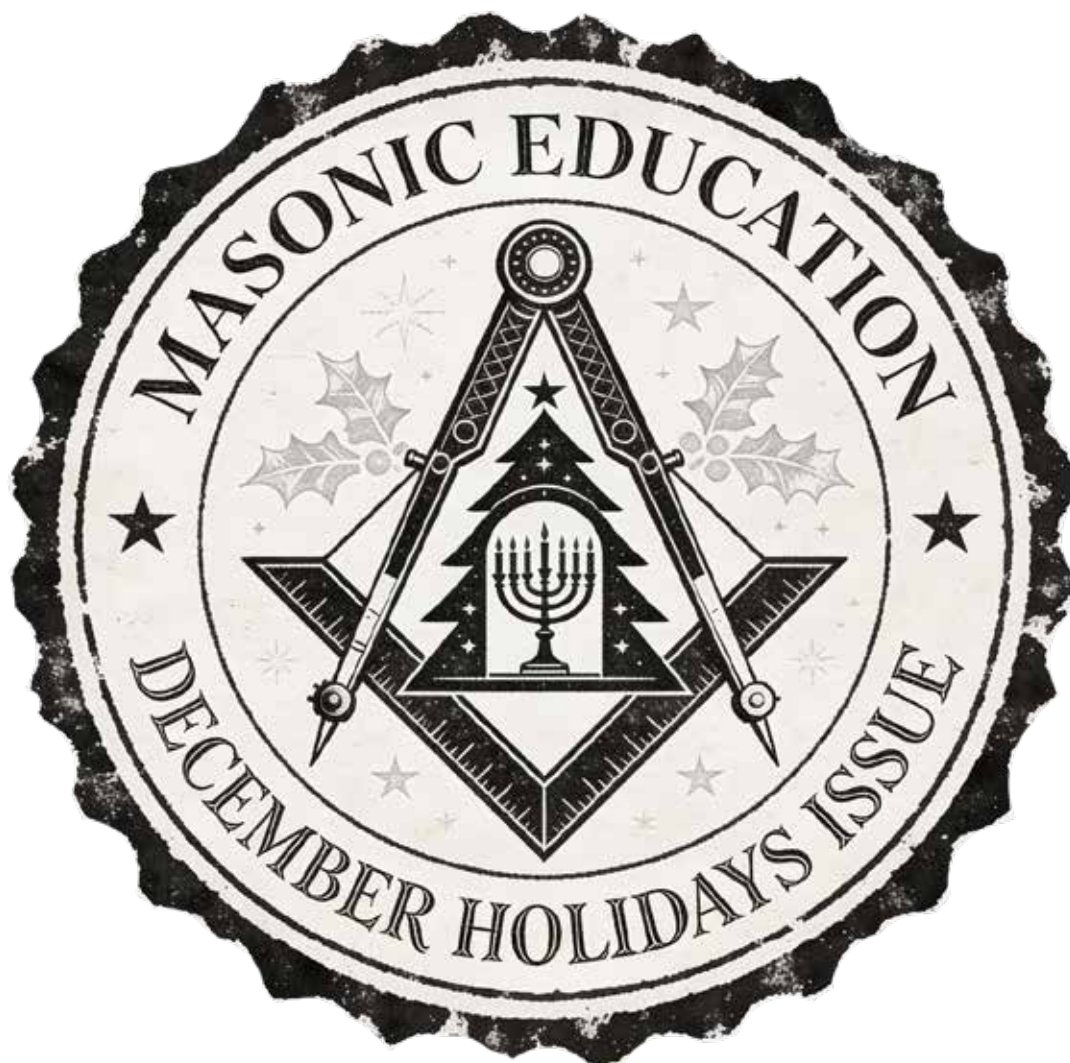

The Lyceum



A Publication of
The Committee on Masonic Education



Contents

From the Editor-In-Chief.....	3
RW:. R.H. Johnson, FILOR	
From the Chairman.....	4
WB Dr. Bernard Davis Jr., Chairman - Masonic Education GL Illinois	
Giving Back.....	5
Committee on Masonic Education, IL	
The Holidays as a Freemason.....	6
RWB:. Chad M. Lacek, 33°	
The Hanukkah Story.....	7
WB:. Darin A. Lahners, FILOR	
My Brother's Wife.....	9
Bro. Bill Hosler, PM †	
Dear Santa: All I want for Christmas---.....	13
WB:. Darin A. Lahners, FILOR	
Reflection, Practice and the Seven Principals: Kwanzaa.....	15
Committee on Masonic Education, IL	
The Great Eggnog Riot.....	17
Committee on Masonic Education, IL	
The Christmas Guest.....	21
WB:. Darin A. Lahners, FILOR	
Diwali: The Festival of Lights.....	24
The Committee on Masonic Education	
Oh Sprig of Acacia, How Lovely Are Your Branches.....	26
WB:. Darin A. Lahners, FILOR	
New Year's Resolutions for Masonic Lodges?.....	28
Bros. Bill Hosler, PM †, Greg Knott, 33°, Robert H. Johnson, FILOR	
Put It Into Practice / Listen To It.....	31
Committee on Masonic Education, IL	
Educational Conferences.....	32
The Committee on Masonic Education	



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Your Publication Staff & Contributors
Robert H. Johnson - Editor-In-Chief, Darin A. Lahners -
Editor, Chad Lacek, 33°, Bernard Davis, Chairman

FROM THE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Brethren and Friends,

As the closing days of the year descend upon us and the quiet majesty of winter settles across the Lodges and communities of Illinois, the season invites both contemplation and renewal. The stillness of snow-covered fields and the shortened days remind us of nature's cycles—periods of rest that precede rebirth and growth. In this sacred pause, humanity turns to ancient observances that kindle light against the darkness, fostering faith, harmony, and the triumph of virtue over adversity.

These year-end celebrations—Hanukkah, Christmas, Diwali, Kwanzaa, and others observed by brethren and friends worldwide—each illuminate profound truths. They speak to resilience, communal bonds, and spiritual renewal, echoing the timeless tenets of Freemasonry: brotherly love that unites diverse peoples, relief extended in times of need, and the unyielding pursuit of truth amid trials.

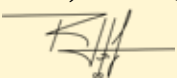
In this edition of The Lyceum, we present a distinguished collection of articles that delve deeply into these holidays, including WB Darin A. Lahners' account of "The Hanukkah Story." This piece traces the historical upheavals under Antiochus IV and the Seleucid Empire, illuminating the Maccabean revolt's legacy of defiance and divine provision—the miracle of the oil that burned for eight days. Subsequent contributions explore Christmas traditions rooted in Christian charity and incarnation, the luminous Festival of Lights in Diwali that symbolizes good's victory over evil, and Kwanzaa's seven principles emphasizing unity, self-determination, and collective work. These essays reveal customs both familiar to our Western heritage and those from distant shores, yet all converge on moral imperatives that strengthen the Mason's resolve.

Such scholarship serves the Fraternity's noble aim: to cultivate minds open to the world's rich tapestry. By studying these traditions—whether the re-dedication of the Temple in Jerusalem or the shared feasts of harvest and hope—we exercise tolerance, broaden understanding, and affirm our commitment to universal brotherhood. In the Square and Compasses, we discern not division in diversity, but the harmonious design of the Great Architect, where every culture contributes to the edifice of human enlightenment.

As winter deepens its hold, let us embrace its lessons—pausing from laborious pursuits to reflect on the year past, fortifying our inner temple, and gathering in Lodge fellowship against the chill. The hearth's glow and the Trestle Board's wisdom sustain us, ever pointing toward that perpetual Light which no shadow can extinguish.

On behalf of the Editorial Board of The Lyceum, I extend fraternal greetings and heartfelt wishes for a season of profound peace and spiritual enrichment. May the New Year dawn with health, prosperity, and unwavering dedication to our Great Work—the perfection of character and the service of mankind.

Fraternally yours,
R.H. Johnson,



Editor-In-Chief
The Lyceum
The Grand Lodge of Illinois,
Committee on Masonic Education



From the Chairman's Desk

by WB: Dr. Bernard Davis Jr., Chairman- Masonic Education Committee

Honoring the Many Lights of the Season



As we enter the close of the year, our communities are illuminated by a tapestry of celebrations, Christmas, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Diwali, and many others observed by cultures and faiths across the world. Each tradition carries its own symbols, rituals, and stories, yet all share a common thread: the pursuit of light, understanding, and renewal.

From an educational perspective, this season offers us a powerful reminder of why we study, teach, and grow together. Learning is, at its core, an act of illumination. It invites us to move beyond the boundaries of our own experience and appreciate the diverse ways people seek meaning and connection. When we explore the traditions of others, we strengthen our capacity for empathy, broaden our worldview, and deepen our commitment to harmony.

In Freemasonry, we often speak of the universality of the Craft, namely, its ability to unite individuals of different backgrounds under shared principles. The holiday season gives us a living example of that universality. Whether one lights a menorah, decorates a tree, gathers for a feast, or simply reflects quietly on the year gone by, each observance is a testament to the human desire for hope, gratitude, and fellowship.

As Masons and lifelong learners, we have an opportunity and a responsibility, to model this spirit. Let us use this season to reaffirm our dedication to understanding one another, to asking questions with humility, and to teaching with generosity. Let us celebrate not only our own traditions but also the rich diversity that strengthens our lodges and our communities.

May the many lights of this season inspire us to continue our work: seeking knowledge, sharing wisdom, and building a more enlightened world.

Fraternally,

Dr. Bernard Davis Jr.,

WB Dr. Bernard Davis Jr,
Chairman - Committee on Masonic Education
Grand Lodge of the State of Illinois



GIVING BACK TO OUR MEMBERS IN NEED AND MORE

Charities

Charity is a core part of our duty as Freemasons. The Grand Lodge of Illinois A. F. & A. M. and Freemasons of our state are proud to support life-changing efforts for the most vulnerable in our communities. Learn more about our charitable initiatives below.



ILLINOIS MASONIC OUTREACH SERVICES (IMOS)

IMOS allows Illinois Freemasons to fulfill their Masonic oath of coming to the aid of a Brother, their spouse, widow, and orphans in times of necessity.



ILLINOIS MASONIC CHILDREN'S ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (IMCAP)

IMCAP partners with Illinois Masonic Lodges to provide assistance to children and young adults in our communities.



ILLINOIS MASONIC STUDENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (IMSAP)

IMSAP is a school-based early intervention approach designed to enhance educators' skills in identifying and assisting at-risk students.



ILLINOIS MASONIC FAMILY IDENTIFICATION PROGRAM

Every year in the U.S., thousands of children become lost. A few are victims of abduction. The Freemasons of Illinois hold and fund identification workshops for families all around the state to help them find and prevent victims of abduction.



COINS FOR CHILDREN

Support our mission to provide relief to those most in need.



ILLINOIS MASONIC ACADEMIC BOWL

This annual scholastic tournament, sponsored by the Freemasons of Illinois, aims to provide positive recognition for academic excellence.

The Holidays as a Freemason

by RWB: Chad, 33° M Lacek

One of many tricks we learn as we grow older, and hopefully wiser, is to be able to determine which decisions are important and which can be ignored. I take particular amusement exercising my right not to choose in situations where I don't have to. The best example of this happened to me while I was traveling in New Mexico. I ordered enchiladas, as one should when in Rome, and the waitress asked me if I wanted green or red sauce on them. I replied, "Can I have both?" And she said, "Sure! We call that Christmas."

Why bother to choose between things when you can experience all of them? I feel this is particularly true with the holiday season. As Masons, we know that all humanity is our extended family, and each of us seeks to understand our place in the universe. Humans have spoken over 7,000 different languages to date, 347 of which are spoken in the United States. If we have hundreds of different words for 'apple,' is it any wonder that we have many different names for God?

Being a member of our Fraternity gives us access to people with vastly different customs and beliefs. There is nothing that states that in order to practice your faith, you need to shun or disdain the observances of others. A Christian can sit at a Passover table, and a Jew can participate in an Easter brunch. They are no less Christian or Jewish for doing so. In fact, I would argue that participating in the religious observances of other cultures gives you a deeper understanding of your own beliefs. You will be a better Christian or a better Jew as a result of your wider experiences.

Can you imagine how limited your culinary knowledge would be if you only ever ate one type of cuisine? How narrow would your musical mind be if you only listened to one genre of music? Variety truly is the spice of

life! We can taste the spices of India for lunch, and the creamy goodness of Italy for dinner. We can enjoy the serenity of classical music in the morning and the heart-pounding beats of techno that evening. We can have it all.

Why not enjoy the same fascinating variety in our holiday observances? Wouldn't you like to celebrate Holi with your Hindu Brothers, throwing colorful powder at each other in a celebration of joy, laughter, and merriment? Dance around a roaring bonfire to the beat of drums during Beltane with your Wiccan Brothers. Let your Jewish Brothers teach you how to properly wave the Lulav and Etrog in the six directions during Sukkot. Take a nature walk with your Christian Brothers in celebration of Saint Francis Day. Show gratitude for your family during Eid al-Fitr with your Islamic Brothers. All of these just scratch the surface of what is available for us to enjoy.

There are so many ways to praise God and share our gratitude for the gift of life. Many of us are not aware of the rich variety of celebrations occurring outside of our own cultural circles. Our Masonic Brothers are more than happy to share their traditions. We just need to let them know that we're open and interested. Our Fraternity provides us with unique access and opportunities to expand our understanding of the world we live in and the people we share it with.

The next time you are offered a choice between this, that, or those...answer, "Yes!" Try them all. Share them all. You're a Freemason. The only boundaries you have are self-imposed. Never let a chance to celebrate pass you by. Every holiday is a holiday for every Mason.



The Hanukkah Story

By WB Darin A. Lahners, FILOR



In 175 BCE, Antiochus IV became the ruler of the Seleucid Empire. This empire began in 323 BCE, with the death of Alexander the Great. Seleucus I Nicator, one of Alexander's generals, became the leader of a very large and culturally diverse empire, although the main cultural influence was Greek, and he expanded the territory and established his dynasty. Seleucus' son, Antiochus I, along with his son Antiochus II, fought against the Egyptian emperor, Ptolemy II, as well as the Celts, who threatened their borders. Antiochus III, son of Antiochus II, expanded the empire to include parts of Judea and Syria (which had been part of the Ptolemaic Empire).

By the end of Antiochus III's reign, he had lost Greece to the Roman Empire at the battle of Thermopylae in 191 BCE (not to be confused with the stand of the 300 Spartans against the Persians that took place in 480 BCE) and subsequent defeats against the Roman Army and Navy, he had lost Asia Minor and he was forced to sue for Peace. As a result of the Treaty of Apamea, Antiochus III was forced to abandon all his empire north and west of the Taurus Mountains, pay Rome tribute, and have members of his family held as political hostages. Consequently, with his mil-

itary power waning, the outlying provinces of his empire began to reassert their independence. Antiochus III mounted a new military expedition in Luristan (which is now part of Iran), where he was killed while pillaging a temple in 187 BCE.

Upon the death of Antiochus III, his son, Seleucus IV Philopator, became ruler of the Seleucid empire. His brother Antiochus IV was held as a hostage in Rome as part of the Treaty of Apamea. Antiochus IV was later released in exchange for his nephew and heir to the empire, Demetrius I Soter. Upon the assassination of his brother in 175 BCE, Antiochus, through political maneuvering, usurped the Throne and became ruler of the Seleucid Empire. While his father, Antiochus III, was friendly towards the Jewish people, Antiochus IV was not. At the time, Jerusalem was part of the Ptolemaic empire. In 168 BCE, Antiochus IV attacked the Empire and conquered Jerusalem. In an attempt to unite his empire under Hellenistic customs and religions, he replaced the High Priest of the Temple with a political ally, Joshua, who changed his name to the Hellenic name: Jason.

Jason encouraged the practice of Hellenistic culture at the temple, including the building of a gymnasium, where men exercised in the nude, as well as using temple funds to help Antiochus IV's war effort. Things turned worse when Jason's messenger to Antiochus IV, Menelaus, who was carrying the temple funds, convinced Antiochus IV to replace Jason with him. He promised Antiochus IV an increase of funds from the Temple. While he was away, Menelaus appointed his brother, Lysimachus, as High Priest. Lysimachus stole several religious artifacts from the Temple, which led to riots by the Jewish populace.

As a result of the strife, Antiochus IV outlawed the practice of Judaism, including circumcision, Torah study, and kashrut (the

observance of Jewish dietary laws). He erected an altar to Zeus in the Temple, stripped it of its remaining holy objects, and ordered the sacrifice of pigs (a non-kosher animal) in the Temple.

In 167 BCE, after the altar to Zeus was erected, according to the Books of the Maccabees, a group of Hellenistic officers sent by Antiochus IV came to Mattathias, who was a popular Jewish leader. The officers offered him political benefits to continue to desecrate the Temple with further sacrifices to Zeus. Mattathias refused, and in the melee that followed, he killed a Jewish collaborator and one of the envoys of the emperor. He then fled into the mountains with his friends and his five sons (John, Simon, Eleazar, Jonathan, and Judah).

For the next three years, Mattathias and his sons led a series of battles against the Seleucid army. At first, they mainly fought guerrilla actions, but over time, they began to organize a true army and made strategic alliances with Sparta and later Rome. Judah, one of Mattathias' sons, was given the name Yehuda HaMakabi or Maccabee, meaning "The Hammer, a reference to his ability to destroy his enemies. In 164 BCE, the Maccabees retook Jerusalem and the Temple.

When the Maccabees and their followers retook the Temple, they re-instituted Jewish law and purified the Temple. A new altar was built, and new sacred vessels were crafted. One of the most important ways to rededicate the Temple was the lighting of the Menorah, or seven-branched candelabra, which was to remain lit all night, every night. Ordinary oil could not be used for this purpose, as according to Talmudic law, only purified, blessed, and properly sealed oil could be used. Only one flask of this oil was remaining in the Temple. The Jews lit the menorah, knowing they had only enough oil to keep the lamp lit for a single night. According to 1 Maccabees, the oil miraculously burned for eight full nights until a new supply of holy oil could be delivered. This miracle led to the creation

of the eight-day Hannukkah or "festival of lights".

Modern scholars believe that rather than battling the Seleucid Empire, the Maccabees and their followers were fighting against Hellenized Jews. They believe that Antiochus IV was intervening in a Jewish civil war on the side of the Hellenists, who had been a majority group and force in the Seleucid empire.

To our Jewish brethren, Chag sameach!



My Brother's Wife

by Bill Hosler, PM †



“Because she is my brother’s wife,” my dad said to my mother in a quiet, firm voice. “No, she isn’t,” my mother said in the voice she used on me when I was in trouble. “She is just the wife of some guy in that lodge of yours.”

The house was still except for the argument that my Mom and dad were having in the kitchen. I was sitting in our living room across from an elderly lady, who sat on our sofa. She looked like someone’s grandma, except she looked really tired and sickly. I wasn’t sure if she was crying into the handkerchief she held in her shaking hands over the words my mom and dad were saying, or if it was something else that had this poor old lady upset. All I knew was that at the tender age of ten, it was something that shook me to my very core and something I knew I would never forget.

Earlier that day, I was in the car with my father as he was driving into town to buy my mother’s Christmas present. The inside of the car was toasty warm and comfortable as I snuggled into the leather car seat. Dad was busy streaming Christmas music through the car from his smartphone. The setting sun made the snow flurries look like they were

magical elves dancing in the air as our car navigated the snowy roads to the local mall. My Yuletide fantasy awakened me as I felt Dad slowing the car as he made a turn down an unfamiliar, long driveway. As Dad put the car in park, I looked at our destination. *“I decided I need to make a stop before we get to the mall,”* he said as he started to remove his seat belt. I removed my seat belt and opened the door to follow him.

As we walked up to the house, I began to get scared. The place we were at looked like a haunted house. The paint on the house was peeling off, and I could hear the wind banging one of the house’s shudders back and forth against a broken window. The wind was also blowing the limbs on the leafless trees surrounding this poor old house. I couldn’t understand why he stopped at some scary place like this. I mean, it was Christmas Eve, not Halloween. I took my dad’s hand and hid behind him as he knocked on the house’s door.

After several minutes, the door opened slowly. Standing at the threshold was this little old lady. The poor lady had a confused look on her face, and I’m sure if I were a little older, I

would have noticed she had a cautious look as she said in a frail voice, "Can I help you, sir?"

"Mary, you may not remember me, but my name is Lee Hamilton. I'm a member of Norman's Masonic lodge." Mary smiled frailly. "Please come in." I could feel the wind blowing through the house as we entered the building.

"I'm sorry it's so cold. I'm not used to having guests." Mary said as I sat down on a broken chair. "The furnace went out about a year ago, and I haven't been able to afford a new one. Honestly, it doesn't make sense to put one in any way. One of these days, a good, strong breeze will blow the house down anyway." Mary said in a quiet voice. "It's not too bad, I cover up with lots of blankets, and it makes the place nice and cozy," she said.

My father seemed shocked at the state of her home. "I wish I knew you were having problems with your heating. Did you ever try to contact the lodge?" Mary looked down at her lap. "I did a few years ago when I still had a telephone. I tried, but no matter what time of day or night I tried to call, I always got an answering machine. Sometimes I would leave a message, but no one ever called me back. I figured it had been so many years since my Norman passed away, the members didn't remember him anymore, so I gave up. I read in the paper that the lodge was busy raising thousands of dollars to give scholarships to high school kids and other fundraisers to buy glasses for children. I just assumed they were too busy helping others in the community to worry about me." Mary began to get choked up and reached for an old handkerchief.

Tears fell down the elderly lady's face as she continued, "I get along ok. I get some money from Social Security every month, and I have a part-time job as a cashier at a small grocery store. The job is a blessing because my employee discount on groceries makes my food stamps last nearly the entire month. Luckily, it's Son-

ny's about a mile away, so it isn't far to walk to get to work. I can't drive anymore, so I walk. Sometimes the manager of the store will drive me home. He also carries my groceries."

I was really getting nervous because I could see tears starting to fall from my dad's eyes. Dad always seemed like such a big, tough guy I never thought anything could make him cry.

In a quiet voice, he said, "Mary, what are you doing for Christmas dinner?" Mary raised her head, trying to hide her emotions. "Well, the kids are so busy they can't be here this year. They all have their own lives, and my Grandchildren. They all live so far away, I imagine they won't make it. They haven't been here for years now. I think they forgot about me." Her hands were shaking as she continued, "I don't need a lot. I have a brand-new jar of peanut butter and saltine crackers I'd been saving. At my age, you don't need a lot to live on. Mary began staring off into space. I'm not sure if she was trying to convince herself that what she was saying was real or whether she was thinking about a Christmas time long ago and a time of happier memories.

Dad used the sleeve of his coat to wipe the tears from his eyes. You could tell he was trying to steady himself as he found his voice. "Mary, there is no way I'm leaving you here in this condition. Please gather some clothes together and come spend the holiday with us. I won't take no for an answer. We have plenty, actually, more than we really need. You are welcome to stay with us."

I could hear my folks still discussing the current situation as Mary rose from our couch and slowly started walking toward my parents, who were in the kitchen. "Please, Mister Hamilton, please take me home. The last thing I want to do is cause a family to fight, especially on Christmas Eve. I've lived in that house in its current condition for quite a few years. I want you to have a happy Christmas. One thing this old lady has learned through many

years of living is once your family is gone, all you have left are memories, and they should be happy memories."

I noticed my mom began to sob as my Dad said, *"Mary, there is no way. I could never have a happy memory of this Christmas if I knew you were freezing in an unheated house, living on crackers."*

Dad continued, *"To be honest, I'm actually ashamed of myself for waiting all these years to visit you and not upholding my Masonic obligation to you, and now I wonder how many of our widows we have allowed to live in such a state. Especially when we have raised tens of thousands of dollars to fund projects that have nothing to do with our Masonic obligations. You are going to stay here in our guest room until we can figure out what it will take to fix your house and make sure you never want for food or shelter ever again."*

Everyone in the room looked at my mother for her decision. Even at my young age, my mom felt bad at the thought of sending this woman back to her shack with no food. *"Well,"* mom said in a quiet voice, *"I can see that this means a lot to Lee, and we have plenty of room and definitely more than enough food for all of us. I have to say, please stay."* Tears ran down the faces of both women as they embraced. *"I bet you could use a nice warm bath, and then we will get you some clean clothes. I hope you like roast chicken. I've been cooking all day."* The old lady smiled, *"I do, and it would be an honor if you would let me help you cook tomorrow."*

Later that night, I was hiding at the top of the stairs, trying to stay awake long enough to get a glimpse of Santa Claus. Mom and Dad were in the living room staring into a roaring fire in the fireplace. I saw Dad lean over and kiss my mother's cheek. *"What's that for?"* Mom said with a smile on her face. My Dad smiled and said, *"For allowing Mary to stay here with us. I know that couldn't be easy for you."* *"It wasn't, but I could see in your face how import-*

ant it was to you, and I couldn't, in good conscience, send her back to a place that sounds so horrible. I just hope you can help her." *"I only have one regret,"* Dad said.

"In all of this excitement with Mary, I never got your Christmas gift." He added with a slight hesitation. Mom just snuggled into Dad's shoulder. *"That's okay, babe. I'm a lucky girl. I have everything I will ever need or want. Just having a good, caring man like you is a gift enough."* Mom added, *"I do have one question. What made you stop by her house in the first place?"* Dad took a deep breath. *"Honestly, I can't tell you why. I was just driving down the road, and then all of a sudden, this voice told me to stop the car and pay a visit to Mary. Maybe it was Norman sending me a message from the Grand Lodge above,"* my dad said with a chuckle.

Over the next few weeks, the members of the lodge inspected Mary's little home, and sadly, the place was so disheveled that it could not be saved. The lodge, with Mary's consent, arranged for her to have a room at the Grand lodge's Masonic home. Mary thrived in her new environment. She gained weight from the nutritious food served to her, and she developed a glow as she met new friends and lived the rest of her life in a safe, warm environment with plenty of love and happiness.

Finding Mary living in such a disheveled condition acted as a wake-up call to Dad's little lodge. Dad used to the lodge's next stated meeting as *"The night the lodge quit making Masons and began to practice Freemasonry."* Dad would always say, *"There was a lot of apron gazing that night as the Brethren hung their heads in shame. Especially from the row of Past Masters who not only knew Mary's husband but never thought to check on his widow, and all the other lodge widows for so many years."* Needless to say, the Brethren worked hard, and each took a solemn vow (Or reaffirmed their original Master Mason obligation) to care for each other's widows and orphans.

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"Johnny, we're ready to start," the Master of the lodge said to me as I heard the old tune "*Solemn strikes the funeral chimes.*" Standing here at my father's coffin brought all those memories of that Christmas back to me from so long ago. I was told by the lodge I didn't have to be a part of Dad's Masonic memorial service. I just felt like I should be there, following in his footsteps as a member of his lodge. Standing here holding Dad's apron and a sprig of evergreen reminded me of my new obligation to my own mother, as well as those other ladies. I just hope Dad is looking down and smiling at me, as the man that Freemasonry taught me to be.





# *Dear Santa: All I want for Christmas is for the ruffians to escape this one time...*

By WB Darin A. Lahners, FILOR

Editor's Note: This is Satire. Please read this with that in mind. I'm just having some fun and trying to spread some Holiday cheer by making you laugh (hopefully).



Dear Santa:

Every third degree, I'm forced to tell these three fellow craft that I have seen three workmen from the temple and men of Tyre attempting to book passage to Ethiopia, but they didn't have King Solomon's pass and turned back into the country. I then get to see them captured by the same fellow craft and witness King Solomon order them to be executed according to the several imprecations they gave while in the clefts of the rocks.

I feel really bad about this. I know these men, many of them are past Masters, and as much as they have tortured me by shouting out the ritual to me anytime I pause to take a breath while delivering it, I don't want them to die in that way. It's honestly too good of a fate for them, and I'd rather more torture be involved to make up for the continual disruptions and chaos they cause every degree. Santa, if

bellyaching were an Olympic sport, they'd all get Gold Medals.

Santa, I know that the Ruffians are obviously not very good murderers, since they were part of a conspiracy of many to begin with. Compile this with them not having an alibi, leaving the murder weapons at the scene of the crime, burying the body close enough to the murder site that you can see it, hanging around near where they buried the body, and then openly confessing their guilt within earshot of their pursuers from the clefts of the rocks; I realize they are about as inept as the burglars in Home Alone.

Santa, I don't like them calling me a rat, just because I was asked to perform a part in the degree that they asked me to perform. They're usually really mad that I turned them in, and let's just say that Hiram got off easy. They really lay into me. It really hurts to have them

treat me this way. I defend myself by saying that my obligation tells me I did the right thing. Something...something..Murder and Treason excepted. Should I feel bad? Probably not, but I do. Santa, I'm between a rock and a hard place here. Pardon the pun.

Yes, I know they killed a really important guy. But I heard this guy, Hiram Abiff, was inspecting the temple, and he was careless while inspecting it because he was too busy thinking about the Queen of Sheba and her huge tracts of land. He dislodged a stone, which fell and killed this dude named Cavelum, who was kin to King Solomon. That's why he had the north gate walled up, and he called it a place of darkness. I mean, if he accidentally murdered someone, shouldn't he have met with a similar fate? An eye for an eye. Oh wait, that was King Hammurabi. Solomon likes to order that babies be cut in two.

I also heard this Solomon dude had this guy whacked because he was too familiar with this Queen of Sheba. So, shouldn't we be holding King Solomon accountable for killing him? It just seems unfair that these three dudes get killed for doing something that they were ordered to do. I heard later on that all the workmen from the Temple were killed by Solomon anyway, like he made them some Kool-Aid and they drank it and they all fell dead. Isn't he the real villain here? I think he committed genocide.

Santa, all the ruffians wanted were some secrets that they were promised by Hiram, and this King Solomon dude took advantage of this. Hiram should have just coughed them up; the temple was pretty much done at that point. Honestly, I just don't know what the big deal is. They could have just gone on the internet and found them. It would have saved them and Hiram a lot of hassle.

So, please, Santa, just this once, can we just let them live? That way, I won't be a Narc, unlike those employees at the Holy Royal Golden

Arches. I hear they'll turn anyone in. I can sleep better that one night knowing I didn't rat my brothers out, I also won't be sore from their "retribution". Yes, I know that would be irregular work, Santa. But, in the spirit of the Holidays...I'm hoping you can use some of your Christmas magick and get the Grand-master to turn a blind eye this one time? Can you please sprinkle some of that dust and let them get away? I'd sure appreciate it. Or at least let me be the second fellow craft. I know that part as well. Then we can let someone else be the narc this next time.

Signed-

*A Wayfaring Man*



# Reflection, Practice, and the Seven Principals: Kwanzaa

by The Committee on Masonic Education



Kwanzaa is a secular, cultural holiday celebrated from December 26 to January 1, created in 1966 by Maulana Karenga to affirm African family and social values through a focused week of reflection and practice.

Kwanzaa is organized around the Nguzo Saba (Seven Principles): Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), and Imani (Faith).

These principles map closely onto both Freemasonry's tenets—Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth—and the four cardinal virtues—Prudence, Temperance, Fortitude, and Justice—because both systems aim at moral self-improvement expressed through service and community responsibility. Even though Kwanzaa is a cultural holiday and Freemasonry is a fraternal moral tradition, both treat their values as disciplines to practice, not merely ideas to admire.

## Kwanzaa Principles and Masonic Virtues and Tenets

The table below lists each Kwanzaa value and its match to our Masonic tenets, virtues, or symbols.

| Kwanzaa principle (meaning)              | Closest Freemasonry match                                                               | Why the pairing fits                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Umoja (Unity)                            | Brotherly <u>Love</u> ; the “cement” of brotherly love taught through the trowel symbol | Umoja centers unity in family and community, which parallels the Masonic insistence on respectful regard for the human family and the idea of binding people together through brotherly love.                       |
| <u>Kujichagulia</u> (Self-Determination) | Truth; Prudence                                                                         | Self-determination emphasizes defining and speaking for oneself, which aligns with Truth as integrity and living by moral understanding, and with Prudence as thoughtful judgment about one’s choices and identity. |
| Ujima (Collective Work & Responsibility) | Relief; Justice                                                                         | Ujima makes community problems “our” problems and calls for shared solutions, matching Relief’s practical help for those in distress and Justice’s insistence on fair, responsible treatment within a community.    |
| Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics)           | Justice; Relief (as organized charity)                                                  | Ujamaa’s shared benefit and community uplift parallels Justice’s fairness in dealings and the structured, communal aspect of Masonic Relief (lodges coordinating help).                                             |
| Nia (Purpose)                            | Truth; Prudence                                                                         | Nia’s emphasis on collective vocation and community-building resonates with Truth as a lived moral direction and Prudence as the capacity to choose worthy ends and consistent means.                               |
| Kuumba (Creativity)                      | Fortitude; Truth                                                                        | Kuumba calls for leaving community “more beautiful and beneficial,” which often requires Fortitude (steadfastness through obstacles) and Truth (constructive action grounded in integrity rather than vanity).      |
| Imani (Faith)                            | Truth (as a foundation of faith and civility); Fortitude                                | Imani emphasizes belief “with all our hearts” in people and the righteousness of struggle, which relates to Truth described as tied to faith and to Fortitude as perseverance in a principled path.                 |

Both Freemasonry and Kwanzaa treat ethical life as communal: unity is not just harmony but a responsibility, and truth is not just accuracy, but integrity expressed through action. Kwanzaa articulates this through principles aimed at cultural grounding and community uplift, while Freemasonry articulates it through brotherhood, service, and moral development shaped by its philosophy and teachings.





# The Great Eggnog Riot!

by RWB.: Robert H. Johnson, FILOR

Yes, you read that right, The Eggnog Riot. It all started back in December of 1826 when some cadets of the West Point Military Academy wanted to smuggle whiskey into said academy for the Christmas party. At that time, alcohol possession, drunkenness, and intoxication were absolutely prohibited and would result in expulsion. Even the use of tobacco or gambling would get you minor incarceration, loss of privileges, etc.

Once the cadets had learned that the eggnog would have to be alcohol-free, they promptly decided to smuggle some in. On December 22nd, a few cadets, namely William R. Burnley, Alexander J. Center, and Samuel Alexander Roberts, were at Martin's Tavern and almost got into a fight with another local watering hole over the business of getting this much sought-after whiskey into West Point.

The three cadets managed to convince Private James Dougan to let them cross the Hudson River to smuggle the whiskey in. They had only planned on acquiring one-half gallon of whiskey as a base for the eggnog; however, they ended up with a whole lot more than that.

Thanks to Phillip St. George, who was the Duty Guard for that day (24-hour shift), the three cadets managed to score two gallons of whiskey for the Christmas party, which would be taken back to the North Barracks in room #33. However, it may have been help from Bro. T. M. Lewis, who came through with the clutch when he acted accordingly to acquire a gallon of rum, which he delivered to North Barracks Room #5.

The cadets made their plans, and while Superintendent Sylvanus Thayer was attending his own administrative holiday party, the cadets, including Bro. Jefferson Davis (President of the Confederate States during the Civil War) started to party as well, and even Robert E. Lee was present. The movie *Animal House* comes to mind. Below is a timeline of events that eventually ended with court martials and expulsions.

Follow along carefully...

**24–25 December 1826 - 22:00 to 04:15**

Nathaniel Eaton (Massachusetts) was the cadet in charge of the external post of the North Barracks. Captain Ethan Allen Hitchcock, a

faculty member in military tactics, was also stationed in the North Barracks. Eaton and Hitchcock met and discussed the smuggled liquor in the North Barracks.

The eggnog party started among nine cadets in North Barracks Room No. 28. Numerous cadets appeared as the party progressed, while another party began in Room No. 5, mentioned by seven cadets, including Davis. Farrelly went again to North's or Havens and returned with another gallon of whiskey early on Christmas morning.

Cadet Charles Whipple (Michigan Territory), the division superintendent during the first part of the incident, went to North Barracks Room No. 5 at 02:00 after hearing a commotion, interrupting a round of singing among eight cadets, including Davis. Whipple returned to his room after a verbal exchange with Davis and the other cadets. Hitchcock made another patrol around the barracks at 03:00. Lieutenant William A. Thornton was asleep while the events unfolded.

By 04:00, voices from the floor above Hitchcock were loud enough to cause the faculty member to investigate Room No. 28, where Hitchcock knocked on the door and found six cadets drunk from the eggnog, as well as two others sleeping on a bed. Hitchcock ordered two of the cadets back to their rooms. After they left, Hitchcock woke the two sleeping cadets and ordered them to leave as well. Then he confronted Cadet James W.M. "Weems" Berrien (Georgia), who responded with equal force. Hitchcock read the Riot Act to the residents of the room for possessing alcohol on the premises. The captain left the room at 04:15. Berrien began verbalizing his rage toward Hitchcock, which led William D.C. "Billy" Murdock (District of Columbia) to lead an effort to organize a riot against Hitchcock.

#### **25 December 1826 - 04:30 to 06:05**

Hitchcock went down to his room to sleep.

Three times he heard knocks on the door only to find no one there. After finding another cadet drunk, Hitchcock saw Davis head over to Room No. 5, where thirteen cadets were partying. Davis, seeing Hitchcock's arrival, warned the other cadets. The captain entered the room, ordering one of the cadets to open up another cadet's footlocker, but the cadet refused. Hitchcock ordered no more disorder, left the room, and started looking for Thornton around 04:50.

Meanwhile, Thornton had strolled the North Barracks between 21:00 on the 24th and 02:00 on Christmas Day, observing the ongoing partying, before going to sleep at 02:00. He was awoken by loud yells and, once out of his room, was attacked by two cadets. Thornton then put cadet William P.N. Fitzgerald (New York) under arrest for brandishing a weapon. Fitzgerald retreated from Thornton, then told two cadets in Room No. 29 about the arrest.

At this point, noises erupted from the South Barracks, which distracted Thornton. While going to investigate that commotion, Thornton was knocked out by Roberts, who had been ejected from Room No. 28 by Hitchcock earlier that evening.

Davis was asleep, but other cadets went looking for Hitchcock. Three other cadets were discovered by Cadet James G. Overton (Tennessee), a relief sentinel and not involved in the parties, and questioned about their actions. They gave a drunken explanation about needing drums and a fife.

At around 05:00, Hitchcock found another inebriated cadet wandering the academy.

By this point, several window panes had been broken. Hitchcock returned to the room where he was staying, No. 8. Several cadets then attacked his door, Guion drawing his pistol and firing a shot into the room. Hitchcock opened the door and yelled at the cadets

to stop. The captain then began arresting cadets.

Hitchcock ordered Eaton to find Worth's headquarters. Overton asked Hitchcock to find Thayer, and Hitchcock replied, "*No, Mr. Overton. Fetch the 'com' (Commandant Worth) here!*" Several of the drunken cadets thought Hitchcock had stated the Bombardiers would be the ones to quell the riot, using heavy weapons, causing several cadets who were not drunk to take up arms in defense of the North Barracks. Thayer had been awoken at 05:00 by the sound of drums. He ordered his aide, Patrick Murphy, to get Major Worth because of what he could hear going on in the North Barracks.

Hitchcock continued restoring order in the North Barracks, getting into a fight with Cadet Walter Otey (Virginia). Thornton awoke from the stairway where he had been knocked out and returned to his room. Hitchcock greeted him in his room at 05:45. By 06:00, other cadets who were not drinking were also involved in restoring order. The main rioters were attempting to recruit other cadets, but with no success.

Overton could not find Cadet Eaton, who was checking the South Barracks, but did find Major Worth. Hitchcock met Worth and told him what had transpired. By this time, Thayer's aide had arrived in the North Barracks' guardroom. The Second Artillery had arrived at the North Barracks by the time of Reveille at 06:05.

#### **06:05–18:30**

Reveille sounded at 06:05, along with gunfire, the sound of glass breaking, profanity by cadets, cries of pain, and threats against Academy officials. North Barracks residents who were not drunk from the eggnog were appalled by the damaged property. Cadets in the South Barracks were well rested, while other cadets in the North Barracks were disheveled. Some of the cadets remained in their rooms

drinking, although some appeared in parade formation despite being drunk. Worth met with Superintendent Thayer after the first formation to discuss what had happened in the North Barracks the previous evening. Thayer instructed Worth to get the officers into the North Barracks and restore order.

Captain Mackay, Academy quartermaster, took down details of the damage to the property at North Barracks so repairs could take place in the following days. Many cadets who were drunk made it to company roll call at 06:20, though they were subdued. The mutiny officially ended when Cadet Captain James A.J. Bradford (Kentucky) called the corps to attention and dismissed them from the mess hall after breakfast. Chapel formation took place after breakfast, followed by two hours of service, with most of the drunk cadets still recovering.

Thayer was advised by Worth regarding the events at North Barracks. Captain Hitchcock and Lieutenant Thornton were bruised, while several cadets suffered minor injuries, and Fitzgerald suffered a hand injury. Worth told Thayer that between fifty and ninety cadets had been involved in the mutiny. Later that day, Thayer met with Governor Kemble, an ordnance manufacturer in Cold Spring, New York, to discuss different items, including the events at West Point. Kemble asked Thayer what he would do about the misconduct, to which Thayer replied he did not know.

#### **26 December 1826 - 07:00–08:00**

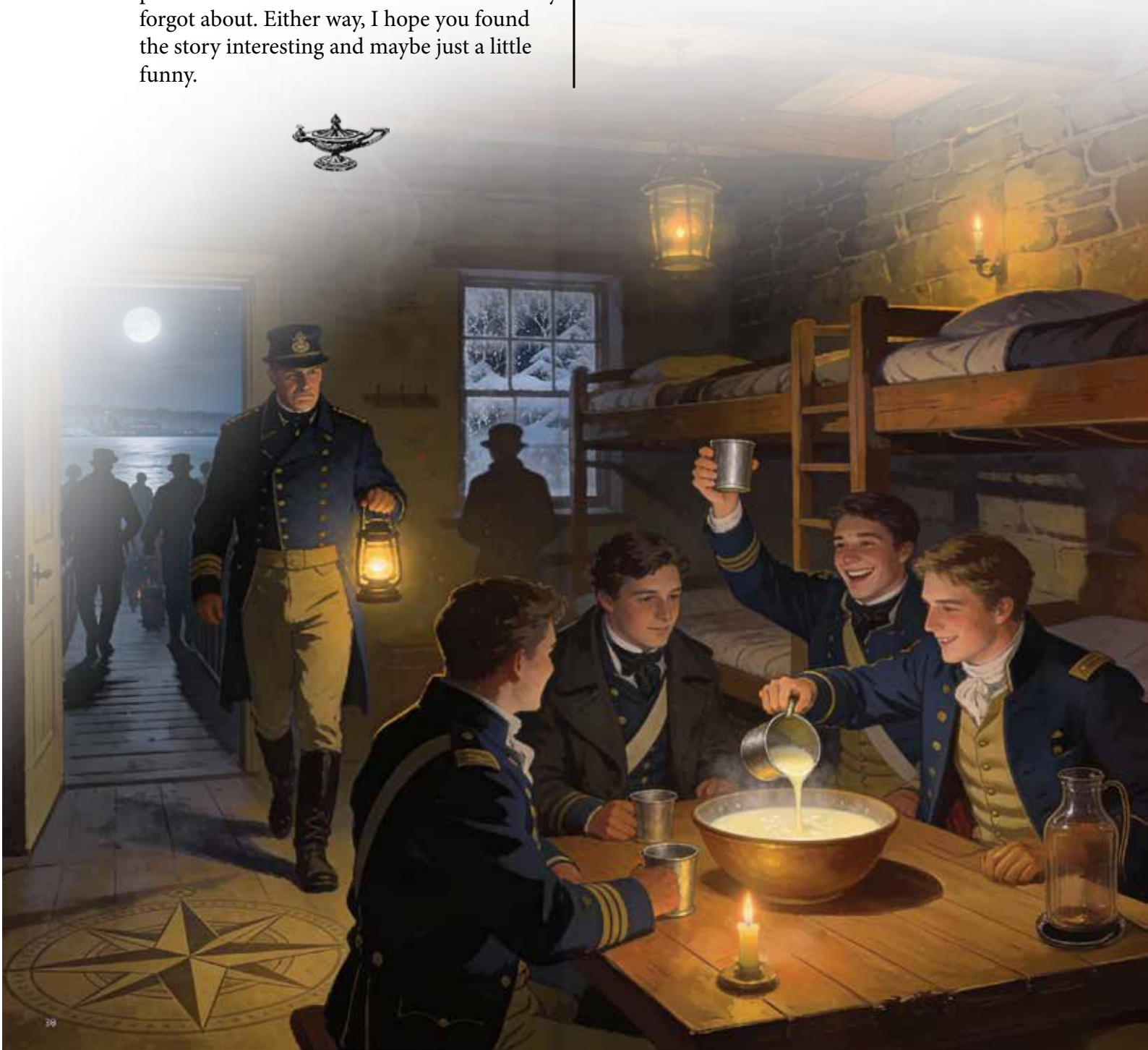
A faculty and staff meeting took place, with all but Captain Thomas C. Legate of the 2nd Artillery A Battery and a few assistant professors in attendance. Thayer informed them that Major General Alexander Macomb, Chief of Engineers and Inspector General of the Academy, had been told of the riot and that he was awaiting orders from Macomb. The superintendent also informed the attendees that an inquiry would take place during semester finals in January 1827, so some of the cadets



would face simultaneous examinations and an inquiry.

Cadet Battalion Order 98 was read at formation and posted at several prominent locations at the Academy. Twenty-two cadets were placed under house arrest until further notice; among them was Davis, who had been reported as a malefactor by Hitchcock and Thornton.

Certainly, a good time and a bunch of cadets, a handful of whom were Brothers of the craft, were determined to have some spirits for their Christmas party. Perhaps keeping passions within due bounds was a lesson they forgot about. Either way, I hope you found the story interesting and maybe just a little funny.





# The Christmas Guest

By WB Darin A. Lahners, FILOR

**Hebrews 13:2** *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it.*

In December of 1980, Johnny Cash released his Classic Christmas album, which included the spoken word poem *The Christmas Guest*. The message is fresh in my mind, courtesy of Past Right Eminent Grand Commander Sean McBride, who included them in his Christmas message to the Illinois Knights Templar. I am not a Knight Templar, for reasons I will not address here, but I have the honor and privilege of knowing Sir Knight Sean for many years now. I hope that I can build off his message. While this spoken word poem is Christmas-centric, I find that it should be something that has value for every Freemason regardless of their religion.



The Lyrics are below (courtesy of johnnycash.com):

*It happened one day at December's end,  
Some neighbors called on an old-time friend.  
And they found his shop so meager and lean  
Made gay with a thousand bows of green*

*And old Conrad was sitting with face a-shine  
When he suddenly stopped as he stitched a twine*

*And he said "My friends, at dawn today,  
When the cock was crowing the night away  
The Lord appeared in a dream to me  
And said 'I'm coming your guest to be.'  
So I've been busy with feet astir*

*Strewing my shop with branches of fir.  
The table is spread and the kettle is shined.  
And over the rafters the holly is twined.  
Now I'll await for my Lord to appear*

*And listen closely so I will hear  
His steps as He nears my humble place.  
And I'll open the door and look on His face."*

*Then his friends went home and left Conrad alone*

*For this was the happiest day he had known,  
For long since, his family had passed away  
And Conrad had spent many a sad Christmas Day.*

*But he knew with the Lord as his Christmas Guest*

*This Christmas would be the dearest and best.*

*So he listened with only joy in his heart  
And with every sound he would rise with a start*

*And look for the Lord to be at his door.  
Like the vision that he had a few hours before.*

*So he ran to the window after hearing a sound*

*But all he could see on the snow covered*

*ground*

*Was a shabby beggar whose shoes were torn  
And all of his clothes were ragged and worn.  
But old Conrad was touched and he went to  
the door*

*And he said, "You know, your feet must be cold  
and sore.*

*I have some shoes in my shop for you  
And a coat that will keep you warmer too."  
So with grateful heart the man went away  
But Conrad noticed the time of day*

*And wondered what made the dear Lord so  
late*

*And how much longer he'd have to wait.*

*Then he heard a knock, he ran to the door  
But it was only a stranger once more.*

*A bent old lady with a shawl of black  
And a bundle of kindling piled on her back.  
She asked for only a place to rest*

*A place that was reserved for Conrad's Great  
Guest.*

*But her voice seemed to plead "Don't send me  
away,*

*Let me rest for a while, it's Christmas Day."  
So Conrad brewed her a steaming cup  
And told her to sit at the table and sup.  
But after she left he was filled with dismay  
For he saw that the hours were slipping away  
And the Lord had not come as he said he  
would.*

*Then Conrad felt sure he had misunderstood.  
When out of the stillness he heard a cry  
"Please help me and tell me where am I?"*

*So again he opened his friendly door  
And stood disappointed as twice before.  
It was only a child who'd wandered away*

*And was lost from her family on Christmas  
Day.*

*Again Conrad's heart was heavy and sad  
But he knew he could make the little girl glad.  
So he called her in and he wiped her tears  
And quieted all her childish fears.*

*Then he led her back to her home once more  
But as he entered his own darkened door  
He knew the Lord was not coming today.  
For the hours of Christmas had all passed  
away.  
So he went to his room and knelt down to pray*

*And he said "Dear Lord, why did you delay?  
What kept you from coming to call on me?  
I wanted so much your face to see."*

*Then softly in the silence a voice he heard.  
"Lift up your head, I have kept my word.*

*Three times my shadow crossed your floor  
And three times I came to your lowly door.*

*I was the beggar with bruised, cold feet  
I was the woman you gave something to eat.  
I was the child on the homeless street.*

*Three times I knocked, three times I came in.  
And each time I found the warmth of a friend.  
Of all the gifts, love is the best.  
And I was honored to be your Christmas  
Guest."*

*Has there ever been a time in your life when  
you extended charity to a stranger who was  
less fortunate than yourself? I believe that  
the Great Architect puts us in situations from  
time to time to test us, to see if we as Freema-  
sons and as men who believe that we should  
treat others as we would want to be treated  
are who we profess to be. I'm not talking  
about putting money in the kettle of the per-  
son ringing the bell of the Salvation Army.*

*I'm not talking about writing a check from  
your lodge. I am talking about individual acts*

of selflessness. Think back to times when you might have, against your better judgment, given a stranger a ride to another town or gone out of your way to help someone load an appliance into their car in the parking lot of Home Depot or Lowe's or given a homeless person the only cash you had so that they could eat.

Our ritual is in states that by the exercise of brotherly love we are taught to regard the whole human species as one family, the high and low, rich and poor, who as created by one Almighty Parent, and inhabitants of the same planet, are to aid, support, and protect each other. Our ritual teaches us that by the principle of Brotherly Love, Freemasonry unites men of every country, sect, and opinion, and conciliates true friendship among those who might otherwise have remained at perpetual distance.

Our ritual tells us that to relieve the distressed is a duty that is incumbent on all men, but particularly on Masons. It states that we profess to be linked together by an indissoluble chain of sincere affection. It places emphasis on the grand aim of soothing the unhappy, sympathizing with their misfortunes, compassionating their miseries, and restoring peace to their troubled minds; and on the basis of this grand view, we as Masons form our friendships and establish our connections.

Our ritual tells us that Truth is a divine attribute and that it is the foundation of every virtue. It says that to be good and true is the first lesson that we are taught in Masonry. It reminds us to contemplate this theme, and by its dictates, endeavor to regulate our conduct.

Therefore, as we are influenced by living truthful lives, hypocrisy and deceit should be unknown to us, plain dealing should distinguish us, and our hearts and tongues should join in promoting each other's welfare and rejoicing in each other's prosperity.

I have written extensively on how a mistrans-

lation of scripture has left us with an idea that charity is different than brotherly love, when in fact, they are one and the same. Freemasons cannot have Brotherly Love without Relief and Truth. They are as much of a triad as the three principal officers of the Lodge, or as Wisdom, Strength, and Beauty, or as the Holy Trinity that Christians believe in.

Yet, we are confronted daily by images, sound bites, memes, of acts or cruelty instead of kindness. To wit, Yesterday I witnessed a video of a road rage incident in Chicago. It was filmed the other day and involved two men. One individual used an axe to smash another individual's car windows. The victim of the window smashing in turn then used his car to hit the other individual's truck. The other individual, in turn, then stole the axe-wielding man's truck. Something tells me that Santa should leave them both coal.

All kidding aside, there is evil and darkness in this world. All of us at one time asked for light, more light, and further light in Masonry. In this season of light, let us illuminate the darkness with our deeds. Let us be like Conrad, and let us extend love to not only one another, but to those strangers who might cross our paths, for they might be either Angels or the Great Architect in disguise.





by The Committee on Masonic Education

Diwali, also called Deepavali, is one of the most significant festivals in India and beyond. The name originates from the Sanskrit term "*deepavali*," which translates to "*row of lights*"—referring to the clay lamps (diyas) that are lit during the celebration.

### **Spiritual Significance**

Diwali symbolizes the triumph of light over darkness, good over evil, and knowledge over ignorance. The festival represents the spiritual victory of dharma (righteousness) over adharma (unrighteousness). When devotees light diyas outside their homes, they symbolize the inner light that protects them from spiritual darkness and celebrate the enlightenment within each person that can overcome ignorance.

### **Religious Observance**

While traditionally a Hindu festival, Diwali is also celebrated by followers of other Indian religions, including Jainism, Sikhism, and Buddhism, each faith holds particular significance to the celebration:

For Hindus, one of the best-known stories associated with Diwali is the return of Lord Rama from his 14-year exile and his victory over the demon king Ravana, as celebrated in the ancient epic the Ramayana. Another popular tradition involves Lord Krishna,

an avatar of Vishnu, defeating the demon Narakasura and releasing 16,000 girls held captive.

For Jains, Diwali commemorates the attainment of nirvana by Lord Mahavira, the 24th Tirthankara. According to Jain tradition, the practice of lighting lamps began on the day of Mahavira's nirvana in 527 BCE, when 18 kings proclaimed that lamps be lit in remembrance of "*the great light, Mahavira*."

### **Historical Origins**

The festival is mentioned in early Sanskrit texts, such as the Padma Purana and the Skanda Purana, composed between the 7th and 10th centuries. Emperor Harsha referred to Deepavali in the 7th-century Sanskrit play Nagananda as a festival where lamps were lit, and newly engaged brides and grooms received gifts. The festival appears to have originated as a fusion of harvest festivals in the Indian subcontinent.

### **Celebration and Duration**

Diwali is a five-day celebration that typically occurs during the Hindu month of Kartik, falling between mid-October and mid-November. Each day of the festival carries unique rituals and festivities. The first day, known as Dhanteras, involves auspicious purchases and home cleaning to symbolize new



beginnings. Throughout the festival, people decorate their homes, temples, and businesses with lights and lamps, welcome family gatherings, and engage in various traditions that reflect their regional and religious practices.

### **Modern Significance**

Originally a religious observance, Diwali has evolved into a cultural celebration observed by individuals of various faiths worldwide. It has become akin to Christmas or Hanukkah in its importance, representing themes of renewal, hope, and the belief that goodness will ultimately prevail.



# Oh, Sprig of Acacia! How Lovely Are Your Branches....

By WB Darin A. Lahners, FILOR

One of the most iconic images that immediately makes one think of Christmas is the Christmas Tree. The influence of Pagan rites can't be debated when it comes to the Christmas Tree. The celebration of the Winter Solstice was important to many pre-Christian faiths. Traditionally, the Solstice was a celebration of the power that their Sun God had over death or illness. The God, who after three days remained low in the sky and was interpreted as death or illness, began to rise again. Many of these faiths used evergreen plants to serve as a reminder of this victory over death and the promise of spring.

The solstice was celebrated by the Egyptians, who filled their homes with green palm rushes in honor of the god Ra, who had the head of a hawk and wore the sun as a crown. In Northern Europe, the Celts decorated their druidic temples with evergreen boughs, which signified everlasting life. The Vikings thought evergreens were the plants of Balder, the god of light and peace. The ancient Romans marked the Winter Solstice with a feast called Saturnalia, held in honor of Saturn, the god of agriculture, and, like the Celts, decorated their homes and temples with evergreen boughs. Historical records suggest that the Christmas tree tradition was started in the 16th century by Germans who decorated fir trees inside their homes. In some Christian cults, Adam and Eve were considered saints, and many people celebrated them on Christmas Eve.

During the 16th century, it was not rare to see huge plays being performed in the open air on Adam and Eve day, which told the story of creation. As part of the performance, the Garden of Eden was symbolized by a "paradise tree" hung with fruit. The clergy banned these heathen practices. Still, some collected



evergreen branches or trees and brought them to their homes, in secret.

These evergreens were initially called 'paradise trees' and were often accompanied by wooden pyramids made of branches held together by rope. On these pyramids, some families would fasten and light candles, one for each family member. These were the precursors of modern Christmas tree lights and ornaments, along with edibles such as gingerbread and gold-covered apples.

However, Legend has it that the modern Christmas tree was born when Martin Luther was walking home through the woods. He was struck by the amazing beauty of starlight shining through fir trees. In wanting to share this experience with his family, Martin Luther cut down a fir tree and took it home. He placed a small candle on the branches to symbolize the Christmas sky so he could recreate the experience with his family. What is known is that by



1605, Christmas trees were a thing, as, in that year, historical records suggest the inhabitants of Strasbourg "*set up fir trees in the parlours ... and hang thereon roses cut out of many-coloured paper, apples, wafers, gold-foil, sweets, etc.*"

Over time, the tradition was spread by German settlers of North America and other parts of the world. It still wasn't wholly adopted until 1846, when Queen Victoria was sketched with her German Prince, Albert, and their children standing around a Christmas Tree. Because of the Queen's popularity and her actions being considered Fashionable, the custom quickly was seen as being such and adopted by British and East Coast American Society.

So why did I entitle my article as such? Much like the Christmas Tree, the Sprig of Acacia is a representation of immortality. In fact, we are told that the "*Acacia or Evergreen which bloomed at the head of his (Hiram Abiff's) grave and betrayed the place of interment is emblematical of the immortal part which survives the grave and bears the nearest affinity to that supreme intelligence which pervades and animates all nature, and which can never, no never, die.*" You can immediately see why this connection is made.

Whether you celebrate Christmas or not, let you be reminded of the lessons of your degrees when you look upon the Christmas trees of this holiday season. Try to practice our tenets of Brotherly Love by practicing the "*Golden Rule*," which is found in all religions, to treat others as you would want to be treated. Practice Relief by giving generously to charity to help those who are less fortunate, and practice Truth with your words and actions this holiday season.





by Bill Hosler, PM †, Greg Knott, 33°, and RW.: Robert H. Johnson, FILOR

#### From Bill

For as long as I can remember, people have looked at the beginning of a new year as a time to "Turn over a new leaf, a chance to start anew. Losing weight, quitting a bad habit, or trying to better themselves have always been popular resolutions in the new year. While many of these resolutions fall by the wayside by February, many people are able to make life-altering changes to themselves by sticking to their resolution and either prolong their life or give themselves a better quality of life.

I know the thought of creating New Year's resolutions for a Masonic lodge at first blush might seem a bit crazy. Under normal circumstances, the words "lodge" and "change" go together like "ice cream" and "mustard," but the events of this previous year may have given us the ability to consider the possibilities.

I'm sure each one of us was, if we were honest, we could think of some issues our lodge could resolve to change in the upcoming year. Just like a human could develop bad habits over its life or there are practices the lodge

could adopt that would prolong its life. These issues could be anything from resolving to getting your membership to learn the ritual well enough to perform your own degree work instead of relying on outside degree teams to assist you or to clean and repair your building as much as I can't tell you what you should resolve to do for yourself in the next coming year in like manner only you and your Brethren know what your local lodge needs to decide to work on. It might be worth a discussion.

It won't be easy, and we all know there might be pushback among some members, but it's worth a try. If you get one thing corrected, you are on your way to improving your lodge. Stay positive and don't give up! We are in this for the long haul. Just like it may take a person several attempts to quit smoking, when they finally do drop the habit, it changes their life. The same thing applies to your lodge. Just keep trying.

It may sound silly, but I believe that if each lodge were to resolve to improve itself locally, there would be no issues in Freemasonry. We



all look to grand lodges to resolve our issues, like they are some kind of lifestyle guru, when actually we are the ones that hold the keys to our future. Individually, we are the ones who affect change for ourselves, and I feel it is the same for our lodges. Take advantage of the new year and make things happen!

I wish you and your lodge members nothing but success and prosperity in the upcoming year.

#### **From Greg**

Here comes the new year, and it is a natural time to think about New Year's resolutions. While that resolution of losing weight and exercising more will probably be done by MLK's birthday, there is no reason not to carry through with ideas of improving your lodge through the coming year.

My lodge, St. Joseph Lodge No. 970, has risen from the ashes over the last several years. We were at a point where the doors were literally ready to close. We couldn't even make a quorum for most of the meetings. But we decided we didn't want to end Masonry in our town, so we decided to give it a try to keep the lights on and grow.

Our efforts paid off handsomely as our membership has grown, we won the Grand Masters Award of Excellence in Illinois many times, and we were even named one of the winners of the prestigious Mark Twain Award.

I've been asked many times what we did to turn things around, and I think one of the first ideas I want to share is desire. We had a strong desire to keep our lodge open and to get it back on track.

Some of the best discussions we had were late at night in the kitchen after the lodge meeting. These were true brainstorming sessions that weren't necessarily designed that way, but they helped build the enthusiasm and are

what really set us on the course for improvement.

So if you have the desire to improve your lodge, start there, I don't pretend to have all the answers, just my experience of what worked for us.

#### **From Robert**

I wanted to contribute some additional ideas that might resonate with our lodges. As Bill pointed out so many years ago, it may seem silly, but what have you got to lose? Your charter. That's what. I'm kidding of course, but seriously think about it--it's a great idea. And as Greg points out, don't even think about trying this out if your members don't have desire. With all that in mind, here are *Ten Resolutions to Revitalize Your Lodge in the Coming Year*:

##### **1. Elevate ritual and degree work**

Resolve that all officers and key ritual participants will improve proficiency and understanding of the work. This can include regular ritual practices, mentoring new officers, and short discussions on symbolism after degrees to move beyond "*just conferring*" to truly making Master Masons.

##### **2. Make Masonic education a priority**

Set a goal that every stated meeting includes a brief educational piece: a paper, discussion, or Q&A on symbolism, history, or ethics. This supports the idea that lodges should help members "*keep learning and growing*" long after the degrees are done.

##### **3. Strengthen brotherly fellowship**

Resolve to offer more chances for brethren to spend time together beyond business meetings, such as meals, game nights, or informal study circles. Lodges that foster camaraderie and a sense of purpose see greater enthusiasm and dedication among members.

##### **4. Improve attendance and engagement**

Set a realistic target (for example, increasing

average attendance by a small percentage) and take specific steps like contacting absent brethren, offering rides, or varying programs. Some jurisdictions encourage member surveys to understand what would motivate brothers to participate more, which can guide this resolution.

#### **5. Involve families more often**

Resolve to host a few well-planned family or open events during the year, such as picnics, recognition nights, or charity projects. Other Masonic groups have found that fun, social, family-friendly activities help build community and appeal to younger men seeking connection.

#### **6. Focus lodge charity and service**

Choose one or two clear charitable priorities and commit to supporting them consistently with time and resources, rather than many small unfocused efforts. Masonic teaching emphasizes benevolence toward brethren, widows, orphans, and the wider community, and a focused plan helps live that value.

#### **7. Invest in leadership development**

Resolve that officers will attend at least one training, workshop, or leadership program during the year, and that the lodge will actively mentor emerging leaders. Some grand lodges explicitly highlight building strong, confident leaders as a pillar of their vision.

#### **8. Improve lodge communication and image**

Set a goal to modernize and regularize communication: a simple website, updated social media, or a monthly email or printed bulletin. Guidance from several jurisdictions stresses clear communication and improved public awareness as essential to lodge health.

#### **9. Build a sustainable membership plan**

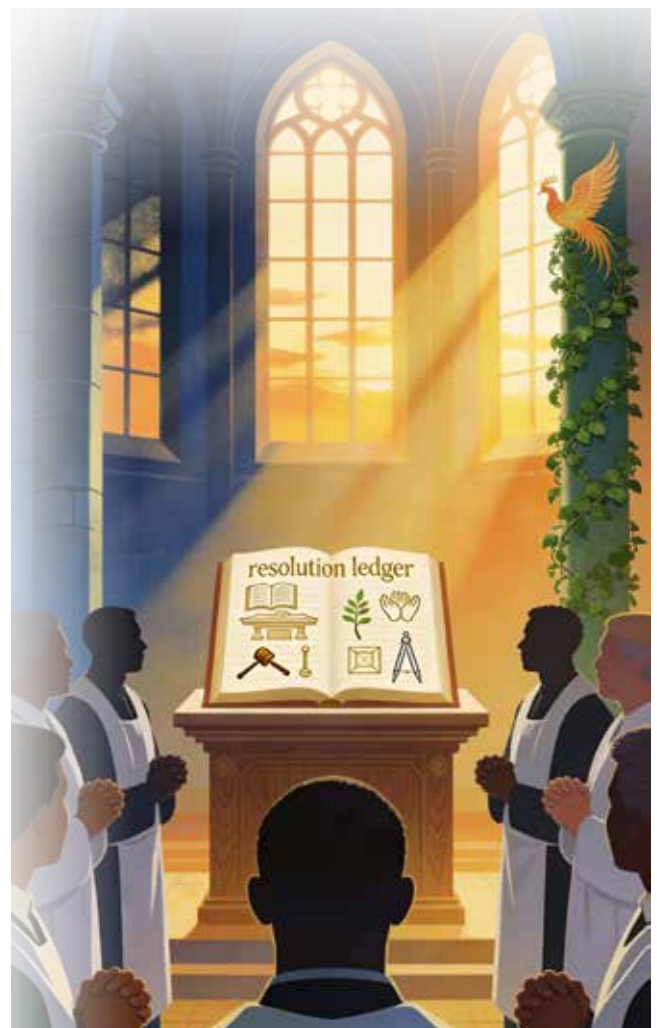
Resolve to create or refresh a simple membership plan covering prospect outreach, welcoming new members, and retaining current ones through meaningful participation. Strategic planning materials for lodges often

mention realistic membership targets, better induction processes, and helping mobile members connect to a new lodge.

#### **10. Measure, review, and celebrate progress**

Commit to reviewing these resolutions quarterly, adjusting where needed, and celebrating wins such as well-attended events or improved ritual. Best-practice recommendations for lodges emphasize acknowledging achievements and creating visible momentum to keep the lodge vibrant.

You may be thinking, "Wow, that's a lot." And it would be, if you were going to do it all. Just pick one and go for it! The Grand Lodge of Illinois and its resources are here to help as well. Good luck!





## OUR HISTORY

Formed as a charity of Illinois Freemasonry, the Illinois Masonic Student Assistance Program (IMSAP) has been dedicated to a school based early intervention approach to identify and assist at risk students.

IMSAP now impacts thousands of students throughout the state of Illinois through its multiple programs and initiatives.

## HOW TO HELP

We always welcome and encourage any assistance. Whether through your monetary contributions or by reaching out to your district to bring IMSAP to your local schools, you can be a part of the change we work to instill in our youth. Be a part of an incredible impact on our students and their futures.

## CONTACT

IMSAP Coordinator

217-529-8900 ext. 219 

[imsap@ilmason.org](mailto:imsap@ilmason.org)

3731 Wabash Avenue  
Springfield, IL 62711-6261

[www.imsap.org](http://www.imsap.org)

IMSAP is an Illinois Freemasonry Charity



# ILLINOIS FREEMASONRY



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# Masonic Conferences

**Masonic Week** – February 3-8, 2026, Crystal City, VA

[www.MCME1949.org](http://www.MCME1949.org)



**Midwest Conference on Masonic Education** – April 24-26 - 2026, Omaha, NE,

[www.MCME1949.org](http://www.MCME1949.org)



**Yes! Masonic Con Chicago will be back in September of 2026.**



**Texas Esoteric Summit** – June 12-13 2026, Seguin, TX, [www.TexasEsotericSummit.com](http://www.TexasEsotericSummit.com)



**Esotericon** - June 20, 2026, Manassas, VA

Website coming soon!

For more visit, [MasonicConferences.com](http://MasonicConferences.com)

**If your lodge or organization is having an Educational Event (not related to instruction or charities), please let us know. Email the details to: [Admin@wcypodcast.com](mailto:Admin@wcypodcast.com)**

**Please give us at least a month notice so that we can ensure it is added.**





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