

Meet Your Friends at the Library

On books and reading

“Masons have more need to read than men in almost any other society or organization to pursue Masonic studies for the joy of it or even for the fun of it.”

These words were written by the eminent Masonic scholar, Bro. Harry LeRoy Haywood more than a half century ago. The injunction remains true today when research tools and resources are more comprehensive and more widely accessible than Bro. Haywood could ever have imagined. While the electronic age has provided instant access to the world, *“A book is the greatest interactive medium of all time. You can underline it, write in the margins, fold down a page, skip ahead. And you can take it anywhere.”* (Michael Lynton)

*“Properly we should read for power.
Man reading should be man intensely alive.
The book should be a ball of light in one’s hand.”*
Ezra Pound

Freemasons are well served by the resources readily available to students of Masonic history, philosophy, and expositions of our ritual, explanations of our ceremonies, and explications of our symbolism. An essential part of being a Freemason is a collection of books, small or large. Each Mason over time gradually accumulates his own selection of books during his search for light and quest for knowledge. Every Master Mason in Ontario should have in his possession a copy of The Masonic Manual, Meeting the Challenge, Whence Come We? and Beyond the Pillars all published by our Grand Lodge. Curiosity and interest in Freemasonry results in new titles being published almost every month, and these appear in book shops or ‘online.’ Any book that promises to reveal ‘The *Secrets* of Freemasonry’ is bound to sell well. It is a fact of life: Where is human nature so weak as in the bookstore?

“Nothing is pleasanter than exploring a library.”
Wallace S. Landor

The Grand Lodge Library is located on the second floor of the Memorial Building, 363 King Street West, Hamilton. It was officially opened in its present location, together with the Grand Lodge Museum, by M.W. Bro. C. Edwin Drew, the Grand Master, on May 27th, 1995. It must be the undiscovered secret of our Grand Lodge - ‘Yours to discover.’ Bro. Walt Disney once wrote: *“There is more treasure in books than in all the pirates’ loot on Treasure Island ... and best of all, you can enjoy these riches every day of your life.”* Rich treasure indeed! More than 5,500 volumes are in the circulating collection, and hundreds more may be accessed in the Library in the rare and special collection kept on reserve. Among other resources, a complete set of the Proceedings of our Grand Lodge from 1855 to the present and Ars Quatuor Coronatorum, the Transactions of Quatuor Coronati Lodge 2076 UGLE, the premier lodge of research in the English-speaking world, from 1884 to the present are available for research. The extensive collection of the Supreme Council of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite is also housed in the library. *“A book in the hand is worth two on the shelf.”* Recently the collection has been

reclassified using the user-friendly Masonic Revised Boyden system. The catalogue may be accessed from the Grand Lodge website.

“These are not books, lumps of lifeless paper, but minds alive on the shelves. From each of them goes out its own voice. By taking down one of these volumes and opening it, one can call into range the voice of a man far distant in time and space, and hear him speaking to us, mind to mind, heart to heart.”

Gilbert Highet

The personal collections of two eminent Masonic scholars, R.W. Bro. Dr. Charles A. Sankey, PDDGM, and R.W. Bro. J. Lawrence Runnalls, PGSW, and also those of the Standing family have been donated to the James A. Gibson Library at Brock University in St. Catharines. The Special Collections and Archives contain more than 1,200 volumes, transactions, proceedings, and periodicals in the Masonic section housed in the Special Collection adjacent to the reading room. The catalogue may be searched on the Brock University website - www.brocku.ca. Follow the tabs to the library, then to special collections. The Masons in the Niagara region of southern Ontario have one of the largest collections of rare Masonic books in North America available to them on their doorstep. The Heritage Lodge No. 730 G.R.C. has supported this collection with a generous financial grant to preserve, maintain and promote the use of this invaluable resource. V.W. Bro. Iain B. Mackenzie serves as liaison with the University, Heritage Lodge, and the Committee on Masonic Education.

LIBRARY

*Here is where people,
One frequently finds,
Lower their voices
And raise their minds.*

Richard Armour

The National Library and Archives in Ottawa has a Masonic collection of 3,663 books. The personal library of R.W. Bro. A. J. B. Milbourne, PDDGM and historian of the Grand Lodge of Quebec, forms the core of the collection. Most public libraries will have a limited selection of titles related to Masons, Freemason, and Freemasonry.

*“Knowledge is of two kinds.
We know a subject ourselves.
Or we know where we can find information upon it.”*

Samuel Johnson

Hidden on an obscure shelf behind the Secretary’s desk, or behind other paraphernalia in the lodge locker, most lodges have a small collection of books, many of which are rare volumes by the most distinguished Masonic authors of a century ago. It is not uncommon to find the early editions of Albert Mackey’s Encyclopedia, or the multi-volume ‘Library of Freemasonry’ (Robert Freke Gould & James Hughan), together with the monumental two-volume ‘The History of Freemasonry in Canada’ by M.W. Bro. John Ross Robertson (1890). It is a case of ‘seek and you may find’ buried treasure.

“Reading all the good books is like a conversation with the finest people of past centuries.”
René Descartes

The brethren of the lodges that meet in the Dufferin Avenue Temple, London, maintain a large lending library that is open before every meeting and staffed by volunteer librarians for the convenience of the brethren. A small library and museum is located in the Bellrock Temple, Sudbury. Some keen, young Masons in Kerr Lodge No. 230 are working toward establishing a library in the Morrow Road Temple, Barrie. A collection of books has recently been donated and placed in the Board Room of the Kitchener-Waterloo Masonic Temple in Waterloo. These are but four local initiatives designed and created to serve the reading pleasure and research needs of the brethren in other parts of the Grand Jurisdiction.

If a book is worth reading, it is worth buying.
John Ruskin

A selection of authorized texts, Masonic classics, standard and recent publications are kept in stock at the Grand Secretary’s Office in Hamilton for the convenience of the Brethren. They may be ordered by post through the Lodge Secretary, or purchased over the counter at the Grand Lodge Building. A selection of books is also made available at the annual Lodges of Instruction and workshops and seminars presented by the several committees. There is a well-stocked book table at the Annual Communication in Toronto, where the brethren can obtain resource material to enhance their knowledge of Freemasonry and to support their role as Master and Mentor to the Apprentices and younger Masons in the lodge.

“The best effect of any book is that it excites the reader to self activity.”
Thomas Carlyle

Learning by Degrees
read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest

Harold Bloom, the foremost literary critic and man of letters wrote in How to Read and Why (2000): *“Ultimately we read in order to strengthen the self, and to learn its authentic interests.”* Properly understood, Freemasonry is the largest and oldest organization devoted to adult education in the world. Men learn the lessons of life. The lectures and charges are designed and intended to provide a five-part course of self-discipline: self-examination, self-discovery, self-analysis, self-realization, and self-fulfilment. Know Thyself. *“Books provide the most helpful of road maps for an inner journey. They show us the tracks of fellow travellers, footprints left behind by earlier pilgrims who have trod the path that stretches before us. Their luminosity helps to light our way. As we read we realize that we are not alone.”* (Terry W. Glaspey)

That, in summary, is why Masons read.

By R.W. Bro. Raymond S. J. Daniels, F.C.F.
for The Curriculum Group
The Committee on Masonic Education
2007.06.04