

Masonic Membership Myths Debunked

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Quite a few commonly held views as to what has happened to masonic membership abound, and these are often quoted. Indeed shortly after the formation of the Premier Grand Lodge we can find these words in the second of Anderson's Charges of a Free-Mason from his 1723 'The Constitutions of the Free-Masons'.

Mafonry hath been always injured by War, Bloodfhed, and Confufion ... [and] the Craftmen ... ever flourifh'd in Times of Peace.

Are such traditional views correct or not? If strategies to address the issue of falling numbers are based upon false premises then those strategies themselves are likely to be conceptually flawed! These are good reasons to examine whether some of these views are real or myth and to do so on the basis of an analysis of current membership data.

Why bother to explore the background to our current decline? Simply that freemasons around the world are seeking to minimize any contraction in their numbers. Individual lodges are as keen to stop having to recycle Past Masters as grand lodges are to see their numerical and financial declines reversed. Whatever strategies are adopted stand a better chance of success if they are based upon the clearest possible understanding of exactly what is happening. There is in fact a mutual shared objective.

First of all, in numerical terms, what does the annual membership figure represent—what is it composed of? A clearer understanding may help us all in removing some common misconceptions. Consider the formula

$$M_y = M_{y-1} + N + A - L - D$$

or expressed in non-pseudo-mathematical language:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Membership at the end of this year} &= \text{Membership at end of last year} \\ &+ \text{New Members} + \text{Affiliating members} \\ &1. \text{ Leaving Members}^1 - \text{Deaths.} \\ &2. \end{aligned}$$

Thus it will be immediately clear that membership is composed of several different components, each of which is driven by different factors. This figure does not exclude multiple lodge memberships or those masons with cross-state or country memberships; it is the number of men paying their annual dues. Deaths are a matter over which no control can be exercised. It is a factor related to age, and is one that the actuaries have good information about (for example, the Scottish Rite, S.J. U.S.A. death rate in 2000 was 3.19% per year).

The number of New Members is a reflection of "the propensity of men to join freemasonry." Clearly this propensity has been in decline for some decades, as has the habit of joining most fraternal and other civic organizations in general. If society changes its value of membership in civic and fraternal organizations, then we might expect the number of new members to provide the earliest indication of any such change.

Demits and suspensions for non-payment of dues (abbreviated NPDs) are the reaction of members who have found freemasonry "not being to their liking" or "not offering value for their time and money." In part this may be related to some failing in masonry to meet their

needs, to a change in personal circumstances, and to changing attitudes within society. The balance between these factors, however, is probably not determinable.

Prof. Robert Putnam has studied the broader issue of U.S. Civic - not just fraternal - participation in his seminal work *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (2000). In Appendix III of his book he gives membership graphs for and shows the declines of thirty American voluntary and fraternal organizations, from 4-H to the Jaycees to Optimists to the Women's Christian Temperance Union.² Clearly freemasonry is not alone in its membership problem!

MYTH NO. 1. THE POPULARITY OF FREEMASONRY REACHED AN ALL-TIME PEAK AFTER WORLD WAR II.

Yes - it is true that in absolute numbers freemasonry (in the U.S.A.) had the most members after WWII at around four million in 1960, but this is not the best measure of true "popularity". If we measure "popularity" not by absolute numbers but by percentage of the base male population over the age of twenty, a different story is told. In 1929, the year of the U.S.A. post-WWI peak, 8.6% of the base population were masons, while in 1960, the post-WWII peak, only 7.6% belonged.³ Thus by 1960, around the year of peak membership, the U.S.A. was experiencing a smaller share - about 12% less - of the male population who were choosing to be freemasons than after WWI!

There is evidence that not all fraternal bodies in the U.S.A., for example the York Rite and the Odd Fellows, recovered even to the same extent as freemasonry, after the Great Depression Trough (note also the virtual disappearance of the Knights of Pythias)⁴. The Odd Fellows did not grow at all after the end of WWII and by 1997 had shrunk by 94% of their 1920 peak⁵

Indeed, a further example of the fact that similar organizations can decline at different times than their companion organizations can be found in the peak membership of some traditional Protestant churches in England: Baptists in 1905, Methodists in 1910, Anglicans in 1930, Presbyterians in 1935 (while the Catholics didn't start to decline until 1960).⁶ Society is changing all the time, and complacency does need to be avoided.

The popularity of freemasonry, measured as a percentage of the base male population over the age of twenty, was lower after WWII than WWI.

Myth number one is debunked.

MYTH NO. 2. THE PEAK MEMBERSHIPS OF POST-WWI AND WWII WERE DUE TO MEN RETURNING FROM THE ARMED FORCES AND SEEKING A SIMILAR ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH TO SOCIALIZE.

At first sight the fact that membership in nineteen states' peaked in 1928 and 1963 (see figure 3) might lead one to that conclusion. However, if one considers the formula for membership given earlier, it is worth examining further the trends in new members and total membership.

Because of the twenty-fold difference between Raisings and Members, different scales are used in figure 3 to allow a visual comparison between the peaks and troughs of the two sets of data. It is interesting to compare the U.S. data with that for Australia. It is quite evident, though, that the influx of new masons peaked or bottomed well before its impact was felt in the total membership figure! It is of course true that the number of masons for quite some period after both World Wars increased and that lodges would have felt themselves to be prospering - but the graph makes it clear, with the benefit of the exact science of hindsight, that the decline was in fact both inevitable and predictable - if the number of raisings had been but tracked.

	Post WWI Peak	Great Depression Trough	Post WWII Peak
New members	1920	1933	1946
Total membership	1928	1940	1963
	<i>Nov. 1918 WWI ends</i>	<i>Oct. 1929 Wall Street Crash</i>	<i>May/Aug. 1945 WWII ends</i>

Figure 1. Peaks and trough of U.S. Masonic membership (from nineteen Grand Lodges).

	Country	Post WWI Masonic Peak	Great Depression Masonic Trough	Post WWII Masonic Peak
New members	'Australia'	1923 Australia 1920 England	1934 Australia 1933 England	1948 Australia 1950/51 England 1947 New Zealand
Total membership	'Australia'	1930 Australia	1935 Australia	1961 Australia 1963 New Zealand
		<i>Nov. 1918 WWI ends</i>	<i>Oct. 1929 Wall Street Crash</i>	<i>May/Aug. 1945 WWII ends</i>

Figure 2. Peaks and trough of Masonic membership in other jurisdictions (published data from various Grand Lodges; total memberships not published by England)."

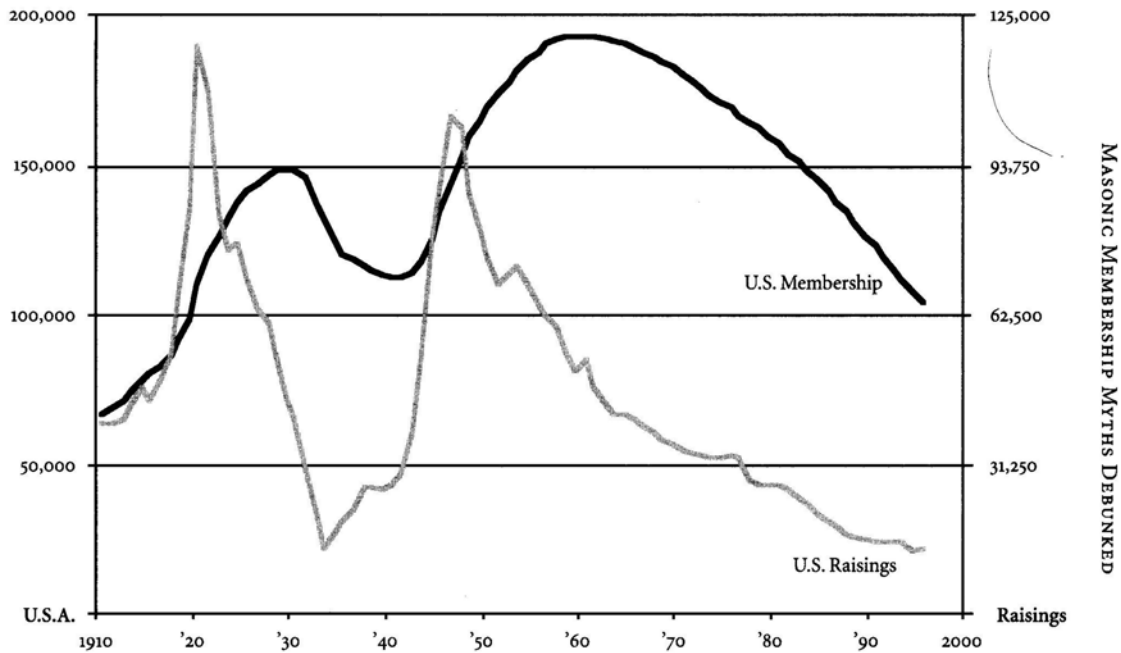


Figure 3. Comparison of total membership and raisings in nineteen selected U.S. Grand Lodges. NOTE: Different scales are used for each graph. Paul Bessel: <http://bessel.org/natl/stats>.

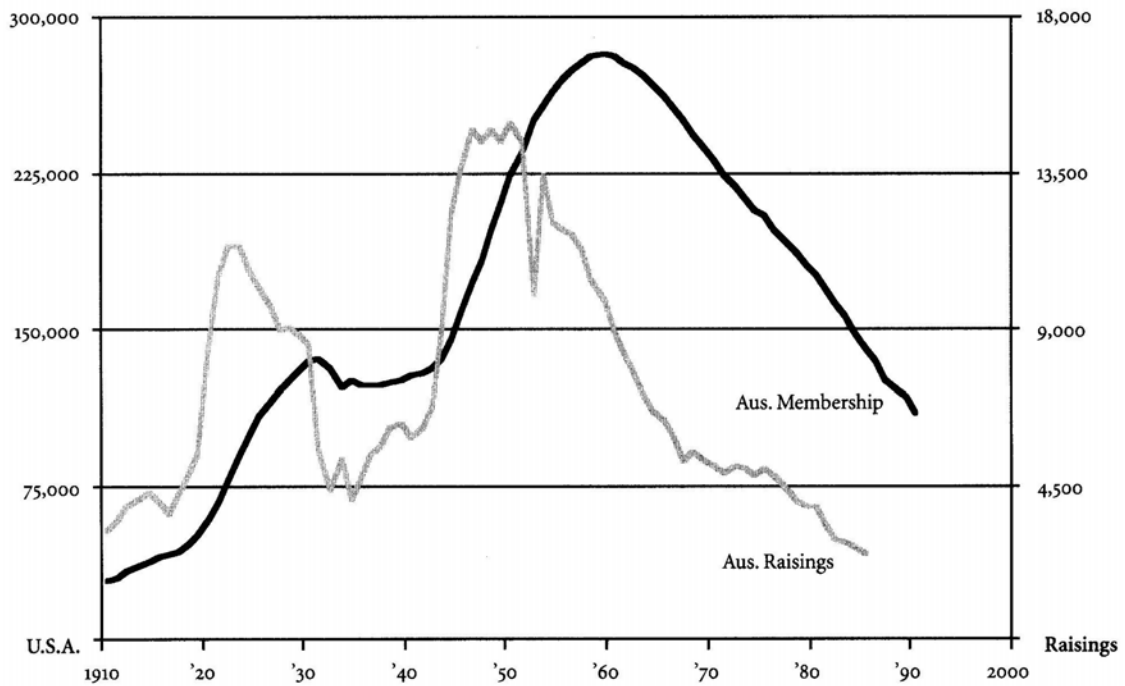


Figure 4. Comparison of total membership and raisings in four Australian Grand Lodges (New South Wales, Tasmania, Western Australia, and Victoria). NOTE: Different scales are used for each graph.

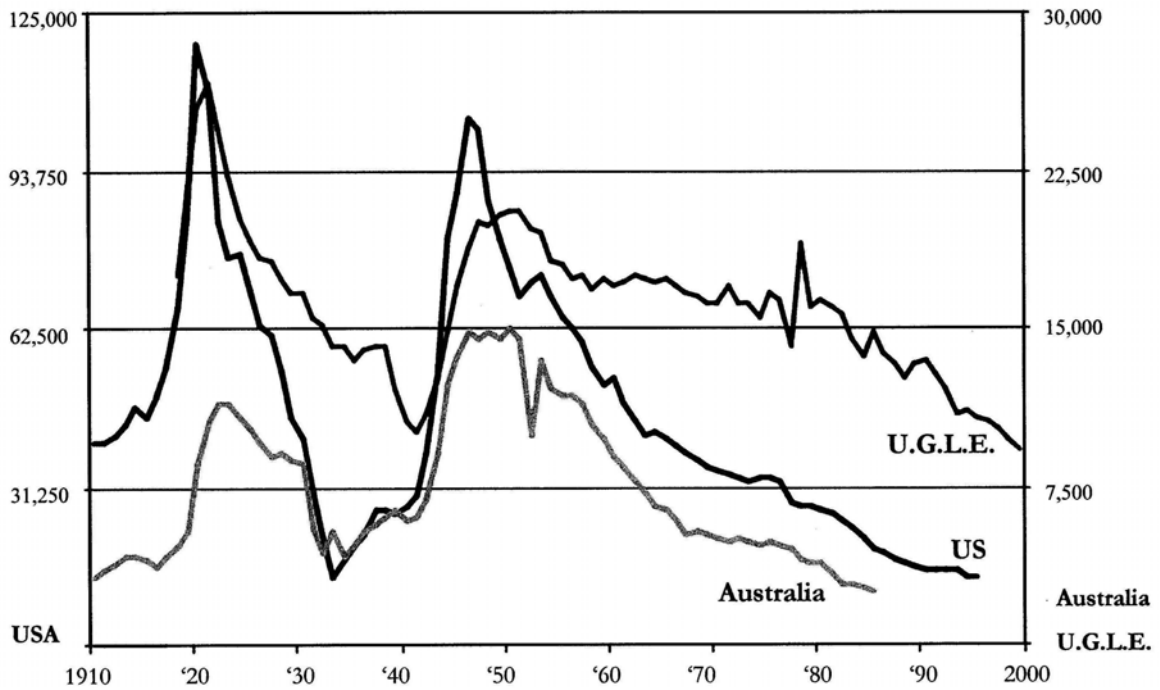


Figure 5. Comparison of total raisings in the nineteen U.S. Grand Lodges, four Australian Grand Lodges, and the United Grand Lodge of England. NOTE : Different scales are used for each graph.

The increase in membership seen after WWII was not from men joining after 1945, the end of the war - it was the result of a strong thirteen-year upward trend from 1933 which peaked in 1946. Curiously the end of that war saw "John Doe" becoming less inclined to become a freemason with each passing year.

Logic seems to demand that we accept that membership would fall after the Wall Street Crash because of the great personal hardships it caused, and that some of the contraction in membership must have been income-related. Yet underlying this was a sharply falling number of new members from 1920 through to 1933, a fall that started nine years before the Wall Street Crash. The timings were mere coincidence! If a man dying of cancer is killed by a truck, his long-term disease is forgotten, and the spectacular accident is remembered.

For whatever reason, men started to join in increasing numbers from 1933 almost as soon as the recovery from the Great Depression started, and this growth continued at a sustained upward pace until 1946. There is no obvious explanation for this, but it is not purely an American phenomenon because the patterns in Australia and England are remarkably similar. The similarity of the Australian data and the English data for new masons is thought-provoking. Sadly U.G.L.E. does not publish total membership figures, and only those for new members are available.

The common wisdom is that men joined in large numbers after the World Wars, and that this accounts for the post-war membership peaks. The facts, however, show to the contrary that men started joining in ever smaller numbers soon after the end of the wars. The myth and the fact are diametrically opposed. This conundrum is examined later in the paper, in particular in relation to the views of Robert Putnam, Francis Fukuyama, and John Kenneth Galbraith.

Myth number two is debunked.

MYTH NO. 3. THE MAJOR CAUSE OF CURRENT LOSS OF MEMBERS IS DEATH

The belief that men joined in large numbers after the World Wars and that their deaths are responsible for the current decline can be cited in recent articles. An English freemason, Timothy R. R. Richards, states a commonly held view that:

“In addition, you then have, running side by side, the decline in Freemasons of about four per cent a year. We are seeing this decline for two reasons. Number one: masonry is not exactly the flavor of the month with the outside community, and number two; there was such an enormous influx of men who came back from the war in the late 1940s, all of whom are now reaching full maturity, and you are now seeing an exaggerated number of masons -who are dying because there was a masonic bulge.”⁹

The reality is that the number of deaths is related only to the age profile and number of members, and, as any actuary will tell you, it is quite predictable. In simple terms if the average male lives till eighty then one-eightieth of any sizeable sample will die each year - 1.23%. If any population becomes skewed to being older than the average, then the death rate as a percentage will rise. The figures for the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia, F.A.A.M. Comparing number of deaths and deaths as a percentage of members are instructive.

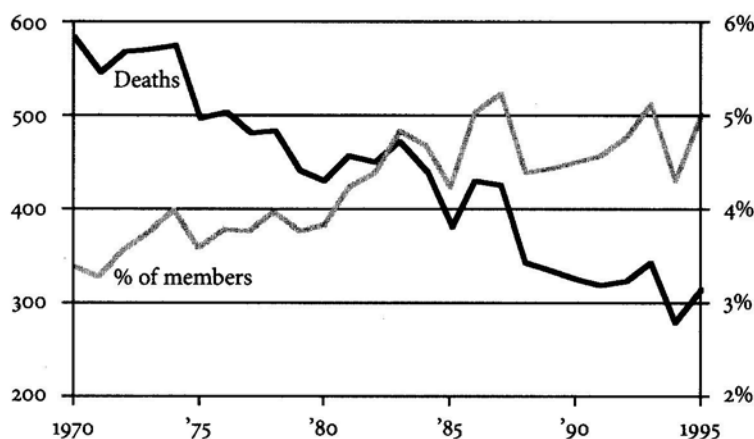


Figure 6. Comparisons of annual deaths in and their percentage of membership in the G.L. of the District of Columbia. Data courtesy Paul Bessel.

In the above graph one can easily see that in the District of Columbia while the number of deaths have been declining since 1970, they do in fact constitute a rising percentage of the membership, and thus are in reality no cause for complacency. The percentage death rates are always a simple reflection of the age profile of the membership!

That deaths are not the prime cause of our decline is not easily appreciated for the death of an elderly lodge member leaves behind it a very tangible gap that is felt by the other members. On the other hand those who join, never attend regularly, and then demit or go NPD are forgotten and excluded from the personal and collective memory with relative ease. When talking to lodges on the matter of falling numbers I have found that many masons will insist that Demit or NPD is not the major cause of the problem - all I can do is to recommend them to analyze their lodge's membership records.

Because in the last half of the twentieth century we have increasingly failed to maintain both recruitment levels and membership retention, the age profile of freemasonry has become skewed to a more aged membership. This produces a greater rate of death. However, the commonly held belief that once this generation of members, joining after the war and swelling the total size of the Craft, has died out "that all will be well again" is a false and a most dangerous assumption - simply because it inclines the managers of freemasonry to avoid looking at the figures and to avoid taking the required and essential corrective actions. Just look at the recruitment and retention figures if you have any doubt of this.

Myth number three is debunked.

MYTH NO. 4. THE CAUSE OF TODAY'S SMALLER LODGES IS THE SHORTAGE OF CANDIDATES AND IS DUE TO THE STATE OF THE ECONOMY, A BAD PRESS FOR FREEMASONRY, ETC., ETC.

While it is true that the number of new members is shrinking, the main cause of smaller lodges is that those who do become members stay for a much shorter period of time.¹⁰ The paper, "The Missing Master Mason," shows that of those members who depart, in the 1950s the average length of time that members stayed with a lodge was over twenty years, in the mid-1970s this had fallen to under ten years, and by the mid-1980s was below five years. These figures are remarkably similar for lodges not only in England but also in Queensland, Australia; Montana, U.S.A. and Alberta and Ontario, Canada. Figure 7 gives a detailed comparison of the average membership duration of leaving members.

While we might find it easy to attribute our current situation to any number of causes the facts are clear - we have fewer new members, and our ability to retain their interest has

decreased. This in turn results in an ageing membership and an increase in deaths as a percentage of membership. Many researchers have hunted for the causes of decline in civic activity, and failed to find convincing ones that can be substantiated. We should be beware of simplistic answers to a problem that clearly is not simple.

Myth number four is debunked.

It should be noted that this increasing inability to retain new members is the one that is most denied by the individual mason and lodge ("It's not like that in my lodge!" is the usual response). Yet in all the lodges studied the data was

Period	Mellor #3844 England	Mellor #1774 England	Welbeck #2890 England	Concord #124 Alberta	Granite #446 Ontario	Cooroora #232 Q'sland	Lord Salton #98 Q'sland	Ashlar #19 Montana
1945-49	23.0	15.4	18.0	15.7	12.5	20.4	N/A	17.8
1950-54	25.6	20.2	26.2	17.4	14.7	16.8	26.3	18.8
1955-59	16.6	14.5	13.4	13.2	16.1	13.6	21.3	14.3
1960-64	16.1	17.6	10.0	12.6	14.4	16.2	17.0	14.5
1965-69	16.0	13.8	19.7	12.0	15.6	15.3	16.0	15.3
1970-74	13.8	10.6	13.3	10.8	14.2	N/A	12.8	11.7
1975-79	9.8	8.1	11.0	8.4	7.6	9.0	9.8	9.6
1980-84	8.3	8.2	10.7	6.5	8.8	4.8	8.3	6.5
1985-89	5.3	2.5	6.2	4.8	7.8	6.0	5.0	N/A
1990-94	3.7	3.8	4.5	N/A	4.0	4.3	4.0	N/A

Figure 7. Comparison of average membership duration of leaving members.

It should be noted that this increasing inability to retain new members is the one that is most denied by the individual mason and lodge ("It's not like that in my lodge!" is the usual response). Yet in all the lodges studied the data was remarkably similar - with each passing decade since the end of World War II those becoming freemasons have resigned after an ever shorter period of time. Indeed in one more recent study of a Welsh Province it was found that around 40% of Initiates had left the Craft within six years of joining.¹¹ Such men have a much lower visibility in the lodge; they are new members and have fewer established connections with the other members. Their behaviour is characterized by increasingly irregular attendance through to non-attendance and invisibility. The end result is either resignation or exclusion for non-payment of dues - but they have left almost unnoticed to those remaining!

MYTH NO. 5. OUR PROBLEMS ARE NOT THE SAME AS THOSE IN [INSERT THE NAME OF THE NEXT DOOR LODGE, DISTRICT, PROVINCE OR GRAND LODGE].

The above four myths really do mean that the problems are very much the same everywhere. The peaks and troughs of new members joining and total membership are remarkably similar, as is the average duration of membership, across the whole of the English-speaking world. Given this, the cause(s) are most unlikely to be either local or parochial. The message is clear. The cause of the problem lies not within the lodge or grand lodge, nor even within any single Country - it is a universal phenomenon.¹²

Thus it is very discouraging to see the same failed solutions being tried again and again in different places when all the evidence is that they don't produce the desired outcomes. It is also regrettable that there has been little effort until recently to make any attempt to measure the effectiveness of remedial measures. In effect these measures are wasted efforts and greatly discouraging for the lodges and individual masons who are encouraged to believe that (failed) strategies can bring salvation to their problems.

Myth number five debunked.

KEY INDICATORS OF POSITIVE CHANGE IN MEMBERSHIP

1. The first signs of any reversal in the current trend of decline will be an increase in the number of new members. When this happens over a period of several years there will be some grounds for optimism.
2. Retention of those new members will be absolutely crucial to any renaissance. At the moment, whatever we put into the bucket in the form of new members tends to leak quickly away through the hole in the bottom. Sadly, statistics of membership retention are not easy to produce; they require a database of at least five years, and one that has not been purged of members who have left.
3. Only when the total number of new members and joining members exceed those demitting or being excluded for NPD can we actually be said to be providing "value for a Brother's time and money."
4. Finally only when the total inflow exceeds the number of those leaving and dying will the figure for total membership show any increase. A look at the current balances makes it clear that that will not happen overnight.

Platitudinous statements about "turning the corner" are not helpful for morale. However, when the key indicators start to move in the right direction that is something every mason can take encouragement from - even though the top line membership figure may still be moving down. The only strategies that are most likely to succeed will almost certainly be those that adopt a holistic approach to the problem - but that is a matter for another paper!

WHERE AND WHEN DO WE HUNT FOR THE CULPRIT?

The decline in civic participation of the past half century has been the subject of much work by academics. Among them are Prof. Robert Putnam and his book, *Bowling Alone* (2000), and Prof. Francis Fukuyama, author of *The End of History* (1992) and *The Great Disruption* (1999) - The culprit proves remarkably elusive.

Freemasonry is not alone in its decline, and it is mirrored closely by American "chapter based associations" of which it is one. Putnam's graph of "Average Membership Rates in Thirty-two National Chapter-Based Associations 1900 - 1997" (*Bowling Alone*, figure 8, p. 54) shows the familiar-shaped curve of U.S. masonic membership. He goes on to say,

The sharp dip in this generally rising line of civic involvement in the 1930s is evidence of the traumatic impact of the Great Depression on American Communities. The membership records of virtually every adult organization in the sample bears the scars of that period. In some cases the effect was a brief pause in ebullient growth, but in others the reversal was extraordinary. Membership in the League of Women Voters, for example, was cut in half between 1930 and 1935, as was membership in the Elks, the Moose, and the Knights of Columbus. This period of history underlines the effects of acute economic distress on civic engagement....

Most of these losses were recouped, however, by the early 1940s. World War II occasioned a massive outpouring of patriotism and collective solidarity. At the war's end those energies were redirected into community life. The two decades following 1945 witnessed one of the most vital periods of community involvement in American history....

On average, across all these organizations, membership rates began to plateau in 1957, peaked in the early 1960s, and began the period of sustained decline by 1969.¹³

It is clear that Putnam sees the immediate post-war periods to be beneficial to civic involvement and membership of associations, and the Great Depression to be adverse to these factors. Freemasonry is fortunate because it records the specific dates that each new member

takes his first steps in freemasonry, and these details have largely been reported annually, and thus can be compared. Fukuyama comments that

Beginning in about 1965, a large number of indicators that can serve as negative measures of social capital all started moving upward rapidly at the same time... These changes occurred in virtually all developed countries, with the exception of Japan and Korea. As we will see, there are a number of regularities in these changes: the Scandinavian countries, English speaking nations (the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand), and Latin Catholic countries like Spain and Italy tended to behave in similar ways.

However Fukuyama only gathers time series data from 1950, and it is thus not possible to consider whether his indicators moved in a similar manner in the post-World War I period.

While Putnam alludes to a plateauing of membership in 1937, he is unequivocal in stating that the periods after both World Wars were good for civic involvement, and that the Great Depression was bad. A glance at figure 3, "Comparison of Members and Raisings in Selected U.S. Grand Lodges," demonstrates that the peaks and troughs of total membership were predated by some seven to thirteen years by peaks and troughs of new men becoming masons.

Critical to unravelling this is the appreciation that total membership is a composite figure and that only the numbers of men becoming masons actually reflects the propensity of men in society to join our organization (that is, to be civically involved).

It is thus purely fortuitous that we find a peak of membership in 1928 at the time of the Great Depression - in fact there had already been 13 years of decline in new members from 1920 through to the upswing in 1933 - curiously some three years after the Wall Street Crash and at the time when the downward economic spiral bottomed out, to be replaced by the start of recovery. It is worthy of note that these peaks and troughs were mirrored in Australia and England - so whatever was happening was global, and it could reasonably be inferred that it was the same global forces at work producing the same results in geographically disparate parts of the globe.

The next part of the equation comes, not from an observer of society but from an observer of the economy: John Kenneth Galbraith and his theory of "The Culture of Contentment." The essence of this theory is that:

The most nearly invariant is that individuals and communities that are favored in their economic, social and political condition attribute social virtue and political durability to that which they themselves enjoy. That attribution, in turn, is made to apply even in the face of commanding evidence to the contrary. The beliefs of the fortunate are brought to serve the cause of continuing contentment, and the economic and political ideas of the time are similarly accommodated.¹⁴

It is in the nature of contentment that it resists that which invades it with vigour and often, as in very recent times, with strongly voiced indignation. This too I have learned from long and intimate association.¹⁵

The second, less consciously but extremely important characteristic of the contented majority, one already noted, is its attitude towards time. In the briefest word, short-run public inaction, even if held to be alarming as to consequence, is always preferred to protective long run action. The reason is readily evident. The long run may not arrive; that is the frequent and comfortable belief.¹⁶

Thus once society has entered into a state of (economic) contentment it will strive to maintain it, often even in the face of reality, until an event occurs to shatter the bubble. This has occurred once in the 20th century with the Wall Street Crash of 1929. If one accepts that a "culture of contentment" can exist then the corollary needs to be considered; namely that a state of a "culture of discontentment" can exist. Thus if rising prosperity creates a culture of contentment then we can see that since the end of WW II this can be linked with an ongoing decline in membership.

My thesis is that an increasing feeling of prosperity among the "middle classes" (who are the majority among freemasonry) produces a culture of contentment and that this "certainty" of ongoing social and economic prosperity continues until some world ranking cataclysm "bursts the bubble" The corollary is also true.

Now to demonstrate the validity of the thesis.

1900-1914

Economy & Politics. This period was characterized by the formation and growing membership of unions in order to enhance income, a period of discontentment.

Freemasonry. Moderate growth in new members

1914-1918

Economy & Politics. War on a world scale brings with it the ultimate reason for angst and discontentment - the war could be lost and with it "our way of life." With the armistice in 1918 it was now possible to look forward to a brighter future.

Freemasonry. The rate at which new members join increases steeply until 1920 (two years after the armistice).

NOTE: It would seem that a level of discontentment can vary, for example increase during periods of war. A change in the degree of discontentment or a change from discontentment to contentment will take time to become apparent simply because it is a visible expression of the sentiment of the majority of the population.

1918-1929

Economy & Politics. The immediate post-war boom burst in 1920 and was followed by decreasing wage levels. However, prices fell even faster and by 1929 the industrial output had almost doubled. The 1920s were times of rapidly increasing prosperity. Under the pro-business Harding administration union membership fell from 3 million in 1920 to 3.5 million by 1929 - and a similar trend can be seen during the post WWII period.

Freemasonry. The number of men becoming masons in the U.S. peaked in 1920 and thereafter decreased as sharply as it had grown before the peak and continued to fall until 1933- The peaks elsewhere were 1920 for England and 1923 in Australia.

NOTE: The winning of WWI in 1918 needed to be translated from a majority of "discontents" into a majority of "contents" and for that to be translated into a decision by the average Mr. John Doe to feel less likely to become a freemason after 1920 than he was before 1920. This was the time of the New Deal, the formation of the League of Nations and of the President Woodrow Wilson inspired and optimistic appendices to the Treaty of Versailles.

1929-1945

Economy and Politics. Clearly the Wall Street Crash of October 1929 engulfed the rest of the world, and the downward economic trends persisted until 1933- The non-interventionist stance of Republican President Hoover resulted in the effects being more severe in the U.S. than elsewhere, and by the time of the next Presidential election the voters were ready for the more interventionist policies of President Franklin D Roosevelt.¹⁷

Freemasonry. This trough occurred in 1933 in the U.S.A. and for comparison, 1933 in England and 1934 in Australia.

1945-2000 (AND ONWARD)

Economy and Politics. The period after 1945 is one of (almost) constantly rising peace and prosperity, or at least for the majority that has been the case Freemasonry. The peak of new men becoming masons was in 1946 in the U.S.A., 1947 in New Zealand, 1948 in Australia and 1950/1951 in England. All these masonic jurisdictions have been in decline ever since.

NOTE: It is worth comparing this decline with that recorded in the Index of National Civic Health (INCH) in the United States." During this period there have been both the Korean and Vietnam wars and several "collapses" in the stock market. One can only conclude that no matter how painful these were for those who sustained "collateral damage" they were insufficient to affect the increasing propensity of men to be less willing / interested in joining freemasonry.

The new-member data for England represent something of an enigma. Not only was the peak later but the decline that followed it was less pronounced and it was only in 1980 that the figures show a clear and pronounced decline. It is perhaps interesting to reflect that 1979 was the year when the Conservative Margaret Thatcher was elected and Britain embarked upon more radical free market policies than it had experienced in the 20th century. After 1945 Britain embarked upon a time of repaying its wartime debts and a time of both further borrowing and high taxation to fund its social welfare programs prior to the economic growth required to fund them. Perhaps we English experienced less of the Culture of Contentment until 1980 and once contented embarked upon a period of increased civic disengagement?

Why does this downward trend seem to be affecting North America, Australasia, and Great Britain more than other parts of the world in masonic terms? Hofstede in 1984 carried out a study of individualism in work¹⁹ - how far individuals want to keep their independence and autonomy. He notes that those countries that are most individualist are more prosperous, and that there is a strong correlation between individualism and GNP. Comparing data from forty countries, he found a number of correlates of collectivism (the opposite of individualism) including lesser economic development, less social mobility, less development of a middle class, less industry and urbanization, more extended families and more children per family.

In summary it would seem that government policies designed to encourage individuals to take more responsibility for their own affairs seem to result in us collectively deciding to absent ourselves increasingly from social and civic involvement. Not only do we do it less but we desire to do it for a shorter period of time and for less hours when we do it. Perhaps more alarming is that co-operation seems to be a response to adverse socio-economic circumstances and only the most dire events, those that affect a majority of the population of any country personally, seem to change either a culture of contentment into discontentment or vice versa

APPENDIX

Measuring Membership Attrition

While the causes of our reduction in membership are proving difficult to tie down with exactitude it is important to understand what is happening. It is that understanding that can offer us some clear indicators of where our new members are finding a lack of satisfaction.

Whenever I have spoken on the subject of falling numbers there has been someone present who has stood up and said "it is not like that in my lodge." It is clear and easy to understand that the number of men choosing to become masons is going down year by year and there is never any discussion on that factor because it is an accepted fact.

There is a common (mis)conception that the mix of ages is skewed to the older age groups who came in after the WW II and the implicit assumption that when these men have died a more normal pattern of membership will automatically resume. I have demonstrated that this will not be the case.

We do need to measure attrition both at a lodge level and at a higher, grand lodge or district, level - and it is possible to measure this! The act of measurement and the discovery that in general terms your lodge conforms to the findings in this paper may be the single most important factor in you or your lodge deciding what action to take.

1. MEASURING MEMBERSHIP ATTRITION AT THE GRAND-LODGE LEVEL

The requirement is to have a grand lodge membership database which includes at least five years of complete records (that is, no deletions of the details of resigned members). From the records you need to determine the total number of new members in any one year ("the Class of 199*") and then determine the number of the "Class of 199*" who resigned in that year and in each

successive year. These leavings can be added to produce a cumulative total of the leavers of the "Class of 199*" in each subsequent year. The exercise can be repeated for successive years and plotted in either tabular or graphical form.

The significance of such a table is that one can see very clearly the reaction of new members to our organization and trends will start to appear. Its other great value is that any strategy for renewal that is adopted can be measured for its effect—and that is not something that has ever been attempted before!

If one measures the attrition of the class of 1993, for example, then by 1997 those who joined earliest will have completed five years of membership while those who joined at the end of 1993 will have only a possible maximum of four years membership. Thus one has in effect measured the degree of attrition in 4.5 years of membership—the same "half year" applies to each subsequent year. Deaths are excluded at all times from the calculations.

Indicative rates of attrition could well be in the range of 30-40% in four to seven years for Craft freemasonry.

CUMULATIVE DEPARTURES BY YEAR							
	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Class of 1993 (194)	4	7	21	33	53	68	79
Class of 1994 (188)	-	3	12	22	35	57	75
Class of 1995 (166)	-	-	3	16	27	42	62
Class of 1996 (170)	-	-	-	2	6	22	35
Class of 1997 (173)	-	-	-	-	2	7	23
Class of 1998 (151)	-	-	-	-	-	7	12
Class of 1999 (144)	-	-	-	-	-	-	3
CUMULATIVE PERCENTAGE DEPARTURES BY YEAR							
Class of 1993 (194)	2.1%	3.6%	17.0%	10.8%	27.3%	35.1%	40.1%
Class of 1994 (188)	-	1.6%	6.4%	11.7%	18.6%	30.3%	39.9%
Class of 1995 (166)	-	-	1.8%	9.6%	16.3%	25.3%	37.3%
Class of 1996 (170)	-	-	-	1.1%	3.5%	12.9%	20.6%
Class of 1997 (173)	-	-	-	-	1.1%	4.0%	13.3%
Class of 1998 (151)	-	-	-	-	-	4.6%	7.9%
Class of 1999 (144)	-	-	-	-	-	-	2.1%

Figure 8. Measuring membership attrition at the Grand Lodge level, with data from a provincial grand lodge under the U.G.L.E. For example, 194 men became Master Masons in 1993, the "Class of 1993". Of these, 4 or 2.1% dropped out in the first year, 3 more for a total of 3.6% dropped out by the second year, a total of 21 or 10.8% dropped out by the third year, and so on.

2. MEASURING MEMBERSHIP ATTRITION AT THE LODGE LEVEL

When I have spoken to individual lodges on the subject of falling numbers it is often the case that a member of that lodge stands up and says, "It is not like that in my lodge." Later analysis has in fact demonstrated that they were mistaken! Do not be beguiled by such siren voices—analyze your lodge's data!

Because of the much smaller number in any one lodge, it is not possible to undertake the same form of analysis as can be done for a grand lodge, but it is still possible to get some meaningful data out of the records. You will require access to your lodge's membership records and ideally for the past fifty years, but at least twenty years. List each man becoming a mason (ignoring all affiliations because they have past masonic membership elsewhere), and against each

name record the age, date of initiation, date of raising, date of leaving, and current status (demit, NPD, death, still a member). Sadly, this is a repetitive manual task that cannot be avoided and is thus ideal for dark winter evenings.

Split the list into successive five-year time blocks (for example, January 1,1945 till December 31,1949) with a thick black line. Clearly strike out all deaths and (if included) all affiliates. It is now possible to start the calculations and this could include the number of new masons in each five year period, the average age at joining, and length of membership (leaving year minus start year). One can also look at any increase in NPDs over the periods or at the number that never came back for their second and third degrees.

Year	No. Raised	All Leavers	Average years to leaving	% of all Raised who left
1945-49	61	34	15.7	56%
1945-49	76	45	17.4	59%
1950-54	53	34	13.2	64%
1955-59	25	18	12.6	72%
1960-64	15	6	12.0	40%
1965-69	26	17	10.8	65%
1970-74	37	23	8.4	62%
1975-79	27	20	6.5	74%
1980-84	28	8	4.8	29%
1985-89	23			

Figure 8. Measuring membership attrition at the Lodge level, with data from Concord Lodge No. 124 of the Grand Lodge of Alberta. "All Leavers" included demits and NPDs. Note that Leavers for the last period is not known.

Most importantly, by adding up the individual lengths of membership and dividing by the number of such occurrences one can get the average years of membership until resignation for that five-year cohort. This is likely to be the most surprising calculation. Having done it a number of times, I can vouch for the fact that the results will not be obvious until the final few presses on the calculator buttons.

Indicative results are likely to show that in the 1950s the average duration of membership was between fifteen and twenty years, but this likely will have fallen to below ten years around 1975, and will have halved again by around 1990.

Any calculations covering the immediate past five-year period should be treated with caution, and for the five-year period before with thought. The reason being that the figures will appear to indicate a shorter than actual average because they only record those who have left to date. Expect to find that around 50% have left from the cohort where you have ten years of data.

NOTES

1. The exact terminology used for *Leaving Members* does vary. In those Jurisdictions or Constitutions with a strong U.G.L.E. connection, *demit* would be called resignation. It is basically a member leaving voluntarily by the writing of a letter. *NPD*, otherwise called *Exclusion*, is a membership terminated because of non-payment of dues or annual fees.

2. Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York; Simon & Schuster, 2000), pp. 440-44.

3. Paul Bessel, details of the statistics are at <http://bessel.org/natl/stats>

4. S Brent Morris, "A Radical in the East," *A Radical in the East* (Iowa: Research Lodge No. 2,1993).

5. Putnam, p. 438.

6. "Faith's Top of the Pops," *The Guardian*, Society Supplement, p. 9, London, Sept. 27, 2000

7. I thank Paul Bessel for permission to use his data on United States grand lodges and S Brent Morris for further data. The only states for which virtually complete data was available were Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Washington, D.C., Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Tennessee, Virginia, and Wyoming. The data used was that published by the grand lodges themselves in their annual transactions, rather than the annual figures published by the Masonic Service Association, which do not include new members. It should be noted that the grand lodges were only those that had published a full set of data from 1910 to date and that Bessel and Morris could access. No other selection criteria were applied.

8. Only three Australian grand lodges are included. It should be noted that data is not always easily available even if published, the data presented thus reflects the willingness of correspondents around the world to assist in the work. I am grateful to W. Bro. Kent Henderson (G.L. of Victoria data), W. Bro. Peter Verall (G.L. of Western Australia data) and W. Bro. Murray Yaxley (G.L. of Tasmania data). The New Zealand data is from Alan Busfield's "The Final Forty Years of Freemasonry," in *United Masters Lodge No. 167*, vol. 26, no. 12 (June 1986), p. 244

9. Timothy R. R. Richards, "I am who I am," *Freemasonry Today* (England), No. 10, Autumn 1999) P- 32, emphasis added.

10. John L. Belton, "The Missing Master Mason," <http://www.internet.lodge.org.uk/>

11. Unpublished data. The information was drawn from an U.G.L.E. Provincial membership database which had been accumulating data from 1993 and with a membership of around 6,000. It is worth noting that only time and a retention of all data, especially of those members who left enables any accurate calculation of the resignation rate of new masons to be undertaken.

12. The situation in certain countries does vary, and further research is required. The figures in Scandinavia are very stable, but of course they have deliberately chosen to keep the organization small in numbers. In France there are three main grand lodges—Grand Loge Nationale Francaise, Grand Loge de France, and Grand Orient de France – and competition between them for supremacy. Also in all these analyses there has been no consideration given to any changes in Prince Hall masonry.

13. Robert Putnam, pp. 54-55.

14. John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Culture of Contentment* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), p. 2

15. Galbraith, p. 12

16. Galbraith, p. 20

17. It is interesting that the Presidential election of 1928 elected the Republican Hoover with 58.2% of the popular vote and forty-two states, against a Democrat with 40.8% of the vote and winning six Southern states. By 1932 the vote was 57.3% and forty-two states voting for the Democrat Roosevelt leaving his Republican challenger with 36.9% of the vote and wins in only six northeastern states.

18. The National Commission on Civic Renewal, University of Maryland, can be found at [www.puaf.umd.edu/Affiliates/Civic Renewal](http://www.puaf.umd.edu/Affiliates/Civic%20Renewal), with considerable detail on all the factors and weightings that are included in the Index.

19. Hofstede, in Michael Argyle, *Cooperation—The Basis of Sociability* (London; Routledge, 1991). Hofstede undertook a social survey in 40 countries with 116,000 respondents. He calculated "Individualism Indices" for 39 of these countries and among them are the following: U.S.A. 91, Australia 90, Great Britain 89, Canada 80, Netherlands 80, France 71, Ireland 70, Austria 55, Israel 54, Japan 46, Hong Kong 25, Singapore 20, Pakistan 14, with a mean Index Score of 51 over 39 countries.

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