
The Lyceum



A Publication of
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 Seekers of Light,

As the crisp autumn air finally replaces the sweltering grasp of summer, it's a time for both reflection and adventure. With harvest season upon us, we welcome you to a particularly intriguing edition of The Lyceum, where we delve into the seldom-explored, mysterious realms of Freemasonry.

This issue, we've embraced a theme as colorful as the changing leaves: the strange and unusual side of our craft. Our contributors have ventured into the shadows to bring enlightening tales and insights that will stir both curiosity and contemplation.

You'll find thought-provoking articles on various types of meditation, designed to enhance your spiritual journey within Masonic tradition. Additionally, we traverse into haunted locations storied in Masonic lore, where history and mystery intertwine. For those with a penchant for the imaginative, our own, Darin Lahners has a strange take of Masonic fiction that beckons you to worlds where the ordinary is challenged by the bizarre.

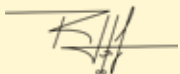
Meanwhile, a column on weird Masonic conspiracy theories offers a playful nod to the more fantastical aspects occasionally associated with our fraternity. We've even published a ghost story that will both chill and thrill on those brisk fall evenings.

As we transition from the exhaustive heat of summer into the cool embrace of autumn, let us carry forward the spirit of renewal and discovery. The close of the year is an opportunity to not only reflect on the past but to eagerly anticipate the possibilities that lie ahead. May this edition inspire deeper exploration and embellish your understanding of the many facets of our noble art.

I urge you to read the Education Chairman, Dr. Bernard Davis Jr.'s thoughts on the reflective nature of this time of year before diving into the issue. His words are timely!

Thank you for your continued engagement with The Lyceum. We wish you warmth, wisdom, and well-being as we approach the year's end, and encourage you to uncover the hidden, the marvelous, and the enigmatic in every page.

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

-Unmasking the Lessons of the Season-



Brethren,

As the leaves turn and the air grows crisp, we enter a season steeped in symbolism — Halloween. Though often dismissed as mere revelry, this time of year offers a rich tapestry of metaphor and meaning that resonates deeply with our Masonic journey. It is a season of masks and mystery, of light flickering in the darkness, and of reflection on mortality and transformation. These themes are not foreign to us; they are embedded in our degrees, our symbols, and our educational mission.

Halloween, rooted in ancient traditions like Samhain and All Hallows' Eve, marked a liminal time — a threshold between the known and the unknown, the living and the departed. In Masonry, we too dwell in the realm of thresholds. Every degree is a passage, every symbol a veil to be lifted. The candidate enters in darkness, seeking light. He is masked by ignorance, and through instruction, ritual, and reflection, he is unmasked — revealed to himself and to the Craft.

This season invites us to ask:

- What light do we carry into the world, and how do we kindle it in others?
- What masks do we wear, and how do we help our Brethren remove theirs in pursuit of truth?
- How do we balance the solemnity of our teachings with the joy of fellowship and seasonal celebration?

As Chairman of the Committee on Masonic Education, I urge each Lodge to use this season as an opportunity for deeper engagement. Consider hosting a discussion on the symbolism of death and rebirth in our rituals. Explore the allegorical connections between seasonal change and the transformative nature of Masonic growth. Encourage Brethren to reflect on the “masks” they wear in daily life — and how our teachings guide them toward authenticity and integrity.

Let us also remember that education is not confined to lectures or printed materials. It is found in the quiet moments of mentorship, in the shared stories of our elders, and in the questions asked by our newest Entered Apprentices. Halloween reminds us that behind every mask is a seeker — and behind every seeker, a teacher.

May this season inspire us to illuminate the path for others, to embrace the mystery with wisdom, and to celebrate the Craft with renewed purpose.

Fraternally,

Dr. Bernard Davis Jr.

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



The Stranger Side of Freemasonry: Unraveling Masonic Conspiracy Theories

by Robert H. Johnson, PDDGM, FILOR

As Halloween is in the air, it gets heavier with whispers of things mysterious and strange. It's a fitting time to delve into the world of Masonic conspiracy theories—a tapestry of myth, intrigue, and humorous absurdity.

These theories have thrived for centuries, fueled by misunderstanding, secrecy, and the human penchant for crafting elaborate stories in lieu of the mundane. From tales of global domination to bizarre religious practices, Masonic conspiracy theories come in various flavors, each more amusing or concerning than the last. Let's explore why these theories are prevalent, why they're often funny, and what you need to know about this stranger side of Freemasonry.

The Saga of Secret Societies

The origins of Masonic conspiracy theories can be traced to the 18th century, steeped in an era when secret societies were both the norm and the anomaly. Freemasonry, with its cloaked rituals and secretive lodges, naturally became a fertile ground for speculation and gossip. Throughout history, hundreds of conspiracy theories have been spun around Freemasonry, usually falling into three categories: political, religious, and cultural.

Political Puppeteers?

One of the most enduring conspiracy theories involves Freemasonry's alleged grip on political power. Perhaps the most famous of these is the *New World Order theory*—alleging that a small cabal of Freemasons orchestrates global events from the shadows. Proponents of this theory cite the Masonic symbols on the US one-dollar bill as evidence, combining paranoia with artistic interpretation. The idea that Masonic influence pervades political systems isn't just an amusing anecdote but reflects a deep-seated suspicion of institutions and power—a sentiment prevalent among conspiracy theorists looking for a villain in their narratives.

Religious Revelations or Ridiculous Rumors?

Freemasonry's rumored dabble with the occult has given rise to some of the most imaginative conspiracy theories. Historically, these originated from the Taxil hoax in the late 19th century, which falsely portrayed Freemason-



ry as Satanic worship. Conservative Protestants and various interest groups have since perpetuated these tales, proposing that Masons worship deities like Baal or Baphomet, linked to occult practices. For outsiders, particularly those drawn to sensationalism, these tales add an air of forbidden allure, intertwining real Masonic symbols with misconstrued meanings, making for a thrilling narrative.

The Symbolic Conundrum

Perhaps what makes these theories so hilarious is the extrapolation from mundane symbols to grand conspiracies. Many theories allege that Masonic symbols are embedded in everything from street patterns to corporate logos. The idea that simple symbols hide coded messages controlling world events is a testament to the human capacity for creativity—finding connections where none exist.

The Birth and Bloom of Absurdity

One of the more entertaining facets of these conspiracy theories is their inherent absurdity. For example, the notion that Freemasons at NASA hide the truth

about the Earth being flat demonstrates how far imaginative storytelling can stretch logic. Equally entertaining is the theory pertaining to humanoid reptiles controlling secret societies. These stories, while far-fetched, showcase storytelling's power to amuse and bemuse in equal measure, bridging the gap between conspiracy and creativity.

Why Are These Theories So Prevalent?

Part of the allure of Masonic conspiracy theories lies in the secrecy of the organization itself. Freemasonry's private rituals and arcane customs provide an opaque veil that invites speculation. Theories are often rooted in the universal fear of the unknown—a reflexive attempt to explain events within a comforting narrative, even when those explanations strain credulity.

Moreover, these theories often resonate in periods of social or political upheaval, providing scapegoats and targets for societal anxieties. They offer ready explanations for complex issues, channeling discontent into a framework that is both familiar and thrilling. The humor often stems from the contrast between the seriousness with which these conspiracies are proposed and the implausibility of the claims.

What We Need to Know

While it's easy to dismiss these theories as harmless fun or cultural curiosities, there's a valuable lesson to be learned about critical thinking and skepticism. The outright rejection of theories without evidence is as important as an open mind to verifiable truths. For those within Freemasonry, these conspiracy theories, while sometimes irritating, also offer opportunities for reflection and education, breaking down stereotypes and communicating truths about their traditions rooted in community and moral philosophy.

Masonic conspiracy theories thrive at the intersection of secrecy, symbolism, and storytelling. They are windows into human nature and societal fears. Though often absurd and humorous, these narratives remind us of our shared culture of curiosity and the persistent quest to find meaning in the unseen. As we don our costumes this Halloween season, let's remember that the strangest stories, whether about magic or Masonry, often reveal more about the tellers than the tales themselves.



The Metamorphosis of Hiram Abiff: A work of Fiction

by WB:. Darin A. Lahners, FILOR



There was a great commotion in the morning. King Solomon inquired with Hiram, King of Tyre, the Grand Senior Warden. Hiram, King of Tyre, informed King Solomon that there were no designs on the Trestle Board. King Solomon then inquired as to the whereabouts of Grand Master Hiram Abiff. Hiram, King of Tyre, informed

King Solomon that Hiram Abiff had not been seen since High Twelve the day before. King Solomon feared that Hiram Abiff was indisposed and ordered a search and due inquiry be made for him in and around the several apartments of the Temple.

Three Fellowcraft approached Hiram Abiff's Apartment, and one of them, Adoniram, knocked on the door. He spoke: *"Grandmaster Hiram, King Solomon is concerned. There are no designs on the Trestle Board. Are you ill?"* Hiram attempted to answer... but all that came out was a series of clicks. Adoniram spoke: *"Grandmaster Hiram? I can't understand you. I will fetch Hiram, King of Tyre, and bring him to you."*

The three fellowcraft departed in search of Hiram, King of Tyre. Upon finding him, Adoniram spoke: *"Excellent, Hiram, King of Tyre."* Hiram, King of Tyre, replied: *"Report"*. Adoniram spoke: *"Upon reaching Hiram Abiff's Apartment, we knocked and found it occupied by Hiram. However, he seems to be ill and unable to speak. He can only communicate in a guttural clicking."* Hiram, King of Tyre, spoke: *"Bring me to him immediately."*

The fellowcraft escorted Hiram, King of Tyre, to Hiram Abiff's apartment. Upon arriving, Hiram

knocked on the door. Again, Hiram Abiff could only reply in the same guttural clicking that Adoniram had described. Hiram, King of Tyre, ordered the door unlocked. The fellowcraft set out to find the superintendent of the apartments, and he, using his key, unlocked the door. The room was dark. Hiram, King of Tyre, ordered a torch to be brought so that the apartment could be illuminated. The fellowcrafts set out to find one and returned quickly with one. Hiram entered the room. He was unprepared for what he saw.

A mottled Greenish giant worm had replaced the muscled bronzed humanity of Hiram Abiff. Hiram, King of Tyre, could hardly believe his eyes. He was staring directly at a creature he only knew from legend. A giant Shamir! He slammed the door and turned to Adoniram. *"Stand guard here and let none enter."* He ordered. Hiram immediately went in search of King Solomon. He found him near the brazen sea, in the courtyard. Hiram, King of Tyre, approached him and spoke: *"Most Excellent King Solomon, Tidings. If I had not seen it with my own eyes, I would not believe it, but Grandmaster Hiram Abiff has transformed into a giant Shamir!"* King Solomon replied: *"Excellent Hiram King, I do not have time for your practical jokes."* Hiram replied: *"Most Excellent King, I only wish this was the case. I implore you to follow me and see for yourself."* *"Very well then."* King Solomon answered. Both men then made their way to Hiram Abiff's apartment.



Upon their arrival, Adoniram and the other fellowcraft bowed. King Solomon grabbed the torch and entered the room with Hiram, King of Tyre. King Solomon spoke: *"Grandmaster Hiram Abiff, I do not know how*



this tragedy has befallen you. You have become a giant Shamir. I do not know if you know your Talmud. According to the Talmud, the Shamir is said to have been created as one of the ten wonders at the twilight of the Sabbath eve just before YHWH finished creation. It was described as a worm or substance the size of a grain

of rice that could cut through stone, iron or diamond. The Talmud also states that the Shamir was first used at the time of the construction of the Tabernacle, to engrave the names of the tribes on the precious jewels of the High Priest's breastplate. As strange as this is, I believe that YHWH has chosen you to be his instrument to aid in the construction of his temple. Do you understand?" Hiram Abiff could only manage his guttural clicks as a response.

King Solomon spoke: *"Grandmaster Hiram, King of Tyre, it is my order that you post these three fellowcraft as guards at this room. You will have workmen deliver unhewn stones every evening to them. They will place the unhewn stones in the room. In the morning, you they will retrieve the hewn stones. The workmen will then retrieve the hewn stones from them. The shamir will do the work. You will inform Hiram's family what has happened. They will need to make sure that Hiram is fed daily and has adequate water. No one else must know what has happened here. I fear they would not understand. If any inquiring minds want to know, Hiram Abiff has taken ill."* With his orders given, King Solomon departed.

Hiram Abiff's movements became a rapid, scuttling shuffle. He avoided mirrors, and when he saw his reflection in a pool of rainwater, he recoiled, seeing only a monstrous, unfamiliar creature. The delicate touch of his master craftsman's hands was gone, replaced by a strange, chitinous hardness. His eyesight, once so keen for detail, became a tunnel vision, focused only on the crystalline perfection of rock.

His family's acceptance was the most terrifying part. They saw his transformation, but spoke of it only in whispers, attributing his changes to the pressures of his work. His mother brought him food, leaving it on a small ledge in the dark corner of his apartment, the only place he felt safe. She never looked at him directly, and her eyes held a constant, pained pity. Hiram

Abiff, once the glorious artificer, had become a family secret, an inconvenience to be managed.

He had become the Temple's greatest tool, a living shamir. The fellowcraft, too, adapted. They would leave the unhewn stones on the floor of his darkened room, as they had been instructed. He would pass over them in the night, and in the morning, the stones would be perfectly cleaved, the pieces as smooth as river glass. The work of the Temple progressed with a terrifying, silent efficiency. No longer did the sound of iron ring out. Only the click and shuffle of something small and hard, a new, inhuman sound.

Three Fellowcraft conspired to force Hiram Abiff to give them the Master's word as the Temple neared completion. The fellowcraft, Jubela, Jubelum, and Jubelo, men of Tyre, approached Hiram Abiff's Apartment around Low Twelve. The guard in front of the apartment was fast asleep. They heard a skittering



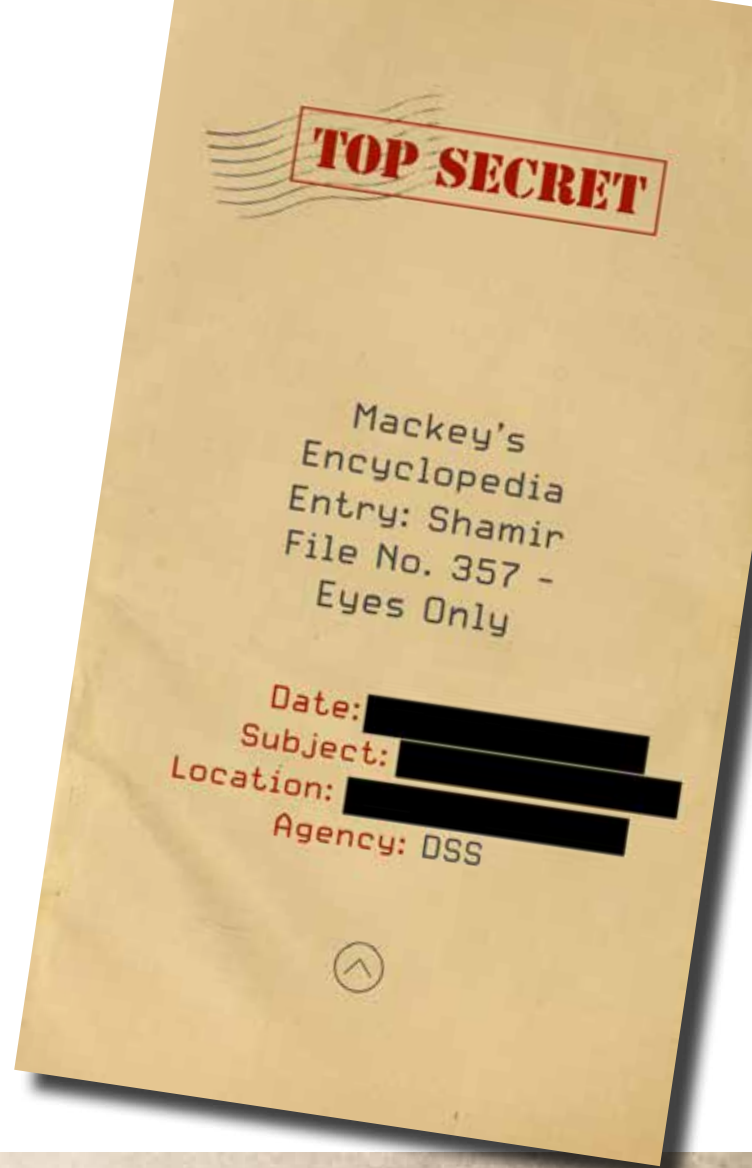
sound from inside. Jubela slowly opened the door, followed closely by Jubelum and Jubelo. They froze in horror. A giant mottled greenish worm with red beams from its eyes was cutting stones in front of them. Jubela let out a scream. The Shamir turned up from its work, its gaze catching Jubela's throat, immediately cutting it open. Jubela grasped at the wound and collapsed. Jubelum, seeing his brother fall, turned towards the door, but in doing so, had his upper torso cross directly into the beam; and he fell on top of his brother's body. Jubelo, seeing this horror unfold, let out a battle cry and charged towards the abomination, but the worm's gaze tore a hole directly through his abdomen. He fell five feet away from Hiram Abiff.

Hiram knew that this moment would come. When he was still human, he had visions of the three craftsmen who sought to extract his secret. When he had still walked the construction site, their resentful gazes missed the most profound secret of

all. It was not a word, but a condition. The secret was the transformation itself. He knew they would come for him, as they did in his visions, but their clumsy iron hammers were useless against him now. But he no longer felt fear, only a profound and perfect indifference. He was a creature of peace now, a worker of stone, his old life a meaningless whisper. He believed that when he died, he would not be found; only the last, small, perfectly cleaved stone would be. Only he did not die. After the temple was completed, King Solomon buried him under the Holy of Holies. He would be found again during the Middle Ages by an order of warrior monks, the Knights Templar. But that is a tale for another day.



MACKEY'S ENCYCLOPEDIA
ENTRY: SHAMIR
FILE NO. 357 - EYES ONLY



King Solomon is said, in a Rabbinical legend, to have used the worm Shamir as an instrument for building the Temple. The legend is that Moses engraved the names of the twelve tribes on the stones of the breast-plate by means of the blood of the worm Shamir, whose solvent power was so great that it could corrode the hardest substances. When Solomon was about to build the Temple of stones without the use of any metallic implement, he was desirous of obtaining this potent blood; but the knowledge of the source whence Moses had derived it had been lost by the lapse of time.

Solomon enclosed the chick of a bird, either an ostrich or a hoopoe, in a crystal vessel, and placed a sentinel to watch it. The parent bird, finding it impossible to break the vessel with her bill so as to gain access to the young one, flew to the desert, and returned with the miraculous worm, which, by means of its blood, soon penetrated the prison of glass, and liberated the chick. By a repetition of the process, the King of Israel at length acquired a sufficiency of the dissolving blood to enable him to work upon the stones of the Temple.

It is supposed that the legend is based on a corruption of the word Smiris, the Greek for emery, which was used by the antique engravers in their works and medallions, and that the name Shamir is merely the Hebrew form of the Greek word.



The Danse Macabre

by WB: Darin A. Lahners, FILOR



The Danse Macabre or “*Dance of Death*” is an artistic allegory of the late middle ages on the universality of death. Its purpose is to show that death is inescapable, and it is the only thing other than birth that we have in common with everything else. In this world, everything is born to die. It normally depicts the dead or a personification of the dead (Usually skeletons) dancing with those of all stations of life (normally depicting the pope, royalty, children, laborers, farmers) to the grave. It is a type of memento mori to remind us of the fragility of life and the certainty of death.

It might be macabre but I think that the most beautiful ceremony in Freemasonry is the Masonic Funeral Ritual. It might be because I’ve become used to hearing it in the past few months, having lost a good friend and brother in early December, and having lost a member of one of my home lodge a few weeks ago. However, it defines the purpose of Freemasonry. The purpose of Freemasonry isn’t to make good men better. The purpose of Freemasonry is to teach you how to embrace death.

Think about the experience of the 3rd Degree. The penultimate degree of Freemasonry is based upon death. If Freemasonry was about life, about making good men better, the highest degree would be that of Fellowcraft. In fact, there was a time in Freemasonry where the second degree was the highest in the blue lodge. That’s another article

entirely, however. My point being, that if Freemasonry was about life, we wouldn’t be focusing so much on death.

Death permeates the 2nd section of the 3rd degree. If you’ve gone through the degree, you understand what I’m talking about. The entire section is an allegory regarding death. There are a lot of different layers of meanings of what is happening in this section of the 3rd degree, but the main one I think is the idea of death not being the end of life. There is a part during this section where there is a procession around a grave and song being sung. The song commonly is known as the funeral dirge. Once again, if you’ve been through, participated in, or observed the degree, you know the words. However, once again, there’s a lot of things I personally think this represents but given the definition above, is it not a Danse Macabre?

Death is the work that we as Freemasons are trying to master. As the 3rd degree lecture on the emblems begins to end, we are told from the un-cyphered Illinois book of Standard work:

”Thus my brother, we close our lecture on the solemn thoughts of death: we are born, we breathe, we suffer, we mourn and we die. Yes, my brother, we are all born to die. We follow our friends to the brink of the grave and, standing on the shore of a vast ocean, gaze with exquisite anxiety until the last dreadful struggle is over, and see them sink into the fathomless abyss. We feel our own feet slide from the precarious bank on which we stand,

and but a few suns more, my Brother, and we too will be whelmed mid death's awful waves, there rest in the stilly shade where the worm shall cover us and naught but silence and darkness reign around our melancholy abode.

But is this the end of man and the expiring hope of faithful Masons? No, blessed be God, but true to our principles we pause not at our first or second step, but press forward for greater light; and as the last embers of mortal life are yet feebly glimmering in the socket of existence, the Bible, that Great Light in Masonry, lifts the shroud, draws aside the sable curtains of the tomb, and bids hope and joy rouse up to sustain and cheer the departing spirit. It points beyond the dark valley of the shadow of death and bids us turn an eye of faith and confidence to the vast and opening scenes of boundless eternity.”

The summary of the above being:
Death is the great leveler.

We need to reflect upon death.

However, if we follow and apply the tenets of your chosen book of faith, that there is hope in the after-life, whatever you define that as.

As the Illinois Masonic Funeral Ritual begins, we begin with what we are taught upon our first admission into a lodge, that we should evoke the blessing of deity before any great undertaking. The ritual begins with the chaplain's prayer and has this line that really stands out for me:

“Standing by the open portals of this house appointed for all the living, we pray for light—for light to illuminate the dark path which our brother has trod, for light to drive away all the shadows of mortality and reveal to our anxious souls those serene heights of joy and beauty, whither, we trust, our brother has ascended.”

I was given a book for Christmas a few years ago from the then Secretary of St. Joseph Lodge #970, WB Curt Bolding. Curt is a man that I consider a brother in the truest sense of the word. He is like family to me and is very much the older brother I never had. The title of the book is *God and the Afterlife* by Jeffery Long, MD, and Paul Perry. Dr. Long did a survey of 1,122 people from around the world

and having different social-economic and religious backgrounds that have had a near-death experience. It asks 16 questions of these people, and those that score a 7 or above qualifies an experience as an NDE. In all of the experiences, there are twelve elements that usually occur in consistent order during an NDE. One of which is encountering a brilliant or mystic light. 64.8 percent of those answering the survey said that they encountered a light. It is my personal belief that the light being described above is the light described by a majority of those who have experienced an NDE. Many of these individuals described God as being either this light or surrounded by this light. As God said: *“Let there be light.”* Is it not possible to think God was already light?

What do we ask for when we are at the altar of Masonry for the first time and the subsequent times after that? Light. At that time, Light has a different meaning, or at least you think it does. I know I thought it did. However, I realize now that the light that we are asking for is the light that we pray for here. That light will illuminate us in the darkness of death, and which will comfort us in our journey into the lodge on high. A divine light.

As the funeral ritual continues, The Worshipful Master reiterates what is taught in the emblem lecture of the 3rd degree:

“Change and decay are written upon every living thing. The cradle and the coffin stand side by side, and it is a melancholy truth that as soon as life begins to live that moment also, we begin to die.”

Shortly thereafter the ritual makes us aware that death can come at any time and that like depicted in the Danse Macabre, death is the great leveler:

“We go on from design to design, add hope to hope, and layout plans for the employment of many years. The messenger of death comes when least expected, and at a moment which to us seems the meridian of our existence. What are all the externals of human dignity, the power of wealth, or the charms of beauty when nature has paid her just debt? View life stripped of its ornaments and exposed in its natural weakness, and we see the vanity of all earthly things save those which go to the growth and perfection of individual character. In the grave all fallacies are detected, all ranks are lev-

eled, all distinctions are done away. Here the scepter of the prince and the of the beggar lie side by side.”

It teaches us that although we are mourning, we should see our departed brother as a memory to keep alive and to cherish:

“Happy, indeed, it for us—and blessed the agencies which have made it possible—that while our eyes may be dim with tears as we think of our departed brother, we may in the sincerity of our hearts, accord to his memory the commendation of having lived a useful and exemplary life and as a just and upright Mason.”

The ritual then continues onto what I think is the most wonderful summary of about what we should our fraternity is trying to teach us:

“And now, my brethren, let us see to it, and so regulate our lives by the plumb line of justice, ever squaring our actions by the square of virtue, that when the Grand Warden of Heaven shall call for us we may be found ready. Let us cultivate assiduously the noble tenets of our profession—Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth. From the square learn morality; from the level, equality; and from the plumb, rectitude of life. With the trowel spread liberally the cement of brotherly love; circumscribed by the compasses, let us ponder well our words and actions, and let all the energies of our minds and the affections of our souls be employed in the attainment of our Supreme Grand Master’s approbation. Then, when our dissolution draws nigh, and the cold winds of death come sighing around us—and his chill dews already glisten upon our foreheads—with joy shall we obey the summons of the Grand Warden of Heaven, and go from our labors on earth to eternal refreshment in the paradise of God, where, by the benefit of the pass of a pure and blameless life, and an unshaken confidence in the merits of the Lion of the tribe of Judah, shall we gain ready admission into the celestial lodge where the Supreme Architect of the Universe presides. There, placed at His right hand, He will be pleased to pronounce us just and upright Masons”

We are then reminded again of the inevitability of death:

“The LAMBSKIN, or white apron, was the first gift

of Freemasonry to our departed brother. It is an emblem of innocence and the badge of a Freemason. This I now deposit upon the casket. We are reminded here of the universal dominion of death. The arm of friendship cannot interpose to prevent his coming; the wealth of the world cannot purchase exemption; nor will the innocence of youth or the charms of beauty change his purpose.”

As well as a hope in the afterlife here:

“This evergreen is an emblem of an enduring faith in the immortality, of the soul. By it, we are reminded that we have a life within us that shall survive the grave, and which can never die. By it, we are admonished that we also, like our brother whose remains lie here before us, shall soon be clothed in the habiliments of death. Through our belief in the mercy of God, we may confidently hope that our souls will bloom in eternal spring. This, too, I deposit with our deceased brother.” And here: “Soft and safe be the earthly bed of our brother; bright and glorious be his rising from it. Fragrant be the acacia sprig which shall flourish there. May the earliest buds of spring unfold their beauties over his resting place, and, in the bright morning of the world’s resurrection, may his soul spring into newness of life and expand into immortal beauty in realms beyond the skies. Until then, dear friend and brother, until then—Farewell!”

And in closing the chaplain again prays reiterating the hope of an afterlife:

“If we feel that there is one tie less binding us to the earth, may we also feel that there is another, and a deathless tie, binding us to heaven. And there shall be no night there. O blessed assurance; the last farewell spoken, the last sigh breathed, the last cry of anguish changed into an anthem of immortal joy.”

As our journey in Freemasonry begins by asking for light, it ends the same way. I think these final lines prove the idea of the light we seek is that divine light that I mentioned above. The final prayer ends with:

“And now, O God, we pray for Thy hand to lead us in all the paths our feet may tread, and when the journey of life is ended may light from our immor-

tal home illuminate the dark valley of the shadow of death, and voices of loved ones, gone before, welcome us home to that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, where no discordant voice shall arise, and all the soul shall experience shall be perfect bliss, and all it shall express shall be perfect praise. and love divine ennoble every heart and hosannas exalted employ every tongue. Amen."

It is our goal as Freemasons to become a perfect ashlar. Only through the application of the tenets of Freemasonry, will we be able to become the perfect ashlar, and that ashlar is only perfected in death when it can be used by the Supreme Architect of the Universe to help build the house not made with hands eternal in the heavens. If we truly live our lives as Freemasons, we should not fear death. We should embrace it. As death sets us free from this world, embracing death sets us free as Freemasons. Instead of living with the existential pain of the consciousness of death, we are free to pursue anything we want to pursue and we are able to conquer any obstacle in our lives. Once you accept the inevitability of death, you can finally begin to live your life because you have faith in the afterlife. That is the most important lesson that Freemasonry can teach you. It can teach you how to be truly free.

Due to what I posit above, I think those that argue that skulls should not be a part of Freemasonry are missing the entire point of the craft. The same can be said for those who do not like the idea of having a chamber of reflection. The idea that we should use some symbols to represent reflection upon our mortality but not others because the profane might view us in a negative light is absurd. The skull has been used from time immemorial to represent our mortality. The entire purpose of the chamber of reflection is to have a candidate reflect upon their mortality. If the craft has existed since time immemorial as some have argued, then why shouldn't we be using the skull or a chamber of reflection? Especially when the entire point of the 3rd degree is to teach you to embrace death by reflecting on your mortality. Most especially when the Masonic Funeral reinforces this.

So, my brothers, I leave you with the solemn thoughts of death, but I also hope that I leave you with something to think about and maybe one question to

ponder:

If you are afraid of death, why are you afraid of it?

Do your own reflection. Listen and observe closely during the next 3rd degree or Masonic Funeral you attend. I think you'll find that there's nothing to be afraid of.



The Haunting Mystique of Masonic Landmarks: A Journey Through Enigmatic History and Paranormal Activity

by RWB.: Robert H. Johnson, PDDGM, FILOR

Freemasonry is a centuries-old fraternity shrouded in mystery and intrigue. Its members are known for their philanthropy, moral frameworks, and architectural achievements. Yet, what fascinates many are the ghost stories and supernatural occurrences associated with some of the most renowned Masonic sites around the world. As we journey through these reportedly haunted Masonic locations, we delve deeper into the mysteries and legends that continue to entice both skeptics and believers alike.

Winchester Mystery House: An Architectural Enigma

Located in San Jose, California, the Winchester Mystery House stands as a testament to the eccentric legacy of Sarah Winchester, heiress of the Winchester rifle fortune. Sarah, married into a Masonic family, believed she was haunted by the spirits of those killed by Winchester rifles. The perpetual construction of her home, which features 160 rooms, staircases leading to ceilings, and doors opening to walls, reflects her desperate attempt to evade these spirits. Reports of ghostly encounters fill the air surrounding this architectural oddity, with visitors and staff recounting unexplained footsteps, shadowy figures, and doors slamming shut. The enigmatic design entwined with this haunting narrative makes it a fascinating site for those enthralled by the supernatural.

The House of the Temple: A Symbol of Masonic Heritage

The House of the Temple in Washington D.C. serves as the headquarters for the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, Southern Jurisdiction. This monumental building is steeped in symbolism and mystique. Designed by John Russell Pope and inspired by the ancient Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, the temple is rumored to be inhabited by spirits. Security personnel have reported hearing disembodied voices and encountering cold spots that defy rational explanation. The building's labyrinthine architecture contributes to its aura of mysticism, drawing curiosity about what lies beyond its towering columns and meticulously crafted interiors.

Rosslyn Chapel: The Quintessential Celtic Enigma

Tucked away in the heart of Scotland, Rosslyn Chapel, although not a Masonic lodge, holds significant allure for those interested in Freemasonry due to its associations with the Knights Templar. Its intricate carvings and stonework are believed to hide a multitude of secrets. This 15th-century chapel has inspired legends of the Holy Grail and is reputed to house ancient relics within its stone walls. Visitors have often mentioned strange occurrences, such as mysterious lights, voices, and even apparitions—which some suggest are linked to the Knights Templar themselves. The chapel's mystique is not only a draw for historians but also for paranormal enthusiasts eager to uncover the next secret within its hallowed grounds.

Freemasons' Hall: London's Majestic Haunt

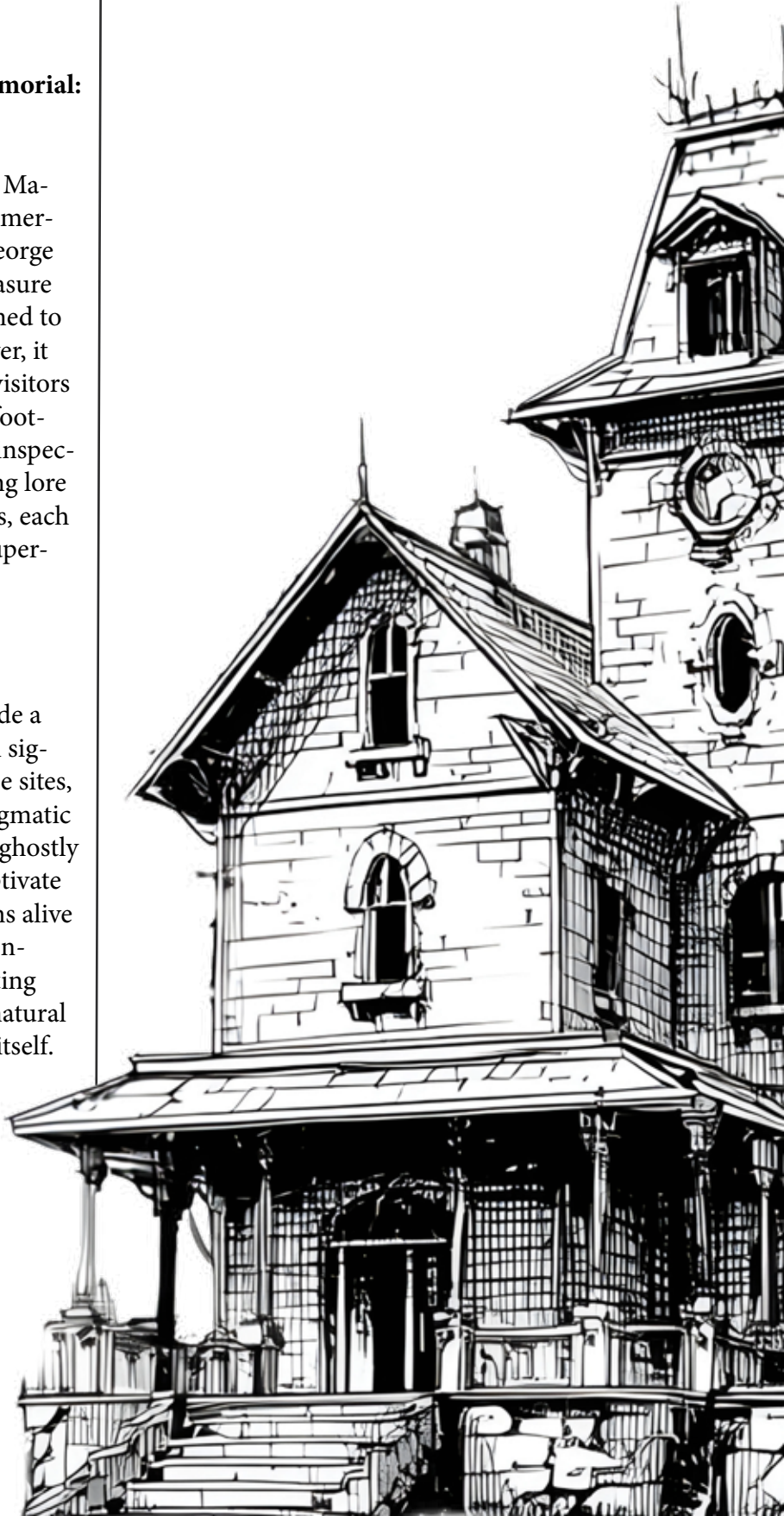
Freemasons' Hall in London, England serves as the grand headquarters of the United Grand Lodge of England. This site is a beacon of Masonic history and tradition, known for its splendid Art Deco architecture and expansive archives. Yet, its historical depth brings tales of spectral sightings. Visitors recount encounters with a ghostly janitor, who continues to patrol the corridors and chambers long after his earthly duties ended. The building's grandiose ambiance and rich Masonic heritage ensure that it remains a staple of paranormal tours in the city, captivating the imagination of those who enter.

The George Washington Masonic National Memorial: A Beacon of Legacy

In Alexandria, Virginia, the George Washington Masonic National Memorial stands as a tribute to America's first president and renowned Freemason, George Washington. This monumental structure is a treasure trove of Masonic artifacts and symbolism, designed to embody Washington's virtues and legacy. However, it is also the site of numerous ghost stories. Some visitors and employees have reported hearing phantom footsteps and seeing figures that vanish upon closer inspection. This combination of rich history and chilling lore attracts both Masonic scholars and ghost hunters, each keen to uncover layers of history imbued with supernatural elements.

A Legacy Transcending Time

The reportedly haunted Masonic locations provide a fascinating glimpse into a world where historical significance intertwines with the unexplained. These sites, steeped in Freemasonry's rich traditions and enigmatic past, serve as cultural heritage landmarks. Their ghostly tales and mysterious happenings continue to captivate the public, ensuring that Masonic history remains alive in both mystery and legacy. Whether through confirmed sightings or speculative tales, these haunting locations invite us to ponder not only the supernatural but also the enduring mystique of Freemasonry itself.





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.

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CONTACT

IMSAP Coordinator

217-529-8900 ext. 219

imsap@ilmason.org

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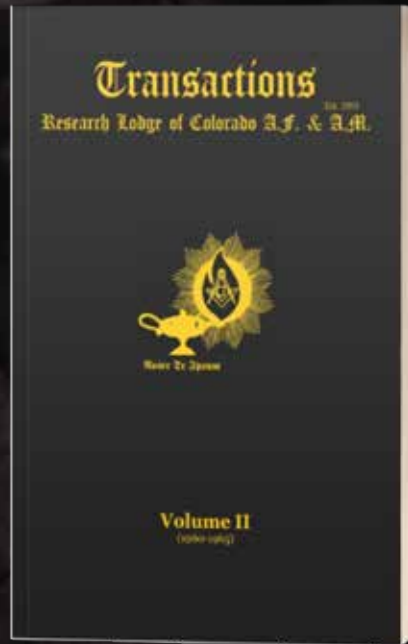


EPISODE: 0318
MY MASONIC GHOST STORY

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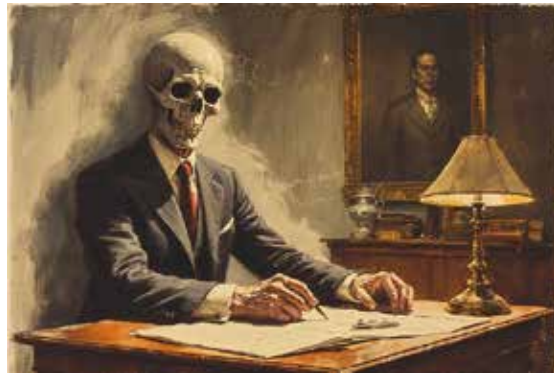
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Secretary for Life (and Death?)

by RWB.: Chad M. Lacek, 33°



We heard a rumor that the building was haunted, but thought little of it...

In August of 2018, the Masonic Restoration Foundation held its 9th annual symposium at the beautiful Scottish Rite Temple in Santa Fe, New Mexico. The structure, completed in 1912, was modeled after the Alhambra in Spain. One feature of the sprawling complex is a 20-room dormitory, which was offered to visitors for a mere \$10 per night. I loved the idea of staying in this historic building, and I did so along with half a dozen other Masons.

We spent our first night relaxing in a lounge at the end of the dormitory hallway. Our host, Bro. Scott Jaquith of Montezuma Lodge #1, entered and asked if we were enjoying our stay. We confessed that we were delighted to be able to crawl all over this wonderful old building unsupervised. Then he said, *"Have you seen the crypt?"*

The room filled with wide eyes and a chorus of Nos. *"Would you like to see it?"* was answered with a resounding, collective *"ABSOLUTELY!"* Off we went through the darkened halls and vaulted spaces, until we came to a plain, unmarked door. Peering through the darkness, we could see the walls were lined with square niches, some containing funerary urns. The remains of Illustrious Brother Harper Cunningham and his wife were here, along with several other Masons, one of them unidentified.

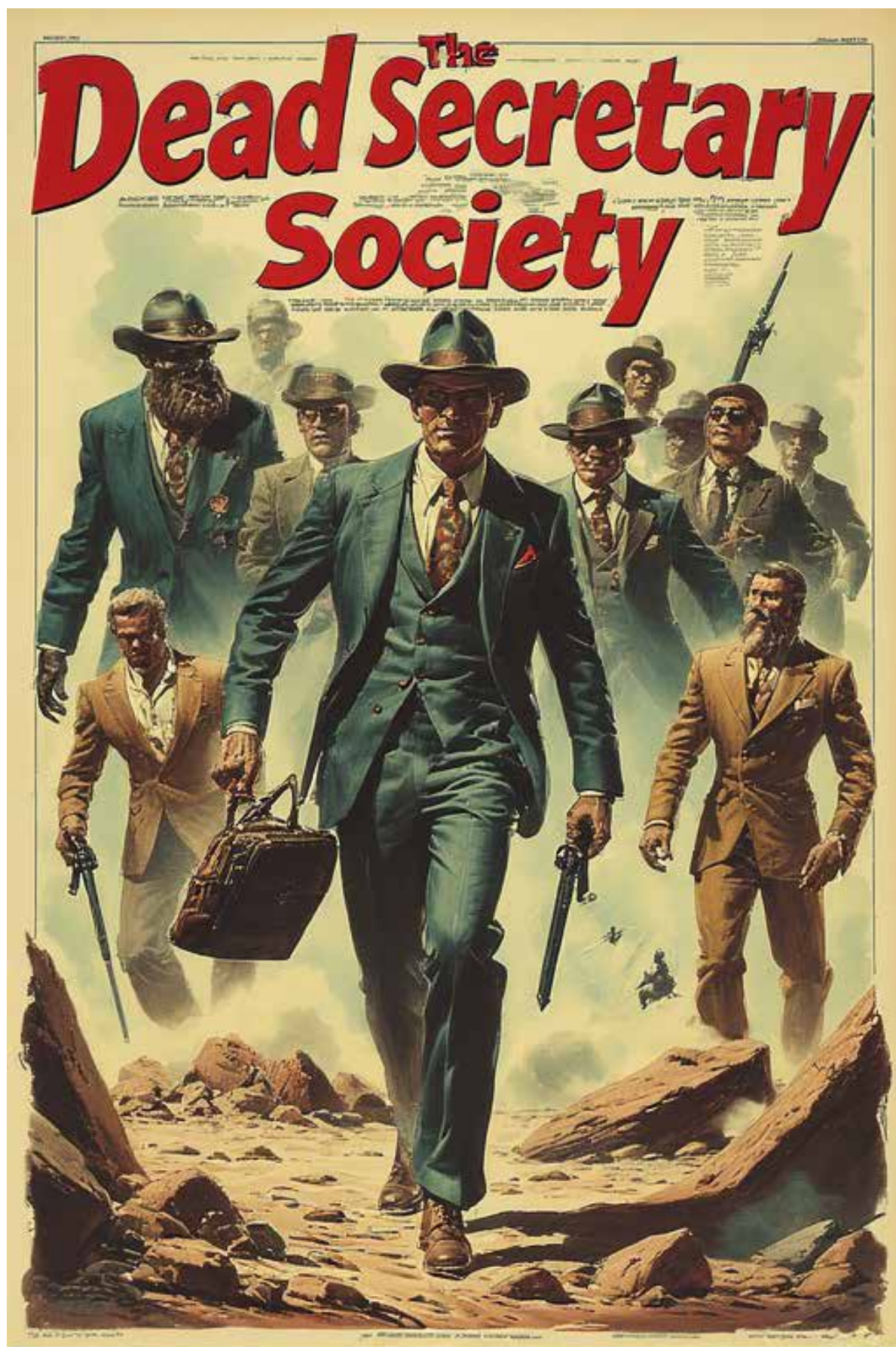
Our curiosity satisfied, we returned to our lounge, and our host bade us good night. The next morning, Bro. Jaquith greeted us and asked if we had slept well. We responded in the affirmative, and he expressed relief. He told us that the last visitor to spend the night in the dormitory had a much different experience.

This visitor said that he was kept awake all night long by a discussion taking place in the hallway outside his room. The dormitory is somewhat cavernous, and any sounds made in that hallway echo and reverberate loudly. He resented the fact that they did not conduct their conversation elsewhere. One of the speakers sounded as though he were a Lodge Secretary. The topic being discussed was the Lodge's finances and a disagreement regarding certain expenditures.

When Bro. Jaquith heard this, he informed the visitor that he was completely alone in the building the previous night. There were no other lodgers, no staff, no one. The building was securely locked until he opened it just a few moments ago. The voices that kept him from sleep all night were not from living men.

A chill ran through our bodies. It's bad enough being a Lodge Secretary in life, but to be saddled with it for all eternity is too horrible to contemplate!





EXPLORING THE MYSTICAL DEPTHS: MEDITATIVE PRACTICES IN MASONIC TRADITION

by RWB.: Robert H. Johnson, PDDGM, FILOR



Meditation has long played a pivotal role in the life of a Freemason, offering a path to self-discovery and enlightenment. While traditional practices like guided and non-guided meditation are well-known, the mystical arts also embrace a variety of less conventional practices that align with Masonic and occult traditions. Understanding these practices can enhance one's spiritual journey and enrich Masonic education.

Scrying: The Art of Vision

Scrying, a time-honored method of divination, involves gazing into a reflective surface to receive spiritual insights. This practice, which dates back to ancient times, was famously used by Dr. John Dee, the Elizabethan scholar and occultist. For Masons, scrying offers a bridge between the conscious and the subconscious, inviting visions that can herald new understanding. Its reflective quality not only reveals hidden truths but also encourages introspection, aligning with the Masonic pursuit of inner light.

The use of tools like a mirror, water, or glass helps to focus the practitioner's mind, allowing them to enter a meditative state where intuitive insights come to the forefront. The process of scrying requires patience and practice, as the images or impressions perceived are often symbolic. For Freemasons, engaging in scrying can enhance one's ability to perceive the greater mys-

teries of existence and deepen the connection to the spiritual aspects of Masonic teachings.

Psychomantiums and the Masonic Spirit

Another intriguing meditative practice is the use of psychomantiums, which are darkened rooms where a chair is placed in between two adjacent walls where mirrors are hung on each respective side. This offers an infinite reflection loop. Typically the only light is a candle or a dim lamp. They are designed to foster communication with the spirit realm. This approach was popularized by Dr. Raymond Moody in the 20th century, but its roots can be traced back to ancient Greek rituals. Psychomantiums offer Masons an opportunity to explore the ethereal aspects of existence. By creating a chamber devoid of light, practitioners aim to facilitate a focused state where spiritual encounters and meditative reflections are heightened.

In Masonic traditions, the psychomantium can serve as a symbolic journey into the inner sanctum, reflecting the introspective path one must traverse to achieve enlightenment. Through this practice, Freemasons may engage with the archetypes and symbols that populate Masonic lore, potentially gaining insights that illuminate their own paths toward moral and spiritual improvement.

Crystal Balls and Emblems of Clarity

Crystal gazing is another mystical practice that holds historical significance in Masonic and occult traditions. Often associated with fortune-telling, the crystal ball is actually a tool for meditation and reflection, inviting clarity of thought and insight into one's subconscious. For Masons, the crystal can serve not only as a focal point for meditation but also as a metaphor for clarity and truth—a core Masonic virtue.

The act of gazing into a crystal ball requires the practitioner to empty their mind, allowing visions or symbols to reveal themselves. This practice can lead to a heightened state of awareness and contribute to personal and spiritual growth. Freemasons can utilize crystal gazing to deepen their understanding of the symbols and allegories that pervade Masonic teachings, translating cryptic images into meaningful personal and philosophical revelations.

Traditional Meditation: Guided and Un-guided Journeys

Traditional meditation, both guided and un-guided, remains central to many spiritual and philosophical systems, including Freemasonry. Guided meditation involves following a series of instructions or envisioning a particular scenario, which can be beneficial for those beginning their meditative journey. It provides a structured path to relaxation and concentration, enhancing one's ability to internalize Masonic teachings. This approach has been adopted over the last 200 years, but in most recent times, it was enhanced and made to be of the utmost use to Freemasons by a group of Masons called, *The Masonic Legacy Society*.

In contrast, un-guided meditation encourages independent exploration, allowing the mind to wander and settle on its own revelations. This practice cultivates discipline and introspection, essential qualities for a Mason seeking self-improvement. Whether guided or un-guided, meditation promotes mental clarity, emotional stability, and spiritual insight, reflecting the Masonic ideals of peace and harmony.

The Black Mirror: Reflecting the Inner Self

The use of a black mirror in meditative practice, or specularum, combines aspects of scrying and traditional meditation. The dark, reflective surface of the black mirror serves as a portal to the subconscious, allowing practitioners to explore hidden facets of their psyche. For Freemasons, the black mirror represents the introspective journey toward self-aware-

ness and the unveiling of truths that lie beneath the surface of everyday consciousness.

Gazing into a black mirror requires a quieting of the mind and a willingness to confront whatever thoughts or images arise. This practice can lead to transformative insights, enabling Masons to confront and integrate neglected parts of themselves into their personal and communal Masonic journey.

Water Bowls: Nostradamus' Liquid Legacy

Nostradamus famously utilized bowls of water for his prophetic scrying practices. This method involves gazing into a body of liquid, reflecting not only one's physical image but also one's spiritual essence. The fluidity of water symbolizes the ever-changing nature of thought and consciousness, a concept that resonates with the Masonic emphasis on adaptability and progress.

For Masons seeking to employ the use of water in their meditative practices, the focus is on allowing the mind to enter a state akin to water—flowing, unconfined, and receptive to new insights. This practice encourages the dissolution of rigid mental structures, opening the practitioner to the infinite possibilities of becoming a better man, true to Masonic aspirations.

The Reflective Path of Masonry

Meditative practices, whether rooted in traditional methods or in the mysticism of scrying and other occult traditions, offer invaluable benefits for Freemasons. Each technique serves as a tool for reflection and inner exploration, facilitating personal growth and deeper understanding of Masonic ideals. Engaging in these practices can illuminate the path toward enlightenment, fostering a harmonious balance between the intellectual and spiritual pursuits that define Freemasonry. By embracing these diverse meditative practices, Freemasons can continue their quest for self-improvement and the attainment of universal truths.



The Legend of Jack O' the Lantern

ORIGINALLY PUBLISHED BY
THE DUBLIN PENNY JOURNAL - 1836

Once upon a time, there lived a man whose natural disposition was churlish and morose, and the asperities of whose soul had not been softened down by the influence of a knowledge of God; and his acquirements in the things of this world did not much exceed the narrow skill which enabled him to cultivate the farm on which he lived. He was known throughout the country for his unsocial manners, his blazing hearth never cheered the way-worn stranger, and the repulsed beggar never again sought his inhospitable door. In short, he lived the reproach of humanity, and his name was a bye-word in the land.

Jack, for so this churl was named, was returning home one night from a neighboring fair, when, as he approached a dark and rapid stream at a particular ford, which the imagination of the people of that time had associated with some tales of murder and superstition, he heard a groan that, to his fancy, proceeded from some tortured spirit. He suddenly drew in the mare on which he rode, all the horrid tales recorded of that dark glen rushed to his memory, and as a second and a third sound of agony smote his ear, his bristling hair stood erect, the cold beads of dismay oozed at every pore. Nor did the whiskey which he quaffed that evening in his own sordid way prevent the current of his blood from freezing at his very heart; but when the horrid sounds were again repeated, he summoned nerve sufficient to inquire what he could do for the tortured soul that crossed his path in that glen of gloom and horror.

"For the love of heaven," said the voice, "take me to some human habitation; for I am no tortured spirit, but a poor homeless wanderer who have lost my way on the wild moor, and have lain down here to die, for I durst not cross this rapid water. So may mercy be shown you in your hour of need, and in the day



of your distress."

Delivered from supernatural terrors, the peasant's soul softened into humanity. With an indescribable feeling of pity, which never till that hour reached his heart, he dismounted and saw extended on the damp earth a very aged man, with a white beard, who was evidently born down with the load of years and misery. He wrapped the aged sufferer in his warm great coat, placed him on the saddle, and then mounting on the crupper, he supported the object of his pity till he reached home. His wife smiled to behold her gruff husband engaged in the unusual office of hospitality and wondered much what charm could have soothed his unsocial soul to kindness. The miserable stranger received every

necessary that her cupboard afforded; was laid to rest in a warm bed, and in a short time his grief and infirmities were forgotten in sound repose.

About the dawn of day, Jack was awakened from his sleep by a bright blaze of light that shone through all the cabin. Unable to account for this sudden illumination, he started to his feet from the bed, when his progress was instantly checked, and his astonishment greatly augmented to behold a young man of celestial beauty, wrapped in white garments. His shoulders were furnished with wings, the plumage of which exceeded in whiteness the down of swans; and as he spoke, his words stole like the notes of a heavenly harp, to the soul of the wondering cottager.

“Mortal,” said the celestial visitant, “I am one of the angels commissioned to watch over the sons of Adam, I heard thy brethren exclaim against thy unsocial temper, and utter disregard of the sacred virtue of hospitality; but I find that some generous seeds of virtue have lain uncultivated with thee. In me thou beholdest the miserable senior whom thy generous humanity relieved. I have shared thy frugal fare and lowly bed. My blessing shall remain with thy house, but to thyself in particular I bestow three wishes; then freely ask, as I shall freely give. May wisdom bound the desire of thy soul.”

Jack paused for a moment, and then said, *“There’s a sycamore tree before the door, fair and wide-spreading, but every passer-by must pluck a bough from it. Grant that everyone touching it with such intent may cling to the tree till I release him. Secondly, I do wish that any person who sits in my elbow chair may never be able to leave it, nor the chair to leave the ground, without my consent. There’s a wooden box on the wall. I keep it to hold the thread, and awls, and hammer, with which I mend my brogues, but the moment I turn my back, every clown comes here cobbling for himself. My third request is that the person who puts his hand into the box, might not withdraw it, and that the box may stick to the wall, during my pleasure. My wishes are ended.”*

The angel sighed as he granted the boon; and the legend further adds that Jack was from that hour excluded from all hope of heaven, because he had eternal happiness within his wish, and neglected to secure the vast gift; but the angel’s blessing remained with his house. His children were many, and his crops and cattle thrived with large increase.

In twenty years after, as Jack sat one evening in his elbow-chair musing on his earthly affairs, a strange and unearthly smell of brimstone assailed his nose; and when he turned round to ascertain the cause, the appearance of a tall, dark-looking being, graced with a pair of horns, a cloven foot, and a long tail, which he carried rather genteelly tucked under his arm, further increased his astonishment. The stranger immediately opened his message, mentioned Jack’s exclusion from heaven, and spoke of his infernal master’s anxiety to see him speedily at his own hot home.

When Jack heard these awful tidings, he repressed every symptom of alarm, and, starting to his feet, bid the stranger welcome. *“I hope,”* he continued, *“your honour won’t be above sitting in the elbow-chair and tasting a drop of potteen this cold evening, while I put on my Sunday clothes.”*

The demon complied. *“There,”* said his host, *“is a real drop of the native.”* The revenue police never set their ugly face on it. *Why then, would your honour tell me if ye have any revenueurs in your native place?”*

“We have lots of them,” replied he of the cloven hoof; *“but we give them other employment than still-hunting; but come, the road is long, and we must away.”*

So saying, he motioned to leave his seat, but found himself immovably fixed therein, while the guileful mortal set his flail to work on his captive enemy. Vain every entreaty for mercy. In vain he kicked, and flung his arms around; the swift descending instrument of vengeance smashed every bone in his skin; and it was only when exhausted, and unable to prosecute his task, that he consented to liberate the miserable being, on his solemn oath, that he would never more visit this upper world on a similar errand.

Satan has more than one courier to do his errands. A second messenger, provided with the necessary instruction for shunning the fatal chair and flail, was dispatched to fetch the doomed mortal, who was ruminating, next day, on the adventure of the preceding evening, when the latch was raised, and a strang-

er cautiously entered. When he had explained his business, Jack requested that he would be seated and expressed his willingness to depart when he had put a stitch or two in his old brogue. The courier was too cautious and declined to sit, but Jack took the chair, pulled off his broken shoe, and requested the demon to hand him an awl from the small box. The infernal visitant obeyed, but found that he could neither withdraw his hand, nor remove the box from the wall. He cast a glance of dismay at his mortal antagonist, who sprung to the flail, and bestowed such discipline as forced the present visitor to submit to the same conditions for his release that his brother devil had done.

It is said that his sable majesty was greatly surprised at the discomfiture of his two trusty messengers, and, like a skillful general, he resolved to go in person and explore the enemy's camp. He ascended from the nether world through Mangerton mountain, near Killarney, where that barren and bottomless pool, called the Hole of Hell, now fills up the funnel which formed his upward passage. He looked round from the lofty height into the far country, and with the sagacity of the vulture in quest of his prey, directed his course to Jack's habitation. It was a sunny morning, and a heavy frost of some days' continuance had congealed all the waters and rendered the surface of the land hard and slippery. Aware of Jack's wiles, he rapped at the door and, in a voice of thunder, bid the miserable mortal come forth.

"I will go whithersoever your Lordship commands me," he answered, awed by the threatening voice and formidable manner of his summoner, *"but the road is slippery, and you will permit me in to fetch my cane; besides, I would wish to kiss my wife and little ones before I go."*

The fiend was inexorable and urged the wretched being on before him.

"If I walk without the support of a stick," he resumed, hobbling on before his captor, *"I shall speedily break my bones, and if there are no coachman on the road to hell, how would your Lordship wish to fetch my carcass on your princely shoulders? Oh, that I had even a bough from yonder sycamore to support my poor old limbs!"*

To stay his murmuring, and furnish the desired support, Satan laid hold on a fair branch of the tree but

immediately found that he was unable either to break the bough or quit his hold; and Jack, with a yell of joy, returned to fetch his favorite flail. In the words of the legend, whoever would come from the remote ends of the earth to hear the most fearful howlings, occasioned by the most dreadful castigation, would here have ample gratification. Jack broke his three best flails on the occasion, and though the miserable fiend cried loudly for mercy, he continued his toil till the going down of the sun, when on his promising neither to seek Jack on earth, or permit his entrance into hell, the arch fiend was released and the fortunate man retired to rest, more fatigued from that day's thrashing than ever he had been before.

Our story draws near its close. Jack, with all his skill, could not baffle the assault of Death. He paid the debt of nature, but when his soul was dismissed to its final residence, the porter at the gate of the infernal regions stoutly denied him admittance. The fiends turned pale with fright, and even Satan himself fled within the lowest depths to hide his head from the dreaded enemy. Then, because he was unfit for heaven, and hell refused to take him, he was decreed to walk the earth till the day of judgment. He was given a single burning coal of hellfire, which he held in a carved turnip, to light his earthly wanderings. Such, reader, is the legend of Jack-o'-the-Lantern, commonly believed by the peasantry in many districts of Ireland.



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