



Petition Investigations Manual

Petition Investigations

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• Guarding Our West Gate

No Mason could be charged with a higher or more noble and rewarding responsibility than he who is charged with the responsibility to be a guard at the entrance porch of the Temple.

In the times in which we live today, nothing is more dangerous to our beloved Order than a careless and slipshod investigation of a petitioner.

An investigation of a petitioner consists of a great deal more than a casual interview or a couple of hurried calls to the petitioner's references on the very day that the investigation report is due. It is human nature that a petitioner will give as references those who are most likely to give him a clean bill of health. We need to face the fact that more than just a few Lodges have taken in members of whom they cannot be proud, and who, had they been thoroughly investigated, would never have passed the ballot box. What every Lodge desperately needs is a group of men who will not only consider the statements of the petitioner, but will go behind those statements and take them to pieces to see if they are really true in fact, or are partly or wholly fictitious.

Today, it is not at all unusual that a man, born in one place, will live in any number of different places before he reaches the age to petition for the Degrees of Masonry. After reaching the required age, many men move around in search of either employment or in pursuit of higher learning. Such conditions make it tremendously difficult to discover a lot about a man's true character when he has moved from city to city, or even from state to state. Such investigation would be difficult even for the specially trained and professional investigator. It is, therefore, relatively easy to imagine that the average Lodge member who may be a banker, a toolmaker, an accountant or a farmer would experience considerable difficulty in making a proper investigation of a petitioner.

A proper investigation of a petitioner is especially important today when in most cases few of the Brethren who will vote on his petition actually know the petitioner and, therefore, depend almost entirely on the report of the Investigating Committee to decide how they will vote.

As members of the Investigative Committee, you are answerable to no one except your conscience. Your Lodge and Freemasonry are dependent upon your best efforts and keen judgment. You are screening a person who has the ability to make the structure of Freemasonry within your lodge either stronger or weaker by his very presence. It is, therefore, your solemn duty to perform the following checklist upon yourself before you begin to investigate a candidate.

Each member of the Masonic Investigative Committee must be unbiased by improper solicitations and uninfluenced by any possible mercenary motives by the Candidate, other Brothers or well-meaning friends or relatives of the prospect. Remember, you are searching to discover the true character of the man behind the petition.

Serving as a member of an Investigating Committee has particular importance and meaning when you apply the charge given during your Third Degree; "to preserve unsullied the reputation of the Fraternity must be your constant care." We must permit none to pass except those who are well qualified.

Most of all, you should heed the message found in Article 393 of Grand Lodge Law concerning the qualifications of candidates, wherein it states that candidates for the degrees of Masonry must be "of good moral character" and that the candidate's qualifications are to be "strictly met."

• The Investigator Group

The solution to obtaining a good investigation demands that our Lodges make a special effort to train a group of its members in the basic fundamentals of how best to do the job - a group who would become expert in and enjoy doing investigative work for the Lodge.

You cannot have a “Permanent Investigation Committee” because it is contrary to Article 408 of the laws of Grand Lodge, but you can have a group of Lodge members that have been selected on the basis of experience, wisdom, discretion and knowledge.

The best way to begin looking for members of the Lodge Investigation Group is to ask each of the Lodge members if they have any background or experience in the area of investigations. If they do not have any investigation experience, ask them if they have a desire to serve as a member of the Investigation Group and would be willing to learn how to properly investigate a petitioner.

If the Lodge is fortunate and does have experienced investigators among its membership, those members could become the core of the Investigation Group. The Lodge should then select other members from the Lodge membership who are interested and willing to be trained to undertake the responsibility of investigation of petitioners.

Once your group is selected, if a petition is received, you will have a ready-made group from which to select an Investigating Committee. One of the committee members should be selected to act as Chairman.

• Petition Review

After the Worshipful Master has appointed the members of the Investigation Committee, the Chairman should coordinate with the Secretary of the Lodge and call a meeting of the committee at the Lodge to carefully go over the petition itself. The Petition is loaded with good information for the committee to use during the investigation. The committee should review each question and each answer on the petition, checking for date gaps and inconsistencies, all the while making a list of items to be checked and questions to ask the petitioner.

The Chairman should assign certain areas of inquiry to each member of the committee, such as:

- Background Check
 - Criminal Records
 - Neighbors
- Petitioner's References
 - Contact each reference listed by petitioner
 - Contact petitioner's past and present employers
- Petitioner's Recommenders
 - Contact petitioner's listed recommenders

After the background, reference and recommender inquiries of the investigation have been completed, the Investigation Committee should meet again to compare their findings and discuss how the findings will play into their interviews with the petitioner. Then each committee member should plan to individually and independently visit the petitioner in his home.

• Background Check

It is essential that a professional criminal and financial background check be performed on all petitions for the degrees and out-of-state affiliations. Individuals with a history of criminal activity or a lack of financial responsibility will often seek the refuge of Freemasonry to cover their past misdeeds.

LAW ENFORCEMENT: The very first thing that an investigator should understand is: **Do not ask a Law Enforcement Officer to obtain non-public information for you! Don't ask him to perform an illegal act.** However, you might ask him to assistance in steering you in the right direction with regard to obtaining information that is a matter of public record obtainable from State and County records.

If the petitioner has been or is currently a Texas resident, you can go to the web site listed below to check his criminal background and the Sex Offender Registry:

<https://records.txdps.state.tx.us/DpsWebsite/CriminalHistory/>

RECORD OF FORMER RESIDENCE: In our changing society, many young men leave their “roots” to look for greener pastures. Even so, the diligent investigator can gain a lot of information about a man, particularly if he came from a small community. Some of his family may belong to a Lodge. A visit to the Lodge near where he grew up or a simple call to the Secretary might prove beneficial to the investigation. Seek, and you just might gain some valuable information about the petitioner – and valuable information might well be to the credit of the petitioner. If it proves to be to the discredit of the petitioner, then the investigator has done his job well.

REPUTATION IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD: Today neighbors seldom talk across the fence and become involved in neighborhood activities, and it may be rather difficult to get much information about a man from his neighbors. Even so, a good investigator should give it a try! By your own observation, you can tell if he takes pride in his property. You may just stop by and visit with a neighbor. Tell the neighbor that you are considering entering into a relationship with his neighbor, and you would like to know what he thinks of him. Ask if he is a good neighbor. Ask if his neighbor's children are well behaved. There is no necessity to mention the Fraternity, unless of course you know the person to be a Mason.

WORKPLACE: Contact each of the petitioner's employer's for the past 10 years. Although some employers are guarded about giving out information regarding past employees, it is always worth the effort to try. At the very least, have the employer verify the information reported on the petition. Ask if the petitioner was terminated or if he resigned.

Important Questions Regarding the Petitioner

- Does he have a criminal history?
- Are there any criminal warrants or charges pending?
- Do his co-workers know him to be a good man?
- Does he pay his bills on time and meet his obligations?
- Do his neighbors know him as a good man?
- What information is on the internet about him?
- Do his civic and social activities show him to be a good man?

• References

Grand Lodge Law requires that a petitioner provide three references who are Masons. Masonic references can be the best source for obtaining valuable information about the petitioner, and, because they are Masons, the investigator should be able to explore all areas of the petitioner's background without having to tread lightly. These Masons must **KNOW** the petitioner and not be Masons who have little or no knowledge of the character of the petitioner. References must also be members of a Lodge under the jurisdiction of Grand Lodge that is in fraternal recognition with the Grand Lodge of Texas (see Article 394).

Call and talk to each one of the Masonic References listed on the petition. Ask them specifically about the petitioner's character, both good and bad. If a reference tells you that he has never heard anything bad about the candidate, dig deeper and ask about what he knows to be good about the candidate. A man who is worthy to be a Mason should possess character traits that are well known to all, more especially a reference who is a Mason.

Don't overlook any reference. The last one you check just may be the one that is needed to help complete a proper investigation.

• Check Recommenders

Call each one of the recommenders that signed the petition and challenge them to convince you that the petitioner is worthy to be considered as a candidate for the Degrees. Ask about the character traits of the candidate and ask if the candidate is truly “Worthy and Well Qualified”.

Ask the recommenders why they signed the petition and for answers beyond, "He wants to be a Mason". **Find out what they really know about him**, how long they have known him, who introduced them to him and why. Ask them for names of Masons and other people they know who are associated with the petitioner or know him personally.

Ask questions about the petitioner’s character, both good and bad, and ask if the petitioner will enhance the reputation of the Lodge. Ask the recommender if he would trust the well being of his wife to the petitioner. Ask the recommender if he would allow the petitioner to date his underage daughter.

In short, ask the recommender if he knows the petitioner to be of high moral character, such that he would be a worthy and well qualified Mason.

• Interviewing The Petitioner

The three members of the Investigating Committee should go individually to visit the petitioner in his home, and such visit should be made without notice to the petitioner. Then, the Committee should have a final meeting and make a decision with regard to the report of the Committee – favorable, or unfavorable. **REMEMBER: Article 412 of the Laws of the Grand Lodge REQUIRES a face to face interview between EACH Investigating Committee member and the petitioner on ALL petitions either for the Degrees of Masonry or for Advancement.** The **ONLY** exception to that requirement is for a petition for Advancement and that is by the approval of the Worshipful Master.

The investigators should not just concentrate on finding out what is **WRONG** with the petitioner. While such information is important, of equal importance is to find out what is **RIGHT** about him. Remember, most men have distinguished themselves in activities such as church, family, business, civic and public life. **LOOK FOR SOME OF THE GOOD THINGS.** Don't spend a great deal of time looking for past faults; rather concentrate on whether or not he has corrected those faults. A lot of good men have made mistakes in the days of their youth, corrected their mistakes and go on in adult life to make good husbands, fathers, and citizens, and will doubtless make good Masons. Skilled and interested investigators can be counted on to take these and many other points into consideration.

AREAS TO EXPLORE DURING THE INTERVIEW

FAMILY LIFE: Is he a good husband, father and provider for his family? Is he kind and gentle with his wife? Does he guide his children by example, provide for their education, and share in their activities as a family? What is the attitude of the family regarding the petitioner becoming a Mason?

CREDIT RECORD: There are many restrictions in this area of investigation. The best approach would be to point blank ask the question: **“Are you aware that some financial responsibility is attached to membership in the Masonic Fraternity?”** It then would be appropriate to explain **that such responsibilities include the initial Degree Fees, and then on an annual basis is the matter of Lodge Dues?”** Tell him what will be expected for the Degree Fees, and tell him what the annual dues in the Lodge are. Then, tell him something like: **“Freemasonry has historically been a band of good men who seek to be better men by the lessons we teach. While we make every effort to respond to the needs of our members and their families, Masonry is not an insurance society, nor is it a lending institution. Its members are expected to be financially accountable in their personal life and to the Lodge.”** Explain to the petitioner that the Lodge – indeed the entire Fraternity, have a moral and spiritual investment in each of its members, and we simply must investigate matters such as financial responsibility of petitioners. Then ask the simple question: **“Is there anything in the area of your financial dealings that are a matter of public record that you feel would be appropriate for us to discuss at this time?”** Let him talk. **Listen to what he says!** In many instances you can learn a lot by simply listening!

IF the petitioner has indicated on his petition that he has had previous brushes with either civil or criminal charges, talk with him about it and don't prejudge the circumstances. In many instances the matter can be cleared up to the satisfaction of the investigator. If the petitioner indicates there has been a problem in the past, encourage a discussion about the matter.

CIVIC ACTIVITIES: Is he interested in Public Schools, in the School Board, in City or County government? Does he serve on any local committees or boards? Is he registered to vote, and does he exercise the privilege to do so? Does he consider voting on Election Day more important than his personal recreation? There is a vast amount of information to be gleaned from his response to such questions.

CHURCH MEMBERSHIP AND ACTIVITIES: You should first assure the petitioner that Freemasonry only requires that a man express a belief in a Supreme Being. Beyond that, the matter of worship or membership in organized religion is a matter to be determined by each individual. Even so, a petitioner should not be offended if asked the question: **“Do you belong to a church?”** **If so: Do you attend church regularly, or on special occasions? Do you have any assigned duties in your church?”** Here again, ask simple questions and **LISTEN** to what he says. You can gain a lot about a man’s character in such a manner.

OCCUPATION: Many candidates are initiated into our Fraternity and then do not advance because they did not fully understand what they were getting into as far as the time commitment is concerned. Inform the petitioner about the time that will be required for him to devote to instruction during the Degree learning process and for attending Lodge. Ask him if his work and/or personal schedule will allow him the time required. Do not accept a simple yes answer, ask directly **“Are you willing and able to commit the time that is necessary to learn the required lessons and to attend Lodge on a regular basis?”**

BUSINESS REPUTATION: Ask him to tell you about his job. If he is self-employed, ask him how his competitors feel about his business ethics? Based upon his reaction to your questions, do you feel like he is honest in his dealings with others?

If he works for others, ask him what he believes would be the honest appraisal of his performance as an employee. Ask him what he believes co-workers might say about him. Ask him if he honestly feels that he gives a full day's work for a full day's pay. Will his occupation permit him the time necessary to learn the work and then to attend regular meetings? **LISTEN and LEARN!**

EDUCATION & TRAINING: Have the petitioner tell you about his formal education and any special training and make note of any special skills that he might have. Ask him if he has any degrees or certifications.

ARMED FORCES RECORD: Ask the petitioner if he has ever served as a member of the Armed Forces. If he has, ask if he would mind showing you his discharge papers. All discharges are **NOT HONORABLE!** If there is a problem, ask him to explain the circumstances to your satisfaction.

ORGANIZATIONS BELONGED TO: Find out what kind of organizations he has joined – if any. If he has been a “joiner”, ask for an explanation of the objectives of the organization(s). Some organizations have a reputation of dealing with violence, not only physical violence, but violence to the rights of others, while some are subversive in character. Many times a careful inquiry along these lines will tell you much about a man's character and should not be disregarded nor considered as radical.

RECREATION & HOBBIES: Ask him if he has any hobbies, and what he does in his spare time for recreation.

FRIENDS & NEIGHBORS: Ask him if he has any friends or neighbors that you can contact who can vouch for his character. Are any of them Masons?

REASON FOR PETITIONING: Now, the investigation is getting down to the nitty-gritty! What is the petitioner's motive to become a Mason? Point blank ask him – Why do you want to become a Mason. Ask him what attracted him to the Fraternity. Ask him if he has or if his wife has relatives who are Masons.

Does he think that being a Mason will help him in business, or socially or even politically? Does he want to be a Master Mason as a stepping-stone to other branches of Masonry? If married, has his wife pushed him into petitioning because she wants to join some Masonic related organization requiring that he be a Mason? Engage the petitioner in conversation on this subject. **LISTEN!** A lot can be learned about the petitioner when it comes to his reason for petitioning.

Find out if the petitioner will be able to devote the necessary time to learn the degree work and then to attend Lodge meetings on a regular basis. Be straight forward with information about the amount of time that is required to really be a Mason. He and his lady must fully understand the time commitment involved when a man decides to become a Mason.

In Order For Freemasonry To Flourish

**Masonry Must Be Good For The Man
And
The Man Must Be Good For Masonry**

ONLY THE VERY BEST ARE GOOD ENOUGH TO BE MASONS

• Committee Review

At this point, the Committee Chairman should call a meeting of the committee to review all of the findings of the investigation and discuss the various aspects of the investigation. Each Committee member should have enough information to make his own individual decision regarding the petitioner, whether favorable or unfavorable. If there is any doubt on the part of any of the committee members as to his recommendation, the chairman should have the committee work to resolve any lingering issues.

Before making a final decision regarding the petitioner, each committee member should ask himself the following questions:

- **Is this man truly “Worthy and Well Qualified”?**
- **Would I welcome this man into my home?**
- **Would I leave this man alone with my wife?**
- **Would I want this man to marry my daughter?**
- **Would I trust my life to this man?**
- **Will this man be a credit to the Fraternity?**
- **Is this man sufficiently literate to be able to grasp and retain the precepts of Freemasonry?**
- **Are his motives for becoming a Mason good?**

• Summary

Such are some suggestions for conducting an investigation of a petitioner for the Degrees of Freemasonry. They are not all- inclusive and can be expanded upon to suit the circumstances.

Finally, when it comes time to ballot on the petitioner, if the Investigating Committee has done a good job the Worshipful Master should tell them so. A good pat on the back for a job well done will always pay dividends.

On the other hand, if they have not done a good job, the Worshipful Master should talk with them in private about how to best improve in the area of investigating petitioners. And, remember the good name and reputation of your Lodge – indeed of the entire fraternity – hinges in a great measure upon the investigators!

BRETHREN, IT IS UP US TO GUARD WELL OUR WEST GATE!

• Grand Lodge Law References

Art. 393. **Qualifications.** A candidate for the degrees of Masonry must be free-born, sound in mind, of good moral character, a full eighteen years of age on or before the day his petition is received by the Lodge, and without maim or defect which will render him incapable of earning his own living or receiving and imparting, Masonically, all that is required by the ritual of the several degrees; provided that as to physical mains and defects Articles 27 and 401 of these Laws shall be applicable. After the foregoing requirements have been strictly met, the question of the candidate's mental, moral and such physical qualifications as do not come within the restrictions of Art. 401 is one to be decided within the sound discretion of the members of the Lodge petitioned.

Art. 407. **Referred to Committee.** A petition for the degrees shall be presented at a stated meeting and referred by the Master presiding to a committee of three members for investigation and report. A member of this committee may not be a recommender or any Mason listed as a reference on this petition, unless no other qualified Brother is available to serve as such. Such report may be made at a subsequent stated meeting; but no ballot shall be taken thereon in less than one lunar month from the date the petition is received, unless dispensation is granted by the Grand Master under Art. 414.

The Lodge may grant the committee further time upon request of one of its members; but no recommitment may be made after the committee has made its report to the Lodge.

Art. 408. **No Standing Committee.** No standing committee shall be appointed for investigation of candidates petitioning for the degrees.

Art. 409. **New Committee. When.** When the investigating committee fails to report within two months, it may be discharged, and a new committee appointed, which shall report at a subsequent stated meeting.

Art. 410. **Petitioner's Death or Mental Incompetence.** When a candidate dies or becomes incompetent, before the report of the investigating committee is made, his death or mental incompetence shall be reported to the Lodge and noted in the minutes, the committee discharged, and no further proceedings shall be taken thereon; and all fees returned, and no further action taken.

Art. 411. **Petitioner's Total Disqualification.** If the investigating committee finds the candidate totally disqualified for any reason, the facts should be reported to the Lodge, such report entered into the minutes, and no further action taken.

Art. 412. **Committee: Duties and Report.** The investigation by the committee shall include: the moral character and reputation of the petitioner, facts relating to jurisdiction, physical qualifications, and all other matters the Lodge is called upon to pass in balloting on petitioner. A face-to-face interview between each Investigating Committee member and the petitioner is required on all petitions for the Mysteries and Advancement, except on approval of the Worshipful Master.

Before a ballot can be taken a signed report of each of the three members of the committee shall be attached to the petition and read to the Lodge; each of which shall cover all matters referenced in this article and in Form 28. If the Master of the Lodge is a member of the committee before his installation he may continue to serve thereon.