



**The Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free
and Accepted Masons of Virginia
Committee on Masonic Education**



Lodge Program Paper

The Working Tools Part III – The Master Mason

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“To wear the Square and act upon it in all your daily deeds; to meet all men upon the Level and judge them in accordance with the Compasses of Truth and Charity; to be loyal to the Order and Master of yourself. To Travel ever Eastward from the feeble Light of an Entered Apprentice toward the glorious Light of Wisdom; and finally, to be prepared for the final Password giving entrance to the presence of The Grand Master of the Supreme Order of the Universe.”

I found this prayer-like quote in my search for material for this Working Tools presentation. It reads much like a charge – an admonition of what a Master Mason should be and do throughout his life. As such, it serves as a reminder of our obligations, all those “I will” and “I will not.” It brings to mind the lessons of the Working Tools as presented in all three degrees.

“All the implements of Masonry indiscriminately...” These words open the Working Tools presentation to a new Master Mason. As such, they encompass the quote above. They are intended to remind the Brother of the earlier presentations, to bring to mind the lessons, allegories, and metaphors on which the selection of the tools is built. The next line, “...more especially the Trowel,” focuses our intent on a Working Tool not previously discussed.

The Trowel is a simple tool, one easily adapted to uses other than a stonemason’s work. It is likely there is a “chicken or the egg” argument in attempting to determine for which purpose a trowel was first developed. Let us consider some of the more obvious uses.

My wife loves to garden, often using a small hand tool sometimes called a trowel. With it, she plants flowers and weeds the flowerbeds. For planting, the sharp edge and point of the trowel prepares a place, the specific spot in the garden, by piercing the soil and removing excess dirt to make room for the new plant. She also uses it for weeding, again utilizing its sharp edge and point to excise stray growth from the garden area. The Trowel, like the archaic Entered Apprentice tool, the Chisel, aids in removing the unwanted, but also aids in adding the desired.

A traditional stonemason uses a trowel for its most simplistic purpose – to add something to a larger whole. Operative Masons use a trowel “to spread the cement, which unites a building into one common mass or whole.” Unlike the fitted stonework of the Aztec temples or Egyptian pyramids, European stonemasons employed cement as the “glue” that held together individual blocks of stone. Early Mesopotamians began using

cement around 3000 BCE, and it was independently improved and perfected by the Romans. When used specifically as mortar, as opposed to concrete, cement chemically and physically binds to the rocks or bricks between which it is employed. This is an important concept, which will be mentioned again later.

In the years before computer-aided design, automakers would transfer their paper designs for new cars into three-dimensional clay models. Like the gardener's tool, the trowel-like implement used by those modelers allowed both the addition of new material (more clay) and removal of excess (trimming the surface). It is useful to notice that the auto maker's employment of this type of trowel is a substantially greater fine-motor-skill level of work. The creation of a clay model of an automobile necessarily assumes some basic form-and-function that enables the skilled modeler to only work on finishing touches.

When Renaissance artist Michelangelo created the amazing painted finish-work of the Sistine Chapel ceiling, he employed a form of painting called "fresco" that used wet plaster already colored by paint pigments. By applying wet plaster, by specific color, the artists were able to achieve a long-lasting masterpiece. To have attempted to paint on wet plaster was double work – applying plaster then going back to paint – and would have smeared the colors and removed some of the plaster. To paint over the dry plaster was also double work and the paint would not have adhered to the plaster for very long. The tool of choice? Why, a trowel, of course. The fresco artist used many of the same fine-motor-skill abilities as the auto modeler, but to an even higher level of artistry. In addition to shape and size, the fresco artist must also match colors from pigmented plaster mixed

at different times. The work is also very weather and climate dependent. If the air is too dry, the plaster dries too quickly on the artist's palette, as well as on the wall or ceiling, and so the batches have to be smaller thereby making color matching more difficult. If the climate is too humid, the plaster does not dry quickly and could fall off the walls or ceiling. Going beyond the skills of the auto modeler and far beyond those of the gardener, a fresco artist must be constantly assessing multiple factors to ensure a truly beautiful result.

A Master Mason uses the Trowel to “spread the cement of Brotherly Love and Affection, which unites us into one sacred band or society of friends and Brothers...” Thus the analogy to the stonemason's Trowel. We enter Freemasonry as individuals, each of us the result of our upbringing and our experiences, as well as our setting aside harmful or non-useful experiences – sometimes we are something other than just “from whence we came.” The lesson for the individual Master Mason is that it takes work to find the joining, the bindings, that enable Brothers of disparate backgrounds to unite without contention, or at least to set those contentions aside, working toward that creation of a “sacred band or society.”

Many of us have experienced individuals in the workplace with whom we just cannot get along. In our younger years, we might have changed jobs to avoid a particular individual, only to discover that every workplace has at least one such person. After working for a few years, many of us realize “I don't have to like the person; I only have to work with them.” And so our thinking shifts... A Masonic Lodge is no different, which is why the lessons of Freemasonry are all the more important, and why we are reminded of them with every charge at closing in a Master Mason's lodge.

“Forget not the duties,” Brethren, for you have “solemnly bound yourselves.” “Be ye all of one mind” is directly related to that “Temple of Living Stones” phrase from the Master Mason Working Tools.

Finally, the Trowel in the hands of the Master of the Lodge employs all the methods previously described. Being Master of a Lodge is not like being a teacher in charge of students, the supervisor of a work crew, or commander of a military unit. Unlike any of these other organizations, a Masonic Lodge completes its tasks – attracting and screening candidates, conferring degrees, maintaining a facility, educating its members, and otherwise conducting the business of the Lodge – by gaining the cooperation and assistance of the Brethren, rather than through the commands of the Master. To the Master of the Lodge, the Trowel is a multi-faceted tool.

Preparing a place in a Lodge for a new member is a little like preparing a spot in the garden for a new plant, and it can also resemble the stonemason’s efforts to add more stones to an existing wall. When animosities arise between Brethren, the Master must wield the Trowel to spread more Brotherly Love and Affection in the same manner as spreading mortar between uneven blocks of stone. If necessary, in the hands of the Master of the Lodge, his metaphorical Trowel can be used to excise a “weed.” Inheriting a well-run Lodge often requires minimal effort to maintain. As the auto modeler trims, smooths and shapes, so does the Worshipful Master. When a committee needs to be formed, the Master “matches tints” just as the fresco painter, carefully selecting individuals with complimentary and contrasting skills to ensure desirable end results.

Over three separate programs, we have reviewed the various Working Tools of Freemasonry – the Twenty-Four Inch Gauge, Common Gavel, and Chisel of the Entered Apprentice; the Square, Level, and Plumb of the Fellow Craft; and the Trowel of the Master Mason. Different tools have different tasks, and some are more versatile than others. None, however, is more versatile than the Trowel. In the hands of a skilled Master Mason or the Master of a Lodge, the metaphorical Trowel can create, repair, and renew. We are charged with its careful use – to guard against excess of zeal; to wield it with accuracy; to avoid its use with animosity or any emotion other than the loving regard from Brother to Brother. Every Master Mason, and most especially a Master of a Lodge, should be responsible to his Brethren, to himself, and, in his devotions to Deity, for his actions with the Master Mason’s Trowel.