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## By the Light of the Silvery Masonic Moon

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**THOUGH THE NIGHT WAS MADE FOR LOVING, AND THE DAY RETURNS TOO SOON, YET WE'LL GO A-ROVING, BY THE LIGHT OF THE MOON. ---- LORD BYRON**

The moon, rising in the heavens, has always held a passion for mortals. Even in the time of the Old Testament, we read, in the book of Genesis that on the fourth day of Creation, God made two Great Lights: 'the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night.' In Deuteronomy and in the Book of Kings, the moon was regarded as a symbol of permanence. In the early traditions of Masonry espoused by the ancient Grand Lodges, both in Scotland and in Ireland, ritual reference is made to three lights of the Lodge: the Sun, the Moon and the Master.

There were, in addition, three fixed or immovable lights, described by students of early Craft Masonry as three windows in the lodge room: "to light men to and from their work." These windows, in some ancient traditions, have been replaced by three candles, one situated in the East, another in the West, and the third in the south, each in front of one of the three principal officers of the Lodge. In the American ritual of Thomas Smith Webb, the moon is given reference in the first degree of Masonry as one of the lesser lights. In this tradition, it is identified as the Biblical rules of the night. In the jewel of the Junior Deacon, this heavenly orb is enclosed within the square and compasses. Though the spiritual and ritualistic ties which bind the moon into the Grand Masonic Circle are recognized, there is yet another and more significant link between the moon and the Craft of Masonry.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in rural America, it was only with much hardship that a Mason might journey to his Lodge or return from it because the depth of the night shadows reduced visibility and rendered travel most hazardous. It was not uncommon for a Brother to face the existence of many long miles between his home and his Lodge. Darkness and the dangers of inclement weather often combined to make perilous travel. The bright shining light beaming downward from a full moon would provide welcome illumination for night travel. Many rural Lodges, in awareness of this, planned fraternal gatherings in accord with the appearance of a full moon. The Grand Lodge of Kentucky published in its proceedings of 1874 an "Almanac of Full Moons," which showed the full moons in each year from 1869 to 1883, indicating the day of the week and the month upon which every full moon occurred. It was also recognized that the weather conditions were often most favorable at these times. There were but few states that did not have at least one or more "Moon Lodges." By the middle of the nineteenth century, there were in excess of three thousand such Lodges in America.

The greatest complement were found in the states of Vermont, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Maryland, and Kentucky. As the years moved ahead, this number has dropped until there remains but a handful in our time.

The occasions may differ, but improved roads, lighting conditions, and vehicles of greater dependability have combined to effect this change. A number of grand jurisdictions have legislated Moon Lodges out of existence; thirty-six Grand Lodges still maintain some,

but the confusion over exact times of meeting, with the substitution of such constitutional wording as, "on or before" or "on or after" the full moon, has engendered much perplexity. Though improvements in the standards of life in America have witnessed the demise of this Masonic custom, there are even now Lodges across the country that still cling to the conducting of meetings in relation to the appearance of the full moon in the heavens above. Acacia Lodge No. 51 in Minnesota, Freedom Lodge No. 194 in Illinois, Gila Valley Lodge No. 9 in Arizona, Mt. Moriah Lodge No. 11 in Washington State, and County Line Lodge No. 373 located on the border of

Arkansas and Missouri have persisted as Moon Lodges. DeSoto Lodge No. 105 of Florida, chartered in 1889, still holds its meetings on or before the full moon and on Tuesdays also on or before the appearance of the new moon. This Lodge has been affectionately dubbed, "the moonshine Lodge."

Some American Moon Lodges are of ancient vintage. Perhaps, the oldest was Friendship Lodge No. 7 in Rhode Island. This Lodge was chartered in 1802. Its charter contains an injunction that "after the lodge is closed, every brother shall decently and immediately depart." Furthermore, that "each visitor shall pay for himself and his horse the sum of 37 1/2 cents; without a horse, 25 cents."

Clermont Social Lodge No. 29 of Ohio is believed to be the second oldest of the Moon Lodges, being established about 1850. The Lodge Treasurer's account book contains a bill in the amount of \$40 for a set of officers' jewels made of solid silver. These jewels exist today in Cincinnati at a value many, many times their original cost. The Lodge register also contains a bill in the amount of \$4 charged to the estate of one of the members for the purchase of wood to be used for making a coffin for his deceased wife.

Travel in these years was so difficult that at the installation of the Master in the year of 1885, G. B. Beacham requested that the Lodge Secretary, also a Justice of the Peace, conduct his marriage ceremony immediately after the installation and in the presence of the assembled Brethren and guests. Afterwards, he and his bride retired to the lodge dining hall for a wedding banquet, all with the design to save extra travel hardship.

A Lodge, meeting by the light of the moon in Albion, Idaho, held a family night in 1887. During the course of the evening, someone, as a prank, rearranged the blankets and clothing of all the infants who had been brought by their parents. Most of the mothers picked up their offspring only to discover miles away that they had carried home the wrong baby. Each was forced to return over rough trails illumined only by moonlight, in order to rectify this mistake!

Claude Claudy, one of the most gifted of Masonic writers, authored a series of lodge room plays depicting interesting stories in a setting of fraternal meetings. Each of the twelve plays had a common home in a place called "Doric Lodge," often described as being a Moon Lodge. Moon Lodges have imparted something of rural American ways that is truly unique, something that can never be replaced. These Lodges have demonstrated to us the importance which our early Brethren placed upon fraternal existence. Despite hardship, attendance was good, interest was keen, and Masonry flourished in a spirit of love rarely equaled in the succeeding years.

Today, with every convenience of the modern world, Masonry seems to be losing a strong bond of fellowship, so much a part of former times. A loss of this challenge possibly has reduced the values placed upon fraternal presence—I wonder.

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