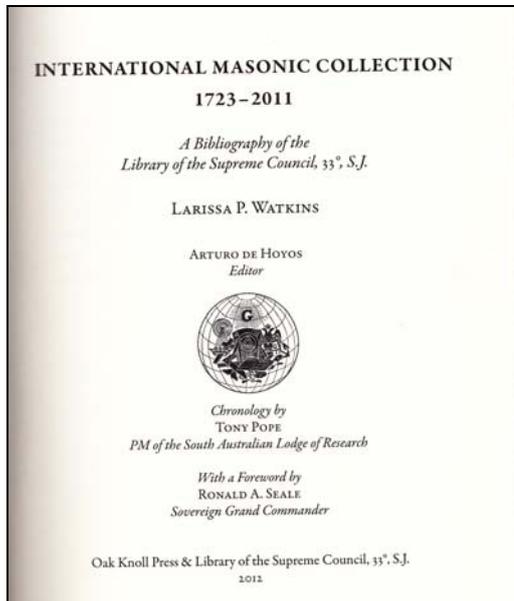


# Book Review

by **Tony Pope**



## ***International Masonic Collection 1723–2011: A Bibliography of the Library of the Supreme Council, 33°, S.J.***

**Larissa P Watkins**

Editor: Arturo de Hoyos

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**The House of the Temple**, in Washington DC, a magnificent building designed by an architect named Pope, and situated some 3 km due north of the White House, is headquarters of the Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction. Tucked away at the semi-circular rear of the first floor is one of the largest and best Masonic libraries in the United States, with over 250,000 books and manuscripts.

In addition to the enormous general collection, covering history, philosophy, symbolism, anti-Masonry, poetry, and the publications of the 51 Grand Lodges of the United States, there are a number of special *Collections*, five of which have been the subject of separate bibliographies by Larissa Watkins, the Russian-born Assistant to the Librarian. Educated in the Russian Federation as a journalist and librarian, she holds an honours degree in Library Science from the Cultural Sciences Institute of Higher Learning in Ussurisk, Primorskiy Krai, and was Director of Acquisition and Automation at the State Scientific Library in the Maritime Provinces in Vladivostok.

Her previous bibliographies have been *American Masonic Periodicals 1811–2001* (2003), *International Masonic Periodicals 1738–2005* (2006), the Louis D Carman Lincolniana Collection, *Our Very Illustrious Brother, Abraham Lincoln* (2007), and the William R Smith collection of published works by and about Robert Burns, recognised as second only to the Burns Collection in Glasgow, *Burnsiana* (2008). And now we have the *International Masonic Collection 1723–2011*, the culmination of more than ten years work, firstly to restructure the original collection, which was ‘continent-based’, rather than ‘country-oriented’, and then put the more than 8000 books from 90 countries, in three major alphabets and 25 languages, into order, before attempting the bibliography. Given that the other bibliographies were composed during the same period, it is an amazing feat.

One may ask: *What is the difference between the compiler of a catalog and a bibliographer?* Put simply, it is much the same difference as that between a compiler of historical facts and an historian. The one provides a basic list, while the other assesses the material, describes it, interprets it, arranges it and presents it in a form that makes particular information more easily accessed or understood by the reader. If you know precisely what you are looking for, a catalog will suit you fine, but for a more comprehensive record of material available, a good bibliography is worth its weight in gold.

At this point I must make a 'declaration of interest'. In 2005 Bro Robert Watkins of Virginia contacted me and asked if I would assist his wife, Larissa, with regard to Australian Masonic periodicals for her forthcoming bibliography of 'foreign' periodicals held in the House of the Temple Library. I was happy to assist in a small way, and subsequently received lavish acknowledgement as part of her 'team', together with an autographed copy of *International Masonic Periodicals 1738–2005*.

Meanwhile, Jim Daniel asked me for assistance in researching Australian publications, in preparation for his paper, 'Lord Carnarvon in Australia', to be offered on his ANZMRC tour of Australia and New Zealand in 2007. I told Jim that I would research Australian non-Masonic periodicals for him, but that the House of the Temple Library held a more comprehensive collection of Australian Masonic periodicals than could be found in any Australian library, and referred him to Larissa. The assistance Jim received is reflected in his endorsement of *International Masonic Periodicals 1738–2005*, published in the May/June 2006 edition of the *Scottish Rite Journal*:

Larissa Watkins' *International Masonic Periodicals* is a brilliant piece of scholarship. It not only lets scholars know what publications you have in your remarkable library, but also stands alone as a record of Masonic publishing around the world. *International Masonic Periodicals* will be an invaluable resource in every serious Masonic research library.

The sequel occurred a year later. When I visited the United States in 2007, Robert and Larissa Watkins were my kind and generous hosts during my short stay in DC. I received a brief intimation that I might have to sing for my supper when Larissa mentioned she was working on another bibliography, *International Masonic Collection*, and had the idea of preceding each country's entry with a short list of dates and events in the development of Freemasonry in that country—more of a compilation than a history, just something to help place the holdings of that country in perspective. That shouldn't be too difficult for me to do, just crib stuff from *Freemasonry Universal*, and update it here and there. How wrong could we be? It took all of my spare time, and some that wasn't spare, for more than two years, to gather information from old and new friends, to produce what Larissa calls a 'chronology'.

I make no comment on the quality or utility of the chronology (for which I neither derived nor expect to derive any financial benefit), in the hope that readers will accept this report on *International Masonic Collection* as a genuine review, not an advertising promotion.

The cover, silver on a sombre dark blue, matches that of its companion volume, *International Masonic Periodicals*, except in the style and wording on the spine—a minor defect, but noticeable when viewing the two books side by side on the shelf, and likely to drive a perfectionist author to despair, or to covering both volumes with brown paper! A more serious defect is the omission of books published in England after 1900. This is deliberate, a pragmatic decision taken because that subset of the collection was too large to be included. A more elegant solution would have been to set aside England (& Wales), Ireland and Scotland for a second volume at a later date.

As for the contents, the general holdings are beautifully set out in two columns, containing a full description of each book, and enlivened by many small illustrations. In addition are a list of bibliographies contained in the collection, comprehensive indexes of authors and titles, and a 30-page appendix of international Masonic *periodicals* received or located subsequent to the publication of that volume in 2006. *International Masonic Collection* is a credit to author Larissa Watkins, editor Art de Hoyos and layout specialist Elizabeth McCarthy.

Obviously, the bibliography will be of great assistance to those who use the library, or are within visiting distance of the District of Columbia, but whom else will it benefit? Answer: researchers worldwide. See the example above, of Jim Daniel's search for reports in the Australian Masonic press. Reference to the bibliography can reveal the existence, and the contents, of material previously unknown to a researcher, who can then look for copies closer to home or on the Internet, seek assistance of a fellow researcher who can visit the House of the Temple Library, or even contact the library direct. Therefore, this book is a *must* for

the reference section of every serious Masonic library, worldwide. Urge your librarian to get it, then make use of it—and tell your friends!