

The Books of Freemasonry - "Simplifying the Overwhelming "

By Tom Thornton - 9/20/03

It is said the most written about subject in the English world is the Holy Bible
The second is Freemasonry.

Any one who decides, he has something to write about Masonry, can simply do it. If he can find a publisher, or if he can afford to pay a publisher, his work will be published. Some writers who are not Freemasons have written a great deal about the craft and to some degree their books, and Freemasonry, provide them income from their work. That will be covered in detail under the topic of Christian Bookstores/The Anti-Masonic writing.

Masonic Encyclopedias

For the purpose of this paper, in case you get tired reading/listening the conclusion will be presented first. Of all the books and documents the writer has read, looked at, heard about, the one I would recommended first is "Coils Masonic Encyclopedia".

The latest is dated 1995 and is published by Macoy in Richmond VA. It is expensive, over \$50.00 but well worth the investment. When counting the cost of all the "old" books one could purchase, buying Coils first would have saved a bundle.

The first edition was published in 1961, and copies have been seen still asking \$50.00.

So for the purpose of this discussion the one best book above all others is Coils Masonic Encyclopedia

Using Coils as reference for this paper, the present revised edition (1995) Preface by Allen Roberts describes the progress of the Masonic Encyclopedia. The following is quoted from it.. (ref1)

"The history of the longest active and best know American Encyclopedia is indeed interesting. Albert G Mackey (1807-1881) was the man responsible for it. In his original preface he said he had found that the character of the institution was elevated in everyone's opinion just in proportion to the amount of knowledge that he had acquired of its symbolism, philosophy and history"

Mackey & Moss held the first copyrights of 1873 and 1878. Macoy bought the copyrights and printed the revised works until recent years.

In 1929, a new and revised edition shows Robert Clegg as reviser along with Hutgin & Hawkins of Quaturo Coronati London.

The 1924 version comes in two volumes, very fancy embossed leather covers 900 pages, 2 columns per page, about 8 sized font so things did get "abridged"/ changed .

There is a 1921 version appears to be same as the 1924.

There also is a seven Volume set dated in the 20's, found in many lodge libraries. It was physically a large book but the text seems to be the same size as the 1921 version, but pages had wider boarder.

In 1946, it was again revised and enlarged. The reviser was HL Haywood and this edition did not meet with critical acclaim.

The latest with a nice fancy plastic cover, copyright dated 1996, says by AG Mackey, has a 6 page introduction but doesn't say who wrote the intro. It is 450 pages, one col. width about size 12 font. It also mentions "other books by Random House, Meaning of Masonry by Wilmhurst and New Encyclopedia of Masonry by Waite.

A note, on "Encyclopedias" the "New Encyclopedia of Masonry by Waite" still floats around both new and used. It comes in both one Volume and two volume sizes. He was English Mason, very into the occult. Trying to read it requires much mental translation of his ideas and how they compare to other writings. Masonic critics (me included) do not find real value to it. So much for the encyclopedias.

To close, of all the Encyclopedias in print, the current volume Coils is by far the best value for the money. If a person could only have one Masonic reference book it should be Coils.

Masonic Service Association

The Masonic Service Association (ref 2) (MSA) formed in the 1919 to provide a national Organization for assisting Masonic relief and veterans service work. And to provide a outlet for accurate Masonic writing.

As mentioned, up to this time anyone could publish and some so called Masonic work was really writers imagination. A source of accurate Masonic writing was needed and the MSA filled the need.

All Masons should have their current catalogue, should subscribe to the "Short Talk Bulletins, which is a mailed monthly 6 page bulletin with covering one Masonic subject. To subscribe is only \$ 5.00 per year.

The following MSA Pocket digests provide a rich source of information which could bring a newcomer quickly up to speed:

- What Is Freemasonry?
- Pocket Masonic Dictionary
- One Hundred & One Questions About Freemasonry
- Masonic Vocabulary

They also have a extensive library of general Masonic information, especially regarding past members and their histories.

They include Masonic poetic works and Mason's plays written for use within the lodge.

No Mason can claim knowledge of our writings without a understanding and examples of their works. They are one our best kept secrets

-Review, Coils then MSA Pocket Digests

Books about Masonic People and Masonic Artifacts

The most noted, George Washington

WASHINGTON The Man And The Mason (1913) is the most noted. Washington And His Masonic Compeers by Hayden (1874) follows but, you may note that few of the current history books on Washington make any mention of Masonry.

Roosevelt's Library at Hyde Park has two small items really simple Masonic gifts presented to him, nothing else.

Researching the Internet, I find Truman's Library in Independence Missouri has a excellent display of his Masonic artifacts.

MacArthur's Memorial in Richmond has one case which displays his blue lodge apron so one may read "Made a mason at Sight" dated and signed by secretary of a Lodge in Philippines. The case also displays other Masonic Scottish Rite and Shrine emblems. So it is a nice reasonable display of Masonic items.

Also researching Internet, the Warren Harding Library in Marion Ohio has a excellent Display of his Masonic artifacts.

Overall it seems the general writing about folks we consider noted Masons make little reference to their Masonic activity.

Rituals or Manuals

Rituals and manuals usually abound in old book stores. But use great caution, most are outdated. Our NJ Rituals were printed as far back as 1927 but only the current loose leaf should be used and there will be found subtle changes from issue to issue.

Some are called Monitors of the Lodge and many of these omit parts of the work or simply show asterisks where the actual wording is still considered 'secret' and not to be printed

They are good collectors items and for historical interest.

Exposes

The most common, still in print, "Duncans Ritual" probably done in the late 1800s or early 1900s. Supposedly from New York Lodge ritual at that time. So it really doesn't fit exactly anywhere today but is good for general understand of the works of a meeting and degree.

Also “Ronyane” printed by Ezra Cooke in Chicago. The prefaces stated he felt there should be no secrets in our society and published the books to permit anyone to learn and understand. Again its non specific and really only general information.

The copy I had was from the Morristown library, released after 20 years, never withdrawn once!!!

Cooke also reprinted a copy of the work done by Morgan. There are several versions of this still around. There is no way to tell how close it is to the original and as it wasn't printed until after WW2 it should be regarded as a oddity.

Ritual In General

For the New Jersey Mason, the important names to remember are Preston, Webb and Cross. These are the main people who passed today's ritual to us. Preston in England did the work but designed it to be taught in class over a period of time. His work if given in

One sitting would take the greater part of a day. Webb who realized the value of Preston's work and simple edited to fit into a smaller time. Cross who with some minor changes as our New Jersey lecturer made the work we now use today. .

Our current loose leaf with floor work is really the best for today's use but some of the brethren still seem to use older copies.

Histories

Coil devotes about a full page to Masonic histories. (ref 3) Of note, “only about the past 85 years have been marked by any respectable historiography productions” You should be aware of Dr. Anderson, author of the “Ancient charges of 1717” and then went on to write his version of where we came from. Sadly he is more remembered for this foolish account than the good work he did. Preston's work of 1772 while mentioning Solomon does not try and make a real connection nor do the other British writers of that time. But in 1785 in Germany several writers attempted to connect back to the ancient builders, but trip when it becomes known their work came from England. In 1774, a French writer published a history but concentrates on French freemasonry.

England came along in 1804. WJ Hagan may be called the father of true Masonic history in 1869 published his “Constitutions”, “Masonic Sketches”, and “Old Charges”.

In the US in 1858, JWS Mitchell did a 2 volume History of Freemasonry which followed the Solomon/Hebrew thinking and was considered out of date within 20 years. American GF Fort published several volumes in beginning in 1875, Dr. Mackey picked things up in 1881 History Freemasonry & Concordant Orders copyright in 1890 and still being reprinted in 1919 and often found today in Lodges. A good and hefty book, but considered incomplete today. JF Newton published “the builders” and the stream of books of today continued. Today it seems to be generally accepted that our history should begin with the formation of the UGLE in 1717. While some documentation has been found prior to this time it all lacks what we consider today to be the fundamentals of Masonry, a lodge with regular meetings conferring one or more degrees in a organized fashion.

To summarize, the older the history the more questionable it becomes. Any references prior to 1717 and open to dispute as nothing prior to the time can really be proven.

The famous Regius Poem ends with “So Mote It be”. Does that prove the writer was a mason or does it prove a Mason stole the phrase?

One finds a square and compass carved on a pyramid, does that prove the carver was a mason or does it merely tell the symbol was chosen by modern Masons as their own.

As with Encyclopedias (and sometimes included with them) were usually large books intended for display in ones personal library. Some very ornate covers and printed. Most as accurate as the knowledge was at the time they were printed. Some of the old is still being reprinted.

Masonic Fiction

Probably the most famous in our time is “Born in Blood “ by John Robinson, followed by a “A Pilgrims Path” describing his path in writing the Born In Blood and then better understanding the craft and becoming a member getting his final degrees on his death bed. A sad but interesting story.

Webb’s Work

No discussion of Masonic work would be complete with including the work of Thomas Smith Webb. He was born in 1771 and died in 1819. In his short 48 years his work made a major impact on north American freemasonry. He completed his apprenticeship as a printer and book binder, moved to Keene, NH and was made a Freemason 1790. Moving to Albany, NY he met one John Hanmer who was well skilled in Preston’s work. With Hanmers assistance Webb condensed and rearranged the work.

As originally written, Preston’s work would take over 10 hours to present at one sitting. It was originally designed to be presented in class over a period of weeks.

Webb wrote and published “Freemasons Monitor and Illustrations of Freemasonry” in 1797. This work was republished for over 100 years. The 23rd edition was issued by Rob Morris in 1869 and copyrighted by Sickels & Macoy in 1864. (Ref4)

Webb went on to become a key figure with the establishment of the York Rite and wrote manuals and published them for the York Rite.

With the exception of Pennsylvania and Louisiana, most current Grand Lodges use Webb’s work in some form.

You may note the original publication dates is before the split and merger which formed the United Grand Lodge of England in 1817. At that time they confirmed the ritual they now use. So our Webb ritual really is the oldest ritual now in use.

Sadly his books were pocket size, which was great for private use within the Lodge but not good for preserving them. They wore out in the pocket and were thrown away. So finding this book is a rare

treat today. There are still copies available via the world wide web but the asking price seems to be \$ 200.00 up, and that for later issues. However his work still exists within our own ritual.

Albert Pike (ref 5)

Albert Pike warrants three pages in Coils Encyclopedia. Born in 1809, became a Mason in 1850 (age 41). Born in Boston attended Harvard but didn't finish, actually finished through self-study. He traveled the country to the west finally settled in Little Rock, Ark. As a teacher and writer. He was Initiated in Western Star Lodge No. 1 at Little Rock. Became Master in 1854 and 1855. Moved to New Orleans and became lawyer. A mover and shaker of the Scottish Rite Southern Jurisdiction he wrote "Morals & Dogma". It was published and given to every new member of the Scottish Rite in the southern jurisdiction.

It being a large heavy book it survived the families and appears on many old bookstore shelves. In recent years has been found by anti-Masons and some of his writings have been used against us. Especially Pike's reference to Masonry being a religion. (ref 8) Evidently to him it was so and his work *Morals & Dogma* is now famous in the anti Masonic circles.

It is interesting but very deep reading. It has been said the only way to understand it is to read it aloud.

In searching it for references to religion for this article, it was found to contain references alluding to Masonry as a religion and others stating it was not to be used as a religion. So he covered both sides of the issue.

The Three M's of Masonic writing Macoy MacKey & Morris

Morris, Rob (ref11) Active Freemason and author, born 1818 died 1888. Raised in Oxford Lodge No. 33 Oxford Miss in 1845. Moved to Kentucky, Belonged to all degrees and became Grand Master of Kentucky 1858-59. Spent most of his life as teacher. Most noted poem, "Meet Upon the Level and part upon the square." He had large library of some 1200 volumes at his home at LaGrange KY which after some problems wound up in New York and was the founding for the NY Grand Lodge Library, (Livingston Library). Most noted for his the ritual for Order of Eastern Star but passed this work to Robert McCoy of New York who made it what we see there today.

McCoy, Robert, (ref 9)

Born in Ireland 1815 died New York City 1895. Became printer publisher in New York his entire life, started McCoy Printing & Publishing Company which is still in business today. Initiated in Lebanon Lodge No. 191 in 1848. Deputy GM of New York in 1856. Friend of Rob Morris and publish most of his work. Including completed & organized OES Ritual in 1869 & still in use today. Also published:

- True Masonic Guide, 1852
- Master Workman 1849
- Masonic Manual 1852
- Vocal Manual 1853

- Masonic Minstrel 1857
- Rite of Adoption 1868
- General History, Encyclopedia and Dictionary of Freemasonry in 1868-70.

The last was also done in three parts, Short History, McCoy Cyclopedia, Symbolic Freemasonry. By Dr Oliver

The Amaranth Ritual was his last work and was published in 1895. But the publishing company continued, Worshipful Masters Assistant 1902, Many of his books had a now familiar Medium Blue Cloth Cover which was carried on by the publishing company for years.

Mackey , Dr. Albert, (ref 6)

American Mason, historian, symbolist and especially devoted to ancient mysteries and societies. Born in Charleston SC 1807, died Ft Monroe VA 1881. Graduated from Charleston Medical College. Practice medicine at Charleston until 1854 he turned his attention exclusively to Masonry and various antiquities. He was made a mason in 1841 affiliated with Solomon's Lodge in Charleston and was its master in 1842. From 1843 to 1867 Grand Secretary of the grand Lodge of SC. 1870 after Civil War moved to Washington where he became Grand Commander of Scottish Rite, He was one of the most voluminous of our Masonic writers. Seemed to ignore Rob Morris. But had a good relationship with Albert Pike. Mackey was one of the most influential writers and works were accepted without question although much of his work has been found to be in error. He produced a book every two and a half years for 36 years and also did numerous magazine contributions. Many of his works are still to be found today in old book stores. Simple put, his work and ideas are now long outdated and copies of his works only good for historical examples.

Some of his titles,
 1855 Masonic Law,
 1859 Masonic Jurisprudence,
 1872 Manual of the Lodge,
 Cryptic Masonry,
 Mackeys Masonic Ritualist

Other Masonic Authors

Carl H Claudy. (ref 7)

Probably best know in NJ for the Claudy Books given to all new members by most lodges for almost 40 years. He was born in 1879, died in 1957. Made a Mason in 1908, Master in 1932, Grand Master of District of Columbia in 1943. From 1930 thru 1957 the executive secretary of the MSA. Probably one of our most prolific Masonic writers. Especially the work of the MSA including many "short talk bulletins" and editing the 20 volume Little Masonic Library which is still today, one of the most short and to the point pieces of Masonic educational literature we have. Also wrote a number of full books including:

- Introduction to Freemasonry,
- Old Tillers Talks,
- Old past Master,
- Masters Book,

- These Were Brethren

These are just a few.

He also found time to contribute to about 170 other publications during his long career. Up to the time of the MSA and Claudys' leadership it was as common among many other writers to mix imagination with fact. Claudy was one of the founders of the realistic Masonic school of writers who thought Masonic writing should be factual and avoided any distorting of facts. He also replaced the 'commanding ordering' with reason and detailed explaining.

Alan E Roberts

Finally our most current writer, Alan E Roberts, died in 1997. He devoted his life to Masonic writing. His House Undivided gives the detailed history of the craft during the Civil War probably the best writing of Masonic work for that period. His Craft and Its Symbols printed in 1974 is a "current" description of the Blue Lodge work for the newly made Mason. It is given by many lodges to the new member to complete his Masonic education.

A mention should be made of books usually found in the religious book stores. In fact, the largest square and compass on any cover I have ever seen was on "The Secrets of The Masonic Lodge". John Ankerberg is one of the noted authors. Robert Morey is another. These books usually found in Christian book store usually always have a preface or opening remark's stating the authors are "not" Masons but have made exhaustive studies of Masonry and have found ... blah blah.

Interesting the immediate next series of books, by the same author makes the same opening statements and proceeds to denounce the Odd Fellows and/or other social groups in our society. It looks like sometimes only the subject name is changed.

But it is important for us to be aware the public is exposed to anti-Masonic literature in many of our book stores.

To summarize, any one with a Masonic story to tell is free to put pen to paper and proceed. There are many, many excellent works available. Macoy of Richmond VA is probably our greatest supplier. Also, on occasion, a decent volume will be found in the local book store. Old bookstores are also a good source of our books. But even this has an interesting note - You'll find them under "occult" because that's where they fall within the Library of Congress.

Before closing it should be noted only a handful of Masonic writers have been mentioned. The Pennsylvania Grand Lodge Library posts a suggested reading list of about 150 titles which includes over 100 different authors.

Our local Madison Lodge library with about 300 different volumes has over 125 authors so, there are and have been many Masonic writers published. This work only mentions those few considered to be the most noted.

To finalize, Coils Masonic Encyclopedia the best but most expensive source. The Masonic Service Association follows especially for those on a budget. The older writers who left the largest marks -

Albert Pike, Thomas S. Webb, Morris, Mackey, McCoy used old style creative writing. Carl Claudy & Allen Roberts stylized factual teaching and reasoning.

END

End notes

- 1 Coils masonic Encyclopedia ,Macoy, 1996 page
- 2 Coils Masonic Encyclopedia, Macoy, 1996 page 409
- 3 History " " " " page 317
- 4 Webb " " " " page 678
- 5 Pike " " " " page 473
- 6 Mackey " " " " page 394
- 7 Claudy " " " " page 174
- 8 Pike, Morals & Dogma 1915ed pages 1, 213, 217
- 9 Macoy, Coils Encyclopedia 1995 page 395
- 10 Mackey " " " " page 392
- 11 Morris " " " " page 435