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**The Rise, Decline, and Renaissance of Freemasonry in the United States during the 20th  
and 21st Century**

A Thesis presented by

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To

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## **Abstract**

During the 1960s, service clubs in the United States like the Freemasons started to diminish in membership numbers. Leading scholars have tried to understand why Americans decided to not join these various social clubs. In their focus on Freemasonry's declining members, scholars have identified external factors that have been important in shaping the fraternity's place within American society. These include changing community geography and a shift in larger patterns of sociability. Virtually none have examined how Freemasons themselves have changed their lodge in response to these external forces. This research looks at how the Masonic Lodge reacted over the course of the twentieth century. I argue that the rise in membership immediately after the end of both World War I and World War II superficially bloated lodges with inactive members. In Grand Lodge proceedings, leaders considered whether the increase in members meant quantity was supreme over quality. By the late twentieth-century, lodge leaders decided that adherence to central principles of Freemasonry should prevail over recruitment efforts that risked diluting the membership with "paper members." By the early twenty-first century, the internet brought a renaissance within Freemasonry, returning to notions of quality over quantity. Even as membership numbers decreased, members increasingly focused on Masonic philosophy, education, and symbolism.

Keywords: Masonic Membership, Social Clubs, Freemasonry, Esotericism, Masonic Education, United States History

Freemasonry is one of the U.S. largest and most significant voluntary organizations. Members have included presidents and prominent businessmen. As a significant gathering place for American men, the changes it has experienced reflect changes in masculine sociability, and even in the social framework. Due to their long existence as a fraternity attracting elite men of society, and because of their policy of strict secrecy, Freemasons are more likely to be subject of crazy conspiracy theories, shadowy adventure movies, or late-night documentaries on the History Channel than within the scope of historical research. Only recently have researchers and historians within academia turned their attention to Freemasonry to discover the role that the organization plays within the American experience. Scholars in the United States have now examined the world's oldest fraternity from a variety of different perspectives, including how Americans organize, how Americans relate to spirituality and how Freemasonry relates to being American.<sup>1</sup>

Even though historians and sociologists are now paying attention to Freemasonry, virtually all agree that Freemasonry is dying, and they point to the gradually falling number of members since the 1960s in the United States. Many statistics and numbers back this up. Some have even suggested that the fraternity itself will cease to exist by the year 2040 at its current rate.<sup>2</sup> In their focus on Freemasonry's declining members, scholars have identified external factors that have undoubtedly been important in shaping the fraternity's changing place in society. These include changing community geography and a shift in larger patterns of sociability. Virtually none, however, have taken time to examine how Freemasons themselves

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<sup>1</sup> Penny Long Marler and C. Kirk Hadaway, "'Being Religious' or 'Being Spiritual' in America: A Zero-Sum Proposition?," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 41, no. 2 (2002): pp. 289-300, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-5906.00117>, 289.

<sup>2</sup> John M Hineck, "Understanding the Decline in Participation in Fraternal Organizations: A Mixed Methods Approach" (dissertation, 2018)) 4.

have changed their lodge in response to these external forces. Yet by neglecting the lodge's own response, they have missed a crucial shift within the lodge, that illustrates its continuing significance to those members who remain. As the Freemasons' numbers decline, Freemasonry began to return to its spiritual and esoteric roots, indicating that it is playing a different role today than at the peak of its membership in the twentieth century.

As several historians have argued, in the early twentieth century the fundamental changes in community and social organization changed the structure and motivations of lodges from a society of spiritual and moral character into one of a civic-based society represented by early twentieth-century Americanism. My research looks at how the Masonic Lodge reacts as the twentieth century progresses and argues that the rise in membership immediately after the end of both World War I and World War II superficially bloated lodges with inactive members. Rather than representing increased lodge influence, these members in name only caused a fundamental dilemma within lodges. In Grand Lodge proceedings leaders considered whether the increase in members meant quantity being supreme over quality. Ultimately, by the late twentieth century lodge leaders decided that adherence to central principles of Freemasonry should prevail over recruitment efforts that risked diluting the membership with "paper members."

By the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the emergence of the internet brought on a renaissance within Freemasonry that demonstrates that as membership numbers have decreased, there has been an increase in the proliferation and discussion of Masonic philosophy, education, and symbolism within lodges which looks at a long line of esoteric thought and promotion within the fraternity since its foundation. In fact, even as the number of Freemasons seem to indicate a declining influence, there has been a revival, harkening back to a style of Freemasonry, which emphasizes spirituality and ritual but not in place of civic-based practices, but congruent with it. Just as the

changes in in early twentieth century Masonry represented changes in masculine sociability in the early twentieth century, this recent masonic revival reveals something about the fragmented, but more focused spiritual and community concerns of the twenty-first century. The return to the esoteric and ritual-based Freemasonry thus mirrors other developments that have brought a renewed emphasis on spirituality in U.S. culture.

### **Masonic Esotericism**

While the Freemasons' move west in the nineteenth century shows a desire for an orderly life in new circumstances, it also shows the continued appeal of the esoteric aspects of Freemasonry. Therefore, this term needs to be explained from a Masonic perspective. The dictionary definition of esotericism refers to the knowledge that is restricted to a small group.<sup>3</sup> When applying this term to Freemasonry, it becomes complex and can take on various forms or definitions.

Three different definitions of esotericism are relevant. First represents the idea that any of the Masonic lectures or ritual are considered secret and reserved solely for a closed Masonic meeting, whereby outsiders are not allowed to listen or witness.<sup>4</sup> This implies that there exists a dichotomy of two groups and their relation to knowledge, the exoteric and the esoteric. William Preston, the most famous of American Freemasons who authored various lectures in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, first mentions this division between the esoteric and exoteric classes in 1801 by saying that the ancient teacher "divided them into the esoteric and exoteric classes: to the former he intrusted(sic) the more sublime and secret doctrines, to the latter the more simple and popular."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Esoteric," Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, 2008, <http://www.webster.com/dictionary/esoteric>.

<sup>4</sup> Shawn Eyer, "Defining Esotericism from a Masonic Perspective," *The Journal of the Masonic Society*, no. 2 (2008): pp. 16.

<sup>5</sup> William Preston, *Illustrations of Masonry* (London: Wilkie, 1801), 99.

The second form relates to the hidden meanings, which may be implicit, and designed to be obscured within Masonic symbolism, lecture, and ritual. This definition extends the first definition to the Freemasons themselves rather than to the uninitiated. Whereby the first definition relates to the uninitiated and the initiated, the second definition creates a division of those within Freemasonry that understand the esoteric or hidden knowledge that exists within the ritual and those new initiates that are unfit to comprehend the ritual's deeper meaning.<sup>6</sup> We can see this represented in a Masonic song from 1731 which mentions that “*sublime Truths* are not obtain'd any otherwise than by a *right Study*, and an Endeavour to find out the *real Sense*, which being always *veil'd*, are holy therefore and sacred.”<sup>7</sup> In this, the second definition denotes that the ritual itself has both an exoteric and esoteric or hidden meaning for which those with an esoteric lens may understand.

Lastly, esotericism from a Masonic perspective relates to the broader umbrella and field of “Western Esotericism” (alchemy, kabbalah, Christian Hermeticism, and any other mystical approach which gained an audience during the Renaissance era). Numerous amounts of Masonic authors in comparative religion, symbolism, and philosophy have purported the idea that Freemasonry is an inheritor of these various traditions or at least a means by which these older philosophies have been resurrected or continued.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the institution of Freemasonry can be classified as belonging to the wider range of disciplines, philosophies, and ideas that belong to the field of Western Esotericism.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Shawn Eyer, “Defining Esotericism from a Masonic Perspective. 16.

<sup>7</sup> “*The New Fairies*”, *In A Curious Collection of the Most Celebrated Songs in Honour of Masonry* (London: Creak and Cole, 1731).

<sup>8</sup> Eyer, “Defining Esotericism from a Masonic Perspective. 19.

<sup>9</sup> For a more comprehensive look at the topic of Western Esotericism, Wouter J. Hanegraaff's *Western Esotericism: A Guide for the Perplexed* and Antoine Faivre's *Western Esotericism: A Concise History* are highly recommended for a better understanding.



Most Masonic authors during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century have concentrated on the second and third definition of Masonic esotericism and these ideas will be expounded on in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century publications and research. The promotion of Masonic esotericism and education withstood the influx of large members entering the lodge in the twentieth century as the membership boom fills lodge rooms.

### **Historiography**

Most of the historical attention to Freemasonry in the U.S. has been paid to its early years in the U.S. The most comprehensive treatment on the colonial/early republic period was written by Steven C. Bullock *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730-1840*. Bullock's book traces Freemasonry from its inception in England, to the fraternity's role in the Revolution, and then argues that Masonry changed the social order within American society.<sup>10</sup> Concentrating on the colonial elite establishment, Bullock argues that they used Freemasonry and the lodge as a means of affirming their right to dictate and construct a ruling class.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, Bullock argues that Freemasonry played an integral part in framing American culture after the American Revolution and although it is portrayed as a selective group, the lodge became increasingly inclusive to those in other classes that were not of the ruling class. As Bullock states, "Ancient Masons helped reshape the social distribution of power in America."<sup>12</sup> Additionally, Bullock mentions the Christianization of Masonic ritual that helped "proclaim the truths of Christianity."<sup>13</sup> Therefore, even in its early years, the Masonic Lodge acted as a moldable vessel for the rapid changes in society in the new nation.

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<sup>10</sup> Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 5.

<sup>11</sup> Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 59.

<sup>12</sup> Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 107.

<sup>13</sup> Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 163.

David G. Hackett picks up this story in *That Religion in Which All Men Agree: Freemasonry in American Culture*. He argues that while it might appear that American men were much less religious than their female counterparts in the mid-nineteenth century, their religiosity was expressed in different location, a Masonic lodge. Hackett further illustrates this by saying that the dominant Protestant sphere of influence on American men was not as strong as once thought and that Freemasonry played more of an important role in “American religious past.”<sup>14</sup> Thus, in the nineteenth century, even though it was not a religion, Masonic membership provided moral instruction and spiritual solace to men dissatisfied with conventional Christianity.<sup>15</sup> Hackett’s work demonstrates the complexity and continued appeal of spiritual and esotericism within and without which it retained for many masons into the twenty-first century.

Still, dramatic changes did occur around the turn of the twentieth century, and these changes are well detailed in Lynn Dumenil’s work, *Freemasonry and American Culture: 1880-1930*. As Dumenil argues, in the context of urbanization and commercialization of American culture, lodges that were once sanctuaries would adapt and change into more open and commercially orientated club after World War I.<sup>16</sup> The Masonic lodge became a meeting place for leisure time rather than a sacred place to instill symbolic bonds based off ritual and secrets.<sup>17</sup> This is seen even in the appendant bodies, like the Scottish Rite, where the cultural and social forces influenced the transition of Masonic ritual from lodge experience into that of theater.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> David G. Hackett, *That Religion in Which All Men Agree: Freemasonry in American Culture* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2015) ix.

<sup>15</sup> Hackett, *That Religion in Which All Men Agree*, 227.

<sup>16</sup> Lynn Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture: 1880-1930* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984) 221.

<sup>17</sup> Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 203.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Ann Clawson, “Masculinity, Consumption and the Transformation of Scottish Rite Freemasonry in the Turn-of-the-Century United States,” *Gender & History* 19, no. 1 (April 2007): pp. 101-121, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0424.2007.00466.x>, 101.

These three works, then take the study of Freemasonry up into the early twentieth century. But historical studies of freemasonry past the 1920s are scant, and indeed what scholarship exists is primarily sociological and political documenting the slow decline in membership but doing little to explain it historically. When Robert D. Putnam's work published his well-known analysis of social disintegration entitled *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* he was able to regard the decline of freemasonry as a foregone conclusion. The declining membership of freemasonry was just one more example of social disconnectedness that he sees in American life after the 1960s compared to that of the first half of the twentieth century.

Putnam did do some historical analysis, as to why Americans are choosing to stay home rather than join social organizations like Masonic lodges. As women entered the workforce, male sociability changed, and the time available for married couples' social interaction decreased. As other critics have mentioned, it might have been more compelling if Putnam included the extraneous pressure for more working hours on the workforce to compete in the global system as well.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, technological advances like television, and later computers, promote a level of isolation. The third factor Putnam identifies is geographic, based on the idea that as the sprawl of American society and the movement further and further away from each other, along with commuting to work, hinders sociability and setting down roots in a new area as moving from neighborhood to neighborhood becomes more common. These forces work together to create generational changes so that younger people have different ideas about social interaction.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Karen Wright, "Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community by Robert D. Putnam," *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 12, no. 2 (June 2001): pp. 181-184) 183.

<sup>20</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 65-78.

Putnam's work, though controversial in some aspects, has been quite influential, and subsequent work, such as Theda Skocpol's work *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civil Life*, also argues that the decline of civic society declined in the 1960s and illustrates, like Putnam, the peak in membership in voluntary organization in the decades preceding World War II.<sup>21</sup> Skocpol argues that "broad expressions of community or fellow citizenship" were replaced by a more "specialized, instrumental activities" within the civic universe and social clubs were replaced by a new class of organizations that occupied civic life which are advocacy groups as well as non-profits which concentrated more on lobbying and influencing public opinion.<sup>22</sup>

Still, while the social trends noted by Putnam and Skocpol are quantitatively hard to dispute, their historical significance remains less certain. To understand historically what is happening within groups like freemasonry, it is important to look inside the organization, and see how they changed from their peak years of influence, and then, when their declining numbers became obvious, how they attempted to respond. In the discussions they hold in formal meetings such as conventions one can see other forces, rather than mere social disintegration at work. Furthermore, as the Freemasons who remained sought to rally their organization, their choices to return to esoteric and ritual show what they valued about the organization. This study argues that the changes within freemasonry are as revealing as the what the outside world saw as simply declining membership.

This research solely looks at the more common organizations and members of Freemasonry but there is excellent work being done in the field of Freemasonry from other

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<sup>21</sup> Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civil Life* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003)68.

<sup>22</sup> Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Civil Life*, 163.

perspectives including Prince Hall, Native American tribes and their experiences within lodges, and even co-Masonry which includes both men and women in lodge. Certainly, further work needs to be done in how these groups have been affected by the membership changes during the twentieth century.<sup>23</sup>

This study's main sources are the digitized annual proceedings from the Grand Lodge of California and what Freemasons themselves have said in relation to Freemasonry and membership. The Grand Lodge of California has digitized all their annual communication proceedings from 1850 to present and placed them online for members to view for their reading pleasure.<sup>24</sup> The Grand Lodge of California is similar to the rest of the United States in relation to membership numbers and decline. The only difference is the time period by which California experienced its period of growth after World War I and in the mid-twentieth century. Big membership numbers for American Grand Lodges were in 1928 (3,296,00) and 1959 (4,103,00), California's high membership numbers were 1930 (142,400) and 1965 (244,500). The reason for this offset is due to the increasing population in the state of California, the growth of urban development, and the opening of international markets.<sup>25</sup> As one of U.S. Masonry's largest constituencies, California is an appropriate place to begin the analysis of freemasonry in the later twentieth century.

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<sup>23</sup> Some excellent scholarship in these fields include Joy Porter's book *Native American Freemasonry: Associationalism and Performance in America*, Loretta Williams' work *Black Freemasonry and Middle-Class Realities* and Karen Kidd's book *haunted Chambers: The Lives of Early Women Freemasons*

<sup>24</sup> It must be stated that I was able to gain access to these sources due to my membership and received approval from the Grand Lodge of California to use these primary sources. I am sure others would be able to gain admission to these documents but the accessibility from my position was easier. This database of digitized proceedings was downloaded from <https://freemason.org/memberCenter/secured/publications.htm>

<sup>25</sup> California Freemasonry, 1850-2000: The Past Fifty Years (San Francisco, CA: Grand Lodge of Free & Accepted Masons of California, 2000), 242.

## History of Freemasonry in United States and California

To better understand the membership issues that occur in the middle of the twentieth century and a way of reimagining membership, it is best to have a basic level of understanding of the history of Freemasonry, in general, and in the United States specifically. One needs to understand the beginnings and formation of the organization.

The organization of Freemasonry has an uncertain understanding of its own past and the genesis story it tells about itself is ambiguous at best. This complicates studying or researching the organization for historians because there is no set date or person that creates Freemasonry. The leading theory is that speculative Freemasonry originated from the stone mason's guilds of Europe and eventually started to initiate members into their society who were not particularly operative masons themselves. The usual date that is set as a foundation of the current form of Freemasonry is June 24<sup>th</sup>, 1717. This correlates with the erection of the first Grand Lodge of Freemasons which was organized together by four lodges who desired to separate from the stonemason's guilds in England and unify under the name of the Grand Lodge of London and Westminster.<sup>26</sup>

Freemasonry eventually found its way to the colonies with the help of British Empire spreading throughout the globe. Within the colonies, the rich and elite society formulated lodges, the first being in Boston in 1733. One of the oldest Masonic documents in existence comes from a manuscript found in 1849 in the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts known as *A Dissertation Upon Masonry, Deliver'd to a Lodge in America, June 24th, 1734*. The exact author and location of the lodge that it was given at is unknown, although it was more than likely given in Boston of

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<sup>26</sup>Mark A. Tabbert, *American Freemasons: Three Centuries of Building Communities* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 2006), 24.

Philadelphia. This document shows that Freemasonry was involved in the colonies to some extent and lodges met and were organized before the American Revolutionary War.

After the war, American Freemasonry emphasized ritual, decorated sanctuaries, dramatic action, and symbolism. This emphasis on rituals led Freemasons back to a seventeenth-century longing for ancient wisdom mixed with romanticism ideals of searching for identity through deep feelings.<sup>27</sup> This promotion of ritual and esoteric Freemasonry responded and contributed to American society post-revolution. In David Hackett's words, the lodges, like Protestant groups "looked to the past for wisdom amid the social uncertainty and religious pluralism of the early eighteenth century."<sup>28</sup> As society began to modernize, Americans and Freemasons looked inward to find meaning and wisdom to find certainty, emphasizing the esoteric nature of Freemasonry.

This spiritual and esoteric nature of Freemasonry paralleled religious institutions in the nineteenth century that had ritual, prayer, dramatic pageantry, and volumes of sacred Law on an altar.<sup>29</sup> The lodge was seen as a synonymous institution that, at times, would compete against organized religion. The Grand Lodge of California in 1899 pressed this point by stating that the most important work, even over charity, was "the preservation of its Ritual in its integrity".<sup>30</sup> The importance of this would change over time, as we will see, but it is crucial to note the importance that spirituality played within Masonic lodges in the mid to late nineteenth century. As Freemasonry moved west, it continued to offer a place for spiritual relief, for the men who took it with them.

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<sup>27</sup> Hackett, *That Religion in Which All Men Agree*, 84.

<sup>28</sup> Hackett, *That Religion in Which All Men Agree*, 103.

<sup>29</sup> Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880-1930*, 31.

<sup>30</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California* (San Francisco, CA, 1899) 280.

During the early years of California's formation in the Republic, Freemasonry was not only present but growing. During the Gold Rush of 1849, numerous amounts of settlers traveled to California in search of fortune. Many settlers who came to California in the early days were Freemasons. They brought with them not only dreams of riches but also their Masonic traditions. In consequence, many of the earliest lodges to arise during this time were in the mining towns. Not only was this push towards the West for riches but for class and culture as well. The northeastern Americans who travelled West were middle-class men.<sup>31</sup> Freemasonry is an organization that is inclusive of all classes and professions. California had a number of these middle-class fortune-seekers who became Freemasons as a part of striving to not only better their financial situation but their culture, community, and class.

The myth of the "wild west" is believed by the notion that average middle-class Americans from the northeast aimed to bring with them their customs, courtesies, and morals to distinguish themselves from the rough and disorderly state of affairs that was current in the West.<sup>32</sup> To the Freemason, the ideals of good citizenship and tolerance for other humans are congruent with the middle-class culture that spread to California. In a part of the world where one could feel distant and alone, there was a lodge that could give solace to every mason who trudged away in the mines.

The same year that California became a state, the Grand Lodge of California was established in Sacramento.<sup>33</sup> At the formation of Grand Lodge of California, the first Most

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<sup>31</sup>Brian Roberts, *American Alchemy: The California Gold Rush and Middle-Class Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000) 5.

<sup>32</sup>Roberts, *American Alchemy*, 230.

<sup>33</sup>Grand Lodge of California, *Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California* (San Francisco, CA,1857) 14-21.



Worshipful Master of California, Jonathan D. Stevenson, gave a speech to the new members of the Grand Lodge informing them that brotherly love and affection is recommended and shall be given to all. In addition, Stevenson promoted the idea that “no strife should ever exist either among Masons or Lodges, except that honorable strife or emulation of who can best promote the happiness of his fellow man.”<sup>34</sup>

The first lodges gathered and were granted charters to meet and conduct business in California as they arrived. On November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1848, a charter was given to California Lodge No. 13, now known as California Lodge No. 1, by the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia to organize and meet regularly.<sup>35</sup> The first Worshipful Master of the newly founded lodge, Levi Stowell, transported the charter from Washington to San Francisco. Levi traveled to San Francisco by ship that went South on the Atlantic Ocean towards Panama. Once he arrived at Panama, Levi had to carry the charter by mule across the isthmus towards the Pacific. Once Levi reached the coastline of the Pacific Ocean, he waited several weeks until another ship arrived to transport him and the charter to San Francisco. Levi finally arrived in San Francisco on February 28<sup>th</sup>, 1849.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 1857*, 28.

<sup>35</sup>San Francisco, accessed March 27, 2018, [http://ohp.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=21482](http://ohp.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=21482).

<sup>36</sup> The first Masonic funeral service took place before California was even admitted into the United States. A heavily tattooed man was found floating in the San Francisco Bay and upon examining the body, he was found to be holding on him a shekel of a Mark Master Mason, which was inscribed with his initials. The tattoos on his body were those of the symbolism of Freemasonry and contained the images of the Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Mason. Upon the discovery, examination, and conclusion that he indeed was a Freemason, a large number of brothers, although not knowing him personally, gathered to pay respects and give their brother a Masonic funeral. Although the man’s name was never known, the Masonic community came together and rendered unto him a Masonic ceremony. From this source, we can see that the funeral had a large attendance of Freemasons who came from “all quarters of the globe” *History of Nevada with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers* (Oakland, CA: Thompson and West, 1881) 234.

## California and the Membership Booms

Nonetheless, as California lodges developed and received a new influx of members beginning at the turn of the twentieth century, there is no doubt that meant that esotericism at least briefly declined in importance when considering the outcome and consequences of the membership booms after both World Wars, it is important to ascertain the ideas of Freemasons and their thoughts about the new influx of members into the fraternity. In doing so, a chronological approach of looking at the Grand Lodge of California's Annual Proceedings minutes through the various years during and after the membership booms of World War I and World War II will give insight into the ideas, thoughts, and motivations about membership numbers.

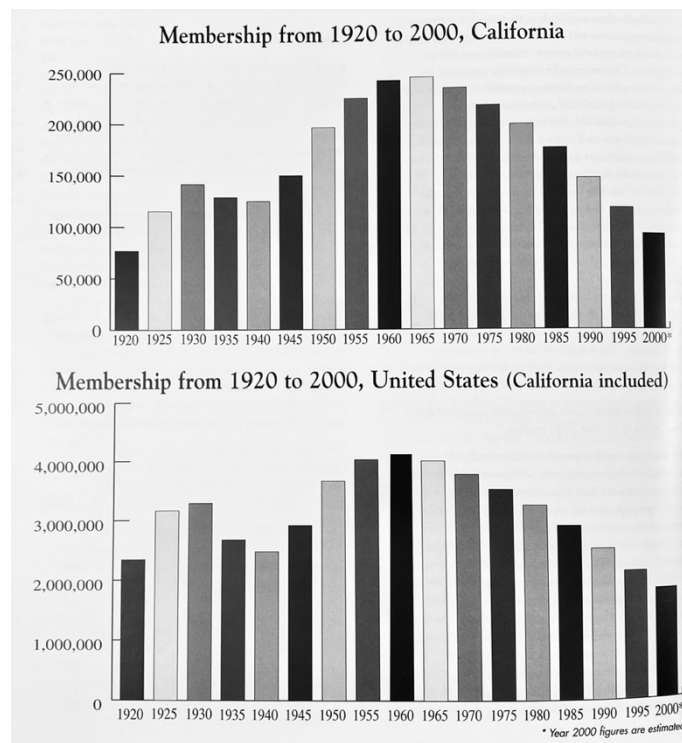
One thing to note is that the membership boom of World War One is that the increase in new members started to occur not after the war but during it. The Grand Master of California in 1918 stated that there were a lot of degrees of initiation occurring in California but that the lodges were lacking in instruction of the more philosophical and spiritual demands of the members.

The conception that the prosperity and greatness of a Lodge is measured by its large membership and its wealth is erroneous. That Lodge is prosperous and great which commands the affections of its members and displays spiritual rather than material wealth. The conferring of degrees is essential and desirable, but a Lodge abrogates some of its responsibilities and neglects its fairest opportunities when it devotes its entire time to the conferring of degrees and fails to unite its membership into an homogeneous spiritual and working whole. This homogeneity can be accomplished only by as assiduous attention to the needs and desires of those who are already Masons as it does to the prayers of those seeking to become Masons. By failing to respond to the intellectual and spiritual demands of their members some of our Lodges are losing the interest and active support of many of the best Masons of California, and are in danger of becoming the patrons of the mediocre.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California* (San Francisco, CA, 1918) 13.

Even at the onset of this membership boom, the leadership of the Grand Lodge was noticing that an increase in membership without instruction in the meaning and philosophical underpinnings of Freemasonry would become “mediocre”. The increase in degrees were acting like a double-edged sword within the fraternity by both providing more members but at the same time not having enough time or reason to provide meaningful Masonic education. The move from a lodge of religious and spiritual characteristics gave way to the promotion of Freemasonry as a civic institution that promoted Americanism at the onset of World War I.<sup>38</sup>



This idea of a lack of substance in favor of a growing membership would continue in 1919 in which the Grand Master of California would warn again that the quality of Masonic membership would succumb to the quantitative aspect. The Grand Lodge also stated that the new

<sup>38</sup> Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880-1930*, 116-117.

<sup>39</sup> *California Freemasonry, 1850-2000*, 250.

Freemasons who were entering the lodge desired more social events, lesser degrees, shorter ritual, an emphasizing of the social aspect of Masonic membership. The Grand Master at this time stated that he had seen the dissatisfaction with the emphasis of meetings placed on ritualistic activities and that “the remedy, if such there be for these conditions, seems clearly indicated to confer fewer degrees...and emphasize the social features.”<sup>40</sup> We can see here that the institution was starting to transform into a different form of Masonic experience which elevated the social events over the educational. The annual proceedings will illustrate this change. For in the Grand Master’s closing remarks, he says “In conclusion, then, it seems that so far as we can make a general recommendation, it should be along the line of emphasizing the social and fraternal features of our order.”<sup>41</sup>

This change from a philosophical and educational aspect to a social club would become even more strengthened in 1920 when the Grand Master of California stated that the ritual needed to be reduced and that more extra-curricular events centered around socializing and dinners needed to be added to lodges to attract more members.<sup>42</sup> The ritual committee of the Grand Lodge would promote this by looking into reducing the lectures of the degrees so that the rituals of initiation are shorter in time.<sup>43</sup> Even so, the Grand Master still professed the “ill-fate of lodges if not given importance to ritual and philosophy.”<sup>44</sup> Again, the Grand Lodge addresses the quantity over quality issue and said that there were “too many members and not enough

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<sup>40</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California* (San Francisco, CA,1919) 359.

<sup>41</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 1919*, 359.

<sup>42</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California* (San Francisco, CA,1920) 78.

<sup>43</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 1920*, 310.

<sup>44</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 1920*, 79.

masons.”<sup>45</sup> Still, the Grandmaster felt the lure of new members as he would then state that there needed to be changes to those rituals to make it quicker.<sup>46</sup>

It is apparent that in 1920 we can see the rise of social Freemasonry and the decline of educational Freemasonry although some still emphasized the importance of the latter. It appears that the membership of the Grand Lodge recognized the importance of Masonic education but at the same time understood the growing demand for a more social organization. This ultimately would put the Grand Lodge in a precarious situation of being caught in the middle of trying to accommodate both those new members who wanted to have an experience reflective of those that exist in other fraternal organizations at the time and those who sought to keep the lodge spiritual.

The solidification of social Freemasonry occurred even more in 1922 when members of the Grand Lodge started shifting the lens of the lodges towards more labor and social issues that existed at the time. For instance, during the Grand Orator’s speech, he informed the brethren in attendance that the Grand Lodge wanted to take on roles relating to educational support, political, and social endeavors as well. He saw Masonry as a way to help and resolve the labor dispute in America if members were both employee and employer.<sup>47</sup> Turning the gaze towards issues in America and ways that Masonic lodges can fix or alleviate some of them, the Grand Orator also told the typical Freemason to “rededicate himself” to Americanism.<sup>48</sup> This is a change from nineteenth-century Freemasonry where universality was preached. This universality was characteristic of associating men without regard to their class or nationality.<sup>49</sup> In contrast to

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<sup>45</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 1920*, 86.

<sup>46</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 1920*, 108.

<sup>47</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California* (San Francisco, CA, 1922) 82.

<sup>48</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 1922*, 84.

<sup>49</sup> Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 9.

the inclusion of Americanism into twentieth-century Freemasonry, the Freemasons of the nineteenth were receptive to immigrants. California had three lodges that were distinctly ethnic lodges, Italiana Speranza, Parfaite Union, and Hermann.<sup>50</sup>

This injection of Americanism into lodges was appealing to members who were looking for outlets of patriotism when Catholics, immigrants, and radicals were of concern to the American public during the 1920s.<sup>51</sup> There is good information about the cross-membership of Freemasons and those within the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s. The Grand Lodge of California forbade dual membership with the Klan as it aimed to reconcile the need for both organizations to exist and complement one another.<sup>52</sup> This Americanism even created appendant bodies to Freemasonry like those of the National Sojourners. The National Sojourners started clubs in 1900 in the Philippines during the Spanish American War and officially became an organization in Chicago in 1917 by former and current military members. The meaning of these clubs was to unite Freemasons who were displaced around the world into traveling lodges on bases to both meet and even create lodges in foreign nations. The efforts of the National Sojourners have been from then until now the promotion of Americanism and Masonic activities. They provided patriotic services centered around speeches, presentations, and ceremonies that were intent on showing love of their country and the promotion of national security.<sup>53</sup> This fundamental change to the lodges defined the fraternity itself as a patriotic organization, which made it more accessible and sparked interest in the community.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 10.

<sup>51</sup> Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 153.

<sup>52</sup> Adam G. Kendall, "Freemasonry and the Second Ku Klux Klan in California, 1921-1925," *Journal for Research into Freemasonry and Fraternalism* 2, no. 1 (2011): pp. 123-143, <https://doi.org/10.1558/jrff.v2i1.123>.

<sup>53</sup> "History," National Sojourners, accessed January 26, 2021, <https://nationalsojourners.org/history>.

<sup>54</sup> Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 154.

Even with this inclusion of Americanism into lodges, we can see the Grand Lodge members struggling with how to retain members in lodges. The Committee on Jurisprudence explains that the rapid growth of members that have entered the lodges in the past few years have not found the way “into the spirit of Masonry” and stressed further the importance of instilling in their minds the true meaning of Masonry.<sup>55</sup> Here we can see that the importance of spiritual Freemasonry remained an issue for a number of members, particularly in the leadership, but rather there had been a division of thought about whether to become either more social or spiritual.

The membership spike in fact created a bind for the lodges. On one hand we see still see big membership numbers during 1922 but on the other hand, the Grand Master, worried about the essence of Freemasonry, stated that his motive for the year was to have more lodges with fewer members rather than less lodges with more members.<sup>56</sup> This bind which lodges found themselves in meant more membership dues to pay for the new real property that was owned or rented by these lodges, which led lodges to concentrate on only initiating new members to pay on these new founded financial burdens. Whereas, if the lodges still had the preexisting lodges initiate more members, then the dues already being paid would suffice and the coffers of the lodge’s treasury would be filled for future savings or educational events.

The Grand Lodge in 1923 still advocated for spiritual and educational Freemasonry. The Grand Master pushed back on social and moral Masonry and stated that “Masonry is not a beneficiary society.”<sup>57</sup> Unlike the other fraternal orders that existed to promote the welfare of the community through engagement and financial support, the Grand Lodge in 1923 looked to

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<sup>55</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 1922*, 355.

<sup>56</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 1922*, 17.

<sup>57</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California* (San Francisco, CA, 1923) 475.

separate itself from those other groups. Additionally, we can see that the Grand Lodge was starting to question their ethos as an organization at this point when the question about “what is Freemasonry” was asked before the Grand Lodge. In the answer to this question, we see an admission of change from the Grand Lodge while still holding on to the spiritual and esoteric underpinnings of Freemasonry.

The Grand Master stated that esotericism had always been a part of Masonry but agreed that the lodge is now a sociable one for the mutual aid and comfort of others.<sup>58</sup> Masonry had always appealed to search for Truth, but that was apparently quickly fading as the Grand Secretary stated that the members were anxious about too many members joining too fast and not assimilating into the lodge and understanding what Freemasonry is.<sup>59</sup> The Grand Lecturer said that the Masters and members of the lodge, when performing the ritual, were doing so without explaining or they themselves not understanding the content or meaning of that which they are reciting.

As Lynn Dumenil has argued, anxieties concerning the threats facing American society at the time de-emphasized the religious and ritualistic qualities of the lodge.<sup>60</sup> Going back to the earlier fears of the Grand Lodge saying that lodges have become degree mills, we can see here fears that lodges have now just become just that, a mill that has now lost the reasoning for why they are even doing the rite or ritual.<sup>61</sup> What was discussed in lodges changed from that of topics on Masonry to increasingly more non-Masonic topics on Americanism, Bolshevism, crime, law, and public education.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 1923*, 467-477.

<sup>59</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 1923*, 488.

<sup>60</sup> Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880-1930*, 148.

<sup>61</sup> Marco G Thorne and Levi Stowell, “Bound for the Land of Canaan, Ho!: The Diary of Levi Stowell,” *California Historical Society Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (March 1948): pp. 33-50.

<sup>62</sup> Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880-1930*, 133.



Other freemasons were writing and publishing books at this time stressing the importance of Masonic education and the division of thought that was occurring within lodges. One famous Freemason at the time, W.L. Wilmschurst argued in his book *The Masonic Initiation* that some members wish to not be educated at all and that they wish to be known as Mason in name only. Additionally, he said that there existed brothers within the lodge that are seeking “Wisdom and Light” but lose interest when they see what the lodge has to offer.<sup>63</sup> The desire for Freemasons to learn and take part in the more esoteric perspective of Freemasonry remained but was being diminished by the joiners who fill the lodges in the 1920s.

This further adds to the case that the esoteric or more spiritual aspect of Freemasonry existed, as a concern among some members albeit being more of a shadow in the background, but the importance of social Freemasonry was elevated. These issues do not cease to exist as the twentieth century continued and the same issues would present themselves into the mid-late twentieth century.

### **Membership Issues in the Mid-Late 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

As we have seen, the issues with membership started during and after the World Wars that occurred during the earlier part of the twentieth century. These issues become more apparent as the century continued from the 1960s forward to the twenty-first. The Grand Lodge in the 1950s still expressed an interest in growing the membership and more suggestions were made to ensure that members come to lodge meetings and stay. The membership issues of the lodges started to occur here before the decline appeared in the following decade.

On the report of the condition of the Craft in 1955, the Secretary announced that 8,679 new Master Masons were made in that year and that the membership was showing steady

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<sup>63</sup> W. L. Wilmschurst, *The Masonic Initiation, Revised Edition* (Martinez: Plumbstone, 2007), 15.

growth. Additionally, he commented that there was “harmony and cooperation” in the Craft that likewise seemed to be growing within the lodges. This was all situated against a suggestion saying that lodges make their meetings shorter and keeping discussion within lodge to a minimum so that the lodge members can join in fellowship sessions after the lodge is closed for the evening.<sup>64</sup> This makes it apparent that members were not coming to lodge and that the qualitative experience was waning as the membership numbers continue to grow. The distinctly Masonry quality of meetings was reduced to showing up to quickly run through a meeting so that after lodge gatherings could occur. The experience moved out of the lodge and into the dining room or elsewhere. This loss of profound experience would start to become exacerbated as the membership starts to decline in the 1960s.

The mid 1960s did see the first nationwide decline in Masonry membership since the nineteenth century. Even in California, the 1964 Annual Communication reported a positive growth of only five new members into Freemasonry. The Grand Secretary also noted that California was one of a very select few of Grand Lodges in the United States that were able to report a gain in membership.<sup>65</sup> Even so, the Grand Lodge remained optimistic and the leadership stated that Freemasonry in California is “in a most healthy situation and making real and substantial progress toward a great Masonic future.”<sup>66</sup> This would be short lived as 1966 would show membership decline even in California. We can also see that deaths of members began to rise around this time as well for in 1965, the Grand Lodge reported its largest number of deaths within the fraternity at 462 in that single year, indicating an aging Freemasonry population.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California* (San Francisco, CA, 1955) 24-25.

<sup>65</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California* (San Francisco, CA, 1964) 17-18.

<sup>66</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 1964*, 18.

<sup>67</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California* (San Francisco, CA, 1965) 190.

During the 1966 Annual Communication, the Grand Secretary reported on a ten-year study of suspensions for non-payment of dues within lodges. The Grand Lodge found that 12,987 members were suspended, and it represented more than all the brethren raised in a two-year period. The Grand Master at the time stated that not only was the membership decreasing but that the average age was increasing as well, but not to worry because other Grand Lodges in the United States were recording greater losses.<sup>68</sup> The committee on correspondence looked at all the proceedings from the forty-nine Masonic jurisdictions in the United States and indicated that the biggest problem concerning Freemasonry is “the preservation of Freemasonry’s fundamental philosophy and landmarks in light of the constant changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some of which was having an impact on Masonry in general.”<sup>69</sup>

The Secretaries reported at the annual communication of 1970 shows a net loss of 3,015 members in that year, almost triple the amount since 1966.<sup>70</sup> As a response, the Grandmaster for that year in his message to the brethren, noted that he thought that nothing is more important than Masonic education for its membership and that he felt that if the members were more knowledgeable about Freemasonry, that it would strengthen it.<sup>71</sup> As the 1970s progressed, the Grand Lodge reported on average a loss of 3,272-3,777 members per year in the state, and the deaths stayed consistently around 500 members per year as well.<sup>72</sup> In some instances, this membership decline was not even discussed by the Grand Master and Secretary, and a graph of membership totals was just given to the members to view without analysis or commentary. In

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<sup>68</sup> Grand Lodge of California, Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California (San Francisco, CA,1966) 48.

<sup>69</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 1966*, 175.

<sup>70</sup> Grand Lodge of California, Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California (San Francisco, CA,1970) 78.

<sup>71</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 1970*, 30.

<sup>72</sup> Grand Lodge of California, Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California (San Francisco, CA,1975) 62.

other instances, various committees that composed the Grand Lodge, like the inspectors committee, whose job it is to inspect and ascertain that lodges ritual and work were being done correctly in each jurisdiction, were more vocal about the issues they saw in their respective areas of the state. The Grand Lecturer noted that he sees three issues with Lodges as being three-fold. The issues he saw present were a declining interest in membership to attend lodge, the reluctance to serve in the lodge as an officer, and lastly the lack of candidates wishing to join.<sup>73</sup> The membership decline was now causing more issues within lodges, and this included members wanting to take on leadership rolls within their own lodges. If a lodge cannot field a team of leaders to run a particular lodge, then a lodge no longer is able to meet and after six months without a stated meeting, the charter for the lodge can be revoked or suspended.<sup>74</sup>

At the 1980 Annual Communication, another milestone was reached in the decline of membership. The Grand Secretary noted the largest loss in a single year to date at 4,147. Included with this loss, the Grand Secretary also notes that the large number of deaths that happen each year is due to the membership boom of the 1920s. Lastly, a trend was shown that members were now not finishing their degrees and were not progressing in their Masonic journeys in lodge.<sup>75</sup> Even so, the Grand Master at this time noted that even though membership might be declining rapidly, that lodges still had the ability to develop the greatest potential of its members, regardless of the number.<sup>76</sup>

A decade later, the declining membership continued to be an issue that appears to have no end in sight. At the 1990 Annual Communication, the Grand Master lamented during the State of

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<sup>73</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 1975*, 93.

<sup>74</sup> California Masonic Code, pg. 163.

<sup>75</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California* (San Francisco, CA, 1980) 54.

<sup>76</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 1980*, 19.

the Craft section of the annual meeting when he noted that more consolidations are occurring, and that the inspector's report showed that more are planned for the following years. He stated that "deaths, demits, and suspensions for non-payment of dues far exceed the number that we are raising...Entered Apprentices and Fellow Crafts are being dropped at an alarming rate."<sup>77</sup> The Grand Lodge at this Annual Communication expressed the need for Masonic Education and even argues that lodge dropouts decrease when an interest is shown in promoting the qualitative experience through educational topics presented to the members.<sup>78</sup> The net loss of members in the Grand Lodge continued to rise as the 1990s progressed and the Secretaries report on membership statistics seems bleak and less optimistic about the future. The Grand Secretary stated that a serious look should be taken at the losses due to suspension for non-payment of dues.<sup>79</sup>

### **Masonic Renaissance**

Things seemed to turn around in the twenty first century though, as we see the number of deaths start to decrease and the net loss starting to slow down as well. At the 2005 Annual Communication the membership reported that they saw the decline ending in the following six to eight years and that interest in the fraternity was increasing. In the same year, they had more degrees performed than in the previous twelve years and the average Master Masons raised per lodge was better than the last twenty-one years. The membership reports notes that the media plays a role in the interest, including the newest release of the movie National Treasure.<sup>80</sup>

Freemasonry was put before the eyes of American men that had an appeal towards secrecy,

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<sup>77</sup> Grand Lodge of California, Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California (San Francisco, CA,1990) 31.

<sup>78</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 1990*, 327.

<sup>79</sup> Grand Lodge of California, Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California (San Francisco, CA,1997) 168.

<sup>80</sup> Grand Lodge of California, Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California (San Francisco, CA,2005) 38-39.

esotericism, and historical significance The Grand Master in 2006 mentioned that other movies like *The Da Vinci Code* put the mysteries of Freemasonry before the public, and that this could be a reason for the surge of younger Freemasons joining.<sup>81</sup>

Likewise, during the incoming new Grand Master's speech, he noted that Masonic esoteric education is needed and the keys by which the members benefit from.<sup>82</sup> Again, we see this importance of Masonic education and the necessity of the expounding of esoteric instruction on the Craft within Freemasonry from the Grand Lodge. We can see that Masonic education played a pivotal role within upcoming leadership over the course of fifty or so years and that it needed to be present in lodges. At the same time, we see a surge in Masonic books promoting the history, esoteric, and even basic understandings of Freemasonry during the early 2000s. With the help of technology and the internet, many books both new and old have been digitized and put online in E-libraries.<sup>83</sup> Dan Brown's fictional novel *The Lost Symbol* put Freemasonry in the hands of millions of Americans and was ranked #1 on the New York Times Best Seller list in September of 2009.<sup>84</sup>

2010 even showed more promising signs of a resurgence in the interest in lodge as the Grand Lodge Secretary reported that for the first time since 1966, the Grand Lodge had an overall increase in lodges being formed rather than lost or revoked. More men were joining the lodge, and a level of activity in lodge membership reached a goal not seen in twenty-one years.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Grand Lodge of California, Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California (San Francisco, CA,2006) 74.

<sup>82</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 2005*, 93.

<sup>83</sup> One, if not the biggest, e-libraries in existence is the Count Cagliostro Masonic E-Library which has indexed 14,500 eBooks related to Masonic study.  
<https://countcagliostromasonicelibrary.wordpress.com/>

<sup>84</sup> "Hardcover Fiction Books - Best Sellers - Books," The New York Times (The New York Times, September 25, 2009), <https://www.nytimes.com/books/best-sellers/hardcover-fiction/>.

<sup>85</sup> Grand Lodge of California, Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California (San Francisco, CA,2010) 89.

Something must have been changing within these lodges. Eventually the older members that joined in the early to mid-twentieth century would have to decrease over time of course but more men were joining and going through the degrees and progressing all the way to Master Mason. The Grand Lodge insisted that the membership and new members want masonic education and a greater membership experience. What they were looking for is quality in the lodge, regardless of the quantity.<sup>86</sup> The Grand Lodge acknowledged this and the committee on ritual states that becoming a Freemason is a process and that the new members want a full initiate experience including education. The committee stated that “we must never forget that we are in the business of making Masons, not just adding to our membership rolls.”<sup>87</sup> This is a break from what the Grand Lodge mostly advocated for in the early to mid-twentieth century, the elevation of numbers. The switch to a more qualitative experience became the emphasis within Grand Lodge. One example of increasing the qualitative experience is that in 2010, the Grand Lodge reintroduced the usage of the old tradition of utilizing a chamber of reflection that lodges could put candidates into prior to their first degree of initiation. In 2012, the Grand Lodge acknowledged that this was beneficial and that lodges have been improving the educational opportunities provided to the candidates. The Grand Lodge concluded that those lodges that increased this qualitative experience of offering education in lodge, better quality ritual, and emphasized these things were the healthiest lodges.<sup>88</sup>

Growth continued all the way into 2019, 40% of lodges initiated more members than in the previous year and three divisions had overall growth including a quarter of all lodges in the state having net positive growth in membership. The Grand Lodge reports that a majority of the

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<sup>86</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 2010*, 62.

<sup>87</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 2010*, 183.

<sup>88</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California* (San Francisco, CA, 2012) 121.

losses were due to non-payment of dues and so a survey was sent out to those who were suspended and asked why they didn't pay. 64% said they could not afford their dues, 28% said they haven't received communication from their lodge, and 9% thought they had already paid their dues. Of all respondents, 82% responded by saying that they want to stay in the lodge.<sup>89</sup> Lack of income or communication issues within lodges rather than declining interest appears to be the reason behind the non-payment of dues in the twenty-first century.

Lastly, the 2020 Annual Communication was bittersweet for the Grand Lodge. For the first time since 1964, there would have been a net gain of new members in Freemasonry in California but 700 gains in membership were not realized due to the shutdowns to thwart the spread of the COVID-19 virus in March of the same year. Only 390 members were removed from the roles in a net loss for the year 2020.<sup>90</sup> Even so, the qualitative experience showed to improve in lodges in the twenty-first century and more men are joining the lodge and the already existing members are staying and participating more. The Grand Lodge indicated that the focus is on quality over quantity and that the four pillars of this are: a rewarding member experience (through education programs); memorable and meaningful degrees; strong lodges and halls; and a positive impact on society.<sup>91</sup>

### **Freemasonry in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Given this revival, the question then arises as to what is causing this increase in membership and the qualitative experience? It is apparent that Masonic education is critical to this and that the Grand Lodge saw a necessity for it to retain membership. Prominent members of

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<sup>89</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California* (San Francisco, CA,2019) 98.

<sup>90</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California* (San Francisco, CA,2020) 79-80.

<sup>91</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 2020*, 31.



Grand Lodges have proposed that men seeking lodges in the twenty-first century are looking for a more spiritual connection and that esotericism is a growing trend linked to this interest.<sup>92</sup> The Freemasons themselves meet virtually and discuss the spiritual and esoteric aspects of the Craft. If the Grand Lodge, and even local lodges, cannot provide the education and qualitative experience that the members want, they will find it on the internet amongst themselves.

As we have seen, membership stabilized and even started to grow in the early twenty-first century, after decades of decline. The question then arises about what Freemasonry will look like in the twenty-first century compared to the twentieth. How will these membership issues change or evolve as the information age changes the world, and with it, Masonic lodges too? It seems that as the quantity of members joining decreased or recedes, the qualitative experience started to improve. Freemasons, through the use of the internet, had more access to older books, articles, and works that harken back to Masonic education and esotericism that was non-existent in a majority of the twentieth century. Many websites, journals, and internet groups exist to illustrate this, but this research will highlight the more well-known and influential sources.

The internet has played a critical role in the how Americans view social, civic, professional, and spiritual groups. In a Pew research study that was taken in 2010, 68% of adults agreed that the internet has a major impact on the ways that groups communicate with members. Additionally, 49% of social media users say that they use various platforms to find groups that match their interests. 79% of internet users say that they use the internet to communicate with members.<sup>93</sup> The internet made the world a smaller place and gave society a tool by which

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<sup>92</sup> Steven Burkle, "A Guide for the New Esoteric Mason," Prometheans (Utah Grand Lodge, June 10, 2019), <http://utahgrandlodge.org/prometheans/a-guide-for-the-new-esoteric-mason>.

<sup>93</sup> Kristen Purcell and Aaron Smith, "Section 4: The Impact of the Internet on Group Activities," Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech (Pew Research Center, January 18, 2011), <https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2011/01/18/section-4-the-impact-of-the-internet-on-group-activities/>.

communication was more accessible and easier. Within various religious groups, it has given a new space to congregate and meet to discuss traditions, practices, and even meet for spiritual devotion. Religious groups are able to proselytize and form new communities that are not bound to geography.<sup>94</sup> This same factor will affect Freemasonry on a large and profound scale.

Lodge members are no longer just be confined to their lodges to which they belong physically but are able to communicate and discuss with other members around the world on a virtual level, including lodges that meet solely online.<sup>95</sup> This is both true for members seeking out other members and for leadership within the Grand Lodges as well. The United Grand Lodge of England recognized the importance of the internet as a means to both communicate with members under the Grand Lodge of England as well as dispel myths about the misinformation being spread about Freemasonry.<sup>96</sup> Social media has been used as a platform for Freemasons to voice their opinions against conspiracy theorists as well as attract new members.<sup>97</sup> Grand lodges were able to disseminate communications about legislation changes or general information at a quicker rate. Instead of lodges having to wait for the monthly stated meeting to hear communications brought to the various lodges within a state or country, Grand Lodges could email and post updates that could be instantly read by all members of the organization.

Additionally, the internet gives many people voices to express their personal opinions and beliefs, even more so than in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Lodges and Grand Lodges, with help from the internet, voiced their concerns for misinformation about the fraternity

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<sup>94</sup> Heidi Campbell, "Religion and the Internet," *Communication Research Trends: Center for the Study of Communication and Culture* 25, no. 1 (2006): pp. 1-43, 4-6.

<sup>95</sup> Vic Dorman, "What Is It?," *Internet Lodge No. 9659*, November 2001, <https://internet.lodge.org.uk/index.php/whatisit>.

<sup>96</sup> Nigel Brown, "Masonic Communications in an Electronic Age," *Freemasonry Today* (United Grand Lodge of England, September 14, 2011), <https://www.freemasonrytoday.com/ugle-sgc/ugle/masonic-communications-in-an-electronic-age>.

<sup>97</sup> Jessica Lucas, "Tiktok's Freemasons Are Battling the Haters and Conspiracy Theorists," *Input* (Input, May 25, 2022), <https://www.inputmag.com/culture/freemasons-tiktok-conspiracy-theories>.

through social media and websites.<sup>98</sup> Not only do websites from the Grand Lodge of England disseminate information to members and the public at large but the members themselves created websites to share their thoughts, opinions, and information as well. Websites like FreemasonInformation.com are created by Freemasons themselves whose aim is to “broaden the understanding of non-Masons who have an interest in the fraternity. While each Grand Lodge speaks to Freemasonry in its individual state, this site offers a broad overview of the how Masonry intersects with society.”<sup>99</sup>

One of the first spots that Freemasons met on the internet was on forums that started to become popular in the 1990s. One forum that various Freemasons met was on a CompuServe Masonry Forum that was created sometime in the mid-1990s by one “Brother Wine”. Before closing the forum, a last post was sent to the members highlighting the importance of the internet age for ushering in the forum for Freemasons to meet and discuss.<sup>100</sup> These digital platforms made it easier for members of various lodges around not only the United States but the world to communicate with one another about a wide range of topics in relation to Freemasonry.

The internet was making it easier for Freemasons to disseminate Masonic education to other members. As opposed to the top-down approach of the Grand Lodge trying to enrich and promote Masonic education, the members themselves were compiling sources and research for other members to access. One of the most influential and biggest repositories of Masonic education online was from a Freemason in Italy by the name of Bruno Virgilio Gazzo who created the website *Pietre-Stones Review of Freemasonry* on July 17<sup>th</sup>, 1996. This website was

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<sup>98</sup> “The Myths of Freemasonry,” Norman Masonic Lodge No. 38, 2008,  
<https://www.normanlodge38.org/myths>.

<sup>99</sup> “About Us,” About Us (Freemason Information), accessed February 10, 2022,  
<https://freemasoninformation.com/about>.

<sup>100</sup> “CompuServe Masonry Forum,” CompuServe Masonry Forum, 2004,  
<https://alt.freemasonry.narkive.com/2yeMKVoL/compuServe-masonry-forum>.

dedicated to Masonic education and hosts an extensive collection of research papers and articles by known authors on Freemasonry. The website alone attracted a million unique visitors in 2007 alone.<sup>101</sup>

Likewise other websites in the late 1990s started to appear that hosted Masonic research papers and education like Phoenixmasonry and The Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon. Included in this were Masonic research societies that saw the utility in the internet and started recruiting on web forums for mailing lists to have publications sent across the United States.<sup>102</sup> The means by which Freemasons could acquire education was now at the will and pleasure of their ability to get online and access these various websites.

In addition to members sharing research and papers, a marketplace was created for old Masonic books to be sold and bought on the internet. With the creation of websites like eBay and Amazon, Freemasons could purchase books and research that were otherwise hard to acquire beforehand. These online marketplaces matched buyers and sellers all over the world and consolidated them into a platform on the internet to meet and exchange. Sellers and buyers no longer needed to make phone calls, send faxes, or attend trade-fairs to acquire books and goods.<sup>103</sup> This made the acquisition of old Masonic books and texts more accessible and Freemasons and non-Freemasons alike were able to study and engage in Masonic education from home rather than within a lodge.

Masonic education was being done from the bottom-up approach here and a transformation within lodges was accomplished outside of the lodge by the membership. As

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<sup>101</sup> Trevor McKeown, "An Historical Outline of Freemasons Online," Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon, 2008, [https://www.freemasonry.bcy.ca/trevor/internet\\_history.pdf](https://www.freemasonry.bcy.ca/trevor/internet_history.pdf), 18.

<sup>102</sup> McKeown, An Historical Outline of Freemasons Online, 19.

<sup>103</sup> Andreas Lendle et al., "There Goes Gravity: eBay and the Death of Distance," *The Economic Journal* 126, no. 591 (March 2016): pp. 406-441, <https://doi.org/10.1111/eoj.12286>, 407.

more and more members and potential candidates gain access to this education and seeing that their lodges are not providing the meaningful experience that they desire, Freemasons started to create models for lodges to enrich their Masonic experience. One popular movement that took place starting in 2001 is the Masonic Restoration Foundation. The goals of this organization are to find realistic solutions to improving the lodge experience. They recognized a trend in new applicants and younger Freemasons joining who view Freemasonry as a venue for truth seeking and philosophical development. In short, the goal of Masonic Restoration Foundation is “to restore Freemasonry to the historical and philosophical intent of its organizational founders. We believe that in so doing, Masons will return to the development of a fraternal culture of learning and intellectual growth, which will not only benefit the individual Mason, but society as a whole.”<sup>104</sup>

As more and more Freemasons looked critically upon their own organization; they began to express their beliefs about what Freemasonry should aspire to be. One of the advocates of a push towards a more traditional observance lodge, and member of the Masonic Restoration Foundation, is Andrew Hammer. In his influential book from 2010 *Observing the Craft*, Hammer urged Freemasons to elevate the lodge experience over acquiring new membership. This reads as a manifesto and a restoration of Freemasonry from within by its membership. Freemasons and research lodges tout this work as “the most significant book of the 21<sup>st</sup> century written for Freemason.”<sup>105</sup> Additionally, the Southern California Lodge of Research lists the book as being number one in the most important book of the new millennium and for the future of

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<sup>104</sup> “Masonic Restoration Foundation,” Masonic Restoration Foundation, accessed March 3, 2022, <https://www.masonicrestorationfoundation.org/>.

<sup>105</sup> Dan M Kemble, “Book Review: Observing the Craft: The Pursuit of Excellence in Masonic Labour and Observance,” William O. Ware Lodge of Research, January 2020, <https://williamowarelodgeofresearch.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/WOW-BOOK-REVIEW-Andrew-Hammer-Observing-the-Craft-4818-0390-3383-v1.pdf>.

Freemasonry.<sup>106</sup> The other books on the top ten list are not without merit though. All but one is philosophical or esoteric in nature. What is to note is that these books are written by individual Freemasons themselves and not produced or published by a Grand Lodge. This illustrates an emphasis on esoterica being important or at least valuable whereby Freemasons are writing on the subject and Freemasons are reading it.

### **Masonic Revival and Post-Secularism**

The renewed interest in Masonic education or esotericism, apart from the films and internet has a role in the post-secular movement that has shown a congruent surge along with interest in Masonic lodges in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. As Masonic lodges started to emphasize or elevate the importance of esotericism and ritual, society and academia became more post-secular.<sup>107</sup> Jürgen Habermas, the researcher who made the term prominent, sees and defines post-secular society as one that “adapts to the fact that religious communities continue to exist in a context of ongoing secularization.”<sup>108</sup>

As the Masonic lodge is an extension of society at large, what is the reasoning behind this renewed interest in ritual, masonic education, and spirituality? Research since the early 1990s has been done on what is considered a post-secular turn that has taken place within American society. The post-secular is a general term among leading critics of a desire to resist grand narratives related to the modern secularization of society as well as the return of religion into society. Post-secular thought is the attempt to look beyond the structures of traditional religious

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<sup>106</sup> Christopher Murray, “Top 10 Masonic Books of the New Millennium,” *Southern California Research Lodge Fraternal Review* 62, no. 8 (September 2021), 20.

<sup>107</sup> James Hodkinson and Silke Horstkotte, “Introducing the Postsecular: From Conceptual Beginnings to Cultural Theory,” *Poetics Today* 41, no. 3 (2020): pp. 317-326, <https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-8519586>, 317-318.

<sup>108</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2003), 104.

belief and the limited binary language of modern secularism<sup>109</sup> Society has become religious but on different terms that is non-conforming to traditional presuppositions of religion yet at the same time, not aiming to adopt secular ideologies as well. Some have pointed to the acts of 9/11 that left American society yearning for reassurance, comfort, and some semblance of redemptive meaning in the act of sharing grief and confusion as a means for this renewed interest in religious or spiritual renewal.<sup>110</sup>

In this renewal, Americans have been exposed to various faiths, practices, and ideologies, most in part to globalization. This has led to an interest in western esotericism and the esoteric components of religion have become more popular.<sup>111</sup> This renewal in more various aspects of spirituality has become a good fit for those seeking Masonic membership. Masonic lodges have become post-secular in the sense that a belief in a supreme being is necessary but the subjective ideologies that the member brings are limitless. The only stipulation is that one who joins be not atheist. This ambiguity in spiritual requirements has made Masonic lodges repositories for inquiry into other realms of spiritual practice that is neither religiously dogmatic nor secular.

The leadership within Grand Lodge started to notice a renewed interest in not only the memorization of ritual but the education and meaning behind the ritual. The first ever Masonic Symposium was held in 2001 where well-known Masonic speakers came to discuss Freemasonry and expound on Masonic education.<sup>112</sup> Every year since then, the Grand Lodge has held a

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<sup>109</sup> Michael Kaufmann, "Locating the Postsecular," *Religion & Literature* 41, no. 3 (2009): pp. 68-73, 68-69.

<sup>110</sup> Wilfred M. McClay, "Religion in Post-Secular America," *American Thought and Culture in the 21st Century*, July 2008, pp. 127-141, <https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9780748626014.003.0009>, 131.

<sup>111</sup> Kennet Granholm, "Post-Secular Esotericism? Some Reflections on the Transformation of Esotericism," *Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis* 20 (2008): pp. 50-67, <https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.67326>, 60.

<sup>112</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California* (San Francisco, CA, 2001) 330.

symposium on matters relating to spiritually, history, esotericism, or anything related to Masonic research and inquiry. Additionally, the Grand Lodge of California in 2009 entered into a partnership with the history department at the University of California, Los Angeles, to create a Masonic Studies curriculum under the guidance of Professor Margaret Jacob.<sup>113</sup> Attendance has been high at these events, and it encouraged more lodges to expand on this by doing their own educational presentations at their respective lodges.<sup>114</sup>

The Grand Lodge being pragmatic, decided to put a survey out to the membership in 2009 to ask the Freemasons of California their visions for the fraternity. The members asked for more Masonic education and for the membership experience to be improved on with meaningful programs for all.<sup>115</sup> Even with the symposiums and education provided by the Grand Lodge, the membership was still wanting more. An emphasis on education and spirituality is seen. Freemasons themselves, outside of the Grand Lodge would start to host “MasonicCon” events where panel discussions and education relating to esoteric topics and spirituality would take place. Websites would be created to keep track of conventions not only in California but the rest of the United States.<sup>116</sup> The topics range from historical to spiritual and esoteric to how to manage Freemasonry in the digital era. We can see this on a local level whereby individual lodges themselves will host Masonic speakers to expand on Masonic education.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Journal of Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of California* (San Francisco, CA, 2009) 263.

<sup>114</sup> “300 Years of Masonic Ritual,” Conejo Valley Lodge No. 807, accessed September 16, 2022, <https://conejomasons.org/events/news/300-years-of-masonic-ritual/>.

<sup>115</sup> Grand Lodge of California, *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of 2010*, 73.

<sup>116</sup> The website mentioned is <http://www.masonicconferences.com/>. One thing to note is that these Masonic Conferences are not funded by Grand Lodges but are funded by lodges and Freemasons themselves. The push for Masonic education is seen on both ends of the Masonic hierarchy, that being the top-down and bottom-up.

<sup>117</sup> “Welcome to Vista Lodge No. 687,” Vista Freemasons, January 25, 2022, <https://vistafreemasons.org/>.



Freemasons themselves started to research on the esoteric, educational, historical, and spiritual topics within Freemasonry and self-publish books for others to read. Enough publications and research have been pushed out into the public that Freemasons within academia have given insight for other Freemasons on how to do proper research.<sup>118</sup> At all levels of Masonic membership, whether it be on a personal level, lodge level, or Grand Lodge, Freemasons engaged in masonic education.

Freemasonry deals in symbolism. The Freemason himself can distinguish the meaning behind it in subjectively various ways. In a way, the Masonic lodge is a meta-modern institution whereby the pendulum swings both between modern and postmodern characteristics, or an oscillation between subjective and objective realities.<sup>119</sup> Meta-modernism postulates that ideas move between postmodern and modern polarities of irony and enthusiasm, hope and melancholy, between unity and plurality depending on the situation but never tilted towards one side or another fully.<sup>120</sup> Lodges became repositories for this oscillation. On one hand the modern notions of secularity in lodge exist, the discussion or even acceptance of Freemasonry as a whole committing to one faith, exists and at the same time, the requirement that one possess a spirituality remains. Freemasonry espoused the search and yearning for a “Truth” and other narratives that have objective goals, but all the meanwhile respecting the notion that a multiplicity of means and perspectives exist towards progressing towards those grand narratives.

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<sup>118</sup> Andreas J Önnersfors, “Freemasonry and Research,” Academia.edu, May 25, 2020, [https://www.academia.edu/43160739/Freemasonry\\_and\\_research](https://www.academia.edu/43160739/Freemasonry_and_research).

<sup>119</sup> Luke Turner, “Metamodernism: A Brief Introduction,” Notes on Metamodernism, January 12, 2015, <http://www.metamodernism.com/2015/01/12/metamodernism-a-brief-introduction/>.

<sup>120</sup> Timotheus Vermeulen and Robin van der Akker, “Notes on Metamodernism,” *Journal of Aesthetics; Culture* 2, no. 1 (2010), <https://doi.org/10.3402/jac.v2i0.5677>, 5-6.

Freemasons themselves have noticed the correlation with the return to masonic instruction and education and the parallels with meta-modernist thinking.<sup>121</sup>

## Conclusion

In the twenty-first century we see a Renaissance of esoteric masonry. Perchance this is an example of a more cyclical nature of organizations and the desires of their membership. Lodges are composed of the men who fill them and the ideas and desires they bring with them into the lodge. The aims of lodges looking for a more profound experience in the lodge with an emphasis on ritual and esotericism harkens back to this resurgence of same motivations that occurred in the early nineteenth-century. The Freemasons of the early nineteenth-century looked back in time to the seventeenth century and the longing for ancient wisdom and spirituality.<sup>122</sup> The Freemasons of the twenty-first century resemble those Freemasons of the early nineteenth-century.

The twenty-first century revival of Freemasonry does not necessarily contradict the arguments of Putnam or Skocpol on the declining willingness in general for humans in a society to meet socially in groups. Those arguments are valid, but it is clear that those Freemasons who join today are more interested in its principles than ever before.<sup>123</sup> The motivations of the members to decrease the emphasis of ritual and promote the idea of quantity over quality in the early twentieth century plays a critical role in the decline of Masonic membership and attendance. The lodges became hollowed out for the sake of obtaining and initiating new members. Likewise, the

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<sup>121</sup> Hank Kraychir, "Post-Postmodernism or Metamodernism and Freemasonry," [gnosismasonry.wordpress.com](https://gnosismasonry.wordpress.com), October 1, 2016, <https://gnosismasonry.wordpress.com/2016/10/01/post-postmodernism-or-metamodernism-and-freemasonry/>.

<sup>122</sup> Hackett, *That Religion in Which All Men Agree*, 84.

<sup>123</sup> Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 132.

decline in secrecy of lodges and promotion of transparency has played a bigger factor in decline than merely the television as Putnam argues.<sup>124</sup>

One question that still needs to be answered is what is compelling these Freemasons in the twenty first century to care more about the quality of a lodge experience rather than the quantity of membership? If the information age is a driving force in the resurgence of Masonic esotericism, then it must be the older texts and books that they are reading that inspires them to change their lodges. The writings of nineteenth and early twentieth century Freemasons like Albert Pike, W.L. Wilmshurst, and Manly P. Hall lecture in their works on a Freemasonry of the past that is unlike their hollowed-out lodges that they entered.

Even back in the nineteenth century, Albert Pike asserted that he was fearful that Freemasonry's philosophical underpinnings would be stomped out by the more charitable and social aspects entering the lodges. Pike saw this already starting to happen as a smaller number of Masons "regard the symbolism of Freemasonry as of any real value, or care to study it."<sup>125</sup> Pike also expressed the importance of Freemasonry in his famous book, *Morals & Dogma*, and mentions the esoteric nature of the organization when he says "Masonry, like all the Religions, all the Mysteries, Hermeticism and Alchemy, conceals its secrets from all except the Adepts and Sages, or the Elect."<sup>126</sup> He is combating the weakening of philosophical approaches to the Craft and trying to inspire the promotion of esotericism within Freemasonry.

Likewise, Freemasons of the early twentieth century lamented at the situation that they see occurring within their lodges. Newer Freemasons sympathize and read the words of W.L.

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<sup>124</sup> Joshua Gunn, "Death by Publicity: U.S. Freemasonry and the Public Drama of Secrecy," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 11, no. 2 (2008): pp. 243-277, 246.

<sup>125</sup> Albert Pike, *Albert Pike's "Esoterika": Symbolism of the Blue Degrees of Freemasonry*, ed. Arturo de Hoyos (Washington D.C.: The Scottish Rite Research Society, 2005), 98.

<sup>126</sup> Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry* (Washington, D.C.: Supreme Council of the Southern Jurisdiction, A.A.S.R., U.S.A, 1950), 104.

Wilmshurst who argues in 1924 that “no more is needed and useful work is to be done in the Masonic Order today than the education of its members in the true purpose of rites of initiation.”<sup>127</sup>

Masonic lodges molded and shaped themselves towards the community at large and became civic based because the United States was becoming more civic. As society shifted its views towards Americanism and sociability, the lodges adjusted to accommodate the influx of new members that seek these values. The purpose and value of the lodge, one of spiritual and educational value, was suppressed to accommodate a changing nation. It would take nearly a hundred years for lodges to remember and look back at what Freemasonry was before the twentieth century and aim to not eliminate the social aspects of lodges but re-introduce the esoteric and spiritual perspectives back into the lodge. Lodges did not replace the social and civic aspects as much as reintroduce or include the educational and esoteric aspects back into the lodge. There is room for both social and esoteric Freemasonry.

On another note, we can see that the larger argument is made about quality over quantity. The appeal of ritual and esotericism among the membership is indicative of the spiritual hunger that is present within post-secular America in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century. The qualitative experience of making the lodge experience about these various topics, increased interest in both new members joining and retaining old ones. This quality over quantity issue is being discussed on all levels of the organization and a form of equilibrium is being searched for in whether relaxing membership rules to invite more members in or making the Masonic experience more meaningful is the right choice.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Wilmshurst, *The Masonic Initiation*, 15.

<sup>128</sup> William J. Mollere, “Notes from the Conference of Grand Masters,” *The Scottish Rite of Freemasonry: Southern Jurisdiction, USA*, 2012, <https://scottishrite.org/blog/about/media-publications/journal/article/qualityquantity/>.

What is apparent is that there is a desire for a more profound experience in the lodge rather than making it easier to become a Freemason. New members are seeking to have it harder to become a Freemason. The petitioning process is being reformed by Freemasons who are making it stricter and more selective in who should join the organization for the sake of acquiring members who desire to participate rather than join and eventually be suspended or not actively engage in the lodge.<sup>129</sup> Freemasonry is going through another pivotal shift in its long history and both adapting to and reflecting the changes in the society of which it remains an active part.

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<sup>129</sup> Justin Jones, "Putting Quantity Before Quality: The Open West Gate," *Masonic Improvement*, July 31, 2016, <https://masonicimprovement.com/2016/07/31/putting-quantity-before-qualitythe-open-west-gate/>.

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