

Veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols



Officers for 2012-13 are (front, from left) Blake Bowden, junior deacon; Joey Moss, senior warden; Bill Finch Jr., Worshipful Master; Royce Towns, junior warden; and Joe Orum, senior deacon; and (back) Bubba Hermann, tiler; Lowell Turner, secretary; and Jerry Akers, junior steward. Other officers for 2012-13 not pictured include Juan Gaytan, treasurer; Stephen Henrichs, chaplain; Gary Combs, senior steward; Bobby O'Neal, marshal; and Glen Sachtleben, master of ceremonies.

With a legacy encompassing 165 years, a history of the Gonzales Lodge No. 30 would almost be a history of Texas itself

BY BLAKE L. BOWDEN
Special to the Inquirer

One cannot speak of Gonzales, without mentioning Freemasonry and its impact on our community. Freemasonry is the largest and oldest Fraternity in the world, and in Gonzales, it's no different. Gonzales Masonic Lodge No. 30 has conducted business, performed charitable acts and provided scholarships for more than 165 consecutive years. The lodge was chartered on Jan. 17, 1847, and has been located at its present location of 519½ St. Joseph Street for 115 of those years.

The city of Gonzales has a rich history with Freemasonry. For example, six of the Gonzales "Old Eighteen" were Freemasons. No other lodge of its size has furnished such a large number of noted men to the Craft. It has provided the Grand Lodge with five Grand Masters, including the late James F. Miller, Judge B.R. Abernethy, John B. McMahon, Chief Justice W.S. Fly and Hon. W.M. Fly, the last two remaining the most distinguished in Masonic circles of Texas for some time. Chief Justice Fly, the last Grand Master from Gonzales Lodge, never

missed attending any of the Grand Lodge meetings for 57 consecutive years. It is said that no member in this country held more honors in the Masonic Lodge than did W.S. Fly. According to J.H. Daniel, Secretary of the Lodge in 1923, "writing a history of the Gonzales Lodge No. 30 would almost be a history of Texas." From its beginning, it played a prominent part in Masonry, having outstanding men on its membership rolls. These men in their time made history, had great vision, and aided greatly to make Texas the state she is today.

In 1889, the Masons laid the cornerstone for the Gonzales High School. The original cornerstone is now located at the Gonzales Masonic Cemetery. In 1901, Masons laid the cornerstone for the old Gonzales Cotton Mill, and in 1924, laid the cornerstone for the new Presbyterian Church building.

While Texas was a Republic, Masons served in many pivotal positions. All of the Presidents, Vice Presidents and Presidents pro tempore of the Senate were all Masons. What did Texas heroes such as Stephen F. Austin, Sam Houston, William B. Travis, Jim Bowie, Davy Crockett, James Bonham, Ben Milam, David G. Burnet, James Fannin, Mirabeau B. Lamar, Lorenzo de Zavala,

Edward Burleson, Jose Navarro, Juan N. Seguin, R.E.B. Baylor and Thomas Rusk all have in common? They were all Freemasons.

Did you know that Brad Paisley, Shaquille O'Neal, Scottie Pippen, Arnold Palmer, Steve Wozniak, Richard Dreyfuss, Chief Justice David B. Sentelle are as well?

Freemasons use operative mason tools as symbols by which to teach Masonic philosophy. The terms "acting on the square" and "on the level" are Masonic terms which have filtered down into everyday language. This brings us to the most common question, "What is Freemasonry?" It is the oldest and largest worldwide fraternity dedicated to the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God. Freemasons do not solicit membership. In order to be a Mason, you must take the first step. If you'd like more information, email the lodge secretary at lowellt@crozierturner.com. If you're already a Mason, you are invited to attend the stated meetings held the first Monday of the month. The meal is at 6:30 p.m.; the meeting is at 7:30 p.m.

Blake L. Bowden is a past worshipful master for Gonzales Lodge A.F.&A.M. No. 30.

Principles and activities

While Freemasonry has often been called a "secret society," Freemasons themselves argue that it is more correct to say that it is an esoteric society, in that certain aspects are private. The most common phrasing is that Freemasonry has become less a secret society and more of a "society with secrets." The private aspects of modern Freemasonry are the modes of recognition amongst members and particular elements within the ritual. Despite the organization's great diversity, Freemasonry's central preoccupations remain charitable work within a local or wider community, moral uprightness – in most cases requiring a belief in a supreme being – as well as the development and maintenance of fraternal friendship.

Ritual, symbolism, and morality

Masons conduct their meetings using a ritualized format. There is no single Masonic ritual, and each jurisdiction is free to set (or not set) its own ritual. However, there are similarities that exist among jurisdictions. For example, all Masonic ritual makes use of the architectural symbolism of the tools of the medieval operative stonemason. Freemasons, as speculative masons, meaning philosophical building rather than actual building, use this symbolism to teach moral and ethical lessons of the principles of "Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth."

The Square and Compasses carved into stone

Two of the principal symbolic tools always found in a lodge are the square and compasses. Some lodges and rituals explain these tools as lessons in conduct: for example, that Masons should "square their actions by the square of virtue" and to learn to "circumscribe their desires and keep their passions within due bounds toward all mankind." However, as Freemasonry is non-dogmatic, there is no general interpretation for these tools – or any Masonic emblem – that is used by Freemasonry as a whole.

These moral lessons are communicated in performance of allegorical ritual. A candidate progresses through degrees, gaining knowledge and understanding of himself, his relation-

ship with others, and his relationship with the Supreme Being, per his own interpretation. Any mason may speculate on the symbols and purpose of Freemasonry, and, indeed, all masons are required, to some extent, to speculate on Masonic meaning as a condition of advancing through the degrees. There is no one accepted meaning, and no one person "speaks" for the whole of Freemasonry.

Freemasonry uses the metaphors of operative stonemasons' tools and implements, against the allegorical backdrop of the building of King Solomon's Temple, to convey what has been described by both Masons and critics as "a system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols."

The Supreme Being and the Volume of Sacred Law

Candidates for regular Freemasonry are required to declare a belief in a Supreme Being. However, the candidate is not asked to expand on, or explain, his interpretation of Supreme Being. The discussion of politics and religion is forbidden within a Masonic Lodge, in part, so a Mason will not be placed in the situation of having to justify his personal interpretation. Thus, reference to the Supreme Being can mean the Christian Trinity to a Christian Mason, Allah to a Muslim Mason, Para Brahman to a Hindu Mason, etc. While most Freemasons would take the view that the term Supreme Being equates to God, others may hold a more complex or philosophical interpretation of the term.

In the ritual, the Supreme Being is referred to as the Great Architect of the Universe, which alludes to the use of architectural symbolism within Freemasonry.

A Volume of the Sacred Law is always displayed in an open lodge in those jurisdictions which require a belief in the Supreme Being. In English-speaking countries, this is frequently

the King James Version of the Bible or another standard translation; there is no such thing as an exclusive "Masonic Bible."

Degrees

The three degrees of Craft or Blue Lodge Freemasonry are: Entered Apprentice – the degree of an Initiate, which makes one a Freemason;

Fellow Craft – an intermediate degree, involved with learning; and

Master Mason – the "third degree," a necessity for participation in most aspects of Masonry.

The degrees represent stages of personal development. No Freemason is told that there is only one meaning to the allegories; as a Freemason works through the degrees and studies their lessons, he interprets them for himself, his personal interpretation being bounded only by the Constitution within which he works. A common symbolic structure and universal archetypes provide a means for each Freemason to come to his own answers to life's important philosophical questions.

There is no degree of Craft Freemasonry higher than that of Master Mason. Although some Masonic bodies and orders have further degrees named with higher numbers, these degrees may be considered to be supplements to the Master Mason degree rather than promotions from it. An example is the Scottish Rite, conferring degrees numbered from 4° up to 33°. It is essential to be a Master Mason in order to qualify for these further degrees.

Signs, grips and words

Freemasons use signs (gestures), grips or tokens (handshakes) and words to gain admission to meetings and identify legitimate visitors. Many attempts have been made to reveal these "secrets" to the uninitiated, but the fraternity has responded. One response, made by many Masonic jurisdictions, was to deliberately transpose certain words in the ritual, so as to identify an imposter. Today, an unknown visitor may be required to produce membership documentation, in addition to demonstrating knowledge of the signs, grips and passwords.

Masons you may have heard of

Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin
John Jacob Astor
Stephen F. Austin
Gene Autry
"Count" Basie
Lloyd Bentsen
Irving Berlin
Daniel Boone
Ernest Borgnine
Jim Bowie
Gen. Omar Bradley
William Jennings Bryan
Bob Bullock
Admiral Richard E. Byrd
Kit Carson
Winston Churchill
Ty Cobb
Buffalo Bill Cody
Nat King Cole
Davy Crockett
Cecil B. DeMille
Jack Dempsey
Bob Dole
Gen. Jimmy Doolittle
Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
Wyatt Earp
Duke Ellington
John Elway
Douglas Fairbanks
W.C. Fields
Henry Ford
Benjamin Franklin
Clark Gable
John Glenn
Barry Goldwater
Gus Grissom
John Hancock
J. Edgar Hoover
Harry Houdini
Gen. Sam Houston
John Paul Jones
Benito Juarez
Rudyard Kipling
Charles Lindbergh
Gen. Douglas MacArthur
Gen. George C. Marshall
Tom Mix
Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Audie Murphy
Dr. James Naismith
Brad Paisley
Arnold Palmer
Fess Parker
Gen. George S. Patton
Norman Vincent Peale
J.C. Penney
Gen. "Black Jack" Pershing
Gen. George Pickett
Zebulon Pike
Paul Revere
Eddie Rickenbacker
Ringling Brothers (all seven)
"Sugar Ray" Robinson
Roy Rogers
Will Rogers
Col. Harland Sanders
Wally Schirra
Red Skelton
John Philip Sousa
John Steinbeck
Col. William Travis
Mark Twain
John Wayne
Brigham Young
Cy Young
At least 14 U.S. Presidents

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