

WHEN THE BAND STOPPED PLAYING

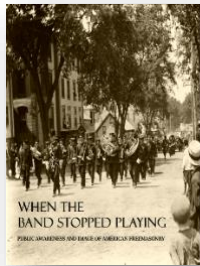
PUBLIC AWARENESS
AND IMAGE OF AMERICAN FREEMASONRY

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Cover Image

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Title: Masons marching with Painchaud's Band, Biddeford, ca. 1915, Creator: Gay, Robert H.,b Creation

Date: circa 1915, Town: Biddeford, County: York, State: ME

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BSF Foundation, Lexington, Kentucky



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How does a person or organization begin to successfully address and resolve an issue if they do not know what caused it to become an issue and when? Root Cause Analysis is a useful process for understanding, as well as solving, a problem. It is a useful tool to answer those questions when something goes badly but can also be used when something goes well.

There are only three questions to research and ponder: *What is the problem? Why did it happen? and What can or will be done to prevent it from happening again?*

Figuring out what negative (or positive) events are occurring answers the first question. Looking at and understanding the complex systems that surround those events answers the second. Identifying the key points of failure (or success) answers the third. The answers, when properly researched and analyzed, reveal the root cause. As simple as it may sound, and sometimes as simple as it is to do, the evidence is scant that American Freemasonry has regularly used root cause analysis when it comes to the issue of public image and awareness of the idea of Freemasonry.

As the 20th century ended, American Freemasonry struggled to come to grips with the uncomfortable reality that, after 270 years of residency in the United States, there was a persistent problem that seemed immune to remedy.

Despite multiple millions of dollars raised for public charity, and uncountable number of good deeds performed in thousands of communities, and after millions of men were admitted into the ranks, many of whom saw their lives transformed by adopting, living, and practicing the philosophies and tenets of the fraternity, Freemasonry's public image has significantly depreciated and fewer of the nation's citizens than ever before are less aware of the *idea* of Freemasonry.

The lust for high membership levels, although long-proven to be a false measurement of the fraternity's success, still infected and drove the thinking of most Masons in 2000. The steady decline of membership since 1959 (-2,261,992) fueled the handwringing as it became clearer each decade that there seemed to be no way to maintain the once high membership numbers.¹ The parade of men lining up to become members that started in 1943 and that added 1,624,269 men by 1959, was rained out.

¹ Masonic Services Association of North America (MSANA) Membership Totals since 1924.

The Masonic Service Association compiled and reported total members as reported by American Grand Lodges. This data in this writing is from MSANA records and do not necessarily correspond exactly with those published by other sources. The final year these records appeared on the MSNA website was 2017.

“... IT WAS BACK IN 1933”

Some Masons argue that the factor that accounts mostly for the declining membership since 1959 is the death of members. The examination of membership losses in one jurisdiction from 1959-2019 tell us that 106,803 members died in that period, thus were removed from the rolls. The demits during that period total, 35,692 and suspensions were 94,379 for a total of 130,071 more men removed from the rolls. The total loss over 59 years is: 236,874 members. Deaths account for 45% of the losses, not the majority.² Even if the losses were equal - 50/50 – should we not be asking why the fraternity cannot retain 50% of its members, why is it not and marshaling considerable effort to rectify that unfortunate reality?

When we consider the percentage of those on the rolls who have never actively participated in their respective Lodges since having received their most recent Degree (56%), we see the categories of Demit and Suspension for non-payment of dues in their real light.³ What is clearly seen is that over a 120-year period, 55% of the members in one jurisdiction voluntarily left the fraternity or were suspended for not paying their dues.⁴



Applying what mathematician and well-known Masonic publisher, researcher, and writer, S. Brent Morris refers to as the “Put Through” formula, we find additional data that should make clear to us that all problems associated with waning interest in Freemasonry are not just from the public. Those problems exist without our membership as well. The formula is simple: the total number of those initiated into the fraternity in one year compared to the total number of those initiated and raised to the degree of Master Mason in that year. Morris reports that his research shows that roughly 1/3rd of those initiated go on to be raised to Master Mason.

In one jurisdiction whose records were examined, we find that from 1900-2019, a total 305,724 men were initiated into the ranks. **Of those, _____ were raised to Master Mason, _____%.**

When we go back and look at the data that tell us 55% of members leave the fraternity on their own accord or stop paying their dues, we start to see something else in sharper focus. Despite the steady decline in membership, Freemasonry continues to initiate candidates – just not enough to replace the ones lost to death, demits, and suspensions.

Is there not something seriously wrong in the fact that the fraternity is failing to retain the *interest* of members? This is far from a new issue. In the 1920s an attendance of 10% of members at Lodge meetings was looked upon as a “good” turnout.⁵ Today, that percentage is repeatedly found to be around 6%. Yet there are Lodges which have a greater number at almost every communication, but the fraternity has not focused much effort to look at or pay attention to the reasons why.

² Kemble, Dan M. *Membership Losses Grand Lodge of Kentucky 1959-2019*, William O. Ware Lodge of Research, Covington, Kentucky, 2019.

³ *Characteristics of an Ideal Lodge: Survey and Result Analysis*, William O. Ware Lodge of Research, 2019, 2,16,25.

⁴ Annual Proceedings, Grand Lodge of Kentucky, 1900-2020.

⁵ “Increasing Lodge Attendance,” Masonic Services Association, Short Talk Bulletin, Vol. Vi, October 1928, No.10, author not listed.

If Freemasonry was a business (some argue it is or should at least be managed as one) faced a 55% drop in “clients,” there would be more than serious concern in the boardroom among shareholders. Boardrooms in American Freemasonry show concern, of course, but the complacency of shareholders is notable.⁶

Kent Henderson, distinguished Australian Masonic Scholar, explains in his research the differences between the inexorable numeric decline of what he calls English-speaking Freemasonry and European Freemasonry where there is a consistent 2-3% growth. Here is an honest, balanced, and purposeful root cause analysis providing clear evidence that Freemasonry has moved away from its original purpose as primarily an educational institution, and, was largely evolved into two functions, namely the learning and presenting of ritual and ceremony by rote, and the raising and disbursing of charitable funds. Both of these functions, although not without virtue in themselves, have not served [American] Freemasonry well.⁷

Henderson goes on to say that “if gaining and retaining members is the most important objective, then paying attention to European Masonry is obviously a very good idea.” His research points out a number of differences, but one sticks out: membership in European Lodges is mostly small with high attendance and members are involved: they are officers or have specific jobs in their Lodge. Logically, it follows that Masons who do not retain their interest in the fraternity for very long unless they can actively participate in Lodge activities and contribute on some level to the purpose of their Lodge. It would seem quite evident that members who are uninvolved in their Lodges and who have no particular job, or a specific charge, are solid candidates for the classification of “Resignations or Suspensions Waiting to Happen.”

For doubters who believe that consistently involving members in Lodge work is not critical, or that what is called, The European Model does not prove more successful than what happens in America, Henderson’s story about a discussion he had with a Mason from Norway while attending a Festive Board in London may be worth considering. Henderson asked the visitor how his lodge in Norway was going and if his lodge had much in the way of resignations. “Ahh,” the brother answered, then replied, “Yes, we did have a resignation once, it was back in 1933...”

TOO BIG FOR ITS BRITCHES

The truth that the Institution can never be greater than those of whom it is composed was largely ignored for multiple decades prior to 1943. The fraternity’s long-held premise that the more members made, the better the world, was and continues to be, mistaken. In fact, in 1959, the year membership levels in the United States reached its peak of 4,103,161, America was approaching, and about to experience, the most tumultuous decade of its history since the 1920s in terms of societal upheaval.

The 1960s have been defined as a decade of hope, change, and war that led to a shift in American culture. Citizens began to expand the meaning of the American promise, which started to unravel the national consensus and laid bare a far more fragmented society. A marked change in politics, music, literature, education, a slow general rejection of many of the cultural standards of the previous generation, and

⁶ Copley, Raymond C. “Freemasonry & the Man – a Critical Appraisal,” Victorian Lodge of Research, No. 218, Melbourne, November 26, 1977.

⁷ Henderson, Kent, “Where to From Here, The Future of English-Speaking Freemasonry.” n.d.

public protests and riots seeded the next ten years creating and launching shifts in the thinking of many that shaped the next fifty years. The irony is that the idea and principles of Freemasonry could have been useful remedy for much of the upheaval in the 1960s.

One might think that with 4,103,161 members, Freemasonry would have had some natural appeal during that decade and in later years. Perhaps, it may have if all members had been unified in their understanding of what the aim and purpose of the fraternity is historically meant to be, and then coupled that with a useful and effective overall plan that kept the public more aware of Freemasonry.

Regardless, the membership loss in the 1960s (281,372) was certainly enough to get the attention of Masonic leadership. Like many organizations of the time, the changes taking place in society (morality, business models, family structure, consumer products, attire, materialism, concern for law and order, concern for helping others, entertainment, transportation, economic development, and religious beliefs) were considered the cause of many things that negatively affected Freemasonry's position in society. Some of those changes brought the future relevance of the Institution into question by the late 1970s. That relevancy issue continues to be debated today, as we continue to see the effects of the lack of public awareness of the *idea* of Freemasonry.

In the 1960s on, the fraternity, unaccustomed to the practice of looking inward, did not spend a lot of time trying to answer the question of whether there might be internal reasons as to why lodges were unable to retain members. More accustomed to the previous 16-year steady parade of men seeking admittance, leadership instinctively attacked the declining membership problem from the wrong end, with crusade-like thinking and marched into the next decade and into later years on hasty expeditions designed only to get more members.

The march was well-intended but hapless. Men did continue to seek admittance, but the watering down of standards, qualifications, proficiency requirements, adoption of programs that flirted with crossing the line on the no-solicitation rule, and sliding further into casualizing rituals, protocols and practices did nothing to stop the unsparing member losses or significantly offset those losses.

The writings of Indiana Past Grand Master, Dwight L. Smith in the early 1960s tell us that such reactions resulted in the watering down of standards, and practices. Insufficient understanding of the purpose of Freemasonry in the late 1960s and beyond, was not merely a result of losing over a quarter-million members alone in that decade. Smith's seminal work stands today as a testament that the fraternity was well on the road years earlier of becoming overconfident and full of its own importance – in other words: “too big for its britches.”⁸ He summed up his views saying there were no problems in Freemasonry that could not be resolved by simply practicing Freemasonry.⁹ To do that, of course, a sufficient and collective

⁸ Lee, Laura, *Around the World in 80 Cliches*, Wellfleet, 2016. (Too big for your breeches – later britches - is first found in print in *An Account of Col. Crockett's Tour to the North and Down East*, published in 1835 in Philadelphia by E.L. Carey and A. heart, and written by Davy Crockett. The phrase is found as "I myself was one of the first to fire a gun under Andrew Jackson. I helped to give him all his glory. But I liked him well once: but when a man gets too big for his breeches, I say Good bye.").

⁹ Smith, Dwight L. "Whither Are We Traveling?" 1963. 27 Sep 2007

http://masonicrestorationfoundation.org/documents/DLS_WhitherAreWeTraveling.pdf; accessed March 20, 2021, "Why This Confusion In The Temple?" reprint 1970 Masonic Service Association, http://masonicrestorationfoundation.org/documents/DLS_WhyThisConfusion.pdf; accessed March 20, 2021; The Knights of the North, *Laudable Pursuit: A 21st Century Response to Dwight Smith*, 2nd Edition, Lulu, 2005.

understanding of the purpose of Freemasonry is necessary. As Smith confirms, that part had been waning for some time prior to the 1970s.

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND THE GOOD PUBLIC IMAGE

There is no use in being upset over situations that have already happened and cannot be changed (think spilt milk) but failing to recognize and learn from the experiences and the lessons that have already happened is very likely to cause them to repeat themselves in some form.

In the 1700s through the 1930s, Freemasons did not consciously generate public awareness of the Institution. They did not have to do that.

In the 1960s, when the ideals of Freemasonry were not seen as that important anymore, we saw the last of well-known public figures who were usually seen and viewed by many as the “face of the fraternity” in that period. Masons were no longer an attraction in traditional public parades. Great Masonic buildings erected in major, medium sized, and smaller cities – almost all in prominent downtown areas – were no longer being built. Masons still held large public events that were well attended and reported. Cornerstone laying at prominent buildings were frequent and well-publicized news stories. There was a consistently *good public image* because people saw Freemasons and understood who they were, and what they stood for.¹⁰ But, by the late 1970s, and clearly in the following decades, for Freemasonry, *the band has stopped playing*.

Public image and public awareness, although they sometimes overlap, are not the same and are often confused, especially by Freemasons, who, further convolute the two by throwing in the equally misunderstood notion that doing anything to *promote* public awareness of Freemasonry may violate the no-solicitation of membership rule.

Public awareness is nothing more than presenting to the public a *consistent* message and is based exclusively on the long-understood reality that people relate to what they see and hear on a consistent basis. People whose thinking aligns with the *idea of Freemasonry* have, at various times in our history (and in large numbers), sought to be part of (or support) an organization having historic roots, one that is values based, and is perceived as having strong moral and ethical principles, if, that is, they are aware that the organization exists and if its public image good and consistent.

What does the public consistently see and hear (if anything) about Freemasonry today?

They may see Masonic websites declaring a lot of charitable giving (an aspect of Freemasonry, not the purpose). While the past 60 years of the extraordinary charitable efforts and giving reported is, by far, from Shriners, and the Scottish and York Rites, not Blue Lodge Masonry, yet philanthropy continues to be seen by many Masons and perhaps some of the public affected by it. Some even believe that philanthropy is all that has kept it going for decades. This great teaching of Freemasonry exists to educate members to behave with charity (as well as other moral and ethical ideals) not to be the

¹⁰ Richard A. Fletcher, Masonic Services Association Presentation on Public Awareness, Conference of Grand Masters of Masons in North America, February 16, 2004, Washington, D.C. 74.

overriding purpose of the Institution.¹¹ When the philanthropic/charitable aspect is out of balance with the other parts of Freemasonry, it has, skewed the understanding of the purpose of the fraternity by members and non-members. This has been the experience of at least the last six decades.

The public today also sees a lot of deteriorating Masonic facilities. Massive auditoriums and cathedral-like structures are near empty, being sold, or repurposed. The public hears a lot on television and is exposed to much on the Internet, about the glory days of Freemasonry, which often come across like funeral eulogies. Masons who are interviewed often lament days past or spend time attempting to ward off allegations of dark, conspiratorial theories, supposedly linked to alleged “secrets” the fraternity holds.

The public sees some members wearing hats and T-shirts and other attire suggesting the foolish notions that goats, spaceships, and comic book heroes are somehow connected to the historical philosophies and the purpose-filled practices of the fraternity. Too many social media posts by Masons are far from exemplifying the tenets, much less the purpose of Freemasonry. Masonic websites and their content (or lack thereof) and particularly their design, certainly shape public image - and not always in a positive light. These things alone, when consistently seen, heard, or read lay the foundation of public image while contributing little to nothing at all about the *idea* of Freemasonry.

There certainly does exist dozens of different ways to participate in Freemasonry, and as disappointing as it may be for some to acknowledge, there is no such thing as the perfect lodge. Today, however, in terms of public awareness and image, the breadth of the kaleidoscopic image of Freemasonry confuses more than just its members.

Does public awareness and image begin at the national, state, or local level? There is likely agreement each level of hierarchy shares the same responsibility, as well as the same culpability, for confusing messages.

No matter, various Masonic and non-Masonic vendors continue to promote and market clothing and jewelry with images of goats wearing a square and compass collar, key fobs, briefcases, paper weights, ink pins, coffee mugs and hats. Their wares that promote phrases that are not connected to Freemasonry but make use of Masonic symbols in those phrases. They offer books written by kooks about wild-eyed conspiracies that are beyond evidence-troubled and push an expanding inventory of other paraphernalia promoting skulls and crossbones that are more representative of the Golden Age of Pirates and the Jolly Roger than the fraternity. These things are offered because such items sell. Do they sustain or propel the fraternity toward a *good* public image, much less advance public awareness of the idea of Freemasonry?

Some adamantly defend the view that Freemasons should have the liberty to express themselves with such flippancy. Does that liberty to express stand true if it unfavorably influences public image? That question would be an interesting topic for a Lodge discussion.

What was a more consistent public awareness and an almost universal, good public image, at least until the first part of the 20th century, took only a few decades to conspicuously diminish.

The 1970s through today show us that Masons want initiatives and programs that have an immediate impact on public awareness as well as image, but true public awareness does not happen that quickly no

¹¹ Henderson.

matter how well-intended the program (2B1-ask1, one-day classes, billboard marketing, charity drives, etc.) Undoing years of constructive public awareness and image happens much more quickly.

THIS SECTION ON NEVADA NEEDS TO BE UPDATED NOW THAT WE HAVE THEIR LATEST DATA. Perhaps even shortened?

RECENT NATIONAL PUBLIC AWARENESS STRATEGY: THE *NOT JUST A MAN, A MASON* CAMPAIGN FROM THE SCOTTISH RITE NORTHERN MASONIC JURISDICTION

THE *IDEA* OF FREEMASONRY

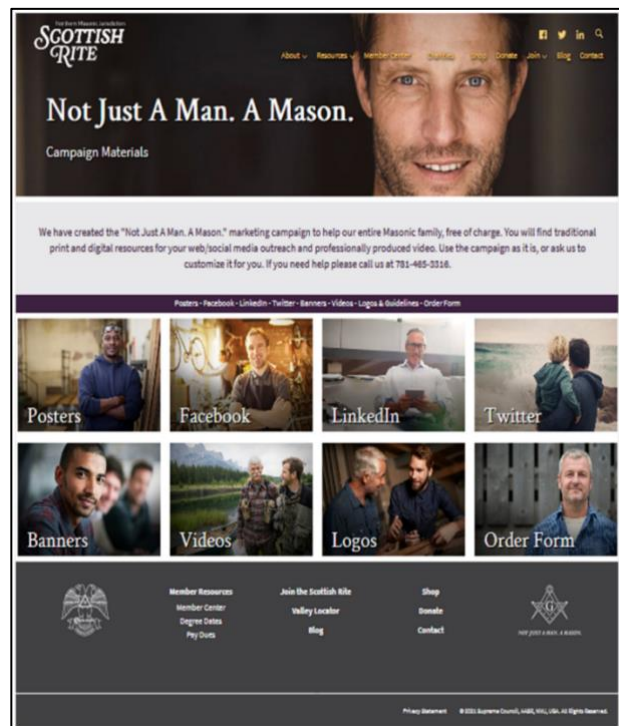
In February 2018, at the Conference of Grand Masters, The Scottish Rite Northern Masonic Jurisdiction presented what has been described as a “gift” to American Freemasonry: a whole new branded advertising and media campaign about Freemasonry that can be used as is or tailored to suit a specific grand lodge jurisdiction. The campaign is designed to educate the public, and to inspire Masonic brethren about who we are and what we stand for as Freemasons.¹²

The marketing material is provided free of charge to individual lodges and grand lodges and can be customized by the Northern Jurisdiction to localize them, or to brand them for the grand lodge. Forms for ordering customization appear on The Scottish Rite Northern Masonic Jurisdiction website.

The products are of considerably higher quality than promotional approaches in previous decades, and emphasize themes clearly designed by knowledgeable, experienced Masons, as well as by marketing experts.

The Series was embraced almost immediately by those in attendance at the Conference of Grand Masters, but was later met with mixed reviews by other members of the Craft.

The less enthusiastic agreed that the campaign puts the fraternity in a positive light, but contend that the images and videos for the campaign suggest the entire fraternity is made up only of what the campaign portrays. The concern that potential candidates who see the campaign and believe that every lodge in the

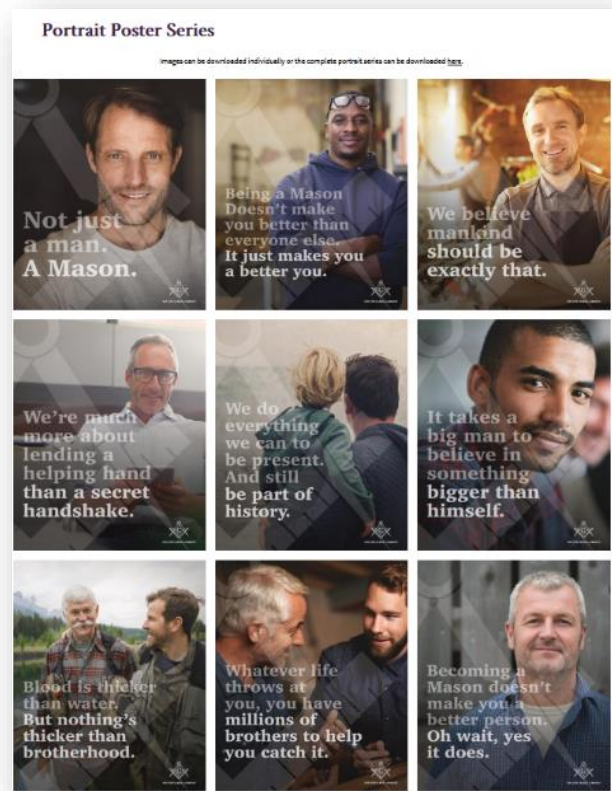


¹² The Scottish Rite Northern Jurisdiction, <https://scottishritenmj.org/resources/njam>, accessed December 28, 2020, Christopher Hodapp, Freemasons for Dummies, Blog, *Not Just a Man, A Mason*, February 18, 2018.

nation is exactly what is depicted in the Series, but subsequently find that every lodge is not as depicted, is, a legitimate concern. Contrary to that concern is the fact that the campaign is about *showcasing the idea* of Freemasonry and is designed to be a contemporary public awareness tool and is not a recruitment gimmick.

While some members around the country continue to express unfavorable opinions about the value of this campaign, most all agree that the quality of the material, and the fact that the materials are free, makes it better than what has been offered in the past.

Since its introduction, the campaign has slowly seeped into American Freemasonry. The materials appear on several lodge websites and those of several grand jurisdictions (Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Indiana, Massachusetts, Ohio, Illinois, New Hampshire, Wyoming, Grand Lodge of Saskatchewan). However, a serious criticism hovers: many programs are not coordinated, nor do they collect quantifiable data that will provide proof of context that can be used to demonstrate that the campaign works. The Scottish Rite Northern Jurisdiction does not assume responsibility of collecting such data – they leave that task up to the jurisdictions that request use of the materials.



Overcoming the typical lack of quantifiable data put forth by many grand jurisdictions to promote or make the public more aware of Freemasonry, we find the experience of the Grand Lodge of Nevada with the *More than Man, A Mason* campaign, useful, telling, and most refreshing.

THE NEVADA EXPERIENCE

The Grand Lodge of Nevada took seriously the necessity of keeping quantifiable records to measure the effectiveness of their campaign in 2020 and recognized the value of *showcasing the idea of Freemasonry* to the public. The Grand Lodge of Nevada has 56 subordinate lodges and roughly 4,700 members.

Recognizing the potential of such an awareness program, Nevada, instead of merely posting the free campaign banners and videos on Facebook, or a website, and then hoping for the best, prepared a strategic plan, budgeted for the initiative, and contracted with an experienced, professional marketing firm to manage the campaign. By doing so they produced impressive, verifiable data not only affirming the workability and value of the campaign, but also the wisdom in putting it in the hands of those who know

much more about public awareness strategies than Freemasons have shown that they do over the past six decades.

While the program materials are free, a cost does accompany the proper application of the campaign. The “do-it-yourself” approach, as observed in other jurisdictions with these materials, has failed to report the kind of results of the Nevada experience.

Nevada accepted the reality that organizing, coordinating, advertising, positioning, and moving awareness materials around as numbers change in a campaign requires close coordination and the best approach is using a professional marketing firm to do so. Such a firm in Reno, Nevada was contracted by the grand lodge. The total budget for all advertising and to hire the firm was \$40,000.¹³ The program was comprised of digital banner ads, Nevada Public Radio Sponsor Messages, and television spots. Banner ads ran on Facebook and Google DV360 online advertising outlets.

Several dozen sponsorship messages promoting Freemasonry in Nevada were read by radio hosts on Nevada Public Radio from March – May 2020. A 30-second TV commercial also ran 232 times from April to June in the Las Vegas and Reno markets, localized with the Grand Lodge of Nevada logo and landing page link at the end.

The target audience was men aged 35-45 in the metro Reno and Las Vegas areas, with a focus on targeting current and former military personnel, current and former police, fire and first responders and what was described in a category as, “patriotic citizens.”¹⁴ Demographic analysis showed Nevada Masonic leaders that the campaign was most popular with the 25-34 and 35-44 age ranges.

In all, 17 of the 56 Nevada Lodges took part in this campaign (11 in the northern part of Nevada and 6 in the southern area). The campaign ran from late April until the middle of September 2020 and was refined by displaying only those ads that had the best click-through rates. Further refinements were made by taking the email addresses of users and targeting consumers with similar tastes and interests.

Recognizing the potential of such an awareness program, Nevada, instead of merely posting the free campaign banners and videos on Facebook or a website and then hoping for the best, prepared a strategic plan, formally budgeted for the initiative, hired an experienced, professional marketing firm to manage the campaign.

¹³ The initial financial support request to the Grand Lodge of Nevada was \$30,000.00. The Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons, the Grand Chapter of Cryptic Masons and the Grand Commandery of Knights Templar each voted unanimously to donate \$10,000, without any conditions or “strings attached” to the Grand Lodge Marketing Campaign. During the Grand Lodge’s 2019 Annual Communication, members voted to assign \$10,000.00 of the Grand Lodge’s annual budget to the marketing campaign. The total marketing budget was \$40,000.00.

¹⁴ The target audience identified by the Grand Lodge of Nevada (current and former military personnel, current and former police, fire and first responders and patriotic citizens) was believed the audience that was most likely to respond to the first round of the campaign. The target audience can easily be extended to other groups, i.e., college fraternities, engineers, the medical and legal field, small and large business owners, administrators, merchants, etc.

The normal *conversion rate* in this type of campaign is 3-5%.¹⁵ The Grand Lodge of Nevada conversion rate started with a combined 10.45% in April and increased to a 17.2% conversion rate by September. The grand lodge plans to continue the program in 2021.

The campaign produced the following:

1. 3,430,322 impressions (views) of the material (radio, television, print ads, social media).
2. 80% of the views came from social media postings arranged by, coordinated, and managed by the public relations firm.
3. 8,867 visitors were drawn to the Grand Lodge of Nevada interactive website.
4. 1,722 visitors were drawn to the Grand Lodge of Nevada interactive website who the provided their contact information and requested follow up to their inquiries and sought more information about the fraternity and Freemasonry. Nevada reports that the campaign received “more than 1,700 inquiries into lodge membership” during the six-month period of the campaign (April-September, and at the height of the 2020 pandemic), and that “Never before has Nevada Masonry received more than 1,700 inquiries into lodge membership in a single year.”¹⁶
5. 1,491 visitors clicked on links appearing on the grand lodge site that took them to the sites of the lodges who were participating in the campaign. (Note: Despite Lodges being unable to meet with prospective candidates due to the worldwide pandemic during the months of the campaign, arrangements were made for each of 1,491 visitors to be contacted personally by a Lodge designee within 24 hours).
6. Two particular lodges mentioned in the earlier inquiry made to the Grand Lodge of Nevada were Carson City No. 1, which initiated 6 candidates who came to Freemasonry because of the campaign, and Oasis Lodge No. 41 in the Las Vegas Valley, which initiated 12 candidates. Dozens of other candidates have submitted petitions during the pandemic months when lodges were unable to hold stated communications.

The Grand Lodge of Nevada reported:

The quality of prospective members has been extraordinarily high. For all those that attended open houses or virtual meet-and-greets, the feedback has been remarkably similar among participating Lodges. Most all of the interested men have expressed two recurring themes: 1) they are looking for spiritual guidance and fellowship, and 2) they wish they had known how to knock on the door years ago. Each lodge is going to have to determine the

¹⁵ Conversation rate is a measure of the number of potentially interested persons that go to a website that has an interest in what is being offered, and the overall percentage of that group that go on to secure acquisition of what is offered.

¹⁶ Marketing Committee Report to the Grand Lodge of Nevada, 2020, Numbers Summary, p1.

criteria/process for selection of these interested candidates. Protecting the West Gate is up to each individual lodge.¹⁷

The only other Masonic jurisdiction the Northern Jurisdiction recommend contacting that might have data collected was the Grand Lodge of Florida.

It was determined that the Florida grand lodge had used the materials prior to the pandemic. They deployed them by using tags on “Facebook and social media.” They consider the program “very responsive” and report they have received “3-10 requests for more information.” Little additional clarity could be found about the campaign, but it was evident that there was not an organized approach to collecting quantifiable data in the same manner as did the Grand Lodge Nevada.

Those who may claim that the Nevada jurisdiction is not like their jurisdiction and therefore the campaign would not work in theirs, are either opposed to the idea for some undisclosed reason or thinks that Nevada is somehow immune to the lack of public awareness that smites the rest of the nation. In this case, the size of membership, number of lodges, or general population do not matter.

Furthermore, those clinging to the notion that more members solve all ills in American Freemasonry without the understanding that the fraternity today is experiencing the end result of that very notion (an ultimate decline in membership and public awareness) expose their own lack of awareness of the factual history of their fraternity.

Across the nation more lodges have come to grips with the evidence that men leave the fraternity or fail to become involved in their lodge because it generally is not providing what they had hoped to find when they joined. Also, coming into light is the reality that as societal values have clearly changed since the 1960s, the Institution of Freemasonry has significantly faded in the public eye. The result of the combination of those two factors is overwhelmingly clearer today than in years past and accounts for much of the state of American Freemasonry as it heads into the current decade. Although significantly challenging, addressing these two real problems instead of devising ways to merely get more men on the roster through quick fix programs, has substance and foresight.

Video Series - Even Better

Videos can be downloaded individually or the complete Even Better series can be downloaded [here](#).



Video Series - Nice Guys

Videos can be downloaded individually or the complete Nice Guys series can be downloaded [here](#).



¹⁷ *IBID*.p.5.

Programs in the past designed to increase numbers alone did not factor in several consequential rippling effects: most important, perhaps, was the effect of overlooking the waning interest of society due to changing values and the blurred distinction and differences between the aim and purpose of Freemasonry and the aims of those of popular civic clubs. The invisibility of Freemasonry over the past sixty years (even despite its philanthropy) today has advanced to the point that the public needs *reminding*, as it were, that the Institution still exists what the idea of Freemasonry is.

Recognizing the importance of marketing is vital to the continued existence of Masonry and that importance cannot be understated. Those who confuse public awareness with solicitation need make themselves much more familiar with the differences.

The *Not Just a Man, a Mason* public awareness campaign is about *showcasing the idea* of Freemasonry. It is not designed to be a marketing or promotional gimmick for fund raising, much less solicitation of candidates. Those attracted to the fraternity because of this public awareness campaign are no different than those who might be attracted to the fraternity after seeing Masons involved in some way in a local community: they become aware, then inquire. It remains the responsibility of the lodges where inquiries are made to determine if a man is qualified for admittance. Those who may seek membership as a result of this particular campaign are a by-product of an effective initiative designed to make the public more aware that the fraternity exists by highlighting the *idea of Freemasonry*.

The *Not Just a Man, a Mason* public awareness campaign is about showcasing the idea of Freemasonry. It is not designed to be a marketing or promotional gimmick for fund raising, much less solicitation of candidates.

The reported success of the Nevada program occurred for three reasons:

1. They accepted that the long-standing advice and encouragement to lodges to “get out in your community” used the since the 1950s is today, not enough to effectively promote awareness. As a sole or principle approach to create sufficient awareness of Freemasonry, much less generate attraction, its usefulness has come to its end.
2. The campaign was sufficiently financed to accomplish its goals.
3. Although Masons were involved in setting goals and coordinating the response/follow up procedures, the campaign was turned over to a professional firm with the experience necessary to accomplish the purpose of set goals.

A WORD ABOUT SOLICITATION: UNDERSTANDING THE ISSUE WITH CONTEXT

A starting point to help better understand the consistently awkward and often left fully unexplained concept that Freemasons should not recruit members might be thought of in this way: *do not beg men to join the fraternity and do not push or promise.*

It is improper to use a repeated, high pressure sales approach, at one time associated with carnival barkers. It is improper to promise a prospective candidate that he will receive material benefit or some

special recognition if he joins. It is improper to give a petition to a person of casual acquaintance or of uncertain background.

The correct statement of the rule governing solicitation is that each non-member must seek membership in Freemasonry of his own free will and accord. This is easy to understand, but the rule in the negative is so ingrained in the minds of many of our members that it remains an awkward concept advancing the utter nonsense notion that talking about the fraternity at all to a non-member is some form of solicitation.

Engaging in a sensible discussion about Freemasonry with a nonmember is merely conveying information and is not soliciting or giving the non-member a sales talk. Masons should not only feel free to discuss Masonry with the uninitiated but should be knowledgeable enough to be comfortable in doing so, and therein we often find the root of the awkwardness that many members experience when called upon to discuss Freemasonry with men who are not initiated. They simply do not know enough about Freemasonry to engage in a substantive discussion that goes beyond service club projects.

The no-solicitation rule is so strictly construed by some of our members that they will not, under any circumstances, discuss Freemasonry in any way with a non-member. This may be due to the fact that the member has an ingrained fear that he may say something that would be considered improper. It may be simply that he knows so little about Freemasonry that he cannot answer even the most basic questions. For too long we have failed to discuss this subject fairly and completely, so that our members may be correctly informed of the meaning and application of this rule.

... the rule in the negative [no solicitation] is so ingrained in the minds of many of our members that it remains an awkward concept advancing the utter nonsense notion that talking about the fraternity at all to a non-member is some form of solicitation.

Virtually every Lodge most often had more petitions than it could handle from 1943 through 1959, so few questioned what they did not understand regarding solicitation. It was also a time when there was little, if any, education for the scores of candidates flowing into the Lodges. There is no evidence that substantial, uniform collective efforts were made to have every new Mason educated to understand the intricacies of the Fraternity he was joining. The new member was told, *do not solicit members*. Over time, this advice evolved to be understood as meaning: *do not, in any way, encourage a non-member to join*. We still hear today the accounts of men who tell of this ridiculous notion through stories of how their fathers, uncles, grandfathers, and others they knew to be Freemasons would never talk to them about the fraternity.

Today, just as we know the effects of a Freemasons being reluctant, fearful, or unable to speak reasonably about Freemasonry because he knows so little about it, we also know members have, at times, directly solicited non-members to join. We know that because those members admit and have told many they were asked to join. One recent example of this was when a well-known public figure spoke at a Masonic event and told the attendees how proud he was of his 30 years of membership, even though, he admitted, he had not attended lodge in decades, and rarely did before that. He then added that he would never have become a member if it were not for the men who kept asking him to join. In the minutes of

Although every member is supposed to know, at least in a general way, that members are prohibited from asking non-members to join the fraternity, over the past multiple decades, some officials have sought to provide more than simple boosterism as a solution to dwindling membership rolls.

Grand Masters, and other officials in the past, should be commended for their awareness that “something is wrong,” and their search for a solution to the problem. Time, however, shows that the solutions they put forth, and ones ultimately adopted erred in attacking the problem from the wrong end.¹⁸

By the late 1960s, when it was first recognized that membership levels across the entire nation were tapering off after a steady 16 year increase, the fraternity, alarmed and still cognizant of the losses of the 1930s, sought solutions, and met a hard collision with the absolute ban on recruiting.¹⁹ Although the restriction was understood by generations of Masons to mean that a man may not be solicited to join the order, as the membership rolls steadily shrank into the 1970s, this principle was wrongly called into question.

The first notable incursion on the recruiting prohibition came in the form of an advertising slogan: 2B1ASK1, which arrived on the scene in the United States in the 1970s, and it said, apparently, all that

2B1ASK1 directly addressed the mid-20th century linear decline in membership, and it attempted to skirt the issue of recruiting by couching overt solicitation in the form of a question: Want to be a Mason? Just ask to join. Clever though it was, 2B1ASK1 failed outright and the numbers just kept falling.

needed to be said about Masonic membership. To be(come) (a Mason), ask (a Mason).²⁰ Although its origins are difficult to determine, by the late 1980s the phrase was Masonically ubiquitous and 40 years later, it is still routinely encountered in North America. 2B1ASK1 directly addressed the mid-20th century linear decline in membership, and it attempted to skirt the issue of recruiting by couching overt solicitation in the form of a question: *Want to be a Mason? Just ask to join.* Clever though it was, 2B1ASK1 failed outright, and the membership numbers just kept falling. In response, several jurisdictions began experimenting with more overt solicitation. In the Midwest, the Grand Lodge of Missouri passed a resolution in 1989 allowing solicitation. The Grand Lodge of Colorado followed suit three years later.²¹

Colorado’s grand master, Richard A. Miklich reported on the “universal problem” of declining membership during a visit to the Grand Lodge of Kansas, and stated that during his administration, “each of the lodges in Colorado has been challenged to raise at least 10 new Masons.” As a result, he said, “Colorado has changed its requirements on solicitation.”²² This was by no means a Midwestern perspective. The following year, the Ohio Grand Lodge adopted a similar measure as an official program:

¹⁸ S. Brent Morris, *The Siren Song of Solicitation: The Case Against Easing Masonic Membership Practices*, a presentation at The Northeast Conference on Masonic Education and Libraries, Newark, Delaware, May 13, 1983.

¹⁹ The prohibition against solicitation is easily be traced to William Preston. *Illustrations of Masonry*, 2d., London, 1775, 59.

²⁰ Michael A. Halleran, Past Grand Master, Grand Lodge of Kansas Quality Vs. Quantity: Membership Standards in The 21st Century Let Him Wait With Patience? How Solicitation, Recruitment and One-Day Conferrals Failed North American Freemasonry, *Proceedings of the World Conference of Regular Masonic Grand Lodges is the Official Journal of the World Conference of Regular Masonic Grand Lodges*. 2016, 445-452

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Grand Lodge of Kansas, “Greetings From Colorado,” *Proceedings*, Salina, 1992, 32.

“You’d Make a Good Mason,” which encouraged its members to engage potential members with that phrase.²³

In Kansas on March 14, 1979, W. Nolan Artz, Grand Master of Masons, waived restrictions on the time between degrees, on all proficiencies before advancement, and on the number of candidates per conferral. This was done for the explicit purpose of bringing in 5,000 petitions.²⁴ In Illinois, in the same year, Grand Master Vance C. van Tassel granted an “amnesty” to all candidates who had allowed the time limit for their proficiencies to expire. These Illinois Brethren were then permitted to advance without examination.²⁵ In Iowa and other jurisdictions, the “Fellowship Night” is a popular way to introduce Freemasonry to prospective candidates. Illustrious Brother David O. Johnson, in Oregon, said, “Our attitude toward the non-solicitation of members is one of our greatest deterrents to membership increase.” In each of these examples, however, our leaders have been lured by the siren song of solicitation: *if it were only easier to get men into Masonry, our problems would be solved.*”

Attacking the problem from the wrong end continued into the next several decades. By the mid-1990s the grand lodges began recommending outright solicitation.²⁶ In 1995, for example, Kansas Grand Master Morris L. Fisher challenged the members of Kansas lodges to:

*Actively search your memory for the names of good men of your acquaintance... Ask that individual if he would have any interest in becoming a member of the Greatest Fraternity in the World. If he indicates an interest, the door is open for you to ... get the petition process started. So long as you allow him to make his own decisions, you are not violating any Masonic law, as we believed in generations past.*²⁷

At the conclusion of his term, Grand Master Fisher reported optimistically on modest membership gains during his term but emphasized that “our survival lies in the recruitment of these good men, and in them recruiting those of their peers, who are also qualified.”

In 2011, Thomas K. Sturgeon, the Grand Master in Pennsylvania, announced an ambitious slate of initiatives. One of the initiatives was the allowance of “selective invitations to join.” Another was lifetime dues remission awarded to any 60-year-old Mason who “successfully recommends two new members.”²⁸

Kentucky, in 2016, experienced its own version of veiled solicitation through the use of a pamphlet titled, *Who are the Masons and What do They Do.*²⁹ No records were kept as to the manner and extent that such pamphlets were actually used by subordinate lodges. Correspondingly, there are no records related to the number of men who may have been brought into the fraternity through their use. No formal training in how to utilize such pamphlets was provided. It was merely the strong recommendation of the then sitting

²³ Grand Lodge of Ohio, “Address of the Grand Master,” Proceedings, Cleveland, 1980, 19.

²⁴ Grand Lodge of Kansas, A.F. & A.M. Proceedings, Topeka, Grand Lodge, 1979.

²⁵ Grand Lodge of Illinois, A.F. & A.M., Proceedings, Springfield, Grand Lodge, 1979.

²⁶ See e.g., Grand Lodge of Connecticut, Proceedings, “Address of the Grand Master,” Cromwell, 1993,45; Grand Lodge of Oklahoma, Proceedings, “State of the Craft,” Guthrie 1993,29; Grand Lodge of Washington, “State of the Craft,” Proceedings, Wenatchee, 1999, 14-15; Grand Lodge of Kentucky, “Friend to Friend,” Proceedings, Jefferson County, 1996,30; As late as 2003, the Grand Lodge of Minnesota referred to lodge websites as “public relations and recruiting vehicle[s].” Grand Lodge of Minnesota, Proceedings, St. Paul: 2003, 21.

²⁷ Grand Lodge of Kansas, “Acceptance Speech,” Proceedings, Salina: 1995, 172.

²⁸ The Journal of The Masonic Society, *Masonic News*, Issue No.7, Dec 19, 2009

²⁹ Masonic Information Center, Silver Spring, Maryland.

grand master that Kentucky lodges use the pamphlets. Lodges that did were awarded points toward the annual Grand Master's Excellency Award.³⁰ Kentucky Masons were told that such an approach may, "... walk right up to the line [solicitation], but not cross it." These pamphlets may still be found in lodges across the Commonwealth. Interestingly, Grand Lodge records show a loss of over another 1,000 members at the end of that year, and a continued decline through 2020 further underscoring the futility of an unfocused and unsystematic effort to increase public awareness of Freemasonry.

With much of the fraternity seduced by what was hoped to be a windfall in membership to offset the troubling annual decline, by the 1990s (a decade in which Kentucky, for example, lost 20,986 members), the disappointment that even outright solicitation did not work led to another idea reeking of the desperation, leadership was experiencing due to the troubling decline in membership (and loss of recurring revenue).

The first mass raising in the modern era occurred in 1992 in the District of Columbia, by order of Grand Master Jerold J. Samet. This "Grand Master's Class" conferred all three degrees of Craft Masonry over a two-day period. Again, many grand lodges, seduced by this possible windfall of membership, adopted the new thinking – at least 31 other grand lodges have adopted some form of mass raising, usually over the span of a single day – from whence the term One-Day Class derives.³¹



The Grand Lodge of Ohio raised more than 7,700 new Master Masons in a mass raising. In 2007, the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia, which ushered in the first Grand Master's Class in 1992, abandoned the idea. Other states (like Ohio and Pennsylvania) continue to tinker with the concept while others quietly drifted away from the practice.

Valid records that would confirm that such mass raising did anything more for the fraternity than temporarily increase the balance of lodge income and add to the number of names on a membership roster have not been produced by jurisdictions using the concept. However, as typically found in American Freemasonry, plenty of anecdotal and opinion-based assessments are available.

In consideration of the toll the pandemic has taken on the fraternity in 2020, coupled with the steady decline in membership, the threat posed to the financial stability of several jurisdictions weighs heavy. Today, talk of revisiting the idea of One-Day classes has once again slithered its way into discussions as a "possible and justifiable" way to keep the fraternity "afloat."

³⁰ Grand Lodge of Kentucky, District Deputy Handbook, 2015-2016, Grand Master's Excellency Award.

³¹ Paul M. Bessel, Statistical Evaluation of Grand Masters Classes, June 19, 2001, <http://bessel.org/gmclass.pdf>, accessed January 15, 2021.

A glance at Masonic membership in North America confirms that these efforts “not only failed but failed spectacularly; the gains experienced as a result are statistically insignificant.”

It can easily be demonstrated that the one-day conferral was the 1990s solution to the membership problem, designed to increase numbers alone. The One-Day Class was brought to Freemasonry as a way to make wholesale Masons who were too busy in their lives to advance through the degrees in the traditional way. In other words, to resolve our membership problem we brought many men into the ranks, who, in fact, have no time to become Masons or practice Masonry.³²

There is conclusive evidence that grand master’s classes, solicitation, and recruitment were expressly implemented to halt the decline in membership; the grand lodges say as much

in their proceedings. Did they succeed?

A glance at Masonic membership in North America confirms that these efforts “not only failed but failed spectacularly; the gains experienced as a result are statistically insignificant.” But this is not to say that these doctrinal shifts came with no effects. The unintended consequences are clear: a devaluation of the order, a cheapening of the initiatic experience, and a break with centuries of tradition. Each of these consequences has created problems of its own, which may require yet another doctrinal shift to repair the damage.³³

IN THE END

Instead of attacking from the wrong end the issues and concerns stemming from the steady decline in membership since 1959, a look at a practical, level-headed, non-recruitment public awareness campaign that goes beyond, and constructively surpasses, what jurisdictions and their subordinate lodges have done in the past (and still today) to educate the public and inspire its member about what Freemasonry is and that for which the fraternity stands, makes much more sense.

Across the nation, more jurisdictions have come to grips with the evidence that men leave the fraternity or fail to become involved in their lodge because it generally is not providing what they had hoped to find when they joined. Also, coming into light is the reality that as societal values have slowly changed since the 1960s, the Institution of Freemasonry has significantly faded in the public eye. The result of the combination of those two factors is overwhelmingly clearer today than in years past, and accounts for much of the state of American Freemasonry as it heads into this decade.

- 1990 data from a national survey regarding public awareness of Freemasonry tells us that 71% of the population had no idea what Freemasonry is or what it is about. Another 26.1% of them claimed to know a small amount about the Fraternity and they generally have a favorable opinion of the institution. That left only 2.9% of the male population who had some knowledge of the Fraternity.³⁴

³² Jorge Aladro, Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Florida, Grand Lodge of Kentucky, Annual Proceedings,” Keynote Speaker” Louisville: 2013, 24-25; Halleran.

³³ Halleran.

³⁴ Masonic Renewal Task Force Reports: Phase I Research (Attitudes of Non-Masons towards joining organizations such as Freemasonry.); Phase II Research (Attitudes of Masons toward Freemasonry), produced by, Barton-Gillet Co. of Baltimore, & Opinion Research Corporation,

- 2014 data regarding public awareness of Freemasonry tells us that only 14.7% of males between the ages 21-65 are aware of the existence of Freemasonry, 85.3% are not aware of Freemasonry.³⁵
- Since the 1970s American Freemasonry has tinkered with programs that are oversight solicitation to increase membership rolls. Each has failed to prove effective, much less produce long-term successful results. Standard programs, ideas, initiatives, and the “get out in your community” approaches used since the late 1960s have not worked as well over the years as optimistically intended and expected. Jurisdictions shackled to using that approach as a primary strategy to keep the public aware of Freemasonry, are clearly swimming against the tide. If these programs alone worked as intended, we would not find the vast majority of the male population of the state unaware that Freemasonry exists.
- A 2021 survey tells us that 8 of every 10 members support a program that would generate a more positive public awareness (and good image) of their lodge.³⁶

The *Not Just a Man, a Mason* campaign, whether seen this way by all, *is* designed and intended only to *showcase the idea of Freemasonry*. The campaign fulfills that intended purpose, when properly funded and administered. Also proven is that when the *Not Just a Man, a Mason* material is used in a random, impromptu, indiscriminate, and casual way by just posting banners and announcements on social media, the purpose and message of the campaign fails.

Programs in the past designed to increase numbers alone did not factor in several consequential rippling effects: most important, perhaps, was the effect of the waning interest of society due to changing values and the blurred distinctions and differences between the aim and purpose of Freemasonry and the aim and purposes of popular civic clubs. The invisibility of Freemasonry over the past sixty years (even despite its philanthropy) has advanced to the point that the public needs *reminding*, as it were, that the Institution still exists what the *idea of Freemasonry* is.

Recognizing the importance of marketing is vital to the continued existence of Masonry and that importance cannot be understated. Those who confuse public awareness with solicitation need to make themselves familiar with the differences.

There exists quantifiable proof that men are looking for Masonic values and brotherhood today, and that Masonry is exactly the outlet for which the target audience is searching.

Will jurisdictions follow the example of Nevada? If so, will they be capable of doing so without resorting to shortcuts, or fall back on the “good enough” approach? Will members recognize that there may be absolutely nothing more important to the fraternity in the 21st century than constructive public awareness and good image?

Published by Masonic Service Association, 1989. Singer, Robert. *How Do Non-Masons and Masons View Freemasonry?* Presentation to The Conference of Grand Masters of North America, Salt Lake City, Utah, February 1990.

³⁵ BMS Survey, *Awareness Freemasonry in the Commonwealth of Kentucky*, unpublished survey conducted in Louisville, Paintsville, Frankfort, Owensboro, Paducah, Covington, Lexington, Maysville, Bowling Green, Ashland, Kenneth Schwendeman, Richmond, Kentucky, 2014.

³⁶ *A Public Awareness Campaign For 2022*, White Paper, John W. Bizzack, Brian T. Evans, John, Cissell, Dan M. Kemble, (ed.), March 24, 2021, Appendix, Grand Lodge of Kentucky Survey, February 2021.³⁵

The *Not Just a Man, a Mason* program is not pedestaled or promoted as the only workable approach to productively restoring the essential public awareness of Freemasonry today. It is, however, a promising start.

ADD AREA HERE ABOUT STOOP and his findings.

Will other grand jurisdictions follow the 2021 lead of Kansas Grand Master Mikel Stoops, and earnestly delve into then discuss a balanced examination of the one-day class status and benefits or drawbacks or continue to rely on largely anecdotal data?