

# Klein's Korner - Book Review

Why has there been since a dearth of Masonic information about our Masonic presidents in Presidential biographies? In this outstanding work, the author, B. Chris Ruli gives the reasons for the lack of Masonic content in these biographies and provides the data we have long wanted to learn for every Masonic President.

Ruli explains that a non-Masonic author may not fully appreciate the importance the Craft plays in shaping the values and character of the President. They may omit what they fail to understand. Other considerations are the length of the work, and if the audience (or the publisher) has sufficient interest to explore the Masonic aspect of the President's life. Masonic and non-Masonic historians and biographers seldom interact. Grand Lodge and blue lodge archives, often understaffed, cannot provide the services a biographer requires. Amateur historians are not academic researchers. They rarely go beyond the basic resources of local libraries and the internet. Early lodge records can be missing or incomplete.

Some historians draw false conclusions based on a numbers-only analysis, saying that a prominent Mason wasn't that interested in Masonry because the Tiler's Register showed they seldom attended meetings. This is preposterous. Quantifying lodge attendance as a measurement of Masonic commitment cannot be made. Keeping scorecards this way does not reveal a Mason's love for the Craft.

Ruli provides the Masonic resumes of every President, with their Masonic activities while in office - Washington, Monroe, Jackson, Polk, Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, Garfield, McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, Taft, Harding, FDR, Truman, LBJ, and Ford. Their blue lodges are listed with the dates of their degree conferals and their appendant bodies memberships - York Rite, Scottish Rite, Shrine, Commandery, etc. The research is impressive, and occurs over many jurisdictions and centuries.

Perhaps Masonic events may have been perceived only as public relations, not major administration accomplishments. However, the White House maintains meticulous logs of the President's activities on a daily and even hourly basis. Newspaper stories, diaries, radio and phonograph recordings, and newsreels exist. The information has always been there for any historian who wished to find it. The definition of an event with a president can be a personal meeting, a speech, attending dedication ceremonies for Scottish Rite facilities or Shriner's Hospitals, a letter send by the president, a

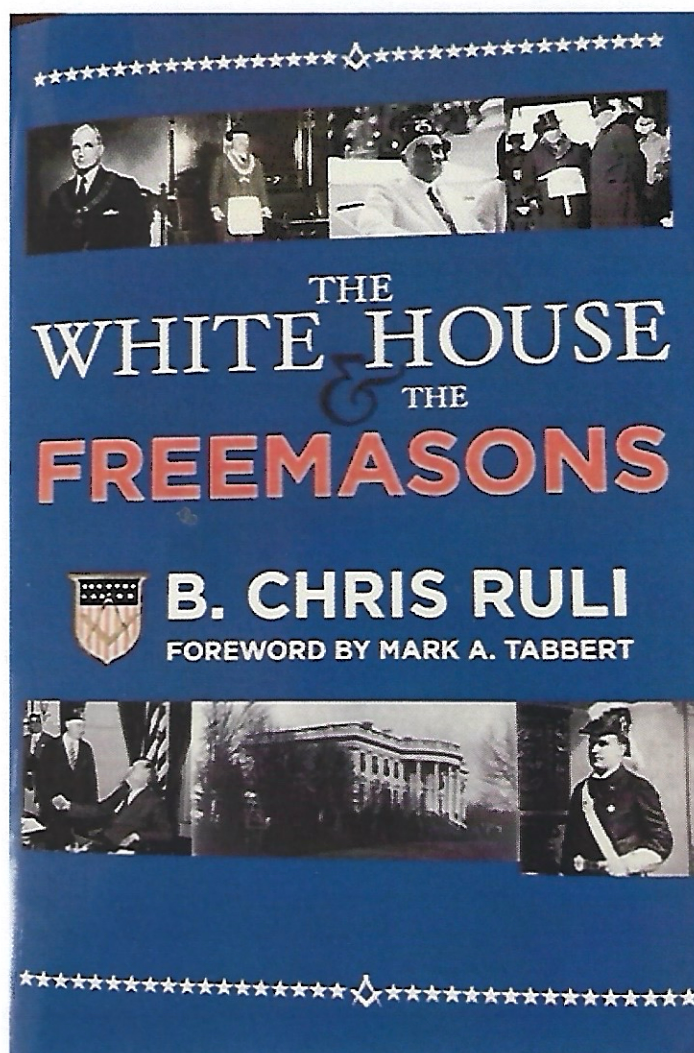


photo op, or the use of the George Washington bible or the president sending someone in his stead.

The most important precedent in Masonic Presidential history was George Washington performing a cornerstone laying ceremony at the nation's capitol on September 18, 1793. Washington was a member of Alexandria Lodge No. 22 and served as Master during one year of his presidency, the only Masonic President to do so. William McKinley's administration shows about 18 Masonic activities during his presidency. Theodore Roosevelt had about 24 Masonic events during his presidency, Coolidge; non-Mason, about 23 Masonic events. Hoover, a non-Mason, had about 21 Masonic events. Warren G. Harding died before completing his term, yet had approximately 51 interactions with Masons. FDR had about 41 Masonic activities during his tenure in office. Harry S. Truman had about 76 Masonic activities. Gerald Ford had about 16 events.

In a major decline in recent decades, fewer events have occurred as concerns arose about potential political fallout by meeting with Masons. Masonic influence has dwindled. Our ranks have shrunk, baby boomers and subsequent generations have found fraternal orders passe, social movements have changed the country and globalization and the social services that fraternal orders provide now are embedded in government programs or company benefits. Ronald Reagan had 3 events, George H. W. Bush 4 events, George W. Bush had 1. None are known to have occurred since 2005.

This is an outstanding book. I enthusiastically recommend it. This book fills a gap. It needed to be written. All activities of our Masonic presidents are conveniently contained in one book. Chris Ruli's fine work enhances Masonic knowledge and serves to inform and inspire us.



Sincerely & Fraternally, Steven D. Klein



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