

Research Lodges of the Commonwealth of Virginia

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What is a Research Lodge? We are chartered by the Grand Lodge, we meet four times a year, we have the same officers as a regular Lodge, but we do not initiate, pass or raise candidates. At each meeting, we present one or more research papers and have a discussion afterwards. There are five Research Lodges in Virginia. Anyone from a regular Lodge in Virginia, or from a Grand Lodge in amity with Virginia, may affiliate. Our dues are between \$15 and \$30 a year, and we all offer Life Membership in Perpetuity. We pay no assessments to Grand Lodge.

The purpose of this article is to inform you about the history and operations of our Lodges. In preparation, we held a Zoom meeting with panelists from all five Research Lodges. This article is a compilation of their answers.

A. Douglas Smith, Jr. Lodge of Research No. 1949, chartered in 1982, meets at the George Washington National Masonic Memorial in Alexandria. Over one hundred Masons signed the Charter Petition. It was named for Mt. Wor. A. Douglas Smith, Jr., who served as Grand Master in 1949. An editor of the Masonic Herald, he was a prolific writer and researcher and was a strong proponent of Masonic Education. The intent was to establish a Lodge in Northern Virginia to foster research and promote serious study among brethren, specifically about early American and early Masonic history.

Civil War Lodge of Research No. 1865 was chartered in 1995 in Highland Springs by several Masons who were Civil War reenactors. A travelling Lodge that emulates early

Military Lodges, they visit Civil War battlegrounds to hold their meetings: As far west as Tennessee, as far north as Massachusetts, and as far south as Alabama.

George Washington Lodge of Research No. 1732, chartered in 2012, meets in Fredericksburg. Realizing that Scottish and Ancient Masonry was quite different from the more common Modern Lodges in Virginia, their focus is on Colonial, Military, and Scottish Masonry.

Peyton Randolph Lodge of Research No. 1774, chartered in 2007, meets in Williamsburg. Several members of Williamsburg Lodge wanted a Lodge focused on Colonial Masonry, specifically the lives of people who were responsible for the growth of Masonry at the founding of our Grand Lodge.

Virginia Research Lodge No. 1777, chartered in 1951 as our first Research Lodge, meets in Highland Springs. It sprang from a discussion between Grand Master A. Douglas Smith, Jr. and Grand Junior Deacon Hugh M. Reed in 1949. They submitted a resolution to Grand Lodge to investigate, collect, and collate information about Ancient Craft Masonry in Virginia. Many famous Virginia Masons were found among the charter members.

James Noah Hillman Lodge of Research No. 1883, chartered in 2009, met in Southwest Virginia but soon folded. Fortunately, there is now a renewed interest in starting a new Research Lodge in this area.

Each Lodge has a distinct character, which you can only experience by visiting. A. Douglas Smith's members have a broad base of experience and depth of subject matter, with experts from all walks of life, experiences, and cultures. Many members live in D.C. and Northern Virginia.

Civil War has more members, and more from other jurisdictions, than the others. This blend of different backgrounds highlights the differences for how to open and close a Lodge, while demonstrating that Masonry at its core is the same everywhere.

Peyton Randolph actively participates with the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation and leads St. John's Day celebrations twice a year.

Virginia Research was created when no other such Lodge existed. It was chartered specifically to correct the myths and legends of Masonry and replace them with facts. For example, Rt. Wor. Robert E. Simpson and Mt. Wor. A. Douglas Smith, Jr. both wrote papers on the legend of the Grand Master's jewel, how it was allegedly crafted by Paul Revere specifically for George Washington to wear as our first Grand Master. Research efforts by both of these Brothers proved that this was completely untrue, but the myths still persist.

A major change came in 2019. Mt. Wor. William Hershey Jr. created a new Research District, with our own District Deputy Grand Master. It made little sense for Research Lodges to belong to their geographical area, as our requirements differ from regular Lodges. Having our own District also helps us act more like a team, instead of individuals swimming in separate directions. This article and the preparations involved probably would not have occurred if we were not in our own District.

In 2020 and 2021, COVID-19 forced most Masonic bodies to meet online or else not meet at all. For Research Lodges, this became a blessing, as participation increased among the members. A. Douglas Smith broadcast their papers during stated meetings, but did not meet online except during stateds. Civil War's membership being geographically widespread, there were many Brothers who attended online that wouldn't have otherwise, the same with Peyton Randolph.

But it was Virginia Research Lodge who truly took advantage of this opportunity. As one Stated Meeting after another was cancelled, we decided instead to call it an "Unstated Meeting" and meet online. We performed no ritual and conducted no business, but we did have our scheduled presentation, "The Diverse Grand Lodges of France", and the "Unstated Meeting" tradition was born. We have met over thirty times since, with a variety of speakers and panel discussions, all of which are posted to YouTube for others to view.

So, how are Research Lodges essential to Masonry? We serve a purpose, but we haven't done enough to highlight what that purpose is. We spread Masonic light and knowledge which can help those Brothers who want further light and understanding but might not have the time or ability to do the research. We must remember that it is not our existence; it is our impact that we need to share. Our impact is how we foster the growth of education in Masonry.

Every Lodge, and every Mason, benefits from Masonic Education; but the general consensus is that education is where Masonry, as a whole, fails to deliver. Lodges lack members who do their own research and offer quality presentations. Research Lodges offer structured, research-supported presentations. Many presentations you see in Lodge are from members of the Masonic research community. By becoming active in a Research Lodge, a dedicated Mason can learn to how to write research papers on his own. Newer members want to know why something happened, not just what happened. Research Lodges can answer the question, "Why?".

Like the Committee on Work, even if you are not an active ritualist, you benefit from seeing good ritual. We preserve the history and traditions of Virginia Masonry, the very core of our institution. By building on that foundation, there are second and third level effects that permeate Masonry. A Brother who is not participating still reaps the benefits. We may attract men who are not aware of Masonry but come to learn about Masonic Research, and that adds members to Lodges.

Civil War brings visibility to Masonry and Masonic Education when visiting battlefields and historic sites. They inspire petitions from Brothers who see something they don't usually see: the camaraderie, the battlefields, and other aspects of our Brotherhood. Research Lodges also help Masons make connections: A Brother may ask a member of a Lodge for speakers, for people who are knowledgeable about a topic, and the connections between educated Brothers grow.

One topic of discussion for the panel was about chartering more Research Lodges, specifically in areas such as Hampton Roads and Southwest Virginia, where Masonry is active and there is an interest in Masonic Education. One panelist pointed out that all it takes is a spark, for one Mason to share the idea, that will inspire others to get the ball rolling. If we can light a spark with this article to interest more Masons in education and research, we may soon find new Research Lodges all across our Commonwealth, and that would be something to see.

In our earlier years, you would see a half dozen Past Grand Masters in attendance at Virginia Research or A. Douglas Smith. Past Grand Masters were essential in chartering both Lodges and were our earliest Worshipful Masters. Mt. Wor. Cabell Cobbs was Worshipful Master of Virginia Research in 1995. Imagine how impressed a new Master Mason felt, attending his first Research Lodge meeting and seeing the most recent Grand Master sitting in the East! There was a strong connection between the Grand Lodge and the Research Lodges, and we were often tasked to gather information from Grand Lodge records and other sources to support ongoing projects. This was in an era long before computers made searching through archives an almost trivial task. The Grand Lodge frequently tasked Mt. Wor. Stewart Miner, Mt. Wor. Donald Robey, Rt. Wor. Allen E. Roberts, and others, who then delivered papers showing the results of their efforts.

Today, Past Grand Masters and Grand Lodge Officers are a rarity in our Research Lodges. Where once we worked arm in arm, now we are at a distance. Hopefully, articles like this may close that gap.

The impetus is on us. We must be more than just another Saturday Lodge. We must offer something pertinent to Masonry. We must increase our visibility. Simply inviting others to attend is not enough. If the Research Lodges demonstrate their value to Virginia Freemasonry writ large, then we will attract attendees. If we do not, they are unlikely to attend on their own. Hopefully, the buzz generated by our Unstated Meetings and other online efforts, and this article itself, will spark more interest. In research, it is important to find a hook, to provide something people can walk away with, something that makes you remember, something that makes you think.

So, why should you attend a Research Lodge? To gain a broader understanding and appreciation of different perspectives. To learn about Masonic topics of interest. To gain more Masonic Light. To hear an educational program you might not hear in a regular Lodge.

Most Masons do not consider themselves students, they think of research as a dirty word. They have little interest in "historical stuff" unless they lived through it themselves or it was one story their high school history teacher told them that they liked. Sometimes you reach one person in a crowd, sometimes you reach twenty. It all depends on the crowd, and how well you tell the story. We can only hope we told our story well.

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Visit <https://tinyurl.com/UnstatedMeetings> to see our previous Unstated Meetings.