

Eleven Secret Herbs and Spices

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Deep in a bank vault somewhere in Atlanta, Georgia there is a piece of paper with 17 or 18 common ingredients on it. Mix those items in the right proportions under the proper conditions, and you have recreated the world's most popular soft drink: Coca-Cola. Billions of people across the globe know the name, but rumor has it that only three or four company executives, including the company's chief chemist, know the exact formula from that piece of paper in that mysterious vault. Special undisclosed measures are taken to ensure the safety of these individuals, as if they were royalty. They rarely travel together, and when one dies, the others must approve his successor.

This is one example of the lengths to which multi-billion dollar food companies will go to protect the formulas that make their products unique and successful. And, since most of us have heard phrases like "secret blend of eleven herbs and spices" or "secret sauce" it's obvious these companies have also found they benefit from perpetuating the mystique surrounding their closely held confidential recipes.

Asking a company spokesman about the location of that bank vault where the formula resides is like asking a security company how they keep a building secure. They're just not going to tell you.

In his book *Big Secrets*, William Poundstone's sources say the number of people who know the Coca-Cola formula is just two. He also discovered that the bank vault holding the secret formula is owned by the Trust Company of Georgia.

Just as mysterious as the secret formula for Coca-Cola are the eleven herbs and spices in KFC's famous fried chicken coating. The former Kentucky Fried Chicken has shortened its name to KFC, but the company claims the recipe has stayed the same for 40 years. According to KFC spokesperson Jean Litterst less than a handful of people know their multi-million dollar recipe.

Like Coca-Cola, KFC secures its recipe in a bank vault. This one is somewhere in Louisville, Kentucky. To ensure that spice vendors don't know the formula, the secret blend of eleven herbs and spices is mixed at two different locations and then combined elsewhere with the aid of an IBM processing system. All this technology, secrecy and security for a formula that used to be mixed by KFC's founder, Colonel Harland Sanders, on the concrete floor of his own backyard porch.

Orange Julius is another product whose 70-year old formula is also under lock and key. A company spokesperson says only three or four people know exactly what goes into the special powder added to orange juice, ice and sugar water that, when blended, magically turns the drink into a sweet, foamy Orange Julius.

All very interesting, you say, but what has any of this got to do with Freemasonry?

Whether we want to admit it or not Freemasonry has always had an aura of mystery about it – the mystique of a "secret society." We as Freemasons don't build on that – we prefer to use the old, time honoured,

hackneyed mantra that we have expounded for so long: "we take a good man and make him better." But like it or not, we do seem to have an indissoluble link with the phrase "secret society." This is easily verified by 'Googling' the words "secret society" on the Internet and reading any of the multiple hits you will come up with. Here's an example: "By a secret society was formerly meant a society which was known to exist, but whose members and places of meetings were not publicly known. Today, we understand by a secret society, *a society with secrets*, having a ritual demanding an oath of allegiance and secrecy, prescribing ceremonies of a religious character, such as the use of the Bible, either by extracts therefrom, or by its being placed an altar within a lodge room, by the use of prayers, of hymns, of religious signs and symbols, special funeral services, etc." (Rosen, *The Catholic Church and Secret Societies*, p. 2).

Catholic theologian Johann Michael Raich gives a more elaborate description: "Secret societies are those organizations which completely conceal their rules, corporate activity, the names of their members, their signs, passwords and usages from outsiders or the 'profane.' As a rule, the members of these societies are bound to the strictest secrecy concerning all the business of the association by oath or promise or word of honour, and often under the threat of severe punishment in case of its violation. If such secret society has higher and lower degrees, the members of the higher degree must be equally careful to conceal their secrets from their brethren of a lower degree. Secret societies were founded to promote certain ideal aims, to be obtained not by violent but by moral measures. By this, they are distinguished from conspiracies and secret plots which are formed to attain a particular object through violent means."

It's interesting that many of our brethren have adopted, by means of an explanation of "who we are and what we do," the phrase "we are not a secret society, we are a society with secrets" thinking that this rhetorical explanation will dispel all accusations of us being a "secret society." But after hearing these two preceding definitions one realizes that we are really fooling no one nor explaining anything by using these words because they are synonymous.

It has been my observation both as the secretary of a craft lodge as well as an active Freemason that an increasing number of inquiries concerning membership in our fraternity are coming from young men who are intrigued by the supposed secrecy of our organization (and thus perhaps its perceived elitism) and, to a lesser degree, with references to the Knights Templar rather than the more traditional values of associating with good men or joining an organization by which they may improve themselves. In my lodge, at least two recent candidates gave "wanting to become a Knight Templar" as one of their reasons for petitioning for membership. One candidate was rejected by the investigating committee due to his aggressive fixation with military swords and sword drills.

It is also my observation that our young candidates are better read than their Masonic predecessors of previous generations, but the books they are reading are those of a more esoteric nature. Almost every one of our recent candidates have read books such as *Turning the Hiram Key*, *Turning the Solomon Key*, *Turning the Templar Key* or *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail*, *The Invisible College*, and *The Temple and the Lodge*. Many candidates have read these books and other books prior to petitioning for membership and are much more informed about Freemasonry than I was when I joined some thirty odd years ago. Yet they have not read nor are they even familiar with books that I would consider basic references in Freemasonry such as those by Bernard Jones, Henry Carr, Albert Mackey, Arthur Waite, John Robinson, Jasper Ridley or that time honoured favourite, Carl Claudy.

Likewise, I find our young Masons, particularly those who have been raised for only a few years, incredibly naïve or uninformed about what I would call the traditional or basic knowledge of our craft – its symbolism and allegory, the meaning of the degrees, and particularly protocol, parliamentary procedure and rules of order.

So what is it that is driving this curiosity about secret societies?

To find an answer I first looked (albeit in a somewhat cursory manner) at another topic popular today in Freemasonry and one on which there have been several Masonic papers written – the increasing differences

in generations and what it is that distinguishes one from the other. The two categories of men from whom we are currently drawing the majority of our new members are "Generation X" and "Generation Y." Those in their early to mid thirties are part of Generation X (those born between 1964 -1982). The younger generation, currently in their twenties, is part of Generation Y (born between 1980 -1995). I had a quick look at the characteristics of both and I must confess that I did not at first see anything that would indicate to me that their "generation stereotype" is driving them to become Freemasons.

The one thing I did notice that these two groups have in common, however, is that they are technically savvy and do a lot of their research on the Internet. "Generation Y'ers" in particular can't live a day without the Internet or their Ipod and they're apt to put a wide-screen television in their bedroom. This group lives in a fast-paced world where communication is immediate through text messaging and email, which means they want all the information and the details served to them quickly.

This heavy reliance on the Internet can be both a good thing and a bad thing. The Internet is bursting with information (favourable and unfavourable, accurate and inaccurate) about Freemasonry and people are using it in staggering numbers. For example, the web page of the Grand Lodge of BC and Yukon receives an average of more than 3000 hits per day. That's right – 3000 hits per day! That's an average of about 125 hits per hour or close to two hits per minute. Obviously these hits are not all coming from our own members. And it would be erroneous to presuppose that all the surfing done on all the Internet web pages results in accurate and factual (or even understandable) information about Freemasonry. Those seeking information are bound to find some anti-Masonic sites as well as those of our detractors who suggest we are a secret society, a body of the occult, etc. Some may find this intriguing and pursue it further. But to avoid an unfair bias, I should in all fairness say that we are still getting an equal or perhaps larger group of men who tell us they are joining for the more traditional of self improvement, moral virtue and wanting to associate with men of good character.

Despite the Internet, people still buy and read books. Books like *The Da Vinci Code* generated media coverage with headlines such as:

Mason Mania: Freemasons on the Rise Again

A 'Da Vinci Code' Connection Triggers Interest in Fraternal Group

The article goes on to say, "Like many fraternal organizations, the Freemasons have suffered from shrinking numbers for decades. But a controversial novel has suddenly made one fraternal group hip and is bringing in some new members." Dan Brown's book *The Da Vinci Code* was propelled by references to the Knights Templar – a group some Freemasons say has a connection to their group. "The short version of the story is that the Knights Templar were kicked out of France and went to England," says Brian Johnson, general lodge administrator in Burlington, New Jersey. "And there's no doubt there's a connection between the Knights Templar and the Freemasons." "Some people are just curious about the Freemasons. But others who ask questions ultimately become Masons," Johnson said. And that may increase next year when Dan Brown releases *The Solomon Key*, his follow-up book to *The Da Vinci Code*, reportedly a thriller centered around the Freemasons rather than the Templars and set in Washington, D.C.

"Modern-day people, especially younger people, just don't have as much time to devote to social and fraternal organizations," said Ward Guffey, president of the Masonic Temple Corporation which owns the Masonic temple in Dallas Texas. "At the same time, though, Masons do seem to be making a cultural splash. The release of the film version *The Da Vinci Code* has piqued interest in secret societies and ancient rituals."

According to the media, many Masonic leaders see the spike in interest as an opportunity to re-energize Freemasonry. The fraternity has a lot of history on its side – and legend, precisely the kind that is so fascinating to eager consumers of tales like *The Da Vinci Code*. However, some religious groups, leery of

the Masons' focus on rites, vows and rituals, warn their members to steer clear. In particular, the Roman Catholic Church which has famously objected to Masonry since the 1730's.

I should interject at this point that when the non-fictional book *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* was published in 1982, it too kindled both interest and controversy about Freemasonry. *The Da Vinci Code* is a much larger repeat. Judging from membership statistics, *Holy Blood Holy Grail* did not open the floodgates for new candidates. It remains to be seen what effect Dan Brown's books will have on the number of petitions we receive, and more importantly, retain in the next few years.

Not only books but movies, too, have spotlighted Freemasonry in recent years and created more public awareness of our fraternity. Freemasonry figured prominently in the 2004 Nicolas Cage adventure film, *National Treasure*, even with its Hollywood tinted plot which the National Geographic News described as "absolutely preposterous." The 2001 movie *From Hell*, set in London of 1888, is based on the infamous Jack the Ripper case. It presents the allegation that "the Ripper" was actually a Freemason who worked with other Masons to murder and mutilate women who knew secrets about the British Royal family that could have caused the public to be upset with them and with the Freemasons who were in high government positions. Incidentally, this is one movie where Masonic rituals are shown in some detail.

In 2005 the epic film *The Kingdom of Heaven* was released, a movie set during the Crusades of the 12th century. The script is a heavily fictionalized but does have some allusion (albeit not historically correct) to the Knights Templar and their defense of the city of Jerusalem against the Muslim leader Saladin, who is battling to reclaim the city from the Christians.

One thing that books and movies do cause to occur is that when writers such as Dan Brown cook up a far-out plot under the license of fiction, or when movie directors take liberties with historical data for the sake of making a good movie, readers flock to religious and historical texts to learn more about what really happened, or go to the Internet, where they must again decide what is truth and what is fiction. So my premise is that perhaps this renewed search for information has created a new interest in Freemasonry, not for the traditional reasons of past generations, but as a consequence of a search for truth or enlightenment both about history and about society today and the groups that exist within it.

I would like to summarize these thoughts by going back to the topic of this paper and hopefully explain why I chose it for this presentation. When you read that I was going to talk about "eleven secret herbs and spices" I'm sure each and every one of you immediately thought of Kentucky Fried Chicken, or KFC as it is now known.

Food companies such as Coca Cola, KFC, Orange Julius, and many others have found that the hype and mystique surrounding their secret recipe makes for a good marketing tactic. Promoting the secrecy of that formula and the security surrounding it sends the message that we are getting something original and very special for our dollar; indeed something that we can get nowhere else. But how truly valuable are these corporate secret formulas that have become the heart and soul of these corporations?

Assume for a moment that you were able to get your hands on the actual herb blend for the original recipe from KFC. And for those of you who are fans of television shows such as CSI, it wouldn't be that hard to do if your name was Gilbert "Gil" Grissom or Horatio Caine and you had the right equipment available to you. How much would that recipe really be worth? What damage could that security leak do to KFC? If you think about it, probably not that much. A competitor such as Lee's or Church's or Chubby Chicken probably wouldn't be interested in the recipe. Their success depends on having a unique flavor all their own. They want their own special formulas that appeal to folks who crave a flavor and texture other than what is offered at KFC.

When you think about it, that "secret recipe" is really only an image. It is backed by a distribution and manufacturing network, and a logo that everyone recognizes and trusts – elements that KFC has worked for decades to establish. So those little secret formulas all locked up tight in those armored vaults aren't the real

secret to the continuing success of KFC after all, are they? Those secret formulas they are protecting are not even close to as valuable as the company's reputation and marketing savvy. No bank vault contains a secret formula for that.

As you may or may not know, Harland "Colonel" Sanders was initiated into Freemasonry in 1917 and passed and raised in 1919. His gravestone displays the Masonic square and compasses, together with the logos of the Shriners and the Scottish Rite, of which he was a 33°. I mention Colonel Sanders' Masonic affiliation for a reason. The eleven secret herbs and spices associated with his name and his famous food product have a parallel in Freemasonry. In recent years our reputation for the mystique surrounding our secrets has aroused the public curiosity as much if not more so than has our reputation as being men of good character. But does this public curiosity include an awareness that the "secrecy" of our fraternity and the security surrounding it means that we have something original and very special to offer – indeed, something that is offered nowhere else?

Like market-leading products such as Coca Cola and Kentucky Fried Chicken, we too keep our secrets locked up – but not in a bank vault. We lock up our secrets in the safe and sacred repository of a faithful breast every time we close our lodge. But unlike market-leading products such as Coca-Cola and Kentucky Fried Chicken who jealously guard their secrets, we are willing to make our secrets known to anyone who shows that they are worthy of receiving them.

And that's what we must be cognizant of as Freemasons. Just as KFC and Coca-Cola, secrets notwithstanding, it is our reputation – what we stand for – not the mystique that will preserve our fraternity and keep it viable. And that's what we must jealously guard.

I mentioned previously that KFC and Coca-Cola have corporate logos that everyone recognizes and trusts. These are elements that they have worked on for decades to establish. The same should apply to Freemasonry. The square and compasses should be universally recognized. I recently read (and I apologize that I cannot find the source of this statement) that whereas some 60 to 80 years ago eighty percent of the population immediately recognized the square and compasses as a Masonic symbol, today that number has dropped to somewhere around three per cent. We need to ask ourselves why this is. Would Coca-Cola or KFC still be the corporate leaders they are today if only three percent of the population recognized their logo?

If I may again indulge you with the allegory I am attempting to develop, may I point out that the franchising of his product was a major source of Bro. Sanders' success and wealth. And you can be sure that those to whom a franchise was granted were closely scrutinized and monitored to ensure that KFC's reputation for quality was maintained. When you think about it, our individual Masonic lodges can be likened to a franchise. The franchise is granted when Grand Lodge constitutes a lodge and grants it a warrant. That warrant is presented to every incoming Worshipful Master at his installation and he is charged to guard it such that it may be transferred to his successor as pure and unsullied as it was when he received it. But who are the stewards of this cherished Masonic franchise? You can be sure that if a KFC franchise was not maintained to the exacting standards of the parent company, the franchise would be in jeopardy if not revoked. Can we say the same about our lodge warrants? I am sure all of us can think of at least one lodge where the franchisees should be taken to task for failing to maintain the corporate image. Not wanting to appear negative or overly critical, I will not expound further, preferring to leave this observation for your private contemplation.

Finally, we have all heard the standard definition from the Fellow Craft Degree: 'Freemasonry is a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.' Unless properly explained, this is puzzling to the candidate and quite incomprehensible to anyone outside the Craft. We need a definition that is short, succinct, and understandable. Think of Coca-Cola: "It's the real thing." Think of KFC: "Finger lickin' good." Think of Staples Office Supplies: "That was easy!" How many of us could volunteer three, four, five or even ten, fifteen or twenty words that would immediately cause us to think of Freemasonry or succinctly identify our fraternity? But we must be careful. All too often, troubled companies think a new ad campaign will fix what ails them. As a matter of fact, it often makes things worse.

One last observation with respect to our "Masonic franchise," if I may coin such a phrase: we need to deliver a quality product. The report *It's About Time* published by the Masonic Information Center contains several points that we as franchise holders should be not only be aware of but working to improve. One of these areas is the need for public awareness in claiming our Masonic identity. Another is a willingness to face the facts that society and lifestyles are changing, and although we cherish our time honoured traditions, we must at the same time make a few adjustments to steer us and our fraternity on a path consistent with the current social and work environment. We need to generate renewed energy and break out of our current patterns of lethargy. Freemasonry can be and is exciting. We need to rekindle that excitement for the benefit of our new as well as our existing members. We need to keep our Masonic franchise fine tuned so that it is constantly and consistently in tune with our Masonic goals and objectives, not to mention the wonderful precepts of our time honoured fraternity.

In short, brethren, what we need is some "finger lickin' good" Freemasonry

Thank you for your attention.

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