

# The Value Of Masonic Libraries

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*As you read this STB please bear in mind that as Bro. Kaulback talks about The library in Boston he is really describing all Masonic libraries. – Editor*

## ARE YOU A MASONIC STUDENT?

Masonic ritual teaches us to be general lovers of the arts and sciences, particularly geometry or Masonry. We know ourselves in this day and age as speculative Masons, not operative, as in the Middle Ages when the great cathedrals of the world were built by our brothers of long ago. What does the term speculative mean and how does this relate to our lives, both in and out of the lodgeroom, today?

The definition of speculative, is: "1. Pertaining to, the nature of, or characterized by speculation, contemplation, conjecture, or abstract reasoning. 2. Theoretical, rather than practical." Simply stated it means to think and to study. We are all under an obligation to be Masonic students; from the moment we take the Entered Apprentice Degree, we cannot advance in Freemasonry without learning and reciting the lessons taught in that degree. As we proceed through the degrees in Masonry, many lessons are put before us to be learned, and more importantly, understood, before we can advance further. It is this continual learning process and our putting the lessons we have studied to use that makes us better men and better Masons. The true precepts of Masonry are meaningful only when put into practice and used in our day to day lives.

One of the more famous names connected with modern Masonic literature is John Robinson. Mr. Robinson's book "Born in Blood" was written long before he entertained any thought of becoming a Freemason. He studied Masonry and became knowledgeable in its history and its philosophy. He became well known for his defense of Freemasonry on the radio and in print. When asked why he had not joined Freemasonry his response was "I can do a better job explaining Freemasonry without being a member and have more credibility by not joining." Mr.

Robinson eventually did join the fraternity because he admired its principles after years of having actively studied them. Here was a man, not even a Mason, who took the time to look into Masonry and its principles and philosophy and was so impressed by what he found that he undertook to defend Masonry without even being a member himself.

The work of Masonry is to study! It is noble work which purifies the heart and clarifies the mind. The house of Freemasonry has many rooms; each room teaches different lessons such as brotherly love, charity for all mankind, love of deity, morality, truth, and tolerance.

Freemasonry is a philosophy that teaches and brings out all that is good in man. That Masonry is a philosophy, a way of life, is the very essence of what sets us apart from other organizations. It is for this reason that all Masons should be Masonic students and we should all strive to read and study Masonry and put what we learn to use. It is the lessons of Masonry that unite us as brothers in the world wide fraternity of Masonry, for we know that we share a common philosophy.

It is an interesting feeling to be asked by a non-mason "What is Freemasonry?" It is even more interesting when you, yourself, realize that you really don't know what it is. This can and does happen.

Do you know if your Lodge or Grand Lodge has a library? If it has, have you visited or contacted it? Are you familiar with the latest books on Masonry and where to locate them? Do you know what the latest anti-Masonic books are and where to locate them? This last is an important question, for it is here that the study of Masonry shines through the clouds that the advocates of anti-Masonry would have us believe exist. To answer the questions and charges brought against us as Masons we must understand clearly who we are, and be able to defend what we stand for. The only way to accomplish this is to read and study not only what we are but what we were in ages past, who were the Masons of long ago and how did they meet these questions.

Our Masonic Libraries and Museums must be able to educate the public at large about our craft. They must serve as information sources to dispel the rumors and outright lies that are told to the public. Many of the people who disseminate this wrongful information do not understand Freemasonry and have themselves been given information that is skewed and twisted. We as the keepers of the Masonic Flame of truth must be the leaders in dispelling these rumors and be a source of light to the public.

In a paper entitled "Working Tools Less Used," John Platt, Director of the Masonic Library and Museum in Philadelphia explores the trials and tribulations of Masonic libraries and librarians. Here in Boston we have what is believed to be one of the best Masonic research libraries in North America. The libraries at Philadelphia, New York, and Iowa are also top ranked, as are several others. Masonic libraries serve the fraternity and act as "keepers of the flame" of Masonic literature and philosophy. We have the history and knowledge of Freemasonry at our

fingertips, yet how many in the fraternity make use of this wonderful and useful "working tool"?

The Boston Masonic Library has had a long and useful 181 years of helping to spread the light of Freemasonry in this state. In a report to the Grand Master in 1988, Bro. Robert A. Gilbert of Bristol, England, wrote: "Although the library of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts is among the most important of Masonic Libraries, this fact has not generally been recognized as it is both under-utilized by Brethren, and Masonic Libraries have yet to be integrated into the accepted academic and institutional library systems."

Our Masonic Libraries are begging for Masons to make more use of them, but the sad truth is that the vast majority of Masons do not read or study about the Fraternity or its history. We here in Boston have a collection of over 100,000 Masonic titles and close to 50,000 non-Masonic titles in our library, also over 60 drawers of clippings, Lodge histories, biographical materials, sheet music, book plates, postcards, and philatelic material all relating to Masonry. We offer not only reading material, but also video and audio material. We have a mailing service that all masons in the state can make use of and receive books or other materials delivered to their front door by mail. We are open to the general public and have been able to help many college students who have elected to study some aspect of Freemasonry for papers they work on. Their interests are many and varied, from Masonic artifacts to the study of Masonic philosophy itself. We also have a Masonic museum that contains items from 1733 on. Our history in this state has many famous names connected to it including; Joseph Warren, Paul Revere and other well known patriots.

We in Boston are working towards the goal of computerizing this library to make it more "user friendly" and to enable the exchange of information between libraries both Masonic and non-masonic throughout the United States. This goal is most important to the "Masonic Library and Museum Association," an international organization of Librarians, Archivists, Curators, and Directors, under the leadership of John Platt of Pennsylvania - President, and Cynthia Alcorn of Massachusetts - Vice President. This organization represents Masonic Librarians and Curators from all over the world and is active in solving the problems that are common to Masonic Libraries .

It is exciting to see that the younger Masons that are joining are very interested in the written literature of Masonry. They seem to understand that Freemasonry is a study society and must be researched at length to be appreciated to its fullest extent. These young Masons are actively looking into the symbolism of our craft and looking for the deeper meanings of our rituals. Did you know that in some European Countries not only do the Candidates wait at least a year between degrees, but they have to write a thesis on how they spent that year as a Mason practicing the virtues of the degree they are working on? Then they have to read the paper before the lodge and have it approved before they advance to the next degree.

In conclusion, let me reaffirm the importance of being a Masonic student and making use of your local Masonic Library. We must read, study and practice the lessons we are taught in the lodge in order to be better Masons, and better human beings. Take time out of our busy life, even if it is only 10 -15 minutes a day, to study Masonry and its philosophy, read a Masonic book, or discuss Masonry with a brother. You won't regret it! Pass this thought on to other Masonic brethren and introduce them to the "light" that we all seek as speculative Freemasons. We must remember that each and every one of us represent a link to the public and to potential members that may never have heard about Freemasonry until we talk to them about it. We must be our own publicity agents and salesmen if we expect to survive. In the past Freemasonry has always been an agency for good that was quiet, but represented a forceful presence that was well thought of. Today many people do not know of our existence, let alone the good we do in our charitable work every day. We all must read, act, and think as Masons each day to be true to our noble and gentle Craft.

Visit your local Masonic Library and take out a book or two to read, you won't regret it. You will find some very knowledgeable people in your libraries that can help you to become better and more informed Masons, so don't be afraid to ask questions and discuss the topics that interest you, that is what we are there for. We are here to help further your Masonic Education and better prepare you to tell the world at large what our Craft is all about and what we represent.

A human being cannot stand immovable and uninfluenced in the midst of life as a rock stands in the wash of the tide. His life goes on every moment influencing and being influenced. And life is full and rich, happiness comes, when we so understand ourselves, and the world, and the forces of nature that we can harmoniously adjust ourselves thereto. The report of what nature, the world, life really are, that is truth; and the items of information which we need to have in order to know the truth, that is knowledge. A wise man desires truth and seeks knowledge, not in order to pose as a scholar or a learned man, but in order that he may live happily.

H.L. Haywood

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