

THESIS

THE SILENT FORCE OF MASONRY:
FREEMASONRY'S IMPACT ON THE MAKING OF COLORADO, 1858–1900

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ABSTRACT

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In the mid-nineteenth-century American West, transient populations faced an institutional vacuum where formal governments and established social structures were largely absent. This thesis argues that in early Colorado, from the initial gold rush in 1858 through the turn of the century in 1900, the essential work of community creation and state-building was driven by the networks of voluntary associations, most notably the Freemasons. Operating as a “polyvalent associational anchor,” the Masonic lodge functioned as a versatile institution capable of transforming into a spiritual body, a judicial court, an economic safety net, or a civic hub to fill whatever voids existed in fledgling settlements.

To move beyond anecdotal histories, this study employs spatial history and digital humanities to visualize the fraternity’s “invisible ubiquity”. By digitizing original member ledgers and Grand Lodge proceedings, Numerous datasets were created, tracking the occupations, ages, and geographic mobility of over 1,500 early Colorado Masons. This demographic autopsy refutes the notion that Masonry was strictly an elite club. Instead, the data showcases a transition from a youthful, transient membership dominated by miners in the 1860s to a stable, middle-aged demographic of white-collar and skilled professionals by 1900.

Furthermore, this thesis introduces an analysis termed the “Civic Gap,” which demonstrates that during Colorado’s territorial period (1861–1876), 76% of towns with Masonic Lodges saw the fraternity establish its network prior to the town's legal incorporation. Acting as

“civic pioneers,” these Lodges provided immediate infrastructure for extrajudicial justice, public education, and business trust by mitigating the principal-agent problem. By promoting restrained masculinity over frontier violence and enforcing a continent-wide network of mutual aid and respectability, Freemasonry imposed a durable vision of order from the bottom up, ostensibly serving as a rehearsal for statehood long before official governments arrived.

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This thesis is, in many ways, my love letter to the generations of my family that came before me. My grandfather wears the Scottish Rite ring of *his* grandfather; my great-grandma's Eastern Star chinaware adorns the wall of my family's living room. I have read the record of my great-great-great-great-grandfather, Franklin Noe, being made a Mason in February of 1870. My father, mother, cousin, and grandma have all become members of various Masonic bodies over the past several years. This wouldn't have been possible without the unconditional love and support of my parents, my two younger brothers, and my grandparents. To have a strong family foundation is something I will never take for granted. It is to my role model, my hero, and idol in all things—Masonic and otherwise—that I dedicate this thesis: My grandpa, Steve Davis. Thank you for instilling in me an interest in history, a passion for Masonry, and the love of learning.

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Introduction

The Colorado mountains were dark on a cool summer night in late June of 1858. From the valleys below, an observer might have noticed specks of light—lanterns held by unseen men—steadily tracing their way up the mountainside. There, in a makeshift “Temple” crafted from logs felled in the woods near present-day Central City, reportedly over two hundred men gathered. They were strangers to one another, hailing from distant states and countries, yet they were brothers. As one attendee, William M. Slaughter recalled, “four men... armed with rifles and revolvers stood on guard, one at each corner of the ‘Temple,’ and one at the other door also.” Simultaneously, scores of visitors proved their credentials as Freemasons to an examining committee. These men were in Colorado to prospect for gold, but on that mountainside, they were engaged in something else entirely: the construction of a civil society from the ground up. What was this institution that commanded such devotion in such a wild place, and what role did it play in the settlement of the West? In the vast literature of the region’s history, this question has been largely ignored.¹

The scene on that mountainside was a microcosm of the central challenge facing the American West. The region in the mid-nineteenth century was, as historian Walter Nugent describes, overwhelmingly populated by “transient young men,” drawn by the promise of land, resources, and self-improvement.² In gold rush camps, on cattle drives, and in nascent towns, established social structures were conspicuously absent. Institutions that had provided order and identity in the East such as settled towns, established churches, extended families, and formal

¹ William Slaughter, “First Meetings of Pioneer Masons in Gregory Gulch: Letter of Bro. Wm M. Slaughter, One of the First Settlers, to Bro. J. C. Johnston, Secretary of Denver Lodge No. 5,” *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 5, no. 2, (1896): 30.

² Walter Nugent, *Into the West: The Story of Its People* (Vintage Books, 1999), 74.

governments were either nonexistent or in their infancy. This social vacuum created a profound instability. In this environment, the enduring American myth of the rugged individualist, a lone figure taming the wilderness, obscures a more fundamental historical reality. As Nugent observes, the history of the West “much more often reveals communities and civic cooperation rather than the extremely rare shoot-outs.”³ The critical question, then, is not whether cooperation existed, but how it was organized. If the West was not simply a collection of atomized individuals, what were the mechanisms that fostered trust, established norms, and allowed for collective action in the absence of strong governmental presence?

The answer lies in the proliferation of voluntary associations. As historian Richard White notes, these organizations could create new communities where none existed before and provide the connective tissue for a society in flux.⁴ Rapidly, just as they had during the colonial period in the American East and in many colonial efforts by the British Empire, fraternal orders, benevolent societies, and civic clubs became essential platforms for forging social bonds, conducting business, and organizing public life.⁵ Yet these groups were not merely supplemental social outlets for people in unfamiliar territories. In a landscape defined by conquest and the contest for resources, these groups were engaged in the fundamental work of place-making and community creation, positioning themselves as primary agents in constructing civil society itself. Among the hundreds of orders that took root in the West, none was older, more widespread, or more influential than Freemasonry. As the archetypal fraternal organization, it provides an indispensable case study for understanding this overlooked process of community formation.

³ Nugent, *Into the West*, 73.

⁴ Richard White, *“It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own”: A New History of the American West* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 317–18.

⁵ Jessica Harland-Jacobs, *Builders of Empire: Freemasons and British Imperialism, 1717–1927* (University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 4. Harland-Jacobs invokes a letter by Lord Carnarvon in which he says that the Masons would follow closely on the heels of the “flag of conquest.”

While it would be improper to suggest Freemasonry has received no historical attention, the disproportionately low number of academic works centered on the world's oldest and largest fraternal organization is striking. This absence is particularly acute in the historiography of the American West, and the defining works of the New Western History movement—which revolutionized the field in the late 1980s and 1990s—are largely silent on the matter. For example, the flagship text of the movement, Patricia Nelson Limerick's, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West*, masterfully detailed the intricate contests over property, race, and resources, but contained no mention of the fraternity or any similar organizations. Similarly, William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* and Donald Worster's *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* similarly ignore the presences of social organizations in their studies. Indeed, most of the texts that spearheaded this intellectual revolution were devoid of any sincere mention of associationalism.⁶

The exception to this trend is Richard White's expansive and influential tome, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own": A New History of the American West*. In his analysis of Cripple Creek, Colorado, White notes that the mining town of twenty thousand people boasted over one hundred chapters of forty different fraternal orders, including the Masons. He observes that in pursuing their individual interests, whether that took the form of business contacts, recreation, or insurance benefits, the members of these lodges knit together a community that

⁶ The so-called "gang of four" that fostered the New Western History movement consisted of Patty Limerick, Richard White, William Cronon, and Donald Worster. Their respective works that defined the early years of the movement were: Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (W. W. Norton, 1987); White, *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own"*; William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (W. W. Norton, 1992); Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (Oxford University Press, 1985). The term "gang of four" appears in a handful of publications, most famously in David M. Wrobel, "Introduction: 'What on Earth Has Happened to the New Western History?'" *The Historian* 66, no. 3 (2004): 437–41. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24453032>.

was otherwise fractured by class and ethnicity.⁷ Yet this crucial insight occupies only a few paragraphs in a work of over six hundred pages, leaving the role of these organizations underdeveloped.⁸

This omission is significant for a variety of reasons. Not the least of which stemming from the overwhelming consensus among scholars who have studied Masonry that it served as the blueprint for a significant number of other fraternal, civic, social, and voluntary organizations that proliferated during the nineteenth century.⁹ As historian Mary Ann Clawson argues, a “Masonic type of fraternalism served as the organizational model for trade unions, agricultural societies, nativist organizations, and political movements of every conceivable ideological stripe.”¹⁰ To study Masonry, then, is to study the foundations of American associationalism itself, yet few have taken up the challenge of investigating its role in the crucible of the American West.

Part of the challenge of writing history regarding the Masons emerges from a complicated paradox best expressed by the French historian of the order, Alec Mellor: “*Ceux qui appartiennent à la Franc-Maçonnerie ne peuvent tout dire, et ceux qui n’en sont pas membres ne peuvent tout savoir: tel est le double obstacle*” (“Those who belong to Freemasonry cannot say everything, and those who are not members cannot know everything: such is the double

⁷ White, “*It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own*,” 317-18.

⁸ Following an interview conducted by my colleague Samantha Hanek with Richard White regarding the importance of mentorship to the fields of public and environmental history, he expressed to Sam the great importance of Freemasonry and its role in the development in the American West. He further acknowledged the historiographic gap pertaining to the influence of the order on the West and encouraged historians to fill said gap. Richard White, conversation with Samantha Hanek, October 17, 2025, Western History Association 2026 Annual Conference, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

⁹ Several authors point out the archetypal structuring of the Freemasons in relation to other subsequent groups. Roger Burt, ““Order Without Law”: Masons and Vigilantism in Virginia City, Montana, and Tombstone, Arizona” *Heredom: The Transactions of the Scottish Rite Research Society* 25 (2017): 584; Mary Ann Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood: Class, Gender, and Fraternalism* (Princeton University Press, 1989), 4–5; Mark A. Tabbert, *American Freemasons: Three Centuries of Building Communities* (National Heritage Museum; New York University Press, 2005), 11.

¹⁰ Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood*, 5.

jeopardy’).”¹¹ This dilemma has shaped the field, creating a persistent divide between academic and practitioner histories and seemingly scaring away generations of academics. The limited scholarship that does exist can be organized into three primary waves. The first, emerging in the 1980s, was defined by Lynn Dumenil’s *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880–1930*. Her work set the tone for future socioeconomic analyses of fraternalism but contained significant flaws, most notably its statistically erroneous assumption that data extracted from a single lodge in Oakland, California, could somehow represent the composition of a nationally prevalent organization.¹² Building on Dumenil’s work, scholars like Clawson and Mark Carnes produced important studies on class, gender, and ritual, but often focused on single facets of fraternalism rather than the institution as a whole.¹³

A second wave in the 2000s expanded the scope of inquiry. William Moore’s study of Masonic temples explored the ways in which architecture was used to anchor masculine identity, while Jessica Harland-Jacobs’s *Builders of Empire: Freemasons and British Imperialism, 1717–1927* argued that Freemasonry was intimately bound up with British imperialism, accompanying troops and administrators across the globe. Her work strongly suggests a similar role for the fraternity in America’s own westward expansion, which some might argue was an imperial effort in all but name.¹⁴ The third and most recent wave, emerging in the 2020s, includes global and comparative studies by scholars like Roger Burt and Margaret Jacobs. Burt’s work,

¹¹ Alec Mellor, *La Franc-Maçonnerie à l’heure du choix* (Mame, 1963), 9.

¹² Lynn Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880–1930* (Princeton University Press, 1984). While there are numerous conclusions, assertions, and discoveries in Dumenil’s work that have value, I find many of her applications of data to be fallible. One cannot make an accurate assumption concerning, for example, the socio-economic composition of American Freemasonry based solely off of data taken from one lodge in California during a forty year span.

¹³ Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood*; Mark Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (Yale University Press, 1989).

¹⁴ The second wave of publications features Moore’s and Harland-Jacobs’s works: William D. Moore, *Masonic Temples: Freemasonry, Ritual Architecture, and Masculine Archetypes* (University of Tennessee Press, 2006); Harland-Jacobs, *Builders of Empire*.

both in his monograph and various articles, demonstrated that the fraternity's global network provided its members with economic, social, and educational benefits that were crucial for facilitating the operation of the free-market capitalist system by reinforcing trust and creating safety nets. Jacobs's 2023 publication, on the other hand, focused more specifically on the role of Freemasons in various civil societies around the globe. Both such works indicate the shift towards a more globalized society and scholastic lens.¹⁵

Throughout these works, the divide between Masonic and non-Masonic authors has shaped interpretations of the fraternity's role. Masonic author and historian Mark Tabbert articulates the dilemma at the heart of this historiography. Speaking on non-Masonic historians, he writes, "while these scholars have much to say about Freemasonry that is valuable, most of them are not members, have never attended a meeting and have not actually witnessed the rituals performed. This limits their ability to fully understand the Craft."¹⁶ The frequent result is that much has been written about Freemasons, but very little about Freemasonry itself as a system of meaning, ritual, and social organization.¹⁷ This leaves a clear and significant gap in the histories of the American West.

In the mid-nineteenth-century American West, transient populations faced an institutional vacuum where formal governments and established social structures were largely absent. This thesis argues that in early Colorado, the essential work of community creation and state-building was performed in large part by the networks of voluntary associations like the Freemasons.

¹⁵ For Burt's variety of publications, see: Roger Burt, *Miners, Mariners, and Masons: The Global Network of Victorian Freemasonry* (University of Exeter Press, 2020); Roger Burt, "Benevolent Organization in Mining Communities: Cornwall, the Keweenaw and California Compared," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 130 (2017): 205–222; Burt, "'Order Without Law': Masons and Vigilantism in Virginia City, Montana, and Tombstone, Arizona". Further, for a recent global analysis of Freemasonry, see Jacob, Margaret C. Jacob and Maria Eugenia Vasquez Semadeni, *Freemasonry and Civil Society: Europe and the Americas (North and South)* (Peter Lang, 2023).

¹⁶ Tabbert, *American Freemasons*, 11.

¹⁷ Christopher Powell. "Masonic Historiography or the Craft of a Masonic Historian," *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* 129 (2016): 266.

Operating as a “polyvalent associational anchor,” the Masonic lodge was a highly versatile institution capable of instantaneously transforming into a spiritual body, a judicial court, an economic safety net, or a civic hub to fill whatever voids existed in fledgling settlements. By supplying this adaptable civic infrastructure—frequently acting as “civic pioneers” that predated formal town incorporations—the fraternity functioned as a primary stabilizing force on the chaotic frontier. This study demonstrates that through its replicable organization, its promotion of restrained masculinity, and its creation of continent-wide trust networks, Freemasonry imposed a durable vision of order from the bottom up, effectively serving as a rehearsal for statehood long before official governments arrived.

The Masonic network operated in a manner strikingly similar to the U.S. postal system, which historian Cameron Blevins, in *Paper Trails: The US Post and the Making of the American West*, describes as a “gossamer network.” Like the postal service, Masonic lodges had a tendency to “hide in plain sight, camouflaged by their own routine, ubiquitous presence.”¹⁸ Furthermore, the fraternity’s expansion mirrored the “agency model” that Blevins identifies in the postal system. This model reverses the traditional direction of state power; instead of a central authority imposing its structure from the top down, local residents initiated the process by petitioning for the creation of a post office. So too with Masonry. The Grand Lodge of Colorado provided the legal framework by granting charters, but the impetus, organization, and establishment of lodges were almost entirely local endeavors, making them a prime example of community-driven institution building on the frontier—not unlike the process of statemaking.

It is important to note that there are several different “branches” on the Masonic family tree. The “base” of American Freemasonry is referred to as Blue Lodge Masonry, and contains

¹⁸ Cameron Blevins, *Paper Trails: The US Post and the Making of the American West* (Oxford University Press, 2021), 5.

the first three degrees, variably called the “craft” or “symbolic” degrees. Upon reaching the third, or “Master Mason” degree, the individual is considered a full member, which comes with several rights and benefits detailed in the philosophy section of part one. One of the key benefits extended to Master Masons is the right to join the “appendant bodies” that comprise the Masonic tree. Dozens, if not hundreds, of such orders have been created over the centuries, each attempting to contribute something new to the broader Masonic network, with some having significant success and other discontinuing operations after only a few years. Of all the groups, four key appendant bodies have emerged in American Freemasonry: the Scottish Rite, the York Rite, the Shriners, and the Order of the Eastern Star.

The Scottish Rite, founded in Charleston, South Carolina in 1801, houses degrees four through thirty-three which are generally of a more esoteric and philosophical bent than some other Masonic bodies. It was, and continues to be, composed of two jurisdictions, North and South, with Colorado belonging to the latter. The York Rite is made up of three separate bodies: Chapter, Council, and Commandery. The Commandery, known as the Knights Templar, was among the most popular Masonic bodies in the United States for many years and would hold massive nation-wide triennial Conclaves that would attract tens of thousands of visitors, dominating whatever city they were held at. In dramatic fashion, the 25th Triennial Conclave, held in 1892, brought over 100,000 visitors to Denver, veritably doubling the city’s population for several days. Uniquely, the Templars require that all members belong to the Christian faith, a deviation from the general Masonic requirement of simply believing in a higher power.

The third appendant body is the Ancient Arabic Order of the Nobles of the Mystic Shrine, more commonly known as the Shriners. Since its inception in 1872, the Shriners have been one of the more social Masonic orders, attending shows together, hosting festivals, and even parading

down the streets of Denver atop a live “ceremonial camel.”¹⁹ Today, Shriners are known for their series of nearly two-dozen children hospitals across North America and for their comically small clown-cars that appear in parades across the nation. A common refrain in modern Masonic circles is to think of the three appendant bodies as follows: The Scottish Rite is the university of Freemasonry; the York Rite is the church of Freemasonry; the Shriners are the fraternity of Freemasonry. While far from a complete picture of the roles of each appendant body, this humorous saying presents a general outline of the roles of each of these orders.

The final appendant body that warrants recognition is the Order of the Eastern Star (O.E.S.), which is unique in one major facet: the order was created with the intent of presenting “Masonry” to women. The Eastern Star, first founded in the 1850s and eventually recognized as legitimate by most Grand Lodges by the 1870s, has long been a space where wives and husbands can attend meetings together. The requirement for women’s membership, up until 2024, dictated that she must be either the wife, mother, daughter, or sister of a third degree Freemason. This body will be discussed in greater depth later.

An interesting aspect of these appendant bodies is their national components: all three have a national leader and the states defer to them. Blue lodge Masonry in the United States has never had a national governing component, and the jurisdictions remain limited to the state level. To join either of the rites, the Shriners, or even the Eastern Star, a Mason must be a third degree “Master Mason.” As such, like a square to a rectangle, all Shriners, Scottish Rite members, and York Rite members are Masons, but not all Masons belong to the appendant bodies. As the

¹⁹ “Neil Burgess’ Farewell: Denver Shriners Invited to Visit the Broadway To-Night,” *Rocky Mountain News*, June 3, 1893; “Two Trains Filled with Shriners: They Take a Trip to Colorado Springs and Manitou Accompanied by Their Families,” *Rocky Mountain News*, August 20, 1897; During the visit of Grand Potentate, A. B. McGaffy in 1897, the Shriners were reported to be planning a procession from the train station to the Masonic temple in Downtown Denver. During this procession, the Potentate was to be placed “on the back of the sacred camel belonging to the temple.” This was, indeed, a live camel. “Honors for the Potentate: Shriners to Receive A. B. McGaffy With Imposing Ceremony,” *Rocky Mountain News*, June 13, 1897; “Shriners Will Make Merry: Camel Drivers Have a Day of Fierce Festivities,” *Rocky Mountain News*, March 15, 1898.

oldest, most wide-spread, and foundational of all the orders, along with the fact that all Freemasons must progress through the initial three craft degrees, it is the most comprehensive Masonic body to study. All future references to “Freemasonry,” unless otherwise specified, are in regards to these degrees.

Most scholarly analyses of Freemasonry typically commence in the latter third of the nineteenth century, coinciding with the generally accepted start date of 1870 for the “Golden Age of Fraternalism.” I depart from this established chronology, however, for a crucial reason: Freemasonry in early Colorado was not an isolated or self-contained phenomenon. Therefore, rather than initiating my chronological framework with the national resurgence of fraternalism in the 1870s, I have chosen to begin in 1858, the year when gold was first discovered in the region that would ultimately become the state of Colorado. A core argument of this thesis is that Masonry was fundamentally and inextricably linked to the social and economic development of the region itself. Consequently, it is most appropriate that the narrative of this study should commence alongside the story of the state’s inception.

The Polyvalent Associational Anchor and the Connectivity of the West

For people moving westward into the region that would become Colorado, uncertainty and instability abounded. Blevins, in his analysis of the U. S. Postal Service argues that the commonly held idea of “boom and bust” in the West is flawed. Both actions were happening simultaneously, threatening the stability of communities and settlements in the region on a near-constant basis. Instead, he proposes a new term: *churn*. The post office, Blevins demonstrates, was ubiquitous, but was not necessarily a harbinger of future prosperity to the town. On the other hand, the presence of a Masonic Lodge was, with very few exceptions, an

indicator of future stability and success. Masonry, therefore, extracted order from chaos on the frontier, occupying a variety of roles in the local society as the needs of the community required.²⁰

To conceptualize this multi-faceted utility, I propose the term *polyvalent associational anchor* to describe the unique style of network the Masons formed in the nineteenth-century American West. While historians have often viewed fraternalism through a singular lens—be it a social club, a business network, or a surrogate family—the reality of the Colorado frontier demanded a more versatile institution. The lodge could transform instantaneously: functioning as a spiritual body in one moment, a pedagogical assembly in the next, and a community league or charitable group when local needs arose. This versatility allowed the lodge to mitigate the institutional vacuums common in early settlements where the state had yet to establish a formal presence. By acting as a polyvalent entity, the fraternity did more than just provide fellowship; it provided the essential social utility required for a town to survive its initial boom and bust cycles. It served as the anchor—a permanent, recognizable source of respectability and order that legitimized both the “transient young man” and the town he built, effectively serving as a rehearsal for statehood years before the first official ballots were cast.²¹

By defining the Lodge as a specific type of network, this study situates itself within a long-standing tradition of western scholarship. Western History is no stranger to the idea of networks. Although the field has undergone seismic changes in the past several decades, the idea of networks being used to occupy the West has remained a throughline: for some historians, like Richard Wade and Eugene Moehring, the network took the form of urban settlement. Others, like

²⁰ Blevins, *Paper Trails*, 72.

²¹ Historians of masculinity generally frame fraternal orders as being social groups or substitutes of domesticity at best. On the other hand, Roger Burt, an economic historian, approached the Masons as a global business network. These are too simple for such a complex organization. For masculine studies, see; E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformation in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (Basic Books, 1993); Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2006).

Richard White, saw transportation as the foundational network system of the region, while Blevins argues for the communicative networking of the postal service. Indeed, one could argue that networks have been the undergirding flavor of Western History for the past sixty years.

Wade, in his 1967 work *The Urban Frontier*, saw towns as the “spearheads of the frontier,” which defined the key experience of many settlers during the push to the West. This process of creating nodes of organization, in turn, reflects what Moehring describes in *Urbanism and Empire in the Far West, 1840–1890* as a network model of conquest. Moehring argues that, like previous empires, the Americans used the town and networks of towns to conquer their periphery. These urban networks served as vehicles for transporting capitalism and colonial control into the hinterlands. Freemasonry, as this thesis will demonstrate, created a parallel social network that was equally vital to this process. It provided the social cohesion and civic structure necessary for these newly made towns to survive and flourish, effectively functioning as an instrument of settlement and development.²²

While other networks have long dominated the narrative of Western expansion, their physical prominence often obscures the less tangible systems that made them viable. Because the Masonic lodge became a standard fixture of nearly every mining camp and railhead, it eventually suffered from the invisibility of ubiquity that Cameron Blevins explores in his discussion on post offices. As Blevins notes, “when something is everywhere, it can start to become invisible,” which extends beyond the post office to other “large-scale networks, organizations, and institutions” that “have a tendency to hide in plain sight, camouflaged by their own routine, ubiquitous presence.” The post, railroads, and urbanism served as the underlying spatial circuitries of western expansion, knitting the region into a national system of communication. If

²² Richard C. Wade, *The Urban Frontier: The Rise of Western Cities, 1790–1830* (Harvard University Press, 1967), 1–2, 39. Eugene P. Moehring, *Urbanism and Empire in the Far West, 1840–1890* (University of Nevada Press, 2004), xi.

the Post Office provided the wires, the Masonic fraternity helped provide the current. It was home to a human force whose true possibilities for stabilizing a society are difficult to fully comprehend at a passing glance.²³

The Civic Gap analysis at the end of part two is just one example of how the Lodge was particularly essential to urban settings—those “spearheads of the frontier.” In the chaotic scramble for survival, the Lodge became a key instrument for managing the “propensity for community, density, connectivity, and hinterland conquest” that defined western urbanism. Of course, the Lodge did not operate alone: other civic institutions like churches, schools, and other voluntary associations contributed to the forging of towns in the West, but, in several instances, the lodge was among the very first buildings constructed, and Masons almost always met together informally before finding a permanent structure to call their own. Therefore, in an “impersonal and bewildering urban environment,” the Lodge provided a cohesive social network that helped transform a collection of strangers into a functioning municipality. By acting as a polyvalent anchor, the fraternity ensured that the urban centers described by Wade and Moehring could become enduring communities rooted in a shared code of conduct and not just mere sites of transit.²⁴

Richard White, building upon the ideology of Wade over fifty years later, presented his own network: railroads and the transcontinentals. The prevalence of the iron horse in the West, which White analyzes in *Railroaded*, drove westward expansion, reshaped notions of space and time, and revolutionized economic growth for the region.²⁵

²³ Blevins, *Paper Trails*, 3–5.

²⁴ First quote is from Moehring, *Urbanism and Conquest*, 317. Second quote belongs to Wade, *The Urban Frontier*, 39.

²⁵ White argues that railroads created the demand for development of land located in the West that had merely been claimed, but not controlled. Similarly, he argues that “the railroads made their customers acutely aware of space, but they also rendered that space radically unstable and seemingly subject to the whims of distant corporations.” Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (W. W. Norton, 2011), xxiv and xxix. Wade discusses how the economies of urban settlements remained largely unchanged for hundreds of years until the

In his discussion of the different approaches between railroads and transcontinentals, White comments that the latter were more about finance and politics than the mere revenue gained by moving people and freight. He states, “Finance and politics were in the late nineteenth century about networks, and networks, in turn, were functions of family, friendship, and information.” Yet it seems that White could have just as easily added a fourth function: fraternity. Indeed, the networking strength of fraternal enterprises, the Masons in particular, were well known and acted as a common attractant for prospective members. In fact, the structure and operation of the Lodge incorporates all three elements that White professes to have been so vital to the railroad. Lodges would attempt to foster a familial network, exemplified by the regular addressing of fellow members as “brother.” Yet there was also a high degree of camaraderie promoted in the Lodge more reminiscent of that between friends; dances, musical performances, educational lectures, and lengthy trips together all intended to foster a sense of friendship in the Lodge. Finally, as Ramage’s letter indicates, it was not uncommon for Lodges to agree to share information about business ventures—or, in Ramage’s case, the location of recently located gold mines—personal whereabouts, and familial news.²⁶

However, a degree of caution should be taken: much like the postal service Blevins discusses, the geographic dispersal of Lodges was not preplanned with a particular scheme or “false sense of purpose, coherence, and intentionality” from a central power. Instead, Masonry was a bottom-up phenomenon with dispersion dictated by a critical mass of local membership and not a decree from the Grand Lodge. Additionally, similar to the post office, fraternalism, at its most basic level, could act as a social network allowing for the communication that historian Mary Ann Clawson argues is a “prerequisite for even the most ‘spontaneous’ of activities.”

coming of the railroads. He also comments that transportation dictated the “pattern of settlement, the direction and volume of commerce, and the ease and speed of the occupation of the West.” Wade, *The Urban Frontier*, 39.

²⁶ White, *Railroaded*, 96.

Examples abound of the Masonic network being able to call meetings, create committees, and even summon a people's court with extreme speed and efficiency in the early days of Colorado. As the governing Grand Lodge was established in the territory, the fraternity could coordinate administrative capacity across distances, mirroring the state's need to manage power across vast spaces, but doing so through the voluntary, polyvalent ties of the Craft.²⁷

The utility of this connection went beyond the social life of the frontier and began to affect the economic reality. Roger Burt, an economic historian, is one of a handful of academics to approach fraternalism as a network. In Burt's eyes, Freemasonry served as a "global network" that, "probably also greatly facilitated the operation of the entire free-market capitalist system" by reinforcing trust and increasing information flows. In a region where legal recourse was often distant or non-existent, "sworn trust relationships facilitated the performance of business without access to additional legal arrangements." Burt's assertions are not without reason. His study lays the foundations for the argument that the social and occupational makeup of Masonic membership allowed for "unparalleled information exchanges and webs of personal contact and introductions" on every level from local to international. In an economic sense, Burt argues that these networks could be used to provide guidance, information, assistance in finding and securing jobs and business contacts, aiding in "social assimilation," and, critically, "providing temporary security for members and their families when on the move." For a transient population, Masonic charity and support was a key motivator for membership.²⁸

Masonic literature at the time recognized this economic utility in the business networks of the West. In an 1892 publication in the *Square and Compass*—a Denver-based Masonic journal—an article entitled "Masonry and Business" asserts that, because Masonry "is intended

²⁷ Blevins, *Paper Trails*, 64 and 33; Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood*, 7.

²⁸ Burt, *Mariners, Miners, and Masons*, xvi, 68, 84.

to help a man in his everyday life,” and because “business is a part of that life,” members had the “right to expect that those who wear the square and compass will deal on the square, and circumscribe their actions by the compass of justice.”²⁹ The author continues, proclaiming that all people have “a right to expect from a Mason honest and upright dealings in all his transactions,” which would take the form of selling goods at a “certain price, a fair price, and as right between man and man.” However, this author also made sure to note that members should not expect a fellow Mason to lower his price or “come down” to favor another simply because they shared membership.³⁰

Burt’s work corroborates that Masons, to an extent, followed these admonitions. There were, of course, many instances where members would wrong one another in their personal or business lives, but the power of Masonic respectability and its economic role in, as Burt says, “[facilitating] the performance of business without access to additional legal arrangements,” largely ensured that members would be on their best behavior. They knew that any transgressions against other Masons would be documented and communicated throughout the Masonic community, and such actions would carry with them detrimental effects on their future business endeavors. By providing these channels for information exchanges and networks of personal contact, the Lodge served as an economic anchor that allowed commerce to flourish in the institutional vacuum of the West.³¹

²⁹ The *Square and Compass* promoted itself as a representation of Freemasonry in the American West, and it was certainly well regarded in this capacity in its time, as the frequent letters to the editor from across the nation indicate. Published monthly, the cost for a subscription was \$1.00 per year, or 10 cents each month. Lawrence N. Greenleaf, one of the most prolific and renowned Masons of his day, was the chief editor. The journal used cunning tactics to increase its proliferation: It informed lodge secretaries in Colorado, Wyoming, Utah, New Mexico, Montana, Texas, Kansas, and Nebraska that their office carried with it an “immunity” from subscription fees, and that they could receive a subscription for their lodges free of charge. Additionally, small commissions of 25 cents were offered to any lodge secretaries who acted as an agent for the journal in securing subscriptions. Consequently, the journal became widely read in a very short period of time. *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 1, no. 1 (Denver: March, 1892), 3–4; *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 1, no. 2 (Denver: April, 1892), 4.

³⁰ “Masonry and Business” *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 1, no. 8 (Denver: October, 1892), 132.

³¹ For Burt’s interpretation and discussion on the “sworn trust relationship” that girded Masonic business dealings, see Burt, *Mariners, Miners, and Masons*, 196. Additionally, Burt makes a brief argument that the “networking

The establishment of Colorado's first newspaper, the *Rocky Mountain News*, serves as a perfect case study for this polyvalent connectivity. On April 17, 1859 William Byers arrived in Auraria, Colorado, bringing with him the publishing equipment of the defunct *Bellevue Gazette* which he had purchased during his time in Nebraska, with the intention of starting a press.³² However, four days before Byers's arrival, Jack Merrick had already arrived and had begun the process of attaining permissions from the Auraria Board of Directors to establish a shop and begin publishing. Byers, almost certainly by virtue of his Masonic affiliation, was already connected in town and he engaged Merrick in a race for publication without hesitation. Ultimately, on April 22, 1859, the board of directors granted Byers shares in the town, and he immediately set up shop. The first edition of the *Rocky Mountain News* would be published the following day, coming off the press only twenty minutes before Merrick's *Cherry Creek Pioneer* did. It is likely of consequence that three of the five members of the board were Masons: William A McFadding, Levi Russell, and Henry Allen.³³

The *Rocky Mountain News* would go on to be one of the most consequential institutions in early Colorado. Jerome Smiley, writing the *History of Denver* in 1901, said that there was no other agency so vital in "laying the foundations of this city and State" nor any "more potent in results, more effective in forwarding and sustaining the welfare of the people, and in leading the

potential of Freemasonry would have assisted election," citing evidence of Cornish members of the British parliament joining multiple lodges in order to expand their networks. Unfortunately, a study of the political implications of Masonic membership is outside the scope of this thesis, but a future study would be most valuable. For this discussion, see Burt, *Mariners, Miners, and Masons*, 178.

³² Prior to his arrival in Denver, Byers was a key figure in the development of Nebraska, specifically Omaha. He issued the first official plat of Omaha, made the first map of the city, served on its first city council, and even was a member of the first session of the Nebraska Territorial Legislature in January 1855. "William N. Byers," Nebraska State Historical Society, December 2003, https://web.archive.org/web/20061115223931/http://www.nebraskahistory.org/publish/publicat/timeline/byers_william_n.htm.

³³ Ben Williams, the publisher of the *Rocky Mountain Mason* wrote a fantastic article on the appearance of the first Masons in the Pike's Peak region and the subsequent prevalence of the order in the early history of the state. For his investigation of Byers's race with Merrick, see, Ben Williams, "Freemasonry and the Frontier: Freemasonry in 'Pike's Peak Country,'" *Rocky Mountain Mason*, no. 25, 42–43.

way to better material and social conditions, than the *Rocky Mountain News*.” In this instance, the Lodge transformed from a social club into a business association and a political engine, proving that its influence in the establishment of the fledgling city’s most important tool of administration cannot be understated.³⁴

Indeed, Masonry’s reputation for close bonds of fellowship and connection became so widespread that “freemasonry” began to be used as a description of a “natural fellowship based on some common experience.” Writers and journalists in the late nineteenth century would frequently use the term to describe the amiable relationships between workers. One newspaper article described the relationship between actors, stating, “to be sure, there is a freemasonry among them,” before later clarifying that “I meant by the freemasonry of actors, their warm disposition to assist one another.” Another article similarly described the railway works as having developed a “grand freemasonry” in which the workers drew closer and started offering social benefits to each other. The famous poet, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow invoked this language, stating in the introduction to his collection, *Poems of Place*, “I have often observed that among travellers there exists a kind of Freemasonry. To have visited the same scenes is a bond of sympathy between those who have no other point of contact.” Even the harmony found in musical arrangement was being described as a “freemasonry of music.”³⁵

This widespread linguistic adoption indicates that the principles of the fraternity had transcended the lodge doors to become a cultural benchmark for effective social cooperation. By making use of the term as a synonym for “natural fellowship,” the nineteenth-century public

³⁴ Jerome C. Smiley, *History of Denver: With Outlines of the Earlier History of the Rocky Mountain Country* (The Times-Sun Publishing Company, 1901), 294.

³⁵ The definition of ‘freemasonry’ is from Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “freemasonry,” accessed February 15, 2026, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/freemasonry>. For the article on the actors, see: “Actors Charity,” *Rocky Mountain News*, 10/11/1876. For the railroad workers, see: “Notes,” *Rocky Mountain News*, 4/11/1882. For the music example, see: “First Academy of Music,” *Golden Weekly Globe*, January 24, 1880. Finally, for the Longfellow quote, see the newspaper publication: “Longfellow on Poems of Places” *Colorado Springs Gazette*, 6/17/1876.

acknowledged the fraternity's ability to foster mutual aid among relative strangers. This shift in the vernacular effectively transformed a private organizational title into a public metaphor for the social capital required to sustain a functioning community. Consequently, the cultural ubiquity of the word reflected an underlying societal respect for the specific brand of organized, supportive connection that Masonry championed.

In sum, the Masonic Lodge operated as a foundational but often overlooked infrastructure, providing the electrical current of social capital that powered the physical wires of western expansion. By weaving together economic trust, civic order, and a shared vernacular of cooperation, the fraternity served as the invisible anchor for a region defined by transient churn. Yet, to move beyond these anecdotal case studies and truly grasp the scale of this polyvalent network across the vast Colorado landscape, a shift in methodology is required. If the Lodge functioned as a spatial and social circuit, then understanding its full impact necessitates a way to visualize those connections across time and geography. To make this invisible ubiquity visible, this study turns from the qualitative narratives of the nineteenth century toward the quantitative tools of the twenty-first, employing digital methods to map the deep-seated connectivity of the Masonic West.

Digital Methods, Spatial Mapping, and a Note on Collecting Data

Writing in 2008, historian Dan Cohen creatively challenged the historical field with what he termed, "The Pirate Problem." This dilemma, according to Cohen, concerned the threatened position of the age-old status quo of conducting historical research by an emerging approach; digital history. As strange to the historical profession as a pirate themed pub was to a sleepy D.C. neighborhood, the growth of digital history caused Cohen to warn his fellow "boosters of digital

processes in the humanities,” that “the humanities have an order, and we, mateys, threaten to take that calm ship into unknown waters.”³⁶ If the ship was being steered towards unknown waters in 2008, the vessel is on the precipice of the world’s end in 2026. This thesis is yet another craft in the fleet of digital history. The various maps, charts, and visualizations that accompany this work are products of numerous datasets constructed for the purpose of this project. In order to streamline readability, I have attempted to relegate the lionshare of strict methodological discussion to the appendix and away from the main body of text.

The primary frame of analysis used for this thesis is spatial history. As historian Hannu Salmi states in *What is Digital History?*, “the motives and uses of maps also influence the interpretation of these documents,” explaining the varied applications of the thematic, topographic, and physical maps that appear throughout this work.³⁷ Much like Cameron Blevins’s visualizations in *Paper Trails*, the several ArcGIS maps that I created function as “platforms for accumulated data for various historical sources.”³⁸ This is bolstered by an online ArcGIS StoryMap that includes varying levels of user-directed zoom and interaction. This online element uses numerous spatial visualizations spread over three distinct presentations, and follows Blevins’s ideology, ensuring that consideration is given to questions of space and geography in relation to the data.³⁹ These inquiries, particularly when time-animated, promoted further questions about the role of Masonry in Colorado and indicate relationships between members, organizational growth, and the development of the Centennial State. To view these online elements, please go to: <https://arcg.is/1fmyTv1>.

³⁶ Dan Cohen, “The Pirate Problem,” Dan Cohen, April 22, 2008. <https://dancohen.org/2008/04/22/the-pirate-problem/#:~:text=We%20need%20to%20recognize%20that,%2C%20publish%2C%20and%20get%20rewarded>.

³⁷ Hannu Salmi, *What is Digital History?* (Polity, 2021), 59.

³⁸ Blevins, *Paper Trails*, 14.

³⁹ Blevins, *Paper Trails*, 13.

The integration of digital tools like ArcGIS into historical methodology represents the maturation of a broader historiographical movement known as the “spatial turn,” a concept widely popularized in the late 1980s and 1990s to describe the reassertion of space within critical social theory. Crucially, the digital mapping undertaken in this project is not merely illustrative, but rather serves as a fundamental analytical framework. As Richard White—a repeat-offender in this thesis—asserted in his 2010 essay “What is Spatial History?,” the use of GIS and digital visualization is “not about producing illustrations or maps to communicate things that you have discovered by other means.” Rather, it operates as “a means of doing research; it generates questions that might otherwise go unasked, it reveals historical relations that might otherwise go unnoticed, and it undermines, or substantiates, stories upon which we build our own versions of the past.” White’s assertion that spatial history allows scholars to explore dynamic processes in motion aligns precisely with how the time-animated maps in this project function to promote further inquiries into the development of Masonry in Colorado.⁴⁰

This methodological approach is heavily indebted to the theoretical foundations laid by spatial theorists who challenged traditional historical perspectives. Foremost among them is the French philosopher Henri Lefebvre, whose landmark 1974 book *The Production of Space* introduced historians to the idea that “space is neither simply natural geography nor an empty container filled by history.” Instead, Lefebvre argued that space must be approached as something socially produced over time. Similarly, Paul Carter’s 1987 work *The Road to Botany Bay* explicitly embraced the term “spatial history” to push back against traditional “cause-and-effect narrative history.” Carter criticized approaches that reduced “space to a stage”

⁴⁰ Richard White, “What is Spatial History?” *The Spatial History Project*, Stanford University (February 2010), 6.

on which events simply unfold chronologically, advocating instead for a focus on “spatial experiences” and the active processes of place-making.⁴¹

History is, White reminds us, inherently temporal in focus, but to ignore the spatial elements is to ignore the very world in which events transpire. Much like White’s definition of his own spatial work in the Spatial History Project at Stanford University, my interaction with spatial history has been collaborative and reliant on digital tools. White rightly asserts that the vast scale of most spatial history endeavors results in projects too large for any one person to undertake. A team of researchers assisted me with much of the data collection, and many of the visualizations would not have been possible without their aid.⁴²

By operating at the intersection of history, geography, and the digital humanities, this thesis embraces spatial history’s role as an analytical boundary spanner. Rather than viewing the Centennial State as a fixed entity where Masonic history simply occurred, this project uses spatial and networking analysis to understand how these environments were actively shaped and navigated. By mapping the relationships between members, organizational growth, and the land itself, this work demonstrates how digital visualizations can move past crude spatial-pattern spotting and into a relational understanding of how historical spaces are continuously constructed over time. As space and movement are inextricably linked, and static maps are the only manner in which my spatial representations can be presented in this thesis, please seriously consider visiting the StoryMap. The dynamic elements of the embedded animations allow for a far more intimate understanding of the research being conducted.

⁴¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991; originally published in French, 1974). Cited in White, “What is Spatial History?,” 2. For additional, more in-depth discussion of the historiography of spatial history, see Riccardo Bavaj, “Introduction: Spatial History, an Expansive field,” in *Doing Spatial History*, eds. Riccardo Baaj, Konrad Lawson, and Bernhard Struck (Routledge, 2022).

⁴² Many thanks to the researchers who helped me with the digital components of this project: Tracy Flett, Jay Martin, Aaron Pratt, and Dylan Quinn. Although they have already been thanked in the acknowledgments, all members of this team deserve an additional recognition.

To reconstruct the Masonic network and analyze its influence, this study draws on the internal records of twelve Masonic lodges from across Colorado. These Lodges were selected to represent a cross-section of the state's early development, including Golden City Lodge No. 1, chosen for Golden's prominence in early territorial history; the "Gold Country" Lodges of Nevada No. 4, Georgetown No. 12, Idaho Springs No. 26, and Washington No. 48 representing the initial mining boom; the urban centers of Denver Lodge No. 5 and Union Lodge No. 7; and geographically diverse lodges in Leadville (Ionic No. 35 and Leadville No. 51), Kokomo (Corinthian No. 42), Eagle (Eagle No. 43), and Fort Collins (Collins No. 19).⁴³ Using original member ledgers, minute books, and the annually published Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Colorado, numerous datasets were created containing the names, occupations, ages, and dates of advancement for thousands of Masons between 1861 and 1900. While accessing these records, it became clear that archival practices varied widely. Some records were remarkably well-organized and digitized, while others were discovered in disorganized closets and safes. Such is the reality of over a century of decentralized record-keeping.

Research on Freemasonry presents particular challenges, as many lodges remain protective of their internal records. My own membership in the fraternity must therefore be addressed not as a potential liability to objectivity, but as a methodological tool. In her statistically flawed but still highly influential book, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, historian Lynn Dumenil asserted that for her, "although minutes of the lodge's meetings were secret, and thus not available, I had access to membership records for the entire period studied."⁴⁴ Strictly speaking, the "secrecy" of Masonic documents is very discretionary, but by virtue of my membership in the order, I have been able to access records that many previous authors have

⁴³ Ionic No. 35, Corinthian No. 42, Eagle No. 43, and Leadville No. 51 have since combined into one lodge, Corinthian No. 35, now located in Leadville, Colorado.

⁴⁴ Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, xv.

been unable to. Beyond granting access to restricted archives, my “insider” perspective provides an ethnographic understanding of the ritual, symbolism, and internal vocabulary that constitute the lived experience of Freemasonry.⁴⁵ It allows for an analysis that many previous scholars, as outsiders, could not achieve: a history blending an understanding of Freemasonry with a history of its members. This approach is essential for understanding *why* the institution was so influential and for moving beyond the surface-level analyses that have characterized much of the historiography.

In his 1901 publication, Denver historian Jerome C. Smiley dedicated a section of his extensive 1,018-page work, *History of Denver*, to discussing the ubiquity of fraternal orders, benevolent societies, and comparable organizations. He wrote, “It would be out of place in this volume for any attempt at a detailed account of the rise and growth of all these forms and societies to be presented. It is another subject, which could only receive full treatment in a volume devoted entirely to it; and such a volume would properly be of no mean proportions.” On Freemasonry in particular, he continues, “the strength, potency and results of those influences among the men who resolved to suppress lawlessness and to maintain order in our pioneer communities, and who established forms of government of their own devising, would afford material for a most interesting chapter of pioneer history if the story in its entirety might be told.” This thesis, in part, answers Smiley’s call to action.⁴⁶

Two parts comprise this work. Part one establishes the foundational identity, philosophical toolkit, and demographic realities of the fraternity. It traces Freemasonry’s debated European origins, its alignment with the ideals of the new American republic, and its rapid

⁴⁵ For example, in the journal of pioneer woman Mollie Sanford, she states, “By will take the first degree.” To many readers, this may come across as a confusing sentence when in reality, this is Mrs. Sanford recording that her husband Byron was being initiated into the first degree of Masonry. Mollie Dorsey Sanford, *Mollie: The Journal of Mollie Dorsey Sanford in Nebraska and Colorado Territories, 1857–1866*, ed. Donald F. Danker and Lillian Schlissel (University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 155.

⁴⁶ Smiley, *History of Denver*, 778.

expansion into the chaotic American West. After detailing the specific establishment and growth of the fraternity in Colorado, it explores the immense national and international mobility of its members. Crucially, this part contains an intensive analysis of the demographic composition of Masonry. Utilizing original datasets, it maps the occupational and age-related shifts of the members, proving that early Colorado Lodges were initially dominated by young, transient miners and only gradually transitioned into a stable, middle-aged demographic of white-collar professionals as the state matured. It concludes with addressing the complexities of Masonic inclusivity and exclusion, touching upon the successful integration of Jewish members and the historical exclusion of black men.

Part two shifts from the internal makeup of the Masons to their external, tangible impact on frontier stability, arguing that the fraternity acted as a primary engine for community creation and state-building. A central section in this part explores the physical space of the lodge, demonstrating how these buildings evolved from makeshift log cabins into monumental temples that functioned as the ultimate physical calcification of Victorian order. It illustrates how these spaces acted as a polyvalent associational anchor, filling civic voids by hosting early appellate courts, territorial legislative halls, and public schools before formal institutions arrived. Furthermore, it examines how the fraternity promoted “restrained masculinity,” conducted extrajudicial justice, and successfully mitigated the principal-agent problem by enforcing business trust. Finally, this section introduces the empirical “Civic Gap” analysis, revealing that during the territorial period, 76% of Colorado towns with lodges saw the Masons establish their network before the town was legally incorporated.

The thesis concludes with an examination of the Knights Templar’s 1892 Triennial Conclave in Denver. This event served as the ultimate logistical and physical manifestation of

Masonic influence in the state, drawing over 100,000 visitors to the city and showcasing Colorado's transition from a rugged frontier into a refined, economically viable state. By comparing the institutional vacuum faced by the "transient young men" of the nineteenth-century West to the isolated individuals navigating today's digital landscape, the final section explores what Masonry means in the twenty-first century. It contends that the fraternity's core strengths—its mastery of place-making, its dedication to crafting interpersonal relationships and networks, and its role as a polyvalent associational anchor—uniquely position the Lodge to combat the modern loneliness epidemic and continue its quiet, stabilizing work well into the future.

For over 300 years, Masonic membership has ebbed and flowed, drawing in a curious blend of the powerful, the visionary, and the everyday man. Since the humble beginnings of American Masonry in 1733, Masons have sworn oaths beneath chandeliers and starlight alike: fifteen have taken the presidential oath, astronauts like Alan Shepard, Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin, and John Glenn carried their compasses into orbit, and frontier legends like William "Buffalo Bill" Cody and Kit Carson brought the square and compasses to the Wild West. This thesis examines the collective impact of Masonry on the men and communities that helped shape early Colorado. For all the headline names, however, the heart of the fraternity has always been built by millions of men of no particular fame who found in its rituals and lodge halls a sense of stability, purpose, and brotherhood.

Part One

The Weight of History in Their Rucksacks: The Foundations and Faces of the Fraternity

To understand what Freemasonry did in Colorado, we must first trace the origins of the Masonic organization and its portable toolkit of philosophy and ritual. Part one, therefore, follows the chain of inheritance back to its mysterious beginnings in the guildhalls of Europe, through its codification in London, and across the Atlantic to a new republic, before it finally arrived in the shadows of the Rocky Mountains. However, before looking specifically at the Masonic presence in Colorado, several sections establish the essential organizational and ideological foundations of the institution. They analyze the internal structure of the Masonic lodge and the core philosophies of ritual, equality, and benevolence that provided its members with a shared system of meaning that they would deploy to build a new society in the West.

This investigation into the Masonic toolkit concludes with a demographic and economic autopsy of the lodges themselves. By analyzing the occupational shifts and aging cycles of the membership from the 1860s through the turn of the century, we can see the fraternity's transition from a collection of transient young men in gold camps to a stable, middle-class pillar of the urbanized West. These data points refute the notion that Masonry was merely a social club for the elite, and instead illustrate that the fraternity was a diverse cross-section of Colorado's working and professional classes, providing a rare site of class intersection and social stability.

In sum, Part One argues that the survival and success of early Colorado required a replicable system of trust and mutual aid to complement the mineral wealth of the soil and political willpower of the people. By establishing the organizational, philosophical, and

demographic foundations of the Craft, we gain a clearer view of the men who donned the white leather apron. In doing so, the understanding of Masonry might shift from that of a mysterious cabal, to a mass of human capital dedicated to the project of community-making in a land that initially offered very little of it. To understand the Masons who stood on the banks of Cherry Creek or gathered together in a makeshift ‘Temple’ near Gregory Gulch in 1858, one must first understand the weight of history they carried in their rucksacks. The institution they brought to the frontier was not born in that wilderness. It arrived fully formed, a complex inheritance carrying a potent philosophy and a replicable structure that had already been tested in the fires of revolution and the project of empire.

Debated Origins of Freemasonry

There is no greater mystery in Freemasonry than when and where the organization first began. Whether due to laziness, paranoia, persecution, or destruction of records—intentional or otherwise—the earliest accounts of Freemasonry’s origins have been lost to the annals of history. Opening up any number of works on Masonic history is likely to present just as many differing opinions of the origins of the order. Some simply suggest that 1717 marks the start of Freemasonry, while others present a more general mid- to late seventeenth century formation date. While these proposals are safer due to higher documentation, there are still those that cite the late 1300s as the origin point of Freemasonry and even individuals who suggest it can be traced back one or two centuries prior to that. There are of course Masonic myths and legends that cite the founding of Freemasonry as having occurred in ancient, perhaps even Biblical, times.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ One such source suggests 1356 AD as the founding date. See: Harry Carr, *Harry Carr’s World of Freemasonry* (Lewis Masonic, 1984), 1, https://archive.org/stream/eb0062/eb0062_djvu.txt.

Each suggestion is presented with varied levels of certainty and conviction. As lawyer and Masonic historian Henry Wilson Coil wrote, “Truth is an entire fabric; anything that is true will conform to every other thing that is true; what is false will not match what is true.”⁴⁸ If a theory that fully explained the placement of every piece of the puzzle that is the origins of Freemasonry had been found, the debates surrounding the topic would no longer continue. Yet here we are. The purpose of this section is not to debate the specific origins of the organization, but in order to fully understand the presence of the Craft in Colorado during the latter half of the nineteenth century, it is important to understand the spread of Masonry across the globe, its intrinsic ties to the founders of the United States, and its rapid expansion across the North American continent.⁴⁹

One thing that is for certain is that modern Freemasonry found its origins in the operative stonemason guilds of the late Middle Ages. Over the coming centuries, operative masons toiled away in the quarries, constructing many of Europe’s grand cathedrals, such as those at Strasbourg and Cologne. These masonic guilds were regarded as possessing secret knowledge of geometry and structural engineering, which they guarded closely. They developed systems of recognition, including secret words and handshakes, to protect their trade and ensure that only qualified craftsmen were employed.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Henry Wilson Coil, “The Origin of Freemasonry,” *Royal Arch Magazine* (Winter 1966), http://themasonictrowel.com/Articles/History/origin_files/the_origin_of_freemasonry_by_coil.htm.

⁴⁹ It is from a fourteenth-century document housed in the British Museum that the earliest mention of “Masonry” in a form somewhat resembling what we understand to be Freemasonry is found. This document, known as either the Regius or Halliwell Manuscript, written in 1390, outlines the “constitutions of the art of Geometry according to Euclid”# in a poetic rhyming form. Within the document is a list of charges or moral rules that each Mason ought to follow. However, the document itself states that it is a copy of an earlier document, and claims that “the craft came into England, as you I say, In time of good King Athelstan’s day.” Outside of the Regius Manuscript, there is little to no evidence of these assertions, but the survival of such a document casts doubt on the exact early origins of Masonry. “The Regius Poem,” *Pietre-Stones Review of Freemasonry*, accessed December 1, 2025, <https://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/regius.html>.

⁵⁰ For a detailed overview of these building projects and the operative Masonic guilds that conducted them, see Jean Gimpel, *The Cathedral Builders*, trans. Teresa Waugh (Harper Colophon, 1983). There are several discussions of the transition from operative to speculative Masonry within this work as well.

The transition from these purely operative guilds to “speculative” Freemasonry—a system less concerned with building in stone than with building character—was gradual. In the early seventeenth century, these operative lodges began admitting men who were not working stonemasons but were drawn to the guilds’ secrecy, symbolism, and professed ancient lineage. This shift involved the admission of ‘accepted’ or ‘gentlemen’ Masons, intellectuals, and antiquarians. The most famous documented example of this transition is the antiquarian Elias Ashmole, who wrote about his initiation in his diary on October 16, 1646. He writes, “4:30p.m. I was made a Free Mason at Warrington in Lancashire, with Colonel Henry Mainwaring of Karincham in Cheshire...” before going on to list seven other men that were present.⁵¹ Interestingly, several of the men subsequently listed were also of the more intellectual persuasion, apart from the operative line of Masonry. Clearly, those present would have certainly been initiated at a younger date. Ashmole’s entry verifies that Freemasonry had, by the middle of the seventeenth century, already transitioned from solely operative to at least partially speculative.

Masonry’s Expansion

While the precise number of lodges and Masons in the British Isles at this time is unknown, their history took a decisive turn in 1717. That year, four London lodges met at the Goose and Gridiron Tavern to form the Premier Grand Lodge, effectively ending the era of English cathedral builders as they were formerly known and transforming Freemasonry into a powerful, centralized, and replicable system.⁵² This body, after merging with a competing grand lodge almost a century later, would become the modern United Grand Lodge of England. During

⁵¹ Elias Ashmole, *The Diary and Will of Elias Ashmole*, R. T. Gunther ed. (Ashmolean Museum, 1927), 26.

⁵² Jean Gimpel. *The Cathedral Builders*, 152.

the empire's explosive growth, the fraternity became a key component of imperial expansion. As many of the colonial holdings were populated by a vast majority of men, they turned to homosocial groups for support. Lodges opportunistically attached themselves to nearly every military regiment, while civilian lodges emerged in port cities, colonial capitals, and frontier towns. Indeed, the Lodge was, at times, the earliest and only community building on the empire's frontiers.⁵³ The order's growth was explosive: by 1725, the Grand Lodge already oversaw 70 lodges in the United Kingdom.⁵⁴ Within a decade, this newly organized fraternity would leap across the Atlantic to the Western Hemisphere.

Freemasonry's expansion into North America began around 1730, with Masons meeting informally in Philadelphia's St. John Lodge even as the first officially chartered lodge was established in Boston. This growth, though disorganized, was effective. As Masonic historian Steven Bullock notes, "American Freemasonry (like the American colonies themselves) developed haphazardly and sporadically, victim of confusion on both sides of the Atlantic." It nonetheless found fertile ground, permeating the ranks of colonial leaders. Membership was almost exclusively the domain of men with high economic standing, as the fees and dues were prohibitive for most. For this elite class, Masonry was a representation of their societal values. Though these early eighteenth-century elites may not have considered Masonry central to their lives, its importance was set to change dramatically by the century's end.⁵⁵

The revolutionary generation personified this dramatic shift, transforming Masonry from a colonial social club into a symbol of the new nation and vehicle of its principles. As the colonies forged an identity rooted in Enlightenment ideals of liberty, reason, and equality, the

⁵³ Harland-Jacobs, *Builders of Empire*, 2, 13, 16.

⁵⁴ Steven Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730–1840* (University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 42.

⁵⁵ Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 46–47, 51.

fraternity rose with them by championing those same philosophies in its lodges. No event captured this alignment more effectively than the actions of the republic's first president.

In the late morning air on September 18, 1793, George Washington stood in a trench, surrounded by hundreds of people eagerly awaiting the completion of the day's purpose. Around the President's neck rested an ornate collar, and around his waist, a white leather apron decorated with a measuring square overlapped by a geometric compass. The flags of France and the United States similarly adorned his apron. In his hand was a stone gavel which was the instrument with which he would perform the task ahead of him. This was the scene during the cornerstone laying of the U.S. Capitol building. Clad in the regalia of a Freemason, Washington presided over the laying of the U.S. Capitol's cornerstone, a moment that not only marked the construction of the nation's most important building but also reinforced the connection between the new republic and the fraternity to which many of its founders belonged.⁵⁶ The words inscribed upon the silver plate underneath the cornerstone reveal this connection explicitly:

This South East corner stone, of the Capitol of the United States of America in the City of Washington, was laid on the 18th day of September, in the thirteenth year of American Independence, in the first year of the second term of the Presidency of George Washington, whose virtues in the civil administration of his country have been as conspicuous and beneficial, as his Military valor and prudence have been useful in establishing her liberties, and in the year of Masonry 5793, by the Grand Lodge of Maryland, several lodges under its jurisdiction, and Lodge 22, from Alexandria, Virginia.

The public, ritualistic nature of this ceremony, centered on the nation's new capitol, speaks directly to the fraternity's elevated public stature. As Bullock contends, "The fraternity's position on Capitol Hill... provided a powerful symbol of Masonry's new place in post-Revolutionary America." This event, one of the many Masonic cornerstone and consecration ceremonies performed over the next several decades in Washington D.C., signaled a

⁵⁶ Chris Ruli, "Freemasonry and the White House," Rubenstein Center Scholarship, The White House Historical Association, December 1, 2022, <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/freemasonry-and-the-white-house>.

profound shift. Masonry was “no longer an expression of honor and solidarity of a particular social class,” but was now “increasingly identified... with the ideals of the nation as a whole.”⁵⁷ This alignment with the ideals of the new American republic was now complete. Masonry’s evolution, from its English origins through its global expansion and its distinct “Americanization,” had forged the fraternity into a portable and proven model for building society. It was an institution now ready to be carried into the nation’s expanding frontiers.

Philosophy

The Masonic order should not be thought of as a simple collection of men who meet in the often windowless second story of their buildings and occasionally emerge to lay a cornerstone while wearing white leather aprons over their formal attire. The fraternity satisfied a variety of roles in the life of its members: a lodge, a pseudo-religious center, a space for masculine expression, a reprieve from domesticity, a welfare system, or what Masonic essayist, H. R. Haywood calls, “a sieve with which to sift the wheat from the chaff among the American adventurers, miners, trappers and traders.” However, none of these services or systems would be possible without the internal moral system of the Craft. Each degree imparts onto the “candidate” a variety of philosophical lessons with the intention to, as Masons say, “make good men better.” Indeed, ask most members today how they would define Freemasonry, and they would likely respond with a nineteenth-century quote from George Oliver: “Masonry is a beautiful system of morality, veiled in allegory, and illustrated by symbols.” As historian Mark Tabbert so astutely argues, “Freemasonry cannot be understood apart from its rituals and symbols and the way in which its members have interpreted and employed them.” In other words, one must understand the philosophies of Masonry in order to understand Masons. For the purposes of this discussion,

⁵⁷ Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 137.

the past-tense is employed, not to mean that these philosophies have necessarily changed, but merely to present a representation of what Masons were taught in the degrees and carried with them throughout the chronology of this study.⁵⁸

The generation that forged the new nation saw Masonry as a representation of a system of morality bent on improving humanity as a whole. George Washington, at that time the living embodiment of the Revolution, once wrote to his Masonic connections in Massachusetts that he believed that “the grand object of Masonry is to promote the happiness of the human race.” Yet Washington had already made his opinion on the achievement of happiness quite clear in a letter to the Protestant Episcopal Church written a few years before in which he asserted that “human happiness and moral duty are inseparably connected.” For Washington, and for many other members of the fraternity at that time, Masonic philosophy was just as Oliver would write half a century later: it was, above all, a system of morality espoused to members as ideal ways to conduct themselves in private and public alike.⁵⁹

The overarching philosophy of the lodge was rooted in Enlightenment ideals, which first proposed what Steven Bullock calls a “fraternal metaphor,” suggesting that “the group was held together, not by authority or coercion, but by social affection among relative equals.”⁶⁰ During the rigidly hierarchical world of the Enlightenment period, this was a revolutionary concept, and it remained a powerful one in the nineteenth-century West. Within the space of the lodge, a

⁵⁸ First quote: H. L. Haywood, “The Masonic Essays of H. R. Haywood” *Transactions of the Missouri Grand Lodge of Research* 20, (Fulton, 1963), 206. Second quote: George Oliver, *The Book of the Lodge, or Officer’s Manual* (London: R. Spencer, 1849), 17. Dr. George Oliver was considered by many Masons during the nineteenth century to be the “greatest essayist” on matters of Masonry of their age. Third quote: Tabbert, *American Freemasons*, 4.

⁵⁹ Washington’s letter to the Masons of Massachusetts: “George Washington to the Massachusetts Masons, January 1793,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-12-02-0048>. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Presidential Series, vol. 12, 16 January 1793–31 May 1793, ed. Christine Sternberg Patrick and John C. Pinheiro. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005, pp. 76–77.] Washington to the Protestant Episcopal Church: “George Washington to the Protestant Episcopal Church, 19 August 1789,” *Founders Online*, National Archives, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-03-02-0289>. [Original source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Presidential Series, vol. 3, 15 June 1789–5 September 1789, ed. Dorothy Twohig. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1989, pp. 496–499.]

⁶⁰ Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 37.

man's social or economic status was theoretically second to his Masonic standing. This ideal of fraternal equality created a unique environment of trust, and it allowed men from different backgrounds and regions, strangers in a new land, to find a common ground, enabling the network of social and business relationships that was critical for a mobile, transient society. This internal bond of trust was then activated by an explicit, internal philosophy of action. The public articulation of these philosophies, found in newspaper accounts of speeches, cornerstone ceremonies, and Masonic journals provides a direct window into how Masons defined their philosophies during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

However, as with most philosophical teachings, the lessons were highly idealized, and members, many of whom sought membership for business advantages, political clout, or simply to have a social circle, would frequently ignore or forget the lessons they had heard in Lodge. Further, the notion of a "perfect man," taught in the Lodge can sometimes be antiquated by modern sensibilities. As discussed later in this section, matters such as racial and gendered exclusion featured heavily in an order that took pride in their religious and occupational inclusivity. Occasionally, Masonic officials would publicly reprimand members for their failures, such as in the case of Grand Master John Maxwell in 1892 when, during his yearly Grand Master's Address in front of the gathered officers of the Colorado lodges, he said, "there is not in Colorado Masonry that close bond of union, brotherly love and friendship that should exist. We do not, as we should, teach and practice out of the lodge the lessons taught in it, and do not, as we should, regard the ties that bind us together in one brotherhood." Sometimes, though rarely, if a member *truly* went against Masonic morality, they would be brought up on internal charges of "unmasonic conduct," and could be expelled from membership.⁶¹

⁶¹ "GM John Maxwell Address," *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 1, no. 8 (Denver: October, 1892), 125.

Members were reminded that simply paying dues, or even holding a Masonic office did not make them “Masons.” For that, they were “obligated to do good” and to “make the world better.” Additionally, as repeated within the degrees themselves, lodge officers were encouraged throughout the late 1800s to “spare no pains to impress upon the minds of initiates... that there is nothing taught or required in the Lodge which conflicts with our civil, moral, or religious duties.” Evidently, generalization in Masonic philosophy and instruction was the name of the game. How exactly does one “make the world better?” Suggestions would be offered, frequently in broad themes such as fidelity, kindness, and toleration, but also in slightly more practical matters like studying the liberal arts, using time wisely, and ensuring fellow members and their families did not fall into poverty.

In late December of 1893, Edward Garbutt, the Master of Collins Lodge No. 19 in Fort Collins, Colorado delivered a speech regarding Masonic philosophy which, along with other contemporary sources allow future historians to see how Masonic leaders were discussing their philosophies at the time. He directed the Masons in his audience to “practice outside the lodge room the fraternal love and charity taught you in it, make a home application of it.” Critically, Garbutt recognized that the prestige of the order rested on the conduct of its membership. He reminded the listeners that, “by our own works, and not those of another, shall we be judged.” Over the course of the nineteenth century, hundreds of thousands of men would advance through the degrees, all being taught roughly the same philosophies, and being instructed to enact them in their everyday lives. This mass of human capital, as one Masonic author argues, was an army “enlisted in the interests of peace and universal benevolence” that could be rapidly mobilized within communities, should the need arise.⁶²

⁶² “Latent Power of Masonry,” [reprint: *American Tyler*], *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 3, no. 5 (Denver: July, 1894), 116–117; E. N. Garbutt, “Origin and Aims of Masonry,” *Fort Collins Courier*, January 4,

Garbutt's speech appeared in a local Fort Collins newspaper, and through an analysis of other available printed sources, six themes emerge: Charity, duty to family, temperance, dignity in death, secrecy, and democracy, all of which, when combined, comprise the bedrock of the public-facing Masonic philosophy. However, it cannot be understated that the majority of Masonic thought is devoted to the improvement of the self. Each Mason was taught that, much like a block of stone, they should constantly strive to chisel off their "rough edges," all the while aiming for an ultimately unattainable level of divine perfection. Should each Mason take this task seriously, the many "stones" of the order could create a magnificent cathedral of moral men within their community, uplifting their families and others, creating the type of communities that would benefit the development of a region like Colorado.

Charity: In the first degree of Masonry, initiates are informed that, second only to a belief in deity, charity is the most important tenant of Freemasonry. William Preston, one of the most well known and well respected Masonic authors of the eighteenth century, regarded charity as the "defining characteristic of our order," and often spoke at length about the duties of Masons to one another in this regard. The Masonic sense of "charity" extended beyond mere monetary donations, although those did feature heavily, to include broader concepts like those of kindness and tolerance in the judgment of others or offering help to those in need by acts of service.⁶³ The following poem, written by an anonymous writer—without a doubt a member of the fraternity—to the *Rocky Mountain News*, was published in April of 1860 and represents the way in which the Masonic institution saw themselves and desired to portray their charitable impact:

1894; Frederic Speed, "The Duty of Masons to Masons Before the Law of the Land," *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 5, no. 1 (Denver: March, 1896), 7.

⁶³ William Preston, *Illustrations of Masonry* (1772; repr., London: The Eidographic Reproduction Publishing Co., 1887), 25.

*I saw a band of brothers move, with slow and solemn tread;
Their hearts are joined in ties of love, in charity were wed;
And types of light illumed the ray, shone on the chastening rod,
And in the midst, wide open lay The Gospel of our God.*

*I asked a man of four score years, why after them he ran?
He said, and melted into tears—"they fed the poor old man!"
He said, "I once was sick and sad, my limbs were racked with pain;
They came, they comforted and clad; the old man rose again."*

*I asked a weeping widow why she followed those before?
She said—and wiped her weeping eyes—"They came unto my door!
They came when all the world besides had turned from me and fled—
They came my wants and woes to hide, they gave my children bread."*

*I asked an orphan boy why he, his eager footsteps bend?
He said, "they smiled on all like me, they were my father's friend.
Before he died they clothed and fed, and all our gifts they gave,
And when we wept for father dead, they threw gifts in his grave."*

*And such I said are Masons all, friends to the needy poor;
They never view a brother's fall, they never shun his door.
And though 'tis said they are not 'free.' Virtue and love are twins,
And the best grace of charity, hides multitudes of sins.*

*They worship in the Lodge of God, secret and solemn there;
They bow beneath His sacred rod, and breathe a heart-felt prayer.
Free Masonry, like woman's love, is taught by private rules,
So deep that should it public prove, it would be sport for fools.⁶⁴*

Years later, during his speech in Fort Collins, Edward Garbutt eloquently captured the prevailing Masonic thoughts on their philanthropic roles, writing, “to relieve the distressed is a duty incumbent on all men, but more particularly so on Masons, for it is their grand aim to alleviate misfortune, compassionate misery and restore peace to the troubled mind.” He reminded the Masons in the audience that this duty was not thrust upon them; they had willingly joined the organization and voluntarily swore to provide aid to “worthy brother master masons, their widows and orphans, wherever dispersed around the globe.” The specific focus on widows and orphans was no mistake. For many men, the assurance that their families would be cared for through Masonic charity was a leading motivation for membership. This allowed them to, as they saw it, fulfill their masculine obligations owed to their families, even after death.⁶⁵

While charity was a motivation for membership, it was also a motivation for the broader Masonic organization itself. Through the various charitable endeavors, the Masons gained

⁶⁴ “Masonic Brotherhood,” *Rocky Mountain News*, April 11, 1860.

⁶⁵ E. N. Garbutt, “Origin and Aims of Masonry,” *Fort Collins Courier*, January 4, 1894. For a discussion of the widows and orphans assistance being a leading motivation for membership, see Harland-Jacobs, *Builders of Empire*, 17.

legitimacy and were able to demonstrate the practical uses of their internal philosophies. However, specific cases of Masonic philanthropy in this period are notoriously difficult to find, not because the acts of philanthropy never happened, but because Masons were specifically instructed not to make such contributions widely known. Garbutt's speech hails the "absence of ostentation" in Masonic benefaction. He lauds the fact that "the millions that are given in charity attract very little attention outside of those who are directly benefitted." This is reflected in the regard for the order at that time: seemingly everyone knew and agreed that the Masons were engaged in philanthropic endeavors, but specifics were rarely given.⁶⁶ While the absence of ostentation is certainly a noble practice—widely publicized charity often seems more akin to advertisement than beneficence—this act creates a frustrating reality for future historians to pick up the pieces.⁶⁷

However, through a wide range of sources, a variety of examples begin to emerge. Critically, by being extended privileged access to internal Lodge documents such as historic minute books, notations from the treasurer or secretary regarding charitable donations can be found. Examples from the minute books of Golden City Lodge No. 1 (Golden, Colorado) and Georgetown Lodge No. 48 (Georgetown, Colorado) include donations sent to a member whose only child had passed away in 1890, \$50 sent to "Yellow Fever sufferers" in 1878, and a

⁶⁶ For historians, Lynn Dumenil first proposed the notion that Masonic charity was a way in which the order sought to legitimize itself with a practical, important moral purpose. Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 21. While certainly true, Dumenil largely ignores the importance of the internal degree work, something that Masonic historians like Tabbert or Burt do not neglect. This is an excellent demonstration of Tabbert's assertion on the necessity of understanding the rituals and Mellor's argument of the uninitiated not knowing everything about the order. Dumenil herself admits that restricted access to documents such as minute books was limiting in her study. E. N. Garbutt, "Origin and Aims of Masonry," *Fort Collins Courier*, January 4, 1894.

⁶⁷ The charitable actions of Freemasonry and its appendant bodies in the modern day attract considerably more attention. The largest and most public of these charities is the Shriners Hospitals for Children, the first of which was founded in 1922. The Shriners, an Masonic appendant body, currently operate 22 non-profit hospitals for children across the United States, Canada, and Mexico. They have TV ads, fundraisers, and other public-facing events that draw attention to their philanthropic endeavors.

donation given to the Galveston Relief fund in 1900.⁶⁸ Occasionally, a local newspaper might publish some mention of Masonic charity, such as when the members of the Fort Collins Lodge donated food baskets to the widows of their deceased members in addition to making sure families felt welcome at public Masonic events.⁶⁹ Additionally, during cases of extreme hardship for an entire community, a specialized “board of relief” could be created, such as in the case of a devastating fire that struck Cripple Creek, Colorado in 1896. In this case, the Masons of Colorado came together and donated over \$1,000 to the relief of their Masonic brothers alongside various supplies for the rebuilding of the town.⁷⁰

Some Grand Lodges would establish official standing Boards of Relief for the purpose of distributing funds to Masons and their families, should the individual Lodges not have the money to do so. In the 1890s, Colorado had a Board of Relief of seemingly little permanence that would be mentioned in the Masonic records of the time and then disappear. However, the yearly financial report of this institution was published in a Masonic journal in 1892. The statement appears below:

⁶⁸ Minute references in order as they appear: Minutes of Golden City Lodge No. 1 (Golden: CO), April 24, 1890, 381; Minutes of Golden City Lodge No. 1 (Golden: CO), August 17, 1878, 35; Minutes of Georgetown Lodge No. 48 (Georgetown: CO), October 15, 1900, 68.

⁶⁹ “The Annual Festival of St. John’s Day,” *Fort Collins Courier*, December 28, 1893.

⁷⁰ Within a few weeks, \$1,060 was dispersed to the members in Cripple Creek, and “through the judicious and wise management of the board of relief, every brother’s wants were soon supplied.” *Proceedings of the M. W. Grand Lodge of A. F. & A. M. of Colorado, at the 36th Annual Communication held at Denver, September 15 and 16, A. D. 1896—A. L. 5896* (Denver: W. F. Robinson & Co., 1896), 28–29.

Received	Amount	Expended	Amount
From Denver Lodges, Chapter, and Commandery	\$908.20	Donations to Masons	\$200.80
From Reimbursements: Lodges	\$683.70	Donations to Widows and Orphans	\$127.00
From Reimbursements: Persons.	\$196.90	Funerals	\$316.50
From Golden Excursion Fund	\$12.60	Transportation	\$360.75
From Balance Last Report	\$76.27	Advanced to Masons	\$321.05
From Overdraft on Treasurer this Date	\$56.46	Hotels and Boarding Houses	\$233.90
		Fuel, Groceries, and Medicine	\$98.94
		Hospitals	\$39.00
		Nurses	\$166.00
		Telegrams, Printing, and Books	\$70.09
Total	\$1,934.13	Total	\$1,934.13

Table 1: Report of Colorado Masonic Board of Relief from 1892. "Masonic Board of Relief," *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 1, no. 10 (Denver: December, 1892), 192.

The report submitted by the Board of Relief concluded that, "In addition to these amounts, [we] have guaranteed bills of undertakers, hospitals, nurses and boarding houses for Lodges and persons in other places amounting to many hundreds of dollars, all of which have been paid." Evidently, the Mason's largely internal charity in this period was used for a variety of purposes by the membership. Notions of Masonic charity can also be seen in the internal employment of members. The records indicate that, when possible, Lodges would attempt to employ their own members for building improvements, security, or paid care for ailing

brothers.⁷¹ Interestingly, historians Margaret C. Jacob and Maria Eugenia Vasquez Semadeni, in their expansive work, *Freemasonry in Civil Society*, were unable to find “evidence of racial or religious prejudices playing a part” in the distribution of funds. “Masonic charity,” they write, “presents a face of being color-blind, at least as far as the records take us.” While beyond the scope of this thesis, a further study on the distribution of Masonic beneficence on the basis of race, religion, nationality, or other such identifiers would be a worthy inquiry.⁷²

Duties to Family: The relationship between Masonry and the family unit is an intriguing one that also warrants a further study in its own right. Past projects on the history of Freemasonry, such as Harland-Jacob’s work, argue that “how a Mason treated his wife and children served as one gauge of his progress in Freemasonry.” Indeed, in his 1892 speech, Garbutt asserts that Masonry regards the family and the home as “the center of every true life,” and calls “performance of family obligations...true obedience to Masonic law.”⁷³ Other Masonic writers at the time similarly promoted the idea that members were only “true Masons” if they cared for the families. These authors recognized that many members neglected their families, choosing instead to chase Masonic honors and spending too much time with the Lodge, and so they wrote liberally on the matter. One such article, entitled “Masonry and Matrimony,” appeared

⁷¹ In the case of the lodge building in Georgetown, Colorado, a member of the order was contracted to construct the new structure in the 1890s: Minutes of Georgetown Lodge No. 48 (Georgetown: CO), August 28, 1890, 397. Additionally, Golden City Lodge’s minutes detail how the Lodge would “pay all reasonable expenses” for Brother Harrison to put a shingle roof on their Masonic hall. Minutes of Golden City Lodge No. 1 (Golden: CO), January 16, 1864, 9–10. Several examples of the Tyler (also spelled Tiler), who acted as an outer door guard for meetings, being paid for his services. The accepted rate throughout much of the second half of the 1800s in Colorado for this action was \$2.50 per meeting. The Tyler, Brother W. H. Christie was paid \$72.50 for typing 29 nights: Minutes of Georgetown Lodge No. 48 (Georgetown: CO), December 14, 1882, 81. Article IX of the Washington Lodge By-Laws asserts that “The Tyler shall receive for his services two dollars and fifty cents for each communication at which he tiles.” Minutes of Washington Lodge No. 12 (Georgetown: CO), October 7, 1867, 3. Finally, two members were employed by Golden City Lodge No. 1 to care for an ill brother in April of 1874: Minutes of Golden City Lodge No. 1 (Golden: CO), April 20, 1874, 28.

⁷² For more details on the Masonic Board of Relief for Colorado report, see: “Masonic Board of Relief,” *Square and Compass*, 192. For Jacob and Semadeni, they were conducting a study on the distribution of Masonic charity in the case of Arizona tubercular cases. Jacob and Semadeni, *Freemasonry and Civil Society*, 80.

⁷³ It is worth noting that by 1892, the demographic composition of Colorado Freemasonry would have certainly included more married men as opposed to the late 1850s and early 1860s.

in a nationally circulated Masonic journal in the mid 1890s in which the author argued that, regarding conflict between the family and the Lodge, “there is none, if the member of the Lodge be honest, and his devotion to his home be sincere.” Indeed, in the first degree of Masonry, initiates are informed that the degree they are about to progress through should, in no way, interfere with their duties already owed to their families, their churches, or their governments. Judging by the prevalence of masonic writing on the topic, this was clearly an issue among members and one that the Masonic leadership took seriously.⁷⁴

Temperance: In the early days of the Masonic institution, meetings were frequently held in inns and taverns. Despite the environment of their meeting places, the Masonic institution was very clear on its standards of conduct in regards to intoxicating liquors. In a quote that beautifully bridges the gap between duties to family and Masonic positions on temperance, article 6, section 5 of the original 1723 Constitutions of Freemasonry—a document that governed the early operations of the Grand Lodge of England, and upon which much of future Masonry—reads: “You are to act as becomes a moral and wise Man... You must also consult your Health, by not continuing together too late, or too long from home, after Lodge Hours are past; and by avoiding of Gluttony or Drunkenness, that your Families be not neglected or injured, nor you disabled from working.” By the mid-nineteenth century, the practice of meeting in bars had all but disappeared in the various American Masonic jurisdictions.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Harland-Jacobs, *Builders of Empire*, 96. “The Annual Festival of St. John’s Day,” *Fort Collins Courier*, December 28, 1893. In the “Masonry and Matrimony” article, the author writes, “that there have been men who neglected the family, giving the Lodge as an excuse for their delinquency, is not denied; what is denied is that these men have given a true excuse.” “Masonry and Matrimony,” *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 3, no. 7 (Denver: CO, September 1894), 175–176. E. N. Garbutt, “Origin and Aims of Masonry,” *Fort Collins Courier*, January 4, 1894.

⁷⁵ James Anderson, *The Constitutions of the Free-Masons: Containing the History Charges, Regulations, &c. of that Most Ancient and Right Worshipful Fraternity. For the Use of the Lodges*, (London: Printed by William Hunter for John Senex and John Hooke, 1723), 55.

While not, perhaps, leaders in the temperance movement, Masonic Lodges were nonetheless long-time supporters of temperance ideology. In 1886, the Colorado Grand Lodge circulated a statement to the membership “urgently recommend[ing members] to refrain from engaging in the liquor traffic,” banning all intoxicating liquors from the Lodge buildings, and declaring that “it shall be unlawful to initiate or elect to membership any person engaged in the sale of intoxicating liquors.” This latter assertion was justified years later by a publication that read: “no liquor dealer can be a true, conscientious Mason. The business he is engaged in is the source of nine-tenths of the sin, sorrow and suffering humanity has made itself heir to, and is damnable in its conclusions, both for time and eternity.” Membership in Masonry, therefore, was not for those who could not go without their liquor.⁷⁶

Dignity in Death: For even the casual observers of Freemasonry, there is a recurring feature in many symbols and works of Masonic art that is hard to miss and often raises both questions and eyebrows: the skull. Masons, internally, are frequently reminded by their degrees of the impermanence of mortal life, the belief in the promise of eternal life being a key motivator for the performance of their system of morality, so it would only be natural for their ideology to be associated with the burial and care of deceased members. Fraternal cemeteries were commonplace, with special rules concerning who could or could not be buried in them. In many Masonic cemeteries in Colorado, burial permits would be issued to all masons in good standing as well as their wives or widows, young children, or “unmarried daughters.” If, for some reason, a petition was given by someone who fell outside of these categories, Lodges such as

⁷⁶ For the Grand Master’s published statement, see “Effects of Prohibition,” *Fort Collins Courier*, October 21, 1886. Regarding the later justification, see “The Saloon vs The Lodge,” *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 1, no. 10 (Denver: CO, December 1892), 189–190. Additionally, records exist of Grand Masters gently reprimanding Lodges for permitting smoking during meetings, as in the case of a visit to Boulder Lodge No. 45 in 1892. See, “A Boulder Banquet,” *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 1, no. 3 (Denver: CO, May 1892), 12.

Georgetown No. 48 had a provision that stipulated that permits could be given out at the discretion of the three principle officers.⁷⁷

Additionally, funds would frequently be expended for the burials of members, and could include purchasing a tombstone if the deceased had inadequate funds in their estate to do so. But most significantly, the Masonic order would typically conduct the funeral ceremony of their members. This is critical for two vital reasons. First, the ceremony was, obviously, a solemn event, used to espouse Masonic stances on the existence of an afterlife, and second, the ceremonies were rare instances of some Masonic ritual being performed in front of public audiences. For many citizens, Masonic funerals may have been the most common time they saw members of the fraternity, and almost certain was the most frequent time they would see them dressed in their official regalia.⁷⁸

Secrecy: Secrecy is, and was, without question the most commonly thought of attribute of the Masonic institution. It lies at the heart of the order's character, ensnaring the curiosities of the public and creating the Masonic culture. At various points in history, such as during the Anti-Masonic period of the 1820s or even in the modern day, Masonry has been associated with grand conspiracy theories, featuring in thrilling fiction stories such as Dan Brown's best-selling novel, *The Lost Symbol*, or the wildly entertaining 2004 action and adventure flick, *National Treasure* starring Nicholas Cage.⁷⁹ However, not all conspiracy theories are built on shaky

⁷⁷ Lodge minutes outlining the details of burial in respective Lodge cemeteries: Minutes of Georgetown Lodge No. 48 (Georgetown: CO), December 24, 1891, 434; Minutes of Washington Lodge No. 12 (Georgetown: CO), June 26, 1869; Minutes of Golden City Lodge No. 1 (Golden: CO), March 2, 1872, 23.

⁷⁸ Accounts regarding the arrangements for the funeral of a brother at the expense of the Lodge and the performance of the actual burial: Minutes of Golden City Lodge No. 1 (Golden: CO), April 22, 1874 to April 23, 1874, 28. The bill for the burial of another member in July of 1881 came out to \$49.00 and the Lodge paid it: Minutes of Golden City Lodge No. 1 (Golden: CO), July 18, 1881, 39. Pall bearers and members of the funeral service for an upcoming burial appointed in a meeting: Minutes of Golden City Lodge No. 1, 1906–1909 (Golden: CO), February 22, 1906. "Tombstone purchased for a deceased brother" in, Minutes of Golden City Lodge No. 1 (Golden: CO), March 1, 1879, 36.

⁷⁹ After the release of both pieces of media, membership in Freemasonry spiked across the nation, followed quickly by an almost equal decline. Much to the dismay of the new members, Freemasons do not possess the secrets to the

foundations, and there have been several occasions where Masons were involved in conspicuous activities that did not shine a favorable light on the order. Most infamously, in the modern period, was the discovery of the “Propaganda Due,” or P2, Masonic Lodge in Italy during the early months of 1981, which directly led to the collapse of the Italian government at the time. However, P2 has been a dramatic exception to the rule, and to this day, there has been only one scandal to this degree with American Masonic Lodges—the Morgan Affair—which will be discussed at the start of the next section.⁸⁰

Nevertheless, it is a humorous occurrence to hear Freemasonry referred to as a “secret society,” when, in truth, any self-respecting secret society would not dream of publishing their meeting locations, times, and dates in the local newspaper like the Masons did. The publishing of members’ names and internal positions would be highly uncharacteristic of an organization bent on nefarious secrecy and obfuscation. On the contrary, the “secrets” of Masonry serve to create an identity which, in turn, creates a community. As Lynn Dumenil wisely points out, “the contents of secrets frequently [are] less important than their existence as secrets.” The degrees, taught to the members as “ancient secrets,” served as a common experience bent on forging internal connections between members and giving them a shared knowledge base that the outside world was not privy to.⁸¹

lost treasure of the Knights Templar; this would be a far different thesis if they did. If they do, they certainly haven’t told me.

⁸⁰ The membership lists of the P2 Lodge contained numerous party members, judges, military leaders, bankers, and newspapermen. This Lodge, unlike most Masonic groups, operated in the shadows, conducting its business privately and for political gain. In American Lodges, discussion of politics is forbidden. Of course, it still occurs, but while P2 Lodges eventually made their way to several countries in Central and South America, they were never formed in the United States. For more information on the P2 scandal, see: “1981: Italy in crisis as cabinet resigns,” BBC: On This Day, May 26, 1981, http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/may/26/newsid_4396000/4396893.stm; George Russell and Wilton Wynn, “Italy: A Grand Master’s Conspiracy,” *Time*, June 8, 1981, <https://archive.ph/20130104231755/http://www.time.com/time/printout/0.8816.922552.00.html>.

⁸¹ Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 38–39.

Democracy: However, through the use of secrecy to initiate individuals into an organization, there is an unavoidable “othering” that occurs. The secrecy of the Masons, paired with the idea of internal democracy, created an environment ripe for exclusion. In most American jurisdictions of Masonry, the Lodge as an organization, is a highly democratic process. In Colorado, for example, officers were elected by majority votes, state-wide constitutional amendments were passed or rejected by three representatives from each Lodge in the state at a yearly session, and amendments to local Lodge by-laws had to be passed by a super-majority.⁸² Critically, Masons are informed that, while in the lodge, all members “meet on the level,” which is literally represented during each meeting. The physical layouts of lodges are meant to represent such a philosophy as well. Architectural historian William Moore illustrates how “the lodge room was organized to promote the act of incorporation,” what could otherwise be termed ‘inclusion’ in the organization. Moore continues, arguing that “whether a brother were a bank president or ditch digger, if he were not a lodge officer, he sat with the rest of the brethren.” The seats along the perimeter of the lodge were, as Moore contends, the symbolic representation of the Masonic ideal of equality amongst members.⁸³

However, while the employment or economic status of a member had no bearing on their voting power within the confines of the Lodge, prior studies indicate that men of a higher class were more likely to be elected into Masonic office. Lynn Dumenil contends that “the oligarchic nature of [officer] arrangement[s] was compounded by the fact that Secretaries, Treasurers, and Tylers frequently held their positions for years. Consequently, access to office was not so open as the order’s provisions for democratic elections might suggest.” Yet this fails to consider that

⁸² Taken from Article XIII of the Washington Lodge No. 12 by-laws which reads, “no alteration or amendment shall be made to these By-Laws unless the same shall be proposed to the Lodge, in writing, signed by three members, and lie over from one stated communication to another.” Minutes of Washington Lodge No. 12 (Georgetown: CO), October 7, 1867, 3.

⁸³ William D. Moore, “Masonic Lodges and their Furnishings, 1870–1930,” *Heredom: The Transactions of the Scottish Rite Research Society* 2 (1993), 114–115.

Masons consider the secretary and treasurer as positions of *trust*, not of *power*. It is critical to understand that, despite being one of the pre-eminent social institutions for much of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, the local level of Masonic administration has always been composed of volunteers. With the general exception of the Tyler, Lodge officers were rarely paid for their services. Nor were they always professional treasurers or secretaries. A treasurer that was elected year in and year out, for example, was familiar with the various accounts, systems, and investments that the Lodge made. Similarly, the position of secretary would demand a great deal of learning in order to be efficient with constant communications, annual reports, and intimate knowledge of the by-laws. It was likely seen as in the best interest of the Lodge for these two positions in particular to be reappointed year after year as to avoid retraining a new member every election cycle.⁸⁴

Yet while the power of Masonic democracy could produce stability or chaos on the administrative front, it could also be a tool for exclusion. In order for a member to be accepted for initiation, they had to receive a unanimous vote in their favor. A single “nay” would cause the petition for membership to be rejected. Certain groups of people were excluded en masse. By virtue of being a fraternal order, women were excluded from membership. In the nineteenth century, if a man was unable to work for a living, he would be similarly excluded. Perhaps the greatest example of exclusion in Masonry due to democratic practices stems from the issue of race. Prince Hall Freemasonry, an independent Masonic system built on serving black membership, has existed since the mid-1770s when it was founded in Boston by the man after whom the order was named. Over the subsequent centuries, the debate surrounding the

⁸⁴ Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 14–15. I don’t wish to seem overly critical of Dumenil’s work. Her monograph’s importance to the field of fraternal studies cannot be understated. There are simply aspects of her argument that lack the institutional understanding that membership and access to internal records allow.

recognition of black men in Freemasonry raged. One example, presented by the Grand Lodge of Ohio in 1875, serves as the perfect case study for this phenomenon.⁸⁵

In 1875, the Grand Master of Ohio, one Mr. Asa H. Battin, declared that, in recognition of the upcoming “centenary of the union, and as the summit of perfection in free government had been reached, not only in theory, but in fact, by liberating the bondmen and placing all upon an equality of rights, it was a fit time to recognize the colored Grand Lodge of that state.” And so a committee was appointed to examine the legal processes that must be taken to combine the predominately white Grand Lodge of Ohio with the predominately black Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Ohio. The committee, perhaps surprisingly, reported that the Prince Hall Grand Lodge was a legitimate Masonic organization, and they recommended that “the Grand Lodge of Ohio recognize the African Grand Lodge of that state as a legitimate and independent Grand Lodge.” However, at the grand lodge session that year, the vote for recognition failed: 332 for and 390 against. This example demonstrates that the Masonic institution, as a functional democratic institution, was subject to the will of its members. Although the Grand Lodge of Ohio recommended recognizing the Prince Hall Grand Lodge in 1875, the membership rejected the idea. The same could go for membership petitions in the Lodge, or for deciding who “deserved” distributions of Masonic charity.⁸⁶

Undoubtedly, Masons like Edward Garbutt present a heavily idealized view of Masonic morality, but this is unsurprising.⁸⁷ He acknowledged that not all members live up to these

⁸⁵ A case of such rejection can be found in the Minutes of Georgetown Lodge No. 48, (Georgetown: CO), May 28, 1891, 422. In 1892, the Grand Lodge of Colorado made an official declaration that “a man who is deformed by one leg being shorter than the other, is not eligible to receive the degrees in Masonry,” and that “a man who has lost the first two fingers of his right hand is not eligible to receive the degrees in Masonry.” “Decisions by the Grand Master,” *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 1, no. 8 (Denver: CO, October 1892), 128.

⁸⁶ For the full story on the Ohio Grand Lodge vote, see: “African Lodges in the United States,” *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 3, no. 9 (Denver: CO, November 1894), 232–233.

⁸⁷ Without question, not all Masons were the “moral men” that they were made out to be. Studies conducted on the eventual overlap in membership between the Freemasons and the twentieth-century Ku Klux Klan should be case and point on this matter.

ideals—some give in to petty grievances or neglect their obligations—but he urged his audience to refrain from judging the fraternity by individual failings, and instead encouraged personal accountability and the sincere practice of Masonic values in both private and public life. The ideals of Masonry proffered in his speech are emblematic of the broader tendency of Masonry at the time to mirror Victorian America’s moral culture. Masonic leaders in the late nineteenth century were hyper aware of the “quality” of their membership, often barring or expelling those that they saw as “notoriously profligate” or “profane.”⁸⁸ Therefore, the positive public image of the organization and its membership was of the utmost importance to both Grand Lodge officers and local Lodge leaders. Garbutt’s call for the expression of internal Masonic teachings in the outside world is emblematic of this concern.⁸⁹ Despite the overwhelming promotion of tolerance, the fraternity remained predominantly white, Protestant, and, obviously, male. Although the speech idealized Masonry, the reality remains that even if only a few of the brothers in attendance truly lived by the fraternity’s lofty principles, their communities would have been better for it—and, in fact, more than a few did.

It was this potent combination of an internal, ritual-forged equality and an external, public-facing mandate for benevolent action that made the fraternity such a powerful force for community creation. As this thesis explores, the Lodge provided, all at once, a social center, a system of trust, a vehicle for networking, and a charitable organization. Masonry could adapt to the needs and wants of its members and its community. Garbutt’s speech is evidence of this, framing a Mason’s life as a problem “that each must solve for himself”: whether his “path shall be through the green fields of humanity, overarched with memories of deeds of charity and

⁸⁸ Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 74–75.

⁸⁹ E. N. Garbutt, “Origin and Aims of Masonry,” *Fort Collins Courier*, January 4, 1894.

kindness, or whether it shall pass through the sandy place of selfishness.” This was the philosophical toolkit Masons would carry with them wherever they went.⁹⁰

Lodge Organization: Officers and the Craft Degrees

To fully understand the Masonic institution and its philosophies, there must be an understanding of how and where they are communicated to the membership. Fundamentally, the most important level of Masonic organization is the Lodge. A Masonic Lodge can mean either a physical building or a group of Masons—a ‘herd’ of Masons doesn’t have the same ring to it. Occasionally, the buildings will be referred to as ‘halls’ or ‘temples,’ but the specific Masonic group is always called a Lodge. Throughout this thesis, when referring to the organizational unit, “Lodge” will be capitalized, while the physical structure will be lowercase. A Lodge operates as the basic unit of Freemasonry, functioning under a charter granted by a “Grand Lodge,” which is the sovereign governing body for a specific jurisdiction. In the United States, there has never been a national governing body, so Grand Lodges are organized at either the state or territory level. The network of these Lodges operated in a manner similar to Cameron Blevins’s “agency model” of the U.S. postal system. The fraternity was not imposed from a central authority; rather, local Masons, finding themselves in a new and unstable environment, petitioned a Grand Lodge for a charter, building the institution from the ground up. They would require the recommendation of other Lodges in the area, something that was not always guaranteed.⁹¹

Frequently, Masons would meet informally for a period of time before officially applying for

⁹⁰ E. N. Garbutt, “Origin and Aims of Masonry,” *Fort Collins Courier*, January 4, 1894.

⁹¹ Accounts exist in the minutes of Georgetown Lodge No. 12 that discuss the rejection of a request made by a group of fellow Masons in their efforts to charter a new Lodge. The Georgetown Masons had concern over the proximity of the new Lodge to one that already existed in the next town over. Minutes of Georgetown Lodge No. 12, (Georgetown, CO).

Lodge dispensations (essentially a probationary period) and charters (full official status in the jurisdiction).⁹²

The administration of the Lodge is hierarchical and standardized, led by a “worshipful master” who is elected annually by the members, along with senior and junior “wardens,” other elected positions include the secretary and treasurer. Two “deacons” who guide candidates through rituals, two “stewards,” a chaplain, a marshall, and a “tyler” (an outer guard, sometimes spelled ‘tiler’) are appointed by the master of the Lodge for the duration of his yearly term.⁹³ As Lynn Dumenil has suggested, the ability to hold office within the Masonic order allowed men of relatively little status in their everyday lives to achieve some level of prestige within the fraternal structure.⁹⁴

Membership was attained through a process of petitioning, investigation by a committee, and a unanimous secret ballot. There has always been a requirement that prospective members must know a Mason for a certain amount of time—depending on when and where in time, this requirement was sometimes one year, sometimes six months, and sometimes something else entirely. Membership was then conferred through three symbolic “degrees” named: Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft, and Master Mason. Each involved a ritual drama designed to impart specific moral lessons, often invoking biblical allegories and symbolic meaning to the tools of a stonemasonry. As Tabbert asserts, the information conveyed in these degrees “was not true knowledge,” rather it simply “referred me to other knowledge contained with Holy Scripture and

⁹² For more details on the agency model, see Blevins, *Paper Trails*. The charter members of Collins Lodge No. 19 met informally in the home of one of their members, Henry C. Peterson as early as 1866 before they organized an official petition for a Lodge charter. Lloyd Hagen, *Collins Lodge No. 19 A. F. and A. M., 1870-1970: 100 Years of Masonry in Fort Collins* (Robinson-Warfield, 1970), 13. Similarly, as illustrated by the letters of Ramage and Slaughter, Masons met in Auraria and Denver informally before dispensations were given from Kansas and Nebraska. This trend appears in practically every other locality I have investigated.

⁹³ Some Lodges might have further appointed positions such as musician or cook. Denver Lodge No. 5 and Union Lodge No. 7 both had organists appointed in the latter portion of the nineteenth century, a position indicative of the Lodge’s material prosperity in this time.

⁹⁴ Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 17.

the seven liberal arts and sciences.” The degrees, in theory, were to act as stepping stones for members in pursuit of further knowledge. Critically, each degree was memorized and performed, and each member, in order to advance to the next degree, had to similarly memorize and perform an abbreviated version of the same. This act, Tabbert argues, “strengthened a man’s intellectual capacity” and the in-lodge performances of degrees “reinforced their principles to brothers in attendance.” The three degrees are sometimes referred to as the “symbolic” or “craft” degrees of the “craft lodges.” Once “raised” to the degree of a Master Mason, an individual is considered a full member and is “entitled to the rights and benefits” of Masonry. In sum, this organizational structure composes Blue Lodge Masonry.⁹⁵

The degrees themselves, otherwise called rituals, are worthy of a quick discussion. Their specific roles in the development of Masonic identity and its relation to place will be discussed later, but their existence as rituals is key. For some historians, rituals have been understood as cognitive facets of organizations, meant to direct people’s attention to specific aspects of the organization. However, dull, uninteresting, and shallow rituals would not stand the tests of time. The Masonic rituals, largely unchanged for centuries, are as much an art form as a theater performance. They have a profundity and an aesthetic appeal that has not only attracted membership, but retained it, for a considerable length of time, despite constant repetition. Dramatic, memorized, and with overt religious and moralistic philosophies being espoused, Masonic rituals and meetings were carried out with a degree of reverence with “sacred overtones.” Additional features like costumes, elaborate titles, and exclusive rights to wear various symbols were also key factors that contributed to men joining not only the Masons, but other fraternal orders as well. However, despite their desire to be entertaining, the rituals were to

⁹⁵ The seven liberal arts and sciences promoted in lodge rooms are derived from the medieval traditions of the Trivium and the Quadrivium. The former contains grammar, logic, and rhetoric, while the Quadrivium is home to arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy. For the Tabbert quotes, see Tabbert, *American Freemasons*, 74.

be taken with the utmost degree of seriousness. The central motivation behind each degree was to provide each member with the same initiatory experience which would, in turn, create a shared bond within the Lodge. Freemasonry's rituals and the lectures that accompanied them invested men with a knowledge of Enlightenment philosophy, scripture, and liberal arts while simultaneously promoting the practice of proper etiquette and diction.⁹⁶

The beauty of Masonry lay in its versatility. Tabbert eloquently describes this phenomenon, articulating how, in one moment, the Lodge was a spiritual organization led in prayer by the chaplain, while the next it was a guild filled with new members learning the symbolic uses of stonemason's tools. The Lodge could transform into a pedagogical assembly when ritual or open discussion turned towards the importance of the seven liberal arts and sciences. The Lodge was also a site of entertainment, with the rituals performed as an exclusive community theater and the dinners and fellowship periods transforming the order into a social club. Further, when philanthropic needs arose among the membership or their families, the Lodge became a charitable group, and when public needs arose, it became a community league to offer volunteers. It was also, Tabbert argues, a business association where members shared ideas and interests. Finally, in Tabbert's mind, the Lodge resembled a family when "fathers and sons, strangers and friends bond[ed] as 'brothers.'"⁹⁷

When combined, the versatility of the Masonic order culminates in its greatest contribution to the construction of the American nation in the latter half of the nineteenth century: stability. The Masonic order, self-assured in its resurgent power after times of strife,

⁹⁶ For discussions on the importance of ritual for fraternal organizations, see Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood*, 13 and Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood*. For further insights on the role of fraternal regalia in attracting and retaining members, see; Harriet W. McBride, "The Golden Age of Fraternalism: 1870–1910" *Heredom: The Transactions of the Scottish Rite Research Society* 13 (2005): 117–166. Lynn Dumenil discusses the "sacred overtones" of Masonic Lodge meetings. I would argue that the rituals are sacred, but the meetings are often lighthearted; Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 24. Tabbert, *American Freemasons*, 74.

⁹⁷ Tabbert, *American Freemasons*, 12.

societal prominence, and ubiquity, saw itself as a vehicle for self improvement for men across the young nation. If enough people in an area strive for self-improvement, they will, in most circumstances, consequently improve their communities. Through its many forms and uses—business, social, philanthropic, educational, or entertainment—the Lodge created a community network that followed in the wake of the United States as it moved to the West.

Move Westward

Ideologically and symbolically attached to the nation and publicly associated with national heroes like Washington, Franklin, Revere, and Hancock, Freemasonry began to grow exponentially. In 1800, the fledgling country was home to eleven Grand Lodges, 347 individual Lodges, and approximately 15,000 members. By 1825, 450 Lodges and 20,000 brothers could be found in New York State alone.⁹⁸ However, this flourishing was to be short-lived. In 1826, a controversy known as the “Morgan Affair” stemming from the alleged murder of a disgruntled member—William Morgan—struck the nation, resulting in the creation of the Anti-Masonic Party, and the decimation of both Masonic membership and prestige. Estimates suggest only a couple hundred members maintained membership in New York during the “Anti-Masonic period.” It would not be until the late 1840s that fraternity could pick up where it had left off in 1825.⁹⁹

If there was any doubt in the minds of nineteenth-century Americans about the resilience of the Masonic order, their uncertainties were quelled during the 1850s. In the span of one decade, the national membership almost tripled, reaching nearly 200,000 men. Immigrants were

⁹⁸ Figures adopted from Ronald P. Formisano and Kathleen Smith Kutolowski “Anti Masonry and Masonry: The Genesis of Protest, 1826–1827,” *American Quarterly* 29, no. 2 (1977):139–65. Citation borrowed from Jacob and Semadeni, *Freemasonry and Civil Society*, 38.

⁹⁹ Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood*, 117.

significant contributors to this event. Masonry had been present on the European continent for over a century, growing slowly in popularity in France, the various Germanic nations, and other regions. The German immigrants in particular played a major role in the growth of Freemasonry during this time. Historians Margaret C. Jacob and Maria Eugenia Vasquez Semadeni have uncovered that, “by 1858, there were twenty-eight German Lodges in the United States, some as far to the west as St. Louis, and to the south as Louisiana.” For these immigrants, Freemasonry provided them with numerous benefits, all of which contributed to familiarity and stability in a strange land. The varied attractions of Masonry and their utility to members will be explored throughout this work.¹⁰⁰

Having recovered from the trials of the Anti-Masonic period, Freemasonry once again fell into step with the nation, paralleling the rapid territorial growth and settlement that characterized much of the latter half of the nineteenth century. As the United States expanded into the West, so too did Masonry. For many, the allure of the West lay in the promise of opportunity and the terrifyingly captivating qualities of the unknown. Millions of people would heed its siren song over the following decades. However, as many soon found out, the vast expanses were full of peril and often imparted extreme hardship onto those brave—or foolish—enough to roll the dice of fate. The potential for tempestuous and often anarchic life in the West demanded that settlers bring with them a vessel for order and stability on the frontier.

What was, and what is, the “West” remains a topic of considerable contention. For nearly 100 years, Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis, codified in his 1893 address, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” reigned supreme, casting the West as a place defined by a series of ever moving geographic frontiers. However, after the advent of the New Western History Movement, it is necessary to briefly address what the West is in this context. As

¹⁰⁰ Jacob and Semadeni, *Freemasonry and Civil Society*, 39.

Patricia Nelson Limerick argues in her field-altering work, *The Legacy of Conquest*, “we must reject the Turnerian perspective of the West as a process and instead restructure our perceptions of the West as a place.” Complimentary to this belief was Richard White’s position that the “American West is a product of conquest and of the mixing of diverse groups of people... the West did not suddenly emerge; rather, it was gradually created.” Whether the West is a place, process, or product, it matters little for this study. Few arguments exist that can exclude Colorado from any of these frameworks. It falls geographically within most conceptions of the western United States; the site of continuous conflict, conquest, and creation, it was certainly a participant in Limerick’s process of the West; and it was the site of innumerable cross-cultural encounters, economic developments, and major migrations that gradually created it.¹⁰¹

Walter Nugent’s concept of the “transient young man” who populated the West is central to understanding the role of Masonry in the settlement and development of the region. Concepts of manhood and masculinity had been in flux following the end of the Revolutionary period with the emergence of the “self-made man” concept, produced by the market economy and allowed to develop in an era increasingly dependent on competition and self-advancement. According to historian of masculinity, E. Anthony Rotundo, men increasingly felt the need to vent their “aggressive, ‘manly’ passions, but they needed to learn how to do it without being socially destructive.” Fellow historian of masculinity, Michael S. Kimmel argues that the West presented such a venue, siphoning off excess population and permitting the ambitious and the unsuccessful alike to seek their fortunes. These men carried with them their cultural conceptions of what it meant to be a man in nineteenth-century America, which historian Amy S. Greenberg argues, “shaped the ideology, and practices... of manhood, and the meaning of Manifest Destiny.” As

¹⁰¹ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Significance of the Frontier in American History* (State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1893); Limerick, *Legacy of Conquest*, 323; White, “*It’s Your Misfortune*,” 4.

such, the transient men's understanding of their own masculinity was projected onto the development of the region.¹⁰²

Greenberg argues for two forms of masculinity that predominated: martial masculinity and restrained masculinity. The martial framework centered on public displays of physical prowess, bravery, and aggressive expansionism, ideals often realized through athletics, volunteer firefighting, or warfare, and championed as the “heroic” engine of Manifest Destiny. In contrast, restrained masculinity emphasized the private cultivation of character, prioritizing temperance, domestic virtue, and the moral discipline required to be a reliable breadwinner. These two models existed in a state of constant friction, with proponents of restrained manliness often viewing the aggressive tendencies of martial men as morally degenerate, and the latter viewing the former as soft and effeminate. However, despite the significance of these frameworks, fraternalism remains a notable omission in Greenberg's analysis. Given that fraternal organizations were in flourishing during the Antebellum period and provided a structured environment of restrained masculinity for men to negotiate these tensions, the absence of Lodges or Freemasonry from her study leaves a gap in understanding how such orders mediated the competitive and youthful impulses of the era.¹⁰³

Yet whether ascribing to martial or restrained masculinity, Americans moved westwards in droves. In a region largely defined by transience and mobility, voluntary organizations like the Masons were essential in performing the work of community creation. As Richard White notes, such groups could accomplish two critical tasks: they could “partially transcend small, localistic communities by attracting members from several such communities” and they could “create new

¹⁰² Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 20; Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 41; Amy S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 6.

¹⁰³ For martial masculinity, see: Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood*, 8, 139. For restrained masculinity, see: Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood*, 140–141.

communities where none existed before.”¹⁰⁴ Much like in British colonial holdings, women were largely absent, so the men turned to their homosocial groups for support. Innumerable reasons existed for why they would join orders like the Freemasons—each man may have his own motivation—but the Lodge’s role as a surrogate family that provided support, familiarity, and opportunity for mobile men cannot be understated. In particular for men of mobile occupations such as cattlemen, miners, postal workers, and the like, the allure for a replicable and nation-wide institution drove them to join Lodges and charter new ones where they did not yet exist. In the chaotic boom-and-bust gold camps and fledgling towns of the West, institutions that could manufacture social cohesion were more than just useful; they were tools for survival.¹⁰⁵

Masonry in Colorado

For millennia, groups of people have created texts that encapsulate who they are and what they ought to be. The Greeks had Herodotus, the Romans had the works of Plutarch, Livy, and Tacitus, and Christians have the Bible. The people of Denver, Colorado had Jerome C. Smiley. Published in 1901, Smiley’s *History of Denver* spans over 1,000 pages, presenting the city’s history from prehistoric times to the turn of the century, and even includes forecasts for the future. Buried within the hundreds of pages is a brief discussion of the significant presence and role of “secret orders and societies” in Denver. Smiley, predicting the arguments of historians of fraternal studies writing 100 years later, asserts that “so many men, and in a large proportion young men, constituted the successive increases of male population by immigration, that membership in some mutually helpful organization was desirable, if not essential, to most of them.” Smiley, recognizes the utility of fraternal organizations as means to establish oneself in a

¹⁰⁴ White, “*It’s Your Misfortune*”, 317–318.

¹⁰⁵ Burt, *Mariners, Miners, and Masons*, xv.

“new, distant and hurrying community,” to “[form] acquaintances and friendships,” or acquire “needed aid and comfort in misfortune and distress.” These motivations were clearly known and widely acknowledged in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America.¹⁰⁶

Although much of Smiley’s later focus on these orders centered around the Grand Army of the Republic, the Pioneer Club, and a handful of strictly charitable orders, he does take a moment to say that the Masons were the first to organize in Denver. Further, asserting that a “large number of the pioneers of Denver and Colorado” were Masons, he qualifies their “bonds of union” as “unusually strong and influential.” Regrettably, apparently out of desire not to burden his readers with a prolonged discussion about early Colorado associationalism, Smiley moves on to other topics quickly, but he did claim that a future study of the influence of the Masonic order on the pioneer communities would provide for a “a most interesting chapter” of Colorado history. He concludes his three paragraph discussion on Masonry arguing that, “the stride from the beginning in that humble log cabin [in 1859] to the magnificent Masonic Temple erected in 1889, would seem to sufficiently indicate, without amplifying words, the progress of this great order through the intervening thirty years.” With all due respect to Mr. Smiley, an exploration of Masonry’s growth from before the Colorado Territory was formed through the end of the century, has long been overdue.¹⁰⁷

The presence of Freemasons in Colorado began on November 3, 1858, in the fledgling settlement of Auraria, a mere ten days after the first party of settlers, the Russell party, had arrived at the junction of Cherry Creek and the Platte River. On that evening, J. D. Ramage, who had arrived only the day before, was called out of his tent by Henry Allen, who used “a Masonic expression” to identify himself. Ramage was brought to Allen’s cabin to join five other men:

¹⁰⁶ Smiley, *History of Denver*, 778.

¹⁰⁷ Smiley, *History of Denver*, 778.

William M. Slaughter, Charles Blake, Dr. Levi Russell, Andrew Sagendorf, and Oscar E. Lehow. These first seven Masons, as Ramage recalled in a letter written several decades later, immediately formed an informal Lodge and agreed to meet every Saturday night. Their purpose, as Ramage stated, was not only “mutual fellowship” and practicing their ritual, but also to share “any information which might be beneficial to the brethren, Masonically or financially.” From its very inception in the territory, the fraternity was a vehicle for both social cohesion and economic cooperation.¹⁰⁸

Over the next two months, this fledgling group of Masons demonstrated their commitment to the formal organization of a Lodge in the cold wilderness on the front range of the Rockies. On December 27, 1858, the Masons of Auraria, now numbering twenty-six, resolved to celebrate the Feast of St. John, a common tradition of the Freemasons.¹⁰⁹ The story of this banquet became a classic in Colorado Masonic history: held in a sixteen-by-sixteen-foot cabin, the table was constructed from the wooden boards of their wagons, and with no tablecloths to be found, the men borrowed clean bed sheets from a newly arrived Mormon family.¹¹⁰ Lacking chairs, they stood to eat a meal of pork, beans, biscuits, coffee, and wild game.

This event, as Ramage writes, “was a work of no small difficulty.” Yet he confidently claims that “notwithstanding our hurried preparations, there probably never was a happier or pleasanter meeting of such a body of Masons.” Yet the numbers of Masons in the area would soon expand exponentially, as in the spring of 1859, John Gregory’s massive gold strike in the

¹⁰⁸ J. D. Ramage, “Another Chapter in the Early History of Colorado Masonry: Letter of Bro. J. D. Ramage, One of the First Settlers, to Bro. J. C. Johnston, Secretary of Denver Lodge. No. 5,” *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 5, no. 1, (1896): 2–4.

¹⁰⁹ Masonic Lodges are commonly dedicated “to the holy saints John,” meaning St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist. December 27 is dedicated to the latter.

¹¹⁰ In a humorous portion of Ramage’s letter, he recounts the Mason’s quest for a table cloth for their “festal board.” He writes, “Somebody informed us that a Mormon, his wife and daughter had lately come to town, and taking for granted that where there were women (a scarce article in that country in those days), there we would surely find table clothes. We called on the old lady and she informed us that while she did not possess what we desired, she had some nice, clean bed sheets, and we were welcome to them.” Ramage, “Another Chapter,” 4.

mountains to the west set off a new rush. By June, twenty thousand men had reportedly descended upon “Gregory Gulch,” comprised of a chaotic assembly of prospectors, merchants, lawyers, saloon keepers, gamblers, criminals, and everything in between. In this environment of chaos and lawlessness, the Masons again moved to create an internal community that was both stable and familiar.¹¹¹

The Masons in Gregory Gulch, many of whom had come from the meetings in Auraria, sought to create a permanent, physical symbol of their order. On June 12, 1859, a building committee composed of William M. Slaughter, John Hughs, and Joseph Casto filed a claim, declaring: “Know all men by these presents that we... do this day pre-empt one block for the purpose of erecting a Masonic Temple.” Within days, this act of asserting the civic presence of the Masonic organization was followed by immediate action. Between fifty and one hundred men, with ox teams, leveled the ground and dragged logs to the site. According to the letter of William M. Slaughter, in just two or three days, they had erected a thirty-foot-square “Temple,” chinked and plastered with mud, with a pole roof covered in earth.¹¹² The furniture was fashioned from the materials at hand: stations were made of pine logs, and the Secretary’s desk was “the endgate of a wagon box.”¹¹³

Around June 20, they held their first meeting, a scene described by Slaughter in his letter penned several decades later and recounted at the beginning of this thesis: over two hundred Masons lined the trails to the “Temple,” while armed guards stood at each corner and a ten-man committee examined the scores of unknown visitors. Their ability to organize, vet, and secure such a large gathering in a volatile mining camp is demonstrative of the fact that the fraternity was operating as a powerful and self-regulating body. Their public function was soon noted; a

¹¹¹ Ramage, “Another Chapter,” 3; Slaughter, “First Meeting of Pioneer Masons,” 30.

¹¹² Slaughter, “First Meeting of Pioneer Masons,” 29–31.

¹¹³ Gregory Mining District Records, Book A, Arapahoe County, Kansas Territory (Gilpin County Records), 59.

correspondent for the *Rocky Mountain News* in 1860 reported on a “Masonic funeral in Central City” and noted that “a Masonic Lodge will be formed in this place as soon as Dispensation can be obtained from Kansas.” The performance of a Masonic funeral prior to the creation of an official local Lodge should not be overlooked.¹¹⁴

This desire for formal organization quickly led the Masons to petition established Grand Lodges from the East. In the fall of 1859, the Auraria group, having returned from the mountains, petitioned the Grand Lodge of Kansas for a charter. The Grand Master of Kansas, Richard R. Rees, issued a dispensation on August 15, 1859, and in his address, he spoke to the significance of this act: “Auraria Lodge is the first advance of Masonry thus far west into the confines of the Rocky Mountains... literally amidst the highest hills and lowest valleys.” He captured the fraternity's sense of purpose, continuing, “Truly, this is an age of penetration and progression, and the genial influence of Masonry, cementing and warming the hearts of its members, keeps pace with the march of civilization.” This statement reveals a clear consciousness among Masonic leaders that they were active, willing participants in the “Americanization” and “civilizing” of the West, as they saw it.¹¹⁵

While Auraria, Golden City (1860), and Nevada (1860) all received their charters from Kansas, a new figure arrived who would create a competing jurisdiction: John Milton Chivington. Not yet the infamous perpetrator of the Sand Creek Massacre, Chivington was known for his religious and Masonic affiliations. A Methodist minister and the Presiding Elder of his church, he arrived from Nebraska in 1860. At this time, he was also the Grand Chaplain of the Grand Lodge of Nebraska, and he carried with him the authority to grant dispensations,

¹¹⁴ “From Nevada,” *Rocky Mountain News*, November 26, 1860.

¹¹⁵ *Centennial Celebration 1861–1961: Grand Lodge A. F. & A. M. of Colorado* (n.p., 1961), 5.

which he promptly did for Summit Lodge and Rocky Mountain Lodge in 1861.¹¹⁶ This jurisdictional overlap, with Lodges in the same territory chartered by rival Grand Lodges in Kansas and Nebraska, created the political necessity for a local, sovereign body. This complex chain of authority, showing how Masonry spread from established Grand Lodges to new territories, was not unique to Colorado. George Clark's 1939 map, the *Genealogy of Masonic Grand Lodges of the U.S.* provides a visualization of this chaotic network of charters (fig. 1).

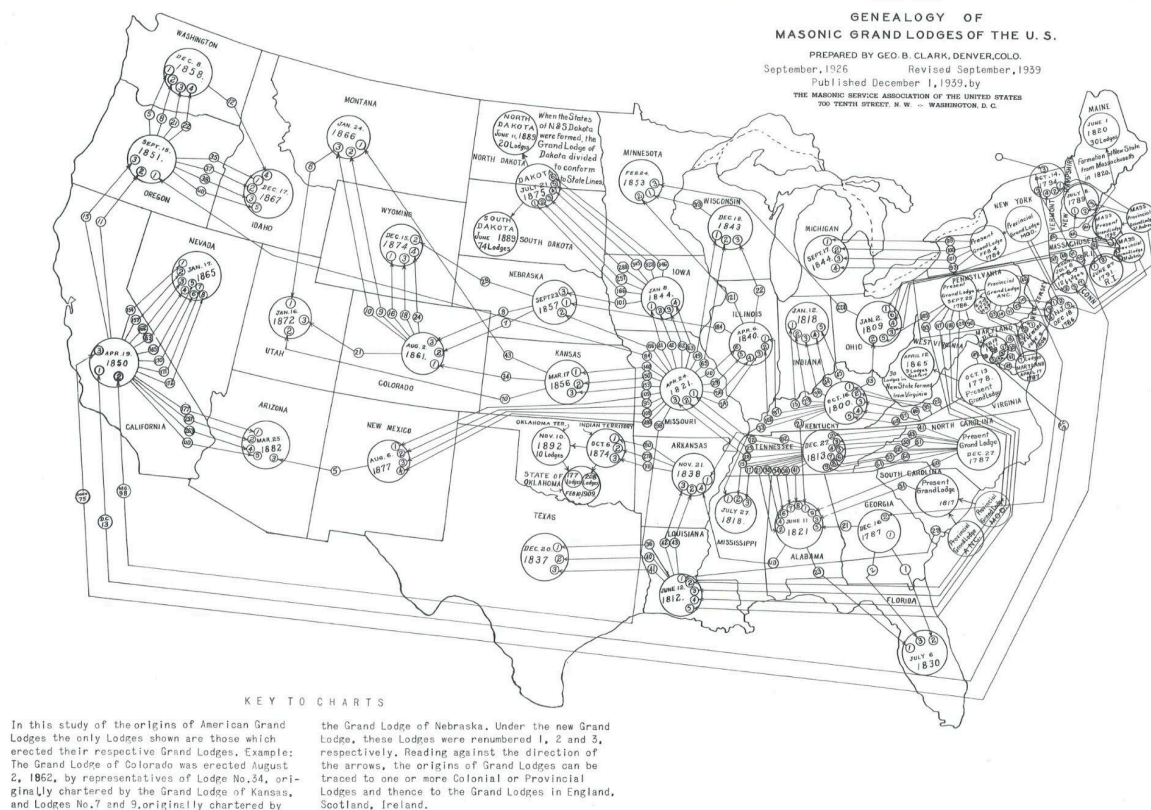


Figure 1: A map detailing the chartering “genealogy” of Masonic Grand Lodges in the United States. Thanks to Jerry Edwards of the Scottish Rite Denver Consistory for preserving and supplying this file.

¹¹⁶ Chivington would go on to win considerable military acclaim for his heroism at the Battle of Glorieta Pass in 1862, but would become infamous for his leadership during the Sand Creek Massacre two years later. He is addressed in greater detail near the end of part two.

Masonic Spotlight: Abraham Jacobs

This formal expansion, from its first chaotic meetings to the formation of a sovereign Grand Lodge, can be traced through the remarkable career of one man who seemed to be present at nearly every pivotal moment: Abraham Jacobs. Jacobs, a Jewish-German immigrant who became a Master Mason in Kentucky, was a member of Capital Lodge No. 3 in Omaha, Nebraska, and, in 1859, already on his way to the gold fields. He arrived in Auraria that year and opened a general store. On October 1, 1859, when Auraria Lodge held its very first regular communication under its new Kansas charter, it was Abraham Jacobs, one of the forty Masons present, who provided the second floor of his new store for the meeting room.¹¹⁷ Jacobs was also an active builder of the new community beyond his Masonic connections. In 1860, he served as the Secretary for the famous “moonlight meeting” on the bridge between Auraria and Denver City, the very meeting where the two rival towns agreed to merge under the name of Denver.¹¹⁸

Jacobs’s Forrest Gump-type presence at key events continued as the territory’s Masonic structure solidified. On August 2, 1861, when the three chartered Lodges—Golden City (Kansas), Summit (Nebraska), and Rocky Mountain (Nebraska)—met to form the independent Grand Lodge of Colorado, Abraham Jacobs was present for the occasion. Yet his loyalties and connections spanned the new territory. He withdrew from the original Auraria Lodge (which became Denver Lodge No. 5) to become a charter member of Chivington Lodge No. 6 in Central City, the Lodge named for the new Grand Master, John M. Chivington. While there, he and his brother-in-law, Benjamin Wisebart, ran a clothing store, and Jacobs sponsored Wisebart’s admittance into the Lodge.¹¹⁹ Jacobs’s life traced the entire arc of early Colorado Masonry: his

¹¹⁷ Thomas E. Shotts, “*Jacob’s Store*”: *Denver Lodge No. 5 A. F. & A. M.: Re-enactment of 1st Entered Apprentice Degree, December 10, A.L. 5859 A.D. 1859*, (self-pub., 2009), 9, 12–14.

¹¹⁸ Smiley, *History of Denver*, 324; “Jews Came to Denver With Gold Rush of 1859,” *Intermountain Jewish News*, March 26, 1953.

¹¹⁹ Ben Wisebart would later be elected Mayor of Central City, just one demonstration of the link between the fraternity and new civic leadership.

former home at 1606 Welton Street was sold to the Masonic Temple Association in 1888 for \$115,000, becoming the site of the new, monumental Masonic Temple. And in 1911, at the 50th Anniversary of the Grand Lodge, only two men were present who had also been at its 1861 formation: Andrew Sagendorf, one of the “Original Seven” from Allen's cabin, and Abraham Jacobs.¹²⁰

Abraham's story, however, is inseparable from that of his wife, Frances Wisebart Jacobs, who arrived with him in Central City by wagon in 1863. While her husband built the fraternal and business networks of the new territory, Frances built its conscience. Known as “The Mother of Charities,” she became one of nineteenth-century Colorado's most important civic figures. She was a remarkably effective organizer, forming numerous philanthropies that have persisted into the modern day: She founded the Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Society in 1872, now known as Jewish Family Services of Colorado. In 1874, she formed the Denver Ladies Relief Society to operate a home for the elderly, an organization that still exists as The Argyle. In 1887, in a truly remarkable act of bridging social capital, she joined with Catholic priests and Protestant ministers to create the Charity Organization Society, an institution that would eventually evolve into the national Community Chest and, later, the United Way.¹²¹ And finally, when National Jewish Health was incorporated, she was a key figure. Francis died from pneumonia in 1892, contracted after delivering medicine to a sick child on a rainy night, less than a month after the National Jewish Hospital's cornerstone was laid. The institution was subsequently named the

¹²⁰ Smiley, *History of Denver*, 962; Letter of Stewart A. Shafer, President of The Masonic Temple Association of Denver, August 26, 1959 in Scott L. Palmer *History of Denver Lodge No. 5, A. F. & A. M.: Published in Commemoration of 100th Anniversary, Denver Lodge No. 5, A. F. & A. M., 1859–1959* (n.p., 1959), 85–86; Palmer, *History of Denver Lodge No. 5*, 6–7.

¹²¹ Until 2015, United Way was the largest nonprofit in the United States by donations from the public. “A philanthropic boom: ‘donor-advised funds’,” *The Economist*, Internet Archive: Way Back Machine, March 23, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190609180120/https://www.economist.com/finance-and-economics/2017/03/23/a-philanthropic-boom-donor-advised-funds>.

Frances Wisebart Jacobs Hospital in her honor. Today, her legacy is immortalized in the rotunda of the Colorado State Capitol, where she is the only woman honored among the sixteen stained-glass windows of the state's pioneers.¹²²

The solidification of the fraternity, traced through the life of Colorado Masonic history's Virgil, Abraham Jacobs, was a pattern that repeated itself across the territory for the next four decades. The formation of the Grand Lodge of Colorado in 1861 created a sovereign, local authority with the power to charter new Lodges. Consequently, the institution was able to keep pace with, and often to anticipate, the spread of American settlement. The fraternity closely followed the prospectors, merchants, and railroad men. As new mining booms erupted, Masons were invariably present in the first wave, quickly petitioning the Grand Lodge for a dispensation to form a new lodge. The story of Georgetown Lodge, for example, is typical; founded in 1867, it grew in lockstep with the silver boom in Clear Creek County. Similarly, when vast carbonate strikes were discovered in 1877, creating the new city of Leadville, Masons were already there, and the Grand Lodge chartered Ionic Lodge No. 35 the following year in 1878. The fraternity was a consistent presence in the formation of these new urban networks, providing a ready-made social structure in boomtowns that otherwise lacked institutional cohesion.

Masonry's Growth in Colorado, 1861–1900

Practically since the moment men arrived in what was then referred to as the "Pike's Peak Region," there was a push for legal recognition of the area in which they resided which was legally under the jurisdiction of the Kansas Territory. For a time, the men of the region fancied themselves the "Jefferson Territory," which functioned as an independent-renegade-state with its

¹²² Smiley, *History of Denver*, 779; Majorie Hornbein. "Frances Wisebart Jacobs," *Shalvi/Hyman Encyclopedia of Jewish Women*, 27 February 2009, Jewish Women's Archive (Viewed on January 12, 2026), <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/jacobs-frances-wisebart>.

own court system, elected officials, and other facets of a typical political system. However, upon Kansas's recognition as a state in early 1861, the idea that was the "Jefferson Territory" died, and within a month, on February 28, the Colorado Territory was recognized by the U. S. Congress. Following closely on the heels of territorial organization was a new form of Masonic organization: the Grand Lodge. Previously, Lodges in the state had been chartered through the Grand Lodges of Kansas, Nebraska, but, with a new territory now formed, the Masons followed suit, creating the "Most Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons of Colorado" on August 2, 1861. This would eventually be renamed to its current title of "The Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Colorado" (MWGL of CO) in 1875. Of note, the jurisdictional boundaries of the Grand Lodge were coextensive with the future statelines.¹²³

The narrative of this expansion, however, only tells part of the story. To truly understand the scope and scale of Masonic influence, one must turn to a quantitative analysis of its growth. The data collected for this thesis, drawn from the membership records of the Grand Lodge of Colorado and its constituent Lodges, allows for a numerical and spatial mapping of the fraternity's footprint.

At the time of its formation in 1861, the Colorado Grand Lodge sported six Lodges and sixty-two members. However, while only sixty-two members are reflected in the yearly membership report published by the Grand Lodge, this figure misrepresents the actual number of men belonging to the fraternity in this time. Reflecting on the recent organization of a Denver

¹²³ The proposed boundary of the Jefferson Territory would have been approximately 70% larger than the modern state of Colorado. Brian K. Trembath, "Jefferson Territory: The Renegade State that Almost Replaced Colorado," Denver Public Library Special Collections and Archives, June 24, 2020, <https://history.denverlibrary.org/news/literary-research/jefferson-territory-renegade-state-almost-replaced-colorado>. On the organization of the MWGL of CO, see: William C. Matthews, *The Laying of the Corner Stone of Masonry in Colorado* (n.p., 1923), 14–15. For a discussion of the coextensivity of the boundaries, see: Ben Williams, "Freemasonry and the Frontier: Freemasonry in 'Pike's Peak Country,'" *Rocky Mountain Mason*, no. 25, 46.

Lodge in July of 1860, the *Rocky Mountain News* commented that “the number of members of the Fraternity in this region is quite large.” Sixty-two men within the entire region would not warrant such a comment. Indeed, at this time, Lodges such as Washington Lodge No. 12 in Georgetown, Colorado, would require that a man had lived in the established jurisdiction of that specific Lodge for at least six weeks. In a period where men were almost coming and going, this was a tall order. It is likely that many Masons simply retained their membership in their home Lodges from whatever state or country they moved from, and only after several months or years—once they were confident that they would be staying in the area for a time—would they become members of a Colorado Lodge.¹²⁴

From 1861 to 1880, the Lodge grew at a steady, but still respectable rate of approximately 94 men per year, reaching 1,857 members by the start of the 1880s. However, the final two decades of the century saw the number of Masons in Colorado explode: over 326 new members joined Lodges, on average, each year through 1900.¹²⁵ This pattern is reflected in fig. 2. During this period, it was not uncommon for the performance of degrees to take most of the day; each member was expected to go through the degrees individually. In 1892, Union Lodge No. 7 conferred seven Master Mason degrees in one night: it took from 5:00pm to nearly midnight.¹²⁶ Out-of-state visitors, it should be noted, were not counted among the Colorado membership until they applied for dual membership, even if they stayed in the state for years. As such, all figures

¹²⁴ The first quote is from “Masonic,” *Rocky Mountain News*, July 5, 1860. The stipulation regarding length of residency in the jurisdiction of the Lodge is from “Article V,” Washington Lodge No. 12 Minute Book, October 7, 1867 (Georgetown, CO). Quotes regarding Masonry taken from the *Rocky Mountain News* should be approached with a degree of skepticism, as William Byers was himself a member and may have therefore presented Masonry in an overwhelmingly positive light.

¹²⁵ All statistics regarding yearly Colorado Masonic membership are derived from Sean Nelson, “MWGL of CO Yearly Membership Totals Dataset,” created November, 2025. Yearly membership numbers would be published in the Grand Lodge yearly proceedings.

¹²⁶ “Union #7,” *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 1, no. 2 (Denver: April, 1892), 2. The practice of pairing initiates has since been adopted, which speeds up the process considerably. I had the pleasure of advancing through the Masonic degrees simultaneously alongside my father with my grandfather leading the “degree team.”

for the number of Masons in Colorado only count the number of Masons who were dues paying members of Colorado Lodges. There would have been, at any given period, potentially hundreds of visitors who were in the region but not counted in the statistics.

Colorado Masons by Year, 1861–1900

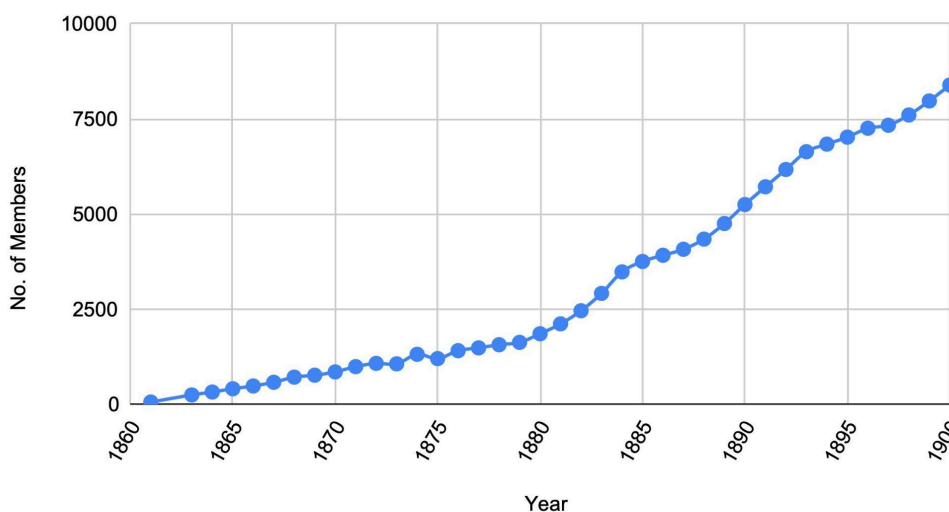


Figure 2: The linear graphing of the number of Colorado Masons by year, 1861–1900. (Google Sheets)

With each increase of Masonic membership, new Lodges had to be chartered. Much like the post offices that Cameron Blevins explores, the charting process of the Lodge was a bottom-up process. Members would gather and petition the Grand Lodge for recognition. This meant that where Masons went, organized Lodges were sure to follow. The 1880s saw a dramatic increase in the number of Lodges in the state: From 1881 to 1890, forty-six new Lodges were chartered, a rate of over five per year. However, each Lodge could only effectively maintain a certain number of members (fig. 3). Spatial, economic, and social restraints informally required new Lodges to form once membership reached a certain point. While the larger urban lodge halls could house gatherings of numerous Masons—Denver, Golden, Pueblo, and Leadville’s were quite expansive—more rural lodges would be hard-pressed to fit more than twenty members in the seats. Recognizing that the physical size of each hall differed greatly, the statistical analysis

of membership relative to the number of Lodges from 1861 to 1900 reveals that there was, on average, one Lodge per sixty-one Masons at any given time (fig. 3 and table 2). However, it must be noted that the majority of members did not regularly attend the meetings, and almost every session was attended by “visiting brethren” who, for one reason or another, did not have membership in that specific Lodge.

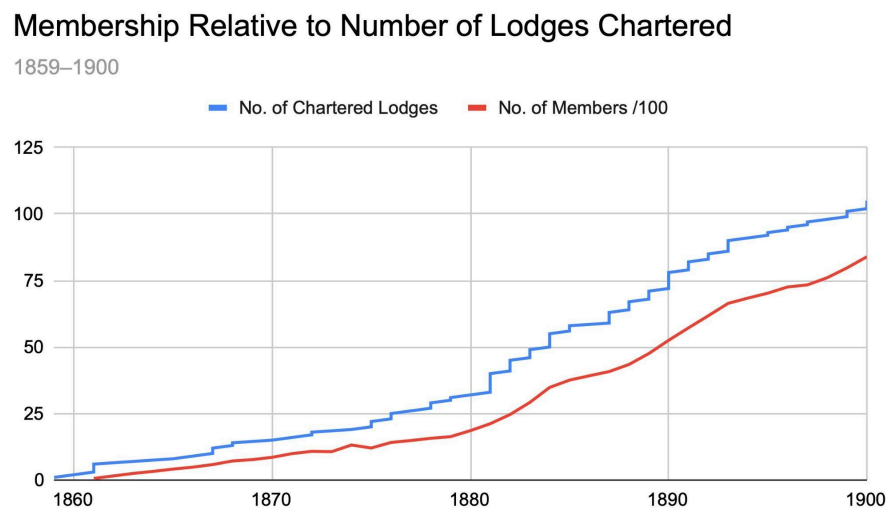


Figure 3: “Membership Relative to Number of Lodges Chartered, 1859–1900.” (Google Sheets)

A calculation of the attendance records for each meeting of Collins Lodge No. 19 in Fort Collins, Colorado from 1870 to 1892 concludes that the average meeting had, on average, approximately twenty-two Masons in the audience. Of these twenty two, nineteen or twenty would have been members of Collins No. 19 while the other two or three would have been visitors. However, the attendance ledger does not tell the full story. When cross referenced to the records of officers in a given year, the names do not overlap. Evidently, the secretary did not record the elected or appointed officers in the attendance book, likely noting them in the minutes as was the custom.¹²⁷ Therefore, on an average night with a full roster of officers, ten in total,

¹²⁷ The minutes of Collins Lodge No. 19 from this period were destroyed in a flood some years ago. They are almost completely illegible outside of a few words. However, the majority of other lodge minutes I have interacted with would include the list of officers at the beginning of the minutes.

Collins Lodge No. 19 would have thirty two Masons sitting in the lodge hall.¹²⁸ However, the average number of paid members in Collins No. 19 during this period was 123 *total*. So, on average, little more than a quarter of the total membership was in attendance on a given night.

Year	No. of Lodges	No. of Members	Average per Lodge
1861	6	62	10
1870	15	854	57
1880	32	1857	58
1890	78	5252	67
1900	105	8392	80

Table 2: Average number of Masons per Lodge in Colorado by decade.

Meetings convened for specific events such as funerals, cornerstone ceremonies, or elections had significantly larger attendance numbers. Funerals and cornerstone ceremonies, considered “special communications” as opposed to “regular communications” held on established dates and times, averaged over forty-seven attendees—forty-one members and six visitors—not including officers. However, while such special events were well attended, they paled in comparison to the yearly election night. For Collins No. 19, the first meeting of December was when the next year’s officers would be elected. As such, it was imperative that the outgoing officers be present, and the greater the number of members in attendance, the more voices could be heard regarding the future leadership of the Lodge. From 1881 to 1890, an astonishing average of fifty-nine members, four visitors, and ten officers would attend election nights. Even visitor counts were above the mean, surprising considering visitors had no voting rights in their host Lodges. In both 1886 and 1890, eighty-one members and ten officers were

¹²⁸ There are two meeting types, regular and special. Regular, as one might imagine, are more common. Of the 322 meetings evaluated, 244 of them were “regular communications” while the remaining 78 were “special communications.” The difference in average attendance between these two styles was negligible. Regular: 19.32 members and 2.23 visitors per meeting. Special: 19.27 members and 2.66 visitors. While special meetings for funerals were often well attended, special meetings for the conferral of a degree had the lowest regular attendance of any meeting time, on average.

present. Unlike the typical meeting night, elections drew crowds of over 58% of the Lodge's total membership, demonstrating the desire of Masons to participate in their internal democratic practices.¹²⁹

The membership numbers across the state grew rapidly over the several decades of Colorado's growth. As such, interlodge visitor numbers would grow more and more dramatically. For example, in 1892, two Lodges existed in Georgetown, Colorado, numbering 119 members collectively. The *Square and Compass* reported that, following the opening of the new lodge building in town, Washington Lodge No. 12 performed a third degree that had "a large number of visitors, including a delegation of thirty from Idaho Springs" in attendance.¹³⁰ To accommodate these increases in membership, more and more Lodges had to be chartered. By the turn of the century, the Grand Lodge was home to over 100 Lodges and nearly 9,000 members.

Obviously, not all of the Lodges could be in the same locality. The Masonic growth in these days was geographic as well as numerical. Fig. 4 presents a visualization that tracks the expansion of Masonic membership and lodges from 1861 to 1900. The location of each Lodge is represented by a dot whose radius expands or contracts to reflect the total active membership in that lodge for that specific year. Each Lodge was responsible for a particular geographic territory, often determined by the Grand Lodge. If a prospective member lived within the jurisdiction of Georgetown, for example, it would be incredibly unlikely that he would be given admittance to the lodge in Central City.

However, as Masonry grew in Colorado, the larger urban centers began to have several lodges within one jurisdiction. These presented the members with choices geared towards a

¹²⁹ Calculations from the previous two paragraphs were taken from Sean Nelson, "Collins Lodge No. 19 Attendance Records Dataset," November 28, 2025. Yearly officer information is from Sean Nelson, "Lodge Leadership Dataset," July 10, 2025. Numbers for the yearly total membership numbers are from Sean Nelson, "Lodge Membership By Year Master Dataset," created December, 2025.

¹³⁰ *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 1, no. 2 (Denver: April, 1892), 9.

certain ideological bend or occupation. Infamously, in 1863 during the height of the Civil War, Denver Lodge No. 5 was home to a considerable number of men who were, for one reason or another, sympathetic to the Confederacy. This caused great discomfort among those friendly to the Union cause, and so, in November of 1863, Union Lodge No. 7 was created by an act of the Grand Lodge, providing a home for “Union men,” hence the name. Other lodges, such as Harmony Lodge No. 61 would tend to be populated by a majority of members that had the same or similar professions. Harmony Lodge was closely tied to the railroad workers. Therefore, the placement and expansion of Lodges helped to serve the Masonic population, reducing their commute time to meetings and, in some cases, providing different options for members based on their personal preferences or occupations.¹³¹

¹³¹ For the history on the schism between Denver Lodge No. 5 and Union Lodge No. 7, see: “Lodge Notes: Union Lodge No. 7,” *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 3, no. 2 (Denver: April, 1894), 46; *Centennial Celebration 1861–1961: Grand Lodge A. F. & A. M. of Colorado* (n.p., 1961), 44. Regarding Harmony Lodge No. 61, see: *Centennial Celebration*, 84–85.

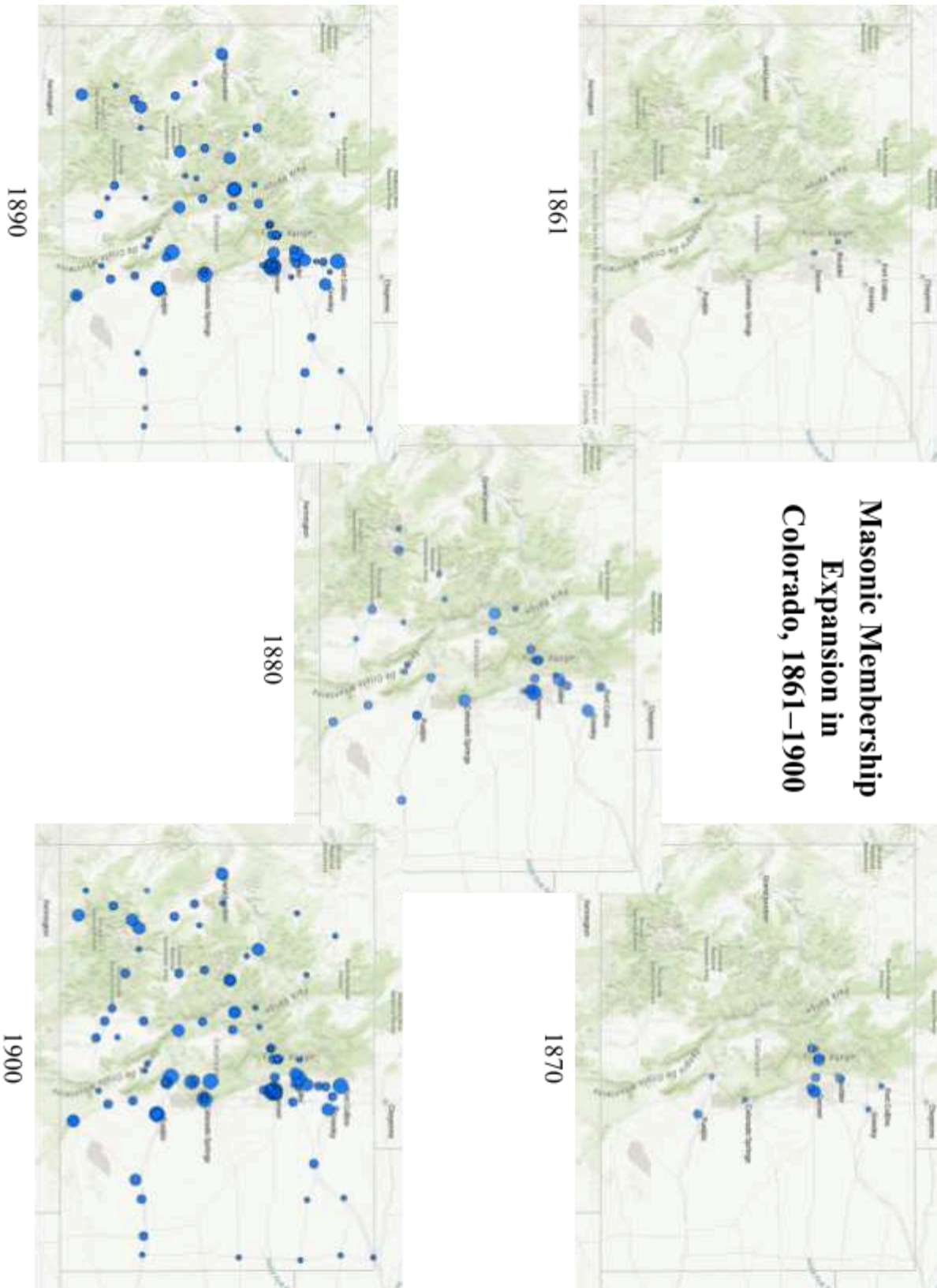


Figure 4: Five maps demonstrating the “Masonic Membership Expansion in Colorado, 1861–1900.” Each blue dot represents a Lodge, with the diameter of the dots corresponding to the relative number of members.

Clearly, the distribution of Masons was vast, yet statistics and maps all too often fail to reflect that the populations they portray were individuals, each with their own lives, stories, and experiences. Each member of each Lodge was unique. Unfortunately, to tell the story of each member is an impossible task, but a better understanding of who these men were can be found through an evaluation of the tangible characteristics that defined them: their professional trades, their investment into the fraternity, and their ages. By employing this focus, the anonymous dots on a map or line on a graph transform into a portrait of a living, breathing community. However, before dissecting the aggregate demographic data of the Colorado lodges, one must first look at the specific mechanism that allowed these unique individuals to transcend their local boundaries and activate the Masonic network on a national, and even international, scale. This was facilitated by one of the fraternity's most enduring principles: the ability of a brother to find a home—and a helping hand—wherever his journey might take him.

“The Right to Travel in Foreign Countries”: Inter-Lodge Relationships

Men milled about the lodge hall, shaking hands with friends, introducing themselves to newcomers, and preparing for another eventful Lodge meeting. On October 11, 1882, electric lighting had not yet been installed in the Masonic hall belonging to Leadville Lodge No. 51, so the light of lamps and candles danced along the walls of the lodge room. Officers strode about, donning their jewels—metal emblems attached to blue or purple collars that hung around their necks—and all members present wore the same peculiar article: a white leather apron. The different configurations by which the apron could be worn indicated what degree the member had attained. Through the dull roar of casual conversation, a sharp rap split the air. The Master,

wielding a wooden gavel, pronounced, “brethren be clothed. Officers repair to your stations and places.” The meeting had begun.¹³²

A full record of the members in attendance that night in October does not exist, but this meeting had an unusual quality about it: the hall was almost certainly filled with Masons. In order to open a meeting of Master Masons, a minimum of three officers are needed, and it is almost guaranteed that there were far more regular attendees there that night. But what made this meeting special was that, in addition to the “regulars,” the seats were filled with visiting Masons. Twenty-four visitors lined the sides of the lodge room, and although eleven of them were from the other Leadville Masonic Lodge, Ionic No. 35, the remaining thirteen hailed from all parts of the globe. Two came from elsewhere in Colorado, two had arrived from Michigan, and Maine, Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, and Pennsylvania were all represented by a brother each as well. Yet diverse accents could be heard before the meeting had been called to order. Masons from Scotland, England, and Canada were present. Astonishingly, on an otherwise inconspicuous Wednesday night in October of 1882, this collection of men from across the North American continent and beyond all gathered together to partake in whatever forms and ceremonies of the Masonic institution were planned for that night.¹³³

It is impossible to know the individual motivations that each visitor had for sitting in the lodge that night. The eleven men from Ionic Lodge No. 35 were almost assuredly part of a formal delegation, invited or otherwise, that was paying their fellow Leadville Masons a visit. But the rest of the men in attendance are more of an enigma. It is possible that they had moved to Leadville and were simply recorded as “visitors” while they waited on the process to become full

¹³² One of the beauties of the largely unchanged nature of the Masonic structure is that the wording of most of the degrees, including the opening and closing of the Lodge, remain very similar today to what they were in the 1880s which allows for an ethically constructed dramatization such as this opening paragraph.

¹³³ All data on visitors to Leadville Lodge No. 51 come from Sean Nelson, “Leadville Lodge No. 51 Visitors Ledger Mapping Dataset,” December, 2025.

members of Leadville No. 51. Alternatively, they may have just been passing through and wished to have a meal and share in the company of fellow Masons. Or, perhaps, they were there to call on the support of their Masonic brethren. It was not uncommon for Lodges to distribute small cash handouts to visitors or members in order that they might buy food, acquire temporary lodging, purchase a ticket to the next town, or pay for medicine. Roger Burt's study indicates that some members would attend the Lodge in search of advice for where to find local employment. As part of the Masonic obligation that all members had to swear upon their initiation—and reaffirm in various manners in each of the subsequent degrees—Masons could expect assistance from other Masons whom they encountered.¹³⁴

Similarly, in one of the craft degrees, there is a recurring refrain of “the right to travel in foreign countries,” which is, in the ritual, an allusion to the rights that operative Master Masons could exercise in Biblical or medieval times. The story asserts that, upon being made a Master Mason, one of the several “rights and benefits” that men were entitled to was the ability to travel freely between countries and work on their various projects. For Freemasons in the speculative period, this notion was used to describe the right of members to travel from Lodge to Lodge and exercise the other rights and benefits of their membership in these “foreign countries.” Leadville Lodge No. 51 acts as a case study for this phenomenon.

Established in 1877 after the discovery of silver deposits, Leadville, Colorado was a vibrant and thriving cosmopolitan area. Its first Lodge, Ionic No. 35, received its dispensation to conduct meetings in March of 1878 and quickly grew to one of the largest Lodges in the state within a short time. Within four years, the Lodge more than tripled in size, approaching 130 members by September of 1882. As such, the local members petitioned the Grand Lodge for a dispensation for a second local Lodge, this one to be named Leadville No. 51. The petition was

¹³⁴ Burt, “Benevolent Organization in Mining Communities,” 213.

granted, and in 1882, the first meeting of Masons was held by Lodge No. 51; there were eight members. By the following year, fifty Masons had joined, bringing the joint membership of the two Leadville Lodges to over 200 men. At the start of each meeting, Leadville No. 51 had a custom of asking each visitor to write their name, residence, home Lodge, and home state in a specific Visitors Ledger, which had fortunately survived to the present day.

From 1882, when the Lodge was chartered, to 1890, over 500 individual visitor records were recorded. These were, for the purpose of this thesis, digitized into a dataset, and the geolocations of the home towns of each visiting Mason recorded. As a result, several striking visuals emerge that demonstrate the human mobility of Masons that helped craft Leadville into a national hub. It should come as no surprise that, by virtue of being founded in the British Isles, there was an international presence of Masons, even during the latter portion of the nineteenth century. Over a dozen Masons from Scotland, Wales, and England were recorded as visitors to Leadville, Colorado from 1882 to 1900, with the most common origin being Cornwall, England. The extensive mining operations of Cornwall almost certainly explain the presence of these men in the Leadville silver mines.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ The phenomenon of Masons who were miners by trade traveling abroad to seek their fortunes while simultaneously using their Masonic membership advantageously is discussed in Burt, *Mariners, Miners, and Masons*.

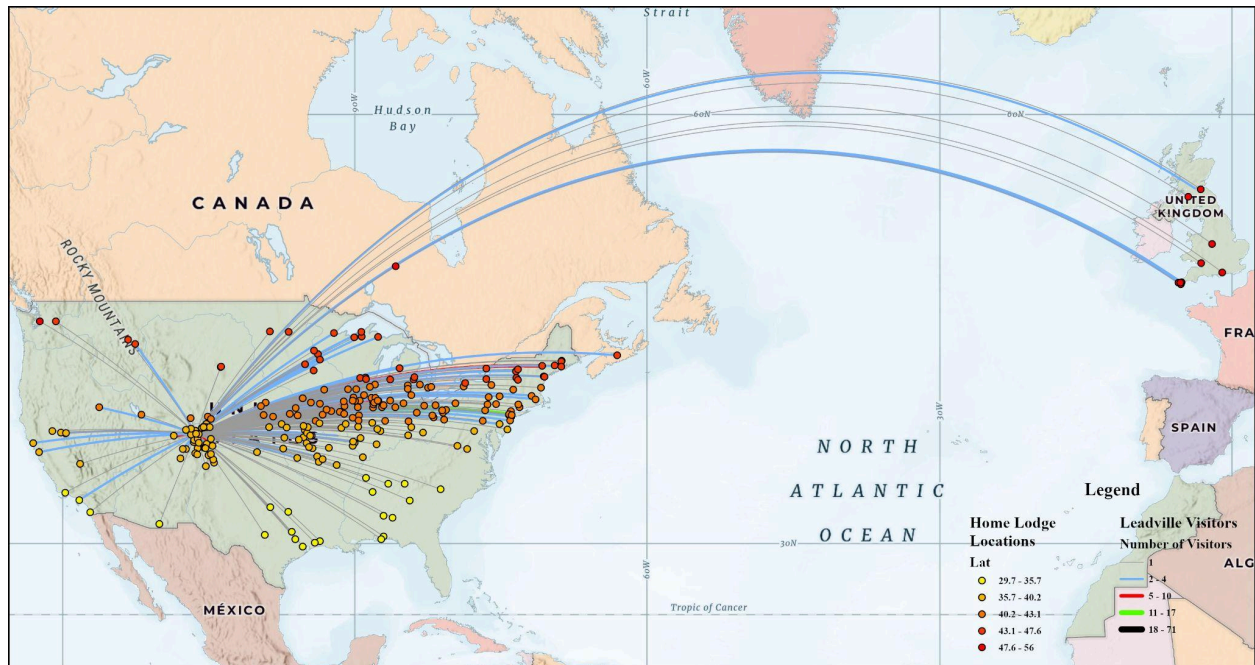


Figure 5: An international view displaying the origin points of the visitors to Leadville Lodge No. 51 from 1882 to 1890. Created with ArcGIS.

Turning attention to the domestic travel of Freemasons, a few obvious conclusions can be drawn. First, there are very few Masons traveling to Colorado from the West. Similar to the lack of travel from directly North or South, this is in large part due to the limited population and probably a lack of motivation to return East after having already made the overland trek to California, or the Washington Territory. Surprisingly, there was an extremely low representation of visitors from the South. In fact, over the course of eight years, only 20 instances of a southern Freemason visiting the Leadville Lodge were recorded, accounting for a paltry 3.9% of all visitors. Beyond the generally lower number of men moving from the South to the West, the reasons for this trend remain unclear, and certainly warrant further study.

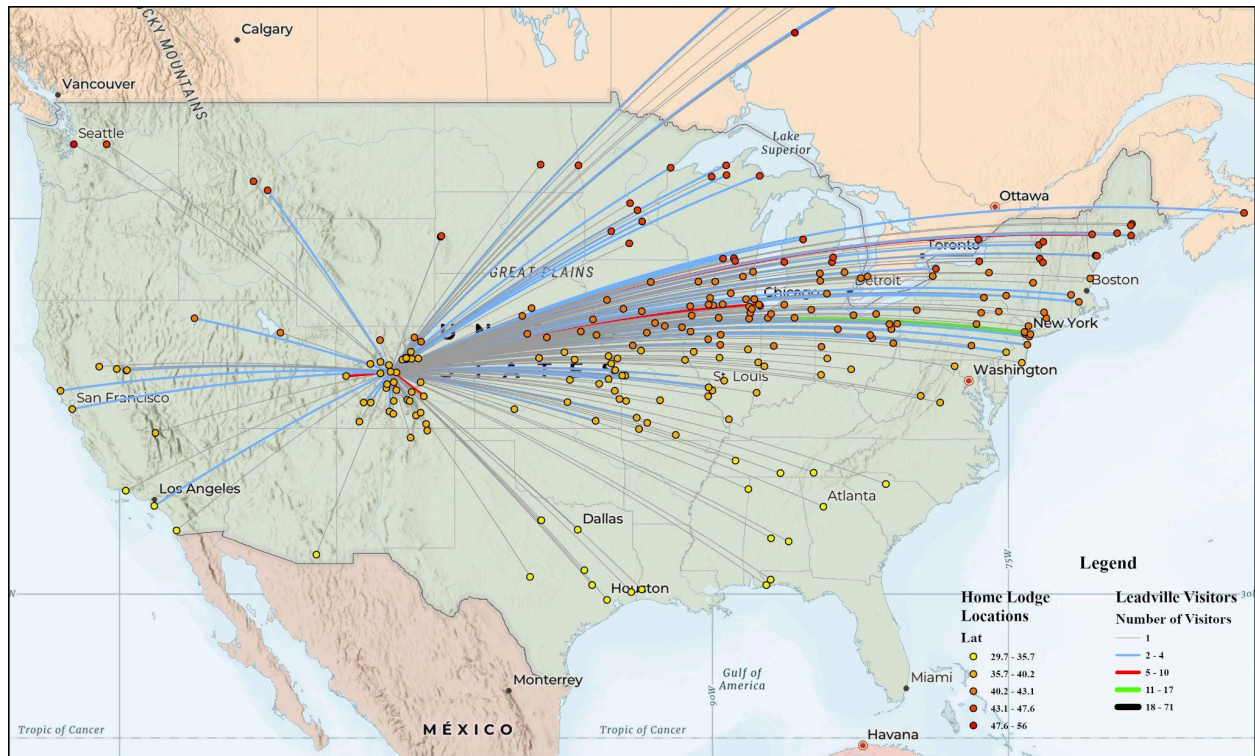


Figure 6: A national scope of visitors to Leadville Lodge No. 51 from 1882 to 1890. Created with ArcGIS.

Unlike the South, New England saw many Masons move westward, either settling in or passing through Leadville long enough to attend a Lodge meeting. New York and Maine emerged as the most common states of origin for visitors, accounting for 6.5% and 3.3% of the visitors, respectively. Without a doubt, the most common region for visitors to Leadville, outside of Colorado itself, was the Midwest. Nearly one hundred Masons hailed from Illinois (8%), Michigan (3.5%), Iowa (3.3%), and Ohio (3.1%) together, with the other Midwest states contributing heavily in their own rights.

Leadville No. 51 Visitor's Home State Representation, 1882–1890

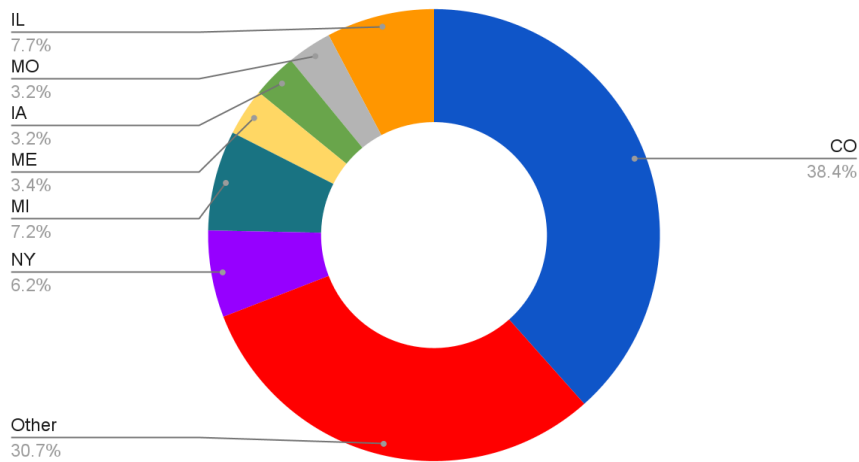


Figure 7: A donut chart displaying the representation of American states represented by visitors to Leadville Lodge No. 51, 1882–1890.

Intrastate visitation accounted for 40% of all entries in the ledger, with Ionic Lodge No. 35 comprising 13.9% of visitors. Unlike other Lodges in the state such as Denver No. 5 and Union No. 7, there was no ill will between the two Leadville Lodges. Naturally, Masons from the Denver Lodges were the second highest in-state contributors, accounting for 2.7% of visitors. The Gold Country Lodges in Georgetown, Central City, Idaho Springs, and Black Hawk were also common points of origin for visiting Masons. These locations, in addition to Denver, were some of the most densely populated in the state, so the high number of Masons has a basis in the raw demographics. While it is difficult to determine the motivation for each visitor's presence in Leadville without conducting a biographical study of each person, it is likely that the Colorado members were simply visiting the town for a time before returning home whereas Masons from New England or the Midwest being recorded were likely moving to Leadville for employment. By 1880, Leadville had already become the second largest city in Colorado and one of the wealthiest municipalities in the nation. The visual weight of the connections to Chicago, New York, and elsewhere challenges the narrative of frontier isolation, demonstrating that through the

fraternal network, a Mason in a remote silver camp could remain closely connected to the metropolitan centers of the Gilded Age.

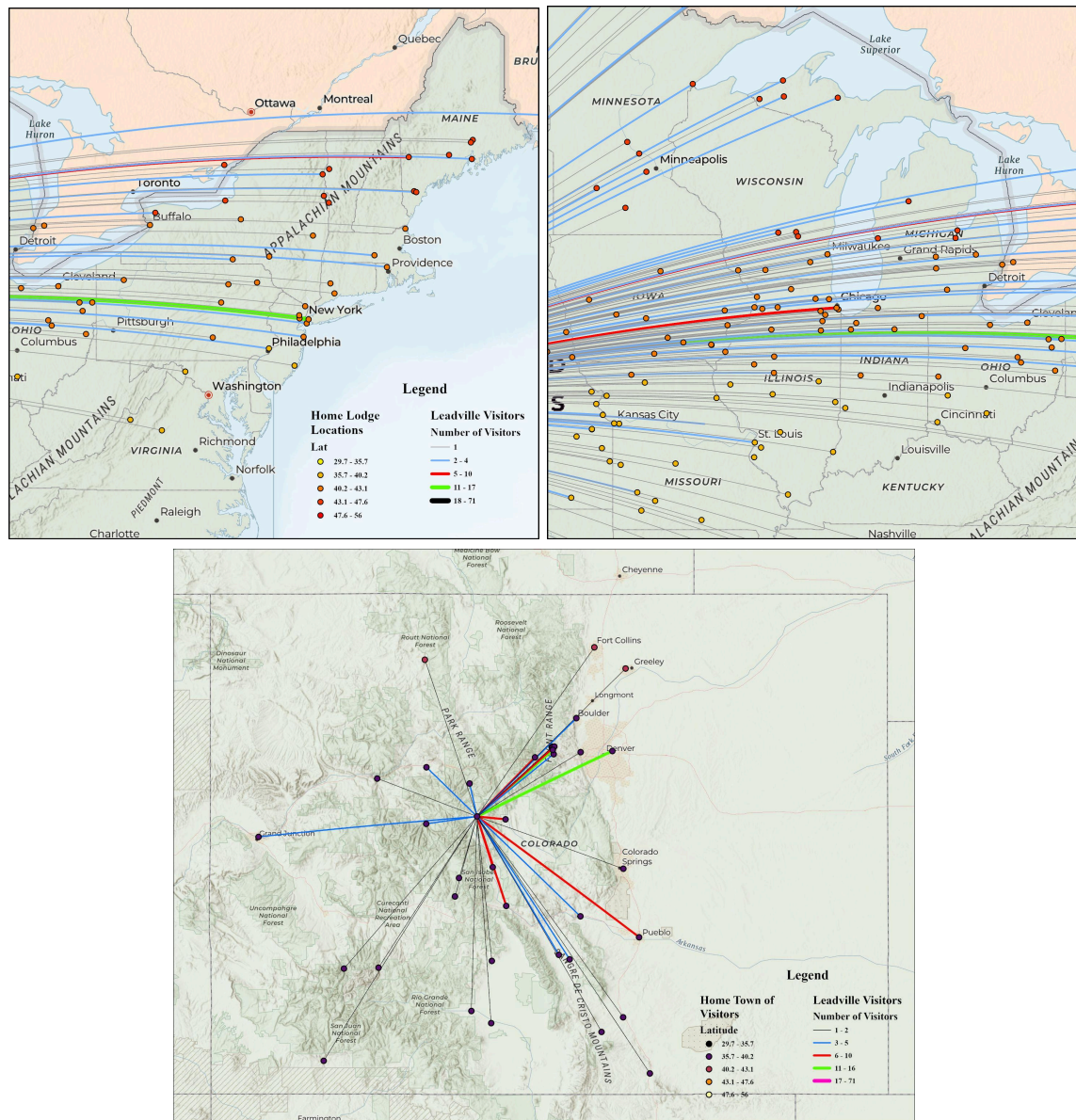


Figure 8: A zoomed focus of visitors to Leadville Lodge No. 51 from 1882 to 1890 hailing from New England. Created with ArcGIS. Figure 9: A zoomed focus of visitors to Leadville Lodge No. 51 from 1882 to 1890 hailing from the Midwest. Created with ArcGIS. Figure 10: Colorado visitors to Leadville Lodge No. 51 from 1882 to 1890. Created with ArcGIS.

The above analysis examines the visitors who moved between Lodges, but men were not the only metric by which this network could be measured. Information, in particular that which related to the standings of Masons within the fraternity, was transmitted frequently between

regions. Innumerable accounts exist in the minutes that record “communications” from other Lodges in the area concerning the suspension, expulsion, or rejection of members or prospects. Additionally, if a suspended member was reinstated, this would similarly be relayed to other Lodges. These names were then, according to the minutes, recorded in a “black book,” which seems to have preserved the names and descriptions of offending Masons. While I have been unable to find any surviving black books, their references in the minutes of Golden City Lodge No. 1, Nevada Lodge No. 4, Washington Lodge No. 12, and several others indicate they were prevalent throughout the Masonic communities of Colorado. The act of Lodges informing one another of rejections, suspensions, and expulsions, is a testament to the Masonic idea of preserving the “quality” of their membership throughout the jurisdiction, not just within the specific Lodge.¹³⁶

Further, Lodges would occasionally ask others for financial assistance, which presents an interesting insight into the relationship between Lodges and their officers. Take, for example, a request received from Arcana Lodge No. 187 in Minneapolis by Golden City No. 1 in 1906. Arcana Lodge, desirous of “securing a home” for their body to meet, wrote to Golden City No. 1 and offered them a Senior Deacon’s jewel at the price of \$2.00. The request was read in the March 5th meeting and it was voted that the Senior Deacon of Golden City Lodge No. 1 would buy the jewel himself and then donate it to the Lodge. The minutes regarding this section conclude by stating that the officer gladly accommodated the “will of the lodge.” This case is interesting for two reasons: first, it demonstrates that Lodges from disparate regions of the nation

¹³⁶ Several instances of this appear throughout all the minute books I evaluated. A sampling include: A report of reinstatement from Idaho Springs No. 26 in Minutes of Georgetown Lodge No. 48 (Georgetown, CO), March 23, 1882, 28; “A communication from Pitkin Lodge No. 40, giving notice of the rejection of the petition of Joseph F. Smith to be made a Mason, was read and his name was ordered to be placed upon the black list.” Minutes of Georgetown Lodge No. 48 (Georgetown, CO), March 9, 1882, 25; a communication from Union Lodge No. 7 “giving notice of the rejection of A. I. Gill,” from Minutes of Golden City Lodge No. 1 (Golden, CO), March 5, 1864, 10; Communication with list of names rejected by Nevada Lodge No. 4 “ordered placed on the black list,” from Minutes of Washington Lodge No. 12 (Georgetown, CO), January 25, 1868, 33.

could request financial assistance from one another, and that in certain circumstances, the requests were approved.¹³⁷ Second, the Lodge evidently had some power to impose itself on the members in a financial manner. Beyond simple dues payments, the Lodge was able to occasionally ask its officers and members to spend their own personal money for the benefit of the fraternity at large.¹³⁸

The communication networks within the Masonic organization could also be employed for personal use. Obviously, the case of Thomas Freeman's murder is a strong example of the power and speed of Masonic communication, but that account was largely localized in the city of Denver. Much like the proliferation of visitors, Masonic communications extended beyond the immediate area. For example, the minutes of Georgetown Lodge No. 48 record a committee report from Mystic Tie Lodge No. 74 in Augusta, Kansas that contained information regarding the disappearance of a brother Mason by the name of Robert Clark. Clark was a resident of Augusta during the 1880s, when, while on a business trip to Kansas City in mid-December of 1889, he disappeared. The newspapers in Augusta frequently reported any updates, or, more commonly, the lack thereof, to their readers. One such update, published in the *Augusta Journal* on January 23, 1890, states that "Mystic Tie Lodge A.F. & A.M. are preparing a circular letter to be sent to lodges in this and surrounding States, describing Robert Clark." The minutes of Georgetown No. 48 indicate they received this circular by early February. Unfortunately, the case of Robert Clark remained unsolved, weighing on the residents of Augusta for, as they said, "the suspense is worse than death."¹³⁹

¹³⁷ Not always, however. A communication from a Lodge in the Dakota Territory asking for financial assistance in securing a lodge building was sent to Georgetown Lodge No. 48 in 1888 and they declined. Minutes of Georgetown Lodge No. 48 (Georgetown, CO), April 12, 1888, 299.

¹³⁸ The case of the Arcana Lodge communication is found in the Minutes of Golden City Lodge No. 1 (Golden, CO), March 5, 1906, 14–15.

¹³⁹ For the report of Clark's disappearance, see, "Robert Clark Missing," *The Augusta News*, December 20, 1889. For the publication mentioning the Mystic Tie Lodge circular, see, "Mystic Tie Lodge," *Augusta Journal*, January 23,

Once more, the respectability of membership can be seen in a request from El Reno Lodge No. 7 in Oklahoma that was received by Golden City Lodge No. 1 in 1906. This request asked for “information relative to the character of Rev. I. L. Constantine,” a previous member in Golden before moving to El Reno. Clearly, the Masons used their internal communication networks to investigate wrongs caused to—or caused by—their members. A personal endorsement from a Masonic Lodge was as good a character witness as any. Maintaining good standing in one Lodge allowed for other Lodges, sometimes across the nation, to make immediate assumptions about an individual.

A constant reality of life in the nineteenth century was the ubiquity of death. Modern medicine, workplace safety standards, nutrition, and environmental control were yet to come, so it was in a person’s best interest to ensure their affairs were in order should they suffer an untimely death. As previously explored in the philosophies section, dignity in death and duties to family both played considerable roles in the organization of the Masonic order. These rights were not limited to the brethren of one Lodge, but rather to all Masons in good standing, no matter where they were. Take, for example, Jarvis Dennis, a 38 year old Mason and resident of Golden, Colorado. Dennis had moved to Golden sometime in the previous year, but had not applied for membership in Golden City Lodge No. 1, deciding instead to maintain his membership in St. Helena Lodge No. 96 in Greensburg, Louisiana where he was from. In mid April, Dennis contracted pneumonia, and by the 20th of the month, the Lodge had employed two brothers to care for him. Their efforts were, sadly, in vain, and he passed away on April 22nd. Golden City No. 1 quickly went about organizing a funeral for Dennis, the expenses of which were carried by the Lodge. They also notified his aged mother and home Lodge of his passing. Golden City

1890. The recording of Georgetown Lodge No. 48’s reading of the circular appears in Minutes of Georgetown Lodge No. 48 (Georgetown, CO), February 3, 1890, 370.

Lodge, the local York Rite chapter still in its infancy, and the Eastern Star chapter were all present for the funeral, which indicates that Dennis was heavily involved in the Golden Masonic community.¹⁴⁰

Coincidentally, another Mason from Louisiana also appears in Colorado Lodge records with a similar but far more complex story. Brother Boulocq, or as he was commonly called, Bro. B, had moved to Georgetown, Colorado sometime in the late 1860s or early 1870s from New Orleans, Louisiana.¹⁴¹ Originally a member of Hermitage Lodge No. 98 in New Orleans, Bro. B became associated with Washington Lodge No. 12 in Georgetown, until his death on January 16, 1876. Just like Jarvis Dennis, Bro. B was buried by, and at the expense of, the Colorado Lodge of which he was not even a member. However, the story does not end there. A series of letters received by Washington No. 12 from Hermitage No. 98 trace the efforts of both Lodges to track down and care for the children of their deceased member.

Writing on March 23, 1876, J. D. Taylor, the Worshipful Master of Hermitage Lodge, thanked the members of Washington No. 12 profusely for “the interest taken in Bro. Boulocq and his family.” He inquired “to what extent [Washington] Lodge has been involved in defraying the expenses of the funeral, and other matters, with a view to reimbursement by [Hermitage],” once again demonstrating the financial assistance provided between Lodges. This offer was more significant than was initially thought because, in future letters, Taylor confessed that his Lodge was not faring well financially. He concluded his letter with repeated thanks “for having helped one of our own members, who was permitted to die among friends, although in a distant land.”

¹⁴⁰ Internal Masonic details outlining the arrangements made for the care and burial of Jarvis Dennis are from the Minutes of Golden City Lodge No. 1 (Golden, CO), April 20–23, 1874, 28. For the record of the various appendant bodies being in attendance, see; “Died,” *The Colorado Transcript*, April 29, 1874. For the record of the Golden Lodge notifying the home Lodge, see “A.F. & A.M.,” *Golden Weekly Globe*, May 9, 1874.

¹⁴¹ The letters between the two Lodges cannot seem to agree on a spelling of his name. However, the most common one used was “Boulocq.” Other forms include: Bulorq, Bulbqu, Buloque, and Boulocq.

Bro. B, over 1,300 miles from home, who had suffered a seemingly premature death, was cared for by the Lodge, and his family attended to.¹⁴²

His children quickly became the topic of the continued correspondence between the two Lodges. To the knowledge of Hermitage Lodge, Bro. B had no other relatives in Louisiana aside from his mother-in-law, who lived in a “remote part of [New Orleans] and was reported as being “very aged and very poor.” From afar, Taylor and his Lodge were determined to assist the children, but owing to their distance and poor financial state, options for support were thin. He writes, “Now as to the children who of course must be cared for I am not able to offer any suggestions at present.” The underlining is reflected in the original letter, clearly indicating the significance of this assertion. Several ideas as to what might be done with the children are proposed in Taylor’s letter: should they be sent to New Orleans? Can the members of Washington No. 12 care for them? Is the oldest child able to care for the others? Unfortunately, Taylor had no concrete ideas for how to resolve the situation he was faced with. He hoped, however, “that whatever may be done will be for the benefit of the little ones.” Much to the dismay of a future thesis writer, none of the letters contain the eventual solution that was reached. The fate of the young Boullocq children remains unknown.¹⁴³

The internal communication, financial, and charitable networks of the Masons are on full display in these two examples. The philosophies espoused to members in the degrees took material form in the burial of fellow Masons, and the provisions to the children of men like Bro. B exhibit the charitable tenants of Freemasonry that are so prominently espoused in the degrees.

Without the connections that these Lodges afforded, numerous men would have gone without

¹⁴² J. D. Taylor to the W.M., Wardens and Brethren of Washington Lodge No. 12 A.F. & A.M., March 23, 1876. This series of letters was found by the author in a box about to be thrown in the trash from a lodge cleanup at Georgetown Lodge No. 12. Their last minute salvation begs the question of how many other correspondences like this have been cast into the wastebins of the world and lost to time?

¹⁴³ J. D. Taylor to James A. Burdick, March 25, 1876; J. D. Taylor to the Secretary of Washington Lodge No. 12, May 5, 1876.

their dignity in death; countless families would have gone without aid after losing their primary provider; and numerous children would have been left without the care and support that the Masonic network was able to provide. These examples demonstrate the practical, material application of the Masonic philosophies throughout the network in a time when such organized support was vital to survival.

The example of the visitors to Leadville No. 51 illustrates the practical application of the masonic “right to travel in foreign countries” during the late nineteenth century. The sheer volume and geographic diversity of visitors recorded in the lodge ledger reveals a community deeply embedded within a transnational fraternal network, demonstrating that Masons in a remote silver camp could remain closely connected to the metropolitan centers of the Gilded Age and beyond. Whether Masons were moving for work, passing through, or seeking temporary aid, the Lodge served as a reliable node in this extensive system, fulfilling the fraternal obligation to assist brethren far from their home Lodges.

Beyond the physical movement of Masons, the communication and charitable networks further cemented this organizational unity. The transmission of information about membership standing, requests for financial assistance, and, most profoundly, the provision of care for sick, deceased, and orphaned members—such as Jarvis Dennis and Brother Boulocq—demonstrates the material reality of the Masonic tenets of brotherly love, relief, and truth. These networks ensured that dignity in death and support for family were not limited by geographic boundaries. By examining both the tangible flow of individuals into a frontier town and the less visible, yet vital, flow of communication and aid between Lodges, it becomes clear that the Masonic fraternity provided a crucial system of organized support, challenging the narrative of a solitary

American West and revealing the interconnectedness of its members across the continent and the Atlantic.

The Demographic Composition of Masonry

Much has now been said on *what* the Masons were, *where* they physically appeared throughout the state, and *how* they helped transient members. But it is equally important to inquire as to *who* the Masons were in this period. There is a common perception that Freemasonry consists primarily of the social elites: the influential politicians, the leaders of nations, movements, and businesses, the titans of industry, and the most renowned intellectuals of any given era. Masons promote these members as confirmation of the value of their craft, while skeptics and conspiracy theorists interpret them as evidence of a nefarious cabal running the “New World Order” from the shadows. From either interpretive lens, this view obscures the reality of Masonry’s broad membership.

While it is undeniable that many individuals occupying those positions of high visibility and power were Masons throughout history—and their actions often shaped the public narrative of the fraternity—the vast majority of the membership consisted of millions of men of no particular fame or singular historical import. The typical Mason was rarely the subject of national headlines or academic biographies. The strength and ubiquity of Freemasonry lay not in its connection to a select few famous individuals, but in its deep, diverse roots within the middling and working classes. The typical Mason was a shopkeeper, a craftsman, a farmer, a clerk, a laborer, or a local professional whose primary sphere of influence was their immediate community, family, and trade. To truly understand the impact of the organization, one must look

past the presidents and generals to the sheer volume of ordinary citizens who paid their dues, attended meetings, and built the foundation of the Masonic network.

There have been a handful of historians who have attempted similar studies in the past, and while their works have made many valuable contributions to the grossly understudied field of fraternalism, they largely miss the mark on the Masons. The primary error that both Lynn Dumenil and Mary Ann Clawson make in *Freemasonry and American Culture* (1984) and *Constructing Brotherhood* (1989), respectively, is the lack of diverse Lodges. Clawson, who incorporated much of Dumenil's research into her own analysis, presents an occupational analysis of Lodges from Providence, Rhode Island, Oakland, California, and Boston, Massachusetts. This selection, while geographically wide-spread, does not present a quality view for truly understanding the Masonic organization. Providence and Boston are state capitals, both of which had been established in the 1630s and had matured for over two hundred years before the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century records that Clawson evaluated. Oakland, on the other hand, was incorporated in 1852, having been previously settled during the periods of Mexican and Spanish ownership. As such, it was not a young city in 1890, and certainly not by 1912 when the records Dumenil evaluates were made.¹⁴⁴

The conclusion from the analysis of the occupations of members across the eight Lodges in these three cities is that the vast majority of men were white-collar workers. Clawson puts this figure at approximately 75% across the board. Boston's Lodges, of which three were evaluated, averaged out to over 84% white collar while Providence sat at 82%. And yet, this should be unsurprising. The Masons, admittedly, were more exclusionary than many other fraternal organizations of the time. Their reputation as the premier order, surpassed only by their own various appendant bodies like the Scottish Rite or York Rite, permitted them to be as selective as

¹⁴⁴ Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*; Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood*, 89–110.

they were. Clawson effectively demonstrates that other orders, such as the Knights of Pythias, the Oddfellows, and the Ren Men provided fraternal homes for men of blue-collar backgrounds and lower economic statuses. However, by only looking at the Masons in large, well-established cities in the East and Oakland forty to sixty years after its establishment, their studies only evaluate the nature of Masonry in longstanding, stable situations. As such, these three locations do not present a comprehensive view of Masonic demographics.¹⁴⁵

Clawson, in her 1989 work, admits that “an examination of the disaggregated data is needed, since the city-wide heterogeneity may conceal significant variations among individual lodges.”¹⁴⁶ In this assertion she is absolutely correct because, as several Masonic authors have repeatedly stated, Lodges often morph to fit the needs of their respective communities.

Therefore, it is imperative that a wide range of Lodges be evaluated to understand the true representation amongst Masonic membership. Additionally, few of the studies previously conducted paired multi-Lodge analysis with an evaluation of the change in membership demographics across several decades.¹⁴⁷ The following sections present an analysis of the Masonic demographics in Colorado from approximately 1860 to 1900, looking intently at the occupational composition of six Lodges across the state, along with the average age of membership at various points throughout the final half of the nineteenth century. This broader, longitudinal study of Colorado Lodges will provide a more accurate and nuanced picture of the social and economic composition of Freemasonry than has been previously published, challenging the narrative of the fraternity as an exclusively elite organization.

¹⁴⁵ She rightly acknowledges that, in order to attain a full understanding of the working-class participation in the fraternal movement, researchers must look beyond just the Masons. This is not the aim of this thesis, but her work is exceptional for its professed goal. See, Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood*, 95–96.

¹⁴⁶ Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood*, 98.

¹⁴⁷ Dumenil does well to include nearly forty years of analysis in one section of her work, but she only evaluated Live Oak Lodge in Oakland, California during that time. Clawson, on the other hand, looked at several previously conducted studies on Masonic membership, presenting eight Lodges, but did so in a snapshot fashion with one year for each.

Occupations

For a Lodge to thrive and be successful, it had to be attached to a population center. Towns, cities, and other examples of urban developments in the West were, among other things, cultural centers, social venues, and political arenas. But, as Richard Wade argues, they were primarily places where people could earn a living.¹⁴⁸ To evaluate what professions were represented in various Lodges, documents known as member ledgers were consulted. For the majority of Lodges, each member would be entered into the ledger upon being made a Master Mason, recording a considerable amount of both personal and Masonic information. For the purpose of this study, each member's name, age, petition date, affiliation date, death date, and occupation was recorded as available for six different Lodges, totaling 1,331 individual members. Of these, 1,114 had complete entries capable of being evaluated for occupational analysis.¹⁴⁹

Across all six Lodges and almost forty years, approximately 200 distinct occupations were listed. These raw entries—which included specialized urban roles such as assayers, architects, and book publishers—exemplify the complexity of the burgeoning western economy. These were then condensed into thirteen categories listed above (fig. 11). Without question, mining was the most common occupation across the six Lodges. However, while Colorado's early history and growth was undeniably attached to mining, this phenomenon in the records is largely due to the Lodges selected for study. With the exception of Collins Lodge No. 19, each Lodge was situated in an environment where mineral extraction was the primary economic

¹⁴⁸ Wade, *The Urban Frontier*, 39.

¹⁴⁹ The Lodges included were: Nevada Lodge No. 4 (1864-1901), Collins Lodge No. 19 (1870-1903), Idaho Springs Lodge No. 26 (1876-1900), Ionic Lodge No. 35 (1878-1900), Eagle Lodge No. 43 (1881-1900), and Leadville Lodge No. 51 (1882-1900). In order to be used for the occupational analysis, the member's entry had to include their name, a date of initiation or affiliation, and their occupation.

driver. Naturally, the occupations most commonly found in Lodges closely resembled the nature of the town or city in which the Lodge resided (fig. 12). However, several other categories were also well represented including skilled trades—which accounted for 18.5% of the total membership and included occupations such as carpenters, blacksmiths, and machinists—and the commerce and trade professions (14.0%) such as merchants, grocers, and insurance agents.

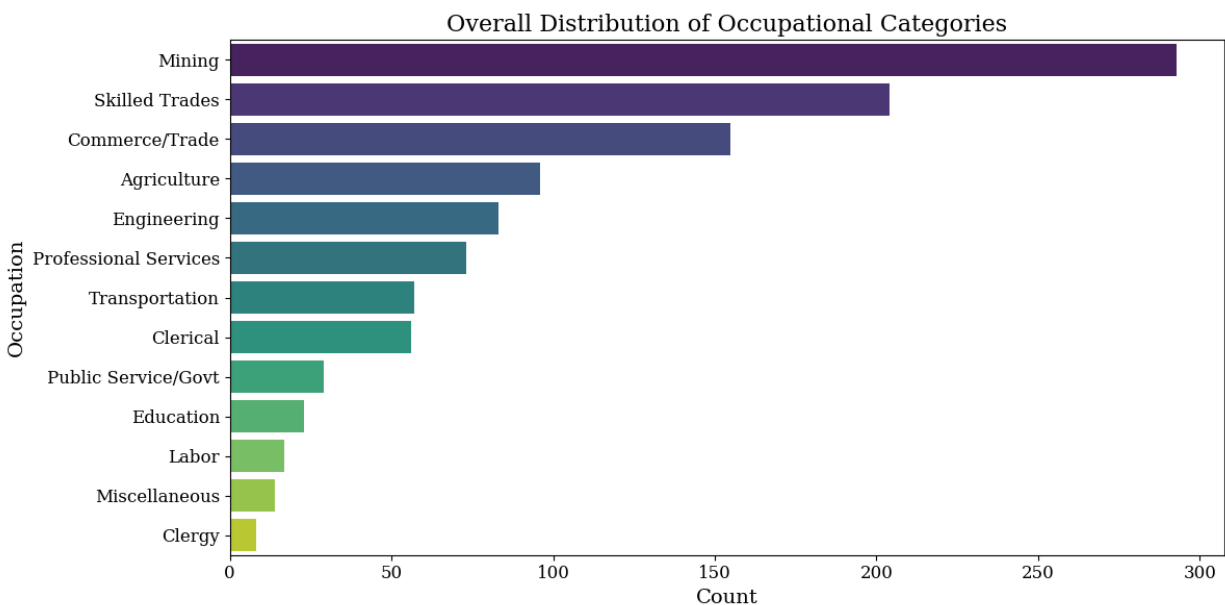


Figure 11: This graph depicts the “Overall Distribution of Occupation Categories.” All thirteen groupings are represented. Created with the aid of Google Gemini.

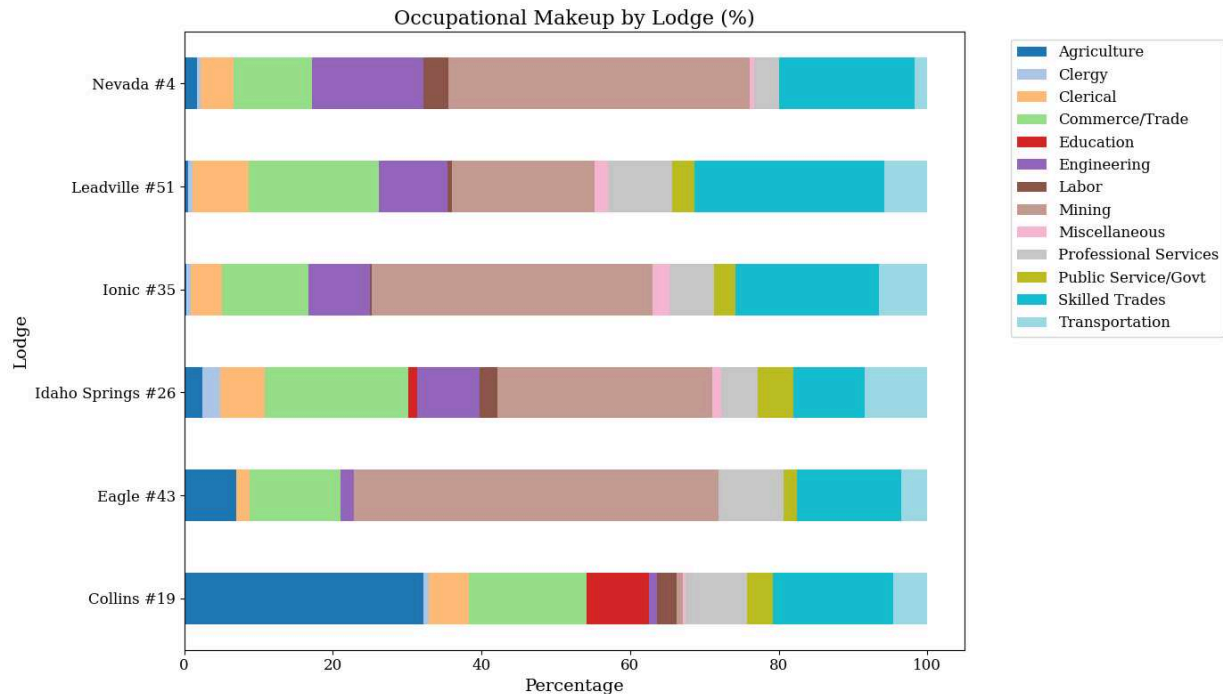


Figure 12: A depiction of the thirteen occupational categories broken down by their proportional representation in each Lodge examined. Created with the aid of Google Gemini.

What previous studies have failed to capture is the occupational change over time within Freemasonry. Figure 13 offers a visual of how the representation of various professions shifted as Colorado matured. With each passing decade, the diversity of occupations in the ranks of Masons increased. In the 1860s, mining accounted for 36.3% of all Masons who were accepted for membership, but by the 1890s, this figure had dropped to 16.0%, replaced instead by increases in almost every single other occupational category. Particularly notable was the growth of roles associated with the state’s administrative maturation; Clerical and Public Service/Government positions surged from a combined 5.49% in the 1860s to 20.0% by 1900.

Indeed, it was in the 1890s that mining was finally surpassed as the most common category by Skilled Trades (17.5%), and by 1900 Commerce and Trade (17.1%) also eclipsed it. Over the latter portion of the century, the occupations that required higher levels of manual labor—what might be classified as blue-collar work—decreased steadily. While skilled labor

increased, mining dwindled, and agriculture fell in representation. Furthermore, unskilled labor remained a negligible fraction of membership throughout the period, never exceeding 3.3%. As such, it is easy to see why previous scholars like Dumenil and Clawson drew the conclusions they did about the white-collared nature of Masonry. If one were to only look at 1900 in Colorado, the majority of members would be white-collar workers. This figure would certainly be much higher if Denver was included in the calculations, but unfortunately their member ledgers have either not survived or simply cannot be found.

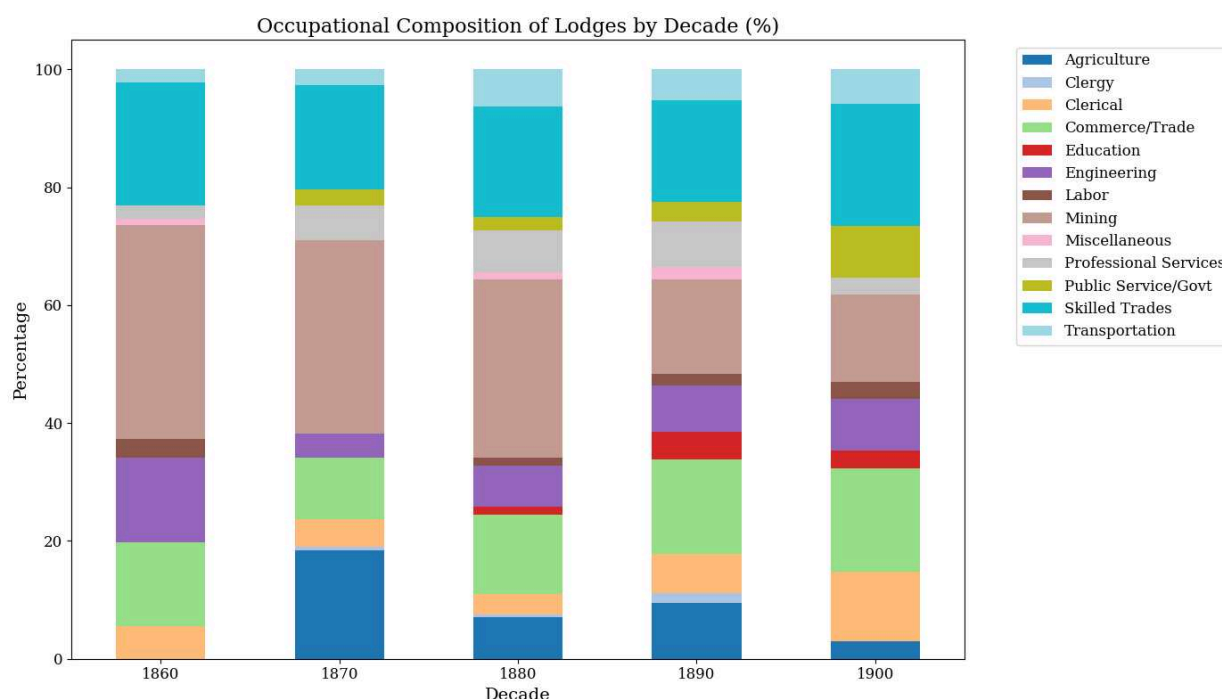


Figure 13: “Occupational Composition of Lodges by Decade,” shows the evolution of the professional makeup of Masonry in Colorado from its founding until the turn of the century. Created with the aid of Google Gemini.

In the absence of the two principal Denver Lodges, the two Lodges in Leadville were substituted. Leadville was, for a time, the second largest city in Colorado and one of the wealthiest municipalities in the nation during the silver boom of the 1870s and 80s. For the occupational makeup, see Ionic Lodge No. 35, chartered in Leadville in 1878. Mining is, without question, the most prevalent category represented, accounting for 37.5% of all members across

twenty-two years, which is significant but not surprising as Leadville's main economic engine stemmed from precious metals found in the depths of the earth. However, a comparison with Leadville Lodge No. 51 reveals a more nuanced industrial story. While Ionic was dominated by extraction, Lodge No. 51 saw Skilled Trades emerge as its largest category at 25.6%, with mining accounting for only 19.2%. This suggests that Lodge No. 51 may have captured the demographic responsible for Leadville's urban infrastructure—the men who operated the smelters and blast furnaces. Corresponding with the establishment of the Lodges, Leadville, which had previously faltered in population, had a resurgence in 1878 when silver, not gold, was discovered in lead carbonate ores. Within a few years, nearly 40,000 people arrived to try and strike it rich. In addition to those individuals who worked in the mining industry, the boom of Leadville saw the following businesses pop up: “fifty-one groceries, seventeen hardware stores, twelve shoe stores, and nine book and stationary shops, along with four banks,” in addition to, “31 restaurants, 35 brothels, 115 gambling houses, and 120 saloons.”¹⁵⁰

Mining was also accompanied by the growth of smelting, and by 1880, “Leadville's fifteen smelters and thirty-seven blast furnaces made it the largest silver-lead smelting center in North America.” This historical context for Leadville aligns with the data presented in the visualizations. Every occupational category except for Agriculture and Education appears in the member ledgers. Furthermore, the combination of dropping Chrysolite stock prices from late 1879 to late 1880 and the peak of silver production in 1882–1883 before its subsequent decline could explain a significant decrease in members beginning after 1880 and then again in 1885.¹⁵¹

Ultimately, the shift from a membership dominated by extractors and craftsmen to one increasingly defined by merchants and clerks serves as a record of Colorado's stabilization.

¹⁵⁰ For an overview of the history of Leadville, and for the quotes used, see: Carl Abbott, Stephen J. Leonard, and Thomas J. Noel, *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State* (University Press of Colorado, 2013), 104–108.

¹⁵¹ Abbott, et. al., *Colorado: A History of the Centennial State*, 108.

While the fraternity did eventually trend toward the white-collar profile noted by previous scholars, its foundational decades in the West were defined by a much more rugged and diverse occupational base. The Masonic Lodge functioned not as a distant elite club, but as a direct reflection of the town it inhabited, evolving alongside the local economy. In this capacity, the fraternity served a vital social purpose that went beyond ritual. As the ledgers of these six Lodges suggest, the craft provided a rare site of class intersection. This demonstrated, as Roger Burt has suggested, that the Lodges included individuals from all local professions, businesses, trades, and public service roles, offering regular forums, such as dining and social events, for members to share perspectives and ideas. By providing a space where the miner could sit beside the merchant and the blacksmith alongside the attorney, the Lodge became a social engine in the development of the state. However, the professional identity of these men is only one facet of this demographic profile. To gain a deeper understanding of the individuals who filled these rooms and eventually rose to lead them, one must look beyond their trades to the chronological milestones of their lives: their age at initiation and the profiles of the early Grand Masters who presided over this rapidly changing membership.¹⁵²

Economic Considerations: Cost of Membership and Economic Power

For members, the value of Masonry went beyond its function as a social club or promoter of morality; it was a resource for them to gain connections and seek out stability in new and unfamiliar places. However, access to this resource was not free, and to join Masonry carried with it a significant price tag. Take, for example, the fee structures established by Washington Lodge No. 12 and Georgetown Lodge No. 48: Washington, in Article IV of their By-Laws, stated that the fees would consist of \$10 for the petition and \$20 for each of the three degrees.

¹⁵² Burt, *Mariners Miners, and Masons*, xv.

Similarly, Georgetown demanded the same, with the exception that the Master Mason degree be \$25 instead of \$20. As such, it was roughly \$75 just to petition for membership and receive the degrees. This did not include the regular dues, which Georgetown listed as “fifty-cents per month.” In 1887, just six years after Georgetown No. 48 was chartered, the average daily wage for a man employed as a miner in Colorado was just over \$3. To join the Masons and rise through the three degrees would be very nearly the equivalent of a month’s wage for such a man, so there must have been a considerable return on investment that the membership felt they received in order to justify such lavish spending.¹⁵³

Further, the cost of securing a lodge hall and subsequently furnishing it were no small tasks. Typically, in the years immediately following the chartering of a new Lodge, spaces might be rented out above local stores, oftentimes owned by members. When the time came to construct a standalone hall, several options were available to the Lodge: Sometimes, typically for the building of the grand Masonic temples, “investment shares” were sold to members and individuals in the community to support the costs of construction. In other cases, generally for the smaller halls, wealthy members might willingly lend funds to the Lodge for its use, under the promise that it would be paid back over an agreed upon length of time. Such was the case for the procurement of a lodge hall for Georgetown no. 48 in 1882 when brother George W. Hall, a wealthy mine owner, lent \$450 to the Lodge “to secure a lodge hall.” Eventually, after using those funds to rent a space, Washington no. 12 and Georgetown no. 48, alongside the local York

¹⁵³ The figures for the two Lodge’s fee structures are taken from: Minutes of Washington Lodge No. 12 (Georgetown, CO), 1; Minutes of Georgetown Lodge No. 48 (Georgetown, CO), December 8, 1881, 6. For the figures on the average wage of miners in Colorado, see: *First Biennial Report of the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the State of Colorado, 1887–1888* (Denver: Collier & Cleveland Lith. Co., State Printers, 1888), 291: <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.li11j&seq=313>.

Rite bodies, invested in the construction of a shared lodge building which was constructed in 1891.¹⁵⁴

Once a hall was built, it still had to be furnished. By the time of the Golden Age of Fraternalism, companies existed to provide the standard equipment needed for a variety of fraternal and benevolent orders. Figure 14 shows the 1878 receipt of Ionic Lodge No. 35 in Leadville from Parson & Co. who specialized in selling goods to “Masons, Odd-Fellows, Good Templars, Sons of Temperances, Druids, And all the Various Orders of the day.” Among the items purchased were the officer’s jewels, the ballot boxes, visitor cards, and a Bible. In total, the bill ran them \$127.75 which, after an apparent 10% discount, resulted in the members of Ionic No. 35 paying \$115 just for the bare essentials of the lodge.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ The record of Hall’s loan to the Lodge appears in the Minutes of Georgetown Lodge No. 48 (Georgetown, CO), June 22, 1882, 49. It is unclear when exactly the funds were repaid to Hall for the hall. For further details on the various mining successes that George Hall had and a brief biography, see Maria Davies McGrath, *The Real Pioneers of Colorado* (Denver Museum, 1934), retyped ed. 2001, 184–185.

¹⁵⁵ Quote found on figure 14.

St. Louis, April 30 1888

Bought of **PARSON & CO.,**
REGALIA, FLAG & BANNER MANUFACTURERS,
AND DEALERS IN
MILITARY AND THEATRICAL GOODS,
7th North 4th St. 415 WASHINGTON AVENUE.

✓ 1	St. Lodge Jewels 10 lines	20 -
✓ 2	Stewards do	4 -
✓ 1	Set of Officers Collars	20 -
✓ 2	Stewards "	5 -
✓ 3	Charts E. & F. de M.	15 -
✓ 1	Secret Ballot Box	8.50
✓ 3	Do. Ballots	4.50
✓ 1	Pa. Wardens Columns	3 -
✓ 1	Set Working Tools	4.50
✓ 1	Pa. Deacons Rod Tops	4.50
✓ 1	Painted Stone Hammer	3 -
✓ 1	Travel	3 -
✓ 1	Wilt 10 inch Co	2 -
✓ 3	Shony Gavel	3.75
✓ 1	Line 12 Bell	1.50
✓ 2	Hoodwinks	.50
✓ 1	Cable Tow	1 -
✓ 1	Setting stand	1.50
✓ 1	Historical Register & Ledger	2.50
✓ 1	Visitors "	2 -
✓ 1	Record Book	2.50
✓ 1	Bible	5 -
✓ 3	Altar Lights	12 -
✓ 1	Each Books Rights dues - Minutes - Surplus	2.25
✓ 1	Boy Funeral services	.75
✓ 100	Notices Meeting	.75
✓ 100	Each Citizens Membership Admittance	2 -
✓ 100	Notices Assess dues	.75
✓ 100	Visitors Cards	.75
1888		12.97.50
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Figure 14: A receipt from Parson & Co., detailing the purchase of Masonic furnishings and paraphernalia by Ionic Lodge No. 35 in April of 1878.

Later, after a few years of prosperity caused by the silver boom, the jewels of the Lodge in the quaint mining town of Kokomo, Colorado were made out of sterling silver, and special jewels for past masters of Leadville Lodges were fashioned from gold. The Bible, still housed in the center of the "Kokomo Room" in the Leadville Masonic Temple, cost the members \$26 in the 1880s, a figure equivalent to several hundred dollars today. The woodworking on the officers' pedestals and the ornate chairs in which they would sit indicated the time and effort that was placed into the material effects of the lodge. Between the rate of dues, the expenses of

procuring a lodge space, and the costs of furnishing the lodge space, the importance of Masonry to the members is clearly demonstrated. Where people invest their time and money indicates their priorities, and the fraternal bodies of the late nineteenth century certainly commanded the affections of many of their members.¹⁵⁶

Age

The demographic profile of a Lodge is defined by more than just the professional trades of its members; it is equally shaped by the life stages of the men within its ranks. A recurring theme throughout this thesis has been Walter Nugent's phrase of "transient young men" populating the frontier, so while the occupational data illustrates the economic stabilization of Colorado, the age data provides a window into the generational lifecycle of the fraternity. To understand the profile of Colorado Freemasonry, two distinct metrics must be considered: the age of members at the time of their initiation and the theoretical maturation of the active membership as the organization grew. This analysis fully moves the discussion from the "what" of Masonic identity—their jobs and categories—to the "who," showcasing a fraternity that was a product of youthful frontier energy and a vehicle for institutional aging. By tracking these ages across forty years, we can observe how the Lodge transitioned from a collection of young pioneers into an established social pillar for middle-aged professionals.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Corinthian Lodge No. 42 met in Kokomo prior to it merging with the nearby Leadville Lodges. In the current lodge building in Leadville, home of Corinthian Lodge No. 35 (a combination of Ionic No. 35, Corinthian No. 42, Eagle No. 43, and Leadville No. 51), the "Kokomo Room" remains set up just as it would have been sixty years ago before the Lodge moved. The sterling silver jewels are still used on rare occasions, and I had the honor of being shown them by Corinthian Lodge secretary, Bob Trezise. Economist Daniel Egel similarly discusses the return on investment that the Lodges clearly offered their members, given the considerable investment that membership demanded. For this discussion, see: Egel, "The Importance of Freemasonry in the Western United States in the 19th Century," 112.

¹⁵⁷ All calculations regarding the age compositions of Lodges are from Sean Nelson, "Masonic Ages By Lodge Dataset," created January 31, 2026.

In the earliest years of Colorado's Masonic history, the Lodge was an institution of the young. Between 1861 and 1865, the average for men at the time of their petition was just 27.6 years old. This aligns with Nugent's understanding of the West being an environment dominated by young, mobile, and ambitious men seeking to establish a foothold in a new territory. During this period, Nevada Lodge No. 4 functioned almost exclusively as a cohort of men in their twenties and early thirties, reflecting the high-energy, high-risk nature of the early mining districts.¹⁵⁸ These men were often at the start of their professional lives, using the Lodge as a means of establishing reliable social networks in a landscape that was otherwise volatile and unpredictable. Consequently, the fraternity in its infancy acted as a stabilizing force for a demographic that was otherwise untethered by local familial or long-standing professional ties.

As the century progressed and the state's urban centers matured, the profile of the new initiate underwent a subtle but consistent shift. By the 1870s, the average age at joining climbed into the mid-30s, where it remained remarkably stable for decades. Between 1896 and 1900, the average age of a new Mason in Colorado was 36.4 years old. This statistical stability suggests that as the movement West began to slow, and Colorado settled into being a formal part of the Union, the Lodge transitioned into a mark of established, mid-career social status. Joining the Masons was no longer an act of youthful association in a new camp, but rather a rite of passage for men who had achieved professional and personal stability in a permanent community. The data indicates that the fraternity became a destination for men who had already "arrived" socioeconomically, rather than those still struggling to find their footing.

There were, however, significant regional variations in this demographic profile that mirrored the urban development arguments of Richard Wade. Collins Lodge No. 19, situated in a

¹⁵⁸ Within my dataset, only Nevada Lodge No. 4 falls within this period, which includes enough members to suggest that this was an average composition, age wise, but not enough data to be statistically sound.

more stable agricultural and educational center, saw an initial joining age of 34.0 in the late 1860s—significantly older than the 27.6 average found in the mining-heavy Nevada Lodge No. 4 during the same era. This contrast demonstrates that in “settled” population centers, the fraternity was already an institution for established men, whereas in the “boom” Lodges, such as could be found in the mining towns throughout Colorado, it remained a vehicle for the young.

Occasionally, smaller Lodges with fewer records experienced sharp fluctuations; in the case of Eagle No. 43, the joining age spiked to 54 in the late 1890s (fig. 15). While this represents a statistical outlier, it is an example of how specific, localized surges of older, specialized professionals could briefly shift the demographic profile of a smaller industrial community. Such variations serve as a reminder that the “typical” Mason was always a product of his specific local environment.¹⁵⁹

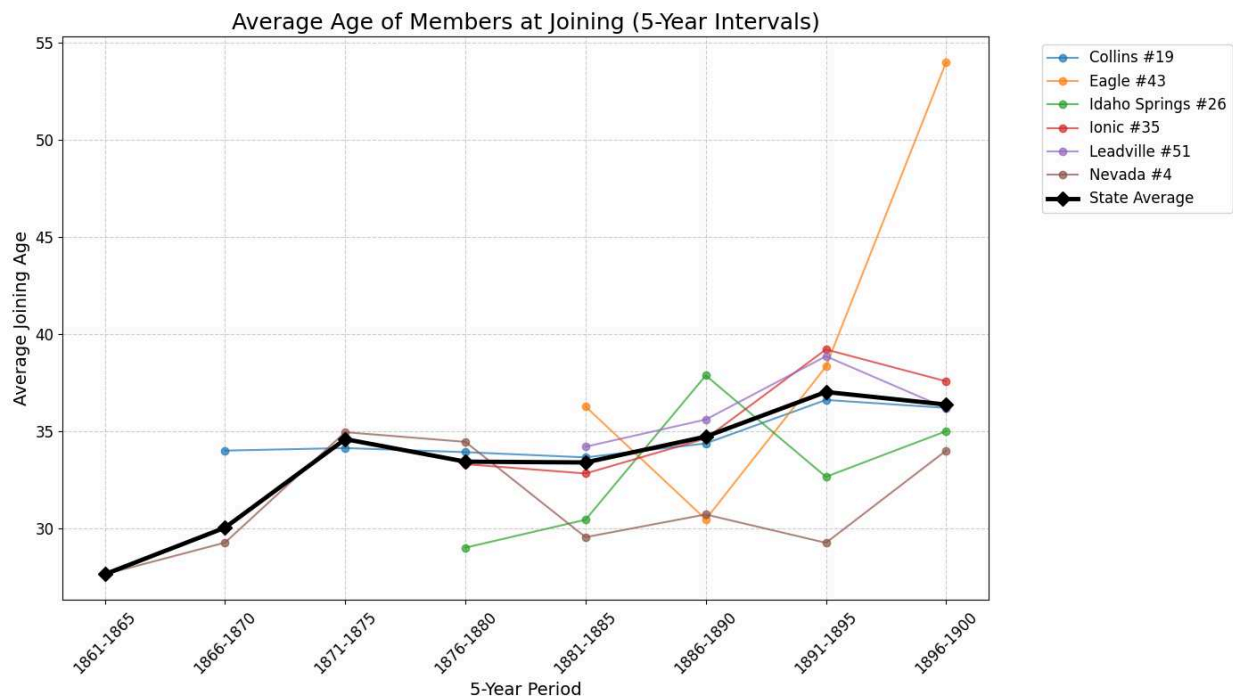


Figure 15: A graph showing the average age of members at joining across six Lodges with a comparative state-wide average line. Created with the aid of Google Gemini.

¹⁵⁹ For the foundational text on the impact of urban environments and development in the West, see: Wade, *The Urban Frontier*.

Beyond the age of new initiates, one must consider the maturation of the Lodge as an institution over time. By factoring in retention and excluding those who were suspended, expelled, demitted, or deceased, a clear picture of organization-wide graying develops. In older lodges like Nevada No. 4, the founding cohort of the 1860s aged alongside the institution, pushing the average age of an active member from 29 to 54.47 by the turn of the century. Statewide, the active membership followed a similar trajectory, maturing from an average of 29 in the 1860s to 47.34 by 1900. This indicates that while the majority of new members applying for membership remained steady at approximately 36 years of age, the cultural and institutional weight of the Lodge was increasingly carried by a senior generation whose frontier experiences stood in stark contrast to the urbanized reality of the new century (fig. 16). The result was a membership body that grew more established and settled with every passing decade.

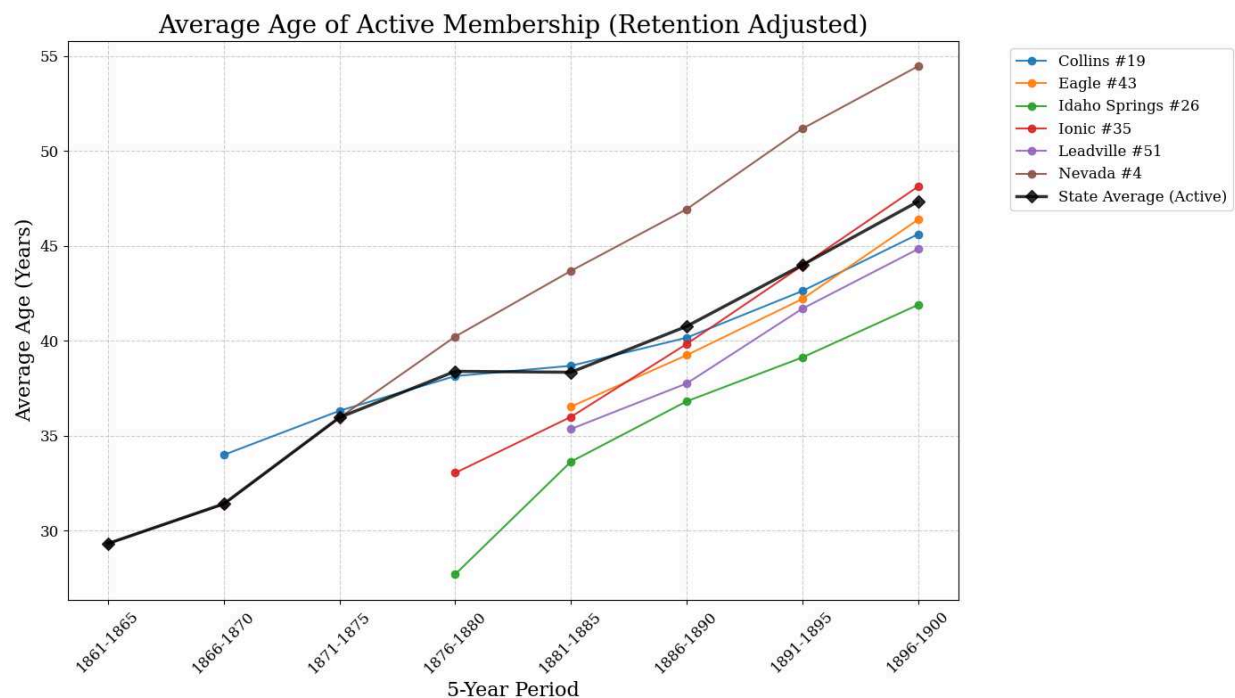


Figure 16: A graph representing the average age of active membership across six Lodges when adjusted for gradual aging and terminal events such as death or suspension. Created with the aid of Google Gemini.

It is within this specific demographic context that the leadership of the fraternity must be examined. While the typical member by the turn of the century was increasingly a man of middle age, the individuals elected to lead the fraternity during its most formative years were often remarkably young. This creates a striking paradox: as the rank-and-file membership matured and aged, the “Grand East” remained a place for the young and energetic. Indeed, for its first twenty-five years, the leadership of the Grand Lodge of Colorado was defined by youthful vigor rather than senior tenure. Consequently, these young leaders were tasked with presiding over a membership that was, in many cases, chronologically older and institutionally more settled than they were themselves. However, these men provided the necessary energy to build a statewide network during a period of intense transition.

The specific ages of the first nineteen Grand Masters are wildly entertaining and exhibit the trend of youthful governance. John Chivington, the first Grand Master, was elected at age forty, which made him the third oldest Grand Master of the first nineteen. The two others in this foundational list that were older than Chivington at the time of their election were Andrew Sagendorf, who was fifty-five, and Lawrence Greenleaf, who was forty-one. The vast majority of the men who shaped the early Grand Lodge did so in their thirties, including men like Henry Teller (33), Alva Adams (35), and James Peabody (32). Other leaders in this cohort, such as Henry (33), Van Deren (33), and Branch (30), assumed the gavel at ages that would be considered exceptionally young for such a high administrative post today.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ *Centennial Celebration*, 12.

Table 3: The first nineteen Grand Masters of Colorado and their Ages at Election¹⁶¹

Chivington	40	Anthony	35	Quillian	39
Weston	39	Henry	33	Church	39
Teller	33	Orahood	35	Sagendorf	55
Van Deren	33	Hart	39	Peabody	32
Mason	39	Woodbury	37	Wyman	37
Withrow	26	Carr	37	Branch	30
		Greenleaf	41		

The most remarkable instance of this youthful leadership was Chase Withrow, who served as Grand Master in 1866 at what the MWGL of Colorado's Centennial History book playfully described as "the ripe old age of twenty-six!" Despite his youth at the time of his service, Withrow would go on to remain a Mason for over seventy years, living to the age of ninety-one. This dynamic of young leadership exemplifies that in the fluid social environment of early Colorado, Masonic leadership was an avenue for the young to exert cultural and political influence. These men provided the energy required to build a statewide network from the ground up during a period of intense transition. By the time Albert Branch, the last of this list, served in 1886 at age thirty, the pattern of young men presiding over the Craft had become an established feature of Colorado's Masonic identity.¹⁶²

Ultimately, the evolution in Colorado confirms that the frontier Lodge was not the same as the well-established Lodge. As the state matured, the occupational composition shifted fundamentally, moving away from the raw extraction and labor of the 1860s toward a predominantly white-collar, administrative class by the turn of the century. Simultaneously, the average age of the membership saw a dramatic increase, transforming from a cohort of "transient

¹⁶¹ Chart adopted from *Centennial Celebration*, 12. Information for Andrew Mason, the fifth Grand Master, was collected from: "Andrew Mason," Find a Grave memorial #89050509, accessed January 31, 2026, <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/89050509/andrew-mason>.

¹⁶² *Centennial Celebration*, 12.

young men” into a stable body of middle-aged citizens. The well-established Lodge of 1900, characterized by its graying membership and professional diversity, stood as a testament to the civilizing role of the fraternity as it evolved from a frontier curiosity into a permanent social pillar.

Racial Minorities

While the exhaustive racial and ethnic composition of Colorado’s Lodges remains outside the primary scope of this study, these demographics warrant a brief mention to provide a complete picture of the fraternity. Claims of Masonic exclusion certainly have historical merit, particularly regarding black men, yet the record also reveals instances of progressive inclusivity during the nineteenth century, as evidenced by the thriving Jewish membership. A brief analysis of these two groups provides examples of the dual nature of Masonic inclusion and exclusion during this period. This discussion is not intended to be comprehensive, but rather to serve as a starting point for future research. Subsequent studies should aim to incorporate historically black Prince Hall Freemasonry as well as deeper investigations into the diverse racial backgrounds found within the Blue Lodges.

Prince Hall Freemasonry, briefly introduced earlier in part one, is the largest and most prominent example for examining the racial boundaries of the craft. Two primary arguments have historically been presented as to why Freemasonry, for much of its American history, typically neglected or rejected membership for black men. The first—and arguably most straightforward—is rooted in the prevailing racism of the era; this is the Occam’s razor approach. As a predominantly white, Protestant, and financially stable institution, Freemasonry naturally reflected the prejudices and sentiments of those demographics in early America. Indeed, the very

existence of Prince Hall Freemasonry resulted from racial exclusion in Boston, where the organization's namesake was denied recognition by local Lodges.

The alternative explanation, which Masons themselves have utilized for over a century, is based on jurisdictional status. An 1894 article in the *Square and Compass* journal articulated this principle, asserting that “no two Sovereign and supreme Grand Masonic bodies can exist at one and the same time in the same territory... it is upon this principle that recognition has been refused the colored Grand lodges in this country.”¹⁶³ Furthermore, the requirement that all prospective members be “freeborn” for consideration for reception of the Masonic degrees has long sparked debate regarding its application to black Americans. While originally intended for the servile classes of medieval Europe without regard to race, meaning that an apprentice could not serve “two masters” simultaneously, this provision was frequently co-opted to exclude black populations due to the legacy of American race-based chattel slavery.

However, while paternalistic or racist sentiments existed toward Prince Hall Masonry, the fraternity was not a monolith, and some members advocated for recognition or absorption. In a discussion on “African lodges” in the *Square and Compass*, one author noted that “the colored Masons are possessed of the same Secrets which distinguish our own lodges... they practice the same rites and the same ceremonies.”¹⁶⁴ Despite this admission of ritual similarity, the author asserted that the “clandestine” designation forbade any formal intercourse with them. These internal debates suggest that even within a segregated system, there were those who questioned the exact status and legitimacy of their black counterparts. This tension between ritual shared-identity and jurisdictional exclusion remained a defining feature of the nineteenth-century fraternity.

¹⁶³ “African Lodges in the United States,” *Square and Compass*, 234.

¹⁶⁴ “African Lodges in the United States,” *Square and Compass*, 232.

Conversely, Jewish membership thrived throughout much of the Masonic world during this period, including in Colorado. Abraham Jacobs serves as a prime example of a Jewish Mason who was influential in both the fraternity and the Jewish presence in the territory. Jacobs worked closely, both as a Mason and a member of the Jewish faith, with other early Colorado figures, including fellow Mason F. Z. Falomon, to establish the foundation of the local community. Together, Jacobs and Salomon formed the Temple Emmanuel Congregation which is still in operation today as the largest and oldest Jewish congregation between Kansas City and the West Coast. Overlapping with their Masonic obligations, Jacobs and Salomon also led a group of Denver Jews “to oversee the proper burial and observance of Jewish functions and religious traditions.”¹⁶⁵ Additionally, Jacobs had a material impact on the early history of Colorado Masonry. A 1953 article in the *Intermountain Jewish News* asserts that “the first recognized Masonic meeting in Colorado territory was held above the store of Abraham Jacobs” in the winter of 1858, which is similarly reflected in Masonic records. The article further notes that most early Jewish figures in the territory, many of whom were Civil War veterans, were active members of the Masonic order.¹⁶⁶

The presence of these minority groups, even in varying states of recognition, demonstrates the complex social role the Lodge played on the frontier. While the “clandestine” labels and “freeborn” requirements created rigid barriers for some, the Lodge simultaneously offered a rare avenue for other marginalized groups to establish a foothold in the local power structure. The occupational and demographic data suggests that the Lodge was in some ways more inclusive than the political or social arenas surrounding it. However, the legacy of

¹⁶⁵ “The Temple and Its History: The History of Temple Emmanuel,” Temple Emmanuel, accessed February 22, 2026, <https://www.emanueldenver.org/about/temple-and-history>.

¹⁶⁶ “The Temple and Its History: The History of Temple Emmanuel,” Temple Emmanuel, accessed February 22, 2026, <https://www.emanueldenver.org/about/temple-and-history>. Shotts, “*Jacob’s Store*”: *Denver Lodge No. 5*, 69. “Jews Came to Denver With Gold Rush of 1859,” *Intermountain Jewish News*, March 26, 1953.

Masonry's sweeping exclusion of most black men should not be ignored. It remains a stain on what was otherwise an institution that, as Margaret Jacobs and Maria Semadeni argue, "permitted men who might otherwise be excluded from social and political power to articulate their own sense of community and identity." This inclusivity even extended to certain Indigenous populations, allowing them a space to navigate their identity within a predominantly white, western institution. Though it largely upheld the racial barriers of its era by excluding black men, a significant historical failing, Masonry simultaneously provided a space for other minority groups, such as Jewish men, to integrate and gain influence within the frontier's social and political landscape.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Jacob and Semadeni, *Freemasonry in Civil Society*, 83.

Part Two

“For the Preservation of Peace and Order in these Mines”: Masonic Stability and Place-Making in Early Colorado

At 10:00 pm on the evening of April 22, 1859, William M. Byers released the lever on his printing press and delicately removed the first copy of the *Rocky Mountain News*, marking the start of a newspaper that would run continuously for the next 150 years. The following morning, as the copies were distributed to subscribers, or sold for 25 cents each, the inhabitants of the burgeoning town of Auraria were brought up to speed on a variety of topics: “The Opening of Japan,” the comparative value of farming or gold digging, the heightened rate of miners returning from the West, and others. A large map commanded the upper right corner of the third page, proudly displaying the “gold region with the routes thereto”—a map of the mail routes in the area. And naturally, a smattering of want ads and advertisements comprised the final page. Being only four pages in length, the space had to be used effectively, yet a curious section adorned the upper corner of page two, just to the right of the “Correspondence” column. This section was merely titled, “Masonic,” and read, “The Arapahoe Lodge of F. & A. Masons meet every Saturday night at their lodge on Cherry street, Auraria. H. A. Smith, Sec[retary] H. Allen, [Worshipful Master]. Visiting brethren are respectfully invited to attend.” This quaint message, hardly more than five lines long, was the first of tens of thousands of similar announcements published over the following forty years.¹⁶⁸

The “Correspondence” column located to the left of the “Masonic” section, adds its own layer to the story. Two letters, both addressed to William Byers and his associates, welcomed him

¹⁶⁸ “Masonic,” *Rocky Mountain News*, April 23, 1859.

and discussed a variety of topics, mostly the local gold diggings and the increase in “returning immigration” from California. The first letter was signed, “Yours truly, H. P. A. Smith,” while the second, bearing the promise that “you will hear from me again soon,” was submitted by William M. Slaughter. Smith was none other than the acting secretary of Arapahoe Lodge, while Slaughter had the distinction of being one of the first seven Masons to meet in the region. What’s more, the editor to whom they were writing, William Byers, was himself an active member of the fraternity. Everywhere one looked in the early days of what would become Denver, Masons were present, riding into town, establishing shops, and welcoming the newcomers with glad tidings and news of opportunity or loss.¹⁶⁹

In a time before smartphones, computers, or even the ancient technology of pagers, the newspaper was the most effective method by which to communicate critical information to the greatest number of people. The Masons used this medium to announce meetings, new Lodge openings, and upcoming events. For over a century, the *Rocky Mountain News* regularly had a “Masonic” section in each of its papers, detailing the meeting times and locations for the local Lodges. Conversely, individuals would likewise mention the fraternity in their correspondence to the editor, as in the case of “Gunnybags,” a correspondent from Nevada City (later renamed Nevadaville). In his letter, in which he discussed the progress of well digging and mine construction along with recent inclement weather, an update was provided concerning the establishment of a Lodge. “Gunnybags” sung the praises of the master, and future Colorado grand master, Andrew Mason, calling him “as bright a Mason as any we have, in this or any other country, a firm friend and a genial companion,” and he concluded his section on the Masons with a powerful assertion: “I believe, from the experience I have had in this country, the Masonic fraternity have done more for the preservation of peace and order in these mines, than

¹⁶⁹ “Correspondence,” *Rocky Mountain News*, April 23, 1859.

the efforts of all others combined.” Indeed, one of Masonry’s key contributions to extracting order out of chaos in early Colorado was through its presence as a stabilizing force. This was done in three key fashions: legitimacy, portability, and respectability.¹⁷⁰

The Lodge legitimized towns: Take, for example, the first 4th of July celebration held in the city of Denver. The festivities were extravagant for the time, with several barrages of a 32-gun salute throughout the day, “an abundant supply of ice-water” made available to “all citizens of the Rocky Mountains” and Denver. But the parade was the crown jewel. Marching down the streets, the band led the way, followed by parade dignitaries, an orator, local government officials, and the clergy. Next came all the veterans in attendance. At this point, the order of march turned towards the variety of local orders. Customs dictated that the ladies organization, the Temple of Liberty, go first, but the Masons followed closely behind, leading the remaining Denver organizations. As the largest and most influential of the groups, it is no mistake the Masons were in the front. In their history of Colorado, Carl Ubbelohde, Maxine Benson, and Duane A. Smith argued that the presence of these organizations at the 4th of July parade in 1860 “alone was enough to dispel any doubts about the civilization of the town that was less than two years old.” Masonic presence was a key ingredient in promoting western towns as sites of “civilization.”¹⁷¹

The Lodge was portable: Each Mason, upon undertaking the first degree, is assured that all Masons that had come before him, “from time immemorial” had gone through the same process. What is meant as encouragement also reflects one of the primary characteristics of Masonry that set it apart from other fraternal orders: the degrees did not change. With rare

¹⁷⁰ “From Nevada Gulch,” *Rocky Mountain News*, November 28, 1860. While the letter is signed only by “Gunnybags,” the wording of the correspondence suggests that the contributor was himself a Mason.

¹⁷¹ “The Celebration to-day,” *Rocky Mountain News*, July 4, 1860; Carl Ubbelohde, Maxine Benson, and Duane A. Smith, *A Colorado History*, 8th ed. (Pruett, 2001), 78.

exceptions, the rituals of the craft degrees have remained practically unaltered for at least the past two hundred years. Each jurisdiction's wording may vary, but the philosophical messages, the "modes of recognition," and the internal ceremonies remained the same across the nation. Contemporary organizations would frequently revise their rituals, constantly jockeying to be the most appealing, modern, inventive, entertaining, or utilitarian order. Masonry seldom concerned itself with such matters. As Mark Tabbert so eloquently states, "since Freemasonry was bound by a mythical past, built by revered Americans and divided by so many state Grand Lodges, the rituals were considered by most Masons to be untouchable. Instead, Masons boasted that their work was not contrived, but pure."¹⁷² A brother from the heart of New York City could travel to Weston Lodge No. 22 in Littleton, Colorado—a Lodge that sported forty or fewer members from 1872 to 1899—and would be intimately familiar with the customs and ceremonies, along with the lodge's physical layout.¹⁷³

It was in the constancy of the Masonic rituals that men could find stability in their otherwise tumultuous lives. The communities that these men had once known were left behind them in the dust of their wagon tracks, and many of the familiar institutions for entertainment and civic governance that existed in the East would take years to arrive in the shadows of the Rocky Mountains. According to historian Mark Carnes, inside the lodge, members old and new could recreate the relationships and values that were typically associated with family and community. The fraternal Lodge became a "source of stability amidst the social chaos of modern

¹⁷² Tabbert, *American Freemasons*, 101. For further assertions of the utility of Masonry's constancy, see Moore, *Masonic Temples*, xv; Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 24.

¹⁷³ Figures for the Weston Lodge membership are taken from Sean Nelson, "Lodge Membership By Year Master Dataset," created December, 2025. Churches had a similar effect. "The emotional response to a completed church on the frontier was intensified by the ever-present awareness of the region's isolation from the rest of the county. As one of the early settlers recalled: 'when for the first time the old bell pealed out in clear tones its call to worship—tones which were strange, indeed, to the ears of these isolated westerners—tears came to the eyes of more than one person whose soul was stirred by the memory of a little church back in the 'states.'" Lodges, I argue, functioned in much the same way. Ubbelohde, et. al., *A Colorado History*, 80.

life.”¹⁷⁴ For many, the long list of prominent Masons who came before them—the Washingtons, Mozarts, and Davy Crocketts—were, for one reason or another, ideals of manhood to aspire to. To walk the same path as “the greats” has always been at least a peripheral motivation for many a Mason’s application for membership.

The rituals, the internal furnishings of the lodge, and the standardized administrative structure—all of which will be addressed in greater detail shortly—contributed to a form of Masonic place-making that could transcend space and time. Much like the Western Apache’s understanding of place and landscape that anthropologist Keith Basso became so intimately familiar with and discussed in his monograph, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, the Lodges became “tools for the imagination, expressive means for accomplishing verbal deeds, and also, of course, eminently portable possessions to which individuals can maintain deep and abiding attachments, regardless of where they travel.”¹⁷⁵ In this sense, the physical lodge and its symbolic meaning became a portable possession that Masons carried with them, ensuring the Masonic community remained a stable mental space regardless of geographic location. This consistency and portability transformed the Masonic Lodge into a stable, symbolic space—a home away from home—that offered a sense of continuity and shared identity across a rapidly changing American landscape. This inherent stability, rooted in unchanging ritual, proved to be a major draw for men seeking order in their modern lives.

Masons commanded respectability: In the wake of the Morgan affair, the perceived respectability of Freemasonry was diminished, but by the Golden Age of Fraternalism, the order’s role as the inspiration for countless other organizations and its prominence across the nation once again established it as a highly respectable institution. This resurgence was fueled by

¹⁷⁴ Carnes, *Secret Ritual*, 2.

¹⁷⁵ Keith H Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 75.

the networks of trust crafted through shared ritual experience and a philosophy that instructed members to value internal character over unrestrained pursuit of material gain. In the first degree, initiates are informed that “*it is the internal, not the external qualities of a man that recommend him to be made a Mason.*” By emphasizing that a man’s worth was not inherently tied to his professional accomplishments, Masonry provided a space where, if a member led a moral life, he need not consider himself a failure.¹⁷⁶

“Back in the day, a man’s word was his bond.” One could easily imagine any old man saying this to an unwilling audience, followed shortly no doubt by a completely accurate recounting of his treacherous childhood walk to school each day. But there is some truth to the assertion that, in days past, a significant portion of business transactions were conducted by “handshake deals.” There was an implied assumption that a promise, physically represented in the shaking of hands, would be carried out because otherwise, the consequence would not only be the dissolution of the deal, but the devaluing of one or both party’s “character.” Roger Burt, an economic historian who studied the business networks of Victorian-era Freemasonry, demonstrates that the order’s reputation for respectability, honesty, and reliability gave them a distinct advantage in business dealings during this period. There was an assumption that, if a man was a Mason, his word had a higher value than a non-Mason might. Burt illustrates this point by evaluating the individuals selected by many of the benevolent societies of the age to serve as treasurers. Constantly in fear of theft or embezzlement, each organization wanted the most trustworthy person to fill the role. Burt demonstrates that, “more often than not they chose those who were Masons and even when such people were not already Masons they frequently were given admittance at a later date.” Indeed, merely obtaining membership was enough for

¹⁷⁶ Dumenil argues that, in spite of the myth of the self-made man in this period, the Masons taught their members that a moral life was the way to success, not material gain: Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 101. The quote is from Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 17.

many men, which strongly indicates the importance of Masonic status in the broader community. In a world without the modern proliferation of legal contracts and enforcement, one's reputation in established social networks, like the Freemasons, served as a form of commercial guarantee.¹⁷⁷

The extravagant grand opening of the La Veta hotel in Gunnison in 1884 is an excellent case study of how the public regarded the Masons, and reflected their opinions in the local newspaper. On May 24, 1884, the *Gunnison Review Press* lauded the local Masonic fraternity as consisting of “the most intelligent and progressive citizens of the Western Slope.” It continues, asserting that the brethren were not “the drones of the bee hive,” but “live, active workers” who had migrated from the “thickly settled communities of the eastern states.” According to the article, the Mason’s “standing in the community [was] of the highest kind” and “their conduct in the different works of life in which they are engaged [have] been squared and plumbed by the proper implements.” Invoking the fraternity’s own symbolism associated with operative masonic tools—the square, which represents morality and truth, and the plumb, which admonishes Masons to walk uprightly before God and men—the paper signals that Masons were beholden to certain objective standards within their order.¹⁷⁸

In doing so, the newspaper reinforced the idea that Masonry was a filter for high-quality civic participants, effectively serving as a public certification of an individual’s reliability in the volatile economy of the Western Slope. The newspaper’s emphasis on members arriving from “thickly settled communities” suggests that Masonic affiliation functioned as a form of portable social capital; a combination of the portability and respectability of Masonry. It allowed an immigrant to bridge the geographic gap between eastern reputational networks and western

¹⁷⁷ Both the matter of Masonic advantage due to respectability and the example of Masons picked as treasurers, see: Burt, *Mariners, Miners, and Masons*, 56. Jacobs and Semadeni have made a similar argument about how the “identification with masonic virtues and respectability” likely contributed to continued membership for many men: Semadeni, *Freemasonry and Civil Society*, 82.

¹⁷⁸ “Banquet and Ball: Grand Formal Opening of Gunnison’s Pride, the La Veta,” *Gunnison Review Press*, May 24, 1884.

opportunity. The relationship between public reputation and private conduct created a self-policing environment where the benefits of membership were inextricably linked to the severe social and commercial risks of being cast out of the “hive.”

It has been said that imitation is the highest form of flattery, and many were willing to imitate Masonic practices to try and gain admission into the Lodge and receive the benefits of membership without actually being members. Through the process of “investigating” visitors with questions about their Masonic experiences, the degrees, or through the secret “modes of recognition,” these travelling Masons were vetted to ensure they were, indeed, Masons.

Occasionally, a man would be caught attempting to fake membership, whereupon he was asked to leave and his name was recorded in a “black book.” The Lodge he attempted to enter would then send letters to other Lodges in the area, warning them of this “fraud” so they could be on alert. Similarly, Lodges would inform each other of “dead beats,” or members who would habitually fail to pay their dues. Not only does the existence of these attempted imposters illustrate the attraction many felt towards the masonic benefits, the communication between Lodges serve as more examples of the intrastatal connections that Masonry built.¹⁷⁹

While the positive aspects of membership were an attractant, an equally powerful force could be the repercussions of suspension or expulsion. Understanding that the public clearly regarded Masonry as an institute that fostered respectability and morality, being kicked out of the order announced to the community that you had committed some moral failing. No study has yet been done concerning the effects of Masonic expulsion on men’s lives, but a comparative study of their prosperity before and after losing membership would be a worthwhile line of inquiry.

¹⁷⁹ References to “frauds” or “imposters” appear throughout Lodge minute books. There are numerous entries in the ledgers of Washington Lodge No. 12, Georgetown Lodge No. 48, Golden City Lodge No. 1, and Nevadaville Lodge No. 4 of this phenomenon. Additionally, these reports would occasionally call the violators “beats,” as in the case of one individual recorded in the minutes of Georgetown Lodge No. 48 on March 13, 1890. These reports would, as often as possible, contain a name, the Lodge the man was claiming to be from, and a physical description.

Economist Daniel Egel argues that Masons would have been very unlikely to betray their fellow members due to the loss of money invested—fees and dues were not cheap—and the many advantages that membership offered. “Thus,” he writes, “the Masonic network may have functioned to reduce the principal-agent problem.” The principle-agent problem that he refers to, in this context, is “the difficulty that individuals faced during this period in trusting others in business transactions. One important example is the difficulty that a businessman (the ‘principal’) faces in ensuring that a business partner (the ‘agent’) will fulfill his end of a business arrangement.” The “principal” (the businessman) could trust the “agent” (the Mason) because the agent had more to lose than he had to gain by a single act of dishonesty. Therefore, the promise of respectability and the fear of social and commercial repercussions for moral failing served as powerful, interconnected mechanisms by which Freemasonry guaranteed the trustworthiness of its members and thus facilitated business within its social network.¹⁸⁰

Case Study: Fort Collins

In the late 1860s, years before Fort Collins took shape as a town, an early resident of the region, Henry C. Peterson hosted informal Masonic meetings in his “workshop,” which local historians referred to as the “cradle of Masonry in Fort Collins.”¹⁸¹ Peterson may very well have been the first white civilian settler at the military fort, and his imprint on the town’s development is hard to overstate.¹⁸² Indeed, in *The History of Larimer County, Colorado*, he is given direct credit for “much of the early construction of Fort Collins.”¹⁸³ He was among the charter members

¹⁸⁰ Egel states that the idea of Masonry as a counter to the principle-agent problem “has also been suggested by both Burt (2003) and Braggion (2009), has been shown to be crucial to the formative stages of long-trade trade networks (Greif, 1993).” Daniel Egel, “The Importance of Freemasonry in the Western United States During the 19th Century,” *Heredom: The Transactions of the Scottish Rite Research Society* 21 (2013), 110.

¹⁸¹ Arlene Briggs Ahlbrandt and Kathryn Stieben, eds., *The History of Larimer County, Colorado*, vol. 2 (Curtis Media Corp, 1987), 553.

¹⁸² Ansel Watrous, *History of Larimer County Colorado Centennial* ed. (Miller Manner, 1972), 275.

¹⁸³ Ahlbrandt and Stieben, *The History of Larimer County*, 553.

of Collins Lodge No. 19 which was created in September, 1870. His contributions to the development of Fort Collins include constructing the first boarding house, co-founding the local flour mill, and opening a brick kiln that supplied material for many of the town's earliest buildings—including its first brick home, which he constructed for himself. Peterson also helped establish and construct the town's first schoolhouse in 1871, its first church in 1876, and served on the inaugural school board.¹⁸⁴ He was, by every measure, a civic-minded man whose work straddled both public service and Masonic ideals. Just as Washington united the young nation with the fraternity through the capitol's cornerstone ceremony, Peterson similarly cemented Fort Collins and Freemasonry.

But he was not alone in this pursuit. After all, it would be very difficult, if not impossible, for a single person to lead a town from creation to incorporation. Other early settlers of significance were also members of the Craft: Benjamin Whedbee, the town's first mayor; Thomas Mason, one of the first ranchers to settle the area; Peter Anderson, a leading figure in creating a sugar beet factory in town (a highly lucrative business in those days); the town's first physician, Dr. Timothy Smith; Abner Loomis, who would become one of the most respected bankers in the area, and many others. Charter member, Benjamin Eaton, would even go on to serve a term as the governor of the state. These men were not operating in a thriving metropolis. In 1870, when the Lodge was chartered, the town was home to a few abandoned military buildings, less than a dozen houses, and hardly any infrastructure. Indeed, the population of the entire county measured only 838.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁴ Watrous, *History of Larimer County*, 227, 275-276.

¹⁸⁵ Barbara Fleming, "History: Many prominent early Fort Collins settlers were Masons," April 9, 2018, <https://www.coloradoan.com/story/news/local/2018/04/09/history-many-prominent-early-fort-collins-settlers-were-masons/493808002/>.

Fort Collins would become incorporated in 1873, but would remain a rather modest agricultural town of only a few thousand residents until the turn of the century. However, the Masons remained an ever-present order in the area, moving among rented rooms—typically leased from members—until they found a semi-permanent home on the third story of a retail building in 1883. After twenty years in the same location, the membership’s growth demanded that an official lodge building be constructed in 1903. Fort Collins was a rare instance of the Masonic Lodge not having a physical home for a considerable amount of time, but it was always present as an organization.¹⁸⁶

Once constructed, the lodge hosted numerous community events, ranging from banquets and dances to professional workshops and meetings of other fraternal orders like the Odd Fellows and the Knights of Pythias. Historic newspapers highlighted the Masons’ hospitality, noting their penchant for organizing enjoyable and well-attended events. This physical space became a local venue for art exhibitions, professional gatherings, and various social orders, demonstrating the wide range of groups that contributed to Fort Collins’ growth. These events not only bolstered the town’s cultural and professional life, but also exemplified how the Masons’ physical spaces empowered local organizations and fostered a sense of community.¹⁸⁷

Leadership was another Masonic principle touted in lodge rooms across the nation, and the members of Collins Lodge No. 19 reflected this through the various political positions they held in Fort Collins. For example, from 1873, when the town’s first mayor was elected, to the

¹⁸⁶ Wayne R. Davis, “Fort Collins Masonic Temple,” Colorado State Register of Historic Places Nomination Form (Denver, CO: Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, State Historic Preservation Office, 2007).

¹⁸⁷ “Odd Fellows Coming Here Next Week,” *Weekly Courier*, October 14, 1903; “Delegates Expected on Evening Train,” *Fort Collins Courier*, August 7, 1907; “Pioneers Arrange a Good Program,” *Fort Collins Courier*, January 29, 1908; “Royal Arcanum Hosts at Banquet and Hall,” *Weekly Courier*, February 17, 1909; “Vets Banquet and Masonic Temple,” *Rocky Mountain Collegian*, May 8, 1909; “The Alumni Banquet,” *The Rocky Mountain Collegian*, June 7, 1911.

turn of the century, eight out of thirteen mayors were Masons.¹⁸⁸ Their presence in public office extended beyond the mayoralty; members were also involved as judges, clerks, postmasters, and county assessors. This level of civic participation suggests that the Lodge was not just a private fraternity but a launching point for public leadership. The philosophies touted within the lodge room found public expression through the roles its members assumed in shaping local governance.

Masons were also influential in the city's signature institution, Colorado State University. Historian Ansel Watrous recorded that "[i]t was through the generosity and public spirit of [John C. Matthews], Arthur H. Patterson, Joseph Mason and Henry C. Peterson, each of whom made a free gift to the state of land, that the friends of the college were able to secure the location of that institution in Fort Collins." All but Patterson were members of Collins Lodge No. 19. It is no coincidence that the principles of "generosity and public spirit" that Watrous assigned to these men could just as easily have been elucidated in E. N. Garbutt's 1893 speech on the principles of Masonry.¹⁸⁹ Beyond the physical placement of the university, the leadership of the institution was also spearheaded by Masons. From 1879, when the university first opened as Colorado Agricultural College, to 1940 when Charles A. Lory finally stepped down as president, a Mason was in charge of CSU for all but 12 years.¹⁹⁰

A common trait amongst the membership of Collins No. 19 was their involvement in the creation and development of Fort Collins over the first thirty years of the town's existence. For example, in 1903, the International Order of Odd Fellows in Colorado was set to host its Grand Encampment in Fort Collins, an event that would bring thousands of visitors to the region. A

¹⁸⁸ "Masonic Mayors" from 1873-1900 include Benjamin Whedbee, David Patton, George Bristol, James Evans, Dr. Ethan Lee, Henry Hall, William B. Miner, and James B. Arthur.

¹⁸⁹ Watrous, *History of Larimer County*, 273.

¹⁹⁰ The membership of some of these men was not always made public. However, the names of CSU Presidents E. E. Edwards, Charles Ingersoll, Alston Ellis, Ernest Newsom, and Charles Lory, all appear in Sean Nelson, "Fort Collins Members" dataset, September 2025.

newspaper announcement called upon the citizens of Larimer County as a whole to assist in the preparations and festivities, with the total number of expected attendees amounting to 10,000. During their stay, the Odd Fellows met in the new Masonic lodge for ritual purposes, as well as on the university grounds, then under the presidency of Charles Lory. The organizing committee for the grand hosting duties was composed of J. B. Arthur, J. A. Brown, and George H. Glover, all of whom were Masons. This was not a Masonic committee. This was a civic committee whose constituent members were Masons, clearly exercising the ideals of civic engagement that was promoted in the lodge.¹⁹¹

The influence of Masons in Fort Collins is subtly reflected in the built environment as well. Indeed, on the CSU campus, the student center and at least four dorm halls and academic buildings bear the names of past members of the fraternity who engaged with the university in a wide variety of ways. Additionally, thirteen buildings are adorned with Masonic cornerstones.¹⁹² Further, the very streets and districts of Fort Collins sport the names of influential figures in the town's history, many of whom were Masons. Whether it is the prominent thoroughway of Mason Street (named after Thomas Mason) or the historic Loomis District (named after Abner Loomis), the names of Masons appear everywhere in Fort Collins.¹⁹³ From the infrastructure to the community spirit, Masonic influence in Fort Collins is woven into the very fabric of the town, marking their pivotal role in its development.

Locally, Collins Lodge No. 19 played an integral role in shaping the development of Fort Collins as a social gathering space and as a key institution in the town's civic evolution. The

¹⁹¹ "Odd Fellows Coming Here Next Week," *Weekly Courier*, October 14, 1903; "To Farmers and Citizens of Larimer County," *Weekly Courier*, October 14, 1903; "Fort Collins Grand Harvest Festival and Monster Barbecue," *Weekly Courier*, October 14, 1903.

¹⁹² The Lory Student Center, Newsom Hall, Edwards Hall, Ingersoll Hall, and the Glover building are all named after Masons who were employed by the university. The dorm hall I lived in during my freshman year of college, colloquially referred to as "Gruesome Newsom," was actually named after not only a Past Master of Collins Lodge No. 19, but a Past Grand Master of Masons in Colorado.

¹⁹³ Streets include Whitcomb, Whedbee, Stover, Taft, Mason, Smith, Stover, and Peterson, to name a few.

Lodge's activities, ranging from charitable initiatives to community celebrations, were instrumental in building a sense of shared identity and purpose. Masonic ideology emphasized leadership, personal development, and service, and its members often brought these values into the public sphere. As demonstrated by the numerous mayors, educators, and business owners that adorned the membership lists of the Lodge, members developed habits of responsibility and civic engagement that left lasting marks on the city's institutions.

The Physical Space of the Lodge

Wherever Masons went, they would gather together, formally or otherwise. While impromptu meetings in tents or log cabins—such as those recalled in the letters of J. D. Ramage and William M. Slaughter—were acceptable in the short term, groups of Masons required established physical spaces in which to hold their meetings, conduct their rituals, and attach their individual Lodge identities to. These spaces, variably called 'lodges,' 'halls,' or 'temples,' began typically in modest fashion, with Masonic groups frequently renting out space on the second floor of a retail building.¹⁹⁴ As time passed, buildings constructed for the express purpose of hosting Masonic bodies became the norm, varying in size from the quaint, narrow two story lodge rooms in rural towns to opulent buildings that garnered architectural admiration the world over. By 1890, a new Masonic temple dominated both the Denver skyline and the front page of the *Rocky Mountain News's* Fourth of July publication.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ In several instances, I have noticed that the owners of the buildings that the Lodge rents from are members themselves. This was certainly the case with the meetings held above the store of Abraham Jacobs in Denver as well as the use of Henry C. Peterson's workshop in the early days of Fort Collins. Yet another example of the fraternity giving preference to membership in economic matters. A future study investigating this phenomenon could prove to be most interesting.

¹⁹⁵ "The Dedication: Formal Consecration of the Masonic Temple to the Use of the Order," *Rocky Mountain News*, July 4, 1890.

The transition from the ramshackle lodges of the mid-nineteenth century to the monumental temples of the 1890s represents the architectural calcification of Masonic influence in the West. If the portability of the Masonic ritual was the catalyst for community creation in the early days of the Colorado Territory, the permanent lodge building was the anchor that eventually held those communities in place. As the transient young man gave way to the settled breadwinner, the fraternity's meeting places followed a parallel evolution from the utilitarian to the ornamental. The development of the physical presence of lodges—stretching from the cabin of the June 1858 meeting on the mountainside to the monumental edifice of the Denver Masonic Temple near the turn of the century—was the physical evidence of a fraternity that had successfully transformed its social capital into a permanent feature of the Colorado landscape.¹⁹⁶

More than merely providing a roof for meetings, the physical presence of a lodge created a multi-dimensional site where various facets of western life intersected. While an outside observer might view the lodge as a simple architectural landmark, for the nineteenth-century Mason, the building functioned as a series of nested environments. To analyze the lodge effectively, one must look beyond the sandstone and brick to see the building as a complex vessel that held different meanings depending on whether one stood in the inner sanctum, the social parlor, or on the public sidewalk outside. Like the petals of a rose, these spheres of Masonic influence do not exist in isolation; each stratum of the Masonic experience rests upon and partially obscures the one beneath it, radiating from the silent center of the lodge room to the bustling civic life of the Colorado frontier. To walk through the doors of a Colorado temple was to navigate a series of overlapping realities: a sacred space for the soul, a sheltered laboratory for

¹⁹⁶ This development is what Jerome Smiley called the “stride” in development. Smiley, *History of Denver*, 778. Dumenil shares this thought, asserting that Masonic temples stood as “imposing symbols of the wealth and permanency of Masonry.” Dumenil, *Freemasonry in American Culture*, 19.

the performance of Victorian masculinity, and a public-facing anchor for the town's civic identity.

The Lodge

To step inside a Colorado lodge room near the turn of the century was to enter a space defined by rigorous rules regarding the layout and furniture. While the exterior of the lodge hall could take any form or style, the interior served as the specific site where Freemasonry took a concrete form. For greater detail on the physical space of the lodge, the several works of architectural historian William D. Moore does an excellent job of describing the lodge layout and function.¹⁹⁷ The main lodge room is, to this day, ordered around two primary axes that transform the physical floor into a figurative map. All lodges are established, at least symbolically, in the same fashion: The primary axis stretches the entire length of the hall, anchored at the “east” by a wall-mounted letter “G” denoting both God and Geometry. From this point, the line passes through the Master’s station, across the central altar, and terminated at the Senior Warden’s chair in the “west,” while a secondary perpendicular axis bisected the room from the Junior Warden in the “south” to the far wall of the “north.” Every element of the room’s internal geography was organized around the intersection of these two lines at the central altar, symbolizing that the tenets of Freemasonry placed thereon remain the literal and figurative center of the Masonic world while in Lodge.

These axes terminated at the chairs of the principal officers: the Master, the Senior Warden, and the Junior Warden. The chairs in which these men sat would frequently be imposing, ornately crafted, and much larger than might seem necessary. However, this was done

¹⁹⁷ Much of the following several paragraphs are inspired by the works of Moore, which include: Moore, *Masonic Temples*; Moore, “Masonic Lodges and their Furnishings.”

to serve a dual purpose within the ritualistic architecture of the lodge: first, the chairs emphasized the significance of the officer's status and authority during the proceedings. However, while the officer's chairs signified a necessary hierarchy, the vast majority of the lodge room was occupied by seating that reflected a very different Masonic principle. Lining the walls were either benches or normal chairs, all of equal ornamentation, height, and prominence. These seats represented the Lodge's notion of equality, and were the great equalizers of the lodge room. As Moore asserts, "whether a brother were a bank president or ditch digger, if he were not a Lodge officer, he sat with the rest of the brethren." This shared seating arrangement made the concept of brotherhood a tangible reality, ensuring that the architecture of the room reinforced the social bond of the craft.¹⁹⁸

Unlike the linear, processional layout of an institution like a traditional church, the Masonic floor plan arrayed members around the perimeter, promoting active participation and a sense of collective cohesion by placing them roughly equidistant from the central altar where the ritual axes crossed. This spatial arrangement transformed the members from passive observers into a vital and symmetrical part of the whole. Further, while officer chairs would frequently be placed on stairs or elevated platforms, *all* men present would conclude meetings by standing on equal ground, similarly representing the notion of equality amongst members. By removing the visual markers of wealth and class, the seats allowed the members to interact as "brethren" in a way that was rarely possible in the "profane" world.¹⁹⁹

In the Craft Lodges, Masons are specifically instructed to refrain from discussions of politics, religion, or anything else that may "disrupt the harmony" of the Lodge. Naturally, there are occasions where this instruction is forgotten or intentionally ignored, but for the most part,

¹⁹⁸ Moore, "Masonic Lodges and Their Furnishings," 114.

¹⁹⁹ Moore, "Masonic Lodges and Their Furnishings," 115.

the lodge room is respected by the members as a near-sacred space. Further, meetings have historically been held—and continue to do so—in the upper stories of the lodge building. As a result, Masonic meetings were intentionally secluded, “the better to keep off cowans and eavesdroppers,” as the Masons would say. While this is done in part to preserve the secrecy of the Masonic degrees, it is also done to foster an innate sense of spatial separation from the “outside world.” It is no mistake that one must typically ascend a flight of stairs to reach the lodge room. What’s more, in the most ornate lodges, typically in the East, “rooms were often decorated in historical motifs so that the Masons not only could separate themselves from the ordinary world spatially, but also could do so temporally as well.” At the bare minimum, paintings, pictures, and drawings would adorn the walls of the lodge, either for decoration or instruction during the degrees.²⁰⁰

Within these spaces, the Lodge took on several forms, many of which have already been alluded to earlier in this thesis. The presence of both secretary and treasurer’s desks on either side of the Master represent the professional element of Masonic meetings where correspondences were read, charity voted upon, and bills paid. It could be a space for education of Masonic principles, guild instruction, or socializing. But most importantly, the lodge room provided space for the performance of the three degrees and their respective rituals. The dramatic and often theatrically performed ceremonies frequently invoked deity while also employing eloquent memorized lectures and dialogue which gave meetings and degrees a reverential, if not spiritual, nature. Finally, of vital importance, is that all Masonic lodges are said to be representations of the first Temple of Solomon. Within these spaces, the layouts and furnishings

²⁰⁰ William D. Moore. “Masonic Lodges and their Furnishings, 1870–1930,” *Heredom: The Transactions of the Scottish Rite Research Society* 2 (1993), 117.

of the rooms themselves became tools to educate the membership and initiate men into the oldest and largest fraternal order in the world.²⁰¹

The influence of Masonry was not exerted solely through ballots cast in town halls or the prestige of names on a ledger; it was also built into the very soil and stone of the region. The stability provided by the fraternity was a physical reality, as Masons sought dedicated spaces that reflected both their values and their rising status. To comprehend how these thousands of men shaped the identity of the West, one must look beyond the ledgers and into the halls where they met and understand how the transition from humble log cabin workshops to monumental temples mirrored the maturing of the Colorado frontier into a settled, civilized state.

The Permanence of the Lodge Hall

It should come as no surprise that an order whose physical presence had such a dramatic impact not only on its membership but upon the community at large would gradually increase the size and opulence of the lodge buildings. Across the nation, simultaneous with the Golden Age of Fraternalism, a golden age of Masonic temple building had begun. Crowning achievements included the 1892 opening of the Chicago Masonic Temple—arguably the tallest skyscraper in the world at that time—and the 1926 completion of “The Masonic” in Detroit, Michigan.²⁰² While Chicago’s building was torn down in the 1930s, the latter is still in operation to the present day. A description of its grandeur extracted from its website reads, “[the architect’s] unique design included three theaters (one was never completed, but is sometimes used by movie-production crews), a Shrine building, the Chapel, eight lodge rooms, a 17,500 square foot

²⁰¹ Moore, *Masonic Temples*, 16.

²⁰² In 1892, the Chicago Masonic Temple opened, standing at 302 feet, it was home to the highest occupied floor in the world, and was only seven feet shy of being the tallest skyscraper at that time. Mellisa Matlins, “Masonic Temple,” World’s Tallest Towers, accessed February 1, 2026, <https://skyscraper.org/tallest-towers/masonic-temple/>.

drill hall, two ballrooms, office space, a cafeteria, dining rooms, a barber shop, 16 bowling lanes—1037 rooms in total—in addition to a powerhouse that generated all electricity for the complex.” At over 550,000 square feet, it was, and remains, the largest Masonic building in the world.²⁰³

While Denver’s 1890 Masonic temple was never among the largest, tallest, or most ornate of Masonic structures, it still bore the same message: Masonry was there to stay. Even in the 1890s, Masonic publications on the other side of the nation hailed the Denver temple as one that “conveys...an idea of permanence and safety.” The newspapers at the time marveled at “the progress of the order” that resulted in a membership of “less than fifty thirty years ago” being able to dedicate a structure in the capital city that cost nearly three-quarters of a million dollars. Incidentally, the dedication of the Denver Temple took place on July 3, 1890 because the Masons were already going to be occupied laying the cornerstone of the Colorado State Capital building the following day on the Fourth of July.²⁰⁴

Previous scholars such as Dumenil and Moore see the construction of these great temples as “imposing symbols of the wealth and permanency of Masonry,” arguing that purely Masonically owned buildings were a statement of confidence in the continued existence of the order, a material reflection of the alleged operative origins of Masonry, and also utilitarian for the ritual purposes. While this is certainly true, the existence of standalone Masonic halls, let alone the larger temples, were statements of confidence in the stability of the town or city in which the hall resided. By 1890, no one in the nation thought Denver was on the verge of disappearance, but in

²⁰³ “Welcome to the Masonic,” Masonic Temple Detroit, visited February 5, 2026, <https://www.themasonic.com/the-venue/>.

²⁰⁴ *Voice of Masonry* 28 (October 1890): 775. Citation borrowed from Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 18. For the newspaper article, see: “The New Temple,” *The Colorado Chieftain*, July 4, 1890: “The Dedication,” *Rocky Mountain News*, July 4, 1890. The latter publication reported that 4,000 people, including at least 1,000 Masons, attended the evening reception. A sizable amount of the funding from the temple came from wise, or lucky, land investments in the Denver area which grew from \$400 initially invested to \$100,000. For this report, see: “The Masonic Temple,” *Rocky Mountain News*, March 17, 1889.

the instances of other towns like Georgetown, Central City, Golden, or even cities past their prime like Leadville in 1910, the construction of a lodge hall helped to legitimize the urban development and was likely seen by many as a vote of confidence in the town itself. In the case of Leadville, the 1910 construction of a dedicated lodge building served as a defiant signal of communal longevity despite the economic devastation wrought by the silver crash of 1893.²⁰⁵

The rise of the monumental temple signaled a material victory for restrained masculinity over the lingering specter of frontier transience. The transition from the utilitarian “lodge over a store” to the near-million-dollar edifice represented a shift from the survivalist grit of the pioneer to the established civic virtue of the settled citizen. For the men who walked the halls of the Denver Temple, the building was more than a meeting place; it was a sandstone and steel assurance that the values of temperance, charity, and self-discipline had successfully integrated themselves into the lives of thousands amid the chaos of the West. As the physical presence of the fraternity became a permanent feature of the Colorado landscape, the ideological influence of its members became a permanent feature of the state’s leadership. At the 1890 dedication of the Denver Temple, the speaker, Donald Fletcher, noted that while Masons are “not required to do the impossible or the impracticable,” they are taught that “every Mason can do something—if not alone, then by combination endeavoring to make his immediate neighborhood the better for his life.” This collective endeavor, once housed in the temporary structures of mining camps, had now found its ultimate expression in the monumental architecture of the city. While the temple stood as a monument to the Order’s collective strength, the individual Mason was the living stone upon which the edifice of Colorado’s history was truly built.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 19. Moore, *Masonic Temples*.

²⁰⁶ “The Dedication,” *Rocky Mountain News*, July 4, 1890.

The Importance of Place in Freemasonry

An extensive description and analysis of the Masonic degrees is beyond the purpose of this study, but, as historian Mark Tabbert rightly claims, “Freemasonry cannot be understood apart from its rituals and symbols and the way in which its members have interpreted and employed them.”²⁰⁷ Each Master Mason experienced the same degrees, learned the same lessons, and shared in the various aspects of the initiatory experience. Intentionally, the degrees bond members together through this shared participation. Further, the complexity and symbolism of the rituals, and the efficiency by which they communicate their intended philosophies, sets Freemasonry apart from the litany of other voluntary associations. Ubiquitous in the Masonic experience for centuries, the value that members derive from the degrees is almost certainly a primary reason why the Masons have retained membership for hundreds of years while most other orders have waxed and waned with passing time.²⁰⁸ Therefore, a brief overview of the degrees follows.

The first degree, called the Entered Apprentice (EA), serves as the introduction to the world of Masonry for the prospective member or candidate. Much like the shallow end of a swimming pool, the EA degree is but a taste of the extent of Masonic philosophy and meaning. Meant to represent the youthful apprentice workman during the days of operative stonemasonry, the EA is then taken under the tutelage of a more senior member who works with the newly

²⁰⁷ Tabbert, *American Freemasons*, 4.

²⁰⁸ At the height of the Golden Age of Fraternalism, Masonry’s membership, despite being nearly one million, was surpassed by both the Oddfellows (IOOF) and the Knights of Pythias (KoP). Today, the IOOF number less than 26,000 members in the United States and the KoP have roughly 50,000. Conversely, the Masons, having peaked in membership in the wake of World War II, still maintain a membership of roughly two million. For IOOF numbers, see: “Look at the Numbers in the Independent Order of Odd Fellows,” Davis Odd Fellows, August 31, 2023, <https://www.davislodge.org/look-at-the-numbers-in-the-independent-order-of-odd-fellows/#:~:text=IOOF%20jurisdictions%20below%20%2C000%20members,25%2C758%20members%20in%20total%20listed>. For KoP membership, see: Knights of Pythias Retirement Center, “Who are the Knights of Pythias?,” Knights of Pythias Retirement Center, August 26, 2019, <https://koprc.com/blog/who-are-the-knights-of-pythias/#:~:text=Notable%20current%20members%20include%20Peter.organization%20was%20originally%20founded%20on>.

made brother to learn a standardized question-and-answer performance of sorts called a ‘proficiency.’ This proficiency, memorized and performed in front of the Lodge, is intended to demonstrate to the members of the Lodge that the EA has learned the vital components of the degree which they went through and is therefore ready to advance on to the next. Many of the most fundamental Masonic philosophies are discussed in this degree: belief in deity, the importance of charity, and the inevitability of death. Like many things in the Masonic Lodge, the right of the EA to progress to the next degree is voted upon by a secret ballot distributed to all Master Masons.²⁰⁹

The second degree, or Fellowcraft (FC), represents the transition, or “passing,” from adolescence to manhood just as the operative tradition had the evolution of apprentice to journeyman. It is in this degree that the principles of the seven liberal arts are espoused, and the value of education stressed. Additional meaning is ascribed to various elements of the lodge room, and the FC becomes more familiar with the various “tools” and “wages” of a Mason. A similar proficiency is required of the FC before his candidacy for advancement is again voted upon by all Master Masons.

Finally, the third, or Master Mason degree (MM), is the longest, most theatrical, and most narrative-driven of the craft degrees. Its intensity was so renowned that it gave rise to the phrase, “give someone the third degree,” which has now been a part of popular vernacular for a considerable time. Within the degree, the candidate is cast as a Biblical figure known in Freemasonry as Hiram Abiff and caused to act out the “Hiram Legend.” For the next twenty to thirty minutes, the candidate is ushered about the room and aggressively accosted both physically and verbally—in a theatrical but serious manner—by fellow Masons acting as characters in the

²⁰⁹ These secret ballots may be the origins of the phrase “to black ball” someone. In the modern day, white balls stand for ‘yes’ votes while black cubes reject. However, this was not always the case. Exclusive societies are commonly attributed as the origin points of this phrase.

story. Upon the refusal of “Hiram” to reveal the secrets that his attackers demand, he is “slain.” For the purpose of the ceremony, the candidate *is* Hiram, and is explicitly reminded of this fact several times as well as implicitly reminded by the nature of the degree being in the present tense and first person.

All of the degrees involve the candidate being ushered about by the Senior Deacon of the Lodge, interacting with various officers or characters as the degree requires. The dialogue is extensive, scripted, and lends itself to the dramatic. Many Masons in the modern day greatly enjoy the theatrical elements of the rituals, both as observers and “actors,” and there is no reason to believe this would have been any different in the nineteenth century. Particularly in the third degree, Lodges will frequently use props, host special meetings at off-site locations, and host an increased number of visitors.²¹⁰ In Masonic circles, a candidate being “raised” to a Master Mason is of great importance, and oftentimes Masonic friends and family will make a special effort to be in the audience for the degree.

As Moore suggests, “we must shift metaphors and view the room, not as a theater, but rather as a spiritual space, as a domain which men inhabited in an attempt to deal with forces larger than themselves.” For him, this regarded the spiritualist movement and the desire for men to have a space to explore and express masculinity. While there is some truth to this, and the Lodge’s role as a masculine space will be explored in-depth in the following section, Moore’s assertions should be reevaluated and taken a step further. The Lodge as a theatre and the Lodge as a spiritual place are far from mutually exclusive, and the Masonic rituals themselves are demonstrative of this fact. Spiritual in both matter and form, the rituals, frequently performed by

²¹⁰ When I became a Master Mason, the degree was held in a large barn at a member’s ranch. It was attended jointly by members of at least three Lodges. The term for the transition from Fellowcraft to Master Mason is “raising,” and as such, I am uniquely equipped to respond in the affirmative when sarcastically asked if I was “raised in a barn.”

the membership in dramatic fashion, are the foundation of Masonic tradition and, in turn, place-making which directly fosters the identity of the order and its members.²¹¹

The lodge room exists as both a space and a place. Space can be conceived as the physical and geographical realities of a given location (i.e. the lodge room is on the fourth floor of the Denver Masonic Temple on 16th and Welton St. in Denver, Colorado), whereas place is what gives space meaning. Without the concept of ‘place,’ ‘space’ lacks connection to the cultural or personal identities of inhabitants or interactants. It is, as historians Richard White and John M. Findlay assert, “a spatial reality constructed by people.”²¹² However, in order for a space to truly become a place, the act of “place-making” must be undertaken. This action, described by anthropologist Keith H. Basso in his seminal 1996 work, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*, as “retrospective world-building,” allows an individual or a community to appreciate the depth and intricacy of a location, preserving that place within their collective memory or imagination.²¹³

As briefly discussed earlier, Basso’s interpretation of place-making, and specifically his application of it to the culture of the Western Apache, bears a striking similarity to the practices of the Freemasons. Basso argues that “if place-making is a way of constructing the past...it is also a way of constructing social traditions and, in the process, personal and social identities.”

Further, Basso argues that the relationships to places “may also find expression through the

²¹¹ Moore, *Masonic Temples*, 120.

²¹² There are several ideas about how exactly ‘space’ and ‘place’ should be thought of. For the literature on this topic, see: Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 5; Richard White and John M. Findlay, *Power and Place In the North American West* (University of Washington Press, 1999); Blevins, *Paper Trails*; MFink, “Everyday Anthropology: Space vs. Place,” *The Cultural Courier: An exercise in public anthropology*, published February 22, 2019, <https://theculturalcourier.home.blog/2019/02/22/everyday-anthropology-space-vs-place/>; or really any other historical or anthropological work that involves a spatial and cultural framework of analysis. For the White and Findlay quote, see: White and Findlay, *Power and Place*, x.

²¹³ Keith H. Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache* (University of New Mexico Press, 1996), 5.

agencies of myth, prayer, music, dance, art, architecture, and, in many communities, recurrent forms of religious and political ritual.”²¹⁴ With the possible exception of dance—although the Masons did host many public dances—every aspect that Basso lists was represented in one fashion or another inside the lodge room by the Masonic order during the latter-half of the nineteenth century. The implication is that, for the Masons, the bonding effect of the Craft degrees’s initiatory experiences creates not only the social identity of the Masons at large, but also influences the personal identities of the constituent members, thereby branding them “Masons,” within and without the physical lodge room.²¹⁵

The role of the place-maker—which for the Masons could be the Senior Deacon, the Master, or a combination of roles in each degree—is, as Basso asserts, to “speak the past into being, to summon it with words and give it dramatic form, to produce experiences by forging ancestral worlds in which others can participate and readily lose themselves.” Each degree adds a new layer of complexity onto the Masonic notion of place, and the knowledge that every member has shared in the same experience, a fact expressly shared with the initiate early in the first degree, helps to codify the community occupied therein. Further, each time the “place-maker” participates in the practice of degree-work, by reciting the descriptions of the room and the symbolic meaning of the various furniture and decorations, he teaches the new member his role

²¹⁴ Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 7, 109. Even Masonic songbooks existed. See: Sion M. Honea, “Nineteenth-Century American Masonic Songbooks,” *Heredom: The Transactions of the Scottish Rite Research Society* 6 (1997): 285–304.

²¹⁵ The notion that Masonic traditions parallel Native ones is not a novel concept. Historians Jacob and Semadeni attest that “the analogies between masonic and Indian beliefs and practices are real and for some men clearly compelling: the use of fraternal oaths, of regalia, and a shared belief in a Supreme Being (or Grand Architect) and added to these was the emphasis upon the passing down of customs as well as ceremonial costumes.” Jacob and Semadeni, *Freemasonry in Civil Society*, 83. More a more expansive study of the overlap between Native Americans and Freemasonry, see: Joy Porter, *Native American Freemasonry: Associationalism and Performance in America* (University of Nebraska Press, 2011); Joy Porter, “Native American Indian Freemasonry and Its Relation to the Performative Turn within Contemporary American Scholarship,” *Journal of American Studies* 47, no. 2 (2013): 439–58, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24485529>.

and reaffirms the way in which the Masons in the audience understand themselves to occupy the place.²¹⁶

The manner and form in which Basso observed the Western Apache construct places through rituals and stories bears striking resemblance to the Masonic traditions. For the Apache, their place making “becomes a form of narrative art, a type of historical theater in which the ‘pastness’ of the past is summarily stripped away and long-elapsed events are made to unfold as if before one’s eyes.” For the Masons, the performance of the third degree and the Hiramic legend serves the same purpose. The candidate is cast as Hiram, and the story, like the Apache narratives, is “given largely in the present tense...and it makes extensive use of quoted speech to enter the hearts and minds of those whom it portrays.” Frequent dialogue occurs throughout all of the Masonic degrees, often with the Senior Deacon answering on behalf of the candidate. Often, Old Testament Biblical scriptures are recited aloud within the degrees as well, and many of the stories and symbols find their origins in the Bible. Within the third degree, Hiram’s death, motivated by the protection of Masonic secrets that were being forcibly extracted by undeserved workmen, thereby casts him as a martyr to the rules of Masonry and the hierarchical structure of the order. The performance, paired with the first two degrees, elucidates similar themes to the Apache, such as the “importance of community and kin,” and the “beneficial consequences, practical and otherwise, of adhering to moral norms.”²¹⁷

Take, for example, an excerpt from the poem, *The Lodge Room Over Simpkins’ Store*, written by Lawrence N. Greenleaf in 1898. Greenleaf was a commanding presence in the development and growth of Masonry in nineteenth-century Colorado: he was Grand Master of

²¹⁶ Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 32, 74.

²¹⁷ The various quotes throughout this paragraph are from: Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 33. The notion of Hiram Abif being a martyr for the “formalized power structure and.. the rules of the work site” is derived from William Moore’s excellent discussion of the archetypes found in the Masonic degrees. See: Moore, *Masonic Temples*, 12.

Masons in 1880, extremely active in the Scottish Rite, a member of the York Rite, and the primary editor of the *Square and Compass* journal, among other involvements. He was also hailed frequently as the “poet laureate of Freemasonry,” in recognition of his talent for worksmithing. Undoubtedly his most well-regarded work was the aforementioned poem about the room over Simpkins’ store. Through a fictionalized telling of a visit made to a poor rural Lodge by Masons who were, presumably, from a more well-to-do chapter, readers gain a glimpse of the way in which the Lodge’s internal proceedings could change the perception of the members. The second stanza reads:

*To city eyes, a cheerless room, long usage had defaced,
The tell-tale lines of lath and beam on wall and ceiling traced.
The light from oil-fed lamps was dim and yellow in its hue,
The carpet once could pattern boast though now ‘twas lost to view
The altar and the pedestals that marked the stations three,
The gate-post pillars topped with balls, the rude-carved Letter G,
Were village joiner's clumsy work, with many things beside,
Where beauty's lines were all effaced and ornament denied.
There could be left no lingering doubt if doubt there was before,
The plainest Lodge room in the land was over Simpkins’ Store.*

The poem then recounts how, much to the surprise of the visitors with whom the poem’s narrator travelled, the members of Friendship Lodge were extremely “skilled in Mason’s ways” during the performance of the ritual despite the poor state of their lodge hall. Later in the poem, it is brought to the attention of the Lodge that the fund for widows and orphans was running low, whereby donations of shoes, a load of wood, and money were rendered. After the ceremonial

work is performed and the charity enacted in this fictional story, Greenleaf's poetic narrator concludes:

*Like scoffer who remained to pray, impressed by sight and sound,
The faded carpet 'neath our feet was now like holy ground.
The walls that had such a dingy look turned celestial blue,
The ceiling changed to canopy where stars were shining through.
Bright tongues of flame from altar leaped, the G was vivid blaze,
All common things seemed glorified by heaven's reflected rays.
O! wondrous transformation wrought through ministry of love—
Behold the Lodge Room Beautiful!—fair type of that above,
The vision fades—the lesson lives! and taught as ne'er before,
In plainest Lodge room in the land—up over Simpkins' store.*

Greenleaf's poem serves as a poignant poetic distillation of Basso's "retrospective world-building," illustrating the exact mechanism by which the shared performance of the ritual transfigures a member's perception of his physical surroundings. The transition of "dingy" walls into "celestial blue" and a "faded carpet" into "holy ground" represents not a literal architectural renovation, but a profound psychological shift occurring within the spiritual and theatrical nature of the lodge room. This metamorphosis marks the precise moment where a utilitarian retail space—the humble room over a general store—is sanctified by the collective memory and moral labor of the men gathered within its walls. For the Colorado Mason, the sanctity of the lodge was never entirely dependent on the material opulence of the building, but rather on the social and spiritual functions that converted a profane "space" into a sacred "place." Ultimately, the poem demonstrates that the "Lodge Room Beautiful" was an internal architecture that could be

superimposed onto even the most “cheerless” environment through the shared knowledge and experiences of the Craft. Because this transformation was rooted in the standardized language and layout of the ritual, the sense of place it created was not bound to a single set of four walls, but was instead anchored in the mind of the initiate.

Vitality, as the lodge was transformed by way of place-making for each new member, it becomes a portable possession of theirs to which they can “maintain deep and abiding attachments, regardless of where they travel.” However, unlike the fixed locations that Basso’s Western Apache turn into places, the Lodge was a traveling asset for Masons. Due to the replicability of the Masonic degrees and lodge rooms throughout most jurisdictions in the United States, the experience that members had internally and the way it shaped their relationship with lodges, could be carried with them wherever they might travel. Naturally, nothing could replace the lodge in which the degrees were received for each Mason, but by the performance of the craft degrees, the lodge was transformed from an oddly furnished room on the second floor of a building to a familiar space for members to feel welcome. Yet Masonic leaders and thinkers were adamant that the lodge was not meant for “relaxation from business” or to “amuse [themselves] by rehearsing frivolous words and stilted forms.” On the contrary, as one Masonic speaker stated in a 1897 speech, “here,” in the lodge room, “men will abandon strife and expediency...Shut in from the cares and bickerings of the world they will here think upon manhood’s worth.” Indeed, for the nineteenth-century Mason, the lodge room became a place for them to work on their mind and begin to develop or hone ideas of their roles in society as Masons, and specifically as men in the tumultuous Victorian Era.²¹⁸

²¹⁸ First quote is from Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places*, 75. The Masonic speaker was Frank Parkhurst, delivering a speech during the dedication of the Masonic building in Frankfort, New York. The speech was later published in: Charles B. Cleland and E. Lagrange Smith. *A History of Olive Branch Lodge No. 40, F&A.M.* (Frankfort, N.Y.: Press of the Register, 1901), 35. Citation borrowed from Moore, “Masonic Lodges and their Furnishings,” 124.

Of Masons and Men: Masculinity in the Fraternal Order

Masculinity is always in crisis. Practically every century has some “cataclysmic shift” away from the previous notions of what it means to be a man and express that masculinity. The catastrophe facing men’s conception of themselves in the nineteenth century consisted of several factors. First, men saw women as having become increasingly more involved in the church during the nineteenth century, thereby feminizing a previously masculine space. As Moore argues, the man was no longer the “spiritual foundation of his family.” Second, dramatic transformations in American industrialization began constricting the livelihoods of craftsmen, and the litany of clerks, factory employees, or textile workers could not carry themselves with the same pride that was traditionally ascribed to skilled professions. Third, in the move westward, many men left behind their communities and were therefore faced with the challenge of being members of the most individualistic society on the planet suddenly thrust into an environment that necessitated community and support in order to survive.²¹⁹

Historian of gender Amy S. Greenberg proposes two forms of manhood in this period: “martial masculinity,” characterized by public displays of strength and courage, and “restrained masculinity,” centered on domestic virtue, religious faith, and self-discipline. On the frontier in the latter half of the nineteenth century, these two ideals of masculinity were in constant tension. The Civil War forged a generation of men soberingly aware of the horrors of war, and also almost certainly traumatised by the conflict. The later publicity surrounding the Indian Wars, the demands of life in the early days of Colorado, and the emotional strain placed upon men who had left behind all they had known upon heading West lured them to the path of martial masculinity. Yet institutions existed to combat this. Often, in the early days of many communities and frontier

²¹⁹ Moore, “Masonic Lodges and their Furnishings,” 124.

settlements, the first community structures in which men could gather were the saloon, the brothel, the church, or the Masonic lodge.²²⁰

Martial masculinity aligned closely with the ideals of physical dominance and bravery celebrated in activities like athletics, firefighting, or going to war. Men adhering to this ideal believed that their masculinity lay in their ability to display physical prowess and courage in public, and saw violence as an appropriate, if not ideal way to prove their manliness. The brothel and saloon were the frequent early venues of this form of masculinity.²²¹ Restrained masculinity, on the other hand, emphasized private displays of character, focusing on behaviors that aligned with temperance, familial responsibility, and moral discipline. According to Greenberg, these men “demonstrated their manliness through their religious faith, their domestic virtue and treatment of family members, their ability to abstain from drinking alcoholic beverages, and their success as breadwinners.” In addition to church doctrine, nearly every one of these characteristics could be found in the philosophies of Freemasonry. Restraint in all things was seen as a virtue for those who followed restrained masculinity.²²²

Fraternal orders increasingly became the venue in which many American men concluded to express their masculinity, not only as individual men, but as “brothers” within a fraternal structure that intentionally imparted shared experiences onto members, thereby bonding them together through rituals and obligations.²²³ Historian of masculinity, E. Anthony Rotundo, argues

²²⁰ This sentiment is shared in multiple instances. For various proposed orders of founding and early community buildings, see: Daniel Egel, “The Importance of Freemasonry in the Western United States in the 19th Century,” *Heredom: The Transactions of the Scottish Rite Research Society* 21 (2013): 107–134; Burt, *Mariners, Miners, and Masons*, 133; Harland-Jacobs, *Builders of Empire*, 13, 15.

²²¹ William N. Byers’s first location for the *Rocky Mountain News* was located above a saloon located in the Wootton building in Auraria. Masonic author Ben William writes, “the occasional stray gunshot posed a ready enough threat to warrant [concern]. Wootton himself records Byers’ first question of his hires, ‘whether he could handle a gun to good advantage.’” Clearly, the saloons in the Pike’s Peak Region were not bastions of safety and refinement. See, William, “Freemasonry and the Frontier,” 43.

²²² Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood*, 139–41, 151.

²²³ For a historian of Masonry’s view on the purpose of fraternalism in bonding men together, see: Harland-Jacobs, *Builders of Empire*, 17.

that the proliferation of such orders—“secret societies, lodges, and fraternities”—occurred during the Golden Age of Fraternalism to satisfy the social needs of young men, offering “social acceptance at a time when other bonds and commitments were in flux.”²²⁴ Historian Mark Carnes in his work *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* similarly argued that “fraternal ritual provided solace and psychological guidance during young men’s troubled passage to manhood in Victorian America.” Naturally, the ritual, the lodge hall, and the identity as a Mason were all intrinsically tied.²²⁵

The physical space of the lodge was vital for the expression, education, and exploration of masculinity for Masons during the late nineteenth century. Masonic ritual and thought was hyper aware of the role that manhood played in their order, with some authors even espousing the notion that “for one to be untrue to his engagements in Masonry is to be false to his manhood.”²²⁶ Inside the lodge, the various furnishings and the floor plan provided officers and senior members with the tools and environment with which to impart Masonic notions of correct masculine behavior on new members. Reverence, charity, temperance, fairness in business, and respect for one’s nation, neighbor, family, and self were all elements of the Masonic flavor of manhood taught in the lodge. Certain symbols represented these values—the compasses represented the control of passions and desires—while officers could enforce them—the Junior Warden’s duty was to ensure that no members overly indulged in any substances. Fraternities in general would frequently have paper presentations, political speeches, readings of poems by the poets themselves, or sponsored lecture series, all of which would have been conducted during the regular Lodge meeting held within the hall.²²⁷

²²⁴ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 63.

²²⁵ Carnes, *Secret Ritual*, 14.

²²⁶ *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 1 no. 7 (Denver: September, 1892), 105.

²²⁷ For further work on the notion that the inside of the lodge room was vital for the tutoring of fellow Masons about being men, see: Moore, *Masonic Temples*, 16. For a discussion of the education inside fraternal bodies, see Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 68.

Further, during meetings and the associated social events, young men were given the opportunity to interact with and possibly learn from men significantly their seniors. These older, more mature men, could offer advice on anything from business to marriage. A future study on marriage rates among Masons might prove to be interesting to determine the possible effect that older, married members might have on young, unmarried ones. Endearingly, in an era where broader Victorian ideas of masculinity made fathers less likely to show outward affection for their children, the Lodge provided a venue where sons and fathers might be able to bond. The fraternal lodge hall could also be a site where veterans, of the Civil War, Indian Wars, or other conflicts, could find a similar degree of male sociability that was typically only found in military life.²²⁸ Alternatively, some historians like Rotundo have suggested that the post-Civil War lodge was a place where men could “vent about their sexual frustrations and discuss their issues with their spouses.” Naturally, griping about spouses almost certainly occurred in Lodges as the same could be found in practically every possible environment. Regardless, the space and the organization was used for a variety of possible motivations, many of which may have been simply at the discretion of the individual member.²²⁹

Not limited to the secrecy of the lodge room, the ideological impact of these spaces spilled over into the public consciousness through the local press, framing Masonic philosophy as a definitive remedy for the era’s masculine anxieties. By the 1880s, the version of restrained manhood most endorsed by the Masons was being explicitly marketed in newspapers as the benchmark for civic virtue. For example, in 1885, F. J. Annis of Collins Lodge No. 19 argued that the “unseen” labors of the craft manifested externally, guiding men toward the “primary

²²⁸ It is no mistake that national membership spikes in fraternal orders after troops return home from wars. Additionally, there was a marked influence from the Civil War on the Masons at the time, exhibited best by the Knights Templar adopting a far more military attire, possibly patterned off of the Grand Army of the Republic. McBride, “Golden Age of Fraternalism,” 120–138.

²²⁹ To read about different ideas about what service fraternal orders provided their members, see: Tabbert, *American Freemasons*, 103; McBride, “Golden Age of Fraternalism,” 132; Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 201–02.

duties which characterize every type of true manhood.” This suggests that the Lodge acted as a moral compass, translating ritualistic symbolism into the “walks and talks of everyday life.” By the time Mason Donald Fletcher spoke at the 1890 dedication of the Denver Masonic Temple, this sentiment had solidified into a moral mandate. In declaring that “bigotry and ignorance are unworthy of our manhood,” Fletcher positioned the Lodge as a site of intellectual and moral refinement, not merely as a social club. In the volatile environment of the frontier, these public declarations served a dual purpose: they defended the Order against charges of elitism while asserting that the path to “true” masculinity was paved with the restraint, education, and fraternal discipline found only within the lodge walls where members could meet and “think upon manhood’s worth.”²³⁰

Women and Eastern Star

While Craft Masonry and the majority of its appendant bodies remained an exclusively male domain, the exclusion of women from the tiled doors of “regular and well-governed lodges” did not equate to their absence from the Masonic world. Instead, the relationship between women and Freemasonry materialized in three distinct capacities: as dissenters who challenged the order’s gendered barriers and the perceived encroachment on the woman’s role as a moral guide, as supporters who facilitated the social and charitable labor of the Lodge, and eventually as appendant members within organizations specifically designed to incorporate the feminine of the Masonic family.

As the focus of this thesis is on Masonry, not much time will be spent on the dissenting group. Their grievances with the Order on account of being excluded are understandable, but the

²³⁰ First quote: “Aims of Masonry: Address Delivered by F. J. Annis, Esq. At the Festival of St. John, Dec. 29th, 1885,” *Fort Collins Courier*, January 14, 1886. Second quote: “The Dedication: Formal Consecration of the Masonic Temple to the Use of the Order,” *Rocky Mountain News*, July 4, 1890. Third and final quote: Cleland and Smith. *A History of Olive Branch Lodge*, 35.

women who did not associate with the Masons are not the concern of this research. Alternatively, those who sought involvement, even so far as to join *are* of concern in this research. Indeed, select Lodges around the globe had allowed women to join since the late 1700s, often at the risk of being deemed “clandestine” and consequently losing their recognition by the Grand Lodge. The centralized body that came to be known as “Universal Co-Masonry” was started in 1879 when Mlle Maria Deraismes was initiated into a small Lodge outside of Paris, France. In the coming years, more women joined and in 1893, the Grande Loge Symbolique Ecossaise Mixte de France was founded, formalizing their presence. Mixed Lodges of this sort rarely appeared in the United States, however, in a surprising turn of events, Universal Co-Masonry moved their headquarters to Larkspur, Colorado in 1916 for the better climate.²³¹

Women who dissented against Masonry typically did so for any combination of reasons. The common accusations included Masonry being, at best, secretive, misogynistic, and exclusionary, and at worst, Satanic and evil.²³² For many women, the Freemasons presented a threat to their societal roles as the “moral sex,” and the “keepers of morality.” The intense promotion of morality within the lodge halls and the degrees was seen as a rejection of the commonly held nineteenth century belief that women held a spiritual role as moral arbiters and that men consequently depended on them for moral restraint. But while Co-Masonry has never managed to approach the power, extent, or prestige that the standard Craft Masonry has had

²³¹ For legal purposes, Universal Co-Masonry is incorporated as The American Federation of Human Rights. Jeanne Heaselwood, “A Brief History of the Founding of Co-Freemasonry,” Universal Co-Masonry, pub. February 5, 2020, <https://www.universalfreemasonry.org/en/article/founding-of-co-freemasonry#:~:text=It%20was%20in%20Grande%20Loge,Georges%20Martin%20becoming%20its%20founder>.

²³² The term “Morgan-Killers” was used for a time to insult Masons but, much like the American appropriation of the insult “yankee,” the Masons began to use it ironically by the end of the nineteenth century. “Personal,” *Fort Collins Courier*, April 11, 1889. A major publication emerged out of France in the 1890s claiming that Freemasonry was a venue for the Devil on Earth. The author, Dr. Bataille, was proven to be a pseudonym of Léo Taxil, who was simply trying to discredit Masonry. Léo Taxil, *Le Diable au XIXe Siècle: ou, Les Mystères du Spiritisme, la Franc-Maçonnerie Luciférienne* (Paris: Delhomme et Bruguet, 1892–94). Many of these same accusations can be found today.

throughout its history, to claim that Masonry reached such heights on account of exclusively men would be an extreme misrepresentation. Beyond the simple notion of “behind every great man there is a great woman,” women could be found supporting their husbands, sons, and fathers in several ways.²³³

Interestingly, as Dumenil asserts and my findings parallel, Masonic sources rarely gave any indication that they thought women were hostile to the fraternity. Dumenil proposes three likely reasons that women’s negatives attitudes towards Masonry either softened or never grew to be aggressive in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries: “Masonry’s repeated insistence that the order did not threaten to supplant Christianity,” Masonic sympathy and support for the temperance movement, and the creation of women’s appendant bodies. These are all excellent points, and when paired with the notion that many women of the age fashioned themselves as keepers of morality, it is likely that some thought it in their interests to promote an order that was doing the same thing.

A fourth point should be added as well, namely that of familial and self interest. No doubt some women saw value in a fraternity where their husbands made friends and business connections, were told to care for their families, and stayed out of the saloons and brothels (if only for the meeting night, at worst). Indeed, as Harriet A. Ercenbrack, a woman member of the Order of the Eastern Star (OES)—a women’s Masonic body discussed below—wrote in 1894, “the wife of a Master Mason cannot fail to discover that the experiences of the lodge are exercising a deep and lasting influence upon his life and conduct.” While Ercenbrack uses this observation as a motivation for the OES, it also reveals how some women saw the influence of Masonry impacting the lives of the men in their families. For many, it was in the best interest of

²³³ For discussions of the reaction to Masonry encroaching on women’s roles as moral repositories, see: Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 37; Clawson, *Constructing Brotherhood*, 17.

the family unit that the man be involved in such an expansive, prestigious, and powerful network. Potentially, women might have been fond of their husbands, sons, or fathers, and enjoyed seeing them take value out of their Masonic endeavors. The idea of a wife supporting her spouse's interests is endearing, assuming it is voluntary.²³⁴

One of the key ways in which women supported their Masonic men was through the organization of fairs to raise funds for the construction of the grand Masonic temples of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. William Moore, in his article, "Funding the Temples of Masculinity: Women's Roles in Masonic Fairs in New York State, 1870-1930" highlights these events, convincingly arguing that, "although women could not become Masons themselves, a significant number of women were actively involved in Masonic building programs and supported Freemasonry." These women recognized Masonry as a resource for the promotion of values supported by both men of the restrained masculinity strand and women alike. As a result, many women aided in the funding of the massive temples that would go on to dominate skylines across the country, physically representing the power and permanence of the order.²³⁵

Without question, the greatest involvement with Masonry that women had came in the form of an appendant body created by Dr. Rob Morris, a Poet Laureate of Freemasonry. While confined to his home in the wake of an accident, Dr. Morris, along with his wife, Charlotte Mendenhall Morris, crafted the degrees that would go on to form the Order of the Eastern Star. Morris felt that the beauties of Masonry were too great not to share with everyone, even if the

²³⁴ Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 25. Harriet A. Ercenbrack, "The Eastern Star And Its Benefits to Women as an Educational Organization," *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 3, no. 2 (Denver: April, 1894), 54. Ercenbrack also referred to Masonry thus: "The protracted existence and high character of the Masonic Institution is known throughout the intelligent world. It is the most revered and useful Order extant." She clearly had a high opinion of the Order, no doubt accentuated by the fact she was publishing this report in a Masonic journal.

²³⁵ William D. Moore, "Funding the Temples of Masculinity: Women's Roles in Masonic Fairs in New York State, 1870-1930," *Heredom: The Transactions of the Scottish Rite Research Society* 5 (1996), 46-47.

ancient landmarks that governed Craft Masonry's membership restrictions were unchangeable. First created in 1850, it would take some time for Eastern Star to be considered "legitimate," but by the mid 1870s, it was recognized as an official appendant body, providing a spot where both men and women could partake in Masonic-like degrees and activities.²³⁶

Writings of the OES published in Denver's *Square and Compass* provide an insight about what women thought of their order and its purpose. One author, writing in 1892, referred to Eastern Star as the "one niche in Masonry where wife and husband, mother and son, sister and brother can stand and join hands in giving practical effect to the social and beneficent principles of the esteemed order." Eastern Star was seen, and promoted as the familial side of Masonry. In 1894, Harriet Ercenbrack, the Grand Treasurer of Colorado Eastern Star from 1889 to 1895, promoted OES as a venue that "provides women with a proper and genial field of action." Such action included the intellectual and oratorical development of its members, as Ercenbrack noted that "our Chapters afford schools of culture in elocution and extemporaneous speaking." However, the Order's mission extended far beyond personal refinement and into the realm of communal care; she concluded that, "but chiefest of all, our Chapters are nurseries of benevolence. They exist because love and sympathy demand exercise and encouragement. By the means which Chapters afford, the women are enabled to go outside their own families and find worthy objects on which to bestow loving kindness."²³⁷

Through these various avenues—dissent, supportive labor, and formal membership in appendant bodies—women successfully navigated and reshaped the boundaries of a traditionally masculine order. By the late nineteenth century, the Order of the Eastern Star had attached itself

²³⁶ "Order of the Eastern Star: Origins" Order of the Eastern Star General Grand Chapter, visited February 6, 2026, <https://easternstar.org/about/history/>.

²³⁷ "Eastern Star," *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 1, no. 2 (Denver: April, 1892), 9; Ercenbrack, "The Eastern Star And Its Benefits to Women as an Educational Organization," 55–56.

to the values, form, and respectability of Masonry, allowing women to exercise their perceived roles as moral guides within a structured, recognized Masonic framework. This evolution ensured that the fraternity's broader orders were no longer merely a refuge for men, but a cornerstone of the family unit and the social fabric of the community.

Indeed, the establishment of grand, permanent temples instead of rented rooms could be seen as a representation of the parallels between the physical presence of Masonry and women. The rented lodge room was a tabernacle; it was ephemeral, and a representation of the transient population of young men moving to Colorado in the early days of the territory. However, as the social composition of the fraternity expanded and its public reputation solidified, the need for a permanent, grander stage for these interactions became paramount. Simultaneously, women and families also appeared in the region, signaling the increasing stability of Colorado, just as the architectural presence of the order became codified. This shift necessitated a move beyond temporary meeting spaces into the monumental architecture that would eventually define the Masonic presence in the American landscape.

Lodge Hall as a Community Building

Turning now to the final way in which to think of the physical space of the lodge: a community center. If place-making was focused on the individual's mind and relationship to the space, and the construction of Masonic masculine thought served to shape the individual's identity, the final step was to expand beyond the individual and into the communal. While the notion of internal community creation has been discussed throughout this thesis, the lodge hall's physical presence as a community anchor has yet to be fully explored. This subsection argues that in early Colorado, the Masonic Hall's resources and early establishment positioned it as the

de facto public square, functioning as a central community structure for civic operations, social functions, education, and use by other fraternal orders. The Lodge's physical structure, therefore, became an indispensable cornerstone of early Colorado's public life.

Oftentimes, as will be explored in the Extrajudicial Masonry section, the territorial "rule of law" was often more theoretical than physical. In the absence or infancy of formal civic institutions, the Masonic Hall provided the architectural gravity and moral dignity necessary for governance. For example, in 1860, prior to the territory being established, the first Appellate Court meeting was held in the Masonic hall over J.B. Doyle and Co.'s store in Denver. It's possible that the meeting was held in the lodge hall simply because it was an available space. Or, alternatively, by holding court in a space dedicated to "truth and justice," the early judiciary aimed to borrow the Lodge's existing moral authority to legitimize its own proceedings. Further, this trend of the Lodge as a civic surrogate continued as the frontier expanded throughout the nineteenth century, proving that Masonic influence was woven into the very fabric of the state's legal origins. For instance, the *Colorado Springs Gazette's* 1876 report of court terms being held in the Masonic Hall suggests that even after Colorado achieved statehood, the Masonic hall remained a reliable infrastructure for public business.²³⁸

The logistical importance of the Lodge reached into the very heart of the legislative process, often serving as the only suitable venue for the high-stakes business of building a territory. Minutes from an 1866 meeting in Golden City Lodge No. 1 detail the members discussing a motion made "to let the [territorial] legislators have the [lodge] hall during their session." The motion was approved, and the conversation then turned to appointing a committee to negotiate rent with the Territorial Secretary, which was eventually agreed upon. This was not

²³⁸ "Court Notice," *Rocky Mountain News*, 11/10/1860; *Colorado Springs Gazette*, October 14, 1876.

merely a matter of convenience; by housing the machinery of the state, the Masons bridged the gap between a private, “secret” fraternity and a transparent, public service.²³⁹

Even the most basic democratic functions, such as the school elections in Pueblo in 1898, found a home within the Masonic Temple, showing that the fraternity was a partner in the community’s intellectual growth. Perhaps the most striking validation of the Lodge as the center of civic life, certainly in the territorial period, was the 1868 reception for Generals Ulysses S. Grant, William Tecumseh Sherman, and Philip Sheridan. For several hours, the “legendary trio” stood in the Denver Masonic hall, shaking hands and meeting with both local dignitaries and star-struck citizens alike. Hosting such high-profile national figures required a space that reflected the city’s aspirations of refinement, and the Masonic Temple stood as the venue deemed fit for the task of representing Colorado to Ulysses S. Grant, the man expected to win the 1868 election in a landslide only a few months after his visit, and the nation’s military elite.²⁴⁰

Beyond law and politics, the Lodge served as the cultural hearth of the community, filling the vacuum left by the slow arrival of established churches. As early as 1859, the Denver Masonic Hall was utilized for religious services, functioning as a sanctuary for settlers who had yet to build their own sectarian churches. The practice of lodges being used for priests and pastors to preach the gospel would continue on for decades, well past the conclusion of this study. The records do not indicate any one denomination having a stronger presence than others, although there are no instances of Jewish or Catholic services being performed in this environment. A further, more detailed study may present cases of Jewish congregations, but it is highly unlikely that Catholics would see a Masonic hall fit for their service. However, the

²³⁹ Minutes of Golden City Lodge No. 1 (Golden, CO), December 1, 1866, 17.

²⁴⁰ “School Elections Today,” *Colorado Daily Chieftain*, May 2, 1898. For reports and mentions of Grant’s visit and reception in the Masonic Lodge, see: “Daily News,” *Rocky Mountain News*, July 24, 1868; “Thirty Years Ago To-Day,” *Rocky Mountain News*, July 23, 1898.

proliferation of denominations underscores the Masonic philosophy of the lodge as a space where men of different faiths could find common ground. This was evidently extended beyond the interpersonal and into the material as the lodges gave congregations meeting space before they had the resources to build their own steeples.²⁴¹

The hall also acted as a premier venue for the higher arts, positioning the Order as the guardian of Victorian refinement in a rough-hewn landscape. In Boulder and Denver, the use of the hall for operettas and the University of Colorado graduation dances suggests that the Lodge was viewed as an acceptable location for evening socializing for people of all ages. Indeed, for the residents of mining camps, where winters were long and social outlets were often limited to the moral hazards of the saloon, the Lodge provided a sober, intellectually stimulating alternative. As historian Roger Burt notes, in these remote camps with “long shut-in winters,” Lodge membership was “just as essential for entertainment... as it was for business.” Finally, by hosting “Masonic Sociables” and literary readings, the Hall functioned as a site for the community where the rough edges of frontier life were smoothed by music, poetry, and structured social interaction.²⁴²

While the ritual of Masonry was a strictly masculine endeavor, the physical hall was surprisingly accessible to the women of the frontier, serving as a bridge between the male-only fraternity and the broader community. The presence of the Woman’s Republican Club and the Pueblo Women’s Club indicates that the Lodge was often a safe and respectable venue for

²⁴¹ There are hundreds, if not thousands of examples of preachers using Masonic halls for their services. A quick search on the Colorado Historic Newspapers website is a good start to investigate such examples. A few include: “Religious Notice,” *Rocky Mountain News*, October 13, 1859; “Mesa Presbyterian Church,” *Colorado Daily Chieftain*, October 25, 1884.

²⁴² Lodge hosting an operetta: *Boulder Daily Camera*, June 13, 1898. For the mention of the CU senior dance, see: “Last Words to Graduates,” *Rocky Mountain News*, May 30, 1898. For Burt’s discussion of the entertainment value of Masonry for miners in the winter months, see: “Burt, “Benevolent Organizations in Mining Communities,” 213. For the first record of a “Masonic Sociable” being held, see: “The Masonic Sociable,” *Rocky Mountain News*, April 20, 1861. For an understanding of what such a sociable entailed, see: “Masonic Scociable,” *The San Juan*, June 23, 1887.

women's civic engagement and political organization. In a landscape dominated by masculine spaces such as mines, saloons, and construction camps, the Masonic Hall offered a rare domestic sanctuary within the public sphere. This paradox—a male-only ritual space serving as a hub for women's social power—is central to understanding the Lodge's broader communal impact. By providing a roof for these organizations, the Masons essentially sanctioned women's public roles under the umbrella of fraternal respectability.²⁴³

From the “strawberry and cream festival” in Delta to the “musical and literary entertainment” provided by the Women's Relief Corps in Salida, these events reveal a form of public domesticity that supported community stability. By opening their doors to organizations like the Ladies Aid Society, Masons displayed their affinity for restrained masculinity. Their ideal suggested that a “true man” was a protector and provider who facilitated the moral and social betterment of his family and neighbors. These events allowed women to steadily increase their public presence. Consequently, the Lodge hall became a rare middle ground where the rigid gender segregations of the era were temporarily suspended for the sake of communal health and festive charity.²⁴⁴

Finally, the Masonic Lodge could serve as the mother hive for Victorian organizational life, acting as a multi-tenant incubator for almost every significant social movement in early Colorado. It was rarely a monolithic or exclusive space; instead, it was a shared resource for the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), the Knights of Labor, the Grange, and the Odd Fellows (IOOF) among many others. This inter-fraternalism is crucial because, by frequently housing groups like the Knights of Labor and The Grange, the Masonic Hall indirectly facilitated the rise

²⁴³ The expansive headquarters of the Pueblo chapter of the Women's Club were built inside the Masonic temple in that city. “Opening of the New Quarters of the Women's Club,” *Colorado Weekly Chieftain*, January 13, 1898; “Pueblo Women's Club Headquarters,” *Rocky Mountain News*, January 9, 1898. For the Women's Republican Club using the Masonic hall, see: “Plans for the Summer,” *Rocky Mountain News*, April 9, 1897.

²⁴⁴ “Ladies Aid Society,” *The Delta Chief*, June 18, 1884. Details on the Women's Relief Corps's event are found in: *The Salida Mail*, September 19, 1890.

of the labor and agricultural movements that defined Colorado's early economy. The Lodge hall was a versatile vessel that could shift from a labor meeting to a ritual space with the simple swap of a gavel.

Public Education

*"Equality has an organ; — gratuitous and obligatory intrusion. We must begin with the right to the alphabet. The primary school obligatory upon all; the high school offered to all. Such is the law. From the same school for all springs equal society."*²⁴⁵
~ From *"Morals and Dogma,"* a key philosophical work for the Scottish Rite of Freemasonry

Masons, by explicit instruction in the first degree, were forbidden from engaging in politics in their capacity as members of the fraternity. As such, Masonic Craft Lodges have typically aimed to remain as neutral as possible on matters of political importance.²⁴⁶ However, one of the most glaring exceptions to this has historically been the Masonic support shown for public education. It is possible that the long-standing tensions between the Catholic Church and Freemasonry contributed to this stance. Many Masons were critical of the Catholic position against public school systems, accusing them of attempting "to shackle the minds of children through [Catholic] schools." This philosophical commitment to secular knowledge eventually found empirical validation through the rapid expansion of educational infrastructure in regions with high Masonic density.²⁴⁷

Additionally, Daniel Egel's work on the economic power of Masons in the West reveals a strong positive correlation between fraternal membership and educational access in the late

²⁴⁵ Albert Pike, *Morals and Dogma of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry*, new and revised ed. (1871; repr., Roberts Publishing Company, 1950), 44.

²⁴⁶ There are numerous instances where this instruction was ignored, such as in the case of Union Lodge No. 7 advocating for Col. John M. Chivington's actions at the Sand Creek Massacre in 1864. Similarly, conducting cornerstone ceremonies for public buildings carries the potential for being associated with the political views or motivations of that organization.

²⁴⁷ Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 11. Also see: Jacob and Semadeni, *Freemasonry in Civil Society*, 79.

nineteenth century. He found that counties with a higher density of Freemasons consistently reported higher primary school enrollment rates, suggesting that the fraternity was a key driver of local literacy and education. To quantify this, Egel explains that a one standard-deviation increase in the local concentration of Masons resulted in a one-fourth of a standard-deviation increase in school enrollment. In practical terms, this means that for every major leap in the size of the local Masonic network, there was a substantial and measurable jump in the community's commitment to schooling that rivaled other economic predictors. This statistical correlation suggests that Masonic networks functioned as a primary engine for human capital development during a formative era of American history. While certainly not the only driver of institutional growth, Egel's research demonstrates how fraternal groups were able to translate their philosophical values into concrete educational outcomes for the public.²⁴⁸

The physical infrastructure provided by the fraternity played an equally vital role in facilitating this rapid educational expansion across the frontier. Historian and non-Mason Walter Prescott Webb, writing an introduction to a 1955 work on Texas Masonry, noted that, "Even though the state might provide meager funds for paying a teacher, it provided nothing for a building, a place to teach. That the community had to furnish. But there were the Masons who had a hall, always a two-story hall because they could not hold their meetings on the first floor..." Because Masonic ritual required the privacy of an upper floor, the ground level of these buildings often remained unoccupied during regular business and school hours. This unique architectural requirement could provide a solution to the lack of dedicated schoolhouses in rapidly developing western territories. Consequently, the fraternity's internal regulations unintentionally provided a scaffolding upon which early public education could be built.

²⁴⁸ Daniel Peter Egel, "Social Institutions and Development," PhD diss. (University of California, Berkeley, 2010), 95, <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/38h0b5qg>.

Webb emphasizes the transformative nature of this arrangement, stating that “in community after community this lower story of the Masonic Hall became the first house of learning, maybe a private or subscription school which was converted into a public school as soon as possible.” He further argues that this “hatching of public free schools out of the nest of society could not have happened in so many cases had not the Masons been favorable to public education. And their interest was not passive—it was active. They did what was needed when it was needed.” This active participation underscores a broader historical trend where private social capital directly subsidized the creation of essential public goods. By providing the literal and metaphorical foundation for these schools, the Masons bridged the gap between a lack of state resources and a growing demand for literacy. Ultimately, the integration of Masonic resources into the civic landscape left a lasting mark on the trajectory of American primary education.²⁴⁹

Masonic Community Creation

The sounds of music and dancing filled the air. Never before had the town of Gunnison, Colorado seen such a spectacular gathering as that which was held on the night of May 23, 1884 in the newly constructed La Veta Hotel. The hotel, which was being hailed as “Gunnison’s pride,” towered above the rest of the quaint town whose population of roughly 1,000 people hardly seemed to warrant a structure with 107 sleeping rooms. Yet the building was not constructed for those already living in the town, but rather as a symbol of the confidence they had in the impending growth of the region. Discoveries of iron and coal deposits led the residents to believe that Gunnison and the surrounding area was about to boom. To celebrate the opening

²⁴⁹ Notably, Webb was not himself a Mason. Walter Prescott Webb, “Introduction,” in *Masonry in Texas, Background, History and Influence in 1846* (The Masonic Home and School Press, 1955). Quote taken from Egel, “The Importance of Freemasonry in the Western United States in the 19th Century,” 123. It should be noted that Webb’s work focused on Texas, not Colorado, which could possibly be an outlier. Further research is needed to firmly establish this as a trend throughout the West.

of this grand structure, over 400 dinner guests attended a feast hosted by none other than the local Masonic organizations. However, this event was not a strictly Masonic one. Instead, newspaper accounts reported that Masonic involvement in the planning and performance of the festivities was “In compliance with the wish of the management of the La Veta the Fraternity,” and that while they hosted the ball and banquet, “they were perfectly at home in such business [which] is plain from the harmony displayed in every detail of the program.” This seamless coordination between the hotel management and the fraternity underscored the Lodge’s role as a reliable civic partner, capable of orchestrating complex social rituals that signaled a town's transition from a frontier outpost to a civilized center of commerce.²⁵⁰



Figure 17: Image of the La Veta Hotel in Gunnison, Colorado, circa 1890s. Denver Public Library Special Collections, WHJ-856.

²⁵⁰ “Banquet and Ball,” *Gunnison Review-Press*, May 24, 1884. The 1880 census reported Gunnison’s population to be 888, while the 1890 census showed an increase to 1,105. Assuming a generally linear increase in population, there would have been a little under 1,000 residents of Gunnison at the time. See: “Historical Census Lookup,” Colorado Department of Local Affairs: State Demography Office, https://demography.dola.colorado.gov/assets/lookups/historical_census_lookup.html#:~:text=Clear%20Creek%20County%2C%20Conejos%20County%2C%20Costilla%20County%2C,County%2C%20Hinsdale%20County%2C%20Huerfano%20County%2C%20Jackson%20County.

While the festive atmosphere of the La Veta Hotel grand opening serves as a vibrant snapshot of the type of communal life that the Masonic fraternity was capable of fostering, the true significance of the Order in Colorado lies beneath the surface of such galas. For all the various facets of Freemasonry explored across this thesis, none was more critical than the tangible actions of the men themselves in the physical and social construction of the West. To teach a man that he must strive to be moral, educated, and active in his community remains a hollow exercise unless such instructions are realized through civic engagement. Therefore, the role of Masons in the creation of communities is the lynchpin upon which all other aspects of this study rest. This process of community creation functioned through a dual lens: the internal community fostered within the lodge walls and the external community built in the streets of growing towns in the territory and state.

The internal community served as a pedagogical space where the raw materials of frontier character were refined into the tools of leadership. As historian Roger Burt argues, the act of learning and performing complex rituals improved members' reading and memory skills while simultaneously building the self-confidence necessary for public life. Furthermore, managing the Lodge provided a practical education in administrative duties, democratic processes, and the nuance of political negotiation within committees. As a Central City newspaper declared in 1890, "Every young man should become a member of some fraternal organization," because the Lodge provided a safety net where "friends will defend your good name, and in business adversities will come to your rescue." The press promised innumerable advantages to men who joined such groups, saying, "If a member of a good fraternity order, it matters not where you are in the civilized world, you will always find the warmest of friends." This internal bond transformed the Lodge into a polyvalent associational anchor, developing the

very community leaders who would eventually drive Colorado's upward social and economic movement.²⁵¹

The efficacy of this internal training was amplified by the “power of meeting,” a concept Alexis de Tocqueville identified as fundamental to the American character. De Tocqueville noted that when an association establishes “centres of action at certain important points in the country, its activity is increased and its influence extended.” In doing so, men, he argued, “have the opportunity of seeing each other; means of execution are more readily combined, and opinions are maintained with a degree of warmth and energy which written language cannot approach.” In the volatile environment of the Colorado frontier, where traditional social structures were often absent, these meetings provided the stability necessary for regional growth. As Richard White observes, voluntary organizations became a primary means “for organizing self-interest in the world beyond the community or in a world where communities were weak.” By providing a reliable framework for association, the Masons were able to create new communities where none had existed before, partially transcending the perceived localistic limitations of small towns and camps.²⁵²

This external community building was further reinforced by a strictly defined sense of Masonic “good citizenship” that was broadcast to the public. Reverend Myron Reed, speaking at the dedication of the Denver Masonic Temple in 1890, argued that any man who is a Mason “is bound to be a good citizen, a good neighbor and friend,” emphasizing an obligation to “pay respect to women and help the poor.” The Masons were acutely aware of this influence, often viewing their fraternal oaths as a secondary, more rigorous layer of civic duty. An 1896 article in the *Square and Compass* reminded its thousands of readers that a Mason was “bound by the

²⁵¹ *Weekly Register-Call*, September 12, 1890. Burt, *Miners, Mariners, and Masons*, 194.

²⁵² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. George Lawrence, ed. J. P. Mayer (Harper & Row, 1966), 190. White, “*It’s Your Misfortune*,” 317.

highest consideration of duty to uphold the law,” and that his obligations to the state were “reinforced and emphasized” by those he owed the fraternity. Consequently, the Mason was not merely a resident of a town, but a sworn conservator of its moral and legal order.²⁵³

The Masonic Lodges of Colorado acted as mirrors, reflecting the unique occupational and social character of the communities they inhabited. Indeed, Lodges were often shaped by their environments, manifesting as mining Lodges, farming Lodges, railroad Lodges, or military Lodges depending on the local economy. This adaptability allowed the Craft to facilitate social capital across all strata of society, from the urban elite to the rural pioneer. While wealthy urban Lodges hosted extravagant feasts with the finest cutlery, rural Lodges showed equal ambition, such as the 1861 Pike’s Peak ball where three 1,000-pound cows were slaughtered for the celebration. As Burt concludes, these organizations played “leading roles in early community development,” ensuring that the “centres of action” created within the Lodge became the foundations upon which the State of Colorado was built.²⁵⁴

Extrajudicial Masonry

In the late evening on Friday, November 30, 1860, a lone rider approached a railroad station. The men working on the train of M. C. Fisher noticed the man’s lack of a saddle, the blind bridle still attached to the steed, and the man’s “general appearance such as to attract [their]

²⁵³ For Reed’s speech, see: “The Dedication,” *Rocky Mountain News*, July 4, 1890. For the *Square and Compass* quote, see: Frederic Speed, “The Duty of Mason to Mason Before the Law of the Land,” *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 5, no. 1 (Denver: March, 1896), 7.

²⁵⁴ Dumenil makes a similar argument with great eloquence, stating: “All lodges shared in the ritualism of Masonry; all Masons had similar ritualistic experiences. Lodge social activities, however, were far less uniform.” See: Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 24. For Burt’s quote, see: Burt, *Mariners, Miners, and Masons*, xv. For the account of the cows, see: “From Nevada Gulch,” *Rocky Mountain News*, February 27, 1861. For a sampling of the many Masonic balls and festivities held in the region, territory, and state, see: A festival held at the St. Vrain Hotel, “Notes,” *Rocky Mountain News*, September 17, 1860; an announcement for the Denver Masonic Ball, “Local Matters,” *Rocky Mountain News*, January 11, 1861; a St. John’s Day feast in Boulder, “St. John’s Festival,” *The Boulder County News*, December 29, 1876; a charity ball, “Society Dances at Charity Ball,” *Boulder Daily Camera*, November 19, 1898.

close scrutiny.” Perturbed, the railroadmen took note of the wayward Irishman, but continued on with their evening. The following day, the train approached the establishment of Fort Lupton, where, whether by chance or by design, while encamped about five miles south of the fort a member of the company made a grisly discovery that would shock the residents of Denver.

The workers had discovered a wagon that “had been driven over a high bank into a thicket of willows on a little strip of low bottom land, and close to the river. The wagon box and sides were smeared with blood—a bunch of hay in the wagon was filled with it, and it had dripped through on the hounds and running gear of the wagon.” Alarmed, the railroadmen searched for the source of the gore, and discovered that “the dead body had been dragged over the side board, and carried...to the river and thrown in, and pushed into the deep channel with a pole which still lay near by.” Of the two horses that had drawn the wagon, one was peacefully grazing on the hill, the harness still on, while the other had been mounted and ridden away. The body could not be found.²⁵⁵

The wagon and horses were identified as belonging to Thomas Freeman, a rancher who was a “well known citizen” of Denver. Freeman was, like so many others, a member of the Freemasons. He had left Denver on Wednesday, November 28th, traveling towards Fort Lupton with a companion, Patrick Waters, another well-known figure in Denver at the time, with the intention of purchasing a sizable amount of hay. He carried with him \$100 in cash. It did not take long for the railroadmen to match the horse and rider that they had encountered on Friday with the description of Freeman’s horse and his fellow traveler, Pat Waters.

A group of men was quickly organized and deputized by the sheriff for the purpose of hunting down Waters and bringing him back to Denver along with making an effort to locate the body of the murdered Freeman. However, despite a sincere effort, the group returned on

²⁵⁵ “Murder of Thos. Freeman,” *Rocky Mountain News*, December 6, 1860.

December 10th, unable to achieve either goal. One man, Deputy William T. Shortridge continued on in search of the murderer.²⁵⁶ Only a few days later, on December 14th, a local physician by the name of Dr. Wilson rode into town bearing news of an unclean, perhaps ill-favored man who rode a small sorrel pony who, on account of his appearance, attracted the attention of the doctor, much as he had with the railroad workers two weeks before. The doctor, unaware of the murder of Freeman, had simply thought it an odd encounter, but upon learning of the local rancher's untimely demise, he confirmed that the man he had passed matched the description of Pat Waters. In the eyes of the Denver public, there was "but little doubt that he was the murderer of Freeman."²⁵⁷

To the delight of the town, Deputy Shortridge rode in the following morning with the vagabond in tow. Shortridge had tracked him down and arrested him near Cottonwood Springs. A newspaper detailing the capture reads: "It was an easy matter to track Waters along the entire route, as he had disposed, at nearly every ranch, of some one thing or another, known to have belonged to the missing man, Freeman."²⁵⁸ According to the sworn testimony of the deputy, Waters possessed nothing belonging to Freeman at the time of his capture, but the horse, over-shoes, and powder flask of the deceased were located a little ways down the road, while Freeman's double-barreled shotgun had been given to a passerby.²⁵⁹ With Waters now in custody, the attention of the town turned to the finding of the corpse.

To this point, the Masons had not officially participated in the events although several members of the local Lodge were part of the deputized group initially dispatched to pursue Waters. However, in the late morning or early afternoon of December 16th, Auraria Lodge met

²⁵⁶ "The Freeman Case," *Rocky Mountain News*, December 11, 1860. William T. Shortridge would go on to become a member of Denver Lodge No. 5 in 1871.

²⁵⁷ "Freeman's Murderer," *Rocky Mountain News*, December 14, 1860.

²⁵⁸ "Capture of Waters, the Suspected Murderer," *Rocky Mountain News*, December 17, 1860.

²⁵⁹ "Trial of Patrick Waters," *Rocky Mountain News*, December 20, 1860; "Capture of Pat Waters," *Western Mountaineer*, December 20, 1860.

and resolved to appoint a committee of five with the intention of ascertaining how the body of Freeman was disposed of so that it could be brought back to Denver and given a proper burial. Within the provisions of the appointed committee, it stated that “it is not the sense of this meeting to cause the above named prisoner, Pat Waters, to compromise himself in any way that might act against him in his defence before the proper court,” but it did extend authorization to “act in their judgement, as to how to procure and bring up the body” of the deceased Freeman.²⁶⁰ Alongside a handful of non-Masonic volunteers, the committee would exercise the full leniency of these guidelines.

William Byers, the principal publisher of the *Rocky Mountain News*, was among the five Masons selected by the Lodge to take Waters back to where the wagon was first found, but even in his absence, the paper’s eloquence was unabated. Reflecting upon the alleged perpetrator’s unwillingness to admit to any wrongdoing, the *Rocky Mountain News* published a chilling prophesy: “It is our candid opinion that when he arrives in the vicinity of the spot where Freeman was last seen alive, Waters will be more communicative. The soft winds sighing through the spreading branches of the stately cottonwood, will prompt him to open his lips early and earnestly.”²⁶¹ The party carried with them a length of rope, and trees were far from in short supply.

Sheriff Edward ‘Ned’ Wynkoop, a Mason and one of the men assigned by the Lodge, had ridden alongside the prisoner, conversing with him on the way to Fort Lupton. During their conversation, the sheriff had “assured [Waters] that no harm should be done him.” During the subsequent murder trial, the sheriff testified that, “When [the] prisoner was riding with me down the Platte, he remarked that if he had known Freeman was a Mason, this would never have

²⁶⁰ “Masonic Meetings,” *Rocky Mountain News*, December 19, 1860.

²⁶¹ “Capture of Waters, the Suspected Murderer,” *Rocky Mountain News*, December 17, 1860.

happened.” The same sentiment was echoed to John Martin, a volunteer who was not a member of the fraternity. Upon arriving at the scene of the crime, the committee once more asked Waters to confess to his actions, but the Irishman remained obstinate. Frustrated, the committee stepped aside and came to a resolution: “unless Waters confessed where Freeman’s body was secreted, he should be hung.” He was informed, and “preparations were then made for an execution.” Despite the threats and intimidations of the committee, Waters was “as cool as possible and denied any crime,” trusting in the earlier assurances of the sheriff.

“He wanted to pray,” and so the party waited in the blistering cold until they “nearly froze and had to stop him.” He was then taken to a tree from which a rope was dangling. The *Rocky Mountain News*’ prediction came to pass, for as the noose slipped over his head, and as “the coil fell upon his neck, he weakened” and told them the location of Freeman’s body.²⁶² Yet it was all a farce; the committee never intended to actually hang Patrick Waters. Sheriff Wynkoop had “requested [the] committee privately not to draw him off his feet.” Additionally, John Wanless, another member of the committee and a fellow Mason, assured the jury that “it was not the intention of the committee to hang Waters, as a pledge had been given to the citizens of Denver that the prisoner should be returned to them.”²⁶³ But the ruse had worked, and shortly thereafter the body was recovered, having evidently been thrown from the wagon at some point and covered lightly with hay.²⁶⁴

Upon returning to Denver, the members of the Masonic Lodge busied themselves with preparations for two tasks of paramount importance: the deserving burial and care of their deceased brother, and the discharge of justice upon the murderer. Regarding the first order,

²⁶² “Back in ‘59: A Few Thrilling Chapters of Denver’s Early History As Related by an Eye Witness of the Stirring Scenes: Enforcing the Law Before Courts Were Established. The Early Murders, Trials, Hangings and Lynchings,” *Rocky Mountain News*, December 27, 1882. This is a gripping interview with William M. Byers.

²⁶³ “Trial of Patrick Waters,” *Rocky Mountain News*, December 20, 1860.

²⁶⁴ “The Recovery of the Body of Thomas Freeman,” *Rocky Mountain News*, December 18, 1860.

Captain Richard Sopris, the presiding officer of Auraria Lodge at the time, was tasked with administering the estate of Thomas Freeman, and the Lodge as a whole was tasked with his burial. Further, a motion was passed to “call a meeting of the citizens and perform such duties as they may deem necessary in prosecuting the trial of Patrick Waters.” The familiar figures of John Wanless, Abraham Jacobs, and William Byers were the appointed committee. The meeting adjourned at 1:30 in the afternoon, and by the printing of the evening paper an announcement read: “Attention, Citizens! All good citizens are requested to meet at Criterion Hall to-morrow morning, 19th inst., at ten o’clock, to take steps for the trial of Patrick Waters, who is accused with having murdered Thomas Freeman, on the 30th day of November last.”²⁶⁵

The following morning, the town gathered together to witness the trial. Numerous witnesses were called to the stand, including the sheriff, deputy sheriff, and several members of the search party. Complementary accounts were given regarding the tale of the search for, and finding of, the body of Freeman. At one point Dr. Farner, the physician who examined the body upon its arrival back in Denver, testified that he concluded “that the first cause of death was a blow on [the] front of [the] head, which fractured the skull. The gun-shot wound was given afterwards...either the blows on the skull, or the gun-shot wound, would have produced death—the latter instantly.” Waters’s counsel, knowing that the evidence was damning, mounted a half-hearted defense, bringing forth three character witnesses to speak on his behalf. Sheriff Wynkoop spoke for all those present when he said, “I judged from all I saw of [the] prisoner that he was a wreck of a former better man; liquor seemed to have in a measure shattered his intellect.” Whether by way of whiskey, money, or blind rage, the motivation for Water’s murder of Thomas Freeman was never fully decided. After merely ten minutes of deliberation, the jury returned a verdict of “guilty,” and the defendant, when asked if he had anything to say regarding

²⁶⁵ “Special Notices,” *Rocky Mountain News*, December 18, 1860.

why he should not receive a sentence of death, replied in the negative. He was hanged the following day.

In the story of Freeman's murder, Masons were everywhere: the Sheriff and many of his deputies were members; the committee appointed to look for the body was an official "Masonic committee"; even the newspaper which published this story as it developed and sent out notices for the trial of Waters, was owned and operated by a Mason. The presence of the fraternity members was ubiquitous; they were remarkably widespread and numerous. Within a matter of days, the local Lodge was able to mobilize the press, the law enforcement, and the judiciary, all of which was done before Colorado was even a territory. In the absence of formal civic structure, the Masons wove a network of stability. By supporting each other, they also enhanced the influence of these various industries or organizations that helped prove to Congress that the region that would eventually become Colorado had the stable institutions necessary for admittance to statehood. This rapid mobilization across multiple sectors of public life suggests that the fraternity was not merely a social club, but a multi-functional apparatus capable of assuming various roles on demand. It could act as an extrajudicial entity in the absence of state governance, and it served to connect members from within and without the borders of Colorado.

The execution of Patrick Waters was more than just a simple act of frontier vengeance; it represents a case study of what may be termed "extrajudicial Masonry." In the late autumn of 1860, Denver existed as a liminal space, legally within the jurisdiction of the Kansas Territory but simultaneously the heart of the ill-fated movement to create the Jefferson Territory. In the absence of state courts or federal authority to provide a framework for justice, the community inhabited a legal void. It was in this environment that Auraria Lodge provided administrative and moral scaffolding, particularly in regards to matters concerning its members. As historian Roger

Burt notes, “through the regular performance of rituals, sworn principles of loyalty and fair-dealing, regular close association, and the organization of innumerable social and sporting events, [Freemasonry] imported onto an initially anarchic frontier stabilizing cultural relationships.”²⁶⁶ This “stabilizing culture” that the Order carefully crafted was generally subtle and unobtrusive, but it could have a trigger that, when activated, mobilized its considerable resources. Freeman’s murder, for example, was such an occasion: the Lodge mobilized rapidly, creating search parties and coordinated paralegal efforts that operated outside of the fledgling legal structure of the Pike’s Peak Region.

This intervention was made possible by a sizable presence in the position of civic influence held by the members of the craft. In an examination of several key figures involved in the search and prosecution of Waters, one observes an organizational prominence held by no other organization at that time. For example, William Byers, through the *Rocky Mountain News*, wielded the power of the press to interact with and shape public opinion. The Lodge’s proceedings and its summons to the broader citizenry were published in Byers’s newspaper rapidly. Sheriff Ned Wynkoop controlled the physical custody of the prisoner, the official parameters of the search, and the power to deputize and arrest. Meanwhile, Captain Richard Sopris was charged with administering Freeman’s estate, which ensured the victim’s material legacy remained under fraternal management. This concentration of influence meant that when the Lodge met on the morning of December 16th, it was no mere private gathering of friends. Their decision to appoint a committee of five to recover the body was the precise moment that private fraternal interest transformed into a public civic mandate.

²⁶⁶ Burt, Roger. ““Order Without Law’: Masons and Vigilantism in Virginia City, Montana, and Tombstone, Arizona.” *Heredom: The Transactions of the Scottish Rite Research Society* 25 (2017), 581.

One could argue that the methodology employed by this committee—specifically the gambit of the mock hanging—highlights the distinction between Masonic classification as a “moral order” and the actions that would otherwise categorize standard frontier vigilantism. Unlike a typical lynch mob, which sought only a rope and a quick end, the Masonic search party was bound by a different set of ethics. A mid-century reflection in the *Freemasons’ Quarterly Magazine and Review* reflected that while “Religious Orders were instituted to make men better Christians” and “Military Orders were founded to inspire the love of Glory,” the Masons were “instituted to form men into good citizens... It is a Moral Order.”²⁶⁷ This self-conception as a civilizing force was paramount; as John Wanless later testified, the committee had promised the citizens of Denver that Waters would be returned unharmed. To have actually executed him in the woods would have risked damaging the order’s reputation for respectability, so instead they engaged in a psychological operation of coercion. They required a confession not just for a conviction in the courts, but also to fulfill the sacred duty of burial. Funerals, alongside parades and cornerstone ceremonies, were among the few occasions where the Masons appeared in public in an expressly Masonic capacity. To leave a brother’s body in a thicket would have been seen as a failure by all those in the fraternity.

Internally, Masons would hold their own trials, often establishing committees of investigation to collect the testimonies of the involved parties and report back.²⁶⁸ Indeed, as historian Dorothy Ann Lipson observes, Masonry frequently “administered justice according to its own standards.” Dumenil does not miss the opportunity to argue that these internal Lodge

²⁶⁷ *Freemasons’ Quarterly Magazine and Review* (London: Published by Richard Spencer, 1850), 429–30.

²⁶⁸ An example of this process appears in the minutes of Washington Lodge No. 12 in Georgetown, Colorado in February and March of 1869. During this process, Thomas Buchanan, a member of the Lodge, appeared at the meeting and after “hearing both sides, [the committee] decided the charge not well found and Bro. Buchanan [was] declared not guilty.” The decision being made by a committee of three behind closed doors as opposed to a twelve-man jury is less rigorous, but would have permitted personal biases, grudges, or motives to have an increased influence on the decisions. Minutes of a Regular Communication, November 14, 1868, *Minutes of Washington Lodge No. 12, 1867–1882*, Georgetown Lodge No. 12 archives, Georgetown, Colorado: 88.

trials would frequently lend “themselves to personal grudges—sexual jealousy, lateral outrage, business disagreements, and other private conflicts.” Regrettably, reports of “grievance committees” within the Lodge seldom were preserved, and the only hints of internal Masonic justice comes from passing comments in the minute books, a source category that Dumenil bemoaned not having personal access to for her research, but is available for this thesis.²⁶⁹ Masonic trials operated much like public ones, but with a few key differences: first, a committee would be appointed first to investigate the claims made, after which it would report to the membership. Instead of a twelve-man jury, the decisions could be made by either: the appointed committee, the master of the Lodge, or the entire membership, depending on the severity and nature of the offense.²⁷⁰ William D. Wright, Grand Master of Masons in Colorado for 1892, reminded the membership “it is the duty of a lodge to proceed with the trial of a brother charged with a Masonic offense, regardless of the action or non-action of the courts of the state.”²⁷¹

However, the Freeman-Waters affair prompted a significant departure from this practice. By resolving that Waters should not “compromise himself” through an internal trial, the Lodge recognized the jurisdictional boundaries of the civic and fraternal interests at play. Even as they applied this extrajudicial pressure, the Lodge maintained a desire to operate within a framework resembling a “proper court.” Rather than forcing a private confession or an internal verdict that might conflict with public interests, the Masons deferred to the principles of civil process. This

²⁶⁹ First quote: Dorothy Ann Lipson, *Freemasonry in Federalist Connecticut, 1789–1835* (Princeton University Press, 1978), 226. Second quote: Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, 83. Dumenil writes, “Although minutes of the lodge’s meetings were secret, and thus not available, I had access to membership records for the entire period studied.” This is not the case for my research. Dumenil, *Freemasonry and American Culture*, xv.

²⁷⁰ The trial(s) of W. H. Hendersen were recorded in the minutes of Washington Lodge No. 12 on February 14, 1869 (pg. 101), March 13, 1869 (pg. 105), and December 1, 1869 (pg. 123). A multi-person committee found him guilty and he was suspended on an unspecified charge in March before being expelled in December from a future, unrelated charge. Similarly, the trial of Thomas I. Buchanan was conducted by a multi-person committee from Washington Lodge No. 12 in tandem with a prosecuting committee from Empire Lodge No. 8. Finally, in Golden City Lodge No. 1, there are accounts of a “committee of one” that was appointed to investigate an “erring brother” and “report...to the worshipful master.” Golden City Lodge No. 1 Minutes Book 1906–1909, January 1, 1906, 2.

²⁷¹ “Decisions by the Grand Master of Colorado During the Past Year,” *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 1, no. 8 (Denver: October, 1892), 127.

restraint suggests that the Lodge viewed its role as an agent of procedural integrity, not as a substitute for the law. When the *Rocky Mountain News* echoed this sentiment—pledging not to sway public opinion even after weeks of editorializing—it reinforced the civic consensus that even in the absence of a robust state judiciary, the performance of due process was essential to social stability.²⁷² In regards to the fashion in which Masons ought to treat fellow Masons in matters of prosecution or defense, they were taught that “the duty of [one] Mason [to another] begins and ends with seeing that he has a fair and impartial trial, with an opportunity and the means of making his defense, and such other assistance as he himself would have a right to demand if in like distress.”²⁷³ While Waters was not a member of the fraternity, it seems that this philosophy was, in the absence of state power, extended to those entangled with legal cases involving Masons. At Criterion Hall, the Lodge had little formal presence, allowing the convened court and a non-Masonic jury to deliver the verdict. This was a strategic success; by inviting the non-Masonic public to judge the evidence, the Lodge successfully converted a fraternal act into a legitimate civic one.

The ultimate significance of the Waters affair, however, lies in the specific nature of the killer’s regret. Waters’s assertion that he would never have harmed Freeman had he known he was a Mason reveals that the fraternity functioned as a mobile jurisdiction in a land where the state was little more than a whisper. In the 1860s, the square and compasses acted as a form of social insurance that provided the traveler with a protection that neither the Kansas nor the Jefferson Territories could guarantee. Waters’s realization was less a moral awakening than a

²⁷² The *Rocky Mountain News* published, on December 14, 1860, “There is but little doubt that [Pat Waters] was the murderer of Freeman.” However, only a few days later, on December 18, they write, “The evidence in the case, the confession, and all the attendant circumstances will doubtless be elicited in the trial of Waters, and it is improper for us to allude to them in this connection, and thereby influence or forestall public opinion.” “Freeman’s Murderer,” *Rocky Mountain News*, December 14, 1860; “The Recovery of the Body of Thomas Freeman,” *Rocky Mountain News*, December 18, 1860.

²⁷³ Speed, “The Duty of Mason to Mason Before the Law of the Land,” 7.

belated recognition of institutional reach. He had inadvertently collided with a network that possessed what the frontier lacked: a memory.

By murdering Freeman, Waters had not just attacked a lone rancher, he had provoked a global bureaucracy of mutual obligation whose membership occupied every level of society. This parajudicial deterrence operated on the understanding that a Mason was never an anonymous traveler; his membership presented him access to a collective capable of pursuing justice across vast distances. Much like a bill of exchange that carried value across state lines, Masonic identity guaranteed a specific institutional response. Waters realized, too late, that the Lodge's resources—its presses, its sheriffs, and its committees—could contract the Pike's Peak region into a remarkably small and monitored space. In this light, the Criterion Hall trial was the final audit of a fraternal contract, proving that while the state was absent, the Craft was present, ensuring that even in a lawless thicket, a brother's death remained a matter of public record and private reckoning.

Men Who Would Be Kings: Chivington and the Negative Aspects of Masonry

While many Freemasons were amiable members of their communities, exhibiting their Masonic philosophies in everyday life, the order had its black sheep and was still a product of its time. The many social and business advantages that Masonry offered its members drew men who saw the fraternity as an avenue to power. No man exemplifies this relationship better than Col. John M. Chivington. For many, Chivington's name is synonymous with the Sand Creek Massacre, an atrocity Chivington and his troops committed in 1864 when they murdered hundreds of Native women and children under a flag of truce. Chivington was the epitome of the ambitious mid-century man: a Methodist minister who traveled the West, won military glory at

the Battle of Glorieta Pass, curried favor with the political elite, and leveraged his fraternal memberships to great advantage.²⁷⁴

To understand Chivington's relationship with Masonry, one must understand Chivington. Much has been written on the colonel, and it is not the intent of this work to add anything of substance to the already well known and deeply researched stories of his role in the Sand Creek Massacre, his fervently held abolitionist views, or his role as the "fighting parson." The many facets of Chivington all contribute to the understanding of him as a fervently individualistic figure and one whose primary motivation was his own ambition. In his abolitionist sentiments and ministerial career, he was undeterred by the threats of those who opposed his views. Allegedly, when confronted by pro-slavery Missourians who had prohibited Methodist preachers in the county, Chivington marched into the church, laid down a Bible, two pistols, and declared "by the grace of God and these two revolvers, I am going to preach here today." No one was going to tell Chivington what he could or could not do.²⁷⁵

The same motivation could similarly be applied to the travesty at Sand Creek. Although territorial governor John Evans, a fellow Mason, was similarly culpable in the proliferation of anti-Indigenous sentiments in Colorado that culminated in the massacre, Chivington ignored orders when he attacked Black Kettle's host in 1864. In the aftermath of his actions at Sand Creek, the fraternity suspended his membership while a federal investigation took place, but he was reinstated within a few years. There are no records indicating if Evans faced any Masonic charges for the part he played in the affair. Indeed, the only lasting effect on Chivington that the Colorado Masons enacted was the renaming of a Lodge from "Chivington Lodge No. 6" to

²⁷⁴ In addition to Freemasonry, Chivington was a member of the Grand Army of the Republics and the International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF), even holding a position in the IOOF grand line of Nebraska in the late 1850s. See: Lori Cox-Paul, "John M Chivington The 'Reverend Colonel' 'Marry-Your-Daughter' 'Sand Creek Massacre,'" *Nebraska History* 88 (2007): 126–137, 142–147.

²⁷⁵ Cox-Paul, "John M Chivington," 128.

“Central Lodge No. 6” in the years after Sand Creek. This is not to say that Masonry inherently supported acts like the Sand Creek Massacre, but rather to illustrate that even an order so intently focused on matters of morality and proper conduct was fallible.²⁷⁶

At each turn, Chivington leveraged his many occupations and memberships to his advantage, often taking an “ask forgiveness, not permission” approach. For example, as a Mason, Chivington helped organize the first Lodge in the Kansas Territory in 1854 where he served as its first master, was present at the organization of the Grand Lodge of Nebraska in 1857, and took the liberty of chartering Lodges in what would eventually become the Colorado Territory in 1860. His active role in Masonry resulted in him being appointed as the first Grand Master of Masons for the newly formed Grand Lodge of Colorado in 1861, a position he held for several months before the first formal election. Additionally, Chivington’s profession as a minister earned him appointments as the chaplain of the house of the Nebraska territorial legislature in 1857 and Grand Chaplain of both the Nebraska Odd Fellows and the Nebraska Freemasons in later years of the same decade. During his military service, he often called upon his many contacts to advocate on his behalf for promotions that may or may not have been deserved. Finally, he tried using his later involvement with the press to clear his name and promote his candidacy for the Ohio state legislature. In all, while his status leading into Sand Creek likely stood as the high water mark of his life, Chivington’s many roles were to him vessels by which to advance his own interests.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁶ In fact, there was vocal support for Chivington’s attack on the natives in 1864 by the members of Union Lodge No. 7. Stating, “whereas, Col. Chivington and many of his officers and men of his command are well known to us and members of our order,” they condoned their actions. They resolved, “that we express the sentiments of the entire population of Colorado when we endorse the conduct of Col. Chivington and his command in the Sand Creek affair,” and “that the command of Col. Chivington has our warmest gratitude and that we urge the Military authorities to repeat the chastisement...until the Indians of the plains sue for peace and give evidence of their sincerity.” *Centennial Celebration*, 13.

²⁷⁷ Cox-Paul, “John M Chivington,” 128–129, 138.

Notably, Chivington was, by even the measures of his own day, not a particularly moral man. Perhaps in his younger, more pious days this was not the case, but a marriage to his wealthy daughter-in-law (whom he later abandoned) exemplified once again the extreme measures he was willing to go to for personal gain. Later on in life, after his third marriage, it was revealed that he beat his spouse, which, by the morals promoted in Masonic publications, should have warranted his suspension or expulsion from the order. However, no such action was taken. Granted, by this time, Chivington had returned to Ohio, so discussions of this matter would not appear in any of the Colorado Masonic documents, but the fact he received a full Masonic burial attended by nearly 600 members of the fraternity indicates that he maintained his good standing.²⁷⁸

Clearly, Masonic philosophy could be far more idealistic than what was practiced in reality, and the diffusion of internal Masonic jurisprudence could be selective. Perhaps no member was willing to bring Masonic charges against a former Grand Master. Perhaps Chivington's role as a pioneering figure in not one, but three Grand Lodges was enough to excuse him from prosecution. Unfortunately, the records do not exist, and it is unclear if discussions about these matters were ever held on the record. Chivington's life serves as a reminder that the tools of the fraternity are sometimes only as moral as the hands that wield them. His ability to navigate the highest echelons of the order despite his public and private transgressions suggests a systemic reluctance to hold powerful members accountable. The pursuit of fraternal harmony may have come at the direct expense of ethical justice. Ultimately, the Chivington era demonstrates that while Masonry sought to "make good men better," it also provided a network for men who were already dangerously self-interested. His legacy remains a

²⁷⁸ Cox-Paul, "John M Chivington," 136–137. For the reports of Chivington's funeral, see: "Death of Chivington," *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 3, no. 8 (Denver: October, 1894), 214.

cautionary tale about the intersection of fraternal orders and unchecked personal ambition in the American West.

Such exploitation of Masonic ties was not merely a localized phenomenon of the Colorado frontier, but a recurring theme in the cultural consciousness of the nineteenth century. The idea that the fraternity's secret language could be weaponized for personal gain eventually found its way into the era's most celebrated literature. Authors who were themselves members of the craft began to explore how these sacred bonds could be perverted by those seeking dominion over others. By looking toward the literary world, we can see how the Victorian era grappled with the dual nature of Masonic connection. One of the most famous explorations of this dynamic appears in the work of a brother who understood both the beauty and the danger of the order's influence.

By knowing another man was a Mason, there was an immediate connection between the two. This is, of course, not exclusive to the Masonic world: practically all shared identities or affiliations have this effect to one degree or another. Two people wearing Denver Broncos ballcaps immediately have a connection. Whether or not they choose to explore it is up to them. Take, for example, a fictionalized version of this relationship between two Masons exemplified in Rudyard Kipling's 1888 short story, "The Man Who Would Be King."

Within the first few pages of the story, the narrator—representing Kipling himself—is approached while in a train car by a man who, after exchanging whiskey and pleasantries, asks him for a favor. The character, later revealed to be a man named Peachey Carnehan, asks Kipling to pass along a message that "he has gone South for the week." The narrator is hesitant to acquiesce however, because it would involve him cutting his trip short by two full days. However, Carnehan's request ends with a peculiar statement:

*“I ask you as a stranger — going to the West, ’ he said with emphasis.
“Where have you come from?” said I.
“From the East,” said he, “and I am hoping that you will give him the message on the Square —
for the sake of my Mother as well as your own.”
Englishmen are not usually softened by appeals to the memory of their mothers, but for certain
reasons, which will be fully apparent, I saw fit to agree.*

The “certain reasons, which will be fully apparent,” was that both characters, as readers come to find out, are Masons. This exchange is what informs the characters themselves that they are dealing with a fellow member of the fraternity. Of course, this is a work of fiction about men becoming kings in a far-off land, however, Kipling was himself an active member of Masonry, and would likely have based this interaction off of ones that had transpired in real life. However, this story also exhibits some of the nefarious acts of the Masonic connection and the ambition to become leaders.²⁷⁹

The two principle characters with whom the narrator interacts, Carnehan and Dravot, both intended to become kings of Kafiristan while at the same time establishing a Masonic presence in the region. Indeed, the creation of a Lodge of Master Masons is no small part of the story’s narrative, and it causes tension between the narrator and Dravot, the former claiming that it would be illegal for the latter to establish a Lodge without a warrant and the other citing the “Afghans” knowledge of Masonry up through only the second degree as a symbol of both their civilization and inferiority to an English Master Mason such as himself. When the time came in the story for the declaration of kingship, the act took place in a Lodge meeting. Dravot, speaking to the assemblage of native Masons, declared, ““By virtue of the authority vested in me by my own right hand and the help of Peachey, I declare myself Grand-Master of all Freemasonry in Kafiristan in this the Mother Lodge o’ the country, and King of Kafiristan equally with

²⁷⁹ Rudyard Kipling, *The Man Who Would be King*, Project Gutenberg,
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/8147/8147-h/8147-h.htm>.

Peachey!’” after which Dravot put the crown on his head. No doubt, this representation of Freemasonry was heavily influenced by the practice of the Masonic hierarchy in England being intimately connected with the royal family. In the United States, the distinction was less clear, but the overlapping roles of many politicians as public servants and Lodge officers is a clear parallel.²⁸⁰

As the fervor of the Anti-Masonic period demonstrated, the negative elements of Masonry were no secret to the broader public. Any organization that shrouds itself in secrecy will inherently garner the wariness of their neighbors, and invite speculation about internal dealings. Members might claim altruism and skeptics will cast accusations of degeneracy. Like most aspects of both life and history, the reality is seldom black and white. Instead, shades of gray predominate. Take, for example, the story of Thomas Freeman’s murder. This thesis frames the ubiquity of the Masons in early Denver as a boon to the community, exemplified through their swift and efficient convening of a people’s court. However, this very same story could be seen from a drastically different perspective.

Masonic loyalty was renowned for centuries. Indeed, as outlined in the introduction, “Freemasonry” eventually came to be used as an adjective to describe something or someone with whom a close associational bond had been formed. Networks of trust and support were calling cards of the order, and major attractants for prospective members. However, the Masonic obligations to assist fellow Masons, paired with the tendency for Masons to occupy positions of trust and power, has repeatedly been seen as a threat to equal treatment. In the Freeman case, the *Rocky Mountain News* was owned by a Mason, and largely controlled the media narrative

²⁸⁰ Kipling, *The Man Who Would be King*. The sequence of presidents at the turn of the nineteenth century might be the best example of this. McKinley, Roosevelt, and Taft were all active members of Freemasonry and, of course, commander-in-chiefs of the United States from March 1897 to March 1913. Later, Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman, both remarkably involved members, occupied the nation’s highest office for two months shy of twenty years (1933–1953).

surrounding the trial. Additionally, the search party was composed of Masons who could have easily colluded to incriminate Waters. Finally, the hearing for the murderer of a Freemason was organized by the Masons themselves; one would be forgiven for assuming there might be a conflict of interest.²⁸¹

Yet, the Freeman murder also serves as an example of the Masons displaying their internal moral systems. In the aftermath of the killing, the fraternity kept their promise to return Waters unharmed to the citizens of Denver and fulfilled their obligation to their deceased brother by recovering and burying his body. Critically, upon convening the people's court, the Masons did not attempt to dominate the jury box, the lawyer's podium, or the judge's bench. This restraint suggests that even when the fraternity's influence was at its height, there was an effort to balance Masonic loyalty with civic responsibility.

Ultimately, while Chivington and Evans failed to extend their Masonic obligations of morality to the Indigenous peoples in the territory, a distinction must be made between the philosophy of an organization and the selective actions of its members. One could not rightly claim that Christianity, for instance, saw Indigenous peoples as inferior or deserving of the heinous deeds Chivington enacted, yet Chivington remained, first and foremost, a Methodist minister. However, like many of his contemporaries, he frequently invoked Christian thought in his justification for violence. As Frederick Douglass aptly noted when likening the American government and the Constitution to nautical instruments: "they are distinct in character as is a

²⁸¹ This issue persists in the modern day. In February of 2026, an English court upheld the British Metropolitan Police Service's (MET) right to require officers to disclose their Masonic memberships. The MET passed this requirement in late 2025 under the justification that the public had "longstanding concerns" about conflicts of interest with officers who were a part of any organization that had "confidential membership, hierarchical structures and requires members to support and protect each other." The United Grand Lodge of England (UGLE) believes this requirement to be a form of profiling and a promotion of "harmful stereotypes" surrounding Masons, essentially allowing the MET to create a blacklist of their Masonic officers. Apparently the English judiciary does not agree with the UGLE's stance. Domic Casciani and Adriana Elgueta, "Legal challenge to Met's Freemasons policy thrown out," British Broadcasting Corporation, February 17, 2026, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly86125nqno>.

ship and compass. The one may point right and the other steer wrong. A chart is one thing, the course of the vessel is another.” While individual Masons often steered a crooked course, the “chart” of the fraternity remained a fixed point for others navigating the social chaos of the frontier.²⁸²

However, the legacy of the order in the West is not defined by these individual failures of character. Beyond the personal ambitions of those who fancied themselves kings in their own realms, and the moral ambiguities of frontier justice, the fraternity functioned as a polyvalent associational anchor for the developing region. The ways in which the Lodge offered legitimacy, portability, and respectability during their roles as place-makers and community creators have already been explored, but an analysis of the relationship between the formal presence of a Masonic Lodge or Grand Lodge in a given town or state illustrates an undeniable pattern: Masonic Lodges encouraged stability, particularly during the territorial periods.

The “Civic Gap” in Colorado’s Territorial and Statehood Periods

Founded on August 2, 1861, the MWGL of Colorado predated the state government by one day shy of 15 years, and it was far from the only instance of a Grand Lodge preceding statehood. Indeed, 60% of all 50 states had Masonic Grand Lodges before they were admitted into the Union. What’s more, of the states that were west of the Mississippi River—a commonly accepted geographic definition of “the West”—over 86% of the continental states had a Grand Lodge before they had a state legislature (fig. 18).²⁸³ This should come as no surprise: since the days of the British Empire, the Masonic hall was often among the first community structures to

²⁸² Frederick Douglass, “The Constitution of the United States: Pro-Slavery or Anti-Slavery?,” March 26, 1860.

²⁸³ The outliers: Louisiana, Nevada, and Arkansas. Grand Lodge formations followed closely on the heels of statehood for these three. Louisiana went 51 days without a Grand Lodge (4/30/1812–6/20/1812), Nevada took only 4 months (10/31/1864–3/3/1865), and Arkansas had to wait a little over two years (6/15/1836–11/1838).

be built in settlements. In her analysis of the relationship between Freemasonry and British Imperialism, Jessica Harland-Jacobs demonstrates that the lodge buildings themselves were often used by the broader population of settlers and imperial administrators “as gathering places for recreational activities, business transactions, and civic meetings.” The lodge buildings would continue to serve similar purposes in the United States. But through the promotion of community creation by the membership and through the physical lodge space, Freemasonry directly contributed to the regional stability that encouraged a territory to apply for statehood, and assured Congress that it was a good idea.²⁸⁴

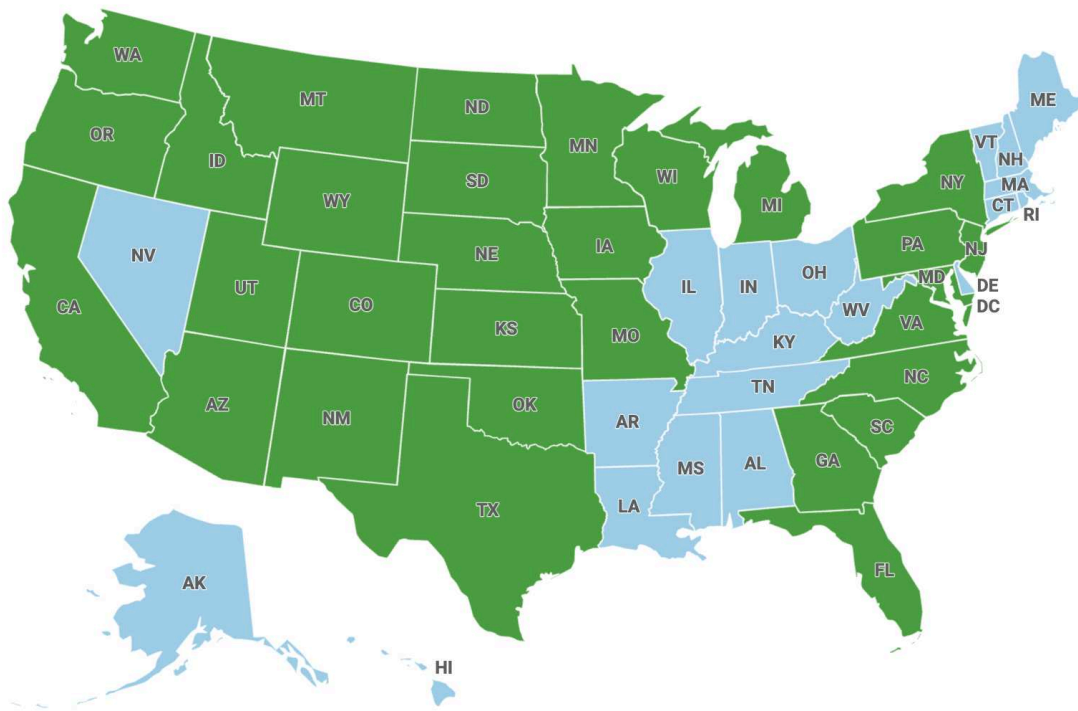


Figure 18: This map illustrates the parts of the nation where the Masonic Grand Lodge predated its state’s admittance into the Union. Green states represent places where the Grand Lodge came first.

²⁸⁴ Quote: Harland-Jacobs, *Builders of Empire*, 53. Information for the analysis on Masonic organization relative to statehood and town incorporations comes from Sean Nelson, “State and Town Relational Incorporations Dataset,” created January 15, 2026.

This phenomenon existed on multiple levels. If Grand Lodge formation and statehood is the macro scale, then individual Lodges and their respective town's incorporation dates are the micro. By collecting the dates of each Lodge's chartering and its respective town's legal incorporation, a temporal calculation can be conducted. This produced what I have termed the "Civic Gap," which involves categorizing Lodges as either "Civic Pioneers" (those chartered prior to town incorporation) or "Followers" (those established within an existing legal framework). For the purpose of accuracy, locations were decided according to their historical relevance, ensuring that early mining camps like Parkville and Nevadaville, modern ghost towns, were placed realistically within the territorial landscape (fig. 19).

Prior to Colorado statehood, twenty-two Lodges had existed in the territory.²⁸⁵ Three belonged to small mining communities that were never incorporated towns, and an additional two were Followers because they came after their town's incorporation. The remaining sixteen Lodges were Civic Pioneers because they came first. This means, during the territorial period from 1861 to 1876, over 76% of all towns with Masonic Lodges in Colorado were Civic Pioneer lodges, chartered prior to the town's legal incorporation, based on the Civic Gap calculation.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ Union Lodge No. 7 is an outlier because it was a direct offshoot of Denver Lodge No. 5, created not out of a need for a Lodge in the city, but for a Lodge of a different ideological strain to avoid in-fighting. For that reason, it is excluded from these calculations. As such, the percentages are based on twenty-one Lodges, not twenty-two.

²⁸⁶ Strictly speaking, a few Lodges such as Golden City No. 1 and Denver No. 5, as they are known now, were chartered after their respective cities. However, these Lodges predated the formation of the Colorado Grand Lodge, having been officially chartered by the Grand Lodge of Kansas. Both Lodges, under Kansas, came before their town's incorporation. In 1861 they were renamed and renumbered, but kept their membership, location, and everything else. It is for this reason I use their original Kansas charter dates to make the calculations.

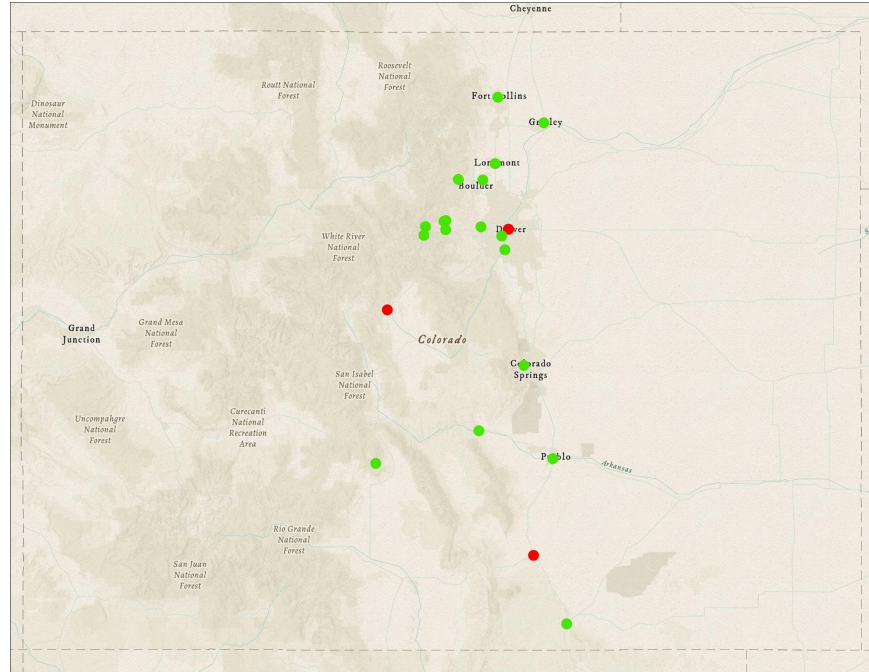


Figure 19: Civic Pioneer Lodges in the territorial period (1861–1876). Green dots represent Lodges that predate their town's incorporation. Red represents those that followed. Created with ArcGIS.

Take, for example, the city of Fort Collins, Colorado. As the name suggests, it began as a military outpost in the early 1860s. However, by 1867, all the troops had been withdrawn. The handful of citizens that had attached themselves to the military camp were then left with a gaping hole in their lives: the source of stability. For five years, they had lived off of Fort Collins, selling goods to the troops, caring for them, and generally surviving in relation to the military presence. The abandonment of the fort demanded that a new force must emerge or the town would end before it even truly began. Of course, the church had a presence in the area, with some of the first organized Methodist congregations meeting in 1867 and a few Catholic missionaries preaching while passing through as early as 1866. Unsurprisingly, the Masons were organizing as well.

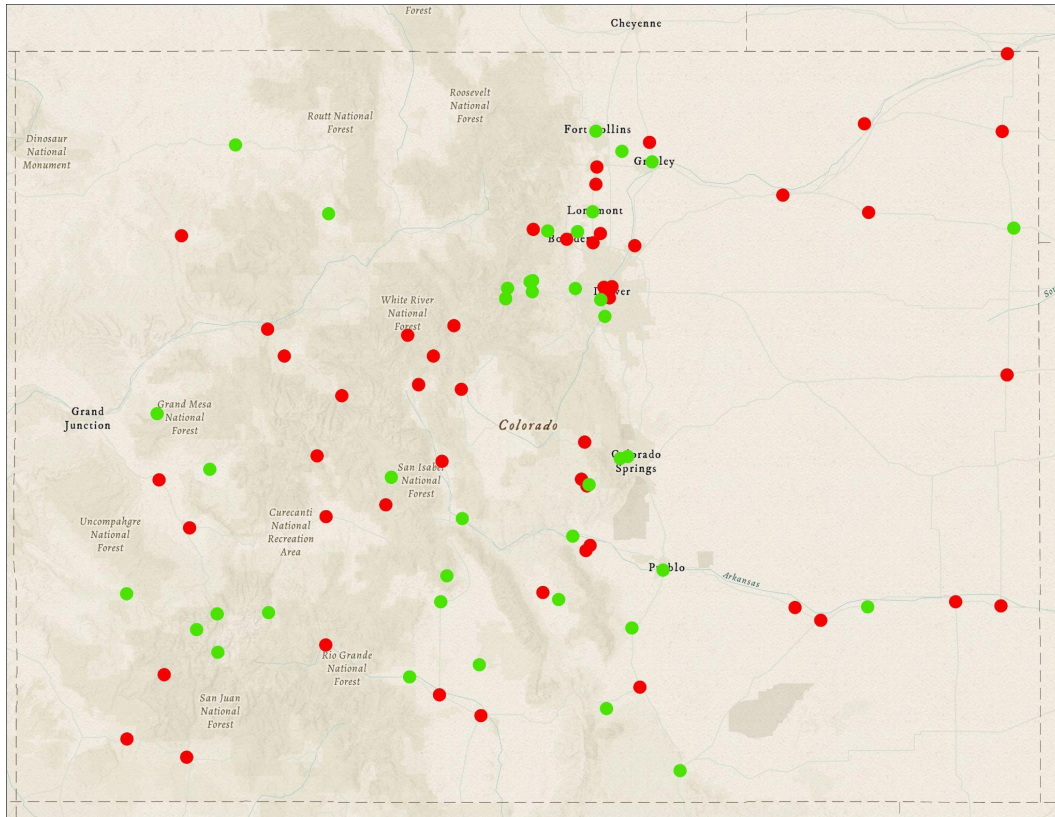


Figure 20: Civic Pioneer Lodges in the statehood period (1876–1900). Green dots represent Lodges that predate their town's incorporation. Red represents those that followed. Created with ArcGIS.

However, after Colorado achieved statehood in August of 1861, the pattern of Civic Pioneer Lodges practically inverts itself. Town incorporations rapidly began to outpace the organization of Masonic Lodges, with sixty of the eighty-three Lodges chartered from 1876 to 1900 classifying as Followers (fig. 20).²⁸⁷ The exact reasons for this are unclear, but it was likely a combination of several factors. First, there were simply fewer Masons relative to the total population of the state (fig. 21). The data indicate that the representative population of Colorado Masons took a nose-dive between 1870 and 1880. In 1870, Masons belonging to Colorado Lodges made up 3.4% of the male population. By 1880, they were only 1.4%. In part, this was certainly due to the increase in families; the era of Colorado being populated almost exclusively

²⁸⁷ The pattern fully flipped in 1880. From 1876 through 1879, nine total Lodges were chartered: six were Civic Pioneers while three were Followers. From 1880 to 1900, the percentage of Follower Lodges was 77% (57 of 74).

by “transient young men,” had ended. While men were still the majority, more women and children meant more non-Masons (fig. 22).²⁸⁸

Male vs Masonic Population by Decade

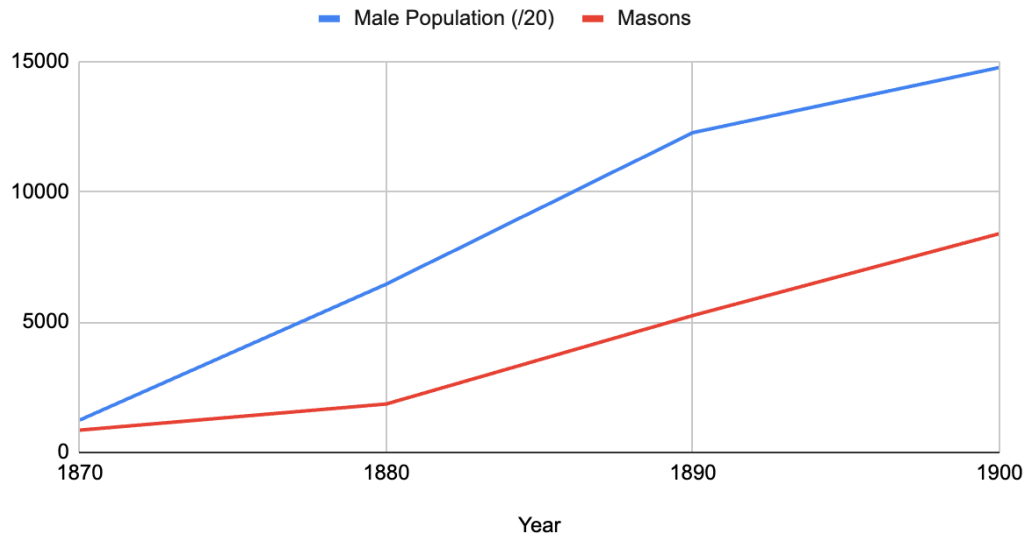


Figure 21: A graph demonstrating the relationship between the male and Masonic populations of Colorado by decade, 1870 to 1900. (Google Sheets)

Similarly, 1870 was the approximate starting point for the Golden Age of Fraternalism which saw a meteoric rise in other fraternal, civic, benevolent, and voluntary orders which would have certainly siphoned off membership from the Masons. Inspired by the variety of available options and sometimes limited by economic, racial, or geographical considerations, men would seek out membership in the order best suited for their station. Mark Tabbert asserts that “as they diversified, fraternities became associated with the social class of its members and were ranked accordingly.” Mutual benefit and immigrant fraternities, such as the Ancient Order of United Workmen, housed the least affluent members of society. On the other hand, “lower middle classes gravitated to groups that were focused on ritual, such as the Knights of Pythias, while the Odd Fellows were composed of ‘the great middle, industrial classes.’” Freemasonry rested at the

²⁸⁸ In 1890, the representation of Masons rose to 2.1%, and in 1900 it hit 2.8%. Gender and population visuals were created from Sean Nelson, “Gender and Population Data,” created January 16, 2026. The data was collected from the federal census.

top of this hierarchy, surpassed only by its Scottish Rite and York Rite Knights Templar appendant bodies. However, if Tabbert’s argument that, “by 1900, being a Mason was almost a prerequisite for middle-class respectability,” is true, then by 1900 only 2.8% of men in Colorado had “middle-class respectability.”²⁸⁹

Gender Composition of Colorado by Decade

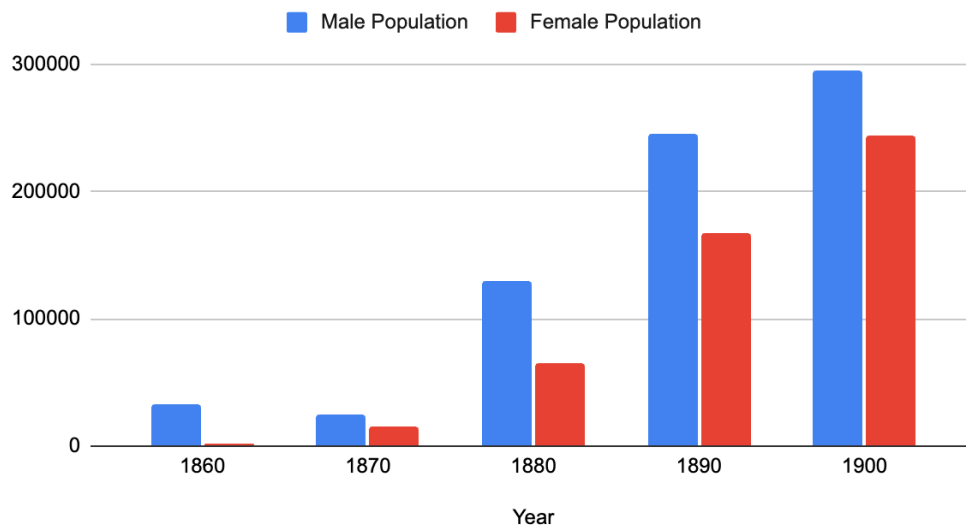


Figure 22: A bar chart showing the gender composition of Colorado by decade from 1860 to 1900. (Google Sheets)

By the close of the nineteenth century, the Masonic landscape in Colorado had undergone a radical transformation from its fragmented territorial beginnings into a sophisticated and ubiquitous social network. What began in 1861 with a small collection of sixty-two men seeking fraternal ties in the “Pike’s Peak Region” had, by 1900, evolved into a sophisticated web of 105 Lodges and nearly 9,000 members. The “Civic Gap” analysis reveals that this expansion was foundational rather than reactionary; in the territorial period, 76% of Lodges acted as “Civic Pioneers,” meaning they were chartered prior to the legal incorporation of the towns they served. The MWGL of Colorado, established nearly fifteen years before Colorado statehood, functioned as something resembling a rehearsal for statehood. By organizing a sovereign, local authority

²⁸⁹ Tabbert, *American Freemasons*, 122.

before a state legislature existed, the fraternity provided a predictable administrative framework that encouraged regional stability. This phenomenon was not unique to Colorado, as the vast majority of western states established a Grand Lodge before their respective state legislatures.

This stabilizing influence was made possible through the interconnected mechanisms of legitimacy, portability, and respectability. Through portability, the unchanging nature of Masonic ritual provided men, young and old, with a stable mental space and a “home away from home” as they navigated the volatile reality of the western frontier. The fraternity further provided legitimacy to fledgling settlements, where public displays—such as the 1860 Denver Fourth of July parade—helped dispel doubts regarding the “civilization” of towns only a few years old. In terms of respectability, the Lodge acted as a reputational filter that mitigated the principal-agent problem in business transactions. Because a Mason’s word was his bond, at least in theory, and expulsion carried severe social and commercial risks, the fraternity sought to guarantee the trustworthiness of its members in an era before modern legal contracts. By emphasizing internal character over the aggressive self-made man concept of the market economy, Masonry provided a space for men to negotiate the tensions of nineteenth-century masculinity while maintaining social order.

However, as Colorado transitioned from a territory to a state after 1876, the role of the fraternity underwent a significant inversion. The rise of the Golden Age of Fraternalism saw a proliferation of other voluntary orders, which likely attracted potential members away from Masonry, and diversified the social landscape. Within this new hierarchy, Freemasonry remained at the apex, serving as a prerequisite for middle-class respectability even as it moved from *creating* civic order to *validating* it. As the Masonic refrain goes: “*harmony being the strength and support of all institutions, especially this of ours,*” so even when faced with internal

ideological strain, such as the Civil War-era schism between Denver Lodge No. 5 and the Union-sympathetic Union Lodge No. 7, the fraternity managed to mediate conflict by providing environments for different ideologies. This capacity to manufacture social cohesion amidst deep fragmentation allowed the fraternity to remain a source of stability throughout the closing decades of the century.

The transition of the Lodge from a civic pioneer to a pillar of established respectability is but one element in the foundational role it played framing Colorado's social architecture. This legacy is etched not merely in nineteenth-century membership rolls, but in the enduring permanence of the communities it stabilized during the frontier's most volatile years.

Conclusion

A vote had been cast. 200 members of the Knights Templar, the preeminent order of the York Rite branch of Freemasonry, waited eagerly for the results. These men, only a fraction of the tens of thousands that had descended upon Washington D. C. for several days in October of 1889, represented the electoral body whose job it was to decide on the future location of the next Triennial Conclave. Held every three years, the Templar's Triennial Conclaves had paralleled the order's methodical growth in both numbers and prestige, with the 24th such conclave, held in DC, being attended by the president of the United States himself, Benjamin Harrison. One round of balloting had already been held regarding the site of the 25th Triennial Conclave, having narrowed the eligible host cities to Louisville and Denver. Louisville, at that time the twentieth largest city in the nation and a respected southern town, was the safe bet to play host for the 1892 meeting. However, the western members of the voting body argued that the 25th anniversary of an event is the "silver anniversary," and no state in the union had greater connections to silver than Colorado.²⁹⁰

In the final moments leading up to the vote, Sir Knight—as Templars called themselves—John C. Baird, the representative of Wyoming, stood and proclaimed: "Nature herself designed Colorado for a Templar shrine." The crowd listened. "If you meet in Denver," he argued, "you will marshall your banners almost under the shadow of that grand and sacred old mountain over which 'the morning stars sang together at the dawn of earth's creation.'" Those present from the West likely knew of what mountain Baird spoke, but for the others present, he continued, "High on its beetling crest, and facing to the east, the chief symbol of our order

²⁹⁰ "Denver is Selected: The Knights Templar Decide to Hold Their Next Triennial Conclave in the Queen City," *Rocky Mountain News*, October 11, 1889. This decision, alongside the announcement of the newly elected Grand Officers for the Knights Templar was front-page, center-column news.

glistens with the purest crystals of everlasting snow. Nowhere does nature more sweetly reflect to heaven the faith of earth than from these resplendent gems that adorn the passion cross on that grandest of all Templar shrines, the Mount of the Holy Cross.” It was one thing to argue a continuity of mineral abundance and the stereotypical gift for an anniversary should be the motivation behind the selection of Denver; to claim that Colorado was divinely prepared for such an event was another matter entirely. Whether Baird’s eloquence moved the needle is unknown. Regardless, Denver won the vote, 104 to 96.²⁹¹

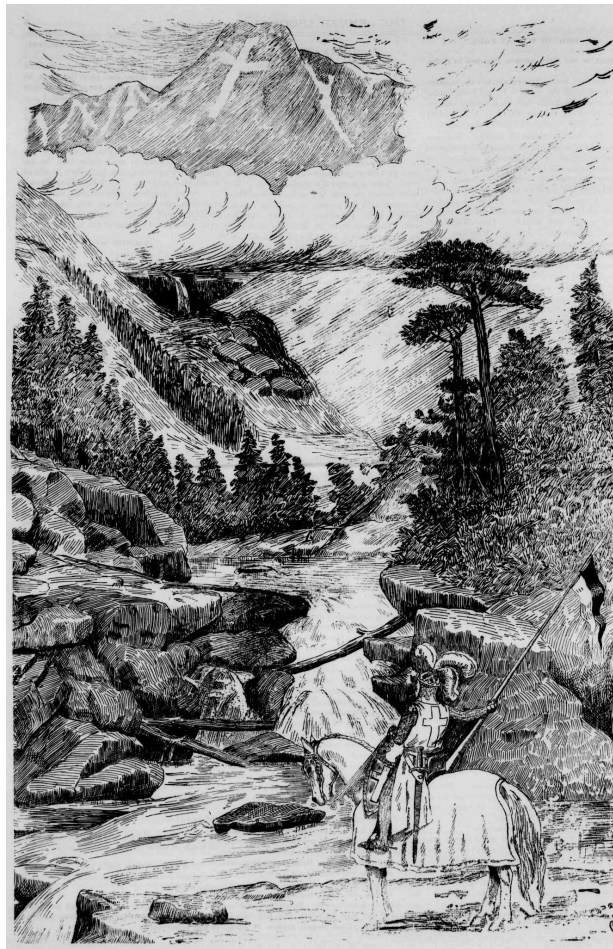


Figure 23: An artistic interpretation of a medieval Templar Knight standing in front of the Mount of the Holy Cross in Eagle County, Colorado. The drawing appears on page 6 of *The Denver Argonaut*, August 27, 1892.

²⁹¹ “In Souvenir: Of the Knights Templar Twenty-Fifth Triennial Conclave, August 9, 1892,” *Denver Argonaut*, August 27, 1892. The results of the vote are found in “Denver is Selected,” *Rocky Mountain News*, October 11, 1889.

Now that “the Queen City” had won the right to host the conclave, it had to live up to expectations. Preparations began almost as soon as the knights returned from DC in 1889. Numerous Masonic committees were formed, tasked with various goals spanning from the minor—securing ice for the visitors, finding musical accompaniment—to the monumental—raising funds, planning the parade route, overseeing massive construction projects, and, of course, housing, entertainment, and transportation. The latter was the charge of the general reception committee which was composed of several hundred members of the various Colorado commandaries. Their task was perhaps the most daunting. The 1890 census reflected the total population of Denver as not quite 107,000 people, so when initial estimates for visitors sat at around 75,000, folks were understandably skeptical of the city’s ability to host such a crowd. As the date of the conclave approached, these estimates grew larger, with some publications suggesting 185,000 people might descend upon Denver in mid-August.²⁹²

To prepare for the possibility of such a number, the committee arranged for the accommodation of 200,000 people. Practically every hotel and restaurant in Denver was booked for the event, with numerous hotel owners making exceptions to their typical operating procedures keeping dining rooms open all day, rotating between social spaces so one might be cleaned while the other is occupied, and providing increased amounts of refreshments.²⁹³ Many hotels in the surrounding cities were similarly booked, thousands of private home owners rented

²⁹² “60,000 Knights of the various parts of the country will be here, together with 125,000 visitors of the Masonic order.” “Cross and Crown: The Great Silver Conclave of Knights Templar to be Held in Denver,” *The Herald Democrat*, July 17, 1892. By June of 1892, two months in advance, 53,000 people had already reserved rooms: “Cost of the Conclave,” *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 1 no. 4 (Denver: June, 1892), 1.

²⁹³ Reports of hotels abound, but one of the best is from “Loaves and Fishes,” *Rocky Mountain News*, July 4, 1892. This article reported, “Tons of Fresh Meats and Game in Cold Storage and Supplies Sufficient for 100,000 Within Call.” The content of the subsequent article in the same paper, “Restaurant Capacities,” *Rocky Mountain News*, July 4, 1892, is rather self-explanatory.

out rooms to visitors, and numerous sleeping cars were placed about the city.²⁹⁴ Additionally, a new Masonic appendant body composed of the wives of the Denver Templars named the Some Of Our Business society (S.O.O.B.) was formed in 1890 with the stated purpose of assisting with the planning and performance of the upcoming Conclave. This order would later be renamed the Social Order of the Beauceant in 1913.

Of course, such an event was not going to be a cheap affair. The committee on finance estimated that it would cost at least \$100,000 to build the structures, hire entertainment and labor, and host the tens of thousands of visitors. They set about raising these funds in a variety of ways. First, and most significantly, they appealed to the economic strength and vested interest of the local Masonic orders. While not all Masons were also members of the York Rite, all members of the York Rite were Masons, and so certain sympathies could be called upon to help fund the order. By June, the committee had reported that they expected \$40,000 to \$50,000 to be contributed by various Masonic bodies throughout the state. The leading contributor was Colorado Commandery No. 1, Denver's permanent Templar group. They pledged \$25,000. It should be noted that the men of the Knights Templar order were generally among the wealthiest members of Masonry. In addition to their Blue Lodge dues, they had to pay the petition fees for several additional degrees and keep up their dues for two additional York Rite groups, and only then could they petition for membership in the Templars. The several levels of dues and fees created a financial barrier for many.²⁹⁵

However, the finance committee did not have a regular system of raising money. When asked how they were procuring their funds, they replied, "some of the money comes from private

²⁹⁴ "Sir Knights all AGOG," *Herald Democrat*, April 15, 1892. For early estimates of the numbers that would be arriving and for other preparations made, see: "Cross and Crown: The Great Silver Conclave of Knights Templar to be Held in Denver," *The Herald Democrat*, July 17, 1892.

²⁹⁵ "Cost of the Conclave," *Square and Compass*, 1.

subscriptions, some is raised by commanderies by individual donations from its members, while other commanderies appropriate what they think proper from their treasuries.” Indeed, even the Citizens’ Committee of Denver mobilized to help raise capital for the conclave. This proved to be an exceptionally worthwhile effort, as \$41,687.60 was collected from “circulars and personal solicitation.” In addition to private citizens, local governments began to chip in. The city of Denver donated \$10,000 to the coffers, and Arapahoe County gave \$5,000. The commercial and media sectors also had an interest in bringing the conclave to Colorado, and an additional \$1,357 was collected from various subscription fees submitted by hotels, newspapers, and businesses. The extensive mobilization of financial resources emphatically underscores that Coloradans across private and public sectors strongly desired the visiting Templars to not only enjoy their time in the state but to also spend their money liberally, indicating a clear, unified effort to maximize the economic benefit of the conclave.²⁹⁶

From the moment Denver had been selected to host the 25th Conclave, the opportunity to advance the interests of Colorado were considered. On his visit to Denver in December of 1890, F. B. Hill, the chairman of the national triennial committee, announced that “the conclave in Colorado...will bring 75,000 visitors into the state, the benefits of which will be beyond calculation.” Special trains were organized to ferry visitors across the state, with Central City, Colorado Springs, Pueblo, Canon City, Leadville, Aspen, Greeley, Fort Collins, Boulder, Longmont, Ouray, Montrose, and Glenwood Springs all scheduled for special visits with formal receptions. A publication from a Glenwood Springs based newspaper reflects local sentiments towards the conclave as the article announced. The article regards the Templars as being “composed of the wealthiest as well as the most intelligent men in the United States,” who had a

²⁹⁶ “Cost of the Conclave,” *Square and Compass*, 1. “Citizens’ Subscriptions,” *Rocky Mountain News*, August 14, 1892.

reputation for seeking investment opportunities during past conclaves. The article continues, “Every citizen of this place man, woman and child should constitute themselves a reception committee to make it their special duty to see that [the Templars] leave our city with the knowledge that they have visited the greatest and most wonderful Sanitarium and pleasure resort in the known World.” The conclave’s use extended well past the Masonic world, and it was rapidly conceived as an opportunity for Colorado’s burgeoning communities to market themselves to an influential audience of potential investors.²⁹⁷

Similarly, the Masons of Georgetown produced thousands of photographs depicting the town. On the back was printed a detailed report of the economic viability of the area, the social connectivity of the population, and the natural beauty. It lauded the town’s infrastructure, including eleven miles of sewer lines, electricity, and gas. The fire department and local Masonic Lodges are also detailed. Critically, the informational blurb on the back of each photo asserted that “[Georgetown’s] growth and prosperity [were] convincing proof of the growth and stability of [the mining] industry.” Perhaps in a more subtle manner than Glenwood, Georgetown was also seeking investors, and the Conclave was the perfect opportunity to do so.²⁹⁸

The connection between the triennial and the economic ambition of the state was not merely limited to local matters. Indeed, the *Square and Compass* reported that “the general desire of all Colorado is that the visiting Knights may gain an accurate idea of the wonderful

²⁹⁷ Hill quote: “The Knights Templar: Preparations for the Triennial Conclave to be Held in 1892,” *The Colorado Daily Chieftain*, December 8, 1890. The receptions of the majority of the listed locations are alluded to in “The Coming Conclave,” *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 1, no. 5 (Denver: July, 1892), 18. The Glenwood Springs article has several gems, and is an excellent representation of the ways in which individual cities saw the conclave as an opportunity to promote themselves to a national audience. See, “Glenwood’s Opportunity,” *The Avalanche*, July 14, 1892.

²⁹⁸ “A Conclave Souvenir,” *The Georgetown Courier*, July 30, 1892. Pictures were not the only souvenir items produced for the conclave. 40,000 commemorative pins were also ordered from the Henry Bohm Company. The *Square and Compass* reported that “The design for the souvenir sword badge... is to be an exact reproduction of the regulation Knight Templar sword, and will be made of solid Colorado silver.” “Cost of the Conclave,” *Square and Compass*, 1.

scenic and material resources of the state.” In so doing, many hoped to dispel the notion that Colorado was only a mining state. The “rich agricultural and horticultural products, which far exceed [the mineral output of the state] in value,” could be placed on full display, alongside other natural features like the hot springs. The Denver Chamber of Commerce echoed this sentiment, and had, months in advance, formed a committee to make arrangements for a “Colorado exhibit” during the triennial. This was motivated in part by the presence of other such exhibits promoting neighboring states in the West, and the chairman believed it “was absolutely necessary that Colorado compete within her own borders.”²⁹⁹

The committee proceeded to correspond with county commissioners, requesting that they appoint one representative commissioner for each county to assist in the planning of the exhibit. In order to fund such a lavish display of the state, the Chamber of Commerce appointed a committee of five to “circulate a petition among the heaviest tax payers of the county, asking the commissioners to appropriate the sum of \$15,000.” The committee was further enabled, and encouraged, to “call upon the various business organizations of [Denver] asking for the appointment of committees to perform such work as may be recommended by the executive committee.” Evidently, there was a conclave-concerned committee craze. \$15,000 at this time would be roughly equivalent to half a million dollars today, and as previously discussed, investment shows priority. These actions reveal the intense motivations that the businessmen of Denver had in regards to promoting the city and the state to visitors.³⁰⁰

Denver began preparing itself for the conclave far in advance, but construction began in June. By April, the various Masonic committees had secured the assurances of the various hotels, restaurants, and railroads. Every band in the state had been booked so that arriving

²⁹⁹ First quote: “The Coming Conclave,” *Square and Compass*, 18. For the statement of the chairman, see: “Denver Chamber of Commerce,” *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 1, no. 2 (Denver: April, 1892), 2.

³⁰⁰ “Denver Chamber of Commerce,” 2–3.

commanderies—the Templar version of a Lodge—could be escorted to their accommodations with musical accompaniment. Notably, a key attractant of the 25th Triennial was the increased proliferation of electricity. Denver, in order to “wow” its visitors, commissioned several massive arches to be built, and every street to be lit with electric lighting. On July 17th, the *Herald Democrat* reported that “The reception arch at the depot is now finished and is a magnificent piece of work. It contains pictures of the pilgrims and emblems of the Masonic order, worked out in hundreds of colored incandescent lights.” However, this was not the only such structure, and “the work on the triumphal arch at the corner of the temple” was hailed as “a grand piece of architecture.” The focal point of the upcoming parade, this arch “reach[ed] from curb to curb on all four corners, [was] sixty feet in height, [and] illuminated with 2,000 electric lights.” The article described the streets of Denver as “a vast blaze of light,” illuminating the public buildings decorated in the colored banners of the Templars—black, scarlet, white, and yellow.³⁰¹

The quantity and arrangement of these lights were, without question, a striking sight to visitors and residents alike. As was frequently the case during business negotiations between the Templar committees and local businesses, a special contract was reached with the Denver Consolidated Electric Company which provided a discounted rate. In fact, implementation of the lighting on the arches and surrounding parts of town was so striking that the artists were “already in demand for interior decorations [in] Chicago for the world’s fair” that would be held the following year. Indeed, the Denver Triennial Conclave ultimately became the proving ground for the lighting and logistics that would be implemented the following year at the famous 1893

³⁰¹ The music committee was unsure exactly how many bands would be in attendance as “a large number of commanderies” were going to bring their own musicians with them. The reported, however, that “the entire available local music ha[d] already been secured” by April, 1892. The details of the procurement of music can be found in “Triennial Talk,” *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 1, no. 2 (Denver: April, 1892), 2. See also: “What the Reception Committee is Doing,” *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 1, no. 5 (Denver: July, 1892), 53. The arch descriptions are from “Cross and Crown: The Great Silver Conclave of Knights Templar to be Held in Denver,” *The Herald Democrat*, July 17, 1892.

Chicago World's Fair. Chief among the lessons learned was how to transport tens of thousands of people in only a matter of days. To this, of course, the Masons turned towards the railroads.³⁰²

The scale of this logistical undertaking was unprecedented, with railroad officials estimating an influx of over 100,000 people during the Conclave. In a report sent to the *Square and Compass*, it was announced that accommodating such a surge in visitors meant “the entire suspension of freight traffic on the lines between Denver and the Missouri River,” because “the whole available motive power [was] needed for passenger trains.” This massive mobilization was facilitated by a series of coordinated agreements across several regional bodies, including the Western, Trans-Missouri, and Trans-Continental Passenger Associations. These organizations established a uniform “one fare” rate for round trips from major hubs like Chicago—only \$12—St. Louis, and St. Paul, as well as from distant points along the Pacific Coast, Idaho, and Montana. The scale at which this migration was estimated to take place was reflected in the frequency of trains scheduled to leave Chicago headed for Denver: one every thirty minutes.³⁰³

Within Colorado itself, the local Passenger Association offered deep discounts and “stop-over privileges” to ensure the visiting Templars could explore the state's natural wonders. Excursion tickets to destinations within 100 miles of Denver, such as Colorado Springs and Manitou, were sold at less than half fare, often for as little as \$2.00. Even the musical atmosphere of the event was subsidized by the rails; the Transportation Committee arranged for

³⁰² A *Rocky Mountain News* article proclaimed, “The windy city has gained valuable pointers from the twenty-fifth conclave, and will attempt many handsome figures in electrical illumination.” For this quote, and the one from the text, see: “World's Fair Decorations,” *Rocky Mountain News*, August 14, 1892.

³⁰³ The announcement regarding suspension of freight traffic is found in, “Triennial Talk,” *Square and Compass*, 2. The details of the various railroad associations announcing flat rates are from “The Twenty-fifth Triennial Conclave,” *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 1, no. 3 (Denver: May, 1892), 6. The specific rate of \$12 from Chicago is found in “Conclave of Knights Templar,” *Littleton Republican*, August 13, 1892. For details relating to the locations in Idaho, Montana, and the Pacific Coast, see “Conclave Circulate No. 3,” *Square and Compass: A Journal of Masonry* 1, no. 4 (Denver: June, 1892), 6. Idaho and Montana's rates were \$30, except for Helena which was \$35.85. The report of trains leaving Chicago every thirty minutes is found in “Cross and Crown: The Great Silver Conclave of Knights Templar to be Held in Denver,” *The Herald Democrat*, July 17, 1892.

brass bands of ten or more in uniform to be carried at one-fourth the regular fare. This partnership was a sophisticated symbiosis between fraternal idealism and the quintessential representation of industrial might in the nineteenth century. By securing these sweeping concessions, the Masonic committees turned the regional rail network into a high-capacity transit system dedicated to a single cultural event. For the railroads, the Conclave served as a “stress test” for passenger logistics, proving they could suspend the flow of commerce (freight) in favor of human movement without collapsing the infrastructure.³⁰⁴ The inclusion of discounted rates for brass bands and deeply subsidized “pilgrimages” to various points throughout the state demonstrated a shared understanding that the journey itself was part of the spectacle. The alignment of Masonic organizational discipline and railroad efficiency not only moved over 100,000 people safely through the Rockies but also solidified Denver’s reputation as a city capable of hosting the world.³⁰⁵

Finally, after years of planning, preparation, and suspense, August arrived and the deluge of visitors descended upon Denver. On a typical day in Denver, 101 trains came and went. From the evening of August 4th to the morning of the 9th, an additional 474 trains arrived, “and the regular trains all had from two to five extra coaches.” Knowing that the train stations would be the central choke-point for visitors, and being desperate to make a good impression, the train depot hired extra hands, increasing their staff from seventy to 190. Twenty-nine men were employed in the baggage room, where over 300,000 pieces of baggage were processed in a six-day span. 105,000 people arrived via train, where they were welcomed by the Templar’s Reception Committee. An additional 40,000 visitors arrived from various points in Colorado,

³⁰⁴ While the conclave was a proving ground, the Chicago World’s Fair dwarfed the number of people being transported. Roughly 105,000 people arrived in Denver by train over the course of several days in 1892 whereas approximately that same number arrived *each day* during the 180 day run of the World’s Fair. “From the Big Fair,” *Rocky Mountain News*, November 26, 1892.

³⁰⁵ For details pertaining to excursion tickets, see: “The Twenty-fifth Triennial Conclave,” *Square and Compass*, 6.

desiring to see the Denver based festivities. Visiting commanderies were hastily ferried to their reserved accommodations, frequently accompanied by music.³⁰⁶

The main event of the conclave was the parade in which the 320 commanderies would, in full military-adjacent garb, march down the streets of Denver. As if to support Baird's fortuitous comment about the heavens themselves deeming Colorado the appropriate location for the triennial, a light rainstorm occurred the night before the parade. The rains washed clean the streets, suppressed the dust, and brought a cool breeze. The following morning, on August 9th, over 100,000 spectators lined the sidewalks, watched from windows, and stood on rooftops to observe the procession. 8,000 Templar Knights donned their swords, ostrich-plumed hats, and black wool coats and marched on foot or on horseback for blocks. Dozens of bands, the local firemen, and other organizations followed behind them, swelling the numbers further. One newspaper article reported that it took the procession nearly two and a half hours to move past any given point in the line. Unfortunately, a mishap by a Chicago commandery resulted in the disruption of the marching order, and the conclusion of the parade fell rather flat.³⁰⁷ Yet the spirits of the visitors and knights were not dulled, and numerous receptions were held afterwards by practically every state's respective commanderies.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ "Estimated Arrivals: Statistics Show 105,000 People and 300,000 Pieces of Baggage," *Rocky Mountain News*, August 12, 1892. "How Many Came: 105,000 people, 300,000 Trunks," *The Denver Argonaut*, August 27, 1892.

³⁰⁷ For the report on the total number of commanderies, as well as their marching order, see "In Souvenir: Of the Knights Templar Twenty-Fifth Triennial Conclave, August 9, 1892," *Denver Argonaut*, August 27, 1892. The count of 8,000 marching knights, as well as the report on the length of time they took to march, was published in "Conclave of Knights Templar," *Littleton Republican*, August 13, 1892. See also "Firemen in Parade," *Rocky Mountain News*, August 12, 1892.

³⁰⁸ A handful of the details concerning receptions held were reported in the *Rocky Mountain News*: The Alabama Grand Commandery held a reception from 8:00–12:00am at the American House with 700 attendees; Minnesotans at the Albert from 2:00-12:00; Chicago bodies at the Windsor Chevalier Bayard; Kentucky at their headquarters (unspecified) with 5,000 visitors from 5:00–9:00pm; Missouri had 5,000-6,000 guests in the People's Bank building; Utah and Wyoming commanderies had a reception on the corner of Welton and 18th Street from early in the evening until after midnight. They held an open house all day the following day. "Receptions," *Rocky Mountain News*, August 12, 1892. Additionally, I feel compelled to include a mention of there being an elephant in Denver at the time, according to the *Denver Argonaut*. "In Souvenir: Of the Knights Templar Twenty-Fifth Triennial Conclave, August 9, 1892," *Denver Argonaut*, August 27, 1892.

For the majority of visitors, the 25th Triennial Conclave was their first time visiting Colorado. For most, the Masonic festivities were the primary attraction. For others, the opportunity to explore the Colorado countryside was very appealing, and some groups spent weeks traveling around the state. And for a certain group, the conclave was an excuse to visit a rapidly growing region in the West and scout out the opportunities for investment. One such man was F. R. Wardle, a “prominent New York investment capitalist,” who was interviewed by the *Rocky Mountain News* regarding his thoughts on the investment potential of Denver. He replied that “a number of my wealthy New York friends have asked me to look up good investment opportunities for them, and since arriving I have written to several of them to quote me as authority in advising them to put their money into Denver realty as the most profitable and safe investment of which I know.” For Wardle, the “magnificent business blocks” and “palatial residences” were merely symptoms of a deeper cause: the character of the citizenry. He noted that these structures “betoken the spirit of courage and confidence which makes up the mental fiber of the leading men of Denver.” Of course, many of the “leading men” of Denver were Masons who were charged with building upright characters as the foundation of a stable society. Wardle’s self-asserted investment philosophy was explicitly human-centric, stating that while Denver possessed “great natural advantages,” he intended to “pay more attention to the men who are backing the enterprises than to its geographical location.”³⁰⁹

This focus on the representative men of a city meant that having the Masonic bodies—organizations predicated on the cultivation of morality and civic duty—acting as the primary hosts for the conclave created a powerful atmospheric endorsement for Colorado. Wardle admitted that when “casting up [his] calculations regarding the change for making a

³⁰⁹ “Could Not Believe It: A New York Man Confesses His Ignorance of Denver,” *Rocky Mountain News*, August 12, 1892.

permanent and profitable investment,” he prioritized the study of a city’s leadership over its physical assets. By presenting a front of disciplined, plumed, and organized Knights Templar, Denver signaled to the capital markets of the East that its social fiber was as strong as stone.³¹⁰

Denver, the Queen City, who played host to the preeminent appendent body of the Masonic Order at the veritable height of their power, experienced a great deal of benefit from the conclave. The economic ripple effects of these visitors and potential investors were immediately felt by the local business community, which saw a nearly universal surge in commercial activity. Retailers like Appel & Co. reported that trade by the night of the 11th had already matched the entire total for the same month the previous year, while Skinner Bros. & Wright enjoyed a 70 percent increase in sales. Large department stores such as Daniels & Fisher experienced a doubling of their usual business, predicting an overall 60 percent increase for the entire month of August. The jewelry sector was particularly successful; H. Bohm recorded taking in \$15,000 more than the prior year, with weekly sales skyrocketing 500 percent above the week preceding the event. Even service and luxury staples like the Palace Drug Store reported a 300 percent gain, driven by an “enormous” trade at the soda fountain.³¹¹ Across the city, reports from merchants showed gains ranging from 30 to over 100 percent, confirming local merchant W. H. Lawrence’s sentiment that the event was a “splendid thing for Denver.”³¹²

The departure of the tens of thousands of Knights was as orderly and methodical as their arrival, a final testament to the rigid organizational discipline that the order had demonstrated

³¹⁰ “Could Not Believe It: A New York Man Confesses His Ignorance of Denver,” *Rocky Mountain News*, August 12, 1892.

³¹¹ If I have one vice in this world, it is my love for Coca-Cola. Had I been present at the 1892 conclave, rest assured that the Palace Drug Store’s profits from the soda fountain would have been inflated even more.

³¹² “Business Increased: Reports of Merchants Upon the Orders of Conclave Visitors,” *Rocky Mountain News*, August 14, 1892. As an example of how highly the Masonic Orders were thought of in this time, the *Herald Democrat* stated, “no one now believes the stupid slander that they are engaged in any definite conspiracy against the state, religion or social order. The mere conception of the order implies cosmopolitan brotherhood.” “Cross and Crown: The Great Silver Conclave of Knights Templar to be Held in Denver,” *The Herald Democrat*, July 17, 1892.

throughout the conclave. As the special trains pulled away from the depot, they carried with them a new national narrative: that Denver was no longer a rugged camp of the frontier, but a beacon of the West, capable of hosting the most elite organizations in the world. The Masons had not merely held a meeting; they had performed a civic transformation. Through their partnership with the railroads, the mobilization of local capital, and the literally brilliant application of new technology, the Templars had provided Colorado with a fleeting but magnificent golden age. As the *Denver Argonaut* eloquently asserted, “the whole nation got acquainted during the conclave.” The triennial served as the state’s most successful advertisement, proving that Denver possessed the institutions and individuals needed to command industrial power while maintaining the moral and cultural standards of a refined society.³¹³

Unfortunately, fate has a twisted sense of humor. Colorado was chosen as the host state for the conclave in no small part because of the connection between the “silver anniversary” and the proliferation of remarkably productive silver mines in the region. Yet even as the *Rocky Mountain News* reported on the splendors and successes of the triennial, an unassuming column read: “Silver went down one cent an ounce today.” It warned that, “should the coinage of silver stop in India and the gold standard be adopted, the worst will have come.” The paper predicted that the fall of silver would “press the life” out of Colorado’s mines. Once again, the *Rocky Mountain News* proved prophetic, as the increase in silver production meant to meet the demands of the 1890 Sherman Silver Purchase Act likely caused the worst economic crisis the nation had seen up to that point: the Panic of 1893.³¹⁴

³¹³ “In Souvenir: Of the Knights Templar Twenty-Fifth Triennial Conclave, August 9, 1892,” *Denver Argonaut*, August 27, 1892.

³¹⁴ For the article about the fall of silver in India, see “It Falls with a Crash,” *Rocky Mountain News*, August 12, 1892.

The very metal that had served as the lyrical justification for the “silver anniversary” invitation to the Rockies—became the catalyst for the state’s sudden ruin. Within months of the Knights’ departure, the “vast blaze of light” that had illuminated Denver’s triumphal arches was metaphorically dimmed by the closing of banks and the shuttering of mines. The investment capital Wardle had so confidently promised evaporated as the constitutions of Denver’s leading men were tested by a depression that spared neither Mason nor merchant. In historical retrospect, the 1892 Conclave was the final, grand spectacle of Colorado’s Gilded Age, a far cry from the humble beginnings of that first meeting on the mountainside. It was a luminous, ostrich-plumed peak that immediately preceded a precipitous and painful fall.

What Masonry Means in the Modern Day

In spite of the Panic of 1893, both Colorado and Freemasonry have survived. Indeed, there is no such thing as a “boom” without a recession and vice versa. However, while Colorado’s future is guaranteed, the prospects facing Masonry are less concrete. Masonic membership across the nation peaked in the wake of World War II with millions of men joining Lodges in search of the same fraternal connections they felt with their compatriots during the war. Since then, membership numbers have done nothing but steadily decline and the average age of the remaining constituents has increased. In more ways than one, Masonry is dying. This has, understandably, caused alarm amongst many Masons, and conversations abound regarding what might be done to preserve the oldest—and still largest—fraternal organization in the world.

I agree that there should be action taken, but I would remind my fellow Masons that historical context is important. This is not the first time that membership has dropped dramatically, nor do I think it will be the last. Recall the devastation that the Anti-Masonic

Period wrought on the order: New York alone saw a decline of 20,000 Masons to only a few hundred in a matter of a few years. Instead, I would argue that the membership spike as a result of World War II was the exception, and the decline in membership we are currently experiencing is largely due to its position relative to the all-time high in membership. That is not to say, however, that there are not very serious challenges facing Masonry in the twenty-first century.

Gone are the days of the conclaves. Parades of tens of thousands of uniformed knights marching under massive illuminated arches spanning across the streets of a state capital, with bands playing and women waving handkerchiefs from windows, will never be seen again. But it has never been the million-dollar temples or massive parades that made the Masons important. It was the order's role in the moral and philosophical development of its membership and its involvement in the betterment of the local community that produced the greatest value. In the nineteenth century, the Lodge served as a polyvalent associational anchor that mitigated the extreme isolation and instability faced by the "transient young men" of the frontier, providing them with a surrogate family and a sanctuary for restrained masculinity. Today, the physical frontier has been replaced by a digital one, but the institutional vacuum remains. Disconnected from established communities and traditional safety nets, today's society is quietly desperate for the very stability that the Masonic Lodge once brought to the American West. As people, men in particular, increasingly navigate crises of identity and the superficiality of the modern world, the lodge room endures as a physical space dedicated to face-to-face interaction and Alexis de Tocqueville's idea of the "power of meeting." By returning to its roots—fostering deep, ritual-bound connections and providing a quiet space for men to "think upon manhood's

worth”—the fraternity, and other associations like it, are uniquely positioned to combat the isolation of the modern era.³¹⁵

As this thesis has demonstrated, the Lodge helped actively manufacture communities in the Colorado Territory and in the statehood period. By functioning as civic pioneers, the Masons bridged the territory’s “civic gap” by establishing networks of trust, governance, and charity long before formal town incorporations or state legislatures took root. Masonry’s true power lay in its portable philosophical toolkit and its mastery of place-making. Through unchanging, theatrical rituals, the Lodge transformed utilitarian rooms above general stores into sacred, stable mental spaces and ensured that, amidst the social chaos of the frontier, men had a reliable sanctuary to interact face-to-face, transcend their local limitations, and build a shared identity.

This legacy of quiet, foundational influence was perhaps best captured by Lawrence N. Greenleaf—nineteenth-century Colorado’s own poet laureate of Freemasonry. Writing in 1911 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Grand Lodge of Colorado, Greenleaf’s verse serves as an eloquent reflection of the fraternity’s ascent alongside the state it helped to build:

³¹⁵ For a very brief examination of the literature surrounding the “loneliness epidemic” currently facing men and the American public, see: Alan Greenblatt, “Loneliness Epidemic,” *CQ Researcher* 33, no. 9 (May 5, 2023): 1, <http://library.cqpress.com/>; Tiaoro Maraki, “The Loneliness Epidemic: Social Media Usage and Its Link to Youth Mental Health,” *Journal of Mental Health* 1, no. 1 (2025): 46, <https://doi.org/10.63808/jmh.v1i1.46>; John Martyn Ratcliffe et al., “Men and Loneliness in the ‘West’: A Critical Interpretive Synthesis,” posted March 18, 2020, preprint, version 1, Research Square, <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-17584/v1>.

*Turn we our thoughts to early days, when o'er the stretching plains
 The long procession wound its way of white-topped wagon trains.
 Bearing brave souls to this new land, the mecca of their hopes,
 Where wealth was found along the streams and on the mountain slopes,
 And army vast, together drawn, by God's all-potent spell
 Which stirs such fever in the blood; its quest alone may quell.
 Their settlements in valleys and on many a mountain side—
 All types and classes of mankind, 'mong whom e'er long was had
 The struggle for supremacy between the good and bad.*

*'Twas then each Mason knew his place, although as such unknown,
 Nor rested till the right prevailed and wrong was overthrown.
 No Lodge was here, but Brethren true were leaders in the van
 Of each forced march of progress for the betterment of man.
 For Order out of Chaos and from darkness into light
 Hath ever been the teaching that a Mason cannot slight,
 And where a voice must needs be raised, his lips can ne'er be dumb
 Whose course is ever guided by the lesson of the plumb.
 Though well they served the common weal, the world may never know
 The silent force of Masonry those many years ago.³¹⁶*

If Greenleaf feared the silent role of the Craft in forging Colorado would remain forever hidden, I hope this work has, in some small measure, abated that concern. The story of

³¹⁶ Lawrence N. Greenleaf, "50th Anniversary Poem," *Centennial Celebration*, i.

Freemasonry in early Colorado is the story of how organized human capital and voluntary associationalism stabilized a transient population and crafted networks in new western territories. While the public prominence of the order has receded, the fundamental human need for authentic connection, mutual trust, and moral development remains urgent. If the fraternity can re-embrace the same quiet adaptability and steadfast commitment to community-building that allowed it to extract order from the chaotic gold camps of 1858, it will prove that its most significant work is not yet finished. By offering a physical space dedicated to equality and brotherly love, the Masonic Lodge remains uniquely equipped to serve as a vital, stabilizing anchor in the twenty-first century and beyond.

Appendix: Digital Methodologies

The reconstruction of nineteenth-century social networks requires moving beyond static narratives and into the realm of data-driven spatial and demographic analysis. This project sought to map the expansion of Freemasonry in Colorado from its territorial beginnings in 1861 through the turn of the century, transforming thousands of archival fragments into a coherent digital portrait of a burgeoning western society. Through synthesizing member ledgers, Grand Lodge proceedings, and civic records, this study evaluates how fraternal life intersected with urban development, occupational shifts, and the maturing demographics of the American West. Just as Richard White said in his seminal article, “What is Spatial History?,” the creation of this digital framework was a collaborative and iterative process, blending traditional archival research with modern geospatial tools and computational analysis to visualize a history previously locked within the pages of dusty ledgers.³¹⁷

While I was the principal agent behind the collection of the sources used for the construction of the various datasets, I was fortunate enough to have exemplary assistance from a number of people. During a Digital History course taught by Dr. Lesil Carr Childers at Colorado State University in the Fall of 2025, I was graciously permitted to be a “team leader” for a semester-long project that could serve as both our class project and a digital component of my thesis. the duration of a Digital History course she taught in the Fall semester of 2025. I oversaw the efforts of four fantastic team members: Tracy Flett, Jay Martin, Aaron Pratt, and Dylan Quinn. Together, we constructed much of the data and laid the groundwork for the analysis that would become this thesis.

³¹⁷ Richard White, “What is Spatial History?” *The Spatial History Project*, Stanford University (February 2010), 2.

The principal records processed into datasets were member ledgers, which contain information pertaining to each Lodge member, typically recorded upon their ascension to the third degree of Freemasonry. For each entry, we recorded the following information as available: the Lodge name and number, the member's "identification number" (the page number they appear on), the specific source record (including the name of the Lodge and ledger number), the member's full name, the date of petition, the year, the member's occupation, the member's age, the date the member was admitted, the date the member died, and any additional notes written on the member's ledger page. This information was collected for Nevada Lodge No. 4 (1864–1901), Washington Lodge No. 12 (1876–1900), Collins Lodge No. 19 (1870–1903), Idaho Springs Lodge No. 26 (1876–1900), Ionic Lodge No. 35 (1878–1900), Eagle Lodge No. 43 (1881–1900), and Leadville Lodge No. 51 (1882–1900), totaling 1,518 individual members. Additionally, the visitors ledger of Leadville Lodge No. 51 served as a key source for visualizing the origins of Masonic visitors to one of Colorado's most influential towns. While the source contained the visitation date, member name, current residence, and home Lodge, data entry focused on the date, town, and state of origin to facilitate mapping, covering every entry from 1882 through 1890 for a total of 510 visits.

These local records were supplemented by data from the Grand Lodge of Colorado's yearly proceedings (1861-1900). These publications include Grand Master addresses and tabular statements detailing the membership statistics of every Lodge in the jurisdiction. To support the spatial and network analysis, the total membership of Denver Lodge No. 5 was recorded for the years 1861 through 1871. Furthermore, the 75th-anniversary book for Union Lodge No. 7, published in 1933, provided a retrospective full listing of every active and historical member, yielding 1,307 names. AI was used in the latter instance to transcribe pdf scans of the lists and

turn them into such an expansive dataset. Leadership within the fraternity was tracked using officer lists for eleven specific Lodges (Lodges No. 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 12, 13, 17, 19, 26, and 35), as well as yearly proceedings for the York Rite, Scottish Rite, and Order of the Eastern Star.

Finally, several lists of influential figures at both the state and local levels were collected in a variety of ways. Most were found using a litany of online resources. These datasets and their respective sources appear in the appendix. Information on figures from Clear Creek County was shared by Christine Bradley with the Clear Creek County Library District. These resources detailed the elected and appointed civic officials in our selected counties and towns, as well as prominent business and social leaders.

Spatial Mapping

The transformation of archival information into analyzable datasets involved a multi-stage process of transcription, digitization, and standardization. The primary membership datasets were constructed by manually transcribing physical member ledgers to record the various categories mentioned above. For the Leadville visitors data, the original columns were streamlined to focus on geographic origins, with a “county” column added during the cleaning process to aid in spatial visualization. The membership census data was derived from the “Lodge Membership By Year Master Dataset,” a composite dataset created by digitizing yearly statistical tables from the Colorado Grand Lodge proceedings. This required normalizing inconsistent categories across decades; for instance, pre-1880s categories such as “Entered Apprentices” or “Members stricken from roll” were preserved to ensure data fidelity but not mapped. The spatial foundation of the project, the “Lodge Locations” dataset was created by geocoding the list of chartered Lodges found in the 1900 Grand Lodge Proceedings. For most Lodges, their current

locations were used as the coordinates for their historic placement, but if a Lodge had switched towns since 1900, such as Black Hawk No. 11 moving to Denver, an approximate location in the original locality was selected. The scale at which we created our visualizations, paired with the selected symbology, relegated specific coordinates to a lower tier of importance. The “Lodge Location” data was used for the creation of the “Town Incorporation Dataset” by merging the existing spatial coordinates of lodge halls with official municipal records from the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA).

The coding process required developing specific categories to handle the inconsistencies of historical data and to facilitate spatial analysis. To test the notion that Lodges acted as “proto-civic” institutions prior to the establishment of official government facilities, Lodges were coded based on a temporal calculation we defined as the “Civic Gap.” This involved categorizing Lodges as either “Civic Pioneers” (those chartered prior to town incorporation) or “Followers” (those established within an existing legal framework). Locations were coded according to their historical relevance, ensuring that early mining camps like Parkville and Nevadaville, modern ghost towns, were placed accurately within the territorial landscape.

The analytical phase of this project relied on Geographic Information Systems (GIS), specifically ArcGIS Pro, a spatial mapping software. GIS is a digital framework that allows historians to layer geographic data such as maps and coordinates with attribute data, ideally revealing patterns invisible in traditional textual analysis. As with most spatial frames of analysis, it transforms space into an active variable of historical inquiry. Custom Arcade expressions were written to calculate the “Civic Gap” by subtracting town incorporation dates from Lodge charter dates, deriving a precise yearly value for each community. Furthermore, the “XY To Line” tool was employed to process the Leadville Visitors dataset, aggregating over 500

records by origin city to generate geodesic vectors that visually reconstructed the mining town's integration into the national Masonic network. For the online component hosted on ArcGIS StoryMaps (<https://arcg.is/1fmyTv1>) a time-slider function was enabled with a one-year step interval to animate the membership expansion visual derived from the tabular dataset, using graduated symbology to illustrate when and where Masons were most prevalent throughout Colorado during the latter half of the nineteenth century. In the thesis, stills of these maps were exported and used.

While all analytical operations were conducted in the NAD 1983 UTM Zone 13N projected coordinate system to ensure regional accuracy, all final map layers were subsequently re-projected to Web Mercator Auxiliary Sphere. This transformation was necessary to ensure visual compatibility with the ArcGIS StoryMaps publishing environment. Serving as a complement to the analytical environment of ArcGIS Pro, StoryMaps acts as a narrative presentation platform, allowing geospatial data to be woven into an accessible, web-based digital history format suitable for public engagement.

Occupations

The information transformed into data and the subsequent datasets that were created came from six total Colorado Masonic Lodges: Nevada No. 4, Collins No. 19, Idaho Springs No. 26, Ionic No. 35, Eagle No. 43, and Leadville No. 51. In total, 1,114 individual members had complete entries capable of being evaluated for occupational analysis. The recorded member ledger information was entered into a separate spreadsheet for each Lodge and then combined into a master dataset with the number of entries from the seven combined member ledgers

totaling 1,518 data points. From this master dataset, a modified dataset was created that would show the various occupations recorded across the six Lodges, spanning 1861–1901.

The modified dataset was recorded to be used in producing occupation-specific visualizations. It contains three separate categories: the Lodge, the date which the member joined—entered as YYYY-MM-DD—and the occupational category. Thirteen distinct categories encompass over 200 unique occupations that appeared throughout the member ledgers. The decision was made to streamline the various different occupations listed in the member ledgers into one of thirteen to get a better overall picture of the volume of occupations present over time and in each Lodge and to see if any patterns emerged. The thirteen occupational categories are as follows along with the various jobs listed in the member ledgers that fall under each category:

- **Agriculture** – Farmer; Stock grower/raiser; Ranchman; Stockman; Fruit Stand; Horse Feed; Stable Boss.
- **Clergy** – Messenger of the Gospel; Minister; Preacher; Clergyman.
- **Clerical** – Clerk; Bookkeeper.
- **Commerce/trade** – Merchant of any kind; Bartender; Hotel Keeper; Grocer; Insurance Agent; Trader; Boarding House; Cashier; Saloon Keeper.
- **Education** – President of Agriculture College; Superintendent of Schools; Teacher.
- **Engineer** – Civil; Mechanical; Engineer; Gas.
- **Labor** – Mill Wright; Match Maker; Laborer; Charcoal Burner.
- **Mining** – Mining/Miner; Quartz Milling; Mining Engineer; Ore Buyer; Mining Foreman; Mine Superintendent; Ore Sampler.
- **Miscellaneous** – Leaster; Soldier; Water Sample Agent; Time Keeper; Hospital Steward; Venter; Retired Drafter; Any job that was recorded in the member ledgers

and is not legible; any datapoint on the Mason Occupations in CO dataset that did not have an occupation recorded was assigned miscellaneous.

- **Professional Services** – Physician; Attorney; Druggist; Banker; Dentist; Accountant.
- **Public Service and Government** – County Clerk; Deputy County Clerk; County Assessor; Deputy Post Master; Jailor; Policeman; Fireman; County Judge; Sheriff.
- **Skilled Trades** – Blacksmith; Stone Cutter; Carpenter; Butcher; Shoemaker; Jeweler; Painter; Barber; Miller; Lumberman; Brick Layer; Stone Mason; Undertaker; Baker; Machinist; Book Publisher; Harness Maker; Electrician; Chemist; Contractor; Boilermaker; Metallurgist.
- **Transportation** – Teamster; Mechanic; Any and all jobs with the Railroad; Expressman; Freight Agent; Express Agent; Telegraph Operator; Station Agent; Liveryman; Road Overseer.

The above categories of occupations were coded two ways. The first came from a separate dataset of the Collins Lodge Member ledgers, 1870–1900, previously coded in 2024 for a Fort Collins case study. At that point, I began the categorization of various occupations into categories. The Masonic Occupations by Lodge Dataset (MOLD) utilized the same categories to maintain cohesion: Agriculture, Clerical, Labor, Commerce/trade, Professional Services, Public Service and Government, Education, and Transportation. Additionally, the category of Mining was added to the MOLD dataset, as were the categories of Engineer, Clergy, and Miscellaneous. Some divergence occurred between the Collins Lodge Dataset and the MOLD in the category of Transportation in which expressman was placed in the Trade/Commerce category on the Fort Collins Dataset but placed in the Transportation category on the MOLD.

To categorize occupations found in the MOLD but not in the Collins Lodge dataset, a systematic approach was implemented. The Transportation category was assigned to all jobs involving the transfer of information or goods, encompassing all railroad positions, express agents, and telegraph agents/operators. Occupations related to religious practice were grouped under Clergy. All engineering roles, except those in mining, were placed in the Engineer category. Mining-related occupations, which were numerous in the seven member ledgers used to create the MOLD, were given their own dedicated category. Finally, a Miscellaneous category was established for any remaining occupations listed on the seven member ledgers that did not fit other categories (e.g., soldier, timekeeper), as well as any occupations in the member ledgers that were illegible or recorded in a foreign language.³¹⁸

Ages

The datasets for this project were constructed from the nineteenth-century Masonic membership ledgers of the same six Colorado Lodges spanning from 1861 to 1900 as the occupational analysis. Any entry falling outside the nineteenth-century timeframe was excluded. These entries formed the basis of the Compiled Member Ledgers dataset, which was then transformed into the Masonic Ages by Lodge dataset to remove unnecessary data points and format the information for future graphing. To prepare the dataset for visualization, age values were converted to 5-year age ranges. This data is in the Age as Category dataset shown as: 21 to 25, 26 to 30, 31 to 35, 36 to 40, 41 to 45, 46 to 50, 51 to 55, and 56 and over. Because the ledger books were inconsistent in recording ages, some data points were left blank or illegible. Entries lacking both a recorded age and a petition date were excluded from the final analysis, resulting in a refined cohort of members with complete demographic profiles.

³¹⁸ Special thanks to Tracy Flett for being the key researcher and data-smith regarding the occupations of members.

The first specific metric calculated was the Average Joining Age, which aimed to capture the profile of the average initiate at his moment of entry into the fraternity. The dataset was partitioned into eight distinct five-year periods to smooth out annual volatility while preserving the ability to observe decade-over-decade shifts. For each period, the mean age of all new initiates was calculated both for the state as a whole and for each individual Lodge to identify regional demographic variances. This method allowed for a clear distinction between the “transient young man” era of the 1860s and the more established and mature environment of the late 1890s. By isolating the age at the point of petition, the analysis provided a baseline for understanding the fraternity’s appeal to various age cohorts during different stages of Colorado’s development.

The second and more complex analysis involved a Retention-Adjusted Simulation designed to estimate the average age of the active membership. Unlike a simple average of new initiates, this model created a dynamic active pool for each year by tracking a member from his date of initiation until his recorded exit from the Lodge. An “exit year” was algorithmically determined for each member by parsing the “Died” and “Notes” columns for specific terminal events such as death, suspension, expulsion, or demission. If a member had no recorded exit, they were assumed to remain active through the end of the study period in 1900. Each year, the simulation aged every member in the active pool by one year and recalculated the mean age of the current roster, thereby providing a census-style snapshot of the men physically present in the Lodge room at any given time.

The computational logic for this simulation required a year-by-year iteration to account for the simultaneous processes of recruitment and organizational aging. For every year between 1861 and 1900, a member was considered active only if the current year fell on or after their

joining year and strictly before their determined exit year. The member's "current age" for that specific year was calculated as their joining age plus the number of years elapsed since their initiation. These individual ages were then aggregated to produce annual Lodge-level and state-wide averages, which were subsequently grouped into the same five-year bins used in the joining-age analysis. This dual-track approach allowed for a direct comparison between the age of the new members entering the fraternity and the graying of the established membership. These two approaches provided a useful demographic history that accounted for both the individual milestones of the members and the broader institutional maturation of the Grand Lodge.

AI Disclaimer

AI software was used at various points throughout this methodological process. Google Gemini and Open AI's ChatGPT were used in four ways. First, Gemini was used to convert a PDF scan of Union Lodge No. 7's past membership lists found in their 75th-anniversary book. This helped to capture the names, death dates, and hometowns of 1,307 members, turning them into a Google Sheet. The second use of AI was evaluation and reorganization of data. Researchers incorporated AI tools to help sort the several thousand member ledgers into predetermined age ranges and occupational categories. The programs also proved useful in identifying missing or erroneous data entries which researchers would manually go in and resolve. In all cases of artificial intelligence being used, data was manually double-checked to ensure the generative AI platform made no hallucinations or errors.

The third way in which this new technology was used was as a technical assistant and teacher. Specifically, AI tools were employed to troubleshoot ArcGIS Pro geoprocessing errors, generate custom Arcade scripts for temporal calculations, and refine the logical structure of the

geospatial workflows. Finally, Google Gemini was used in the production of several charts and graphs that appear throughout this thesis. Simply put, most chart-making softwares that I used did not produce visualizations of the same quality as Gemini was able to produce. This process was hardly different from generating a chart in Excel or Google Sheets. A CSV file containing the target data range was supplied to the AI model, and all styles, colors, fonts, and titles could be dictated to the program. Throughout this project, AI software was used as a tool for the construction of data, statistical analysis, and visualization thereof. All historical arguments remain the original work of the author.

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