

Grand Master's Report

Welcome to the 142nd Annual Communication of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free, and Accepted Masons of the State of West Virginia. It is my high honor to have been elected by the Craft to serve as the 133rd Grand Master of Masons in West Virginia. One of my favorite Psalms is the 133rd, which we use to inspire us in the Entered Apprentice Degree. "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

It is a special pleasure to welcome you to Wheeling, where West Virginia began, and where the Grand Lodge of West Virginia began. My mother lodge is Wellsburg Lodge #2 in nearby Brooke County, which is named for Robert Brooke, who was, at the same time, Governor of Virginia and Grand Master.

In addition to the support of the brethren, my family, and the Grand Lodge Officers, I have had the steady support of my father, who is with us today. Bob Haas has adopted the title of "Grand Dad," and he deserves it. He observed

that he is my father, my brother, and my Grand Dad.
Thanks, Dad.

When I began my term as Grand Master, after being installed in the presence of seventeen of my Scottish brethren, I enjoyed an evening of celebration under their traditions. At that time at the Harmony, we had the Grand Commander of Knights Templar, the Grand High Priest of Royal Arch Masons, the Sovereign Grand Inspector General of the Scottish Rite, the Potentate of the Shrine, and the Grand Master of Masons, all present at the same event at the same time. Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. Sincere thanks are owed to our Scottish brethren for pulling us together, and two of them, William D. Morrison and Ian Hay, are here. The only unfortunate aspect of it was that no one could remember the last time such unity was displayed. The world is not always friendly to Freemasons. At times, it is cruel to Freemasonry. We need to know who our friends are, and

we need to treat our friends like friends. We are all pulling on the same rope.

I thank all of the lodges and brethren for the warmth of the reception I received wherever I went. I thank you personally, and I thank you for the office I represent. It is humbling to be honored in this way. I have received more honors in Freemasonry than I deserve. I think I was elected by the Craft to do more than to receive honors and more than to prepare for my successor. At meetings, I have paused, when it was possible to do so, to take your questions, and to try to answer them, whenever time would allow. Based on these sessions, which were very useful and enlightening for me, I tried to understand what the Craft wants the Grand Lodge to do. Your hopes are consistent with the Landmarks. I continue to believe firmly that the Grand Lodge belongs to the Craft, and not the other way around. Our actions as a sovereign Grand Lodge, our laws, and our regulations, should be intuitive with members of the high moral character of Freemasons. Good men should

know from deep down inside themselves what is right and wrong, and our law should reflect that. The four most destructive words in Freemasonry are: "You can't do that."

Based on questions I have received, I have put together an agenda to try to harmonize the concerns of the Craft and the state of our law. No change will be made to the Landmarks, nor can there be. No change is proposed for the ritual by me. However, our general laws and regulations were made by us and can be changed by us by referring them for consideration for next year. Our Notes to our laws were adopted by a majority vote, can be changed today without lying over, and are designed to be flexible tools to respond to any given situation.

I promised to have an agenda in your hands in writing in advance of Grand Lodge, and I was able to keep that promise. I hope that it has been the subject of news and discussion. I will make reference to it throughout this session.

When I was installed as Grand Master, I quoted our brother, Sir Isaac Newton, who said that he had been standing on the shoulders of giants and that was why he could see farther. In Freemasonry, we stand on the shoulders of giants in the form of those who had a hand in founding our great fraternity, our grand lodge, and our predecessors in office. Some of those giants are among us, and we value their advice. There are good reasons it is beneficial to stand on the shoulders of giants. We use that firm foundation to have the benefit of experience and tradition, and this enables us to see better and farther than the giants that support us. It is harmful if the giants insist on standing on our shoulders and try to keep us down.

We live in a changing world. There is some substantial hostility to Freemasonry, but not to the extent that exists in other countries, some of which have legislated the death penalty for being a Mason. We must draw strength from our Landmarks, our traditions, our laws, and our own minds to enable us to respond to the changing

world, so that we, in turn, will have something to pass on to those in the future, and to be the giants for future generations to stand upon.

This very month, the United States will surpass the milestone of 300 million in population. There were 200 million Americans in 1967 for the first time. We passed the 100 million mark in 1915. In 2006, two people per million will die of tuberculosis; in 1967, it was 35; in 1915, it was 1,401. Life expectancy is now 78; it was 70 in 1967, and in 1915, it was 54 years. The percentage of women working was 23% in 1915, 41% in 1967, and 59% now. The world changes and our laws need to help us to respond.

The only thing that stays the same is change. Our Landmarks do allow Freemasonry to respond to a changing world. Freemasonry needs to have fewer members who are like ostriches with their heads in the sand, hoping that all problems will someday pass. Freemasonry needs to have more members who are like giraffes, willing to stick their necks out for Freemasonry.

Youth Directive

I am not one who has had a great deal of prior experience with Masonic youth organizations. What I learned was troubling. The Grand Lodge position with regard to youth organizations should be, at worst, neutral. I learned that, to a substantial extent, the laws of this Grand Lodge were, in practice, harmful to youth organizations. To me, this was alarming, because I do not know of a single Freemason in West Virginia who wants to be a party to something like that. In this state, we were reduced to two active DeMolay chapters. We have one struggling Job's Daughters bethel. We have fewer than 150 Rainbow Girls statewide. Masonic law is not to blame for all of these problems, but it has proven detrimental. When I found out, I knew that you would want me to act immediately for you. It is unmasonic for Freemasons ever intentionally to do anything detrimental to the interests of youth. I issued a Directive about the subject. I did not state what was forbidden; I suggested what lodges and the Craft could do

that was positive for youth. I directed our lodges to help the youth. I used a similar directive to one promulgated this year by Grand Master Patton Hart of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky. The Roman maxim, "*Primum non nocere*," means, "first, do no harm." Let us never find ourselves doing harm to youth organizations by action or by neglect. It is always the Masonic thing to do to help the kids.

Age to Petition

I issued a ruling about the age to petition Freemasonry. Earlier in our history, Grand Lodge had observed that a petition was like a legal document; so being of lawful age was necessary to petition. "Twenty-one" appeared, not in the Landmark, but only in numerals in parentheses in a Note. Being of lawful age has been changed by our fellow citizens in amending the Constitution of the United States and by amending the West Virginia Code. Therefore, it followed that the age to petition Freemasonry also changed. Grand Lodge can choose any age for degrees with a new note. Among American grand

lodges, eleven set the age at twenty-one. Eighteen is the age chosen now by thirty-three of our sister grand lodges.

Minority of One

There is virtue in being resolute and in standing your ground. When faced with an onslaught of popular opinion to the contrary, it is noble to stand up for principle. We are not "Ancient Craft Masons" as an entity distinguished from all other Freemasons. We are Ancient, Free, and Accepted Masons, and we are a part of Freemasonry around the globe. We seek to travel in foreign countries, and we lecture about Masonry Universal. In this context, when we in West Virginia find ourselves to be a minority of one, we must give careful consideration to the foundation of our position and whether we are out of step with the rest of our brothers. Is everyone else wrong; are we contributing to harmony in the Craft? These items are presented, after some research, to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Masonic Service Association. The Masonic Service Association of North America provides information to lodges

and the public about Freemasonry. The staff is experienced and skilled, to serve some needs of Grand Lodges more efficiently than they can do individually. It has functioned since 1919, to assist in disaster relief, to provide education and information publications for the Craft, to provide information publications about Freemasonry for the public, and to organize visitation to assist and serve our sick and wounded veterans at the Veterans Hospitals. All Grand Lodges of the United States are members—with one exception.

The Grand Lodge of West Virginia does not belong and does not participate. We save a six cents per member as dues, about \$1,440 per year. We do trust the MSA to seek out our brothers in need and to distribute our charitable donations, and they did so faithfully with the money that you contributed, during Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita on the Gulf Coast last year. They distributed our money to those in need, and they did not charge us for their service.

The Masonic Service Association of North America is not a policy making body. They are effective, economical, and needed. It is time that we stop being a minority of one. I have asked for a budget item for those dues, and your approval of that will bring the Grand Lodge of West Virginia into the MSA.

DeMolay. Only one grand lodge forbids its lodges to permit the DeMolay to meet in lodge rooms. That grand lodge, in a minority of one, is the Grand Lodge of West Virginia. There is nothing secret to be seen in our lodge rooms. We allow an open house for the public to view our interior decorations. However, we have specifically excluded the DeMolay on a statewide level. This is a decision that should be made lodge-by-lodge. I will ask for Grand Lodge to vote to allow lodges to decide individually whether DeMolay chapters can meet in our lodge rooms. The youth may track in mud. They may leave candy wrappers on the floor. They may even break some glass. Most lodges can cope.

Prince Hall

We recognize the fifty-one regular grand lodges in the country—all fifty states and the District of Columbia. Of these, thirty-nine have adopted some form of cooperation or acknowledgement of Prince Hall Masonry in their states. There are twelve grand lodges that have not. We are one of the twelve. In our defense, we have never been asked to do otherwise.

At a Quarterly Communication of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, the subject of Prince Hall Masonry in America was discussed. The Scottish brothers in the Grand Lodge of Scotland were dismayed at the thought of racial exclusion in American Freemasonry, and a proposal was advanced to expedite Scottish recognition of all Prince Hall grand lodges in America. Instead, the Grand Lodge of Scotland adhered to a wait-and-see policy.

At the Conference of Grand Masters of North America meeting this February, a motion was made to allow a seat for Prince Hall Masonry. After some emotional discussion,

the motion passed, and I voted in the affirmative, but due to a procedural ruling, the vote was set aside.

In silence, the Grand Lodge of West Virginia is clinging to a policy that is without foundation and without merit.

The position of our grand lodge on Prince Hall Masonry has traditionally been one of deference to the United Grand Lodge of England, which was the original source of the charter of the founding lodges of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, from which other American Prince Hall grand lodges descended. Our English brothers once declared those lodges to be irregular, and it followed that the grand lodge formed by irregular lodges could not be recognized. England now takes a different position.

The formation of the State of West Virginia was impelled by racial discrimination in its most extreme form—slavery. The Civil War was fought, and West Virginia was admitted to the Union, because of the issue of race. At the time of the founding of the Grand Lodge of West Virginia, West Virginians fought and died to oppose racism. West

Virginia took the high road on the issue of slavery, a decision for which we can be proud. America has made great strides toward racial harmony, but more progress is need in some areas.

In Freemasonry, we are taught that the internal and not the external qualifications are what recommend a man to be a Mason. The Grand Lodges of Virginia and West Virginia derive their legitimacy from the grand lodges of England, Scotland, and Ireland, all of which charter lodges in Africa, fully aware of the racial composition of that continent. They charter just and legally constituted lodges that raise just and upright Masons.

I have been asked as Grand Master to give advice about the propriety of admitting to lodges visitors of another race. A master has the authority to exclude visitors and members whose presence would disrupt the peace and harmony of the lodge. However, this power is an extraordinary one, and it cannot be exercised if race is a factor in the decision; otherwise, it is unmasonic. I have

referred this ruling to our Committee on Masonic Jurisprudence.

In the same manner, I have been asked whether a Prince Hall lodge can hold a function in the same building at which one of our lodges meets. My answer is that it is a decision to be made by the property owner or the lodge, because we have no Landmark or law against it in Grand Lodge.

To a substantial extent, the United Grand Lodge of England generally recognizes Prince Hall Masonry, as do the Grand Lodge of Scotland, the Grand Lodge of Ireland, and thirty-nine American grand lodges. Mindful of the history of the founding of the State of West Virginia, and the acknowledgement extended by the overwhelming majority of our sister grand lodges, I initiated contact with the Grand Master of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of West Virginia. In December, I sent him a letter suggesting a meeting. In April, I sent him a letter suggesting a meeting. I followed this with a handwritten note seeking to get to know each

other man-to-man. Our Senior Grand Deacon and I traveled to the hotel at which the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of West Virginia was meeting, and I had a note delivered to him. This bore fruit in the form of a cordial handshake with him and his successor. The Prince Hall Grand Master has my card. There has been no other contact.

Lawsuit

Much bitterness has marred my term of office, stemming from mostly private grudges in Mountain. No Grand Master should support the use of Masonic Law in the furtherance of a private pique or quarrel. Hatred has borne its rotten fruit in the form of a lawsuit by an Eastern Star Chapter against a Lodge. Our Deputy Grand Master has used his extraordinary skills and experience to try to put an end to it. Lawsuits are not the way sisters and brothers resolve disputes among themselves. Freemasonry has suffered a wound that was, in part, inflicted by a Blue Lodge in conflict with an Eastern Star Chapter. No honor is due to

either side, except to say, as Jesus did, blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the Sons of God.

Website

The internet is an important source of information and commerce in our society today. Its use is growing rapidly. Our grand lodge now has a useful and informative website. It helps us to educate our members and the public about Freemasonry. There is great interest in Freemasonry among the general public. Our Junior Grand Deacon went to a bookstore last month and counted about fifty titles about Freemasonry intended for a non-masonic audience. Freemasons should be able to tell the public about non-esoteric Freemasonry, and our website helps us to do that.

The website committee has evolved into an effective force, and its efforts have been apparent to all of you. About 900 copies of the Grand Master's Agenda were downloaded from the website. We have had three-quarters of a million page views from people who visited our website in little more than a year. Over 800 petitions have been

downloaded. More improvements are planned, and we can maintain the capacity that we have for about \$175 per year.

I am proud to say that I recently learned that our website has been nominated for an award for its design and content. Thank you, Greg Wentzel, for your leadership in this increasingly important endeavor.

Cornerstone

It was an honor for Grand Lodge to open to lay the cornerstone for a new water department building in Crum, in Wayne County, West Virginia. We revived the provision in our ritual for our members as Knights Templar to provide and escort, and they represented us well. Unfortunately, it had been so long since it had happened before that we were not sure what to do regarding aprons. It was a good day for the citizens of Crum, for the water department, and for Freemasonry. I have suggested language in the agenda that will specifically encourage the acceptance of cornerstone invitations.

Agenda

Other items for consideration have been referred to the jurisprudence committee, and other committees have been hard at work. I intentionally changed the committee membership and some chairmen to have new people to learn new duties for the future of Grand Lodge. It increases our organizational efficiency. An ambitious agenda is in your hands, in advance, in writing, as I had promised. It is impossible to let every brother have his say on every issue. Debate must be limited. However, you can have confidence that what we do today and tomorrow can be undone in the future, if necessary, if the brothers vote to do so. Brethren, this is your Grand Lodge. I hope to give a little bit more freedom to the lodges and the Craft. Our ritual and our Landmarks will remain intact. I will defend them against alteration. However, you make our laws, my brethren. You can change them with a clear conscience. Vote your conscience.

I have had an enjoyable year serving you as Grand Master. Many times, I was called on the telephone by a brother who wanted, not a Grand Master, but a Grand Pitbull. Ours is a gentle craft, and I have experienced better results with whispering good counsel. I could have claimed many more scalps, but mostly in doing so, that brings about more harm than good. Thank you for the honor of allowing me to serve you as the 133rd Grand Master of Masons of West Virginia. I have done my best for you and for Freemasonry.

Fraternally,

Frank Joseph Haas
Wheeling, West Virginia
October 9, 2006