



INTERPRETING A PRIVATE COMMUNITY



Adam Kendall, Guest Editor

Why this issue?

by Elida Zelaya

Some of you may wonder why you should read an issue of WestMuse that seems narrowly focused on one community. I will admit to this issue becoming a "pet idea" of mine for two reasons:

1. Sensationalism vs. Knowledge: As stated in this issue, "the mystery really is the draw," but the thrill is that the Masons are not an "extinct body". I like movies, especially mystery/adventures like National Treasure or the Da Vinci Code. I like them as pure entertainment, but I also like how they inspire me. The intellectual deep inside wants to know more about the theme behind the movie so I will often go on a reading junket to further experience the mysteries and identify the misconceptions. Also, I thought that if I was interested in this community many of you might be as well; these articles provide a glimpse into the realities surrounding the Masons.

2. Communities and Cultural Divide: This issue provides some insights from the Masonic community and demonstrates that even private societies experience conflict within themselves about exhibit propriety. Are the lessons about exhibit challenges new? Not particularly, but hearing from a particular community is always valuable. Listening to a particular community can reinforce our ideals. Involving a particular community can help to lift the burden of misconceptions, and that is what we are all trying to do.

Right?

Being relevant to our community stakeholders (different ethnic, religious, cultural, economic, age, etc. groups) and addressing cultural divide (whatever that might be in your community) have become benchmark goals for our organizations and programming. We have all experienced the frustration of having to balance exhibition content in order to be politically sensitive; we have all faced the challenge of fabulous exhibition objects that have a dearth of reliable research to go with them; and, we have all faced discord from one source or another that is unhappy about how X was

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See page 8 for an explanation of this surprising object in the collection of the National Heritage Museum.

Executive Director's Report



Do you ever wonder where your money goes? While I can't answer that for your whole income, I can for the portion that you commit to support the Western Museums Association as membership dues, contributions, or annual meeting registrations. The big picture is that as a 501(c) 3 we do what most of you do, and fold any surplus back into the organization in order to accomplish our mission - professional development.

I think that the 'little picture' - the specifics of our costs and fees will be of interest to you as you make tough decisions regarding membership, travel, and meeting attendance in 2009.

Membership:

For You: Is your WMA membership current? With an individual or institutional membership you can save a minimum of \$30 (almost the cost of a membership) in registration fees, especially if you watch for the special early bird deals (to be announced on the website and in the preliminary program soon). An institutional membership has the added benefit of allowing several staff or board members to claim the membership registration rate.

Also, your WMA membership includes eligibility to apply for a scholarship from the Wanda Chin Professional Development Support Fund, www.westmuse.org/WandaChin_Appl.htm. Registration and a portion of travel and accommodations are typically covered with the scholarship stipend. You must be a member for at least a year to be eligible, so renew or join now.

For WMA:

We strive to keep membership fees to a bare minimum; membership income partially underwrites the office costs of staying in touch with you.

Travel/Accommodations:

For You: A huge portion of member meeting expenses often goes toward travel and hotel rooms. This year we will continue to help you to reduce your costs with our roommate list; please email info@westmuse.org, subject line San Diego Roommate. We are happy to help you, but please help us by staying at the conference hotel, the Catamaran; if we don't meet our room block goals, we have to pay for unused rooms which will drive up costs. So please make sure to clarify with Reservations that you are part of the WMA group. Catamaran Reservations: (USA) 800-422-8386, (Canada) 800-233-8172, or www.catamaranresort.com.

WESTMUSE

Interpreting a Private Community

Guest Editor: Adam G. Kendall, Henry Coil Library & Museum of Freemasonry

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Future Issues of WestMUSE (*schedule subject to change*)

Volume II 2009 The Money Issue: Making Money and Raising Funds in a Down-turned Economy

Volume III 2009 The New AAM (and what it means for museums in the West)

Volume IV 2009 Greening the Museum

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Executive director's Report

In another effort to help you economize, this year we are initiating a car-pool connection for San Diego. To participate, please email info@westmuse.org with subject line: San Diego car-pool, with your origination location.

For WMA: WMA does not gain income from event tickets at the annual meeting. Our evening event tickets have been \$45 for several years, but did you know that approximately \$15 of your ticket goes to travel costs? After paying for motor coaches to/from the museums, this leaves only \$30 to cater your meals on site - hence chicken, pasta, buffets, and cash bars! In order to keep tickets this low, despite rising costs, we may simplify some events. We know that providing excellent networking and learning opportunities is more important to our membership than fancy victuals. To keep the meeting affordable so that you can maximize your professional development, we constantly strive to minimize event costs.

Registration

For You: Your registration fees vary depending on your level of participation, but the best deal is to register before the early bird deadline. Typical fees will include:

Registration - access to over 40 sessions during three full days; Tech Lab; food & beverages at exhibit hall breaks and receptions; eligibility to purchase workshop and event tickets.

Workshops - Half-day workshops offer the opportunity to learn about a topic in-depth, usually in a hands-on manner, and to have access to experts one-on-one or in a small group. Registering for the annual meeting allows you to register for workshops (fee per workshop). Those who do not register for the meeting will pay an additional service fee to attend only a workshop.

Events - affinity, peer-to-peer, and mentoring networking during afternoon and evening events at the Catamaran and local museums; access to resource clinics (resume reviews, presentation skills, evaluation, grant writing). (fee per event)

For WMA: We want you to attend the annual meeting, after all you are the reason that we exist! However, there are costs associated with every registration. You can help to reduce these costs and thus help to maintain our conservative fees.

- ◆ Stay at the Catamaran and reference WMA when you register.
- ◆ Do business with our Exhibit Hall vendors, so they want to come again.
- ◆ Send a check for your registration; it saves us approximately 2.5% on credit card transactions.

We thank you for working with us to keep WMA a good value for all. We will be investigating and experimenting with other ways to reduce our costs so that we can maintain an affordable, high quality, value-packed annual meeting that advances your professional development goals and is a justified expense for your manager, institution, or you!

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Why This Issue?

presented.

I hope you enjoy this issue as much as I do. If not, perhaps there is another community, experience, subject, or lessons to be highlighted that you would like to read about? Usually the themes for our newsletters come from WMA staff and Publications Chair board member, but when I tell you that we would love to hear about the themes you want to see (or loved from the past) I mean it. Our goal is to provide you with a membership newsletter that reflects you and addresses your needs - your personal experiences of the museums in the region and beyond, your professional interests, and your challenges.

The Material Culture of Fraternal Societies & the Rules of Engagement

by Adam Kendal, Guest Editor

Freemasonry and other fraternal orders have internationally been regarded with equal amounts of curiosity and suspicion. At best, the histories of these private societies have been viewed as curiosities of a by-gone world with strange bonding rituals. At worst, they are harbingers of a new world order. There has always been a feverish fascination with these organizations, and those in the historical professions are often faced with the difficult task of locating reliable information in order to display their material culture without buying into the latest conspiracy theory or relegating the objects to curious and detached footnotes of mummerly in small town histories.

When this unfortunate problem does rear its head, one cannot rely on the old excuse that because these organizations are supposedly secret, there is, therefore, a complete blackout of information (except from those who claim to know dark and mysterious secrets). In the last century, there have been serious scholarly inquiries into fraternal societies' contributions to the empires of the West, as well as the rest of the world - which have inspired a new crop of scholars, funded university chairs, and a series of recent books on the subject. These studies have advanced verifiable evidence of the effects fraternalism has had in the development of modern culture during the past three hundred-plus years.

It is especially important that we, as museum professionals, look toward this relatively recent renaissance of scholastic research into Freemasonry and fraternal organizations; rather than be bogged down by the endless labyrinth of conspiracies or half-baked ideas, we should be concerned with understanding their history and complexity by availing ourselves of the resources at hand. Such outlets do exist and the recent exhibit, *Brotherhood: Freemasonry's Mark on Idaho* at the Idaho State Historical Museum in Boise, is testimony to a genuine interest in researching and exhibiting fraternalism as a viable force in the formation of society.

In this issue I am indebted to the contributions of Robert L.D. Cooper of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, Mark Tabbert of the George Washington National Masonic Memorial, Shawn Eyer of J.F.K University, Tom Savini of the Grand Lodge of New York, and Hilary Anderson Stelling of the National Heritage Museum. By trade, they are all, more or less, involved exclusively in Masonic history. However, because Freemasonry is a part of a

greater fraternal impulse, we should keep the other organizations in mind, if not for the fact that many of them such as the Elks, the Odd Fellows, etc., were influenced or inspired from the ideals and symbolism of that old granddaddy of fraternal orders, Freemasonry. In their articles, the authors give a brief insight into why and how Masonic and fraternal artifacts can and should be displayed in order to give a broader insight into the culture of fraternal organizations, and how it invariably relates to our own.

Adam G. Kendall, Henry Coil Library & Museum of Freemasonry and Founding Fellow, *The Masonic Society* (<http://themasonicsociety.com>)

Dispelling the Myth of Secrecy from Freemasonry: Displaying and Cataloguing Freemasonry at the Chancellor Robert R Livingston Masonic Library

by Thomas M. Savini

If one was to believe popular novels and motion pictures, one would think that the task of collecting and sharing material relating to the Freemasons, that oldest, most mysterious, most "secret" of societies, would be an impossible feat to fathom. Could a library actually catalogue books that lay bare the history and philosophy of the Masons? Would a museum be able to display the fraternity's artifacts, without risking the imposition of some blood penalty?

Sensationalism aside, the answers to these questions amount to a resounding "yes." And the way that we've accomplished these goals at the Chancellor Robert R Livingston Masonic Library of Grand Lodge in New York City is by developing a clear and direct mission statement; abiding by that mission when we are in doubt; and maintaining high professional standards of quality and patron service, just as any other library or museum would.

The origins of Freemasonry (also known simply as the Masons, or more complicatedly as the Free and Accepted Masons, sometimes adding the word "Ancient" to that appellation) are lost to the mists of time, but most historians agree that the group developed in Western Europe in the late 17th century. Some theories see the fraternal order evolving from the guilds of craft masons who built cathedrals and castles across Europe throughout the Middle Ages. Other theories suggest the Freemasons as a parallel organization to the Royal Academy or the Rosicrucians. Whatever its roots, we know that Freemasonry organized and "went public" in London, 1717, with the announcement of the formation of the Grand Lodge of England, an entity set up to administer and direct the workings of four individual Masonic lodges meeting in London, and to charter new lodges across England and ruled territories. Freemasonry welcomed men

of good character and report, drawing from all social classes, trades, and religious practices, although English Freemasonry in the early 18th century seemed to have strongest appeal among the rising bourgeoisie.

From its beginnings, Freemasonry has included initiatory ceremonies, or "degrees" (three in number in a symbolic or "blue" Masonic lodge; higher numbers in related Masonic



Past Master's Jewel. Gold compass and quadrant and sunburst with "diamond" at hinge, surrounded by wreath. Inscribed on reverse: Presented to Chas. Schlessinger, Past Master, Fidelity Lodge #121, F.& A.M. of California. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum of Freemasonry.

orders), which represent stages of membership each new member passes through on his way to becoming a full, voting member of the lodge. The contents of the degrees are kept private among members.

Privacy, rather than secrecy, is important in Freemasonry. Masons have a tradition of using modes of recognition and ceremonies that remain private within the order. Any Freemason (I am one) will tell you that these "secrets," and the degrees which teach them, hold a great deal of reverence for each Mason. The degrees and the traditions surrounding them comprise vital components of the experiential process of becoming a Freemason, and as

such, we prefer to keep that content private, rather than secret.

However, it is not necessary to become a Freemason in order to study the group. Nor is it necessary to know the contents of the degrees, or to have explicit knowledge of the "secrets" of the order, to fully appreciate our history, philosophy, and material culture. Conspiracy theorists may want to know what goes on inside lodge rooms: the fact is, Masonic "exposures," works which claim to detail the contents of Masonic degrees, have been published since

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Dispelling the Myth of Secrecy from Freemasonry

the morning after the first Masonic meeting took place. But to base one's understanding of Freemasonry on an exposure, even one that comes close to an actual degree, loses the broader appreciation and understanding of a fraternity that is so much more than secret handshakes and code words.


Most comprehensive Masonic histories and studies will focus not so much on the "secret" matters, but rather on the lessons and the theories Freemasonry imparts to its members, now and over the course of the past three hundred years. These types of histories contain the vital components of the study of Freemasonry. What is more important: to know how to give a handshake, or to know that Freemasonry was an early proving ground for practices of religious toleration, universal enfranchisement, and public education?

The staff of the Chancellor Robert R Livingston Masonic Library follows standards of professionalism in assisting all patrons, Masons and non-Masons alike, and also maintains the practice of letting the patrons decide their own courses of inquiry, rather than telling patrons what we think they need to hear. We answer questions when we can, and offer guidance when it's requested, but we do not perform the work of research for our patrons. By maintaining these practices, we avoid having to confront any dilemmas regarding the private nature of some of the books in our collection. If, for example, a patron points to a Masonic symbol, such as a builder's level, and says: "What does the Grand Lodge of New York's Masonic ritual say about that symbol?", my staff, who are non-Masons, may honestly reply, "I'm afraid I don't know." When I'm asked that question, I can honestly reply, "I'm afraid I can't tell you exactly what Masonic ritual says; I can, however, tell you that the level is a symbol of equality..." and provide what I hope is an informative answer without violating any Masonic obligations I have taken.

Our library collection is catalogued according to standardized methods and comprises 60,000 volumes of 16,000 titles, subdivided into two sections: Masonic, and Masonic-related. Masonic-related titles are catalogued by the Dewey Decimal system, and include works on esoterica, religious histories, biographies of prominent Masons, general histories that mention Freemasonry, and similar types of works. Masonic titles are catalogued using a Dewey-based system developed by Masonic librarian


William Boyden in the early 20th century. Boyden's system of subject headings and classifications allow any Masonic work to be catalogued and shelved, and accessed by any patron who visits our library, Mason or non-Mason. (Our Masonic collection, and Boyden's system, include works in Masonic history; philosophy; symbolism; rituals; history by geography; anti-Masonic works; periodicals; and related orders.)

In a similar way, our inventory and display of Masonic material culture focuses on standardized methods of cataloging and exhibition. We organize our artifact collection by object type, placing uniquely Masonic material in categories as closely related to the 'real world' as possible. For example, a Masonic tracing board is a painting, poster, or textile that displays a set of Masonic symbols, and may be used as both a teaching tool during degrees, and a decoration at other times. We would catalogue a tracing board in a category according to its medium-oil painting, lithograph or engraving, textile. The term "tracing board" would be included as a descriptive note, and the symbols portrayed would be described in



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Dispelling the Myth of Secrecy from Freemasonry


cataloging and exhibition notes. These entries require no Masonic knowledge to be thorough. The description may be augmented by information relating to Masonic use - for example, a tracing board used during a second degree rather than a first or third can best be identified by a Mason - but this is not necessarily knowledge limited to Masons.

Scholars have studied religions for centuries, without becoming adherents of the religions they study in the process. Freemasonry is not a religion. But under similar analysis, scholars may study Freemasonry, and may amass a wealth of knowledge about Freemasonry, without undergoing the experiential process of actually becoming a Mason. The secret aspects of Freemasonry are kept private because they are intended for an audience that chooses to join the order. This tradition of privacy confounds conspiracy theorists, and provides grist for novelists, but it does not prevent visitors to museums and libraries from obtaining a well-rounded and comprehensive understanding of a fascinating, centuries-old organization.

Thomas M. Savini is beginning his tenth year as director of the Chancellor Robert R. Livingston Masonic Library of Grand Lodge in New York City, NY. He has overseen the digital conversion of the Library's catalogue, and initiated the process of creating a Virtual Museum of the Library's artifact collection, viewable at the Library's website, www.nymasoniclibrary.org. He earned his MA in Liberal Studies from SUNY Empire State College, and his BA in History from Buffalo State College. He has been a Freemason for seventeen years.



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AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF MUSEUMS

What's the big secret? Exhibiting Masonic and Fraternal History

by Hilary Anderson Stelling

A life-sized goat on wheels? One object in the National Heritage Museum's collection, below, a mechanical goat once owned by an Odd Fellows lodge, inspires more visitor



Mechanical goat, 1900-1925. DeMoulin Bro. & Co., Greenville, Illinois. National Heritage Museum, 96.048

questions than just about any other. This object - part livestock, part bicycle - relates to the history of Freemasonry and other fraternal organizations. These groups played a role in millions of American lives from the 1700s through the present. Displaying and interpreting this history and material culture at a museum presents both challenges and opportunities.

Now, back to that goat. Although fraternal organizations generally frowned on hazing, around the turn of the century, it took place. The fraternal supply company, DeMoulin Bro. & Co., of Greenville, Illinois saw a business opportunity in the practice and took advantage by selling not only goats but also exploding chairs and other rambunctious devices to their customers. A hapless, possibly blindfolded, initiate rode the goat. His bumpy journey on wonky wheels provided a spectacle for all who watched. Use of the goat provided a sharp contrast to the

serious degree ceremonies that were and continue to be central to the work of ritual-based fraternal organizations. Although the goat can simply be explained as a device used in mock initiations, one scholar has pointed to its description in literature and its use as evidence of changing ideas about American masculinity in the 1800 and 1900s. As his study underscores, when you delve into the context surrounding a fraternal object, there is often much to learn, not only about the organization and the people who participated, but about the larger culture that produced them.

Freemasonry is an exclusively male, oath-bound organization that teaches a system of ethics with the goal of bettering men's characters through education, friendship, philanthropy and leadership. Since the 1730s, American men have joined to find fellowship, to explore Masonic ideals and to forge social and business connections. In the 1800s and 1900s Americans joined Freemasonry and other fraternal organizations, many of which modeled their aims and rituals on Masonry, in huge numbers. By 1896 three and a half million men belonged to the ten most popular fraternal organizations in the country.

Although many people consider Freemasonry and other fraternal organizations to be secret societies, there is actually little that is secret about them. Members cannot disclose ritual, passwords and recognition signs. However, to teach and explore their system of morals, they have published a rich body of literature. Over the years, Masons have also created a distinct material culture to help them present their complex rituals and explain symbols drawn from the classical world, ancient stonemasons' work and Biblical stories. Museum collections house many examples of this material culture. These objects, ranging from tracing boards (below) and ceremonial swords to jewels of office and splendid costumes, speak to the activities, values and interests of the organizations that commissioned them. All of this historic material can be used in exhibitions to help you bring this interesting story to the public.

In telling the story, though, your museum may need to

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What's the big secret?

address certain issues. Many visitors come to exhibitions and programs burdened by misconceptions about Freemasonry and other fraternal organizations. To those who have not participated, the purpose and business of these organizations can seem mysterious. The more colorful misconception - often fueled by popular novels and movies - can be hard to work through, no matter how thoughtful and balanced your interpretation is. At NHM, we try to tackle some of the biggest misconceptions by considering our visitors' input as we structure our exhibitions and plan our interpretation. We evaluate what they know about Freemasonry and fraternalism, and ask them what else they would like to know about the subject. We try to put a human face on Masonry by highlighting members both famous and ordinary - anyone from Paul Revere to your grandfather. Finally, we ask visitors for comments to find out what we have missed. This lets us know what to feature in our next exhibition on the subject. In spite of taking these measures, our message does not always get through. This comment left at NHM's current Masonic exhibition on Freemasonry, underscores the fact: "I want to know exactly how Freemasons control the weather."

A bigger challenge in interpreting Freemasonry and other fraternal groups is that for many years, some of these organizations excluded not only women but also men of color and certain religions and ethnicities. This idea is essential to understanding the history of the organizations, yet is difficult for modern visitors to take on. This exclusivity, however, gives rise to some significant, yet underexplored stories. As an example, the history and ongoing activities of Prince Hall Freemasonry, founded by African American men who were barred from joining a Boston Masonic lodge in the 1770s, is a story that is not well known outside the African American and Masonic communities. Discussion of Prince Hall Freemasonry in an exhibition can illustrate aspects of Americans' complicated relationship with race and segregation. Likewise the history of co-Masonry-Masonic lodges for women or lodges that both men and women attend - is a complex topic that can show changing attitudes toward gender roles.

With the exception of ritual - and even this is negotiable - Masonic records, publications, regalia and ceremonial objects can be presented to the public for educational purposes in exhibitions and public programs without fear of unintentionally revealing privileged information. If you have any questions about displaying Masonic or fraternal objects or material, just ask. A good source of information is your state's Grand Lodge. Give them a call and they will be thrilled to hear of your organization's interest in their history. The museum-going public will also be delighted to learn more about these important organizations that have touched and continue to be a part of so many American lives.

Hilary Anderson Stelling is the Director of Collections and Exhibitions at the National Heritage Museum in Lexington, MA.



Tracing board, 1818. Jonas Prentiss (1777-1832), West Cambridge, Massachusetts. National Heritage Museum, Gift of Hiram Lodge, A.F. & A.M., Arlington, Massachusetts, 91.048

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So You Want to Borrow Some Masonic Artefacts...

by Robert L D Cooper

The material culture of Freemasonry in Europe is quite different from that of North America. In Europe Masonic artefacts, symbolism and even jargon are considered to be the 'private language' of the Craft (as Freemasonry is commonly known.) These differences arise as a consequence of the different cultures and history of the societies on either side of the Atlantic.

Note that I use the word 'private' rather than secret. If Freemasonry was truly a 'secret society' then the reader would know little or nothing of the organization and I certainly would not be writing this brief article. Permit me to put this in another way.

Does the Mafia have a Museum where artefacts relating to the organization can be viewed by its 'members' as well as by the general public? Is there a public Library financed and staffed by Triad members where the public can study the history and development of that organization? Do the Yakusa maintain a membership archive which is accessible by academics, genealogists and others? The answer to these questions is, of course, no! Why? Because these are real secret societies. Here then is the first problem: why do the media and even museum professionals, perpetuate the myth that Freemasonry is a "secret society"? Even the e-mail inviting me to contribute an article referred to Freemasonry as a 'secret society' - as if the use of quotes in some way negated the use of the term. For as long as non-Masons refer to the organization in this way there will be a continuing belief by non-Masonic organizations that Freemasons are in some way suspicious or sinister. That being so, why should Freemasonry, as an institution, lend artefacts etc. for exhibit when it continues to be described in that way? The suspicion is that Freemasonry is being used rather than appreciated.

In that light I turn to the matter of the differences within Freemasonry in America and Europe. The Craft must, of necessity, reflect the society in which it is based. In some Scandinavian countries, where the population is 95%+ Lutheran in religion, the chances of meeting a Buddhist Freemason is slight. On the same basis how many Protestant Freemasons are there in Rome? Very few, I can assure you!

North America never experienced all the horrors of World War II on that continent. In Europe, at least 80,000

Freemasons were tortured and executed by the Nazi and Fascist regimes simply because they were Freemasons. That, and other experiences, has shaped the attitude of European Freemasonry which, compared with Freemasonry in the USA, is very low key and has little public visible impact. Consequently Masonic artefacts located in North America are more likely to be available to non-Masonic museums, but for them to obtain older European Masonic material is likely to be much more difficult.

There are a huge number of Masonic artefacts that are historically important (nationally and internationally) and many are beautiful examples of their type. Until non-Masonic Institutions demonstrate sensitivity towards Freemasonry (which is after all made up of human beings just like you!) there is a danger that Freemasonry and Freemasons will remain suspicious that they are not valued as people, but only for what they possess. Consequently, obtaining Masonic artefacts (certainly from Europe) will remain problematic.

How then does one overcome this problem? I see one simple answer and that is greater participation by Freemasons themselves in exhibitions organized by non-Masonic organizations. The reason is simply this: exhibitions arranged to enlighten and educate people as to their history culture are extremely important but Freemasonry is not an extinct body (such as the ancient Egyptians), nor are they geographically or culturally far away (for example Australian aborigines or Native Americans) and this situation is quite different from exhibitions regarding cultures which no longer exist. Freemasons generally are more than willing to explain 'what they are about.' Non-Masonic museums, etc. could do far worse than to give them that opportunity.

Robert L D Cooper, FRSA, BA, FSA (Scot) is curator of the Grand Lodge of Scotland Museum and Library.

Keeping the Meaning Intact: The Preparation of Notes for the Display of Symbolic Artifacts

by Shawn Eyer

The very thing that makes Masonic and other fraternal artifacts attractive for a museum's audience is what represents the greatest challenge for the exhibit designer: How can we make these fascinating but cryptic displays meaningful to the generally uninitiated viewer? The fact is that for each fraternal artifact there may be several obstacles that the designer faces: the inherently private nature of the meaning of some artifacts, the different understandings of the symbolism that flourished at specific time periods, and the cultural divide that modern people feel when encountering traditional ideas and symbols.

The first obstacle is actually a deliberate one. These symbols were not meant to be fully understood outside of their context in initiatic societies. I say "fully," because in general each symbol will have a range of meanings which were not considered private. Often there is a substantial literature devoted to the interpretation of such symbolism. But it is probably incumbent upon any exhibit designer to acknowledge, somewhere in the tour notes, that it is not

possible to completely understand the symbols of these fraternal cultures from the outside. The mystery is really the draw, and acknowledging the mystery will reinforce the viewer's interest.

Closely connected to that mystery is the question of the origins of these societies, which are typically not fully understood. Non-academic sources (such as official pamphlets from the organizations themselves) tend to be little more than unqualified folk histories, but within the academy great progress has been made in the understanding of the history of some fraternal groups. The standard work on the ultimate beginnings of Freemasonry is David Stevenson's *The Origins of Freemasonry: Scotland's Century, 1690-1710* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), and the best summary of American Masonic history is Steven Bullock's *Revolutionary Brotherhood* (University of North Carolina Press). Rest assured that

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even after basing our historical notes on sound scholarship, we will find plenty of mystery left.

The next hurdle is where exhibits frequently tend to fall short. The symbolism of the displays should not be interpreted through the eyes of contemporary members, at least not uncritically so. Just as residency in modern Boston does not qualify one to interpret century-old Bostonian artifacts, mere membership in a fraternal organization is insufficient qualification to explain what a given symbol on an older artifact means. Even leadership positions in modern fraternities do not imply such qualification. The iconographical representations of the symbols have evolved over time, and there exists the danger that a modern interpreter might, in full confidence, assign anachronistic meanings to items that could never have been so interpreted in their day. Further, the oral and literary culture of fraternal groups changes over time. So even if a given symbol looks today exactly as it did two hundred years ago, it is highly likely that the way in which members speak of that symbol has changed.

The best way to avoid this pitfall is to rely mainly on published texts dating near the original provenance of the artifact. In terms of Masonic artifacts, several sources are easy to identify:

1. William Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry*. From the first edition in 1772, this has been the most influential book ever published on Masonic symbolism. It doesn't describe every symbol, but is excellent source material for contextualizing British artifacts from 1770 to 1820 and even later. A searchable electronic

version of the first nine editions is available on CD-ROM from Academy Electronic Publications Ltd. More symbolism is explained in Preston's unpublished lectures, now available in full in Colin Dyer's *William Preston and His Work* (Lewis Masonic, 1987). Although these were not published until recently, they were nearly as influential as his *Illustrations*.

2. An American version of Preston's *Illustrations* appeared in 1797, retitled *A Free-Mason's Monitor, or Illustrations of Masonry* and edited by Thomas Smith Webb.



White leather Blue Lodge apron with gold and blue trim and white apron ties. On the flap is the Seeing Eye. The face of the apron contains several masonic symbols including the square and compass, trowel, 4th Problem of Euclid, hour glass, beehive, three steps, anchor and ark. Mid-19th century. Placed with Sarah Ann Lowery of Chattanooga for safe keeping during the Civil War. Passed on to Ruth H. Murdock. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum of Freemasonry

3. Jeremy Ladd Cross' *True Masonic Chart, or Hieroglyphic Monitor*. Appearing in 1819 and remaining very popular until the end of the nineteenth century, Cross' *Monitor* is the quintessential American Masonic document of the epoch. Cross was a student of Webb, and his innovation was to add engravings of the various Masonic symbols to the lectures already provided by his predecessor. These engravings were highly influential and are largely responsible for the relative homogeneity of Masonic iconography after 1820, where greater variation was common before. Explanations from Webb's *Monitor* may be safely associated with the vast majority of American Masonic artifacts from the

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nineteenth century.

4. Albert G. Mackey's *Symbolism of Freemasonry*. Originally printed in 1869, Mackey's *Symbolism* represents a reexamination of Masonic iconography from the philosophical perspective of the late nineteenth century, including significant cross-cultural insights. This work was a standard resource well into the twentieth century, and artifacts from the late 1800s may be well illuminated by quotations from Mackey's text. A convenient modern edition with index and scholarly notes is available from Plumbstone books.

5. Oliver Day Street's *Symbolism of the Three Degrees*. Originally published in 1922, Street's text is the best example of the simplified approach that became popular in the twentieth century. Based strongly on the work of Albert Mackey and other great interpreters of the nineteenth century, Street's *Symbolism* is well-regarded for its accessible format. It is ideal source material for explaining artifacts created during the twentieth century.

Similar volumes exist for many other fraternal societies, such as the Odd Fellows and the Grange, though not so numerous. Ironically, while recent academic works are the best way to research historical questions, in terms of the symbolism and philosophy they tend to be quite superficial. So when it comes to the philosophical side, stick closely to what the initiates themselves had to say.

Finally, the last problem: bridging the cultural divide. Many of the relics of the fraternal societies refer to general icons of Western culture, the

recognition of which is in decline. For example, an image of an older man standing with a drawn blade over a bound youth might be instantaneously recognizable as a representation of the Biblical story of Abraham and Isaac. But a significant and growing segment of the population today is not familiar with this story. To avoid miscommunication, a short summary of the story's importance might be required. The cultural core which the fraternal societies took for granted is no longer as universal in today's world. While full context can never be fully restored, one might work to reduce the purely "hieroglyphical" nature of an encounter with these symbols, and provide the viewer with a meaningful and authentic glimpse into the mysteries of these fascinating ceremonial societies.

Acknowledging the mystery, using interpretive language from the same era as a given piece, and linking the present to the past by addressing cultural shifts will do much to improve the display of these symbolic images that remain, as Preston put it 250 years ago, "a subject of contemplation... a theme inexhaustible, ever new, and always interesting."

Shawn Eyer is an adjunct professor in the Department of Liberal Arts at John F. Kennedy University, and an active member of the Masonic fraternity.



Cream and blue Masonic plate with various Masonic symbols including columns, gavel, star, clasped hands, eye, trowel, altar with compass and square, around rim Bienfaisance. Liberté. Egalité. Fraternité; Loge Humanité, Nevers, France. 1884. Henry Wilson Coil Library & Museum of Freemasonry

Why Display Masonic Relics?

by Mark A. Tabbert

In 1948, the distinguished Masonic author, playwright, and past Masonic Service Association Executive Secretary, Carl Claudy, published his collection of writings in a book: "Masonic Harvest." One of the book's essays, "Relics," describes the many treasured Masonic historical artifacts from around the country, including numerous George Washington Masonic treasures, and other colonial and early American Masonic furniture and papers. In other parts of the country he mentions Lewis' and Clark's Masonic aprons, Mark Twain's petition for membership, and the first square and compasses used in the Utah territory in 1859. To him these relics were important to "keep tradition alive" and "wield a restraining influence against those too modern minded brethren by whom 'streamlining' and 'modernization' would be applied to the Ancient Craft."

Born in the horse and buggy days of 1879 and living to see the dawn of the Space Age in 1957, Claudy's generation witnessed more technological, social, and cultural changes than any other; before or since. It is no wonder then that he worried about the survival of the Craft's "ancient established usages" when governed by "modern minded brethren." Now that we live in the 21st century we know all too well the effects of "streamlining and modernization" and new questions have arisen to the meaning and purpose of these long cherished Masonic relics.

What now, indeed, is the purpose of display cases filled with George Washington related artifacts, old aprons and jewels from long dead famous American masons, or countless badges from Masonic conventions and ceremonies? Are they simply there to show past Masonic activities and enhance the grandeur and beauty of lodges? Or are they expected to impress non-masons of the Craft's ancient heritage just as some families display genealogy charts? Do these Masonic artifacts have real historic value? Do they teach, inspire, or are they simply nice things to please the eye?

Being a proud Mason I share Bro. Claudy's reverence for these relics, but as a historian I am obliged to answer these new questions and the public's curiosity with Freemasonry. The answers I discovered resulted from nearly ten years of working first as Curator as the Scottish Rite Museum in Lexington, MA and now here at the George Washington Masonic Memorial. As Claudy hoped his essay would inspire brothers to seek out and preserve their relics, it is my hope this bulletin will inspire brothers to present new displays of their lodges' important history.

But before new displays are presented, an inventory and assessment of artifacts, photographs, and documents must be completed. Only by first knowing the available materials and how to care for them, can building begin. I suggest working with Grand Lodge library and museum staff found through the Masonic Library and Museum Association, (www.mlmassn.org). The members can provide expert advice. Furthermore, the Memorial is now offering an on-line database free for all Masonic bodies to use to catalog and inventory their collections.

Of the several ways to reinterpret and present Masonic history displays, I believe, the first and foremost is to remember Freemasonry is comprised of men. While seemingly obvious, all too often grand masters' aprons or past masters' jewels are displayed with no information on their owners. Masonic relics are simply evidence of men's participation in the Craft. No matter how beautiful or impressive, they say nothing by themselves. They come alive, however, when we can learn about when, why, and how men used them. Such relics speak of lifelong friendships. Friendships that began at initiation, grew through good times and bad, and ended with an evergreen sprig at the grave.

Whenever possible aprons and jewels should be displayed with photographs, short biographic labels, and non-Masonic personal items. By taking a few minutes to write a description of a historic brother, and find a photograph of him with his family or in "civilian" dress, you create depth and an engaging story. Even displaying just one past master's apron on a tuxedoed mannequin will attract and engage visitors far better than walls covered with anonymous framed aprons.

In conjunction with this new approach, Masonic displays should also contain a variety of artifacts. Rather than having cases organized by type or style, they should be grouped by era or personality. History exhibits are not zoological and we should not display aprons, porcelain pitchers, or jewels like genus or species! Because today's visitors find them repetitively

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Why Display Masonic Relics?

boring, few modern natural history museums have cases filled with every variety of duck, butterfly, or snake. Rather they show a variety of animals together in their habitat - beaver, heron, trout, snake, and snail all in a woodland stream setting.

Likewise, Masonic displays should group objects according to their era, such as aprons, photographs, jewels, and gavels all used between say 1870 and 1900. In this way visitors can see how the Craft and the Grand Lodge or lodge evolved over time. Starting with a selection of crude frontier Masonic artifacts from the 1850s and finishing with a few expensive 1990s artifacts shows how a Grand Lodge or valley prospered with the territory and state.

If, however, a lodge has more artifacts related to people than eras, then displays can be organized to create a Masonic "hall of fame." As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "There is properly no history, only biography," and through the lives of brothers, lodge histories can be told. These individuals' cases may show relics from his range of Masonic activities: Blue Lodge, York Rite, Scottish Rite Shrine, etc. But beyond objects, it should contain biographical labels that mention both his personal and professional achievements. Knowing a past master served in World War I, owned a barbershop, held public office, and was married with children, while he organized a Demolay chapter, established a lodge charity fund, and wrote a Masonic book, does indeed teach and inspire younger generations.

Another important point to remember is to keep exhibitions simple, factual, and focused on local stories. Displays that try to tell the whole history of the Craft are doomed to fail. The endless differences in Masonic rituals, jurisdictions, rites, auxiliaries, and charities perplex 50-year brothers, let alone non-masons. If the relics to display are primarily from your lodge, then tell the story of your lodge, and not any other. Do not mention the Medieval Knight Templars unless you live in France and own a suit of armor. If you live in Wisconsin, then let Virginia tell George Washington's story and New Mexico tell Kit Carson's. Rather be a proud "Badger" and tell the story of the Ringling Brothers in Baraboo, or Bart Star of the Green Bay Packers.

When creating display labels and graphic information, remember to write a story and not an editorial or an advertisement. It is unnecessary to address the various

controversial issues that have dogged the fraternity for centuries. If visitors want answers to such issues then provide a rack of Masonic Service Association brochures. They are easily obtainable and already written.

While it is proper to be proud of the fraternity, circumscribe mentioning Freemasonry's wonderful social and charitable activities. A few well-placed notices of exciting events or great charitable statistics over time, is enough to impress. A quiet voice often resonates more than a shout. But remain proud of the fraternity's tenets, principles and mission. Intelligent prospective candidates want to know Freemasonry's purpose. If you are too embarrassed to clearly state them, then let the actions of historical masons prove them. Otherwise, men seeking admission will look elsewhere for morality, brotherly love, and truth.

Lastly, use common terminology that everyone can understand. While it is great fun to list every exalted Masonic title or incorporate phrases from the ritual in display labels, they easily confuse non-masons. But if you choose to use the title Worshipful Master, then do not be afraid to explain its origin and meaning. When in doubt give your display labels to an intelligent teenager. If he or she can understand them, then others will too.

While American and Freemasonry has changed since Carl Claudy published his essay his conclusion remains true. "... every Masonic antiquity, wherever kept and displayed, yields also a ... reverence for, the ancient laws and principles which makes Freemasonry what it is, and not something else." Today there are literally thousands of clubs, groups, and associations for men to join. While Freemasonry is the parent of most of them, it remains distinct. No other organization can claim such universality, generous charity and, most important, rich history. For too long masons have tried to be like others, but through a proper application of a little wisdom, strength, and beauty, displays of our "relics" can encourage others to become like us-brothers.

Mark A. Tabbert is Director of Collections at the George Washington Masonic Memorial in Alexandria, Virginia. This article was originally printed in *The Northern Light*, Oct 2002.

resources

Grant & Award Deadlines

MARCH

2. The National Park Service invites proposals for FY 2009 Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) grants. Two types of grants are available. Consultation/Documentation Grants are awarded annually and range from \$5,000 to \$90,000. Repatriation Grants of up to \$15,000 are awarded on an ongoing basis, October through June 2009. Applications are available online or contact: (202) 354-2203. For information go to <http://www.nps.gov/nagpra/GRANTS>

15. IMLS 21st Century Museum Professionals Grants fund a broad range of activities, including the development and implementation of classes, seminars, and workshops; resources to support leadership development; collection, assessment, development and/or dissemination of information that leads to better museum operations; activities that strengthen the use of contemporary technology tools to deliver program and services; support for the enhancement of pre-professional training programs; and organizational support for the development of internship and fellowship programs. For information visit IMLS at <http://www.imls.gov/applicants/applicants.shtm>

APRIL

1. IMLS Native American/Native Hawaiian Museum Services Program promotes enhanced learning and innovation within museums and museum related organizations, such as cultural centers. See contact information above.

Meetings & Workshops

February 25-27, 2009: The California Association of Museums (<http://www.calmuseums.org/index.html>) annual meeting will be held in San Francisco at the Hotel Kabuki.

February 26-27, 2009: The *2009 WebWise Conference on Libraries and Museums in the Digital World* will take place at the Hyatt Regency on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., with a pre-conference workshop on February 25.

March 2 & 3, 2009: *A Race Against Time: Preserving Our Audiovisual Media* will be presented by the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts, and cosponsored and hosted by the Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin Austin, TX. Register on line at <http://www.ccaha.org/education/program-calendar> or call 215-545-0613. CCAHA will also conduct this program at the Denver Public Library in Denver, CO on July 29 & 30, 2009 and in Atlanta, GA in Fall 2009, dates to be announced.

March 15 -16, 2009: The Oregon Museums Association (www.oregonmuseums.org/) annual meeting will be held at the North Lincoln County Historical Museum in Lincoln City.

March 18-20, 2009: AASLH and the Arizona Historical Society, in Tempe, AZ, will host *Digitization and Museums: Bringing Your Collections Into the 21st Century*.

Publications

Rebecca Buck and Jean Allman Gilmore, editors of the much-loved **New Museum Registration Methods**, have written another volume destined for collections managers' bookshelves everywhere. **Collection Conundrums: Solving Collections Management Mysteries** addresses the common challenge of how to resolve those collections oddballs found in every museum. The book provides guidelines for investigating and deciding what to do with items lacking a record, identification, title, or even location. The authors review a history of registration methods and the current standards for collections documentation and care. Particularly useful are the many sample forms included here, such as loan agreement, co-tenancy, storage, and deed of gift. Go to bookstore@aam-us.org to learn more.

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