

# WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

## Book Review

September 2023

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### THE CANKER WORM ON THE ROSE

The Story of the Struggle in Kentucky

to Develop a Consistent Approach to the Observance of Freemasonry

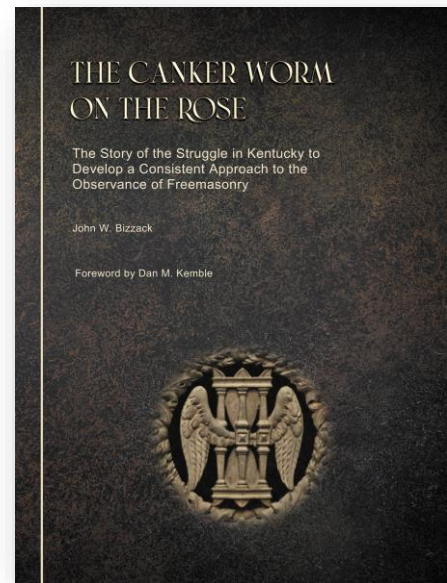
Dr. John W. Bizzack

Reviewed by William J. Lorenz

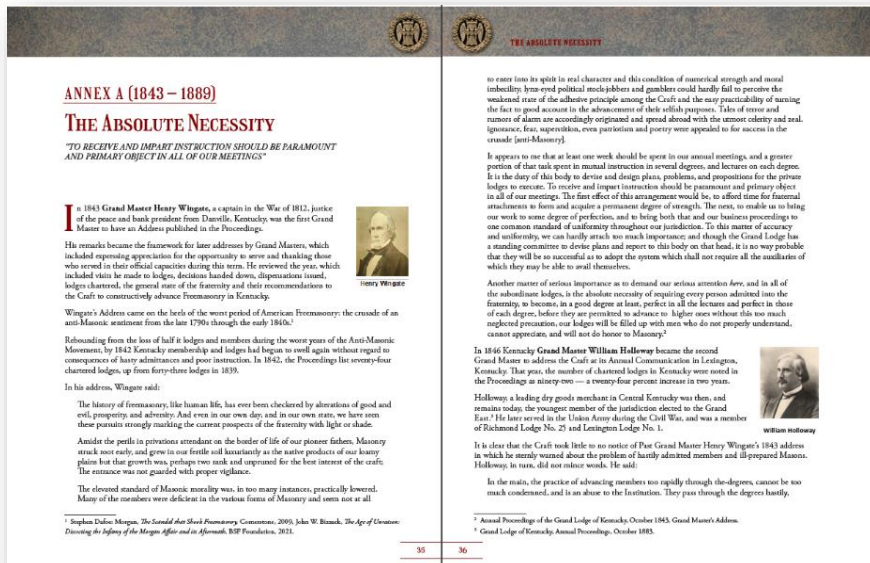
Past Master and Fellow

William O. Ware Lodge of Research

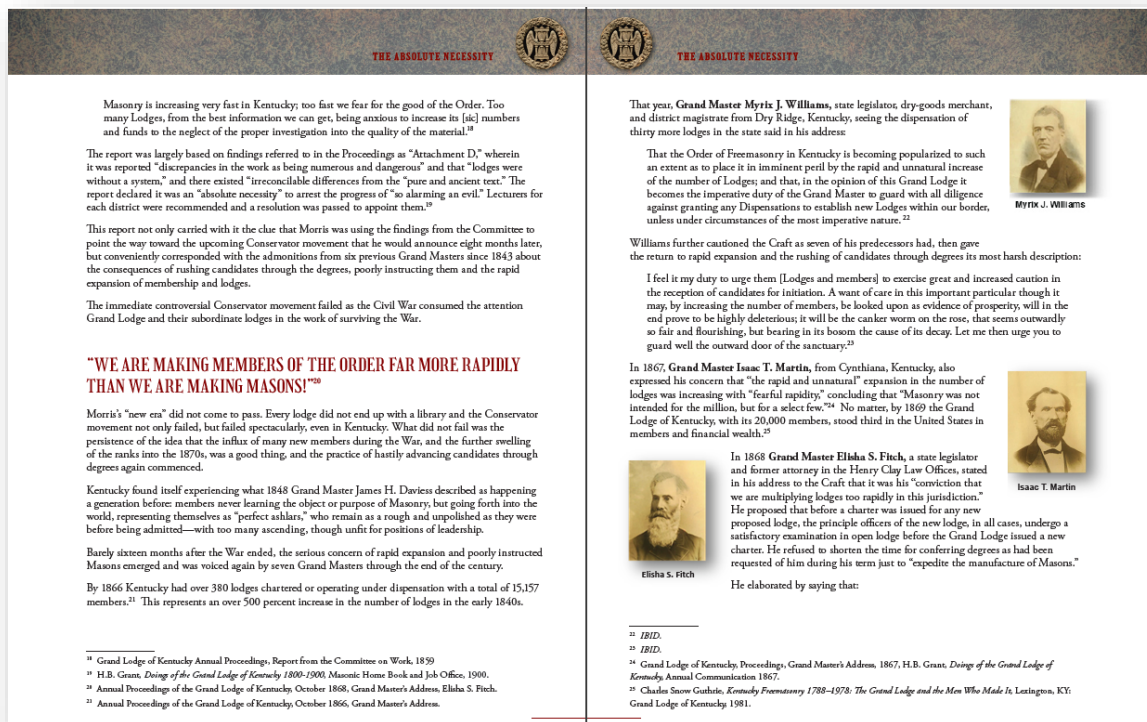
**T***he Canker Worm on the Rose: The Story of Struggle in Kentucky to Develop a Consistent Approach to the Observance of Freemasonry*, authored by nationally recognized Masonic author and Past Master of Lexington Lodge #1, Dr. John W. Bizzack, employs the words of approximately forty Grand Masters to reveal a pattern of ills that have plagued the Grand Lodge of Kentucky from its very beginning. These warnings have mostly gone unheeded. It is difficult to fault Researcher Bizzack on his findings, as they are meticulously gleaned from the Grand Lodge Proceedings, as described in the Committee on Education reports and other like committees, but more particularly taken from the “Grand Master’s Address,” first found in the Grand Lodge Proceedings of 1843, and soon afterwards becoming an annual commentary. Utilizing much of his research from the above, W. B. Bizzack brilliantly weaves the Grand Masters’ concerns for Kentucky Freemasonry into a methodical narrative, a narrative that could be told about most any Masonic Jurisdiction across the United States, with conceivably few Grand Jurisdictions concluding with varying results. This is John W. Bizzack at his best.



The “Foreword” to the book, by Dan M. Kemble, Past Master and Research Fellow of William O. Ware Lodge of Research, is pleasant and enlightening reading, setting the stage for the main body of the book. It demonstrates how the ceremonies and customs of the fraternity have been passed down orally, thereby lending itself to error. In a time when



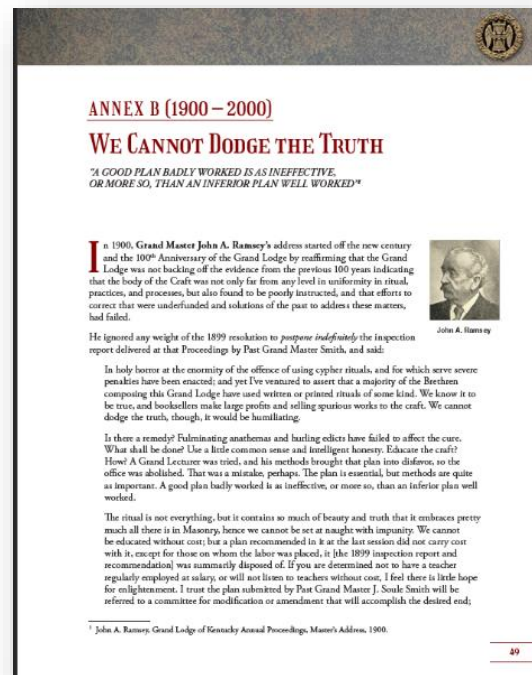
travel was slow, the Grand Lodge, located in Lexington, proved too distant from many lodges to properly instruct and correct the increasing irregularities and the deviations from the accepted procedures. Ironically, the same reason, in part, was given to the Grand Lodge of Virginia by the five original Kentucky lodges in forming the Grand Lodge of Kentucky.



Author Bizzack points out that in 1800, the Grand Lodge of Kentucky was born through the efforts of a total of approximately one hundred and fifty members in the five lodges originally chartered through the Grand Lodge of Virginia. The new Grand Lodge of Kentucky, the twelfth Grand Lodge in the then sixteen States, immediately began to grant charters for more lodges within and without the Kentucky borders. Within ten years, the five lodges tripled to fifteen and membership doubled to three hundred. By 1814, nine more lodges were chartered and eight years later, by 1822, another thirty-eight lodges had been added, bringing the total to sixty-eight lodges in just twenty-two years. Many of the new members had been previously made Masons in other jurisdictions, bringing varied ritual and operational procedures with them.

By 1866, the Grand Lodge of Kentucky had grown to 380 lodges and over fifteen thousand members. As previous Grand Masters may have surmised, Grand Master Myrix J. Williams then stated, "... *the Order of Freemasonry in Kentucky is becoming popularized to such an extent as to place it in imminent peril by the rapid and unnatural increase of the number of Lodges...*" adding, "*it may, by increasing the number of members, be looked upon as evidence of prosperity, will in the end prove to be highly deleterious; it will be the canker worm on the rose, that seems outwardly so fair and flourishing, but bearing in its bosom the cause of decay,*" thus, the suggestion for the title of the book.

W. B. Bizzack points to four factors that contributed to this result. "*The first, factor, already existing in 1800 when the Grand Lodge of Kentucky was established, was a lack of a clear, institution-wide agreement on a certain direction or way of administrating the fraternity or ensuring that all new and veteran members received proper instructions.*<sup>1</sup> *The second, beginning in 1800, as well, was the absence of a regular ritual from which the consistent practices and protocols may be derived. The third, in 1833, was the abolishment of the 1802 Grand Lodge By-Law requiring that, 'In all subordinate lodges it shall be the duty of the Master or presiding officer, at their respective stated meetings, to deliver a lecture on one of the three first degrees in Masonry.'*<sup>2</sup> *The fourth, first noted in 1843 and after, is the failure to heed the assessments and warnings of Grand Masters about the consequences of what had happened (and continued to happen) to Kentucky Freemasonry as a result of unbridled rapid expansion of membership and lodges, non-compliance with the Book of Constitution, and the hasty advancement of poorly instructed candidates through the degrees before achieving proficiency in the preceding degrees.*" (Footnote <sup>1</sup> and Footnote <sup>2</sup> cites, "By Laws of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, paragraph 5, 1802. Rob Morris, *History of Freemasonry in Kentucky*, 1859. Grand Lodge of Kentucky Annual Proceedings 1802, 1832, 1833. H.B. Grant, *Doings of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky* 1800, 1900")



Undeterred by the Anti-Masonic movement, the Civil War and World Wars I and II, and the Great Depression, this early period of rapid growth extended well into the twentieth century. There is little doubt that Masonry's incredible expansion placed a heavy burden in many adverse ways, on both the individual lodges as well as the Grand Lodge, a burden that could not be harnessed, the results of which continue into the present day. Quite simply, the practice of too many lodges became "making members but not making Masons."

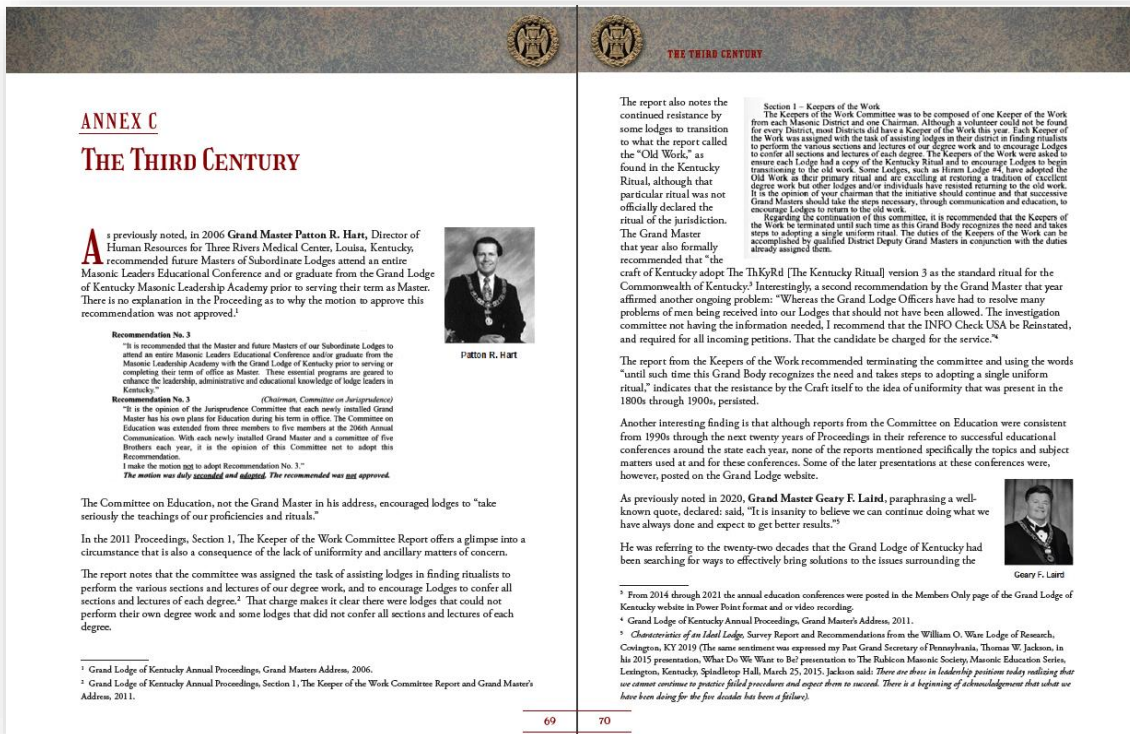
The rushing of candidates through the degrees spawned members who were taught the "words" of Masonry, but not the meaning behind the words, what Masonry truly is, or what it means to be a Mason. Eventually, the number of members grew larger than the number of Masons who truly understood the ceremonies, causing Past Grand Master Rob Morris to decry that we are "creating semi-manufactured Masons in semi-Masonic Lodges." Eventually, the well-informed Mason became in short supply and the less schooled member became the instructor of new members, resulting in less understanding of the principles of Masonry and, in turn, lack of interest.

Bizzack demonstrates that many attempts were made to educate both the lodge and the new member. During the early days, the appointment of both instructors and lecturers for lodges, the printing of educational materials for the new candidates, and the outlining of programs to teach the officers good practices for the benefit of the Lodge and the members, were tried. These efforts, however, were short-lived and fell by the wayside.

Immediately before the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, in 1899, the "Report from the Committee on the Visitation and Inspection" was presented to the Grand Lodge. It was the most extensive report thus far, with a critical view of Freemasonry in Kentucky. It did, though, offer solutions through instruction to the lodges and members on Freemasonry, with no expense to the Grand Lodge. The full five-page report can be found under the "Appendix A" section of the book. The Proceedings reflect that immediately following the report, a motion was made and passed to indefinitely postpone the adoption the recommendations of the report.

Other less aggressive attempts to relieve the situation were either rejected or only temporary. Three Past Grand Masters, however, would present the "1965 Committee on Masonic Education Report." Although less complex, it was in agreement with much of the 1899 report. The first page of the report states what Freemasonry truly is. The second page offers a way to accomplish making Kentucky Masonry the best it could be. This report was adopted, but after a brief acceptance, like previous attempts, this was also short-lived and fell by the wayside. The complete report is found in the "Appendix B" section of the book.





Moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, in 2006, Grand Master Patton R. Hart offered his “Recommendation No. 3” in an attempt to enhance leadership skills. Grand Master Hart recommended that the Master of a lodge, and future Masters, should attend and graduate from a Kentucky Grand Lodge Masonic Educational Conference prior to serving or completing their term of office as Master. The Jurisprudence Committee, however, opposed the Recommendation and it was defeated.

***The Canker Worm on the Rose*** is a powerful, thought-provoking book, delivered impressively by John W. Bizzack, who leaves no stone unturned in his exhaustive research. It finds much in the very words of the Grand Masters -- words of good intentions that went unheeded and were soon forgotten, words that offered correction to problems but were simply ignored, and words that were necessary to be said, but were rebuked. Thus the original four problems as identified earlier, remain. I find myself agreeing with the remarks of Geary F. Laird while serving as Grand Master in 2020, “It is insanity to believe we can continue doing what we have always done and expect to get better results.”

Perhaps ***The Canker Worm on the Rose, The Story of the Struggles in Kentucky to Develop a Consistent Approach to the Observance of Freemasonry*** is author John W. Bizzack’s best book to date. I loved this book and highly recommend it!