

**GRAND LODGE F.& A.M.
OF CALIFORNIA
GRAND ORATION
GRAND ORATOR
John F. Lowe
“On Constancy”**

Most Worshipful Grand Master, Past Grand Masters, Distinguished and Honored Guests, Grand Lodge Officers, my Brethren all: “When I have sometimes observed Men of Wit and Learning, in Spite of their excellent natural and acquired Qualifications, fail of obtaining that Regard and Esteem with Mankind, which their Inferiors in point of Understanding frequently arrive at, I have, upon a slight Reflection, been apt to think, that it was owing to the ill Judgment, Malice, or Envy of their Acquaintance: But of late two or three flagrant Instances of this kind have put me upon thinking and deliberating more maturely, and I find within the Compass of my Observation the greatest part of those fine Men have been ruined for want of **CONSTANCY**, a Virtue never too highly prized, and whose true Worth is by few rightly understood.

“Without Steadiness or Perseverance no Virtue can long subsist; and however honest and well-meaning a Man’s Principles may be, the Want of this is sufficient to render them ineffectual, and useless to himself or others.

”The first American, our Worthy Brother Ben Franklin, made this observation in 1734, when American Freemasonry was in its infancy. Now, in the twenty-first century, is constancy a virtue worthy of our attention?

Is our belief in brotherly love, relief, and truth *all* that is required?

Or, must we constantly practice all Masonic virtues to prove their meaning and value to the world?

Is constancy the virtue that reinforces commitment to our primary values?

This year, your Grand Lodge officers performed our ancient, symbolic cornerstone-laying ceremony a number of times for new schools. Five new schools were dedicated in one ceremony in Elk Grove. Unique is the policy in Elk Grove to name schools for living individuals, with a history of community service.

One such honored individual is Mr. Edward Harris, Jr., a retired chemist. His twenty-one years of service as a school board member pointed him out as an example to the students; a middle school now carries his name proudly. At the ceremony, Mr. Harris remarked, “My name is on that school. That means I have to be good, every day, for the rest of my life!” *An example of constancy, my brothers, worthy of all imitation!*

Traveling up and down this great state over the past year, we observed many Lodges, both young and old, filled with our brothers, both young and old.

In each, one can observe enthusiasm for our Craft, meaningful activities for the Family of Freemasonry, and service to their community. In all, the constant display of our values and teachings. *Constancy in word and action!*

Freemasonry, as we know it, has spanned four different centuries. Our ethics, morals, and lessons are as valuable in this age of electronic superhighways as in the age of stone highways.

Our brothers of the “Greatest Generation” recognized our fraternal values as a cornerstone in their lives. Having fulfilled their destiny to ensure the freedom of our country, this band of wartime brothers, became a band of fraternal brothers. We enjoyed the largest growth period in our history, and our membership numbers swelled as never before, or since.

Sadly however, in ever-increasing numbers, these brothers are being called to that house not made with hands; a journey my father has already made.

What made our Fraternity strong in the 1950s and 1960s? Was it really our membership roll of two-hundred thousand?

Or, was the real strength of California Freemasonry the daily practice and example of our values, by each member, in all our towns and cities?

To all these brothers, we owe two debts of gratitude.

Constancy in service to country.

Constancy in service to our Fraternity.

I submit to you that *each* of them has given full measure.

Ah, we baby boomers! Growing up with two superpowers glaring across a tense world, we sought constancy in our own way. Yes, we distrusted people over thirty. We involved ourselves in political actions and protests. We were, by some accounts, an angry generation. Some of us, however, did notice the constancy of virtue displayed by our fathers; we recognized the source as this Fraternity. Some of us joined in our twenties, some in our thirties. Others of my age, unfortunately, are only now discovering the wealth of teachings in our Craft. I must admit that we boomers have *not* done our share to maintain our Fraternity at the level left by our fathers.

Can we now be the model for our sons and grandsons? What shall become our legacy?

Our numbers are now below seventy thousand. At what point will we pass the mantel of leadership? Some think fifty thousand; others forty thousand.

Regardless of the final number, my brothers, will you practice daily our values, as our fathers before us?

Constancy is the imperative, and thankfully, knows no size limitation.

The Millennial Generation is now coming of age. They have grown up with political constancy in America.

Viet Nam was before their time.

President Nixon resigned before their decade.

Perhaps, some remember the speeches of the “Great Communicator,” President Reagan, and sensed constancy in world order; the Iron Curtain fell in shambles.

These young men are now beginning to join our Lodges. They see a constancy displayed by their father, or grandfather, and cherish that virtue.

They are happy to listen to the words of senior members of a Lodge. They are becoming active members, and are assuming line positions.

They will make fine Lodge masters, and thus model their own constancy to others.

Can they fill every vacancy by our older members leaving us? No, but I have faith that the good men of their generation will do their part. They will portray constancy as a virtue, and their legacy.

Your Grand Lodge leadership has adopted a strategic plan, to align our mission of Masonic teaching; our core values: tolerance, freedom, philanthropy, family, personal growth, ethics; our vision of member vitality, lodge prosperity, and community awareness.

This plan will, over the coming decade, ensure a constancy of purpose to guide our Craft.

Our leaders have also included a prime directive, that our programs, membership development, and training require quality standards that are independent of our membership size. The content must include value that cannot be obtained from industry or academic sources. This training will not just be free, it will be ***priceless***.

I offer for your consideration, that as our strategic plan unfolds, the training of future leaders must be of highest priority. Good men and true will continue knocking on the door of Freemasonry, with a desire to learn leadership skills; skills with a cornerstone of Masonic values. These same skills and knowledge necessary for the strength of our Fraternity will, more importantly, be applicable in business, community service, and government affairs.

We cannot lessen our duty to provide our communities, and our nation, with skillful leaders; this has been an American Masonic constant since our Boston brethren, not so long ago, held a small tea party in honor of King George.

Over the past several years, my predecessors spoke to this issue of decline in membership in our jurisdiction.

They spoke of a call to action.

That one Mason can make a difference.

Tell a friend about our Craft. To pass it on.

That education is the key.

Ask what you can do for your Fraternity. To each of you who heeded these calls, I say well done!

Your individual and collective deeds have manifested a new groundswell of interest in this Fraternity. The number of applications to join in our mysteries is showing a positive trend. While not the only metric of our Fraternity’s health, it is nonetheless a harbinger of the future.

It is often said there is no such thing as bad publicity. The recent motion picture *National Treasure* captivated young and old, Mason and non-Mason. It was certainly fanciful in the depiction of a treasure left in America by the Knights Templar. It also used our fraternal symbols as secret keys to the treasure; it created a renewed interest in our Craft by all ages. In print media, *U.S. News and World Report* showcased the involvement by our Masonic brothers in the formation of this country. None less than our Brother and President George Washington stood on the cover, in Masonic regalia. The article referred to scholarly sources, both Masonic and academic, and highlighted our Fraternity as an interesting subject for further understanding by the general public.

Today, I ask for your continued good work: To speak openly of our values and teachings.

To encourage good men, young or old, to join and become active members.

For ***you*** to be an active member.

We must capitalize on the current interest in our Fraternity, in our values.

We must be constant in our display of ethics, morals, and teachings.

Our Worthy Brother Ben also noted, “...for a Man who has no End in View, no Design to pursue, is like an irresolute Master of a Ship at Sea, that can fix upon no one Port to steer her to, and consequently can call not one Wind favourable to his Wishes...”

”Brethren, California Freemasonry offer a design in moral life, for each of us, to pursue each day; To better mankind is the great end we have in view. Our Masonic Lighthouse shines as a beacon of hope across the Great State of California!

Will you make a difference?

Will you pass your legacy to the next generation?

Will you practice constancy, in word and action, as your personal virtue?

Will you, each day, brighten a part of your community?

Brethren of California Freemasonry, will ***you*** share the light for our future?