

Masonry the Past, Present, and Future

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Let's talk about the past.

We only had a few lodges; our lodges were very small; we only had a few members.

Meetings were held in taverns, churches, meeting halls or wherever they could assemble.

Some of them would call from labor to refreshment and have a drink of refreshment. It was customary at that time to do this.

While at refreshment, they would discuss Preston's lectures, the very backbone of our fraternity. They would discuss the truths of friendship, morality, brotherly love, faith, hope, and charity.

Let's travel back a hundred years in America to any town or city on any night except Sunday, you would have seen lighted windows downtown, usually in the upper stories of the buildings. Flickering shadows, cast by gaslight or kerosene lamps, crossed and re-crossed the window shades as men in colorful costumes engaged in rituals of their secret societies, of which there were hundreds.

The Masons were the largest, of course. But then there were the Odd Fellows, the Improved Order of Red Men, Knights of Pythias, Knights of Columbus, Knights of Honor, Knights of Khorassan and the Knights of Labor, the Society of Druids, the Improved Order of the Temple, the Independent Order of Good Templars, the Order of the Gordian Knot, the Order of the Iroquois, the Order of Patrons of Husbandry, the Order of the Star-Spangled Banner, the Sons of Honor, the Sons of liberty, the Sons of Malta, the Sons of Temperance, the Supreme Tribe of Ben-Hur, the Modern Woodsmen of the World, the Military Order of the Loyal Legion and many, many, more. You probably have not heard of most of them.

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None of these were truly secret societies of course, although they almost all used that title. A truly secret society tries to hide the fact that it exists, and certainly conceals the identity of its members. These "social" secret societies appeared in parades, owned buildings identified with signs for their meetings, and participated in many public events from funerals to picnics. So how could they be secret?

Even though it was not that long ago, it is hard for most of us today, to realize just how important these societies, especially Masonry, were in America at the turn of the century. Consider this: in the early 1900's, nearly one of every four white males in America over the age of 25 was a member of the Masons. That is a larger percentage than belonged to any single denomination or even political party. It was the largest organization in America.

Today, of course, the vast majority of these organizations are long gone - of interest only to historians and sociologists. Masonry has hung on - but that is about the best we can say at the moment.

Since people do not join voluntary organizations which do not meet their needs in some way, another way to say the same thing is that at the turn of the century, we met the needs of one man in four. Now, we meet the needs of one man in forty. We have become almost quaint.

What happened?

It is popular in Masonic circles today to say it is the fault of the world. "Men just don't believe in integrity anymore. Movies and television keep them at home. People are just too busy".

This is at best, a cop-out.

Men have always been busy, and they have always found time to do the things which meet their needs. Television may keep the elderly in at night, but not a younger man.

Sometime in the Forties and Fifties, we stopped meeting the needs of many men. We meet the needs of 5% of the Masonic population. We are not meeting the needs of 95%

of our own members. The needs have not changed. Masonry changed. We oriented almost exclusively on ritual. As long as we spent some time meeting other needs as well, men joined.

To quote from Carl Claudy 1924 Masonry's failures:

"Masonry fails because it doesn't interest men sufficiently to make them practice what they preach."

"It is rankly unjust to blame Christ for the failures of those who profess to follow him. Was it Christ's fault that Peter denied him and Judas betrayed him? Was it the fault of the religion they professed? Or was it the fault of the man, the character, the up-bringing, the times?"

"Masonry does not fail men. Men fail Masonry. Masonry has the teachings, the thought, the ennobling influence, the example to set, the vision to show those who have eyes to see. If they close their hearts to the ennobling influence, will not profit by the example and shut their eyes to the vision, is that the fault of Masonry?"

We use to lay a lot of cornerstones and were seen in the public with much dignity. Masonic memorial services were attended by large groups and was very dignified. When was the last time you saw a Masonic Lodge lay a cornerstone? How many brethren were at the last memorial service you attended, or did you bother to attend?

We all professed a belief in God when we entered Masonry.

Religion was the backbone of our fraternity. We practiced and lived by the 10 commandments and the golden rule.

We always considered that God came first, then family and then Masonry.

People of outstanding character and dignity, outstanding citizens of our community became Masons.

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People of honor became Masons. They were outstanding in the public and were very careful about their remarks about Masonry.

We lived by our Masonic oaths and believed and practiced our obligations.

I can remember when most of our politicians, police officers, firemen, lawyers, and judges were Masons. We must take a very careful look at them today. We must take a very careful look at everyone. Guard the west gate.

When I became a Mason, I felt that I had become associated with the finest people in the world. When I entered the Masonic Lodge, I felt like I was entering the sanctum sanctorum or holy of holies.

Now let's talk about the present.

We now have many lodges.

Some are very large and have a great number of members.

We do not require any memory work as in the past. Just the words, signs and due-guards.

How many brethren can teach the catechism correctly?

Are we guarding the west gate properly? Is every candidate of outstanding moral character and professes a belief in God?

We violate our Masonic obligations, we speak-out in the public about Masonry and sometimes it is not good. We should be very careful about our remarks in the public because people that hear negative remarks become discouraged.

How many people have been told what to say when asked in whom do you put your trust?

Commotion and talking in the Lodge while the master or someone is talking is out of hand. Most brethren do not exit the Lodge in a proper manner. You should go to the altar and ask permission to leave.

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I have heard people use the Lord's name in vain in Lodge. How disgraceful. Is that proper respect to God, your neighbor or yourself?

Do we always considered the Lodge as sacred as a church? We should - why not?

We are seeing our Lodges decline each year some members are upset by our actions, foul language and statements in Lodge.

Lodges are merging together, due to small memberships, and financial reasons.

Masonic vows are violated every day.

The younger generation does not have time to become members, as they are struggling, raising children, involved in children's activities and financially strapped.

They don't have time to go to church.

The other Sunday morning as I was on the way to my church, I passed the soccer complex and there were about 1500 kids and parents there at 10:00 in the morning. It is my belief that they should have been in church. I know sports is important in a youth's life, but what is more important than God or church?

Young parents are so strapped with other obligations, activities, finances, work, they don't have time to go to church. But you know I can find time to do what I want to do. There are plenty of things I could have been doing today but I chose to be here. We need to involve our families more. We need to have ladies nights. We need to have children's nights. We need to have picnics. We need to visit the sick. We need to visit our widows. We need to support our youth organizations more. We need to visit that old brother that can't attend anymore. Do you remember your obligation? Some of us need to have a rededication service and repeat our Masonic obligations as a reminder.

The most violated part of our obligation, is speaking evil of a brother's good name. I ask you all, have you done this? Keep your answers to yourself, you have to live with your conscience. A few years ago, I was in a situation and I promised God, if he would let me

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live, I would be a better Christian, husband, father and Mason, and I have tried my best to do this.

Let me give you some statistics.

Year	Virginia Population	Total Masons in VA
1900	1,854,000	13,444
1925	2,400,000	5,561
1950	3,318,000	54,046
1975	4,675,000	70,733
2000	7,078,000	48,259
2025	8,466,000	

What happened between 1975 and 2000? We had a population growth of over 3,000,000. Was our Masonic decline due to the lack of interest, lack of finances, our negative impression, or what some think to be secrecy? And our wives have gone out into the work place. I can't give you the correct answer on this, maybe it was a combination of all.

On April 27th of this year, the Grand Lodge of Ohio initiated 8,300 candidates as a part of its first ever one-day class. My question is: how many of these will become active Masons? Was this done to obtain a membership card and the right to wear a ring and lapel pin? Are we going in the right direction?

Now let's look at the future where are we going? Our lodges seem to be getting smaller and fewer.

Our biggest loss is by death. I would like for everyone 65 years or older to please stand. I think you for being here and leading Masonry over the years.

We are not attracting enough new younger members to offset this. Everyone under 65 please stand. My brethren, I present you the leaders of the next generation of Masonry.

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The Grand Lodge keeps raising the per-capita every few years. Are we pricing ourselves out? It is my opinion that the Grand Lodge needs to tighten its belt. We can only do what we can afford. Every day, more and more members are being admitted into nursing homes, living off of fixed incomes, Medicare and Medicare. Look at your lodges -- what is the average age of the members? How can we afford to pay more?

If every member of our fraternity could bring in one new member each year for the next five years we, could survive. We all know this will not happen.

We have eliminated the requirement of the memory work. I ask you, is this good or bad?

We have one-day conferrals. I ask you, is this good or bad?

But the membership still declines.

We have officers in our lodges that do not learn the work or really try, but we push them on and on. Unqualified, what kind of job do you think they will do?

We are losing that bond between the mentor and the candidate. Every one of us developed a great friendship with our mentor. I know I will never forget mine.

I predict that in the future our lectures will be on video tape. Nobody seems to want to learn the lectures or improve their Masonic education.

What are we going to do about it? I wish I knew the answer!

I have talked about my personal thoughts. You may or may not agree with some of them, but a lot of them have merit. I hope I have given you something to think about. Let's carry Masonry forward. We must, or we will lose it!

I thank you for the opportunity to be here this morning and sharing my thoughts with you.

God bless you, God bless Masonry, and God bless America.