

Topic: What is happening to the History of our Lodges?

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Masonry is dying! ...and it needs to!

Once upon a time... Masonic Lodges were the central hub of free-thinking men, some were men of influence and means, and others were, more importantly, men of action and ambition desiring to make of this world a better place for all mankind. A Masonic Lodge was where men would "come of age" throwing off the trappings of boyhood and becoming true men responsible to their God, their country, their neighbors and their families. Masons were perceived by society to be their best representatives, and that their decisions were carefully considered to be in the best interest of the community. Masons built and maintained that reputation through virtuous, moral, and selfless service to their fellow men. It was an organization that required its members to continue to prove its value to their respective societies.

As time passed some in Masonry, in a desire to be more inclusive of membership, modified the standards originally set. It was for good reason that the term "freeborn" now included the wage slave or servant, rather than just the landowner elite or masters of their own destinies in royalty, politics, and fiefdoms, to expand the group of potential candidates to include the honorable in the working class.

This further evolved into many facets of modern Masonry today. This is the part of us that is diminishing, and seems more of a social club bent on paying the bills and sharing treats after the meetings. These Brothers are rarely motivated to do anything outside of the lodge and often lack any desire to "improve ourselves in Masonry". Some may get involved in minor power plays with each other and foster petty differences that do nothing to increase the harmony native to the original Freemason.

In contrast we have pockets of Freemasons who are following the original precepts, the fundamentals, and are hotbeds of activity and personal

growth for its members and its Lodges. These groups are focused on “doing the right thing”, rather than “the end justifies the means”, and seek higher standards that make the fruit of their work more meaningful and important to their development. They avoid the easy tasks and ever press and seek out the more difficult activities designed to make a difference in the world and enhance their values and improve our society. Is this the history we need to return to, the history worth keeping?

George Santayana, the Spanish philosopher, essayist, poet, and novelist is credited with the quote "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

The word history originated from the Greek word *histōr*, meaning learned wise man, then evolved into Classical Latin as *historia*, meaning "investigation, inquiry, research, account, description, written account of past events, writing of history, historical narrative, recorded knowledge of past events, story, and narrative".

We have lost many historical philosophies and concepts that were present when Speculative Freemasonry was born.

Lost is the exclusivity of insisting on an exact definition of “Good Man” as stated in the Approach to the Altar for fear of elitism charges and not including all men on the level. In today’s world it is the rare man that considers the impact of his choices so that he can be known as a man of integrity, moral and upright before God and of good repute before the world. This was a time when a man’s word and handshake was trusted enough for a contract.

Accepting poor or inconsistent ritual because that is the best we can do instead of organizing and attending rehearsals to restore the poignancy, meaning and impact of our great work. The elementary school annual play gets more rehearsal time.

Not utilizing the massive resources available to educate the members in life as well as Masonry. Making the attending members receive valuable

knowledge and wisdom while in Lodge will keep them coming in and persuade non-attending brothers to return for the value.

We have lowered the standards to receive the degrees and to be proficient in those degrees. These well-meaning changes, meant to allow the busier man to get in quicker, reduces the value derived by improving oneself in reaching a difficult objective. Men of strength and character generally won't waste their time on easily attained low-value goals.

Our dues structure has not kept pace with inflation and is a lower percentage of our contemporary earnings. This reduces the Lodges ability to afford the activities that improve the Masonic Lodge experience. A well maintained lodge with good facilities develops pride and allows us to focus on improving ourselves in Masonry.

We have lost the requirement of proving ourselves in performance and duties as a requirement to stand for election to officer chairs. We used to have to be proficient in all the ritual required for a station before we could advance. Now it is an On-The-Job-Training program that often is not complete before the year is up with past officers filling in on needed ritual. This reduces the value of going through the chairs by not interiorizing or memorizing the Masonic lectures... to imprint on the mind wise and serious truths; and thus, through a succession of ages, are transmitted unimpaired the most excellent tenets of our institution.

Do we want to re-promote improvement of self to renew our Lodges and recover our fundamental history and push away our contemporary service club mentality?

How do we attract the movers and shakers of our communities to become united with us in this great and good work?

For starters we need to do great and good work, good ritual work, work that improves the community, work that adds to brotherhood and harmony.

The easiest way to convert an ambitious man into apathetic man is to give him nothing of value to attain.

Ambition is the inner force that drives you through hard work and obstacles towards ultimate success. If you have enough ambition, you take the initiative to aim for what you want and take the steps needed to get it. Historically ancient Freemasonry promoted good societal improvement through ambition. They knew good things rarely come without intention and effort. With no ambition, you may never have anything worth having. Our ancient Brothers included these concepts into the culture of Freemasonry.

They elevated and supported admirable men as heroes. A hero can inspire you to think bigger and do more. They did this through venerating great men in the world and in the Fraternity. Teaching about the amazing things they did and how they kept moving toward their goals despite hardship and doubt. Additionally our lectures showcase great examples, like our Hiram legend, that demonstrate the fulfillment of destiny through integrity.

They boosted their positive self-esteem through doing good works. This is an important ingredient of ambition. If you don't believe you deserve the best, you're likely to sabotage yourself or not even try to do better things. Research has shown that self-esteem does matter.

They fostered social support within the craft. Brothers were encouraged to contribute, of their own talents, activities that would unite us as a sacred band, or society of friends and Brothers. We can only garner social support from ambitious people.

Our ancient Brethren reinforced the hope that they could do better, refused to buy into the mindset that kept them from hoping for the best, even having hope against overwhelming odds of achievement. Our United States stands as testament to their hope of creating a free nation, taking on the preeminent power of the world at that time.

They continued to test their Masonic knowledge and proficiency by mandating memorization of all of their lectures as a requirement to advance in Lodge office. They insisted on proficiency in the degrees, modes of recognition and their obligations. This kept in the forefront of their minds the value and enlightenment of Masonic teachings. This also allowed them the

satisfaction to contribute to the improvement of their brethren by imprinting on their minds, wise and serious truths.

Freemasons worked to develop their talents so they could be of better service to their brethren and to the world. This allowed them to find what made them special and valuable in the scheme of things and motivated them to achieve greater accomplishments.

Freemasons understood and constantly renewed their commitment to the purposes and goals of Masonry. Their goals were well defined and they knew whether they were successful or not in their efforts to promote those purposes and achieve those goals.

Our ancient brethren developed mentoring processes both for new candidate's progression through the degrees and development of Masons within the Lodge. It was a haven promoting higher understanding and knowledge.

Masonry treated success as a process. A step-by-step progression through the degrees and lectures taught them, from the basics of trust, to the higher levels of liberal arts, and the meaning of life.

Early Freemasonry provided motivation to improve yourself in Masonry. It was expected that with your newly found enlightenment you were to live by the tenants of Freemasonry and endeavor to make of your world, a better place. It encouraged you to do things you had not done before in the process of personal growth.

Freemasonry fostered an environment of commitment to lifelong learning. They knew that if you continue to make a place in your life for learning every day of your life, the new information and insight you gain can spur you on to seek more.

Finally Freemasonry encourages us to face our own mortality. It is only through the knowledge that we will have an end to our existence that motivates us to any level of achievement, the reason for making a difference.

There have always been good men in this world and there have always been bad men. This was offered by a Brother that his occupation exposed him to pursuing and stopping the dark underside of society. He viewed Masonry as a haven where he could find solace with like-minded “good” men.

In our desire to increase our numbers we sometime don't ask the hard questions that guard the west gate against those would diminish the integrity of our venerable institution. We may ask, who then is worthy to be a Mason, for aren't all of us imperfect human beings? While not perfect, the members of our Fraternity uniquely share the desire to improve ourselves. We want to be better as individuals through Masonry, and by extension, better the world around us. That we have made conscious choices to not do the things that would have excluded us from being accepted into an organization known for its integrity and moral standards.

Some Masons today seem more focused on changing others to suit them, than on improving themselves. Historically, there was a time when you had no choice, but that you would get along with brothers because they were brothers. Amends were made because both brothers wanted to get along as brothers. Our ritual is full of examples of needing to make amends to restore good brotherhood. Some Masons think it is okay to be divisive with other Masons. This is likened to the brotherhood of a Cain and Abel. A long-time Mason once remarked that he never had an enemy until he joined the Masons. How many of you have considered how many Brothers you'd expect to come to your relief if there be a greater probability of saving your life than losing their own? On a less important but more common question; have you considered even how many would show up to help you move? It used to be the standard to call on fellow Masons for help. It was because they wanted to help you and expected your help when they needed it. Many brothers today hesitate to ask for help because they may never be asked to help another brother and don't want to be a burden. Our culture seems to dismiss or mock our need to bond as like minded Brothers, diminishing the value of what we can accomplish as a benevolent group.

Our efforts to improve ourselves in Masonry have and will inevitably lead to helping others and charitable acts. This will lead some to view Masonry as a charity or service organization. Community service activity is great for public relations but do we really want to be competing with all the other service organizations?

Community service is a natural offshoot but is not the driving force behind Masonry.

There is a case to be made that we are unique as an organization in that we exist solely to improve our members.

Which of our histories do we want to build on? Our choice is to return to the early concepts and philosophies of ancient Freemasonry that takes good men and makes them better, or continue the current trend toward being a service organization that is a group of good men helping the community.

Which do you see as best at promoting Masonry in perpetuity? Can we have both? Can we have both in the same Lodge?

The choice is ours which history will prevail.