

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1973**

**Grand Orator
Harlan P. Huebner
"The Time Is Now"**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Grand Lodge Officers, Past Grand Masters, Distinguished Guests, and my Brethren

The year is 1717, and the time is now. The year is 1733, and the time is now. The year is 1848, and the time is now. The time is 1973- yes my brethren- the time IS now.

These periods represent a beginning and a challenge for Speculative Masonry. From the past our Fraternity has become as a phoenix rising from the chaos and adversity created by the social, economic and intellectual problems of the moment. It grew and winged its way to every civilized part of the world, our nation and our state. Freemasonry could not be stilled, it was a force for the betterment of man under the Fatherhood of God. Through its teachings, its tenets and precepts men have found a brotherhood. Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice are not just empty words but a way of life and a belief.

What would have happened if dedicated Masons had not worked and strived to perpetuate Freemasonry? Our forbearers had the same problems as we have today. They could have become selfish and lazy and forgotten Masonry. If that had happened I would not be here today, probably none of us would be here in a Grand Lodge Communication. Probably there would not be a Grand Lodge. But my brethren, there is a Grand Lodge and we are here. Masonry is alive-however, it is in danger. As with all things good, we must fight for it.

Return with me to 1717. The tenor of life in England had sunk to a low level of morals; the people had few, if any, rights. England had just emerged from a war and her economy was just beginning to prosper, she was embarking on a period of worldwide maritime and commercial supremacy. However, contrast this with some of the other social problems of the day. Towns were dirty and unsafe, inhabited by mobs.

Further, the religious life of England at this time engendered a constant fight between those who desired the supremacy of Catholicism and the Pope and others who desired a Church of England as the only religion for that country. There was religious unrest.

Politically, England was ruled by a Germanic King, and the Stuarts sought the crown, thus adding more strife to the times and the hardships of the people.

Yes, in 1717 it was time to find a philosophy and teachings to give strength and support to the people. Out of those trying times there emerged this force and an influence. Albert Mackey in his words "The History of Freemasonry" has stated it this way: "**** the gentlemen of education and refinement who constituted the theoretic element or the Honorary membership of the four lodges then existing in the city of London, resolved to change the character of these lodges, and to withdraw then entirely from any connection with Operative or Practical Masonry."

Thus in 1717 four operative lodges met to form the Grand Lodge of England. From St. Paul's churchyard came the brethren of the Goose and Gridiron Ale-house, from Parker's Lane near Drury Lane came the brethren of the Crown Ale-house, from Charles Street, Covent Garden came the brethren of the Apple Tree Tavern and from Channel Row, Westminster came the brethren of the Rummer and Grapes Tavern. They met at the Goose and Gridiron Ale-house, elected a Grand Master and Speculative Masonry emerged to become a force and a way of life.

While Operative Masonry faded, Speculative Freemasonry was erected on its ruins, and lives as a perpetual memorial in its symbols and its technical language of the source whence it sprang.

Yes, the times were tumultuous but the Masonic Lodges became places where worldly distinctions were forgotten and all men were equal. Politics and religion were forgotten, harmony prevailed and all earthly problems were transcended. Masonry became a force with no equal.

The original Speculative Masons fought for survival- they did not give up and withdraw under the pressure of the times.

Within a matter of a few years Masonry as we know it spread to the thirteen American colonies and elsewhere. In 1731 the American colonies were by no means somnolent. They had not only internal colonial problems of religious intolerance, but economic boycotts and other interferences. We became more and more a puppet to be used at the whim of the King of England. Additionally a new land demanded of these pioneers their full endurance to establish themselves.

However, as we see, men of vision and assurance were able to lay down their hoes, set down their pens, replace their daily aprons with the lambskin apron and divorce themselves from all daily threats and problems to bring to this shore the light of Brotherly Love. Yes, in 1731, St. John's Lodge in Boston, Massachusetts was formed under authority of the Grand Lodge of England. In 1733 the appointment of Right Worshipful Henry Price as Provisional Grand Master of New England was an accomplished fact and Masonry came of age in America.

The members of this and other lodges in our colonies, the pioneers of our country recognized the force for good which Freemasonry provides and gave of themselves to further that force. This could have been the beginning and the end in America. The War of Independence was on the horizon, political infighting was developing and self-preservation was the order of the day. However, faced with all of these adversities Masons emerged to not only lead the country but to disseminate the Masonic spirit.

Nor did our leaders in the 1700's forget their Masonic heritage and lessons. Recall with me a few passages from our Declaration of Independence, "Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes." Also, further on in that document we find the words, "Nor have we been wanting in attentions to our British brethren." These leaders were great men who epitomize our ritual wherein it teaches that, we are "an institution having for its foundation the practice of the social and moral virtues; and to so high an eminence has its credit been advanced, that in every age and country, men pre-eminent for their moral and intellectual attainments have encouraged and promoted its interests."

Our forefathers did not become complacent and allow Masonry to die. To them the time was now to move and rededicate themselves to their country, their families, themselves and to Masonry. They recognized the force for good found within the Masonic Lodge.

Moving forward in time to another critical period in our history we next arrive at 1848, the place an area known as California. "GOLD" was the magic word. Men from every corner of the globe converged on a relatively few miles of earth to seek their fortune. Most of you are familiar with accounts of the times. The chaos, lawlessness and rough and ready times that pervaded the mining camps seems to us unreal and fictitious.

But amidst all of this chaotic existence Freemasonry appeared. First with the chartering of Western Star Lodge No. 98 in May 1848 by the Grand Lodge of Missouri, and finally with the institution of our own Grand Lodge in 1850.

My brethren, what prompted men confronted with the rigors of gold mining camps, rampant with disease, no law, save the Miners Law, to come together under one roof with guns left outside, personal feuds dismissed and work together as Masons?

These California pioneers probably had less reason to take time out to start Masonic Lodges or attend lodge than any other time in history, yet they did. What drove them to give that extra effort to create a lasting institution in our State? I believe it was that men at every age in time who possess the teachings of our Craft wish to perpetuate the principles by passing them on to others and also to reaffirm their own learning.

Doesn't this speak one of the highest praises for our institution- they did not forget Masonry, they gave of themselves to practice its teachings and help bring calm out of chaos.

What about today? Are the problems so different than in the previously alluded to milestones of Masonic history?

We read every day about lawlessness in our cities and, yes, even in our schools. Special guards have to be hired to monitor the school halls, our police forces are yearly increased to combat crime. As it was in the past some of our cities are plainly unsafe and dirty and mobs run rampant, lawlessness is not an unknown word.

Politics of today can really claim no great distinction over the past. We are confronted on every side with apparent deception and, yes, corruption. But again it is the fault of the apathetic American citizen, which fosters such cancer. We must involve ourselves in an effort to combat such political practices. Our youth are certainly becoming more active politically, why aren't we as individuals practicing the lesson of good citizenship. Early in our Masonic teachings each one of us was "enjoined to be exemplary in the discharge of your civil duties, by never proposing or countenancing any act which may have a tendency to subvert the peace and good order of society; by paying due obedience to the laws under whose protection you live, and never losing sight of the allegiance due to your country."

Nor did our Speculative Masonic founders have a monopoly on religious problems, intolerance and bigotry. One has only to read the papers to see as late as just a month ago intolerance still prevails in America. Witness the Florida Methodist Church that wished to baptize a black man and the Ku Klux Klan appeared in robes to protest, harass and threaten all who were present.

Yes, witness the youth of 1973 who say, "God is Dead." Witness others who brag of their atheistic beliefs.

Fortunately these examples are in the minority - but, they do exist and cannot be ignored.

No my brethren, our times are not really different than they were in the past. True we have progressed in science, education and personal comforts over our earlier brethren, but the problems still remain the same.

We in 1973 Masonry have a challenge and more important we have a legacy from our brethren of the past. Anywhere along the road of Masonic time our brethren could have given up. They could have said, "I'm just too busy to worry about my Lodge." They could have used reverse logic and said, "I've learned my lessons, I live by Masonic Principles, that's enough." But they did not. They worked together in harmony through all types of external adversity for a common goal to spread the teachings of our Fraternity, yes, they sacrificed themselves to Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. They by their everyday lives showed others that Masonry has a philosophy for all, they were active and participated. They grew in number, from the handful of 1717 to over 223,000 members of our own Grand Lodge plus all the other Grand Lodges around the world.

This statistic may give some comfort, but it should not. Masonry needs help. We in Grand Lodge, nor any of our brethren whithersoever dispersed can afford to relax and consider our work is done. Each year our membership decreases and each year our attendance at Lodges decreases. On all sides we hear "I'm too busy to attend the meetings," or "It's too long a drive from my home to lodge." My brethren, I ask the rhetorical question, what would have happened if George Washington would have said, "It's too long a horseback ride from Mount Vernon to Alexandria," or other early leaders had such a ready excuse?

We must show our young men of today that we are not leaving everything up to them to solve, we must work with them and show them by examples Masonry in Action.

We must conduct ourselves by the precepts we learned. We must remember the Masons of the past, and that their daily struggles were no different from our own. We must, each one of us, take an active part in our Masonic work. We cannot leave it to others. Masonry is a force for the betterment of man under the Fatherhood of God. Our principles go back before recorded time, we cannot let them die or even wane. We in Masonry must become involved in life at all levels, in order to foster understanding, compassion and a better world.

Take a moment and mentally review the First Degree Charge. This, my brethren, says it all. We are charged as Masons with duties to God, our neighbor and ourselves, as citizens and as individuals. If we but practice those charges given to us at the conclusion of our first exposure to the teachings of Freemasonry we can grow and perpetuate our Fraternity. We can become a greater force to preserve our freedoms, strengthen our religions and most important find a peace within ourselves.

YES, THE TIME IS NOW.