

Research Lodges

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Virginia Research Lodge No. 1777

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Editor's Note: The author references Rt. Wor. Paul Bessel's ten step guideline for producing a research paper, I am including the steps as an introduction, with the option of publishing the entire article in the near future as a reference.

- 1. Start with a Masonic Encyclopedia*
- 2. Think About Your Goals*
- 3. Use Basic Masonic Books*
- 4. Masonic Journals and Magazines*
- 5. Make an Outline of Your Research*
- 6. Seeking Advice and Ideas from Others*
- 7. Keep Track of Sources and Give Them to Others*
- 8. Be Willing to Change Your Mind*
- 9. Make Your Research Interesting and Relevant*
- 10. Masonic Libraries and Computer Resources*

Our Worshipful Master of A. Douglas Smith Lodge of Research No. 1949, Rt. Wor. Sam Atkinson, has instituted a program this year to encourage more members to prepare papers. A part of this program involves a short Masonic research vignette at each of our meetings in order to illustrate some approaches that each member might use to prepare a research paper. We have defined those kinds of papers that we plan to print in our transactions and, so far this year, I have provided one research paper and one book report to illustrate types of research that we will be publishing in our transactions.

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These vignettes follow up on a paper provided by Rt. Wor. Paul Bessel that provided guidelines for preparation of a Masonic research paper. You may have heard of 12-step programs. Rt. Wor. Paul has kindly authorized me to provide you a copy of an outline of his ten step-program for interesting and informative Masonic research.

I thought that for today, I might walk quickly through those steps to illustrate how it might be used in looking into a question that, hopefully, may be of some interest to those here today — a brief background of research lodges and our Virginia research lodges.

For step 1, I checked my Masonic Encyclopedias and found nothing in Mackey or Waite under the topics of research or education. Of course, this took me some time as there are so very many fascinating topics that one runs across while looking for something else in these books that it's hard not to read a number of the other articles, several of which are very likely to suggest topics for future papers.

Going on to Step 2, my goal for this particular effort was to prepare a very brief paper for today that would hopefully be interesting and informative for Masons already members of Research Lodges. Often, in preparing Masonic research papers I find myself hard put to stop the research and write the paper as the reading is both easier and more fun for me.

In following Step 3, I looked again at several of my favorite books: Rt. Wor. the Reverend Doctor Joseph Fort Newton's *The Builders*; Brother George Steinmetz's *Freemasonry; Its Hidden Meaning* and W. L. Wilmhurst's *The Meaning of Masonry* but didn't find anything specifically related to Masonic research. However, when I checked our speaker's¹ fellow Canadian, Wallace McLeod's *Quest for Light*, I found his statement (p. 22):

¹ Wor. Nelson King, FPS was the guest speaker that meeting with "Whither Are We Traveling".

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"Of the various specific functions of Masonry, in my opinion the most useful will be in Masonic education, the dissemination of practical new ideas. My own view is that the brethren should be at least made aware that there is such a thing as Masonic scholarship, and possibly that they may be able to learn about it from research lodges or research groups."

I also found interesting historical data on research lodges. The earliest reference Brother McLeod has found to a Masonic research organization deals with the Masonic Archaeological Institute in London as early as 1871, but which ceased to operate in 1873. He believes the oldest active Masonic research society to be Quatuor Coronati warranted in 1884. The movement spread as far as Australia with the research lodge, St. Albans No. 38 having been founded in Adelaide in 1889. While that lodge is still active, it ceased being a research lodge 50 years ago. The first evidence he notes of a research group in the U.S. was the National Masonic Research Society founded in Iowa in 1913/14 which published the magazine "The Builder" from 1915 - 1930. The Philalethes Society, much loved and fostered by our late Rt. Wor. Allen E. Roberts as well as by Wor. Nelson King, was founded in 1928. Rt. Wor. Brother Roberts has published a very interesting history of the Philalethes Society.

The earliest actual Research Lodge Brother McLeod found in the United States was the North Carolina Lodge of Research which worked from 1931 to 1954. New York and Oregon likewise formed Research Lodges later in 1931.

For Step 4, I thumbed through a number of back issues of *The Philalethes*, *The Royal Arch Mason*, *The Plumblin*, and *The Scottish Rite Magazine*. This was slow going for me because they have so many interesting articles that I stopped to scan. I didn't select anything for this paper from my review but gathered some more ideas for future papers.

For step 5, because this paper needed to be very brief, I restricted it to two main points, (1) a bit of background on Masonic research in general, and (2) a bit of background on

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our research lodges in Virginia, and I had chosen the organization for the paper to follow Rt. Wor. Brother Bessel's 10 steps. Therefore, I did not feel the need for an outline for this paper as I would for a longer, more complex paper. However, if you find this effort lacking for organization, this is probably the reason for my shortcoming in that regard.

For step 6, I sought advice from Rt. Wor. Brothers Bessel, Atkinson, and Brother Bill Copenhaver, Secretary of Civil War Lodge of Research No. 1865 regarding their specific areas. All were helpful but shortcomings in the paper should be laid only at the feet of the author.

I have kept track of my sources and cited them within the paragraphs for this brief paper as suggested in step 7. For longer, more complex papers I use endnotes and a bibliography. I still chafe over the difficulty that I suffered while in school in inserting footnotes in typewritten term papers in the days before word processing programs, so never use footnotes.

Step 8 is a challenge to many of us who may focus on gathering evidence to support our hypotheses rather than being ready to change our minds. Fortunately for this paper, it is a fact-gathering rather than an opinion-centered paper so I had no preconceived ideas about it.

Step 9, "make your research interesting and relevant" can best be judged by others so I think this can best be done in conjunction with step 6 in seeking advice from others.

Step 10, Masonic libraries and computer resources, proved very helpful. Rt. Wor. Brother Bessel has a computer home page at the web address <http://bessel.org>² that addresses each of the Virginia Research Lodges and a page at <http://bessel.org/resldgs.htm> that provides information about Research Lodges in other states and countries. He lists some

² Updated web site addresses in original text.

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59 Research Lodges³ in this country and only 12 of the 50 states have none in his list. He proposed an association of these Research Lodges but found there was more opposition than support for the idea, although lodges that meet in the daytime have a national association. He also lists on this site quite a large number of Research Lodges, associations and study circles in Canada, Australia, England, Scotland, Ireland, France, Italy, New Zealand, South Africa, and even Lebanon.

Many of you know that the senior Virginia Research Lodge is Virginia Research Lodge No. 1777 chartered in 1950 with 22 members. Congratulations, Brothers, on your 50th Birthday. It is noteworthy that James N. Hillman is shown as Worshipful Master for the first nine years of existence. In its first decade, the membership had a net growth of only two members. In the next decade, it grew by almost 100 members and almost another 100 in its third, so that membership was at 210 in 1981. In 10 of the years since, membership has increased but losses have occurred in the rest, so that by the end of 1999, membership stood at 227.

A. Douglas Smith Lodge of Research No. 1949, formed in 1983, was named for Mt. Wor. Doug Smith who was Master of Virginia Research Lodge No. 1777 in 1962. It was given the number 1949 for the year that he served as Grand Master. It had 136 members when chartered and added, like Virginia Research Lodge, almost 100 members in its first decade, which was also its high-water mark in memberships. At the end of 1999, memberships stood at 205.

The new kid on the block is Civil War Lodge of Research (CWLR) No. 1865, chartered in 1995 with Rt. Wor. Allen E. Roberts as its Charter Master. Of course, he served Virginia Lodge of Research as Worshipful Master in 1966 and as Secretary for many years thereafter and was instrumental in the degree team which traveled widely conferring the Master Mason degree while wearing Confederate uniforms. I believe he would be proud

³ Rt. Wor. Bessel stopped updating his web site in 2015, he listed 65 in the U.S. There are likely more now.

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of the record of accomplishments and growth of CWLR which had grown from a beginning of 130 members to 321 members at the end of 1999 and has continued this phenomenal growth over the past two years so that, while the newest, it is now the largest of the three. Members come from many states and several other countries, including our very good neighbor, Canada where Wor. King is a member of this Lodge. Today, Wor. Bob Schindler will be leading us on a tour of the Battlefield at Petersburg. He has planned Masonic visits to Manassas, Chambersburg and Cold Harbor during the rest of this Masonic year.

Is there any significance to the membership numbers mentioned or to the comparison between the Lodges' membership records? Rt. Wor. Jim Cole, our Deputy Grand Master⁴, has quoted Mt. Wor. William Mosely Brown, Master of Virginia Research Lodge in 1959, who said during the period of the great membership losses in the 1930s that the main problem was not the amount of members in Masonry, but was, rather, the amount of Masonry in the members. On the other hand, a speaker at the Scottish Rite symposium in Williamsburg said that a lot of his staff members were inclined to say about Masonic education, "You can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him drink." To this he said he always replied, "No, you can't make him drink, but you can always salt his hay."

A very active Mason in the District of Columbia has postulated that where men can clearly identify their hobby with their Masonic membership and with brothers interested in sharing their hobby through Masonry, their interest in both the hobby and their Masonry is greatly stimulated. Perhaps this accounts for the popularity over a wide geographic area for CWLR. Perhaps also, if we study our membership trends to see if we can discover any correlation between gains and our lodge activities, such as our research publications, by encouraging wider participation in research and publishing, and enthusiastically emphasizing the fun of it, we can learn how we can best add seasoning to their lives by salting their hay a bit. That can be the next research paper for someone.

⁴ Mt. Wor. Cole was Grand Master of Masons in Virginia in 2001.

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