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John Cooper and Problems in Masonic Research

We are fortunate to have scholars like John Cooper who are also Freemasons. The history of secret and ritualistic organizations has never received the attention that the subject deserves. Although their influence has been and continues to be considerable, they are viewed as having members who are enjoined to be tight-lipped about the activities. Despite the manifest differences between the branches of this fascinating group, their culture has a commonality whose consideration has been neglected, and the research problems they present for scholars have similarities.

Secrecy and ritualism often go together, although for many societies the secrecy is no longer as strong as it once was. However, ritual remains one of their major characteristics, making them distinct from a large number of other groups that may have a few ceremonies such as passing along the chair's gavel or investing new members with lapel pins but which are chiefly issue-oriented. Sometimes it is hard to demarcate between a ritualistic and issue-oriented movement. While the Grange, for example, is certainly an agricultural lobby, it has always had a strong ritualistic side. Rotary or the Lions would seem to be more on the service side, but we have all met members who were as enraptured by the Rotary Wheel as anyone ever was by the Masonic square and compass. All of this presents special challenges to understanding.

As Dr. Cooper points out, there can be a change in emphasis over the years. But for all the changes, few public or university libraries take seriously the collecting of material on the Masons, so the serious researcher must get permission to use Masonic archives and libraries. A number date from the nineteenth century and have large holdings. An idea of what they might contain is indicated by the classifications of the Library of the Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite in Washington, which dates back to 1888 and even then had more than eight thousand volumes. Categories include philosophy and symbolism, church and state, paraphernalia, glassware, benevolent and educational institutions, hospitals, cemeteries, architecture, poetry and drama, humor and satire, and women in Masonry. Paris is unique in having at least four major collections.

Another challenge is understanding the special language and usages that an organization such as the Masons invokes. The more ritualistic the society, the more arcane will be the terminology found in papers. As an example, a considerable problem for the researcher is the dating system used by different Masonic bodies. Ordinary Craft or blue lodge Masons who have taken the first three degrees of Entered Apprentice, Fellowcraft and Master Mason use the Anno Lucis system, adding 4000 years and giving the year as dated from the Creation. Thus a blue lodge Masonic document of 1995 would be 5995. Royal Arch Masons begin the calendar with the start of work on the Second Temple at Jerusalem in 530 B.C., so that this is the year 2525. Royal and Select Masters number the years from the completion of the original King Solomon's Temple in 1000 B.C., making this the year 2995. Masonic Knights Templar date documents from the founding of the Order in 1118 and hence this is 877. There are other pitfalls: On occasion the researcher will face documents that have been rendered into cipher or have had critical words removed. He or she will also encounter vast amounts of allegory and metaphor, so that without an advance immersion in the rituals the text will be unintelligible.

In sum, we need researchers who can tackle the special problems of what is a fascinating subject. We are lucky to have as many hard workers in the stacks as we do, and these papers are a notable contribution.

Paul Rich
President, Policy Studies Organization

Ethnic Diversity in California Freemasonry

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The question of ethnic diversity in Freemasonry might seem strange in that the fraternity makes claim to universality. *For in every country and in every clime are Masons to be found*, as the words of the lecture of the First Degree of Masonry in California puts it. Freemasonry boasts that it disregards both race and ethnicity in accepting men who are *under the tongue of good report* as aspirants for its mysteries. Masonic law in California backs up that ancient principle, for our code makes it clear that men of every race and culture are entitled to apply for the degrees of Masonry in our Grand Lodge. And yet a study of the history of Freemasonry in California amply demonstrates that issues of ethnicity have been important. This paper is, therefore, an attempt to relate some of the issues pertaining to ethnic groups that have had an impact on the practice of Freemasonry in California since the founding of the Grand Lodge in 1850.

Getting information for a study of ethnic diversity in California Freemasonry – or rather within the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of California – is itself a challenge. The *California Masonic Code* makes it clear that race and ethnicity are not to be considered when it comes to membership:

§200.010. CORE VALUES.

Masonry is a fraternity composed exclusively of men ages 18 years and older who believe in a Supreme Being and a future existence and who support the other Ancient Landmarks. The membership in Masonry of anyone who does not comply with the foregoing is automatically terminated. Racial or ethnic background, color of skin, political views or religious belief, except for the requirement of a belief in a Supreme Being and a future existence, shall not be a consideration either for membership or visitation.

Since neither racial nor ethnic background can be considered for membership in lodges under the Grand Lodge of California, no statistics on ethnicity or race are kept by Grand Lodge. The information available is either found in the histories of Grand Lodge (of which there have been three since its founding in 1850), or indirectly through references in the *Proceedings* to events that pertain primarily to language rather than directly to ethnicity.

It is important at the outset to understand that this paper concerns lodges under the Grand Lodge of California. No attempt has been made to look at the issues of race and ethnicity in other masonic organizations in California, except insofar as they touch upon actions of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of California (hereinafter referred to as “Grand Lodge”). This paper will discuss non-recognized Freemasonry existing in California at the appropriate time, as well as the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of California, with which our Grand Lodge is in amity, but only from the point of view of the influence of these organizations on the

Grand Lodge of California. Understanding this at the outset will ensure that no erroneous conclusions are reached about the lack of data on these organizations in the paper. Further studies using information from and about these organizations might shed additional light on the issue at hand in a future paper.

Foreign Language Lodges

Many jurisdictions have foreign language lodges, or masonic lodges that work in a language other than the prevailing one used in the jurisdiction of a grand lodge. California is no exception. On June 6, 1851, Grand Master John A. Tutt issued a dispensation for La Parfaite Union Lodge No. 17 in San Francisco – only slightly more than one year after the Grand Lodge of California was founded. Little is known about the circumstances surrounding its formation because the original records were destroyed in the great San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of April 18, 1906. The lodge continues to work the three degrees of Ancient Craft Masonry in French, although the Fellow Craft and Master Mason degrees are French translations of the York Rite Preston-Webb working of the Grand Lodge of California. For some unknown reason the lodge was allowed to work the Entered Apprentice Degree not only in French, but using a Scottish Rite Ritual rather than the York Rite ritual. This ritual may have come from a member who affiliated in 1852 with the lodge – Most Worshipful Bro. Lucien Herman, who had been Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Louisiana in 1848-1849.¹ Herman was the second Master of the lodge, and the Master when the charter was received from Grand Lodge. The lodge continues in existence today as a constituent lodge of the Grand Lodge of California.

On October 15, 1897, the Grand Lodge of California issued a charter to the second lodge working Scottish Rite Grand Lodge in France – formed in French in California – Vallee de France Lodge No. 329, in Los Angeles. The lodge had originally been chartered by the Symbolic in the aftermath of an attempt to create an independent Craft grand lodge out of the Scottish Rite Supreme Council in the 1890s. The lodge returned its charter to France, and accepted a charter from the Grand Lodge of California. Although it had undoubtedly worked the three degrees of Ancient Craft Masonry using a Scottish Rite ritual, the conditions under which its charter was granted by the Grand Lodge of California were the same as for La Parfaite Union No. 17 a half-century earlier. They were permitted to work the Entered Apprentice Degree using a Scottish Rite ritual, but were required to use the York Rite Preston-Webb ritual of the Grand Lodge of California for the Fellow Craft and Master Mason degrees. As does La Parfaite Union No. 17, Vallee de France Lodge No. 329 continues to work today as a constituent lodge of the Grand Lodge of California, although, like its sister lodge in San Francisco, it has maintained its existence with some difficulty because of the limited number of French-speaking residents in California nowadays.

The second lodge working in a foreign language in California was Hermann Lodge No. 127. The dispensation for that lodge was issued by Grand Master Nathaniel G. Curtis on March 6, 1858. The lodge met in San Francisco, and worked in German. The lodge continued in existence until January 6, 2003, when it surrendered its charter. It did not consolidate with any other lodge, and at its demise, listed only twenty-nine members of its rolls. It continued to work in German,

¹ Whitsell, Leon O., *One Hundred Years of Freemasonry in California*, Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of California, ©1950, p.225.

even through the difficult years of World War I, and its records were kept in both English and German from the start.² It should be noted that the lodge was named for the great German hero, Hermann, otherwise known as Arminius, who led the Germans in a successful uprising against the Romans, whom he defeated at the Battle of the Teutoberg Forest in A.D. 9. An account of this can be read in the *Annals* of the Roman historian Tacitus. The founders of the lodge were obviously familiar with this story, and named their lodge after the great German chieftain of the Cheruci.

The third foreign language lodge chartered in California was Speranza Italiana Lodge No. 219. On September 16, 1871, Grand Master Leonidas E. Pratt issued a dispensation to a group of Italian Masons in San Francisco to form a lodge working in Italian. The formation of this new lodge followed closely upon events in Italy that had resulted in the creation of the modern state of Italy, and the great hero of the “Reunification” of Italy, Giuseppe Garibaldi, who was a Freemason, and the first Grand Master of the Grand Orient of Italy. The name, Speranza Italiana, means “Italian Hope” in English, and was an apt name for this new lodge. The charter was granted by Grand Lodge on October 11, 1872. The lodge continued to work in Italian until its consolidation with Golden Gate Lodge No. 30 in 1966. By that time, candidates who spoke Italian had become few and far between, and the consolidation with an English-speaking lodge in San Francisco meant that there would no longer be an Italian-speaking lodge on the rolls of the Grand Lodge of California.

On October 14, 1913, a charter was issued by Grand Lodge to a lodge in Los Angeles to work in the German language. The name and number of this lodge were Germania Lodge No. 438. The lodge consolidated with an English-speaking lodge in 1958, and today as Metropolitan Lodge No. 352, which meets in Downey, a suburb of Los Angeles. In the beginning it was authorized to work the three degrees of Masonry in German – using the York Rite Preston-Webb ritual of the Grand Lodge of California.

This lodge had a rather stormy existence during its years on the rolls of the Grand Lodge of California. In 1918, due to the hysteria occasioned by the war with German in World War I, the lodge petitioned Grand Lodge to change its name to “Acacia” Lodge No. 438, which was granted. It continued to work in German, however, through all these years, and continued to be a “German-speaking” lodge through the even more difficult years of the 1950’s and World War II.

In 1935 Acacia Lodge No. 438 ran afoul of Grand Lodge, and had its charter suspended. Apparently controversy had broken out in the lodge, causing Grand Master Randolph V. Whiting to suspend the charter of the lodge on September 30, 1935. This was just before the Annual Communication of Grand Lodge, and after the Annual Communication, the charter was returned by Grand Master Earl Warren. The name “Earl Warren” may be familiar to you. He was appointed by President Dwight Eisenhower, and confirmed by the United States Senate, as 14th Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court in 1953. The conditions of the return of the charter were that Acacia Lodge No. 438 should thereafter work its degrees in German, but keep its minutes in English, so that Grand Lodge would be aware of what it was up to!³

² Whitsell, *op. cit.*, p. 1038.

³ Whitsell, *Op. Cit.*, p. 1824.

There is a further footnote to the history of Acacia Lodge No. 438. Although it had disappeared as a separate lodge in 1958 when it consolidated with Arlington Lodge No. 414 (later to become Metropolitan Lodge No. 352), the name had not disappeared from history. In 2001 the Grand Lodge of California carried on its rolls a lodge named “Acacia Lodge No. 243,” a relatively new name occasioned by a consolidation lodges in Northern California. In that year, Grand Master David C. Decker, received an email from a journalist in the Republic of Belarus. Belarus is the former Belorussia, a constituent “state” of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, which had dissolved in 1990. The Nazi invasion of 1941 had brought German soldiers to this country, and one who died in the invasion, had a letter on his body, which was from the Master of Acacia Lodge No. 438 in Los Angeles. The dead soldier was a cousin of the Master, and the letter was found in the archives abandoned by the Soviets when the USSR disintegrated in 1990. These archives became public property, and in 2001 the journalist in Belarus had sent an email to Grand Master David C. Decker asking about a letter found in the archives. The Grand Master referred it to the then Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge (the author of this paper), who researched it in the records of Grand Lodge. The author of the letter to this young German soldier was located in the “card files” of Grand Lodge from 1941, and confirmed that Acacia Lodge No. 438 had been in contact with him through the Master of the lodge, who was his cousin. Thus a “footnote” to history was confirmed. Acacia Lodge No. 438 had been in touch with Germans fighting on the Eastern Front in 1941, and a letter, found in the pocket of a dead German soldier, connected with a California lodge in Los Angeles at the same time!

In 2001, Grand Master Decker received an email from a journalist in Belarus asking about “Acacia Lodge.” He had found “Acacia Loge No. 243” on our website, and thought it might be “Acacia Lodge No. 438.” It was not. Careful research into the records of Grand Lodge indicated that it was “Acacia Lodge No. 438” rather than the more recent “Acacia Lodge No. 243.” A chapter in the history of Acacia Lodge No. 438 was thus closed more than forty-three years after the lodge had technically ceased to exist.

Maya Lodge No. 793 was chartered by Grand Lodge in the 1960’s as a lodge for Spanish-speaking and Spanish-heritage brethren *working in English*. In the early 1990’s they obtained permission to work the three degrees of Ancient Craft Masonry in Spanish – using the ritual of the Grand Lodge of California. Although their stated meetings were conducted in English, and their records were kept in English, the lodge was for all intents and purposes a “Hispanic” lodge. Until 2004, they were the only Spanish-speaking lodge in this jurisdiction, despite the fact that the Spanish-speaking population of California is now approaching 50%. In that year, Grand Master Howard Kirkpatrick determined that he would encourage the creation of foreign-language lodges in California, and during his tenure as Grand Master, he issued dispensations to two such lodges. Panamericana Lodge No. 849 was chartered by Grand Lodge in 2005 as a lodge working in Spanish. In 2008, it absorbed a Filipino Lodge, Cahuenga – La Brea Lodge No. 513, and now has the number “513.” However, it is still a Spanish-speaking lodge: Panamericana Lodge No. 513.

The second foreign-language lodge that was issued a dispensation by Grand Master Howard Kirkpatrick in 2005 was Ararat Lodge No. 848, an Armenian lodge. At the time of its dispensation, they did not have a ritual in Armenian. The lodge worked in English until the California ritual could be translated into Armenian, and still works in English as of 2010, except

for the Entered Apprentice Degree, which they work in Armenian. This situation illustrates a change from the earlier formation of foreign-language lodges in California. In the case of the French-speaking and German-speaking community, as well as the Italian-speaking community, the desire for the formation of a lodge working in those languages was truly a “grass roots” movement. The same thing can be said about a Spanish-speaking lodge, although for the first thirty years of the existence of Maya Lodge No. 793, there was no expressed desire to work in Spanish. Then – in 2004 – the impetus for new foreign-language lodges came from the Grand Master. This was a result of a recognition that California had become a multi-lingual state, and that the creation of lodges working in languages other than English would be desirable. The result has not been particularly good. Although we now have an additional lodge working in Spanish, and a lodge partially working in Armenian, neither lodge has exhibited the strength that a new lodge should have demonstrated. The slowness with which Ararat Lodge No. 848 has progressed toward the translation of the ritual into Armenian is an example of the rather lukewarm reception that an Armenian-speaking lodge has had within the Armenian-speaking community, and the similar slowness with which Panamericana Lodge No. 513 has progressed in obtaining new Spanish-speaking members is an example of the difficulty of a “top-down” approach to the creation of foreign-language lodges in California.

Speranza Italiana Lodge No. 219 did not survive as a foreign-language lodge, and merged with an English-speaking lodge in 1966. California thus has two French-speaking lodges, which are just barely hanging on, two Spanish-speaking lodges, both of which are in Southern California and neither of which is thriving, and an Armenian-speaking lodge, which is experiencing a similar lack of success. It is thus apparent that the effort of the Grand Lodge of California to promote “ethnic” lodges in recent times has not been successful.

The Chinese Acacia Club

The Chinese Acacia Club of San Francisco is unique in California Freemasonry. It is not a lodge, but rather a club of Freemasons of Chinese ancestry, and has been in existence since 1946. The history of this club was furnished to the author by Bro. Sydney Pond, a past president of the Chinese Acacia Club, and an active Freemason in San Francisco.

There was apparently an initial interest in forming a lodge of Chinese Freemasons as early as 1922.⁴ The lodge, to be known as Educator Lodge, received a dispensation from Grand Master William A. Sherman on April 19, 1922, and a charter at the Annual Communication in October of that year. However, his original plan of creating this lodge as a Chinese lodge did not materialize. Whitsell’s history has this cryptic remark:

.... it is known that among the things discussed was a proposal to take in a number of Chinese brethren, qualify them to hold office in the proposed Lodge, and have them fill the chairs of the Caucasian brethren who would retire at the earliest opportunity. The plan seemed a good one at first. Then, like many other ideas that come up on preliminary meetings, it met too much criticism and had to be abandoned.⁵

⁴ Whitsell, *op. cit.* p. 1260, and Pond, Sydney, unpublished history of the Chinese Acacia Club, 2010.

⁵ *Ibid.*

It would be intriguing to know what this criticism was, and particularly in light of the fact that the Grand Lodge of California already had “ethnic” lodges in existence at this time – French, German, and Italian. However, it must be remembered that California was the home of significant anti-Chinese sentiment, which had only begun to abate in the years after World War I. A summary of this attitude is appropriate here:

From their arrival during the Gold Rush, the Chinese experienced discrimination and often overt racism, and finally exclusion. Action often in the form of Legislation was used against Chinese immigrants and started as early as the 1850 foreign Miners' License Tax law. In 1854 was the California State Supreme Court categorizing Chinese with Blacks and Indians, and denying them there right to testify against white men in courts of law. During the 1870s, an economic downturn resulted in serious unemployment problems, and led to more heightened outcries against Asian immigrants. The Chinese often became the scapegoats for business owners who paid them low wages. This willingness to work for lower wages along with the productivity of the Chinese workers ignited the ire of white labor in California. Racist labor union leaders directed their actions and the anger of unemployed works at the Chinese, blaming them for depressed wages, lack of jobs, and accusing them of being morally corrupt. Denis Kearney, head of the Workingmen's Party of California, led this inflammatory battle against the Chinese. As a consequence of this hostility, local and statewide restrictions continued to be enforced against the Chinese. Eventually, the United States government passed the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. This barred Chinese laborers from immigrating for ten years. Only officials, teachers, students, merchants, and travelers were allowed to enter. The Chinese currently in the United States were barred from naturalization. China, as the home country for these immigrants, was unable to exert any influence on American policy. This law stood in place till it was repealed in 1943.⁶

While the more open forms of discrimination against the Chinese may have been avoided by Freemasonry, the Craft is not immune to the larger social context in which it operates, and it may have been a form of racial or ethnic discrimination which prevented the plan with Educator Lodge No. 554 from moving forward. The lodge never had a significant Chinese membership, and became just another urban lodge in San Francisco. In 1979, it was absorbed by consolidation with San Francisco Lodge No. 166. It is an interesting footnote to the history of this lodge that the current Senior Grand Warden of the Grand Lodge of California is a past master of San Francisco Lodge – now number “120” through another consolidation – and in another year will be the second Chinese Grand Master in the history of the Grand Lodge of California. The roster shows that the lodge has a number of Chinese members, although they are not in the majority.

The effort to create a Chinese lodge having run aground, it was decided in 1946 to form a club instead, and thus the Chinese Acacia Club was founded in that year. Its membership has furnished a number of Grand Lodge Officers over the years – and, and indicated above, a Grand Master (Leo B. Mark) in 1987, and presumptively, another Grand Master in 2011. The membership roll since 1946 has more than 700 names, many of them prominent in San Francisco

⁶ <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award99/cubhtml/theme9.html>

Freemasonry. Since the appointment of Bro. Sau Yee Chang as Grand Sword Bearer in 1957, twenty-five members have served as Grand Lodge Officers. In addition, the international character of their membership has meant that they have also had Grand Masters of other jurisdictions as members: Hawaii, Japan and Panama, as well as the Grand Lodge of the Republic of China. In addition, several other Associate Members (non-Chinese) have served their Grand Lodges as Grand Master.

In 1990, the club began a tradition of hosting the Grand Master for a reception each year, and has followed that custom ever since. The annual reception is also the occasion for the presenting of scholarships to graduating high school students of Chinese descent, and thus providing an important community service. If one purpose of the club was to make Freemasons of Chinese decent more visible in California Freemasonry, that purpose has been successful.

Jewish Lodges

It may be questionable whether Judaism is a religion or an ethnic group, but throughout the history of Freemasonry in California, they have apparently been thought of as primarily an ethnic group. As Freemasonry makes no distinction on the basis of religion, other than that a man must possess a belief in a Supreme Being and a future existence⁷, the idea of a “Jewish” lodge may seem to be a contradiction of terms if we are talking about a “religious” distinction for a lodge. However, as an ethnic group, adherents of the Jewish religion have been treated much the same as other ethnic and language groups when it comes to the formation of lodges.

One of the most prominent of the “Jewish” lodges in California was Fidelity Lodge No. 120. It maintained a proud existence from July 11, 1857, when a dispensation was issued by Grand Master Nathaniel G. Curtis to some members of Lebanon Lodge No. 49 whose charter had been suspended by Curtis, and which was subsequently revoked by vote of Grand Lodge. The name, “Fidelity,” was chosen because these brethren believed that they were the “faithful” members of the former Lebanon Lodge No. 49 who had supported the action of the Grand Master in suspending the charter – an action taken because the lodge had failed to discipline a member who had violated his Obligation as a Master Mason. The first Master of Fidelity Lodge No. 120 – and the former Master of the suspended Lebanon Lodge No. 49 – was Louis Cohn. The Senior Warden was Fred A. Benjamin, and the Junior Warden was Seixas Solomons. Inferring ethnicity from names is a chancy thing, but as these three names appear to be Jewish, Fidelity Lodge No. 120 may have had a large Jewish membership from the beginning.

By the early 1950’s, Fidelity was known as the “Jewish Lodge” in San Francisco, while California Lodge No. 1 was known as the “Gentile Lodge.” They met on the same evening at 25 Van Ness, then the largest masonic building in San Francisco, and also the headquarters of the Grand Lodge of California. Past Grand Secretary Robert A. Klinger was Master of Fidelity Lodge No. 120 in 1957, and over the years he told many others about the close relationship and friendship between these two lodges. He personally related to the author of this paper that whenever a man would show up at 25 Van Ness and exhibit an interest in becoming a Mason, his religion was first ascertained. If he was Jewish, his application was given to Fidelity Lodge No. 120; if he was not, his application was given to California Lodge No. 1. Apparently other lodges

⁷ California Masonic Code, Section 200.010

that met at 25 Van Ness had to get their candidates elsewhere! But this practice aside, he related that the two lodges shared much in common, and great masonic friendships ensued that might otherwise never have developed in the outside world.

This religious – or ethnic – division even affected other masonic organizations. San Francisco once had two Scottish Rite valleys – the San Francisco Bodies and the California Bodies. Apparently when the earlier of these two organizations was formed, the San Francisco Bodies, it became a mostly Jewish organization. The idea presumably was that if a mason were a Christian he should go into the York Rite, which was thought to be a Christian masonic organization because being a Christian was required for the Knights Templar, the “top” organization in the York Rite. As this was not open to Jewish Freemasons, the Scottish Rite came to be thought of as “Jewish,” and non-Jewish members were not as welcome. This led to the founding of a second Scottish Rite in San Francisco, which was primarily “Gentile” in membership. In the 1990s, these two groups merged, and now there is only one Scottish Rite valley in San Francisco – the San Francisco Bodies – which no longer makes any distinction on the basis of ethnicity or religion.

Over the years California has had other lodges whose membership is, or was, largely Jewish, and therefore came to be considered “Jewish” lodges. Among them were Menorah Lodge No. 623 in Los Angeles, and Blackmer Lodge No. 442, in San Diego. Both these lodges are not now in existence, except insofar as they continue through consolidation with other – and mostly non-Jewish – lodges. Menorah Lodge continues as Southern California Lodge No. 529, and probably still has the largest Jewish membership of any lodge in California.

Ethnic lodges are in decline, and Jewish lodges are no exception. As indicated above, most have merged with other non-Jewish lodges, and it is difficult to characterize any of them as “Jewish” any longer. However, that does not mean that ethnic issues pertaining to Jewish Freemasons have disappeared. In 1998, Grand Master Anthony P. Wordlow was confronted with an issue that required a formal Grand Master’s Decision. In California, a Grand Master’s Decision is a published interpretation of the *California Masonic Code*, or of its ritual. In that year a question had arisen as to whether a Jewish Mason could wear a Jewish headcovering in a tiled lodge. Two years before Grand Master Charles Alexander had been confronted with a similar situation pertaining to the wearing of Jewish headcoverings at masonic funerals, but as the Master does not wear a hat at funerals, his decision that these headcoverings could be worn at funerals did not create as much of a stir as did the question of wearing them in tiled lodges. Grand Master Wordlow ruled that a headcovering worn for religious reasons was not a violation of our ritual in California, and submitted his Grand Master’s Decision for a vote of Grand Lodge. The motion to approve his decision, however, did not pass.

In California, a Grand Master’s Decision is valid only for the term of office of the Grand Master who issues it, although by submitting it for approval to Grand Lodge, there is some presumption that it the decision can be used by future Grand Masters as guidance. The defeat of Grand Master Wordlow’s decision, however, left the question of the wearing of headcoverings in limbo. His successor, Grand Master Melville H. Nahin, then directed the Grand Lecturer and the Ritual Committee to cease and desist their campaign to forbid the wearing of Jewish headcoverings in a tiled lodge, and since that time it has been a moot point in California. It might be noted that

Grand Master Nahin was Jewish, and he may have been more sensitive than others to the problems created for religiously observant Jews who need to wear a headcovering on certain occasions – and apparently a tiled masonic lodge is one of these.

It should be noted that at the time that this issue came up, not all Jewish Freemasons in California concurred with Grand Master Wordlow or Grand Master Nahin. One prominent such mason, Past Grand Secretary Robert A. Klinger, was vocal in his opposition to the wearing of headcoverings by Jewish Freemasons in a tiled lodge. It was his firm belief that this intruded sectarian religion into the lodge, and was inappropriate. However, his view did not prevail, and the practice now is to allow the wearing of religious headcoverings in a tiled lodge. As a footnote to this situation, it should be further noted that there is an ongoing question as to the wearing of religious emblems in a masonic lodge is appropriate. There have been occasions when masonic Knights Templar have been asked to remove their coats before entering a tiled lodge because these uniforms prominently display the emblem of the Christian religion. The issue of religious emblems in a masonic lodge in California is therefore far from resolved.

African-American Freemasons

The question of African-American Freemasons and the Grand Lodge of California is complicated by the existence of another historic grand lodge operating within the boundaries of California. While there are lodges, and even grand lodges, operating in California, only one is recognized as a regular grand lodge by the Grand Lodge of California – the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of California. This paper will not explore the issues of mutual recognition between these two grand lodges, although an extended discussion of these issues was the subject of a 2005 paper presented to the Philalethes Society at its Annual Feast and Assembly in Washington, DC, that year.⁸

As previously stated, the Grand Lodge of California does not compile statistics based on race or ethnicity. It is therefore very difficult to ascertain the number of men of African descent who are members of lodges under this Grand Lodge. It is also virtually impossible to come by this information in the way described below for Filipino Freemasons. This topic, therefore, needs further research when more information is available.

Filipino Freemasons

The situation with Freemasons of Filipino ethnicity is an entirely different one, and has been a cause for concern in Grand Lodge for a number of years. In order to understand this concern, a bit of history is first in order.

While Freemasonry existed in the Philippine Islands before the American occupation in 1898, then involvement of California Freemasonry in the Philippines began with the chartering of three lodges: Manila Lodge No. 342, Cavite Lodge No. 350, and Corregidor Lodge No. 386. These were not the first American lodges in the Philippines, however. A North Dakota field lodge was formed on August 21, 1898.⁹

⁸ Cooper, John, Annual Lecture, Philalethes Society, February 14, 2004.

⁹ Whitsell, *op. cit.* p. 435.

Manila Lodge No. 342 received its dispensation from Grand Master James A. Foshay on July 4, 1901, and received its charter on October 10 of the same year. In 1912, pursuant to a Grand Master's Decision on the part of Grand Master Alonzo Monroe that the creation of a grand lodge in the Philippine Islands was appropriate, the Grand Lodge of the Philippines was organized, and received recognition from the Grand Lodge of California. Other lodges chartered elsewhere remained in the island, chiefly Lodge Perla del Oriente No. 1034, under the Grand Lodge of Scotland and did not join the new Grand Lodge. But California surrendered the charters of its first three lodges in the Philippines to the new Grand Lodge, and thus began a long and close relationship between the Grand Lodge of the Philippines and the Grand Lodge of California.

The figures from the 2010 Census have not yet been published, but the 2000 Census revealed that there were an estimated 1,850,314 in the United States that year. Half of these were in California, which means that California had a Filipino population of approximately 925,000.¹⁰ The Filipino presence in California lodges is particularly felt – perhaps more than any other ethnic group. This has had both positive and negative results, as discussed below.

The first all-Filipino lodge in California as Tila Pass Lodge No. 797. The lodge was named for the Battle of Tila Pass, a battle between the occupying American Forces and the native Filipino army which was struggling for independence in the wake of the transfer of the Philippines from Spain to the United States. General Gregorio del Pilar let the rear guard which allowed the founder of the Philippine Republic, Emilio Aguinaldo, a Freemason, to escape. The name “Tila Pass,” therefore had great meaning to the Filipino masons who founded the lodge. The lodge is still in existence as Atwater-Larchmont-Tila Pass Lodge No. 614 in Los Angeles.

During the decline of Freemasonry in California during the 1990s, many lodges had difficult filling officer positions. They found a ready-made source of eager Freemasons in the Filipino masonic community, and in several lodges the officers line was soon filled with Filipino masons. Some were the result of the consolidation of an all-Filipino lodge with a non-Filipino lodge (Sublime-Benicia Lodge No. 5 is such a lodge), but in many more Filipino affiliations brought a fresh supply of leadership needed by failing lodges. In many cases, this had a salutary effect on Freemasonry, and lodges were revived and revitalized by this importation of new blood. Unfortunately there were also some less desirable side effects, caused in some cases by cultural differences, and in others by the resentment of older, Caucasian members to this new influx into their lodges. In many cases of such conflict, the older members were unwilling to take up the burdens of office, but didn't want anyone else to do so either. As turmoil ensued, the Grand Lodge itself was drawn into these struggles. The unfortunate result has been the suspension of the charters of a number of lodges and the forced consolidation of at least one such lodge.

In addition to the spread of Filipino membership – and leadership – to lodges that are or were failing, another problem has arisen which involves Grand Lodge. As might be suspected, many Filipino brethren feel a very close attachment to the grand lodge in their homeland, or the homeland of their ancestors in the case of those who were born here. Such attachment is natural, and the Grand Lodge of the Philippines holds a very special place in the hearts of our Filipino brethren. This closeness has resulted in the creation of a fraternal association, the Philippine

¹⁰ <http://www.abs-cbnglobal.com/Regions/USA/Products/AdSales/FilipinoAmericanPopulation/tabid/630/Default.aspx>

Masonic American Association. This nationwide organization of Filipino masons hosts the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the Philippines, and on more than one occasion, has also asked the Grand Master of Masons in California to address their annual meeting. The cordiality afforded the Grand Master of California on these occasions is well known, and is mirrored when our Grand Master visits lodges under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of California whose membership is primarily Filipino. Grand Master have, in turn, often appointed Filipino masons as Grand Lodge Officers, as well as inspectors and committeemen – thus indicating that the troubles afflicting some lodges as earlier described has not dampened this warm relationship.

There has been one issue, however, that has caused a significant problem, not only for the Grand Lodge of California, but also for some lodges with significant Filipino membership. This is the Grand and Glorious Order of the Knights of the Creeping Serpent – an organization consisting primarily of Filipino masons in California, and whose existence in the jurisdiction has created considerable acrimony. Understanding this situation is essential to understanding the relationship between Filipino masons in California, and the Grand Lodge of California itself.

Exactly how and why an organization that probably originated in Mexico through the Shrine became so closely entwined with the Filipino masonic community is a mystery that may never be solved. Evidence indicates that the Grand and Glorious Order of the Knights of the Creeping Serpent grew out of the Order of Quetzalcoatl founded in 1945 by a Shriner mason, Arthur J. Elian, Recorder of Anezeh Shrine Temple in Mexico City.¹¹ It spread from there to other Shrine temples, including Al Bahr in San Diego, where some twenty years ago it surfaced as a “side degree.” From there is spread to the Filipino masonic community, and eventually crossed the Pacific where it became popular with the Grand Lodge of the Philippines. Information on this organization can be found on the Internet,¹² although the information there indicating that it was founded in San Diego in 1960 out of “Oriental Lodge No. 20” is in error – at least if this is a reference to a lodge under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of California. There is no such lodge on the register of our Grand Lodge, and the only “Lodge No. 20” under the Grand Lodge of California is “Washington Lodge No. 20” at Sacramento.

The organization is reported to confer a degree – or degrees – and as such ran afoul of the Grand Lodge of California because it was operating in California without permission from Grand Lodge. Under the provisions of the *California Masonic Code*, no degree-conferring organization which has as a prerequisite that a member must be a mason can operate in California without first obtaining permission from Grand Lodge through a majority vote at an Annual Communication.

Also known as the “Snakes,” this organization has created controversy in some lodges, separate and apart from any problem with Grand Lodge. Although not legally entitled to operate in California (except as a non-degree conferring organization, of which more below), it has taken candidates to a neighboring jurisdiction for the initiation ceremony, and thus recruited members

¹¹ http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/order_of_the_quetzalcoatl_ritual.htm

¹² <http://www.freewebs.com/ggokcsphils/>

from California lodges. As with all “exclusive” organizations, it has the potential for causing those who are not invited to membership to become jealous, and over the past six years, it has been blamed for unrest in some lodges by the members of those lodges who felt themselves excluded by the “Snakes.”

Several approaches to the problem have been tried by Grand Lodge, including outright prohibition of membership by direct order of the Grand Master, to an effort to get the organization approved by vote of Grand Lodge in 2008 (unsuccessful). In 2009, our then Grand Master got some of their members to agree to operate the organization as a social club only, thereby sidestepping the need for approval of Grand Lodge. Whether this remedy will be effective in the long run is yet to be seen. However, from this ongoing struggle, several things seem to have emerged:

- An organization which is popular with an ethnic group within California Freemasonry is difficult to control and/or eliminate;
- An organization which, in the case of the Filipino masonic community, is endorsed and supported by the Grand Lodge of the Philippines, will remain popular regardless of the position on it taken by the Grand Lodge of California;
- Masons who are passionately attached to an “extra-masonic” organization do not easily yield to the majority opinion of their brother masons as to the value or legitimacy of such an organization, and a struggle with Grand Lodge over such issues is not unexpected.

It should be noted that these kinds of struggles are not necessarily confined to ethnic organizations such as the “Snakes.” Similar struggles have existed in the past with other appendant organizations, and notably with the Shrine, over issues of gambling and alcohol. Some masons are as passionately attached to these organizations as some within the Filipino masonic community are to the “Grand and Glorious Order,” and the Shrine issues are not ethnic in origin.

This paper has been an attempt to explain the varieties of issues that have arisen in California as a result of ethnic groups within Freemasonry in general, and in the Grand Lodge of F. & A. M. of California in particular. While neither race nor ethnicity is supposed to have any bearing on being a mason, it does have such a bearing – or at least it has had in the experience of the Grand Lodge of California from the very beginning. Some experiences led to foreign-language lodges; some led to the creation of influential clubs, such as the Chinese Acacia Club; and some have led to more disturbing situations, such as the “Snakes” within the Filipino masonic community.

In 1723, Dr. James Anderson presented to the Premier Grand Lodge a set of “Constitutions.” He gave Grand Lodge a new set of “charges,” one of which is the famous First Charge, “Concerning God and Religion.” He concluded it with “... Masonry becomes the Center of Union, and the means of conciliating true friendship among persons that must else have remained at a perpetual distance” (orthography and punctuation modernized). Although Anderson was talking about religion in this paragraph, it could just as easily apply to racial and ethnic groups. Despite our differences – differences which exist within Freemasonry despite our Freemasonry – it is also a “Center of Union” for racial and ethnic groups. The experience in California with ethnic diversity may have made our understanding of the value of Freemasonry stronger than it

otherwise would have been. Languages, race and ethnicity can divide, Freemasonry can unite, and when it does, it truly becomes “the means of conciliating true friendship among persons that must else have remained at a perpetual distance.” *So Mote It Be!*