

WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

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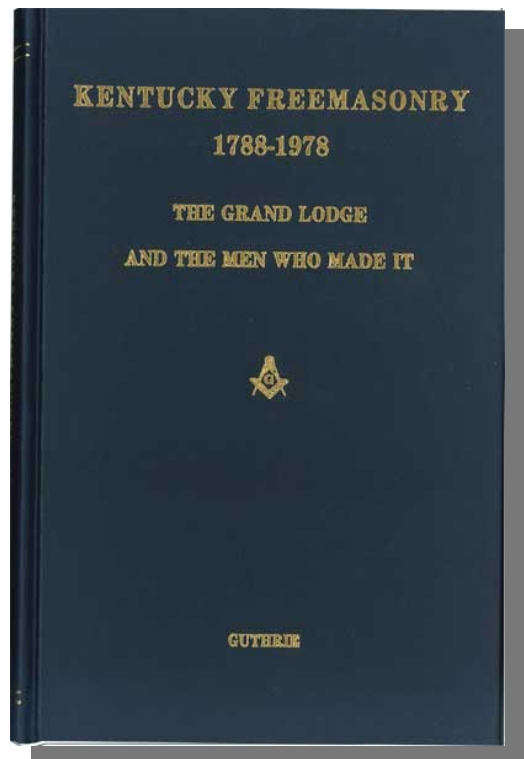
Kentucky Freemasonry - 1788-1978: The Grand Lodge And The Men Who Made It

By Charles Snow Guthrie

Professor Charles Snow Guthrie's *Kentucky Freemasonry – 1788-1978 The Grand Lodge and the Men Who Made It* is the most recent and the most comprehensive study of Kentucky Freemasonry currently available. Prior to the 1981 publication of Worshipful Bro. Guthrie's work, the most recent book that addressed the history of Kentucky Freemasonry was Bro. J. Winston Coleman's *Masonry in the Bluegrass*, which was published in 1933. Fittingly, Bro. Coleman wrote the introduction for *Kentucky Freemasonry – 1788-1978*.

Bro. Guthrie's work is unique in that while it addresses specific historical eras in Kentucky Freemasonry, it also provides previously unavailable biographical sketches of several of the legendary men who influenced the course of Freemasonry in Kentucky.

The first three chapters of *Kentucky Freemasonry – 1788-1978* describe the foundation on which Kentucky Freemasonry was built. Worshipful Bro. Guthrie faithfully traces the formation of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717, the spread of Freemasonry to the American Colonies, the establishment of the Grand Lodge of Virginia and the path of the pioneers who brought Freemasonry into present day Kentucky. Recognizing



Kentucky's prominent role in the expansion of Freemasonry into the American West, Worshipful Bro. Guthrie titled his chapter on the foundation of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, "The Premier Grand Lodge of the West."

Worshipful Bro. Guthrie devotes an entire chapter to the towering influence of M. W. P. G. M. Rob Morris and gives perhaps the most complete portrait of Morris available. Most students of Freemasonry instantly recognize M. W. P. G. M. Morris as the Poet Laureate of Freemasonry and credit him with the founding of the Order of the Eastern Star. Worshipful Bro. Guthrie examines the life of Morris in more detail and describes the ill-fated Conservator movement, his travels abroad and his involvement with Kentucky's Masonic University. Placed in his proper historical context, Morris becomes a much more accessible figure. Perhaps the most telling shortcoming of *Kentucky Freemasonry – 1788-1978* is the failure to hold M. W. P. G. M. Morris accountable for his publication in 1883 of *William Morgan: Or Political Anti-Masonry, Its Rise, Growth, And Decadence*, in which Morris stated that Morgan had not been abducted and murdered by Masons, but had been deported to Canada. Morris's work, a fanciful bit of conjecture at best, is not directly mentioned by Worshipful Bro. Guthrie.

Other notable Kentucky Freemasons who receive attention in *Kentucky Freemasonry – 1788-1978* include M. W. P. G. M. John Henry Cowles, who has his own chapter detailing his service to Freemasonry and especially to the Scottish Rite, R. W. Past Grand Secretary H. B. Grant, M. W. P. G. M. Henry Clay, Bro. John Cabell Breckinridge and M. W. P. G. M. Joseph H. Daviess.

One of the more intriguing chapters in *Kentucky Freemasonry – 1788-1978* is the chapter titled, "Masonic University," which details the Grand Lodge's lone foray into the realm of public education. Originally envisioned as a school for the orphans of Masons, the institution at LaGrange struggled for identity and served as a primary and secondary school for boys and also awarded a handful of college degrees. In an effort to re-energize the institution, it briefly became affiliated with the Kentucky School of Medicine. Low enrollment, the Civil War and the costs of maintenance all doomed the Masonic University to a relatively brief existence.

Perhaps the ideological successor to the Masonic University are Kentucky's two Masonic homes, which are the subject of another one of Professor Guthrie's chapters. More focused in purpose (the support and education of Masonic widows and orphans following the Civil War), the Masonic Homes received more widespread support than did the Masonic University. Worshipful Bro. Guthrie describes the Widows and Orphans Home in Louisville, and later the Old Masons Home located in Shelbyville, as objects of pride for Kentucky Masons.

Professor Guthrie also devotes several chapters to the roller coaster years of the 20th Century, noting the rapid increase of membership in Kentucky Lodges, the devastating effect of the Great Depression and the last great increase in membership following World War II. Much of Professor Guthrie's work on the 20th Century provides background for the organizational structure of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky as we know it today. His work includes a discussion

of the several editions of the Constitution, the rise of the concept of District Deputies (originally known as “Key Men”) and, of course, the endless debates over which version of ritual should be used.

Worshipful Bro. Guthrie published *Kentucky Freemasonry – 1788-1978* at a time when Kentucky Freemasonry had experienced nearly twenty consecutive years of membership losses. He notes those losses in his work and speculates briefly as to the reasons that men are no longer attracted to, and remain active in, their respective Lodges. Worshipful Bro. Guthrie does not speculate on the continuance of such membership trends (after another forty years, we now know that membership has continued to steeply decline), nor does he offer any commentary as to the long-term future of Kentucky Freemasonry.

Kentucky Freemasonry – 1788-1978 The Grand Lodge and the Men Who Made It is exactly what it advertises itself to be. It is a factual account of Freemasonry in Kentucky from its earliest days to the last quarter of the 20th Century. It draws heavily on the Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky and the prior works of J. Winston Coleman, R. W. Grand Secretary H. B. Grant and M. W. P. G. M. Rob Morris.

Kentucky Freemasonry – 1788-1978 is a scholarly work, well organized, and written in very accessible language. Providing necessary detail and placing important issues in proper historical context, it is an absolute necessity for any serious student of Kentucky Freemasonry.

Kentucky Freemasonry – 1788-1978 is available through amazon.com or from other online booksellers.

Charles Snow Guthrie Jr, February 15, 1922 – December 24, 2000 was a member and Past Master of Cumberland Lodge No. 413 in Burkesville, Kentucky, and a dual member at Bowling Green Lodge No. 73, Bowling Green, Kentucky. Worshipful Bro. Guthrie was a retired professor of English at Western Kentucky University and a retired teacher at Cumberland County High School. He was the editor of the Kentucky Folklore Record. Worshipful Bro. Guthrie was raised to the sublime Degree of a Master Mason on August 27, 1943, in Cumberland Lodge No. 413. He was a recipient of the Thirty-Third Degree of Scottish Rite Freemasonry, the Allied Masonic Degrees, and the Red Cross of Constantine.

**Reviewed by Dan M. Kemble, Past Master
William O. Ware Lodge of Research**

