

WHY WE DO WHAT WE DO

DAN M. KEMBLE, PM, WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

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When Masons talk about the last sixty years, we generally talk about the dramatic decline in Lodge membership over that period of time. Equally dramatic, however, in that same period of time is the increase in the availability of information regarding Freemasonry. Information about the Fraternity is delivered to our desktops and cell phones through technological advances that seemingly have no end in sight.

The “Age of Information” in which we live has not ignored Freemasonry, although we are at times slow to take advantage of its resources. Those interested in learning more about Freemasonry can visit various Lodge and Grand Lodge websites, listen to podcasts, read blogs and even attend a “virtual” Lodge.

In addition to information available electronically, there are organizations such as “The Masonic Society” and “The Philaethes Society” that publish quarterly journals containing scholarly works on subjects of interest to Freemasons.

In something of a chicken or egg manner, the thirst for Masonic knowledge and the increase of electronic resources and other print media providing information about Freemasonry seem, at least for the time being, to fuel each other.

The desire for more knowledge about Masonry, while exciting to observe, is not, in itself, new. Before the technology revolution and before the widespread printing of Masonic journals, Masons seeking to expand their knowledge of Freemasonry formed Lodges of Research, in which they could meet with other like-minded Masons to share information and pursue new avenues of investigation.

The world’s oldest Lodge of Research is Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076, founded in London in 1886. Founders included noted Masonic scholars Robert F. Gould, William J. Hughan and George W. Speth. Anyone having spent any time at all in a Masonic Library will be well familiar with those three names.

The founders of the Lodge were Masons who had concluded that the history of Freemasonry to that time had not been properly recorded. Insisting on an evidence-based approach to Masonic research and writing, these men are responsible for the application of strict academic research standards to Masonic topics. That was a radical approach in 1886, and, regrettably, it remains a radical approach in 2022.

There are now at least eighty-three Lodges of Research worldwide, forty-nine of which are in the United States (that includes Chapters of Research in Massachusetts and Kentucky, which focus on

Royal Arch related topics). Notable Lodges of Research in the United States include the Missouri Lodge of Research, which was chartered under the direction of Harry Truman and has published several valuable books on Masonic history, philosophy and ritual; the Research Lodge of Southern California, in South Pasadena, which publishes the monthly "Fraternal Review;" and the Texas Lodge of Research.

The Grand Lodge of Kentucky has chartered six Lodges of Research within its jurisdiction. The oldest is our William O. Ware Lodge of Research, which was chartered on October 20, 1965. The Lodge is named in honor of Most Worshipful Bro. William O. Ware, who served as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky in 1957-58.

In addition to the six Lodges of Research and the one Chapter of Research, Kentucky has at least two other organizations devoted to the pursuit of further light in Masonry. Jefferson County is the home of the Greater Louisville Masonic Education Association and Lexington, of course, is the home of The Rubicon Masonic Society.

The proliferation of Research Lodges and related organizations, around the globe and here at home, is an indicator that Masons have a desire for more knowledge and a greater understanding of Masonry. It also indicates that their desires are not being met in their home Lodges.

Let's look at the guidelines for Kentucky's Lodges of Research, which are found in Appendix F to the Digest portion of the Constitution of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky.

Appendix F provides that twenty-five or more Master Masons who are members in good standing of any Kentucky Lodge may petition the Grand Master for a Dispensation to form a Lodge of Research. A Charter may be subsequently issued upon approval of the Grand Lodge.

Further, Appendix F defines the mission and authority of a Lodge of Research, As follows:

A Lodge of Research shall be a Lodge of Research only and have the right, power and authority only;

- A. To promote within its own membership Masonic study and historical research;
- B. To present findings and conclusions to the Lodge for discussion and interchange of judgment;
- C. To publish at convenient intervals proceedings or transactions containing such portions of the addresses and discussion in Lodge as may be desirable to print;
- D. To publish new Masonic books of outstanding merit;
- E. To reproduce or print Masonic documents of historical importance;
- F. To reprint scarce Masonic books and pamphlets;
- G. To open and close its Lodge on the Third Degree;

H. To have such rights and authority as may be necessary to carry out such work. Any publications shall be without expense to the Grand Lodge.

A quick glance at this list begs the obvious question, why aren't all Lodges engaged in this sort of work anyway?

Freemasonry has a single aim and purpose, and that is to make good men better by equipping them with the tools to practice the necessary self-discipline to lead a balanced and rewarding life. If all Lodges were engaged in the pursuit of this aim and purpose, would not such Lodges necessarily be engaged in the activities delegated to Research Lodges under our Constitution?

To answer that question, look at the practices of your own Blue Lodge. Has your Lodge indicated that it understands and accepts as its mission the practice of Masonry's purpose? Does it incorporate the characteristics of a Research Lodge into its normal operations?

In a sense, the existence of Research Lodges points out that Masonic Lodges have strayed from their mission – that of being a place where Masons can present, exchange and discuss ideas in a thoughtful and rational manner; finding points of agreement and disagreeing without being disagreeable.

A Lodge's tendency to stray from its original purpose is an inherent risk for Lodges of Research as well. A review of the history of William O. Ware Lodge of Research, will show, in its first fifteen years of existence, a focused and well-ordered Lodge that had a regular program of wholesome Masonic education and which regularly collected and maintained the presentations made at its communications.

The next thirty years or so of its existence reflect the gradual drift away from doing the things outlined in the Constitution as the work of a Research Lodge, until it reached the point that it became just another Masonic supper club, generally consisting of a bad meal and a dispirited discussion of how poor Brother Davy Crockett almost had the Mexicans whipped at the Alamo.

The renaissance for William O. Ware Lodge of Research began in 2014 when Lodge leadership at that time organized a festive board, and later brought noted Masonic writer, Worshipful Brother Chris Hodapp, in to speak. These events sparked a renewed interest in the mission and purpose of the Lodge of Research.

Since that point in time, this Lodge of Research has, in incremental stages, adopted certain policies and procedures designed to facilitate (and underscore) its commitment to the practice of observant Freemasonry.

We have adopted the practice of requiring proper attire for Lodge events. Our attire speaks to our reverence for the Fraternity, and is an outward expression of our respect for our Lodge, our Brothers, and, equally importantly, ourselves. Reverence and self-respect are conspicuously absent in the casual age in which we live, but, as we all know, there is no such thing as casual Freemasonry. Membership in this Lodge of Research is not for the casual Mason.

We have instituted the practice of having those Brothers who desire membership in our Lodge of Research furnish a sample of their written Masonic research accompanying their petition for affiliation. Like most Lodges in Kentucky, William O. Ware Lodge of Research does not need more members. What we need are Masons who are genuinely committed to the practice of observant Freemasonry, and who are not content to merely be another name on a list. The act of engaging in research and preparing a paper prior to attaining membership is a demonstration of the genuine commitment to Masonic scholarship that we seek to instill in ourselves.

We have established a more rigorous investigation process, designed to determine whether or not a petitioner is a good fit among us. All Master Masons are welcome to attend our meetings and our events, but membership is reserved for those who will conform to our standards, and who will actively promote the tenets of observant Freemasonry.

We adhere to the provisions of the “Old Charges” as they appear in Anderson’s Constitutions of 1723 and 1738, in that Lodge officers are chosen on the basis of merit, and not merely as a result of seniority. We believe that to be an officer of this Lodge requires a commitment to this Lodge and to the course on which it has embarked. We believe that commitments are to be honored.

To help set our financial affairs in order, we have abolished the sale of life memberships.

We have revived the tradition of “Papers Nights,” which has become one of our most popular annual activities.

Members of our Lodge of Research have written and published articles and books about Freemasonry. Later this year, we anticipate publishing our first volume of ***The Transactions of William O. Ware Lodge of Research***, which will contain a collection of papers written by members of our Research Lodge.

The Lodge of Research was a partner in the Sowing Seeds of Freemasonry experiment. We have been a co-sponsor of various symposia, and we are currently a co-sponsor of the monthly virtual Masonic education programs hosted by The Rubicon Masonic Society.

We have conducted a statistical survey regarding the opinions of Kentucky Masons with respect to the characteristics of an ideal Lodge, and we are currently engaged in a follow-up to that study.

We have held a Table Lodge.

We have held a Festive Board, and we will be holding another one on November 3 of this year.

Near the end of 2018, we introduced our website, www.williamowarelodgeofresearch.com, which currently contains a growing number of articles, essays and commentaries on various topics of interest to Freemasons; early papers presented at the Lodge of Research in the years 1965 to 1990; monthly book reviews and recommendations; and links to other Research Lodges, Masonic journals and publications.

The result of all of these activities is that our observant approach to Freemasonry is taking on the perception of being “the way we’ve always done it.”

Why have we adopted this approach? Because we believe that it most nearly fulfills the experience that our members were seeking when they made the decision to petition a Lodge for membership in Freemasonry. Our practices and procedures are meant to facilitate our desire for a meaningful and rewarding Masonic experience, and to communicate to prospective members our expectations of them should they be granted membership in the Lodge of Research. It also, by the way, communicates to the Craft at large what it should expect from us, whether they are members or not.

The influx of newer (younger) and more motivated members has given William O. Ware Lodge of Research new energy and a renewed sense of purpose.

The history of our Lodge of Research points out the inclination and the inherent danger, for all organizations, not just Masonic Lodges, to drift away from its original purpose. It requires vigilant leadership to hold the organization on course and adhere to the original mission statement.

But our history also illustrates that, with the commitment of its members, the organization can return to, and successfully pursue, its intended aim and purpose.

The simple, inescapable conclusion is that every regularly chartered Lodge ought to be a Lodge of Research. That is every bit as much the purpose of a Lodge as to initiate, pass and raise candidates. The charter issued to a Blue Lodge sets the Lodge to work and instructs it to “make Masons.” To our detriment, this is generally interpreted as raising someone to the Degree of Master Mason.

Initiating, passing and raising Brothers does not, in fact, make Masons. It merely makes members. It begins the process by which a man may become a Mason, but that work (which is the work of a lifetime) necessarily includes the activities that have been relegated to Research Lodges.

In a perfect world, if all regular Lodges were practicing Freemasonry as it was intended, Research Lodges would not be the source of ongoing Masonic education, but would rather be a repository for it, facilitating access to speakers, books, journals and articles emanating from the regular Lodges.

To this end, William O. Ware Lodge of Research accepts as a part of its mission the task of encouraging regular Lodges to incorporate those activities delegated to Research Lodges into their own programs.

Until such time as Freemasonry is uniformly practiced as it was intended, Research Lodges will continue to be an important part of the tapestry of Masonic education. The challenge for each Research Lodge, then, is to be true to its mission, which, in the final analysis, is the mission accepted by Quatuor Coronati Lodge in 1886 – the pursuit of more light in Masonry and the strict application of academic standards of research.