

WILLIAM O. WARE LODGE OF RESEARCH BOOK REVIEW

MODERN FREEMASONRY

Joseph Fort Newton

Book Review by Thomas L. Nitschke, II, PM William O. Ware Lodge of Research

In a world that goes by so fast, and which takes little time to seek the wisdom of yesteryears, it is refreshing to find a Masonic literary gem, *Modern Freemasonry*, by Joseph Fort Newton. First released in 1924 in a series of books written by various Masonic authors, and published by the Masonic Service Association, the book contains a mere 92 pages. As we will see in this book review, however, there is more than enough to entertain and stimulate historical curiosity.

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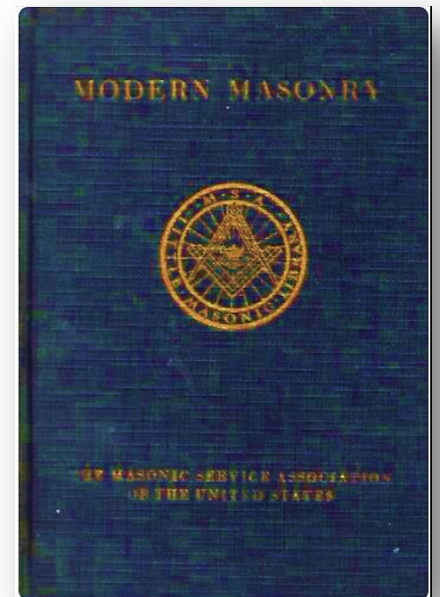


Newton begins the book with the origins of Freemasonry. His scholarly insights into the early days of the Craft are well founded have withstood the test of time. This includes topics such as the movement from operative to speculative Masonry, early references Freemasons, the creation of the Grand Lodge of England in 1717, so much more.

Newton progresses through the years of Masonic history, he devotes some time to the schism between the Ancients and Moderns, with their eventual unification and how it shaped

Masonry. The offices of the deacons within the lodge may have not been around had it not been for this dramatic and complex set of events. The expansion of Freemasonry to other parts of the world is examined. It provides a unique look into many regions such as Europe, Asia, and the American colonies which later became the United States. Newton describes how many areas were granted warrants to work and the issues that were spurred by multiple Masonic jurisdictions operating in the same area. He also expounds on the early development and current conditions of the Craft around the time of his writing. This is especially important to any Masonic historian who is researching the beginnings of many of the world's grand lodges.

Near the end of the book, Newton focuses on Freemasonry in the United States and its beginnings, along with its current condition circa 1924. He discusses the Ancient and Modern lodges being developed in the colonies and makes a very compelling argument as to the Craft's ability to have possibly tempered tensions before a war of independence



took hold. This theory will have you contemplating “what if,” and thinking about what kind of Masonry we would have today in an America still a part of the United Kingdom, and whether our country would have existed at all without influence of Freemasonry. We can only imagine.

As the reader continues, Newton explores the Morgan Affair and the Anti-Masonry movement and its effects on the Craft. Following the Civil War, the Craft in America once again gained prosperity and expansion. In ending *Modern Freemasonry*, Newton speaks of an ever-growing craft and warns with the following, “Meantime it grows almost too fast for assimilation, and the problems of prosperity are well-nigh as difficult as the problems of adversity.” One can only speculate that had this dire warning been heeded by generations of Masons before us, and subsequently, what our current condition would be. We can only wonder.

I highly recommend this book for any Mason looking for the true history of the Craft. Do not be fooled by its small size, as it contains a wealth of information.

First editions of the book from 1924 can still be found, but they are rare items. Macoy Publishing and Masonic Supply later created its own “Little Masonic Library” series that contains all the Masonic Service Association books, including *Modern Freemasonry*.

Modern Freemasonry is available from online booksellers.