would have remained scattered and perhaps unknown.

Charles Snow Guthrie's 1981 book, *Kentucky Freemasonry 1788 – 1978: The Grand Lodge and the Men Who Made It*, could be considered a "follow-up" to Coleman's work. Although a very interesting read, Guthrie's work, published forty-eight years after Coleman's, offered very little about the history of my Lodge that was not already covered in Coleman's book. Fittingly, Coleman wrote the introduction for Guthrie's work. While valuable for context, Guthrie's book was not helpful for the research I wished to perform. His book, like Coleman's, was not in the closet-like room that passed for a library at the Lodge.

It was Guthrie's book, however, that re-queued one of my earliest questions about the Fraternity that was puzzling and would later offer many considerations for exploration about why membership and interest in the Fraternity so steadily declined since 1959. That decline had become a free fall by the time I became a member.

Guthrie addressed specific historical eras in Kentucky Freemasonry, provided biographical sketches of several of the men who influenced the course of Freemasonry in Kentucky, and drew heavily from the Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky. Written at a time when Kentucky had already experienced two decades of steady membership decline, Guthrie, while attributing many losses to death, nonpayment of dues, and suspensions that exceeded those admitted in those decades, noted that while many were initiated [in Kentucky], they rarely attended or took part in Masonic activities. He wrote that religious prejudice kept some out and pushed others away. It was also asserted that television, sports events, the host of service clubs, and the fast pace of modern urban life consumed the time and energy that in *slower times* [undefined] were devoted to the Lodge.

Although a few Masons in the United States in the 1970s had already written about what Guthrie credited as the cause of the declining membership, his view restated the model of what would be most commonly expressed by Masons when trying to explain why fewer men were interested in Freemasonry than in the previous forty years. The theme became more firmly entrenched throughout most of the American Fraternity after Robert Putnam's book, *Bowling Alone*, published in 2000, further cemented the explanation Guthrie cited in 1981. Putnam's book was about the social behavior of the era, not specifically Freemasonry; however, since Freemasonry was among the many organizations described in his findings, it was easily adopted as an explanation often used by the Fraternity about what was going on in American Freemasonry as a reason for declining interest and membership.

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While there is no dispute with Guthrie's or Putnam's analyses, accepting them as the only reasons for the decline in public interest in Freemasonry without looking inward is a convenient oversimplification. The Fraternity sang the Guthrie chorus until Putnam's book was published. The chorus grew louder to the extent

that it drowned out the consideration that the culture of the Fraternity shared any of the responsibility for the decline of membership and increasing lack of public interest in Freemasonry since the 1960s.

Ignored by both books is that the explanation does not consider that the Fraternity's official records tell us the vast percentage of members have never regularly attended or taken part in Masonic activities, even in a time when there was no television, explosion of sports events, hosts of service clubs, overwhelming religious prejudices, or the fast pace of urban life. In fact, since around the middle of the 1800s, many members claimed that they did not have time for Freemasonry *before* they were admitted⁹ and that *belonging* to the Fraternity was considered more important than participating in it well before the 1950s. Accepting Guthrie's and Putnam's theories as the *only* reasons for the inability of the Fraternity to sustain high membership levels and attract more members and for the loss of social capital diminishing public interest in Freemasonry without looking inward is an imprudent reach that tells only half the story.

Peculiar to this circumstance is that self-reflection—*knowing thyself*—a fundamental aspect of Masonic philosophy and lessons could hardly be said to have been regularly, much less uniformly, at the forefront of the Fraternity. Official records clearly show that for more than a mere couple of generations, the primary business of the Lodge cannot be said to have been the exploration of Freemasonry. Had what the Fraternity

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preaches, as it were, been applied and practiced by the management and administration of the organization at all levels, there would likely have been many more members who recognized, then and now, that the Fraternity does have to share responsibility for its membership decline. Allowing the expansion of the unbridled membership from 1943 through 1959 also made Freemasonry peripheral in the public eye.

What has to be considered is whether the intoxicating glee of the Fraternity and its

leadership, at having had so many men at once seek Freemasonry from 1943 through 1959, eclipsed the foresight as to what would happen when so many men were admitted with no more instruction than had been given in most Lodges over past generations.

For example, the Lodge declared with excitement in its 1946 minutes that a "class" of twenty-four men were initiated together in one night. That was the largest group initiated into the Lodge at one time in the memory of those present. Examining later records found that only seven of that "class" went on to be raised to Master Mason.¹⁰ As the heyday of the long lines seeking admittance continued, the Lodge minutes regularly reflected there were called meetings on Saturdays to confer degrees. Two stated meetings a month were not enough to keep up with the business of swelling the ranks. Twelve to fourteen candidates would be initiated or passed on to other degrees.¹¹ The time between degrees averaged thirty-five days.

⁹ Charles W. Moore, "Application and Lethargy Contrasted," *The Masonic Review*, 22, Cincinnati, C. Moore, 1860.

¹⁰ *A Summarizing History of Lexington Lodge No. 1: 1788-2018, Showing the Spirit of the Work of the Oldest Masonic Lodge in Kentucky for the past 230 Years*, John W. Bizzack, Editor and Chair, Preservation Committee, Lexington Lodge No. 1, BSF Foundation, 2018

¹¹ *IBID.*

But since the Lodge (and other Lodges around the nation at the time) already presumed that ritual alone offered enough instruction and Masonic education, what possible concerns could they have had that the practice would both at the time and later affect retention? Again, records reflect that nothing had changed in the Fraternity even after another generation of steady decline and the constant inability to attract enough members to offset it, exacerbated by the continued fading of Freemasonry from the public eye. Despite this reality, 64 percent of Masons still believed the current practices of their Lodge reflected the best ways to convey and practice Freemasonry¹² — the same practices in place before and since the unbridled membership expansion from 1943-1959.

As pointed out by Putnam, the decline in social capital since the 1950s blended with decades of society's withdrawal from the long-accepted values of the Age of Enlightenment — an Age upon which Freemasonry was formally founded and organized. The effect of the decline continues to ripple. It is even more of an issue that faces the Fraternity in the twenty-first century.

To increase membership numbers in the 1980s, the Fraternity lowered the qualifications for admittance. Practices and protocol remained casual, and what little emphasis had previously been in place on instruction and education beyond ritual did not improve. Despite the lower standards and persistent casual air in many Lodges that was actually thought by some at the time to serve as a lure to candidates, public interest only continued to decline, as did membership.

Careful reasoning suggests that Freemasonry has played a significant role in its diminution. This is certainly an instance where the Fraternity could take a hardy dose of its own medicine and look harder than ever at the internal instead of the external.

If a finger of blame about decline is pointed at the Fraternity's leadership, which has been done in both the past and present, it would be wise to remember that all elected and appointed leaders come from the ranks of the Lodge culture and that such culture is the only source from which Grand Lodge leadership emerges. So, is not the quality of output (those to ascending into leadership) directly related to, and determined by, the quality of the input? Can the Fraternity be immune from the effects of depreciating its culture? If so, there has not been an explanation for why there is such immunity, except from those who offer an unsupported opinion.

After finding and reviewing the other four primary sources that Guthrie cited in his book,¹³ it followed that to identify additional past and, perhaps, contemporary reasons for the current culture of the Lodge, a study of Lodge minutes and official attendance and visitor registries would be the obvious next step in the research.

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¹² *Characteristics of an Ideal Lodge: Survey Results and Analysis*, October 1, 2019, William O. Ware Lodge of Research, Covington, Kentucky.

¹³ H.B. Grant, *Doings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, 1800-1900*, Masonic Home Books and Job Office, 1900, and *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky: October 1800-1814*, Masonic Homes Journal Print, Louisville, 1814, *History of Freemasonry in Kentucky, 1800-1900*, Masonic Homes Journal Print, Louisville, 1900, and Rob Morris, *History of Freemasonry in Kentucky*, 1859, Morris, Louisville.

Although it proved the logical starting point, the time and effort to locate over twenty decades of Lodge minutes began to reveal as much about past and current Lodge cultures as did the review of many years of minutes and other records. Once, that is, they were found.

THE NEGLECT OF UNMINED DATA

Getting a key to the Lodge attic and storage rooms proved a productive part of the search for the history of the Lodge beyond Coleman's and Guthrie's works. The hours of searching through boxes of inventoried materials, which ultimately led to the attic storage of another local Lodge, proved useful in locating attendance registers and several library books once in the collection of the Lodge before 1988.¹⁴ The search also yielded two very important publications that no then current member of the Lodge knew existed.

In an attendance register that belonged to Lexington Lodge and was discovered in the storage attic of another city Lodge, a notation referred to a particular page in a 1912 bank account ledger. That ledger had already been found in the attic of Lexington Lodge. Checking that page later revealed a small envelope. Inside was a six-by-three-inch, hardbound book published by the Lodge titled *Lexington Lodge No. 1 By-Laws: 1788-1904*.¹⁵ In that book was a special section titled *History*. Information from that book did not appear in any previous writings about the Lodge.

A visit and search for records related to the Lodge at university libraries¹⁶ produced yet another surprising find: a 1913 book whose existence was unknown to anyone in the Lodge.¹⁷ The Lodge published one-thousand copies of the book in 1913. The book is titled, *A Concise History of Lexington Lodge No. 1, F. & A.M., 1788-1913, Showing, Without Rhetorical Fog, The Spirit Of The Work In Lexington For The Past Century And A Quarter*. Strangely, considering the wealth of information about the founding and history of the Lodge from 1788-1913, the book was not cited as a source in Coleman's or Guthrie's books.

In the 1913 book, a name was found of a charter member who was not reported in any other Lodge records known at the time. This person's influence was later determined to be why the Lodge was chartered in 1788. Subsequent inquiry revealed that John Belli was a spy sent to Kentucky following the American Revolution by Secretary of War Henry Knox. Belli remained in that position in the territory, and later state, through both of George Washington's two presidential terms. Uncovering his activities and involvement in Kentucky and discovering the previously unknown reasons for the 1788 chartering of the first Lodge in Kentucky shed an entirely new light on how and why Freemasonry came to Kentucky that year.¹⁸ This new information reshaped the story about the founding of the Lodge in 1788—no part of which was apparently known to Coleman or Guthrie nor Past Grand Master Rob Morris, who wrote the first history of Freemasonry in Kentucky in 1859.¹⁹ Additionally, the 1913 book provided biographical information about many of the early Masters of the Lodge who were also founders of Lexington, played roles in the conventions that led to

¹⁴ Lexington Lodge No. 1 had shared a facility with another Lodge and appendant bodies from 1914-1988. When the building was sold, both lodges moved another shared location where some belongings were stored. No. 1 moved three more times before 2006 and many stored items were not retrieved from the 1988 move.

¹⁵ John W. Lancaster, *Lexington Lodge No. 1 By Laws: 1788-1904*. "History" section, Press of McClure & Bronston 1904.

¹⁶ Special Collections Research Center, Margaret I. King Library, University of Kentucky.

¹⁷ J.W. Norwood, *A Concise History of Lexington Lodge No. 1, F. & A.M., 1788-1913, Showing, Without Rhetorical Fog, The Spirit Of The Work In Lexington For The Past Century And A Quarter* (Published By Order And Authority Of The Lodge), 1913, (upon learning that the Lodge did not have a copy of Norwood's book, Kentucky Past Grand Master Carroll Curtis (1969-1970) made a copy of a surviving original in his personal library and donated the copy to Lexington Lodge No. 1. Today, only four of these books are known to exist).

¹⁸ John W. Bizzack, "The Enigmatic Life of Major John Belli: Merchant, Solider, Spy and Freemason" *The Rubicon Masonic Society Transactions*, Vol. I 2022 (First appearing in *How and Why Freemasonry Came to Kentucky*, Autumn House Publishing 2014, John W. Bizzack, and *Notable Men in Kentucky Who Happened to be Freemasons*, BSF Foundation, John W. Bizzack and Dan M. Kemble, 2019).

¹⁹ Rob Morris, *The History of Freemasonry in Kentucky and Its Relations to the Symbolic Degrees*, Louisville, Kentucky, 1859.

Kentucky statehood and held high offices in the first decades of America's history. Their early images and photographs were preserved in that book.

The fact that all of this information had been in storage since 1988 but was not known to exist by Lodge members did not portray well the Lodge's commitment to preserving Masonic relicts left in its care by previous generations.

The title of the 1903 book, *By-Laws of Lexington Lodge No. 1: 1788-1904* that was found in the old bank account ledger was misleading since it contained only the by-laws of 1904. Although it also had several pages of previously unknown history about the Lodge, it was a passage on the first page of the booklet written by John W. Lancaster, who served forty years as Secretary, that provided yet another bit of irony.

He called the Minute Books the "The Foundation of a Lodge History." The entire passage is:

The foundation of a Lodge history is the Minute Book, but careful inquiry seems to show that the Minute Books embracing a period have been lost, some destroyed by fire, some by the looting of soldiers, and others perhaps through neglect—a deplorable state of affairs which ought to suggest to every loyal brother the necessity for having a safe place in which to preserve all records worthy of the notice of the generations yet to be born.²⁰

The irony is that Lancaster called the neglect associated with lost Minute Books a "deplorable state of affairs" and that "every loyal brother" should see the necessity for preserving all worthy records for future generations. He may have rolled over in his grave when it was determined 109 years later that the vast majority of Minute Books (and other records) were not destroyed by fire and soldiers as he notes but lost through neglect and thought to be long gone by the prevailing members, their leadership, and the leadership of the Lodge in years past.

Several years of minutes and other Masonic records had, in fact, been destroyed in an 1837 fire that burned the Lodge facility to the ground: and the records of later years were destroyed as a result of the ransacking of the Lodge by Union soldiers during the Civil War. Disheartening, though, was finding that the records for many years were missing because of negligence and carelessness on the part of members and leaders to properly preserve them during the almost a dozen physical moves of the Lodge since the Civil War.

However, years of minutes, registries, and other records were eventually found after a months-long search in and outside the Lodge. Some were in fair to good condition for their age and considering how they had been stored. Others were definitely not.

Some were buried in the bottom drawers of a desk in the unused, makeshift storeroom pretending to be the secretary's office. Others were found in the back of already overpacked kitchen cabinets, in non-inventoried storage closets, in a broken file cabinet located in the attic of another Lodge in the city, stored in musty, water-damaged boxes in the attic of the Lodge. A few years of minutes from the mid to late 1800s were in a safe that had not been accurately inventoried since 1988. Also found in that safe was the original 1788 charter issued by the Grand Lodge of Virginia, which was believed, at least since the mid-1990s, to also be lost.

As the search continued, more years of minutes, registers, old photographs, and other papers and documents were found in the possession of Past Masters and secretaries at their homes. Six years of minutes were in the possession of a member who had demitted. Eventually, the five-month search accounted for all but thirty-five years of the over 3,000 stated and called communications since 1788 and provided, as anticipated, a trove of previously unknown and unmined data.

²⁰ Lancaster.

The necessity of such an extensive search to locate these historical records said as much about the culture of the Lodge over the years as what was found in the minutes revealed about the level of life and care of the Lodge.

The six-month review of every page of the recovered records, combined with other findings, established the insight necessary to identify not only different cultures in the Lodge since 1788 but also why the generational cultures ebbed and flowed as they had.

The comprehensive review led to the compilation that summarized the Lodge's history, using all the material that covered the years 1788-2018. The summary was published in January 2019.²¹

The summary was augmented with articles from past local newspaper accounts, materials in public and local university libraries, documents and writings at the Kentucky Historical Society, and personal files and records of past members who donated their collections to university libraries. The Annual Returns of the Lodge, all published in the Grand Lodge Annual Proceedings, *The Masonic Home Journal* (the official organ of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky), along with the addition of the two other valuable books that were not known to exist before the search for the missing and lost minutes began, filled in many blanks in the history of the Lodge. The 2019 summary provided a microcosmic view that more clearly explained what had happened in and to the Lodge over its 231-year history. Moreover, light was shed as to why it happened. The model was compared against reported factual histories of how Masonry spread and unfolded in other jurisdictions. The variance was insignificant.

During the search for Lodge minutes, it was determined that the Lodge did not have even a modest inventory of its property, gifts made to the Lodge, and other belongings. However, nowhere was the absence of an inventory more evident than in the library relegated to a storage closet in a relatively new facility in 2006.

It was said that over 1,500 books were reported to have filled multiple bookcases at the Lodge in the years before the 1988 sale of its building. If accurate, the vast majority of that collection had vanished by 2011—a collection that once reportedly held valuable Masonic writings and artifacts. One particular relic was a red waist sash, reportedly given to Lexington Lodge No. 1, that was worn by Marquis de Lafayette in 1825 during his visit to Lexington and the Lodge for a banquet while on his highly acclaimed, twenty-four-state tour of America.

Only seventy-three books of that reported original collection remained. Most were copies of the Annual Proceedings of the Jurisdictions of Kentucky, Missouri, and West Virginia, and a few copies of the history of the Grand Commandries of Knights Templar of Kentucky and other states. There were publications from the 1960s and 1970s from the Missouri Lodge of Research, three sets of *Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, some lesser-known Masonic books from the 1950s through the 1960s, and stacks of clippings and pages from publications from Lodges in Kentucky and surrounding states. The materials included books about Lexington

He may have rolled over in his grave when it was determined 109 years later that the vast majority of Minute Books (and other records) were not destroyed by fire and soldiers he notes, but lost through neglect, and thought to be long-gone by the then current members and leadership of the Lodge.

²¹ *A Summarizing History of Lexington Lodge No. 1: 1788-2018, Showing the Spirit of the Work of the Oldest Masonic Lodge in Kentucky for the past 230 Years*, John W. Bizzack, Editor and Chair, Preservation Committee, Lexington Lodge No. 1, BSF Foundation, 2018 (All minutes were handwritten until 1924 when the lodge acquired its first typewriter). Because of the historical connection of the Lodge to the state and formation of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky in 1800, all of the materials collected, including the 2018 summary publication, was, upon unanimous approval of the lodge, donated to the Department of Special Collections, University of Kentucky, Margret I. King Library, for future generations and proper preservation.

and the Civil War and “famous Masons.” Among the few relics collected and preserved were three late nineteenth-century hand-painted aprons, Masonic ashtrays, expired stock certificates, picture frames, and some rotting degree team costumes. One item of particular note was a nineteenth-century, thirty-inch casting of statesman and 1820 Master of the Lodge, and later that same year, Grand Master Henry Clay was in deteriorating condition and possessing a broken arm.²² The veteran member who returned the casting to the Lodge sadly reported that he had salvaged the statue after it had been thrown away by members who were moving items that had been in storage since one of the Lodge’s three moves since 1988. The casting was restored and is now prominently displayed at the current Lodge.

In the first quarter of the 20th century, American Freemasonry continued to reel from the influence of the Age of Fraternalism that started in the latter decades of the previous century.²³ The drive to transform Masonry from temple to club, emphasizing socializing key functions, mirrored the cultural transformations outside the temple. The character and nature of Freemasonry markedly and significantly changed at the hands of many men of varying minds, skills, and talents. Just as Secretary Lancaster wrote in the 1904 six-by-three-inch booklet that was found stuck in a bank ledger book, one would find the real history of a Masonic Lodge in its minutes. As it turns out, even the absence of minutes tells the story.

STRENGTH IN FEWNESS

As the twenty-first century moved into its fourteenth year, sixty-four men had been admitted and raised as Master Masons since 2006. Although 42 percent of that group faded away or were suspended for nonpayment of dues, several had become officers and were among the most actively involved and engaged members of the Lodge.

Most of those who regularly participated in the life and care of the Lodge slowly led many initiatives and new practices that were introduced first as pilots and then gradually adopted following unanimous approval through motions made at stated communications.²⁴

By the end of the second decade of the twenty-first century, a new Lodge culture emerged that began striving to consistently provide what the majority of its regularly active and engaged members sought in their collective and individual Masonic journeys — a practice that continues through today.

But what about members who were not active and engaged in the life and care of the Lodge beyond paying their annual dues, which was then, and remains, the vast majority of members?

²² Henry Clay was Master of Lexington Lodge No. 1 for six months in 1820, which was the standard practice at the time. Later in the year he was elected Grand Master of Kentucky. The casting of the statue was one of many produced in the era and was manufactured in Cincinnati, Ohio. The Thomas Ball bronze casting of Clay (1858) was likely the model for this plaster casting.

²³ Lynn Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880-1930*, Princeton, NJ, Princeton Univ. Press, 1984.

²⁴ Structured Degree Program that ended the rushing of members through degrees and provided more extensive instruction during their journey through the degrees; dues were raised; education presentations were scheduled at each stated communication when there was no degree or related work scheduled; a consent agenda was used at each stated communication; casual attire at meeting disappeared although no directive was issued to do so; committees were restructured; investment funds were completely overhauled and reinvested; the progressive line practice was abolished and officers were elected and appointed on merit; an interactive website and lodge app were created; festive boards reintroduced, a modest library established that has since quadrupled the size of its collection; historical records were achieved with a local university; a formal program to affiliate with well-known, long-established community relief organizations was adopted; new by-laws that had not been revised since 1980 were adopted; a five-year plan was unanimously approved and adopted and extended another five years before the first one expired, incoming Masters were required to produce and publish a Master’s Plan for his term; much of the physical plant was upgraded and enhanced; the Lodge sought relief from property taxes and was awarded that relief based on the community service plan it had adopted, the Lodge hosted two national Masonic conferences drawing from jurisdictions throughout the United States, and spawned the nationally known and now 501(c)(3) organization, The Rubicon Masonic Society. A dozen or more other significant constructive changes in practices continue today and literally changed not only the Masonic culture of Lexington Lodge No. 1 but the standard of life and care of the Lodge.

Those members were kept informed of Lodge happenings, their direction, and, of course, meetings and events through letters, a newsletter supplemented by an app for Lodge members, and were further kept informed by a new, interactive Lodge website. Only a handful of those members considered “inactive” would occasionally attend Lodge or an event during this period. Far fewer than a handful continued to return or involve themselves other than as an occasional spectator.

In 2016, a group of Past Masters who were once curators of what was also slowly becoming the past culture of the Lodge (along with other members of that and the current culture) were invited to a non-tyled meeting where several proposals were presented that, if passed, would eliminate specific practices that were long-determined to be ineffective and cost prohibitive. These were to be discussed before a formal proposal was made before the body of the Lodge to abolish them.

After hearing the proposals, several Past Masters voiced their position that the current Officer Corps and members were responsible, and accordingly bound, to maintain the practices and keep the Lodge exactly as they found it.

Their position was discussed and considered during the remainder of the non-tyled meeting, of course, however, with only feelings and opinions to support their position, and since no proposal involved changing anything regarding ritual, tenets, philosophies, by-laws, or was outside the constitution of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, their position, as expressed, was unconvincing. The meeting was congenial, and courtesy was extended to all who attended. Each was personally invited by the Master to attend the next stated communication where the proposals would be presented to the body of the Craft.

At that stated communication, none of the invited attendees to that non-tyled meeting were present. The proposals were presented and adopted, marking that year as the end of an already waning shadow of the previous Lodge culture.

Several lessons came from this and earlier experiences in those years of slow culture change.

While a Lodge culture can change, it cannot and should not change abruptly without reasonable efforts to discuss changes with those interested before making them. Additionally, and importantly, Lodge culture cannot change without the necessary commitment of time and labor by the active and involved members in the Lodge, effective leadership, and the research to support changes that also effectually support the further shaping of the emerging culture in subsequent years.

With regard to leadership in the Fraternity, we find repeated calls for membership to assume more responsibility, to consider each year before and during elections "who among us can best work and best agree" and whether those elected, or appointed, are truly the best members to lead a Lodge. Those who would be capable of building bridges between factions and, if necessary, of saying things that others do not want to hear and who will assume a leadership role, particularly when the Lodge is in need, require courage, tactful diplomacy, and well-grounded working knowledge of not only our rules but our factual history.²⁵

Any effort to renew a Lodge takes time, patience, and perseverance. Those things became the agreed-upon prescription for what was expected of future leaders at the Lodge. By 2017, that consensus led the Lodge to abolish the fifteen-decade steady practice of seating its leaders under the progressive line process. The recommendation was unanimously approved, as was a later 2019 motion that extended the existing 2016 five-year plan for the Lodge.

²⁵ Jordan Yelinek, “New and Renewed Lodges: Re-Imaging Lodge Renewal And Growth For a Greater Fraternity,” *The Journal of the Masonic Society*, Issue No. 32, Spring 2016. (Yelinek is, at the time was Director of Lodge Development and Training for the Grand lodge of California, PM of and the current secretary at Prometheus Lodge 851 in San-Francisco)

A presentation at the XIV World Conference of Regular Masonic Grand Lodges tells us that in an assessment of the historical growth of the Craft, the decline in membership and Lodges could be attributed to what was called a *natural cycle* the Fraternity has experienced throughout its history.²⁶ While the *usualness* of such a cycle is easy to see, what might make it “natural” remains debatable. Importantly, that presentation also encouraged Grand Lodges to stop making more and more programs to “rescue subordinate Lodges, but rather to look at their unique situations and empower and encourage individual Lodges to make the changes they need to thrive.”²⁷ The presenter went on to say that “As long as they [Lodges] don’t alter the ritual or the landmarks, they’re [changes] open for discussion” and that “different practices within those boundaries are all [usually] things that Masons have done in the past!”²⁸

In looking at the ‘naturalness’ of the cycle referred to in the presentation, we find that the average age of those inactive members at the Lodge ranged from 21 to 85, and thirty-seven of those inactive members have been admitted since 2006. This suggests that no matter the Lodge's offerings, culture, or condition, interest in the Lodge and Freemasonry as it was provided reflected a level of participation that was little more than transient and provisional.

That consideration led to the question whether it makes any difference what a Lodge does or does not do that affects its members' interest and active involvement. Insight into that question was found, once again, in past records.

No records tell us the exact size of any of the Lodge rooms in any of the first six buildings the Lodge occupied from 1788 through 1913. However, what is known is the size of each building in which the Lodge rooms were located. When considering the size of those facilities and combining the findings in minutes and attendance registries, we find an answer to the question about the mindset of generations regarding quantity.

Even when the new facility was completed in 2006, only 88 seats were available for 473 members. The question this brings up is why a lodge would admit more members than it could possibly accommodate.

The membership roster in 1798 shows sixty-five members. The average membership from 1800-1825 was fifty-three. The average membership from 1826-1859 was thirty-eight. The average from 1860-1899 was fifty-four. From 1900-1926 that average increased to 283. From 1927-1947 membership averaged 732. From 1945-1960 that average was 1,023. From 1961-1979 it was 1,328. And from 1980-1999, it was 502. From 2000-2018, the membership average was 340.²⁹

It was not until 1914 that the Lodge had a building with a large enough space to accommodate a Lodge room that could possibly seat more than sixty attendees. The average membership in that period, however, was 732.

The next three Lodge rooms occupied by the Lodge after that building was sold in 1988 were located in other Lodges in the city, which were limited in seating to only about seventy-five attendees. The *average* membership of the Lodge in that period was 896. The high point of membership was in 1963 (1,665). At that time, the Lodge was meeting in rooms that would normally seat and accommodate around seventy-five attendees.

²⁶ David Cameron, “Quality vs. Quantity: Membership Standards in the 21st Century, XIV World Conference of Regular Masonic Grand Lodges, San Francisco, 2015.

²⁷ *IBID.*

²⁸ *IBID.*

²⁹ *A Summarizing History of Lexington Lodge No. 1: 1788-2018, Showing the Spirit of the Work of the Oldest Masonic Lodge in Kentucky for the past 230 Years*, John W. Bizzack, Editor and Chair, Preservation Committee, Lexington Lodge No. 1, BSF Foundation, 2018

When the new facility was completed in 2006, and membership stood at 473, the Lodge room was designed with only eighty-eight seats and a dining room with an 80-person seating capacity.

Examination of the Annual Returns of reported membership to the Grand Lodge, Attendance Registries that were salvaged from 1800 forward, along with the minutes recovered, established that even when membership was small, all members had never attended Lodge meetings at the same time. Likewise, when membership was high, most members never attended simultaneously.

The records reflect that since at least the last two decades of the 1800s, the Lodge has never assembled its laborers nor designed the two new facilities to accommodate the participation or attendance of more than an average of 5 percent of its members.

The question of why a Lodge would admit more members than could be accommodated may have more than one answer. *One*, leaders at any given time had learned from experience that no matter the number of members reflected on the roster, only a handful would participate in the life and care of the Lodge (which should pose the question, why?) *Two*, that the mindset of the Fraternity believed that membership, even without participation beyond admittance, made men better and expanded the network of Masons throughout the community. *Three*, the more members a Lodge could claim, the more successful the Lodge appeared to be. And *four*, the more members, the larger the treasury, regardless of active participation.

The records reflect that since at least the last two decades of the 1800s, the Lodge has never assembled for its labors nor designed its own new facility to accommodate the participation or attendance of more than an average of five percent of its members.

Supporting the findings of the space-made-available-compared-to-the-level-of-membership analysis, the Attendance Registries substantiate the meager participation of members in the life and care of their Lodge.³⁰

In over twenty decades (225 years) of Lodge records collected and known to exist, the attendance of active and engaged members was never found to be higher than an average of 3-5 percent of the membership and, more often than not, that percentage was found to be the same members for a twelve-to-eighteen-year period before their names faded from the rolls and were replaced by another 3-5 percent.

While this is a lower average, it corresponds with the findings of a much more extensive study that was done nearly forty years earlier. In 1984, it was determined that a Lodge in California had experienced significant

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growth. Interestingly, studying Tyler's Register of that Lodge determined trends from Lodge size and attendance. When that Lodge had approximately 100 members, about 20 percent would attend meetings. When it grew to 150-300 members, about 10 percent would attend. Finally, when it grew beyond 300 members, only about 4.5 percent would attend. The

³⁰ The earliest surviving official record of Lodge membership (1798) reported forty-five total members and found in the library of the Grand Lodge of Virginia where Annual Returns were made at that time. The highest membership count (1,665) was reported to the Grand Lodge of Kentucky in 1963 as documented in the Annual Proceeding. Although attendance records for the first eleven years (1778-1799) have never been recovered, later Annual Returns, early and later newspaper reports, Attendance Registers, minutes, and writings of members, tell the story of attendance rates.

attendance figure remained consistent even when expanded to some 1,200 members.³¹

This 1984 study was of an active Lodge during the first decades of the twentieth century, a period of unbridled expansion of membership in America, so it is quite clear that the Fraternity in the early years of the 1900s experienced the same troubling attendance problems as Lodges did in the second unbridled membership expansion in that century (1943-1959). That study has been available to the leaders and members of the Fraternity for the past forty-four years.

If the goal of the Fraternity was ever to get more men to participate in their Lodges, ensuring Lodges remained small in membership would have been the logical and carefully reasoned first step. There are Masons today who see this as common sense. No matter, rapid and unbridled expansion of membership was an egregious mistake by the generations of leaders and members during the second explosion of membership of that same century, and one that would continue to change the character of the membership and affect the understanding of Freemasonry through today.

Were leaders and members aware of the 1984 study during the second explosion? Some may have been, but clearly, not enough of the decision-makers could bring to it the attention of the body of the Craft in all jurisdictions, which may have done something about it. But then again, since at least a generation before 1875, we also know that Masons were not widely known to read much about Freemasonry, their Fraternity, and certainly factual history.³²

By the year the study was available, the damage of the second sixteen-year rapid influx of members in the 1900s had already started taking its toll. We will never know how things might be today in American Freemasonry had there been enough Masons in the latter half of the twentieth century who had bothered to read this 1984 study or had studied parts of the factual past.

One exception existed in the study of Lexington Lodge No. 1's attendance and participation records for the 1960s when attendance averaged higher than in other decades. In that decade, membership peaked at 1,665, and the average attendance was forty-seven. That number, however, is skewed by the number of ritual meetings where the candidates were counted as attendees and the visiting degree teams that conferred some or all parts of degrees (often as many as an additional twelve or more men) who were not all members of the Lodge but were counted as if they were.

Since 2015, the average attendance has been between 10 and 20 percent, depending on the season and pre-announced agenda. The majority of that average are regularly active, involved, and engaged members. This percentage represents around twenty-two of the most familiar faces in and to the Lodge. These are the early members and those admitted since 2011 who now sustain and build on the work that ultimately changed the culture of the Lodge.

In the long history of Lexington Lodge No. 1, the most active and involved members have always determined the course for their Lodge, and it has customarily been a small percentage of the overall membership that has accomplished that. This gives considerable credence to the fact that there is *strength in fewness*, no matter what the culture perceives as Freemasonry and practices.

Nothing in the factual history of American Freemasons shows that a Lodge can exceed the aggregate average ability of its members. The higher the membership, the lower the aggregate average ability seems. The lower the ability, the higher the costs of unmooring from the historical design and idea of Freemasonry by the Fraternity surrounding it.

³¹ Yelinek (source, Lynn Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880-1930*, Princeton University Press, 1984).

³² Albert G. Mackey, *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, and remains today a popular source that is cited in books, articles, papers, presentations and research.

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Future generations will determine what course is believed constructive for Lexington Lodge. A guide and index to that foundation on which to build or change the current course, reform, reshape, or merely tweak as required will always depend on what the majority of the active and involved members of a Lodge culture believe is the aim and purpose of Freemasonry and their knowledge of the factual past.

At the root of what most influences that we find steadfastly in place—appropriate and uniform education for all admitted. It must be acknowledged by members and leaders that there is no finish line to constantly improving upon the delivery of the Masonic experience.

CLOSING

This story illustrates how it cannot be too carefully observed that Freemasonry will be or become what most members think it is or want it to become. Changing social institutions, government, advances in sciences, literature, industry, standards of living, concepts of morality, war, peace, prosperity, depression, and the general surge of current technology and history all affect the Fraternity, which in turn, directly affect Freemasonry³³ and how it is conveyed, understood, practiced, and passed on to the next generation.

What easily transpires when, over multiple decades, a Lodge is not focused on arousing intellect, exploring what is spirituality espoused in our ritual and ceremonies, and facilitating the ability of all members to carefully reason their way through those lessons and experiences of the depth of Freemasonry, has become all too predictable, no matter the external changes in the larger society.

Tom Jackson was correct: *to understand the present, study the past.*

Should any member who aspires to a leadership position in the Fraternity be expected to do that? The factual history of the Fraternity does not support a contention that they all do.

Masonic leaders are prone to concern themselves, primarily, with that which lies immediately at hand, with very little awareness of what brought them to that approach or caused them to only deal with what lies immediately at hand. Knowing and understanding what has already been done and what can be done to stabilize or improve upon what has been done proves, in fact, to be imperative and only achieved through careful reasoning. Something to which all leaders in the Fraternity cannot lay claim.

How can members question the desirability of a leader to understand, in some depth, the factual historical background of the activity in which he is engaged. How can members determine if those nominated actually understand the mechanics and administrative evolution of the organization they are expected to effectively lead?

Regrettably, too many members do not question the qualifications of those they elect even though it would be most productive if they did. The reason so few members question the qualification and ability of those

³³ Henry W. Coil, *Conversations on Freemasonry*, Transactions of the Missouri Lodge of Research, 1976.

they elect is that their own awareness of the organization's factual history is no better than, if not somewhere below, that of the elected leaders who are charged with the life and care of not only their Lodges but Freemasonry.

The current culture of Lexington Lodge No. 1 slowly unfolded over a decade because of the dedicated labor of many who shared a commitment and will to nurture the seeds planted each year to change it.

Like the official Masonic records that revealed the character of past Lodge cultures, the development of the current culture is also chronicled in our minutes, registries, practices, protocols, appearance, and ambiance of our Lodge room and facility, writings, books, and Masonic conferences and events for future generations. Moreover, an unwavering drive to achieve excellence in the work of the Lodge is what the majority of today's active and engaged members seek.

There are indeed cynics and scoffers who claim what the Lodge does is not what is commonly found in their jurisdiction that they know as Freemasonry. That claim cannot be disputed any more than the fact that the Lodge does not intentionally nor actively promote the notion other Masons should conform to the point of view of its current culture.

There are indeed cynics and scoffers who claim that what Lexington Lodge does is not what is commonly found in their jurisdiction, which they know as Freemasonry. That claim cannot be disputed. However, the Lodge does not intentionally nor actively promote the notion that other Masons should conform to the point of view of its current culture. As a point of that fact, the Lodge today continues to pursue that which the majority of its active and involved members seek in their individual and collective Masonic experience, all within the rules and regulations of their jurisdiction and Lodge By-Laws, just as any other Lodge may choose to do. Ultimately, whether any Lodge prospers or perishes will come down to whether we learn from the past and effectively address troubling issues or continue to succumb to them.

For it to be possible to observe Freemasonry, time and effort must be taken to understand it. An earnest effort must be consistently put forth in preserving that understanding so that it is passed on to the next generation in a way that enables them to do the same.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The commitment of the labor required to gradually change the Masonic culture of Lexington Lodge No. 1 was a collaboration of many that took place over a decade. Today, the labor continues to sustain it. Driven by the synergy of like-minded members seeking more in their Masonic experience, the alliance of such members ultimately became the majority of active and participating members. And under the Lodge By-Laws and the rules and regulations of the Grand Jurisdiction, that majority, then and now, seek to do what best can be done to better ensure and preserve the life and care of the Lodge and Masonry so that future generations can also assume that same responsibility.

Among the members and non-members involved, the below list recognizes those making specific contributions of time, labor, and service.

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