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Haunted Chambers: the lives of early women Freemasons

Karen Kidd

Cornerstone Book Publishers, 2009

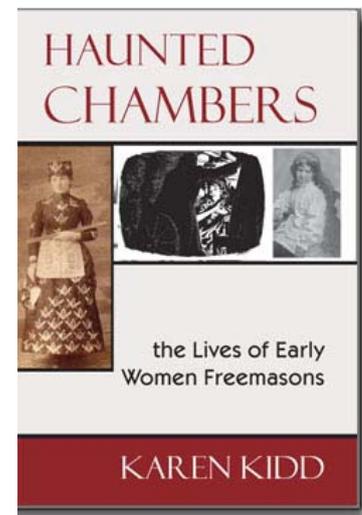
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Reviewed by David Slater



From someone who states that ‘this book required more than a little effort, persistence and a certain stubborn commitment to apply high standards and research’ (p ix), I would have expected a rather different presentation. Don’t get me wrong: the book is factual and well researched but the results of this research could have been, not to place too fine a point on it, better presented in some instances.

The preface opens with a citation from the ‘1892 edition [*sic*] of *Ars Quatour* [*sic*] *Coronatorum*’. If there is a second edition of this book, I would suggest that there be some more proof reading before it is published. The use of informal writing such as the word ‘thru’ and paragraphs such as:

‘And we must give up Sabina von Steinbach.
She never existed.
Period.’ (p 11)

rather grates when one is expecting a more research-oriented style, and an index would have been helpful.

The first chapter looks at ‘Women in Medieval Mason Guilds’. The author cites the Sabina von Steinbach story and, as shown above, comes to the conclusion that Sabina never existed but ‘represents the many women who did exist but whose stories and names are forgotten’ (p 12). She lists a number of documents that prove beyond reasonable doubt that there were female operative masons, and then goes to great lengths to show that the ‘shee’ in York Roll No 4 indeed refers to a female, a point that I thought had long been conceded. As Bro Kidd argues that women were prohibited from joining lodges because they were not free at the time when Anderson wrote his *Constitutions*, I fail to see why so much space was spent on showing that there were women operative masons, since she is not arguing that women were not able to join the Malecraft (a term she acknowledges to be borrowed from our own WBro Graeme Love) because of a mistaken belief that there were no women operative masons.

The 18th-century antipathy towards women in Freemasonry probably resulted in what is termed Adoptive Masonry. Bro Kidd makes the point that this was a European, more specifically a French, phenomenon. Adoptive Masonry, she argues, is masonic in the sense of its symbolism, as opposed to American Adoptive Masonry, which was and is more allegorical in nature.

The bulk of the book covers women and Malecraft Masonry. Bro Kidd gives the background to and discusses differing opinions of a number of women who have been initiated into lodges. These include women who, either accidentally or purposely, overheard lodge ritual, such as the Irishwoman Elizabeth St Leger Aldworth, the Canadian Mary Ann Belding Sproul and Catherine Sweet Babington from Kentucky. Others seem to have been legitimately initiated, such as Hannah Mather Crocker (who was Mistress of St Anne’s Lodge in Boston, Massachusetts), the German-born French war heroine Henriette Heiniken (*aka* Madame Xaintrailles) and the Hungarian Helene, Countess Hadik Barkoczy (whose initiation was later declared invalid by the Grand Orient of Hungary). Vinnie Ream Hoxie (the sculptress and acquaintance of Albert Pike who was received into the degrees of Pike’s short-lived Adoptive Rite) is also mentioned. Bro Kidd sees Pike’s Adoptive Rite as being akin to the European adoptive rites rather than to the Order of the Eastern Star (OES). Another who was probably, but not definitely, initiated into a Malecraft lodge, is Salome Anderson of Oakland, California.

There is mention of Charles de Beaumont (Chevalier d'Eon), who in my opinion should not be included in this book as it was proved after his death that he was male. Other possibilities are mentioned and also a number of 'near misses'—women who could easily have been made masons if circumstances had been different or who had eavesdropped, or tried to eavesdrop, but were not initiated as a result. Perhaps one of the most interesting examples is an 'Irish Girl' which Bro Kidd states is the least documented of the women Freemasons in her book. During the Civil War in the USA, she saved her brother from death by giving the Grand Hailing Sign of a Master Mason.

In the last chapter, Bro Kidd gives a brief summary of the OES, Femalecraft and Co-Masonry, and ends by citing Graeme Love's 'soft option' that the problem is not women wishing to join Malecraft but rather the need for the Malecraft to recognise that women can meet as masons. This would result in less pressure for the Malecraft to change its admission rules.

The appendix includes a satire that has been attributed to Jonathan Swift in the form of a letter from the Grand Mistress of the Female Free Masons (amusing but, in my opinion, not relevant), a Hudibrastic poem (referred to in the text, but not really necessary to be included in the appendix), some more information relating to the Irish Girl and to Salome Anderson, and UGLE's statement on Women and Freemasonry made in 1999.

So, in summary, this book is well worth reading for the background that it gives to the lives and circumstances of various women Freemasons. In my opinion the book could be improved by substantially reducing the space given to women operative masons, by more careful proof reading, by the use of less informal language and by the inclusion of an index. I hope that this book does succeed in more women Freemasons being remembered—one of its stated aims. The extensive number of illustrations, references and bibliography will be very helpful for anyone who wishes to pursue the topic of women in Freemasonry any further.

David Slater

"Haunted Chambers" is a befitting title, as the quest for a finer understanding of Freemasonry cannot ignore the material which Karen has so eloquently presented. Karen's book pleasantly took me by surprise - not easily done. She illustrates a shadowed history in a most intriguing form; unknown to the vast majority of Masons. Such milestones are rarely so simple. Karen Kidd's Haunted Chambers: the Lives of Early Women Freemasons has two apparent goals. First, to demonstrate that women have already had a share, albeit a small one, in regular Masonry since its inception. Second, that female Freemasons, possessing the same abilities and Masonic passions as their male counterparts, deserve to enjoy full recognition and acceptance by all-male lodges. *FREE* shipping on qualifying offers. Haunted Chambers: The Lives of Early Women Freemasons. Jobs Daughters Masonic Lodge Freemason Book Publishing Literature Books Life Women Presents. More information... Romans thought the early Christians were practicing cannibalism when they heard about them eating bread and wine as symbolic representations of the body and blood of Christ. Ancient Romans did everything from drinking gladiator blood to washing clothes in urine. Amanda HISTORY!

Womens Freemason Lodges and Le Droit Humain generally recognize each other and are free to visit one another, although their rituals and traditions differ in minor ways. Women's Freemasonry is growing in popularity around the world. Since the early 1900s, women's lodges have become quite widespread in France. Internationally, women Freemasons now number in the tens of thousands and there are more than 60,000 women Freemasons in England. Women Freemasons Working Tools

The photo of a female Freemason at the top of this page is the cover page of the book, "Haunted Chambers - The Lives of Early Women Freemasons", by Brother Karen Kidd. It is a well-researched, non-fiction book about women Freemasons down through history within a currently male dominated craft. One of my books, "Haunted Chambers: the Lives of Early Women Freemasons", gets a mention here at about 20:00.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNNFy8blnuA>. Just two things: 1) In this book, I don't document all the women initiated into Freemasonry over the "past 400 years" as that would encompass the rise of Co-Freemasonry and Femalecraft Freemasonry. I document cases in the mid-19th Century and earlier. 2) The book's title comes from W. Fred Vernon's observations in the 1892 edition of the *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum*: " . . . and I have no doubt other ancient "Haunted Chambers", for the first time ever, presents not only the most complete list of early women Freemasons but also as much detail about their lives as can still be found. Here are their stories, long suppressed, ignored and marginalized. They include medieval women stone cutters; so-called "adoptive" women Freemasons; an aristocrat; a countess; an early New Brunswick settler; a war hero; a writer of women's rights; an immigrant Irish girl; the famed sculptress of Abraham Lincoln's statue in the US Capitol Rotunda and many whose names are now lost. Some will find this book a challenge. S The Order of Women Freemasons meets regularly in lodges, or temples, around the country. During ceremonies, the women dress in white robes, with regalia worn around their necks to represent their place in the hierarchy. The service we see begins with a procession down the centre aisle. Members of the organisation bow as they reach the front, where grand master Zuzanka Penn sits on a grand chair that looks similar to a throne. Can women and minorities become Freemasons? The early Masonic lodges were exclusively male, meaning that women were prohibited from membership, a point made clear in the "Old Charges" ("no bondmen, no women, no immoral or scandalous men..."). This tradition, a principle that reflected the predominant social arrangements of the time, continued for many decades, especially in Great Britain. But over the years, women increasingly began to play active roles in the organization, especially on the European mainland. In France during the 1740s, for example, so-called "lodges

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