

Bits & Pieces

By now most of you are aware that I have relinquished my position on the Grand Lodge Committee on Education. Three years as your DEO, and 3 as Division Provost....now it's time for something different! The WM has asked me to take on the challenge of Lodge Education Officer. I see it as a promotion, because I will be able to do more Masonic research and writing, rather than the administrative duties I've had for the past couple of years. And that gives me the chance to get back to the nuts and bolts of Masonic Education. Real Masonic Education is not just an exercise in scholarship – it's a voyage of personal discovery. We should constantly seek new information to further our understanding of Freemasonry and its relevance to today's world, and I look forward to being a resource for you in that area.

I must take a moment and say a sincere 'thank you' to our own Wor. Jack Cooke for a fine job he did as a DEO on my education team. Although I didn't have to 'ride herd' on Jack too much, he did manage to add a few gray hairs to my beard! Jack too is moving on, and Ray Lindquist from Westhampton Lodge will be the new DEO in 15-C .I look forward to his efforts for Masonic education.

During the coming year I hope to offer some insight into the meaning behind why we do the things we do, and offer some further explanation of one of the ceremonies we perform....the evening memorial service, for example. Have you ever taken part in one...do you know what to do and when, and what responses to make? And what about the 24-inch gauge....is it just a tool to measure distance? We'll talk about those topics and more at future meetings, so be sure to be here for more of the gems from the quarry. So, are you ready to go exploring???

Do you know how old Freemasonry is? Our traditional history dates Masonry from Biblical times, and includes the story of Hiram Abif and the Lost Word. The story of Hiram Abif is of course *not* biblical, nor does everything in Freemasonry come from the Bible. Sources of traditional history include such things as the Old Charges and our ritual. Traditional Masonic history is not 'history' in the true sense of the word, as it is (for the most part) the product of the fertile imagination of various Masonic writers. When found in the ritual, these accounts are meant to teach concepts of morality, not to give an accurate portrayal of past events. I must stress that no one today really knows how the Fraternity originated, but the transition theory, from operative to speculative Masons, seems to have taken on a life of its own, and is all too often treated as the last word on the subject. It should be noted that these are just theories of origin and not established facts.

Did you know?....In some countries the Craft or Blue Lodge degrees are under the jurisdiction of the York Rite, in some places it is controlled by the Scottish Rite while in others (in Sweden for example) the Grand Lodge directly controls advancement to degrees beyond that of Master Mason. In many parts of the world advancing to the next degree is neither fast nor is it automatic, the candidate having a lot more study and reflection to do than is usual here in the U.S. Some Grand Lodges (again, Sweden) limit Masonic membership to Christians, though this is not the case in the U.K and U.S.

Prince Hall Masons...I want to point out that black and Prince Hall Masons are not automatically considered irregular....that irregular black or Prince Hall masons are not irregular because of their race. A black Mason is not necessarily a Prince Hall mason, and that many Black masons belong to lodges chartered by so-called “White” grand lodges. The term ‘Irregular’ actually stems from a Grand Lodge’s pedigree, not the racial makeup of its lodges, and is always judged subjectively. Within the past couple of years we in Virginia have reached an agreement with the Prince Hall Grand Lodge to allow for cross visitation of lodges, with some minor restrictions. It was a long time coming, and I’ve found the visits to our Prince Hall brethren have been very enjoyable and filled with good fellowship.

The original Masonic degrees were Apprentice and Fellow. The Master Mason degree was more or less settled in the 1720s and the Royal Arch degrees appeared about a decade later, but all other degrees are more recent innovations and arose outside of the Craft Masonry setting. Grand Lodges have sovereign authority to determine what Craft rituals will be used within their jurisdiction. A Grand Lodge may specify a particular ritual, or may leave the matter up to local lodges and simply set general guidelines. By the way, the designations “F. & A.M.,” “A.F. & A.M.,” or “F.A.A.M.,” are totally irrelevant as far as the ritual is concerned.

Masonic ritual is supposed to make sense spiritually and emotionally, not logically or historically. Take, for example, the Pythagorean theorem, which relates the lengths of the sides of a right triangle to its hypotenuse, stated algebraically as $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$. Even today, mathematicians dispute whether Pythagoras himself ever developed this theorem that was named after him, or if he even devised a proof of it. But in either case, the Babylonians made use of this theory around 2,000 B.C., that’s about 1,400 years before Pythagoras was born, and none of his original research has survived. Nor is Pythagoras famous for saying “Eureka,” meaning “I have found it.” It was Archimedes, who gave this exclamation when, sitting in his bath, he realized how to determine whether the crown of the King of Syracuse, was really made of pure gold by immersing it in water to discover its specific gravity. And by the way, in the EA lecture it is mentioned that Pythagoras “.....was initiated into several orders of priesthood and raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason.” Actually, there was no such degree during his time of history.

Due guards and signs....Those of you who served in the military perhaps noticed that salutes become sloppier in direct proportion to the rank of the officer giving the salute. In Freemasonry, however, just the opposite should be true. Sometimes that’s not the case. Due-guards and signs should be given in a crisp, military manner, and accompanied by appropriate placement of the feet. Hands should be completely flat for all due-guards and signs, except for the moving portion of the FC sign.

Doing the ritual correctly.....I am reminded of the story of the new mason, who went home and told his wife of the three types of men to be found in a Masonic lodge, the walkers, the talkers and the holy men. The walkers walk around the lodge; the talkers talk while the walkers walk; and the holy men (they’re the ones with aprons trimmed in purple), they listen to the ritual and then put their heads in their hands saying, “Oh mi goodness, that’s not right!” Of course it’s easy to preach from the sidelines; it’s quite another when you’re sitting in the East with all eyes upon you...been there done that! We all acquire bad habits – some very dear to the heart. In fact, certain passages sound *better* with a word pronounced, shall we say, “with improvement.” For example, some Masons

much prefer /PILE-as-tur/, and /DYE-ves-ted....both of which are wrong. Mispronouncing the word “divest” is particularly popular because emphasizing the first syllable draws attention to the distinction between *investing* and *divesting*. Which proves the point that we must consider the message being conveyed not only by the words but by the way they are delivered as well. Correct pronunciation is only a beginning, but it is a necessary one.

The American Revolution was not a Masonic plot or conspiracy, nor was the Boston Tea Party. Certainly *Masons* participated in all these events, but if Masonry (as an organization) were to have done so it would be more a cause for shame than jubilation. After all, if you recall, General Benedict Arnold was also a Freemason.

Freemasonry isn't about secrets.....and saying that “It's a secret” is an unacceptable response to general questions about the Craft. Anti-masons like to attack Masonic “secrecy,” attempting to neatly avoid the fact that our organization, like any other, is entitled to its privacy. As if we should be ashamed of restricting our meetings to members only. Please understand that “the real secrets in Masonry are personal insights”. They are secret not because we have pledged to conceal them, but because they cannot be truly communicated from one person to another. Anti-masons who think they've done something really clever by publishing our ritual on the Internet, thereby revealing what they believe to be our “secrets”, are truly a sad lot. My comment....He who discovers the secrets of Freemasonry, will not arrive at that knowledge by simply going to lodge. He gains it through reflection, reasoning, comparing, and deducing. He will not confide it to his best friend in Freemasonry, for he knows if that his friend doesn't find it for himself, the friend will certainly not get it from whatever might be whispered in his ear.

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