



Thomas Lodge "FREEMASONS" Newsletter

Starting with Egyptian hieroglyphics dating back some 5,000 years, through Meso-American carvings to today's written word, symbols have been utilized to convey messages, record events of historical nature, complete mercantile transactions and communicate important messages for posterity.

From the very simple and seemingly trivial to the more elaborate, symbols had to be used at times when the written word was not yet invented or the message was to be "reserved" for those in need of that particular knowledge and keep prying eyes from availing themselves to the material.

These symbols could have direct meaning, for instance the depiction of a few wavy lines could mean water the thirst quencher, water the life giver, river, ocean, or perhaps at times something more elaborate like travel or a geographical landmark. The complete meaning obtained by the series of symbols in a particular order could be read or interpreted by those who held the "key" to the deciphering, thereby creating an exclusive group of individuals with access to privileged information (keeping always in mind that the vast majority of the population of yesteryear did not have a formal education, therefore unable to read and write)

The Egyptian hieroglyphs were not "translated" until the 1800's, when Napoleonic troops stumbled upon a tablet with inscriptions in three "languages" during their invasion of Egypt; the known ancient Greek writing on the now famous tablet (the Rosetta Stone) enabled historians to match characters and "read" Egyptian cartouches and other materials thus decoding what had been impossible for the previous 3,000 years.

The Aztecs, Mayas and Incas of America utilized their own and most unique kind of hieroglyphs, some which have not yet been totally understood, despite our level of knowledge and even the advent of computers. Their symbols appear as long chains, either vertical or horizontal, depicting animals plants, people and objects; they dedicated their cultural endeavors to the study of the celestial bodies, their movements and their relation to the weather and the seasons, composing sophisticated calendars and making elaborate mathematical calculations (they discovered/mastered the concept of the "zero", essential for expressing very large quantities and performing any measuring of substance). Not knowing the "key" to deciphering and having no records of their language (therefore not knowing if the base of the encoding has to do with vowels, actual words, letters or even sounds), we have no idea what these symbols really mean.

As far as Masonry is concerned, we come in contact with ritual and cypher that has been in use for a mere 300 years or so. We "know" the code, and we also have a good understanding of the symbolism, to a certain degree, but we still hunger to know what the XVIII century Brothers really had in mind when they penned what we now know as our catechism.

The recorded genesis of our beloved fraternity places us at the very beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup>. Century (1717 to be precise) very turbulent times, a period of enlightenment, of newly acquired freedoms that will allow

our forefathers to put in writing Masonic doctrine and literally “come out of the closet” where Freemasonry had delved for many, many years. How many you might ask. Nothing but pure speculation since records before that date are but a few, and vague in content given the possible consequences.

During the middle ages and times leading to these famous dates, were without a doubt, dangerous and very turbulent; the influence and power of the Church in those times is undeniable and far reaching. The Pope literally ran empires and kingdoms, ruled them with an iron fist, subjecting all to their capricious whims desires and needs. In order to further their cause they established the infamous Inquisition during which times an undefined number were tortured and put to death in the name of Christianity and its dictates. Those conveniently determined to be heretic were persecuted, imprisoned and most often than not, put to death; their wealth confiscated and their families and relatives ostracized and often abandoned to their own devices, desolate and destitute.(..widows and orphans....ring a bell?.)

Secrecy therefore was of the essence (life and death actually), Lodges did not “exist” as dwellings or temples specifically dedicated to that effect. They met in hills and valleys, basements and in rooms above taverns, making sure only Brethren were aware of their meetings and doings. Without a written catechism (a most dangerous piece of evidence if caught by the authorities) ritual was learned by memorization and symbols were used as crutches in learning and remembering. (drop-cloths were hand painted and sewn with colorful symbols to assist during ceremonies).

Symbols have been with us for thousands of years, and the way we continue to utilize them nowadays somehow predicts the continuous application for years to come.

#### APRIL NOTABLES:

- 1775 Bro. Paul Revere took his famous ride Boston-Lexington warning that “British were coming”
- 1789 Bro. George Washington takes the first ever Presidential Oath Of Office at his installation as the first US President.
- 1790 Died. Bro. Benjamin Franklin
- 1827 Born. Bro. Lewis Wallace, prolific author ( “Ben - Hur” )
- 1865 Bro. Andrew Jackson takes the Presidency
- 1891 Died. Bro. P. T. Barnum
- 1897 Leo Taxil publishes his “confessions” (real name: Gabriel Jogand) causing untold damage to the Fraternity. Later recanted and confessed to have “made-up” his findings
- 1910 Died. Bro. Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain)
- 1945 Bro. Harry Truman takes office at the death of F.D.R.

#### FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

During 1897 the North American Review estimated that the average Lodge member spent \$ 50 annually on dues, and \$ 200 on initiation fees; this at a time when the average factory worker earned just \$ 500 a year. (Yale University Press 1989). They also estimated that by 1989, \$ 50 dues would be equal to about \$ 1,100 annually, and the \$ 200 initiation would cost in the vicinity of \$ 4,200 (on a adjusted \$ 10,000 wage of a factory worker). How much do YOU pay for the privilege ?

*The Inside Sentinel - Editor*