

Master's Message

My dear brethren, family, and friends,

We are so blessed to be able to represent Freemasonry in the heart of the Napa Valley here in St. Helena. Stated meetings are still via Zoom (link elsewhere in this, and every previous, Trestleboard). Summer dress continues. No practices are scheduled yet for the obvious reason that continues for over a year and a half now. Be safe everyone.

Officers, and indeed all brothers, are reminded to make your annual contribution to your choice of Masonic program. Go to <https://freemason.org/>, and then click on How To Give under the button Masonic Charities.

I am in encouragement of the concept that lodges in our district, or even neighboring districts, form degree teams. My sample size is small, but there appears to be few lodges that are proficient enough to put on any of the degrees right now, and a third degree is particularly hard. Right now the Covid risk is too great for many of those that would normally be on a degree team. It is unfortunate that we can not practice degrees via Zoom; I think that would have had great value in maintaining our skill level, but since we can't, most of us will require perhaps as much as several months to come up to speed, if we even have enough returning brothers to have enough players. In the third degree especially many of our lodges just won't have enough players to do it all on their own.

Of course the other big thing we need to focus on when we do start having regular events again is *prospects*. We need new members to get into the line, and we have one fleeting chance to draw them in.

I think of a lodge as a very welcoming place. No matter where I go when I enter a lodge room I feel like I'm home. The men there may all be strangers to me, but they are all brothers, and the friendly inclusion in their discussions makes it feel like they've been family forever.

This got me to thinking once again about lodge culture and how that can impact a first time visit by a prospect. When we go into a fast food restaurant, we are confronted with colors chosen to make us feel uncomfortable, hard immovable seats, and poor acoustics, all well engineered so we don't not want to hang around. Most coffee shops have a different model. Soft modern music, comfortable chairs, available power outlets, are all engineered to keep us hanging around through at least two eating periods.

Obviously both models are engineered so as to achieve the same goal of maximizing revenue potential from the space, but a difference that results is the social component. At the fast food restaurant the people inside are in transition. Their time there is brief, and encouraged to be so by the uncomfortable design elements. In the coffee shop model when you walk in you see people engaged in other-than-eating. Light jazz filters from above. There are animated conversations peppering the room's ambiance. Do you ever have a fleeting thought that you wish you had a few friends to run into at the coffee shop? I bet that thought never occurs to you at MacDonald's. Some of my best friends are people I met at Starbucks. The environment is one that facilitates meeting new friends and old friends getting together.

How do Masonic lodges feel to you? How does your lodge feel to you? How does a lodge feel to a prospect or visitor on their first time to the lodge? What imparts this feeling? Is it the color of the walls and the furnishings? Is it the sounds one hears? The sound of happy people? The engagement by members with the visitor?

I think the coffee shop model is worthy of consideration for a lodge. When visitors first come to a lodge, they are likely to arrive during a meal period. There should be some light music playing over the sound system. Was the dining room last upgraded in the 1970's? Are the walls adorned with ancient history that is no longer relevant? Are the lights 60 hertz vibrating blue fluorescent lights or modern warm-colored LEDs? Is the space loud or are there some tapestries to soften sound reflections and quiet the room? Are their youth and women there? A guest speaker perhaps, or accolades to pass around after dinner?

It is a very welcoming sight to enter the dining room and see the lodge officers spread around the room at random tables and to hear the happy, chatting, inclusive sounds of men in congress. Or instead, are the secretary and treasurer at their respective desks in the lodge room doing work that should have already been done? Is the master running around frantically putting out pre-event fires instead of having delegated that? Are the wardens and deacons working in the kitchen? It can easily become the accidental culture of a lodge that when a visitor or prospect shows up at dinner time the dinning room looks more like a women's Masonic support group than a fraternal organization.

The culture of a lodge needs to be given constant thought and attention to its maintenance. Our Masonic lodge's culture should be one that looks like and sounds like inclusivity. It should look like and sound like the love of family. It should look and sound like a group of men with decorum accompanied by family that supports the Masonic life.

This is no different than how a coffee shop considers its structures its brand image to attract and retain their target market. We want visitors to our lodges to feel drawn in by the sights and sounds. We want them to feel like this is a place they could hang out for a while and maybe even consider joining the world wide family of Freemasonry.

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Michael's Masonic Esoterica

My dear brethren who follow me on our journey of discovery of the ancient (and not so ancient) secrets of our oh so great and Gentle Craft, I am so excited this month with some fascinating information about art not far from, or right smack dab in the middle of, the formative years of Freemasonry. Some months or more ago I referenced art. I believe we were exploring architecture, or perhaps marble sculptures, both of which from the 1400's through the 1800's abound with mystery, but I had mentioned that we would be taking a closer look at oil paintings, and I have been poking my mind into that space on occasion, and I have a few interesting pieces of information that I strongly believe further points to our originating brethren having knowledge of what is now a set of lost technologies and knowledge that appears to be demonstrated in art and architecture.

Most recently I have been looking at art from the Renaissance period (it is generally accepted that "High Renaissance" art was created between 1490-1527), and specifically at Leonardo da Vinci's paintings. Leonardo da Vinci lived from 1452 to 1519, so just a couple hundred years before the formation of the first Grand Lodge in England, and certainly well within the period of Freemasonry being practiced. Just to remind you, the Regius Manuscript, the oldest known Masonic document, is dated between 1350 and 1450, so was contemporary with whatever technology was used by da Vinci to perform his paintings (and marble sculptors who were capable of carving 3d photo realistic statues out of solid blocks of stone, as we have previously looked at).

In 2010 a study was done on 7 paintings. The results reveal that thin layers of paint 1 to 2 micrometers have been applied. The study, led by the team of Philippe Walter, of the "Laboratoire du Centre de Recherche et de Restauration des Musées de France" (LC2RMF, CNRS/Ministère de la culture et de la communication), with the collaboration of the European Synchrotron Radiation Facility (ESRF) and the support of the Louvre Museum, is published the 15 of July 2010 in the journal *Angewandte Chemie International Edition*.

The technique Da Vinci employed is called Sfumato. The concept is instead of mixing different colors of paint together on a palette in order to make the desired color, the original colors that would have been mixed are instead laid down in such thin layers that light shining through them all reveals the blended color to the eye. This technique is what allowed Da Vinci to achieve the incredible blending of one color into the next without hard edges that his art is so famous for.

So, ok, that's cool and all, but what about those layers? How thin is 1-2 microns? Was Da Vinci capable of attaining such fine pigment powder with a mortar and pestle?

Quality artist oil paint today is 7-20 microns thick, and there are only a few companies that can create such thin paint and it is very expensive. I could not find a figure for how small pigments can be ground in a mortar and pestle, but I'm pretty sure it wouldn't be anywhere near 1-2 microns.

How thin is 1-2 microns? Turns out a sheet of printer paper is around 60-120 microns thick, so we're not in the ball park there. The thickness of toner on a printed sheet of paper is 8-12 microns thick. Thinner, but we're still no where near 1-2 microns. Ink jet printers lay down ink at about 1-2 microns.

The layers of paint that Leonardo Da Vinci laid down in his paintings was as thin as ink jet printer ink, and he laid them down in as many as a dozen layers to achieve the look he was after. There are no visible brush strokes, no different than an ink jet printer has no brush strokes. We previously looked at examples of marble statues from the same period that appear to have been 3d printed from molten stone. We see examples where the machine was not tuned quite right and created little regularly spaced blow-out holes. We saw an example where the subject being 3d scanned moved and the resultant print from molten marble was blurred. We saw examples of insanely intricate work that can not be reached by tools.

And now this. Oil paintings that for all the world appear to be prints of unimaginable complexity made from impossibly thin layers of paint. Just imagine the challenge of judging how much of each pigmented microscopically thin layers of different colors of paint it takes to create a particular shade, and to have those shades blend and morph seamlessly throughout the entire painting.

How much of these technical processes were known to our early Masonic brothers? Exactly what kind of secrets are hiding in Freemasonry? An open mind has to also accept that it is possible Freemasonry became subverted at a later time to be a part of the "forgetting machine" that re-wrote our history and caused us to forget our real past, and my mind's eyes are open to any clues that might be the case, but so far my research very clearly points to a set of secrets being held in the bosom of Freemasonry, held so close and so well veiled and for such a long time that we can only look at examples in history, written texts, architecture, science and art and compare it to our known Masonic history and ritual and see if there is any connections. And, well, those of you that have followed along would probably agree we have found a lot that is synchronous with this hypothesis.

Michael McKeown

August Birthdays

First Name	Last Name	Birth Date
Raymond	Mc Mullen	9/11/55
Robert	Woods	9/4/56
Richard	Pierce	9/17/37
Carl	Baughman	9/10/82

August 3rd Degree Anniversaries

First Name	Last Name	Suffix	Masonic Suff	Mm Date
James	Mc Gee			9/29/77
James	Nolan			9/5/89
Richard	Doran			9/4/86
Stanley	Waggoner	Jr.	PM	9/25/90
Harvey	Bantz			9/13/61
Douglas	Owens			9/28/74
Ronald	Werle		PM	9/11/96
Michael	Stern		PM	9/18/96
Eugene	Burgle			9/6/97
Thomas	De Gaetano		PM	9/25/01
Carl	Baughman			9/17/03
Paul	Gagnon	Jr.		9/26/12
Manuel	Tueros			9/18/13
Andrew	Sweeney	II		9/14/16