

WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH

Book Review – December 2019

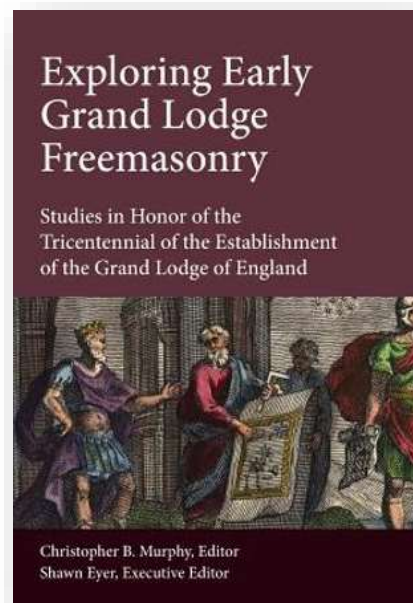
Exploring Early Grand Lodge Freemasonry: Studies in Honor of the Tricentennial of the Establishment of the Grand Lodge of England

Christopher B. Murphy, Editor; Shawn Eyer, Executive Editor

When an anniversary of a special event occurs, it almost always requires a new look at that noteworthy happening with a correlation of newer information concerning the event and the thoughts of the men who participated then and in the following years. And so it is, in this collection of scholarly presentations: *Exploring Early Grand Lodge Freemasonry – Studies in Honor of the Tricentennial of the Establishment of the Grand Lodge of England.*

As a fresh review at previously researched material, this book presents a clear and concise understanding of the thoughts of the men who lived it, concerning such things as religion and science, the true secrets of Freemasonry, what actually happened within the Lodges, and what the Masons of that era truthfully thought and felt about their Lodges and themselves as Freemasons. This study enables the reader to grasp “the cultural realities of Masonic life and thought” in the early years of the first Grand Lodge.

Editor Christopher M. Murphy, who lectured at the 10th annual Masonic Restoration Foundation’s Symposium held in Lexington, Kentucky (2019), offers the “Introduction” to the book. Murphy also presents two brilliant articles: “A Just and Exact Account of Freemasonry - A Survey of the Constitutions and Pocket Companions of 1723 to 1756;” and “Assessing Authentic Lodge Culture: Moving Beyond the Tavern Myth.”



The ninety-eight page “Just and Exact Account” article examines James Anderson’s Constitutions, with eight other early works presented within a period of forty years, all of which were Grand Lodge publications, and puts forth the practices and the beliefs of early Grand Lodge Masonry, which enables the student to identify the essential themes presented, and in the words of H. L. Haywood, “think Masonry out for himself.” Murphy also suggests that the mythical history of Freemasonry was for years important enough to be presented to each new brother at his initiation. So should it be reviewed with the same importance by the Masonic student.

In his second presentation, “Assessing Authentic Lodge Culture,” author Murphy states that the fact Lodges met in taverns has given rise to the notion that Lodge meetings consisted of eating, drinking and singing a few songs. The mysteries were only what stonemasons practiced, and “the only secret is there is no secret.” Masons should of course, keep the only secrets, the grips and words, private. Murphy unequivocally rejects this notion, and through thorough research, presents a convincing case for a far more spiritual society, one that will “unfold the Mysteries of Godliness” to those who search its truth. Perhaps this is the most important lecture in the series.

The “Foreword” of the book is offered by the renowned Masonic scholar and Executive Editor of the book, Shawn Eyer, who adds his article, “The Essential Secrets of Masonry – Insight from an American Masonic Oration of 1734.” This “Dissertation upon Freemasonry” is remarkable for several reasons. It is the first known American Lodge oration and the third oldest surviving Masonic oration in the world. Eyer states the oration was not intended to be published but was intended for Lodge presentation only. It deals with the Master Mason degree, proving that the third degree was available soon after Masonry arrived in the colonies. It reflects that “the harmony of the tiled Lodge reflects the harmony of heaven”, and adds that hidden knowledge was available through Masonry, to those who wished to pursue it. This thought pattern is found among several other early Masonic sources.

“Genius of Masonry – The Preservation of Masonic Tradition in the Songs of Freemasons,” by Nathan A. St. Pierre, offers a look at music, one of the seven liberal sciences, that is today often ignored. While there are some American Lodges who are currently reviving the practice of the singing of the songs that appeared in Anderson’s Constitutions (and elsewhere), music is mostly ignored by the majority of American Lodges. However, these songs reflect the culture of the era and how Masons felt about their Masonry. More Masonic related studies should be done on this subject. St. Pierre says that music is not so much listening to a famous singer but should be sung or played for the joy it provides to one’s self, and it offers additional comradery when singing or playing an instrument as a group.

“John Desaguliers – The Balance of Religion and Science,” by researcher Jedediah French, is an interesting look at the third Grand Master, John Desaguliers, and his obsession in promoting Newtonian philosophy in early Masonry. Desaguliers was a close associate with Isaac Newton through the Royal Society. Much research by Brother French brings forth new information on Desaguliers, who guided the Grand Lodge in the early years.

Other presentations included in *Exploring Early Grand Lodge Freemasonry* include two very popular authors: Ric Berman, who contributed “Freemasonry, the London Irish, and the Antients Grand Lodge” and David Harrison, who offered “The Grand Lodge of All England Held at York – An Independent Grand Lodge in England in the Eighteenth Century.” Dana Scofield’s “Spiritual and Heavenly People in the Corners – Embracing Masonic Ethos through the Eyes of James Anderson” rounds out the series of presentations. Each of these articles display considerable reference to Rev. James Anderson’s “Traditional History of Freemasonry” which is also included in this book. Reading the complete series of the above research papers, leaves a far more favorable opinion of James Anderson than previously held and definitely a better understanding of early Grand Lodge Freemasonry and the culture behind it. If one thinks that Freemasonry in its Grand Lodge beginnings was shallow, and its secrets minimal, then he who reads “Exploring Early Grand Lodge Freemasonry” will have a broader understanding of the complexity of Freemasonry in its early Grand Lodge years.

This book is certainly one of the most important books on the subject of the early Grand Lodge and was written by new Masonic researchers and well-known Masonic scholars alike. If you want to know what early eighteenth-century Freemasonry really was and what it truly meant to Freemasons, “Exploring Early Grand Lodge Freemasonry” is a must read. It was certainly will be studied by Masonic students for years to come. I highly recommend it.

Exploring Early Grand lodge Freemasonry – Studies in Honor of the Tricentennial of the Establishment of the Grand Lodge of England, Christopher B. Murphy, Editor; Shawn Eyer, Executive Editor is available online or through any good bookseller. A copy is also available at the Covington Masonic Library.

Reviewed by William J. Lorenz, P. M.

William J. Lorenz is a member and Past Master of Henry Barnes Lodge No. 607. He is also a Past Master of William O. Ware Lodge of Research and in 2018 was named to the initial class of William O. Ware Research Fellows.