The Numbers Don't Lie
Has the Last American Freemason Already Been Born?

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Please look at this chart. Find the year when you became a Freemason and check the number of US Freemason to the right; then look at the number for 2014. A discussion follows.

YEAR	U.S. TOTAL	YEAR	U.S. TOTAL	YEAR	U.S. TOTAL
1924	3,077,161	1955	4,009,925	1986	2,839,962
1925	3,157,566	1956	4,053,323	1987	2,763,828
1926	3,218,375	1957	4,085,676	1988	2,682,537
1927	3,267,241	1958	4,099,928	1989	2,608,935
1928	3,295,872	**1959**	**4,103,161**	1990	2,531,643
1929	3,295,125	1960	4,099,219	1991	2,452,676
1930	3,279,778	1961	4,086,499	1992	2,371,863
1931	3,216,307	1962	4,063,563	1993	2,293,949
1932	3,069,645	1963	4,034,020	1994	2,225,611
1933	2,901,758	1964	4,005,605	1995	2,153,316
1934	2,760,451	1965	3,987,690	1996	2,089,578
1935	2,659,218	1966	3,948,193	1997	2,021,909
1936	2,591,309	1967	3,910,509	1998	1,967,208
1937	2,549,772	1968	3,868,854	1999	1,902,588
1938	2,514,595	1969	3,817,846	2000	1,841,169
1939	2,482,291	1970	3,763,213	2001	1,774,200
1940	2,457,263	1971	3,718,718	2002	1,727,505
1941	2,451,301	1972	3,661,507	2003	1,671,255
1942	2,478,892	1973	3,611,448	2004	1,617,032
1943	2,561,844	1974	3,561,767	2005	1,569,812
1944	2,719,607	1975	3,512,628	2006	1,525,131
1945	2,896,343	1976	3,470,980	2007	1,483,449
1946	3,097,713	1977	3,418,844	2008	1,444,823
1947	3,281,371	1978	3,360,409	2009	1,404,059
1948	3,426,155	1979	3,304,334	2010	1,373,453
1949	3,545,757	1980	3,251,528	2011	1,336,503
1950	3,644,634	1981	3,188,175	2012	1,306,539
1951	3,726,744	1982	3,121,746	2013	1,246,241
1952	3,808,364	1983	3,060,242	2014	1,211,183
1953	3,893,530	1984	2,992,389		
1954	3,964,118	1985	2,914,421		

The chart you have looked at is from the Masonic Service Association of North America. It as "official" as one can get. I became a Freemason in 1973 when there were 3,611,448 US Freemasons. As of 2014, there are just 1,211,183, which is almost exactly one-third of the total when I joined. (Note: To my knowledge, demitted members who had not affiliated at the times of the counts are not included, nor are suspensions.)*

The highest membership number is seen for 1959 (4,103,161). From that point on, the numbers declined.

If we consider just the "declining years" the total loss was 2,888,936 members. This averages to 52,526 members per year.

What we see here is that more men (members) are passing on to the Grand Lodge Above or leaving the Order for other reasons than are becoming members. One does not need to be a mathematician to see that if the decline continues at the current rate, the last Freemason in the USA will pass away in about 23 years. (Year 2039). Of course, one can fiddle around with numbers, and looking at the last 14 years the best scenario is about 27 years before "the end."

Whatever the case, the future looks dim unless there is a dramatic turnaround in the number of new members joining our Order.

Most of us would likely be opposed to any changes in the age-old "process" for admittance of new members. I have lauded this process and commented on how remarkable and emphatic it is. From my own experiences, however, I have seen how our aging lodge memberships have resulted in great inefficiencies. Of course, everybody is doing their best; but there does come a time. I do believe that degree work should be centralized by Grand Lodges, along the same lines as the AASR. This would take the pressure off the individual lodges, and probably improve lodge attendance. Naturally, each lodge should have a choice in the matter.

I do believe that if new members went through their degrees with highly efficient officers and an experienced degree team we would leave a much better impression and an incentive to recommend our Order to others.

Again from my experience, a lodge is lucky to get 20% of its members to lodge meetings. As a result, the lodge monthly bulletin is the only communication a lodge has with 80% of its members. If the bulletin were well-crafted with articles on our Order's situation, and other interesting Masonic material, we might see more concern and action. I doubt that at this time more than 20% of members across the entire United States are aware of what is being said in this paper.

Perhaps the biggest question that needs to be asked is how can the appeal to join the Masonic Order be restored to what it was prior to 1959? The major change in the 1950s was reasonably access to television. As a source of entertainment it was, and continues to be, very hard to beat. I would say every fraternal organization has the same problem. Freemasonry requires a commitment to begin with, and effort from that point forward. Television requires absolutely nothing except time.

There is a partial solution, but it only applies to members who are, as they say "on line." Lodges could use websites and email bulletins to keep their members interested in Freemasonry. Some lodges are doing this now. The objective, of course, is to get current members to "sing our praises" and hopefully attract the members' friends and acquaintances.

The most aggressive approach to the issue is for the Masonic Order to have its own television channel. In Canada we have the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, aimed at maintaining aboriginal culture—same idea. It would cost millions of dollars to provide programming and maintain; and the needed funds would have to be redirected from charitable pursuits. However, if the numbers don't lie, our "charitable pursuits" days are numbered anyway.
CLM

*The members in these categories are still Freemasons, they are just not included in the counts. How many are there? My guess is about 273,000.