

Lodge History By Unknown

It happens several times each year. Someone calls the Masonic Service association with what they consider an insurmountable challenge. It usually goes something like this:

"Help! I don't know why, but the Master has appointed me to chair the Lodge History Committee. How the heck do I go about writing a lodge history?"

Then it is "twenty-question" time. How old is the lodge? When was the last time a history of the lodge was published? What do you know about the charter members? Why was the lodge formed? What were the principal occupations of the founding members? What were the economic conditions in the Community when the lodge was organized? What impact was made on the community by the formation of the lodge? Who were the "prime movers?" Where did they first meet? When, where and why did they move? What were the high points and low points of lodge finances? What were the charitable projects the lodge was engaged in?

The questions could go on and on, but usually the call is on "his nickel", so we feel as though we've given him a basis to start his research. Next, he will have to organize the material into logical segments.

Selecting those segments, of course, will depend upon the age of the lodge. Older lodges can usually be divided into fifty or twenty-five year segments. Younger lodges will probably wish to use ten year segments or possibly yearly. This naturally will be dictated by the interests of the author(s). One notable exception that comes to mind is a history of an old lodge in Pennsylvania. The author used varying lengths of time for each segment, but identified the major inventions which were patented in those years. It was fascinating and an interesting point of reference. A lodge in South Carolina prepared a history which was tied to the growth of the county, emphasizing the contributions made by the lodge members in the development of the county government and economic growth. Other lodge histories have been tied to the expansions of the railroads, the oil fields, industry and other social factors affecting the lodge.

A number of years ago, Brothers B. F. Mandelbaum and L. E. Vanatta presented a paper at the Oklahoma Lodge of Research entitled, "Preparation of a Lodge History." Following is a summary of that paper:

Masonic Research divides itself into numerous lines: history, philosophy, symbolism and other aspects of the Craft, as well as the practical application of the teachings of our Fraternity.

Of these, history is one of the most important aspects; to give knowledge of what has gone on before, to account for the spread of the Craft, and to know the contributions we have made to our cities, states and country. We are concerned with the aspect of history and primarily the history of Masonry, mainly Craft Lodge History.

We propose to outline what should be looked for in preparing a Lodge history. Perhaps with this outline, more Lodges could find a member who would be interested in compiling a history or information for a history.

The most fundamental, and first start on compilation of a history is to go through the minutes of the Lodge, write a brief or long page for each year and in this manner cover the month-to-month business and activities of the Lodge. But even in this sort of compilation, we need to know and plan what to look for.

Let us, therefore, itemize, with some discussion the several aspects that make up the Lodge history.

1. **PICTURES:** Strangely enough, it is possible to find old ones if time is taken to look. They may be in old newspaper files in photographers' studios. If possible, pictures of the first temple building (even if rented) and subsequent temples would be of interest; as will a few of the more prominent members, especially Grand Lodge Officers. Although not a picture, if an imprint of the Lodge Seal is available it should be included, especially when the Lodge was chartered under another jurisdiction.
2. **DATES:** When the Lodge was issued a dispensation, how was it obtained and when was it chartered? The dates of its first meeting Under Dispensation and after Charter and other firsts. When the Lodge moved to other temples, or built their own should be of importance, as well as when the first degrees were conferred.
3. **PEOPLE:** At the start, Masons who were the charter members: Who were they? Where did they come from? Who among them were most active? Some of the more prominent members should be noted for their civic or business activity as well as Masonic offices. While we are writing a history of a Lodge it is made up of people and therefore we will find names all through the history. Probably a list of Worshipful Masters and Secretaries should be included, and any long time officers such as a Tyler, who served many years.
4. **FINANCIAL:** What were the first dues? What changes were made over the years? How was the temple financed and if on borrowed money, when and how was it paid off? Were there any gifts or bequests to the Lodge and for what were they used?

5. **CHARITY:** We are a fraternal organization and any assistance to our members should not be openly published, except as perhaps an amount used for such purpose each year. Many Lodges, however, contribute much to our Grand Lodge Homes, to civic uses, hospitals, and other charities.
6. **SPECIAL MEETINGS:** Some Lodges have annual picnics, social functions, special events, SOyear presentations and other activities.
7. **OTHER MASONIC BODIES:** We are seek ing further Masonic education and affiliate with other bodies, the York and Scottish Rite and others. We also sponsor and assist DeMolay, Rainbow and Job's Daughters. Such activity, where it affects the Lodge or Lodge members is a part of our history.
8. **OLDTIMERS:** The best source of events and happenings in the Lodge is the older members who might remember items of interest, or may be able to elaborate on the items in the Lodge minutes that are briefed by the Secretary. Because these are memory items, they should be checked in some manner with other members or other sources for exactness. The use of a tape recorder to interview oldtimers is useful, just get ting them to reminisce about events in the Lodge while the recorder is on, and some questions are asked.

These are merely eight items, and there are others not listed, which might help a member in preparing a history of his Lodge. While some would not consider writing a history, perhaps they could, using an outline, prepare sufficient information from the Lodge records for another Brother to compile the information into a history.

Such are the challenges which we face in preparing a lodge history. Just as the "proof of the pudding is in the eating", when writing we must never lose sight of the reader. "The proof of the writing is in the reading." Lodge histories, to be effective must bring the events into focus so that those who read it will be interested, inspired and informed.

A lodge history should give a logical, factual and interesting story of the formation, events and individuals which resulted in the lodge being what it is. There is usually a good story as to how and why the name of the lodge was selected, and every member deserves to know. It costs money to publish a lodge history. The funds available will usually determine how extensive a volume will be published, and how many copies will be available. We think a quality lodge deserves a quality history. Just as in every other worthwhile endeavor, we need to "place our designs on the trestleboard." We need to plan. It is a good idea to set aside a set amount each year for several years in an interest-bearing "History Fund." In this way you can insure sufficient funds for a quality history. Many lodges supplement that fund by having annual fund raising dinners, picnics and family outings.

A lodge history is a challenge. More important, to meet that challenge, a great many members will become involved in its research, planning, preparation, proofreading, printing and publication. The more involvement in the project the more interest and support will be given to it.

The same is true when it comes time to update a lodge history. It's a constant challenge to record the good years and the bad and to evaluate the accomplishments of the lodge.

Does your lodge have a printed history?

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