

Masonic Camp: Natural Transformation

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“With movement, as Smiley had anticipated, Jim found new fluency of speech.”

“It must be a habit of the trade, he decided; we talk better when there’s a view.”

- John le Carré, *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*

Getting to Masonic Camp is, in many ways, a metaphor for coming to the Craft itself. The first turn is from a normal state highway and leaves you in a flat and grassy area with little direction of where to go. When you figure out where to go, you approach a steep and intimidating path down, where men of lesser courage—or perhaps less reliable cars, to strain the metaphor—might shy away from. But if one perseveres, and trusts in one’s downshifting, a world of enlightenment and education awaits.

For one who has not been initiated into this arboreal Masonic experience, The Masonic Camp is a now five-year-old celebration of Masonic education and fellowship held in Erhard, MN at the Moccasin Valley Camp. In those five years it has grown significantly in size and scope, but at its heart it retains the same spirit which first led to its creation: removing brethren from their normal environments, teaching them, and letting their minds soar.

In the quotes above, famous fictional spy George Smiley discusses how movement and beautiful views make spies more talkative, but the same could be said of Masons. Like all men, we can get stuck in a world of routines and business; in concerns that are not petty in terms of their importance but limited in terms of being stuck in the day-to-day world. When taken out among the trees and set to labor—chopping wood, say—our minds have the room to move.

Further, Masonic Camp takes advantage of one of the most important verses from the sacred law: As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another. We are not a Craft which can do its important work only in isolation, for one of our ancient landmarks calls us to meet in lodges. Our minds, our dreams, and our philosophy benefits from exposure to new ideas, new modes of thinking, and new brethren.

At Masonic Camp in 2026, I was honored to be one of the presenters. It was my second time visiting Minnesota Masonry, after the Midwest Conference on Masonic

Education was held in Minneapolis in 2024, but my first time attending any official lodge work. At the Camp, we had brethren from Minnesota, Nebraska, Wisconsin, England, and South Africa. We had topics ranging from history to philosophy to deep esotericism, and we watched—for the first time for some of us—a Minnesota Entered Apprentice degree.

The conversation that followed each of those presentations and especially the degree will remain among the highlights of my entire career in the Craft. The degree was Friday evening, and by the time I was finally leaving for the night I had spoken to it felt like no fewer than a dozen brethren about ritual differences between the various jurisdictions. Especially interesting was the what must have been the better part of an hour going through almost the entire degree with a brother from the United Grand Lodge of England, delighting in the differences and the similarities.

Saturday was the presentations. It would be unconscionably rude to discuss the quality of my presentation, so we won't, but the quality of the questions and conversation after the presentation was among the best I've ever had for any I've ever given. Thoughtful brethren seeking further information about Judaism and Freemasonry caused me to think about concepts I hadn't considered in the five years I've been giving this presentation.

Robert Johnson's presentation was no less thought provoking, and the conversation afterward of no lesser quality. RJ is, of course, one of the leading lights in American Freemasonry with his presentations, writing, and podcasting, and is exactly the kind of quality speaker that Masonic Camp deserves. And as a keynote speaker, he left the brethren energized to discuss the esoteric history he presented.

I have been blessed in my time in Masonry to be brought to multiple states as a speaker and to meet brethren from all around the world. I am not being hyperbolic when I say that the Masonic Camp ranks among the best events that I have ever been to. There is an atmosphere to it that cannot be equaled, and the passion of the brethren behind it can be felt in every aspect. No Masonic Con has ever been run by more committed men, nor has a better atmosphere. I would even go so far as to say that there is no other Masonic event one could attend which exceeds it, only ones that equal it.

The greatest compliment I can give to it is this: In 2026 I attended the event as a paid presenter, receiving the cost of my tickets and gas covered. In 2027 there is a very real possibility that I will be attending fully on my own cost, because I don't know if I will be able to sit at home knowing that my brothers are once again making that journey down the steep hill to such a magical experience.