

MASONIC EXPOSÉS

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There has been a good deal of attention focused lately on the Internet and the proliferation of Masonic information, both good and bad that result from Internet sources. Many potential candidates now petition a lodge for membership having first obtained a good deal of Masonic information, including portrayals and discussion of ritual work, from the Internet. While "old school Masons" in some jurisdictions get apoplectic at the thought of their potential members having obtained information that way (the curmudgeons in the Grand Lodge of West Virginia come to mind), these types of exposes are nothing new, and go back to the founding of the fraternity.

There are generally two types of exposés. The first is a total fabrication, made up out of whole cloth. This type is generally lurid in its details, and posits that Masons worship the Devil or something equally nefarious. A good example of this is found in the late 19 Century writings of a French con artist, who, in order to make a quick franc and get the local authorities off his case, made a deal with the Catholic Church. He informed them that he was a Mason, and would reveal all sorts of dastardly secrets to them in return for some money. They swallowed the bait and he produced several lurid documents, and was due to have his public finale in a Paris theater. When the assembled multitude of Church and governmental dignitaries were gathered, he announced that he had snookered them and that all his presentations had been made up. He fled the scene just ahead of the irate mob, supposedly keeping his ill-gotten gain. Much of his bogus work has found its way into the 21st Century, perpetuated by some anti-Masonic religious zealots (who, interestingly enough, always omit the last part about the expose in the Paris theater).

This type of material, while available on the net, can generally be recognized for what it is, and potential members generally regard it as so much trash. The other type of exposé is generally based on genuine ritual work, and while it may be promulgated by groups or individuals who wish to expose Masonry to scorn or ridicule, it does have a valid basis.

A recent book published by the Art DeHoyos of the Scottish Rite Research Society, "Light on Masonry," examines some of those early exposures, particularly those that occurred in the wake of the Morgan Affair. The ridicule of Masonry and the betrayal of its secrets began over a century before Morgan. The earliest known example was a pamphlet published in London in 1698. Similar documents, some of which may have been ciphers for members, were published in Edinburgh from 1700 until 1750. "Masonry Dissected", published in 1730 was the first widespread expose, and it was followed by eight English exposes published between 1760 and 1769, as well as a dozen French exposés of the Craft degrees, published between 1737 and 1751. Exposures of the "High Degrees" of Freemasonry began in France in 1763 and in England in 1825.



American exposures began in 1730 with the publication of "The Mystery of Free-Masonry" by none other than Benjamin Franklin a year before he joined St. John's Lodge in Philadelphia. All these exposes were on the streets when the William Morgan affair occurred in New York hi 1826. Morgan's supposed revelations and his ostensible death at the hands of Masons resulted in the Anti-Masonic movement. David Bernard, a New York clergyman and former Mason, published his expose, "Light on Masonry" in 1829. That work became the basis for much of the anti-Masonic furor that subsequently swept the country.

That book is also the basis for the recent DeHoyos work. Interestingly, Bernard's book contains not only ritual work for the Blue Lodge Degrees, but also for the Chapter, Council, and Commandery Degrees and Orders, as well as most of the Scottish Rite Degrees. Additionally, ritual work for other appendant orders, such as the Red Cross of Constantine and some side degrees, such as the Knights of Constantinople (now a part of the Allied Masonic Degrees), are included.

The bottom line, for our purposes, is that information on Masonry, much of it based upon valid rituals, has always been, is now, and will be in the future, available to those who look for it. The Internet has made it more readily available to many who might otherwise not have spent the time doing library research on the subject. We, as Masons, need to accept the fact that some of our new candidates will have acquired a good deal of Masonic knowledge before they become Entered Apprentices, and we need to capitalize on that. We can note where some of their prior research is correct, and also point out some areas where it is not. We do not need our less informed members stating, "I can't tell you. It's a secret." We need to ensure that our older members are as knowledgeable as our newer ones, and to ensure that our newer members recognize that Masonry is not only ritual. After all, it is the inner qualifications, not the external, that make a man a Mason.

