

# MASONRY IN TEXAS



I want you to know that I sincerely appreciate this opportunity to share with you some information about the fraternity known as Masonry. To begin with, Masonry is the oldest and largest fraternal organization in the world. We can trace it back some four or five hundred years in Europe and Britain, and organized Masonry has been present in Texas since 1837.

Some have claimed that Masonry is a religion. This has never been Masonry's purpose. We do require a belief in God, and we believe fervently in freedom of religion, encouraging our members to worship God as they choose in their own places of worship. Men of all faiths are welcome to petition for membership in Masonry. We emphasize the Bible, but it has never been our purpose to promote a dogma or creed concerning God or the Bible. It is unfortunate that some churches would try to make us a religion, for it just isn't so.

By its very definition, a fraternity is designed to bring people together in a fraternal relationship. The idea of fraternal is like the idea of fellowship or friendship. We can disagree, but we can all still be friends. We all believe in a democratic form of government, but we don't agree on the form. English Masons have a king and queen; in the United States we have a president. We all believe in and support education, but we don't all agree that it should be public education. We all believe in charity, but we don't try to force anyone to support a particular charity. In short, Masonry provides an organization where brethren can share their beliefs and be able to disagree without being disagreeable. It is our desire that the fellowship and inspiration as well as the teachings of our fraternity will make Masons better church goers, better citizens, better educators and better people.

Now, let's go back 156 years and see if this is true. Since there are no available records it is impossible to know just how many Texas pioneers were Masons, but there were many. It has been documented that Masons were at the very forefront of the Texas Revolution. Stephen F. Austin, Sam Houston, William Barrett Travis, Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie, James Fannin, Anson Jones, Lorenzo de Zavala, Thomas Rusk and Mirabeau Lamar were all Masons. It is apparent from their conduct and the documents they produced that loved liberty and opposed tyranny. As soon as the revolution was over, Masonic lodges became an integral part of every Texas community. If a town had a courthouse, churches and schools, it had a Masonic lodge. A look at the history of any Texas community will make it clear that the most prominent citizens of the community were Masons. Often, the lodge hall also served as a church, a school, a city hall and a community center. The early Texas Masons were doing what we would expect of a strong fraternal organization designed to help good men be better men.

In Texas, Masons are governed by their local lodge officers as well as a state headquarters known as the Masonic Grand Lodge of Texas which is in Waco. The presiding officer of the Grand Lodge is known as the Grand Master, and he presides over some 160,000 Texas Masons who belong to 921 lodges scattered over the state. These Texas Masons are like their ancestors

as they are actively engaged in good works in their respective communities. Our membership includes men of every rank and profession, and they are men who love and support our government, a variety of churches, public education, law and order, and, last but not least, charity.

We need to enlarge on that last point-charity. At this moment, Texas Masons are helping to support schools and homes for children and the aged, hospitals for disadvantaged children, centers for learning disabled children, and foundations that spend a combined total of almost two million dollars per day for their care. That's right, almost two million dollars a day! These Masonic institutions are the finest in the world, and they are supported without one nickel of local, state or national tax money. Furthermore, most of these facilities are available to any family in need, Masonic or non-Masonic, regardless of race, color or creed.

I would be neglect if I did not comment on the fact that some refer to Masonry as a secret society? It is not. There are a few secrets in our rituals, but there is nothing evil about them. They are simply symbolic of the days of the ancient stonemasons in medieval Britain and Europe when life was severe. It is difficult to believe that the secrets of Masonry are evil when you consider the heritage of Masonry that includes a long list of influential leaders like Paul Revere, George Washington, Andrew Jackson, Theodore Roosevelt, Douglas MacArthur, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Stephen F. Austin, and Sam Houston. It is difficult to believe that the secrets of Masonry are evil when you see so many Masons working as a vital part of every community to provide better churches, better schools and better governments. It is difficult to look into the eyes of a little child in a Scottish Rite or Shrine hospital and say the secrets of Masonry are evil. If we really believe the biblical teaching, "by their fruits ye shall know them," then we must believe that the secrets of Masonry, rather than being evil, actually help to make a good man better.



Let me close by saying that the influence of Masonry is like the influence of the home and the influence of the church. It does not produce perfect human beings. Despite the best efforts of the home there has never been a perfect child. Despite the best efforts of church there has never been a perfect Christian. Despite the best efforts of Masonry there has never been a perfect Mason. Nevertheless, there is a place for all of these in our society. Man's basic nature is such that he needs every good influence he can get. He needs powerful influence of a good home, a dedicated church, and a dedicated public school with dedicated teachers. But, when it is all said and done, it doesn't hurt to have a little extra push that comes from civic organizations and fraternal organizations. Masonry has a proud heritage of service to the state of Texas, and we hope this talk has helped you come to a better understanding of the purpose for our fraternity. Texas Masonry looks to the future with the hope that our lodges will continue to have a rightful place in the community, right alongside the church, the home, the schools, and the civic organizations as a positive force for good. There is every reason to believe that we can all work together to make our government, our schools and our churches even stronger than before. The strength of Texas has always been built upon the combined efforts of all these groups, and the Masons of Texas are very proud of the role they have always played in service to God, our nation, our state and our community. Thank you.