

The background of the cover is a dark, textured wooden door. It features a vertical row of ten brass studs on the right side. On the left, there are two large, ornate brass hinges with decorative scrollwork. A brass handle is visible on the right side, partially obscured by the text. A faint, light-colored geometric pattern, possibly a mandala or a similar design, is overlaid on the door's surface.

John Michael Greer

INSIDE
A
MAGICAL
LODGE

Traditional Lodge Methods
for Modern Mages

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for Modern Mages

2nd Edition Revised and Expanded

John Michael Greer

AEON

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FOREWORD TO THE NEW EDITION

I think every author has a favorite book or two, and this is one of mine. I began work on it in the fall of 1996, when my first published book was just out and my second was in the editing process. At that time, I was in the first flush of my enthusiasm for the traditional lodge system, which I saw—and not inaccurately—as one of the lost secrets of Hermetic magic, a way of collective organization and initiatory ritual as central to the Hermetic tradition as monastic life is to Buddhism and the church to Christianity. I wrote it in a blaze of enthusiasm, while spending what now seems like an astonishing share of my evenings in lodges of one kind or another. When it went off to its original publisher, I had high hopes that a new era of magical lodges would follow promptly on its publication.

It's easy to chuckle at the absurdities of one's younger self. That new era still shows no signs of arriving, and the more general aspiration that framed it—the hope that the revival of Hermetic magic then under way would lead to a broader revival of interest in the extraordinary richness of the Hermetic tradition more generally—remains no more than a hope. Over the twenty-two years since it originally saw print, though, *Inside a Magical Lodge* found a steady stream of readers who shared my interest in the traditional lodge system, or were simply fascinated

by the prospect of learning how magical lodges worked. Thus when the original edition finally went out of print after twenty years, and Aeon Books expressed enthusiastic interest in a revised and expanded version, I agreed at once.

One of the core reasons for the revision was simply that I had spent much more time inside lodge doors, and gained a good deal more experience with lodges and their ways. When *Inside a Magical Lodge* was first published, I was a member of two fraternal orders, one Hermetic magical order, and one Druid order; I had not yet become a Freemason, my magical background was still mostly in the Golden Dawn tradition, and—to put it mildly—I had a lot to learn. Twenty-two years is a long time, and the extraordinary revival of magic that has been going on since shortly after I was born has been generous with opportunities.

I was pleasantly surprised, all things considered, to find that *Inside a Magical Lodge* needed as little rewriting as it did. Some sections had to be modified, and a few were simply deleted and replaced; the uncritical enthusiasm I had for democratic methods of running a lodge had been tempered by watching several democratically run lodges tear themselves apart, on the one hand, and watching several other lodges with more centralized modes of leadership shrug off comparable problems and keep going. The section on the magical side of lodge work needed further development in the light of more extensive experience, and quite a few other revisions needed to be made.

Those revisions and corrections, though, touched few of the central points made in the book. To my mind, it has weathered twenty-two years of changes remarkably well, and I am pleased to be able to place it in the hands of a new generation of mages. I remain grateful to all those who made constructive use of the original edition, and also with the thousands of fellow initiates—Odd Fellows, Grangers, Freemasons, Druids, and members of nearly a dozen magical lodges of one kind or another—who have helped me to learn, and shared my enthusiasm for a colorful, fascinating, and neglected tradition. My thanks go with all.

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION

It is one of the most vivid memories of my childhood: the old sword gleaming in my grandfather's hands, its blade engraved with strange symbols and with my own name. My grandfather was in one of his rare reminiscent moods, and so the sword had come down from the attic and out from its leather case. It had belonged to his father, John William Greer, who had worn it as a member of a lodge. The symbols on it had something to do with the lodge, but my grandfather (who had never joined) didn't know what.

Years later, as my grandparents were leaving the Pacific coast lumber town where they spent nearly all their lives to move to a Sun Belt trailer park, my father waved me over in the middle of a long-distance phone call. "You remember your great-grandfather's sword," he said, covering the mouthpiece. "Do you want it?"

It arrived about a month later, still in its brown leather case. I unpacked it and stared at the symbols on the blade and the hilt, wondering what they meant. They had to do with a lodge, I remembered, but I had only the dimmest idea what a lodge was. The sword went into my closet, a treasure and a mystery.

That was about the same time I first began to study ceremonial magic. A handful of books I found in libraries and bookstores had awakened

me to the fact that there was something huge and strange behind the “Do Not Enter” signs set up in front of magic by modern Western culture, something that called to me with an intensity I could not ignore. Those first books led me to others; they also taught me the first, fundamental practices of the system created by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an English magical lodge of the late nineteenth century whose teachings form one of the most potent approaches to Western magic. I began to find my way through the wilderness of a powerful and neglected tradition, learning ancient symbolism and philosophy, testing my understanding against the touchstone of magical practice and the realities of everyday life. Meanwhile the old sword waited, a message I did not yet know how to read.

It was my magical studies, in the end, that gave me the key. Hints and references in the Golden Dawn papers led me to chase down the origins of certain old symbols in the unfamiliar world of nineteenth-century fraternal lodge traditions. That sent me to the stacks of a university library, and to a dusty volume more than a century old where emblems I recognized from the old sword were connected to the name of a fraternal order with a peculiar name: the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. When I told my wife about my discovery that evening, she gave me a startled look and said, “They have a lodge here in Seattle, you know. There was an article about them in the morning paper a week ago.”

I found the article at the library the next day. It told how the lodge, once hundreds of members strong, had dwindled away to a handful of retirees; how a few younger men had joined in the past two years; how old and young members alike were trying to keep up the lodge’s traditions and community service projects. I mulled it over for a few days, and wrote the lodge a letter. That led to phone conversations with the lodge secretary, to an application, to an interview, and finally to a hot summer evening when I and two others sat in a little, dusty room with no windows, waiting for our initiation.

I was about ten minutes into the initiation ceremony itself when I began to notice something very familiar about what was going on. Magic was never mentioned, before or afterward; many of the older members of the lodge were devout Christians, and would have been horrified at the thought that their treasured ceremonies had any link with occultism. Still, the ritual I experienced that evening had deep connections with the material I’d studied in the Golden Dawn papers.

Those connections became even clearer as I passed through other initiations and became an active member of the lodge.

At the same time, I found myself looking at the Golden Dawn documents themselves with new eyes. Points I had missed or misunderstood took on unexpected meanings as I compared them with my growing knowledge of lodge work. The Golden Dawn was itself a lodge organization, I realized, based on the same foundation of ideas and techniques that fraternal lodges use—and I came to see that this foundation, unspoken and usually unnoticed, forms a hidden dimension to many of the traditions of Western magic.

That realization was the beginning of an adventure, one that still continues. In the years since that first initiation, I rose up through the degrees of the Odd Fellows, and finally earned the right to wear my great-grandfather's sword. I became a member of several other lodge organizations, fraternal and magical, and—with a small group of friends who shared my interest in the lodge system's magical side—helped found a new magical lodge in order to explore the interface between lodge traditions and magical practice. I saw three lodges born, watched two die, and followed these and still others through many of the stages of their life cycle. I studied secret documents on ritual and symbolism, and traced the information in them back through the murky history of the lodge system to their roots in forgotten traditions. Along the way, I learned a good deal about lodges, about magic—and about myself. Finally, as I worked on my two previous books on Golden Dawn magic and thought about what I had learned during the years of my magical training, the connections between magic and the lodge system came to occupy more and more of my thoughts.

The impulse that finally set me writing this book, though, came from a different source. One wet afternoon a year or so after I joined that first fraternal lodge, I was discussing magical group work with a friend who had a good deal of experience in the local Pagan community. We compared notes on lodges and covens, and talked about the problems that beset various magical groups—problems that mostly revolved about the ordinary, practical tasks of making decisions, assigning responsibilities, and getting organized for the “real work” of magic. “Do you know what our problem is?” my friend said finally. “We have too many high priestesses and not enough secretaries.”

It was at that point that I realized that the lodge system had something else to offer modern magicians. Traditional lodge organizations have

several centuries' worth of experience in dealing with the everyday problems of running a ritual working group, and long ago devised ways of dealing with problems that continue to wreck far too many modern magical groups. The lodge tradition thus has practical as well as magical lessons to teach, I saw, and as I began to piece those lessons together, the nucleus of this book began to take shape.

How to use this book

Inside A Magical Lodge is designed to be a complete introduction to the traditional lodge system and its magical possibilities. It's intended for those who are simply curious about lodges, for those who belong to lodges, for those who are thinking of joining lodges, and for those who want to explore the possibility of creating new lodges.

There are two things left out of this book that some readers may expect to find in it, however, and it may be worth mentioning them here for the sake of clarity. First, while most of the material covered in this book has its roots in my own experience as a member of several different magical and fraternal lodges, there are certain limits that need to be acknowledged. As an initiate of several different orders, I have been given access to ritual texts and a variety of other secret documents, and the rituals of several other orders have come into my possession by a variety of channels. In fairness to the orders involved, and in recognition of the central role of secrecy in the lodge system—a role discussed at some length in Chapter 5 of this book—I have not included any of this material here. Instead, in Chapters 6 through 11, I have shown how a magical lodge is constructed from the ground up, and the rituals and secrets of the lodge created in these chapters has been used to illustrate how the lodge system works in practice. Readers who hope to learn the secrets of existing lodge organizations without joining the lodges in question, therefore, will have to look elsewhere.

Second, I have not included detailed instructions in magic in this book, except where it's necessary to show how the magical side of lodge work can be handled. Partly this is a matter of sheer limitations of space, since a book that included both the lodge system and magic would have to have either too many pages or too many omissions! Partly, it is a reflection of the fact that there are already many capable books on magic in print, and readers who want to learn the nuts and bolts of magical work have plenty of options. Partly, though, it is a recognition

of the fact that magical lodge work can be carried out effectively using any system of Western magic, not only the Cabalistic magic of the Golden Dawn tradition that I personally know and teach. The material covered in this book can be combined with whatever approach to magic you prefer—Cabalistic, Pagan, Thelemite, Celtic, astrological, Wiccan, esoteric Christian, Enochian, or what have you—to form an effective method of magical lodge work. This is one measure of the flexibility of the traditional lodge system, a flexibility we'll be exploring in many more contexts in the pages ahead.

The book is organized into three parts. The first, from Chapter 1 through Chapter 5, is theoretical and historical. It starts out with a discussion of how the magical lodge system came into being, and goes on to explore the foundations of the system in terms of structure, symbolism, magic, and the art and practice of secrecy. The second part, from Chapter 6 through Chapter 11, is illustrative. It goes step by step through the construction of a complete magical lodge system, from its basic symbolism and structure to its ritual and magical workings, and finishes with an imaginary visit to a lodge meeting, where all these things are put to work. The third part, made up of Chapter 12 and Chapter 13, is practical. It provides detailed instructions for those who want to take part in lodge work themselves, either by organizing a new lodge or by joining an existing one.

There are two ways to approach this material, and different readers may want to choose one or the other depending on their interests and learning styles. Those who are more interested in the history and theory behind lodge work, or who prefer to tackle a subject starting with the core ideas and proceeding from there, will want to read these sections in the order given, starting with Chapter 1 and going straight through to the end. Those who are more interested in getting to the practical details, or who prefer to start with specific examples and work their way to the underlying principles, may find it easier to read this book more or less backwards, starting with Chapters 12 and 13, then backtracking to Chapters 6 through 11, and finally going to the beginning and reading Chapters 1 through 5. Either way will provide a workable introduction to the material we'll be covering.

During my journey into the world of the traditional lodge system, I have had the help and friendship of a great many people in and out of the lodges I have joined. Many of these, for a variety of reasons, must remain nameless here. My gratitude and thanks remain with them all.

Among those who can be named, a profound debt of thanks is owed to my wife Sara, who has accompanied me all through my journey into the mysteries of the lodge system, offered her own insights as a magician and a member and officer of several lodges, and read and critiqued my writings on lodge matters from the first tentative articles to the final drafts of this book. In this as in all else, her support, insight, and love have enriched my life immeasurably.

Richard Brzustowicz Jr., friend and fellow student of the Mysteries, also took part from the beginning in this exploration of the lodge system, and many of the ideas in this book had their origins in our late-night discussions after lodge meetings. His insights and comments continue to keep me on my toes.

Finally, I owe a special debt to one other person: John William Greer, my great-grandfather. Though we never met—he died more than forty years before I was born—his legacy, and the links we share as initiates of the Odd Fellows, were guiding presences throughout the making of this book, and through the journey that gave it birth.