

Sunday Masonic Paper No. 833
Dangerous Travels
by WBro Bill Hosler - February 2017

Recently, I've been thinking about the founding of my mother Grand Lodge in Indiana. In 2018, the Grand Lodge of Indiana will celebrate their bicentennial. In January 1818, Freemasons from nine lodges, working under charters by the Grand Lodge of Kentucky and the Grand Lodge of Ohio gathered in Madison, Indiana to start the process of organizing their own future. Back in that day, there were very few choices of transportation by which you could travel across a newly formed state; you could travel by riverboat down the Ohio river (if your town was near the river and you could afford the fare), you could travel via horseback (down rough paths which could hardly qualify as a trail), and if you didn't own a horse, you walked. No matter which mode of transportation you chose, the journey was guaranteed to be uncomfortable; muddy trails, snow and high winds combined to make the trip difficult. Depending on where you lived, your destination may be several days (or even weeks) away. In the winter you slept on the cold ground, shivering under a blanket near a fire, eating what meager provisions you brought. During the summer, you endured the heat of the day and hordes of insects. You might encounter highwaymen who would think nothing of robbing you of all your possessions and leaving you for dead in the wilderness. You always ran the risk of a wild animal who might see you as a threat to his domain and an easy dinner. There was no 911 or Auto Club to come to your rescue if you were in trouble. You were on your own. No matter how you traveled, when you arrived at your destination the accommodations were scant at best. Most of these men would stay in the home of another Freemason or in a local inn. Tavern owners usually offered beds above their establishments; you paid to spend the night and you shared that bed with all of the other travelers. You ate what the tavern served that day. Once your business was complete, you began your return trip home facing the same dangers and discomforts as before.

These men so believed in the Craft that they were willing to endure all of these hardships and dangers, not to mention the days of being away from their families and livelihoods, all in order to help advance the Craft. Traveling wasn't the only hardships our forefathers had to endure. We are taught that Masons originally met in high hills or low vales, which later became the upstairs loft spaces of inns and taverns, accessible only by climbing a ladder. I have heard stories of lodges meeting in caves, in barns, sometimes even in the home of one of the brothers. One thing is for certain, most of these spaces were not ideal for a lodge meeting. Before a lodge was opened, the Masons had to get to work setting up the room, moving the chairs into position, laying out the jewels and the aprons. If degree work was to happen that night, a brother would draw out the tracing boards on the floor which had to be mopped up after the lodge was closed. Once the lodge was closed, the furniture in the space had to be moved back to its normal position. These buildings were drafty, cold and uncomfortable to occupy.

Over the last century, we Freemasons have become accustomed to meeting in beautiful lodge buildings. Sometimes these edifices were marble palaces in the center of a big city, other times a modest room above a storefront in a small town. These buildings all have modern plumbing, are heated for the winter and sometimes even air conditioned for a pleasant climate in the summertime. Custom furniture was commissioned and purchased which never had to be moved. Beautiful carpets lay on the floor beneath the feet of the Brethren. It's difficult today for us to imagine the travel involved and the meeting places that our forefathers used to spread the light of Masonry. Sometimes just the events surrounding these men's lives added even more issues for these men to bear.

Most of us know that throughout the last few centuries many Grand Lodges issued emergent charters to men in order to meet during war time. The daily lives of these men are the hardest thing for me in my comfortable modern life to fathom. These men would march for hours a day, usually with little sleep and even less food, to a battlefield where they had to make camp, and then risk their lives on the field of battle. Once the battle was over, if they survived the conflict and weren't too badly injured, the men would erect a tent, get out the trunk of Masonic regalia from a wagon, and open a lodge. Sometimes lodge officers had to be continually re-elected, not because the brother quit the lodge, but because the man had been killed on the field of battle. Think of it: these men were hungry, exhausted, and trying to forget the horrors of war they had witnessed that day, but they still thought enough of their obligation to continue to meet, just like they would have back in their homes. Throughout history, our Masonic forefathers endured hardships of all kinds just to practice what today we take for granted. From rough travel, to bad living and meeting accommodations, to actually risking their lives on battlefields or being tortured in a prison camp for their belief in Freemasonry.

Sadly, not all of these hardships are in our past. Many continue to this day. I recently had the distinct honor to speak with a Brother who asked that I keep his name and his home secret, not because he was worried about his own safety (he escaped and is now in a free country) but because the Brethren of his lodge in his home country are still in peril. This Brother belongs to a lodge in the Middle East. His government has declared Freemasonry illegal. If the location of his lodge is discovered by their local government, his Brothers will be arrested, placed in prison, and after they are tortured into confessing crimes against the state, they would be executed. In spite of the risk, they still meet on a regular basis, in a secret lodge room. They meet and discuss Freemasonry and how it helps them in their lives. While meeting, they keep an eye on each other and if a member or his family needs Masonic charity they will quietly arrange it. They don't allow a dictatorship or the threat of death to stop their belief in the obligation they took.

Brother! After reading this short piece, I want to ask you a question: if these men can attend lodge with zeal and enthusiasm despite all these hardships, why don't you attend lodge? If our forefathers could risk their lives to the elements of weather and rough travel for days to attend a meeting, why can't you get in your well heated and air conditioned car to drive less than an hour on a well built road to visit a lodge in a well heated or air conditioned building with running water and electricity to spend an hour with the Brethren of your lodge? If the men in a secret lodge living under a dictatorship can sneak away in the dark of night in secret to meet under the possibility of being tortured and executed, why can't you endure the reading of the minutes or a treasurer's report? Is listening to Past Masters arguing about the price of light bulbs the reason that keeps you away from a group of men you swore to treat as your Brother help

him in his time of need?

No. I didn't think so. I'm not saying dealing with our troubles are trivial. We all have a lot of current issues within our lodge rooms. But is quitting going to change them? No! The only thing not attending lodge will do is allow the problems to get worse and eventually put our Fraternity of the ash heap of history. Instead of everyone quitting the Craft, why not find kindred spirits within your lodge and start changing what you don't like? Think of it this way: if your lodge only has eight regular attendees, if you and nine other Brethren vote to do something, you will win the majority. If your numbers continue to grow you and your brothers can start to transform the lodge into a place you can look forward to attending, chances are your changes will entice new men into joining your lodge. If for some reason this doesn't work, check with your Grand Lodge and see how many Master Masons it takes to start a new lodge.

Most of the hardships I have listed above, and many others I don't have the space to mention, can be fixed with hard work, perseverance, and time. Roads were built, money was raised for new, comfortable meeting accommodations, and lodges were arranged in secret to protect those in countries where Masonry is still illegal. Whining and quitting has never fixed anything. Neither has letting someone else deal with it. It's time for all of us to stand up, roll up our sleeves and make Freemasonry the Fraternity we want it to be and that it should be.

WBro Bill Hosler was made a Master Mason in 2002 in Three Rivers Lodge #733 in Indiana. He served as Worshipful Master in 2007 and became a member of the internet committee for Indiana's Grand Lodge. Bill is currently a member of Roff Lodge No. 169 in Roff Oklahoma and Lebanon Lodge No. 837 in Frisco, Texas. Bill is also a member of the Valley of Fort Wayne Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite in Indiana. A typical active Freemason, Bill also served as the High Priest of Fort Wayne's Chapter of the York Rite No. 19 and was commander of the Fort Wayne Commandery No. 4 of the Knight Templar. During all this he also served as the webmaster and magazine editor for the Mizpah Shrine in Fort Wayne Indiana.