

**Grand Lodge
Free & Accepted Masons
Of California
Grand Oration 1983**

**Grand Orator
Richard L. Riemer
"CAN YOUR SIGNATURE BE READ WITHOUT
THE USE OF SPECTACLES?"**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, my Fellow Grand Lodge Officers, Past Grand Masters, Distinguished Guests, Members of the Grand Lodge, my Brethren All

"Thank God! I also—am an American!"

With these stirring words of Daniel Webster as a backdrop, join me, please, for a short journey through history.

It is the night of December the sixteenth, 1773 and, in Boston, St. Andrews Lodge is about to hold its regularly scheduled meeting. But there are only five members present that evening—one looks about the meeting room at the famous Green Dragon Tavern and observes that many of the most active members of St. Andrew's are missing. Joseph Warren is not in his usual chair, nor is John Hancock, Samuel Adams, Samuel Peck, Paul Revere, and others. If you were to ask one of the five members who were present, where their Brethren were, it is possible that you would have seen a sly smile on his face and, with a twinkle in his eye, his response might have been that they had a party to attend that evening.

And, yes, a party did take place—the world's biggest tea party—as a group of men, disguised, more or less, as Indians, proceeded to Griffin's Wharf, boarded the three British ships moored there, and filled Boston harbor with their cargoes of tea.

My Brethren, I ask you, if such a cause existed today and such an event was planned, would you be at the party?

The date is now April 18, 1775, and General Gage of the British Army has sent a detachment of "regulars" to capture or destroy military stores at Concord just north of Boston. But the plan was suspected by the Minute Men and our Brother, Paul Revere, awaited a signal to tell him of the route the British were taking. Longfellow tells us in his famous poem.

"He said to his friend, 'If the British march
By land or sea from the town tonight
Hang a lantern aloft in the belfry arch
Of the North Church tower as a signal light,—
One, if by land, and two if by sea;'"

And the signal was given—two lanterns lit up the belfry at the Old North Church—and Paul Revere, on a horse borrowed for that purpose, rode through the countryside alerting his neighbors and the greater part of the stores at Concord were saved.

My Brethren, if today were the day and riders were needed, would you be in the saddle? It is now June 16, 1775, and the Past Grand Master and General Joseph Warren together with our Brother, General Israel Putnam, gathered with some 1500 patriots, including many members of our Fraternity, to defend Breed's Hill near Cambridge.

The next day the battle took place—misnamed the Battle of Bunker Hill—and the 1500 Americans were attacked by some 3000 British troops. Waiting until they could see the whites of the enemies eyes, the inexperienced colonists delivered such a withering fire that the British line broke in disorder. A second assault was mounted with a similar result and it was not until the third assault that the British troops gained their objective and then only after suffering the loss of 1054 men killed or wounded including some 89 commissioned officers. The defenders lost some 420 killed and wounded and 30 prisoners. Among the dead, however, was our Brother Joseph Warren and, among the wounded, was Brother Ephraim Kirby who received the first of thirteen wounds he would sustain during the War of Independence—one for each Colony.

My Brethren, if that battle were to be fought today, would you be in the trenches?

The date is August 2, 1776, and around a table in the Statehouse in Philadelphia—the building now known as Independence Hall—are gathered the members of the Continental Congress who had, just one month before on July 2, 1776, adopted the resolution for independence. Two days later on July 4, 1776, the actual text of our Declaration of Independence had been approved and read to the men who made up the Continental Army.

That Declaration represented the collective work of all the 56 men who were to sign it, including some nine or more Master Masons, but it reflected specifically the words of Thomas Jefferson who authored the immortal document, with the sage and wise counsel of our Brother Benjamin Franklin seated at his right hand to assist in the formation of the dramatic and momentous phrases.

It was time for the document to be signed, and our Brother John Hancock approaches the table, takes the quill pen in hand and affixes his signature in oversize and bold characters, remarking that he wanted

George III to be able to read his name without the need of spectacles.

My Brethren, if such a document lay on the table before you today, would your signature be there?

It is now the winter of 1777 and our Brother, George Washington, is encamped with his men at Valley Forge, Pennsylvania. The weather is freezing cold. Many of the men are without shoes or adequate clothing.

They huddle in small groups around the campfires before their log huts. This is the Continental Army, commanded by that renowned Brother, General George Washington, and it is this group which holds in its hands, the destiny of the United Colonies in their struggle to gain independence.

Many of these volunteers are Master Masons, as we learn from the records of the Army or Military Lodges of the day, which have endured the ravages of time. It will not be until June of 1778, however, that the troops will have completed their training under our Brother, Baron Frederick von Steuben, and will leave Valley Forge.

My Brethren, if faced today with such hardships to maintain our independence, would you be in the ranks of that army?

It is now September 17, 1787, and we are again in Independence Hall in Philadelphia. This time we have on the table that document which forms the blue print for our government—the Constitution of the United States of America. Thirteen Master Masons are among the thirty-nine gifted men who approach the table and sign that plan for democracy, under the watchful eye of Brother George Washington, then President of the Constitutional Convention and, later to become, the first President of the new nation to serve under that Constitution.

My Brethren, are you doing your part to preserve intact the principles given to us by this dedicated group of men?

We, as members of the Masonic Fraternity today, remember with pride the contributions made by those forward looking patriots who founded this country we call "home", and we are quick to point out that so many of them were members of our ancient Fraternity. And, my Brethren, we have a right to be proud, for I am confident that the contributions of our Masonic Brethren in forming and shaping our new nation outweigh the contributions of any other group.

But the contributions of Masonry did not end with the Revolutionary War and the ratification of our Constitution!! The history of our nation can be likened to a Masonic Hall of Fame.

It was Brother John Paul Jones, known as the father of our Navy, who, as commander of the Bon Homme Richard, answered a British call for surrender with the never to be forgotten words:

"I have not yet begun to fight!!"

It was Brother John Marshall who served as Chief Justice of our new Supreme Court from 1801 to 1835, earning the title of "Father of the Judiciary".

In 1803, it was our Brothers James Monroe and Robert Livingston who negotiated the Louisiana Purchase and added to our nation some 828,000 square miles of land stretching westward to the Rocky Mountains.

And in 1804, it was an expedition headed by Brothers Merriwether Lewis and William Clark which explored those new lands and opened the West.

It was our Brother, Past Grand Master and General, Andrew Jackson, whose defense of New Orleans preserved our nation during the War of 1812 and led to his subsequent election as our seventh President.

It was the determination of our Brother James Monroe, as President of the United States, which gave us the Monroe Doctrine and alerted the world that our young country was willing to stand up and fight for the principles it believed important.

Our Brother Sam Houston later brought Texas into the Union after the slogan "Remember the Alamo!!" spurred his men to remember the sacrifice of life made in that battle by Brothers Davy Crockett and Colonel William B. Travis.

It was our Brother James K. Polk, as President of the United States, who completed the Oregon Purchase and added more than ten million acres to our nation's size.

During the War between the States, members of our Craft were leaders both in the ranks of the Union and the Confederate Armies. Names like General "Stonewall" Jackson, General George McClellan, General Albert Pike, Admiral David Farragut, and the list goes on, were dedicated to duty and to their cause as they saw it, but they remained, also, dedicated to their Masonic ideals.

It was the leadership of our Brother, Colonel Theodore Roosevelt, and his "Rough Riders" which led to the defeat of Spain in our clash with that country in 1898.

It was the leadership ability of our Brother, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, as President of the United States, which guided this nation through the agonies of World War II; and it was the determination of his successor in the Presidency, our Brother, Past Grand Master, Harry S. Truman which led to a successful end to that conflict.

More recently, it was the sincerity and compassion of our Brother Gerald Ford who helped heal the wounds and dissension inflicted upon his country by the activities of the disgraced President who preceded him.

It was the bravery of Brethren like "Buzz" Aldrin, L. Gordon Cooper, Virgil Grissom, Thomas Stafford, Wally Schirra and others, as modern astronauts which has led to the conquering of the last frontier—that of space exploration. These dedicated Brethren carry on the example set earlier with the Arctic explorations of our Brother Evelyn Baldwin and the Antarctic explorations of our Brother Admiral Richard E. Byrd.

And the list goes on and on!! We have numbered among our ranks some fourteen of the Presidents of our nation; innumerable Senators and Congressmen; the most famous of the Chief Justices to serve our United States Supreme Court; the most capable of our Generals and Admirals; the greatest inventors; the giants of the entertainment industry; and the world's great humanitarians. Yes, we in Masonry can be proud of our heritage.

But, my Brethren, the men to whom I've referred are heroes of yester-day. They come to us from the pages of history and, by its very nature, history is a picture of the past. Where are the Washingtons, the Franklins, the John Marshalls, the Sam Houstons of today?

Centuries ago, even decades ago—the leaders of this nation, were for the most part, members of our Masonic Fraternity and those leadership roles were ones that had been nurtured and developed on the local level; in city government; in county government; and in state government. Can we say the same today?

But let us examine the problem from its true perspective!!

History tells us that in the year 1776 there were, in the United Colonies, some 3000 members of the Masonic Fraternity.

Three thousand Masons and yet, how great were their accomplishments in breathing life into this wonderful country of ours.

I cannot help but wonder about the accomplishments that could be expected in our nation if the 3,000,000 Masons in our land today were to be as dedicated to the cause of liberty, democracy and humanity as were their ancient Brethren.

And what a better world we could have today if the 6,000,000 members of our Fraternity worldwide were to actively devote themselves to encouraging in their nations the practice of those Masonic virtues of brotherly love, relief and truth.

In this Grand Jurisdiction alone, there are some 62 times as many Master

Masons as existed in all of the thirteen colonies in the days when our nation was born. Yet, in our legislature, we find but a scattering of Masonic

Brethren. In our Judiciary we find that an ever-decreasing number wear the Square and Compass. In local government we find relatively little participation by members of our Fraternity, and, on the national level our congressional delegation and our nation's leaders number but a few stalwarts who are there to carry the torch of Freemasonry in the halls of Congress and through the maze of our federal system.

And we, in Masonry, pride ourselves in our support for the concept of public schools and illustrate that support by declaring Public Schools month each year with appropriate local programs. But, my Brethren how many of our school districts number on their governing board a member of the Masonic Fraternity? And yet, what greater role can we, as Masons play in guiding and preserving the destiny of that public school system?

Most certainly, I do not intend to make a blanket indictment of all the members of our Craft. There are those among our Fraternity who have taken up the challenge and who serve their neighbors on the local state and federal level.

We can look around this very auditorium and find dedicated Brethren serving as members of our state judiciary—and serving also as leaders in this Grand Lodge.

We do have members of our Fraternity who serve as members of the Board of Supervisors in county government. Our Grand Lecturer is an example of this dedication to both Masonry and to good government

We do have some of our Brethren active in city government, serving as Mayor or Councilmen in their area, and, likewise, we do have those Brethren whose dedication to our public schools is exemplified by their participation as members of the governing boards of local school districts

Unfortunately, these dedicated Brethren are the exceptions rather than the rule. Their ranks are thin as they face the forces of evil.

We owe these Brethren a great debt of gratitude because they are carrying on the traditions which Masons and Masonry established in the formation and growth of this nation of ours. We owe them more also" We owe them our support, our help and our participation. It is our duty to swell their ranks, firm up their lines and assist them in holding high the torch of Freemasonry.

Many of you here present will say—"What can I do alone? I am but a small voice in the wilderness." The words of Edward Everett Hale former Chaplain of the United States Senate, answer this inquiry:

"I am only one,
But still I am one.
I cannot do everything,
But still I can do something;
And because I cannot do everything
I will not refuse to do the something that I can do."

My Brethren, I challenge you, therefore, to accept the responsibility you owe to our Founding Fathers. I challenge you to do your part in preserving the heritage which was their gift to you. I challenge you to help carry that torch of Freemasonry by turning your talent toward building a better community, in a better state, in a better nation, in a better world.

Our Brother, Theodore Roosevelt, once said:

"The first requisite of a good citizen in this Republic of ours is that he shall be able and willing to pull his own weight."

I ask you, my Brethren, are you in the oarlocks? Is your shoulder to the wheel? I suggest that you bear in mind these words by Ella Wheeler Wilcox:

"There are two kinds of people on earth today,
Just two kinds of people, no more, I say,
Not the good and the bad, for 'tis well understood
The good are half bad and the bad are half good.
Not the happy and sad, for the swift flying years

Bring each man his laughter and each man his tears.
Not the rich and the poor, for to count a man's wealth
You must first know the state of his conscience and health.
Not the humble and proud, for in life's busy span
Who puts on vain airs is not counted a man.
No! The two kinds of people on earth I mean
Are the people who lift, and the people who lean.
Wherever you go you will find the world's masses
Are ever divided in just these two classes,
And strangely enough, you find, too, I wean,
There is only one lifter to twenty who lean.
This one question I ask. Are you easing the load
Of overtaxed lifters who toil down the road?
Or are you a leaner who lets others bear
Your portion of worry and labor and care?"

It is not enough, my Brethren, that we relax and point with pride at the accomplishments made by Masons across the centuries. It is rather our duty to protect the inheritance that they have given us so as to establish our own track record. Our children and our children's children will thus be able, in turn, to look back at the contributions made by our generation as Master Masons and as men.

My Brethren of Grand Lodge, I look to you especially! You have served your Lodge as Master, or you presently serve as a Master or Warden and thus the Brethren of your Lodge have recognized your ability as a leader. I challenge you now to display that same leadership in your community and permit your neighbors to recognize your abilities in this respect. In this way, the principles of Freemasonry which are, of course, the same as the principles that we, as Americans pride ourselves in—the principles of democracy, of patriotism, of brotherly love—can be carried forward in our world today, and this great nation can be preserved for the generations which will follow us.

Thus, also, Masonry will resume the leadership role it established in shaping our country; in drafting our Declaration of Independence and fighting to insure it; in drafting our Constitution and building this nation according to its blueprint.

What better way can we fulfill our Masonic vows, perform our duty as Masons, and display to the world those tenants of brotherly love, relief and truth which we all hold so dear?

Brethren, let us all adopt as our creed these words of Faye McKinney who said:

"I am an American. The golden rule is my rule. I acknowledge my undying debt to the founding fathers who left me a priceless heritage which now is my responsibility. With steadfast loyalty, I will uphold the Constitution of the United States of America. I will treasure my birth rite of American ideals. I will place moral integrity above worldly possessions. The problems of my country shall be my problems. I will count my right of voting as a sacred trust. and I will diligently strive to prove worthy of that trust. I will give my full support to upright public servants. but those with unclean hands, I will firmly oppose. Each obligation that comes to me as a true American, I will discharge with honor. My heart is in America. .America is my heart!!!"

Thank you, my friends, and may you and I together pass on to our children and our grandchildren, the great nation and the wonderful heritage that our fathers and grandfathers, and their fathers and grandfathers passed down to us