

**Grand Lodge  
Free & Accepted Masons  
Of California  
Grand Oration 1978**

**Grand Orator  
Melvin F. Schuster  
“Preserving Our Fraternal Foundations”**

Most Worshipful Grand Master and my Brethren of the Grand Lodge

To stand at this podium to address you, my Brethren, is a privilege and honor, which far surpasses my wildest expectations. I sincerely thank you for your most courteous reception and trust that the thoughts which you allow me to share with you this afternoon will in some small way contribute to the significance of this Communication and perhaps merit your consideration as we set out to do that work which we came here to do.

To begin with, Most Worshipful, to you I express my deepest appreciation for the opportunity you gave to me last year to serve our Grand Lodge and I could never, never put into words my thanks for the courtesies and considerations given to me by you during our sojourns throughout the State with the Grand Family. I also want to take advantage of this moment to acknowledge the fraternal devotion of my fellow Grand Lodge Officers; and to the Masters and Wardens sitting here today and through them to the Brethren of this great Jurisdiction, my profound gratitude for the numberless acts of kindness by which they have made me eternally their debtor. My life and that of my wife, Peggy, has been made that much richer and more meaningful by the privilege of our associations with you.

October, that delightful month of the year signifying the harvest time, finds us again assembled in our Annual Communication to exchange fraternal salutations, to give an accounting of our stewardship, to listen to the wise counsel of our master workmen, to enjoy, for much too short a span of time, the fellowship of our Brethren, to pay tribute to the memory of our departed Brethren who came so often into these chambers but who will enter no more, and then, as Masons have done in all ages before us, discuss the business of the Grand Lodge and go forth from this place to pursue our labors for the benefit of our noble Craft.

At this particular time it is my duty to address you "upon matters appertaining to the Craft," and fully realizing the many former moments of eloquence, I most humbly implore your indulgence.

At the Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge we concern ourselves with the effort to chart our course of future activities, constantly bearing in mind the necessity for a strong hand on that tiller which will guide the ship of California Masonry.

We often hear some of our Brethren expound at great length on the fact that we are not greatly interested in the past, that our chief concern is not even with the present, but that our efforts should concern themselves only with the future. I submit to you, my Brethren, that we cannot intelligently plan the future of this or any other institution, and that we cannot determine the correct paths of wisdom in the present unless we shall have first analyzed that which has taken place in the past; for it is the experiences of the days gone by that must serve as guides to our actions in the future. As the sands in the hourglass of life fall toward the bottom of the vessel, I find myself irresistibly moving with what I consider that ever-increasing group of Brethren who believe that the area of their greatest usefulness is to be found in trying to solve the problems of the present and preparing for those of the future. The yesterdays were full of interest, but today and the days ahead are filled with the inspiration of anticipated success. Therefore I trust I may be forgiven if, in the brief time allotted to me, I might discuss my feelings on matters of dismay and concern, but yet of hope and encouragement which confront us as members of our Institution and which I would hope merit your thoughts and deliberations.

Our society in general is witnessing an era of restlessness, and the effects are being felt by Masonry as well as other institutions. Men of equal abilities, intellect and learning, espouse opposite political, economic and religious programs. Men of equal character champion as ethical

and condemn as immoral the very same practice. The totalitarian states differ as bitterly with each other as with the democracies.

All of these strivings and confusions show that mankind is searching, probing, questing for surer collective foundations; during the process they make even more imperative the need for surer individual foundations.

In the midst of this confusion we frequently encounter agitated and excited Brethren who have lost some of their hospitality for the traditional conception of Masonry's sphere of action. We easily notice these Brethren, for they run through the hallowed halls of Masonry pointing the proverbial finger at those activities to which, in their opinion, the fraternity should commit itself and also to nebulous opportunities of which it might fail to avail itself.

Personally, I have to admit that I am slow to sanction the innovations proposed by our enthusiastic Brethren because I strongly feel that they may have fallen victims to a confusion of thought leading them to impose upon the Institution, duties or activities which are in conflict with the real purpose and meaning of Craft Masonry!

In another apartment of our Temple can be heard the clamor of concern for our so-called decline in membership. Our Grand Master, in his address to this august body, has sufficiently explained the statistics which tend to support this clamor. However, the point is well taken, and decline, justified or not, should be of great concern to us!

And still elsewhere, my Brethren, the attentive ear will detect rumblings of deep concern for Masonry's effectiveness in our educational system, in our communities and even our individual Lodges.

Ask the superintendent or master workman of any large construction site which part of the building required the most deliberate and exacting labor and he will most assuredly answer, "The foundation." The foundation. . . that portion of the structure usually unseen and often unappreciated. There are five separate foundations to which I wish to address my remarks of the afternoon.

We are builders!! Our heritage flows down through history from the ancient artisans in stone. How long their magnificent cathedrals stood was solely dependent upon the foundation upon which they were built. We are builders in another sense, for we construct, shape and mold from an inquisitive candidate, a Master Mason!

How that Master Mason functions is going to be based upon how we set his foundation and guide him in erecting the superstructure of his Masonic life. Just as the height of a building is limited to its foundation, so is the candidate's spiritual height based on his foundations; for this man on whom we confer the third Degree is no longer simply, Mr. Jones. He is John Jones, Master Mason. but even beyond that, he is your Lodge. He is Masonry!

This new Masonic Career will follow him all over the globe and his effectiveness as an example of our noble Craft begins in the northeast corner of the Lodge room. How appropriate that it should be at the point, midway between north and east, a reminder of the fact that a traveler has left darkness and has moved towards the light. True, some of the darkness still clings to him; as yet he belongs in part to the north. But he is turning his face eastward; he is striving for light and truth.

Why is the lesson of the northeast corner such a pinnacle experience in the Masonic life of a man? Because there the essential dignity of the individual is emphasized in a manner that is unforgettable. With body erect and head held high he stands proud to be recognized as a creature of the Great Architect. At that moment he is the most important man in the entire Masonic Craft. Working tools are placed in his hands. His preparatory period of life now under way, he is ready to enter upon its serious business, ready to begin his labors on a Temple not made with hands.

And since a man receives the degrees but once, he will never stand in the northeast corner as the youngest Entered Apprentice again. Never, therefore, should we let him forget that once he stood there, nor why!

The guidance he receives from that point on will determine whether he becomes a Mason or simply a member of a Masonic Lodge.

Freemasonry is what Freemasons are when, and only when, it is seen in action. As one writer in the "Masonic Herald" puts it, "I would not give much for your Freemasonry unless it is seen in

everyday life. Lamps do not talk though they do shine. A lighthouse sounds no drums nor beats any gongs, yet far over the water its friendly glow of light is seen by the captain. So let your light so shine and be recognized by the image of your life as to illustrate and exemplify your conduct and it shall not fail to be illustrious."

The goal of an illustrious life? My Brethren, it is possible for us to achieve this goal, but our work must begin outside the West Gate. Once we relax our standards ever so little, a long and difficult struggle is ahead before their lofty position can be regained, if ever.

One of the most important responsibilities any Worshipful Master will have, is the selection of his Investigating Committees on petitions for membership. No petitioner has an inherent right to become a Freemason; it is a privilege that may be granted or denied according to the worthiness or unworthiness of the man who applies. Sometimes it is our duty to object. Why not get a "pool" of good, conscientious Brethren who will really investigate, leaving no stone unturned? It isn't enough merely to say "He has never been in trouble; there's no reason why he should not be admitted to our fellowship." I prefer to know whether there is any good reason why he SHOULD be admitted. Just because he has managed thus far to keep out of trouble with the law is hardly what we could call a positive recommendation.

"Bring the standard back to the line," the commanding officer in one of the Napoleonic wars ordered in a message to the boy who carried the regimental banner. But the lad was on fire with zeal for victory.

"Bring the line up to the standard," he urged his chief. That is our challenge at the West Gate.

I'm sure many of you have heard comments from our Brethren such as, "They do nothing but confer degrees." If our Lodge Officers do nothing but repeat the words and phrases of our ritual, then the critics have a point. But if in the process of conferring degrees our Lodges are making Masons, then their criticism is entirely unfounded. It all depends on what precedes, what accompanies and what follows the ritualistic ceremonies of our degrees.

Is this a familiar situation? You're disappointed in a certain newly raised Brother named Fred. Fred was impatient to get his petition into your Lodge, then impatient to get the degrees over. You were a little unhappy that the candidate was permitted to get by on somewhat poor proficiency work between degrees. The result was that he came to Lodge exactly three times and you haven't seen him since. Having used the degrees as a stepping-stone, he rushed on to whatever it was he wanted in the first place. Perhaps the thought occurred to you that he would have been better off and certainly Masonry would be better off if he had joined the Elm Street Social Club.

But let's take a closer look at that situation for a moment. First, the Lodge didn't have to elect Fred to membership if that appeared to be his motive. Second, the Lodge didn't have to rush through the degrees. In doing so, didn't it act as an accessory?

If the Lodge had required that Fred take the time to start learning what Freemasonry is all about before the degrees, during the degrees, and after the degrees he just might have become a Master Mason in the truest sense of the word.

Conrad Hahn, a noted Masonic scholar, once wrote, "Unfortunately the rapid process of the individual from one degree to another continues, with an appalling dearth of Masonic education and enlightenment between the degrees. No wonder the ritual work is regarded less and less as a mystic experience to inspire a man and to improve his heart and mind for the art of living.

I share the opinion that the lack of educational work in the average Lodge is the principal reason for the loss of interest and the consequent poor attendance in Masonry. A Lodge of Master Masons does not exist for the purpose of furnishing members for other organizations. Its purpose is to make Master Masons. Why, then, shouldn't we take the time to do just that?

If a Lodge has no time to ripen a candidate, to mold him, to give him a firm foundation, to give him good and wholesome instruction before it raises him to the Sublime Degree, it won't find time to do it after he signs the by-laws. Do you think you can get the average new member to come back to Lodge for such educational experiences when you didn't require them between the degrees? Of course not!

In our symbolism we have a commodity which no else in the world possesses. Think of what a businessman would do if he held in his grasp a product that was one of a kind and which

was in demand by the consumer. Don't you think he'd lash out with a sales campaign to end all sales campaigns? We have such a product and we need no sales campaign because men come to us thirsting for the knowledge that only we can provide! All too often the thirsty candidate comes to a dry well!

It is Masonry's great function to inform; it is the function of individual Masons to perform. How do we judge our performance? By what standard do we measure our effectiveness? Can it be determined by the esteem with which we are regarded in our local communities? Answer this question then, "How much would your Lodge be missed by the community tomorrow if it ceased to exist tonight?"

The reputation of the Fraternity, to a greater or lesser degree, is in the keeping of the individual Mason. It is within the power of every Brother to glorify or nullify the institution. The general public never reads Masonic books nor Masonic philosophy. Its idea of the fraternity is not well defined, and the sole basis of judgment it falls back upon, is the character of the men who are supposed to exemplify its teachings. It isn't the Grand Master; it isn't the Grand Lodge, it isn't even your Lodge-it is you. If you want Masonry to remain a vibrant force only you can make it to be that way.

From time immemorial, our Craft has exercised an influence over our society that has been due to its continuing attachment to unchallengeable, fundamental principles of human conduct. In short, the foundations laid long ago still support the superstructure of our civil society.

But new roads are opening to us; new designs on the trestleboard to be tested; new experiments proposed which challenge our curiosity and our daring. If ever we needed individual's conscious of the basic principles upon which our institution was founded, it is now! Our local communities, our school boards, our State and Federal governing bodies are crying out for the leadership dedicated to old-fashioned Americanism.

The society of our day supports numberless institutions and organizations, each especially created and designed to advance one particular science, to promote one particular profession, to encourage one particular business or industry, to protect one particular group of labor, to uphold the interests of one particular church or party. In those organizations the Mason has a wonderful opportunity to bring to the treatment of every problem and activity of our times, an application of the sound principles which Masonry has instilled into his consciousness and into the impulses of his life. There, in the everyday world, my Brethren, is our opportunity to win the world to that Masonry of action and spirit which is the very heartbeat of civilization.

We hear much about our schools, but do we listen? The Masonic Fraternity is on record as a champion of public education. There is not one among us who would care to take a backward step. In a nation such as ours it is imperative that the people should be educated. We stand always, and with all our strength, for the protection, integrity and up building of the public school system. In that we are unanimous. The individual Mason is not committed by reason of such loyalty to specific measures of education. I do not conceive it to be my Masonic duty blindly to endorse every measure presented to me, merely because it comes from those who have in charge the administration of the schools. I do not recognize it as a Masonic duty to vote for issues of school bonds, for instance, unless I have assured myself of the public necessity therefore. The point I wish to make is this-that Masons should never become the unquestioning and unreasoning bondservants of any institution, whether schools, or churches, or societies.

Frankly, as a parent, I'm concerned!! Law enforcement agencies report that the incidence and severity of crimes committed by youths are increasing. . . suicide attempts both successful and unsuccessful are on an upswing. The number of teenage pregnancies is increasing each year at a dramatic rate. The misuse of alcohol and other drugs by young people shows no evidence of abatement. The scores on college entrance examinations are going down. Young persons seem bored with everything except the pursuit of "Fun" and they are at once apathetic and restless.

Our immediate inclination is to ask, "What is wrong with our young people?" Why do they reject our values of hard work, self-determination and sacrifice of immediate gratification in favor of valuable, long-term goals? No matter what the answers may be, even if there are no answers, the blame appears to rest upon youth. Are we really avoiding the question, "What are we doing wrong?"

When standards, whatever they may be, if imposed, are not rigidly enforced, we should wonder and contemplate what they are teaching our young people. With an increasing frequency young couples are living together without getting married and without the disapproval of their peers.

Many responsible and concerned parents buy and encourage the use of birth control pills because sexual activity is condoned by current social standards, and parents feel helpless to do anything about it. . .unwilling to impose their ideas on their own children.

Young people need and want authority in their lives. The absence or weakness of such authority contributes to the lack of purpose which is characteristic of too many of our young adults.

With the understanding and support of parents and the rest of the community. the school can help to make some changes. There is increasing evidence that many people are looking for a return to more structure in our schools, for stricter discipline and for more rigidly enforced standards of achievement. We must have open communication between the parents, the schools and the community.

That foundation stone of our country' s greatness must not be chipped, cracked, scratched or marred by negativism, complacency or disinterest. It is our duty to know what we are doing when we exercise the electoral franchise, and to realize that those who administer human institutions are as human as ourselves, subject to the same ambitions and faults. There is never a time when Masons should not be particularly careful to see that the Causes they publicly support have real merit and deserve such support.

There is yet another foundation I wish for you to consider; our families. We are hearing a lot today about having the wives and families participating more in Masonic activities-and that is good!

When Masonry was first established in this country during the early Colonial period, its rapid growth and popularity could be attributed greatly to the need for an interest and activity; some place for men to gather. Other than going to church on Sunday, there was little activity in those early days for a man to get fellowship with other men.

We teach and advocate close family ties. We certainly never would recommend that a man not be with his wife and children. We want our members to be good husbands and devoted fathers, but in our zeal to make our Lodge successful, we too often will require so much of our officers and Brethren that we command more of their time than their families get. This particularly is harmful in younger families. We should consider revising our schedules and requirements so that a young man can serve as an officer without imposing too much on the time needed for and by his family.

What I am pointing out is that Masonry needs to be more considerate and smarter in involving the women insofar as is possible. We should have more joint activities for husbands and wives and families-special dinners, picnics, trips, and a host of other opportunities that are available.

There is much that can be done to interest and cause any wife to want her husband to be an active Mason so she can enjoy such activities with him. If she does become interested and excited, she well can be a tremendous public relations force, a powerful publicity agent, and a goodwill ambassador for our Fraternity instead of being a grumbling and unhappy "Masonic widow." (A term I find distasteful).

Show me a Lodge that has the family involved in its activities, and I'll show you an active, vibrant force in the community.

Let me cite an example. On October 30th of last year, your Grand Lodge Officers traveled to Los Molinos for the purpose of laying the Cornerstone for the new Temple of Molino Lodge No. 150, a Lodge with a membership of 144.

On that particular day the wives of the Brethren along with members of the local Chapter of the Eastern Star provided a potluck dinner for over 650 people. I like to think they all came to hear the oration of the afternoon, but I'm not so naive as to realize that the entire community came to share in the joy and pride of Molino Lodge.

There is yet one additional theme upon which we might contemplate.

Let's take a closer look at the situation of membership and Lodge attendance. I mention both in the same context since one is a function of the other. Throughout our country most

fraternal organizations are experiencing a drop in the total number of members. I am not wont to quote figures for you're well aware that statistics on one side of the ledger are equally germane on the other.

Any number of reasons are offered; the lure of television, the fear of crime in our urban areas, the fact that we do not solicit membership, the weakening of moral attitudes and religious and cultural interests.

On the other hand, organizations of strictly a social nature are witnessing a growth in members, partially due to the fact that they are offering anything that enough members want to do. So the casual observer would surmise that those groups that major in social activity advance, and the more staid, moralistic bodies decline.

However, there is another facet of this jewel of contention to consider. There are many who would equate these social organizations with Freemasonry as one and the same type of institution. They are definitely not! No matter how personally gratifying they may be to their members with the philanthropic, social or insurance programs, they are not "fraternal" organizations by definition.

The Latin word "frater" from which we derive "fraternal" means "brother," and it is not defined in terms of social endeavors or philanthropy but it is defined in terms of the mutual obligations and responsibility of Brotherhood. The fellowship of social activity and the "Good works" of a philanthropic project are a part of the character of a fraternity but, for there to be a fraternity in any real sense of the word, there must be the invisible, enduring, voluntarily assumed obligation of brotherhood!

I have to unwillingly concede that in today's culture, some men find the ethical and moral implications of true fraternalism too subtle and too lacking in immediate realization to hold their interest. They would prefer the instant gratification of fun or applied philanthropy; of collecting money, or selling tickets to raise money for a particular project to help other people-and this is good-but this is not the point. The point is that applied philanthropy has very little to do with that quality of brotherhood contemplated in the Degrees of Freemasonry.

Whoa now! Before you shout out, "What about charity?" let me continue. The true fraternalism of Masonry is invisible, something sensed rather than expressed, a noble emotion that is enduring and voluntary. No one forces an individual to assume the obligations of our Craft. Only a mature man, who acts of his own free will and accord, can take on the responsibilities of Masonry; to first undertake and then perform the duties of brotherhood and pledge himself to the life long practice of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth.

If Masonry is so good, why do we not have men standing in line awaiting admission? Why are the Lodge rooms not packed to the rafters when the Master asks the Junior Deacon to invite the Brethren in? Though I am able to solve the most complex problems submitted by Wor. Bro. Ralph Head in his quarterly challenges appearing in the "California Freemason," I confess, my Brethren, I do not have the solution to the issue before us. The simple answers of television, crime and cultural weaknesses are too simple. They're not answers at all; merely excuses.

It doesn't require any extensive research to realize that in the last two decades our society has undergone a frightening upheaval. Attitudes toward ethics and religion are almost beyond recognition. Attitudes toward the family, the home, and the country have changed. Regardless of what Chevrolet's advertising men tell us, even hot dogs, baseball and apple pie are slipping!

And Masonry, with its simple belief that its teachings and principles can make good men better, has fewer takers now than in the past. Part of the reason is sadly apparent. Today's young man has no compelling desire to be better. In his own mind he is good enough, just doing his own thing. Following in Dad's footsteps is not a "turn-on" to him. Even the curious are no longer curious and the ambitious (let's face it, there are some) no longer find the economic advantage of Masonic membership worth the cost. So much for petitioners!

To me, what is even more frightening is that the prevailing social changes are not confined to the "young people." The sad truth is that many of the elders have followed the piping of the young and have accepted the new values and the new morality as an excuse for self-indulgence. Even our Masonry has been affected by this changing moral outlook because Masons are people. To some, our ritual is boring; the once impressively binding nature of our

obligations has been rationalized to mere esoterics. Sure, they pay their dues but their one responsibility to the Craft appears to be providing those vacant seats at our meetings.

Since I have proposed the problem, you are well within your right to demand of me a solution or solutions! Unfortunately, they cannot be neatly counted off in numerical order because the best answers lie within the breasts of each of us.

We are told that Freemasonry has emerged stronger from every adverse condition that has confronted it, because the Brethren answered the challenge by returning to the basics of the Fraternity.

But must we have a crisis before every member becomes as aware of Freemasonry's tenets as he is aware of yesterday's ball scores?

Must we have another world war or another era of anti-Masonic haranguing and propaganda before every Brother is challenged to go forth into the community and show of what Masons are really made?

The time of adversity is now! The foundation upon which we must build solidarity in our Order, the practice of our moral responsibilities and the perfection of the practice of Brotherly Love is awaiting our fervent labor.

In 1969, there appeared in an issue of The Indiana Freemason an article, titled "A Modern Fable of the Builders." Though almost 10 years old the content is as appropriate today as it was at that time.

"Once upon a time there were some God-fearing men who, after consulting with one another many times, agreed to build a temple or tower to the glory of the Grand Architect of the Universe. Its foundation stones were Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth; and its gates Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice. Its doors opened on three steps where the apprentices learned the building arts and, when proficient, became master workmen skilled in all trades.

"In spite of divisions of opinion and ill-wishers, the work progressed and the enterprise succeeded. Even the profane grudgingly admitted the structure was well grounded and of benefit to men.

"To help continue the building, other workers of good report were allowed to join in the tasks. Then the ranks of workers swelled continually.

"Time passed and some of the workers said, 'Go to; we must beautify the building for the benefit of the workers and the admiration of men.'

"So they conceived additions to the fundamental structure. Pointing out that the original building plans were incomplete and some lost, they persuaded a few more of the workers to labor on building superstructures. To enhance these 'improvements,' planning committees were organized and the leaders assumed magnificent titles such as Mighty Pandjorum, Supreme Pooh Bah, Grand Wizard, Imperial Popover, etc. Each designed rooms befitting his ambitions, and soon the great building acquired bays, ells, gables and minarets never conceived by its founders. These committees also divided themselves into smaller parties and vied with each other as to who should be the greatest.

"All this naturally resulted in less labor on the original temple, and the building suffered thereof from lack of workers.

"However, as others noted the apparent success of the 'beautifying,' they became enamored of more and greater 'beauties.' Thus, the temple progress seemed stymied, and the labor on the original temple seemed dull to some.

"So it was proposed by a few that another addition be built to top all others where fun and amusement would reign supreme. These grotesque additions became a subject of merriment to outsiders as well as a burden on the walls of the original temple where time began to take its toll.

"All the various improvements, additions and beautifications having run their course and with human nature being what it is, some of the additions were not able to stand the wear of time and loss of vitality. So a day of reckoning appeared. The cries of anguish from the 'upper' regions, caused by lack of additional apprentices and skilled workmen recruited for work, became heart rendering.

"They cried with loud voices, 'The fault lies with those workers who confine their energies to the original temple. We must do something immediately to help shore up the building lest we perish. Our structure will fall apart and we, being on top, will sustain the greatest damage.'

'Let us aid those poor Brethren down below by pointing out their foolishness in observing their fundamental rules of architecture and convincing them that quantity not quality, is needed.

'It is apparent to us that their old, silly ideas of learning the basic skills are only time-wasting endeavors. We can plainly see that greater numbers are all that is really necessary, so we must convince these foolish Brethren.

'This is an emergency so hasten, lest our beautiful building goes the way of all earthly things!!'

"The ideas of the alarmists prevailed, but the changes they accomplished on the trestleboards had adverse effects. While outside adversaries and the profane laughed and gloated, the temple collapsed inwardly; and the fall thereof was very great."

## EPILOGUE

Excavators, however, proved centuries later that the foundations of the original temple were as sound as ever, and others may build thereon at some future time.

May we hope that their workers will hew to the straight and narrow, but simple road of quality, and build a structure that will last forever.

"Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it." (psalm 127).

Build my Brethren, Build!