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Research into Freemasonry is not just peripheral pleasantry, and the social sciences are not “softer” and so radically different from the physical sciences, which have found surety elusive and that advances come from what appear to be small steps. Once in the elevator of the Harvard library with the great historian Arthur Schlesinger Jr., I dared to ask, “Does history prove anything?” The elevator continued in silence, but as he stepped out he murmured, “Little things, little things.” That is true of much good scholarship, for regardless of topic we search for little things that become the bricks in a bigger vision. Rather than being irrelevant or obscure, Masonic research provides insights into larger social problems.
There are innumerable little used Masonic archives; getting more scholars interested in them can be a consequence of establishing this as a permanent biannual congress. In support of that, I speak about a source which is not being used enough -- the published proceedings of Grand Lodges,\textsuperscript{[1]} and what they might mean for more understanding of nineteenth-century Mexican Masonry.\textsuperscript{[ii]} Ezekiel’s comment in the Old Testament about dry bones coming alive is apt.

Anyone acquainted with Masonic libraries knows that these proceedings, often called \textit{transactions}, take up an enormous amount of space; in consequence they sometimes have been the victims of too energetic house cleaning.\textsuperscript{[iii]} To give an idea, a worksheet in the library of the Scottish Rite Supreme Council of the Southern Jurisdiction in Washington indicates that regular grand lodges of the United States have published approximately 8684 volumes of transactions from the eighteenth century to 2006.\textsuperscript{[iv]} When the transactions of other Masonic bodies such as the Royal Arch, as well as of foreign Masonic jurisdictions and of bodies such as the Prince Hall lodges are considered, the dimensions of the resource become apparent.

The bibliography of grand lodge transactions is yet to be written, but the Supreme Council library has established that some volumes seemingly missing in a transactions collection are not really missing.\textsuperscript{[v]} The publishing became biennial until the budget was in better condition or no annual meeting was held.\textsuperscript{[vi]} The jurisdiction issuing the transactions went unrecognized by the grand body whose library now misses them; the Grand Lodge of British Columbia recognized no additional jurisdictions between 1923 and 1962.

Nevertheless, every grand lodge and many other Masonic organizations (Royal Arch, Council, Commandery, Scottish Rite, Shrine, Eastern Star, and so on) issues them, and so the pressure on
shelf space is unremitting. This is one motive for scanning the records and placing them online. For example, the transactions of the Grand Lodge of Maine from 1820 to 1847 are now available on their site.

The publishing of transactions by a grand lodge usually begins soon after its founding. The Grand Lodge of Illinois, for example, was organized in 1822 and produced its first printed volume of proceedings in 1824. Consciousness of the significance to their status of annual transactions has led grand lodges to reprint them when copies were exhausted. By 1860, reprints appeared for the early transactions of Ohio, Iowa, and Texas.

A motive clearly was to establish the regularity and status of the grand lodge by publishing exchanging transactions with other grand lodges, integral to a grand lodge’s recognition. However, while generalizations about this process should be tempered, exchanges of transactions in the nineteenth century were largely between grand lodges in the Anglo-Saxon sphere. Bros. Brent Morris and Art de Hoyos, inveterate readers of transactions, confirm that the nineteenth-century transactions of the American grand lodges have an absence of mention of Latin America and Mexico. Language may be one explanation, but Masonic historiography in England and America has often suffered from a myopic hubristic view of the Craft. The failure to acknowledge the part Scotland has played is an example, and so is the lack of acknowledgement of early Masonry on the Continent and the role of the guilds. This bias is illustrated in the Transactions of the Grand Lodge of New York for 1851, when the Committee on Foreign Correspondence gratuitously remarks “…James the Second and his followers carried masonry into France, where they perverted it; and the French perverted it still more…”

Another reason for the lack of exchanges is frustration over the conduct of Mexican lodges and pessimism about the outcome
of admitting reciprocity. The New Yorkers lamented chartering lodges in Mexico, and “fierce and embittered” lodge relationships there.\textsuperscript{[xi]} That New York had had any part in the fraternal strife was upsetting: there was “war to the knife” among Mexican Masons “to which we had been an involuntary party.”\textsuperscript{[xii]} This silence may then be partly attributable to distaste, the equivalent of the nonbarking dog that occasioned Sherlock Holmes to remark that no barking was itself significant.

A case can be made that Masonry was brought to Mexico by the Spanish, those in military lodges.\textsuperscript{[xiii]} Dissension among the brothers was soon evident and Luis Rodriguez suggests that since there were divisions in Spanish Masonry, it is logical to suppose that the antagonism between rites came with them, with “terrible consequences”.\textsuperscript{[xiv]}

The historiography of Mexican Freemasonry is indeed a story of fratricide and drama. There are tantalizing hints of Masonic activity as the eighteenth century reached an end, some of which occurred during the administration of the Conde de Revillagigedo as royal viceroy (1789-1794).\textsuperscript{[xv]}

On June 24, 1791, at what must be the most dramatic Saint John's dinners in history,\textsuperscript{[xvi]} what seems to have been a lodge was meeting that had been organized by a number of recently arrived French retainers of the Viceroy, prominent among them watchmaker Jean Laroche, cook Jean Laussel and a barber named Duroy, at whose house the dinner was held. The local parish priest had been watching their comings and goings and tipped off the Holy Inquisition who broke into the meeting. One member, Laussel, was sentenced to three years imprisonment. Witnesses testified that he had bragged about being a Mason and he eventually confessed to having been initiated in Montpellier in Languedoc and had at least two friends in Mexico City who were Masons.\textsuperscript{[xvii]} Languedoc owned \textit{Les Réveries d’un promeneru
solitaire by Rousseau, which goes to the point about the Enlightenment’s coming to Mexico having some Masonic assistance.\[^{xviii}\]

More extensive notice of Masonry in Mexico begins with the early 1800s,\[^{xix}\] often with the meetings of a lodge on Las Ratas street in Mexico City in 1806.\[^{xx}\] Later, in the early new republic, York Freemasonry did seem to be a promising rival to the Scottish Rite.\[^{xxi}\] The 1820s were full of confusing Masonic activity, which is why Guillermo De Los Reyes’ paper today is so welcome.

The first president, Guadalupe Victoria, left the Scottish movement to establish an anti-Spanish xenophobic lodge called The Great Legion of the Black Eagle.\[^{xxii}\] This lodge affiliated with the York Masons (Yorkinos), who to a man were unsympathetic to the Spanish -- even those pledging themselves to support the new republic -- remaining in Mexico. (The lodge that Victoria established, The Great Legion of the Black Eagle, was regarded as a something of a personality cult, and the members were called guadalupanos after their mentor. Still, its members thought of themselves as serious Masons.\[^{xxiii}\]

The York and Scottish lodges became bitter enemies. The first American minister of Mexico, Joel Poinsett, supported the York lodges, fueled by his interest in Royal Arch Masonry, and as the comments from the New York transactions suggest, promised five of their lodges that he would obtain charters from New York (and eventually obtained recognition for three). He entertained Yorkists in his house and supported their creation of a grand or national organization. Cabinet members, senators, congressmen, and army officers affiliated. In the Mexican presidential election of 1828, the Scottish Rite supported Gomez Pedraza, who had left the Scottish lodge for the York lodge. He defeated Guerrero, but the Yorkists rose up and Pedraza fled. Poinsett however became an embarrassment to Guerrero, and President Andrew Jackson withdrew him in January 1830 when the York cause was collapsing and Yorkinos were leaving Mexico.\[^{xxiv}\]

By the middle of nineteenth century, at least New York Masons felt that the Vatican had been bested and tranquility restored: “The bulls of the See of Rome are nearly obsolete, and
many of her professors in Italy, France, Spain, Portugal, Brazil and Mexico are members and patrons of the institution.”[xxv] That was a fond but never realized hope. The Mexican Scottish version of Masonry seemed to breed contention. “By what authority did Albert Pike declare that his Scottish Rite …was the only one that shall be authorized in the Republic (of Mexico) to exercise jurisdiction over the first degrees of Masonry?” complained a correspondent in 1886, to rejoinders that Pike never made such a claim.[xxvi] Could Masonry be legitimate that was not descended from England was asked on more than one occasion.

Originally transactions included the business minutes of the grand lodge annual meeting, addresses from the grand master, and a list of lodges and their officers. Warnings about imposters seeking Masonic charity were soon included and sometimes lists of expelled members or even of the entire membership in the state. There were debates, a Masonic ping pong, when one set of transactions would comment on assertions in the transactions of another grand lodge. What physical problems prevented someone from taking the degrees, what religious views were expected of members, what was one to think of the Grand Lodge of Cuba. Inevitably what (with a shudder sometimes) was one to think of the Grand Orient in Paris. Originally, with Masonic periodicals limited, transactions substituted for Masonic journals. When those became abundant, the custom of issuing transactions was firmly rooted.

As the nineteenth century progressed, American grand lodges enlarged their printed transactions and the space for comment grew on the activities of other jurisdictions.[xxvii] A mission to record for posterity meant the transactions were, “founding for us the groundwork of a Masonic history”. [xxviii] An Ohio brother rejoiced in 1867, “Four thousand pages of official Masonic literature in one year! And yet this only comprises a part of the annual official Masonic literature.”[xxix]
Sometimes it would be the grand secretary who would take the task in hand. Often there would be a committee on foreign correspondence. The custom of having a grand representative to each recognized other jurisdiction became widespread.\ solref{xxx} On occasion all three provided comment.\ solref{xxxi} The reports of foreign jurisdictions dominated many transactions.

This expansiveness did not go unremarked; a sceptic as early as 1860 quoting Sheridan’s view that Gibbon was mistakenly called the most \textit{luminous} writers in English when surely was meant that he was the most \textit{voluminous}.\ solref{xxxii} An Ohio brother admitted that “The writer has an antiquarian turn, and believes with Bacon that “it is not Augustine nor St. Ambrose’s work that will make so wise a divine as ecclesiastical history through read and observed.”\ solref{xxxiii} By the end of the century records were being set in the length of transactions: Illinois in 1899 approvingly noted that the year before California had produced 588 pages, Illinois had managed 480 pages, and Ohio published 563 pages.\ solref{xxxiv}

Ultimately the second half of the nineteenth century proved as chaotic Masonically as the first half, which makes David Merchant’s paper on the ethos of the era all the more welcome. The patience of these commentators with Latin lodges, when a glance occurred, was limited: “Spain and Portugal have no settled conditions…it would be tedious to discuss the condition and situation of Freemasonry in those countries, because all reliable and trustworthy statements and documents are missing” commented the Committee on Foreign Correspondence of the Grand Lodge of Texas in 1876.\ solref{xxxv}

When the Grand Diet, a Mexican national grand lodge, emerged there were American grand lodges that recognized it. Florida did in 1884, but at the same time refused to recognize a new grand lodge in Veracruz that was organized by the Grand Lodge of Cuba as it was challenged by the “central grand lodge”,


and advised Veracruz if it wanted recognition to abandon claims of jurisdiction covering all of Mexico and concentrate on the one state.[xxxvi]

The Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia in the 1880s made a brave effort in recognizing (Mexico City, Jalisco, Morelos, Oaxaca, Vera Cruz, Guerrero, Lower California, Tamaulipas) Mexican Grand Lodges and noting others (Puebla, Tabasco, Durango, Flaxcala, Campeche). Florida in 1886 thought the solution might be a visit: “We are of the opinion that it would be well for, say three of the Grand Lodges of the states bordering upon Mexico – say Texas, Louisiana, and Kansas – to unite in sending a commission of investigation…”[xxxvii]

That was a brave effort, but the complications south of the border made most American grand lodges wary. The Grand Dieta collapsed in charges of embezzlement and irregularity, and the Illinois transactions for 1899 were moved to verse:

\[
\begin{align*}
O \text{ Grand Dieta!} \\
O \text{ Grand Dieta! Faction, strife,} \\
\text{Seem part and parcel of thy life.} \\
\text{What Masonry is this of thine,} \\
\text{Where hallowed lights have} \\
\text{Ceased to shine?} \\
\text{Our landmarks underfoot you’ve trod,} \\
\text{From altar banished Book of God.} \\
\text{With women you our treasures share} \\
\text{As though but ‘trifles, light as air!’}
\end{align*}
\]
When thundered forth the Craft’s protest
You first denied, then half confessed,
Till cornered quite and hedged about,
The awful, awful truth came out

O Grand Dieta!"[xxxviii]

Surveying the expiring century and such confusion, Colorado in 1899 warned that “…hasty recognition of any body is to be deplored, especially one with such a past as the one of Mexico.”[xxxix]

At this conference we probably share the view that the history of secret and ritualistic organizations can expand vistas. A favorite cartoon of mine shows two fish in a bowl, alongside which another bowl with more fish has just been placed. The one fish says to the other “Oh great! Now I’ll have to form a whole new cosmology.”

Such a cosmology beckons in the transactions. May we find the good will in reading them of one compiler who in 1873 wrote, “The undersigned would bid a fraternal adieu to his brethren of other Correspondence Committee…he has found much to admire, little to blame, all earnest and true, doing to the best of their ability their allotted duty.”[xl]
So many problems in physics are demanding unconventional approaches that the phrase ‘conventional wisdom’ is an oxymoron.

The value of transactions and of all material that appears stagnant is I suppose is underscored by the Centre for Research into Freemasonry at the University of Sheffield placing online Lane’s *Masonic Records of England and Wales*, and Draffen’s *Scottish Masonic Records*. And KenWalgren’s prodigious labors on Scottish Rite imprints are another example of how important bibliography is.

Dr. John Cooper, Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of California, recounts dismay on finding that many proceedings of grand lodges and other bodies had been jettisoned before he became a grand lodge executive. The author can vouch that the collection of the proceedings of the library of the Grand Lodge of Louisiana were simply abandoned when the Grand Lodge sold its building in New Orleans: he managed to ship some of them to the George Washington Masonic Memorial for its collection.

Virginia has issued the most, 228 volumes, beginning in 1778. Hawaii, being a new grand lodge, has only issued 17. “Grand Lodges of the USA”, Worksheet of the Supreme Council Library, provided May 18, 2007. The library issued its first catalog in 1880 and published a Masonic classification system by William L. Boyden in 1915, so its bibliographicaal contribution has been long and distinguished.

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The George Washington Masonic National Memorial in Alexandria, Virginia, has proposed the use of the Online Computer Library Center where grand lodges can have the proceedings digitalized, with the Memorial keeping the original paper copies. At the moment, while not available in large university research
libraries or online, these volumes may still be close by, resting on shelves in the library of a Scottish Rite Valley or a building serving several blue lodges.


[1] Ibid.


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Masons then and now celebrate with a dinner in honor of St.John the Baptist, and at Christmastide too when they commemorate St. John the Evangelist. This would seem to be a survival of their medieval history as a guild. See http://www.masonicworld.com/education/files/stjohndays.htm


Houdaille, 17.

“We may take our choice between two rival affirmations or more wisely suspend our judgment, there being no evidence to offer a ground of settlement. According to one, three Lodges in the city of Mexico were warranted from New York about 1825, and a Grand Lodge was formed. According to the other, Mexico was first colonised by the Scottish Rite before 1810.” Arthur Edward Waite, A New Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry (Ars Magna Latomorum), “New and Revised Edition”, Vol. 2, Weathervane Books, New York , 1960, 10.

“Según José Mª. Mateos existía masonería en México antes de 1806 ya que en ese año fue iniciado Don Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla en una Log.: ubicada en la calle de Ratas No. 4, a la que asistían prominentes integrantes del cabildo de la Ciudad de México. Según Castillo desde finales del S. XVIII, existían en México (Nueva España) Log.: militares de españoles. Según el catecismo del Ap.: del R.: N.: M.: “El Rito Escocés Antiguo y Aceptado fue el primero que se conoció en México...” http://www.ritonacionalmexicano.org/ “Para José Marín Mateos (Historia de la Masonería en México, 1884), la masonería se introdujo en México en 1806. En ese año, por iniciativa del señor Enrique Muni, se fundó una logia en la calle de Las Ratas No.4 (hoy Bolivia 73), domicilio particular del regidor Manuel Cuevas Moreno de Monroy Guerrero y Luyando, Pertenecían a ella el propio Manuel Cuevas, el marques de Uluapa, José María Espinosa, Francisco Primo de Verdad y Ramos (1760-1808), Juan Francisco Azcarate y


[1] Jose María Mateos, Historia de la Masonería en Mexico desde 1806 a 1884, Mexico City, 1884, 41.

[1] Rodríguez, 60.


[1] “When we contrast the present voluminous proceedings of the several Grand Lodges with those of twenty years ago...”, Proceedings of the Grand Lodge...State of Missouri, N.Niedner, St.Louis, 1858, 33.


[1] Proceedings of the Grand Lodge... Ohio, Nevins & Myers, Columbus, 1867.

Regardless, one person seemed to always do the work, so the suggestion was unsuccessfully made that they be paid. *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of Missouri*, A.L.1857, no pub.


*Transactions of the Grand Lodge...of the State of New York*, Thomas Holman, New York, 1876, 116.


*Proceedings of the M.W. Grand Lodge...of Colorado*, W.F.Robinson Printer, Denver, 1899.

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http://history.mainemasonrytoday.com/Proceedings/index.htm


Ibid, 110.

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Jose María Mateos, Historia de la Masonería en Mexico desde 1806 a 1884, Mexico City, 1884, 41.

Rodríguez, 60.

See Sims, passim.

Transactions of the Grand Lodge…State of New York, October 18th 5850 – June 3, 5851, 140.


“When we contrast the present voluminous proceedings of the several Grand Lodges with those of twenty years ago…”, Proceedings of the Grand Lodge…State of Missouri, N.Niedner, St.Louis, 1858, 33.
Certainly in the 1840s the topic of grand representatives surfaces. *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of Missouri*, Chambers & Knapp, St. Louis, 1842, 22.

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