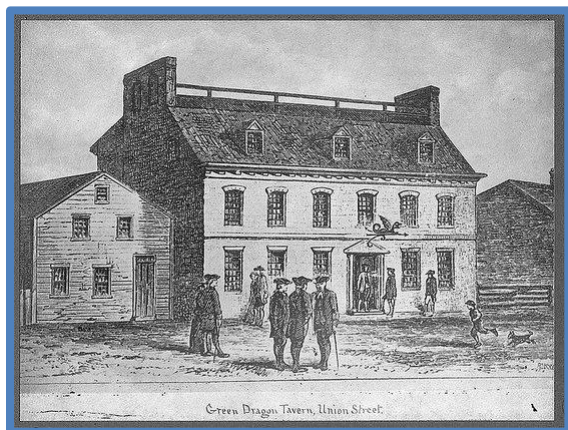


Spirits In and About the Lodge

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((Note: This paper updates my original February 2021 Paper with a very minor revision. There is no major change to the basic paper))

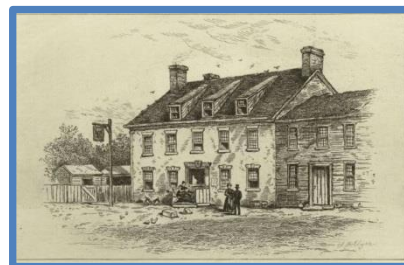


Within the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Texas, there is an ongoing debate about permitting the storage and consumption of spirits (alcohol) on lodge property. I recently had a lengthy exchange via social media with a good brother who supports the effort to change our law book to permit alcohol on lodge property. My position was and is that while I am currently opposed to permitting alcohol consumption and storage in the lodge building, my mind can be changed. I assured the brother that as soon as I see a compelling case that is well supported in research or

credible circumstantial information that I will change my mind. I know he was frustrated because he made many assertions during our discussion; unfortunately none of them swayed me. Indeed, he finally came right out and asked “what is it you want to hear to satisfy your concerns”? I confessed that at that time, I didn’t know and indeed, I still do not know. I have to compliment the brother, he made several points supporting his position, but they did not strike me as substantially compelling individually or collectively.

I decided to list the arguments (pro and con) and probe them critically for detail, substance, and support (by evidence or compelling circumstantial information). First, across the board, everyone making the case for alcohol cites our masonic heritage; we were born over taverns. It’s our collective history and it is part of our fraternal birth rite. This is true and I do not dispute the point or the history. But, I would counter with a re-examination of why lodges were located over taverns as well as the passage of time and the related changes in social attitudes.

In the days when lodges formed over taverns, the taverns were the only evening social options available in most towns and villages. The brothers of the lodges walked to their taverns (lodges) to gather in a social setting. There were no cars, no movie theaters, no family recreation alternatives, and, other than historic stage theater, no other places where people gathered after the work day. So it would seem many lodges were located at pubs because that’s where the men were able, generally, to walk to and meet and were open and available. After



meetings and perhaps (several) drinks, they did not have to get in cars and drive home. For those lodges that did form in those early days, it was neither an affordable or practical matter to buy a building that did not generate income so the simple, at-hand solution was to rent or borrow space in existing buildings such as taverns which were available in the evenings. I would suggest it was NOT the alcohol that was the primary draw for where the lodges were located; rather it was the convenience of the available space coupled with the logic of the social situation of the members that made taverns the optimal place of choice and alcohol was merely a factor that accompanied the choice.

The first counter argument offered by those opposing the idea of alcohol storage and consumption at the lodge is that of legal liability. This argument is one of my primary concerns on this question and it needs to be addressed with some critical consideration.

Without the presence and dependence on cars, brothers were freer to imbibe after a meeting and then walk home, perhaps helping each other as they go. In today's culture, nearly every brother drives to lodge. A mishap on the way home can take any of a variety of forms but which might include encounters with other drivers or police. A brother may simply be stopped by police, be administered field sobriety tests or a blood alcohol test, and may potentially be arrested. If this brother is wearing his ring or masonic jewelry, or maybe has Texas Mason license plates, he has now exposed the fraternity to the publicity of a confrontation with law enforcement and the likely public listing in local "police blotters" that many towns and cities publish in their local papers.

For the consideration of liability (personal, lodge, and Grand Lodge) and alcohol as a factor in lodge and masonic exposure, some basic information is in order. In Texas, a driver is legally impaired at .08% blood alcohol content. For many brothers this can be achieved with two to three beers, depending on the speed with which he consumes the drinks and other mitigating physiological factors (i.e. food, weight, etc.).

In a worst-case scenario where a brother has consumed alcohol and is in an accident, the potential legal exposure for the fraternity would be increased. Even if the accident would not normally be he his fault, he can still be administered field sobriety tests and, potentially, blood alcohol tests and if he is found to be under the influence, he can be found to be at fault. This brings us to the defending argument which follows this line of reason: "the Shrine hasn't had any bad experience(s) with Shrine members and their shrine organizations being sued after an accident". I'm told repeatedly that there has never been a case where a Shrine has had a legal issue resulting from a member being under the influence after leaving a shrine event; no legal challenges, no law suits, no issues.

When I test this point, I do not find this argument compelling. If we suppose a case where a Shrine member is involved in an accident and is determined to be under the influence, I would also speculate a lawyer pressing a case for liability would think long and very hard before publicly filing a case against a shrine organization which is publicly known as the owners and operators of the Shrine Hospitals that provide free medical care to children. Would a lawyer ever actually file a civil suit against a children's hospital organization? This "unknown" prevents me from considering the lack of law suits against the Shrine as comparable or relevant to the potential for a lawsuit against a lodge and the Grand Lodge,

therefore I cannot consider the argument as a qualification or justification for lodges to allow consumption of alcohol on their premises.

There are presumably no statistics or data available to tell us if lawsuits have been filed and settled out of court, or if lawyers have opted not to pursue cases against Shrine organizations due to potential negative public perceptions. However, what about police incidents on/at lodges in states where it is legal? How many brothers have been stopped, arrested, and convicted of DUI's/DWI's after leaving a lodge in those grand jurisdictions? Some statistics and related data would help us determine one way or another.

When local law enforcement agencies publish their records in public forum they include the names of drivers or subjects and the related charges. At a minimum the craft can be exposed through this publicity and, while it doesn't list a person as "a mason", there are people who will know the brothers involved and know them to be masons. We tout our fraternal goal and effect as "making good men better", but how many brothers already appear in public records under these circumstances? This specific point goes to a much larger discussion about drinking alcohol in general and DUI's/DWI's in particular and far exceeds this particular discussion of alcohol consumption on lodge property, but it does go, in my mind to the question of the environment we provide our brothers in lodge which we like to think of as a safe harbor from the outside world, where the west gate serves to protect our fraternity from the influences and impacts from the profane world and our mission to make good men better.

Another pro-alcohol discussion point is that it will provide a way for brothers to enjoy a few drinks in place where they would be able to practice catechisms with candidates, practice their ritual scripts, and discuss masonic topics away from the ears of the profane. I find this assertion unconvincing on two counts. First, I am approaching 64 years of age and throughout my years and travels, I have found myself in many bars, clubs, taverns, and other venues that provide alcohol for recreational consumption. I have watched groups of patrons enjoying drinks over a span of a few hours and in my experience, group behavior changes over the course of the passage of time, sometimes for the better, sometimes not. It has *not* been my personal experience that alcohol makes for a studious atmosphere where learning is the priority, no matter what the "bubble theory" propounds.

I spent many evening hours at the NCO clubs and in the NCO student dorms during my Air Force career through two different technical training schools, NCO Leadership School, and Air Force NCO Academy courses "studying" with those in student-led study groups. While alcohol served as a good ice-breaker for the groups, it quickly became the reason for the groups while our studies gradually receded to after-thoughts.

This brings me to my final concern which is related to the suggestion that it will provide for a social and relaxing study session between instructor and candidates or among those studying ritual. That concern, in my mind, regards our meeting with our brethren on the level. How many brothers among us are non-drinkers? How many have chosen not to consume alcohol and do not patronize bars and clubs because they feel left out or excluded from the group or just do not like to be around alcohol? There are brothers who simply do not enjoy being around people who are consuming alcohol. When they meet today in a

Texas lodge for study or practice, every brother is indeed on the level, no one challenging another to “just have one with us”, or to explain for the hundredth time why they don’t drink. In an alcohol-free environment, a non-drinking brother can feel at home and on the level among his brothers and not feel like an outsider and not feel like he owes anyone an excuse or an explanation. The nature of a lodge is to provide that level shelter where brothers can meet as equals. Brothers who would like to share a few drinks can always go somewhere after their study time at lodge to relax and socialize.

Our society today is vastly different than the day when our founding brothers met above taverns and then retired downstairs for a few libations. Alcohol plays a different role and it impacts our families and friends in ways that our ancient brethren never experienced. We talk about involving our families, and we talk about wives being comfortable that their husbands are at lodge with brothers and not hanging around in bars, but how will the wives feel when their husbands come home from lodge with alcohol on their breath? What happens to the trust we have established with the family? Are we making that husband and father a “better man”?

We have reasonably stable and relatively peaceful environments in and about Texas lodges today. Several years ago we changed our laws in such a way that brothers can (in cases where local lodge rules don’t prohibit) carry firearms into the lodge. I do have a serious concern about this discussion of alcohol now being introduced as well and I worry about the mix of these elements in our lodge buildings. I know the immediate answer to this concern is that we trust our brothers and we trust they are mature men who are unquestionably up to the task of managing their behavior. Yes, I agree this is our ideal, our picture of the perfect fraternity. Yet, if this *is* so, why have we been reinforcing the need to guard our west gate? Why have we been concerned of late about the need to raise and to ensure our standards at the west gate if there are no indications that perhaps some are entering the fraternity who may not meet those standards of maturity and excellent personal behavior? I expect the answer to this will be that we shouldn’t punish the many over the behavior of the few. It is true that collective punishment (if you choose to call it that) is not a desirable tool for an informed group or social organization, but we do know that alcohol is an attitude-altering substance to which many become addicted and which can serve as a very destructive catalyst within an environment over time.

I’m not a prude, and while I don’t drink now, I used to. I’m not against drinking and not necessarily against our eventual approval of storing and consuming alcohol on lodge property, but I do believe everything has its proper time and place. I told one brother that I didn’t know exactly what the argument would be that would convince me to sign on; but that when I hear it I’ll know it. I haven’t heard (yet) any argument that adequately addresses my questions, so for now I will remain opposed. The bottom line question to me is: “how will storage and consumption of alcohol in Texas lodge building improve Texas masonry and contribute to making good men better”? Let us continue the discussion and let us see together if these questions are resolved to the satisfaction of not only me, but many brothers of the Grand West. Above all, let us be honest and thorough in our cost benefit analysis and make a sound, defensible determination on our way forward.

S&F

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