Franklin and the Templar Treasure By: W∴ Michael Fay, 32° Duval Lodge No. 159, F. & A.M. Valley of Jacksonville, Ancient Accepted Scottish Rite, Southern Jurisdiction, U.S.A. Jacksonville York Rite Bodies Knights of Light A lodge reading on legend, trust, and service Reader's note: The following is a dramatic retelling of an unverified legend, offered for reflection rather than as established Masonic or American history. Brethren, imagine a winter evening in the year 1770. In a schoolhouse lit by candles, a small group of men gathers behind a closed door. Outside, the British Empire still governs the colonies, and the talk of rebellion is dangerous. Inside, the men are told that their work must remain secret, their trust in one another must be complete, and the burden before them may shape the future of a nation. One version of the legend places Benjamin Franklin among those present. It tells of a meeting presided over by men of the 46th British Regiment, and of a mission tied to a treasure said to have crossed the Atlantic centuries earlier with the Scottish nobleman Henry Sinclair. The treasure, the story claims, had been hidden in Nova Scotia and was now in danger of being lost. Its recovery, the brethren were told, might help sustain the cause of American liberty. The assembled men are divided into small groups. Each group is given a name connected to one of the ships said to have carried the treasure. They are instructed to rely on one another, to keep their purpose hidden, and to remember that the work ahead will test both their courage and their judgment. Around them, the story says, are soldiers, informants, and loyal subjects of the Crown. A careless word could expose the mission. Then Franklin is said to have reminded them that political and religious differences must not be allowed to break the bonds between brethren. Their promise to one another mattered. Their word mattered. If they could not act with loyalty, discretion, and discipline, then the cause they hoped to serve might fail before it had a chance to begin. It is a stirring scene: a hidden treasure, a secret undertaking, and men asked to place trust in one another at a moment of great uncertainty. But the value of the tale does not depend on proving that the meeting took place. The account is unverified, and Franklin's documented whereabouts place him in England during 1770. We should therefore receive the episode as legend, not as a confirmed event. 1 A lodge reading - legend and reflection A reflection for the lodge Still, a legend can invite a useful question. What does a brother owe to the trust placed in him? The answer is not blind obedience, nor silence for its own sake. It is fidelity to our obligations, care in our words, sound judgment in our actions, and a willingness to serve a purpose greater than personal advantage. The treasure in this story may be literal, symbolic, or only imagined. The lesson is clearer: no undertaking worthy of our effort is carried by one person alone. It depends on character, mutual confidence, and a steady commitment to the good of others. Whether in a tale of revolution or in the ordinary duties of our own lives, may we prove worthy of the trust our brethren place in us. Historical context for the reader Benjamin Franklin was an important Freemason and served as Grand Master of Pennsylvania in 1734 and 1749. However, the

story of his attendance at a 1770 meeting about Templar treasure is not established by reliable historical documentation. The U.S. National Archives notes that Franklin lived in England from 1764 to 1775. Henry Sinclair’s alleged voyage to North America and the related treasure claims also remain disputed. Sources for context: National Archives, "The Founding Fathers: Pennsylvania" (archives.gov/founding-docs/founding-fathers-Pennsylvania); Pennsylvania Grand Lodge, honors and awards (pagrandlodge.org/resources/honors-and-awards/). The Sinclair and treasure narrative is presented here as legend.