

Masonic Tips – the Complete Collection

Masonic Tips: The Complete Collection

This Complete Collection is a chronological log documenting my journey in Freemasonry from my initial curiosity, to joining, to ultimately progressing through several officer positions and presiding as Grand Master over one of the Appendant Bodies.

Views and opinions about Freemasonry vary widely from positive to negative, so instead of trying to convince *you* one way or another, I hope that this will serve as a glimpse into *my* investigation, interaction, and involvement.

My Journey Begins

April 10, 2007

It seems that the topic of Freemasonry can pop up just about anywhere. I was having breakfast with a friend from church when the subject of Freemasonry came up. My friend is not a mason, but he told me that a number of our church members are. I had seen a lapel pin here and there on several of them, but I never gave it much thought. But after hearing a brief list of some church members who were Masons, I was intrigued. My first thought was, "How can these blatantly Godly men be Satan worshipers?" Obviously, I had some pre-conceptions of Freemasonry, so I decided to do some research to see just what it was all about. So began my journey.

Being an Internet geek, I started at the obvious places: Google and Wikipedia. As with most topics on the Internet, I was overwhelmed by the volume of information. It was also a bit discouraging because it seemed that for all the positive and informative Masonic sites I found, there were just as many if not more negative and anti-Masonic sites. On one hand, I read information on pro-Masonic sites that sounded above board and legitimate, and on the other hand, I read the conspiracy theories and claims about Freemasonry's supposed "true" origins, involvements, and agendas. Some of these sites are quite convincing, and they do have some excellent information, but after a while, I became skeptical of many of the claims of the anti-Masonic view. I was reading one anti-Masonic blog that appeared to have some excellent and interesting information...up to the point where it referenced the "Moon Landing Hoax"! That's when the alarm bells went off, and I realized that my perusal of Masonic information had simply confirmed what I have always known: The Internet continues to be filled with lots of crackpots and paranoid people sporting tin-foil hats.

Are some of the anti-Masonic sites worth reading? In fairness, I have to say yes. After all, I believe that it's important to understand all sides of an issue. Just try to be discerning about what both sides have to say. It was at this point that I stumbled upon the site MasonicInfo.com. At first, I thought it was yet another anti-

Masonic site. But it turns out that it is a very pro-Masonic site that includes lots of interesting anti-Masonic information with responses, rebuttals, and explanations from a Masonic perspective. I found it to be very informative, and I was impressed that it presented both sides of the story. I especially liked the "Masonic Primer" section which contains lots of interesting historical and practical information about the "who", "what", and "why" of Freemasonry. For anyone interested in Freemasonry, I suggest you check this site out. It is rich with information, and well worth the read.

One interesting consistency I found with many pro-Masonic sites is that they tend to provide just enough information to get you interested in what Freemasonry is, but they don't reveal everything about it. Many Masons will tell you that there are many things about Freemasonry that simply need to be experienced. In contrast, many of the anti-Masonic sites tend to want to reveal everything to the visitor. Again, this makes sense, as the apparent goal of many anti-Masonic sites is to "expose" Freemasonry. If you want to read the details of the rituals, and learn all of Freemasonry's "secrets", there are numerous sources, and they are available. But if you are at all interested in joining, then I'd recommend that it's probably best to avoid those sources and just experience things as they come. I've chosen not to dig too deep, for should I decide to join, I don't want to "spoil" anything.

Do take the time to research and learn. There are lots of misconceptions and misunderstandings about what Freemasonry is and isn't. Heck, if nothing else, you are in for some interesting reading!

This is my first article about my experience in Freemasonry.

First Contacts

April 10, 2007

I read lots of information online about freemasonry, both pro and anti, but I felt that it was time to talk to someone who was actually involved in it to get some first-hand information. So I approached one of the members of our church who I knew to be a Mason, and he was quite open and happy to discuss it with me. He didn't go into a lot of details, but he did give me enough information to make me want to know more. I left pondering what we discussed, and eventually went back online to read and learn some more.

Then, the next Sunday at church, another friend came up to me and said something along the lines of, "So Jim, I understand you've started a journey." He caught me off guard—I honestly didn't understand what he meant—but my quizzical look was obvious to him, so he said, "Let's just say, you asked the right questions." Then it hit me: he was a Mason also! We chatted for a while, and he answered some questions I had. So far, all of the men who I had discovered were Masons are respected men that I hold in high regard. What a refreshing thing to learn!

Interestingly, one of the things that I learned about Freemasonry is that you will never be asked to join. They don't recruit or solicit—they wait for you to ask. I read a neat story that talked about one person's experience in learning about how to join. He said that had he known that he had to ask, he would have asked long ago.

It later struck me that freemasonry is an organization that is not overt as such. Yes, it's visible, but it doesn't advertise or recruit. It pretty much just exists in the background, just "doing." Now, the conspiracy theorists may have lots to say about that, and I admit that on occasion, I'll don a tin-foil hat, but something about this seemed to be different. There is something about those Masons who I met that seems so compelling: They are humble, friendly, helpful, and Godly men. What they were involved in was something I want to be a part of.

Now, I'll wait and see what is the next step.

This is my second article about my experience in Freemasonry.

Making My Petition

April 10, 2007

After talking with several Masons and doing lots of reading, I decided that I would like to join the ranks of the Freemasons. I talked with a Mason friend from church several times, and eventually he gave me a petition form to complete and return to him. It was an intriguing form with some interestingly worded questions, but everything seemed to be in order, so I completed the form and returned it to him. And that's it! So now I wait patiently to learn the next steps.

He told me that my form would be presented to the Lodge, and that if the Lodge voted to consider my petition, then an investigating committee would be formed to meet with me. Hmm...sounds ominous! But from what I've heard and read, it's really just an opportunity for me to learn more about what's to come, and for the members of the Lodge to decide whether or not they want to allow me to be part of their Lodge.

I'm guessing that it should be pretty straight forward, so I figure that if I just be myself and don't try to impress, they'll see me for who I really am and make decisions based on that.

This is my third article about my experience in Freemasonry.

Some Patience and More Research

April 10, 2007

Patience. It's a virtue, and it seems to be required of becoming a mason. It can be frustrating, but it can also be rewarding. In this day and age, we are so compelled to the here and now, to the immediacy, to the urgency of everything. The mere thought of having to wait days, weeks, or possibly even months to find out if I can join can be very frustrating. But during this time of waiting, I see two important points coming to the surface: perspective and time.

First, the waiting helps me put things into perspective. I've discovered that Freemasonry is not just a club to join, or an event to go to. It will hopefully be a life-long experience. Jumping into something for the wrong reasons is never good, so having the opportunity to try to better understand just what it's all about will hopefully let me make a clear decision instead of a hasty one.

Second, I decided to use this waiting period to learn more about Freemasonry—to do some more research. I found a number of informative blogs written by people who have recently become Masons, detailing their personal experiences. Many contain personal accounts of the steps they followed, the processes, the experiences, and how it impacted them. It's been interesting reading!

Of note is the "Horseshoes and Handgrenades" blog. For me, this site brought all the "heady" historical and impersonal facts down to a personal level as it recounts one man's journey through the degrees of Freemasonry. And the more I read, the more I wanted to know the outcome! But that's for some time in the future, because he's still progressing. What a great read!

That site and others, recommend the book "Freemasons for Dummies" by Christopher Hodapp. I usually avoid "Dummies" books, but this one comes highly recommended (and it was at my local bookstore!) So I purchased it and I'm currently reading it. It's rich with lots of easy-to-understand history and information, and even covers some of the more "secretive" elements of the ritual ceremonies. But fear not. It makes some excellent notations about the "secret" information: First, it doesn't reveal any "true secrets" of the Craft, so anything that it does reveal doesn't compromise the integrity or the experience of Freemasonry. And second, there is a recommendation at the beginning of the "Ceremonies" chapter that clearly states that the chapter does contain some information that, though not secret, may "spoil" the experience for you if you are considering joining. Fortunately, there's so much more in the book that avoiding that one chapter until later should not be a problem. I chose to not read that chapter.

I've learned a lot about what Freemasonry is (and isn't), its history, its involvement in history, and its beliefs. And I've only scratched the surface. So, I continue to wait, and continue to learn more about the history of Freemasonry, and I continue to read about some of the personal experiences on other sites. I'm finding it fascinating, informative, and exciting, and I'm eager to see how things unfold.

This is my fourth article about my experience in Freemasonry.

A Time of Waiting and Patience

April 16, 2007

I told my Mason friend from church that I was reading the book "Freemasons For Dummies". Though he had not heard of it, he was pleased to see that I was taking the initiative to learn and study Freemasonry. I told him that I was getting anxious about waiting for the process to unfold, and he said that this is "a time of waiting and patience". In some Lodges, things can move forward very quickly. In others, things can take a while. For me, it seems to be the later. I want things to move forward, and I know they are (apparently a lot happens behind the scenes) it's just that sometimes I don't like waiting. But you know, it's a good lesson in patience that I'm grateful for.

I'm really enjoying reading and learning the history of Freemasonry. I'm almost done with the "Freemasons For Dummies" book, and I continue to be fascinated by what it presents. For example, I never knew that the Boy Scouts and its honor organization the "Order Of The Arrow" (OA) had some roots in Freemasonry. While they are not Masonic organizations, many of their founders were Masons, and Masonic influence is very evident in ceremonies and moral teachings. This really hit home for me because I received the Eagle Scout award while I was a Scout, and I was elected by my troop to receive the Ordeal honor in OA (Ordeal being the the first "level" of OA) and I later took the Brotherhood honor. In college, I pledged the Alpha Phi Omega service fraternity, which is an offshoot of the Boy Scouts. It did have its social elements, but its main goal was brotherhood and service.

So I do have some familiarity with involvement in fraternal organizations, and I have had the honor of achieving goals of moral and fraternal importance. As an adult, I am no longer active in these organizations, but interestingly, the Scout Oath and Law, and the OA Obligation do cross my mind frequently. I guess the lessons I learned as a child from those organizations have stuck with me.

So, as I continue to wait and be patient, I also continue to read my book, and explore online. Despite the proliferation of anti-Masonic articles, there are many informative and interesting articles and blogs to explore. It's very interesting to read the history of Freemasonry, how it has influenced society, and, more importantly, what other Masons went through and how they perceive Freemasonry.

This is my fifth article about my experience in Freemasonry.

Progress! A Vote!

May 6, 2007

I spoke with my Mason friend from church, and he said that the Lodge had voted on my petition this week, and had formed an investigating committee of three people. They will be contacting me soon. Despite the “fears” that some have expressed about the investigating committee, I feel completely at ease.

During my waiting, I've been reading so much about Freemasonry. I finished the book “Freemasons For Dummies and found it to be an amazing read. Contrary to my earlier decision, I decided to go ahead and read all of the chapters. I read about the rituals, and the symbols, and found both chapters to be very fascinating.

I've also read many interesting articles and blogs on the Internet covering a host of topics, and I found lots of interesting and educational information about Freemasonry—all aspects, positive and negative. I've avoided articles dealing with specific rituals and “exposures” as I would like my experience to be fresh, but there is still an amazing amount of content that I've enjoyed reading. I've particularly found the historical articles to be the most interesting—history of the organization, the rituals, and Freemasonry's current state. I have read literally hundreds of pages of content, and it has only led to piquing my interest more.

So, I continue to wait, but I am encouraged to hear that the process is moving forward. But the wait has also been refreshing. With everything today being so here and now, and expectations of immediate gratification, I find it to be an interesting time while I wait. It's hard to describe, but through the reading I have done, I am learning that Freemasonry's history is rooted deeply in the past, and that the traditions and rituals have been preserved and sustained for many centuries. Those were slower times, and it brings me a different perspective to the organization. It's something that seems to have much more to it than the typical club. I can't wait to learn more and begin my real involvement.

This is my sixth article about my experience in Freemasonry.

Moving Forward

May 11, 2007

A couple days ago, I received a letter from the Lodge secretary officially informing me that the Lodge had voted on and accepted my petition, an investigating committee was formed, and that they would contact me soon. The letter also said that the results of the committee would be presented and voted on at the June 5 meeting.

I called the secretary to let him know that I received the letter, and he was great to talk with! Unlike the letter, he was very informal. He was friendly, and gave me some additional information about what to expect from the investigating committee. Again, it was all very informal. I'm anxious to meet with the Lodge members (so far, I've only met just a couple.) If the balance of the membership is anything like the several Masons I have recently met, I think I'll be in good company!

One point of note is that I was very intrigued by one aspect of the letter, just as I was by the petition: the

wording, the embossed Lodge seal, the formality. But it wasn't just a bunch of legal mumbo-jumbo. It had an air of historical relevance or rootedness. It had a formality about it that is very unusual for this time. It's difficult to articulate, but these points are things that paint a picture of seriousness and importance. On one hand, I see informal Masons, and yet I see seriousness in the administration that I don't see anywhere else.

So, I continue to wait while the process moves forward, but the waiting has been very fruitful. As I stated in earlier posts, I've been reading and reading and reading. I'm so fascinated by the history and the symbolism, and can't wait to go deeper to learn more.

Oh, and the Blogs. Wow! I have found a number of Masonic blogs that I frequent, and have read lots of great (and not so great) articles spanning the spectrum of Masonic blogging. Some of the articles are a bit over my head, simply because haven't been exposed to some of the discussed content, but overall, I'm enjoying some great reads. And I am especially enjoying the blogs by prospective and new Masons. It's interesting and encouraging to read the stories and personal experiences of others around the world. Hopefully, someone out there will find my musings interesting!

Finally, one visitor here asked me where I'm from, inquiring that maybe I live near him. Well, I'm currently living in Anderson, South Carolina in the good ol' U.S.A, having moved a few years ago from the Chicago area. Anderson is in the beautiful Upstate of South Carolina where my wife and I are enjoying the open spaces, friendly people, a deep Faith, and solid morals of most of the people we have met. No, it's not Eden, but it's a fresh change from the big city life of Chicago.

Oh, and I also found out that there are three Lodges in my area. Maybe that's not unusual for a dense, metropolitan area, but for a town of 27,000 in a county of about 175,000, it seems like a lot. And the consensus among the Masons I spoke with is that all are fine Lodges.

More later as things progress....

This is my seventh article about my experience in Freemasonry.

But it's more than that....

May 22, 2007

When I started looking into Freemasonry, I was overwhelmed by all of the information and varied views about just what it is all about. So I read and read, I talked with Masons, and I thought about just what Freemasonry is. And this is what I came up with:

It's a club.

You join it. You attend meetings. Business is conducted at the meetings. You gather socially. You do fundraisers. But it's more than that...

It's a fraternity.

You join in brotherhood. You pledge your loyalty to it. You help your fellow brothers, and you receive help from them. But it's more than that...

It's philanthropic.

It uses your money and time to help others. It helps the poor. It helps the needy. But it's more than that...

It's a mystery.

You seek it, it doesn't seek you. Its secrets are held in high regard. It imparts timeless wisdom. It uses symbols and allegory to explain itself. It has secret signs and words. But it's more than that...

It's open and visible.

Its secrets are published. Its secrets are known. Its buildings are prominent and visible. Its members often wear identifiable pins and rings. But it's more than that...

It's a system of morality.

It teaches good morals. It instructs good ethics. It promotes integrity. It despises falsehood. But it's more than that...

It believes in God.

It finds God in nature. It finds God in Science. It finds God in Mathematics. It finds evidence of God everywhere. But it's more than that...

It's selective.

It requires belief in God. It investigates you. It votes on you. It decides if you are worthy for it. But it's more than that...

It sets aside differences and breaks down walls.

It doesn't discuss religion. It doesn't discuss politics. It accepts men of all God-believing theologies. It is open to all denominations. But it's more than that...

It's theater.

Its rituals and ceremonies rival many local theater groups. But it's more than that...

So what is it? It's Freemasonry! But it's so much more...

A Light At The End Of The Tunnel?

June 4, 2007

I've been a bit concerned lately because I have not yet had any contact with the investigating committee. The next lodge meeting is Tuesday, June 5th, and I've been afraid that if I don't get contacted, I'll have to

wait another month. I'm taking it all in stride, understanding that the summer is a very busy time, so we'll see how this plays out. But I am now greatly encouraged, because I found out a couple things appear to be a light at the end of the tunnel....

Yesterday, I spoke with a Past Master of the lodge and friend from church, and he said that someone from the investigating committee would be contacting me on Monday the 4th, and if that goes OK, then the lodge would vote on me at the meeting on the 5th.

I also spoke with my Masonic friend from church, and he explained a few more things about what I can expect. He said that they would schedule the initiation for about two weeks or so after the lodge votes on me. In fact, he said that if I put my mind to it, I could be initiated, passed, and raised by September. I was concerned about the summer months, but he said that unlike many other lodges, this lodge does not "go dark" during the summer, so I could progress during that time. I'm certainly not going to push anything—heck, I need to get initiated first!—but it's still encouraging.

So, I am reading many articles, I continue to read and study what I can, and I continue to look for resources that might be useful and interesting. Roger said that once I am initiated, that he has lots of good resources for me to read and study. He's a history buff, and I share that interest a bit, so I anticipate learning lots.

This is my eighth article about my experience in Freemasonry.

The Date Is Set!

June 11, 2007

Today, I received a call from the Master of the lodge, and he said that my Entered Apprentice initiation is scheduled for 7:00PM on Tuesday, June 12.

Last week, the investigating committee contacted me. We had a very nice talk that was informal and low-key, and was far from my original impression of the investigation process. It was more like a job interview than anything else, but job interviews really impose more pressure. We discussed some of my beliefs, who I am, what I do for a living, how I learned about Freemasonry, etc. And the fact that they were so nice, polite, and far from intimidating, made our discussion so much easier. Yet at the same time, they spoke with an authority and a knowledge that echoed and confirmed with great precision those things I have been reading over the past two months. I was impressed.

They told me a bit about the lodge, what the next steps were, and what to expect. The lodge is "Divver" lodge #349 in Anderson, South Carolina. It is one of three lodges in the area. Interestingly, it is not the lodge that my friend from church is a member of. (He is the Masonic friend from church who I asked about joining.) But a number of church members that I know attend Divver, so I won't feel like a complete outsider.

I found it interesting to learn that the Divver lodge is not “older leaning”. Though there are older gentlemen who are active in the lodge, the majority tend to be younger—mid 30's or so. I'm 41, so it's great to see that kind of mix. I read so many stories on the 'Net of doom and gloom about the future of Freemasonry, yet locally, I see three very active lodges bringing in new members all the time. Maybe it's regional, or maybe I'm just lucky, but I'm pleased to know that Freemasonry is quite active in my town.

So, the investigating committee reported favorably, the lodge voted to accept me, and on June 12, I go to the lodge to go over some preliminary things. Then, the Entered Apprentice degree work begins. It's been a couple months since I turned in my petition, and the wait has been long, but very rewarding. I've learned a lot about Freemasonry, and can't wait to make the next step to become an Entered Apprentice!

I'll post a follow-up article after the initiation.

This is my ninth article about my experience in Freemasonry.

Initiated as an Entered Apprentice!

June 15, 2007

On Tuesday evening, June 12, I was initiated as an Entered Apprentice into the Divver lodge #349 in Anderson, South Carolina. As I reflect back over the evening of my initiation, the one word that keeps popping into my mind is “impressive”. I was so impressed by the many events of the evening: From the friendliness of the members, to their devotion to the craft; from the seriousness and solemnity of the ceremonies, to the memorization displayed by the team conducting the ceremony. It was certainly an impressive evening—one I'll not forget.

As you have probably read in my earlier posts, as I waited on the process from petitioning to initiation, things seemed to be moving along at a slow pace. This, of course, was only a reflection of my impatience. But then, “Bam!” things started happening quickly. My initiation was scheduled for just two days after I spoke with the investigating committee!

On a side note, the night of the initiation was bitter-sweet. On the down side, I was disappointed because it turns out that several of my Mason friends who were very instrumental in my decision to join were unfortunately not informed of the night. They actually attend different lodges, so it's completely understandable that the lodge I joined would not have informed them. And I simply neglected to let them know as I was all caught up in the moment. But the good news is that I met a group of guys that night who are sincere, friendly, and are certainly worth getting to know better. I will make sure that my friends are invited to my Second degree ceremony.

Obviously, I won't go into any details of the initiation—what went on inside the walls of the lodge will stay inside the walls of the lodge. If you really want to know the details, go seek out a Mason, and ask him about joining. That's really the only way you'll get any accurate picture of what it's all about. I will say,

though, that I was thoroughly impressed by the members who conducted the initiation and lecture. Everything was done from memory, and it was done well. After all was said and done, several members commented about their mistakes and stumbles, but really, they are their own worst critics. From my vantage point, it was very well done. Did I say I was impressed?

Our lodge is very casual in appearance and attire, unlike the glitzy, expensive-looking lodges you see in many pictures. But it has a close, intimate feel, and the ceremony was taken very seriously. What was most amazing about the initiation (the entire evening, in fact) was that it was “all about me.” I was the only candidate, so the evening was devoted to my initiation. The meal, the initiation, the lecture, the social time—all prepared and conducted for me. That busy men would take time out of their lives to prepare and conduct an event spanning several hours specifically for me is truly amazing and very humbling. Yet the excitement, joy, and dedication that was evident in everyone present really spoke volumes to me about their devotion.

After having read numerous articles on the ‘Net, and reading the excellent book, “Freemasonry For Dummies”, I thought I may have spoiled some of the evening, but it turns out that I simply didn’t know what to expect. Though I probably did read more than most would, none of what I read spoiled anything. In many ways, some of my prior knowledge and information helped me to better understand the initiation. The prevailing mantra during the evening was, “Everyone here went through the exact same thing.” I wasn’t sure to be comforted or intimidated! The whole evening was at the same time solemn, exciting, humorous, friendly, unnerving, intriguing, educational, and informative. I can’t wait to go through the remaining two degrees.

So, the wait is over, and I am now an Entered Apprentice Mason. But like so many of the steps in life’s journeys, this is just the beginning. It is now time to work. My proficiency work will consist of lots of memorization. Based on my reading about how other lodges conduct the examinations, it appears that the South Carolina lodges don’t cut any corners. Much must be memorized. But it all seems manageable, and it’s exciting to learn. The Master of the lodge said that he will schedule my Fellowcraft degree in 28 days with two other people—if I can learn the required material.

I look forward to the coming weeks as I strive to learn what’s required, and hopefully earn my second degree. I’ll continue to post my thoughts as they come.

This is my tenth article about my experience in Freemasonry.

Some More First Degree Work

June 22, 2007

Last night, I had the honor of attending another local lodge in Belton, SC to watch their first degree work for three candidates. Two brothers from my lodge attended, and two of the brothers from the Belton lodge who helped with my first degree work were also there. It was very welcoming, and nice to see some familiar faces in an otherwise unfamiliar setting. As I get more and more involved in Freemasonry, I see

that I am going to be meeting lots and lots of people!

The degree work was basically the same as at my initiation with very few exceptions. It was so nice to be able to see things from a different vantage point. I enjoyed being able to really focus on what was being said, and the order in which things were said. I actually found myself mouthing much of the work. (I guess my attempts at memorization are at least a bit fruitful.) Watching the initiation also cleared up a number of words that I have missed in studying. This will definitely help me in better learning my work for my second degree. I am now very interested in attending more first degree work in my area!

Of significant note was an amazing Masonic brother named Justin Parnell, who is the brother who gave the first degree lecture. (Sidebar: I don't know what it is about the name "Justin". I have met more guys named "Justin" through Freemasonry than anywhere else. I think I've met 5 or 6 in the two initiations alone, and that was out of about 50 or so people. Weird!) Anyway, My lodge was unable to schedule someone to do my first degree lecture, so I attended another first degree lodge to hear it there. Justin gave me my first degree lecture, and hearing him giving it to the three candidates and me was so helpful. With very little prompting, he gave it all from memory—and we're talking about a 20 minute or so lecture! Way to go Justin!

I look forward to getting together with some brothers to help coach me. I can get my second degree 28 days after my first degree, but I still feel that I have a long way to go in memorizing.

This is my eleventh article on my experience in Freemasonry.

Passed to the Second Degree!

September 26, 2007

Tonight, I had the honor of being passed to the second degree of Fellow Craft. It was a bit unnerving at first because my coaches have had very, busy work schedules, so I didn't have as much time to work with them as I would have liked. But in the end, I actually did quite well. Originally, we had three candidates scheduled, but unfortunately, one had a work commitment that he could not get out of, so it was two of us receiving our second degree. Hopefully, he will be able to have his second degree in the next week or so. The examination part actually went quite smoothly with only a couple minor glitches. Though we had not practiced together, it probably was hard to tell as we each knew our stuff.

The second degree lecture, like the first, was impressive, but went much deeper, and it was given so well. The man giving it had not done it in over seven months, and he was asked just the night before if he would like to give it. With very minimal prompting, he gave it almost flawlessly. And was it an interesting lecture! The night ended in some good fellowship, and lots of congratulations.

As I was driving home, I had to call my dad and let him know that I had gotten my second degree. Being a Master Mason, he was proud. Kinda fun following in at least some of my father's footsteps! Depending on the timing of things, he will be visiting in the Fall, so he might be able to visit while I receive my third

degree. We'll see.

Over the past three months since my initiation, I had the opportunity to attend five other first degrees—three at my lodge, and two at other local lodges. That really helped clarify and reinforce some of the material. Of note was some first degree work done in Townville, SC where the local Sheriff's department conducted the initiation. It was very impressive seeing uniformed police officers doing all of the work to initiate one of their fellow officers. The the work was very well done. It's great to see community leaders dedicated to Godly work of integrity. I have always had great respect for people in law enforcement, but this really raised the bar. Oh, and at some first degree work at my local lodge, they asked me if I wanted to sit as a Junior Deacon! That was lots of fun and it let me be right in the middle of things. Again, it helped me in preparing for my second degree. I hope to be able to participate like that again soon.

I have decided not to coast too long after getting my second degree. I'm kind of on a roll, so why not maintain the momentum? I need to wait at least 28 days before I can go for my third degree, so I could conceivably get it at the end of October, but I'm not going to rush it unnecessarily. I want to try to do better with the third degree than I did with the second, so if it does take longer, so be it.

So, my journey continues, and as I learn more and more about Freemasonry, I am coming to understand more of what it is, and more importantly, what it is not. I've had some excellent discussions with fellow Christians, non-Christians, Masons, and non-Masons, and I am very comfortable in my decision to pursue Masonry. I'll keep you updated as I continue onward.

This is my twelfth article on my experience in Freemasonry.

The George Washington Masonic Memorial

October 8, 2007

My wife and I are taking a trip to Washington, DC later this month for a long weekend to just "get away". Our focus is intended to be on several of the Smithsonian museums, but we've added the [George Washington Masonic Memorial](#) to the itinerary. I'll be writing an article recapping our adventure, and I'll include some pictures. I'm hoping that this will give us an excellent chance to see some examples of Masonic history and memorabilia, and to learn more about Freemasonry's role in the foundations of this country. Stay tuned....

This is my thirteenth article on my experience in Freemasonry.

I Think I "Get It"

October 8, 2007

Obviously I still have a lot to learn about Freemasonry having only recently been passed to the second degree. So until I progress further, I can really only comment on my current knowledge and exposure to Freemasonry as a Fellow Craft. But of what I do understand now, I think I “get it” concerning just what Freemasonry is all about, and in many ways more importantly, what it is not.

I was driving home the other evening from some first degree work at another lodge, and I was thinking about the work. It got me thinking about all of the anti-masonic stuff I’ve read on the ‘Net. It got me thinking about what it’s all about...just what are the basics...the simple explanation. As I see it, once you pare it all down to its core, it all just seems so simple:

I see an organization comprised of men who have each taken the initiative to learn how to join the organization; who are ultimately granted membership through initiation; who obligate themselves to commit to the ideals of the organization and to not disclose its secrets; who commit to learn the material required to advance in the two remaining degrees; and who ultimately commit themselves to abide by a code of good conduct to improve their character, to embrace the pursuit of knowledge, and to help their fellow man. I believe that in knowing a man to be a Mason, you can be assured that he has experienced all of what I just described, and that he should be trusted to be held to what he has experienced. How that man conducts himself is ultimately his personal responsibility, so being a Mason is, by no means, a guarantee that he will improve himself, but he is provided with the tools to conduct himself in a manner that is very atypical, especially today. And so far, my impression of the men who I know to be Masons is much higher than I ever thought.

So that’s about it! Is there more to Freemasonry? Of course! But at its basic level, it just seems so simple. It’s unfortunate that so many seem to really complicate it.

This is my fourteenth article on my experience in Freemasonry.

Raised to Master Mason!

November 19, 2007

This past Saturday, another Masonic brother and I were raised to the degree of Master Mason, the Third Degree in the Blue Lodge. It was an interesting, informative, and certainly memorable degree. We had our Fellowcraft examination, followed by the Third Degree work. Our Fellowcraft examination went very smoothly despite not having spent any time together going over the questions and answers. I guess we were duly and truly prepared.

After the examination, we began the Third Degree work. Interestingly, this was conducted solely by Past Masters. I’m not sure if it is global to Freemasonry, or something specific to the Grand Lodge of South Carolina, but the first time that any Third Degree work is done in a lodge during a year, the work is conducted by Past Masters. (Which means, sad to say, that our first Third Degree work this year was done all the way in November. I hope that next year, we have more earlier.) Of the 24 or so people who

attended, about nine or ten of them were Past Masters, and they did an excellent job with the degree work.

Obviously, I cannot go into any detail, but suffice it to say, the Third Degree degree work was impressive and very, very memorable. Initially, I had read a lot of information online about the various degrees, but after being initiated to Entered Apprentice and then passed to Fellowcraft, I decided not to read any more about the Third Degree so as not to "spoil" things. Fortunately, nothing was spoiled, and I have to say that experiencing the degree work was exciting. I've had the opportunity over the past several months to see about six First Degrees, and I can't wait to see another Third Degree from the "other side" for a different perspective.

After I received my Third Degree, two key points were made to me by multiple people on different occasions:

"While this is the final degree in the Blue Lodge, this is really just the beginning of my journey in Freemasonry."

"You will get out of Freemasonry what you put into it."

So now, I am a Master Mason! I can attend regular business meetings, vote on new candidates, get more involved in the Lodge, join other Masonic organizations requiring a Third Degree prior to joining, wear a Masonic ring, and a host of other things. I look forward to continuing my journey in Freemasonry, and getting more involved!

This is my fifteenth article on my experience in Freemasonry.

Brother, take a seat!

December 4, 2007

Less than three weeks after being raised to the degree of Master Mason, I was installed as one of the Stewards of our Lodge. The new Junior Warden-Elect appointed me and the other brother who was raised with me as the new Stewards for 2008. I'm honored that the opportunity to begin moving through the chairs has come so quickly! I look forward to being able to participate in the degree work, the business meetings, and to provide cheerful service to the Lodge officers where needed.

The December business meeting was the first meeting I have been able to attend as a Mason, so it was exciting. Though the meeting was likely longer than usual because of the installation ceremony, I found it to be quite interesting. And it was impressive to watch representatives from the Grand Lodge performing the ceremony.

So I look forward to attending the next year's meetings, getting more involved, and helping out as one of the new Stewards. I'm excited to see where Freemasonry takes me in 2008!

The York Rite Background

December 24, 2008



The York Rite, like the Scottish, is one of Freemasonry's Appendant Bodies which is open to a Master Mason to join to further his knowledge of Freemasonry. While Freemasonry officially culminates with the third degree of the Blue Lodge, the nine additional degrees of the the York Rite are considered to expand upon and complete the Blue Lodge degrees.

The York Rite is broken down into three "bodies", each governing and controlling the degree work related to that body. The bodies are Royal Arch Masonry, Cryptic Masonry, and Knights Templar (also called the Chivalric Orders.) The intent is to confer additional Degrees or Orders, each building upon the foundations laid by the Blue Lodge Degrees. The order in which they are received is not necessarily historically chronological.

Here is a brief synopsis of the various Degrees or Orders conferred by each of the York Rite bodies:



Royal Arch Masonry

The degrees of the Royal Arch center on the construction phases of Solomon's Temple. This York Rite Body is governed by a "Chapter", and it consists of the following four Degrees:

Mark Master

This Degree emphasizes the lessons of regularity, discipline, and integrity. It is a most impressive Degree centered on the story of the Fellowcraft of the quarry and their role in the building of the Temple.

Past Master (Virtual)

This Degree emphasizes the lesson of harmony. This Degree is conferred because ancient custom required that a Mason must be a Past Master in order to be exalted to the Royal Arch. In some Grand Jurisdictions this Degree is conferred upon all sitting Masters of the Blue Lodge. The Degree confers no actual rank upon the recipient, but is exemplified to maintain the ancient custom.

Most Excellent Master

This Degree emphasizes the lesson of reverence. This Degree is centered on the dedication of the Temple after its completion, particularly the consecration of the Sanctum Sanctorum and the descent of the Host into the Temple. It is complimentary to the Mark Master Degree and completes the symbolic lessons introduced in that Degree.

The Royal Arch

This is the completion of the Master Mason Degree and the summit of the original Degrees of the Blue Lodge as practiced in the Antients Lodges of England before 1820. The Degree explains the origins of the Substitute Word found in the Master Mason Degree, the recovery of the Ineffable Word, and its concealment within the Royal Arch Word. This Degree, together with the Master Mason Degree, may have once been exemplified as one large or “super” Degree, with the Master Mason Degree explaining the loss of the Master’s Word and the Royal Arch explaining the recovery of the Master’s Word.



Cryptic Masonry

The next York Rite Body is Cryptic Masonry which is governed by a “Council”. The Degrees get their name from a hidden or secret vault referenced in the degrees. The following degrees are conferred in Cryptic Masonry:

Royal master

This Degree emphasizes the lessons of patience and fortitude. The Degree centers around the Fellowcraft Masons who were artificers fabricating the fittings and furniture of the Temple. It is unusual in that the first part of the Degree depicts events taking place before the death of the Grand Master Hiram Abif, and the last part depicts events occurring after his death.

Select Master

This Degree emphasizes the lessons of devotion and zeal. The Degree centers on the construction and furnishing of a Secret Vault beneath the Sanctum Sanctorum of the Temple, and the deposition of those secrets pertaining to the Craft by the three ancient Grand Masters of the Craft. This Degree bridges the events surrounding the concealment and loss of the Ineffable Word and the events leading to the recover of the Word in the Royal Arch Degree.

Super Excellent Master

This Degree emphasizes lessons of loyalty and faithfulness. It centers around events leading to the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple at the hands of the Chaldeans. This degree is an honorary one, and a member of the Council does not need to have it in order to hold membership or office.



Chivalric Orders

The Chivalric Orders confer three Orders, instead of Degrees, culminating in the grade of Knight Templar. This is the only recognized Masonic Body that has religious connotations since it is based on the Christian Religion and virtues. The governing body is the Commandery. The orders conferred are The Illustrious Order of the Red Cross, The Order of Malta and The Order of the Temple. Prior to completing these Orders, the Companion must declare his belief in or loyalty to the Christian religion. These are the Chivalric Orders:

Illustrious Order of the Red Cross

This Order emphasizes the lesson of truth. Elements of this Order were practiced in Ancient Lodges before the final form of the Master Mason Degree came into use.

Order of Malta

This is an Order emphasizing the lesson of faith. This Order requires the Mason to profess and practice the Christian faith. It introduces the lesson and example of the unfearing and faithful martyr of Christianity. The Order is centered on allegorical elements of the Knights of Malta, inheritors of the medieval Knights Hospitaller.

Order of the Temple

Also known as the Knights Templar, this impressive Order emphasizes the lessons of self-sacrifice and reverence. It is meant to rekindle the spirit of the medieval Knights Templar devotion and self-sacrifice to Christianity. The history of this Masonic Order is long and convoluted, with the Order's ritual differing between that conferred in England and in the United States. That practiced in the United States has a slight militant zeal to the lesson of Christianity, whereas the English ritual is more allegorical. However, the American ritual is most impressive, and more emphasis is placed on the solemnity and reverence associated with the Crucifixion, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ. Today's Knight Templar is a man dedicated to the living Christ, and the defense of the virtues contained in the practices observed by all true Christians.

Here are some links to some additional information on these degrees:

[York Rite Degrees](#)

[York Rite Wikipedia article](#)

[Scottish Rite Wikipedia article](#)

[Masonic Appendant Bodies Wikipedia article](#)

Seeking More Light – Part One

December 25, 2008

Since my journey in Freemasonry began, I have always been interested in Freemasonry's Appendant Bodies, specifically the York Rite. My father was a Master Mason, went through the Scottish Rite, and eventually became a Shriner. (In his day, it was a requirement that to become a Shriner, you had to go through either the Scottish Rite or the York Rite. This requirement has since been lifted.) After some reading and research about the Scottish and York Rites, I decided to pursue the York Rite as I felt that it aligned more closely with my Christian walk.

I was raised to a Master Mason in November of 2007, and in October 2008, one of my Masonic brothers and I, along with others, went through the first six of nine Degrees that make up the York Rite. In the United States, the York Rite is divided into three organizations. Each is independent, yet all are intimately connected. Collectively, these are called the "York Rite Bodies". Some jurisdictions confer single Degrees

over time, while others confer them either all together or in groups. Our local York Rite Bodies have a limited membership, so conferring Degree work has to be carefully planned. They decided to confer the multiple Degrees and Orders over two Saturdays.

The first Saturday consisted of the degrees of the Capitular Degrees and the Cryptic Degrees, and the second Saturday conferred the Chivalric Orders. The Capitular Degrees consisted of the four degrees of Royal Arch masonry which include the Mark Master, Past Master (Virtual), Most Excellent Master, and The Royal Arch Degrees. The Cryptic Masonry Degrees conferred were the Royal Master and Select Master.

(Please see my article, The York Rite Background for more details on these Degrees.)

The degree work on the first Saturday was long and exhausting, but it was well done and very impressive. It was certainly just as impressive as the Blue Lodge degrees, and was very engaging as many of the degrees built upon the foundations laid in the first three Degrees. From Mark Master through Select Master, the broader story of Freemasonry was revealed and was very memorable.

The remaining three Orders of the Chivalric Orders were conferred in November, 2008.

(Please see part two of this article for my experience in the Chivalric Orders.)

[Seeking More Light – Part Two](#)

December 26, 2008

After completing the Royal Arch and Cryptic Masonry degrees, the final steps on the path of the York Rite are the “Chivalric Orders”. These Degrees (called Orders in this group) include the the “Illustrious Order of the Red Cross” which is an Order that emphasizes the lesson of truth; the “Order of Malta” which emphasizes the lesson of faith; and the “Order of the Temple” (also called Order of the Knights Templar) which emphasizes the lessons of self-sacrifice and reverence.

The final three Orders were conferred in November, 2008. The Illustrious Order of the Red Cross and the Order of Malta were conducted in short form, and the Order of the Temple was conducted in long form. (Some day, I'd love to see the first two done in long form.) The work took most of the morning, and it was impressive, interesting, and absolutely unforgettable.

It is very refreshing for me as a Christian to see a Masonic group that is wholly devoted to supporting and defending the Christian faith.

So my degree work in the York Rite is now complete, but as is so true with all of Freemasonry, my journey is now just beginning. I look forward to the upcoming year!

York Rite Degree Work – Some ponderings

December 27, 2008

The local York Rite membership is a very dedicated group of Masons, but like so many Masonic groups, it tends to be somewhat “older-leaning” in its membership. The group that with which I went through the degree work is a bit younger than most of the membership (though I don’t know if my age of 42 constitutes being young or old!) Anyway, we all expressed a desire to join, the members were very excited that a new group of younger men were interested in getting involved. They enthusiastically told us that once we complete the Degrees that they would love for us to participate in future Degree work. I am very interested in getting involved.

One thing that I really enjoyed about the Degree work was that we all had the opportunity to participate in the Degrees in some form. Like the Blue Lodge degrees, it wasn’t just a “sit back and watch” event. Being able to go through the work really makes it more interesting, enjoyable, and memorable. I honestly can’t conceive of sitting in a hall with hundreds of other men just watching.

We held 2009 Officer Elections at the November business meeting, and I had the honor of being elected as “Scribe” in our Royal Arch Chapter and “2nd Guard” in our Knights Templar Commandery. Both will allow me to become more involved with the York Rite. I look forward to a great upcoming year!

Faster, faster, faster!?!

December 28, 2008

I had the opportunity to attend the Order of the Temple work at another local lodge, and I must say that I was very impressed. There were about 25 people with three candidates, and the work was done very well. One of the older men had been doing his part for many years, and he had everything memorized—very impressive. It was nice to see the work done again since I went through it. Every time I attend degree work, I learn and understand a lot more. One of the

But one thing struck me as very disappointing. Prior to the work, the Chapter/Council/Commandery conducted their regular monthly business meeting. Wow! It was the fastest business meeting I have ever witnessed. After the work was finished, I was talking with the secretary, a very nice older man, and after some introductions and some chit-chat, he said, “Be sure to join us any time for our monthly business meetings. We make sure they’re done quickly, so we get in and out fast.”

Hmmm. Maybe it’s just because I’m new to all this, but to me it’s a real shame that so many people just want get-in-get-out-as-fast-as-you-can events. What’s the rush? Isn’t there more to talk about, lecture about, or discuss? Why not take the time to go over some of the finer points that we can all so easily forget like modes of recognition or the like? Why not talk about the history of the lodge, of Freemasonry,

or of the various appendent bodies? (Did you know that there is WAY more to Freemasonry than just the Scottish Rite, the York Rite, and the Shrine?)

I spoke with some newer brothers about this, and they feel the same way. We're not going to start up some coup or anything, but we are considering trying to put together some simple presentations that would be interesting and informative.

As with many things, it seems that we may be the ones who can bring about some positive change.

Musical Chairs!

December 29, 2008

At our December business meeting, we elected and appointed the new officers for 2009, and I was elected into the Junior Warden seat. It is quite an honor, as in doing so, I unexpectedly skipped a couple seats. For 2008, I was appointed as a Steward. The natural progression is to move the Junior Deacon seat, however the current Junior Deacon who has held that position for quite a number of years didn't want to move up, so next in line is the Senior Deacon seat. The current Senior Deacon decided to step out of the rotation due to personal scheduling issues, so that left his seat and the Junior Warden seat open. The brother who was passed and raised with me was appointed Senior Deacon, and I was nominated and elected to the Junior Warden seat. I think it's going to be a great fit because I have had to serve as Junior Warden pro-tem on several occasions, so I already know what is required.

Anyway, I look forward to serving in 2009 along side some new as well as familiar faces!

Wow, What a Wild Ride!

April 13, 2018

It is now 10 years later, and I sit here typing this very relaxed and unburdened. I just completed a year of serving as the Most Illustrious Grand Master of the Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters of South Carolina, the fourth year as a Grand Officer in the Grand Council. This year caps 10 years of a very active Masonic life.

In the Blue Lodge, I progressed through the chairs and ultimately served as Master of Divver Lodge #349, AFM. Oh, what a wonderful group of brothers! During that year, we had several new members join, we had major roof repairs, and the crowning joy was in a brother stepping up and offering to paint and fresh the lodge room. His family donated paint and supplies, several brothers found church pews to replace the old theater chairs, and in the end, the lodge room had been beautifully transformed.

After joining the York Rite, I became very active, and I immediately began serving in several officer

positions, to which I was appointed and elected. This culminating in serving to lead the three bodies as Excellent High Priest, Illustrious Master, and Commander. Over the next few years, I served in various Grand Officer positions in the Grand York Rite. I served as the Grand Representative for the Grand Chapter and Grand Council, and as Grand Junior Warden for the Grand Commandery. In 2014, I was humbled to be elected as Rite Illustrious Grand Captain of the Guard, the fourth seat in the Grand Officer line of the Grand Council. I progressed through the line serving and learning, and in 2017 I was elected and installed as Most Illustrious Grand Master of the Grand Council of Royal and Select Masters of South Carolina. This was a wonderful opportunity to serve the Grand York Rite by traveling throughout the state and visiting the various local York Rite bodies. My focus was on unity both within the York Rite and among the other Masonic organizations, particularly with the Blue Lodge. I challenged the members to think outside the box with regards to business meetings, encouraging them to bring new and interesting topics to the meetings. The only way to improve attendance is to provide interesting and useful education.

My Masonic journey has taught me that to be an effective leader, you must a willing and able servant. My tenure as Illustrious Grand Master was not to dictate or change, but to serve the bodies by modeling the ideals of the Craft in hopes that others will follow my lead. Humbly, I can say with certainty that I was very successful.

Though things are quiet right now, I continue to be active ad Chaplain at Divver Lodge, I continue to serve the York Rite, and I am the Chairman for the CMMRF charity for the Grand Council. While I look forward to an easier year, I also look forward to new challenges and more responsibilities in the future.

Date

05/20/2024

Date Created

11/26/2021