

AN HISTORICAL OUTLINE OF FREEMASONS ON THE INTERNET

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VW Bro Trevor W. McKeown's thirty years in communications administration and twenty-eight in Freemasonry are put to good use in his many responsibilities for the Grand Lodge of British

Columbia and Yukon. Online since 1987,¹ he has edited their Grand Lodge Masonic Bulletin for the last ten years, and his handiwork can be seen in their Grand Lodge website, freemasonry.bcy.ca – now in its thirteenth year. He has been curator of their library and archives for almost as long, and has served as Grand Historian since 2006.

As a net is made up of a series of ties, so everything in this world is connected by a series of ties. If anyone thinks that the mesh of a net is an independent, isolated thing, he is mistaken. It is called a net because it is made up of a series of interconnected meshes, and each mesh has its place and responsibility in relation to other meshes.²

Siddhārtha Gautama

Less an history than a chronology, less a chronology than a few notes, this paper can be viewed as an early attempt to outline what in time may become a proper history. If there is a story to be told about freemasons involved in inventing what we now term the Internet, it is not mine to tell. My story is about a few freemasons who used the Internet during its early years. For many reasons these notes are restricted to English-speaking and regular Freemasonry.

One theme that stands out is the frustrating lack of documentation for something that exists mainly as text files. In the headlong rush from punch cards and tape drives to 9 inch floppies, to 3 1/2 inch floppies, to zip disks, compact disks, flash keys and ever-larger hard drives, many files have been not so much lost as left behind. The Internet also creates certain challenges to the usual questions of historiography. In the main I will be dealing with primary or secondary sources. Yet these sources are electronic and not hard documents. I quote from, and rely on, personal email messages, trusting in the stories they tell, often unable to corroborate the events.³

¹The author first used MacTerminal and a 1200 baud Apple modem in the autumn of 1987 and signed on to his first email account on 4 February 1994. The first image file he downloaded from an FTP site, masonry.GIF, was discovered to be a close-up photograph of a mortared stone wall. The second file was a 1988 transcript of a complete three degree ritual worked in Australia. On 13 June 1994 he posted an Illuminati FAQ into the Usenet newsgroup alt.illuminati. Creating the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon's website in 1995, today at over 2800 pages, it is perhaps the Internet's largest repository of factual responses to anti-masonry and information on Freemasonry's appearance in fiction and popular culture.

²Although quoted by Michael Hauben and Ronda Hauben (see next), and frequently ascribed online to 'Buddha', an actual citation to the Tripitāka is not available.

³In the main a product of Internet sources, this paper should itself be viewed as an artefact of the Internet, with all the resultant incertitude of accuracy and credibility that such a perspective implies. Of all the many names found in this paper, the author can vouch for the real-world existence of only Morris, Belton, Merk, and Bennie; the rest are images and text, seen only on a computer monitor.

THE INTERNET

The Internet is far more than the World Wide Web. With the first bulletin board dating from 1978,⁴ the Internet, as a public forum, has been with us for thirty years. Before the Internet there was ARPANet, DARPA net, and other networks. But these do not really concern us, unless someone, while backing up an old tape-drive, unearths a text message perhaps inviting the recipient to a lodge meeting.⁵ The earliest MUDs (Multi-User Dimension) appeared in 1977, running on various local systems, and predominantly used by players of adventure or 'Dungeons and Dragons' games. They also provided chat rooms. MUDs are mentioned here for two reasons. First, because MUDs introduced a generation to computer communications, and second, MUDs later evolved

⁴ See: Michael Hauben, Ronda Hauben, *Netizens: On the History and Impact of Usenet and the Internet*, (Wiley-IEEE Computer Society Press, 1997); Adam Gaffin, *EFF's (Extended) Guide to the Internet*, (Electronic Frontier Foundation, Version 2.3, September 1994). Also see: communication.ucsd.edu/bjones/Usenet.Hist/index.html accessed 2008/02/02.

⁵ The term 'Internet' was adopted in December 1974. Setting aside the first node on ARPANet established at the University of California on 2 September 1969 as a project of the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA), the public use of the Internet can be dated from 16 February 1978, when the Chicago Bulletin Board Systems (CBBS) went online in Chicago, although a notable precursor to the public bulletin board system was Community Memory, started in 1972 in Berkeley, California, using hardwired terminals located in neighbourhoods. It was in 1979 that Columbus Ohio-based Compu-Serve (later CompuServe) introduced email to its subscribers, and Usenet was created at Duke University. Another similar network was BITnet, a cooperative network founded in 1981 at the City University of New York and Yale University. Both BITnet and Usenet (User's Network) resembled bulletin board systems (BBS) in most respects, and are the precursor to the various web fora which are widely used today. One of a number of other applications allowing computer users to participate in discussion channels was Internet Relay Chat (IRC), created by Jarkko Oikarinen in late August 1988 as a form of synchronous conferencing. See: Peter H. Salus, *Casting the Net, from ARPANET to Internet and beyond* (Reading, Mass: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co, 1995), p. 55; Katie Hafner and Matthew Lyon, *Where Wizards Stay Up Late: The Origins of the Internet* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), p. 50. Also see: bbsdocumentary.com accessed 2006/11/30; Andrew S. Tanenbaum, *Upper Saddle River, NJ: Computer Networks* (Prentice Hall, 1996). The first commercial domain under the Domain Name System (DNS) designed in November 1983, symbolics.com, was registered on 15 March 1985. The next month a flurry of universities registered educational domains on 24 April 1985. Prior to this, perhaps 250 computer servers identified themselves with a flat name such as dec-marlboro (source of the first Internet spam message on 3 May 1978). Although there had been earlier browsers such as John Bottoms' Silversmith, created in 1987; Lynx, developed at the University of Kansas in 1992 as a hypertext browser; and others—the web can be dated from September 1993 with the release of Mosaic Version 1.0—it wasn't until the launch of Windows 95 and the web browser, Internet Explorer 1.0, on 24 August 1995 that the web became known to a wider audience of Windows users. The development of Tim Berners-Lee's WorldWideWeb in 1990, the first webpage in late 1990 and other browsers such as Peter Wei's Viola had little impact outside the academic community. The Internet Society has compiled much history of the Internet at isoc.org/internet/history accessed 2006/12/08.

into a level of computer-based virtual communities such as *Second Life*, an aspect of the web addressed later in this paper.

Rather than describe the technology of the Internet, a level of knowledge on the reader's part will be assumed: computers were connected to other computers through telephone lines. The rest is detail.⁶

PIONEERS

Those freemasons working in the computer field during the 1960s and 1970s were, of course, among the first to hear about what Electronic Frontier Foundation founder John Perry Barlow later dubbed 'cyberspace'. The term, e-m@son, originally 'eMason', wasn't coined by Gordon Charlton until 1995, but freemasons, discussing and practising Freemasonry, had been online for years. Only a few will be noted here.

Joining Freemasonry in 1979, at the age of twenty-one, Ron Blaisdell worked using ARPAnet in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and Gopher networks in the early 1990s.

Blaisdell's first gopher site with hypertext markup language (html) support, going live in February 1993, was a masonic *Frequently Asked Questions* file (FAQ) developed by members of the CompuServe Masonry Forum. First uploaded in April 1994, his website rust.net/~ronb/ may qualify as the first masonic website.⁷ He registered hiram.net in 1995 and migrated his website but, like so many others, lost his domain when the site registrar Network Solutions initiated onerous registration fees in September 1995. Unlike so many others, he was able to reclaim his domain on 9 September 1998.⁸ Creating the Michigan masonic mailing list in 1994⁹—currently with over 500 members—and uploading the Grand Lodge of Michigan's first website in 1996, he currently hosts some 125 masonic websites.

⁶ A few technical notes: Telnet (TELEtype NETwork), developed in 1969, is a network protocol allowing file transfer between computers; Kermit, developed at Columbia University in 1981, is a computer file transfer/management protocol and a set of communications software tools; Archie, written in 1990 and considered to be the first Internet search engine, is a tool for indexing File Transfer Protocol (FTP) archives; Gopher, released by the University of Minnesota in 1991, is an improved form of Anonymous FTP. There are many others.

⁷ Email from Ron Blaisdell, 5 June 2007.

⁸ All registration dates, unless otherwise noted, are taken from internic.net/whois.html, uwhois.com or national registrars.

⁹ Like many mailing lists, it began by manually sending an email to multiple addresses; then as an email 'drop box' where an administrator kept a text file of email addresses; then upgraded to Majordomo, a proprietary mailing list manager (MLM) developed in 1992; then to eGroups.com, an email list management web site originally started in January 1997—later acquired by YahooGroups in 1999.

Styling it the e-m@son webzine, Rick Kasparek, in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, created freemasonry.org in November 1995, calling it the *Great Light of the World Wide Web* or 'GLOWWW'.¹⁰ It was later administered by Blaisdell who assisted Kasparek in transferring the domain name to the Philalethes Society in 1997. He continues to administer the guest book, called the 'Welcome Wall'—where visitors can add their names and comments—and update *E-M@son Links*. Migrated to hiram.net on 9 September 1998, and now found at links.hiram.net, *E-M@son Links* currently provides over 2,000 links to masonic sites.

In response to the growing presence of freemasons online, Rick Kasparek, author of 'The Eminent Arrival of the Masonic Internet',¹¹ and Ron Blaisdell, also started the Operative Web Masons' Guild (OWMG) in 1996. Intended as a resource for masonic webmasters, the Guild is currently represented at mastermason.com and owmg.org but is considered inactive.

Dr Peter G. Trei came online in late 1978, registering his first proper account in early 1979 on one of the DEC-20s at Columbia University. Joining Freemasonry in 1988, within a year he had created the *Masonic Digest*, with Volume 1 : Issue 1, released on 16 November 1989.¹²

A career member of the US Navy, David Allen Stites of El Cajon, California had used MilNet in its early days, but it was not until after he retired that he acquired his first dial-up Internet account in January 1988. In 1991 he set up a section of the public File Transfer Protocol (FTP) server on his personal Internet Service Provider (ISP) to make selected masonic-related texts available under the auspices of the Southern California Research Lodge. His role in creating MasNet is detailed later.¹³

One of the first masonic leaders to recognize the potential for Freemasonry was Allen E. Roberts who wrote in 1983: 'Computers are in! Everywhere we turn we're finding them.... They aren't just for business any more... Computer clubs are booming. Computer bulletin boards are located all over the country—and world. Has the time arrived for the freemasons of the country to begin linking their computers, through modems,

¹⁰ First hosted on Rick Kasparek's gryffin.com some six months prior: gryffin.com/80/glowww; gryffin.com/mu.

¹¹ '...the dawn of this new technology has long since passed and we are, in fact, behind the curve on applying it to our benefit.' Rick Kasparek, 'The Eminent [*sic*] Arrival of The Masonic Internet,' *The Philalethes Magazine*, December 1996.

¹² skepticfiles.org/cp002/index.htm accessed 2006/10/05.

¹³ US Navy Naval Tactical Data Systems Programmer, W. Bro David Allen Stites, Sr. (b. 1945/09/06) was initiated in San Diego Lodge No. 35, California, on 12 August 1988 and joined the Southern California Research Lodge (SCRL) early the following year. He served as Master of Lakeside Lodge No. 760, El Cajon, California, in 1998.

all over the country? Is it time to consider a Masonic bulletin board? ... Or should Freemasonry ignore this tremendous technological breakthrough as it has so many others?¹⁴

Gurnee K. Bridgman also recognized the Internet's potential and said so in articles published in the November 1994 and May 1995 editions of *The Scottish Rite Journal*. Reflecting the thinking of many contemporaries, he wrote "The new "electronic frontier" is the future of masonic communication."¹⁵

Many names will be mentioned elsewhere in these notes. Many names will not be mentioned, either due to space constraints or the author's ignorance. Even in the early days the Internet was a large place, and there were many 'communities' that were barely aware of each other. There is opportunity for much research.

E M A I L

Before anything else, there was email.¹⁶ Although there were individual freemasons¹⁷ who had access to email in the 1960s and 1970s, it was not until the introduction of the telephone modem in 1977, bulletin board software in 1978, and commercial email and Usenet (see below) in 1979, that masonic conversation truly became possible. The difference between a bulletin board and a mailing list is defined more by the software used than by the content, so the order of the following list is somewhat arbitrary.

¹⁴ RW Bro Allen E. Roberts (1917/10/1-1997/03/13), "Through Masonic Windows," *The Philalethes Magazine*, 36.5 (October 1983), back cover. He is known to have posted into the CompuServe Masonic Forum at least as early as 8 December 1993: goanchor.com/AllenE.Roberts.htm accessed 2006/11/29.

¹⁵ "Masonic Cyberspace Phase 2," *Scottish Rite Journal of Freemasonry, Southern Jurisdiction, USA*, vol. 104, no. 5 May 1995. Also see: "Masonic Cyberspace," *Scottish Rite Journal of Freemasonry, Southern Jurisdiction, USA*, November, 1994. Retired marketer W Bro Gurnee K. Bridgman, a member of Poynette Lodge No. 173, Poynette, Wisconsin, and Sunrise Lodge No. 130, Fargo, North Dakota, is also a ham radio operator.

¹⁶ "Email was quickly extended to become network email, allowing users to pass messages between different computers by at least 1966 (it is possible the SAGE system had something similar some time before)." "Ray Tomlinson initiated the use of the @ sign to separate the names of the user and their machine in 1971." See: en.wikipedia.org accessed 2007/02/13; Tom Van Vleck interview by Peter Salus, Matrix News, University of West Virginia, 1998: mids.org/mn. Also see: multicians.org/thvv/mail-history.html accessed 2007/01/29.

¹⁷ Email from Michael Segall, To: philalethes@yahoogroups.com 14 January 2007. As an example, in 1966 Michael Segall worked on PROFS, the internal IBM network which preceded ARPAnet. In 1988 he purchased his first personal computer, joined Compu-Serve, briefly assisted as a sysop (System Operator) for the Masonic Forum, and, by long-distance telephone calls, connected with Preston Burner's Hiram's Oasis BBS.

BULLETIN BOARD SYSTEMS (BBS)

Using direct telephone dial-up connexions, bulletin boards originally provided the facility to exchange electronic messages and later, with the exponential growth of hard drive storage capacity, the ability to upload—and more importantly, download—text and image files. Text files of a masonic nature also found their way onto many early non-masonic bulletin boards.¹⁸

Hiram's Oasis

Credited as the first masonic bulletin board,¹⁹ Preston Burner's *Hiram's Oasis* is also styled the Mother Masonic Bulletin Board. The board was established on one of the Chicago Bulletin Board Systems (CBBS)²⁰ by Preston Burner in Vienna, Virginia, on 11 November 1987 for Kena Temple Shrine in Merrifield, Virginia. Amidst the conversation, Burner encouraged his participants to upload educational papers, talks and articles. He had compiled 541 compressed directories of several thousand masonic text files and images—ranging from series of the *Short Talk Bulletin* to less than accurate expositions on the masonic significance of the US dollar bill—when they were migrated to the web by William J. Baumbach II on 8 September 1997. Currently there are over 9000 files available on the present home of *Hiram's Oasis*, kena.org/hirams.

The web made the BBS obsolete and within a year or two of moving the files, Burner turned off the bulletin board.²¹ At the time considered one of the largest electronic col-

¹⁸ Non-mason Jason Scott, a computer historian (and proprietor of the textfiles.com history site), maintains a large archive of bulletin board artefacts including, under the category of 'conspiracy', the text of a leaflet published by the Board of General Purposes of the United Grand Lodge of England in 1987, J. Edward Decker's 'Freemasonry: Satan's Door to America?', the Revd Harmon R. Taylor's 'A Grand Chaplain Speaks Out', excerpts from Ellic Howe's 'Fringe Masonry In England', and Manly P. Hall's 'The Lost Keys Of Freemasonry'.

¹⁹ Email from Joseph A. Everette, 4 February 2008. With ten year's computer experience, and administering seven local masonic bulletin boards at the time, RW Bro Joseph A. Everette, initiated into J. Dewy Hawkins Lodge 331, Oakland Park, Florida in 1980, reports creating the Dayton, Ohio, Masonic BBS List in the autumn of 1982 with a Tandy HD1200 and a 300 baud modem. Unfortunately he has no files from his bulletin board as the 'media went bad.' A list of 513 Area Code BBSs dating to 1982 includes Everette's Antioch Shrine, Ohio Masonic BBS created in 1984 : bbslist.textfiles.com/513/oldschool.html accessed 2007/11/25.

²⁰ Email from Ron Blaisdell, 5 June 2007. The Chicago Bulletin Board System utilized software that allows users to connect to the computer system on which the software was installed. By using a modem, anyone else who knew the phone number of these computers could connect to them, leave messages, and send and receive files. One of the larger collections of early Bulletin Board files is textfiles.com, where, under the occult listing, are stored twenty-three files of a masonic theme.

²¹ Originally run on a 386 clone with 280MB HD, using RBBS software. kena.org/hirams/history.htm

lections of texts and images, Burner continued to provide masonic information and files for the *Hiram's Oasis* website up until his death on 10 May 2000.²²

'Much of this material from Bro Burner's BBS, *Hiram's Oasis*, found its way to Australia more cheaply than via trans-pacific telephone calls—on computer disks, by mail—and some was published by the South Australian Lodge of Research in its newsletter, *Gleanings*.²³

Global Fraternal Network

With the full support of the Grand Lodge of New York, the *Global Fraternal Network* (GFN) was established in 1994 by Richard A. Newman and Jean Rene van Geuns when they developed 'Virtual Internet Lodge No. 1'—a password protected website—although a domain was not registered and uploaded until 1996.²⁴ Starting in 1993 with a bulletin board of about 58 participants, thirteen years later the GFN reported more than 17,000 members.²⁵ By November 2007 their newsletter announced 'a special meeting to discuss the decline of the GFN,' noting a diminishing interest on both the chat forum and the trestleboard.

MasNet

A loose, and ever-changing, collection of bulletin boards, *MasNet* was created by David A. Stites in 1992. Through FidoNet, Stites had discovered a number of bulletin boards such as Preston Burner's *Hiram's Oasis* in Virginia and George Helmer's *Magna Borealis Lux*, in Edmonton. Inspired by their example, late in December 1991 he and Bill Johnson, a Missouri freemason stationed in San Diego, created a set of masonic-related echos which Stites named *MasNet*. After consulting with the Grand Secretary of California, VW Bro John L. Cooper III, and gaining sponsorship from the Southern California

accessed 2006/12/07.

²² Retired carpenter W Bro Preston Eugene Burner (1927/02/23-2000/05/10) was raised 11 June 1952. Email from William J. Baumbach II, 1 December 2006; email from Ronald D. Merk, 13 December 2006. See bessel.org/preston.htm accessed 2007/10/09.

²³ Richard K. Thompson, *Havashim* (Williamstown, Victoria, Australia: Australian & New Zealand Masonic Research Council, Issue 15 July 2000), 6-9.

²⁴ RW Bro Richard A. Newman of New Jersey and RW Bro Jean Rene van Geuns of New York registered masonic-network.com on 26 June 1996. Newman was initiated in 1962 and van Geuns was initiated in 1974, both in New York. Both served as District Deputy Grand Masters of the Grand Lodge of New York in 1992-94.

²⁵ Editorial GFN Cyber Mason Volume 1, Number 5, July 2006. 'During the last 13 years, from 1993 until 2006, in excess of 17,000 Brethren have applied and registered as members. 1,500 Brethren have filled out their Masonic data on the Membership Roster. Of those 1,500 Members, about 500 are active.' Archived at geocities.com/gfn_news accessed 2007/11/21.

Research Lodge (SCRL), Stites created *Hiram's Valley* BBS in July 1992. After first connecting with Bill Johnson's bulletin board to test the system, in August 1992 *MasNet* became active with the addition of Dennis Littlefield's *The Widow's Son* BBS in Sunrise, Florida. By year's end some ten bulletin board systems were connected.

Sometime around 1995 the hub was moved to W Bro Max Shafer's *The Ninth Arch* BBS in Millington, Tennessee, thus minimizing long-distance telephone costs. Before *MasNet* was shut down in 1997 or 1998, it had spread across North America and included at least two bulletin boards in the United Kingdom.²⁶ *MasNet* was sometimes referred to as *MasNet!*, perhaps unconsciously lifting the bang from Ron Boutwell's *FMNet!* (see below). The network ranged geographically from Allan Rice's *The Rice Paddy*, in North Pole, Alaska (using a Macintosh SE), to *The Harmony Board* in Edinburgh, Scotland; from Roger Johnson's *Hiram's Middle Chamber* in Ontario to Doug Huskins's *Grand Lodge of CA* BBS. One extant list of sixteen masonic boards included twelve from across the US and four from Canada. Although invited, *Hiram's Oasis* was never part of *MasNet*. At its highest traffic level, *MasNet* generated some 50 to 70 messages a day.

Every BBS has a story to tell—too many to include here. Ron Merk,²⁷ establishing the *Victoria Masonic Bulletin Board* on 1 June 1994 in Victoria, British Columbia, recalls 120 users on his BBS. In a PowerPoint presentation created in January 1995, Merk noted 'BBSs are known as the lodges that never close.' He stressed the value of email and bulletin boards but made no mention of the web.

At the time there were at least thirty-five boards linked to *MasNet*. Suffice to say that most, if not all, were labours of love requiring an outlay of personal funds for equipment and long distance telephone charges, as well as a considerable investment of time. The fun and excitement of participating in a free-ranging and open-ended discussion group is apparent in the text files that have survived.

Bulletin boards also provided both a means and a motivation to transcribe old masonic writings into text files. George Helmer²⁸ established *Magna Borealis Lux* in

²⁶ Email from David A. Stites, 2 March 2008.

²⁷ W Bro Ronald D. Merk (b. 1950/05/07) joined Vancouver & Quadra Lodge No. 2, Victoria, BC on 6 January 1993.

²⁸ W Bro George Leonard Helmer (1955/01/01-2002/02/18) joined Norwood Lodge No. 90, Edmonton, Alberta on 20 March 1990 and served as Master for 1996-1997. In testimony to his untiring zeal for scanning old masonic texts, he was named to the Masonic Brotherhood of the Blue-Forget-Me-Not. Helmer was named a Fellow of the Philalethes Society after a three-year labour compiling text files of the first fifty years of *The Philalethes Magazine*. He scanned the complete *The Builder* 1915-1930, donating the collection to the Masonic Leadership Center. 'His last project, the status of which is still uncertain, was his scanning of *The Master Mason* which was published from 1924 to 1930. We hope that this information can be found, and preserved for the Craft.' From an anonymous eulogy to George L. Helmer delivered during an online Lodge of Sorrow organized by Betty Langenberg in the Netherlands, 16 March 2002, posted by

Edmonton, Alberta in 1991, and proceeded to convert many documents to text, while David A. Stites's FTP site benefited from texts posted on his *Hiram's Valley* BBS. Many files later found their way to Preston Burner's *Hiram's Oasis*.

MAILING LISTS

There are two types of mailing lists: the first is simply a list of recipients for newsletters, periodicals or advertising, either through the postal system or online. The second type allows members to post their own messages which are broadcast to all of the other mailing list members. Examples of the first type, also styled 'e-Zines', would be Hugh Young's *One more time, please*²⁹ and Gordon Charlton's *Masonry Universal*...³⁰ There have been, and are, many mailing lists for freemasons, ranging from community or jurisdiction-based lists to lists for the masonic family as a whole, or individual groups such as DeMolay or Eastern Star.³¹

The earliest archived post about Freemasonry into a mailing list was not into a masonic list but into *New Age Digest*,³² on 14 December 1984. The topic was 'overt government persecution of Masonic, Wiccan, and other 'occult' groups in Europe.'

RW Bro Bruno V. Gazzo, Editor, *Pietre-Stones Review of Freemasonry*, lnx.freemasons-freemasonry.com/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?p=601& accessed 2006/11/02.

²⁹ Retired Calgary Police Inspector, MW Bro Hugh Young (b. 1944/11/14) Grand Master of Alberta 1997-1998 and Charter Master of Internet Lodge of Research, Grand Lodge of Alberta, got online in 1992. See linshaw.com/omtp/ accessed 2008/03/06.

³⁰ Emails from Gordon Charleton, 23 November 2006, 28 January 2008. Charlton got online in November 1994: 'There were rumours amongst UK Masons online that their activities were disapproved of by the powers that be, and that in some unspecified way being on-line would be detrimental to one's masonic standing. I was unconvinced by these rumours, but it seemed prudent to ensure that my absence would be noticed. Publishing an eZine seemed a very positive way of doing that, and a way to give something back to the online community of freemasons.' Issues are archived at internet.lodge.org.uk/library/universal.php.

³¹ Last updated in 1999, Wall/Spring Lake Lodge No. 73, New Jersey uploaded one list that included twelve such mailing lists. members.tripod.com/~wsl73/masmail.txt accessed 2007/11/03. Currently at besel.org/mascomp.htm, Paul Bessel has compiled a list of 77 mailing lists ranging from state or rite specific lists to ones intended for general masonic topics. Others include Granville Canard's Virginia Masonic Information Net, created 7 April 1997.

³² Unrelated to the Scottish Rite magazine. From: mcvax!vu44!botter!klipper!biep@seismo.ARPA. Date: Fri, 14 Dec 84 10:11:47 -0100. Subject: European Masonic Groups. New Age Digest #4. Moderator: Tim.Maroney@CMU-CS-K.ARPA (uucp: seismo!cmu-cs-k!tim). Sat, Jan 12 17:52:08 EST 1985. skeptical-files.org/mys4/newage4d.htm accessed 2006/12/06.

bit.listserv.freemasonry

As a test run, Ron Boutwell³⁵ moderated a Bitnet feed³⁴ called FMnet! sometime in 1993.³⁵ He later reported an active participation of over 200 within the first two weeks and within six weeks the number had almost doubled. On 9 July 1994 Boutwell announced that the FidoNet³⁶ Freemasonry echo had been merged with FMnet!, added a Listserv function and had, by 12 May 1994, also added a Usenet newsgroup (see below). Commercial systems such as Delphi, Genie, Compuserve, and AOL³⁷ were also carrying FMnet! through their Internet gateways. The awareness of the fact that freemasons could now send text messages to any other freemason on the planet who had a computer and telephone modem created an enthusiasm in early posts, with an expectation that this would usher in a new age of understanding, communication and education within international Freemasonry.³⁸ Unfortunately few text files from FMnet! have survived.³⁹ Shortly after alt.freemasonry's launch as a Usenet newsgroup, Boutwell stopped supporting bit.listserv.freemasonry as a mail list and announced the creation of alt.masonic members (*see below*).

³⁵ Ron Boutwell of Prather Lodge No. 717, Indianapolis, Indiana, administered FMnet! on a FIDONet echo. The earliest archived post into bit.listserv.freemasonry is dated 10 May 1994. List Manager, Bill Hickey recalls twenty-five to thirty participants.

³⁴ BITnet was a cooperative US university network founded in 1981, differing from the Internet in that it was a point-to-point 'store and forward' network: email text and files were transmitted in their entirety from one server to the next until reaching their destination. From this perspective, BITnet was more like Usenet. A 'feed', sometimes called an 'echo', referred to the transmission process.

³⁵ You can post to the newsgroup by joining 'bit.listserv.freemasonry'. You can join the mailing list by sending an email to our automated server at: 'Listserv@Indy.Com'. In the body of the message (first line) write: 'SUBFREEMASONRY VADER@MERYL.CSD.UUSE!'. Then send it. No subject statement is necessary. From: ron.boutwell@indy.com (Ron Boutwell).

³⁶ FidoNet, a non-commercial bulletin board network using dial-up modems was launched in May 1984. See: fidonet.org/genlinfo.html accessed 2006/12/12.

³⁷ Incorporated as Quantum Computer Services on 24 May 1985, the service's name was changed to America Online (AOL) in August 1988. In February 1991 the first DOS version of AOL was launched, a Windows version of AOL was launched in January 1993 and AOL 2.0 for Windows was launched in 1994, giving clients access to Usenet. corp.aol.com/whoware/history.shtml accessed 2006/10/02 ; isp-planet.com/research/rankings/usa.html accessed 2006/12/12. See: Kara Swisher, *AOL.COM: how Steve Case beat Bill Gates, nailed the netheads, and made millions in the war for the Web* (New York: Times Business / Random House, 1998); David Stauffer, *It's a Wired Wired Wired Business the AOL Way* (CT: Capstone Publishing, Inc, 2000).

³⁸ Ron Boutwell post to bit.listserv.freemasonry, 9 July 1994; 10 May 1994.

³⁹ Ron Boutwell post to bit.listserv.freemasonry, 11 July 1994: The text of a pamphlet written by Jim Tresner entitled 'Conscience and The Craft' was adopted as the Masonic FAQ file for the newsgroup bit.listserv.freemasonry, better known as FMnet!.

CanMas

The Canadian Masonic Mailing List dates from March 1997 when Dick James⁴⁰ posted a test message. He started with two others: James G. Bennie of Vancouver, British Columbia, and Ray Salmon in Swift Current, Saskatchewan. Radio announcer 'Jim' Bennie, more or less took over in May that year. Bennie still has a directory from that summer, listing fifty-plus subscribers. It grew to 700 at one point before the list grew quiet and was shut down sometime before 10 October 2006. Almost immediately revived as The Canada Mason List, CanadaMasons, by Dick James on 18 October 2006, this list grew to over 138 members in its first year but is currently little used other than to post texts gleaned from *British Masonic Miscellany*, or to promote the sale of masonic pins and effects. During the short period that CanMas was offline, there was a rumour that a Yahoo group had been created but nothing more was heard of this.

Cinosam

Neil Neddermeyer⁴¹ of Minnesota started Cinosam (masonic spelled backwards) in 1998 as a newsletter with 'quips and bits', with an original mailing list of some sixty brethren who signed up after he announced his intent at the 1998 Minnesota Grand Lodge Annual Communication. By 2006 he had expanded the contents to include masonic biographies, histories, quotes, stories, poems, and the like; and he had some 3000 subscribers—2100 from outside Minnesota. Creating cinosam.net on 1 September 2006, Neddermeyer continues to distribute a monthly newsletter but feels that web search engines may soon make this sort of newsletter obsolete.

Freemasonry-List (FML)

When bit.listserv.freemasonry went offline shortly after 13 August 1994—mostly for technical reasons—it was revived by Henry Miller who hosted the list on a US Bureau of Land Management government system and then, on 6 December 1996, migrated to a server in New Mexico hosted by Fred M. Waid of Jornada Lodge No. 70, Mesilla, New Mexico. Migrated six months later to a California server, the list was renamed freemasonry-list@masonic.org when Bill Hickey registered masonic.org on 12 July 1996. Further technical issues resulted in the list's migration to a University of Colorado list server where it currently processes posts for some 255 participants from around the world.⁴²

⁴⁰ Richard T. James (b. 1944) of Bedford, Nova Scotia, wrote: 'EMasonry brought me back to Lodge.' EMasonry And The Internet, Andrew W. McLuckie, Prospect Lodge No. 578, Prospect Park, PA USA, 1996. skirret.com/library/archive/papers/misc-e/e-masonryandtheinternet.html accessed 2006/09/16.

⁴¹ Retired police detective, MW Bro Neil Neddermeyer was raised in Wayzata Lodge No. 205 in 1967 and served as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Minnesota for 2003-2004.

⁴² Email from W Bro Bill Hickey, 15 December 2006; email from Ron Boutwell, 7 October 1994.

Hiram's Worldwide Newsletter

Grady Lee Honeycutt, of Pawleys Island, South Carolina, produced a hardcopy newsletter that in 1997 was also distributed to almost 5000 email recipients in 28 different countries. The current status of the *Hiram No. 7 Worldwide Newsletter Supplement* is unknown.⁴³

Masonic Information Digest

Carl E. Jones⁴⁴ has no record of when he started his mailing list—originally faxed to a telephone list—but believes it was in 1996 or 1997. It may have been about the same time his first website, itsgreattobeahellashrinemason.org, went offline, but records are unavailable for that as well. Registering itsgreattobeamason.org on 7 October 2003, by early spring 2007, it has become a rarely updated ‘cobweb’, one of those many forgotten webpages left behind once their creators’ enthusiasm had subsided. His mailing list continued to be popular, and by mid-2007 was being sent to over 5000 subscribers—including current and past Grand Lodge officers—in fifty states and twenty-two countries.

One more time, please

First distributed on 2 September 1996. Hugh Young continues to distribute this masonic e-Zine titled *One more time, please*, now to a mail list of over 1600. Volume I included ‘The Story of Freemasonry’ by W.G. Sibley, and ‘The Mason’s Confession,’ attributed to 1727 and transcribed from the *Scots Magazine* for March 1755. Since then Young has continued to glean masonic texts that he believes should be brought to the attention of a wider audience.

OZ-Mason

The OZ-Mason list was initiated in 1987 by Ross Slade and is still active with some hundred members.⁴⁵ The list’s ‘netiquette’ (Internet etiquette) guidelines were adapted by David Beagley⁴⁶ from those he had earlier developed for the UK-Masons list. As a result of the interest in the OZ-Masons list, these two brethren, and others, orga-

⁴³ web.mit.edu/dryfoo/Masonry/Letters/letter9702b.html accessed 2007/03/26.

⁴⁴ Email from Carl E. Jones, 12 February 2007. W Bro Carl E. Jones (b. 1956/11/02), a Past Master of Knox Corinthian Lodge No. 851, Dallas, Texas, was raised in Pulaski Heights Lodge, Little Rock, Arkansas on 1981/10/06.

⁴⁵ Maintained by bus driver, Ross Slade (b. 1959/12/16), a member of Lodge Kotara Hanbury No. 939 UGLNSW and ACT, Australia, the Australian Masonic Mailing List ceased to function 1 March 2007, becoming a Google group at groups.google.com/group/oz-mason.

⁴⁶ Email from David Beagley, 1 January 2007.

nized an Australian E-Masons' Conference, held in Melbourne in July 1997. A one-day seminar, attendees discussed issues such as closed lists, tyling of websites, searching for information, and other technical issues. There are no extant records, and the number of early participants is unknown. The list is about communication between freemasons, not just masonic topics, so discussion ranges from esoterica to football. There was no negative reaction from Grand Lodge and over the years at least one Grand Master has participated.⁴⁷

UK Mason list

In May 1995 Gordon Charlton contacted Chris White of Lodge Boadicea No. 3147 UGLE, and together they formed ukmason-list later that year, a closed list primarily for the benefit of British freemasons. This list led to two initiatives, the e-mason pin and Internet Lodge No. 9659 UGLE. Still active at ukmason.org.uk, the list membership peaked with some 1100 members.⁴⁸

e-Zines

There have been at least two notable masonic electronic magazines: Peter G. Trei's *Masonic Digest* and Gordon Charlton's *Masonry Universal...* (ellipsis not optional). Kasperek's *eMasons' Webzine*, a 'World Wide Web based magazine focusing specifically on Internet developments related to Freemasonry' was not technically an e-Zine but simply a website using a magazine format. It could also be said that the distinction between an e-Zine and a mailing list is moot.

Masonic Digest

After announcing the *Digest* in a number of newsgroups, as well as mailing notices to Gene Spafford's and Rich Zellich's mailing lists, Peter G. Trei⁴⁹ started the *Masonic Digest* on 16 November 1989 by mailing it to twenty-three addresses in the US, Canada, and Britain. It contained two posts as topics for discussion: the appropriateness of reciting the pledge of allegiance in American lodges, and the status of Prince Hall recogni-

⁴⁷ Email from Ross Slade, 1 March 2007.

⁴⁸ Email from Chris White of Wokingham who had a CompuServe account in 1993, 26 November 2006.

⁴⁹ W Bro Peter G. Trei, Master of Wilder Lodge, Massachusetts, in 1994, was raised in Courland-Centennial Lodge No. 763, New York, in 1988. His early presence in Usenet newsgroups garnered him inclusion in one list of net.loon nominees: 'Monomaniac who greps most of Usenet for mentions of Freemasonry, and posts corrections if he feels the fraternity is being slighted. Sporadically publishes the *Masonic Digest* on a mailing list. Not too good at answering his email. At least he has a sense of humor...' ctrl-c.liu.se/~ingvar/legends/lesser.html accessed 2006/11/20.

tion. Topics ranged through the issues of the day but interest appears to have wound down in 1994. The last available issue archived is Volume 6 : Issue 3, from 23 March 1994.

Masonry Universal...

When Gordon Charlton suggested on freemasonry-list that the Internet could be used to raise charitable funds, the idea was not well received: 'you can't mail-shot people asking for money,' being a typical reply. Noting that Peter G. Trei's *Masonic Digest* was no longer active, he created *Masonry Universal...* and in February 1995 posted the first issue to freemasonry-list. From there he gained his first fifty subscribers. With the help of website owners such as Gary Dryfoos⁵⁰ and Rick Kasperev, by its first anniversary *Masonry Universal...* had over one thousand subscribers. Discontinued in February 1999, the run of forty-seven issues is archived at internet.lodge.org.uk/library/universal.php. While the contents make interesting reading, also noteworthy was the inclusion of ASCII art, an almost forgotten artform in which images are created with monospace letters.⁵¹

electronicNCMason

Perhaps the first official Grand Lodge e-Zine, an electronic version of the bimonthly *North Carolina Mason* was mailed out as a 'stripped-down, online version of the real thing.' The earliest archived edition, the January/February, 1995 (vol. cxx, no. 5) issue was numbered vol. 3 no. 1, suggesting that the first online version dated from 1993.⁵²

⁵⁰ W Bro Gary L. Dryfoos, while Master of Ocean Lodge, on 21 June 1989 posted into the Society for Creative Anachronism newsgroup alt.sca to correct some misunderstandings about Freemasonry.

⁵¹ The American Standard Code for Information Interchange (ASCII) dates from 1963. The simplest form of ASCII art, the 'smiley' was created by non-mason Scott E. Fahlman on 19 September 1982.

⁵² THE electronic NORTH CAROLINA Mason, Ric Carter, ed. Washington, NC. grandlodge-nc.org/nc-mason/archives/1995/ENCM_3_1.TXT accessed 2006/08/26.

CHAT ROOMS AND FORUMS

The WELL

Initially a dial-up BBS launched in 1985, The Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link (or The WELL) is one of the oldest virtual communities in continuous operation.⁵³ No artefacts of a masonic forum—if there was one—survive.⁵⁴

America Online (AOL)

When the online service AOL 2.5 was launched with an embedded Internet browser in 1995 Torence Evans Ake⁵⁵ located eight other freemasons, amongst them Ted Fronefield in Alabama, Steve Rost in the Boston area, and Manny Blanco in California. Together, they opened a chatroom titled 'FreeMasonry' on Wednesday Nights at 8:00 pm Eastern USA.

CompuServe

Prompted by discussions started in the AOL chatrooms between Steve Lubetkin of West Jersey Lodge No 15, New Jersey, and Scott Sherman of Waltham-Triad Lodge, Massachusetts, on 1 October, 1992, Neil Shapiro,⁵⁶ later of Bethpage Lodge No. 975, New York, created the Masonry Forum in another online service, CompuServe. This forum, some two years later, became home to the Cornerstone Computer Chapter of the Philaethes Society, their first online chapter.⁵⁷

The forum included active Grand Lodge officers and spurred otherwise inactive freemasons to renewed involvement. Amongst other masonic leaders, Grand Masters Rod-

⁵³ Members of The WELL founded organizations such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation and Craig's List, and documented what was emerging in books like Howard Rheingold's *The Virtual Community*, John Seabrook's *Deeper*, and Katie Hafner's *The WELL*. en.wikipedia.org accessed 2007/09/21. See : well.com.

⁵⁴ '...the Well also had a group.' Email from Ron Blaisdell 5 June 2007. Cf. : King reports a WELL discussion moderator telling him that there was no masonic discussion in the WELL during the CompuServe Masonic Forum period.

⁵⁵ W Bro Torence Evans Ake, Arcadia Lodge No. 1138, Lansing, Illinois, signed onto AOL in 1989 with a Champion KKH-386 16mhz operating Geoworks at 1200 baud. He was suspended from his lodge for publicly discussing the issues of the fraternity on the Internet in 2003 and, after masonic trial in March 2004, was reinstated.

⁵⁶ Gregory Neil Shapiro, of Massachusetts, was a beta tester for the precursor of CompuServe, MicroNet, which had been marketed from 1979 to 1987. He created a masonic section in the New Age Forum in 1991.

⁵⁷ Email from William N. Wine, 2007/06/03. The charter for the Cornerstone Computer Chapter of the Philaethes is currently held by Wine. Edward L. King is the secretary. Also see: William N. Wine, 'On line with Masonic', *The New Canadian Freemason*, Winter 1994/95 vol. 6, issue 1 ed. Hylon L. Maizels.

ney M. Larson (1994) and Ralph L. Hultquist (1987) of Minnesota, and J. Philip Berquist (1981) of Massachusetts, were active on CompuServe. Shapiro, head sysop and the first contract-holder for the Masonry Forum, later assigned the forum to Bill Wine.⁵⁸ Jacques Huyghebaert⁵⁹ was also an early member, and is reputed to have kept a back-up of most of the posts into the forum.⁶⁰ When Allen E. Roberts came to revise *Coil's Encyclopaedia*, he asked the forum for volunteers to read certain sections and to suggest changes. As a result Mike Segall⁶¹ provided major changes to the section on French Freemasonry. It was not only the breadth of knowledge that impressed early participants. Edward L. King⁶² recalls the emotional outpouring when the Forum experienced its first 'online death', a Prince Hall freemason from New York. Although perhaps only one other participant in the Forum had actually met him in the real-world, it was described as akin to the passing of a close neighbour.⁶³

Forum sysops such as Bill White, Bob Brown, David Catten, Bob Corr, and Edward L. King all found a renewed interest in Freemasonry and went on to an active participation in their respective jurisdictions. Not only friendships and masonic careers were forged in the early CompuServe forum. Roger Kessinger, a recently retired Montana printer, responded to an interest in out-of-print masonic books by asking whether the members thought there would be a market in republishing some of these old masonic texts. Encouraged by the response, he now runs Kessinger Publishing with a catalogue of thousands of reprints of out-of-print and rare books.⁶⁴

James Larry Holly, whose efforts in 1993 to ban freemasons from the Southern Baptist Conference bore so little fruit, also posted in the Masonic Forum, although, as one-time sysop Edward L. King recalls, when Holly became too strident, his posts would be shunted into an electronic backwater where only he, and anyone who had been foolish enough to reply to him, could see his later posts. Holly apparently assumed that no one wanted to debate with him, not realizing they weren't seeing his posts. There was also a

⁵⁸ Programmer analyst William N. Wine (b. August 7, 1949) was raised June 1971 in Diablo Valley Lodge No. 448, California, serving as Master for 1978-9 and 1986-7.

⁵⁹ RW Bro Jacques Huyghebaert (b. 1945) was initiated in 1976 in Lodge Libreville, Central Africa, and is a member of Lodge Bonnie Doon No. 611, (SC) and Leinster Lodge No. 115 (IC), both in Colombo, Sri Lanka. He is also a member of Internet Lodge No. 9659 (UGLE) and his writings on Freemasonry have appeared on many masonic websites.

⁶⁰ Email from Edward L. King, 2008/02/09.

⁶¹ Mike Segall, a member of loge l'Étoile No. 1001 and Past Master of Lodge of Research John Scot Eri-gena No. 1000, both in Paris under the Grand Lodge of France, had written, under a pseudonym, an encyclopaedia on Freemasonry in French a few years before.

⁶² Edward L. King, Bangor, Maine.

⁶³ Email from Edward L. King edking@masonicinfo.com, 30 January 2008.

⁶⁴ Email from Edward L. King, 2009/02/05.

brief controversy in October 1996 when it was suggested that participation be restricted to members of regular Freemasonry, but nothing came of it.

GEnie

General Electric's GEnie Online Services operated from 1985 to 1999, claiming 400,000 subscribers, but 115,000 may have been a more accurate number. No complete list of

RoundTables, as the discussion groups were styled, is available, and while there were Religion, Philosophy and New Age RoundTables, there is no record of any RoundTable with a masonic theme.⁶⁵

IRC (Internet Relay Chat)

Masonry Universal... reported in December 1995, the creation of The Sunday Club, 'a weekly opportunity to chat real-time with masons from around the world about any and every topic under the masonic sun.' The Sunday Club met every Sunday, at 2000 GMT, 1500 EST, and 1200 PST on the #Freemasons IRC channel. IRC⁶⁶ continues to be a popular online software but the history of the Freemasons channel is unknown.

MSN

The Microsoft Network debuted on 24 August 1995, to coincide with the release of the Windows 95 operating system. Seth Prokop,⁶⁷ author of 'Harnessing technology for Freemasonry' opened a meeting of Glen Iris Lodge No. 288, Melbourne, in the autumn of 1995 and then called off to allow the brethren to gather around a computer connected to their MSN forum, Hiram's Sons. What discussion took place in their live chat channel is not recorded. His promotion of the use of the Internet bore little fruit and there is no record of the lodge creating a website, or maintaining the forum. Other masonic fora, Emulation Masonic Ritual with 396 members and Joppa Temple Grand Lodge with 54 members continue to exist, while Freemasonry World Chat may only have existed in 2003 and 2004.

Prodigy

Perhaps the first online service, Prodigy was launched regionally in 1988 in Atlanta, Hartford, and San Francisco. A nationwide launch followed on 6 September 1990. Exactly when James M. Keene of New York started the Prodigy Freemasonry Hobby Board is unclear, some members believing it predated the national launch. Participants

⁶⁵ en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GENie accessed 2006/11/28; freegroups.net/camsoc/ctt/pt-5-gen.html accessed 2006/11/28. Cf.: Email from RW Bro Steve Cohn of Garden City Lodge, Massachusetts, 17 March 2008: 'As I recall, there was a masonic section of GENie'; 29 March 2008: 'when Prodigy started the restructuring of all of their BBSs, most of them died off due to lack of participation. Some of us migrated over to the GENie system.'

⁶⁶ IRC, developed in 1988, was an outgrowth of BBS software, inspired by a chat system operating on BITnet.

⁶⁷ The late W Bro Seth Prokop, was Master of Glen Iris Lodge No. 288, Melbourne, in 1995. *Transactions*, Volume 11 'Examining Masonry', 1997, Victorian Lodge of Research, Melbourne, Australia. Also see: *Masonry Universal...*, Issue 15, November 1995.

recall a sense of community that was an important if not key aspect of this early Internet experience. An early member of Prodigy, William B. Alter⁶⁸ still proudly displays his charter life membership certificate from 'Elektronik Research Lodge #1' presented in June of 1992, complete with Tom Dean's calligraphy. He also has retained most of the posted files. By November 1992 the forum secretary Tom Thornton recorded 308 members posting from Texas to Minnesota and from California to New Jersey. But in the summer of 1993, Prodigy began charging hourly rates for its message boards and by 1996 most members had left, some for GENie roundtables or the Philaethes mailing list, others for the newsgroups.

Yahoo groups

With 2110 members, the Yahoo group Free-Mason is both the largest and most active of the 824 masonic themed groups found on the Internet Service Provider Yahoo today.⁶⁹ At the other extreme are cobwebs such as Modernfreemasonry, created 24 May 2006 with eleven members. A total of three posts are archived, all within three days of the group's creation. Two of them were reposts of Jeff Peace's "The truth about the "Antients" and the "Moderns"". A microcosm of the web, Yahoo masonic groups range from closed lists for lodges and districts to public fora discussing lodge management or esoterica. One notable group, created by Josh Heller⁷⁰ on 8 May 2000, provided the inspiration for *The Temple That Never Sleeps*.⁷¹ There are even three anti-masonic groups. One, claiming 534 members, has had a total of five posts archived, all in May 2000.

USENET AND THE NEWSGROUPS

Described as the world's largest online text-based conferencing system, Usenet, established in 1979, allowed the creation of newsgroups, or message boards, dedicated to any topic imaginable. The Internet, especially Usenet, has long been described as anarchistic

⁶⁸ Paramedic, Bro William Byron Alter (b. 1965/10/25) was raised in Albert Pike Lodge No. 1169, San Antonio, Texas, on 1 October 1991. Email from William B. Alter, 18 January 2007.

⁶⁹ "The traditional dial-up online service differed from the modern Internet service provider in that they provided a large degree of content that was only accessible by those who subscribed to the online service, while ISP mostly serves to provide access to the internet and generally provides little if any exclusive content of its own." wikipedia.org accessed 2007/08/13.

⁷⁰ Bro. Josh Heller, co-author of *The Temple That Never Sleeps*, was raised in Chandler Lodge No. 227, Reading, PA on 27 October 1999.

⁷¹ Josh Heller and Gerald Reilly, *The Temple That Never Sleeps: Freemasonry and E-Masonry—Toward a New Paradigm* (Charlottesville, Va: Cornerstone Book Publishing, 2006), 142 pp. See: templeneversleeps.com.

at best. The early days of the Internet provided freemasons many opportunities to put their collective feet in their mouths. Freemasons, regardless of their knowledge or qualifications, weighed in on arguments, responding in ways that often provided anti-masons with further ammunition. The first great influx of newsgroup users began in 1993 when the Internet service provider, America Online, offered Usenet access to its customers. It was at this time that many freemasons first became aware that anti-masonry was a contemporary issue and not just an historical footnote or fringe group obsession. Creating one of the first masonic websites, Peter G. Trei posted the dynamically updated results of an automated search of Usenet for masonic references. Archived pages of zipnet.net/users/trei/masonry.html are now unfortunately blocked and Trei did not maintain his own archives. The earliest extant reference to Freemasonry on Usenet is found in a message regarding *The Book of Mormon*, posted to another newsgroup, net.religion, on 16 September 1983.

Usenet was always something of an Internet secret with many people unable or unwilling to access the Internet with anything other than the web browser software that came installed with their computers. The introduction of Google Groups in February 2001—with an archive of postings to Usenet dating back to 1981—eliminated the need for newsreading software, but the growth of web-based discussion fora such as the anonymously administered thebluelodge.org⁷² and Stephen A. Dafoe's lodgeroomuk.com/forum, and the ease of personal blogs, may sound the death-knell for Usenet. What will result from the June 2008 announcement by major ISPs Sprint, Time Warner and Verizon, that they would no longer provide access to the alt.* hierarchy of newsgroups, among others, remains to be seen. There have been at least nineteen newsgroups dedicated to some aspect of Freemasonry.⁷³ Only four need to be detailed here.

alt.freemasonry

The formation of *alt.freemasonry* was controversial. Many brethren were satisfied with bulletin boards and mailing lists such as the *Masonic Digest*. Some simply didn't want to learn new computer skills, while others knew the anarchic free-for-all of the newsgroups

⁷² Anonymously created on 2 April 2006, possibly by Dale W. Brown.

⁷³ Individual Internet Service Providers (ISPs) will carry different lists of newsgroups but there are more than 62,000 groups. At least eighteen were established for freemasons: *alt.binaries.freemasonry*; *alt.freemasonry*; *alt.freemasonry.binaries*; *alt.freemasonry.handshakes*; *alt.masonic*; *alt.masonic.demolay*; *alt.masonic.members*; *bit.listserv.freemasonry*; *alt.masonic.youth*; *ind.masonic*; *ind.masonic.aasr*; *ind.masonic.york*; *masonic*; *masonic.freemasonry*; *org.freemasonry*; *soc.org.freemasonry*; *soc.org.freemasons*; *uky.org.freemasonry*. A decade or more after they were established, only *alt.freemasonry* and *soc.org.freemasonry* sustain any real traffic.

and could foresee the danger to their safe, friendly online communities.⁷⁴ Believing freemasons needed to meet the real-world, the newsgroup alt.freemasonry was created by Christopher Kylin on 19 July 1994. The moderated newsgroup, bit.listserv.freemasonry was offline at this time because of ‘equipment upgrading’ and a number of regular participants were soon posting into alt.freemasonry.

It is unfortunate that so many of the early newsgroup posts were not archived.⁷⁵ While the only available records show Christopher Kylin sending a newsgroup post to alt.config on 19 July 1994, both Ron Boutwell in Indiana (creator of alt.masonic.members on 25 September 1994), and Ron Blaisdell⁷⁶ have claimed to have sent creation posts for alt.freemasonry. Unfortunately the archives for news.admin and news.admin.announce have no record of these posts.

Early posts into alt.freemasonry by Peter G. Trei and others leave the impression that they understood Kylin had created the group. In reply to Christopher Kylin’s ‘Welcome to alt.freemasonry. (Who would’ve thought...?)’ on 22 July 1994, Boutwell—then moderator of bit.listserv.freemasonry—replied: ‘Chris, I truly wish you well on this venture. But I also (and speaking from experience) feel that the unmoderated nature of this group will be a problem. Brother Trei feels that it will be the [k]ooks and anti-masonic whackos that are the problem. I feel that will be a problem of course but your other problem will be getting masons to participate.’ The archives for alt.config also show that Boutwell later sent a remove group post on 3 November 1994 which was acknowledged by only a few Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and did not seriously slow the propagation of the group. It may have been intended to stop the propagation of two groups with the same name.

From a non-technical or outsider’s perspective, it could appear that Christopher Kylin and Ron Boutwell, and perhaps Ron Blaisdell, each posted the creation of the newsgroup at about the same time, but the how and when of the propagation through the many ISPs that picked up the newsfeed will never be known. Kylin through Wes-

⁷⁴ Newsgroup posts: ‘Also, the current consensus seems to be “there’s already a mailing list, which is gated to a bit.listserv.* group,’ and also any such group should not be a second-level group but should go under alt.org.*, and also I’m not really sure the original proposer has decided whether it should be moderated or not.’ David DeLaney, 19 July 1994. ‘...from what I see on alt.config, I think the general consensus is that the Masonic Digest mailing list already serves the proposed purposes of the “alt.freemasonry” newsgroup, and it has the added advantage of being not terribly overloaded.’ Joe George, 19 July 1994. Note that spelling and grammar in newsgroup postings was a sometime thing.

⁷⁵ Web-based archiving of Usenet posts began in 1995 at Deja News. In 2001, this database was acquired by Google. Other archives were subsequently added but many pre-1995 posts are unavailable.

⁷⁶ Ron Blaisdell, Past Master and endowed life member of Capital of Strict Observance Lodge No. 66, Lansing, Michigan, chaired the Grand Lodge of Michigan Computer Committee for 1995-2002, 2004 and 2005.

leyan University⁷⁷ and Blaisdell through the umich.edu server were both posting into different parts of an Internet still experiencing growing pains and connectivity issues.

Kylin's first post announced that while there were other net options for members to talk to each other in a moderated format, alt.freemasonry was 'for people with an interest in the organization, but not necessarily with an insider's approach.' It is expected that it can become a repository of FAQ's and other information, and generally a useful resource for anyone with a question in the field.⁷⁸

Peter G. Trei posted on 22 July 1994, expressing his serious reservations: 'Unmoderated Usenet discussions of controversial topics have generally been failures.' Roger Ingersoll opined that he was more hopeful. Within days, discussions on Freemasonry in Russia and whether Catholics could be freemasons, and posts from Finland appeared. It took almost a week for the topic of famous freemasons to turn up and by 24 July the topics of anti-masonry and such authors as Robert A. Morey,⁷⁹ John F. Ankerberg,⁸⁰ and Ed Decker⁸¹ were discussed. There was also some extended discussion from people very interested in joining Freemasonry. The future for alt.freemasonry as a forum for reasoned discussion appeared promising. By October the bloom was off and the anti-masons, or at least the chronically argumentative, were circling. It took almost three years for the 'noise to signal ratio', as it was termed, to become unbearable. By 2008, other than the tenacious posting of the Usenet Masonic FAQ by Larry Holbrook, and

⁷⁷ On 1 April 1988 Wesleyan University created wesleyan.edu and later that month was linked to NSF-net, the National Science Foundation network, through JVNCnet. See: ftp.funet.fi/pub/netinfo/NSF-NET/imr/IMR88-01.TXT accessed 2008/02/02.

⁷⁸ Joining Freemasonry when he was 26, Christopher Kylin was Worshipful Master of St. John's Lodge No. 2, Middleton, Connecticut from 1997 to 2000. As a student at Wesleyan University, he recalls having some form of Internet access as early as 1984. An unfortunate incident with then Grand Master, MW Bro Walter Kaechele, on 3 February 2003 led to his leaving the lodge and severing all connection with Freemasonry. See: 'Connecticut: Warrant Withdrawn from Lodge Opposing One-Day Classes' *Freemasonry Today*, Spring 2003 issue 24. Email from editor@theamericanminerva.com 29 January 2008. Newsgroup post from: ckylin@eagle.wesleyan.edu, 18 July 1994. Archived email from Boutwell to Kylin on 7 September 1994 in which Boutwell clearly understood that Kylin had already created the newsgroup: 'You said earlier that when you set up alt.freemasonry you had a friend send the command message. Obviously, since it was accepted the first time, your friend was operating from one of these sites higher up on the hierarchy than my site.' Note that there are no announcements or calls for discussion archived for news.announce.newsgroups, news.announce.newsgroups, news.groups, news.groups.proposals, news.admin, news.admin.announce.

⁷⁹ Author of *The Truth About Masons* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1993).

⁸⁰ Author of *The Secret Teachings of the Masonic Lodge: A Christian Perspective* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1990).

⁸¹ Author of *What You Need To Know About Masons* (Eugene, Or: Harvest House Pub, 1992), and founder of Saints Alive Ministry in Issaquah, Washington. He also created saintsalive.com on 12 September 1996.

the occasional plaintive query asking if there are any freemasons 'lurking', i.e. reading but not posting, the group was populated by promoters of assorted conspiracy theories and non-masonic sales schemes. From the archives it would appear that the newsgroup was most active in 2000 and 2001 with an anomalous flurry in 2004. It is curious that faqs.org records this author's Anti-Masonry FAQ (v. 2.8.11) as the FAQ for alt.freemasonry.⁸² Another unsolved mystery is the authorship of the newsgroup's archive description: 'Someone will build my basement for free? Cool.'

bit.listserv.freemasonry

Ron Boutwell created bit.listserv.freemasonry as a Usenet newsgroup on 10 May 1994, announcing that the listserve would no longer be supported for technical reasons. As noted above, the mailing list was revived, but, quite independently. The newsgroup also continues to exist, albeit *sans* posts, masonic or otherwise.

alt.masonic.members

Also created by Boutwell on 25 September 1994; he described alt.masonic.members as a 'Cyberlodge for net-Masons and friends.'⁸³ First intended to be moderated, on 18 November 1994 he described it as 'lightly moderated'. In October he announced 'the end of the trolling'⁸⁴ but soon realized that there was no real way to control content in the newsgroup. Today it enjoys little more traffic than bit.listserv.freemasonry.

soc.org.freemasonry

Scott, or Scotty, Fitzgerald, of Yorktown Lodge No. 1154, New York, posted the first request for discussion regarding the moderated group soc.org.freemasonry on 19 March 1997: 'The newsgroup alt.freemasonry has degenerated into a flame pit. The presence of individuals bent on attacking our beliefs has been a great cause of concern for many masons wishing to carry on a meaningful discussion with those that wish to sincerely learn our beliefs.'⁸⁵ Although there were objections from such longtime newsgroup par-

⁸² The FAQ archives at Ohio State was migrated to faqs.org sometime in early 2005. Other errors can be found in the current index. A search for the alt.illuminati FAQ will also return The Anti-Masonry FAQ although this author also periodically posts an alt.illuminati FAQ complete with all required headers.

⁸³ Newsgroup post from Ron Boutwell, 25 September 1994.

⁸⁴ A piscatorial metaphor, 'trolling' originally referred to the practice of veteran participants in Usenet newsgroups to post messages that would incite a response from new users or 'newbies'. It has become a synonym for flamebaiting: the posting of inflammatory remarks intended to provoke outrage.

⁸⁵ faqs.org/fip/usenet/news.announce.newsgroups/soc/soc.org.freemasonry accessed 2008/01/24. Although Masonry Universal... reported 'On 4th December the thread "RFD for Soc.org.freemasonry.moderated" was started in the news.groups newsgroup,' the post is not in the available archives.

ticipants as Andrew Philip Fabbro, a vote of 171 to 56 led to the newsgroup's creation on 10 July 1997, with four moderators and three arbitrators.⁸⁶ In early 2008, groups.google.ca reported 318 subscribers.

Usenet Masonry FAQ

With the growing use of newsgroups came the need for a Frequently Asked Questions file (FAQ). Peter G. Trei had posted several introductory overviews of Freemasonry, including *So You Want to Join the Masons* in May 1994, but the defining characteristic of an FAQ is the question and answer format. Ron Boutwell—who had adopted Jim Tresner's *Conscience and the Craft* as the FAQ for bit.listserv.freemasonry—suggested a masonic Usenet FAQ project and then-Entered Apprentice Andrew Philip Fabbro volunteered to coordinate. Working from texts gleaned from Roger Ingersoll's masonic FTP archives, William N. Wine's FMBITS.TXT (a file of short masonic articles posted to the CompuServe Masonic Forum around 1993), and input from several dozen other participants, Fabbro created a comprehensive file that, with minor amendments by Roger Ingersoll and others, is still regularly posted into alt.freemasonry.⁸⁷

File Transfer Protocol (FTP) Sites

FTP sites, generally hosted on university computers, were the first public-accessible repositories of text files and images.⁸⁸ In appearance, little more than lists of file names, the early ftp sites of Gary L. Dryfoos, Roger M. Firestone,⁸⁹ Roger Ingersoll, and David

⁸⁶ Email from James G. Bennie, 19 Nov 2006; post from Brussels StudentenGenootschap, 12 July 1997. Offline: geocities.com/sofreemasonry; hiramnet.org.

⁸⁷ Created by Andrew Philip Fabbro, who maintained the Usenet Masonry FAQ as far as version 1.2. Charles A. Plater maintained it up to version 1.4 and then gave it to Edward L. King. It has been further edited by Larry Holbrook who uploaded Version 1.6 in August 2006. Version 1.5b is archived at maso-nicinfo.com/usenetfaq.htm.

⁸⁸ The File Transfer Protocol (FTP)—first published in 1971 and updated in 1985—allowed transfer of files between linked computers, but without knowing the actual name and location of a file there was no way of searching or browsing through multiple sites. In 1990 Archie, considered to be the first Internet search engine, was introduced. It, and other search tools for the Gopher protocol such as Jughead and Veronica, allowed easy searches of many university systems. A search on the FTP emulator archie.icm.edu.pl/archie-adv_eng.html on 12 December 2007 returned only twelve files for the search term 'freemasonry'—eight were either broken links or '550 no such file' while four returned various versions of the Anti-masonry FAQ.

⁸⁹ IT manager Roger M. Firestone was raised in Ancient Landmark Lodge No. 5, St. Paul, Minnesota, and served as Master of Dawson Lodge No. 16, District of Columbia, in 1996. He uploaded many masonic files to cacr.caltech.edu/~rfire on 28 December 1994, a website that was taken offline in late 2000.

A. Stites⁹⁰ provided many freemasons with their first access to masonic text files and images.

THE WORLD WIDE WEB

Moving to the web was an easy decision for many. On the other hand, there was also some hesitancy on the part of brethren who had considerable emotional and technical investment in bulletin boards to consider the value of developing masonic websites.⁹¹ By 2007 a keyword search on Google for 'Freemasonry' returned some 2.2 million websites.

The question of who created the first masonic website is made difficult by technical definitions and incomplete records. The Grand Lodge of California created freemason.org on 4 January 1994; Gary L. Dryfoos uploaded 'A page about Freemasonry' to web.mit.edu/dryfoo/Masonry in October 1994; and the Valley of Toledo claimed to have been 'on the web' since November 1994, although its domain toledoaasr.com was not created until 26 September 1998. Early work by Peter G. Trei and Ron Blaisdell is noted above.

REGULATING FREEMASONS ONLINE

Website policies

Most jurisdictions eventually set some policies or guidelines for lodge websites. Some jurisdictions further dictated what could appear on individual freemasons' pages. While the perception outside England is that the UGLE took a heavy handed approach to its members' use of the Internet, a review of its *Code of Practice* belies that notion. The perception is probably the result of an early assumption on the part of some UGLE members, and a presumption on the part of some current or past Grand Lodge officers to dictate without first consulting their Grand Secretary's office. Outlined in a six page 'Guidance for members' pdf file, the Code is in the main a collection of common sense guidelines. Recognizing that the Internet is administratively and practically impossible to control, the Board of General Purposes settled for a request that 'to ensure accuracy and consistency on policy matters' the contents of masonic websites be submitted to

⁹⁰ W Bro Dave Stites, Master of Lakeside Lodge No. 760, El Cajon, California, in 1998, ran an early bulletin board, Hiram's Valley BBS, and an FTP site, neither of which have been archived.

⁹¹ Email from Ron Merk, rmerk@islandnet.com, 21 November 1995 responding to the Grand Lodge of British Columbia's development of a website: 'I find that the cost is just too high for the benefit...I believe that the Computer Bulletin Board system is a much better way to go... Best part is that the Network is "tyled" so to speak, so there are no anti-masonic flames etc.'

the Grand Secretary for approval, to take the form of a small jpeg 'Charter Mark' to be placed on a website's top page. Absent from the guidelines is any mention of individuals' websites or penalties for non-compliance. Prior to its consecration Internet Lodge UGLE had gained an unofficial waiver in 1997 to send minutes and summonses by email. By 2003 the Grand Lodge Board of General Purposes recommended 'that it be given power to authorize on a permissive basis, the electronic submission of returns and forms' by any lodge, and by 2004 the Board was clearly in favour of lodge secretaries using mail correspondence.⁹²

The guidelines discouraged the use of any password protected areas for fear that the 'perception is that we have something to hide' and that they would attract the attention of hackers. Posting of ritual, even behind a password, was prohibited.

Common sense included a prohibition on the uploading of copyright material, any details of candidates, or any form of commercial advertising. Regarding other parts of the Internet, such as newsgroups, the guidelines noted that directing questions on protocol and similar matters to those participating in an Internet forum was inappropriate for the obvious reason that the answers would often be wrong, but wisely omitted any penalty. The only restriction on emailing lodge summonses was a requirement that each recipient had to have requested the mailing.⁹³

Some jurisdictions were more concerned about privacy and security issues than others. The Grand Lodge of Alabama website, in early 2008, included a non-password protected page with the names, lodge affiliations and email addresses of almost 1500 members who had filled out a simple online form.

As lodges and Grand Lodges continued to utilize the Internet for communicating internally, as well as with the non-masonic public, issues of privacy and security took on a greater importance. Some jurisdictions refused to post members' names, pictures and contact information while others would reveal all. In a potential breach of masonic protocol, some lodges posted their lodge summonses where the public could find them. At the other extreme, the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon website posted no names other than those of current and past Grand Masters, and the Grand Secretary. His email address is the only one listed other than the site's administrator.

The Grand Lodge of Alabama established a policy whereby all lodge websites must be approved by its Internet Committee, and maintain compliance with the Constitu-

⁹² UGLE Board of General Purposes, December 2003 Report; December 2004 Report.

⁹³ 'Electronic communication rules for the Craft', document created by B. S. Morton, United Grand Lodge of England, IT Department: 2006/03/26. 'Guidance for members of the Craft and Royal Arch on the use of the Internet and the World Wide Web for communicating and informing': Incorporates extracts from the Report of Board of General Purposes, adopted 13 December 2000 and Report of Board of General Purposes, adopted 13 March 2002.

tions. Privacy was a concern, with a prohibition on the appearance of the names or contact information for any Grand Lodge officer, committee member or lecturer. Lodge members' names were only to appear with written permission. A two-page *Criteria for Website Recognition* was modified from that used by the Grand Lodge of Georgia.

The Grand Lodge of Georgia adopted a policy requiring all lodge and district websites to register with its General Welfare Committee and adhere to a short list of common sense requirements including: content was to be 'accurate, current, and consistent with the highest standard'; there could be no commercial use; and no personal contact information was to be displayed without permission. The 'criteria and rules' specifically empowered the committee to direct that websites not conforming to the rules were to be taken offline.

The Grand Lodge of Virginia also established an Internet Committee in 2001 which wrote a Grand Lodge policy for subordinate lodge webpages as well as a set of guidelines to facilitate lodges in designing and building their websites. Like many such policies, it ruled that commercial advertising was not appropriate.⁹⁴ Virginia Masonic Law was also amended, labelling any criticism of current or past Grand Lodge or lodge officer unmasonic and open to masonic charges.

In West Virginia, a policy was adopted in 1999, charging the Grand Master with the responsibility to 'closely supervise the [Grand Lodge] website'.⁹⁵

In New Zealand, Laurence Milton—who was later appointed Grand Secretary—instigated the creation of the Grand Lodge website in 1999 and, due to his Information Technology (IT) background, was given considerable free rein. An outside consultant prepared a report in November 2003 for the Grand Lodge, recommending enhancing the website; introducing moderated electronic discussion fora; increasing the use of electronic mail; and the introduction of email mailing lists. Describing the website as the Craft's 'shop window', recommendations were also made to have the website hosted on a server owned by Grand Lodge and all security precautions be considered.⁹⁶

Conflict

There has been the rare incident when a Grand Master or other officer exercised his prerogative to control websites authored by lodges or individuals. Notable was the reaction of two Grand Masters of Florida, MW Bros Kazanaugh and Robert D. Trump to the cover story, 'The Masonic Manifesto', in the September issue of Tim Bryce's *Free-*

⁹⁴ Email from Neil Marple, DrNeil@cox.net, 26 November 2006.

⁹⁵ Correspondence from MW Bro Charles F. Coleman II, 24 November 2006; 1999 *Proceedings*, 136-37; *Proceedings* 2000, 118.

⁹⁶ Graeme Ruthven, *A Report and Recommendations for: The Improvement of Internal and External Communications for the Freemasons of New Zealand* (Freemasons of New Zealand, 2004/02/04).

masonry for the Next Generation.⁹⁷ Bryce's website home page currently reports that by order of the Grand Master of Florida the site had been suspended, effective 2 December 2005. Styling himself 'A Foot Soldier for Freemasonry', Tim Bryce⁹⁸ continues to write masonic articles for publication outside his jurisdiction. More colourful was the reaction of some members of Halcyon Lodge No. 498, Cleveland, Ohio, when told to remove questionable material from their website and adhere to the Constitutions of the Grand Lodge of Ohio. Without notifying all the lodge members, a vote was taken to return their warrant. The details of this 'train wreck' as R. Theron Dunn⁹⁹ described it, are not the issue. The point is that once again the Internet allowed the entire online world to watch, and comment.¹⁰⁰ There have been other incidents.

WEBSITES

Any snapshot of the web is outdated as soon as it is posted. Peter G. Trei created one list of 158 masonic links on 17 July 1996.¹⁰¹ In an early 2008 review of that list, of the

⁹⁷ 'I am sure you are proud of your "Masonic Manifesto." After review, I feel some of your comments about the Grand Lodge of Florida are abusive. I feel your comments are an affront to the Grand Lodge of Florida and its Officers. As the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Florida, I feel that you show a clear contempt for me as your Grand Master. As to your Website, I can find no record of your authority to publish information about the Grand Lodge of Florida, its Officers, Membership, Committees or Programs. Therefore, I order you to "cease and desist" all publications concerning the Grand Lodge of Florida, its Officers and Members.' Posted correspondence from John F. Kazanaugh, Grand Master, 22 November 2005. '... in order to allow the Grand Lodge of Florida to be in compliance with the rules and regulations of other Grand Jurisdictions, and continue to maintain a good and friendly Fraternal relationship with said Jurisdictions, you are hereby ordered and directed to cease and desist the distribution of any and all materials, either printed or transmitted, to be used by members of any other Grand Jurisdictions unless prior permission has been obtained...' Posted correspondence from Robert D. Trump, 30 December 2006. See: *Freemasonry for the Next Generation*, Vol. 2, Issue 5. phmainstreet.com/fl mason/cov0905.htm. Created on 23 August 1999, the site was last updated 2 December 2005.

⁹⁸ Tim Bryce, raised in Florida in 1997, was Florida Bureau Chief for the *Masonic Globe*, editor of *The Florida Mason and Freemasonry for the Next Generation* e-Zines, and producer of the 'Masonic Update' podcast. His 'Freemasonry from the Edge' weekly column is included in the Freemason Information website.

⁹⁹ Computer administrator and publisher of the monthly masonic E-zine *The Lodgeroom International Magazine*, W Bro Robert Theron Dunn Jr (1 February 1957-13 May 2008) got online in 1993, and was raised on 3 November 2001 in Evergreen Lodge No. 259, Riverside, California when he was 45. Email from R. Theron Dunn, 1 February 2008.

¹⁰⁰ See: lodgeroomuk.net/bb/viewtopic.php?id=2644; halcyontemple.org/pdf/member%20letter%20final.pdf accessed 2 December 2007.

¹⁰¹ ziplink.net/users/trei/masonurl.html 'attempts to be an exhaustive list of Internet Masonic resources.'

twenty-nine Grand Lodge links only the Grand Lodge of California has maintained the same link to the present. Of the other, now broken, links, eleven were maintained on personal user accounts while sixteen had been maintained as subdomains under their Internet Service Provider's domain. Of the fifty-nine individual lodge or concordant body sites listed, only two are extant while one, a personal site for the Grand Lodge of Washington, has been maintained simply to redirect browsers to their current website. Pages maintained by individual freemasons comprised a further forty-seven links. Only four were still live but in one case the individual had removed his masonic content and converted it to a personal blog. Only two of the balance of twenty-two links, ranging from anti-masonic sites to commercial ventures, were current.

The greater majority of links reported '404 Not Found', but a handful could not be found because the host server was no longer active, perhaps victims of the industry shake-out of the late 1990s. Unfortunately two of the domains contained the name freemasonry but are now owned by non-masonic commercial interests.

Freemasons' Websites

It is not possible to enumerate the many websites created by individual freemasons, nor to determine exactly whose was first. The first websites online were those uploaded by individual freemasons such as Dr Gary L. Dryfoos in October 1994,¹⁰² and Roger M. Firestone on 28 December 1994. Dryfoos's website is the oldest extant, although it is predated by both Peter G. Trei's Usenet feed and a web browser viewable FTP site created by Ron Blaisdell. Unfortunately, no back-ups or archives have survived of either Usenet feed or FTP site. The following list is only a sampling.

The website managed by Paul M. Bessel, Executive Secretary of the Masonic Leadership Center in Alexandria, Virginia,¹⁰³ is noteworthy, not for being first but for being accurate and timely. Sponsored by the Philalethes Society, the Masonic Leadership Center was founded in 1995. Its first website, hosted by geocities, displayed the original e-m@son pin design and a '2B1 ASK1' emblem. It was not until 9 February 1999 that bessel.org was created.¹⁰⁴ Collecting, editing and authoring files on Prince Hall recognition, masonic mailing lists, jurisprudence and a wide range of masonic education, in late 2007 Bessel reported over 5000 files on the website.

accessed 2006/11/16.

¹⁰² W Bro Gary L. Dryfoos was Master, Ocean Lodge, Winthrop, Massachusetts, in 1989.

¹⁰³ W Bro Paul M. Bessel (b. 1949/01/24), author of *Masonic Questions and Answers* (2005) and *Out of the Shadows: The Emergence of Prince Hall Freemasonry in America* (2006) was Senior Grand Warden of the Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia in 2005.

¹⁰⁴ See: geocities.com/capecanaveral/2903; bessel.org.

Edward L. King created masonicinfo.com on 10 July 1998 as a response to anti-mason Ken Mitchell's posts in the Usenet newsgroup alt.freemasonry. It has grown from a few pages to over three hundred as new anti-masons continued to enter the newsgroup, create websites or be otherwise active in anti-masonry.

Registering 2be1ask1.com on 27 March 1997 for the First Masonic District, Grand Lodge of New Jersey, Warren V. LeMay of Augusta, New Jersey, used this website to develop and promote the e-m@son webring. With a team of at least a half dozen brethren, the ring at one time linked almost 2600 webpages in forty-nine countries, in English, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, and Spanish.

In response to Yahoo's lack of interest in assisting the existing rings, LeMay arranged to transfer the ring software to an independent server, controlled by the e-m@son web ring. This could be accessed through squarework.com, a website he had registered on 18 November 1997. Although this site was last updated 7 January 2001, and there are no active sites in this ring, a websearch reveals over 11,000 webpages still contain a link to the e-m@son webring. Unrelated to LeMay's original e-m@son webring, webring.com currently links 174 masonic sites. Other masonic webrings are hosted by WebRing Inc: International Guild of Masons, Latin M@sonic Web Ring and Hiram's Inner Circle, among others.¹⁰⁵

Registering mason-defender.net on 24 September 2003 and mason-defender.com on 9 September 2005 as a response to anti-masonic attacks in alt-freemasonry and other Usenet newsgroups, Bill McElligott also participated in the 2003 'cookout' of Freemasonry Watch (see below). Some websites simply took the bulletin board, mailing list concept onto the web. Bill McElligott later registered the domain lodgeroomuk.com on 11 November 2004. The forum started with about 250 members. The combined membership of *LodgeroomUK*, *LodgeroomUS*, and *Massoneria Tradizionale* is currently

¹⁰⁵ Email from Warren V. LeMay notebook@squarework.com 2008/10/08. The GeoCities Masonic Web Ring, created 24 July 1998, currently reports 166 member sites. m.webring.com/t/GeoCities-Masonic-Web-Ring accessed 2008/01/17. Created by LeMay on 31 December 1996, by late 2008 e-m@son WebRing reported 164 active sites. webring.com/t/e-m@son-WebRing accessed 2008/1/17. A webring is a collection of websites joined together through a common code allowing multiway linking. Originally embraced as a means to create communities of common interests, it was quickly recognized as a tool for commercial website promotion. Based on Denis Howe's EUROPa (Expanding Unidirectional Ring Of Pages) and Giraldo Hierro's central CGI (Common Gateway Interface) script, the web ring concept was developed by Sage A. Weil in May 1994. He established WebRing Inc in 1995, selling it to Starseed, Inc in 1997. Starseed was acquired by GeoCities, subsequently bought out by Yahoo. With the purchase of the ring system on 5 September 2000 by Yahoo, came growing technical issues, an influx of commercial sites and the abandonment of the system by many volunteer 'ringmasters'. By 15 April 2000 Yahoo had withdrawn support and currently WebRing Inc continues to support some 40,000 'communities'.

around 1200. McElligott has not been keeping records but he believes that he refers almost one potential candidate a day to a lodge or Grand Lodge.¹⁰⁶

Real-world publishers quickly realized the value of posting electronic versions either on websites or through mailing lists. Inspired by what he found online, Andrew Boracci,¹⁰⁷ of Sag Harbor, New York, began publication of *American Mason Magazine* in 1996. On 22 February 2000 he registered americanmason.com and began uploading what he styled 'The world's first all electronic masonic magazine', its main feature being a calendar of historical events in which freemasons had played some role. Upon Boracci's death in 2004 his successor was less than complimentary in describing the magazine's earlier content, but Webtrends had earlier reported a 2003 'readership' of 400,000, so the site was obviously popular.¹⁰⁸ A more damning criticism was Boracci's willingness to take texts from Internet sources and reprint them, either without citation or without first gaining permission. In Boracci's defence, it must be said that the question of copyright and ownership of posts into public fora was a much discussed and controversial topic in the early days of the web.

Many websites were uploaded by well-meaning brethren without the resources or interest to sustain them. For example, Ken Hawn in Jacksonville, Florida, created masonicfax.com sometime in the spring of 2002 but by 2005 had allowed the domain to expire, leaving yet another masonic URL parked as a 'link farm'.¹⁰⁹ Created by Stephen Dafoe on 22 February 2005, radiofreemason.com was off the air within a year and remains a cobweb.

Personal websites dedicated to Freemasonry have come in all qualities of design and content. With six Grand Lodges warranting lodges in Thailand, it took one individual, Jim Smith, to create thaifreemason.com on 1 September 2005. While displaying clean design, an excellent modified square and compasses logo, and effective content, it unfor-

¹⁰⁶ Bill McElligott, Lodge of Old Friendship No. 3907, UGLE. admin@lodgeroomuk.com.

¹⁰⁷ Journalist, publisher, playwright and pianist, Andrew Boracci (1926/10/01-2004/05/07) of Sag Harbor, New York registered americanmason.com on 22 February 2000. Master of Wamponamon Lodge No. 437, Sag Harbor, in 2002-2003, he was active in the Royal Arch and Scottish Rite as well as a member of the Philalethes Society and the Theosophical Society. See: 'Obituaries', *The East Hampton Independent*, 12 May 2004; *Southampton Eagle*, 13 May 2004. Unrelated, the Masonic Learning Centers for Children registered americanmason.org on 18 January 2005.

¹⁰⁸ Elliot Burns, americanmason.com accessed 2007/01/03; Email from Andrew Boracci, 20 December 2003, Subject: American Mason Passes 400,000 World Wide Readership Mark.

¹⁰⁹ A Universal Resource Locator (URL), otherwise known as a domain name or webpage address, can be registered without actually being attached to a webpage. For a small fee, or included in the cost of registration, Internet Service Providers (ISPs), or webhosts, will provide a template webpage announcing that the URL is located, or 'parked', with that ISP. Template webpages that also include a list of links to other, often commercial, websites is styled a 'link farm'.

tunately also displayed Google ads, mostly promoting inexpensive flights to Thailand. There were also attempts to create niche-market masonic sites. Naftali Appelbaum registered masonicmemorials.com on 2 June 2003, dedicated 'to preserving the memories of masons around the world' but, with only fifteen uploaded memorials by May 2006, it soon was offline. Replacing it was Michael Johnstone's masonicobituaries.com on 23 November 2007.

More successful was the Masonic Poets Society, a project started by Gerald S. Leighton,¹¹⁰ who later registered the domain masonic-poets-society.com on 19 March 2004. The website continues to grow as a repository of contemporary and historical masonic poetry, although Leighton's role is unclear. In a similar vein, J. R. Martin of South Carolina began uploading files to his personal webpage on 26 November 1998, and then created masonicmusic.org on 10 November 2000. With a growing collection of text and sound files, lyrics and sheet music, the site was unfortunately marred by its dependence on low quality music files and low resolution images.

Another of the many special-interest masonic groups to create an online presence, the Widow's Sons is an association of Master Masons who have gathered together to promote Freemasonry within the motorcycling community. They created their website, widowssons.org, on 29 March 2005. Equally colourful, Andrew Horn in California created masonicink.com on 21 December 2005 to promote and display masonic themed tattoos.

Lodges

Statistics are unavailable but anecdotal evidence suggests that more than half of the thirteen thousand North American lodges currently have some form of web presence, ranging from a page under their Grand Lodge's domain or their own website to little more than a lodge secretary with email. With perhaps 7,000 lodge websites online, any practical survey is beyond the resources of these notes. Suffice that they range from the understated elegance of Orinda Lodge No. 122's orindalodge.org,¹¹¹ to hodgepodge collections of animated images, unfortunate colour choices, unimplemented code, and typographically challenged text. While some jurisdictions attempted to regulate their lodges' web presence, others clearly did not.

¹¹⁰ Retired US National Guard administrator, RW Bro Gerald S. Leighton (b. 1944/12/15) was raised in Meridian Splendor Lodge No. 49, Newport, Maine, on 5 May 1988 and served as Grand Master for 2006-2008.

¹¹¹ Created by Shawn Eyer, adjunct professor at John F. Kennedy University, who is helping to build Blazing Star Masonic Temple in Second Life, and Ron Montes, on 22 June 1998, and uploaded the following month. See: orindalodge.org/second_life.php accessed 2008/05/08.

Grand Lodge websites

This will not be a comprehensive enumeration, only highlighting the need for individual jurisdictions to compile their own histories before memories fade and the principals join the great majority.

The Grand Lodge of California registered freemason.org on 4 January 1994,¹¹² perhaps making it the first official masonic website.

Alberta's decision to go online was made in 1997 by the then Grand Master, Hugh Young.¹¹³ Although at least one senior Grand Lodge officer opposed the action, it was approved—circuitously—by the finance committee.

The Grand Lodge of Hawaii did not create their current website until 2005, but it quickly made up for lost time. In mid 2007 MW Bro Oscar M. Jayme approved the website raymond.wieckowicz.googlepages.com/home and the blog changestohmc.blogspot.com, both administered by MW Bro Raymond Wieckowicz Jr. Here can be found proposed and recent resolutions and open discussion on the issues facing Hawaiian Freemasonry.

Created on 21 November 1996 for the United Grand Lodge of England, grand-lodge.org was originally a home page and a half dozen pages under construction. It was redirected to www.grandlodge-england.org on 17 May 2000 and ugle.org.uk on 24 March 2000, and underwent a major redesign in January 2002. A history of the intervening five years will need to be written by someone privy to the deliberations of the website managers. Wisely, they chose to continue to register all three domains, blocking their use by others.

The experience of the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Michigan perhaps reflected that of many Prince Hall jurisdictions. Grand Lodge officers first allowed a nonmason to create a site that did not truly represent their jurisdiction. Soon realizing that both a professional look and accurate, timely information were key, a new website was created in 2000 by James Young¹¹⁴ who had earlier created his own personal website on Freemasonry in 1995. Other Prince Hall jurisdictions had authorized members to create masonic subdomains on their personal websites, many of which, through lack of resources or interest, later became cobwebs. The Prince Hall Conference of Grand Masters Inc created phacgm.org on 14 February 2003, but by 2006 had allowed it to expire.

¹¹² All registration dates, unless otherwise noted, are taken from internic.net/whois.html, uwhois.com or national registrars.

¹¹³ MW Bro Hugh Young (b. 1944/11/14), Grand Master of Alberta 1997-1998 and Charter Worshipful Master of Internet Lodge of Research, Grand Lodge of Alberta.

¹¹⁴ Email from W Bro James Young II, 13 June 1997. A member of Corinthian Lodge No. 38, he has been the webmaster since 2000.

Despite naysayers in his jurisdiction, RW Bro Greg Smith of Ohio registered the domain freemason.com on 6 February 1996, gifting it to the Grand Lodge of Ohio. He continues to donate webhosting services, and has also recently registered freemason.tv.¹¹⁵

In Pennsylvania, the Grand Lodge developed AutoMasonry, 'an electronic information superhighway for Freemasonry in Pennsylvania' and established a 'Friend to Friend' bulletin board in early 1995. Late in 1996, Grand Master Edward O. Weisser reminded the brethren that nothing was to be posted on a masonic website without his permission, yet not wishing to discourage use of the Internet, early in 1997 he encouraged brethren to become involved in the e-Mason Square Club of Pennsylvania. Inspired by their next Grand Master, MW Bro James L. Ernette, on 15 February 1998 the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania Committee on Internet Services announced the creation of its website and an ambitious plan to create extensive interactive functionality. This jurisdiction is one of the few to have the foresight to secure the domains pagrandlodge.com, pagrandlodge.net and pagrandlodge.org.¹¹⁶

W Bro Richard R. Barton created an unofficial website for the Grand Lodge of South Carolina in early 1996 which received a favourable review by the South Carolina Masonic Research Society but was ordered offline by MW Bro Robert V. Pinkston in 1997. It was not until 2001 that another, now official, website was created.¹¹⁷

Although the Grand Master for Virginia for 1997-1998 had opposed a Grand Lodge web presence, other brethren had already blazed the trail. Granville Clayton 'Jack' Canard, Jr, of Alexandria, Virginia, registered aw22.com on 7 April 1997, creating what he called 'The Virginia Masonic Information Net'. Bruce Van Buren, who had created vamason.org on 29 January 2003 to provide a portal for Virginia masonic bodies, later advised the Grand Lodge Internet Committee on rebuilding their website in 2006. Online in 2001, the Grand Lodge website was completely redesigned in spring 2007.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Email from Mark Bernardin, Manager of Program Development, Grand Lodge of Ohio, 17 January 2008.

¹¹⁶ Email from Thomas R. Labagh, Chairman Grand Lodge Committee on Internet Services, 30 November 2006. See *The Pennsylvania Freemason*, 'AutoMasonry' May 1995, 10; 'AutoMasonry establishes Bulletin Board,' August 1995, 8; 'The Ahiman Rezon Addresses Information on the Internet,' November 1996, 8; 'e-Mason Square Club Formed,' February 1997, 6; 'Grand Lodge on the Internet,' vol. xlv, no. 2, May 1998, 3.

¹¹⁷ *Transactions, The South Carolina Masonic Research Society*, Jerome Joseph ed. 1996 vol. 9, 185. Email from Richard R. Barton, 14 December 2006; email from RW Bro Clifton L. Simmons, Jr, 11 December 2006.

¹¹⁸ Email from Dr Neil Marple, 26 November 2006, Chairman of the Committee on the Internet. Also see knightstemplar.org/KnightTemplar/articles/gdpmay1997.pdf accessed 2007/10/09.

Unsurprisingly, anecdotal evidence suggests that of those jurisdictions that utilized the Internet the earliest had a single strong-willed member who either was a Grand Lodge officer or who held the trust of senior Grand Lodge officers and was given considerable freedom. Neither age, nor length of membership appears to have been a factor, although early non-masonic use of either the Internet or computer technology does.

BLOGS

Web logs or 'blogs' will receive little attention in these notes. The concept of a blog—an easily updated online diary—arguably dates to the Usenet newsgroup mod.ber in 1983, but a more easily recognizable form evolved in 1994, and the term itself was not coined until 1999 when software and hosted blog tools were first released. Technology aside, the only real difference between a blog and a website is immediacy. Preoccupied with newsgroups, mailing lists and creating websites, online freemasons were slow to adopt blogs. Blogs are time-consuming, egocentric things. While there may be some four million masonic webpages on the web, one list of masonic blogs in early 2008 included only seventy.¹¹⁹

masonictao.blogspot.com

Tom Accuosti of Connecticut created *The Tao of Masonry*, as a blog in 2006. Possibly due to his gentle humour and non-confrontational style, his blog has received no negative response from his Grand Lodge, and is now listed on his Grand Lodge website, included with another four that he recommended.¹²⁰ Most of the readers of his blog are from outside his jurisdiction, and his anecdotally-based belief is that Connecticut freemasons are not using the Internet to learn about or discuss Freemasonry.

burningtaper.blogspot.com

One of the higher profile blogs, *Burning Taper*, first posted on 1 October 2005. Receiving no visitors in his first month, by his own logs in mid 2007 he was receiving six hundred visitors a day, with the occasional jump to 1400 for a total of almost 120,000 first-time visitors. The author of *burningtaper.blogspot.com* prefers to post anonymously as

¹¹⁹ King Solomon's Lodge – Path to Masonic Blogs, kingsolomonslodge.org, online 31 July 2006. Jeff Day (b. 1981/04/24) was raised in Laurel Lodge No. 13, Roseburg, Oregon on 29 January 2003 and currently serves as Junior Warden. Using computers since the age of ten, he ran his own, non-masonic, bulletin board from 1993 to 1995. He later designed royalarchmason.org and rogue.cryptic-masons.org.

¹²⁰ Email from Tom Accuosti, 16 April 2007. He first posted into alt.freemasonry in April 2001, shortly before joining Friendship Lodge No. 33, Southington, Connecticut. His blog was first posted in June 2006.

'Widow's Son'. Entering Freemasonry with high ideals, he was soon disillusioned when he found his attempts to follow both the spirit and letter of his Grand Lodge's *Constitutions* and the ideals of Freemasonry were met with resistance. The details of his conflict with members of his lodge or Grand Lodge are just that, details. The relevant point is that, for good or ill, he went public. A relatively recently raised freemason, feeling betrayed by his lodge and Grand Lodge, with nowhere within Freemasonry to turn to for advice or redress, he took the only step he felt he could, and told his story to the world. It would beggar probabilities if his was a unique experience. But his experience was unique in that it occurred precisely at the moment when a means to tell the world came available. Casting his nets wide and proclaiming 'This is not a Masonic blog. This is a blog by a Free Mason',¹²¹ he posted stories both masonic and non-masonic, both critical and supportive. His website gained its most visitors when he began writing critically about the Scottish Rite Southern Jurisdiction's involvement in NASCAR in 2007, an issue that was receiving little other coverage at the time.

Of the other blogs, Chris Hodapp¹²² and his Freemasons for Dummies blog and R. Theron Dunn's A Beacon of Masonic Light are noteworthy both for their strong opinions and willingness to enter into debate.

Gregory Stewart,¹²³ who is interested in masonic esoterica, maintains masonic traveler.blogspot.com where he lists almost forty other blogs. Stewart's blog is perhaps representative of the greater majority that are not actively promoting particular agendas or strong points of view but only wish to record a personal journey in Freemasonry, leavened with the occasional observation. The pseudonymous 'Dean' has maintained freemason.blogspot.com since 3 March 2006, opening with a lengthy list of masonic items

¹²¹ Although posting pseudonymously, by his own reports he was initiated into Pickens Star Lodge No. 220, Jasper, Georgia, in mid-2002 at the age of 45, and currently is an honorary member of Blaine Lodge No. 534 GR. Active on non-masonic local BBSs and CompuServe in the mid 1980s, 'Widow's Son' registered and administered Pickens Star Lodge's website from 2002 until 2005. Email from Widow's Son, 13 April 2007. Also see: burningtaper.blogspot.com.

¹²² Retired commercial filmmaker, W Bro Christopher Lee Hodapp (b. 1958), initiated into Broad Ripple Lodge No. 643, Indiana, on 20 November 1998 and Master for 2000-2003, presented 'Laudable Pursuit: A 21st Century Response to Dwight Smith' at the January 2005 meeting of Lodge Vitruvian No. 767, on behalf of the Knights of the North, and authored Freemasons for Dummies, Wiley Publishing, 2005. He is moderator for Hiram's Forum for the Grand Lodge of Indiana. Suspended in April 2004 for un-masonic comments made in an email regarding disciplinary actions against two other freemasons, he was reinstated in September 2004. He was a charter member of Lodge Vitruvian and served as Master in 2005-2006.

¹²³ Bro Gregory Stewart, a 36 year old art director in Encino, California, also administers freemasoninformation.com, created on 25 April 2005.

available through the online auction, eBay, and continuing in a similar vein. He is one of some hundred members of Mike Martin's British Isles Masonic Webring.¹²⁴

PROMOTING THE STUDY OF FREEMASONRY

While many Grand Lodge, lodge, and freemason websites were little more than 'vanity plates on the information superhighway', with pictures and lists of officers, others recognized the educational potential. RW Bro. Bruno Virgilio Gazzo, in Genova, Italy, created Pietre-Stones Review of Freemasonry on 17 July 1996, moderated the yahoogroup list, Pietre-Stones from 29 September 1998, and registered freemasons-freemasonry.com on 4 April 2003. Dedicated to promoting masonic education, his extensive collection of papers and articles by knowledgeable authors and scholars in English, Italian, French, and Portuguese attracted one million unique visitors in 2007.

The Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon may be unique in developing a website that was focused more on masonic education than on the workings of Grand Lodge.¹²⁵ It was an initiative of this author while serving on his Grand Lodge's Community Relations Committee in 1995. At the time few Grand Lodge officers were online, or understood the Internet. By early 2008 the website contained over 2,800 pages of which less than a hundred were about the Grand Lodge and its committees.

Promoting itself as 'the World's Greatest Internet Research Society', Phoenixmasonry Research Society president and museum curator, David J. Lettelier, of Havana, Florida, registered phoenixmasonry.org on 8 June 1999. Lettelier is 'Worshipful Master of Phoenix Lodge and a 32nd degree Scottish Rite Mason under the Jurisdiction of the International Masonic Order "Delphi"' while the society's secretary is Jerry E. Stotler, who served as Assistant Grand Secretary, for the Grand Lodge of Kansas in 1999. Meeting through the auction website eBay, since 11 August 1999, they have administered a virtual masonic museum and library with a collection of masonic text files and images of masonic objects.¹²⁶

Sri Brahadeeswara Lodge No. 150 under the Grand Lodge of India created Brahadeeswara Lodge Research Circle in 2001 and registered masonicpaedia.org on 14

¹²⁴ W Bro Michael C. Martin joined Mersey Lodge No. 5434 UGLE on 25 March 1994 and was installed as Master in 2002. Assuming administration of UK Masons Webring in July 2006—with only twelve websites—he renamed it the British Isles Masonic Webring and by 2007 participating websites exceeded fifty.

¹²⁵ Cited by John L. Belton, *AQC* vol. 118 (2005), 217.

¹²⁶ *The Scottish Rite Journal*, September-October 2005 scottishrite.org/web/journal-files/Issues/sep-oct05/lettelier.html, accessed 2008/03/22.

March 2002. Administered by RW Bro R. Ratnaswami, the site has grown to almost 200 articles in the public section and an additional forty in a password-protected directory.

The Philalethes Society

The Philalethes Society saw its members in the forefront in using and promoting the use of the Internet. Allen E. Roberts is mentioned several times in these notes while many early participants in the CompuServe Masonic Forum, also noted elsewhere, were either members of the Philalethes, or became members. The Philalethes mailing list was created on the CompuServe Masonic Forum although the exact date is unavailable. If a history of this mailing list is to be written it must come from a member, for as Nelson King, editor of the *Philalethes Magazine* notes, 'As it is a closed and private list we do not give out information about members or numbers.'¹²⁷

Quatuor Coronati Lodge No. 2076

Quatuor Coronati Lodge did not rush to embrace, or even acknowledge, the Internet. Registering its website on 20 September 2003 through the Correspondence Circle, the site incorporated unused frames, radio buttons, coloured text on a textured background, an animated image and an unfortunate java code-generated cursor effect. Slow to load, and with little content, the website experienced few changes in the following five years. Within the published proceedings of the lodge there appeared to be equally little interest in the technology or potential of computers or the Internet. There are barely a handful of mentions.

While the Internet has forty-seven entries in Svend Aage Vedersø's Computer Correlated *AQC-Index: Vol.1-109*, few of them are actually referencing papers published in *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*. In vol. 87 (1974) a review of Alec Mellor's *Les Mythes Maçonniques* by A.W. Barnett notes that Mellor—who coined a new word, maçonologie, to designate scientific masonic research—suggests that the masonology of the future will involve the use of computers. There are a few references in 1990 and 1991 to the use of computers in cataloguing libraries, and passing reference is made in vol. 107 (1994) to the 'Information Highway' and 'Global Internet'. One correspondent noted that '...many brethren in America and Canada [are] now online through the medium of "compuserve" and "internet".'¹²⁸ The Manchester Association for Masonic Research,

¹²⁷ Email from Nelson King, 18 January 2007.

¹²⁸ *AQC* 87 (1974), 216; *AQC* 107 (1994) 124-25, 148; 153. Cyril N. Batham, editor of *AQC* 95 (1982), noted that the United Grand Lodge of England had installed a computer and that *AQC* had been allowed to use it. What kind of computer was unmentioned. This is similar to a reference in *AQC* 104 (1991) to a collection of Georg Burkhard Kloss texts 'on discs'. What kind of discs goes unmentioned.

which in early 2008 still had no Internet presence, did however receive on 27 May 1998 a talk by W Bro Gordon Charlton entitled 'The Internet, the Craft and the Future'.¹²⁹

DOMAINS LOST

In one respect, organized Freemasonry was slow to recognize the value of domain name registration. Many names such as *mason*, *masons*, *masonic*, *masonry*, *freemason*, *freemasons*, and *freemasonic*—in the top-level domains: .com, .net and .org—were snapped up by entrepreneurs.¹³⁰ It is but good fortune that they were not snapped up by anti-masons.

As late as September 1995, when InterNIC Registration Services was still registering domains for free, URLs using *masonic* existed, but *freemasonry*, *masonry* and *freemason* were still available. While *freemason.org* and *freemason.com* were registered by Grand Lodges, *freemason.net* is, as I write, for sale. By the same token, while *freemasonry.org* is safe in the hands of the Philaethes Society, *freemasonry.com* is parked and *freemasonry.net* is owned by a UK IT support and consultancy firm, Tubs & Co, who have parked the site, 'for Freemasons all around the world'.¹³¹

Phil Weston, in England, registered *freemasonic.net* on 14 November 2003, as a masonic community website titled 'Onthesquare'. A members-only forum, the actual contents and popularity of the site are unknown. William Hickey of Boulder, Colorado, registered *masonic.org* on 12 July 1996. Never actually utilized as a webpage, it simply functioned as a home for the Freemasonry-list mailing list.

Long Beach Lodge No. 327, California, registered *masonry.org* on 5 May 1997 and Sanford Lodge No. 62, Florida, has a redirect from *freemasons.org*. On 6 February 1996 *freemason.com*, was registered by Gregory Smith for the Grand Lodge of Ohio.

Freemasonry has not been so fortunate with others: unused, *mason.com* was registered by Chad Kissinger of Austin, Texas, on 19 January 1995, and *masonry.com* was registered by Minneapolis building contractor, Timothy Holmlund, on 27 June 2002. The London UK law firm Pinsent Masons registered *masons.com* on 6 September 1994. James Graham of Calgary, Alberta, registered *freemasons.com* on 15 March 1996 as a password-protected portal to what was rumoured to have been an independent music promotion by Guild Media. Until 1998 the site featured an eyeball and winged pyramid

¹²⁹ *Transactions of the Manchester Association for Masonic Research*, Volume 88 (1998), 27-45.

¹³⁰ See Appendix II, 142.

¹³¹ Created as a portal for 'The Freemasonry Network' on 13 January 1997, the site reported that it was officially approved by UGLE. Throughout 2000 the site was displaying scripting errors. For the next six years the single static page either promoted Freemasonry Net or Tubs and Co. Since early 2006 it reports: 'Our new site will be back soon...'

image. Still owned by Graham, the URL is no longer active. Currently a parked domain, freemasonic.com was registered by Warren Weitzman, of Bethesda, Maryland, on 21 January 2003. BrainFood Media Network registered masons.org on 18 January 1996, displaying a square and compasses emblem from 1998 to 2000 and then going offline. Sometime before September 1995 the Masonic Temple Association of St. Louis registered the domain masonic.com. For reasons undetermined, but perhaps related to the increase in registration fees by InterNIC, the domain was later lost to Lapel Pins and More Inc in Arizona. Noteworthy is grandlodge.com, owned by buydomains.com. On 1 December 2006 it was for sale for \$22,000; by 18 February 2007 the price had almost doubled.¹³²

Ed Deppe of Eden Prairie, Minnesota, registered mason.org on 30 May 1995. Except for a short period in 2002 when Deppe uploaded a splash page headlined 'Ed's Home Page', and another short period from December 2004 to February 2005 when the page displayed a notice for a Grand Lodge of Minnesota-sponsored trip to Scotland and a plea for a volunteer webmaster, the URL has only generated a configuration error. Recognizing one of the most common misspellings, Pomino Beach, Florida domain registrar, moniker.com, registered and parked freemasonry.com on 9 March 2000 and masonry.com on 11 June 2001. This registrar also currently owns bc-freemasonry.com, which will be referred to later.

National top domains have rarely befallen the same fate, with national registrars generally requiring some proof of a real-world use of the name. In Canada, freemasonry.ca is currently blocked since several provincial Grand Lodges registered provincial domains such as freemasonry.bc.ca, freemasonry.nf.ca and freemasonry.pe.ca. It would require permission of all organizations holding a provincial domain for any organization to register freemasonry.ca. But Ebenezer Thevasagayam, a notorious 'cyber squatter' from Toronto, Canada, registered freemason.ca on 1 July 2004.

The Grand Lodge of Russia registered freemasonry.ru, but freemasonry.us was registered on 24 April 2002 by a Mr George W. Mephis of Middletown, NY who, like Thevasagayam, has currently parked it as a link farm.

Other names have also been lost. Affiliated with the International Guild of Masonic Webmasters was a portal website, gomasonry.com: 'Your gateway to worldwide masonic

¹³² Several other domains were registered by freemasons: mastermason.com was registered by Carl Davenport of Downers Grove, Illinois, on 13 May 1997 for the Operative Webmasters Guild; masonicworld.com was created on 11 July 2004 by John T. Mathews of Blacksburg, South Carolina; 2be1ask1.com was registered by Warren V. LeMay, 27 March 1997, although its use by the First Masonic District, Grand Lodge of New Jersey, seems to be a cobweb; freemasonry.com was registered by Neil Baharie of Chelmsford, Essex, on 10 May 1998. Originally redirecting to an early version of the UGLE website, by 16 September 2000 the URL defaulted to the server index.

resources' with, at one time, 1558 links to masonic sites. The original owners, Michael R. Poll and the pseudonymous Martin Barbador, allowing the domain to expire, it was purchased on 20 February 2004 by this-domain-for-sale.com, who blocked access to its pages stored at archives.org, and listed it for sale on 25 September 2007 for \$30,088.¹³³

DOMAIN REGISTRATION AND THE PROBLEMS

The early days of website development imposed a steep learning curve on those unfamiliar with a developing technology for which the ground rules were still evolving. There were those websites registered before fees were imposed where the owners found themselves unable later to prove ownership. Other situations also developed.

The Grand Lodge of British Columbia registered its first domain, bc-freemasonry.com, in 1995 through a local company owned by a freemason. He registered it in his own name, not through any hidden motive but because processing payment was simpler. Unfortunately his company was shortly thereafter absorbed by another company and both the domain for the email address he had used when registering the domain, and his real-world mailing address ceased to exist. This meant that two years later the registrar Network Solutions refused to acknowledge that he was who he claimed to be, and refused all attempts to transfer ownership to the Grand Lodge. They would accept payment though. Another two years passed and the Grand Lodge of British Columbia decided to let the domain registration expire, naïvely expecting to re-register the domain once Network Solutions had released it. Network Solutions' unwritten policy was to release domains at an unannounced time anywhere up to two months after they had expired. Unfortunately the Grand Lodge did not have the resources to work with this process, and several weeks later bc-freemasonry.com became a portal for gambling sites. Today it is parked through an ISP in Florida.

In a similar situation, the Grand Lodge of Alabama had registered alagl.org on 30 April 1997, but when their ISP closed, they were unable to transfer the domain and had to register a new domain.

The Grand Lodge of New Brunswick had a similar experience in the summer of 2009. Originally registered on 4 July 2001 by MW Bro W.C. 'Bill' Boone, the URL ginb.ca was lost on 26 August 2009 when he failed to meet a re-registration deadline. In an internet instant it was sold to a Victoria, Australia, vinter selling adult toys through a French language website registered by a Richmond, BC, domain registrar and hosted by a Texan webserver.¹³⁴

¹³³ Created by the pseudonymous Martin Barbador sometime prior to April 1999. At that time some programming issues were resolved by webcoder.net. See: marketplacepro.moniker.com accessed 2007/12/03.

¹³⁴ Email received from Bill Boone, 21 September, 2009.

The Grand Lodge of Minnesota had its own problems. Mentioned earlier, Ed Deppe of Eden Prairie, Minnesota registered mason.org on 30 May 1995. Earlier that month, on 5 May, he had also registered mn-mason.org. Involved in an early computer committee, the committee thought he was registering the domain on their behalf. In point, it appears that he expected to profit thereby. Not wishing to pay, the Grand Lodge of Minnesota registered mn-masons.org (note the plural) on 19 March 2003 and uploaded a site on 21 April 2003. When the Grand Lodge registered mn-masons.com on 1 October 2005, Deppe registered mn-mason.com on 31 December 2005. Deppe, an aeroplane pilot and one time local ISP owner, continues to be a life member of a lodge in Minnesota, and the Grand Lodge has chosen not to pursue this, either masonically or legally.¹³⁵

CONCORDANT OR APPENDANT BODIES

While the many bodies arrayed under the banner of the extended masonic family will likely have developed their own presence on the Internet, they are not detailed in these notes. I will only mention two.

Working closely with the various bodies ranged under the York Rite banner, Dan Pushee developed the official information site for York Rite Masonry in North America. Pushee perhaps best represents those who promoted the additional degrees online.

Accessing the Internet with an American Online (AOL) account in mid-1996, Pushee immediately saw the need to provide a unified appearance to the many parts of what in the US is styled the York Rite. As AOL provided its customers with the tools to create websites, he created York Rite Sites using the 'members.aol.com' system. Kevin Sample in Missouri initially registered yorkrite.org on 11 December 1997. The same year Dan had joined the Operative Web Mason Guild (OWMG) which was at that time attempting to create a comprehensive York Rite links page on mastermason.com. Convincing the OWMG to hand the project over to him, within two years he had not only developed a complete list but had created web pages for most of the national and state bodies, and had overwhelmed his storage capacity on the AOL host server. Registering yorkrite.com on 1 December 1999 as the front page, he then transferred all the AOL sites. In 2007 he obtained the right to www.yorkrite.org as his space on the webhost for www.yorkrite.com had reached its capacity. As of 14 January 2008 he owned and operated over 40% of the 564 York Rite sites listed on mastermason.com.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Email from Thomas C. Jackson, Deputy Grand Master, Grand Lodge of Minnesota, 17 January 2008. In a similar situation, the Masonic Library and Museum Association registered mimassn.org on 9 November 2005 but on 9 October 2008 someone with prior access authority erased the entire website and the Association found themselves having to register a new URL, masoniclibraries.org.

¹³⁶ George Daniel MacGregor Pushee III, now residing in Florida, joined Wilder Lodge, Massachusetts, in 1972 and came online in 1997 at the age of 60. His website yorkrite.org represents 'the Official Infor-

The several jurisdictions of the Scottish Rite were not as quick to establish a web presence as many of their members had been. Pete Baker created the Toledo Ohio Scottish Rite website on 26 September 1998, based on his America Online account experience designing a personal masonic 'website' he recalls creating in 1991.¹³⁷ The Northern Jurisdiction created supremecouncil.org on 2 January 1998, the Southern Jurisdiction created srmason-sj.org on 14 August 1996¹³⁸ and the Scottish Rite of Canada created scottishritemasons-can.org on 18 August 1998. Their histories are still to be told, as are those of the many other members of the masonic family.

MASONIC CRITICS

Call them masonic critics, anti-masons, conspiracy theorists, or 'researchers'; if they weren't online before freemasons, they were in a dead heat. The list of online anti-masons, conspiracy theorists and those who simply enjoyed baiting freemasons, is far too long and unimportant to include here. Edward L. King has compiled an extensive and representative list at masonicinfo.com.¹³⁹ The Grand Lodge of Indiana addressed the issue with eighteen articles, including the mirrored text of Art deHoyos and S. Brent Morris's *Is It True What They Say About Freemasonry?* but no other Grand Lodge focused as much attention on combatting online anti-masonry as the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon. Originally compiled in mid-1997, the *Anti-masonry FAQ* was created to provide historical context and citations to refutations of anti-masonic attacks in the Usenet newsgroup alt.freemasonry. Written by the Grand Lodge's webmaster, the author of these notes, it was felt too controversial to upload to the Grand Lodge's website until early 2000 but was simply posted periodically into the newsgroup. Starting from what was at first a single page in question and answer format, the *FAQ* soon grew to eight pages and required an additional 300 pages of footnoted resources.

mation Site for the York Rite'. Pushee also is a member of and operates and maintains the Official Sites for General Grand Chapter Royal Arch Masons, International, General Grand Council Cryptic Masons, International, Grand Encampment Knights Templar of the U.S.A., Grand Council Allied Masonic Degrees (AMD), USA, Grand Council, Knight Masons (KM) U.S.A., York Rite Sovereign College Of North America, Convent General, K.Y.C.H., The High Council, MSRICF, Grand College US, Holy Royal Arch Knight Templar Priests (HRAKTP) and The Royal Order of Scotland The Provincial Grand Lodge United States of America. Like other early users of the Internet, he is also a ham radio operator. See: 'York Rite Freemasonry on the Internet,' Dan Pushee. *Knight Templar*, vol. xliii, no. 5, May 1997, 10; vol liiii, no. 6, June 2007, 9.

¹³⁷ Email from Pete Baker, 26 November 2006.

¹³⁸ They later registered scottishrite.org on 31 August 1998, using it as a redirect to srmason-sj.org.

¹³⁹ masonicinfo.com/people.htm accessed 2008/01/11.

Usenet

The newsgroups—or open fora—found on Usenet provided freemasons an opportunity to meet freemasons from around the world. It also introduced them to a range of people who firmly claimed to be freemasons, even if mainstream Freemasonry labelled them irregular: perfectly pleasant, reasonable people who just happened to be Women Freemasons, Co-Masons, Grand Orient Masons or other *genus*. It also opened freemasons' eyes to the many varieties of Freemasonry worked under the banner of regularity. And it brought home to them the painful reality of hateful, malicious, agenda-ridden anti-masonry, in a way that many of them had never had to deal with before.

Even with the volume of anti-masonic postings, the top posters into alt.freemasonry and alt.masons.members were all freemasons, Gene Goldman,¹⁴⁰ James G. Bennie, Edward L. King, Manny Blanco, and Larry Holbrook leading the list.

A few names, or pseudonyms, of the more egregious anti-masons stand out and bear mentioning. Kevin McNeil-Smith, then known as 'Saint John the Sublime Reformer' and later 'Freemasonry Watch', appeared in the Usenet archives in March 1999 but was posting much earlier under numerous aliases, cutting and pasting from others' posts in an often transparent attempt to create strawmen for him to knock down. Kenneth Wayne Mitchell, with well over sixty names, may hold the record for the most aliases or 'sock puppets' as they're called online.

Duane Washum's testimony about leaving Vegas Lodge No. 32, Nevada, in 1988¹⁴¹ arrived as a repost in the Usenet newsgroup alt.freemasonry in early 1996, but he doesn't appear to have posted himself, at least under his own name, until late 1997. He is not archived as posting again after March 1998 but left to form Ex-Masons for Jesus.¹⁴² Larry Kunk, whose ephesians5-11.org claimed to prove that the 'god of Freemasonry is not the

¹⁴⁰ Eugene Goldman (b. 1955/12/16) was initiated in 1986 and got online in 1987, joining MasNet, Hiram's Valley BBS, and then CompuServe where he met Edward L. King, Mike Poll, Mike Wells, and others who found the anti-masons to be more entertaining than threatening. Email from Gene Goldman, 2 February 2007.

¹⁴¹ Duane Washum "Masonry, My Savior, and Me", *Christian Research Newsletter*, Volume 1: Number 4, 1988, ed. Ron Rhodes. CRN0004A.TXT (original CRI file name), release 4 April 1993.

¹⁴² Ex-Masons for Jesus, Post Office Box 28702, Las Vegas, NV 89126. 'At the third [National Leadership Conference on Ministry to Masons], in June of 1995, a suggestion was made that it would be good if a group of former Masons would form an organization named Ex-Masons for Jesus, composed of men who had left the Lodge to follow Jesus Christ.' 'The suggestion was embraced by the group of former Masons who attended the conference. Charlie Wiley and Thomas Hilton became the founding directors. Duane Washum manages this website.' All evidence suggests that the group may have a total of five members. emfj.org//emfj_discussion_board.htm accessed 2007/01/16; masonicinfo.com/duane.htm accessed 2007/02/16.

God of the Bible', also created emfj.org on 24 October 2002 as a home for Ex-Masons for Jesus.

The initial appearance of Nick Kaffes, or 'Kansan1225', on the alt.freemasonry usenet newsgroup (and apparently his first usenet posting) was on 6 February 1999, wherein he began his anti-masonic tirade. Over time his often incoherent posts were overshadowed by his obsession with fashion model Heidi Klum and the archives show no posts with his name after July 2004.

With almost 4500 archived posts into alt.freemasonry, Mike Restivo, a masonic critic from Toronto, Ontario, was one of the newsgroup's more vocal participants. Perhaps arriving in the CompuServe Masons Forum in 1995, in August 1996, he announced 'I've written over half a megabyte of masonry-critical communications publicly in this section.' By December he was posting into alt.freemasonry with increasingly personal attacks on Freemasonry and freemasons. Using an anonymous remailer since July 2003, if he has posted since December 2006, it has not been under his own name.¹⁴³

Restivo was responsible for one of the more entertaining incidents in alt.freemasonry when he—unfamiliar with webpage authoring—in early 2001 allowed visitors to his website unwittingly to enter a directory of adult themed texts. When, on 17 March 2001, Edward L. King posted this URL to alt.freemasonry as an example of Restivo's hypocrisy, Restivo responded by claiming that he had been laying a trap for freemasons. A review of posted messages clearly reveals Restivo's inability to sustain any sense of logic or coherence, as well as King's inability to contain his glee in destroying Restivo's arguments. The fact that King so obviously enjoyed, if not revelled, in dismantling the attempts at logic and rhetoric displayed by anti-masons was of some—rarely expressed—concern to other online freemasons. Although he was often quick to flame those he believed were trolling or misrepresenting Freemasonry, there is no evidence that he ever accused anyone of being an anti-mason who did not ultimately prove himself to be so.¹⁴⁴ There is no way of knowing if a Restivo or an Acacia Press, or any of the others, might have become Freemasonry's friends if the online freemasons had been nicer to them.

Freemasons who encountered anti-masons online responded in a variety of ways. Some freemasons were unable to distance themselves emotionally, and the newgroup archives record many a freemason who erupted in anger, irritation and frustration at the

¹⁴³ Michael J. A. Restivo joined Freemasonry on 2 March 1981—then aged 29—so that he could affiliate with a Martinist body styled Chevaliers Beneficent De La Cité-Sainte. He withdrew from membership on 13 November 1981. Email received from Mike Restivo via Peter Renzland, 2008/05/20. CompuServe Christianity Section post by Mike J. Restivo, 74347,751 #1450003 27 June 1996. Also see: home.earthlink.net/~masonicinfo/beingrestivo.htm accessed 2007/02/21.

¹⁴⁴ Flaming is defined as hostile and insulting interaction between Internet users.

personal attacks and obtuse illogic. Richard White, Michael R. Poll, and Eugene Goldman, like the majority, responded with humour, hard facts and logic. Edward L. King, having learned well from dealing with similar posts in the CompuServe Forum, was quick to recognize the difference between honest questions and the trolling of an anti-mason. Unfortunately one anti-mason, Gregory V. Perry of Tampa Bay, Florida, took exception to being constantly ridiculed and, on 15 June 2004, filed a lawsuit against Edward L. King. The GoogleGroups archives for alt.freemasonry show that the filing did not appreciatively affect King's posting into the newsgroup, although he chose to absent himself from the fray from February 2005 until October 2006. The court action was dismissed on 25 July 2006 with an attached protective order prohibiting either party from discussing the terms of settlement.¹⁴⁵

Ron Boutwell, with the intent of having some fun at the expense of one particularly vocal anti-mason, Gennady Kalmykov, forged a number of his newsgroup posts, with contents exactly opposite of what might be expected: apologizing for bad behavior, admitting stupidity, and the like. While Boutwell enjoyed his baiting, Kalmykov, who posted as 'Nukleus' or 'Librarian', remains as antisemitic and apparently hate-filled as ever.¹⁴⁶

WEBSITES

The number of anti-masonic webpages is impossible to determine. In early 2008 a keyword search for 'freemasonry' plus 'new world order' returned over 100,000 pages, a search for 'freemasonry' plus 'satanic' returned almost as many and a search for 'masonic' plus 'Jesus' returned almost 300,000 pages. Assuming some of these pages were defensive pages or masonic sites, the total is still beyond enumeration or evaluation in an outline such as this.

a-albionic.com

Originally an FTP site, since 1991 James Daugherty's A-albionic (AA) Research¹⁴⁷ has collected a broad range of conspiracy theory related texts. Less interested in Freema-

¹⁴⁵In Circuit Court of the Thirteenth Judicial Circuit in the State of Florida, in and for Hillsborough County Civil Division. Gregory Perry, Plaintiff, vs. Edward King, Defendant. Case No. 04 5478, Division K. Action for damages to his good name, credit and reputation that exceed \$15,000. tinyurl.com/ynowqz accessed 2007/10/12.

¹⁴⁶See: masonicinfo.com/echos.htm 27 February 2004, updated 13 May 2004 with Mr. Kalmykov's name included, accessed 2006/10/03.

¹⁴⁷James Daugherty created the domain although Lloyd Miller is now posting as Research Director. PO

