

# In Search of A Vision

William T. Watkins

Virginia Research Lodge No. 1777

March 25, 1989

To the officers, members and guests of Virginia Research Lodge No. 1777 now meeting in Highland Springs, Virginia, I extend to you greetings, and immediately pause to ask myself a question, "How did I arrive at this honor to address this distinguished, eminent, illustrious and august body"?

My recollection is that it was many, many months ago that the Senior Warden of this Lodge, now your Worshipful Master, with pen in hand extended the invitation, and it was a bit of a shock to my nervous system. Most of you brethren probably know that Robert E. Simpson has all the charm and tenacity of a super salesman! He laid it on me so thick that my ego got the better of my intelligence, the results of which I address you with neither rancor nor bitterness, but with one purpose in mind and that is to get over to the Scottish Rite Conference of Virginia, which starts at 11:00 a.m. this morning, which hosts three of the most articulate and scholarly Masonic speakers in the Nation. Because of this I am flattered along with the District Deputy Grand Master that your presence is seen here this morning.

Dr. Richard Kern, Past Grand Master of Masons in Pennsylvania, tells this story on himself: Several years ago he was invited to lecture at St. Raphael's Hospital in Sydney, Australia. On the morning of his appearance there, he left his hotel to walk to the hospital. On the way he did a bit of sightseeing and soon found himself hopelessly lost. So he stopped a passer-by and asked: "How do I get to St. Raphael's Hospital?" The man answered: "I'll

tell you, Guv'nor. You go down this street for two blocks and turn left; about half way down the street, you'll see a pub. You cross the street and go in. When there's a quiet moment, you yell: 'To Hell with the Pope!' And when you wake up, Guv'nor, you'll be in St. Raphael's Hospital!"

This story relates to me that you've got to have a plan to get anywhere you want to go. So - where do we want to go?? In my 45 years of Masonic experience I have seen few plans in the levels of Masonic leadership, across this Nation, particularly in Virginia, that were worth their salt, if indeed there was any salt in the beginning. So ... let's talk.

First I think it is important that we establish the background from whence the speaker comes for this quarterly meeting of Virginia Research. My wife says that Bill Watkins would drive 500 miles to give a speech, but wouldn't walk across the street to hear a good one.

I think it is well that we establish the fact that I am neither Saint nor Sinner, and to explain this I relate as follows: But Sinner I am.

### Saints and Sinners

When some fellow yields to temptation  
And breaks some conventional law.  
We look for no good in his makeup  
But, Lord, how we look 'for the flaw.

No one asks, "Who did the tempting?"  
Nor allows for the battles he's fought.  
His name becomes food for the jackals,  
The saints who have never been caught.

## In Search of A Vision - William T. Watkins

I'm a sinner, O Lord, and I know it,  
I am weak and I blunder and fall  
I am tossed on life's stormy ocean  
Like a ship that's caught in the squall.

I am willing to trust in Thy mercy,  
To keep the Commandments Thou'st taught,  
But deliver me, Lord, from the judgement  
Of the saints who have never been caught.

This I believe would set me apart from all the Grand Line officers I've known for 45 years, who would hasten to condemn me for my remarks, but so many have passed on to other shores, and there are those who remained and became "Past Grand Masters," an honor reserved only for the Apostles, and zealous advocates of doctrine and cause.

### Whence Came Ye

When I think of the early times of our Craft and the history about which we know, I think of the words of Brother Harry S. Truman, when he said, "The only new thing under the sun is the history you don't know about". Further I relate the story of a fable by Alan S. Mirman of Norfolk Lodge No. 1.

### A Fable

Many years ago, a small group of men - friends - would meet in the local tavern to drink, relax, and discuss the issues of the day and to determine who, in the village, might need aid or assistance. Knowing of the good works of the group and being desirous of participating in the intellectual discussions, others asked to join the group.

As the strangers were brought into the friendship, it was decided that a dogma was needed. Taking the craftsman and artisans who had constructed the great cathedrals of Europe as a guide, a ritual was developed based on the symbolic construction of a spiritual temple made of living stones, the intellectual leadership and good deeds of the members. The society proliferated - the perceptive and philosophical discussions led to new ideas and the dissemination of logic and reason - the leaders became venerated - membership was avidly sought by many.

As more people were admitted, the society became engulfed in administering the ritual to the new members - there was no time for the philosophical exchange of ideas - the devotion to charity was subordinated and acts of charity were publicized. The public perception of the intellectual level and philosophical leadership of the society diminished.

There was no drink. There was no relaxation. There was no intellectual inspiration. There was no charity. No one sought to join. The members grew old. The society continued to exist, but the reason for being was dead.

## Please Do Not Disturb

Old, yes we are old and have forgotten how to live. We really don't want to be disturbed and our sign has been out for a long time. The ceremonial land is still in vogue for the leadership of Virginia Freemasonry. We still wear pretty black uniforms and purple badges and eat well from fat budgets. The charity fund is low but the thirty thousand dollar Cadillacs are aglow as the rubber meets the asphalt and concrete to attend Masonic meetings of 100 or at times the number is slightly more. It is not that our leadership neglects charity, for we often place the "hat on the altar", or as some have said, "let 'em eat cake."

## In Search of A Vision - William T. Watkins

You know you are getting old when:

1. Everything hurts and what doesn't hurt, won't work.
2. When your knees buckle but your belt doesn't.
3. When the little old lady that helps you across the street, turns out to be your wife.
4. When the morning after feels like the night before, when you haven't been any place.
5. When the names in your black book all end with M.D.
6. When you sink your teeth in a steak and they stay there.
7. When you reach down to pull the wrinkles out of the stockings, when you're not wearing any.

Yes, Freemasonry is getting old while it sleeps, and it's got to get older before it gets new, to swing with the punches of the 21st century and beyond. Freemasonry can be awarded for its daring, should it decide to move, or indeed dare to move.

Herbert Hoover said: "The principal thing we can do, if we really want to make the world over again, is to try to use the word 'old' again."

There is the old virtue of religious faith.

There is the old virtue of integrity and truth.

There is the old virtue of incorruptible service and honor in public office.

There are the old virtues of patriotism, real love of country and willingness to sacrifice for it.

## Where You-All Coming From?

In the opinion of this writer the time has come for Freemasonry in Virginia to call upon its leaders to pool their ignorance, rearrange their prejudices, and in so doing they might enhance their knowledge.

A friend of the writer, Lloyd Ulrich Jefferson of Richmond, Va. and a Past Grand Master of Masons in Virginia (1982) always enjoyed telling the story of Christopher Columbus, stating that when he left home he didn't know where he was going. When he got here he didn't know where he was, and when he returned he didn't know where he had been. Jeff would always add that Columbus did it all on borrowed money.

Many Masonic leaders have, at times, found themselves in this position, and the writer recalls an incident when, at the old Masonic Temple on Broad and Adams streets in Richmond City, a Deputy Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Virginia stated: "Brethren I don't have any program for this fraternity, I just want to be Grand Master". He was 70 years of age, a good Mason, and he was duly elected. Today we could express critical judgment for leadership of this kind, but that's about what we get from Grand Masters in Virginia today in their role of "Grand Visitor" and Ceremonial head. But as we criticize the office and the ignorance of those who become Grand Master, we must also criticize the system under which they operate. Stewart Wilson Miner, Grand Master of Mason in Virginia (1974) said it best, "Virginia Freemasonry is not geared for progress". We shall deal with this subject in more detail in the paragraphs to follow. And if we do not deal with the system of Freemasonry, and indeed make innovations into the body of Freemasonry, it cannot survive as a viable force in America. It will lie languishing for decades totally incapable of claiming the time and attention of men. In short it will be impotent.

*The First Primeval Calf, a poem by Samuel Walter Foss, was then quoted. Stewart W. Miner used this same item in his paper published in the 1984 Transactions of Virginia Research Lodge. Basically it tells the story of a calf that made a path through the forest. As "civilization" developed, the calf's path was still followed. Both Watkins and Miner used this story to show that Freemasonry, generally, follows the same philosophy.*

## Technology and Its Force of Change

William Thomas Watkins is not ordained or called to preach, but in this paper preach he shall. George F. Will reminds us that we should consider the growing sovereignty of social forces over sovereign governments. Technology-driven change is changing the weight, physical and political of goods, institutions, countries and regions.

Norman Macrae of *The Economist* reports that in 1903 the Mercedes Corporation concluded there never would be a world market for more than 1 million automobiles. The limiting factor? There would never be more than one million people trainable as chauffeurs.

George F. Will reminds us further that in the 1950s in Western Europe and America, 70 percent of all employed people were use-of-hands workers, 30 percent use-of-brain workers. That ratio is being reversed.

Walter Wriston, writing in *Foreign Affairs*, notes that 85% of all the scientists who have ever lived are alive today, that scientific knowledge is doubling every 13 to 15 years and that the resulting social change is diluting the sovereignty of nations.

## In Search of A Vision - William T. Watkins

The ability to mandate the value of currency was a traditional aspect of national sovereignty. Today, communications technologies have produced an instantaneous international market rendering constant judgment about the values of currencies. In this wired world, Wriston writes, there is no place to hide a currency, values are controlled by the "information standard."

Wars have traditionally begun when borders were violated. But today borders are porous because money and ideas - as powerful as armies - cross them electronically. Markets are no longer geographic locations. Rather, markets are data on millions of computer screens, worldwide. The markets render pitiless judgments on political actions by altering monetary values. Such global markets are, as Wriston says, a form of free speech telling the unregulatable truth about nations' politics.

Alan Greenspan argues that the rapid expansion of international trade is produced in part by technology, particularly the shrinkage of the size of products. In 1950, radios were made with vacuum tubes. Today, radios fit in shirt pockets, calculators fit in wallets. A fiber-optic cable as thin as a hair replaces a thick bundle of copper cables. Copper-producing nations lose their weight. (Wriston notes that the material for computer chips is the world's most common substance: sand.)

Today we need organized information. We are so well informed. The man in the street has so many facts, and knows so much, that so much of his knowledge becomes confusion. One set of facts contradicts another set of facts. The challenge is knowing how to "sort it out."



## Sort 'Em Out

A famous linebacker in that interesting game of football was asked how it was that few running backs could get through his line. His reply was: "What I do is get about in the middle of the line, and when the other side starts through with the ball I sorts them out and gets the one with the ball." In Virginia Freemasonry we have a lot of "sorting out" to do.

## "Hit Him Again, Lord."

James F. Dent tells the story of a church in a small town was starting to sag and bend here and there and the minister called a special meeting of the board of deacons to discuss the situation. "I have checked," he told the board, "and they say it will cost about ten thousand dollars to put everything back in shape again. Before I go to the congregation can I get some pledges from you deacons to help toward raising the money?"

There was an uncomfortable silence but finally the fellow generally judged to be the most well-to-do member of the church got to his feet. "The church is in bad shape," he admitted. "And I'll pledge one hundred dollars toward repairs." He sat down again.

At that precise moment, a large chunk of plaster broke away from the ceiling and fell on him. Holding his injured head, he struggled to his feet again. "The place is in worse shape than I thought," he declared. "I'll pledge one thousand dollars."

As he sat back down, a voice was heard to pray: "Hit him again, Lord."

## What Means All This Confusion?

Why is our Leadership not hard at work? What goes on in our Educational programs, and where can we find a mule and a 2 x 4, for we need to get someone's attention. Let us arise and pursue our journey.

## The Monster

In the year 1965, the Grand Lodge of Virginia, in the usual manner, elected a Grand Junior Deacon. He was a new boy on the block and was wild with ideas and suggestions on how to improve this great fraternity. At the same time the Grand Senior Deacon was equally excited and ready to roll.

A luncheon meeting was called, at the Engineers Club in Richmond city, and detailed plans were made in true engineering fashion. The list was long, but it was complete with cause and effect outlines. The first move was to contact those who were senior in the Grand Lodge line, and set forth those courageous plans, and stand by for praise and honor for the daring effects of the Senior and Junior Grand Deacons of Virginia Freemasonry.

Those in the line above listened with an attentive ear and in a most friendly manner. But admonished the young deacons to go their way for in due time they would have their opportunity to soar with Masonic Eagles between the two staffs and three candles. They said, "Your time has not yet come, go back to your slumber and wait for the alarm."

The writer often tells the story of the lifeline and classification of Grand Lodge officers covering those eventful six years. As the Junior Deacon he is a delightful person, pleasing personality, usually a good dancer and lots of fun. He is called about the Commonwealth

to make speeches galore so the brethren can look over the new boy who just came on the floor. Alas! It does not last long for he is soon elected a Warden, and it is during his two years of Warden he becomes contaminated. Soon he is elected Grand Master and becomes a Monster. After serving his year as Monster he becomes a Past Grand Master, receives his jewel and assumes the tile of Genius, with full Masonic Honors. All hail! Please to arise and please to be seated.

## What Order Shall Be Taken

Why are the Craft not at work, and what brings down these heavy losses in our membership? Across the Nation since 1968 we have lost one million, two hundred thousand from Masonic rolls as reported by the Masonic Service Association. In Virginia our roster reads approximately 59,000, down from 70,000 in 1968.

America owes much to Freemasonry, Freemasons owe much to America. The relationship is mutual and beneficial. A roster of our members is a study in American History. Conrad Hahn wrote in 1960: "The strength of Freemasonry, especially in those periods when it enjoys the greatest respect and influence, lies not in numerical power, but in the extent to which its tenets are put into practice. There is grave danger in counting heads."

If Freemasonry really aims to make all men brothers, to harmonize discordant elements in the nation and in the world at large; if Freemasonry is to help, aid, and assist the needy and the troubled; if it hopes to liberate men from the tyranny of ignorance, by means of the light of freedom and the sacredness of the individual, then the Brotherhood might well refrain from pridefully asking, "How many Masons do we have?" and instead concern itself with the more important question, "Are they duly and truly prepared?"

## The Barnyard Secure

I am reminded of Kierkegaard, the Danish Theologian of the early 19th century, who was enjoying a great popularity in contemporary Protestantism, once told a parable that has since become a classic. This is his story: "A flock of geese once lived together in a barnyard. Once a week they gathered in a corner of the yard, and one of the more eloquent of their number mounted the fence to speak of the wonders of geese. He recounted the exploits of their forefathers who mounted on wings and flew the trackless wastes of the sky. He spoke of the goodness of the creator who had given geese the urge to migrate and wings to fly. As he spoke the geese would nod their heads and marvel at these things and comment on the eloquence of the preaching goose. All this they did. But one thing they never did; they did not fly. They went back to their waiting dinner, for the corn was good, and the barnyard secure."

Morris Budkofsky, a Past Grand Master of Connecticut, reminds us we live in critical times. "But it is true that these days are filled with opportunities for greatness, for authenticity, for nobility, and for the opportunity to remind us as Masons who we are, where we came from and where we are going. Let us look at the past and learn from it, but not live in it. Let us look to the future but not wait for it. Come let us all walk together into the future."

Stewart M. L. Pollard of Maryland has reminded the writer: "The only problem we have in Freemasonry is the Forty-Seventh problem of Euclid, all else remains as opportunities and challenge."

## Return to the Basics

I'm not sure what the basics are but we had better start back there somewhere. I believe we have got to educate ourselves and go get some learning, so other people will not look

down on us. Then we should go and get some more learning so we won't look down on other people.

I like the parable of the school master when he was greeting his pupils. The Master said, "What would you learn of me," and the reply came - "Teach us how we shall live together and teach us to what ends we shall live." And the parable ended by saying that the Master turned away with sorrow in his heart because his own learning touched not these things. Freemasonry has so much to teach and there are so many who want to learn, if they could only learn of us.

## Rhetoric et al

We have so much rhetoric, chock full, up to our hind quarters in rhetoric, and little leadership to head out towards the promised land. I get sick, really sick when I read the state of the craft headings of Grand Masters going out of office, telling us all those things that should be done with recommendations and at times even resolutions. Why in hell don't they read the state of the craft that was written before they went in office? There are many who labor for many, many years in Craft Masonry when current leaderships are fast asleep. It is no wonder that it is hard to remember that we are sent to drain the swamp when we are up our hind quarters in alligators.

## Continuity

In Virginia Freemasonry the main problem and challenge is the lack of continuity in its leadership. Each Grand Master has a different approach to leadership, but the Grand Master is not the Grand Lodge. Each Grand Master wants to "Do his own thing", be remembered for something he started in "His Year." These are the exact remarks of Past Grand Master Donald M. Robey at the 1989 annual meeting of the Philalethes Society.

It is not likely that we will ever solve this problem by appealing to the Grand Lodge Officers, at least that's what our history teaches. The only way this will ever be corrected is through legislation regularly submitted and adopted by the delegates of the subordinate lodges, which will direct the path we want to take in the future. The ballot box can be an effective tool both in election and direction. The legislative process must prevail, and in following this process, those that are elected must lead, follow or get the hell out of the way. This great fraternity was not left to us in this generation to preside over its liquidation. We have no problems that leadership cannot cure. As long as this nation remains free and legislators have not resigned their functions to ecclesiastical powers and their prerogatives to priests we have nothing but opportunity and challenge before us.

### A Bit of History, If You Will

In the Free world, in 1778, Virginia Freemasonry was put together by a group of subordinate lodges, not by a Grand Lodge, and it has done well throughout its history. The Grand Lodge in some measure has directed its course, but not without the advice and consent of the subordinate lodges. The Masonic Home of Virginia has provided a home for over 500 orphaned children. Since 1955 this Home has provided food clothing and shelter for over 500 elderly Masons and their widows. The brethren of Virginia have established one of the finest libraries in the Nation and our Masonic Museum is interesting and attractive. Our Grand Lodge office headquarters building is one of the best building structures in the land. We have a right to be proud of our past. Since 1778 over two million men have been made Master Masons in this Commonwealth.

The writer would further call to our attention of the great economic factor that our 657 chartered lodges have made to the State of Virginia, and the great acts of charity and community service that these lodges have rendered. Our great challenge is to pass on to generations yet unborn those things that were given to us which presents our

opportunity. Today in 1989, 358 Masonic lodges are listed on our computer rolls and they are ripe for guidance and leadership.

Doctor Eugene Hopp says: "The simple brilliant idea of Eighteenth Century Freemasonry was to bring together men from every walk of life. Commoner and King, Merchant and Philosopher, Churchman and Soldier, in cordial comfortable surroundings and in an atmosphere of human warmth and affection. This contact was designed to take place in a precinct shielded from the distractions of the larger world where men might speculate together in freedom on philosophical and moral issues central to their lives."

Donald M. Robey, Past Grand Master in Virginia (1987) reminds us that the nineteenth century was not much different Masonically than the eighteenth century.

The writer believes that the twentieth century followed as a matter of course, having lived a majority of those years, but the turn in the events of humankind made its drastic vigorous extreme changes in the mid times of the twentieth century following World War II. Technology with its force of change following this great but terrible war brought changes in the entire world and produced a playing field on which Freemasonry did not understand the rules and could not cope in the process in the competition for the time of men. Masonic Leadership was found wanting, but it was not alone since organized America especially the church witnessed heavy declines in numbers and a new world was born in the process.

## Quality or High Standards

In the movie, "Gone With The Wind," the closing lines, "Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn!" opened the flood gates for the filthy dialogue that would be in vogue following

the war years. Mt. Wor. Brother Dwight McAllister of South Carolina writes (1980) that the reduction in the quality of our Fraternity were, a permissive society, lowering of moral standards, lack of proper investigation, quantity above quality, apathy and indifference, lack of leadership, failure on the part of members to live up to the teachings, duties and obligations, thereby giving Masonry the wrong image to the [uninitiated] and to the world what Masonry really is, its meaning, purpose and goals.

It seems we may have reached the point in life and time when nothing is wrong anymore - nothing is right or wrong so long as it is permitted without condemnation. Nothing is white or black - only gray. Dwight offered the following illustration: "A minister was conducting the funeral of one of his parishioners - in the eulogy he wanted to say something nice about the deceased. After several general and meaningless statements, he finally came up with this: "I can't say that this Brother was what you would call a good Christian but can say this much for him - he was a respectable sinner."

It may be we have reached the time when it is not necessary to be good as long as we are respectable and maybe we have reached the point in Masonry when it is no longer necessary to be of good moral character so long as we are of respectable reputation. All we can do is keep our standards high and admit only those who are willing to adhere to those standards.

## Bring the Regiment up to the Standard

We have the story of the young boy - in the Napoleonic army - too young to bear weapons assigned to the task of carrying the regimental standard. In the thick of battle, his enthusiasm carried him several hundred yards ahead of his regiment. A courier was sent to him with the message "Return the Standard to the regiment." His heroic answer was: "Bring the regiment up to the Standard!"



## Great Truths are Unyielding and Unchangeable

It seems there are those among us who would even amend the Ten Commandments. There are those who consider the Sacred Writings as out-of-date and long overdue for revision and updating. They would change "Thou Shalt not Bear False Witness - except in case of emergence or personal gain." They would change "Thou Shalt not Steal" to "Thou Shalt not Steal much" ..."Thou Shalt not Kill - but neither Shall Thou do anything to Stop Killing."

## The Sense of Community

Leslie Taylor, staff writer for the *Roanoke Times and World News* wrote on March 17, 1989 about the employment of Stephanie Fowler, formerly of Rochester, N.Y., as coordinator of the Roanoke Neighborhood Partnership. Stephanie stated that she had watched her hometown neighborhood in Rochester change over the years. The sense of community is gone, she says. People are too busy to engage in neighborly chitchat or picnic together in neighborhood parks. "You feel isolated. It was not the kind of atmosphere I wanted to live in," she said.

There is a friendliness here in Roanoke. People talk on the street and they don't lock their doors if they're in their house. She said. The first time she walked through downtown Roanoke, Fowler was pleasantly surprised when she "smelled chocolate in the air," as opposed to pollution.

There are many places in America like Roanoke and the Valley of Virginia, and we must appreciate, understand, and preserve what we have. It is like unto Freedom and we must appreciate the circumstances under which we live move and have our being. These things are taught to us in Freemasonry, in holy writ, and in the writings of our Founding Fathers. We must take heed of our lot.

## Where to Find It

The Masonic Fraternity with its challenges and opportunities is similar to the church and other organizations, but as Past Grand Master Stu Miner reminds us, "The Masonic effort stands in contrast to those of most other organizations, largely because of its customs, traditions, and sense of propriety. Therefore its focus of attention tends to be internal rather than external, private rather than public. This is unfortunate for Masons, somewhat like Moses and his people so long ago, now stands in a figurative wilderness, in need of information on which to base a plan that will afford entrance into a fraternal promised land. That information, if it exist at all, is most likely to be found outside and not inside the Craft."

Brother Goldman of Norfolk, Past Master of Norfolk Lodge No. 1, reminds us that "as members of the Craft we know of our laudable pursuits. And yes, it is important that we recognize our virtues and like who we are and what we stand for, but not at the exclusion of what others think. Like teenagers, we, too, are subject to peer pressure. If we want to be accepted, we will have to be social, visible, and involved. If we want to be understood, we will have to be more forthright and explanatory. Our organization needs to become a part of the mainstream. Not simply for the sake of being ingratiating, but because to ignore the world around us is an invitation to be misunderstood."

## In This Our Dilemma What Shall We Do?

In this paper as in so many other areas we have had enough rhetoric, but the writer has laid heavy ground work, and the time has come for action, crash action if you will, the time has really passed, and only ten years remain until we move into the 21st century.

At the outset it must be said: "The recipe for perpetual ignorance is to be satisfied with your opinions and content with your knowledge." In Virginia Freemasonry we have had

good Committee structure and they have produced sound and solid recommendations through the years, but the change of leadership each year will not acknowledge the challenge and necessity for continuity in the process of keeping Freemasonry viable in order to accomplish its mission and purpose, if indeed we know and understand that mission and purpose.

## What Do Lodges Do

Lodges, in general, make Masons, that and no more. The major cause for the lack of attendance in our lodges is due to the lack of effective programs, the competition of the home is an important factor. Donald Robey reminds us that home entertainment is so readily available today. VCRs, Television, Cable TV, computers, home video games, and sports are immediately available.

## The Things We Want

I believe we want to regain for the Fraternity the status it once had in the community. We want to make it attractive to candidates at all levels. But especially, we want to attract, once again, the men of stature, the pillars of the community; and by this I mean the men of character and sound judgment; the leaders in our churches and synagogues, our businesses, our government. In addition we want to make the Fraternity a viable organization; financially supportive, helping to solve the world's problems - not becoming a part of them. If these are the things we want, our leadership should move in these areas in order to accomplish mission and purpose.

## Masonic Surveys

In the past few years the states of Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, Virginia and others have conducted various surveys among their people in an attempt to find solutions to

those haunting questions as to the declines in membership, poor lodge attendance and in general the reasons the Craft is not responding.

The Virginia Survey - 1988: Under the direction of Past Grand Master, John B. Obenchain, under the committee on Long Range Planning, a committee designed a survey to attempt to determine the age-group's thoughts on the following categories:

- I. On becoming a Master Mason
- II. Lodge activity as a Master Mason
- III. Public Activities as a Freemason
- IV. Summary (of individual's personal feelings about Freemasonry.)

The survey was directed to the age group in the 21-45 bracket by selection from the approximately 10,000 Masons (in 1988) in that category. Total Masonic population in Virginia in 1988 was approximately 59,000. The survey was well-received and the response was excellent and it deserves the immediate attention and plans of action by the leaders of Virginia Freemasonry, and in particular the Grand Lodge Officers. The evaluation committee reported as follows on the Virginia Obenchain survey: "First of all the survey was a gem .... a document filled with invaluable information in Virginia addressing many of the grave problems facing the Craft, and offering recommendations on a broad range of issues and subjects." The committee extended the highest commendation to Brother Obenchain and his committee, for an outstanding presentation.

## The Masonic Renewal Task Force

During the summer of 1988, the Masonic Renewal Task Force asked the Barton-Gillet Company to determine the attitudes of adult males in the United States towards joining

organizations - primarily fraternal - and their attitudes and opinions towards Masonry in particular. This complete and outstanding report brought forth conclusions, implications and recommendations on a highly professional basis to learn how Masons feel about the significant opportunities in our society and their stance on making something happen

for young people  
for the elderly  
for the homeless and hungry  
for the abused  
for the addicted  
in the name of Masonry.

The above surveys are in-depth and demand immediate attention upon the part of our leadership in Virginia Freemasonry. During World War II, Brother and Sir Winston Churchill of England said to the President, "give us the tools and we will finish the job." The Leaders of Freemasonry today have the tools, if only they would start the job.

## Dynamic, Creative Leadership

The writer has read many of the records of Virginia Freemasonry since 1778, and he does not recall from the written records a single individual who has served in the office Grand Master, that was not a good and honorable person. But few, very few, could be classified as leaders.

In the year 1989 Cabell F. Cobbs, the Grand Master of Masons in Virginia, a native of this Commonwealth, and from the line of one of Virginia's most distinguished families has set forth a dynamic creative program for the future of Virginia Freemasonry in this Commonwealth. His ability to perceive distinctly the problems at hand, his knowledge of history and the talent to define the problems and set-forth adequate solutions for the future of the Craft is the finest breath of fresh air that has formed over this State in the

past 50 wars. Delegations have already appeared before his kind offices to determine if he would "run again" so that this dynamic role of leadership might continue.

The writer concludes that our annual waste of leadership and a lack of continuity, by Grand Lodge Officers, is nothing short of sin. We close the door on the best we have because we're too shortsighted, and lack the ability to anticipate and make provision for future events, lacking totally in foresight, insight, imagination and intestinal fortitude. Grand Lodge Officers seem to have only one grand aim in view which is "My Program" in "My Year", as they prepare for the ethics, the doctrine that the supreme end of human conduct is the perfection or happiness of the ego, or self, and that all virtue consists in the pursuit of self-interest. The name of the game of life is service. We are sent to be spent on others. Illustrated so well is the great teaching of the carpenter from the plains of Galilee. If we could only remain at school and learn our lessons.

## A Challenge for the Future

Following are the dynamic programs of Cobbs, in 1989, which shall be presented to the delegates in 1990, through commissions and related committees on Advance Planning and Research:

1. The establishment of a Board of General Purposes.
2. The date change for the annual communication of the Grand Lodge of Virginia from February to November.
3. A revised and Dynamic Program in Masonic Education.
4. A National Recognized Charity, dealing with starving children.
5. The challenge for the young men of our Fraternity (21-45).
6. Public Relations and all that that term implies.

7. How to motivate and train lodge officers and to promote effective and exciting programs.
8. To eliminate the tradition of insidious introductions in Virginia Freemasonry.
9. To restore the status symbol of being a Master Mason, and to erase the classification of "old men going into old buildings."
10. Since our history has not provided a program of continuity to seek ways and means to establish that continuity, legislation will be submitted to establish that continuity by the delegates, who are appalled by incompetent leadership.
11. That the tour of duty and leadership in the office of Grand Master shall be two years, and that the Grand Deacons shall be appointive offices.
12. That committee assignments shall be three year terms, with reappointments, if desired, of no more than two additional terms, for a total of 9 years of service.
13. To remove the racist implications in our Masonic law and to provide means whereby Freemasonry will not become vulnerable to Media attacks which eats away at the image of this great fraternity.
14. These items listed above, among others, shall be by the legislative process, by order of the delegates, with a charge to the Grand Master to uphold the law, and carry out the wishes and the directives of the Craft.

Virginia Freemasonry has a choice and that choice is between strength and weakness. It is in danger of becoming impotent and it has only to look at other organizations who were once strong but are now weak, and slowly each year continue to fade away.

## A Story by H. Bruce Green

Past Grand Master H. Bruce Green once said that in early times when you drove into downtown America you first saw a church steeple, a court house and a Masonic Lodge. Today, 1989, downtown America is gone except for very limited purposes. As we speed across America. We "ramp on" and "exit off" and what used to be downtown is now in

shopping centers, airports, and in front of a tube. Our sights are on sports arenas. The drug markets of America are unreal. We are a debtor nation in 1989. The attitude of the young does not look favorable toward Masonic doors. We are unknown in most parts and an "awareness" procedure to establish what Bruce Green used to see in early times is a necessity for our survival.

## The Old Frog

The writer often thinks of the old Frog sitting in a pot of lukewarm water, and the flame is lit and slowly the water heats to boiling and the frog dies. The reverse of this procedure would be to first heat the water to boiling, then throw the frog in and he immediately jumps out. Virginia Freemasonry has this characteristic of slowly boiling away into a state of impotency.

## In Search of A Vision

The writer began this paper with the words of "A Vision." From the 26th chapter of Acts, verse 19 we read: "Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." Frederick B. Speakman as he relates the Apostles Paul's statement before the puppet King Agrippa, "Wherefore, King Agrippa, I have not disobeyed what I saw that day, I have kept faith with that vision!"

You and I probably grow restless at the mention of visions. We have been bullied into tagging such talk for the lunatic fringe of human experience. We have been taught to fear and to distrust that key to the spirit world, the imagination. In Virginia Freemasonry let us pray for vision to lead us into another century.