What Constitute Illinois Freemasonry?

Does Illinois Freemasonry have anything to do with conspiracy theories concerning the Freemasons and their supposedly nefarious plans? The so-called evidence presented to substantiate these conspiracies is invariably a book or a video by an author, and who may or may not be a Freemason.

Even within the Illinois Masonic community our members recount texts which document fairly accurate historical records of pre-1700s operative Masonic lodges, the Knight’s Templar, the Order of the Rose Cross, and many other Masonic affiliated groups ranging from the familiar to the obscure.

There are literally thousands of books written about Freemasonry over hundreds of years, all of which reflect the opinions and perspectives of their authors. The books are filled with supposed mysteries, occult knowledge, legends, treasures, and more plots than one can imagine. The stories are so profuse that anybody who chooses to rely on these books can substantiate any story about Freemasons they choose.

When prospective men seek membership in an Illinois Masonic lodge they can have legitimate concerns about many legitimate and illegitimate preconceptions surrounding Freemasonry. To convey to these men a proper understanding of Illinois Freemasonry requires a sharp understanding regarding the structure of Illinois Freemasonry versus the general body of Masonic opinions. Even if many of the writings are indisputable historical facts demonstrating the use of Masonic symbols, rituals, and floorwork, if these works are not written by, or explicitly sanctioned by, the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of the State of Illinois, then they remain only the *writers’ perspective* about Freemasonry, and those books have no bearing on our official Masonic practices and activities as Illinois Freemasons.

The structured understanding of what Freemasonry in the State of Illinois consists of is exclusively contained within:

* the Constitution and By-Laws of the Grand Lodge of Illinois,
* the By-laws of the local lodges,
* and the edicts ordered by the Illinois Grand Master.

According to code 368 of the Grand Lodge of Illinois Constitution and By-Laws;

* “the Official Monitor,
* the Officers Manual,
* the Book of Ceremonials,
* The Book of Standard Work,
* The Floor Work Instruction Manual,
* and the Code or Cypher containing in “question and answer” form the catechism in first, second and third degrees;

each duly adopted at an annual session of the Grand Lodge; are the only books containing ritual or ceremonial work authorized by the Grand Lodge of Illinois.”

Code 368 further states that “the use of any unauthorized code, exposé or other work purporting to set forth the esoteric work of Masonry is an offense under this code and shall upon conviction subject the offender to the severest Masonic penalty.”

The legal, non-profit and charitable entity of Illinois Freemasonry does not include in its definition any of the opinions and perspectives about Freemasonry promulgated by its members or non-members except as explicitly stated in its Constitution and By-laws, edicts of the Grand Master, and the publications named within the Constitution and By-laws of the Grand Lodge of Illinois. All other opinions and perspectives are explicitly not a part of an Illinois Freemason’s sanctioned lodge activities.

It is not that the opinions outside of Illinois Freemasonry are invalid or uninteresting; It is simply that Illinois Freemasonry is a legal organization with a narrow and specific definition. The entirety of Illinois Freemasonry is what we physically practice and teach while officially engaged in our Illinois Masonic lodge rooms; each Illinois Masonic lodge must conform to these rules due to the obligations inherent in receiving a Masonic Lodge Charter from the Grand Lodge of Illinois.

It is true that Illinois Freemasonry belongs to the broader world of Freemasonry. However, while the use of the word “freemason” encompasses all of Freemasonry, the use of the phrase, “Illinois Freemasonry,” does not encompass everything lumped under “freemasonry.”

As a lodge education officer, I chose to speak about this topic to help the members understand that whatever I, or any other Mason might present as Masonic knowledge, must be understood within the context of the Masonic structure of the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of the State of Illinois versus the general body of Masonic opinions and perspectives.

When seeking Grand Master Michael Jackson’s approval for this presentation, he responded, “Bro Thomson, I have no issue with the document you presented.”

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