

The Square, Compasses and Computer

The advent of the computer has made a large world very small and Masons five thousand miles distant only a few minutes away.

I would like to start with a very brief overview of how and why the internet was created. During the cold war the United States developed a very sophisticated, large and expensive computer system for the control and deployment of its Inter-continental Ballistic Missile System. A central control was desired but logistics and geography interfered tremendously with this plan.

All controls being centralized created a communication nightmare which was susceptible to sabotage from many angles and the missiles being located throughout the country would be extremely difficult and costly to link.

At the same period in time the colleges and universities about the country were jumping on the computer bandwagon in order to ensure appeal for their educational programs, hence high registrations. The military approached the colleges and universities and were allowed access to these computers, linking them all together in a "web" which would allow them control and communication with all of the ICBM sites from numerous locations throughout the country. Higher education institutions saw the benefits of such a system very quickly and pushed the development at a breakneck pace.

This system of communication developed initially within the United States and between educational institutions but soon spread to commerce and beyond the boundaries of North America. The links between the service providers started to look like a figurative spider web, allowing direct access between two points or indirect access that may pass through numerous centers before getting through to the final destination. The e-mail that you send to me may pass through hubs within Calgary only; or may pass through several cities, countries or continents before finally resting in my "In Box".

This ease of data transfer, obtaining and providing of information has led to a more informed society and a significantly more curious one. It has enabled us to communicate with Brethren from across the city, the country and all of the world's oceans. This has many benefits but has also numerous drawbacks.

With this great ability to communicate freely we have Brethren within this room who have "pen pals" around the world. The concept of pen pals is in itself nothing new but in days gone by the news you got by way of the mailman was often history before you even opened the envelope. Now, you can have the agenda of a meeting from an Australian brother at the same time as his neighbor. It is a delight to be able to discuss Freemasonry throughout the world with Masons from every country imaginable. We are able to delve into the workings of foreign Lodges, concordant bodies and affiliated groups.

This knowledge has led many of us into research far beyond what we ever would have considered even 5 years ago. It enables us to continue with the quest that is so deeply entrenched

in our Masonic teachings, broaden our horizons and ultimately, make us search for more, and this quest resulted in the paper which I am now giving.

I must admit that when asked to do this paper I was a little concerned that I would not be able to find enough information to put it all together. I have never given a paper like this before, nor even researched one. After starting I became involved enough in the research that I forgot to phone Bro. SW back to say I wouldn't do it. My problem became where do I start and what do I limit it to. Such is the life of a researcher and such is your life of putting up with Bro. SW choice of a speaker.

The research led me to some interesting areas for both pro and anti-masonry. We are familiar of course with the organizations within the Masonic family so my focus went to other orders with whom we may or may not be at amity with and those who visibly opposed us.

One of the organizations with whom we are at amity with is Prince Hall Masons. This group originated in the United States in the later part of the 18th century. In 1775 fourteen free black men, one of whom was Prince Hall, were initiated into Lodge No. 441, Irish Constitution, which was attached to the 38th regiment of the British Army Garrison stationed at Castle William (now Fort Independence) in Boston Harbor. When the garrison left Boston in 1776 Prince Hall was granted authority to meet as African Lodge No. 1, U.D. to perform various activities under the umbrella of Freemasonry but they were not allowed to confer degrees or perform any Masonic work. For a few years these brethren, along with some others from various Lodges met and enjoyed limited privileges of Freemasonry. Finally in 1784 African Lodge petitioned the Grand Lodge of England for a Charter which was granted September 29, 1784 and delivered to the Lodge April 29, 1787.

The research which I have conducted indicates that the first Prince Hall Lodge in Canada was Mount Olive Lodge #1 in Hamilton, Canada West established by the Union Grand Lodge of New Jersey (PH) in 1852, 15 years before the birth of Canada. In 1853 Victoria Lodge No. 2 in St. Catherines received her warrant and in 1854 Olive Branch Lodge No. 3 of Windsor received her warrant. Over the next 15 years numerous Lodges were set up over "Canada West" and in 1872 these Lodges united to form the Grand Lodge the Province of Ontario (PH) in the infant province of Ontario.

Today there are more than 4,500 Prince Hall Lodges around the world, forming 45 jurisdictions with membership in excess of 300,000.⁽¹⁾⁽²⁾ There are presently 3 Prince Hall Lodges in Alberta who operate under the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Connecticut with whom the Grand Lodge of Alberta has been at amity with since 1998.

Another group conforming to the same ideals as we are the Co-masons which as the name suggest includes or is exclusively for women. The origins of this body are less definitive than Prince Hall Masons, but my research indicates that historical records record women as having been operative Masons before the formal organization of our speculative Freemasonry.

There are records indicating that an Elizabeth St. Leger became a speculative Mason in Cork, Ireland in the early 18th century. As was the custom of the time Lodge members would

hold meetings at their homes. Miss Leger was in her fathers home and secretly witnessed a ceremony of initiation taking place. When she attempted to escape she was apprehended by the tyler. After much deliberation it appears she was initiated and in time became Master of the Lodge.

VWBro. Neville B. Cryer claimed in a paper he wrote in 1995 that she was initiated in 1712, before the Grand Lodge of England was formed and “thus before it was declared that the exclusion of women was an “ancient landmark” and a stop was put to female participation in the craft.”⁽³⁾

In 1879 several Chapters in France of the Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite seceded from that body and formed the La Grande Loge Symbolique de France. One of the chapters proposed to initiate a Mlle. Maria Desraimes a writer on humanitarian and women’s suffrage issues. The initiation took place on January 14, 1882. Numerous other women followed suit and eventually an Androgynous Masonic Body was formed.⁽⁴⁾

In 1903 Co-masonry came to the United States and by 1922 there were more than 450 Co-masonic Lodges around the world including Canada. Official recognition between the Grand Lodges of Freemasonry and co-masonry is almost non-existent but movements are afoot to change this. As writer VWBro. Neville Cryer put it “After all, if a woman is good enough to be the wife, mother, sister or daughter of a Mason she ought to be good enough to be his ‘Brother’”⁽⁵⁾

Along with groups that we share common, though sometimes disassociated ground, there are those that actively attack the very foundation of our fraternity. In the past the Roman Catholic Church had a fair bit to say about the perceived heathen tendencies of our organization. Much of this seems to stem from the fact that we are not trying to convert the world to Catholicism or Christianity but rather allowing men to believe as their own faith would dictate. In recent years the hierarchy Catholic Church have acknowledge not necessarily the good, but at least the lack of a threat we pose.

In their place however the Southern Baptist Church and other fundamentalist organizations in the United States have taken up the fight. A passage that I recently read on the internet⁽⁶⁾ condemns Freemasonry in the Words of God as;

“...profane...Jewish fables which cause men to question and turn from the truth”

and later states

“...And once having heard the Word of God, we urge every Southern Baptist to be a doer of the Word and not a hearer only, by confessing and repenting before the Lord of their involvement in this ungodliness and removing before men their names, energies and resources from this spiritually devastating and ungodly brotherhood of Satanic darkness.”

German General Erich Ludendorff wrote a booklet after the 1st World War that sold in excess of 100,000 copies in which the following quote was found:

“Masonry brings its members into conscious subjection to the Jews... it trains them to become venal Jews... German Masonry is a branch of organized International Masonry the headquarters of which are in New York ... there also is the seat of Jewish world Power.”

Ludendorff blamed Freemasons for bringing America into the World War I, helped by the Jesuits, B'nai B'rith and the Grand Lodge of New York! This, he stated, was done to destroy Austria Hungary, a Catholic world power. Had it not been for Freemasonry, Germany would have won the war -- Kaiser Wilhelm and Czar Nicholas lost their thrones because they were not Freemasons -- and so on and on and on for eighty two pages of *“Annihilation of Freemasonry Through Revelation of its Secrets!”*⁽⁷⁾

Historically we have not aggressively defended against attacks such as this. Some speculation for this “turn the other cheek” attitude is said to come from the treatment the Masonic order received at the hands of the Nazi party during the second world war. Many German Freemasons were said to have been actively persecuted for their role in the order as well as those that were incarcerated in POW camps. Silence and secrecy ensured survival. We have not quite yet shed that cloak of secrecy.

Over the decades Masonry has not been active in it's defense, letting it's own good speak for itself. With the advent of the internet this is no longer adequate. Information promoting false truths about Freemasonry no longer needs a sympathetic media. They can distribute freely and with wanton abandon and those without a proper understanding of our lessons and access to the internet may be swayed. We must actively promote our merits using the World Wide Web.

We have only begun our contact with Prince Halls Lodges and our ritual and constitution regulates and restricts contact with Co-masons. In previous years, decades and centuries these restrictions were assisted by geographical barriers. Today these barriers have been eliminated by two little wires and are restricted only by the amount of time we are willing to spend at our computer. Our ritual and constitution do not presently make much, if any, consideration for a 56K modem, Pentium 4 CPU or 20 gigabyte hard drive.

The “Do's and Don'ts” that may be established and implemented from time to time by the various Grand Lodges serve only to regulate those of us that choose to live within the constitution of our great fraternity. Outside forces may do as they please, say as they please and life will go on. What we must do as “e-masons, internet users and web masters is be the best we can be. Communicate with brethren from other jurisdictions but remember, you do not know who they really are, err on the side of caution.

While corresponding with Masons in other jurisdictions and countries you must first be knowledgeable about the craft to be able to speak intelligently and accurately. This will ensure that you can assess the other persons qualifications. You must also resort to a book called “The List of Masonic Lodges”, issued by the Grand Lodge of Alberta, which lists the Lodges and

jurisdictions which the Grand Lodge of Alberta recognizes. Even then, be careful. Is this individual someone who is well studied on the internet and come up with all the right answers? All of our ritualistic work can be found on the internet and at our public library for those who want to find it.

Anyone who is responsible for the maintenance of a web site must post accurate and interesting information...and keep it current. A web site must be a constantly evolving piece of art. If it becomes stagnant people will stop visiting. If that happens, we will loose them and they will not get the message we have.

We as Masons are taught and encouraged to continue our research into the hidden mysteries of nature and science. This is done on the internet today and barriers will fall, eyes will open and myths will be created and destroyed. We must look into the future and take a proactive and united approach using the exponential growth of this resource, the computer. If we do not we will be left behind with our rotary telephones and Commodore 64's.

Thank you.

- (1) **PRINCE HALL HISTORY**
<http://user.aol.com/jabron/history.htm>
- (2) **The Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge, Free and Accepted Masons, Province of Ontario and Jurisdiction**
<http://www.freemasonry.org/phglont/history.htm>
- (3) **Freemasonry for Women**
<http://www.luckymojo.com/comasonry.html>
- (4) **The Development of Co-Masonry**
<http://www.luckymojo.com/comasonry.html>
- (5) **Co-masonry and Female Masonry Today**
<http://www.luckymojo.com/comasonry.html>
- (6) **Freemasonry and the Southern Baptist Church**
<http://toasthost.com/saintsalive/freemasonry/fmyandsbc.html>
- (7) **Destruction of Freemasonry**
<http://masonicinfo.com/erich.htm>