

The Lodge Historian

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There are several ingredients that must be present in the person of the would-be Lodge Historian, if his efforts are to bear any real fruit. These are: patience, determination, enthusiasm, and, above all curiosity. Thoroughness to detail is another necessary requisite if a Lodge History is to be successfully completed.

The patience that is needed is that patience which will enable the historian to search, study, evaluate and bring together the information that can make a Lodge History a reality. He must be determined that no amount of frustrating dead-ends will cause him to give up his search for useful information. He must have that unflagging enthusiasm that overcomes disappointments, and enables him to spend hours in finding a few nuggets of worthwhile knowledge. Probably, the greatest single requirement of a successful Lodge Historian is an unbounded curiosity coupled with a dedicated thoroughness. A curiosity based on a sincere desire to unearth useful, inspiring, enlightening and entertaining information. A curiosity and thoroughness that will lead him to seek small items with big meanings and that will lead him down every path of inquiry until his search has been completed.

The sources of information available to the Lodge Historian are almost limitless - if he will avail himself of them. He should begin his search by "rounding up" all past minute books of the Lodge that are still in existence. Old minute books, if properly done, are usually a goldmine of information. They should give a factual record of, not only who received what degrees and when, but should show any record of visitors - why they were there and what they said. They should reflect all of the truly important events in which the Lodge has been involved - not only events in the tiled recesses of the Lodge, but also all public functions - such as cornerstones, dedications, funerals, Ladies Nights, visitations to and from other Lodges, Grand Lodge attendance - in short, all activities in which the Lodge has had a part.

Some minute books are so skimpy in information that the heart of the would-be historian is nearly broken in the frustrating effort of trying to recreate some important event given almost no notice at all.

Certainly, the Lodge Historian who encounters such omissions in the minutes and records of his Lodge should caution the secretary to make full and complete minutes, showing who, when, what and where, just as completely as Masonic Law permits. In this way, future historians will be able to reconstruct exactly what went on in our Lodge during our time. Just as the great tenets of Masonry have passed unimpaired down through the ages, so should the records of Lodges be kept, in order that future generations may reconstruct, unimpaired, total information about the activities of the Lodge.

The visitor's Register of past years is a fine source of special information as to who visited the Lodge and when the visit took place. Old newspapers, county, state, and city histories often contain valuable references to Lodges, their past officers, members and activities.

Records of adjoining Lodges often contain references valuable to the Lodge Historian by their inclusion of information referring to his Lodge.

Grand lodge proceedings, the Grand Lodge Library and the Grand Secretary's factual record of Annual Reports can also furnish valuable information.

We should make a special effort to talk to the "old timers" in our Lodge, with reference to things remembered, anecdotes, special events and other items of interest that may have gone unrecorded.

The Lodge Historian should seek out the names and titles of the distinguished guests who have attended his Lodge. He should endeavor to determine if any Brother had attained high rank or special recognition in city, county, state or national circles. He should strive to discover what they said or did while there. He should search for old Masonic photographs of any kind, such as individuals, groups, old buildings, cornerstone layings, dedications, special days and the lodge record supporting the photographs, if any.

He should make special note of any record of aid to a distressed worthy Brother, his widow or orphans. Quite often we will find references to house raisings, crop plantings and harvestings, as well as reference to aid freely given to those in need, both inside and outside the fraternity. We can find countless records of the brethren willingly and happily taking care of "their own".

He should make note of the loving resolutions passed and spread on the minute books of our lodges as a memorial to departed brethren. These, usually well written, resolutions express to future generations true Masonic love for our brethren.

Membership growth or loss should be studied and recorded as to how these changes reflect the times or economic conditions of the country. Also, has membership been affected by internal condition within the Lodge?

The successful Lodge Historian will make special note of any amusing or poignant incidents of record. Again, in the case of my own Lodge, one older brother, completely convinced that the Third Degree, second section, should be more physical than spiritual complained that to change from his way was a violation of the Landmarks of Masonry. Interspersing these tidbits can help to "spice up" the pleasure of reading or hearing the Lodge History particularly for those who are not captivated by dry records with no light moments.

Before beginning to write, it is necessary to organize our material. It is up to the writer to determine whether his material should be presented in a chronological account or under several different headings of interest.

For example: have a Foreword, an Index, divide the book into chapter headings such as "The Founding Years", "The First Decade or Twenty-five Years", "Special Members of Note (Masonic and otherwise)" and then endeavor to use as many photographs as possible.

You might also like to have a Chapter listing in chronological order, the officers of the Lodge with as much biographical information as can be obtained. Consider a chapter on special events, anecdotes or, even an entire Chapter on a brother who may have been Grand Master, Governor or some other high official. Many Lodges have records of men of great military renown. These brothers should be noted and a biographical sketch should be included.

As to the writing: categorize all information according to subject matter. This will enable the Historian to complete one section before moving on to the next. Make every effort to avoid statistical dryness. Lists of figures or numbers should be interspersed with interesting incidents. Remember, strategically placed pictures or the reproduction of some short document can help to overcome the dryness that history can impose on some readers. We must, at all costs, avoid flights of fancy or conjecture. We must have the facts. Do not include any material based on guesswork!

An example of a story that might be of interest as a means of making our Lodge History a little less dry is the one about the Lodge, not mine, that found itself in short financial condition at Annual Report Time. The old Treasurer moved that the Lodge not pay its Grand Lodge fees that year, in order to stay in sound financial condition.

There are a number of ways that we can prepare our history so that it will be available to any who might be interested, as well as to preserve it for the future. If sufficient funds are available our history may be done in pamphlet form or even by the printing of a hardback or softback book, done by a professional printer. It may also be done in photocopy or offset print. While the more expensive forms of print may be desired, the most important consideration is that the result of the long hours spent in compiling a Lodge History be made available to the brethren and preserved for posterity.

We must also pay particular attention to the distribution of the Lodge History so painstakingly prepared. In addition to getting a copy into the hands of the brethren, we should endeavor to

place copies in locations that will make it available to others who might have an interest in such a document. It should be placed in School Libraries and in the Public Libraries of the community, and sent to newspapers and historical societies.

Time is awasting, my brethren! Many of our past records have been lost, destroyed or improperly kept. We must endeavor to establish as complete a set of records as we can and, at the same time, resolve that all future records will be complete, factual, and accurate. Masonry has played a great part in the development of our country. Let us see from the records just how great a part we, in our Lodge, have played.

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