



The Future of Nebraska Freemasonry: A Pragmatic Look

A short study of the current state of Freemasonry in Nebraska by the numbers and a discussion of the decline of fraternal organizations in America with suggestions on how Nebraska Freemasonry can survive its current decline.

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February 2021

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Forward

While the exact date of the beginning of Freemasonry in the world may remain a mystery, the date of the end of Freemasonry in Nebraska and perhaps the rest of the world is becoming quite clear and easy to calculate.

Like all fraternal organizations the Craft peaked in the years 1958 – 1961 and has been on the decline every since. Much of this decline can be traced to changes in society, technology and the demise of the traditional family unit however Freemasonry still has much to offer. Many of the things that people complain we have lost...morality, education, brotherly love and faith are at the very heart of Masonic tradition.

As a Craft, we have ignored or poorly addressed this decline for too long. In the past, all of our efforts were tied to the false hope that if we just made it “easier, faster, cheaper” we could sustain the large number of members. This has proved to be woefully incorrect. We must now put aside our fears and biases and take a long hard look at the Craft and do the difficult things that need to be done to preserve Masonry. It will not be easy, it will not be pain-free but it is my belief that it can be done and should be done. You don’t have to agree with my ideas, but if not, come up with something better and share it with the Craft!

If nothing else, I hope this report will make you think and examine your own commitment to Masonry and perhaps join me in this great and grand work of revitalizing Freemasonry.

Thomas L. Hauder, PGM Nebraska
10 February 2021

The Future of Freemasonry: A Pragmatic Look I Membership Numbers

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the membership numbers for trends and to determine if any of the efforts to stem the decline in membership have had any long-term effects. Concentration was given to number of raisings and number of suspensions for non-payment of dues (SNPD) as these are the only two metrics of the Craft we can affect.

Historical data from 1858 through 2019 were used to get the overall picture of the life of the Craft in Nebraska. The data show that the Craft peaked in 1958 (46,213 members; 293 lodges) before beginning a decline that has had only a few brief positive years of membership retention and raisings over losses.

The rate of decline over the long run is fairly consistent and much of the data shown has focused on the last 20-year period of the Craft. This choice was made to make the charts and numbers more relevant to the current makeup of the Craft and for ease of display in a document.

Currently we have roughly 8,222 members in 115 lodges. The average age of a Nebraska Mason is 65 years of age with a median of 67 and a mode of 73. We raise approximately 275 new Master Masons per year over the last 20 years but we suspend 404 members per year for non-payment of dues each year as well. It is felt that this disparity represents an opportunity for the Craft by placing some focus on cutting down the SNPD numbers.

Various things have been tried to arrest the decline in membership, including greatly reducing the requirements for proficiency. This move was made in 1987 and resulted in an upswing of number of raisings for 2 ½ years and then the numbers returned to their normal negative path. Additionally, during those 2 ½ years of positive raisings, the number of SNPD increased greatly and the net effect was to cancel out the gains in membership. The rate of decline has remained steady since 1990 and it's safe to say that the 1987 experiment had no long-term effect on membership decline.

Overall, the data show that at our current rate of loss and replacement of members, mathematically, we will be down to zero members in 18 years. In reality it will be much less than 18 years as a certain minimum number of members are necessary to keep the Craft viable.

This report concludes that there are some very important questions that need to be addressed in the Craft and without sustained effort over multiple years, the Craft will disappear in Nebraska.

Introduction

It is no secret that membership in the Masonic Fraternity has been declining for many years both in Nebraska and worldwide. There are many hypotheses for why this has been happening ranging from societal changes to the Craft's failure in keeping up with those changes. Whatever the reasons, the first place to start to craft a solution is to get a grip on the actual numbers.

This report uses historical membership data from the Nebraska jurisdiction to look for trends and to analyze the efficacy of various attempts that have been made to stabilize the decline in membership through changes in ritual, bylaws and procedures.

It is hoped that by starting with a firm foundation of the facts about the decline in membership, possible solutions may present themselves. Certainly there is no one single answer to the problem and any set of answers will need time to play out before they can be judged.

What is certain is that at our current rate of decline, the Craft in Nebraska and possibly the United States, will disappear in 20 years or less.

Methods

The data used in this report was obtained from the Grand Lodge of Nebraska office and is current up to 1 December 2020. Generally, the charts and figures shown use only the data up to 2019 as 2020 is not fully reported.

The major metrics used (where applicable) were:

- Year over Year change
- Average
- Median
- Minimum
- Maximum
- Mode

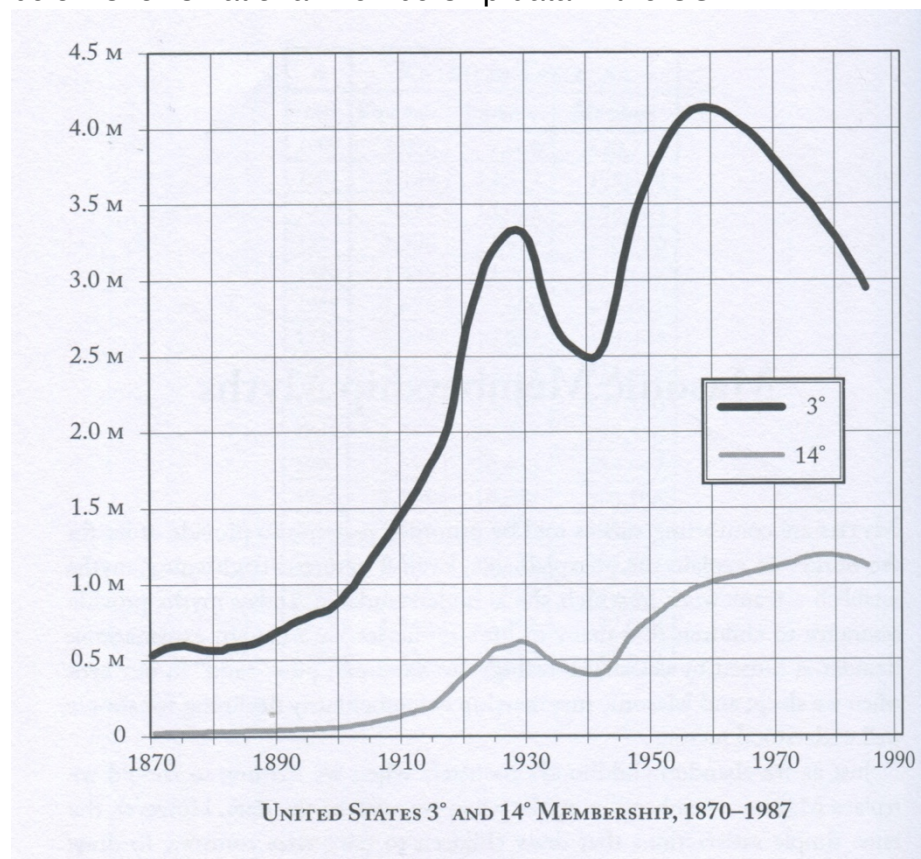
While average, median, minimum and maximum can give us some insight, I believe one of the best metrics to focus on is rate of change from year to year. By using this metric, it becomes possible to gauge if attempts to change the decline have had any lasting positive effects.

All numbers were calculated using an Excel spreadsheet and standard statistical formulas.

Loss of membership due to death, demits due to religious beliefs, expulsions due to trial and relocations are not considered in the calculations with the exception of Chart 1. This choice was made as these items cannot be affected by any actions taken by the leadership of the Craft.

Historical Data from 1857 - 2020

The earliest data on total membership starts in 1858 and continues to present day. As can be seen in Chart 1¹, the membership of the Nebraska jurisdiction has followed the general path of membership nationwide in America. We see distinct dips and surges concurrent with major events such as wars and economic downturns. The illustration below shows national membership data in the US.



Illus. 1 From A Radical in the East by S. Brent Morris

The peak number of Master Masons in good standing in Nebraska occurred in the 1957 – 1958 time frame. From that point forward, there has been a steady and consistent decline in membership numbers. **This chart includes loss of membership from all causes.**

¹ 2020 figures are preliminary but show a decline in line with previous years

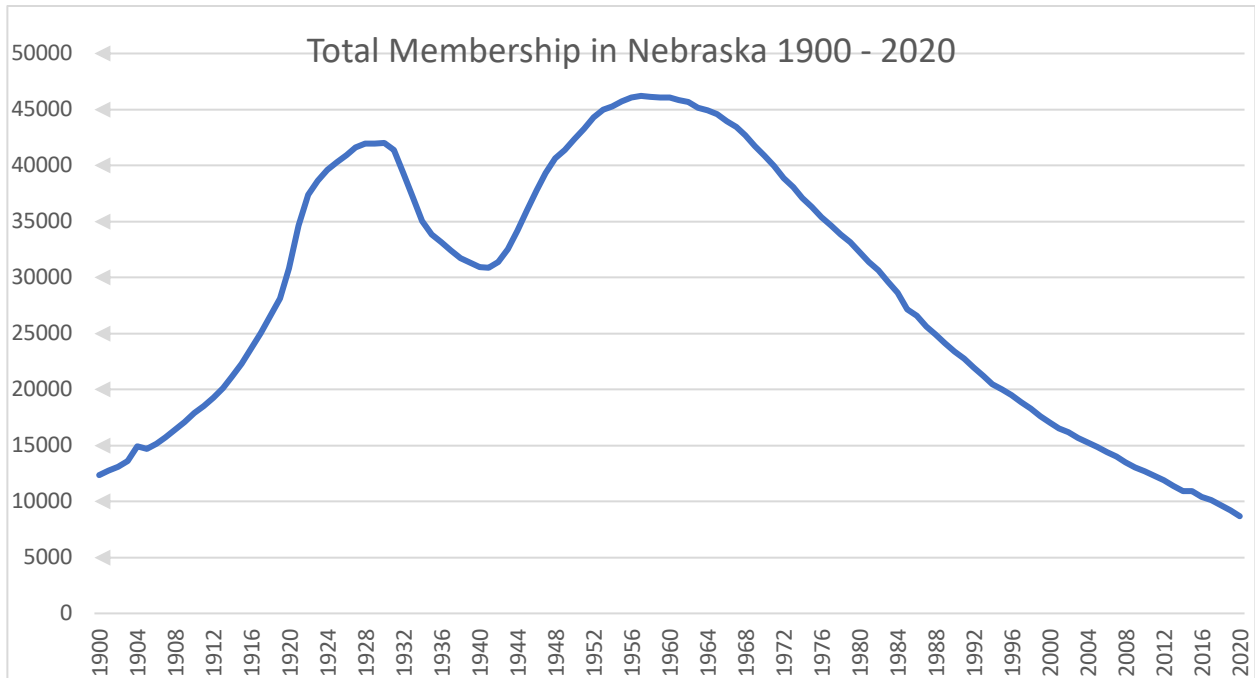


Chart 1

Members

Total

Minimum	140	1858
Maximum	46213	1957
Median	20144	

Lodges

Minimum	6	1858
Maximum	293	1931
Median	231	

Current

Members	8677
Lodges	115

Age Breakdown

Mean (Average) =	65 years old	(Mean/Average in 2003 = 62)
Median =	67 years old	
Mode =	73 years old	

Year over Year / Rate of Change

One of the most important metrics for any business or organization is the Year over Year (rate of positive / negative change) in membership, sales or other benchmark of success. In this case, looking at the rate of change of number of Master Masons being raised each year, from 1958 forward, there is a fairly consistent number.

The data show that on average over the last 20 years, each year the Craft raises 5% *less* Master Masons than the year before. In fact the last positive YOY was 2004. Since then the number has been negative each year. Chart 2 shows the 20-year data.

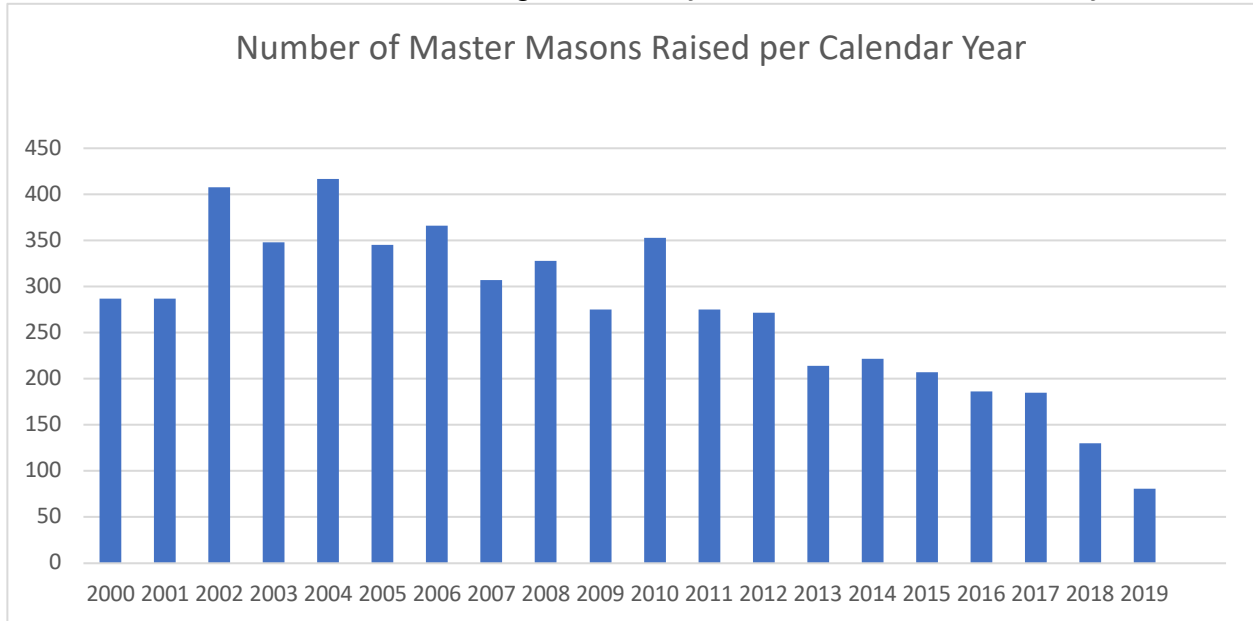


Chart 2

If this data is examined as percentage of YOY² rate of change (Chart 3), an interesting pattern emerges that shows each year with a positive gain over the previous year is followed by a year with a negative gain. This holds true until 2014 when each year, fewer Master Masons are raised than the year before. This phenomenon should be investigated further to determine if this is just a statistical anomaly or if it can be associated with some event or change that is under the control of the Craft.

² YOY change percentage is calculated by $((\text{Current year} - \text{Last Year} / \text{Last year}) * 100$

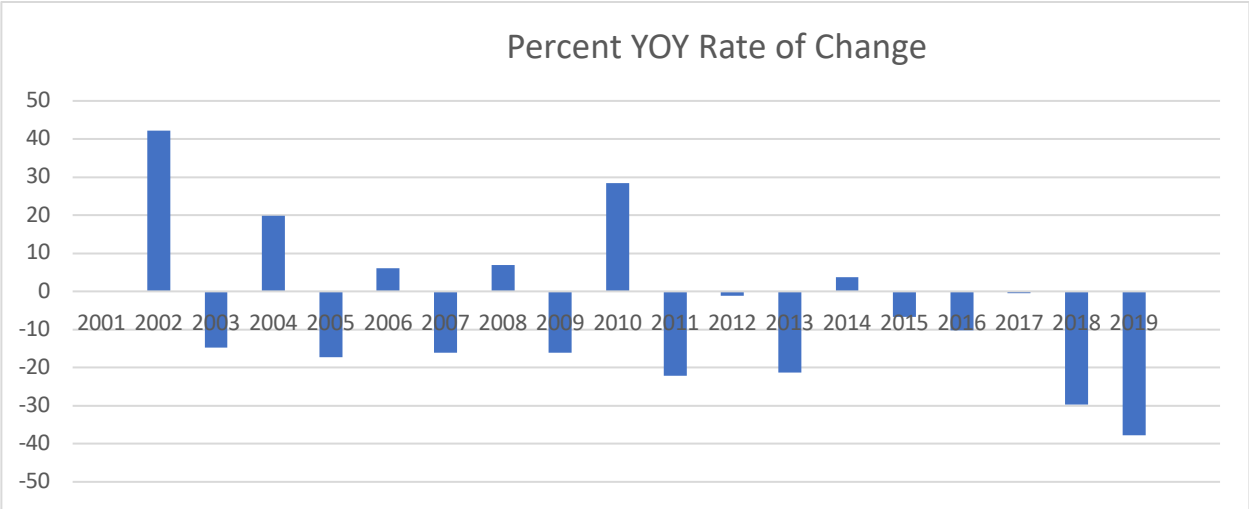


Chart 3

YOY Average % 2000 - 2020	-4.5581984
2015 – 2019 (%)	-16.972271
2010 -2014	-2.4817603
2005 - 2010	-7.323519
2000 - 2004	9.45639652
Median	-8.4508421
Ave. Raised / Year	274.65

Suspension for Non-Payment of Dues

While the vast majority of effort to stem the decline in membership seems to revolve around creating new Master Masons, it is my hypothesis that a good portion of the decline in membership issues could be solved by reducing the number of members that are suspended for non-payment of dues. By focusing on new members only, it's like trying to fill a bucket with water when the bucket has a hole in the bottom. The smaller we can make that hole, the easier filling the bucket becomes.

This is not to say that suspension for non-payment of dues (SNPD) can ever be reduced to zero. There will always be members that leave the organization for a variety of reasons that are not controllable by the Craft. Still, if we could recover even half of the SNPD members, we would be well on our way to reversing our overall losses.

Chart 4 shows the total number of SNPD for the last 20-year period. Again, the peaks and valleys need further investigation to determine what lessons if any can be learned. The general takeaway is that from 2006 onward, there has been an overall decline in the number of SNPD which may be due to less members or better efforts at retention. In any case, reducing this number should be a prime consideration going forward.

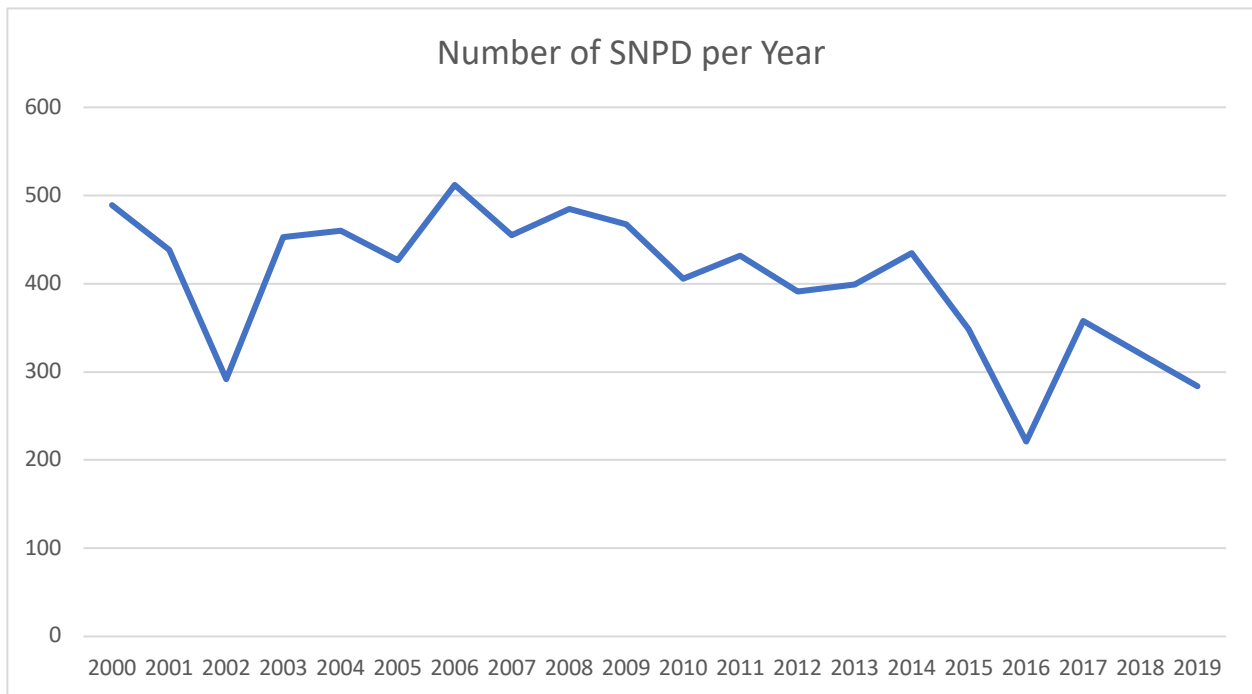


Chart 4

Chart 5 shows the rate of change of SNPD over the last 20 years and shows some interesting spikes that should be the focus of further investigation. In general, however, the number of SNPD is fairly consistent over the last 20 years.

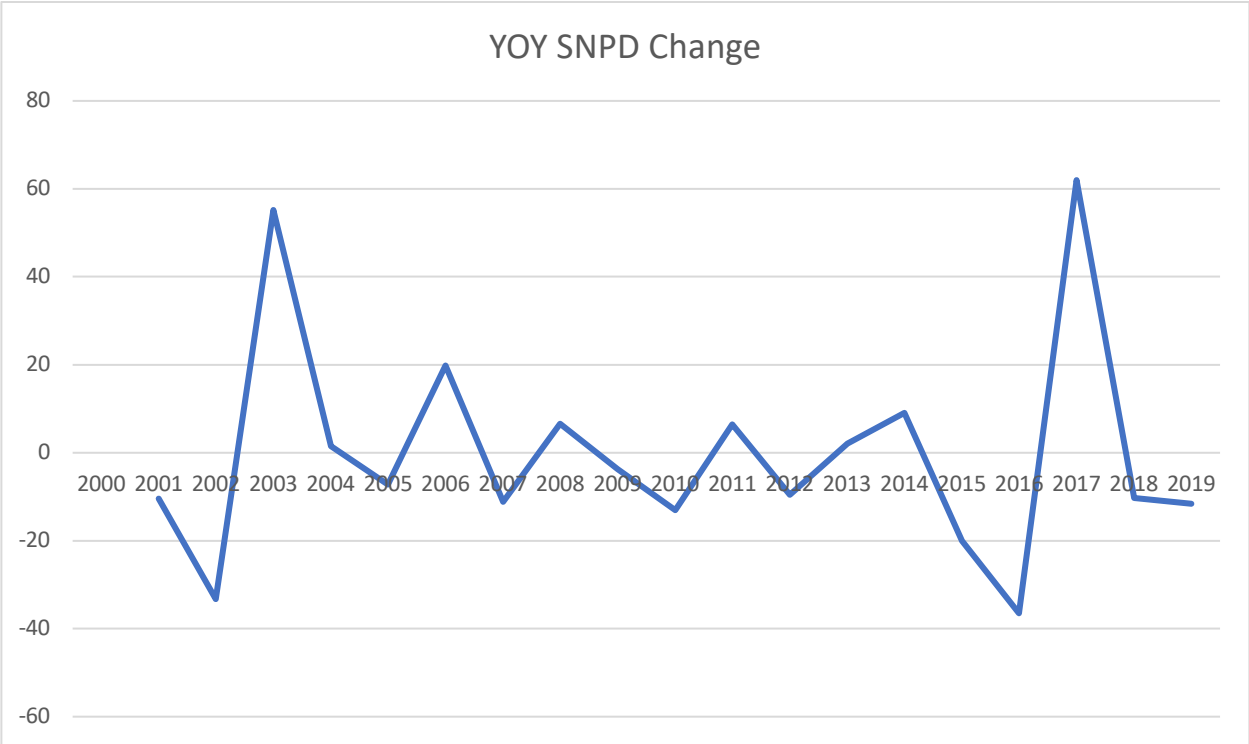


Chart 5

YOY Ave. 2000 - 2020	-0.212850583
2015 – 2019(%)	-3.272995586
2010 -2014	-1.016061232
2005 - 2010	-1.430072412
2000 - 2004	3.229864745
Median	429.5
Ave. SPND	403.65

Raised v SNPD

One way any organization survives is by replacing lost members with new members. Much effort has been put into recruiting in the last 20 years with things like Friendship Nights and other events to spark interest in Masonry. Chart 6 show the comparison between Master Masons raised and SNPD for the last 20-year period. **Keep in mind that this is only SNPD losses and does not include death or other reasons.** The problem is obvious, we are not raising enough men to counter the losses from SNPD. Raising more members does not seem to be the silver bullet to our problems. We must also address the issue of SNPD.

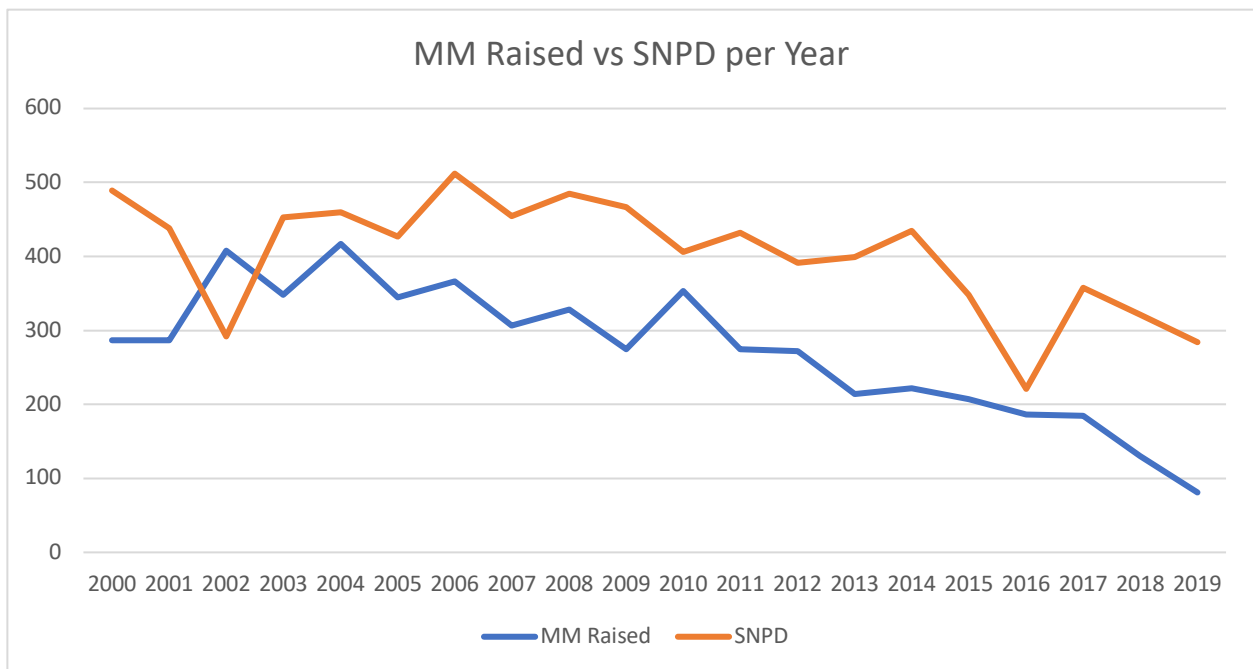


Chart 6

Average Delta -129

Median Delta -149.5

Rural vs Urban Statistics

This section shows the data results when lodges in the Lincoln and Omaha area are removed from the data. Most of the metrics are comparable to the overall data except for number of Master Masons raised between 2018 and 2019 where the YOY rate jumps to 31%.

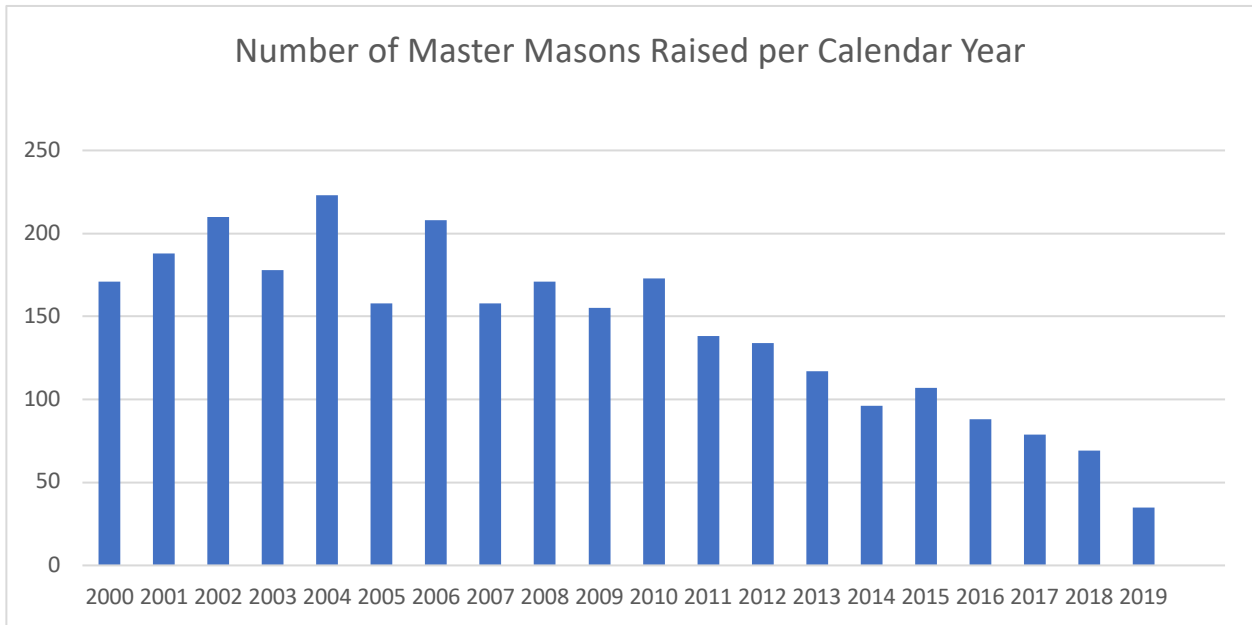


Chart 7

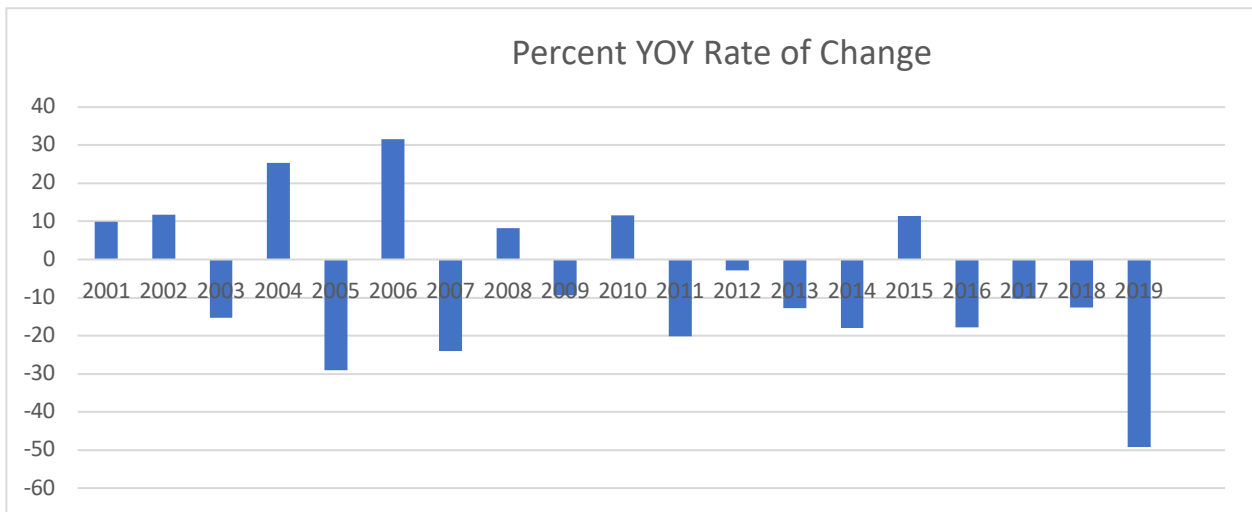


Chart 8

% Change Average YOY

YOY Ave. 2000 - 2020	-5.8734202
YOY Ave. 2018 - 2019	-30.966795
2015 - 2019	-15.691908
2010 -2014	-8.4304293
2005 - 2010	-4.5339502
2000 - 2004	6.33729035

Median -11.44275

Ave. Raised / Year 142.8

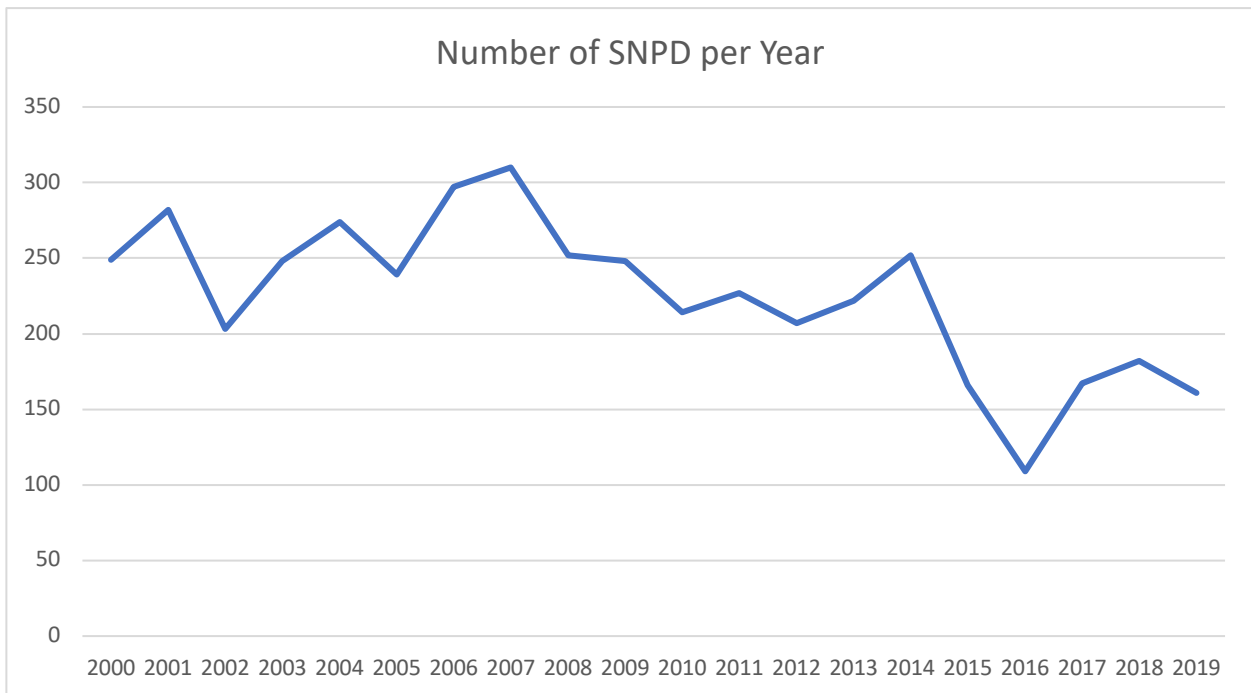


Chart 9

% Change Average YOY

YOY Ave. 2000 - 2020	-0.001630101
YOY Ave. 2018 - 2019	-1.278212805
2015 - 2019	-3.561949992
2010 -2014	0.862881315
2005 - 2010	-3.022582042

2000 - 2004 4.472546576

Median 233

Ave. SPND 225.45

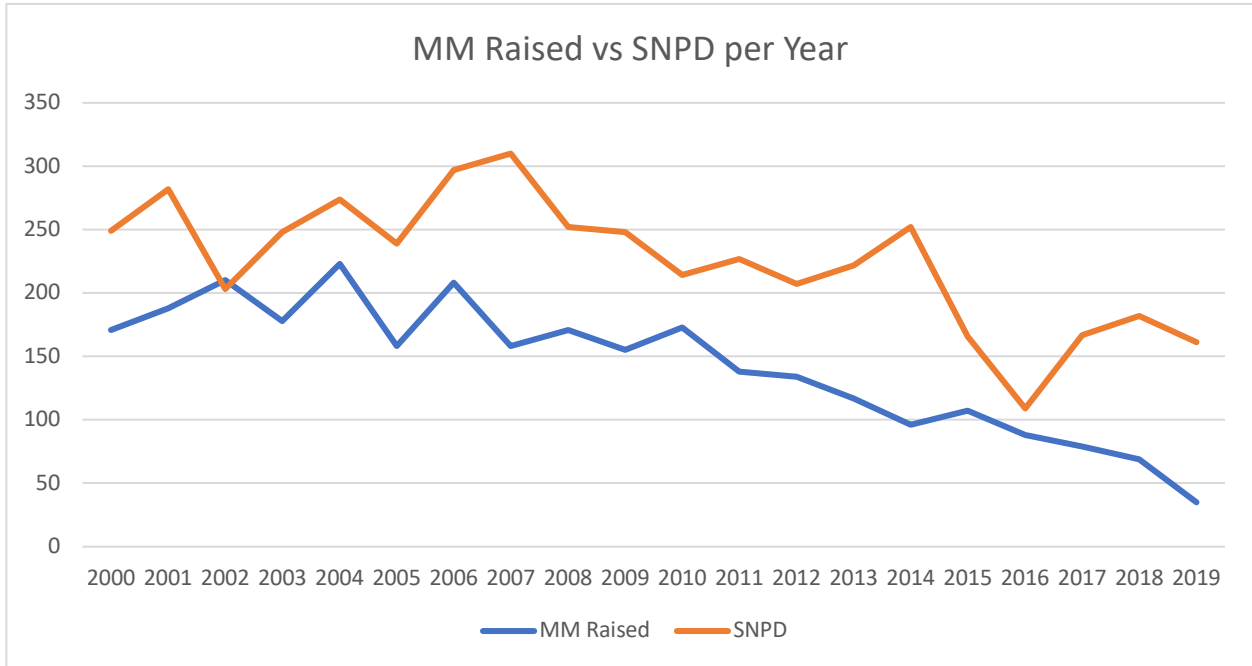


Chart 10

Average Delta -82.65

Median Delta -84.5

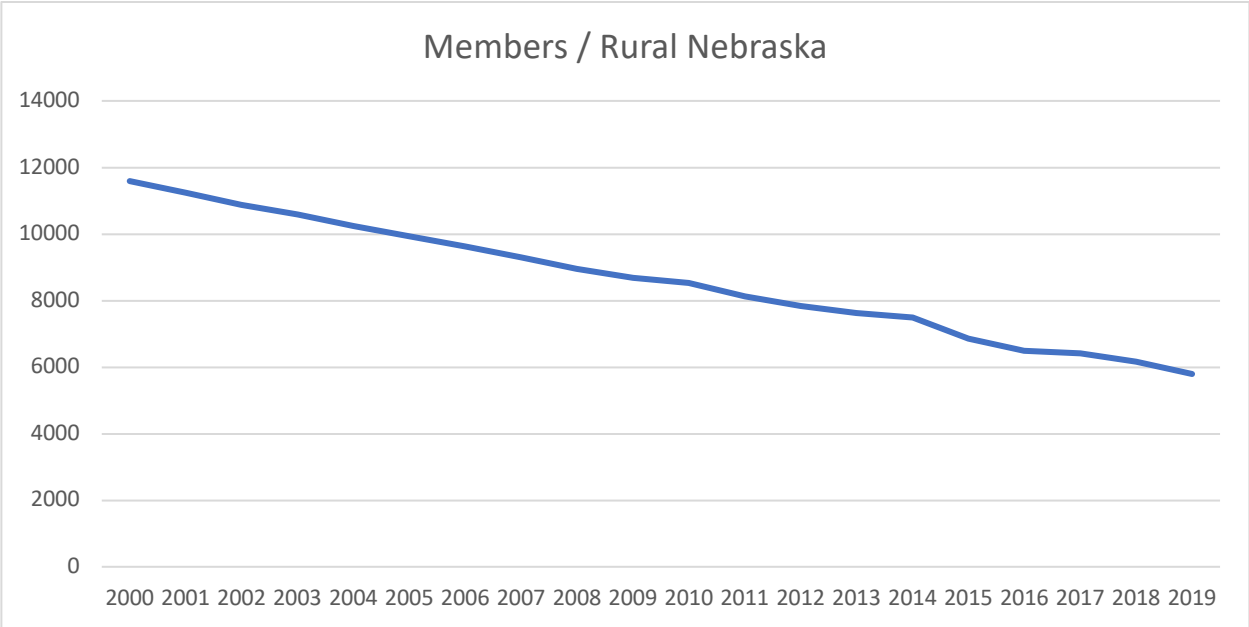


Chart 11

Mean / Average 8617.7

Median 8611

Attempts to arrest the decline

Over the history of Masonry in Nebraska, well-meaning leadership has tried a variety of things to change the general decline in membership. Each of these changes were proposed as a way to make it easier to join the Craft, therefore solving the assumed problem that men weren't joining due to the allegedly high entrance qualifications.

The things that were changed to make it easier to join include:

- Dropping the 30-day waiting period between degrees
- Allowing recruitment of new members
- Lowering the minimum age from 21 to 18
- Allowing lodges to do degree work for up to 5 candidates at a time
- Pre-approved petitions
- Lowering the proficiency requirements for each degree
- One Day classes

While all of these things did make it easier to become a member, they did not in single or in toto have any appreciable effect on the rate of decline. Or if they did, the effect was so minimal that it doesn't show up in the data.

One example is the lowering of proficiency requirements for the degrees. The argument for doing so was that we were asking too much of the candidate to memorize the Q&A for each degree and that by eliminating the vast majority of the memorization work, more men would want to join.

The figures and charts below compare rates of raising and SNPD for the 10 years either side of the reduction in proficiency requirements:

Master Masons Raised in the 20 Year Span from 1977 – 1997

(Proficiency was reduced in 1987)

Year	MM Raised	YOY Change		% Change Average YOY
1977	443	0		
1978	431	-2.7088036		
1979	418	-3.0162413	YOY Ave. 1977 - 1997	0.19112518
		0.7177033		
1980	421	5		
		15.201900		
1981	485	2	YOY Ave. 1977 - 1987	-4.5884462
1982	461	-4.9484536	YOY Ave. 1988 - 1997	4.9706966
1983	363	-21.258134		

		1.3774104		
1984	368	7		
1985	295	-19.836957		
1986	247	-16.271186	Median	0.71770335
1987	259	4.8582996		
		25.482625		
1988	325	5	Ave. Raised / Year	388.238095
		33.538461		
1989	434	5		
		5.5299539		
1990	458	2	Total Raised 1977 - 1997	8153
1991	437	-4.5851528	Total Raised 1977 - 1987	4191
1992	391	-10.526316	Total Raised 1987 - 1997	4221
			Note: Changing proficiency added 3 MM/year	
1993	313	-19.948849	over a 10 year span	
1994	324	3.514377		
		33.641975		
1995	433	3		
		19.861431		
1996	519	9		
1997	328	-36.801541	((Current year - Last Year) / Last Year) * 100	

Ave raised 1988 -
1991

393 Delta to total average 5

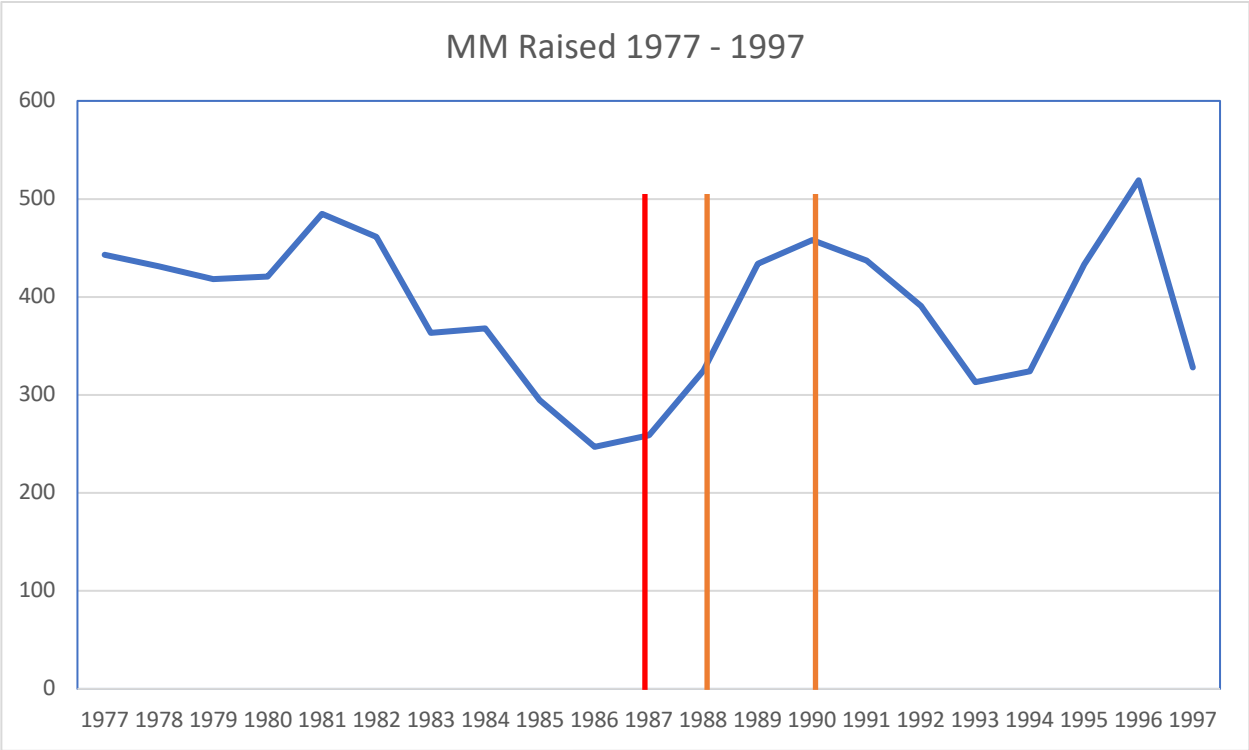


Chart 12

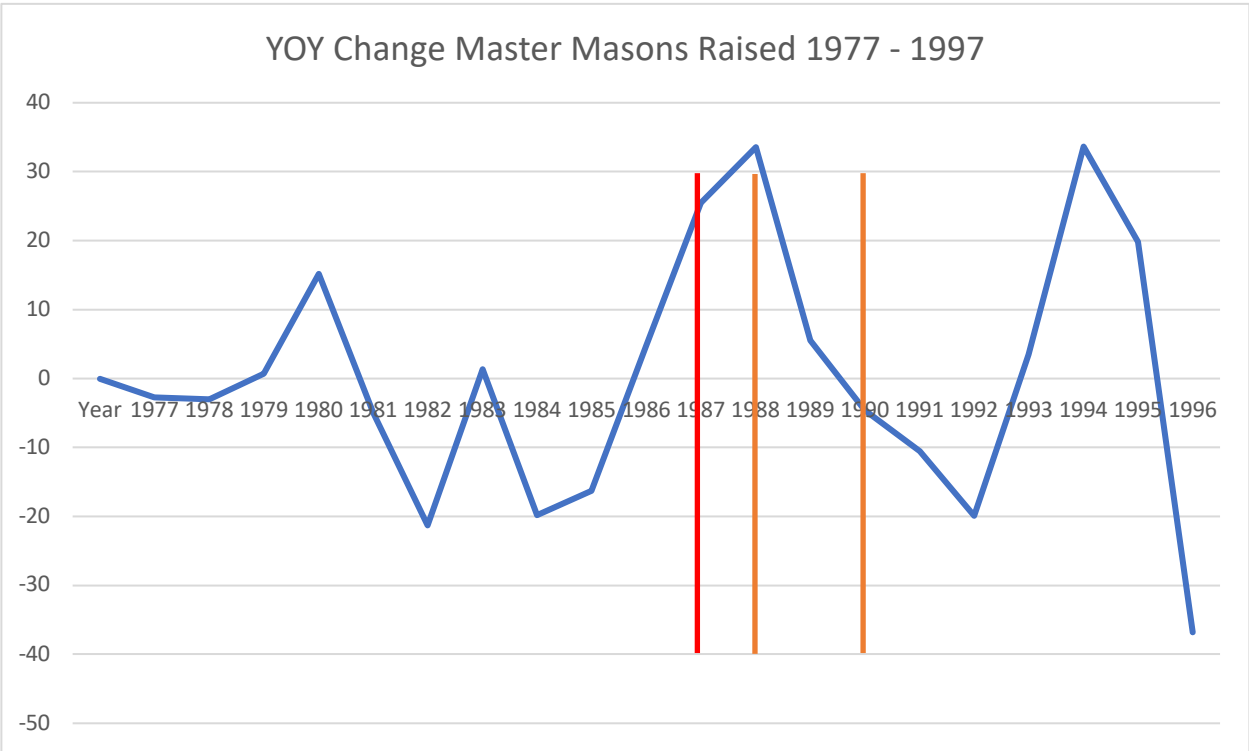


Chart 13

Suspended for Non-Payment of Dues in the 20 Year Span from 1977 – 1997

(Proficiency was reduced in 1987)

Year	SNPD	YOY Change %		% Change Average YOY
1977	480			
1978	464	-3.333333333		
1979	486	4.74137931		
1980	549	12.96296296	YOY Ave. 1977 - 1997	0.77094213
1981	556	1.275045537	YOY Ave. 1977 - 1987	0.94104442
1982	580	4.316546763	YOY Ave. 1988 - 1997	0.60083984
1983	624	7.586206897		
1984	652	4.487179487		
1985	582	-10.73619632		
1986	500	-14.08934708		
1987	511	2.2	Median	552
1988	493	-3.522504892		
1989	559	13.38742394	Ave. SPND 1977 - 1997	547.238095
1990	575	2.862254025	Ave. SPND 1977 - 1987	544
1991	552	-4	Ave. SPND 1988 - 1997	550.8
1992	622	12.68115942		
1993	576	-7.395498392	Total SNPD 1977 - 1997	11492
1994	545	-5.381944444	Total SNPD 1977 - 1987	5984
1995	576	5.688073394	Total SNPD 1987 - 1997	5508
1996	488	-15.27777778	Delta	476

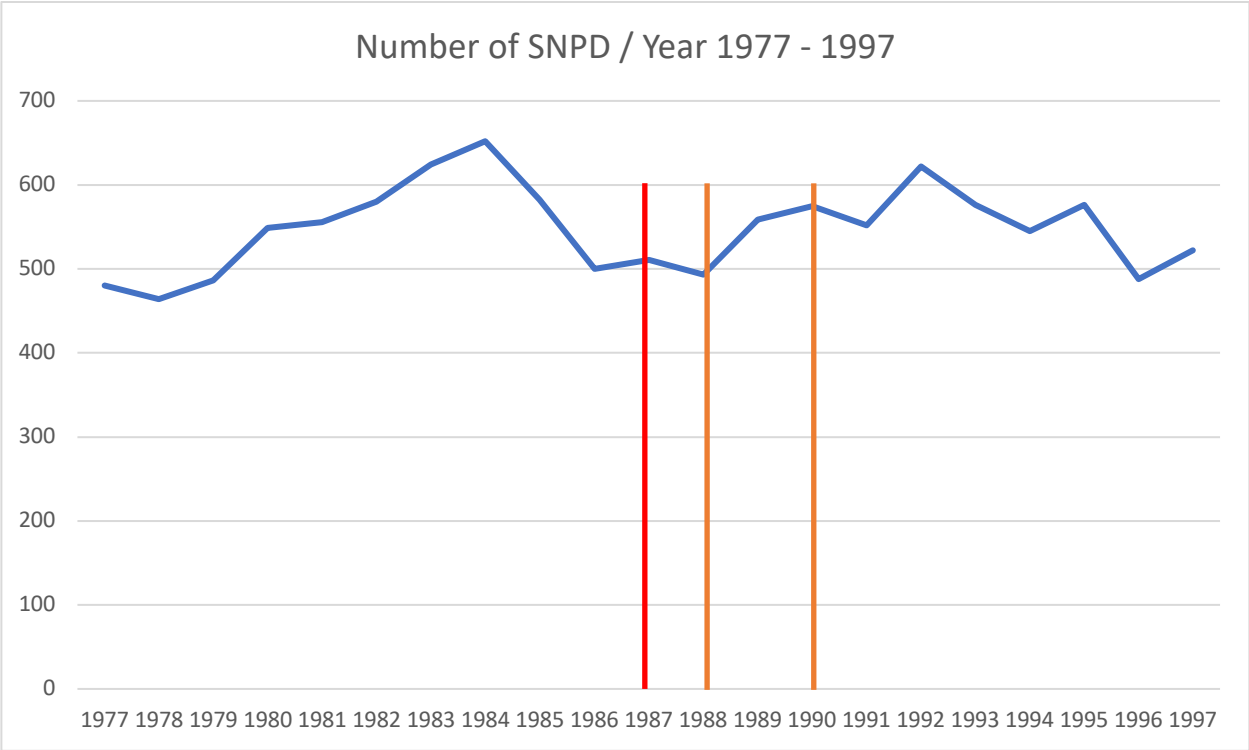


Chart 14

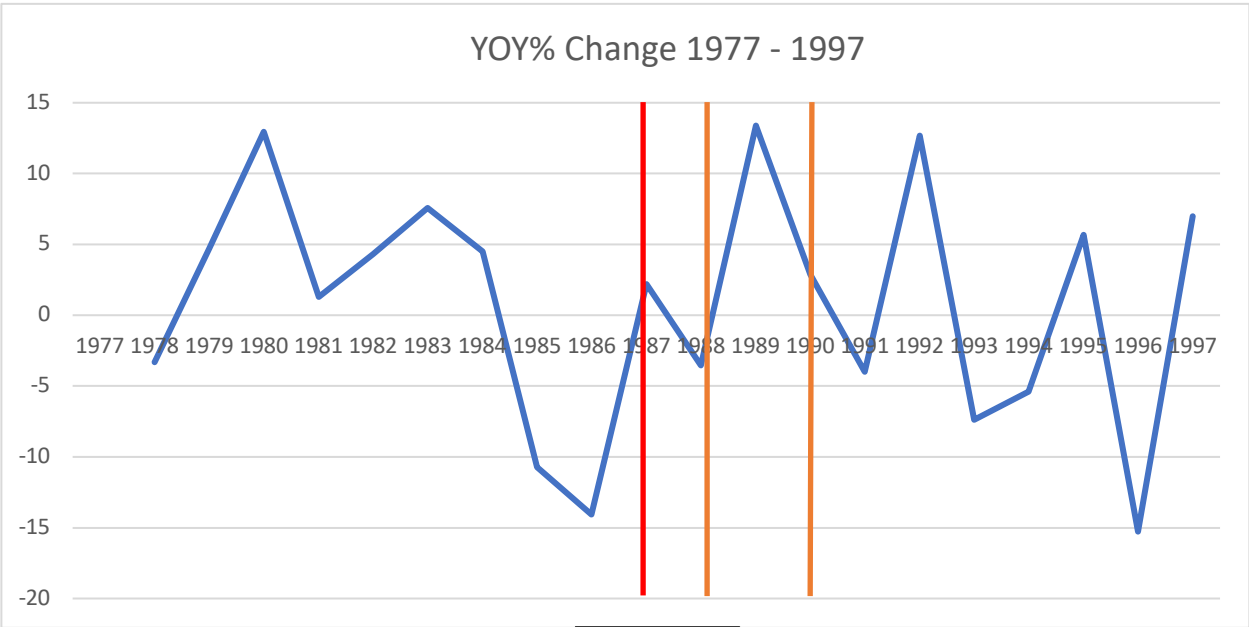


Chart 15

As can be seen in the data, the Craft experienced a temporary upswing in membership that lasted approximately 2 ½ years before the rate of decline returned to its previous path. It is also important to note that during the 2 ½ years of upswing in new members, there was a 2 ½ year upswing in SNPD which essentially cancelled out any gains.

Chart 16 shows the membership decline with a marker for the year the proficiency requirements first changed (1989). As can be seen, the slope of the decline over the last 31 years has not changed.

Other attempts at stemming the losses involved such things as:

- Pre-approved petitions
- Leadership training
- Recruitment seminars
- Friendship nights
- Awards for membership, growth, etc.

Like the changes made to ease the requirements to become a Mason, these seem to have had little lasting effect.

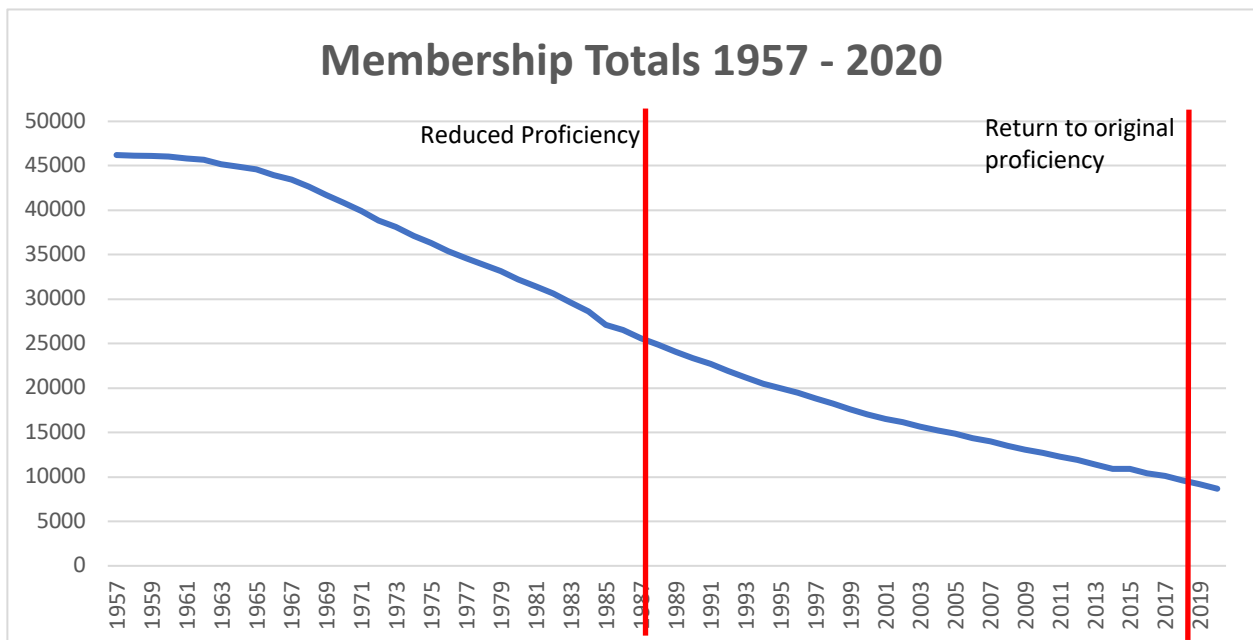


Chart 16

So the data clearly does not support that making it easier to join Masonry was any sort of panacea for membership problems.³

³ A marker has been placed at 2019, which was the first year that the Craft returned to the original proficiency requirements for degrees. This move was made **not** to have any positive effect in membership numbers but to create better educated members. With only 1 year of data, a conclusion cannot be made at this time as to the effect of this change.

Conclusion

Oceans of ink and forests of paper have been consumed debating the membership issue not only in Masonry but nearly all fraternal organizations almost since the beginning of these organizations in America. While no one has come up with a permanent, can't lose, solution yet, it is incumbent upon us to put maximum effort into trying, monitoring and correcting by feedback different solutions and combinations of solutions. This is an ongoing function of organizations like Masonry and cannot be ignored.

One of the big questions always asked is, "Is Masonry still relevant?" That is a question each Mason must answer for himself but assuming that the reader of this report believes that Masonry *is* still relevant, then we need to consider some more concrete and actionable questions that have a chance to turn this decline around.

Questions that need to be asked and answered:

1. Is it really all about numbers?
2. Are we more interested in making members or making Masons? In other words, do the numbers really matter?
3. Are we spending the effort to track any changes made or programs launched to learn if they are effective and how to change them to be more effective?
4. Do we have a long term (5 years minimum) plan to attack these issues or are we looking for short term fixes?
5. How do we relate to the various appendant bodies of Craft Masonry?

It took us 62 years⁴ to get here and we certainly are not going to dig our way out of this situation in a couple of years but if we allow ourselves to be complacent, to ignore the data, to fail to approach this issue with all of the tools available to us, we will surely cease to exist as an organization.

⁴ Membership peaked in 1958

The Future of Freemasonry: A Pragmatic Look I Economics

Abstract

When looking at the future viability of Masonry, focus is often given only to the number of members. While this is an important metric, the declining membership numbers also have an economic impact on the Craft. With each lost member (by any cause) there is less money to support the lodges and the Grand Lodge operation. This economic impact needs to be considered in searching for and implementing solutions to the decline in membership.

As the cost of doing business continues to rise and the Craft expects a certain level of service from the Grand Lodge operation, it is necessary that we look at what we are paying in per capita currently and what would be required to offset the loss of income from the yearly loss of members.

This paper examines the economic aspects of the Grand Lodge operation, the current per capita contribution to the operating budget and makes a case for a recalculated per capita method that would ensure the economic future of the Craft.

In part one of this series on the future of Masonry, the decline of the Craft was examined from purely a “number of members” standpoint. To recap, as of 2020, the Nebraska Jurisdiction has 8,222 members. With a loss rate of 448 members/year from all causes, that would indicate that our time to zero members would be 18 years. Of course the Craft will be gone sooner than that as a certain minimum number of members are required to keep the Craft viable in the state. But is this the total picture?

There is another factor that may hasten our demise as an organization and that is the economic factor.

With each Brother that either goes SNPD, dies or demits the amount of income that the Grand Lodge has to work with gets smaller and smaller. At our current rate of losing 448 members per year and the per capita schedule for the next 5 years, the Grand Lodge will lose on average \$13,000 per year from the operating budget! The combination of less members and less money to work with will likely hasten the end.

Each year at annual communication, the results of the previous Masonic year’s budget and the proposed budget for the upcoming year are distributed to the attendees. If you follow this over several years, you will find some common data points.

1. The budget for Grand Lodge operations is generally between \$500,000 to \$600,000.⁵
2. There is always a projected shortfall of income. The predicted shortfall averages around \$52,000 per year.
3. The predicted shortfall is rarely the same as the actual shortfall. Fortunately, the predicted shortfall is generally more than actual shortfall.

So how does this happen?

First, the expenses of the Grand Lodge are made up of all the normal things that any other business would have such as printing, wages, insurance, equipment maintenance, repair and replacement, utilities, building maintenance and so on. The budgeting process each year is done in cooperation with the Grand Lodge Finance Committee, the Office Manager and the incoming Grand Master. They try to predict what things will cost more, anticipate any equipment replacement (e.g. upgraded computers, replacement of heating / cooling equipment, etc.) and throughout the history of this process, they have done a very good job of controlling costs where they can and anticipating major costs. But there is still a difference between what is needed and what is collected in the form of per capita income and investment income.

⁵ 2020 will be an aberration in the numbers due to the COVID-19 pandemic which caused several events to be cancelled or greatly reduced in size which saved a considerable amount in the budget.

Second, one of the things that is a major help to meeting or being under budget is that the Grand Lodge officers including the Grand Master rarely claim all of the expenses that they are allowed to claim. While the anticipated officer expenses are built into the budget as it should never be assumed that the officers will assume those expenses from their own pockets, the fact that they don't submit all of their expenses helps greatly.

The Grand Lodge also is very careful about using things such as office equipment for as long as possible. While many businesses will upgrade computers, copiers, etc. on a regular basis, the Grand Lodge tends to use these items for as long as possible and then always value shops for replacements.

Another source of relief for the budget is the help the Grand Lodge gets from many of the Brothers that can provide professional services for the Grand Lodge at low cost or even for free. This has been the case throughout the history of the organization and is very much appreciated!

But these things are not enough to cover the shortfall either projected or actual in most years. In that case, money has to be withdrawn from the Grand Lodge investments to cover the shortfall. Taking money from the investments means there is less to invest which means less investment income each year to fall back on. Along with loss of income from fewer members every year, it's not hard to see where this spiral will end.

Can the Grand Lodge reduce expenditures and in what categories? That depends on the level of service that the Craft expects from the Grand Lodge.

The Grand Lodge office building is the first thing that comes to mind. However, the Grand Lodge does not pay any taxes on the building and it is paid for in full. The building represents an investment. That part of Lincoln is continuing to grow and with the building's proximity to the major thoroughfare and a major shopping center, its value continues to increase. Utilities and insurance are the biggest month to month building expenses but those are offset by rent collected from the two tenants, Grand Chapter OES and the Nebraska Masonic Foundation Library and Museum. So there is no obvious avenue to saving money on the building.

Printing costs continue to grow and the Grand Lodge always buys printed material in sufficient quantity to keep the price per piece reasonable. Going to all electronic documents would save less than \$10,000/year and would probably not be acceptable to the Craft.

The various committees generally have budgets for the year but like the officers, rarely spend all of their budget. Eliminating all the budgeted committee money would save roughly \$16,000 (2019) but then the committees would be unable to accomplish their goals.

That really leave only two categories: wages and insurance. The Grand Lodge has diligently worked to assure that the insurance coverage is adequate, from a quality vendor and priced as competitively as possible. Unfortunately, insurance rates go up every year and the Grand Lodge has no control over that increase.

Wages and benefits are always a tricky subject but again the Office Committee which is made up of Brothers that are in touch with such things, manages to keep our wages and benefits competitive but not extravagant. Like Insurance, this is a cost of doing business that goes up every year and that the Grand Lodge has little control over.

So what can the Craft control that would allow us to achieve the break-even point most years for the operation of the Grand Lodge?

There are two things that are under our control:

- The number of members in the Craft.
- The amount of per capita paid by each member to support the Grand Lodge.

Increasing the number of members would have many positive effects assuming those new members can be retained but would also cause an incremental increase in the cost of doing business for the Grand Lodge office, which would somewhat offset the increase in per capita collection. So while increases in members is a good idea, it will likely take too long to have the desired effect on balancing the budget.

This leaves the Craft with only one truly practical option and that is to raise the individual per capita by an amount that makes up for the yearly loss of membership *and* the natural increases in cost of doing business.

Currently the per capita is set at \$27 (before special assessments) and increases by \$1 per year for the next 4 years. This is extraordinarily inadequate to even account for the loss of income from the 448 members lost a year much less other increases in expenses.

How much should the per capita be? There are a couple of different ways to look at this question.

One way would be to simply divide the number of Masons on record at the end of each year into the next year's budget and make that the per capita assessment for the upcoming year. For example (using 2019 budget and 2020 member numbers):

$$\$526,987 / 8,222 = \$64.09 \text{ per member before assessments.}$$

This equals an additional \$37 to what is being paid currently. Add the special assessments plus your local lodge dues to this and there is your yearly dues

assessment. Plus it would have to go up each year by the amount needed to cover loss of members and general cost increases.

Another way of looking at it is to assume we just need to cover the shortfall each year. Assuming a constant average shortfall of \$53,000 and an average loss of 448 members per year, the numbers look like this:

Year	Number of Members	Projected Shortage	Additional Per Capita per Member
2020	8,222	\$53,000	\$6.45
2021	7,774	\$53,000	\$6.82
2022	7,326	\$53,000	\$7.23
2023	6,878	\$53,000	\$7.71
2024	6,430	\$53,000	\$8.24

For less than \$1/month extra per member, the shortfall could be covered. Some years would still be negative and some positive so perhaps raising the per capita more than the minimum would be more prudent. If the per capita was raised another \$12 (\$1/month), it would certainly cover the gap in nearly every year...for a while. This would have to be readjusted yearly. In any event, the issue is not insuperable.

So like it or not, we as an organization are faced with the hard fact that between declining membership, low monetary participation by members and constantly increasing costs, the timeline for the Craft to becoming unsupportable in Nebraska will probably be much shorter than the 18 years calculated only by membership loss. It is time to decide what Masonry is worth in our lives and invest in it accordingly.

The Future of Freemasonry: A Pragmatic Look I Opportunities for Revitalization

Abstract

After looking at the member numbers and economics of the Craft, this paper seeks to understand the reasons behind the general decline in fraternal membership in the United States and then proposes some possible paths to revive Freemasonry.

There have been great changes in society since the early part of the 20th century that have affected the desire to join fraternal societies. Most of these changes are not controllable as they involve changes in the family structure, generational changes and economic pressures. In comparing the path of Masonry since the beginning of the 20th century with other analogous organizations, it is possible to draw some conclusions as to the future of the Craft and what sorts of actions to slow or eliminate the decline do not work. By understanding the history of fraternal organization in the United States, it is possible to get a more nuanced idea of the rise and fall of such organizations.

The second half of the paper proposes some broad ideas for change in certain key areas. These ideas are not fully thought out and are only the opinion of the author but are offered as a thought experiment for the reader.

While the totality of the information points towards a dim if not terminal future for Freemasonry, I believe that instead of seeing only a negative outcome, we should view this as a golden opportunity to put our principles into action and revitalize Masonry and return it to the position it once had in society.

In the first two parts of this series, the decline in membership numbers and its economic effects were examined using data from the Grand Lodge of Nebraska. There can be no doubt that the fraternity is in serious, perhaps fatal decline in this jurisdiction. But the question remains, why did this decline start when it did and why does it continue to this day? The next question is can we stop or reverse this trend?

In order to answer those questions, it is important to examine the history of Fraternal organizations in America and how American society has changed in the last nearly 200 years.

The Prevalence of Fraternal Organizations in America

It has been said that America is a nation of joiners. This was first documented in 1831 by French Diplomat Alexis de Tocqueville during his tour of America ostensibly to examine the prison system but he also used it as an opportunity to examine and document American society⁶. One of the major characteristics of American life noted by de Tocqueville is that whenever some new undertaking or cause came about, Americans generally formed some sort of association or fraternal group. This contrasted sharply with the common practice in England and Europe where such things were generally controlled either by the government or someone of rank. If de Tocqueville had returned just a short 50 years later he would have been witness to the beginning of the “Golden Age of Fraternalism” in America.

The “Golden Age of Fraternalism” is a period of time loosely defined as beginning in the late 19th century and continuing into the early half of the 20th century. By 1927, it was estimated that 1 in 2 of all Americans (men and women⁷) belonged to at least one fraternal organization and that there were at least 800 different fraternal organizations in America! The estimated population of America at that time was roughly 60 million people, meaning there were 30 million fraternal members! This number has never been equaled or exceeded either in the U.S. or any other country. The desire to belong to a fraternal group was truly an American phenomenon.

In the history of American fraternalism, there have been traditionally two kinds of fraternal societies, namely, the secret societies (e.g. Freemasonry, Odd Fellows, Elks, Knights of Pythias) and benefit societies (e.g. Woodmen of the World, Independent Order of Vikings, Sons of Norway). The distinction between the two types of societies is quite simple. Benefit societies generally (but not always) do not have rituals, secrets and passwords and always involve some sort of insurance product.

⁶ De La Democratie en Amerique 1831; Alexis de Tocqueville. Public domain translations of the book are readily available on the Internet.

⁷ The use of the word fraternal includes women-only organizations that did not feel they should refer to themselves as “sororal”.

The structure and operation of nearly all of the secret societies were based on Freemasonry. The use of ritual, passwords, and “secret knowledge”, regardless of the title of the organization followed the same form and function as those in Freemasonry. In fact, the Odd Fellows was often termed to be the “poor man’s” Freemasonry by detractors and Masons would have recognized much from their lodge in the ritual ceremonies of these many secret fraternal societies.

Fraternal benefit societies filled a void that in our time is generally filled by either government assistance programs or stand-alone insurance companies run for the benefit of the member or simply for profit. Many, if not most of the fraternal benefit companies have gone by the wayside or converted to a standard business model but some are still trying to make the change and recall the insurance policies that they have issued over the years⁸.

Secret fraternal societies, with the exception of Freemasonry, however, were formed for much different reasons. These fraternal societies provided four basic functions for the burgeoning population of America during this time period and those functions can be broken down as follows.

Social Integration

From 1880 to 1920, over 40 million people left their native countries and moved to the United States. This influx of immigrants was key in the creation of different fraternal organizations that afforded the immigrant an opportunity to learn about their new country, speak the language of the old country and develop connections and skills that they would need in their new home. These fraternal organizations were key to integration of the new immigrants into American society.

Economic Security

Both the fraternal benefit societies and the secret fraternal societies offered some sort of economic security for their members. The benefit societies did so in the form of simple insurance policies that paid cash benefits. The secret fraternal societies also provided support in the form of mutual aid, small cash disbursements and creating homes for orphans and the aged. This sort of security was important during this period of time. It was not until the Great Society programs of the early 1960’s that Americans began receiving assistance from the government. It is, however, because of those new programs that many if not most of the fraternal benefit societies went under.

Social Prestige

During the time period from 1880 to 1920, the U.S. was still primarily a rural society which meant a multitude of small towns where everyone knew everyone else. One of the ways to gain social status was by joining one of the many secret societies. This not only gave you status with your fellow citizens but allowed you to have important sounding titles, participate in

⁸ An example is the Independent Order of Vikings. Launched in 1896 for Swedish immigrants, it issued insurance policies and as of 2021 are still trying to get them all rescinded. The organization now exists purely as a fraternal organization for people of Swedish descent.

colorful rituals wearing even more colorful regalia. Since the late 1800's social scientists recognized this salient feature of secret fraternal societies and this effect was closely studied well into the 20th century. However, with the shift from a primarily rural society to an urban society, this status by membership began to fade quickly. When you are living in a large city where few people know each other, who is there to impress? Along with lack of organizational change, the inability to provide its members with social prestige greatly reduced the attractiveness of such organizations.

Religion and Morality

One of the functions performed by many fraternal societies and particularly with Freemasonry is providing a religious function through ritual, prayers and moral teachings. In his book *Territorial Masonry*, Masonic author R. V. Denslow noted that for many new settlers in the past, Masonry rather than the church had furnished religious solace. Albert Pike stated "Every Masonic lodge is a temple of religion", a sentiment that has caused the Craft some grief with anti-masons. And it's not just Freemasonry that follows this paradigm. Most fraternal organizations will have an altar, some sort of prayer service and their ritual will certainly be quasi-religious in nature at the very least. Unfortunately, throughout the 20th century, the American public has been less and less disposed to attend church services regardless of the denomination. So offering this feature is no longer seen as an attraction to fraternal societies.

But it is not just the changes in how society values these four aspects that has contributed to the decline of fraternal organizations. There is more, much more to be examined.

In 2000, author Robert D. Putnam released his groundbreaking work on the decline of fraternal organizations entitled *Bowling Alone*⁹. In his book, Putnam examined the foundational parts of society to see how the changes that had occurred since the late 1800's might have affected the American public's interest in fraternal organizations. He looked at changes in civic engagement, pressures of time and money, mobility and urban sprawl, technology and mass media and effects of generational change. And his research showed that all of these things contributed to the decline in interest in fraternal organizations but that with the exception of generational change, they only really had a very small effect. His conclusion was that the biggest thing that contributed to the loss of interest in fraternal organizations was the loss of social capital in our society.

Social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. This is also sometimes referred to as civic virtue. Writes Putnam:

The difference is that "social capital" calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital.

⁹ The book *Bowling Alone* by Robert D. Putnam is available at your local bookstore or through online books stores. There is also a 20th anniversary issue available. This is required reading for anyone interested in the problem of declining membership in Freemasonry.

The book also contains charts for a great number of fraternal organizations, including Freemasonry. The one thing they all have in common is that their membership numbers closely follow the same shape of curve as does Masonry with the peak years being roughly 1958 to 1963.

Putnam then sums up the various factors in the decline of fraternal organizations and their importance:

1. Pressures of Time and Money – This is especially true for two-career families and single parent families. This probably accounts for no more than 10% of the problem.
2. Suburbanization, commuting and sprawl – A reasonable estimate for this factor is that it is also only 10% of the problem.
3. Electronic Entertainment / Internet – Our leisure time has been privatized by forms of instant gratification. The rough estimate is that this contributes to perhaps 25% of the problem.
4. Generational Change – The slow but steady replacement of the long civic generation by their less involved children and grandchildren is most likely the most powerful factor in explaining the decline. It is estimated to be more than 50% of the problem.

The book then concludes with the author's ideas and suggestions for correcting and restoring this lack of social capital which I will leave you to read on your own. The solution will not be quick, it will not be easy and it will not be painless.

So how does all of this information affect Freemasonry?

Regardless of the fact that Freemasonry is one of the oldest if not the oldest fraternal organization in the world and that nearly all other fraternal organizations were fashioned after Masonry and regardless of how important Freemasonry was to our country and the world in the past, we are a part of our society and therefore are vulnerable to each and every one of the changing factors described in Putnam's book. Moreover, few if any of these factors are under our control.

If Freemasonry is to survive, then we have to look at how to fulfil the wants and needs of men of today and quit relying on our past laurels. An organization that spends more time looking backward than forward is doomed to fail. The lessons of Freemasonry are timeless and will improve the life of any man that takes the time to study and practice them. But how do we get his attention and deliver this wonderful knowledge in a form acceptable to the attitudes and constraints of men today?

The first step is to look at what we've done in the past, keep the things that worked and jettison the things that don't. Along with that is the need to be honest about what our strengths and weaknesses really are and not what is easiest to point to or protects our pride in the Craft.

Much has been tried in the past to promote membership and increase participation in the Craft. One of the earliest attempts was introduced by our 2nd Grand Master, MWB George Armstrong (1860 – 1863). The Grand Master felt that new lodges were not being formed quickly enough in Nebraska and that the reason was that the fee for a new charter was too high. MWB Armstrong dropped the fee for a new charter substantially during his term. Unfortunately it had no effect on requests for new charters.

And this is the story of much of what has been done over the years to try to prop up Masonry. We have too often jumped to the conclusion that if it was just faster, cheaper or easier to become a Mason, then our problems would be solved. So various things have been tried. Here is a list of the major changes made in the 20th century:

- Removed the requirement to wait 1 year before joining an appendant body
- Removed the 30-day waiting period between degrees
- Allowing direct recruitment of new members
- Lowering the minimum age from 21 to 18 for new members
- Allowing lodges to do degree work for up to 5 candidates at a time
- Alternate Petition and Election Process (Section 2-913)
- Lowering proficiency requirement for each degree
- One Day classes
- Unrealistically low dues and per capita

Each of these actions was promoted as being guaranteed to halt or at least slow the decline of Masonry. If we just made it faster, cheaper, easier, men would flock to our doors. But that didn't happen. The data documented in part 1 of this series, clearly shows that these actions made basically no difference to our rate of decline and SNPD (suspension for non-payment of dues.) In fact, in some cases, it could be argued that it actually increased the rate of decline.

We can also learn from examining the attempts of other fraternal organizations such as the Odd Fellows, who went down this same faster, cheaper, easier route and has been unable to correct their decline.

If we are going to survive, then we have to look beyond the cheaper, faster, easier quick fix ideas and deal with the fundamental issues facing us. This might mean facing some hard and at times, embarrassing truths about our organization and will most certainly involve considerable change, some of which will be painful.

DISCLAIMER / WARNING: The following suggestions are the opinion of the author of this paper and do not represent the opinions of the Grand Lodge of Nebraska, the Grand Lodge officers or any other Mason, living or dead.

The following section contains ideas that *might* help the Craft work towards a new normal and survive without totally giving up our heritage. Some of these ideas may seem radical or even

too extreme and if that is so, then it is hoped the reader is motivated to think deeply about the issue and come up with a better solution.

Before we can start making any changes in the Craft and how it's run, we must first make a fundamental change in how we launch, track and adapt any new programs or changes that we might want to make to the Craft. Typically, we are only doing the launch part. When doing research for this series of papers, there was little to no data available on the effect of any of the programs or changes that had been made. Outcomes could be inferred from overall data such as yearly number of members but not for individual activities. So before we institute any newer programs or changes, we need to adopt some basic managerial and project management techniques.

If we want to have a new program, we need to follow the basic steps of launching any product or service used in industry. This means defining both the problem, the desired outcome and the method of measurement of success (remember: You can't manage what you don't measure.) Setting realistic goals for implementation, doing a thorough rollout so that the end user understands what the advantage of adopting this new program or change is (WIIFM: What's In It For Me) and perhaps most important of all, track the outcomes, adjust the program and restart. This is the only way a successful product or service ever sticks in the economy. And it's the only way we will be able to make useful, productive changes to the Craft that will allow us to survive and thrive for many more generations.

Let's look at some specific ideas:

Attitude Change

The first step in renewing Masonry will have to be a substantial change in attitudes about what Freemasonry is and what it's intended to do.

Freemasonry is a philosophy of living designed to assist a man in fulfilling his true potential as a human being and a member of society. It promotes the idea of constant education, rejection of superstition and constant self-improvement while always remembering that everything comes from Deity. It does this through symbolic teachings that contain many layers of wisdom such that a man can study the teaching his whole life and never run out of things to learn. One of the major themes of Freemasonry is balance in your life and actions.

However, over the last half century or more, Freemasonry as practiced in this country has lost that balance. We overemphasize the charity aspect (and don't really understand the word charity as the Masonic founders did) and have morphed into an organization that is little different from other service clubs like Rotary, Lions, and others.

While Masonry means something different to everyone and we are all at different places in our understanding and application of Masonic knowledge, the records are there to be studied and it is extremely clear that our focus has wandered greatly from the original intent.

It can be difficult to define what Masonry is but it simple to define what it is not:

- Masonry is not a service club
- Masonry is not a fund-raising organization for appendant bodies
- Masonry is not for everyone
- Masonry is not a wholly external activity
- Masonry is not easy, it requires you to think and change and participate
- Masonry is not a commodity item that should be sold to the lowest bidder
- Masonry is not just on lodge night
- Masonry is not a reform school

We need to get back to the foundational concepts of Freemasonry, make sure our approach is balanced between the ideas of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth and that we truly are fulfilling the goal of creating better men. It will not be easy or painless to change the current culture but it must be done.

Organizational Changes

The Craft has been operating under the same structure for over 300 years now. We need to look at that structure and see if it still meets our needs or if there are ways to improve on how we operate. For example, one of the weaknesses of the current system is that a Grand Master only serves for one year with an advancing line of officers behind him. This makes having any long-term efforts difficult as leadership is constantly changing. Extending the term of a Grand Master may help that but it may also narrow the pool of candidates for the position of Grand Master due to the extensive time and money demands on the Grand Master. Perhaps there needs to be a long-term serving committee for project management that would be consistent from year to year and could be tasked by the Grand Lodge leadership with executing on long term projects.

We also need to examine each of our processes both at the Grand Lodge level and how Grand Lodge interfaces with the subordinate lodges to find inefficiencies and things we might still be doing just because we've always done it that way but they really serve no purpose.

Our Constitution and Bylaws need to be examined for issues of duplication, conflict, useless sections (did you know you can't have a lodge over a "dance hall"?) and update it to be clean, concise and applicable to today's situation.

Per Capita

Many lodges still charge unrealistically low dues and the per capita paid to the Grand Lodge is clearly not sufficient to support the organization. It has been clearly shown in part 2 of this series that substantial changes need to be made to the per capita payment in order to fund the operations of the Grand Lodge.

The proposal then is that we need to raise per capita to a level that allows for a revenue neutral budget for the Grand Lodge (i.e. not making up losses from the investments on a yearly

basis.) This per capita would have to be adjusted yearly up or down depending on the changes in the budget and number of members.

Currently this would be an increase of only \$12/year or \$1/month. Many will reflexively say that that is too much, they can't afford it, it will ruin our senior members and so on. But will it really? What do you spend a month on coffee? Here are some interesting data to think about:

Average cost for a single trip to a nationally recognized coffee house (Dunkin Donuts, Caribou Coffee, and Starbucks)

Cost for 1 purchase per day per 5-day work week: \$16.25

Cost per Month: \$65

Cost per Year: \$780

(source cbsnews.com)

So you could skip the expensive coffee for 1 day a week for a month or so and pay for the \$12 increase in per capita!¹⁰

So is Masonry worth giving up a cup of coffee to you?

As for the senior members who might not be able to afford an extra dollar a month, give up two cups of coffee and pay their extra per capita. You took an obligation to look after your Brothers. Now is the chance to live up to that obligation.

If you think this is crying wolf, then consider the story of the Grand Lodge of Kansas.

The Grand Lodge of Kansas has roughly 14,000 Master Masons and a per capita (2021) of \$30 which is very similar to our per capita. Like the Nebraska jurisdiction, they have had artificially low per capita for years and have been making up the difference by dipping into reserves when the budget ran short each year. In 2020, they finally reached an economic tipping point that has resulted in the selling of the historic Grand Lodge of Kansas building, the entire library and museum collection and the Grand Lodge office has been moved to a single room in a small lodge in Emporia. Further cuts are being considered if a proposed raise of \$1.50/year in per capita is turned down at their Annual Communication in March 2021.

If raising the per capita to an amount that allows for a neutral budget is not acceptable then a list of Grand Lodge activities/services that can be eliminated will need to be agreed upon. Such things as dispensing with committees and the Nebraska Mason magazine would be the first things to consider eliminating, however the amount of money saved would be minimal in comparison to the need.

¹⁰ For those of you that get your \$1/cup coffee from the gas station in the morning, you might have to skip coffee one day a week all year but that's not a real hardship, is it?

Regional Grand Lodges

If we are going to insist on paying such low rates of per capita, then an alternate idea would be to aggregate several states together under one Grand Lodge in order to have enough paying members to support a Grand Lodge operation. For example, Nebraska, Kansas, the Dakotas and Iowa could form a common Grand Lodge. As more states run out of money and members, the regional Grand Lodges would expand until we eventually end up with a national Grand Lodge.

This would certainly be a massive change for all of us but with all jurisdictions having declining numbers in line with the Nebraska jurisdiction, this may be the only way to survive. Certainly, virtually all other countries have National Grand lodges and it seems to work.

Lodges

Over the years as interest in Masonry has waned and small towns in Nebraska have slowly disappeared, we have been left with many lodges that are not really lodges at all. They don't have enough members to open legally, they rarely raise a candidate and most would not be able to raise a candidate as they no longer have anyone that knows the work. By kicking this can down the road we have not done our Brothers or the Craft any favors. It's time to close those lodge that are no longer viable and provide some other path for those Brothers to continue to enjoy Masonry. Perhaps regional lodges or some sort of travelling lodge is the answer but we cannot simply close the lodges and leave our Brethren no alternative.

The lodges we do keep need to be renovated to be something we can all be proud of and not the worst looking building in town. Both inside and outside we need to bring lodges up to date and make them look like they are inhabited by men that care and are part of a vibrant and healthy organization.

Charities

During the boom in fraternal organizations in the first half of the 20th century, the Masonic family of organizations began creating more and more charities. Money was plentiful, donors were plentiful, there were few public charities for people and having a charity to call your own for an appendant body made for interesting activities and a focus for that body. Unfortunately, money is no longer as easy to come by because we have a shrinking pool of donors to choose from and there are dozens of government supported social programs. There are only so many slices to the pie and our charities are still trying to get the same amount of pie they got in the early 20th century. It's time to trim some of the charities and concentrate on our original charities that our obligations as Master Masons binds us to do. And that is taking care of our Brethren, their widows and orphans. We'd all like to take care of the world but the fact is we cannot; there are simply not enough of us left. So let's concentrate on our children and senior folks (which is part of the obligation) and make sure those operations are fully funded and doing what they are supposed to do. We can always expand our charity work as the Craft recovers.

Recruitment

The process of recruitment needs a complete overhaul. Currently, the marketing material that is used to recruit is woefully out of sync with today's target recruit. We use historical figures that are unknown to the generation that we are targeting (how many men under 60 know who Red Skelton was?) and the tone of the "what's in it for you" hook is either better suited to a service club or talks of lofty goals of self-improvement than the candidate joins and gets a boring meeting with bad coffee, none of the lofty ideas they were sold and that's when the clock starts on them going SNPD. So we need to start providing what we are selling first and reconfigure our recruitment materials to speak to the candidate in terms and ideas that he can relate to.

Another issue that needs to stop is recruiting members solely for the purpose of having them join an appendant body. We rush them through the degrees and on to the appendant body and they never get a chance to learn what Masonry is really about. Too often they can't even tell you what lodge they belong to, anything about their lodge or Masonry. This is a tremendous disservice to both the member and the Craft. It would make sense to bring back the one year waiting period to join an appendant body and then provide some sort of education about Masonry at the lodge level. We need to make Masons, not Members!

Whom should we be targeting? This is one of the questions that has plagued Masonry for years. We have seen the results of taking anyone with a few dollars and a bit of time which became more and more common as our numbers began to decline and our focus shifted more to charitable work and less to development of the man. While every man **could** be a Mason, not every man **should** be a Mason. We need to guard the West Gate much more carefully than we have in the last few decades. This would improve our SNPD rate, serve the members much better and restore some of the influence that Masonry once had on society.

One of the other issues with recruitment is what age group should we target? There is much talk about the very young generation¹¹, getting them in the minute they are 18 and this is fine but it overlooks one very important fact. Research done for the book *Bowling Alone* showed that men become most active in Civic and Social activities in their 40's and 50's. This makes sense as they are by then established in their careers, their family is older so there are less demands on their free time and they've matured enough to begin to value the things that Masonry has to offer. This represents a group that should be targeted as well as the younger set but will need a different approach.

¹¹ An important book to read for reference on this age group is *Millennial Apprentices: The Next Revolution In Freemasonry* by Samuel Freidman. See bibliography.

Retention

While no organization will ever achieve 100% retention, the current rate of SNPD is a massive problem. As shown in the previous papers, we lose far more men that we raise each year and generally in the first 3 to 4 years of membership. This is like trying to fill a swimming pool with a bucket that has a huge hole in the bottom! In Nebraska, we lose on average over 400 men a year to SNPD. How many of these could be avoided by making the changes discussed here and other changes? Until we begin to deliver on our promises AND refine our selection process this is going to continue to be one the biggest problems Masonry faces¹².

We need to make sure that the new candidate understands what he is getting into, then we need to provide the things we promised. Each new member should be assigned one or more mentors to make sure the new member is integrated into the lodge and its culture. They should be provided with something active to do within the lodge to get them involved and they should be provided with adequate education about Masonry. Each lodge should institute a focused effort to recover their SNPD members and this could be a joint project between the local lodge and the Grand Lodge.

By cutting down the number of SPND, we can extend the viability of the Craft, learn more about what does and doesn't work and take the pressure off of a lodge to raise so many new members.

Education

This is a subject of endless discussion but is actually much easier to define than most believe. Masonic education can take many forms and each is important to the development of a Mason. In the beginning, the new Mason needs the basics about the Craft and the people they are now joined with. During that time, the lodge or mentor can find out what they are most interested in and how they like to learn (reading, listening, doing) and direct them to the proper resources. The Grand Lodge of Nebraska has many resources to assist a lodge or mentor in this task but they are rarely used. This needs to be changed by better promotion of these resources to the lodges and members. And if there is some type of education material that a lodge or mentor believes should be developed, then they can do so on their own, share it with the rest of the Craft or ask the Grand Lodge to create such a resource.

Education is even more important now than ever as the Internet has massive amounts of incorrect information about the Craft that the new member will be exposed to and the lodge or mentor needs to help them sort out the bad and provide them with quality educational material. Moreover, this educational process needs to be ongoing starting before initiation, during the candidate's journey through the degree work and also after he has become a Master Mason.

¹² AASR-NMJ did a very in-depth study of why men leave and a copy of the study is available at: <https://bit.ly/2YLebOp>

Ritual

Without our ritual, Masonry is really no different than the local book club or neighborhood association. Our ritual is what defines us and the goals that we are working towards as men. It was written in a time when the use of English was much different than in our time and therefore much of its wisdom is hidden in language that sounds strange to our ears. Nonetheless, that's where the wisdom is!

Some would abandon the ritual altogether or at the very least the requirement to deliver it during degree work by memory. Some would propose that everyone must be proficient in the ritual. Neither of these extreme positions are viable. While keeping the ritual alive and delivering it properly during degree work is vital to Masonry, not everyone is a ritualist or degree actor. Masonry would be better served if the two sides would compromise and meet on middle ground. The Brothers that enjoy memorization and performance need to be supported and developed as an important resource for the Craft. The Brothers that are more interested in the meaning, application or other aspect of the ritual also need to be supported and developed and the work of each group can then be put together to make the Craft stronger and more alive for the group as a whole.

PR to the general public

An organization that spends the majority of its time looking to the past and not the present and future is destined to fail. The current approach of the public relations efforts of Masonry relies way too heavily on the past. Masonry needs to promote itself as relevant to today's man with examples of people from the community, relevant public figures and a clear explanation of the benefits of being a Mason. The "Not a Man, a Mason"¹³ campaign released by the Masonic Renewal Committee of the Conference of Grand Masters of North America is one example of this sort of rethinking of our approach to the public. While this campaign is primarily for recruitment, much of the material can be used in approaching the general public. Our image needs to reflect the 21st century, not the 18th.

Appendant Bodies

During the great expansion of the Craft in the first half of the 20th century, appendant bodies also flourished. There was plenty of time and members to keep these bodies working and they provide a different outlook on the Masonic lessons that can be valuable. Nebraska is better off than many jurisdictions in that there is not an overly large amount of appendant bodies. The Grand Lodge and the appendant bodies have a generally good relationship as well. However, it could be better. There needs to be better coordination between the Grand Lodge and appendant bodies on fund raising efforts, recruitment and education of members. Returning to the 1 year waiting period to join an appendant body would give a man time to not only learn the foundational principle of Blue Lodge Masonry but that time could also be used to work with the appendant bodies to educate him on what their goals are.

¹³ <http://www.masonicrenewal.org>

Conclusion

There should be no question at this point that the Masonic Fraternity is in trouble and likely to disappear in the near future. The one question not addressed is should Masonry continue to exist or has it outlived its purpose? One could easily argue that the principles taught by Masonry are now quite commonplace in Western society. Indeed, many of these principles are enshrined in the Constitution of our country. Moreover, education, social safety nets and social constructs are now quite common as well.

But, if you believe as I do that Masonry still has a unique value to and system of improving the quality of a man, then the time to do something to save the Craft is now!

There is no more time to hope “the other guy” steps up or that somehow the Grand Lodge officers can do this all on their own. It will take the cooperation of all of the members of the Craft to correct the course of Masonry. This will take a lot of work, will take substantial time and will involve much compromise to craft a vision we can all support. So get out of your silo, talk with your Grand Lodge officers, think up new ways to do things and participate in the process!

This grand effort will require all of us to check our egos at the door and work together as Brother Craftsmen should work, as a team for the betterment of all.

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