

# The Edmond Ronayne Handbook of Freemasonry

Have you ever heard of the Edmond Ronayne Handbook of Freemasonry? This book has a fascinating backstory that sheds light on the evolution of the Masonic fraternity. In the First Degree ritual, it is forbidden to print any word, syllable, letter, or character that may reveal the secret arts, parts, or points of the hidden mysteries of ancient Freemasonry. Violating this oath can lead to a vengeful penalty in the form of a terrible execution.

Captain William Morgan, who was murdered allegedly for reprinting the material, is often associated with the brethren from Batavia, New York, who imposed those penalties. However, Morgan's work was not original but rather a reprint of William Preston's *Illustrations of Masonry*, which was first published over fifty years prior in 1772.

During the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, initiated, passed, or raised Masons were provided with just a cipher of the first letters of each word to memorize their ritual. However, this system became inadequate for Masons due to the unavailability of patient mentors. Sadly, in today's fast-paced society, finding an available mentor becomes increasingly challenging.

Interestingly, despite their opposition to the Masonic fraternity, the anti-Masons, going back hundreds of years, inadvertently helped overcome these limitations. Certain publishers repeatedly reprinted *Illustrations of Masonry* to reveal Masonic secrets and discredit Freemasonry. During the anti-masonic movement that followed the Morgan Affair, the National Christian Association emerged. Edmond Ronayne was one of the National Christian Association's top lecturers, and he had served as Secretary and Master of Keystone Lodge #639 in Chicago, Illinois.

In 1861, Ronayne authored *Ronayne's Handbook of Freemasonry*, which aimed to reveal the secrets of Freemasonry. However, the general public showed little interest in reading about Freemasonry, but the Freemasons themselves found the book fascinating. The accurate portrayal of the rituals made it a valuable tool for their advancement within the organization. To avoid getting caught with the banned "contraband" book, those most intrigued by Freemasonry kept their Handbook copies hidden from other members. However, when old book copies are discovered in estates, they often show signs of being well-used.

Ronayne journeyed to various cities nationwide, presenting what he claimed to be a Masonic ceremony to sizable audiences. His goal was to "reveal" and criticize Freemasonry. The National Christian Association (NCA), established in 1868, financed Ronayne's talks. Like other groups that oppose masonry, this association aimed to "reveal, resist, and eliminate Secret Societies, with a particular focus on Freemasonry and other Anti-Christian movements, to safeguard the Churches of Christ from corruption."

Thus, credit for the impressive and well-organized Masonic literature should be given to anti-masons rather than Masons. The contraband written reference books allowed for the standardization and unification of lodge activities with a unified Masonic ritual and floorwork performance. Today, the Edmond Ronayne Handbook of Freemasonry remains a valuable resource for Freemasons worldwide, providing an accurate portrayal of the ancient rituals and floorwork.