

Mormonism and Freemasonry

by Terry Chateau

THIS SHORT PAPER on the Church of Latter Day Saints and its relationship to Freemasonry is neither complete, nor entirely accurate. For example, the description given of Joseph Smith's death is not borne out by the historical record, and the explanation of Utah Freemasonry's prohibition on Mormon membership is over-emotional. An adequate overview, this paper should only be considered an introduction to a much larger subject.

INTRODUCTION

Mormonism and Freemasonry are so intimately interwoven and interrelated that the two can never be dissociated. Mormonism was born in the throes of the holocaust provoked by the anti-Masonic Morgan Affair of 1826. What I shall attempt to cover is the period from the beginning of Mormonism in the 1820s, with its early Masonic ties, through the social and political upheaval in New York State tied into the so-called Morgan Affair; the establishment and marriage of Freemasonry and Mormonism in Nauvoo Illinois; the assassination of Joseph Smith by members of the Masonic fraternity; the subsequent exodus to Utah by Brigham Young; the rejection of Mormonism by Utah Freemasonry; and finally the coming of universal Freemasonry to Utah.

The seeker of light on the subject of the interface between Freemasonry and Mormonism quickly becomes frustrated. The so called "literature" pertaining to this subject is generally biased, prejudiced, unscholarly but most alarming, is written by individuals without the requisite background of each of the two organizations.

THE SMITH'S CHARACTER AND FREEMASONRY

The Joseph Smith family was known and acknowledged to have been a close-knit one, where strong individual affection and loyalty existed between each of the members. It was a Masonic family which lived by and practiced the estimable and admirable tenets of Freemasonry.

The father, Joseph Smith Sr. was a documented member of the craft in upstate New York. He was raised to the degree of Master Mason May 7, 1818 in Ontario Lodge No. 23 of Canandaigua, New York.

An older son, Hyrum Smith was a member of Mount Moriah Lodge No. 112 at Palmyra, New York. Numerous attempts have been made to prove that Joseph Smith and his family were depraved, degenerate, and disreputable persons. These documented facts, namely, the masonic membership of Joseph Smith Sr. in the Lodge in Canandaigua, and Hyrum's membership in Palmyra's lodge, are of the most significant importance. Being the elite institution it was recognized by the public to be at that time, and their active membership in two of the masonic lodges of the area is convincing evidence of the stature and high esteem the members of the family enjoyed in the eyes and opinions of those who knew them best.

CHURCH ESTABLISHMENT AND THE MORGAN TIE-IN

As touched on previously, the founding of Mormonism, or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, took place under the strikingly peculiar circumstances associated with the turbulent, tenuous atmosphere then gripping west central and up-state New York. This community unrest was primarily due to the vicious anti-masonic furor which was triggered by the controversial disappearance of William Morgan.

A booklet attributed to the vanished William Morgan appeared in Batavia New York in October of 1826 titled Illustrations of Masonry by one of the Fraternity who has devoted thirty years to the subject.

The Morgan booklet was extensively printed and distributed, causing a torrential flood of publicity related to the practices and ceremonies of the Craft. This booklet of lies, insinuations, and half truths was avidly and devouringly read by a people eager to believe the worst about anything they did not understand, especially a so called "secret society".

During this time Joseph Smith Jr. received and recorded a series of visitations by the Angel Moroni and found and translated the golden plates into what is now known as The Book of Mormon. During the third week of March, 1830, The Book of Mormon was offered for sale at Palmyra, New York.

Critics of The Book of Mormon quickly attempted to attribute the mentioning of secret societies in the volume to the influence of the notorious publicity stemming from the Morgan affair.

A number of incidents are recounted in The Book of Mormon concerning secret societies and evil practices indulged in by this type organization.

Understandably, but mistakenly, the general public semantically considered Freemasonry to be the epitome of a secret society and consequently related Mormonism and Freemasonry at the same wellspring.

The inaccurate writings of numerous prejudiced and emotional authors helped to further confuse the issue. Hundreds of pieces of literature began to appear very quickly with the common theme claiming that the contents of the recently translated Mormon scripture had been influenced by the Morgan excitement.

The rise of sentiment for the anti-masonic party and all the publicity from stage presentations mocking the Craft was further fueled by the public claims that Joseph Smith Jr. had used masonic work to produce The Book of Mormon.

The public lumped them into the same basket and with the masonic background of the Smiths, Mormonism and Freemasonry became so interwoven in the public's mind as to be one and the same.

SIDE NOTE ON MORGAN'S WIFE

If the death of William Morgan was the fuel that sparked the great anti-masonic movement then the actions of his wife was the breath that fanned the flames.

This celebrated woman who, like Niobe, was all tears and affliction whose hand was ever held forth to receive contributions from the sympathetic anti-masons, who vowed eternal widowhood, pains and penance - remarried.

On November 23, 1830, Lucinda Morgan married George W. Harris, a freemason, converted to Mormonism, and moved to Nauvoo.

NAUVOO AND MASONRY

Much of the historical account dealing with the introduction of Freemasonry among the Mormons in Illinois and Iowa was and has been intentionally omitted and or distorted by both freemasons and Mormons. Let us start with the marriage of Mormonism and Freemasonry.

On April 6 1840 the present Grand Lodge of Illinois was formed by the Mormon Patriarch-Judge and General James Adams.

An interesting side note is that the Mormon Church was founded on April 6th 1830, The Nauvoo Temple was dedicated on April 6th and the Mormon Church teaches that the birth of Christ actually was April 6th (though they celebrate it on December 25th)

The early years of the Grand Lodge were fraught with great difficulty and not all lodges within the state joined it until the middle of the 1840s. Under the Grand Mastership of a complex and colorful individual, named Abraham Jonas, and a Deputy Grand Master equally "remarkable" named James Adams, the new Grand Lodge engaged in some unusual transactions with the Mormons of Nauvoo. The motives and thinking of the men concerned in these unusual transactions have been a standing puzzle to masonic scholars throughout the years. It is certainly one of the most devious and controversial performances in which American Freemasonry has ever engaged.

It is my personal, considered opinion that it took an inordinate amount of persuasion on the part of the two self-serving opportunistic partisan politicians, Deputy Grand Master Adams and Grand Master Jonas, to induce Joseph Smith to sanction the introduction of Freemasonry in Nauvoo. They planned on treating it as an elitist group open only to the selected few but Joseph Smith insisted that it be open to every holder of the Mormon Priesthood, who had the interest to petition for admittance into Masonry. The sole exception would be the petitioner who had exceptionally negative qualities, known and acknowledged as such. In other words Joseph Smith insisted that Nauvoo Lodge be an all-inclusive lodge.

Nauvoo had three lodges and Iowa had two; the five collectively being identified as the "Mormon Lodges". Nauvoo compiled a total membership of 1550 Masons. A conservative estimate of the membership of the other four lodges suggests that the total of the five lodges may have exceed 2,000 Masons.

The minutes of Nauvoo Lodge for Tuesday March 15, 1842 shows that "Grand Master Abraham Jonas (Illinois Grand Master) opened the Lodge in the 3rd degree of Masonry" and conducted a public installation of Nauvoo Lodge "at the grove near the Temple". The minutes then go on to show that Both Joseph Smith Jr. and Sidney Rigdon "were duly initiated Entered Apprentice Masons" during the day. The record for Wednesday, March 16 ceremonies again lists the two candidates and shows that they were made Fellowcraft and Masons at sight.

The first five Presidents of the Church, Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and Lorenzo Snow, were all made Masons in Nauvoo Lodge. Also practically every member of the Hierarchy was or became a freemason shortly after the Prophet was raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason.

With the marked and well known exception of the justly famous Lodge of Nine Sisters at Paris, France, with its almost incredible roster of French immortals, it is extremely doubtful if any Lodge in the history of Freemasonry has met, let alone exceeded, the record of Nauvoo Lodge in the number of members whose memory is perpetuated in ageless bronze or masterful portraiture.

After Freemasonry was introduced to Nauvoo the Lodge met in the upper room of Joseph Smith's general store while the new masonic hall was being built. This was dedicated by Hyrum Smith April 5, 1844 and used by the church and community for many community activities.

It is worth noting that in the restoration of Nauvoo the Mormon Church has restored the building and calls it "The Cultural Hall-Masonic Hall".

An interesting side note on the influence that Freemasonry had in the life of the Mormons is the fact that the weather vane placed on the Nauvoo temple depicted an angel in his priestly robes with the Book of Mormon in one hand and a trumpet in the other. The angel is wearing a cap on his head and above him are a square and compass.

THE DEATH OF THE SMITHS

Religious antagonism and physical conflict increased and finally came to a head with the bloody murders of Joseph and his brother Hyrum when they were shot to death June 27, 1844.

Joseph Smith was a freemason in good standing of Nauvoo Lodge while Hyrum was the incumbent Worshipful Master of the lodge.

On the morning of June 27, 1844 the citizens of Warsaw held a meeting and adopted a resolution to proceed to Nauvoo and exterminate the city and its people!

In pursuance to the resolution Col. Levi Williams called together his regiment of militia and marched for Carthage where the Smiths had surrendered themselves upon the pledge of the Governor for their safety.

They were met on the road with an order from the Governor disbanding the regiment. Colonel Williams read the order and called for volunteers. Capt. Mark Aldrich spoke in favor and Capt. Thomas C. Sharp

advised the troops to march to Carthage. Capt. Jacob C. Davis who was then State Senator refrained from speaking but went with the mob and was present at the assassination. About 150 of the rank and file blacked their faces with mud and gunpowder. Arrangements were made for the guards at the jail to charge their guns with blanks which they would fire at the disguised men when they assailed the jail. This plan was carried out and the Smiths and their visitors, John Taylor and Willard Richards threw themselves against the door to prevent the mob from entering. Shots were fired thru the door killing Hyrum instantly and wounding Taylor.

Joseph Smith fired his pistol, which had been smuggled to him, wounding four of his assassins. Having exhausted his weapon, and the mob still trying to break down the door, he attempted to escape by jumping from the window but was stunned by the two story fall when he hit the ground. Someone picked him up and placed him against a well curb. Joseph recognizing Masons in the mob cried out "Oh Lord, My God---" with his words being cut of by a volley of musket balls.

In order to show their approval of the murders, Warsaw Lodge, at their next meeting, elected Mark Aldrich as Worshipful Master and received the petitions of Levi Williams, Thomas C. Sharp and Jacob Davis, all who were under indictment of the murder.

Warsaw Lodge eventually lost its charter but not because of its support for the murders.

EXODUS TO THE WEST

When the first Mormon pioneer company entered the Salt Lake Valley on July 24th, 1847, under Brigham Young's leadership, a significant body of Masons entered with him. As of that date the full Mormon Hierarchy was comprised of Masons.

A review of the 143 men entering the valley at this time shows how wide spread Masonry had become among the Mormons.

Three of the group were black slaves, 16 were young men not yet of age which leaves 124 who might possibly have been of the Craft. Of these there were 10 whose age was not known, who with 38 others are not known to have been Masons. This means that 76 of the possible 124 left or 61% were documented members of the Craft.

Brigham Young knowing both Mormonism and Freemasonry in depth fully realized that nothing constructive or positive could result from a series of continuing exchanges over the years judiciously instituted the inflexible policy that the Mormon Church had nothing to say publicly regarding Freemasonry.

This position has been steadfastly and discretely adhered to for almost a century and a half, with very few exceptions. There is ample evidence that Brigham Young took his Masonry seriously and gave studious attention to its meaning and significance. This is evidenced in the many photos and paintings showing Brigham Young wearing his Masonic pins. It should be acknowledged that the vast majority of the Mormon Masons took their Masonic Obligations most seriously and deeply to heart.

Great numbers were devoted and dedicated Masons who truly loved the Order. Freemasonry among Mormons was not merely a fraternity nor a shallow and trivial fraternal experience; it was what it really is - a genuine brotherhood. Their lodge meetings were serious convocations entirely devoid of jovial lightheartedness and the strenuous, physical horseplay which characterized most frontier lodges. Their time and attention were fully occupied with the heavy demands of degree work.

The Mormons knew who the principals were in the killing of Hyrum and Joseph. They were also well informed as to who the individual Masons were who participated in the murders. Significantly, the Mormons also knew and realized the vital distinction between individual Masons acting solely on their own initiative and the fact that the Masonic Order has in no sense participated as an organization. Brigham Young was especially cognizant of the fact that every organization has regrettable examples of members who are unable to measure up to the tenets and admonitions of the association.

The above factors are but some of the numerous reasons which prompted Brigham young to declare a ban of silence on the Mormon experience with Freemasonry.

SYMBOLISM COMMON TO BOTH MORMONS AND MASONS AND WHY.

In this day when men seek the roots of Masonry and frown on the old theory of it having it's start in King Solomon's Temple they might find it strange that one of the world's major religions that was once scorned by some Masons is a major supporter of this Idea.

The rituals and symbolism of the Mormon church are claimed, by revelation, to come from the rituals of King Solomon's temple and indeed a study of the Holy Scriptures brings many of these symbols to light and give support for the beginnings of our Craft.

The Beehive is an emblem of Industry and recommends the practice of that virtue. Joseph Smith adopted the Beehive as the church and community symbol and Brigham Young added it to his personal seal.

In Utah Brigham Young erected a large home surmounted by a gilded beehive. This came to be known as the Beehive house, also being the home of, at one time, 13 of his wives. I guess it might even have resembled one. Several of the Temples display the beehive prominently on both their interiors and exteriors.

It is the sole heraldic device on the shield of the State Seal and Flag as well as the Seals of the University of Utah and Brigham Young University. Three beehives are the sole adornments of the tabernacle podium and the immense beehive atop the Old Hotel Utah overlooks the valley. The word beehive and Desert are used in the area's businesses so extensively that the native-born scarcely notes them. Even the sidewalks are adorned with a tile pattern of the honey comb.

On the Temple itself you will see inscribed several symbolic items, along with the beehive you will find the Sun, Moon, Stars (shaped like the O.E.S. star), the all-seeing eye and the clasped hands. Across the street on the Relief Society building is prominently displayed a sheaf of Wheat.

This close resemblance to our craft was used by Utah Freemasonry for years as one of the reasons to bar Mormons for becoming Masons.

UNIVERSAL MASONRY VERSUS UTAH MASONRY

Freemasonry supposedly came to Utah on January 16, 1872 when the Grand Lodge of Utah was organized. This was an openly proclaimed and vigorously active anti-mormon organization. It is not necessary to go into detail but simply state that shortly thereafter this uncivil, un-masonic organization issued the untrue and dishonest assertion that the Mormon Temple Ceremony had been "taken" "borrowed" or "stolen" from the Masonic Lodge.

Such alleged claims were published by the Grand Lodge and kept alive in every manner possible until January 31, 1984. On that date the Grand Lodge of Utah repealed its long standing anti-Mormon resolution.

As originally formulated, the false claim was made that the Mormon Temple Ceremony was so Masonic in structure that the Mormon Church was actually practising clandestine Masonry.

It is essentially on this alleged charge of being clandestine that the Grand Lodge of Utah publicly assumed and announced it's anti-Mormon stance.

This repealing action tacitly invalidated and repudiated the claim that the Grand Lodge had fostered for decades and at long last Utah Masonry came into line with the true spirit and meaning of Universal Masonry and joined truly the international order of Freemasonry as a related jurisdiction wherein true Masonry was finally acknowledged and practiced.

Freemasonry and Mormonism; the former an ancient proponent of Brotherhood; the latter offering the potential of Christian Brotherhood. To an Idealist like me you would believe that each organization would reach to the other in a joint endeavor to be the guidepost of mankind.

By its action of January 31, 1984, the Grand Lodge of Utah with the support of universal Freemasonry stretched forth the hand of fellowship to end the long standing contention it had imposed and started a new era of light in Utah.

The above represents about five years of research on my part and with much help from Brother Merv Hogan and Brother Olds both of whom Freemasonry owes much to for their love, care, concern and dedication to the Craft.