

Masonic Perspectives



A Second Look at Aspects of Controversial Topics In American Freemasonry

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Masonic Perspectives is a project created by Past Masters John W. Bizzack and Dan M. Kemble intended to bring the writings about controversial topics of the past in American Freemasonry and provide readers a second look and contemporary perspective on the topics to serve as a catalyst for further discussion. This project is a joint venture of Lexington Lodge No. 1, Lexington, Kentucky and William O. Ware Lodge of Research, Covington, Kentucky.



In this edition, a second look about how the literature of Freemasonry has been examined, written about, and viewed by Masons, non-Masons, and the academic world.



| COMMENTARY

John W. Bizzack, Past Master, Lexington Lodge No. 1

The Neglect of Our Masonic History

John W. Bizzack, PM, Lexington Lodge No. 1

November 2019

History is who we are and why we are the way we are.

~ David G. McCullough

You can't see the picture when you're in the frame is a way of describing the distortion of the perspective we have when we are in the middle of a challenging set of circumstances.

When it comes to the cavalcade of early writing about the history and evolution of Freemasonry, we see in those early accounts how writers recorded from “inside that frame” with little regard to what was going on in history outside the fraternity that influenced it. The lack of authentic materials of those early years make those early accounts more than speculative in parts. Some are little more than imaginary, tormented with a legion of problems, yet they became the *popular version* of Masonic history – especially the theory of how operative masonry transitioned to speculative. Evidence was not always the pillar upon which writings were based.

Masons are entirely free, of course, to consider and use early as well as later writings to form their own conclusions, and so is everyone else interested in subject of Freemasonry. There is a gulf, however, between the popular history constructed by many early and later Masonic writers and the actual history of Freemasonry. Naturally, after multiple decades, it is the popular version entrenched in the mainstream members of the Masonic institution although many writings were one-dimensional and others out of context with the times, and largely centered on the internal goings on of the fraternity.

Even the best understanding the internal history of the institution requires the ideal to be separated from the real and examined along with what was going on in the rest of society at the same time that inspired, swayed, and influenced it since its organized inception. Popular history and “good history” are rarely the same thing.

HISTORIOGRAPHY

The term historiography is the writing of history, especially the writing of history based on the critical examination of sources, the selection of particular details from the authentic materials in those sources, and the synthesis of those details into a narrative that stands the test of critical examination. Until the 1970s the historiography model was conspicuously missing in the writing Masonic history.

Writing about the history of Freemasonry does not make the writer an historian any more than just being made a member of the fraternity alone makes him a Freemason in more than title. While there has been and are today many qualified Masonic writers, researches and historians, their work stands above others because they do not abbreviate or wear blinders that neglect, or altogether ignore, the over-arching influences of the rest of the world on the course of Freemasonry – especially after it was organized as we know it today.

Masonic Perspectives – Edition 8, January 2020

American author, narrator, historian, and lecturer, David G. McCullough, best frames the importance of *comprehensive* history in his quote, *History is who we are and why we are the way we are*. To understand what makes mainstream American Freemasonry like it is today and will likely become in the future, considering only the popular version – the most common way of looking at it - will not provide the answers.

To get even the faintest idea of factual causes leading to its organization and the state of the American fraternity today, at least a marginal acquaintance with the accurate history of the external culture and society surrounding it as it evolved, is essential. The Masonic enthusiast who is content to rely only on the core of the popular history as all that is needed to be known about the institution certainly has plenty of fantastical material at his disposal from which to work. The Masonic world is flooded with fantastic tales and as a matter of regret there are many Masons who seem to prefer the fraternity draped in mysticism rather than to have the truth elicited and understood.¹

Great forces like Freemasonry spring from the needs of the human soul, and a result of growth and development. Freemasonry was not created. It was a slow, deliberate work of the years, and like all other human institutions, is the outgrowth of conditions which provoked its necessity and begs to be studied and understood in that way. Intimately linked to the society of its time, it is impossible to separate Freemasonry from its external surrounding society without turning it into something manufactured.²

The clinging to the surplus of fantastical material by Masons and the institution is one reason trained historians and the academic world ignored what was thought of as Masonic literature for so long. The evaluation by professionally trained historians of how Masonic history was compiled and handed down has not been always well received by all Masons.

In 1947 the pioneering work of two professional English historians, Douglas Knoop and Gwilym Peredur Jones, at least for a short time, first attracted an academic interest in the fraternity. In their *Genesis of Freemasonry, An Account of The Rise and Development of Freemasonry In Its Operative, Accepted, and Early Speculative Phase*, they wrote in Chapter 1:

In the course of time the scope of Masonic history has undergone great changes. So far as we know, the first attempts to write Masonic history were made in the fourteenth century, and resulted in the accounts of the Craft which, in the Regius Poem, the Cooke MS., and in other versions of the MS. Constitutions of Masonry,' were passed on to freemasons of later times. The motives underlying these early versions of the history of freemasonry can only be conjectured. The purpose may have been to provide the masons with something resembling the charters, or records of privileges, possessed by craft guilds at that time. Or possibly some clergyman, or other relatively learned person connected with the building industry, out of interest in the mason's craft and a desire to show how ancient and honorable it was, may have compiled its history. The results, whatever the motive, cannot be taken very seriously today; but the compilers probably did their best according to the standards of their time, basing their accounts mainly upon scriptural and such other received authorities as were directly or indirectly known to them.

The 300 plus page book was off and running, bringing attention, at least among Masons, by what was anticipated as a re-written, fresh version of the origins and workings of the fraternity. No matter, the work languished until 1969 when John Morris Roberts, an English historian who specialized in the study of institutions, noted how surprising it was that professional historians in the country which gave Freemasonry to the world [referring to England] had not found any interest in the subject, and how they had ignored the

¹ Delmar D. Darrah, *History and Evolution of Freemasonry*, The Charles T. Powner, Co, Chicago, 1915, reprint 1954

² Charles Porset, *Masonic Historiography*, Chapter 8, *Handbook of Freemasonry*, Brill, 2014, 118.

Masonic Perspectives – Edition 8, January 2020

influence of Masonry as a cultural agency, as generators and transmitters of ideas, symbols, and as sources of attitudes and images reflecting the times. His opinion was that Masonic history had been effectively abandoned to “Masonic Aquarians and cranks.”³

In 1972 Frances A. Yates, an English historian who focused on the study of the Renaissance, offered one answer to Roberts’ question and opinion. She saw the writings conspicuously shy on evidence and teemed with a unique level of piety and glorification of the *idea* of Freemasonry. As a result, she sounded a cautionary warning to anyone else who might be considering their own research on Freemasonry or areas related to it based on available Masonic literature. She warned that existing materials and “misty discussions, deservedly sinks below the notice of the serious historian” to the extent that the “serious enquirer” may end up feeling they are sinking helplessly in a bottomless bog.⁴ Other professional historians shared Yates’ view who, like her, had expected to find the same rigors and standards of research in Masonic history for which they were trained to study and evaluate.

A desire to understand the appeal and function of fraternal orders launched historian, Lynn Dumenil’s seminal study of American Freemasonry. The book she wrote about her findings, *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880-1930*, was published in 1984. For the past 30 years, her work is perhaps one of the most overlooked accounts, at least by Freemasons, about how and why the philosophical and intellectual qualities of the institution went off the rails. Her historical analysis is not found in many Masonic writings, even by those who may be considered historians, because it does not do what she goes on to explain is common in the fraternity. She wrote, “A major concern of American Freemasonry became and remains the aggrandizement and perpetuation of the organization. Its survival was and continues to be an end in itself.”

To position the real history of Freemasonry in judicious and objective perspective or equip it with academic validity does require an approach much broader than the offerings of many early (and later) Masonic writings. To construct a comprehensive Masonic history, a certain discipline is necessary for writers to reject mere romantic versions; the wealth of existing generalizations; myths; and, the largely opinion or imagination-based writings of the past and present. There is simply no way to get around that if a comprehensive, factual history is the aim.

One must remember though, most all the early writings were intended for a Masonic audience, not the general public. Because of the unrestrained fanciful and capricious styles of writing, why would it be too surprising professionally trained historians, academicians and serious student of history ignored much of Freemasonry for more than 150 years.

THOSE EARLY MASONIC WRITINGS

Freemasonry can hardly be said to have even had a factual literature prior to the last quarter of the eighteenth century, or a literature of any considerable proportions or importance until late in the nineteenth century.⁵ With the exception of James Anderson, none of the founders of the Grand Lodge of England left accounts of their ideas or experiences. Prichard’s exposure *Masonry Dissected* in 1730 and Martin Clares’ *Defense of Masonry* (a response to Prichard) that same year, were, as some argue, the most reliable accounts of what occurred in Masonic lodges.

³ John Morris Roberts, “Freemasonry: Possibilities of a Neglected Topic,” *The English Historical Review* 84, no. 331 (1969): 322–325.

⁴ Frances A. Yates *Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, and Boston, 1972.

⁵ Henry Wilson Coil, “Conversations on Freemasonry,” *Transactions of the Grand Lodge of Missouri* 32 (1976), 83.

Masonic Perspectives – Edition 8, January 2020

According to Henry W. Coil, the first Freemason to attempt a book on the subject was Wellins Calcott, but it was not until 1769 that his work appeared: *A Candid Disquisition of the Principles and Practices of the Most Ancient and Honorary Society of Free and Accepted Masons; Together with Some Strictures on the Origin, Nature and Design of the Institution.*⁶ Calcott's work was not any more factual than earlier or later writings in the 1700s.

As in England, early and later American Freemasonry scholarship has sought legitimacy from university and independent scholarly authorities but neglected the kind of research that is recognized across traditionally accepted scholarly lines. Although recognized scholarly investment by professionally trained historians about Masonic history remains rare in the United States, there is a welcome growing interest today from academia with autonomous Masonic studies.

Resources and information available about the history of Freemasonry in the United State in 1800 is much different than what the research shows its history to be two centuries later. No matter, in the world of Freemasonry, facts do not seem capable of taking the place of a good story told so often in the fraternity that it becomes *Masonic fact*, evidence-troubled or not.

In *The History and Evolution of Freemasonry*, Delmar D. Darrah, Past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Illinois points out how this approach to writing about Masonic history continued in America as it had in England. His book appeared in 1915.

Masons have believed the things concerning the origin of the institution that they wanted to believe and have gone forth and told them as facts. When links were missing, they have been supplied by drawing upon fertile imaginations.⁷

Today we see more writings from Masons and a literature attempting to cure that shortcoming. Much of it, whether realized or not, came on the heels of a late 1940s attempt by non-Masonic historians to start looking at Freemasonry as the important social development it was. What slowly followed was more external academic research and subsequently more was offered in the way of factual information on which serious Masonic writers and researchers who came later could build on with subtlety when examining the social ideas and shifting cultural roles the fraternity has embraced since it was organized and right on up until today. Many more skillful Masonic writers emerged as a result, but it seems the search for historic truth about the origins of the Craft and topics surrounding the true impact of the fraternity on the world relied on professionally trained historians and academics to fuel it and present as a complete entity Freemasonry as a the driving force at one time that mirrored society.⁸ Today we can observe throughout the country how the mainstream indeed mirrors society to a larger degree than it did for decades following its organization.

Each year, the Masonic bibliography increases by several hundreds of references throughout the world. The abundance of this production is nevertheless misleading but cannot hide the fact that they are the product of both Freemason and non-Freemason authors who often analyze an important number of sources, but mostly ignore the standard academic rules.⁹

ENTER THE PROFESSIONAL HISTORIAN

Published in 1886, Robert Freke Gould's *History of Freemasonry* required six years of his time to compile. He brought that work up to date in an abridged edition in 1903. Gould's massive volumes stands today as a

⁶ *Ibid.*, 87

⁷ Darrah.

⁸ Porset, 126.

⁹ *Ibid.*

Masonic Perspectives – Edition 8, January 2020

credible work by a Mason about the history of the institution for many reasons, foremost is the fact that he concerned himself through all four volumes with the development of Freemasonry as we know it, which marks him the first Masonic historian of the Scientific school.

In his 905-page work, Gould establishes how the legitimate approach to the accurate history of Freemasonry is based on documentation and stood upright in his staunch belief that before you believe that Masonry was tied to movements in antiquity, you have to prove it.

In *History of Freemasonry*, he wrote and discussed various theories being put forth in his day, describing in their turn certain Egyptian customs as described by the Greek historian, Herodotus; Greek fraternal and mystical societies as mentioned in William Smith's Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography; rumors of a Dionysian (a philosophical concept based on certain features of ancient Greek mythology) architectural fraternity which resembled Freemasonry and in addition to numerous others; quotes passages from H.A. Gile's *Freemasonry in China*.

He writes about other rites and concludes there is indeed a connection between modern speculative Masonry and these cults and movements in antiquity. However, the connection, he explained, is that some group of 17th century philosophers of the Craft and writers of his own period "ransacked antiquity to discover a model for their newly born Freemasonry."

The influence of Gould's "prove it" approach to the history of Freemasonry altered the way many Masons started to think about the history of the institution. His message corresponds with some Masonic writers today who endorse the idea that the sooner we put all these antiquity claims into the proper context (allegorical ritual designed to teach moral truths) and get on with the business of the labor toward becoming better men and more informed Masons, the better off the institution and its votaries will be.

The effort to raise the level of research about Freemasonry and free it from the quagmire in which it had fallen may be credited to Gould and like-minded charter founders who were part of establishing the first English research lodge, Quatuor Coronati 2076, in 1886. The lodge insisted on using an evidence-based approach to the study of Masonic history with the stated aim of research to replace the imaginative writings of earlier authors on the history of Freemasonry.

Since at least the late 1880s, many Masonic researchers and scholars started applying the authentic school of research more than opinion-based researched disguised as theoretical. The approach helped the study of Masonry to separate historic fact from legend and myth as more often its results created as accurate and unbiased a picture as possible of the actual events in Masonry's past. Regardless, the fraternity was still not examined in context with all that was going in the cultures and societies in which it was evolving.

French Mason Alec Mellor coined the word *masonology* in the 1960s reportedly proposing it with a meaning of defining the study of Masonry beyond ritual. The term was generally accepted though also mean there was an assurance that research of Masonic history was conducted by scientific methods requiring a logical and rational order of steps from which researchers could justify and come to conclusions about their topic of inquiry.

As of 2009, the term turned into the belief that it meant researching Masonry, with all its aspects, by scientific methods including ritual. Either way, it was a good idea, but the bulk of what masquerades as Masonic history literature since Mellor coined the word in the 1960s through today still falls short of adherence to the scientific method of research. In the world of Masonic writings, theorizing about the past is not confined - it is open to all who take an interest in it.

Masonic Perspectives – Edition 8, January 2020

Divergent understandings of Masonry and its history is inevitable; but that does not give carte blanche to anyone to write whatever they want.¹⁰ The accepted practice of writing or just saying whatever one wants about Freemasonry without the concern or compliance with at least some of the rigors of academic standards or an ounce of rational thought - makes the work of study and researching Freemasonry and its history more than troublesome.

Speculation in Freemasonry has never been discouraged, however, a difference between speculation and imagination is distinct. When we work from things which are known to us to try to predict or assess meaning, we speculate. When we imagine, in its purest form, things are invented that are unknown to us or anybody else. Speculation has more to do with an informed guess, whereas imagining makes something out of nothing.

Because several founders, such as Robert Freke Gould, a soldier, lawyer and prominent Freemason, lacked training as professional historians, and whose approach was more attuned to the Masonic audience than to an academic one, Quatuor Coronati “remained in the shadows, at least as far as academics were concerned for the next half century or more.”¹¹

Although a number of theories have been put forth about the evolution of Freemasonry leading to an organized institution, Gould was possibly the first to formulate the theory about the origin of organized Freemasonry which we all know (the transition theory from operative to speculative). That theory has been referred to as the *Gould Thesis*. As yet another approach to studying Freemasonry emerged in the late 20th century, Gould’s thesis is now in question.

As explained by Jan A.M. Snoek and Henry Bogdan:

At first there were simple, so-called ‘operative’, stonemasons, who had their craft in their lodges, but who did not speculate about their Craft or their working tools, that is, they did not interpret them symbolically. Then, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, more and more “gentleman Masons” became members of the lodges, who introduced during this period of transition, the speculative element, out of which arose modern ‘speculative’ Freemasonry.

This theory would be regarded as fact for about a century, but we know now that it is wrong. Firstly, Freemasonry is significantly older than 1717. Secondly, the early Freemasons were all but simple folk. Freemason being short for ‘freestone mason,’ the term refers to the highest trained members of the Craft, the sculptors, and architects, who were allowed to work with the most expensive materials: freestone. It is, thirdly, also clear now that these freestone masons *did* speculate about the craft, its tools, etc. Freemasonry, then, *was speculative right from the start*. And precisely this explains why ‘gentleman masons’ were interested in it in the first place. It were not them [‘gentlemen masons’] who introduced the speculative element, but rather the other way around: they learned it from the stonemasons.¹²

Snoek and Bogdan, both researchers, historians, and academicians, connected dots to make that determination skewing the seventeen-decade, long accepted idea of a distinct difference between

¹⁰ Porset, 117.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Jan A.M. Snoek, *Researching Freemasonry: Where Are We?* Center for Research Into Freemasonry and Fraternalism. A working paper presented at the opening of the first International Conference of the History of Freemasonry in May 2008 in Edinburgh, and Jan A.M. Snoek and Henry Bogdan, *The History of Freemasonry: An Overview*, Handbook on Freemasonry, Henrick Bogdan and Jan A.M. Snoeke, Editors, Brill, Lieden/Boston, Vol. 8, 2014, 13-14.

Masonic Perspectives – Edition 8, January 2020

speculative and operative masons. First noted by English Masonic scholar John Hamill almost thirty-years earlier, Snoeke and Bogdan advanced a finding in 2008.¹³

Hamill, using the historiography style of research and the approach began to unravel the long-standing *Gould Thesis*.

Hamill wrote:

Whilst the approach of writers of the authentic school has the appearance of scientific research their methods were not what we would accept as scientific today. ... their work, in fact, gives the appearance of a search for evidence to fit a preconceived theory. Intent on proving a direct descent from operative to speculative masonry through a transitional phase, they assembled fragments of information from various parts of the British Isles which appeared to forge links in their chain of descent. In doing so they often took such evidence out of its context and made assumptions for which only tenuous substantiation existed. In particular they assumed a parity of conditions and activities in England, Ireland, and Scotland, and thus ignored the crucial social, cultural, political, legal, and religious circumstance in each county, so ably written, and so often published was their theory of an operative-transitional-speculative development that it has become dangerously near to being accepted as unquestionable fact. Despite lack of substantiation the authentic school put together the Scottish and English gleanings and constructed the operative-transitional-speculative theory of the origins of Freemasonry, ignoring the differences and discrepancies between the two sets of evidence.¹⁴

Hamill's critique of the *Gould Thesis* may seem harsh but fundamental and crucial making it very difficult for a serious scholar to adhere to the old theory since that publication.¹⁵ Regardless, Masons have held-fast to the *Gould Thesis* about how the transition from operative to speculative Masonry took place and few Masonic writers mention Hamill or Snoek, and look no further for any evidence to the contrary. Why should they since the long-accepted theory put forth by Gould is written in stone for the past 130 years or more - at least the minds of most Masons?

That intellectual idleness rings of the *that's the way we've always done it attitude* so commonly observed in the world of Masonry –one reason for the state and condition of American Freemasonry today. The lack of appetite in the mainstream to look for much of anything beyond the way things are thought to have always been done - especially when questions arise about long-embedded, romantic, or otherwise about origins – stagnates. Another reason for such idleness could be that many Masons do not read much about Freemasonry in the first place, if at all, and more accustomed to merely accepting what is passed on to them.

At least forty-one Masonic research lodges are chartered in recognized Masonic jurisdictions in the United States. In one way the proportion of research lodges in relation to the number of ordinary lodges in a jurisdiction is a crude measure of the degree of interest shown by brethren in Masonic education. However,

¹³ John Hamill, *The Craft: The History of English Freemasonry*, Wellingborough: Crucible. Second edition: *The History of English Freemasonry*, 1994.

¹⁴ *IBID*.

¹⁵ J.A.M. Snoek, *Researching Freemasonry: Where Are We? A paper at the opening of the first International Conference of the History of Freemasonry in May 2008 in Edinburgh*. Centre For Research Into Freemasonry And Fraternalism, Working Paper Series No. 2.

while some research lodges in America are far more active than others, producing papers, a sponsored bulletin or magazine, building impressive libraries, coordinating events centered on Masonic education matters, the level and quality of what is produced varies as much as the disparities in how Freemasonry is practiced in all jurisdictions. Some generate academic styled materials while others merely cut and paste articles, papers, in an effort to put forth “education” and “research.” Nevertheless, most do more in the area of offering materials than do the majority of regular lodges.

So, how does American Freemasonry come to terms with a historiography approach to such a vast and sprawling subject as Freemasonry - a subject which is extremely complex and wide-ranging in its cultural and social connections?

According to French researcher and historian, Charles Porset, the increase in the number of independent centers of Masonic research recognized in England, Austria, Spain, the Netherlands, and Belgium may be, over time, what eventually brings true Masonic history to light.¹⁶

Optimistically, Snoek suggests that because the sheer quantity of un-examined material that still lies undisturbed in numerous archives and libraries, including the large and well-known Masonic ones, many areas many areas of the history and development of Freemasonry are yet to be written. That expectation is certainly welcome, and since there is growing attention from academia in the subject of the history of Freemasonry, the likelihood is more new information will indeed surface, but at parade speed.

This is good news. It is clear that grand lodges in America will not lead this movement, if that is what it is. Conferences of grand masters and similar gatherings do not promise to advance the broader examination. Perhaps, there is a situational irony occurring that we do not see because we are in the frame of the picture.

The broader examination is needed because of the manner in which Freemasons themselves did or did not write and chronicle the early history of the fraternity’s origins and evolution. Today we are witnessing a turnaround and shift, albeit a slow one, where Masonic writers have again emerged, but this time with a more expanded perspective about the Craft and institution surrounding it in conjunction with the external influences that have either impeded the fraternity or advanced it.

A BODY WITHOUT A SOUL?

The *Philadelphes*, a Masonic periodical in the late 1800s known for its open criticism of English Masonry circulated French lodges, seeking further affiliations. They explained that the aim of their lodge was to spread among the English nation, and particularly the working classes, the spirit of French Freemasonry and its principles of solidarity and fraternity. They declared that the true spirit of Freemasonry was not to be found in English Freemasonry, which was *a body without a soul*.¹⁷

The French view of English Freemasonry not having a soul was centered on around their contention that they were “bound up with the Bibles in its lodge rooms and criticized for “making presentations to cathedrals” as it urged them to “devote themselves to moral architecture.”¹⁸ In return, the English periodical, *The Freemason*,

¹⁶ Porset, 129.

¹⁷ A copy of a circular dated 18 May 1863 in the Bibliothèque Nationale is on the ‘Rite of Memphis’ subject file in The Library and Museum of Freemasonry, Collected Studies In The History Of Freemasonry, 2000-2003 A Body without a Soul? The Philosophical Outlook of British Freemasonry 1700-2000 Paper given at conferences organized by the Free University of Brussels, Cornerstone Society and Canonbury Masonic Research Centre, November-December 2003. Presenters name not noted on document.

¹⁸ This was, in the view of the Philadelphes, due to the influence of the church on English Freemasonry. It pointed out that the functions which were undertaken in France by the Orateur were in England fulfilled by a clergyman. The result was a kind of Jesuitism; although English Freemasonry had built great institutions for its children, the elderly and the infirm, these were closed to anyone who did not believe in God or was

Masonic Perspectives – Edition 8, January 2020

criticized continental Freemasonry as “excessively mystical and denounced its views of philosophy, fraternity, and universality as chimerical [imaginary],” and declared that the English point of view was “surer.”¹⁹

Regardless of early disputes about the philosophical side of the Craft, in the early 1800s there were no men alive who were around when Masonry was first organized. Since there was little literature of record at the time beyond what the internally stylized writings by Freemasons themselves, the two warring views did not appear to take into consideration what internal and external factors first caused one group to splinter from that which both originated. That alone may have explained their different perspectives – perhaps even marginalized them.

Curiously, even then, Freemasonry was looking inwardly at their intuition, unable to see the external influences that had slowly altered much of it and continues to do so. The same applies today with yet another twist: the institution, as a whole, has little self-introspection about what has, from inside the fraternity, caused it to change over the past centuries into what the mainstream appears to be today.

American Freemasonry has been standing at a proverbial crossroads for decades and much of the reasons can be found in the lack of consideration, perhaps even awareness, of the miscalculations of the past that caused it to take the path it is on leading to the crossroads – an obvious lack of mindfulness and neglect of its own factual history. A declining membership that cannot be replaced fast enough with new members to offset a future financial reckoning, confusion about whether the fraternity is an educational and philosophical society or a collection agency for public charity, and a hundred-year plus call for more education that has not been collectively answered, to name a few, all stand as a testament of failing to embrace the point of McCullough’s quote: *History is who we are and why we are the way we are*. All we have to do is look at it with earnest consideration as to how it led to where we are. Therein may be found many answers to questions today about not only the relevancy of Freemasonry in today’s world but serve to avoid miscalculations in the future that do not contribute to the perpetuity of the institution.

Today we see more writings from Masons and a literature that attempt to cure that shortcoming. Much of it, whether some realize or not, came on the heels of a late 1940s attempt by non-Masons historians to start looking at Freemasonry as the phenomenon it is. It was external academic research then and what followed that ultimately offered more factual information on which those serious Masonic writers and researchers could build with great subtlety when examining the social ideas and shifting cultural roles the fraternity has embraced since it was organized and right on up until today.²⁰ Many competent Masonic writers emerged as a result, but it seems the search for historic truth about the origins of the Craft and topics surrounding the true impact of the fraternity on the world relied on professionally trained historians and academics to fuel it.

It might be said that the first time American Freemasonry took a serious collective look at how the external influenced the internal workings and structure of the fraternity was in the late 1960s, as what was to become a

a republican, while the masonic schools did not offer a purely secular 357 Benoît Desquesnes, *Esquisse Autobiographique* (1888), p. 22. Desquesnes also describes (p. 24) a reception thrown by the Philadelphes for Garibaldi in 1864. A copy of a circular dated 18 May 1863 in the Bibliothèque Nationale is on the ‘Rite of Memphis’ subject file in The Library and Museum of Freemasonry. education. Above all, English Freemasonry was simply too expensive for the ordinary man. The Philadelphes intended to show the English Grand Lodge the error of its ways by seeking affiliations from as many foreign lodges as possible. Having been barred from English masonic temples, they would seek succor from French Freemasonry, and help spread its values in England. These criticisms fueled the growing tensions between the English Grand Lodge and the Grand Orient of France. English freemasonry clearly did have a soul, but it was bound up with the Bibles in its lodge rooms, as the increasingly bitter exchanges between the French and English Masonic press indicated. The French journal *Le Monde Maçonique* criticized English freemasons for making presentations to cathedrals and urged them to devote themselves to moral architecture. In reply, the English weekly *The Freemason* criticized continental freemasonry as excessively mystical and denounced its views of philosophy, fraternity, and universality as chimerical. It declared that the English point of view was surer. Grounded in recognition of the supreme being, it did not exclude anyone of any religion. It relied on the Bible as a standard. English freemasonry had no philosophical aspirations or mystical illuminations, but rather simple and touching ceremonies: ‘Non-Christian we are not, as opposed to Christians, but universal we are, in our scope and constitution.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Paul Boyer, preamble to *Freemasonry and American Culture 1880–1930*, by Lynn Dumenil (Boston: Ovid Bell Press, 1997), 53.

Masonic Perspectives – Edition 8, January 2020

long, painful, and steady decline in membership began to more clearly emerge a looming issue. The decline was destined to continue in America largely because of the fraternity's history.

The fraternity, giddy from the rapid swelling of membership starting in 1959, was not thinking about how the rapid expansion of membership prior to 1826, before, during and after the Civil War, The Age of Fraternalism, and following World War I, all declined as well – and the measurement of the success of the institution was never going to be found in counting the number of names on rosters. Importantly, had there been more understanding and familiarity with the internal *and* external history surrounding those past rapid expansions and each subsequent decline, the decades of hand-wringing that ensued and errors made in futile attempt to offset it the decline may have been averted. As noted, however, Freemasonry has rarely looked at its history as part of the system, make of and influence of external factors.

We find that by the 1970s and throughout the 1980s, 90s, and into the next century, fingers were pointed blaming the decline on everything from television, mobility of members, the Vietnam War, breakdown in cultural values, religion, politics, and economics. The finger pointers were correct in the respect that what was occurring in the world and throughout the United States was indeed an external influence affecting all levels of the vitality of Freemasonry.

Had external considerations been practiced decades before the 1959 anomaly, perhaps American Freemasonry would have been in a better position to have adjusted accordingly to such external changes in much more effective way than it did or has. But we know that it is difficult to see the picture when you are inside the frame – something is perhaps a hallmark of American Freemasonry today.

ENCOURAGING NEWS

Heralding a break from Masonic-authored writings carrying forward old school ideas about not only origins but a range of topics about the Craft, we can see today, although characteristic to Masonic writing, slow to appear, not only more scholarly work coming from within the fraternity, but writings that offer more evidence-driven answers to the question of how mainstream American Freemasonry evolved into its current state and condition, and the influence of external factors on the institution as American emerged as a nation as well.

Much of this seems to have come from the generation of Masons who began to come into their own by the end of the 20th century continues today. The writings and growing interest to the work of trained researchers and academicians and the more solid thinking and writing of a few mid-20th century Masonic writers who foresaw with clarity the path Masonry had been traveling and where it was leading. Increased communication technology certainly contributed to this group as well.

Supplementing these Masonic writers, we find such work today by trained historians like David G. Hackett in his 2015 book, *That Religion in Which all Men Agree*, in which he describes and clarifies in strikingly effective detail how, by the early 20th century, American Freemasonry came to take on the attributes of a modern service club we see today. That evolution is not difficult to understand and understanding how we evolved to where we are can certainly help in identifying what might be done to effectively address matters that caused it.

The Origins of Freemasonry in 1988 by David Stevenson, emeritus professor of Scottish history at the University of St. Andrews in Fife, Scotland, is the first British scholar to dedicate an entire work to the theme of Freemasonry's origins since the *Genesis of Freemasonry* in 1947 by Knoop and Jones. His work stemming from rich streams of primary source material available from pre-eighteenth century Scottish Masonic

associations easily convinces readers that the northern kingdom of Scotland was the birthplace and crucible of modern speculative Freemasonry.²¹

Alexander Piatigorsky's 1997 works, *Freemasonry: A Study of the Phenomenon and Who's Afraid of Freemasons?* considers the institution of Freemasonry from the point of view of both Masons and their critics with a comprehensive depth often ignored by earlier scholars and historians, and certainly by many Masonic authors. Piatigorsky's writing offers one of the most balanced treatments of the topic from the view of a highly respected sociologist.

Stephen C. Bullock in his 1998 *Revolutionary Brotherhood, Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840*, traces Freemasonry through its first century in America. He follows the order from its origins in Britain and its introduction into North America in the 1730s to its near destruction by the massive anti-Masonic movement almost a century later and its subsequent reconfiguration into the institution we know today.

Mark A. Tabbert's *American Freemasons: Three Centuries of Building Communities*, in 2006, shows the integral role the fraternity played in a time when aristocracy was the norm and democracy was a totally new experiment. Tabbert's overview of Freemasonry's origins in seventeenth-century Scotland and England before exploring its evolving role in American history, from the Revolution through the labor and civil rights movements, and into the twenty-first century offers a more complete picture of the fraternity as it also provide some of the causes for the rise and fall of membership in the fraternity and why it has attracted men in such large numbers for centuries.

Quatuor Coronati 2076 research lodge continues to advance authoritative accounts of scholarly-based Masonic history, research, and topics with their *Annual Transactions. Heredom*, the annual flagship publication of the Scottish Rite Research Society since 1992, with its thought-provoking essays on contemporary and historical Freemasonry has done the same. Established in 1928, the Philalethes Society is the oldest independent Masonic research society in North America. The quarterly magazine produced by the Society, *Philalethes: The Journal of Masonic Research & Letters*, began publishing in 1946 and features thought-provoking, substantial articles on Masonic symbolism, philosophy, ritual, artwork, literature, and history. In 2008, *The Journal of the Masonic Society* published its first edition and has since blended scholarly papers with educational and engaging nonacademic papers. The world of Freemasonry would be indeed poorer if not for these excellent resources and the work of a number of active research lodges faithfully producing and making available useful materials.

With the 2007 inauguration in Edinburgh, Scotland of the annual *International Conference on the History of Freemasonry*, the intermingling of academic scholars and Masons has grown significantly over the past three decades. The contributions of Masonic historians and scholars like S. Brent Morris, Mark A. Tabbert, Arturo de Hoyas, Wayne A. Huss, Robert G. Davis, Michael Poll, Richard Berman, Shawn Eyer, Christopher B. Murphy, Jan A.M. Snoeke, Henry Bagdon, Robert L.D. Cooper, John Hamill, to name only a few, are in that group. Coupled with the resurfacing and revival of the observations of serious-minded Masonic writers from the mid to latter half of the 20th century such as, Henry W. Coil, Ray V. Denslow, and Dwight L. Smith – again, to name only a few - offer encouragement that a genuine refocus on the direction of Masonic literature and history taking place.

No contemporary list of contributors to this refocus, however, would be complete without adding two particular books. Repeatedly praised and ever popular in the Masonic world for the past fifteen years, these two unique writings cannot be overlooked because of their constructive influence.

²¹. Scanlon, "Origins of Freemasonry."

Christopher Hodapp's 2005, *Freemasons for Dummies* has become an internationally bestselling introduction to the fraternity with its balanced, eye-opening guide that demystifies Freemasonry. Although the style of the now popular For Dummies books series, first introduced in the early 1990s, caused many to be concerned their titles insulted prospective readers, the series today reportedly cover over 2,500 subjects worldwide. Hodapp capitalized on the non-intimidating format and style of the series that combined his unique writing style and opened doors for not only many existing members of the fraternity, but prospective candidates.

Andrew Hammer's 2010, *Observing the Craft: The Pursuit of Excellence in Masonic Labour and Observance* – also one of the most widely read Masonic books of the past decade by Masons. The work challenges Masons to consider the factual origins and true purpose of the Craft and set aspirations and aims at a much higher standard than many American lodges practice today. Hammer steadfastly supports the definition of the fraternity as a philosophical society that demands of its members the highest standards in areas of its labors. No words are minced in this work that has given inspiration to young and many seasoned Masons alike, as well as serving as the core precept footing most Masonic restoration efforts seen since its publication.

CONCLUSION

The sources noted above, although a modest list, represent the range of ongoing enrichments to Masonic literature in just the past decade or more. Whether the majority of Masons today keep up with, read, much less study these or past materials any more than evidence suggest they have in the past, is open to question. The likelihood is, they do to some yet to be accurately measured degree, but perhaps primarily because materials are more easily accessible today due to the wide reach of the Internet.

No matter the reason, the advances in Masonic research, literature and other forms of education materials today chip away at alibis for not only clinging to evidence-troubled theories about the origin of the fraternity but holding on to long-embraced notions fueling misplaced ideas about the aim and purpose of Freemasonry. While there is still much to examine, there is less justifiable reason today for a dense fog to surround the history and purpose of the fraternity at any level inside the institution.