

MASONIC EDUCATION

An address presented to the Lodge at its Installation meeting on Tuesday November 2005 by the District Grand Master of the District Grand Lodge of Carpentaria R.W.Bro. Phil Starr.

I would like to thank the Wor.Bro. preceptor for the opportunity of presenting this Lecture.

Brethren, There have been many papers written by any number of very learned Brethren on the subjects of membership, the modern freemason and the necessity to change. But Brethren, the most important topic of all is Education. We know all of these subjects are necessary for the acquisition and retention of members, but, without education, the other subjects are just collections of writings. Education is the practical concept of passing knowledge to people without that knowledge and for that to happen we must take practical steps not just make theoretical statements.

In my address tonight, I will be using excerpts from papers delivered by Richard Fletcher, PGM of Vermont USA and Emmanuel Anthony, PGM of UGLQ.

Bro Richard states that Conrad Hahn, a most distinguished Mason, who died in 1977 once observed, "The lack of education work in the average lodge is the principal reason for the lack of interest and the poor attendance in Masonry over which spokesmen have been wringing their hands for at least a century".

This quote shows us that the importance of Masonic Education has been badly overlooked for many years, and we must not kid ourselves into thinking that Masonic education is playing the prominent part in Freemasonry that it should.

"Why has this situation come about?" The real problem in answering that question is there is no easy answer. We as a Fraternity have reached the point where too many of our members haven't the faintest idea why they are Freemasons let alone have any real knowledge of our history or heritage.

We have come to depend on the ritual as the basis for Masonic knowledge, but the ritual doesn't make Masons, it only makes members! Until the degrees are explained to the candidate he has no idea of what he has gone through. To suggest that the explanation is complete with the lectures of each degree is again burying our heads in "Masonic sand".

The ritual has an important place in life of a person becoming a Mason, but, that is not the end of it, it is far easier to memorise and recite the ritual than to study the history and meaning of freemasonry. We seem to be more comfortable in working the degrees than in teaching our candidate what our craft is all about.

Has this always been the case? No, but we have drifted far from the true knowledge of our fraternity and it is time to turn the tide.

Bro Richard asks, what in fact are the origins of freemasonry? Where did it begin? How did it reach its present state in which we find it today?

Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could answer these questions in ten words or less, we can only surmise what must have happened. Freemasonry did not begin in London in 1717; it is obvious there had to be Lodges already formed at that time, so they must have had some history, prior to that date. So where did it all begin, we don't know.

Why did the Antient Guilds need signs and passwords; why did they need a means of recognition for the construction of the buildings? We don't really know. In a book by John Robinson, called "Born in Blood", his theory is that Freemasonry began with the Knights Templar in the year 1307. At that time the Templars were crushed in France, though many escaped and it is his theory that they went underground and had to devise a method of recognition to enable them to travel safely and to establish safe houses to rest and refresh.

It also gave them an ability to recognise each other. Although this may or may not have anything to do with early freemasonry, it tends to make more sense than was necessary for a simple tradesman plying his trade in a building; but then who really knows?

One thing we do know, is they formed an order of men doing good work wherever they were permitted to travel and practising the principles of Freemasonry gained the respect of the people.

Bro Richard says the lack of understanding of ancient signs and symbols has misled many Masonic historians into false conclusions. It is obviously going to make reconstruction of our past very difficult because we have very few written records to go by.

The purpose of tracing this part of our history is simply to say that there was a far more significant purpose in the origins of Freemasonry than simply erecting buildings.

One of the greatest mistakes we have made is to try to run Freemasonry as we did in the 1700's. We did not develop the education programs and the communication to deal with the vast numbers of today. In the "old days" when all of the leading men of the small towns were in Freemasonry, every one knew each other. Now we are in vast cities where people don't know each other. We have to do a much better job of communicating and education of our members.

If the lodges don't have the resources within to provide that education, then they need to turn toward other Lodges or Grand Lodge for that information. We must stop producing freemasons who don't have any information about our Fraternity.

We are paying the price for this mistake.

Programs can be developed but it will require commitment on the part of knowledgeable Masons in each Lodge to accept this responsibility of educating all masons about the Fraternity.

We now have a group of men who never quite knew why they joined Freemasonry and over the years have never found out why, who have reached that point where, through lack of interest or financially cutting back, have no incentive to remain in Masonry. They have been around for years, haven't been active and now see no reason to stay as members. If we don't find a means to actively communicate with them and show them reasons why being a freemason is important, we will lose them.

We can do something about this decline, and that Brethren, is the challenge facing Freemasonry today.

The District will be of help in developing a program common to all to whet the appetite of the Brethren so that they will want to do more on their own in furthering their Masonic Knowledge.

Within the Lodge structure of our meetings, and the ritual work itself, we need to embark on an education plan to see all members, from the Master to the Secretary. from DC to the Tyler, are instructed in that particular office so that they may carry out the duties of that office with efficiency and enjoyment. To perform the work of the office be it Ritual or Social efficiently, we need to be able to perform the task correctly and with enthusiasm.

Freemasonry was never intended to begin or to end with an undue emphasis on ritual and process; as soon as we accept a man as a Brother we have a "duty of care" not only to nurture his emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual development but also to be supportive and encouraging in his overall maturity as a freemason.

Bro. Emmanuel, in his address to a Lodge conference in August this year states,

"In planning for the future, it is paramount that, as individuals and as a fraternity, we divest ourselves of (or at the very least, adequately manage) the pessimism with which some have been unfortunately indoctrinated, as well as of the gloom and doom that they purvey. Our number one priority must always be to continue to demonstrate what can be attained through teamwork and without personal agendas. This is not to say we won't experience failures and disappointments. However, the difference between being a loser and being a winner is that losers dwell on failure and wallow in self pity, while winners recover quickly and refocus on the job to be done.

Freemasonry today must be seen as integral parts of the community in which they live. Only then will they be recognised as belonging to a purposeful organisation whose members are dedicated to the welfare of others"

Brethren, we can only meet the challenges and achieve the goals for our order to survive in these modern times with a humble and thoughtful approach to our education both internal and external.

To sum up I again lean to the words of our Bro. Emmanuel,

" I believe that through our humility comes respect for others; through respect for others comes cohesion and unity of purpose and through cohesion and unity of purpose comes the balance that Freemasonry adds to our lives. Our challenge for the future is to ensure that the eloquence of our words is reflected in the eloquence of our actions"

Phil Starr Dist. G. M.

Dist. of Carpentaria

CORN IN ANCIENT ISRAEL?

Americans use the term "corn" to designate what is generally known as maize in the Old World (although American culture continues to infiltrate its usage since the end of World War II. The term "corn" in English usage at the time the Masonic ritual developed, meant any grain but most often wheat. 'Corned Beef' was originally beef cured with salt granules, the size of wheat grains or wheat 'corns'. So! No! There was no corn in Israel or Egypt or anywhere in Eurasia/Africa until brought over from the New World after its rediscovery by Columbus in 1492.