

## **Suggestions About How To Do Interesting And Informative Masonic Research**

By

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*The opinions presented in this paper are strictly those of the author and do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Master and Wardens of the A. Douglas Smith Jr., Lodge of Research #1949 or the official views of the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Virginia.*

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## #1 - Start with a Masonic Encyclopedia

How should you start Masonic research? The answer is simple. If there is a question you have been wondering about, look up that topic and related topics in *Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia* and *Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry*, and other Masonic encyclopedias that you can find in Masonic libraries. *Coil's* is probably the best, because it is one volume, you can buy it and keep referring to it, and it is the one that is most current, having been revised in 1996 by Allen E. Roberts.

Let us use a couple of examples. Have you ever wondered what the Hiram Abif legend is all about, and what it is supposed to teach us? You can use *Coil's* or *Mackey's* to look up Hiram Abif, or Hiram Legend, or Rituals, or Masonic Rites, and you will find good basic information. Or have you been interested in who attacks Freemasonry and why? You can look up Anti-Masonry, Roman Catholicism, Mormons, and Morgan Affair, all of which will give you good information plus ideas for further reading.

Or do you have trouble deciding what you want to research? Pick up *Coil's* or *Mackey's* and thumb through the pages. You will find some items that interest you, and you will get ideas about what you want to research.

## #2 - Think About Your Goals

From the time you begin Masonic research, think about what your goals are. Some people enjoy doing research just for the sake of learning. That is fine, and if that is the category in which you find yourself, all you have to do is read whatever you wish. But what if you later decide that you have found some very interesting information, and that other Masons may be fascinated by what you have found? By the

time you decide that, you may have to redo everything.

So why not set a goal from the beginning that you may write an **article** about your research, or that you may put together a talk about it. Then, you should keep a record of what you have researched, and where, so you can document what you did. This will also give you a clear idea of where each lead led you, and you will be able to produce a good paper or talk about this subject. All you have to do is write down the title and author of each book you consulted, and where you found it, and a brief description of what you found there.

Remember that there are thousands of Lodges and other Masonic groups, and millions of Masons, and among them there are many who will probably be interested in the same things that interest you. It will give you a good feeling to share your research with others, so keep track of what you learn.

## #3 - Use Basic Masonic Books

In every field there are certain generally accepted, basic books and magazines, in addition to encyclopedias. Anyone doing research in these areas is expected to review what these books say about the topic you are researching, and you will undoubtedly benefit from looking up any topic in these books.

For Freemasonry, these **books** include such works as Gould's *History of Freemasonry Throughout the World*, Bernard E. Jones' *Freemasons' Guide and Compendium*, Pick & Knight's *Pocket History of Freemasonry*, Knoop and Jones' *Genesis of Freemasonry*, Lippincott and Johnston's *Masonry Defined*, Joseph Fort Newton's *The Builders*, Hammond's *What Masonry Means*, Voorhis' *Facts for Freemasons*, Crowe's *Things a Freemason Should Know*, Claudy's *Introduction to Freemasonry*, Haywood's *Great Teachings of*

*Masonry*, Denslow's *10,000 Famous Freemasons*, Allen E. Roberts' *Freemasonry in American History*, and Cerza'a *Masonic Reader's Guide*. Others could suggest additional basic Masonic books to consult.

All these books are available in Masonic libraries, and some may be at your local public library. Many of them are still available for purchase from publishing firms. If you are already researching a particular subject, it will be helpful to you to consult these books. Or, if you have not selected a specific topic you want to investigate further, you can get good ideas for topics from looking at some of these basic Masonic books.

#### #4 - Masonic Journals and Magazines

Masons can find excellent sources of research in good Masonic journals and magazines. Some articles will give you an overview of large areas, and others will give you detailed information about very specific subjects. All will help round out the information you research in Masonic books.

The most famous series of Masonic research **journals** are *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*, which is usually referred to as "AQC." These are the transactions of Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076 in London, the first and most famous research lodge in the world. They have published AQC annually since 1886, and each volume contains the texts of papers delivered at the lodge meetings, plus other long and short comments on Masonic subjects, and answers to questions, book reviews, and other material.

A similarly well respected Masonic journal is *The Philalethes* magazine, started in 1946 and now published 6 times a year. It also includes long and short Masonic articles, book reviews, and interesting reader letters. Another excellent American Masonic research magazine, some feel the best ever, was *The Builder*, published from 1915 through 1930 and available in some Masonic libraries.

Other Masonic magazines have articles on subjects you may be researching, but the character and quality of some of the articles varies. These include the transactions or proceedings of research lodges, such as the American Lodge of Research and the Texas Lodge of Research, and magazines published

by various Masonic groups such as the Scottish Rite Journal, the Northern Light (Scottish Rite, Northern Masonic Jurisdiction), the Royal Arch Mason, the Cryptic Mason, Knight Templar, and similar magazines. The Masonic Service Association produces many Short Talk Bulletins, Digests, and other materials that have good basic information on almost every subject in Freemasonry.

Remember that Masonic magazine articles can be very helpful in Masonic research, but you should check several sources since each article is only as good as the person who wrote it.

#### #5 - Make an Outline of Your Research

How should you proceed when you are doing Masonic research? One very good method is to prepare an outline right after you read some basic information about a subject, and then revise your outline as you continue your research.

For example, let's say you are researching Anderson's *Constitutions of the Free-Masons*, the first significant and influential book published about Freemasonry. After reading about it in Coil's or other encyclopedias and basic Masonic books, you could start preparing an outline that could include: I. Contents of Anderson's Constitutions, II. Events in Masonry and the World in the Early 1700's, III. Lasting Effects of Anderson's Constitutions. As your research progresses you can include more subcategories in your outline, and you can always revise or even rewrite your entire outline any time.

How will this help? It will help you **organize** your thoughts, and reorganize them as you proceed. Having an outline will also give you a clearer idea of how you might present the results of your research if you decide to write a research paper or deliver a talk about your research topic.

Having an **outline** will also be similar to having a skeleton. As you read and learn more, you can flesh out the details in your outline in an orderly and logical manner. This will make you a better researcher, and it will improve the work you are doing.

## #6 - Seeking Advice and Ideas from Others

An excellent source of help in Masonic research, but one to use carefully, is talking, writing, or communicating in other ways with others.

For example, if you are researching the meaning of a part of the Masonic ritual, it cannot hurt to talk with expert ritualists to get their ideas about the work they do. Even if a Mason comes up with an idea that is singular to him, that may be one of the most worthwhile ideas you find in all your research. It will also help you to **talk** about your ongoing research with several Masons whose opinions you respect, so they can tell you privately if you are forgetting something basic, or if you have failed to explore an area that is obvious to others but not you. It can also boost your confidence if others tell you they think you are producing an excellent research paper or talk.

At the same time, you should be careful. There are many things that you will hear "everyone knows" that are simply untrue. It is amazing how many things fit this category. A simple example is that most Masons will say our numbers are decreasing primarily because the number of deaths of Masons is going up each year. This is not true, but "everyone knows" it. In fact, one source of good Masonic research ideas is to take some things that are assumed to be true and test them with your research. Has the Masonic ritual remained the same for centuries? Have catechisms always been used to teach Masonry? Does the Master of a Lodge always wear a hat? You and other Masons may be surprised to learn the true answers to these and other questions.

So remember to talk with others during your research, and get all the advice you can, but at the same time remember that even if many people give you similar advice, that does not mean what they tell you is correct. Always be **skeptical**.

## #7 - Keep Track of Sources and Give Them to Others

As you do Masonic research you will probably find information that is surprising to some others. It may even make some people uncomfortable to hear the

facts you discover. You will be more believable if you keep a careful **record of the sources** of the facts you find in your research, and if you give those sources to those who read or hear what you say.

In written research papers, sources can be given in several ways. You can include sources right in your paper, such as saying, "Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia says the Grand Orient is the largest Masonic body in France." If you don't want to include references directly, you could put your sources in parentheses, or in footnotes. The advantage of footnotes is that they allow those who are interested in your sources to find them, while those who are not so interested will not be bothered with that information when they may be interested only in what you have found. Some prefer to put their notes in footnotes, which appear at the bottom of the page, and some prefer endnotes, where the sources are given at the end of an article, chapter, or book. Some authors place additional information, in addition to their sources, in their footnotes or endnotes, if they feel this additional information may be of interest but is not important enough to be in the article itself.

It is also a good idea to include a **bibliography** at the end of any Masonic research you do. You can tell others what books and articles you found to be most important in preparing your research, and you can give them guidance for further study.

Credibility should be important to you when you do Masonic research, for otherwise your readers or listeners may conclude that you are giving ideas you made up or heard from unreliable sources. You can help others and yourself by keeping track of the sources of your information, and giving your source information to others.

## #8 - Be Willing to Change Your Mind

We all have some ideas about most subjects, and often Masons begin Masonic research with the goal of proving things, such as how important Freemasonry was in the life of George Washington, or how Masons were innocent in the Morgan Affair and the Antimasonic excitement of the 1820's and 1830's. Sometimes, as we continue our research we find that our initial ideas are not correct. Do not be

disappointed, as this proves that your research is working just as it should.

None of us should be afraid to learn more, and we should all be prepared to **change our minds** as we learn more. A standard Masonic research effort may become much more interesting and useful if we find information that surprises us and others because it goes against common thoughts. Masonic research that is merely an attempt to prove an initial idea, despite what the evidence shows, is not reputable.

There is no harm, and it is a good idea, to write down your initial thoughts before you begin your research, or after you have learned just a little about it. As you research more, you can review your thoughts and revise them, and you may find it more interesting how you move from certain ideas to others as the evidence moves you.

Remember that your initial thoughts on a Masonic research topic may also be the thoughts of most other Masons. So, if you find evidence that changes your mind, you should be especially careful to be able to prove to others that their ideas also need to be revised. This should be done in a logical and careful manner, so others can discover the facts just as you did.

### **#9 - Make Your Research Interesting and Relevant**

All research is probably useful to someone, but there is a difference between learning more about a topic, such as what date a particular event took place, and another such as what are the standards used to decide who are regular Masons and why. One may be completely boring and of no relevance, while the other can be interesting, important, and **useful** as we make decisions today.

As you are doing Masonic research, keep thinking of what you might include in an article or talk about your topic. If you come up with a talk about this subject, would the members of your lodge be interested in hearing what you have to say? Would you be **excited** to tell them what you have learned? If you cannot give definite affirmative answers to these questions, perhaps you should change what you are doing. Instead of trying to find out all the

details of the life of a past Master of your lodge, maybe you should be working harder to find parallels between the issues he faced and the decisions he made, and the issues and decisions we face today. How did the ideals of Freemasonry help him in the past, and how can our study of them and how they were applied in the past help us today?

Keep asking yourself what your research says that affects Freemasons today. Remember that those who read research papers, or who listen to Masonic talks, do that voluntarily. They have other things they could be doing, so you should show them that they are using their time constructively when they read or listen to the results of your research. We often hear talk of the "lost word" in Freemasonry. Some feel that lost word is "**relevance**." We should keep thinking about whether we are doing work that is relevant, useful, and important.

### **#10 - Masonic Libraries and Computer Resources**

Some Masons are worried that they do not have enough money or space for large Masonic libraries in their homes, and they do not know where or how they can find other resources for Masonic research. However, every Mason in America can do Masonic research right where they are.

There are many large and small Masonic **libraries** throughout the United States. Some of the largest are in Philadelphia, Boston, New York, Washington, and other large cities. Masons may be surprised to find out where the largest Masonic library in the United States is located, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. And there are also excellent Masonic libraries in several cities in Montana, Texas, Michigan, Illinois, Georgia, and many other places. Some Masonic libraries may be hidden treasures, including many maintained by individual lodges or Scottish Rite bodies, that are hardly known or used. Any Mason should be able to ask around to find out where you can find a Masonic library nearby.

Another great source of Masonic research information is the growing body of Masonic material in **computer** libraries. For a relatively small amount of money you can have a computer and modem, and a subscription to an internet service provider. Then,

you can type a few commands into your computer, and you will find that thousands of excellent Masonic files can be downloaded onto your computer screen or printed on paper in your own home. For example, the Compuserve Masonry Forum has arranged scores of research material into categories such as Masonic history, Scottish Rite, York Rite, and many other subjects. You can also get help from hundreds or thousands of other Masons if you ask a question on a research topic on a Masonic listserv, which is similar to a bulletin board that can be read by any Mason with a computer, any place in the world. Just ask what each jurisdiction does about one day classes, and what Masons think about this, and you will see how much information you receive in response.

So, never fear that you cannot have access to Masonic research information. It is available to everyone, and sometimes it is as much fun finding the information as it is when you obtain it.

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