

**Grand Lodge  
Free & Accepted Masons  
Of California  
Grand Oration 2002**

**Grand Orator  
Richard K. Pumerantz**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Past Grand Masters, distinguished and honored guests, fellow Grand Lodge officers, and my Brethren all. Seven score and thirteen years ago, there assembled in California honorable men of vision and courage. Men of great wisdom and even greater compassion. These men conceived our great fraternity in California. But what came them here to do? What came you here to do?

In 1849, a mere 69 men, so inspired by the impassioned cries of their families and friends did raise funds. They raised \$4,500 to comfort the sick—the equivalent of nearly \$8 million today or more than \$100,000 per Mason. Those California Masons buried the dead, and built a house of healing for those in distress for \$32,000—the equivalent of over \$50 million today or more than three-quarters of a million

dollars per Mason, and they provided for that hospital's financial support over two years of anguish during California's cholera epidemic. These compassionate souls were truly Freemasons, and our Masonic

history is filled with similar acts of kindness and charity to widows and orphans, and Brothers of the Craft, whether they be members of a California Lodge or sojourners. Did these men hold the special honor of being the only men of compassion and valor in so dark a time? Were Freemasons the sole claim holders to these selfless acts? To suggest this would reek of self-importance and boastful pride. We, each one of us know of, or belong to other such worthy institutions. Hence, charity is not the true purpose of our Craft.

No, it was not these selfless acts that defined the purpose of these Masons. These were merely demonstrations of the works and deeds of good men, and Freemasonry has no corner on the market for such men.

Everyone of us knows of men of such caliber and quality. For as long as anyone of us can remember, our fraternity purports to take good men and make them better. This is a noble posture for an organization. But is it unique? Are we the only organization that can claim this worthy task? Are there no others that can accomplish this important endeavor? To disallow all other organizations from this important work would be folly. Among those engaged in this role are the organized religions of the world. Those organizations of worship to Deity would remind us that they were charged by the Great Architect of the Universe with this duty as part of their primary role in society. Hence, it is not even logical that this is our true purpose.

So what came we here to do?