

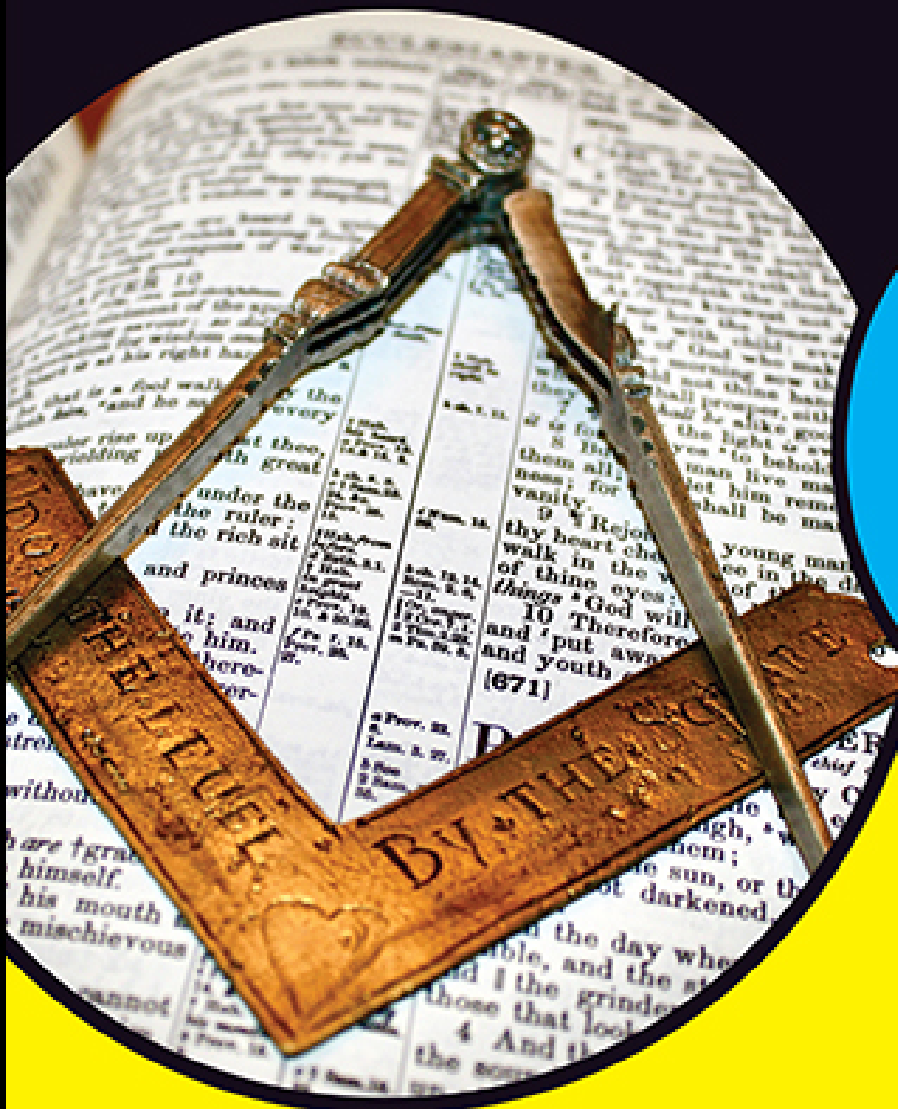
LEARNING MADE EASY



3rd Edition

Freemasons

for
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Learn what goes on
in a Masonic meeting

Gain insight into Masonic
ceremonies and symbols

Discover the origins of the
myths of Freemasonry

Christopher Hodapp 33°

Past Master, Knight Templar



Freemasons

3rd Edition

by Christopher Hodapp 33°

for
dummies
A Wiley Brand

Freemasons For Dummies®, 3rd Edition

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Introduction

Take a look at the symbol on the cover of this book. Whether you know it or not, you've seen this symbol in many places — on buildings, car bumpers, jewelry, TV shows, and the Internet. Chances are actually pretty good that every day you drive past a Masonic lodge without even noticing it. Chances are also pretty good that you don't really know what a Freemason is. That's okay. You aren't alone.

A hundred years ago, this book wasn't needed. Back in the early years of the 20th century, 1 out of every 4 adult American men was a member of some kind of fraternal organization, and 1 out of every 25 men was a Freemason. So many secret handshakes, passwords, lapel pins, and funny hats were going around that it was a challenge for a man just to remember all the groups he belonged to. I'd be willing to bet that your father, grandfather, uncle, or another man in your family was a Freemason.

The Freemasons were the first, the biggest, and the best-known gentlemen's organization in the world. Up until about 1960, if you weren't a Mason, you at least knew what one was. As secret societies go, they were a pretty badly hidden one. If you started looking for Freemasons at your office, factory, school, or family reunion picnic back then, you could throw a stick and whack a sizeable cluster of them. Today, if you go looking for Freemasons in those same places, you'll more than likely be met with the sort of blank stares and lizardlike slow blinks usually reserved for conversations with a tax attorney.

Literally hundreds of books written by Freemasons for Freemasons have been moldy tomes or sensational

speculation, filled with a miasma of mythological and metaphysical mumbo jumbo and a minimum of facts. And non-Masons who seem to have their tinfoil hats screwed on a little too snugly have peddled lots of books, accusing Freemasons of conspiracies and lunatic plots so whacked out that even an ardent *Stranger Things* fan wouldn't fail to snort uncontrollably at them.

What's been missing all along is a basic book by someone armed with the facts, the history, the symbolism, and the, well, real secrets. This is your book, and I'm your guy. I am a Freemason myself, a Past Master of three Masonic lodges, and I'm here to help. Don't get me wrong. As I explain a little later, we do have some secrets that I can't tell you, and I'm no stoolie. But the list of what I'm leaving out is a whole lot smaller than you're probably thinking.

About This Book

Freemasonry is a strange topic. It's not a religion, but it's religious. It's not a political movement, but its members have been some of the greatest political and social reformers of history. It's not a charity or a service club, yet its various organizations operate outstanding charities. Its language comes from the 18th century, yet its lessons apply to the 21st century. To really understand it, you need to know a little something about history, religion, politics, philosophy, literature, mythology, language, and symbolism. In this book, I touch on all these topics and more.

So if Freemasonry is a secret society, how can I write a book about it if I'm supposed to keep it all a big secret? Simple. Most of the word on the street about Masonic secrecy is a big misconception, and I can tell you the history and most of the basics of modern Masonry. But as

a Mason, there are a few things I'm just not going to tell you. Sorry about that. Them's the rules. Freemasons promise not to write, print, paint, stamp, stain, cut, carve, hew, mark, or engrave any of the secrets of the fraternity so that non-Masons can discover them. The official secrets of Freemasonry are mostly the methods Freemasons use to identify each other (passwords, gestures, and secret handshakes), and a few of the details of the third and final ceremony ritual of the lodge.

Now, anti-Masons, opportunistic ex-members, and other rats have been publishing books with all the secrets of Masonry in them since about ten seconds after the first lodges met. Most libraries and bookstores have them on their shelves, and the Internet puts nearly every Masonic ritual at your fingertips. You just won't find those very few details here. And even if you did, you wouldn't be able to bluff your way into a Masonic lodge. Don't even try it. We guard our doors with sharp, pointy swords, which I tell you all about in [Chapter 5](#).

This book doesn't use many unusual conventions, but whenever I use and define a new term, I put that term in *italic*. And whenever I give you an e-mail address, I put it in monofont so you can easily identify it as such.

If you perused the table of contents on your way here, you saw that this book is divided into six parts. Feel free to read them in any order you choose. After all, you paid for the privilege. Here is a brief description of what you can find in each part:

- » [Part 1](#), "**What Is Freemasonry?**": This part explains just what Freemasonry is and is not. If you know absolutely nothing about Freemasonry, start with [Chapter 1](#). [Chapter 2](#) is a long one, but it's a crash course in Masonic history from 1000 BC until today.

[Chapter 3](#) discusses the basic beliefs and philosophy of the Masonic institution and the messages it tries to communicate to its members. [Chapter 4](#) talks about the two subjects that Freemasons forbid talking about in lodge — politics and religion — and their effects on the development of Masonry.

» **[Part 2, “The Inner Workings of Freemasonry”:](#)**

This part gets down to the nuts and bolts, or stones and mortar, of what goes on in a Masonic lodge.

[Chapter 5](#) identifies all the officers of the lodge and then goes on to explain the governing powers of Grand Lodges, as well as the thorny issues surrounding recognition and regularity of foreign Freemasonry. In

[Chapter 6](#), the ceremonies and rituals of Freemasonry are examined and explained, including secret stuff, bloody oaths, and the three essential Masonic degrees.

[Chapter 7](#) talks about the many mysterious symbols used by Freemasons, what they mean, and why they’re used. And [Chapter 8](#) covers the myths, misconceptions, and party gags about Freemasonry, where they came from, why they keep getting passed around, and why your Masonic ring won’t get you out of a speeding ticket.

» **[Part 3, “When One Lodge Isn’t Enough: The Appendant Bodies”:](#)** Freemasons are big joiners, and becoming a Mason often can be like trying to eat one

potato chip. This section shines a light on the many different groups within the Masonic family (known as *appendant bodies*), who joins them, who *can* join them, and what their appeal is. [Chapter 9](#) is an encapsulated overview of the appendant bodies, making the distinction between Masonic organizations and other groups that look and sound similar but aren’t. [Chapter 10](#) is an in-depth explanation of the York Rite degrees, including the Royal Arch, Cryptic,

and Knights Templar. [Chapter 11](#) concentrates on the 29 additional Scottish Rite degrees, plus the 33rd degree. [Chapter 12](#) covers the Shriners, why they wear those overturned flowerpots on their heads, why they seem to be in love with all things motorized with wheels, and just what they have to do with being a Freemason. [Chapter 13](#) explains the extended Masonic family, including groups for women, children, and party animals.

- » **[Part 4, “Freemasonry Today and Tomorrow”](#)**: How does a very old, very private fraternity that pushes faith, morality, harmony, and personal responsibility survive in an age of isolation, indifference, and no “rulz”? [Chapter 14](#) talks about the abrupt and destructive changes to a society that used to crave togetherness but now does everything it can to keep us all strangers, and how Freemasonry holds the potential to help counteract that. [Chapter 15](#) examines what the Masonic world is doing to get men interested again. Some of it is good, some of it isn't, and some changes will be forced on Freemasons whether they like it or not. In [Chapter 16](#), you discover the steps to finding a lodge and becoming a Mason.
- » **[Part 5, “The Part of Tens”](#)**: This part of the book is a conversation starter. [Chapter 17](#) is a list of famous Freemasons, from founding fathers, civil rights activists, and scientists to musicians, actors, and sports figures. [Chapter 18](#) is a list of ten amazing conspiracies, anti-Masons, and hoaxes, proving that you should never trust the history you get from movies, comic books, or fellow college students while they're drinking. [Chapter 19](#) puts ten cool Masonic places on the map, so whether you're a Mason or just a Masonic groupie, you'll have plenty of sightseeing opportunities to drag your family to.

» **Part 6, “Appendixes”**: Just like your second cousin Mort in New Jersey, this book could get along without an appendix, but it wouldn’t be a proper reference book without it. So I include the two most important documents from Masonic history: the Regius Manuscript, the first written record of the workings of a Mason’s lodge; and the Ancient Charges, the framework for the government of Masonic lodges and the conduct of their members. I also include contact information for the Grand Lodges in the United States and Canada.

Foolish Assumptions

Freemasons For Dummies is written for a pretty wide audience, but I make a few assumptions about you. I assume at least one of the following describes you to a T:

- » **You’re Masonically clueless.** If this sounds about right, don’t worry. I explain what the square and compass symbol means, where it came from, what it has to do with building buildings and laying bricks, and why so many men have tied a little white apron around their waists and locked themselves behind the doors of the Masonic lodge. If you found Grandpa’s Masonic ring in an old cigar box and you never knew what it was, you’ll find the answers here.
- » **You’re thinking about becoming a Freemason, or you’ve recently become one.** This book is a pretty concise reference, discussing the origins of the Craft, what it is and what it isn’t, what the rituals mean, how lodges are set up, and why Masons do what they do. I also help you make sense of the complex minefield of related Masonic organizations so you can understand why a Shriner is a Mason who might be a Knight

Templar but not necessarily a Master of the Royal Secret. Or vice versa.

- » **You're the spouse, partner, or relative of someone who's thinking about becoming a Mason, or of someone who already is a Mason.** If you never had a close relative who had been a Mason and you want to know what the heck Freemasonry is all about, you've come to the right place. I'll explain a whole lot more than those History Channel shows about Masons do.
- » **You're suspicious of Freemasons, and you're pretty sure that we're a bizarre cult — but you're open to finding out the truth.** For the curious crowd who has their heads filled with lots of anti-Masonic mush, I spend plenty of time debunking the more common myths, accusations, and urban legends that have been flung at Freemasons over the last 300 years of its modern life. If you picked up this book looking for serious answers, you'll find them here.

Icons Used in This Book

The icons lurking in the margins of this book help you home in on interesting facts as well as give you a little scenery to gaze at.



ASK THE PAST
MASTER

When a new candidate enters the Masonic lodge for the first time, he is faced with unusual rituals, strange vocabulary, and occasionally obscure traditions. New Masons are always encouraged to ask the Past Masters plenty of questions, because they're sort of the Masonic Yodas of their lodge. They know the rituals, the rules, the right way, and the wrong way to do things. This icon is your personal Past Master. Feel free to pester him.



ORIGINS

This icon points out the necessary road trips into history — either an important point in Masonic history or an event that had an effect on the fraternity. Sometimes it's blessedly short and to the point. Other trips into the murky mists of time take a little longer to explain and can be skipped over by anyone with a life-threatening allergy to historical subjects. They do give a deeper understanding of why we are who we are and the events that gave birth to modern Freemasonry.



REMEMBER

Setting aside all touristy side trips and anecdotes, this icon marks key points that are vital to understanding Freemasonry.



TECHNICAL
STUFF

This icon highlights such things as additional data, explanations of obscure rituals and practices, or other information that may interest you but can be ruthlessly skipped over without missing the important themes of the chapter.



INTERNATIONAL

Freemasonry is a worldwide fraternity, but it has no international governing body. As a result, there's a lot of variation from one country (and even one state) to the next in customs, ceremonies, and other details. (A lot.) This book is written from the point of view of Masonry in the United States, but this icon alerts you when you need to be aware of major or unusual differences in other places.



MYTH
BUSTER

No institution on earth has attracted more lies, half-truths, urban legends, and myths, not to mention fakers, charlatans, con artists, and humbugs, than Freemasonry. This icon takes aim at these myths and misconceptions to reveal the truth about Freemasonry.

Beyond the Book

In addition to the abundance of information and guidance related to Freemasonry that I provide in this book, you get access to even more help and information online at Dummies.com. Check out this book's online Cheat

Sheet. Just go to www.dummies.com and search for **Freemasons For Dummies Cheat Sheet**.

And if you want to keep up with the latest news and developments in the Masonic world, check out my *Freemasons For Dummies* blog at www.freemasonsfordummies.blogspot.com.

Where to Go from Here

If you first came across the Freemasons in the movie *National Treasure* or Dan Brown's *The Lost Symbol* (either the novel or the Peacock streaming TV series), you've come to the right place to find the real story. That's fiction. These are the facts. The great news is that this is not a textbook. It's more like a Las Vegas dinner buffet. You can cut in line, go back for an extra chicken leg, or just snag all the chocolate mousse pie, with no haughty *maitre d'* to look you up and down like you've packed in enough chow for the night.

If all you want to know about is Masonic symbolism, pore over [Chapter 7](#). If you've always heard about 33rd-degree Masons and can't wait patiently to find out what they are, feel free to plow into [Chapter 11](#). Secret Masonic symbols on the back of the dollar bill got you feeling nervous every time you pull out your flash wad to pay for a double latté? Brazenly saunter into [Chapter 8](#) like you own the joint. You can always go back and read about Masonic aprons or the Shriners some other time.

Part 1

What Is Freemasonry?

IN THIS PART ...

Discover what Freemasonry is and what it isn't, what Masons do in their lodges, and what all the 'secret society' stuff is all about.

Uncover the mythical, legendary, and real-life history of the Freemasons — from Europe's cathedral builders in the Middle Ages, right up through today.

Explore Masonry's basic philosophy and the lessons it teaches its members.

Chapter 1

Lodges, Aprons, and Funny Handshakes: Freemasonry 101

IN THIS CHAPTER

- » **Defining Freemasonry**
 - » **Discovering what Freemasons do**
 - » **Getting the scoop on all those secrets**
-

Mystery creates wonder, and wonder is the basis of man's desire to understand.

—NEIL ARMSTRONG

Drive through just about any town in America and keep your eyes open. Sooner or later, you'll pass a building or a sign sporting a square and a compass, like the one shown in [Figure 1-1](#). It may be a large, impressive building or a small humble one. It may be marked with a huge sign in the yard or have a simple cornerstone. But it will be there. It is a sign universally recognized throughout the world for three centuries as a symbol of truth, morality, and brotherly love. It is the square and compass of Freemasonry.

The greatest lure of Freemasonry is the mystique of a locked door. On the other side of that door are rituals, symbols, and ceremonies known only to its members and Masters and unwritten secrets that have been passed from mouth to ear for centuries.



Image courtesy of Christopher Hodapp

FIGURE 1-1: The square and compass is the universal symbol of Freemasonry.

Masonic libraries are filled with books of antiquity. Science, philosophy, history, religion, and symbolism all collide in the collected works of Masonic scholars. The

literature of the fraternity is strewn with legends, myths, and ancient mysteries.

Voltaire, Mozart, George Washington, and Winston Churchill were all members, as were 9 signers of the Declaration of Independence and 14 U.S. presidents. The Founding Fathers of the United States embraced Masonic principles and wrote them into the foundations of U.S. government. But dictators like Adolph Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Saddam Hussein all outlawed their gatherings. Many religions forbid their members to join the Masons, and terrible accusations have been made against members of the fraternity, charging them with assassinations, conspiracies, attempts at world domination, and other evil crimes. Millions of men the world over have joined the Freemasons, yet even today, some countries threaten Masons with fines, imprisonment, or even death.

Even so, in almost every country of the world, every week hundreds of thousands of men slip on jackets and ties, reverently fasten small, white aprons around their waists, and enter the confines of windowless lodge rooms. There, they escape the outside world for a few hours and replace it with the comfort of friendship combined with ritual ceremonies from centuries ago.

What is it about this self-described fraternal and benevolent organization that evokes such opposite reactions? Is Freemasonry a mythic mass of mind-expanding, magical, mystical manifestations? An evil organization for socioeconomic pirates? Or just a place for a hot hand of euchre and a fish fry? In this chapter, I give you a brief overview of what Freemasonry really is, what Masons do, and how other organizations are related to Freemasonry.

What Is Freemasonry?

Freemasonry (or just plain Masonry, for short) is a society of gentlemen concerned with moral and spiritual values and is one of the world's oldest and most popular fraternal organizations. It's perhaps the most misunderstood, yet mainstream, "secret society" the world has ever known. It's also the most visible one. Every state in the United States and almost every country in the world has a Grand Lodge of Freemasons, and each has its own website. Masons and Masonic lodges have pages all over Facebook. Masonic buildings are clearly marked, and their addresses and phone numbers are freely available. Freemasons themselves don't hide — they wear rings, jackets, and hats emblazoned with the square and compass. Their cars often have Masonic license plates and bumper stickers. Some Grand Lodges even advertise on billboards. If the Freemasons are a secret, they need a refresher course on camouflage.



REMEMBER Freemasons don't always do such a good job of defining just what they are or what they do, but that's often because the answers non-Masons are looking for are really too complicated. No simple, one-line definition satisfactorily describes what Freemasonry is. It is a philosophy and a system of morality and ethics — and a pretty basic one at that. Here are the main points that make Freemasonry different from any other organization:

- » Freemasonry is a fraternity of men, bound together by obligations and their words of honor, based on the

medieval stonemason craft guilds.

- » Masonic laws, rules, legends, and customs originate in the *Ancient Charges*, the rules of those craft guilds (see [Appendix B](#)).
- » Freemasonry teaches lessons of social and moral virtues based on symbolism of the tools and language of the ancient building trade, using the building of a structure as a symbol for the building of character in men.
- » Masons are obliged to practice brotherly love, mutual assistance, equality, and trust between each other.
- » Masons have private methods of recognizing each other, such as handshakes, signs, and passwords.
- » Masons meet in lodges that are governed by a Master and assisted by Wardens, where petitioners who are found to be morally and mentally qualified are admitted using ritual ceremonies based on the legends of the ancient guilds.
- » Freemasonry is not a religion, and it has no religious dogma that it forces its members to accept. Masons must simply believe in the existence of a Supreme Being, whatever they conceive that deity to be. Their personal beliefs are just that: personal.
- » Freemasonry is not a science, but it does teach its members to value learning and experience. It encourages Masons to think but does not tell them *what* to think.
- » Freemasonry teaches Masons to be tolerant of the beliefs of others and to regard each man as their equal, deserving both their respect and their assistance.

What Do Masons Do?

Lodges have regular meetings throughout the year. Most gather at least once a month for a business meeting, at which communications are read, bills are paid, new members are voted on, and the members catch up on each other's lives. Often, guest speakers are invited, or a member gives a presentation on the ritual, history, philosophy, or symbols of Freemasonry.

Other special meetings are held to initiate new members and perform the various ceremonies to advance them to full membership. And because the primary goal of Freemasonry is fraternalism, a meal usually is served before or after the meeting, either in the lodge building or at a nearby restaurant.

Modern Freemasonry started out by gathering in taverns over a nice dinner, and Masons have spent 300 years obsessing on the importance of the culinary arts. Their feasts are called *festive boards* (from the days when *board* meant "table"), and a tradition of many of these gatherings is a series of ceremonial toasts.

Still, an important mission of the Masonic lodge is to make new Masons, and it's accomplished by conferring degrees.

Conferring the three degrees

The ceremonies a new member must go through are called *degrees*. Masonry has three of them — Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craft, and Master Mason — and they're based on the levels of membership in the old medieval craft guilds. The ceremonies are modeled on rituals used by those guilds centuries ago.