

Freemasonry and American Culture

FREEMASONRY AND AMERICAN CULTURE, 1880-1930

By Lynn Dumenil

Reviewed by Bro. Jason F. Hicks

This book is probably the most academic book out of the list that is presented for each level of the masonic scholar program. The book is a scholarly analysis of the fraternity from 1880-1930 and the surrounding conditions at the time. The book is divided up in two sections distinctive section part one is masonry in the nineteenth century and the second part is masonry in the 1920's. The book argues that masonry was a part of the 460 organizations (professional societies, service clubs, reform organizations and secret societies) that over five million people were members of by the early 1900's.

In the first section of the book it looks at masonry in the nineteenth century. The books starts by pointing out that masonry had recovered from the Morgan Affair and the anti-masonic movement of the early to mid-1800's. The success is due to its multifaceted nature, which accorded it broad based appeal. The appeal the book argues is individual prestige, financial aid, business and political connections, entertainment, and sociability.

By the 1920's, the book argues in the second section, that masonry had undergone great changes. Those changes mainly dealt with the popularity had swelled the membership roles and taken down the level of prestige. There was also a movement that wanted to de-emphasize the ritualistic, religious, and even the moral aspects of the fraternity.

In closing, this is a significant work that offers analysis of an understudied area and while dense is an exceptional scholarly work about the fraternity.