

The Masonic Library and Museum Association – a History

The mission of the Masonic Library and Museum Association is to assist and support, through education, facilitation of communication, coordination of effort, and other means, those individuals charged with the collection, management, and preservation of the Masonic heritage. By-laws, Article 2.

In the beginning was the Northeast Conference on Masonic Education and Libraries (NECOMELI). Freemasonry has committees and conferences “on” subjects, not “for” them. The “Libraries” part was hardly acknowledged, and the concept “Museums” seems not to have existed, although many grand lodges had, and have, excellent libraries and museums. In the early 1990s, Brothers John H. Platt, Jr. (PA); Paul Bessel (GWNM); Keith Arrington (Iowa); Ed Ralph (Ontario), Mike Kaulback (MA); as well as Cynthia Alcorn (MA); Joan (Kleinknecht) Sansbury (Supreme Council, AASR, SJ) and others, members of what was called the North American Masonic Librarians Consortium sought to change that. They held “break-away” sessions whenever they could squeeze them in during the conferences. (As late as 1997, Librarians still attended the Northeast Conference).

By 1992, these librarians and curators decided to hold a separate meeting in the fall (the Northeast Conference met in the spring). There was fear that Grand Lodges would not accept and financially support yet another organization, so that completely separating from NECOMELI seemed ill-advised. (NECOMELI went dark in 2001, and turned over its assets to MLMA). The first meeting was in October, 1992 at the House of the Temple, Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction in Washington, D.C. and the attendees promptly dubbed themselves “The October Group” -- double entendre intended.

The next meeting was at the Museum of Our National Heritage (now the National Heritage Museum) at Lexington, MA, October 8-9, 1993. There are no minutes in the MLMA Archives. Librarians Nola Skousen and Nancy Wilson hosted about ten people: some professional librarians and curators, some amateur lodge librarians. This mix has held true, and MLMA exists to be a support to *all* who are interested in Masonic libraries and museums. The Archives did yield an interesting piece of information as to a topic of discussion (if not at this meeting, then perhaps before – there is no date): Given that many Masonic books were not copyrighted, and given that the Library of Congress

provided catalogue cards, and still provides cataloging in publication, a resolution was passed “that the assembled Masonic Librarians go on record as encouraging all publishers of Masonic books to have their material copyrighted and registered with the Library of Congress prior to final publication.” One of the main topics of discussion, as this writer remembers, was cataloguing software. The Museum of Our National Heritage already had software, called “Information Navigator”, and everyone clustered around the computer to watch it work. The discussion centered around affordability and whether all present would consider buying the same software. That never happened, but with the ability to put one’s whole library or museum online by means of online public access catalogues, it seems not to matter any more. A meeting called the “Librarians, Curators and Directors Session” was held within the Northeast Conference (May 12-13, 1994) in Washington, D.C. Organization, a newsletter, protection of intellectual property (stamping photocopies), and appraising books were topics of discussion. By meeting time (October 21-22, 1994), with Will Moore of Grand Lodge of New York hosting at the branch of the Chancellor Robert R. Livingston Memorial Library at the Masonic Care Community in Utica, New York, several October Group members had cataloguing software and had “frozen” their card catalogues.

In 1995, the October Group met in Cedar Rapids, Iowa (October 20-21, hosted by Keith Arrington of the Grand Lodge of Iowa), and organized itself into the Masonic Library and Museum Association (MLMA), with John H. Platt, Librarian and Curator of the Masonic Library and Museum of Pennsylvania, as its first President. The other officers were Cynthia Alcorn, Vice President; Paul Bessel, Secretary; Joe Nolte, Treasurer; Charles Tupper, Newsletter Editor; Frances Jackson, “Western [North America, and Hawaii] Coordinator”; Robin White, “Coordinator for Great Britain”.

From the outset, MLMA was interested in having members from other countries, as its “subtitle”, “An International Organization of Librarians, Archivists, Curators & Directors...” indicates. The United Grand Lodge of England was a charter member, and there are, or have been, members from Australia, Belgium, Bermuda, Canada, Curaçao, France, Germany, Mexico, and Scotland. Some of these colleagues were, or

are, members of our older sister organization, the Association of Masonic Museums, Libraries and Archives in Europe (AMMLA) founded in 1989 at the German Masonic Museum (Deutsches Freimaurermuseum) in Bayreuth, with its administrative office in Brussels.

The mission of MLMA in practical terms: At first, MLMA was concerned with gathering data on its member libraries, their procedures, sources for the purchase of Masonic books, indexing of Masonic articles in journals (there were neither on-line bookstores nor periodicals!). More recently, MLMA has concerned itself with bibliographic and “artifactual” support, helping small and new member libraries set themselves up and organize their collections. The old Boyden cataloguing system, used by many members, was updated by Richard Bish, so that it remains easily used in the future.

From notes written in 1996 by Bro. & Chaplain Willard Wetzel, one learns how the format of MLMA annual meetings came about: NECOMELI met once a year. It was thought that Librarians should have two meetings: one in conjunction with NECOMELI and one as a separate group. NECOMELI and the librarians would meet Thursday through Saturday morning. There would be a joint meeting Thursday afternoon and evening – with the keynote address at dinner. The librarians, the “October Group”, would have their own meetings Friday morning and afternoon. There would be a joint banquet Friday evening, and a joint meeting Saturday morning to complete the conference, followed by either a separate or joint lunch. MLMA now begins with an informal dinner on Wednesday night, as members arrive, and holds to the format just described, except that some sessions are “field trips” to places and organizations of interest.

As of 1998 thanks to Phil Rose (WI), there have been tri-fold brochures to supplement and replace the website for those who have no internet access. Dick Browning (AR) and Glenys Waldman (PA) have been primarily responsible for the brochures over the years of the new century.

Books: The following reference works, written by members, and edited by other members, though not published by MLMA, are endorsed by it: (in chronological order):

- Masonic Service Association. *Masonic Libraries: a listing of Masonic Libraries in the United States, Canada and England*. Silver Spring, MD: The Masonic Service Association, 1998.
- Walgren, Kent. *Freemasonry, Anti-Masonry and Illuminism in the United States, 1754-1850: a Bibliography*. Worcester, MA: American Antiquarian Society, 2003. 2vols.
- Watkins, Larissa P. *American Masonic Periodicals, 1811-2001: a Bibliography of the Library of the Supreme Council 33^o, S.J.* New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press and Washington DC: The Supreme Council, AASR, S.J., 2003.
- Watkins, Larissa P. *International Masonic Periodicals, 1738-2005: a Bibliography of the Library of the Supreme Council 33^o, S.J.* New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press and Washington DC: The Supreme Council, AASR, S.J., 2006.
- Watkins, Larissa P. *Our Very Illustrious Brother, Abraham Lincoln: a Bibliography of the Louis D. Carman Collection in the Library of the Supreme Council 33^o, S.J.* New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press and Washington DC: The Supreme Council, AASR, S.J., 2007. N.B.: Lincoln was *not* a Freemason.
- Watkins, Larissa P. *Burnsiana: a Bibliography of the William R. Smith Collection in the Library of the Supreme Council 33^o, S.J.* New Castle, DE: Oak Knoll Press and Washington DC: The Supreme Council, AASR, S.J., 2008.

Our **newsletter** might best be called “an occasional miscellany” (apologies to the Library Company of Philadelphia, who use that as their title). The name of the first one was, aptly, “The October Group” edited by Cynthia Alcorn, of which Volume 1, no. 1 appeared “Fall-Winter, 1993”. Thus it continued, always as Volume 1, through issue no. 3, “Winter 1995.” Then Paul Bessel edited it as “Newsletter” written under the full name of “MLMA – Masonic Library & Museum Association: An International Organization of

Librarians, Archivists, Curators & Directors” (1996-1997). Cynthia Alcorn took the reins again, the title being *The MLMA Newsletter* in 1998. Al Bryant was editor in 1999-2001. The Newsletter went dark for a few years, until Helaine Davis, public services librarian at the then Masonic Museum of Our National Heritage (now, the National Heritage Museum) reorganized it as *The MLMA Beehive* starting in 2006. As of 2007 Jay Hochberg has been Editor of *The Beehive*.

MLMA exists to support grand and subordinate lodges in their educational efforts and welcomes staff members – whether professionally trained or not – at its meetings.

To that end also, MLMA has been represented at other Masonic conferences, most notably the Conferences of Grand Masters, Deputy Grand Masters and Grand Secretaries in 2000 (Savannah, GA), 2003 (DC), 2005 (Calgary) and 2006 (Nashville, TN). People expressed interest each time, and MLMA gained members. Previous to, and between those meetings, letters to Masonic libraries, museums and grand lodges, as well as Paul Bessel’s internet website made us known. In addition, MLMA has been represented at the Southeast Conference of Grand Masters (2000), and at the Association of Masonic Museums, Libraries and Archives – Europe (2004-2009). An exhibit explaining our mission, with brochures to hand out, was constructed by Dick Browning, and sometimes accompanied the representatives. A new pop-up, table-top display, designed by Val Korszniak in 2008, will make that even easier.

MLMA has acted as a clearing house for Masonic queries, dispersal of duplicate or bulk-ordered books, and above all as a bibliographic and “artifactual” support for its members. Member Richard Bish tinkered with the old classic Boyden Masonic classification scheme, and MLMA can still send that, sample forms and tips on managing a library to anyone who requests the packet, or refer the questioner to the MLMA website.

From notes by Bro. & Rev. Willard W. Wetzel, Chaplain, at the 2000 meeting in Grand Rapids: “No one who never had a silly idea ever accomplished anything.” “[We are in] Pursuit of ‘Wow!’”

For updates on Association governance, meetings, members’ contact information, please see other sections of the Website.

Appendix

(N.B.: Unless otherwise indicated, the state or province implies association with the regular Grand Lodge of that jurisdiction)

- **Organizers:**

Cynthia Alcorn, GL Massachusetts (Samuel Crocker Lawrence Library)
Keith Arrington, Iowa Masonic Library (Deceased)
Paul M. Bessel, George Washington Masonic National Memorial, Alexandria VA
Sandra Fennell, Scottish Rite, SJ, DC
Timothy Frankel Scottish Rite, NMJ, MA
Frances Jackson, Hawaii Masonic Public Library
Joan Kleinknecht, Scottish Rite, SJ, DC
Kenneth H. Luckenbach, GL New Jersey
Norval Marks, Iowa Masonic Library Assn.
Joe Nolte, Iowa Masonic Library
Harry Ohrt, North Dakota Masonic Library
Peter Pendrotti, Collingwood Library & Museum on Americanism, Alexandria VA
John H. Platt, Jr., The Masonic Library and Museum of PA (GL Pennsylvania)
Ed Ralph, GL of Canada in Ontario
Russell Strawn, GL Iowa
Charles H. Tupper, GL Washington
Robin White, Berkshire Masonic Centre, England
Paul H. Wieck, GL Iowa
Hugh Young, GL Alberta

- **Other Charter Members** according to the Minutes of November 14, 1995: (State abbreviation alone indicates employment with that Grand Lodge): John Ashby (United Grand Lodge of England), Marie M. Barnett (VA), David M. Blossom (Maine Lodge of Research), Joseph Burton (Masonic Library and Museum of Indiana), Ray D. Carpenter (NM), Michael L. Castroll (CT), Robert F. Drechsler (DC); James Dufresne (ME); Richard E. Fletcher (Masonic Service Association),

John Freeburg (Scottish Rite, Valley of Minneapolis), Gerry P. Gaman (Houston Scottish Rite Library), John Hamill (United Grand Lodge of England), John Hamilton (Supreme Council AASR, NMJ), Sion M. Honea, III (Monroe Masonic Library, NY), Rex Hutchens (Tucson Scottish Rite Library and Museum), Michael S. Kaulback (MA), Paul Ladd (Epping, NH; Gary Liddell (public librarian, Toronto, Ontario), Penny Long (Lee-Lockwood Scottish Rite Library, Waco,TX), Ian C. McIntyre (Charlotte, NC); John Mckenzie (Fountain Valley, CA); William Maurer (George Washington Masonic Shrine, Tappan, NY); Sal Mellon (Cape Coral, FL), Wiliam I. Miller (Long beach, CA), William D. Moore (NY); Charles W. Nelson (Minnesota Masonic Historical Society and Museum, St. Paul), Robert S. Porter (GA), Donald M. Robey (George Washington Masonic National Memorial, Alexandria, VA), Gary Shaw (WI), Kathy Swanson (Supreme Council AASR, NMJ, MA; Roger B. Thorin (CT), Kevin Tuck (CA), Glenys A. Waldman (The Masonic Library and Museum of PA (GLof PA), Kent Walgren (Salt Lake City, UT, deceased).

- **Officers 1995-2010**

Presidents: John H. Platt, Jr., 1995-1999; Paul M. Bessel, 1999-2001; James Dufresne, 2001-2005; Dick Browning, 2005-2007; Glenys A. Waldman, 2007-2009, **William Kreuger, 2009-**.

Vice Presidents: Cynthia Alcorn, 1995-2001?; Dick Browning, 2001-2005; Dick Bish, 2005-2007; Mark Tabbert 2007-

Secretaries: Paul M. Bessel, 1995-1999; Cynthia Alcorn, 1999-2001; Glenys A. Waldman, 2001-2007; Brian Rountree, 2007-

Treasurers: Michael Wells, 2001-2004; Eric Troisdahl 2004-

Chaplains: Willard Wetzel, 2001-2005; James Dufresne 2006; Brian Rountree, 2007-

- **Newsletter Editors:** Charles Tupper, Cynthia Alcorn, Al Bryant, Robert Gilbert, Helaine Davis, Jay Hochberg.

- **Webmasters:** Paul M. Bessel, 1996-2004; David Lettelier, 2005-2008; Ed and Brandy King, 2008-