

Most Worshipful Grand Master Terry, Grand Lodge Officers, Distinguished Visitors, my Brothers.

This being the 150th anniversary of the founding of the Grand Lodge of Minnesota, I felt that an oration on the topic of Masonic history would be appropriate. In hopes of not boring you to death, I thought I would give you an idea how history can be distorted and misunderstood. I would like to begin with some examples of student responses to historical questions. This is a compilation of lines from student papers collected by Richard Lederer:

1. The inhabitants of Egypt were called mummies. They lived in the Sarah Dessert and traveled by Camelot. The climate of the Sarah is such that the inhabitants had to live elsewhere.
2. Moses led the Hebrew slaves to the Red Sea, where they made unleavened bread, which is bread made without any ingredients.
3. The Bible is full of interesting caricatures. In the first book of the Bible, Guinnessis, Adam and Eve were created from an apple tree. One of their children, Cain, asked, "Am I my brother's son?"
4. David was a Hebrew king who fought the Philatelists. Solomon, one of David's sons, had 500 wives and 500 porcupines.
5. Socrates was a famous Greek teacher who died from an overdose of wedlock.
6. Actually, Homer was not written by Homer but by another man of that name.
7. Nero was a cruel tyrant who would torture his subjects by playing the fiddle to them.
8. The Magna Carta provided that no man should be hanged twice for the same offense.

9. In the Renaissance, Martin Luther was nailed to the church door at Wittenberg for selling papal indulgences. He died a horrible death, being excommunicated by a bull.
10. The greatest writer was Shakespeare. He was born in the year 1564, supposedly on his birthday. He wrote tragedies, comedies, and hysterectomies, all in Islamic pentameter. Romeo and Juliet are an example of a heroic couplet. Romeo's last wish was to be laid by Juliet.
11. Benjamin Franklin invented electricity by rubbing cats backward. Franklin died in 1790 and is still dead. Lincoln got shot by an actor in a moving picture. His name was John Wilkes Booth. This ruined Booth's career.
12. Bach and Handel were famous composers. Handel was half-German, half-Italian and half-English. He was very large. Bach died from 1750 to the present. Beethoven was so deaf that he wrote loud music. He expired in 1827, and later died from this.

Now moving onto Masonic history, which hopefully will be more accurate. We are not sure at what point in time our craft was born. Hundreds of Masons have investigated this question, but no conclusive answer has been found, and perhaps never will be. In Anderson's Constitutions, which Brent Morris alluded to last night, we trace back to Adam, Manley Hall tells us that Masonic ritual goes back to the days of ancient Egypt. We have books written that say Jesus was a Nazarene and that their ceremonies were of Masonic origin. We have the Knight Templars bringing their ritual from the Holy land and these were the foundation of Masonry. We do know that the earliest written record of the term "Master Mason" appears in the Regius manuscript, written about 1390 and now kept in the British Museum. Its mention of the "Master Mason" refers to the stonemasons of the Middle Ages. Our roots are from the builders of Cathedrals, which desiring to share the secrets of architecture and to fellowship with each other, formed together in Lodges. To members of the aristocracy, this

bonding together, was something to be emulated and thus was speculative masonry begun.

When the organization became what is called Speculative Masonry, men were accepted into the craft without being actual builders, that is they were spiritual builders. We as Speculative Masons adopt the terms and concepts of the actual builders, but we substitute men for stone and mortar, and work toward self-improvement rather than actual construction of buildings.

In 1717 four Lodges in London met together and decided to form a Grand Lodge, possibly for no other reason than to strengthen and preserve themselves. Their success led to the establishment of still other Grand Lodges. In 1725 some of the Lodges in Ireland formed a Grand Lodge and a similar body was instituted in Scotland in 1736. Moreover the original Grand Lodge in England did not remain without rivals, and at one time in the eighteenth century three Grand Lodges existed in England in addition to the one organized in 1717. Two of these died out without influencing the history of Masonry in general, but the third had a great part in the spread and popularizing of Masonry throughout the world. It called itself the "Ancient" Grand Lodge. The two surviving Grand Lodges were long and vigorous rivals, but they finally united in 1813 into the present United Grand Lodge of England. Maybe if the Ancients and Moderns were still vigorous rivals, The Grand Lodge of England would not have bothered with the Grand Lodge of Minnesota, deciding for itself who it wanted to recognize. Thus, from one of these two Grand Bodies in England, or from those of Ireland or Scotland, all other Grand Lodges in the world today are descended.

Freemasonry was formally recognized for the first time in America with the appointment by the Grand Lodge of England of a Provincial Grand Master in New York, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania in 1730. American Masons worked under foreign

jurisdiction until 1731, when the first American Grand Lodge was established in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

One of the most romantic portions of all Masonic history lies in the story of the part played by Freemasons in the formation of our country. Without exaggeration, we can say that Freemasonry and Masonic thinking contributed most significantly to the founding of this great Republic. Many of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, as well as the drafters of the Constitution, were members of the Fraternity. We have all heard the names of famous Masons who helped shape our republic. Washington, Paul Revere, John Paul Jones, Benjamin Franklin, John Hancock, Patrick Henry and many others.

They were builders of a great republic that has survived many crises, such as external and internal wars, depressions, assassinations and attacks upon our very shores. Yet through it all the foundation of these builders has withstood it all.

Through it all Grand Lodges have come and gone, Lodges have come and gone, Grand Masters have come and gone, but the basic tenets of Masonry, brotherly love, relief and truth have not been lost. Nor have its cardinal virtues Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice. These principles or beliefs cover a broad field, actually supplying the pattern to meet every experience in human life.

In Minnesota, on June 9, 1852 St. John's Lodge No.39 of Wisconsin received its charter, Cataract Lodge No. 121 of Illinois received its charter October 5, 1852 and on January 24, 1853 St. Paul Lodge #223 of Ohio received its charter. On February 23, 1853 these three Lodges met to discuss the advisability of forming their own Grand Lodge. On the following day they formed the Grand Lodge of Minnesota. Since there were more offices to fill than there were members to fill them, it was necessary for

Grand Master Alfred E. Ames to go outside of the Grand Lodge membership to complete the official list of officers.

4 Lodges formed the Grand Lodge of England, 3 Lodges formed the Grand Lodge of Minnesota. In 2000 3 lodges in Richfield merged and formed a new heritage for members of Cataract #2, Richfield #334, and Century #338. At the same time 4 lodges in the south Metro area merged together and formed Minnesota River Valley #9. They may not be Grand Lodges but I am sure that their members feel they are grand lodges. As you can see three or four lodges getting together can do great things.

Before we continue with current history, we need look at it to see how far change has come to our world. I recently read, "You know the world is going crazy when the best rapper is a White guy, the best golfer is a black guy, the Swiss hold the America's Cup, France is accusing the U.S. of arrogance, and Germany doesn't want to go to war."

When I was planning this oration, I sent letters to each of the lodges in Minnesota requesting stories of interesting, funny or little known episodes in their lodge's history. I wasn't sure I would get a large response, but was pleasantly surprised by the number of lodges that responded.

The master of Evergreen Lodge #46 informed me that they have a proud tradition of 4 generations of one family serving as Masters, for a total of 11 years. The current master Adam Pierce's Great Great Grandfather Edwin Gerry (Gary) was raised in Evergreen Lodge in 1867 and Adam has had a relative as a member of Evergreen for 136 of the lodge's 139 years of existence.

We all know the tradition of Sibley Lodge #209, which celebrates the memory of their first master who collapsed while participating in the Shrine initiation. The Masons and Shriners of Minnesota assumed all of the funeral expenses for Bro. Wetter, and presumably paid off the mortgage on the hotel that he and his wife were running in Winthrop.

It was on a cold Stated Meeting night in November, 1995 at Fellowship Lodge #257. They kept the thermostats set low to save energy and whoever arrived first was responsible to reset them. The Grand Orator was scheduled to visit the lodge, but due to illness said he would send a substitute. Well, the heat never did come on and the inside temperature of 45 degrees forced the members to keep their outer coats on. When the substitute, none other than Grand Master Jack Benson, arrived the members were blowing their hands to keep warm. The meeting went along very quickly and they probably heard the shortest speech ever delivered by a Grand Master. This might be an idea to keep in mind for long winded Grand Masters.

The story I really got a kick out of, was one that concerns a member of Cannon Falls, Swante Young. When he died he was refused admission to Spring Garden Lutheran Church cemetery, because of his Masonic membership. So he was buried just outside the fence, but as the cemetery needed more space they bought land from the family and his tombstone now has a very prominent location in the cemetery, on the 9 foot marker are the square, compass and letter "G", along with the Crown and Sword of the Knight Templars. Talk about having the last word

One of the beauties of Minnesota masonry is the facility of Winona Lodge #18. This beautiful building with stage facilities, pipe organ and lots of space was the envy of most lodges. As true examples of help, aid and assistance is the large number of community organizations that have made use of the building, when their facilities were

made unavailable by fire. These include the State Teachers College in 1922, the YMCA in 1946 and many other civic and philanthropic projects have been able to use these facilities.

At the other end of building descriptions, we find the early meeting place of my lodge, Bloomington #340. I quote from the Lodge history describing the meeting room over the fire hall. "You can be sure the brothers had Masonry in their hearts to carry on under some pretty adverse conditions. The walls were not painted, there were no tile on the floor and for the ceiling we had steel cross girders. The preparation room was a small toilet, the candidates waiting room was down below, usually on the seat of a fire truck. Our overflow cloak room was a pool table and we vied for space with it and a bass drum and bass horn belonging to the fireman's Little German Band."

The first two initiates of Western Star Lodge #26 in Albert Lea were later to assume interesting jobs; one was Warden of the Minnesota State Prison and the other Collector of Internal Revenue for Southern Minnesota. I'm wondering what principles of Masonry helped them with those jobs.

One that I can just picture in my mind was from Lake Harriet #277. They held an annual "Ball in the Hall in the Fall", a dinner dance with a live band and many door prizes. The grand prize was a live 20-pound turkey, which escaped when the gift box was opened by the winner. They might have to change the name of the dinner dance.

As I read the various lodge histories, I was struck by how many lodges started in log cabins or sod farm houses, progressed to the second floors of business establishments and now are faced with the difficulty those second floor stairs pose to the older members. I was also struck by the number of times that lodges have come to the aid of brother lodges in the times of need. Like Ark #176, Highland Park #336

and Biwabik lodge who came to the aid of Eveleth Lodge when they lost their building to fire.

Just a little bit more of current history and a follow-up to last year's oration about the fact that as Masons "We Care." When we lost my 12-year-old grandson, Michael Mundy in August of last year, the outpouring of love and support we received from Masons around the state was absolutely wonderful. You never realize how vast your various extended families are, until you are faced with trials like this. To all of my brothers who were there when I needed it, thank you very much.

Also thank you Most Worshipful Grand Master Terry for appointing me as your Grand Orator for your term. I am proud to have served such a great leader of Minnesota Masonry.

We have completed 150 years of Minnesota Masonic history, but my brothers, history does not cease and history is not made by dates of events of lodges or Grand Lodges. Masonic history is made now as it was made in the past, in the days of our forefathers, by individual brothers practicing the art of our craft, by following our tenets and the cardinal virtues of Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence and Justice, and applying them in our daily lives, by standing up and being counted, when the heritages of our brothers of the past are threatened. It is made by realizing our mistakes and shortcomings and correcting them. It is made by our being true to our God, our Country and our Neighbor. Then, my Brothers we will continue to make history quietly and justly and steadily until we reach that celestial lodge above and those surviving us can truly say – Well done Brother, Well done. Until that time let us be proud that we are Masons and happy to be members of the greatest fraternity in the world.