

Preserving Our Heritage

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Bro. Duncan wrote the May, 1996 STB entitled "Masonic Postcards. " At the same time this 11-96 STB "Preserving Our Heritage " was also submitted for consideration. The article was accepted, but, most unexpectedly, Bro. Duncan passed away, so this STB is being published posthumously. – Editor

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The American Heritage Dictionary defines the term "heritage" as *"property that is or can be inherited; and something other than property passed down from preceding generations; legacy; tradition."*

There are several aspects of the Craft which should be preserved but too often our brethren are too close to the facts and feel little need to preserve them. Much is not recorded and left uncommunicated to those to whom it is most relevant. Seemingly inconsequential things in our past or present become wonderful historic finds when viewed in retrospect.

RITUAL

All of us, either as a candidate or officer of our Lodge have been involved with the ritual of our organization. We should be concerned with the proper words and their delivery; the understanding of their meaning, which may differ from current usage; and the striving to present the work in the perfect manner which is the ultimate desire of any ritualist. By continuing to aim in this direction, we preserve one aspect of our heritage.

PROTOCOL

Our forms of ceremony and etiquette have set the Craft apart from other organizations for generations. It is one aspect of our fraternity which makes the Craft "user-friendly." Although some of our forms and ceremonies may differ from one jurisdiction to another, we always feel at home in a Lodge and know that with little effort we are able to adjust to the situation and be comfortable in our surroundings. The officers are the same; the structure of our business meetings are similar; the rules of authority are easily recognized and followed; we truly are a "Brother." These aspects of the Craft have been and should be preserved to continue to make us one.

LODGE HISTORIES

Most of what we consider a Lodge's history is what has been recorded by secretaries through the years. Perhaps the Lodge in the past has been fortunate enough to have published a monograph or book containing its history. If so, copies of these books should be in the archives of the Lodge. Information about your Lodge may also be found in the Grand Lodge Proceedings. Some Grand Lodge libraries keep a vertical file of material for each Lodge, which has been donated to them through the years. If such is the case in your jurisdiction, remember that someone has to see that such material gets to the Grand Lodge library. It doesn't happen automatically; we must plan to see that it is accomplished.

SECRETARY'S RECORDS

It is often debated whether the secretary should do his work at the Lodge or at his home. There are many arguments for either way. Surely a Lodge is just as apt to be subject to fire or disaster as the secretary's home and a loss of material could occur in either situation. The "horror" stories have occurred when a deceased secretary's family disposed of Lodge records upon his death, considering them not to be of any importance. More often than not the loss of some records is due to the failure of the Lodge to retrieve all of its records following the death of the secretary for not wanting to disturb the widow. Some lodges have deposited their records in commercial bank vaults for safekeeping. Although it may have been "common knowledge" to those at the time where the material was deposited, through the years banks merge, lodges

consolidate and/or move out of the community and such information becomes easily lost. YoU are not in doubt if you wrote it out!

ARCHIVIST

Each Lodge should appoint a Lodge historian and/or archivist who should keep track of all of the items which the Lodge has in its possession. He should create an inventory of such material and check it on a regular basis. This report should be made in writing to the Lodge and become part of its records. Detailed information such as who donated the item; where it was purchased; or who created the material should be part of the record. A Lodge in my area which was merging with another decided to dispose of some of its furniture which was no longer desired. They discovered that had they been able to identify the manufacturer of the goods, the price which the dealer was willing to pay might have been double what they actually obtained.

PHOTOGRAPHS

Each Lodge should have an appointed photographer to record events in the Lodge's history. Not only do pictures better describe the events of a Master's term of office, but they can illustrate social events which are not usually described in detail in the Lodge records. A photographic collection of Past Masters of the Lodge is something which could be started if your Lodge does not currently have one. At least you are able to obtain photographs of the living Past Masters before they have passed from our midst. Members of note in the community or some other Masonic body might also be taken for the archives. But, remember, whatever the photograph is, be sure that it is identified on the reverse in pencil. I'm sure that each of us has a collection of family photographs which contains many "unknown relatives" whom we wish we could identify.

VERTICAL FILE

As a Lodge you may want to start a file which could contain material about each Past Master; events during his term in office; data about the jewels presented to Past Masters and who might have worn them previously. Written reports, by topics, should be filed so that future appointed committees do not have to re-invent the wheel but have information to refer to, rather than try to remember what was said in an oral report to the Lodge.

MEMORABILIA

Items of a Masonic nature which are displayed by Lodges in a case are more likely to attract additional donations than material which is stored in some closet, safe or attic. Artifacts can at times provide information which is not found in the Lodge record. My own Lodge records are silent as to whether the members participated in an organized way in the 200th Anniversary

parade of the town. The only way we know of their involvement is a silk badge with the name of the lodge and the anniversary date of the town worn by marching members and a photographic postcard which shows the lodge glee club on a float in the parade. Both of these items were donated by non-members of the Lodge when they became aware that we were looking for Lodge memorabilia. The number of items which could be placed upon display is limitless. Your lodge might collect items pertaining to your own organization or they might include Masonic items of general interest.

EPHEMORA

Printed matter of current or passing interest is often the first item to disappear and is the most shortlived of Masonic collectibles. Programs and tickets tend not to be saved as we feel that they are so prevalent our own copy is unimportant. As most of the brethren are of the same thinking, little of this material has survived the years. Lodge notices or trestleboards are an excellent source of facts and should be retained. Have you any idea what the dues card for your lodge looked like forty years ago? Do we think of keeping samples of such items? With the lessening of the number of brothers who are smoking, imprinted match book covers have become a rarity. Committees should include a copy of all of the printed material which pertains to an event with the written report filed in the Lodge to assure: such items are preserved.

The task of preserving our heritage: not solely with a Lodge secretary or Historian/Archivist, but each of us may contribute to such an effort by donating items which we may own or by taking a more active role on committees to preserve items for the future. Many who are interested in history are more concerned with, "what they did" or "who they were" than with what we are doing in the present. Rarely do we think our contributions or activities are of historical importance.

We owe it to our Brethren, past and future, to preserve what we have been given and not allow our future inheritance to be destroyed.

We should all take an active part in Preserving Our Heritage so that future members of the Craft may proudly say, "Come, see what our fathers have left for us."

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