

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1949**

**Grand Orator
Joseph R. Knowland, Sr.
"California's Centennials Recall Early
Masonic History"**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Past Grand Masters, Grand Lodge Officers, Distinguished Guests and Members of Grand Lodge

I have deemed it to be most appropriate at a time when this state is commemorating one of the three years of outstanding historical events, that I should recall early Masonic history associated with California's centennials. In 1947, through legislative mandate and the appointment of a statewide centennials commission, California pledged itself to fittingly celebrate the gold discovery in 1948, gold rush days in 1949, and in 1950 the admission of this territory to statehood. At the request of Governor Earl Warren, I accepted the chairmanship of the Centennials Commission.

During 1948 there was officially commemorated at Coloma the gold discovery by James W. Marshall—a history-making event with ramifications that were far-reaching in their effect upon state and national history. Specifically, the added gold supply enabled this government to finance the unfortunate and prolonged struggle between the states. This historic rush across the plains, with its attendant hazards, emphasized the necessity for the building of a transcontinental railroad, while those Argonauts who came by water and crossed the fever-infested isthmus, or rounded the treacherous Cape Horn, accelerated the movement which eventually resulted in the construction of the Panama Canal.

The present year, 1949, recalls the stirring gold rush days and the establishment of stable government for California through the drafting of a constitution at Monterey. This highly dramatic gathering at Colton Hall, originally constructed as a schoolhouse and public meeting place, was last month most successfully commemorated. During a nine-day period, with record crowds in attendance, a most colorful pageant with a cast of 700 was presented, entitled "Beginners of Statehood." Impressive ceremonies were also held at Colton Hall.

There were forty-eight delegates in the Constitutional Convention, hailing from fourteen states, with seven native Californians.

In recalling the history of this memorable gathering it is most note-worthy that it was called during the height of the gold rush excitement when the quest for riches was the objective of most arrivals. Sixteen of the delegates, about one-third, had come west following the discovery of gold by Marshall. All of these forty-eight participants, those who came recently and the earlier arrivals, obviously must have been inspired by the thought that in life there are things more precious than gold—love of country, support of constitutional government and maintenance of law and order.

This assemblage organized on September 3, 1849, and at the conclusion of their work on October 13th, presented a constitution that reelected high credit upon their deliberations and no doubt expedited in Congress the admission of California as the 31st state in the American Union.

It was a gathering that obviously was attractive to Masons. As yet no Grand Lodge had been established in California. The few Masonic Lodges existed by virtue of charters from other states. Regardless of these conditions, there were nine members of the Craft sitting as delegates, active and influential and wielding an influence far beyond their numerical strength. They worked generally in unison and the record shows them to have been sound on vital issues. It is significant that Robert Semple, a Mason, was chosen as chairman. Semple was a tall Kentuckian, standing six feet eight, and clad in buckskin, his head adorned by a fox skin cap. He was editor of California's first newspaper, "The Californian," and was generally credited with being "Ready with his pen, quick at the type case and true with his rifle."

Among this close working group of nine Masons, four were lawyers. one of these, Elisha O. Crosby, I knew when I was a boy in Alameda, where he officiated as Justice of the Peace.

Thirty-seven years after the constitution was drafted he returned to Colton Hall and was the last delegate to speak in that historic convention building. The occasion was the fortieth

anniversary of the raising of the American Flag at Monterey by Commodore John Drake Sloat, who, by the way, was also a member of the Fraternity.

On that historic occasion, Judge Crosby in closing his remarks, his voice trembling with emotion, said, "Well do I remember that last day of the sitting, and how we clasped hands as we separated, many of us for the last time on earth." Then he dramatically uttered this admonition: "In the name of those departed, and the little band that yet remains, I ask you to take your place to preserve the good we did in this first step to found a constitutional government in California."

Today, after the passing of a full century since the constitution was drafted, these words should stimulate all California Masons and good citizens to continue to be zealous in upholding and preserving constitutional government.

The other lawyers in the convention were Lansford W. Hastings, Jamesue Hall Jones and Myron Norton, the latter a member of Stevenson's New York Regiment, which was brought to California in 1847. Jones, 25 years of age, was the youngest of the group.

Jacob D. Hoppe and Abel Stearns were merchants. Rodman M. Price was a United States Navy purser who served with Commodore Sloat and was later governor of New Jersey. While Pierre Sansevain was said to be a viticulturist. Although a Mason, he was not a citizen of the United States. The average age of this Masonic group was 35 years. These Masons vigorously championed a public school system, which the convention provided. Chairman Robert Semple stepped from his chair to raise his voice and lead the successful battle for a cause, which still has the militant support of Masonry in California and throughout the country.

In the pre-American occupation period and before the gold discovery a sizable group of the early settlers were seafaring men while others were members of those early parties which had crossed the continent for adventure and colonization. Among these were a number of Masons. In this group was Peter Lassen whose party brought the first Masonic Charter and organized Western Star Lodge at Benton City near where was later located Leland Stanford Ranch. After a short time the Lodge was removed to Shasta City and when the Grand Lodge of California was formed in 1850, became Western Star Lodge No. 2.

On May 10, 1948, this lodge celebrated its hundredth anniversary and many Masons journeyed to this historic town. During Western Star's centennial over fifty other California Lodges came to Shasta and the visitors were thrilled, particularly the candidates, as degrees were conferred in the ancient Lodge Hall. An outstanding event was on the night that Grand Master Morris Ewing of Missouri, the Grand Lodge of which state, a hundred years before had granted the charter, came out for a special meeting and presented a bronze plaque to the lodge. On this eventful night, Grand Master Siems made an official visit.

On May 10 of this year, 1949, at a special session called to fittingly close the historic year, and with the Lodge Hall crowded, the impressive ceremony was held by depositing a metal coffer, or casket. This was sealed after being filled with various documents and mementoes to be inspected when another full century has passed.

Other members of the craft included in this impressive list were:

Benjamin D. Wilson, known as Don Benito, who came to California in 1841 and settled on a ranch near the present site of Riverside. He became mayor of Los Angeles in 1851, and was honored by having Mt. Wilson named for him.

Colonel Jonathan D. Stevenson of the New York regiment, which bore his name, was elected as the first Grand Master when a California Grand Lodge was organized, and he became the first Grand Master.

John W. Geary, elected first alcalde, or mayor, of San Francisco, has a most brilliant war record in both the Mexican and Civil Wars, and was later governor of Pennsylvania.

William Heath Davis, author of "Sixty Years in California"; Kit Carson, after whom Kit Carson Pass was named, noted scout who guided General Fremont and other early exploring parties; George C. Yount, for whom Yountville in Napa County was later named; John Bidwell, an associate of Captain John A. Sutter of Sutter's Fort and intimately associated with early California history; Pearson B. Redding, a peak and fort bearing his name; Thomas Fallon who first raised the American Flag at San Jose, following Sloat's action at Monterey. When Fallon heard that war had broken out between Mexico and United States, he recruited a small company of Americans at Santa Cruz, crossed the Santa Cruz Mountains and raised the flag on July 13, 1846, six days after Sloat had unfurled the Stars and Stripes at Monterey.

William B. Ide, another California Mason, headed the famous Bear Flag Party, raised the emblem, since adopted as the California State Flag, at Sonoma on June 14, 1846, and issued a

fiery proclamation as the head of that party. Later, Ide held many important positions in Colusa County. The Native Sons of the Golden West yesterday dedicated a monument in Colusa County to his memory. Sam Kelsey and Henry Fowler were also members of that famous party.

Abel Stearns, who has already been mentioned as one of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention, was among the first Americans to settle in California, arriving in 1829 and locating in Los Angeles.

He shipped to Philadelphia Mint in 1842 first gold mined in California. This was found near San Fernando Mission in Los Angeles County and obtained by Stearns in exchange for merchandise.

Another Mason whose name was associated with early gold discovery and who might have become famous in California history was Charles R. Bennett whose tombstone in the Masonic Cemetery at Salem, Oregon, declares him to be the "Discoverer of gold in California." Bennett came to California with Fremont in 1845. One day while watering the animals on the American River, El Dorado County, he saw yellow metal in the water, and as he had had experience in the gold mines of Georgia, he recognized it to be gold. It was taken to Fremont's tent, and ordered to be tested by the medical corps. Fremont, informed that the find was gold, but realizing he was on foreign soil, suggested they forget the incident.

Bennett also claims to have been with Marshall when gold was discovered at Coloma and contended he was the first to pick up a piece of the precious metal, informing Marshall it was gold. Whether there is truth in these statements of Bennett, the fact remains that the man who gave the discovery to the world, which started the great rush of Argonauts, westward was James W. Marshall, and to him belongs the credit.

In all of California history, the most tragic record of hardship, suffering and of heroism is found in the story of the Donner Party. It is truly epic. Over a century has elapsed since the tragedy. Forty-two men, women and children lost their lives in the most spectacular catastrophe to befall any group of emigrants bound for California. In the party of ninety-three, were 34 children ranging in age from one to four teen years. Time does not permit a recital of the whole story, but the part played by Masons is upon this occasion appropriate.

In nearly all the emigrant parties there was a common tie binding those who belonged to the craft. In the long and trying days during the hazardous treks across the plains, or protracted sea voyages with their imminent dangers, Masons somehow became known to each other and the families likewise seemed to be aware of the ties that bound certain individuals.

There were three members of the fraternity who apparently assumed a certain leadership in the Donner party. They were William Henry Eddy, James Frazier Reed, and William McCutchen.

After word reached the outside world that the party was snow-bound near Truckee, and starvation and exposure were taking their toll, several attempts were made to send relief from Sacramento and San Francisco. Acquilla Glover was a member of one of the first Donner relief parties, which successfully crossed the mountains to bring aid, and finally reached the snowbound and starving survivors. It was Glover's duty to get Mrs. Reed and children ready for the hazardous return trip across the snow clad Sierra Nevada Mountains.

The relief party had not proceeded more than two miles on the return trip when it became apparent that the two Reed children were too small to continue. Recognizing this fact it became Glover's duty to inform the mother that they must go back to camp. The thought of leaving these two little ones with others at such a trying time was a test, which was difficult for any mother to face with unanimity. Worn down by famine and suffering, the ordeal was doubly severe. Then a thought flashed through the mother's mind. "Are you a Mason?" she asked of Glover. He replied that he was. Placing her hand upon his shoulders and looking searchingly into his eyes, she asked, "Will you, on your word as a Master Mason, come back for these children, if I leave them here as you request?" There was only one answer for any red-blooded man and a loyal mason to give and unhesitatingly he replied, "I will!"

The sorrowing mother, caressing the two little children, started out on the hazardous journey with firm step and with that confidence which comes with complete trustfulness.

Little Patty Reed, the daughter, was then eight years old and her brother, Tommy, younger. The little girl at the parting set an example to those older for her self-control and fortitude. As the men were taking her back to camp, controlling her emotions, her voice displaying firmness, she said as she took Tommy by the hand, "I am going back to take care of my little brother, but I never expect to see mother again." I knew Patty years later and talked with her many times after she had become Mrs. Martha Jane Reed Lewis. She was probably the last survivor, and passed

away in 1923.

A stately monument majestically towers among the trees and near the former campsites of various groups of this famous but ill-fated party seeking homes and a new start in California prior to the gold discovery and statehood. They were pathfinders whose adventurous spirit typifies the indomitable determination, perseverance and will to conquer possessed by all pioneers. This is why California has made a state park of this Donner party area, recently extending its boundaries to a total of 360 acres and including a portion of historic Donner Lake.

In early California history, during and following the gold rush days, there were a galaxy of men, members of the craft, who displayed remarkable traits of character, who were early builders, while a substantial number occupied positions of high honor. Time will permit only the mention of a few.

Jonathan Trumbull Warner, a six-foot three Connecticut Yankee, acquired and built up the now famous Warner's Ranch. This landmark figured prominently in the conquest of California. The famous Butterfield Overland Mail Co. established a stage station there in 1858.

Josiah Belden, one of the public-spirited citizens of San Jose, who put up the money to supply a state house, which burned in later years, was chosen the city's first mayor.

In the early mining days, William Morris Stewart was a member of Nevada Lodge of Nevada City, and was later United States Senator from the state of Nevada. Governor Bigler of California in 1854 appointed Stewart to fill the place of Attorney General during the incumbent's temporary absence from the state. Stewart became a great mining expert. He secured, while senator, Mark Twain a job as clerk in the upper house.

A California senator also came out of Nevada Lodge in the person of Aaron A. Sargent. He was appointed Grand Orator of the order but senatorial duties prevented his acceptance after he had been elected to that office. He had previously served as a member of the national House of Representatives and minister plenipotentiary to Germany.

The famous James G. Fair was made a Mason at Bear Mountain Lodge No. 76 when he was installed as Senior Deacon.

Edwin Markham, author of "The Man With the Hoe," was a member of Acacia Lodge No. 92, in El Dorado County. He was one of the great contributors to the literary fame of California.

Among the notable members of Henry Clay Lodge of Sutter Creek, was Alvinza Hayward, miner, banker and millionaire and a great California builder. Hayward was a most enthusiastic Mason and remained active until his death. He never forgot his fellow members and was known for his generosity.

From the smallest lodges sometimes come the biggest men. John W. Mackay, nationally known as one of the big four of Comstock Silver fame, was a member of Forest Lodge, Forest City, Sierra County. He has always been reputed as one of the most democratic individuals and one with great loyalty to friends.

Gravel Lodge No. 69 of Camptonville erected a monument in honor of a noted Californian, Lester Allen Pelton, inventor of the Pelton waterwheel, who joined the lodge in 18-9.

In the heyday of early mining, Lodges were started in many of the communities, which have now become ghost towns. For instance, there were Masonic Lodges in Illinoistown, and in both Alpha and Omega, Orleans Flat, Moore's Flat, North Bloomfield, Brandy City, Red Dog, Spanish Flat, Coloma, where gold was discovered, and Elizabethtown, now all memories. Then there were Drytown and Fiddletown, Rough and Ready, and I might continue.

In these early mining towns, fire was a great and continuing hazard. Few of the Lodges escaped, particularly at a time when insurance was little known. Some of the Lodges burned at least five times and in many cases, early records were destroyed. Mariposa Lodge, for instance, operated under a five-mile roving charter. The Lodge had two disastrous fires and many times they had to meet in the hills back of the town under a tree and elsewhere, the home of a member or in the county courthouse.

The story of historic Rough and Ready is interesting. It was wiped out by fire three times and in 1850 the town seceded from the Union because a Yankee trimmed a Southerner in a mining deal. It was decided to secede and a call to organize a new state in which no Yankees would be allowed to live. The State of Rough and Ready was the result. Finally, the new state was dissolved by its organizers in order to participate in a 4th of July celebration.

Typical of the fate of other early California communities after mining operations had slackened, and devastating fires taken their toll, Columbia, in Tuolumne County, was fast becoming a ghost town. This "Gem of the Southern Mines," and once mentioned as a state

capital, was taken over as a state park in 1947 with impressive ceremonies led by Past Grand Master and Governor Earl Warren and the Park Commission.

All that was left of the Masonic meeting place, Columbia Lodge No. 28, was an excavation above which had stood a dignified but small hall within the sacred walls of which early California history was made. Out of this lodge came a Grand Master, William Abraham Davies, who was also elected Grand Commander of the Knights Templar. After consolidation with Tuolumne Lodge No. 8 at Sonora the property was sold to a mining man who desired to test out the ground as other lots in the vicinity had yielded paying ore, but this venture failed to pay the expenses of the effort.

The movement of the Grand Lodge to rebuild the old hall at Columbia is most praise-worthy and has caused much favorable comment throughout the state. In the years to come when possibly all these mining towns, except Columbia, are but memories, when the old lodge halls in other localities have entirely disappeared, how important that this little building should stand. Possibly it might contain Masonic exhibits pertaining to early mining days, and located as it will be in a state park there will be adequate fire protection which is now being installed. This building should stand as a monument to the activity and struggles of Masonry in the days when the going was hard. It will also be a reminder of the contribution of Masons to stable government. It will likewise complement the little red brick public school house of the gold rush days, which stands on the hill overlooking the town, which building the state has acquired, and which is significant as an American institution, and emblematic of one of the objectives of our order.

It was a great struggle for many of the early Lodges to aid the needy, —so important in this new country where doctors were scarce and practically no hospitals existed. Fraternities bore the burdens. Lodges were usually generous and in many instances paid out more than they had received and the membership made up the difference. For instance, in 1875, Georgetown Lodge expended \$540.12 on relief and took in only \$591.48 during the whole year. This may have been discouraging to the miners but possibly they were accustomed to discouragement. This lodge survived five disastrous fires and still exists.

Amusing stories are handed down, and for a number of these I am indebted to the history committee, which is compiling the story of a century or more of Masonry in California. A story is told of a member who appropriated a lump of gold, we hope by mistake, and was expelled. Shortly after this a member was accused of shooting a Chinaman at Johnstown. He got off with a reprimand. These were the days when anti-Chinese feeling was running high and the shooting of a Chinaman was apparently not considered a heinous offense.

Hydraulic operations entirely obliterated a number of mining towns. The place where St. Louis Lodge stood in Sierra County is today nothing but a huge scar on the hillside, the result of hydraulic mining. A beautiful Italian marble cornerstone, which was freighted into the town on mule back, was washed down with other rock. One day it was found being used as a doorstep for a woman's cottage. Eventually it was rescued and gradually made its way down to Forbestown where it was restored to a place of honor in the wall of the Masonic Temple.

The locale of another story is at Drytown. Originating in Drytown it must be true. A miner was elected to membership and on the evening he was to be initiated he brought with him an inseparable companion, a small dog which followed him into the preparation room. When the officers attempted to put the canine out, the candidate objected. In fact his declaration was, "No dog, no Masonry." As the lodge was very short of members it was finally decided that no harm could come by allowing the dog to enter and they went through the entire degrees together.

One report is that the only trouble was during the third degree. In stretching the story further, it is reported that a few months later the brother and his dog sought admission to another Lodge. The dog was stopped and a row ensued. However, another brother who knew the circumstances and had sat in the lodge at the initiation, vouched for the dog and he came in with the member.

A century ago California was confronted with many problems as it passed through the transition period, when permanent government was being established, and law and order gradually maintained, all marking the beginnings of a great state. Then our population was small, for when the first legislature convened in San Jose in December, 1849, it was less than 100,000, while today it is fast approaching the ten million four hundred thousand mark.

Great national problems face us today as we assume the responsibilities as citizens of one of the largest states in the American Union. Our obligations as Masons and American citizens never weighed more heavily upon us. One hundred years ago the country was heeding admonitions of the Father of our Country to "Avoid entangling foreign alliances." Today we must all admit

Washington's words of caution have probably of necessity been almost entirely disregarded. The red menace has put us in Europe to the very limit of our financial resources. If I interpret the general thinking it appears to be that we cannot afford to disregard the plight of those sixteen world areas now under red pressure, and must show a willingness to aid in rehabilitating and encouraging them that they may eventually become self-supporting and remain self-governed. The noble effort may fail, but our willingness to help should, on the other hand, increase our prestige throughout the world, and America can feel that it has at least tried.

These California Centennial years should be inspiring as they recall the splendid courage of the early builders of this Fraternity as they strove to spread the tenets of Masonry throughout the then ever changing mining regions and into a new territory. While these efforts were difficult and the obstacles encountered were at times most discouraging, these pioneers were not deterred in their fraternal activities, but found time to simultaneously assume the role of good citizens and render valuable service in establishing constitutional government for California when conditions were most chaotic.

With the passing of a century we today find our problems are growing with the years. We must watch and seek to curb those forces within our own boundaries, and from without, insidiously striving to undermine our ancient institutions. May this group, and others, stand as bulwarks against the propaganda and teachings of those who seek to belittle and to destroy. to cast aspersions upon what our forefathers, many of them pioneers, have built and maintained over the years, at such great sacrifices. We should uphold our own government when right, and never hesitate to sustain honest officials in the performance of public service.

Brothers, a great work lies ahead in these trying days, and the years ahead, to hold the lines against those who seek to destroy and not build. The task confronting us at this hour is not easy but the objectives should stimulate us to renewed effort in the building of a more powerful and united nation and state whose prestige and strength shall grow, and the patriotism of its citizens quickened with the passing of years. We may be at the crossroads.