

SUMMER 2022



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A detailed mural of a Masonic temple pediment. The central triangular pediment is made of wood and features a large, stylized eye. Above the eye are golden rays radiating outwards. The background of the pediment is a light blue sky filled with numerous small, golden stars. Below the pediment are white columns with golden capitals and a decorative orange chain-like element. The overall style is classical and symbolic.

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

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CALIFORNIA FREEMASON

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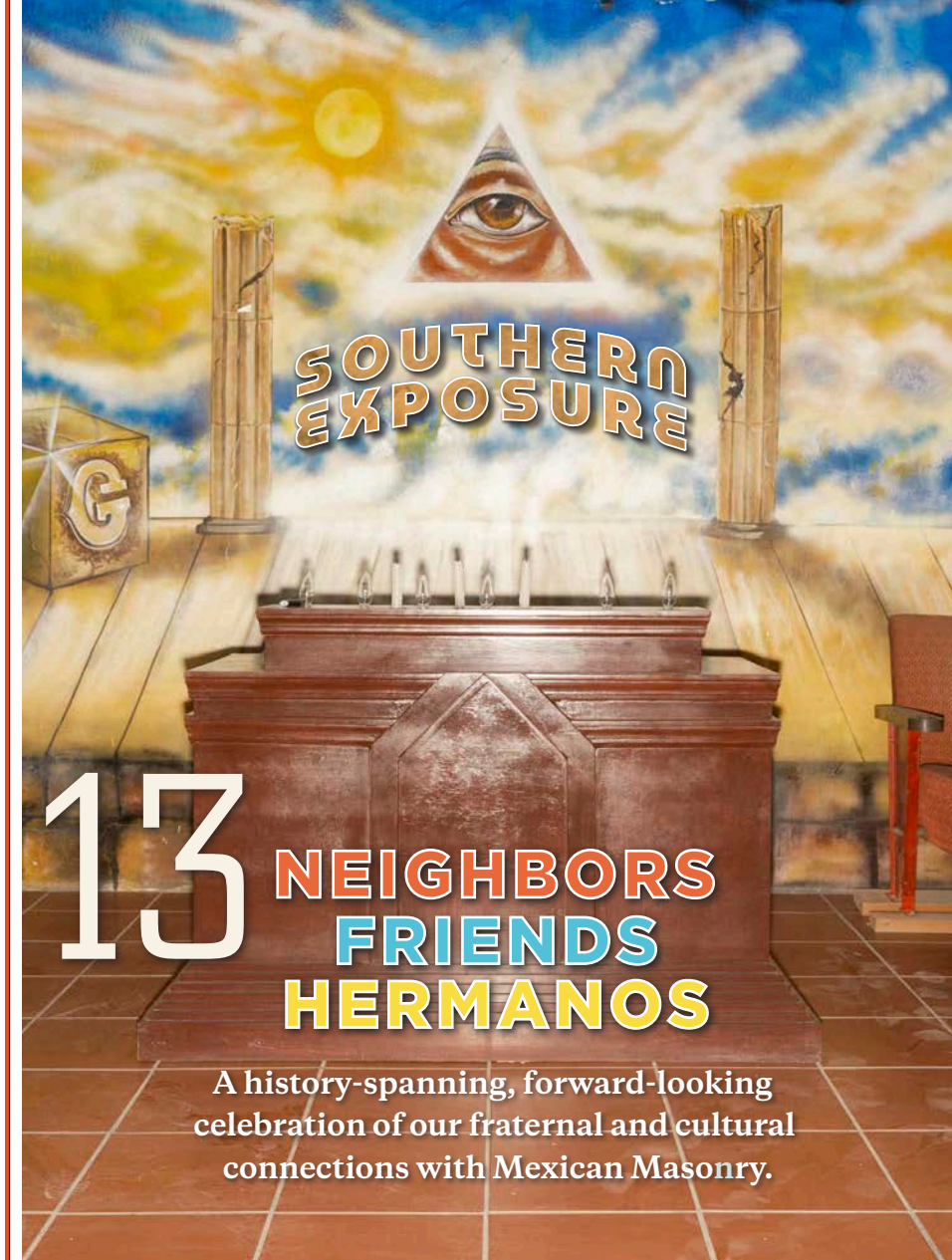
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SNAPSHOT

4/9/2022 | 1:26 P.M.

Riding the Rainbow

IT WAS A PARTY 100 YEARS in the making. This April in Fresno, members of the International Order of the Rainbow for Girls in California gathered to hold their Grand Assembly and celebrate the organization's 100th anniversary. Living up to their name, it was a colorful affair: Katie Sullivan, the 2022 Grand Worthy Advisor in California, made her entrance on a floral-covered Beetle driven by Dana Regier, the state supreme inspector, as other grand officers cheered her on. "Our pillars are leadership, sisterhood, and service, and that will never change," says Dejah Urbanovitch, the director of leadership for an assembly in the San Fernando Valley. "There are some things that are just timeless." For more about the Rainbow Girls' centennial, [see page 9](#).

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK READ

2022 GRAND WORTHY ADVISOR KATIE SULLIVAN MAKES AN ENTRANCE AT THE GRAND ASSEMBLY. LOOKING ON, FROM LEFT, ARE CRISTINA MORALES, TRIANNA DINGMAN, ANGELINA ROBLES, ABIGAIL FRYE, SAMI MAPLES, KARINA MURUGESU, JORDAN MURPHY, JEANINE REYES, KAMRYN MONTEGNA, HOPE RODRIGUEZ, AINSLEY KAY, AND MEGAN LARSON.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGE

CROSSING BORDERS

Let's use Freemasonry to build a world in harmony.



IN THIS ISSUE of *California Freemason*, we're exploring Masonry in Latin America. This has a very special meaning for me. When I served in the U.S. Army in the Republic of Panama, I belonged to **Gatun Lodge**, in the District Grand Lodge of the Panama Canal. While I was stationed there, I met and become friends with many Panamanian Masons, including the members of **Logia Luz y Progreso № 63**, under the Grand Lodge of Panama. The ritual worked in that lodge was the

same as ours, but in Spanish. Meaning that, even with the limited Spanish I spoke, I was able to follow along relatively easily.

What transcended language, however, was the shared experience of performing the ritual together. That's an experience I want to encourage for our members. We have an opportunity to reach out to communities that have been historically underrepresented in our organization and share with them all that makes Masonry great. In doing so, I see us advancing our vision of a world in harmony.

We already know how Freemasonry can meaningfully improve people's lives. I see that at the Masonic Center for Youth and Families. Counselors there recently partnered with the Pomona Unified School District to provide mental health services to children and teens who have suffered extreme trauma and separation from their families during their journey from countries in Latin America to the United States. It's a fine example of providing relief to those truly in need, and one I'm incredibly proud of.

I wish you all the joys of the summer season and good health. May the Supreme Architect of the Universe watch over you, your families, and our beloved craft.

Sincerely and fraternally,

Jeffery M. Wilkins
Grand Master of Masons in California

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CALIFORNIA FREEMASON

ISSUE 03 • VOLUME 70 • SUMMER 2022

USPS #083-940 is published quarterly by the Masons of California, 1111 California Street, San Francisco, CA 94108-2284. Periodicals Postage Paid at San Francisco, CA and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to California Freemason, 1111 California Street, San Francisco, CA 94108-2284.

Publication dates are the first day of March, June, September, and December.

Subscriptions: **California Freemason** is mailed to every member of this Masonic jurisdiction without additional charge. Others are invited to subscribe for \$12 a year or \$15 outside of the United States.

Permission to reprint: Permission to reprint original articles in **California Freemason** is granted to all recognized Masonic publications with credit to the author and this publication.

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AFFINITIES

The Lodge on the Playa

FOR MASONS AT BURNING MAN, THE EVENT HAS A SPIRITUAL COUSIN IN FREEMASONRY.

THIS AUGUST, A SERIES of extraordinary events will unfold on a dusty expanse of desert in northwestern Nevada. In a matter of weeks, a town the size of Eureka, California, will be built from scratch, complete with its own power grid, temple, and ranger force. Its population will shoot from zero to 80,000—bigger than the city of Mountain View. And before it's all torn back down again, the citizens of this overnight oasis will watch and cheer as a 75-foot wooden sculpture of a man is burned in effigy. ¶ Burning Man is a spectacle in every sense. From its origins as an artists' bacchanal on a San Francisco beach to today's enormously complex festival, it has had a profound impact on many. ¶ Revelers in various states of elaborate dress—or undress, as the case



THE DESIGN OF BLACK ROCK CITY, THE POP-UP COMMUNITY IN THE NEVADA DESERT THAT HOSTS BURNING MAN, IS BASED ON SACRED GEOMETRY: A CROSS-ROADS WITHIN A CIRCLE WITHIN A PENTAGON.

may be—converge on the playa each year to make, share, and explore impromptu art installations and generally expand their minds. Scorched by the sun and covered in dust, “burners” treat the event as a pilgrimage of sorts, an opportunity to immerse themselves in an environment far beyond their everyday lives.

And for the small group of California Masons who make the annual trek to Black Rock Desert, the echoes between Burning Man and Freemasonry are unmistakable.

“People who attend Burning Man or are involved in something like Masonry are trying to better themselves or learn something at a higher level,” says Kevin Jones, a member of **Logos № 861** in San Francisco and a self-professed

burner. “Some people just want to party, but most are there for a much bigger purpose.” Participants in both scenes are, he adds, “misunderstood in some ways.”

Once you get past Burning Man’s countercultural trappings, the similarities to Freemasonry become apparent. Beyond the

THE ELABORATE TEMPLE IS EVENTUALLY BURNED DOWN, ALONG WITH ALL THE MEMENTOS PEOPLE LEAVE IN IT.



strange and mystical customs, both are about seeking out a higher meaning. For Nick Angelis, a member of **Oceanside-San Dieguito № 381**, the things that drew him to his first Burning Man in 2009 called him to join Masonry the following year. “I wouldn’t be the person I am today if not for Burning Man and for Masonry,” he says.

Both Burning Man and Masonry offer an opportunity to enter a new dimension. That’s typified by the Masonic custom of referring to the lodge room as a “sublime” space and the world outside as “profane.” Carson Duper, a member of **Pacific-Starr King № 136** who was involved in Burning Man’s early years, recalls stepping over a line drawn in the sand as he arrived onsite, and being instructed, “You’re entering a sacred space now.”

The commitment to living up to one’s highest ideals is baked into the ethos of both Burning Man and Freemasonry. The ten principles of Burning Man, espoused by the event’s original organizers, include things like radical inclusion, the idea that any and all are welcome to join. For the small band of Mason-burners, such principles have direct parallels in Freemasonry.

Then there’s the emphasis on ritual. At Burning Man,

participants have developed all sorts of symbolic gestures. One of the most powerful involves placing mementos inside a wooden temple before it and the man are burned to the ground. When they’re set aflame, the tokens—and whatever they represent—disappear forever. “It’s about

“I wouldn’t be the person that I am today if not for Burning Man and for Masonry.”

discarding something from your life and getting rid of it from your psyche,” Duper says.

Says Jones, “The catharsis of burning the man as a community every year is very deep and very spiritual.”

That allusion to shared community is particularly important. More than the elaborate rituals and costumes, the clearest connection Duper sees between Burning Man and Freemasonry is their ability to form tight-knit groups of unlikely friends. “In a way, it’s just an excuse for a community to gather itself around,” he says.

As Burning Man returns for 2022 (following a gathering in the “multiverse” in 2020 and an unauthorized, renegade conclave last year), many Mason-burners say they hope the old spirit of the event remains. And for those thinking of venturing into the desert for the first time, Angelis offers this: “Just like with Masonry, with Burning Man it’s like a choose-your-own-adventure book. There’s everything for everybody.” No matter what, Angelis says, “You’re going to have an eye-opening experience.” ✨



LUMINARIES

A Dream, Deferred

150 YEARS LATER, AN EFFORT TO RECOGNIZE A VISIONARY SAN FRANCISCO CHARACTER AND LEGENDARY FREEMASON.

IT WAS AN AUDACIOUS PLAN, coming from a suitably audacious source. The year was 1872. Joshua Norton, the beloved San Francisco eccentric, Freemason, and self-proclaimed Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico, had issued yet another of his frequent “proclamations” to be published in the local press. This time his dispatch outlined his vision for a massive new infrastructure scheme. “We, Norton I, Dei gratia Emperor ... order that the bridge be built from Oakland Point to Telegraph Hill, via Goat Island,” he wrote, using the earlier name for Treasure Island.

What he was describing is today called the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. One hundred and fifty years later, John Lumea is on a mission to give credit where it’s due.

Issued more than 60 years before the completion of the bridge, Norton’s proclamation—one of hundreds he’d pen over 20 years—stands either as an amazing bit of foresight or the ravings of an unhinged dreamer. As is often the

case when it comes to Emperor Norton, the truth is entirely in the eye of the beholder.

Lumea knows where he stands on the matter. As head of the Emperor Norton Trust, he's on a yearslong mission to formally recognize the Emperor's legend by having Norton's name affixed

“In all these proclamations, he's talking about things like equality and tolerance and the common good.”

to the bridge. Norton, a failed businessman turned oddball-about-town, was a cultural fixture in 1860s and '70s San Francisco who rubbed shoulders with artists and writers including Mark Twain and Frank Soulé, who along with Norton was a member of **Occidental No. 22**. Today, he's celebrated as a sort of patron saint of the fraternal order E Clampus Vitus. “Even though Norton was known as this bombastic character, his concerns were always about the

people of San Francisco and figuring out how to help,” Lumea says. “He was able to navigate that in a way that really endeared him to people.”

This year, the sesquicentennial of Norton's three bridge proclamations, Lumea feels that the time has finally come to recognize him by adding his name to the bridge. It wouldn't be nearly as unusual as it sounds, he says: More than 30 bridges in California have ceremonial names—including the Bay Bridge, whose western span is named for former mayor Willie Brown.

For all of Norton's well-chronicled peculiarities—he was often pictured in a military costume, epaulettes, and a beaver-fur hat—he was ahead of his time on matters of immigration, race, and urban development. (He also proposed a subway tube beneath the bay, 100 years before BART made it a reality.) For that reason, Lumea says, Norton stands as a sort of 19th-century forerunner to the city's famous countercultural tribes—the bohemians, beatniks, and hippies. “In all these proclamations, he's talking about things like equality and tolerance and the common good,” Lumea says. “These things became adopted as values of the Bay Area, and the Emperor is talking about them in the 1860s.”

Whether or not that thinking was influenced by Freemasonry is an open question. Regardless, the fraternity was clearly an important part of his life. Norton joined Occidental No. 22 (now **California No. 1**) in 1854, and by 1855 was listed in the *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge* as a Master Mason (suggesting he either progressed quickly through the degrees or affiliated after receiving them elsewhere). He remained connected to the lodge until being suspended in 1859, likely for nonpayment of dues. That's not surprising: Despite his immense popularity, following a disastrous business caper that left him bankrupt in 1854, Norton lived in a constant state of near-destitution.

Though he died without rejoining the lodge, it was a fellow Mason, Joseph Eastlund, later the head of Pacific Gas and Electric and a member of California No. 1, who donated the funds to have Norton buried at the old San Francisco Masonic Cemetery. A century and a half later, his fellow members' embrace of Norton at both his heights and depths remains endearing, Lumea says. “It certainly says good things about the Masons.” ♦ —IAN A. STEWART

EMPEROR NORTON I, A BOMBASTIC FIGURE OF EARLY SAN FRANCISCO, ENVISIONED BOTH THE BAY BRIDGE AND THE TRANSBAY TUBE—DECADES BEFORE EITHER CAME TO PASS.



CENTENNIAL

A Century of Change—and Continuity

RAINBOW GIRLS TURNS 100, WITH A FOCUS ON THE FUTURE.

WHEN THE INTERNATIONAL Order of the Rainbow for Girls was founded in 1922, two years after women earned the right to vote, it aimed to build in its members a sense of “good citizenship and sound character.”

Now, as the Masonic youth order celebrates its centennial, there's an opportunity to look back on all that's changed—and all that hasn't. Because with Rainbow, there remains a strong sense of tradition that leaders say is part of the appeal. “Our pillars are leadership, sisterhood, and service, and that will never change,” says Dejah Urbanovitch, who joined in 1998 and now works with an assembly in the San Fernando Valley. “Some things are just timeless.”

That feeling permeates the organization. Of course, it's most

FACES OF THE RAINBOW

Notable organizational alumnae:



Sandra Day O'Connor, first female Supreme Court Justice



Dorothy Metcalf-Lindenburger, NASA astronaut



Olympia J. Snowe, former U.S. Senator (R-Maine)

visible in the dress code, which mandates floor-length or “tea-length” dresses, depending on the context. Rather than stand out as anachronistic, these elements can be a draw, members say, particularly at a time when tradition has become an anomaly. However, the order's greatest value lies in the camaraderie and mentorship its members offer.

Every two weeks, they get hands-on training in leadership competency. They create budgets and proposals for events, discuss how to better their communities, and learn strong public-speaking skills. Each year the grand worthy advisor (the highest-ranking youth member) chooses a statewide service project that members organize around all year long. Recent projects include fundraising for food

MEMBERS CELEBRATE AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY, HELD THIS SPRING IN FRESNO.

banks, helping families in need of housing, and raising money for cancer research and care.

Colleen Penaluna, who joined the Roseville assembly at 12 and served as grand worthy advisor in 2015–16, says those skills helped her land a job out of college. “Understanding that you have tangible experience makes you feel so much more confident when you go into that interview, ask for that raise, or start your own business,” she says.

Today there are 53 assemblies active in California. As with many other service groups, that's a far cry from its peak in the 1970s. While Rainbow's leaders are acutely aware of the challenges facing organizations like theirs, they're adapting as best they can. Dana Regier, the supreme inspector of the California chapter of Rainbow Girls, points to how members use social media to promote events and stay in touch. There's also Beyond the Line, an online leadership-training program. So far it has an 85 percent participation rate. Among the skills it covers is image management, particularly relevant in the internet era. Both, Regier says, are examples of Rainbow adapting to the times.

That said, those close to the organization hit a familiar, and old-fashioned, refrain when discussing Rainbow's future: a sense of seeking, belonging, and finding purpose. “At the end of the day, they're all just girls trying to navigate the world to the best of their ability,” Urbanovitch says. “That's never going to change.” ♦ —DREA ROMER



LODGE PROFILE

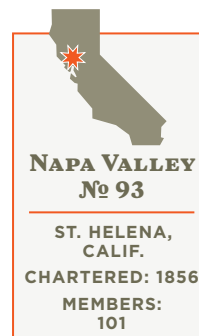
The Civic Center

AT NAPA VALLEY № 93, A LODGE USES ITS HISTORIC HOME TO PAY IT FORWARD.

PHOTOGRAPH
BY WINNI
WINTERMEYER

LEGEND HAS IT, when in 1892 Captain Matthew Ritchie set his sights on constructing the grand new building in downtown St. Helena that would bear his name, he did so with an eye to the sky. Ritchie, a member of what was then called St. Helena № 93, had made his fortune in the Gold Rush, and intended to lease out his new building to serve as the lodge's meeting hall. He also wanted it to make an impression on the town. "The Odd Fellows had just constructed their hall across the street," explains past master Hector Marroquin. "The Masons wanted to make sure theirs was taller."

Richie succeeded on that front. And for the subsequent 130 years, the ornate Queen Anne building



(named the Richie Block) has remained the literal high point of this slice of Napa County. At four stories tall and about 16,000 square feet, the building is still the tallest in downtown. "It was about more than just pride," Marroquin says. "They wanted to make sure the lodge stood as the cornerstone of the community."

That it has, and not just visually. Today, members of **Napa Valley № 93**—the name

change reflects the consolidation of several wine country lodges in the 1990s—take pride in their group's civic zeal. Members continue to donate to local causes, including the St. Helena Unified School District, sports leagues, and the Boys and Girls Clubs, among others. They've also counted

MEMBERS OF NAPA VALLEY № 93 POSE ON THE FACADE OF THE IMPRESSIVE RICHIE BLOCK BUILDING IN DOWNTOWN ST. HELENA.

among their members an unusually large number of city and government officials.

So when in early 2020 the pandemic began to take its toll, the lodge decided to tap into its greatest asset—the Richie Block—as a way to help the town.

Ever since the lodge purchased the building in 1973, it has relied on income from office and commercial tenants. "At the onset of the pandemic, we met to discuss how we could help without hurting ourselves too badly," says Mikal Litzza, the senior warden. The hall association, which manages the building, decided to offer tenants occupying three retail spaces on the ground level and seven offices on the second floor a lifeline: They remitted 90 percent of the monthly rent. By summer that number had shifted to 75 percent, and in 2021, it was 50 percent for the year. The adjustments proved auspicious, Litzza says. "When other business owners downtown saw what we were doing, they started to remit rent for their tenants, too."

All told, the move saved the building's tenants more than a quarter-million dollars, allowing them to retain a dozen employees who might otherwise have been laid off. "In the end, we decided we'd rather see our community come out of the pandemic strong than make money off them," Litzza says.

Despite the loss in revenue, the lodge hasn't shirked its other philanthropic obligations. "We always remind ourselves that we have to avoid getting complacent and remain relevant to our community," says Samuel Maffei, the lodge master. In 2020 and 2021, the lodge donated \$60,000 to charity, including scholarships for members of the Masonic youth orders, continued support of the Masonic Homes, and local public schools. When the local fire station had to stop hosting blood drives because of social-distancing restrictions, the lodge donated use of its spacious hall every other month.

Thanks to its stunning building, just about everyone in St. Helena knows about the local Masons. But, Maffei says, it's lodge members' actions that have made the greater impression. "Our worth isn't about brick and mortar," he says. "Ultimately, it's measured in the impact we have in our community." ♦ —ANTONE PIERUCCI

MORE ONLINE!

CHECK OUT A SPECIAL VIDEO PROFILE OF THE LODGE AT CALIFORNIAFREEMASON.ORG/NAPA93



ESOTERICA

Who's in Charge Around Here, Anyway?

SUDDENLY, REFERENCES TO SHADOWY, ALL-POWERFUL SOCIETIES SEEM TO ABOUND.

THE FORCES THAT SHAPE our world, from pandemics to Tik-Tok crazes, are unknowable indeed. Or are they?

If you've been watching TV or movies lately, you might be forgiven for thinking twice about that question. Because—call us crazy—but it sure seems like we're suddenly surrounded by references to secret societies steering world events. First, in late 2021, came *Dan Brown's The Lost Symbol*, Peacock's streaming adaptation of the best-selling prequel to *The Da Vinci Code*, with its not-quite-accurate portrayal of Masonry, murder, and intrigue. (For more, see californiafreemason.org/lostsymbol.) Then, in May, *Dr. Strange in the Multiverse of Madness*—partly filmed inside Freemasons' Hall in London—introduced Marvel fans to a new superhero-run secret society that rules an alternate-reality version of Earth. And now, Netflix's farcical comedy series, *The Pentaverse*, takes it a step further: Its benevolent secret society, complete with robes, masks, and elaborate initiation rituals, attempts to solve the world's biggest problems, from the Black Plague to global warming.

So what's with all these allusions to the Illuminati, the legendary (and legendarily misunderstood) quasi-Masonic order? Who knows. Perhaps in an era rife with conspiracy theories and online misinformation, there's something reassuringly old-fashioned about a group of elite overlords guiding affairs from behind closed doors. But as any Mason worth his salt knows, that's got nothing to do with us. ♦ —/AS

"So what's with all these allusions to the Illuminati?"



MEMBER PROFILE

Crafting His Message

AN ANNOTATED GUIDE TO A MASONIC-INSPIRED MUSICAL OFFERING.

WHEN ALEJANDRO LABORDE first learned about Freemasonry, he was intrigued but skeptical. A lifelong spiritual seeker, he connected deeply to its humanist messages. But, he says, “I didn’t do groups. I was more searching for my own path.” Finally, a visit to **Panamericana No 513** (and later **Oasis No 854**) won him over. “I realized it’s about finding God within yourself—knowing yourself, working on yourself,” he says. The message resonated, and in the years since it has found its way into his songwriting—including his 2016 track “Te Iluminarás.” Here, the Latin folk guitarist explains the meaning behind his lyrics. ✦ —IAS

Te Iluminarás

Alejandro Laborde and Auras ¹

Soy un humilde obrero / pero uso
sombrero si se presta la ocasión /
Voy por el mundo entero /
se usar el dinero y lo comparto
con amor / A tí yo te amo y
quiero / y con mucho esmero yo
te canto mi canción

Cuando a veces tropiezo solo me
levanto / Sacudo los huesos y sigo
mi canto / Viviendo el momento /
Todo lo que tengo contigo mi
cielo / La vida me sabe mejor

De donde soy no existen
fronteras / tienes tu vivienda y
también tu / habitación /
Hoy voy por esta carretera /

¹ “I’m into a lot of metaphysical stuff. Being in a band, you’re always exchanging different energies and perspectives. Each member has their own aura. When you put them together, you get these different combinations of colors and energies.”

y paso a paso más me acerco
a tu corazón. / Así yo te amo
y quiero / y todo lo que tengo
lo comparto con amor

Luna, luna, luna buscas la
verdad / Entre las estrellas
tú la encontrarás / Luna, luna,
luna sigues sin cesar / Entre
tantos soles te iluminarás /
Te iluminarás

Te iluminarás /
Te iluminarás /
Te iluminarás

You Will Be Enlightened (English translation)

I am a humble worker / But I
wear the hat ² if the occasion
arises / I go all over the world /
I know how to use money and
I share it with love ³ / I love you,
and I want you / And with great
care I sing you my song

When sometimes I stumble, I
just get up / I shake the bones
and continue my song / Living
the moment / All I have with
you my love / Life tastes better
to me

Where I’m from, there are no
borders ⁴ / You have your home
and also your room / Today
I’m going down this road / And
step by step, I get closer to your
heart / So, I love and I want you
And everything I have I share
with love

Moon, moon, moon, you seek
the truth / Among the stars
you will find it / Moon, moon,
moon, you go on and on /
Among so many suns, you will
be enlightened ⁵ / You will be
enlightened

You will be enlightened /
You will be enlightened /
You will be enlightened

²

“I say I’m a humble craftsman, but I wear the hat if necessary. As the senior warden, I have had the opportunity to sit in when the master is out.”

³

“For the past 22 years, I’ve worked with adults with disabilities. You cannot take for granted your ability to walk or talk or understand people. I find that to be a part of brotherly love; to see that in other humans.”

⁴

“I’m interested in spirituality, alchemy, the esoteric sides of religion. I started visiting the Self-Realization Fellowship of Paramahansa Yogananda. It has a lot of similarities to Freemasonry. At their temple, there’s a plaza with the symbols of all different religions. The message is it’s OK to come from different backgrounds. It’s about finding God within yourself.”

⁵

“The song is about my journey through the degrees. We talk about light as knowledge or wisdom. It’s not about religion. It’s more universal than that. With my music, I try to speak to everyone. And if it touches you in some way, that’s the goal—to inspire people to be more friendly, more peaceful.”

SOUTHERN EXPOSURE

NEIGHBORS, FRIENDS, HERMANOS!

In Mexico and California, a picture of two fraternities joined at the hip.

BY IAN A. STEWART

Members of Logia Simbólica Cuauhtémoc No 15 in Tijuana—a sister lodge of La Jolla No 518—pose for an Instagram moment.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MATTHEW REAMER

COURTESY OF ALEJANDRO LABORDE

SAUL ALVARADO ALREADY HAD a good idea about what Freemasonry was capable of, even before he joined it. He'd seen the effect it had on his father-in-law's life, how it helped him navigate sobriety. But when he read up on the fraternity, he began to learn more about its importance to Mexican history. Just as the founding fathers of the United States were Freemasons, so too were the heroes of the Mexican Revolution and the War of Independence. "It was like, wait a second, Mexico has Masons, too?" he recalls thinking. "That really gave me the nudge to learn more. It made me want to get more involved."

Alvarado isn't the only person who's felt that pull of kinship. Freemasonry has a long and distinguished history in Mexico, though it's one that for many in California—including many Mexican Americans—largely remains a mystery. Yet it's also an enormous opportunity for those who, like Alvarado, see in Freemasonry a way not only to make friends and improve themselves, but to forge connections across borders and deepen their understanding of their culture and history. "Learning about all these figures who were Masons, it opens you up in a different way," he says. "It opens another dimension of pride."

Mexican Masonry isn't just a quirk of history. It remains alive and well south of the border, as well as in enclaves throughout California, Texas, and the Southwest, as it has for more than a century. Increasingly, California Masons are looking for opportunities to highlight that tradition and support the growth of Latino participation more broadly. Says Alvarado, "We need to extend this. We need to open Masonry up to the Latino community and celebrate what Freemasonry has meant to our heritage."

LOOKING NORTH, LOOKING SOUTH

This July, a group of Mexican and American Masons will attempt to do just that. Representatives from the grand lodges of California, Baja California, and Baja del Sur will meet in San Diego for the yearly Conference of Three Californias, which has taken place every year since 1979.

The conference is an opportunity to share new developments and best practices, says Arturo Sevilla, the grand secretary of the Grand Lodge of Baja California. It's also a way to celebrate an important partnership that transcends borders. The highlight of the event is a degree presentation put on by the host lodge. For those in attendance, being able to sit together in that setting is a powerful reminder of the global bonds tying members together. "It's good to know how

Masonry operates outside our borders," Sevilla says. "It makes our Freemasonry more cosmopolitan."

As lodges begin to envision a post-pandemic future, the conference is also serving as a possible preview of the fraternity's next evolution in two countries. "Moving forward, as we're talking about ways to adapt to improve diversity and inclusion in California, I see this as an important step," says Arthur Salazar, who as junior grand warden is on track to become California's first Latino grand master. "We can build so much more when we welcome other cultures within our communities. I see this as a challenge and an opportunity."

And an important step in meeting that challenge is saluting the deep Masonic legacy found within those members' cultures. For Masons like Alvarado, that's a real point of pride.

A FABLED HISTORY

The story of Freemasonry in Mexico is practically inseparable from the country's political history. The craft first arrived there in the late 18th century through Spanish military lodges. The first permanent Mexican lodge was formed in 1806, and within a few years several more had been established, made up primarily of the country's European-born ruling classes. It was in these lodges that much of the liberal Enlightenment views of the time were propagated throughout Mexico.

By the end of the War of Independence in the early 1820s, a growing network of Masonic lodges had been installed in Mexico. From the very beginning, however, Mexican Masonry was weighted with the political rivalries that would dominate the country for the next hundred years. In lieu of traditional parties, Mexico's political battles played out in lodge rooms, with Scottish Rite lodges tending to represent the centralists (conservative, Catholic, aligned with Europe). Meanwhile, the liberal federalists gravitated toward lodges working under the York Rite or the Mexican National Rite (pro-democratic,



A statuette holding Masonic working tools breaks free of its chains at the Oaxaca Masonic Temple.

Window to another world: A special view inside the Oaxaca Masonic Temple of the Gran Rito Nacional Benito Juárez.

"It's good to know how Masonry operates outside our borders. It makes our Freemasonry more cosmopolitan."

anticlerical, aligned with the United States). Each side's political hierarchy was essentially reproduced within the respective lodges. From Benito Juárez and Porfirio Díaz to Francisco Madero and Lázaro Cárdenas, nearly every president of Mexico for 100 years

belonged to one of the dueling Masonic bodies.

That connection became even more pronounced during the Mexican Revolution of 1910-20, as lodges morphed into de facto organizing bodies dedicated to promoting the

new government's social reforms. In 1929, President Emilio Portes Gil, a future grand master of Mexico, declared that the "state and Freemasonry in Mexico had become the same thing."

CHANGING TIMES

That's no longer the case. In the decades following the Mexican Revolution, Masonry began to recede from the public spotlight. Lodges became less involved with government affairs, and their influence in civic life waned. Unsurprisingly, the Masonic population in Mexico has also dwindled. In 1929, one estimate suggested a membership of about 10,000, out of a



population of 17 million. Today that figure is nearly 20,000 (not counting irregular lodges, of which there are several) out of a population of 128 million—about a quarter of its relative size a century ago.

Masonic jurisdiction in Mexico is now divided amicably between 31 state-level grand lodges and a separate national grand lodge. Despite that patchwork of organizing bodies, Sevilla says, Freemasonry in Mexico today hardly resembles the factional hot-house it was for most of its history.

Still, Mexican Freemasonry retains a distinct flavor—one quite unlike what's practiced in the United States. The first and most obvious difference is the ritual. California (and most U.S.) lodges use the Preston-Webb ritual, which bears some similarity to the York Rite's craft degrees. While the York Rite still exists in Mexico, today the vast majority of lodges issue the first three degrees of the Scottish Rite. Also, Mexican Masonry places enormous emphasis on esotericism and philosophical study, says Andres Francisco Leon, a member of the Grand Lodge of Tamaulipas and past master of **Cedros del Libano № 79** in Nuevo Laredo, just across the border from Texas. Candidates often spend years progressing through the degrees and are expected to produce written essays demonstrating their understanding of the ritual. Additionally, lodge rooms in Mexico tend to be more elaborately furnished than those in the United States. Most lodges also feature the signs of the zodiac painted onto brightly colored walls.

For all that grandeur, "Masonry in Mexico tends to be very solemn," says Daniel Velazquez, the grand

chancellor of the Gran Logia Occidental Mexicana in Jalisco and a member of **Jacques DeMolay № 52** in Guadalajara. "Most lodges I've attended, they get mad if you cross your legs or take out your cell phone. It's a very serious place."

TWO COUNTRIES, ONE FRATERNITY?

For all the shared history across the border, for generations the fraternity in California was not especially welcoming to its southern neighbors. Until fairly recently, few Mexican American members were ever admitted into California's lodges.

While membership has never been formally closed to anyone on the basis of race, nationality, or ethnicity, Masonic lodges have historically reflected many of the same prejudices found elsewhere in society. Because lodges didn't keep records of members' ethnicity, it's impossible to track Latinos' historic share of overall membership. But during the early and middle part of the 20th century, it was sufficiently small that Leon Whitsell, in his study *One Hundred Years of Freemasonry in California*, pointed out that **Golden Rule № 479** in San Jose was "one of the relatively few

lodges to have a native Hispanic Californian on its rolls. And it has not one, but two." That was in 1950.

Though lacking visibility with the Grand Lodge of California, Mexican Masonry has long flourished in the state, particularly around Los Angeles, where for decades so-called "irregular" lodges have existed. These lodges have slightly different traditions and rules than do those organized under the Grand Lodge of California, and are not formally recognized by it. As such, members of the two bodies are not permitted to sit in on one another's meetings. For much of the 20th century, however, irregular lodges were the source of practically all Masonic activity among certain ethnic groups in California—particularly in Black, Latino, and Filipino communities.

In 1930, the Grand Lodge of California published a study in the *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge* of these ethnic lodges. That year, it identified 20 Mexican lodges organized under the Supremo Gran Oriente del Rito Nacional Mexicano. Another three groups were part of the Grand Lodge Benito Juarez of Tereorin, which in 1932 appealed to the Grand Lodge of California for formal recognition. Later, a splinter group

Below: Grand Master Tomas Galguera inside the Oaxaca Masonic Temple of the Gran Logia Benito Juárez García. Opposite: Grand Master of the State of Baja California Armando López Acosta presides inside Logia Simbólica Cuauhtémoc № 15 in Tijuana.

THE GRAND TOUR OF 1890



TRAIPSING 2,500 MILES through the desert by rail in a three-piece suit might not be for everyone. But for the special delegation of California Masons dispatched to Mexico in 1890, it was the trip of a lifetime. The group toured lodges and attractions in Arizona, Texas, and down into Mexico, where it met with Gen. Porfirio Díaz, the Mexican president (and Freemason).

To see more, visit californiafreemason.org/1890.





A Masonic lodge officer in Tijuana shows off his regalia.

to believe that many of their members are of good Masonic material,” it reported. The motion, however, was not passed. It would be another decade before the next breakthrough.

THE MOTHER TONGUE

Eventually, that moment arrived. In 1959, Grand Master Phil Myers issued a dispensation to **Maya Lodge № 793** in Los Angeles. Though the lodge would perform the ritual in English, it was envisioned as a haven for primarily Mexican American members. It wasn’t until 1993 that it received special permission to perform its first degree ceremony in Spanish. (For more, see page 29.)

In 2005, a dispensation was issued for a second Spanish-speaking lodge, **Panamericana № 849**. (In 2008, it consolidated into Panamericana № 513.) A third Spanish-speaking lodge emerged in 2017, **Fraternidad de los Americas № 867**, though its charter was later revoked.

Through those lodges, Latinos have increasingly established themselves within California Masonry. In 2020, a survey determined that 23 percent of California members were of Latino descent. That figure includes Filipino members with Hispanic surnames, so the true membership descending from Latin American countries is likely lower. Either way, it’s well short of the state’s overall demographics, but also a far cry from the early days.

In addition to those members, California Masonry includes an estimated 35 irregular Mexican-style lodges, which serve an almost exclusively Latino membership. For many, there’s a sense of hope that

the next chapter of Masonry in the state will include finding a way to incorporate those members. “We have a great opportunity to welcome them into the fold,” one California member says. “They want and need the structure of the grand lodge, and they come with a wealth of knowledge. It would benefit us all.”

Salazar has spent a lot of time thinking about that issue. Increasing the diversity in California’s lodges, especially among Latinos, is key to strengthening the fraternity, he says. That hasn’t always been easy. Salazar says even he was initially skeptical about approaching a lodge, since so few of its members looked like him. While much has changed since then, Salazar believes there’s plenty of room to grow. “When I think about diversity, it’s not about recruiting for the sake of a quota,” he says. “We’re talking about making sure every part of our community knows we bring something of value. If our Latino community hears that message, I think it will resonate.”

THE NEXT CHAPTER

That’s why Salazar is bullish on the Conference of Three Californias and other partnerships like it. An international connection is a powerful idea for many members, especially those with family on both sides of the border. More and more, it’s a bond that members are experiencing. Examples of California and Mexican lodges supporting one another are increasingly common. Many Southern California lodges have even established sister-lodge programs with their Mexican counterparts. Among them are El Centro’s **Imperial Valley № 390** (with **Palingensia № 46** of Mexicali) and **La Jolla № 518** (with **Logia Simbólica Cuauhtémoc № 15** in Tijuana). Others, including **Downey United № 220** and **La Mesa № 407**, have similar partnerships.

Says Salazar, “When I look at the larger picture of Freemasonry, it’s wonderful to know you can travel to any country, any state, and be welcomed. It shows our lodges that there’s nothing to be feared from inviting other cultures into our experience.”

Velazquez has seen that up close in his travels throughout Mexico and the United States. It’s left him with an ever deeper appreciation for Freemasonry. “When you go to a lodge in another country and see someone you haven’t met before, he’s going to call you a brother,” Velazquez says. “It makes you feel like you’re part of something that’s very ancient and very big. So I feel like I have a responsibility to keep it going and to keep it great.”

Five Times the Members, Half the Age

In Argentina, an explosion of Freemasonry.

LIKE THE REST of South America, Argentina’s history of Freemasonry can be traced back to the country’s independence movement in the mid-19th century. But in just the past decade, the country has seen a burst of Masonic activity: From only 2,200 members in 2008 to more than 10,000 today, representing 400 lodges that can be found in virtually every province. Grand Master Pablo Lázaro explains the sudden growth spurt. —IAS

YOUNGER MEMBERS, YOUNGER LEADERS

In 2008, the Grand Lodge of Argentina lowered the minimum age of membership to 18. At the same time, it made a sustained push to improve its visibility on social media. Crucially, the fraternity also worked to provide younger members with opportunities for leadership. The result is that the average age of members today is almost half what it was a little more than a decade ago. “Today we have young men of 22, 23 years occupying [lodge officer] positions,” Lázaro told *La Nación*. “That is to say they are entering from the age of 18 and 19.”

EMBRACE DEBATE

Argentinian Masonry places special emphasis on debate within the lodge. There, lodges tend to congregate around shared interests like political science, technology, or classical music. At lodge meetings, members present lectures delving into current events related to those topics. Masonic debating custom dictates that those in attendance may only speak in favor of the lecture; in the case of disagreement, a completely new paper must be prepared and presented in a subsequent meeting.

OPENING THE DOORS

To counter longstanding prejudices and accusations of secrecy, Argentinian lodges have made an effort to open themselves to the public. While the ritual and ceremonies remain private, the organization is increasingly inviting outsiders in, including inside the elaborate Grand Lodge building in Buenos Aires. The temple now participates in a citywide “Night of the Museums” through its Museo Masónico Hermano José de San Martín.



Logia Masónica Hijos del Trabajo № 74 in Buenos Aires.



OLIVER TORREALBA TORRES

Maya № 793, Archimedes № 871
Francisco de Miranda Lodge, Venezuela

How did you first learn about Freemasonry in Venezuela?

My father was in the military, and the command he belonged to was stationed in the Villa Santa Ines, which was the home of Joaquín Crespo Torres, the former president of Venezuela and sovereign grand commander of the Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite in Venezuela. I grew up playing and running around there, and it taught me a lot about Freemasonry. I suspect that my father was a Mason too, but he never told me anything about it. Years later, I joined a military lodge in Caracas, before I came to the United States.

Is the connection between Masonry and Venezuelan history widely celebrated?

In Venezuela, like all Latin American countries, we celebrate our history with fervor. When you read about the revolution, our leaders were all Masons. Many of our founding fathers, like Simón Bolívar, were Masons, and their speeches are full of Masonic words and ideals. José Antonio Páez, a hero of the revolution, was grand master of Venezuela. Even our flag has Masonic elements—the three colors, the seven five-pointed stars.

Is there something about Venezuela’s culture that Masonry fits into very well?

For us as Latin Americans, Masonry is more than just a place for fraternity or for becoming better men. It represents a connection to our history and to our family and ancestors. Being a Mason is a way to set an example for your family to follow. It means placing a column of pride that can sustain your family during adversity. Saying that my father or grandfather was a Mason is saying that they were a worthy example to follow.



THE LIBERATORS

In Latin America's revolutionary movements, Masons were front and center.

WHEREVER THERE'S REVOLUTION, there's almost always a Freemason leading the charge. That's certainly the case when it comes to Latin American history. Here's a rundown of a few of the most important. —JUSTIN JAPITANA AND TONY GILBERT



SIMÓN BOLÍVAR VENEZUELA ▲

Born in Caracas, in what is now Venezuela, Bolívar is the most important figure of the South American independence movement. He is responsible for liberating from Spain the nation of Gran Colombia—what would become Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Panama—and later Peru and Bolivia, which is named for him. Bolívar was initiated into Masonry in Cadiz, Spain, in 1803, and raised in 1806 at **Mother of St. Alexander of Scotland Lodge** in Paris. In April 1824, Bolívar received the 33° of honorary inspector general in the Scottish Rite. He founded and served as master of **Protectora de las Virtudes Lodge No. 1** in Venezuela, and founded the **Order and Liberty Lodge No. 2** in Peru in 1824.



JOSÉ MARTÍ CUBA ▲

The national hero of Cuba, Martí was a poet, journalist, and philosopher who advocated for the abolition of slavery. He is still widely seen as the father of Cuban independence. Martí's Masonic credentials are somewhat murky, but evidence suggests he was raised as a Master Mason in **Armonía Lodge No. 52** in Madrid in the early 1870s.

JOSÉ BONIFÁCIO BRAZIL

Known to Brazilians as the Patriarch of Independence, José Bonifácio de Andrada e Silva was a statesman who played a key role in securing Brazil's independence from Portugal. He supported public education, was an abolitionist, and helped found Brasília, the national capital, in Brazil's underdeveloped interior. Bonifácio also served as grand master of the Grande Oriente do Brasil in 1822 and helped unite the country's many politically oriented Masonic organizations.



BENITO JUÁREZ MEXICO ▲

A liberal politician, a lawyer, and one of the most famous figures in Mexican history, Juárez was Mexico's first indigenous president and led the restored republic following the French invasion of the country. Juárez was initiated into Masonry in 1847 in **La Logia Independencia No. 2** of the Mexican National Rite (which now bears his name). In 1854 he received the 9°, and in 1862 he received the 33°. Every January 15, a ceremony is held to celebrate his legacy by the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons in Mexico.

BERNARDO O'HIGGINS CHILE

Born in Chile of Spanish and Irish descent, O'Higgins helped lead the Chilean War of Independence. In 1817, he became the supreme director of Chile and in 1823 helped liberate Peru alongside Simón Bolívar. O'Higgins was strongly influenced in the 1790s by the influential **Great American Reunion Lodge** of London, established by the Venezuelan revolutionary figure Francisco de Miranda, which was dedicated to an independent Latin America.



MIQUEL HIDALGO MEXICO ▼

The "Father of Mexico" and a hero of the Mexican War of Independence, Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla was a Catholic priest-turned-resistance leader. He is best remembered for his 1810 speech "Grito de Dolores," or "Cry of Dolores," which called for the end of Spanish colonial rule in Mexico. In 1806, Hidalgo, who was influenced by liberal ideas from the United States and Europe, was initiated into the first regular Masonic lodge in Mexico, named **Logia Arquitectura Moral**.



TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE HAITI

Haiti provides the only example in history of a population of enslaved people who rose up to become an independent, self-governing nation. They were led by the freedom fighter Toussaint L'Ouverture, who ended slavery there decades earlier than did any other country in the Americas. L'Ouverture was born into the complex racial caste system of the French colony of Saint Domingue. After buying his freedom, he began training troops when revolution broke out. His trusted inner circle were Masons, and according to historians, so too was L'Ouverture, evidenced by his signature, which featured three dots in a triangle. ✧

Masonic lodges and
monuments in Cuba
are easy to spot.

HAMMER, SICKLE, SQUARE, COMPASS

On one Briton's visit to Cuba, architectural marvels offer a tantalizing clue into the island's Masonic history.

BY DARMON RICHTER

THE FIRST THING YOU SHOULD KNOW is that Freemasonry is a big deal in Cuba.

I was **on a bus** when I first began to notice it, somewhere **on the road** between Aguada de Pasajeros and Santa Clara. It was a hot, dusty day, and as the antique vehicle chugged along, I gazed out the window, watching a rolling landscape of yellowed grass and palm groves, unfinished buildings and the occasional flag-flying monument to the revolution. We passed through a village, its wide streets lined in the usual **mélange** of Soviet-era concrete and colorful, crumbling Spanish Colonial architecture. Suddenly, my eyes landed **on one building** that stood out from the rest, a **burst** of turquoise, red, and gold—more elaborate than anything else on the street. As the bus rattled past, I noticed the emblem carved in bold strokes above the front door: a square and compass, framed by a glorious golden starburst.

The sign immediately distinguished this as a Masonic lodge. Usually such places do little to announce their presence. In Western Europe, Masonic lodges tend to be more conservative affairs. They are grand buildings, very often, but discreet enough that their function doesn't become apparent until you can make out their symbols and plaques. This Cuban lodge, on the other hand, was the most garish, colorful thing in town.

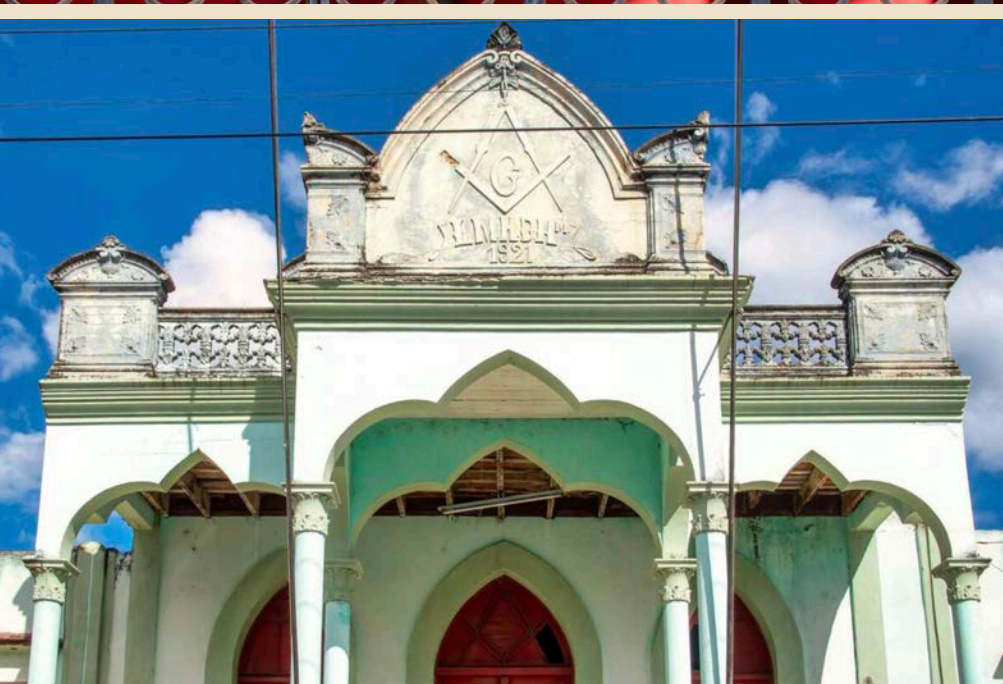
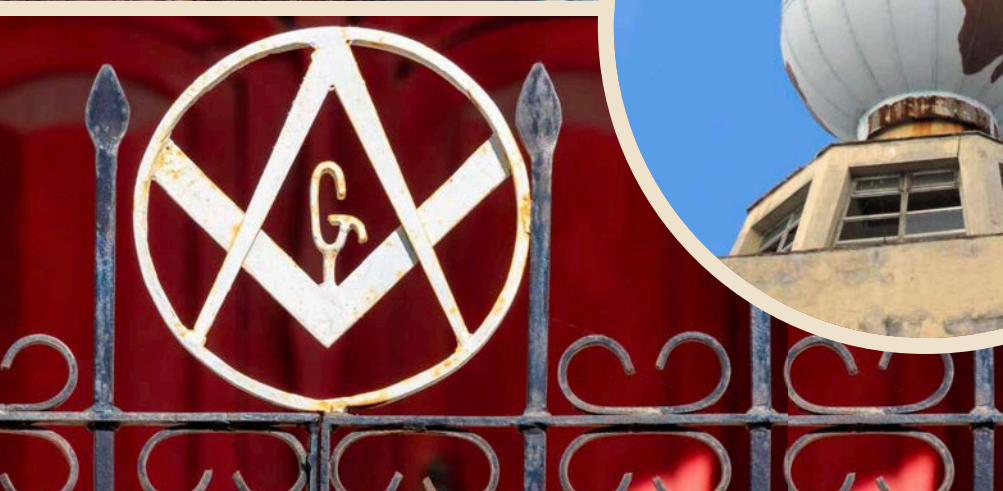
It was at that point I remembered I was traveling through a Communist state, and my brain did a

somersault. Because as far as I knew, Freemasonry had been outlawed by virtually every Communist party of the 20th century. For example: The Grand Lodge of Yugoslavia was “put to sleep” from 1940 to 1990. In Bulgaria, Freemasonry was banned by the 1940 Law for the Defense of the Nation, and subsequently active and even past Freemasons were frequently accused of being agents of foreign intelligence services.

Freemasonry was outlawed in the Soviet Union, too, and while some of the leading Communist revolutionaries had been members of Masonic lodges, they denounced the craft after seizing power in Russia. The general consensus seemed to be that such a system was incompatible with the new mode of Marxist society. As I looked out the window of that humid, rattling bus, however, it seemed as though Cuba disagreed.

That roadside carnival of a lodge was no aberrancy, either, as I'd discover during the rest of my stay in Cuba. Now that my eyes were open, I began noticing them everywhere—collecting them, even. I spotted the **Logia Luz del Sur** and **Logia Aurora del Bien** in Trinidad, on the south coast of Cuba; **Logia José Jacinto Milanés No 21** in Matanza; **Logia Hermanos de la Guardia** in Cifuentes; and **Logia Asilo de la Virtud** (the “asylum of virtue”) in Cienfuegos.

They dominated town squares; they burst in colorful formations of pillars and plaster façades from



otherwise plain village streets. Far from outlawing Freemasonry, Cuba appeared to be celebrating it. So I decided to do some digging and find out why.

LUZ DEL SUR: A BRIEF HISTORY OF FREEMASONRY IN CUBA

The fact is that Cuba is home to a flourishing Masonic community. In 2010, it was reported that the island had more than 300 Masonic lodges and more than 29,000 active members. The fraternity first appeared there in 1763 and grew as French Masons fled the Haitian Revolution of 1791.

The first part of this story is nothing peculiar. The former colonies of the Caribbean have long been a hotbed of Masonry. But the Grand Lodge of Cuba is

remarkable in that it thrived under a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship. One of the popular (if unverified) theories for that is that Fidel Castro may have been a Mason.

When the revolutionaries landed on Cuba in 1956—the Castro brothers, Che Guevara, and the rest, all 82 of them squeezed onto a 12-berth yacht named *Granma*—the island was under the tyrannical rule of Fulgencio Batista. The story goes that Castro and his brother were hidden from Batista's forces by a small Masonic lodge in the Sierra Maestra. It was from this remote lodge that Castro laid the foundation for his 26th of July Movement, which in 1959 would ultimately lead to the socialist revolution in Cuba.

Some say Castro himself was initiated as a Mason during that time. Others suggest that it was only

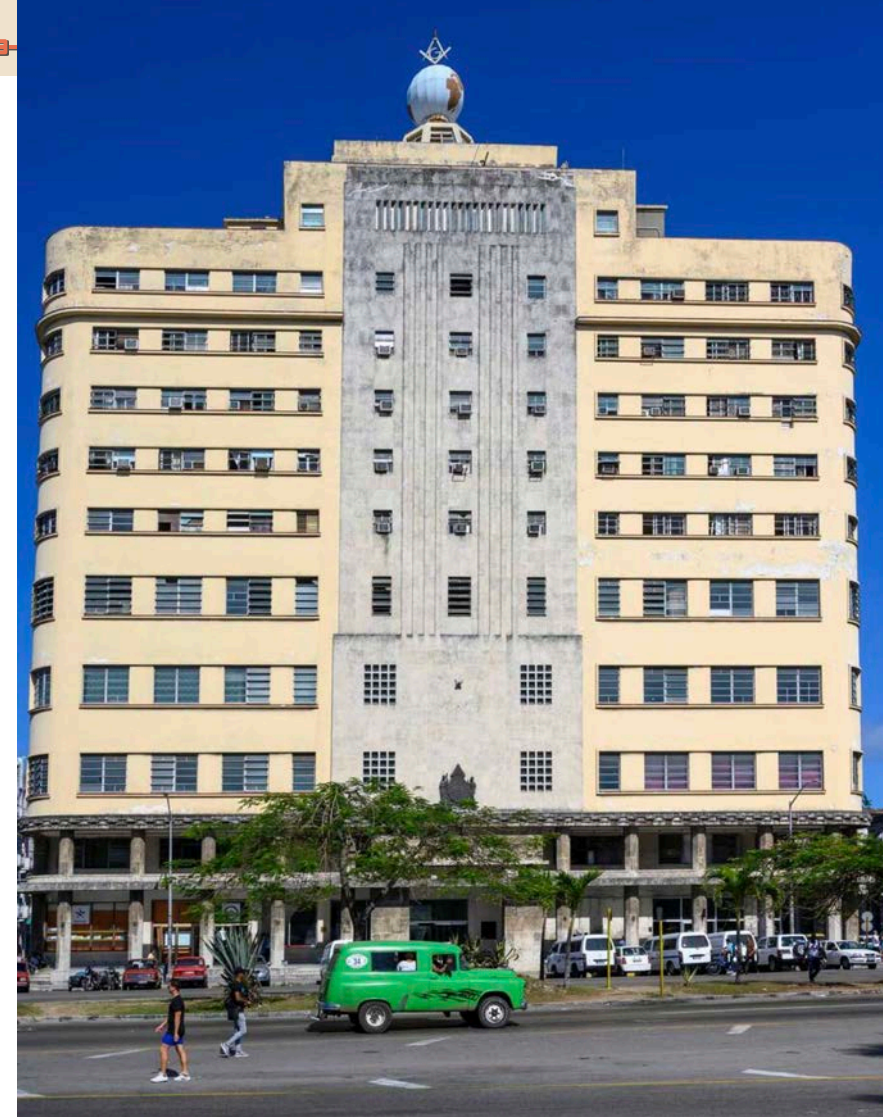
Raúl Castro who joined, or some of the revolutionary fighters. Either way, the kindness and support allegedly given to Castro during those years by a remote Masonic community offered a popular theory for the tolerance Castro's regime would later show toward Cuban Freemasonry.

It's certainly a good story, although the truth might be simpler; after all, Cuba already owed a great debt to its Freemasons. During the island's struggle for independence from Spain, many of Cuba's leading revolutionaries were proud Masons, including Carlos Manuel de Céspedes, Antonia Maceo, and the famous poet, journalist, and philosopher José Martí. It would have been exceedingly difficult for the regime to separate the memory of Cuba's national heroes from the ideas they had openly celebrated.

"Afro-Cuban faith and Freemasonry...both played a role in consensus-building after the revolution," writes the folklorist E. C. Ballard. "The first was useful to gain support from the largely Afro-Cuban population of the island who remain poorly represented in the government. The second ensured the sympathy of the Latin American left."

As a result, Freemasonry in Cuba remained legal, though it was monitored by the Office of Religious Affairs. Membership numbers rose after the fall of the Soviet Union and Castro's government eased restrictions on the craft, allowing the opening of new lodges and even permitting Masons to participate in public ceremonies dressed in full regalia.

Some elements of Cuban Masonry are notable for their differences. In general, for instance, Masons' dress code in Cuba tends to be fairly relaxed, and



The towering Grand Lodge of Cuba dominates the Avenida Salvador Allende in Cuba.

women are sometimes admitted to lodges. Ballard speculates that such adaptations are "welcomed generally in a society which formally eschews bias and discrimination of any kind."

Today, more than a third of Cuba's Freemasons are based in Havana, where the impressive Grand Lodge building dominates an entire city block, daubed in esoteric symbols. This is the nucleus of Cuban Freemasonry, the nerve center from which all 316 Cuban lodges are regulated; and after my week of road-tripping through the cities of the south, I was eager to pay it a visit.

EL GRAN LOGIA DE CUBA

Back in Havana, I spent a morning wandering the city's main cemetery, Necrópolis Cristóbal Colón. Containing row upon row of polished marble, the necropolis was founded in 1876 by the Spanish. As I traversed the endless parade of bleached-white stone, I found a mass of esoteric epitaphs among the grave markers. Lodges gathered their dead together, wrought-iron fences separating the deceased into memorial plots according to Masonic custom. The

symbols of the craft were easy to spot.

In the afternoon, I set out for the Grand Lodge of Cuba at 508 Avenida Salvador Allende, a towering 11-story structure that, before the appearance of a new wave of tourist hotels in the capital, was the second-tallest building on the island. (The avenue itself was named after the 30th president of Chile—a Marxist, Freemason, and good friend of Castro's.)

I spotted the Gran Logia almost the moment I turned onto the avenue. I had cut through backstreets on my way there, under washing lines and spider-webbed telephone cables, where children played baseball in the street. And then, suddenly, there it was. Pontiacs and Corvettes pattered up and down the avenue, while at the far end, rising clear of the colonial blocks and arches, a yellow titan broke the horizon. It was every bit as subtle as the village lodges I'd seen, 11 floors of budget Art Deco capped off with a globe, a square, and a compass.

Established in 1955, Havana's Masonic headquarters contain the office of the grand secretary, a museum, a home for elderly Masons, and an extensive library (though, according to rumor, the Cuban government has since commandeered most of the floors for its own use). I got close—close enough to admire the zodiac clock set into the building's facade—but despite my best efforts, I couldn't get inside.

A gentleman in suit and glasses stood between the doors and greeted me with a quizzical smile. I'd been told the library was open to layfolk. I gestured past him, toward the interior of the building, and said "¿Por favor?" while flashing the best smile I could manage. I was answered with a motion of genteel refusal.

Not wanting an argument, I stepped away, only to run into a man who'd been watching the entire affair. The man was 60 perhaps, with a sun-weathered face and the wiry body of a farmworker. I'd noticed him as I arrived in the park, raking leaves while puffing on a cigar. "Hector," he said with a mischievous smile, and shook my hand.

We exchanged pleasantries, and then I decided to swing for the fences. *Was Fidel Castro a Freemason?* I asked him. He laughed.

"Perhaps," he said, blowing a cloud of smoke. "Who knows?"

"Hector," I said, "are you a Mason?"

Hector puffed thoughtfully on his cigar for a moment, his head half lost in the clouds. "If I am not, I would tell you no," he replied. "But if I am, I would also tell you no." Then he laughed enigmatically, and I decided to leave it at that. ♦

"Afro-Cuban faith and Freemasonry...both played a role in consensus-building after the revolution."



EDGUIN CASTELLANOS
Panamericana No 513
King David No 5
(Belize)

I understand that the lodge you first joined in Belize has an interesting history.

Yes, many lodges in Belize were "quasi-Masonic." My lodge, Star of King David No 5, belonged to the Independent United Order of Scottish Mechanics. The degrees are very similar to Masonry, except the symbols are related to mechanics, not stonemasons. We wore the apron and had all the same signs, and most of the rituals were the same. It was popular in the Caribbean and former English colonies, but these days it's a

dying organization. So with some friends from Mexico, which is 20 minutes north, we regularized the lodge to Freemasonry. I was part of that change.

What was the biggest change for you when you first experienced California Masonry?

In Belize, we worked in English, so when I came here and joined Panamericana No 513, I had to learn the ritual in Spanish, which was challenging. I knew a bit of Spanish, but more like what we'd



call "kitchen Spanish"—just enough to get by. It's also a different ritual. It's similar, of course, but in terms of execution, it's a completely different ball game.

Besides the ritual, is the lodge experience much different?

In Latin American Freemasonry, there's a huge emphasis on esoteric work. Here, it's more philanthropic. In our countries, we invest lots of time in everything spiritual and esoteric. That's a huge draw there. ♦

The Rite Stuff

Exploring the many Masonic rituals of Latin America.

UNLIKE THEIR COUNTERPARTS in the United States, Masonic bodies in Latin America historically have embraced ritualistic diversity. A result of the region's British, French, Spanish, Portuguese, and U.S. colonial influence, this approach spawned a wide array of Masonic practices. Here, Diego Arana and Tadeu Matheus, the regional secretaries for Central and Latin America of the Quatuor Coronati Correspondence Circle, offer an overview of some of the most notable rites found south of the border. —MICHAEL RAMOS

SCOTTISH RITE

Found in: All Latin American countries

The Scottish Rite is the most common Masonic system in the world—including in Latin America. Whereas many American Masons are familiar with its fourth through 32nd degrees, in Latin America the vast majority of lodges also confer the rite's first three (or "craft") degrees. The rite grew out of various French "high degree" systems and was exported throughout Europe and the new world. These "red" lodges were largely brought to Latin America by French and Spanish military groups.

YORK RITE

Found in: Argentina, Chile, Mexico

This system comprises three bodies that members pass through after completing the craft degrees: the Royal Arch Chapter, the Royal and Select Master Council, and the Knights Templar Commandery. Also known as the American Rite, it's most widely practiced in the U.S., from which it was introduced to Mexico in the 1820s. In the 20th century, the rite was revived in Mexico through a series of English-speaking expat lodges. That grand lodge still exists, today comprising some 20 "blue" lodges.

NATIONAL MEXICAN RITE

Found in: Mexico

The seeds of this rite, consisting of nine degrees, were planted in revolutionary France, but found their full flower in Mexico in 1825. Like all 19th century Mexican lodges, the rite struggled for survival amid political upheaval, but ultimately survived and still exists as one of the most distinctive systems of Masonry in Latin America. Similar to the French Rite, the National Mexican Rite tends to feature an adogmatic approach to the craft, including a long history of women's and coed lodges.

EMULATION RITUAL

Found in: Argentina, Brazil, Chile

This ritual was formed in England following the union of the Premiere and Antient grand lodges in 1813. Today, it remains one of the most common rituals there and in countries where the United Grand Lodge of England has been or remains active.

SCHRÖDER RITE

Found in: Brazil, Chile

Developed in early 19th-century Germany, the Schröder Rite has a small presence in South America thanks to the German community there. A unique aspect of this ritual is its penchant for humanism, which focuses on the responsibility and impact of the human race instead of the divine or supernatural. Its unique blend of philosophy is distinctive among Masonic rituals.

MEMPHIS-MISRAIM

Found in: Dominican Republic, Ecuador

Memphis-Misraim is a blend of several Masonic rites and is sometimes referred to as the Ancient and Primitive or Egyptian Rite. Formalized in Italy in the late 1880s, in some countries, it can contain up to 99 degrees. Generally unrecognized by mainstream Masonic bodies, it's often worked in coed lodges and has an interesting history filled with quasi-Masonic celebrities, such as the Italian military hero General Giuseppe Garibaldi and the occultist Theodor Reuss.

ADONHIRAMITE RITE

Found in: Brazil

This rite, developed in France in the 18th century, supposedly takes its name from the biblical figure of Adoniram, whom some consider to be the true architect of King Solomon's Temple. The rite consists of up to 12 degrees, similar to the Scottish Rite, terminating with a form of the Rose Croix degree. Its teachings propagate the idea that Freemasonry originally stemmed from the Middle and Near East. It's been worked in Brazil since the early 19th century.

FRENCH RITE

Found in: Brazil

This rite has an incredibly rich history. It was born in 18th-century France and has since found popularity in Brazil and elsewhere. The rite consists of seven degrees and has been embraced by many coed lodges and other continental-style Masonic bodies. The rite professes some unique lessons that trace to the earliest days of Freemasonry. ✦



WHERE MASONRY WENT POP

In Brazil,
Freemasonry is
everywhere you
look—if you know
what to look for.

BY ADRIAN SPINELLI

ONCE YOU BEGIN TO SEE the signs of Brazil's infatuation with Freemasonry, you can't stop seeing them. There are the obvious ones, of course—the bumper stickers, signet rings, and lodge banners that are common to just about every part of the country. But look a bit deeper, and you're overwhelmed with subtle hints of a cultural phenomenon that hasn't just survived in the seat of South American power, but has thrived.

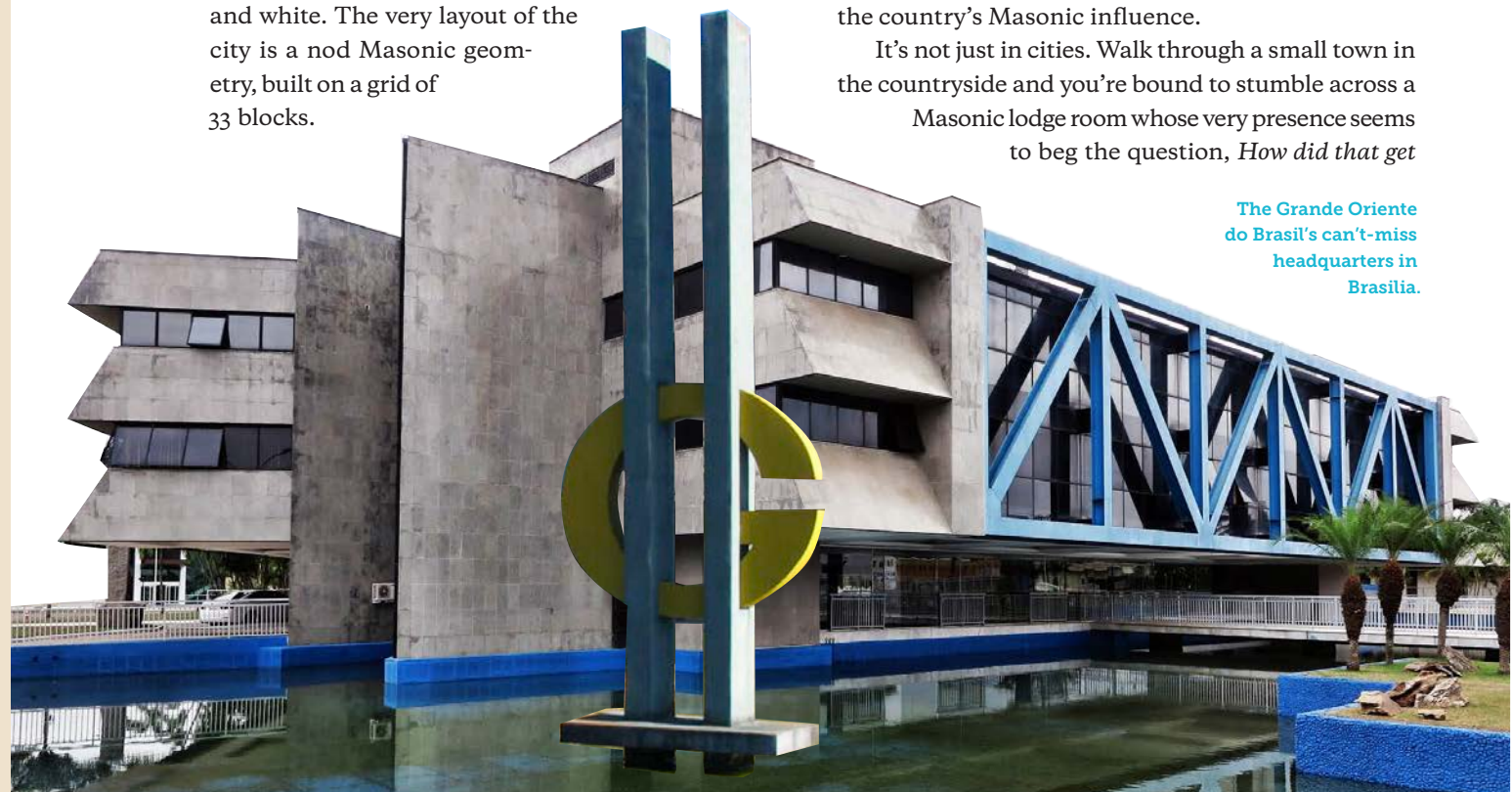
In Paraty, a Unesco World Heritage site and coastal tourist destination in the state of Rio de Janeiro, the cues are even more prevalent. Constructed by Portuguese Freemasons 250 years ago, the city is like a shrine to Masonry. Streetlights and building columns are engraved with geometric ciphers and painted blue and white. The very layout of the city is a nod Masonic geometry, built on a grid of 33 blocks.

Above the city flies its distinctive and Masonic-inspired flag, featuring three stars in a triangle.

These days, Brazil increasingly bears the marks of a country where Freemasonry is in the ascent. Whereas worldwide membership in the fraternity has generally been in decline, it has exploded in Brazil. There are more than 6,000 lodges in the country today. In the state of São Paulo alone, there are more than 800 lodges just affiliated with the Grande Oriente do Brasil—the largest of several Masonic governing bodies in the country. (São Paulo and California have similar-sized populations; by comparison, the Grand Lodge of California has just over 330 lodges.) Those numbers keep growing, too. And with them, so too do the outward manifestations of the country's Masonic influence.

It's not just in cities. Walk through a small town in the countryside and you're bound to stumble across a Masonic lodge room whose very presence seems to beg the question, *How did that get*

The Grande Oriente
do Brasil's can't-miss
headquarters in
Brasilia.



here? Why has Freemasonry spread like wildfire in Brazil but not in, say, Ecuador? Like so much about the country, the answer lies in a complex blend of cultural and historic forces.

A PROUD HISTORY

Freemasonry has played a key role in the country's history. The first emperor of the republic, Dom Pedro I, was a committed Mason who, upon declaring independence from Portugal in 1822, named his advisor and fellow Mason, José Bonifácio, the first grand master of the Grand Oriente do Brasil.

The connection was fundamental to 19th century Brazil, says Monica Dantas, an associate professor at the Universidade de São Paulo and an expert on fraternalism in South America. Masonic lodges were a "privileged space," she says, where Brazil's founding fathers could "formulate a strategy for independence without being in the public eye." In the absence of political parties or a robust university system, lodges acted as an important vehicle for spreading new political thought—including the abolition of slavery.

That history still looms large in Brazil, which this year will celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Grand Oriente. And unlike in many other countries, discretion has not necessarily been part of the equation. Members proudly display their lodge affiliation and often go to lengths to acknowledge one another in public. Masonry in Brazil, in other words, is hard to miss. In fact, the current vice president, Hamilton Mourão, recently appeared on the country's largest TV network to talk about Masonry. (A clip showed him at his lodge; when he appeared in studio, the house band welcomed him with a Masonic anthem.)

BOOM TIMES

Growth has been a major trend in Brazilian Masonry, particularly in the 21st century. The economic boom years of the early 2000s were crucial to that expansion. According to the World Bank, the size of Brazil's middle class more than doubled in the space of a decade. At the same time, interest spiked in Freemasonry. From 2003 to 2009, the Grand Oriente do Brasil (GOB) added nearly 500 lodges and 14,000 members. By 2013, between the national and state grand lodges, there were more than 213,000 Masons in Brazil spread across 6,500 lodges, making it one of the largest Masonic populations in the world. The bicentennial celebrations being held in each state have brought even more attention to the fraternity.

According to Gerald Koppe Jr., the deputy grand chancellor of foreign Masonic relations for the GOB, that membership growth has brought the average age of Brazil's Masons down dramatically. Today, he says, the median age of new members is 28. "We're initiating a lot of 20- and 21-year-olds, and we receive a lot of college students through outreach work with the universities," he says. Additionally, Masonry is popular among the members of Brazil's armed forces, further skewing its membership's age downward.

However, demographic trends can't fully explain the growth of Freemasonry in Brazil. For many, the answer lies in its members' ability to marry Masonic brotherhood with the Brazilian thirst for social life. That, says one member, explains the growing number of lodges in small towns, where Masonry can foster community networks and structure that are otherwise lacking. "People are proud of being known as a Mason," he offers. "It's a real badge of honor." ♦



ROGERIO GOMES

Santa Monica-Palises N° 307
Lux Sapientiae N° 264 and
Primeiro de Setembro N° 461, Brazil

Brazil has one of the fastest-growing Masonic communities in the world. What do you attribute that to?

In Brazilian culture, to become a Mason is seen as a way to grow personally, professionally, and as a leader. So people come in looking for that. But then the longer they're in the lodges, the more they learn about the philosophical teachings and the mystery of Masonry, and that's what keeps them there. And then of course there was also the *Da Vinci Code*.

Is Masonry very visible in Brazil?

Absolutely. The city I'm from has probably 100 lodges. In general, you can look at someone in Brazil and say, I know this guy's a Mason because he'll put three dots in his signature, or because he wears the pin on his jacket. If you're driving on the road and someone sees your Masonic bumper sticker, they'll honk their horn three times at you, to say hi. Brazil is very social. People want to make friends, and this is a way to make friends.

Does Masonry in Brazil reflect the country's Catholic heritage?

Oh yes, to the point that I know of many Catholic priests who are members—people who are very rooted in the diocese. I'd say that in Brazil, most lodges take you on a very spiritual journey to become connected to something even greater than yourself. That attracts a lot of people. And I think Catholicism and the symbols of Masonry have a lot in common. ♦



Culture Clubs

At California's two Spanish-language lodges, the connections run twice as deep. By Ian A. Stewart

FEDERICO JIMENEZ WILL NEVER FORGET his first experience in a Masonic lodge room. It was the early 1950s, in Aguascalientes, Mexico. Over dinner, he found himself seated beside the governor of the state. Rather than lord over the banquet, however, the governor served Jimenez—along with all the rest of the ranchers and tradesmen there. "They said, 'In here, everybody is equal,'" Jimenez, now 92, recalls.

Years later, Jimenez was still moved by that memory. So after he immigrated to California, he sought out the local Masons. As it turned out, he had friends with connections to a Spanish-speaking lodge in L.A. His friend could even serve as his *padrino*, or reference. And in 1969, despite speaking very little English, Jimenez reached out. Half a century later, he's still an integral part of the lodge.

That's a fairly common story at California's two Spanish-language lodges. At **Maya N° 793** and **Panamericana N° 513**, both in Los Angeles, members

with ties to Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America have created a special niche within California Masonry. Members there are able to celebrate and emphasize their heritage, reconnect with family customs, and keep traditions alive. Whether it's recent immigrants or folks who've been in the United States for generations, the two lodges offer something that can be found nowhere else: a Masonic *familia*.

"The minute I came into the lodge, I felt like I was at home with my family," says Christian Sermenio, master of Panamericana N° 513. "When I'm there, I feel like I'm surrounded by all my *tíos*."

A CULTURE WITHIN A CULTURE

It isn't just the language that sets California's Spanish lodges apart. Members there have built on traditions from a wide range of countries. The result is a unique blend of cultural and fraternal customs that's

Members link arms at Panamericana N° 513 in Los Angeles.

PHOTOGRAPHS
BY MATTHEW
REAMER



Members of Panamericana No 513 form a chain of unity.

unique to California but representative of the lodge members' diversity.

"It's very spirited, very loud, and very fun," says Edguin Castellanos, a past master of Panamericana No 513 who was born in Belize. "That can be a turnoff for some people, but we're from Latino homes. That's part of who we are. That's what I fell in love with, that rich spirit."

The connection transcends individual nationalities. More than half of the two lodges' membership was born outside the United States. Among the countries represented there are Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala, Bolivia, Peru, Cuba, and Chile. For many, Freemasonry has been a way to establish social connections in a new country. It's also a bridge back

home, to family and friends in the fraternity abroad.

That bond is often deeply personal. Sermeno, for instance, first joined **Vista No 687**, north of San Diego. As he progressed through the degrees, however, he sought a way to follow in the footsteps of his grandfather, who'd been a lodge master in El Salvador. Joining Panamericana No 513 and learning the ritual in Spanish was a way to feel closer to him.

Those family ties are a source of immense pride for many. When Oliver Alejandro Torrealba Torres was raised in **Yolo No 195** in Davis, a contingent from Maya No 793, where his father belongs, made the trip north to support him. In a nod to his

family's Venezuelan heritage, his degree was scheduled for June 24—that country's independence day (and also the feast day of St. John the Baptist). The significance of the date wasn't lost on him.

Then there's the simple matter of being around familiar faces. "There isn't a very big contingent of Latinos in California Masonry," says Edwin Torres, a charter member of Panamericana No 513. "For the most part, these are the only lodges where, as Latinos, we see people who look like us."

LONG ROAD HOME

Establishing that home away from home has been the project of generations. In the early 1950s, the Grand Lodge of California for the first time assigned

a special committee to scout for interest in forming a Spanish-speaking lodge, to complement the state's existing French-, German-, and Italian-speaking lodges. However, the issue proved contentious. Many within the fraternity argued against expanding foreign-language lodges, on the basis that they divided members along ethnic lines. In 1957, an affinity club led by the late Aurelio Gallegos of **Covenant No 527** requested permission to form a Spanish-speaking lodge. The request was denied.

Gallegos and company were undeterred. And in 1959, the group did successfully charter a new lodge, Maya No 793. The lodge was not allowed to work in Spanish, which was still banned by the *California Masonic Code*. Regardless, it became the first lodge under the Grand Lodge of California to be specifically geared toward Latinos.

The idea proved popular. From an original membership of 54, Maya No 793 grew rapidly. In its first decade, the rolls doubled in size. By 1975, that necessitated a move to a larger meeting space, and the lodge purchased a hall in Monterey Park. By 1983, the lodge had reached a high of 189 members.

Importantly, it also took on an informal ambassadorship role in Latin America. In 1982, its past master, Alejandro Navarro, served as the grand master's representative at the National Masonic Congress, held in Mexico. The lodge became a regular guest of its counterparts across the border. "It was really impressive," Jimenez remembers. "We had a good relationship with the lodges in Mexicali and Baja. Every seat in the lodge room was taken."

SPANISH FOR BROTHERHOOD

Despite the lodge's success, it wasn't until 1992 that it finally fulfilled its founders' hopes. Forty years after the matter had been voted down, Gallegos again introduced legislation to allow Maya Lodge to recite the degrees in Spanish. Evidently, attitudes had changed in the intervening years. It passed.

Today, Maya is officially a bilingual lodge. Regular meetings are held in English, but candidates choose whether to receive the degrees in English or Spanish. Ritual "teams" proficient in each language step in when called upon, so not every officer needs to be word-perfect in both.

At Panamericana No 513, the approach is more straightforward, at least linguistically.

Like Maya, Panamericana grew out of a club of Spanish-speaking Masons. That group formed in Granada Hills in 2000. Using the Spanish ritual

translated at Maya, the group began training a new cohort in a version of the craft that hews more closely to what's practiced in most of Latin America. "We felt there was a void in some ways in California Masonry—a cultural void," says Torres.

Panamericana's founders envisioned an all-enveloping Latino Masonic experience. Not only would the ritual be performed in Spanish, but so would all meetings. The lodge would also embrace more of the esotericism found in Latin American lodge rooms. "The idea was, let's create a place where we can have an above-and-beyond experience specifically for members who share this background," Torres says.

These days, Panamericana No 513 is also a "traditional observance" lodge. Members wear a suit and tie to meetings, place extra emphasis on their ritual performance, and host frequent lectures and symposia. Initiates are expected to produce research papers demonstrating a deep understanding of Masonic philosophy. "It's pretty intense," Torres acknowledges with a laugh. "But it's a labor of love, man. We have a lot of pride in this lodge, and it's aligned with our pride as Latinos."

Often, members of the two Spanish-speaking lodges enter with a long history in Freemasonry. Oscar Gomora, for instance, is one of several members of Panamericana No 513 who originally joined an "irregular" Spanish-speaking lodge (those not recognized by the Grand Lodge of California). Only later did he discover that the Grand Lodge of California

"It's very spirited, very loud, very fun... That's what I fell in love with, that rich spirit."

Charter members of Maya No 793 in 1959.



JOSE VELA RONDON
Panamericana No 513
Nicolás de Piérola No 20 (Peru)

What are the biggest differences between lodges here and in Peru?

I've been able to visit lodges all over Latin America—Chile, Brazil, Mexico. They work very differently from here. All of them do the work very solemnly. When we're inside the temple, we sit up straight, legs together, hands on legs. You don't speak when you're in lodge. And here, the ritual is done from memory. That's incredible. In South America and

Mexico, too, you read it. Here, you have to have a very good memory to be a Mason.

So you need permission to speak in lodge there?

In South America, we can't talk once the meeting is open. Being silent, we learn how to have our thoughts together so that when we do get an opportunity to speak, we have something meaningful to share. After the meeting, if a brother wishes to speak, according to

their rank, they request permission from their warden.

Do you have a special appreciation for the international connections that Masonry offers?

When you visit a lodge in another country, you really feel the fraternity. I once went to a [table lodge] in Brazil with 300 Freemasons. When I came to the United States, I felt that these were brothers I'd known for years. It was the same feeling. ✨





Top: Members of Panamericana No 513 celebrate during a lodge Cinco de Mayo party in Pasadena. Above: Past Master Sergio Soto waves el tricolor.

included Spanish-speaking lodges. Now, he says, he appreciates the organization and support that the larger fraternity offers.

Past master Sergio Soto also joined Panamericana from an irregular lodge, where he says most members were unaware of matters of “regularity.” In any case, he says, there’s clearly an appetite for Masonry among Latinos in California—and one that should be better catered to. “I think it’s about time that California Masonry takes a look at the Latino community,” he says. “Having lodges that are visible in Latino communities will help us get new members and be a way for people to come into the Grand Lodge of California.”

THE NEXT EVOLUTION

Improving its visibility in the community is Panamericana’s biggest goal, members say. When the lodge was first chartered, it was with the intention that it would serve as a temporary home for recent immigrants looking to join the fraternity, before they settled in elsewhere. There was talk of offering English as a second language courses. Those never quite materialized. But increasingly, the lodge is becoming a resource for recent arrivals.

Between scholarships for local students, a yearly backpack and school-supply drive, and book giveaways, the lodge has made itself known as a place

where immigrant families can turn for help. More and more, members say they’re approached by people seeking asylum or in need of other forms of assistance, many of whom come with connections to Masonry back home. While there’s no formal assistance program in place, the lodge has become adept at connecting those in need with much-needed information and services.

Torres says that this work is helping the lodge become a “beacon” in the community. “We’re like this local incubator where people can come in and talk

to someone who can point them in the right direction,” he says. “It’s all very word-of-mouth, very community-focused.”

That’s the next step in the evolution of California’s Spanish-language lodges, members say. More than 50 years after opening their doors, Castellanos is direct in his view of where Maya’s and Panamericana’s future potential lies. “In my opinion, a hub for immigrant brothers to come in and find help is exactly what they should be. We’re a place they can call home.”



SEE MORE ONLINE

Check out a special web extra! Go behind the scenes with a video profile of Panamericana No 513 at

californiafreemason.org/panamericana513



MASONIC ASSISTANCE

Here for You, at Every Stage of Life

THE MASONIC CENTER FOR YOUTH AND FAMILIES PROVIDES EMOTIONAL SUPPORT FOR ALL AGES. BY LAURA BENYS

FIRST IT WAS THE WEIGHT of isolation. Then it was the stress of reentry. All along, there has been the strain of living with fear and loss, inside a pressure cooker of change. And the effects are catching up with everyone.

“The pandemic has impacted all of us differently, but no one’s been spared,” says marriage and family therapist Kimberly Rich. “We all need emotional support right now.”

When Rich says “we all,” she really does mean everyone. As executive director of the **Masonic Center for Youth and Families**, she’s seen people at every stage of life struggle with the challenges of life in the pandemic. At MCYAF, Rich and her team work with children as young as 4 and

seniors in their 90s, as well as everything in between: adults, families, and teenagers.

That may come as a surprise to some Masons. A common misconception is that the organization focuses exclusively on young people.

It’s true that MCYAF does specialize in supporting kids, teens, and young adults with psychological and behavioral challenges. And the center employs specially trained clinicians skilled at working with schoolkids to overcome academic difficulties. But it also offers a full range of services for adults, too. For instance, MCYAF provides individual and couples therapy, along with family therapy, for people of all ages. That includes seniors. As of this year, each campus of



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the Masonic Homes of California has a full-time mental health clinician on staff.

That means that MCYAF is available to help just about anyone, anytime, with challenges like anxiety, stress, burnout, and depression. MYCAF helps couples keep their relationships healthy. They help families cope with change. And they help kids and teens manage the extraordinary challenges of growing up in the 2020s. These services are completely confidential and available virtually as well as in person. No one is turned away based on their ability to pay, and anyone with a Masonic affiliation receives a discount. (Additionally, MCYAF is now Medicare certified.)

"We're here to go through the heaviness of life with you," says Jodi Mikel, the center's program manager.

A BENEFIT HIDING IN PLAIN SIGHT

In MCYAF, California Masons have an extraordinary resource at their disposal—and one that Mikel wants to see put to even greater use.

Elsewhere, counseling and mental health services can be hard to come by or prohibitively expensive. Especially since the pandemic began, several community-run mental health programs are filled beyond capacity, and private-practice therapists have in many cases stopped accepting insurance. The cost of a single session can be shockingly expensive. Then again, many people

A Range of Services, for a Range of People

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Dynamic groups and workshops connect children, individual family members, or peer groups with shared experiences.

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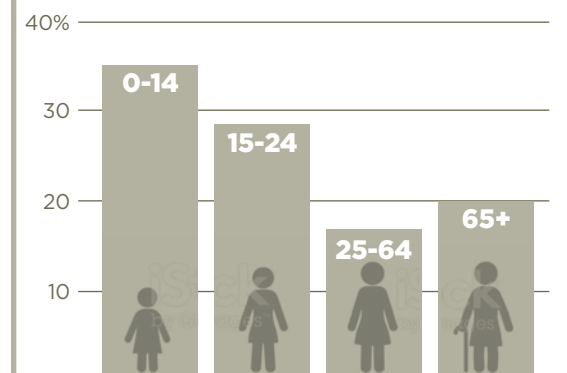
MCYAF offers senior support services to help navigate illness, grief, loneliness, and end-of-life transitions.

INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILY THERAPY

Building trusting relationships allowing clients to explore areas of concern in a safe and accepting environment.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

MCYAF services by clients' age.



never get that far. "At most places," Rich says, "the wait lists are outrageous."

That's not the case at MCYAF.

"We never turn a Mason or their family member away," Rich says. "No matter how full we are, we will find a way. We will be here for you."

A person or family doesn't need to be in the midst of a full-blown crisis to call, either. Mikel stresses that it's OK to reach out even for problems you might be tempted to dismiss as too minor for the professionals. "I think a common misconception is that people need to stay in therapy for years," she says. "Short-term support allows people to check in as needed to navigate a specific challenge."

Rich agrees. "Problems tend to get smaller after therapy," she says. "Sometimes you need another person, a professional, to help you sort it out. Some of us are still dealing with feelings of loneliness and isolation from the pandemic. Other folks are anxious or depressed. We're here for all needs, great and small. We know how to help."

Over the past two years, more and more Masons and their loved ones have tapped into that help. Time and again, Rich, Mikel, and the rest of the MCYAF team hear a common refrain: "I wish I knew about you sooner."

Now, they're on a mission to change that.

"It's really important that every Mason knows they have this invaluable resource waiting for them," Rich says. "Life has a lot of ups and downs. You never know what's going to happen around the bend. You may not need us now, but in case you need us in the future, you should know we're here." ❖

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Patrick Muldoon

11-YEAR MASON

PAST MASTER, WINDSOR LODGE № 181 •
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California Freemason: As an operations controller for the Golden Gate Bridge District, has Masonry shaped your professional life?

Patrick Muldoon: Masonry has definitely shaped my approach to servant-leadership. I really enjoy encouraging the personal growth of the people I work with. That's something I got from Masonry. I was coached and mentored by some fantastic men in my lodges. I remember a past master telling me at my third-degree ceremony that I'd get back what I give out. He was absolutely right.

CFM: As a member of the Cornerstone Society, you've set aside a gift for the California Masonic Foundation. What inspired you to do that?

PM: Volunteering has been part of my life as far back as I can remember. It's an important value that I've tried to teach my two kids. They give 10 percent of their own money to charity or to projects they connect with. I'm really proud they get a sense of joy from giving back. When it comes to Masonry, giving to the Cornerstone Society allows me to ensure that our fraternity and its services will remain long after I'm gone.

CFM: You're also a captain for Masons4Mitts. What makes that program special to you?

PM: My wife and I both coach youth sports, so we get to see how kids develop, build friendships, and learn life skills through sports. All kids should be able to join a team and learn to support themselves and one another. Masons4Mitts helps kids get that positive, life-changing experience—especially kids who may not otherwise have that opportunity to participate. And then Masons Night at the Ballpark is a big yearly highlight for me because I can bring my family to a game, and they can see just how much the fraternity supports our community. ♦ —JUSTIN JAPITANA

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Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of California

173RD ANNUAL COMMUNICATION

OCTOBER 21-23, 2022

SAN FRANCISCO

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GRAND LODGE BUSINESS SESSIONS

at the California Masonic
Memorial Temple
Friday, Oct. 21-Sunday, Oct. 23

PARTNERS AND FAMILY LUNCH

at the Masonic Center
for Youth and Families
Saturday, October 22

GRAND MASTER'S BANQUET

at the Fairmont Hotel's
Venetian Room
Saturday, October 22



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FALL 2022



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FREEMASON

The
Temple

The California Masonic Memorial Temple is a fraternal landmark—and a community treasure.

Assisted Living and Memory Care, Elevated

The PAVILION

AT THE MASONIC HOMES

Welcome home! The Masonic Home at Union City is pleased to announce the grand opening of its new Pavilion, where those in need of memory care and assistance with day-to-day living can enjoy comfortable living quarters in a beautiful, community-minded atmosphere.

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CALIFORNIA FREEMASON

FALL
2022 VOL 70 NO 04

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GRAND LODGE OFFICERS DEDICATE THE NEW VETERANS' AFFAIRS BUILDING AT 3455 KNIGHTON ROAD IN REDDING WITH A FORMAL CORNERSTONE CEREMONY. ONE DAY PRIOR, A SIMILAR DEDICATION WAS PERFORMED AT THE V.A. BUILDING IN CHICO.



SNAPSHOT

7/09/2022 | 1:10 P.M.

A Seal of Approval

ONE OF THE MOST public displays of Freemasonry—and one of the fraternity's oldest and most treasured traditions—is the Masonic cornerstone ceremony. From George Washington's blessing of the Capitol building in 1793 to the California capitol's cornerstone-laying in 1850, Masons for centuries have proudly dedicated civic monuments big and small. That tradition remains alive, as seen in a pair of events this summer in which Grand Master Jeffery M. Wilkins and other officers of the grand lodge joined with members of **Chico-Leland Stanford № 111** and **Reading-Trinity № 27** to dedicate Veterans' Affairs buildings in Chico and Redding (the latter is pictured here).

PHOTOGRAPH BY RUSS HENNINGS/
MOONBEAM STUDIOS

FOR TIME IMMEMORIAL

*The California Masonic Memorial Temple honors fallen
Masons—and also points the way forward.*



THE IDEA FOR a new Grand Lodge building—what would eventually become the California Masonic Memorial Temple—came about in the wake of World War II. It was a time when our fraternity was expanding rapidly, but also grieving for its fallen brothers. Though the building wasn’t completed until 1958, it was meant to honor those who’d “made the supreme sacrifice,” said Past Grand Master Arthur Brouillet in 1946. It would be, in his words, a

memorial “which will be living and pulsating with daily life.”

I certainly think it is. I love that our address is 1111 California, in honor of Veterans Day (celebrated on 11/11). Having served in the Army, this brings me immense pride, especially knowing that so many of our members have served our nation with distinction and honor.

The first time I walked into the building, I was blown away by the massive columns at the entrance and the light-filled endomosaic. This is a beautiful space, and one I love getting to spend time in with my fellow Masons. The more I visited, the more I thought about ways we could share the building’s splendor with the wider community—a way to tell the story of Freemasonry in California to the general public. Starting this fall, we’ll be doing just that, by using QR codes to help visitors understand what makes this building so special.

This being my last message as grand master, I want to take a moment to thank you, the Masons of California, for putting your trust in me. This is the greatest honor that could ever be bestowed on me. I’ve been asked what the best part of being grand master is, and without a doubt, it’s getting to meet on the level with brothers in lodges and at events across the state. My experience as a Mason has been expanded beyond my wildest dreams, and my life has been made so much richer for it. For that, I’m eternally grateful.

I look forward to seeing you all at our Annual Communication. May the Supreme Architect of the Universe bless and protect you, your families, and our beloved craft.

Sincerely and fraternally,


Jeffery M. Wilkins
Grand Master of Masons in California

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CALIFORNIA FREEMASON

ISSUE 04 • VOLUME 70 • FALL 2022

USPS #083-940 is published quarterly by the Masons of California, 1111 California Street, San Francisco, CA 94108-2284. Periodicals Postage Paid at San Francisco, CA and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to California Freemason, 1111 California Street, San Francisco, CA 94108-2284.

Publication dates are the first day of March, June, September, and December.

Subscriptions: *California Freemason* is mailed to every member of this Masonic jurisdiction without additional charge. Others are invited to subscribe for \$12 a year or \$15 outside the United States.

Permission to reprint: Permission to reprint original articles in *California Freemason* is granted to all recognized Masonic publications with credit to the author and this publication.

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Covering
California
Freemasonry

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
MATTHEW REAMER

AFFINITIES

The Shredder

IN THE HIGH DESERT, AN ART-
MAKING, SKATEBOARDING MASON
IS REWRITING PERCEPTIONS.

BY JUSTIN JAPITANA

WHEN HE FIRST STARTED his Masonic-skateboard-deck giveaway program, Joey Buice didn’t have much of a plan for how it would work. That was OK with him. As an artist and designer living in the high-desert town of Yucca Valley, on the northwestern edge of Joshua Tree NationalPark, Buice embraces a decidedly improvisational, do-it-yourself spirit. When he’s touched by a creative spark, Buice uses what’s close at hand to meet his needs and, he hopes, make the world a brighter place. Or at least a little less predictable. ¶ So when a local skateboarding company he’d been connected to dropped a shipment of decks off with him, he scrawled the square and compass on them, drove to the local skate park, and gave the

“I like to keep things curvy and moving, because you don’t want to stay in one spot.”

JOEY BUICE HAS LAUNCHED A SKATEBOARD-EQUIPMENT GIVEAWAY PROGRAM THAT HIS LODGE NOW PARTICIPATES IN.

haul away to some grateful, if possibly perplexed, local kids. That spirit of mischievous invention pervades Buice’s life. From his interactive art installations to his involvement in **Yucca Valley Lodge № 802**, Buice’s instinct is to make something out of nothing.

Over the past two years, Buice’s impromptu skate park drop-offs have grown. In addition

to the donated decks, he takes in T-shirts and other merchandise from Gimme Danger, the L.A. clothing company he works for as a buyer, combing secondhand shops in search of vintage items to upcycle. His motivation isn’t publicity, he says, but rather paying it forward. “Sometimes there won’t be anyone at the park, and I’ll just leave some stuff for the next kid to grab,” he says.

AN ARTIST IN REPOSE

As a punk-rock installation artist, Buice doesn’t quite match up with the stereotypical Mason. But his interest in the craft is genuine, and he’s been embraced wholeheartedly by his lodge.

Originally from Lake Tahoe, Buice moved to Orange County and fell into the local punk scene.

That led him to the annual Joshua Tree Music Festival, where he volunteered in set construction and stage design. Four years ago, he relocated to the desert full-time, where he now produces surrealistic art installations. “They’ve given me pretty complete creative control,” he says of the festival organizers.

In his festival designs, Buice works exclusively with repurposed materials, including acrylic house paint and discarded lumber. “I like textured, abstract stuff,” he says. One of his ongoing projects is a one-on-one improvisational show called *Antiplat Atelier*, in which Buice faces a single viewer inside an “Interrogationatron”—basically a repurposed toolshed. Inside, the shed is rigged with artworks and props—there isn’t

always a distinction between the two—and Buice engages the viewer in intense, sometimes nonsensical conversation. “I’m just trying to get them off guard and to leave in a better mood than they came in with,” he explains.

Growing up in the punk scene, he says, “everything was pretty heavy on the DIY, so that’s what got me to put myself out there.”

In fact, Buice says that lately, he’s increasingly drawn back to music—he posts his records on Soundcloud. “I never stopped writing songs and poems, but during the pandemic I found myself writing more,” he says. “It’s a whole different process for me now. It took me to a different place.”

ON THE LEVEL

Buice compares his artistic and life mantras to transition skating—moving from the flat surface up the walls of a ramp or bowl. “I like to keep things curvy and moving, because you don’t want to stay in one spot,” he says. He sees in that an apt metaphor. “Mental-health-wise, [stasis] is not a good thing. Even if you’re swinging back, you’re moving, making momentum and ultimately getting yourself somewhere higher or farther.”

So when in 2018 Buice felt himself being drawn toward Freemasonry, he acted on it. According to lodge master T.C. Dowden, Buice made his mark right away. “Joey isn’t a wallflower,” he says. “He lends a hand every chance he gets, whether it’s painting the dining room or cleaning carpets. He’s a genuinely cheerful, likable guy.”

As for how he fits into the culture of the lodge, which Dowden says has historically tended toward older members, he says Buice has added some much-needed energy. “He’s gregarious,” Dowden says

with a chuckle. “He’s one of the good young millennials. He injects some humor and life into the lodge, but when it’s time to be serious, he’s able to do that, too.”

This year, Buice is serving as his district’s **Masons4Mitts** captain, and his outgoing personality has paid off in fundraising efforts for the youth-sports program. He’s also begun passing the hat after stated meetings to purchase more skateboarding equipment for local kids. Buice says he has designs on having the lodge sponsor a skate competition in the future, and he hopes that when a nearby skate park opens in 2024, the lodge can lay the cornerstone for it.

Whether it’s degree work or kickflips, from Buice’s perspective, it all comes from the same place of creativity. “Temples or cathedrals can look like upside-down skateboard parks if you use your imagination,” he says with a laugh. “You can probably compare the components of skating to the working tools of Masonry or some other life lessons. But I won’t get too ahead of myself.” ♦



MORE ONLINE

Check out a video profile of Joey Buice as he skates, makes art, and explains how Masonry ties it all together.

californiafreemason.org/shredder



POP CULTURE

Mystery in the Lodge

IN MASTERPIECE’S ENDEAVOUR, A MASONIC REFERENCE IS ILLUMINATED.

IN AN EARLY EPISODE of PBS’ *Masterpiece* mystery *Endeavour*, the prequel to the long-running mystery series *Inspector Morse*, a fellow detective mentions that he’s been invited to join “a certain ancient fraternity.” The young Morse replies, “A man can’t serve two masters.”

What’s probably a fairly oblique quip for most viewers is in fact one of several allusions in the series to Freemasonry. Often mysterious and sometimes more, the references to Masonry suggest someone with at least a passing familiarity with the craft. And indeed, series creator Russell Lewis tells *California Freemason* that while he’s never been a member himself, he had a relative who was and that he “did once work as a *plongeur*”—hired help—“at a lodge in Surrey. I thought the building and its decor were quite beguiling, and the objects in [the] sundry display cabinet fascinating,” he says.

Fans of Lewis’s original *Morse* series may recall earlier nods to the craft. An episode titled “Masonic Mysteries” involved the titular detective being framed for a murder at a rehearsal of Mozart’s *Magic Flute*. In *Endeavour*, the series uses the secrecy surrounding Masonry to similar dramatic—though not always flattering—effect. For instance, a storyline in season eight implicates a lodge in a police-corruption ring—a reference to a real-life British scandal in the 1960s and ’70s. Still, for viewers with a connection to Masonry, the thrill of catching the odd glimpse of an apron or officer’s jewel may well outweigh any sinister insinuations. The ninth and final season is expected in late 2022 or early 2023. ♦ —lan A. Stewart

GOING VIRAL
2.8 MILLION

The online reach of this summer’s **#ImAMason** social media campaign.

+226% 19,000

Site traffic increase to freemason.org May–August vs. January–April 2022.

Single-day engagements with @MasonsofCA Facebook page during campaign.



MEMBER PROFILE

Zahid Peoples

Member
since 2021

Martinez
No 41

Dancer and
entertainer

PHOTOGRAPH
BY MARTIN KLIMEK

California Freemason: You're a professional dancer and sports-team hype man. How did you get your start?

Zahid Peoples: I've been dancing since high school, and I kept at it while I was in college studying for law school. I did a few corporate events and bar mitzvahs, that sort of thing, and then one day I saw a listing looking for dancers for the 49ers. It said it wouldn't pay very much or very often, but it's great

ZAHID PEOPLES FIRES UP
THE CROWD AT A SAN
FRANCISCO GIANTS GAME.

exposure. I'm the kind of person who sees the vastness of an opportunity. So I took the job and danced for the 49ers, and eventually that led me to work with the Golden State Warriors, Oakland A's, and San Francisco Giants.

CFM: Your job is to get people excited and have fun. Are you able to bring that into your life outside of sports?

ZP: It's a lot like Masonry. It's this band of brothers. We're all working toward a common goal, and that's elevating the experiences people have. That's why I'm an artist. I love creating entertainment, especially for someone to be able to go, "Wow."

CFM: Who are some of the acts you've performed with?

ZP: I've break-danced with Run-DMC. I danced onstage with P-Lo at Outside Lands. I've performed with the Foo Fighters, Gwen Stefani, E-40, Weezer. And then for Super Bowl 50, I was an on-field performer for Beyoncé, Bruno Mars, and Coldplay. That was the most incredible experience.

CFM: How did you get interested in Freemasonry?

ZP: My grandfather on my mother's side was a Mason. I didn't know much about it, but it was always in the back of my mind. Then, in 2019, I was touring with a Disney Junior show called *Choo Choo Soul*. I met a guy there who'd brought his kids to the show, and he was a Prince Hall Mason. And I thought, I'd like to get into this. So I read through 15 hours of *Freemasonry for Dummies* and thought, I resonate with all of this.

CFM: Have you ever been roped into performing at your lodge?

ZP: [Laughs] No one ever has to rope me into dancing! I end up performing out of pure reaction. So yeah, last New Year's Eve party, I did a little lead-follow where I call out the moves and do a couple eight counts. That's just what I do. Someone told me that night my dancing is infectious. To me, that's perfect. ✨ —IAS

MORE ONLINE

Check out Peoples's
dance moves at
[californiafreemason.org/
peoples](http://californiafreemason.org/peoples)



MASONIC EDUCATION

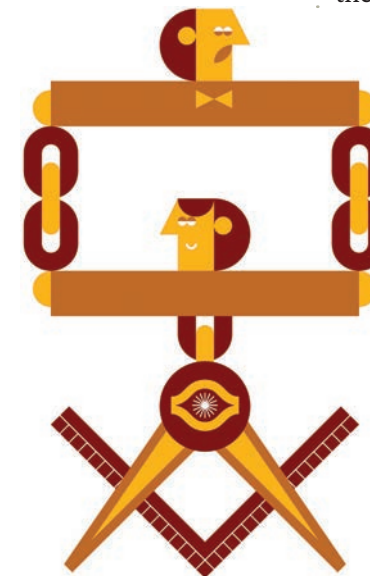
Generations in the Making

THE SELDOM-SEEN LEWIS DEGREE
BINDS MASONIC FATHERS AND SONS.

ON A THURSDAY evening in May, Jerome Ortiz prepared to experience something few Masons ever get to see. In front of a packed lodge room, his father, Victor Ortiz, would raise him to the sublime degree of Master Mason. From then on, the two would know each other not only as father and son, but also as brothers.

There's yet another name for members of the select group of second-generation Masons raised by their fathers: a Lewis, in reference to an ancient iron tool used to hoist large stones. The rare occasion of a Lewis-degree conferral can be commemorated with a special pin shaped like the tool, a sort of looped shackle with three vertical bars underneath.

While it's widely recognized elsewhere, the Lewis degree was formally introduced to California only in 2016, by then-Grand Master David Perry. Perry compares the metaphor of the Lewis with the opening verses of *1 Kings 2:1*, when David encouraged his son Solomon to live an upright life. Perry learned about the custom through his travels to other jurisdictions. Not coincidentally, that same



year, he participated in a Lewis ceremony by raising his own son, Nicholas Leija, at **Napa Valley No 93**. That same night, Leija's childhood friend, Russell Medina, was also raised by his father, Mikal Litzza, making it an extra-rare double Lewis degree night. At the Annual Communication that year, Grand Master Perry presented the Grand Lodge of California's

first-ever Lewis jewel to Nicholas. Says Leija, "As Masons, we're trying to raise good men. What better way than through your son? I'm proud of my dad for bringing back the Lewis award."

For his part, Perry says he now feels "blessed to have lived a life my son feels like following."

That's a familiar refrain among California's Lewis Masons. "It's very emotional for a father to see his offspring

follow in his footsteps," says Victor Ortiz, who traveled widely as a member of the Navy and even served as grand master of the Grand Lodge of Japan. "I have three boys, and I never told them to join. They need to come of their own free will and accord. It's hard to explain the feeling—the joy—of knowing my son is coming to an organization that really was my life."

The Ortiz family shares more than just Masonry between generations, as both father and son have served in the military. Jerome Ortiz, of **Claude H. Morrison No 747**, says that dual bond is strengthened when he meets other veterans or active-duty members in lodge. To know he shares that sense of camaraderie with his father makes his membership even more special.

So while it's often said that you can choose your friends but not your family, the Lewis degree shows that sometimes, you can have both. ✨ —TONY GILBERT

RITUAL

Masterfully Done

A SPECIAL DEGREE CONFERRAL BRINGS SAN DIEGO'S LODGE
MASTERS TOGETHER.

FILE THIS UNDER possible Masonic firsts: This May, **S.W. Hackett No 574** in San Diego held a second-degree ceremony for Ethan Carswell with current masters sitting in every position. "The theater of it was really next-level," Carswell says. "I met some great people and great mentors." The officers on hand included David Murray (**Santa Maria No 580**), who served as master; Jeffrey Powell (**Consuelo No 325**) as senior warden; Nicholas Hoffman (**Black Mountain No 845**) as junior warden; Walter Von Westphalen (**Point Loma No 620**) as secretary; Ronald Banci (**South West No 283**) as treasurer; and Percival Bautista (**Silver Gate Three Stars No 296**), who served as marshal and presented the charge. In addition, Jonathan Robles (**San Diego No 35**) served as chaplain; Roberto Reyes (**East San Diego No 561**) was senior deacon; Mark de la Cruz (**Amity No 442**) was junior deacon; David Descoteaux (**Heartland No 576**) was senior steward; David Diaz (**Lux No 846**) was junior steward; and Michael Singer (**Novus Veteris No 864**) was tiler. "It was top-notch," Carswell said. "It makes me want to give back to the lodge that gave me so much." ✨ —IAS



RIGHT: ORNATE DECORATIVE PLASTERWORK COVERS THE CEILING OF THE SECOND-FLOOR BALCONY OF THE SANTA BARBARA MASONIC TEMPLE.

ABOVE: LODGE MASTER MARK SPURLOCK-BROWN POSES ON THE RENOVATED BALCONY.



LODGE PROFILE

The Spit-Shine

HOW A SIMPLE RESTORATION JOB IS REVITALIZING SANTA BARBARA № 192.

SEVEN YEARS AGO, when Nikolay Sera- phim was hired to retouch the entryway to the stately Santa Barbara Masonic Tem- ple, he looked over the old building from across East Carrillo Street. Each time he looked at it, his eyes kept drifting upward.

Sera- phim, a stonemason by trade, had worked for years for a restoration com- pany, bringing old city halls, theaters, and churches back to life. So he had an inkling that the four-story, circa-1925 temple was hiding a few secrets. Above him, on the second-floor balcony, something was out of place. The arched ceiling was painted a flat, dull white, unlike the ornate charac- ter of the rest of the building. So he pored over old photographs and even asked some of the longest- tenured members of **Santa Barbara № 192**, includ- ing 86-year-old Past Master Nevin Chamberlain, if they knew anything about the ceiling. No one did.



So Sera- phim started peeling away the paint, layer by layer. And before long, the balcony's brightly colored, gold-lined plas- terwork began to emerge—an exquisite brocade of Masonic symbols and figures. Today, as one walks past the old Carl Wer- ner-designed temple (the same architect behind notable Masonic temples in Sac- ramento, Oakland, and Bakersfield), it's practically impossible not to look up and marvel at the many mermaids, candelabras, and working tools carved into the archway.

The building's exterior restoration offers a nice parallel to the revitalization happening within. And it underscores just how important the physical charac- teristics of many Masonic lodges are to the sense of community and place—not to mention intrigue—they inspire. Whereas many other lodges of Santa Barbara's vintage decamped from their stately downtown halls

in favor of large suburban centers with ample parking, those that remained in place retain a powerful connec- tion to their town's history. Says lodge secretary Jeff Matson, who also serves as the head of the Rose Croix chapter of the Scottish Rite, it was the building's archi- tecture that first drew him in. After first laying eyes on

“I didn't know what any of it meant, but I knew I had to join.”

its mysterious ornamenta- tion, “I didn't know what any of it meant, but I knew I had to join,” he says.

Today, the temple still seems to beckon to people. Standing out among the sea of Spanish-style struc- tures in downtown Santa

Barbara, the building was one of the few in town to survive the massive earthquake of 1925, which struck just weeks after the temple's completion. In addition to Seraphim's recent work, plans call for adding a memorial plaque to the ground-floor façade later this year, near where the lunchtime crowd hangs out. The lodge also hosts frequent movie and game nights and degree rehearsals for each of the several bodies that call it home, including chapters of the York and Scot- tish Rite. That's created a sense of momentum for the lodge, which recently celebrated its sesquicentennial. “It feels like we're being rediscovered by a new genera- tion,” Matson says. “We're seeing more younger guys coming in, in their twenties and thirties.”

More work is underway inside, too: A second-floor reading library is being renovated, where researchers will be able to tap into the lodge's extensive history. (The charter for Santa Barbara № 192 is from 1868; two other since-consolidated lodges that met there, La Cumbre № 642 and Magnolia № 242, date from 1875 and 1926, respectively.) In addition to the Scot- tish Rite's RiteCenter language program offices on the fourth floor, other parts of the byzantine temple include a large costume and changing room, lodge halls for the blue lodge and Scottish Rite chapters, additional offices, meeting spaces, a dining hall, and commercial kitchen. Plans are also forming to com- memorate the building's centennial in 2025.

For Matson and others, the hope is that the TLC shown for the historic temple will continue to serve as the lodge's most visible advertisement for Freemasonry generally. At a minimum, it helped bring one new member into the fold. In fact, just a few months after beginning work on the building's façade, Sera- phim submitted his petition to join. Today, he's a Master Mason with the lodge. ♦ —IAS



TRAVEL LODGE

In L.A., an Artist Leaves His Legacy at Lodge

THERE'S NO MISSING THE EGYPTIAN-INSPIRED WALL ART AT DOWNEY UNITED № 220.

WHEN RAJ CHAMPANERI passed away last June, there was little doubt that his memory would live on inside Downey United № 220, where he'd been a member since 2014.

In fact, his legacy there isn't likely to be forgot- ten anytime soon: He's the member behind the showstopping Egyptian- themed mural and sculpture that covers the hall's entire 16-foot-long eastern wall, after all. Affectionately known as the “Raj Mahal,” the piece includes an 8-foot-tall golden square and compass that juts out from the wall, creating a floating effect. On either side of it are two life-sized sarcophagi, painted to appear three-dimensional. Behind them, the wall is plastered in elaborate hieroglyphs and

plexiglass replicas of Masonic jewels. In 2020, Champaneri explained, “The closer you get to the wall, the more charac- ter it reveals.”

Champaneri was an artist and designer outside of lodge, too. Among his creations are his so-called “Exoticmishaps,” a collection of meticulously crafted dioramas of car crashes involving luxury automobiles. Another series was his “Goldgraphs,” images made with paint mixed with ground-up metals and diamond dust. In his career, Champaneri produced works for the likes of Queen Eliza- beth and Janet Jackson.

However, at least for the members of Downey United № 220, it's the Raj Mahal that will live on, a testament to the mysticism and wonder that Freemasonry inspires. ♦ —JJ

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MATHEW SCOTT

PHOTOGRAPH BY MATTHEW REAMER



The Temple

For 64 years, the California Masonic Memorial Temple has evolved along with the fraternity that calls it home. Now it's entering a new era. BY CHRISTOPHER VERPLANCK

IT'S A WARM SUMMER evening in San Francisco as patrons line up to enter the California Masonic Memorial Temple. In less than an hour, the comedian Chris Rock will begin his set. As is increasingly common, guests have been asked to lock away their phones, so the queue to pass through the front doors is backed up onto California Street, where the city's iconic cable cars periodically roll by.

Despite the slow-moving line, tonight's audience seems to be in good spirits, displaying the cheerful giddiness of a big night out. That's a near permanent fixture here, as the auditorium stage is host to some 79 live shows per year, along with numerous private and corporate events. In all, about 250,000 visitors pass through the doors of the California Masonic Memorial Temple annually, making it one of the city's most visited venues.

Drinks in hand, the guests make their way to their seats. On their way, they pass by several noteworthy markers: a golden square and compass carved into the white marble of the building's façade; twin 23-foot-high marble columns flanking the front doors and topped by celestial and terrestrial globes; and the 48-by-38 foot endomosaic mural, full of images and references to the history of Freemasonry in California. A few snap photos of the evocative surroundings, but tonight's crowd for the most part seems unaware of the architectural, historical, and especially fraternal significance of the building they're visiting. In fact, a

large majority are unlikely to even know the building's full name. Outside of the fraternity, very few people ever refer to the California Masonic Memorial Temple. To most, it's simply "the Masonic."

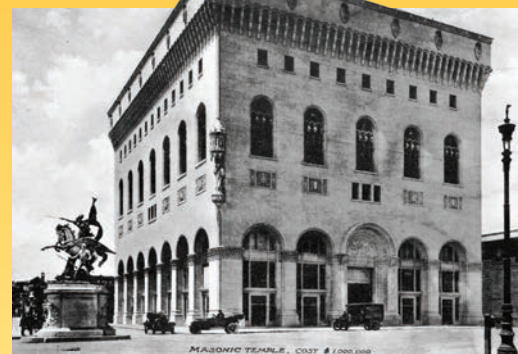
That's no accident. Since opening in 1958, the CMMT has always played a dual role. To the fraternity, it's the general headquarters of the Masons of California—their meeting place, library, and the staff offices of the Grand Lodge of California. Its operations also support the charitable activities of the California Masonic Foundation. Externally, it's an entertainment venue geared toward the enjoyment of a public with slim knowledge of Freemasonry. Now, almost 65 years later, there's hope that the building—by whatever name it's known—can play yet another role: as a vehicle to help propel Freemasonry in California into the future.

"MORE COMMODIOUS QUARTERS"

Freemasonry in California goes all the way back to the gold rush of 1848-50, when fortune seekers from around the world—including many Masons—flooded into the state. The Grand Lodge of California was initially established in April 1850 in the so-called Red House on Fifth and J streets in Sacramento, exercising jurisdiction over 11 lodges across California and Hawaii. Masons played an important role

Patrons line up on California Street outside the California Masonic Memorial Temple before an evening concert—one of 64 shows per year at the iconic venue.

PHOTOGRAPH BY WINNI WINTERMEYER



From left: The first Grand Lodge building in San Francisco, located at Post and Montgomery; the building in the wake of the 1906 earthquake and fire; and the later Grand Lodge temple at 25 Van Ness.

From the beginning, its location and design were meant to demonstrate a sense of the fraternity's civic pride and institutional might.

in securing California's admission to the union in September 1850, and many of California's early civic and business leaders were Masons, including Samuel Brannan, Thomas Starr King, and Leland Stanford.

The Grand Lodge relocated to San Francisco in 1863. For many years, it was headquartered in an impressive hall at the northwest corner of Post and Montgomery streets, where it remained until the 1906 earthquake, which destroyed the building. After meeting at various locations for several years, the Grand Lodge moved into the new San Francisco Masonic Temple at 25 Van Ness in 1913, where it stayed for nearly half a century. Designed by Bliss & Faville in the Venetian Revival style, the building is now operated by the city of San Francisco.

Postwar, the fraternity began to outgrow the Van Ness building and required, in the words of a later temple committee member, "more commodious quarters." Membership in fraternal societies such as the Masons, the Elks, and the Odd Fellows surged after World War II. Between 1946 and 1953, the number of Masons in California nearly doubled, reaching

a high of 225,000. That growth had a profound effect not just on the fraternity, but on the state as a whole. For members of the Greatest Generation, the war had been a tremendous social mixer, and the subsequent rise of suburbanization broke apart traditional ethnic enclaves. In the newly built suburbs, fraternal societies provided an Americanized alternative to traditional religious and ethnic-based organizations. In addition to opportunities for socializing, fraternal organizations offered a sense of belonging, especially with their ritualized pageantry and charitable activities.

By the late 1940s, the 20,000-square-foot Grand Lodge temple on Van Ness was straining to

accommodate the yearly Annual Communication. By 1952, the situation was critical enough that the meeting was moved to the 8,500-capacity San Francisco Civic Auditorium, where it would be held for each of the next five years. Meanwhile, the administrative functions of the Grand Lodge were also severely short on space. A 1947 report commissioned by the Grand Lodge recommended finding a new home at once, to be ready for move-in by the fall of 1950.

The booming fraternity, which had added 100,000 members in less than a decade, needed a new home to match its new scale and ambition. So it looked to the top of the hill.

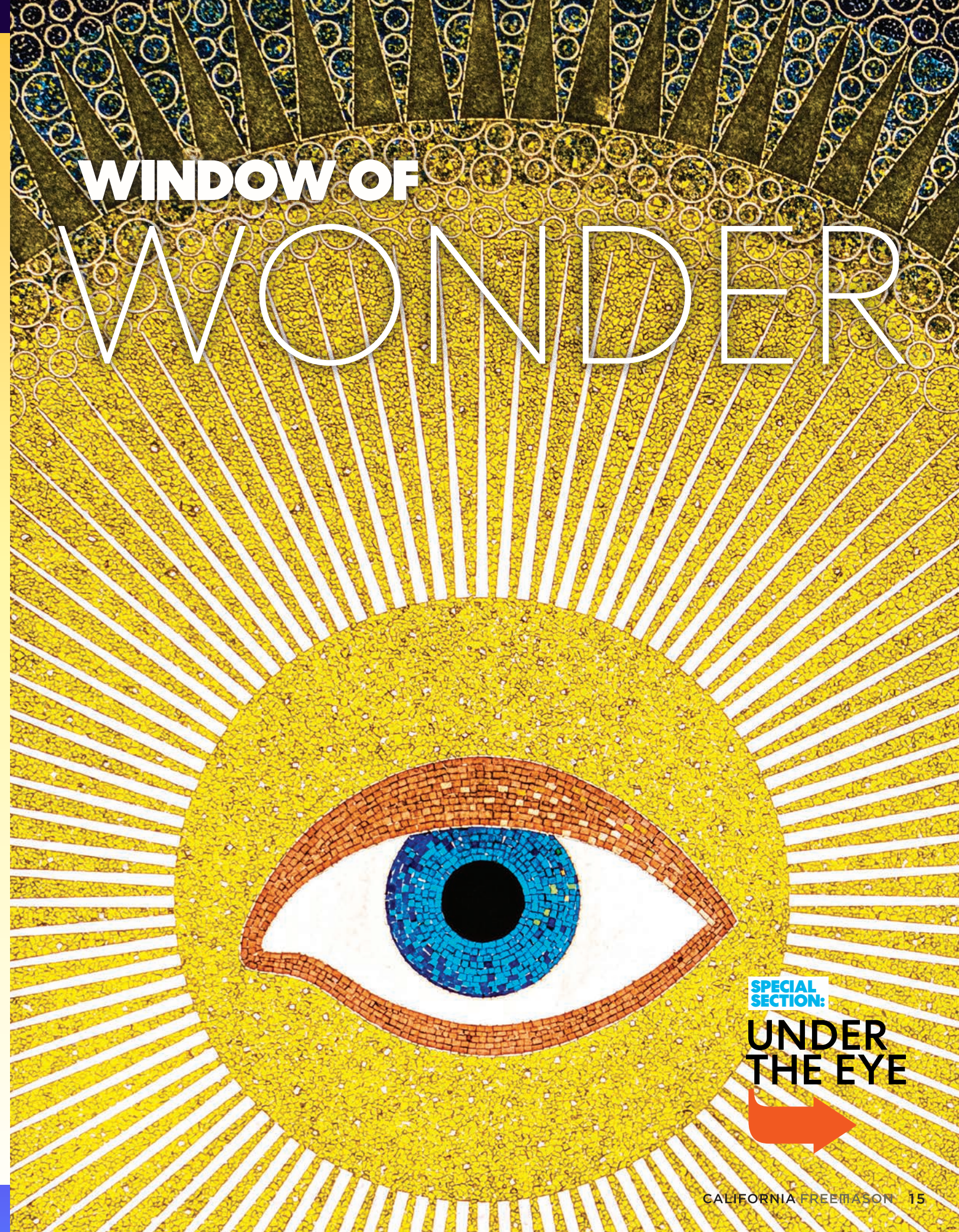
A HOME ON HIGH

The location of today's California Masonic Memorial Temple is significant, though it was perhaps a stroke of luck that it ever worked out. Standing proudly atop Nob Hill, one of San Francisco's most coveted neighborhoods, the modernistic temple is a departure from the stately Beaux Arts hotels and apartment buildings that surround it. From the beginning, its location and design were meant to demonstrate a sense of the fraternity's civic pride and institutional might. (Among its eminent neighbors are Grace Cathedral, the seat of the Diocese of California; the elite Pacific-Union Club; and the luxurious Fairmont Hotel, where Tony Bennett first sang "I Left My Heart in San Francisco.")

The fraternity of the mid-20th century fit securely in among those lofty neighbors. But the location was also a manifestation of a forward-thinking vision for the fraternity and its headquarters—one that saw the organization playing an important role in the city's social and commercial life. Unlike its previous locales, the new Grand Lodge temple would exist not solely to serve the members of the fraternity. Instead, revenue-generating elements of the building would help fund the Masons' charitable arm (what would later become the California Masonic

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WINDOW OF WONDER



SPECIAL SECTION:

UNDER THE EYE



WINDOW OF WONDER

Emile Norman never became a household name. But his massive artwork remains a treasure of California Freemasonry.

BY SARAH HOTCHKISS

NOT EVERY ARTIST is an inventor. But when it came to the massive light-filled multimedia mural that greets visitors at the California Masonic Memorial Temple on Nob Hill in San Francisco, Emile Norman's mode of artmaking was so novel it needed a name.

Stretching practically the entire length of the foyer's southern wall, Norman's "endomosaic" is a stunning sight, one that for more than half a century has made an indelible impression on the thousands of visitors each year who come to the building. In scale and splendor, it's one of San Francisco's most impressive pieces of public art and the crowning achievement of a creative visionary.

Gazing over the 48-by-38-foot work, which is chock-full of Masonic symbolism, the mind whirrs with questions. But perhaps what's most interesting about the piece is how it came to be at all. How did a little-known Big Sur artist, working well outside the mainstream, with no formal training or any connection to Masonry, wind up creating something so integral to the home of California Freemasonry?

Ultimately, the story of the endomosaic is one of serendipity—but also of curiosity, artistic experimentation, and love.

AN UNLIKELY MEDIUM, AN UNLIKELY ARTIST

It may be that Emile Norman was destined to become an artist, but the circumstances of his childhood didn't exactly encourage it. Born in 1918 and raised on a walnut farm in the San Gabriel Valley, he made his first sculpture at the age of 11 from a piece of found granite, ruining his father's wood chisels in the process. "My mother kept heckling me that I should stop all that nonsense and learn an honest trade," Norman, who died in 2009, recalled in the 2007 documentary *Emile Norman: By His Own Design*. "She didn't know who I was. Never did." But that background schooled him in other ways, and steeled his determination to succeed on his own terms.

But what really set Norman apart in his artistic career was his unlikely medium. According to the late artist's nephew, Carl Malone, who worked alongside Norman in his later life, "He really had quite a love affair with plastics." During World War II, when most metals went to military use, the nascent plastics industry grew as manufacturers looked for alternative materials. So while the Museum of Modern Art remained focused on traditional formats like oil on canvas, Norman was piercing cellulose acetate

with a hot electric needle. A *New York World-Telegram* article from 1944 called 26-year-old Norman's work with plastic "fascinating." His great innovation, according to a *New York Times* review published that same year, was freeing plastic from its industrial and commercial uses and putting it to aesthetic ones.

Among his novel creations were fantastical head-dresses (some of which appeared in the 1946 film *Blue Skies*) and decorative screens and boxes. Norman filed five patents dealing with the manipulation of plastics. "Every time I do a work of art, I learn something technically and artistically," he said in the documentary. "I'm an experimenter."

Emile Norman and Brooks Clement, circa 1961.

PHOTOGRAPH BY YOUSUF KARSH, COURTESY OF EMILE NORMAN ARTS FOUNDATION



Norman in his Big Sur studio with a panel destined for the CMMT mural.

EMILE NORMAN ARTS FOUNDATION

Although he was candid about his methods, Norman could also be very secretive—for instance, no one was allowed in his studio. He also hid much of his life from the outside world, including his sexual orientation. At a time when bar raids could end with men's names and addresses in the newspaper, Norman closely guarded his attraction to men.

That began to change when Norman met Brooks Clement, the man who'd be his partner for the next three decades. In 1946, they moved to Big Sur and began building the house that in some ways would stand as Norman's greatest work of art. In the documentary, Norman recalled clearing the land on Pfeiffer Ridge with glee: "That was the butchiest part of my life. I loved running that bulldozer," he said. While Norman made his art, Clement ran the Emile Norman Gallery in nearby Carmel, documented their work and research trips, and, according to newspapers of the time, "managed" Norman's career. Their custom-built home, with its expansive views of the Pacific, became a gathering place for friends, the starting point for hikes along the surrounding ridges, and the backdrop of their life. Tucked away from the wider world, they were free to build a life together, be open

about their relationship, and enjoy the embrace of their neighbors.

Beneath their living space was Norman's studio, filled with tools, equipment, and jars of crushed glass, where he sometimes worked 18 hours a day. Over the years, his art included delicate wood-inlay panels he called Nature Poems, carved bas-reliefs, and graceful sculptures of animals created by combining wax, wood fragments, and epoxy. Precursors to the endomosaics appeared in Norman's window displays at places like Bergdorf Goodman in New York, which sometimes included leaves and butterflies pressed between layers of plastic to create shoji-like screens.

Until his death in 1973, Clement continued to assist Norman's work; sometimes the couple signed their collaborative work "Clemile." On

the Masonic endomosaic, Clement's name appears just under Norman's.

Today, Norman's work is in the permanent collections of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Monterey Museum of Art, but the majority of his output is privately owned. Much of it never left their home. As Will Parrinello, who directed the Norman documentary, points out, "The house is itself a work of art, and it was designed to house his artwork."

THE RIGHT PLACE, THE RIGHT TIME

It wasn't far from his Big Sur studio that Norman became forever linked to California Freemasonry. In 1954, he created his first endomosaic display for the Casa Munras Hotel in Monterey, depicting the history of the town. There it caught the eye of the modernist architect Albert F. Roller, who earlier that year had won the commission to design the California Masonic Memorial Temple. In 1956, Roller sought out Norman to develop a pair of showstopping works for the temple. (In addition to the endomosaic,

Norman created the large bas-relief frieze on the building's northern face.) For David Wessel of Architectural Resources Group, who led a massive 2006 restoration of the endomosaic, part of what makes the piece special is its integration into the temple's overall design.

Says Wessel, "As a product of the plastics movement that had its genesis during World War II, it's completely appropriate for a midcentury building. The materials, the design, and the placement in the building—everything."

Norman had no connection to Freemasonry. To familiarize himself, he dived into the history and symbolism of the fraternity. In 2006, he told *California Freeman* that he interviewed dozens of members and borrowed

His great innovation... was freeing plastic from its industrial and commercial uses and putting it to aesthetic ones.

Behind the Window

It isn't just the scale of Emile Norman's endomosaic that makes it special. From its esoteric iconography to its allusions to fraternal and state history, the artwork rewards a closer reading. Here, a few clues. —IAN A. STEWART

CENTER PANEL

1. Masters of the Lodge

THE SUN AND ALL-SEEING EYE, WITH GRAND LODGE OFFICERS' SYMBOLS

Towering above the mural is the all-seeing eye, a reminder that our actions are seen and judged by others—and that we are accountable to one another. Beneath it are the emblems of the elected officers of the Grand Lodge: the radial sun (representing the grand lecturer); crossed keys (grand treasurer); level (senior grand warden); square and compass with sunburst and quadrant (representing the grand master, the highest-ranking Masonic elected official), the square-and-compass with jewel (deputy grand master), plumb (junior grand warden); and crossed key and pen (grand secretary).

2. The California Freemason

FIGURE WITH APRON, VARIOUS IMAGES

The central figure represents the past, present, and future of California Freemasonry. Surrounding the figure, who wears the Masons' white lambskin apron, are symbols of the state's prominent industries of the 1950s, from wine and logging to shipping and film, depicting the diverse backgrounds and skills of California Masons.

3. The Founders

AMERICAN AND CALIFORNIA FLAGS

Masons have played important roles in the founding of the United States and of California. In fact many of the builders of early California were Freemasons.

4–5. The Settlers

THE WAYFARING MAN AND THE SEAFARING MAN

Representing the earliest American settlers who reached California by land and sea, the figure at left is the wayfarer, who holds a piece of fruit to represent the state's agricultural riches. Behind him are the gold miner, holding a pick, and the trapper, holding a musket. On the right, the seafarer represents the traders who arrived in California in the early 1800s. Behind him are a fisherman and a ship captain, likely representing Levi Stowell, who sailed the charter for California No. 1 from Washington D.C. to San Francisco via the Isthmus of Panama.

6. Emblems of Masonry

THREE STEPS, POT OF INCENSE, BEEHIVE, AND SWORD

Horizontal bands of images run throughout the mural with esoteric meanings to Masons. Beneath the wayfarer and seafarer, they include three steps, symbolizing the three degrees of Freemasonry; a pot of incense (symbolizing a pure heart); the beehive (representing industry and cooperation); and a sword atop the Constitutions of Freemasonry (guarding Masonic traditions and values).

LEFT PANEL

7. The Celestial Beings

STARS, SUN AND MOON, AND SPRIG OF ACACIA

Framing the top of the mural are symbols of the stars, the sun and moon, and the acacia tree. In Masonry, astrological symbols including the sun, moon, and seven stars are used to demonstrate constancy and regularity. The "blazing star" is often used to depict "Masonic light," or knowledge. The sprig of acacia—an evergreen—represents the immortality of the soul. The wood from the acacia tree was used in the construction of King Solomon's Temple.

8. The Foundations of Freemasonry

PILLARS, TAPERS, ALTAR, BIBLE, AND SUN

A band of Masonic imagery here alludes to some of the most important themes in Freemasonry. They include the twin pillars found at the entrance to King Solomon's Temple, and which are depicted in every Masonic lodge room. Next to that is an image of three burning tapers, representing the "lesser lights" of Freemasonry (the sun, moon, and the master of the lodge). Beside it is the altar, which is a place of communion with the divine. Finally, the holy book (here a Bible) topped by the square and compass represents the three "great lights" of Masonry; while the letter "G" stands for geometry, the foundational science of stonemasonry.

9. Historical Vignettes

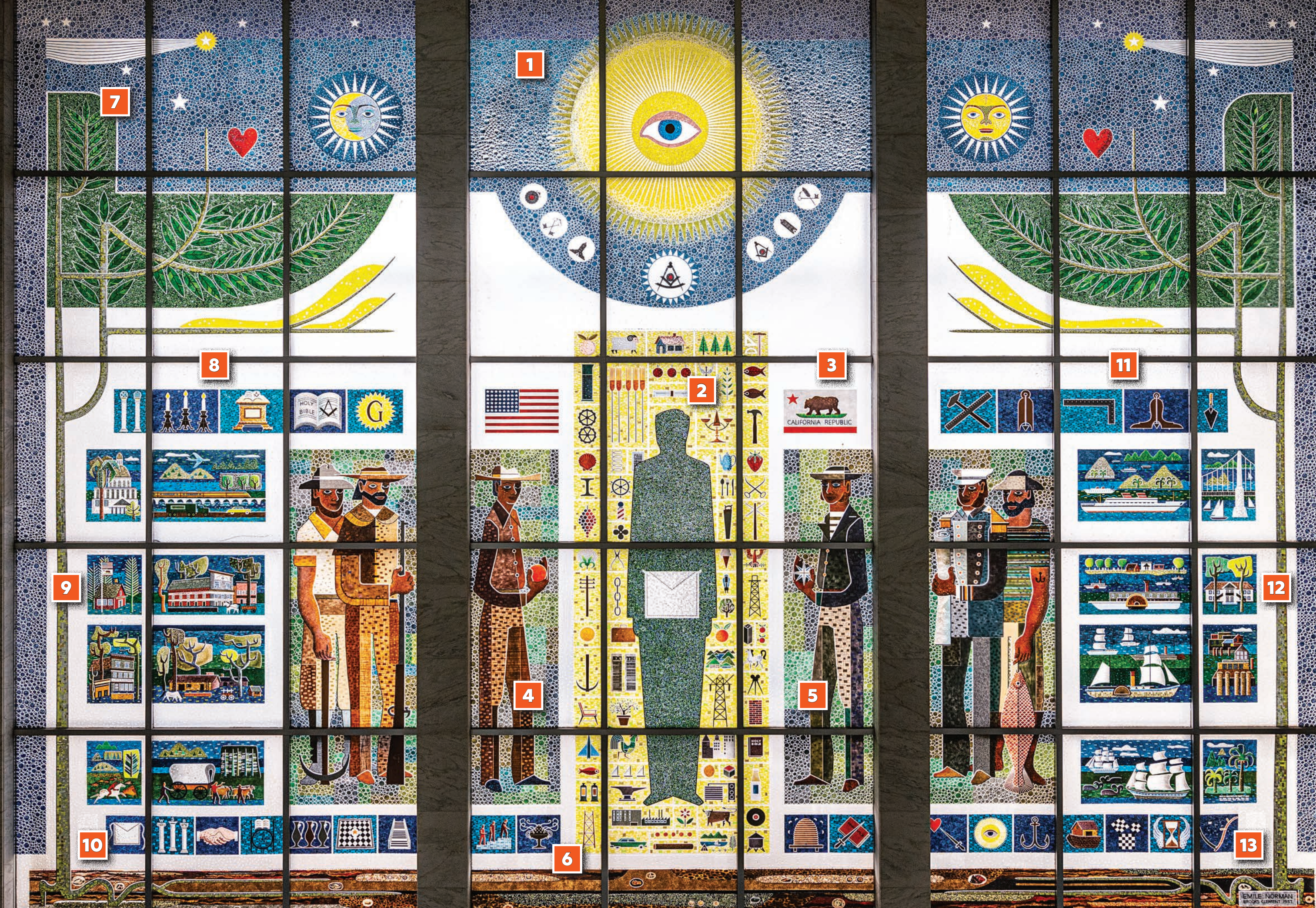
TRANSPORTATION, EDUCATION, AND EXPANSION

The eight vignettes at left paint a picture of history and progress in California. At the top left is the state capitol, next to images of the automobile, train, and airplane. Both recall Masonry's contributions to the state's government and infrastructure. (In fact, 19 governors of California have been Freemasons.) Beneath them are an image of a schoolhouse and Masonic lodge rooms. The schoolhouse represents the birth of the California public education system, founded by Freemason John Swett. The scenes at bottom left represent the covered wagon that reached California by land. At left is a Native American on horseback, representing the state's first inhabitants and the settling of the frontier.



SEE MORE ONLINE

Scan the QR code to learn more about Emile Norman and the story behind his endomosaic masterpiece.



10. The Degrees of Masonry

APRON, PILLARS, HANDSHAKE, HOLY WRITING, VESSELS, MOSAIC, STAIRCASE

Square images along the bottom-left of the mural represent icons related to the degrees of Freemasonry. From left, they are the white apron that is given to the new initiate; three columns (representing wisdom, strength, and beauty); and the holy book upon which all members take their oaths. Beside them is a handshake, representing friendship; and vessels of corn, wine, and oil (the wages paid to early stonemasons, now used ceremonially in the consecration of a new building). The Mosaic pavement, tessellated border, and blazing star represent the "ornaments" of the lodge room. The staircase at right is comprised of three, five, and seven steps. The first three steps represent life stages (youth, manhood, old age), followed by the five steps that allude to the five orders of architecture. Finally the seven steps represent the seven liberal arts and sciences (grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy).

RIGHT PANEL

11. The Working Tools

24-INCH GAUGE AND COMMON GAVEL, PLUMB, SQUARE, LEVEL, TROWEL

The icons running horizontally across the right-hand panel depict the stonemason's working tools, used allegorically in Freemasonry to illuminate important concepts. From left, they are the common gavel and 24-inch gauge (used metaphorically to divide the 24 hours of the day into useful employment); the plumb (representing uprightness); the square (morality and truth); the level (equality), and trowel (used to spread the "cement of friendship.")

12. More Historical Vignettes

HISTORY AND PROGRESS ON CALIFORNIA'S WATERWAYS

The scenes of sea life depict the Masons' bridge-building efforts that contributed to international trade. Beneath them, four panels illustrate the seafaring industries and the 1846 landing at Monterey by Admiral John Drake Sloat, thought to be the first Mason to arrive in California. At bottom, two panels depict the early schooners that arrived in California by way of the Hawaiian Islands. Some of the first-known Masons to land in California were sea captains like John Meek, who in 1852 became a charter member of the first Masonic lodge in Hawaii.

13. Life Lessons

SWORD AND HEART, ALL-SEEING EYE, ANCHOR, ARK, 47TH PROPOSITION OF EUCLID, HOURGLASS, SCYTHE

Rounding out the bottom panel are more Masonic symbols that allude to teachings contained within the Masonic degrees. From left, they include a depiction of a sword pointed at a naked heart (symbolically, a reminder to guard one's heart against impure thoughts) and the all-seeing eye that's always above us. Next to them are the anchor and ark (symbolizing hope and confidence), and the 47th Proposition of Euclid (used to create a perfect right angle). The final two images, of the winged hourglass and the scythe, represent mortality and the brevity of one's time on earth.

PHOTOGRAPHS ON COVER AND LEFT BY WINNI WINTERMEYER; TOP RIGHT COURTESY OF ARC CONSERVATION SERVICES



Fighting Against the Light

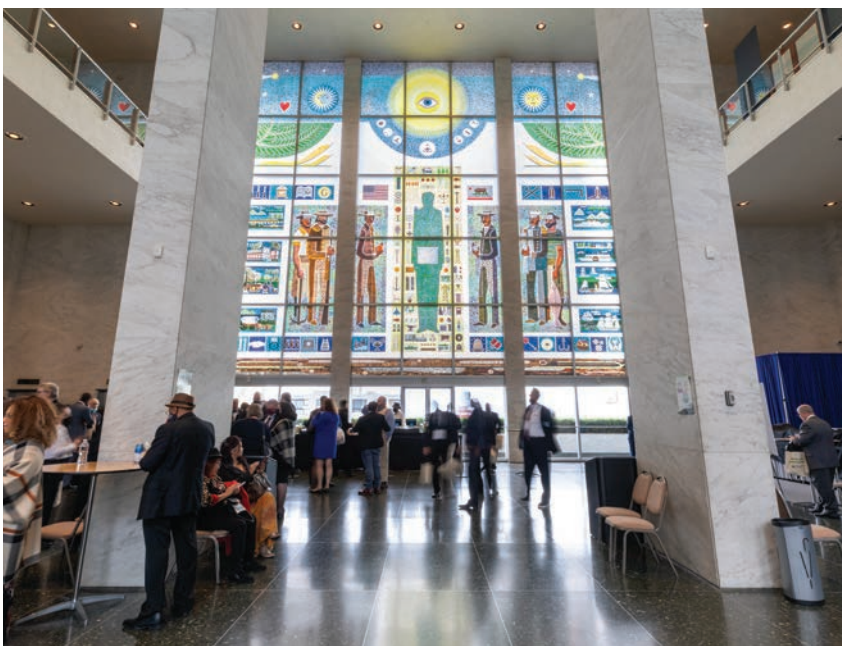
IT STARTED WHEN THE all-seeing eye began to weep. First a little, then more—the little bits of the colored glass that gives the massive endomosaic inside the California Masonic Memorial Temple its wonderful texture and hue had come unglued and began to tumble down between the pressed acrylic that frames the work.

Emile Norman's endomosaic process was both ahead of its time and also, in terms of conservation, something of an untested medium. And nearly 50 years after being installed in the California Masonic Memorial Temple, it was beginning to show its age. "These long-chain polymers, which is what acrylics are, do eventually deteriorate from ultraviolet light exposure," explains David Wessel, the principal of Architectural Resources Group. In 2006, his firm was called in to restore and conserve the work—a massive job that ran to nearly half a million dollars.

It was a learning experience for Wessel, who is not a Mason but says he relished the opportunity to learn about the Masonic symbols contained within the artwork. "The iconography is fascinating. My grandfather was a Mason, so I had a little bit of exposure to it. But it's intriguing. It draws you in."

With Norman's blessing and armed with his original instructions for installing the endomosaic, Wessel's team removed each panel individually and took it to their workshop to assess and treat the tessera (the pieces of the mosaic). Once complete, the team reinstalled the panels and installed UV-filtering panels on the exterior to lessen its exposure to the light.

That said, "the artwork needs light coming through it to be appreciated," Wessel says—meaning that over time, it will continue to deteriorate. So as a failsafe, his conservationists took ultra-high-resolution photographs of each panel, so that should the piece ever need to come down, they can develop a transparency to install in its place. Just in case. —IAS



Patrons gather beneath the endomosaic in the main foyer.

SHOW READY PHOTO

books about Masonry from the Grand Lodge to learn about its iconography. The finished work contains depictions of Masonic tools and symbols including the trowel (friendship), the plumb (uprightness), and the all-seeing eye (benevolence), all framing central figures representing the Masons' contributions to California history. Norman would spend nearly 20 months working on the piece in his home studio. Executed panel by panel with the help of a homemade light table, the 45 sections, each weighing 250 pounds, were trucked up to San Francisco and put into storage until ready for installation.

Much of Norman's other work was on a more human scale, and the endomosaic stands out for its sheer size. "I think the thing that motivated him the most was doing something he hadn't done before," Malone says of his uncle's approach to the project. Norman's process for the endomosaic differed from typical mosaic-making. Rather than apply bits of glass to an object's surface and cement them with grout, he combined all sorts of materials and pressed them between two layers of clear acrylic. Among those used to color and shade the panels are glass, sea-shells, foliage, metals, thinly sliced vegetable matter, and soil collected by Masonic lodges in each of California's 58 counties, as well as the Hawaiian Islands (then a part of the Grand Lodge of California).

The result, even when layered between flat planes, has an incredible tactile quality. Like a pointillist painter, Norman combined 180 hues of ground glass that mix optically to create graceful shading. The cohesion of the overall design is immediate. White and black outlines follow the logic of a single light source, the all-seeing eye at the top of the work.

A LEGACY LIVES ON

Despite the triumph of the endomosaic, which is seen and photographed by thousands of visitors each year, Emile Norman's name has never been widely known beyond a small group of collectors. According to Parrinello, whose documentary is streaming on Kanopy, there was a moment in the early 1960s, when Norman was back east, that he could have pursued a career with a

New York gallery. Instead, he opted to return to Big Sur to pursue his art on his own terms.

Before Norman died in 2009, he laid out plans for a trust to protect both his home and his art. But in 2020, bankruptcy proceedings forced Norman's house onto the market, prompting local fears of demolition—an irreparable loss to the artistic heritage of Big Sur. Thankfully, the home, its artworks, and the 40 acres of land surrounding it were purchased by the newly formed Emile Norman Arts Foundation, funded by a silent benefactor. Heather Chappellet Lanier, Kim Stemler, and Heather Engen, the trio of Big Sur residents behind the foundation, are now working to bring Norman's art to a wider audience.

In a home assembled over decades with love and care, the markers of Norman and Clement's personal and professional accomplishments are finally secure. There are traces of their crowning achievement throughout the space: a scale model of the Masonic endomosaic, a life-size test panel mounted within a door, and dozens of glass jars full of soil from Masonic lodges. "It meant a lot to him, and he kept that part of his life there," Parrinello says.

It was that dedication to his work that drew Parrinello to Norman. The filmmaker remembers their first meeting: "He said things like, 'You know, no one's ever going to give you permission to do what you want except for yourself. So what are you waiting for?'" Parrinello says. "That's how he lived his life." ♦

Emile Norman at the CMMT in 2005, before a major restoration of the endomosaic artwork.

PHOTOGRAPH BY LIZ HAFALIA/GETTY



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 14

Foundation). And, with its planned exhibition hall and performance venue, it would become a fixture of the city's business and entertainment scene—a draw for visitors and Masons alike. In that way, it would be a boon to the economic interests of Nob Hill and downtown San Francisco beyond.

Given that backdrop, it's interesting to note that the location on the corner of California and Taylor streets wasn't the first choice for the new temple. Following the 1947 report, a committee devoted to the search for a new home identified 15 different sites in San Francisco to develop or refurbish. Ultimately, none of them were deemed suitable.

In early 1952, the committee identified a promising 12-story property at 201 Sansome, at the corner of Pine, owned by the San Francisco Stock Exchange and known as the Sub-Treasury Building. However, negotiations over the \$3,000,000 sale fell through; meanwhile, a January 1952 arson at the Van Ness temple caused more than \$100,000 in damages. Suddenly, the committee was under pressure to find a new home, fast. ("Make haste slowly" had been its winking motto.) After looking at several additional properties, in 1953 the committee turned its attention to the southwest corner of California and Taylor. The location, which at the time included a gas station

The modernist venue at 1111 California Street was finally finished in spring 1958, and dedicated later that fall.

and a four-story apartment building, stood opposite the in-progress Grace Cathedral and the Huntington Hotel. The 50,000-square-foot property had frontage on three streets—California, Taylor, and Pine—and was served by the California Street cable car line.

There were several obstacles to developing the Nob Hill site. First, it was zoned for residential use; second, it was expensive. To pay for the land, as well as the costs of constructing and operating the building, the Grand Lodge would have to build a temple with income-generating capability. However, zoning on Nob Hill wouldn't allow for retail storefronts, which had helped subsidize the Van Ness temple.

Street parking was already at a premium in the neighborhood, especially with numerous hotels and apartment buildings nearby. Therefore, a five-level parking garage capable of accommodating over 500 vehicles became part of the building program. At the same time, the hotels provided opportunities for synergy. Many business conventions and trade shows had outgrown hotel ballrooms after the war, and the decision to include a large exhibition hall in the building's design was probably made in consultation with the Fairmont Hotel owner Benjamin Swig, of **Lincoln № 470** in San Francisco. Swig, a major booster of the convention industry in the city,



certainly would have approved of having an exhibition hall only a block from his flagship hotel. Another member of the temple committee certainly did: Walter Swanson, of **Educator № 554**, was manager of the San Francisco Convention and Tourist Bureau.

Financing the project proved to be a tall order. The price of land for the site came to \$1.3 million; plans for construction, including excavating the 62-foot drop from California Street south along Taylor, would come to more than \$6 million. Two ideas for raising capital came to the fore: First, a 50-cent per capita fee that had been introduced in 1951 was raised to \$1 per year in 1952; another \$9 fee for new applicants was also directed toward building costs. Separately, a fundraising drive, initiated by Ernest Bashor, the chairman of the Masonic Homes Endowment Board, called on all members to contribute the equivalent of “one day’s wages”—what came out to \$9 per member—to the project. The names of each contributing member and lodge would be recorded in a public “open book,” to be put on display inside the memorial lounge. (Today that book is kept under glass on the mezzanine level.)

A MODERNIST MARVEL

Meanwhile, architect Albert Roller got to work. Roller, who was a member of **Excelsior № 166**, ably adapted the Masons’ vision to the site, placing the five-level parking garage within the building podium, or reinforced base level, which also contained the exhibition hall on the ground floor. The first floor, accessible by California Street, would serve as the

The temple committee stipulated that the temple’s design philosophy would evince “no stylized tradition or cliché,” in order to stand as a timeless monument.

Artist Emile Norman’s memorial frieze on the building’s exterior represents the branches of the armed forces and the struggle of good and evil.

building’s primary public access point, containing the 50-by-112-foot foyer and the 3,200-seat auditorium. Most of the second floor would be taken up by the auditorium’s mezzanine and the upper part of the foyer. The remainder was set aside for a library and an apartment for the grand master. Meanwhile, the third floor would house an office suite for the staff of the Grand Lodge, Masonic Homes, and other Masonic organizations.

In February 1954, Albert Roller finished his preliminary designs. However, construction did not begin for another 20 months, as construction and fundraising delays pushed back the groundbreaking. The standing apartment house and gas station were finally demolished in January 1956, and excavation and construction followed a few weeks later. The contractor was MacDonald, Young & Nelson.

The temple committee stipulated that the temple’s design philosophy should evince “no stylized tradition or cliché,” in order to stand as a timeless monument. Roller designed the new building’s exterior in a sleek, modernist vocabulary that embodied influences of the “stripped classical” style of the 1930s. The exterior departs from the sometimes arid modernism of the 1950s. The only applied ornament was a memorial frieze by the late artist Emile Norman that, in keeping with the rest of the temple design, is reminiscent of New Deal-era aesthetics. At the left side are four panels depicting men from each of the branches of the armed forces, shown in ageless dress. At the right is a panel depicting a tug of war between the forces of good and evil, democracy and totalitarianism, with an inscription that reads: “Dedicated to Our Masonic Brethren Who Died in the Cause of Freedom.”

Beneath the frieze is a planter bed containing soil taken from each of California’s 58 counties and each of the Hawaiian Islands. (Hawaii fell under the Masonic jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of California until 1989.) The bed contains a row of ornamental olive trees.

At the opposite end of the primary façade is the entrance porch. The porch roof is supported by a colonnade of squared-off columns made from Vermont marble, the same material used in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. At the rear of the porch, flanking the entrance, are a pair of 23-foot-high marble pillars symbolizing the entrance to King Solomon’s Temple. Similar pillars flank the entrance to every Masonic lodge room. In Masonic custom, the pillar on the right is topped by a celestial orb, and the one on the left, the terrestrial.



The first-floor foyer is accessed from the entrance porch. The first thing you see upon entering the building is the stunning endomosaic window. Designed and executed by Norman, the window is made of thousands of pieces of colored glass sandwiched between layers of acrylic. The window comprises three sections, each divided into 15 panels, depicting the history of Masonry in California.

COMING TOGETHER

Finally, on October 27, 1955, more than 2,500 Masons attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the temple, as Grand Master Henry C. Clausen turned over a ceremonial spadeful of earth after ritually

Kenneth Archer, was rescued after three hours.)

Fundraising for the project also proved difficult. The Grand Lodge had vowed not to borrow from the Masonic Homes endowment fund, meaning that members would be responsible for repaying all building costs. In 1954, Grand Master Frank Harwell wrote in the *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge* of the new temple’s long-delayed opening, “There is only one major unsettled question: When? The answer to that is very simple. When the Masons of California and the Hawaiian Islands provide the money. The process can be long or short. It is easily within your power to make it short.”

Under the “one day’s wages” theme, 123,890 members joined the “merit roll” of donors by the building’s opening. Some 457 lodges also received “merit

pouring corn, oil, and wine onto the ground. San Francisco mayor Elmer Robinson, a fellow Mason, declared the occasion “another great day in the history of San Francisco and the history of Masonry in California.”

Construction on the new temple was slow and frequently delayed. Strikes by the carpenters union and in the steel industry caused further slowdowns, and construction was halted on May 9, 1956, when a cave-in buried two workers, killing one. (The other,

Above: The San Francisco Symphony performs in the first concert inside the auditorium on April 19, 1958.

Left: An undated photo shows a car exiting the 500-car parking garage.

The Temple



roll” status. In 1954, those contributions totaled more than \$700,000; in 1957, fundraising topped out at \$1.7 million (about \$18 million today).

Despite the delays, construction did inch along. The cornerstone of the temple was dedicated in October 1956 and the building frame topped out in April 1957. Six months later, the marble cladding on the exterior was in place. Writing in the 1957 *Proceedings*, Grand Master L. Harold Anderson marveled at the sight of the building rounding into shape.

“Hardly a day has passed since construction was started that I have not gone to the top of Nob Hill to watch the workmen at their labors,” he wrote. “I saw it as a mighty steel frame, showing the strength and mighty sinews of California Freemasonry. Then they poured the cement that united the structure into a common mass. And finally, as you will now see it, they adorned the Temple with beauty by applying the white Vermont marble slabs that face the building.... Brethren, a part of that building is mine. And even in its unfinished state it is among my most treasured possessions, because it is not something I have bought, but something I have given. I hope every California Master Mason will be able to look upon the California Masonic Memorial Temple with the same pride and sense of ownership.”

By April 1958, the interior was at last complete. However, the temple was not formally opened until the fall Annual Communication. The official dedication took place on September 29, 1958. Grand Master Leo Anderson presided over the ceremony, which was attended by Masonic dignitaries from 33 states and 11 countries. “This is our new home,” Anderson proclaimed, “a thing of beauty, a living testimonial to the strength and vitality of our great fraternity.” Fittingly, the first Masonic event held in the new temple wasn’t a ritual performance or even lodge business, but rather a meeting to discuss charity: On August 21, 1958, more than 1,200 Bay Area lodge officers gathered in the auditorium to discuss plans for Public Schools Week events that year.

FOR ALL TIME

For nearly 65 years, the California Masonic Memorial Temple has dutifully served the needs of California’s Masons. Its income-producing components, including the parking garage, the exhibition hall, and the auditorium, have helped sustain the Grand Lodge, and revenues generated through them have supported the California Masonic Foundation. They’ve



Above: A circa 1960s trade show inside the exhibition hall.

Right: In this undated photo, the Girl Scouts of America hold their annual convention inside the auditorium.

Below: Chronicle columnist Herb Caen and actress Ruth Roman pose at the 1965 International Film Festival in the temple auditorium.



Below: Bank of America holds its corporate meeting inside the auditorium.

Bottom: One of the many auto shows hosted inside the exhibition hall.



also made the temple a central component of San Francisco’s cultural life. The Masonic auditorium has hosted thousands of concerts by the likes of Barbra Streisand, Bob Dylan, Ella Fitzgerald, Ray Charles, Frank Sinatra, and many others. In 2010, the national concert promoter Live Nation took over management of the facility, and in 2014 it upgraded the auditorium, enlarging it to a capacity of 3,300.

The exterior of the building remains nearly unchanged, although in 1996 the Grand Lodge renovated meeting spaces on the exhibition level and relocated the library and museum there, at the corner of Taylor and California streets. In 2008, the library was moved back to the mezzanine level, and the vacated space was renamed the California Room.

The most significant change to the building’s interior came in 2019, when a different portion of the exhibition hall space was remodeled to include an intimate Masonic lodge room called Freemasons’ Hall, as well as an adjoining library, lounge, dining area, and bar. (For more, see page 28.) Today, eight different Masonic groups rent the space for their monthly meetings, including some that are not affiliated with the Grand Lodge of California. Now, for the first time since 1958, Masons have a place to practice the ritual, raise fellow Masons, and meet as brothers within the home of California Freemasonry.

The opening of Freemasons’ Hall may represent the building’s most consequential physical transformation to date, but it isn’t the only way in which the temple has evolved. This year, as part of the fraternity’s latest five-year operating plan, there’s a new emphasis

on utilizing the temple to tell the story of California Freemasonry to the public. That means activating communal spaces, including the entrance porch, the endomosaic window, and the California Street exterior, with signage and digital access that allows curious passers-by and onlookers to learn more about the building’s history, its uses, and its meaning. Other programming is being developed that

will allow the fraternity to tap into its most visible—and important—asset to help usher a new generation into the centuries-old tradition.

The California Masonic Memorial Temple stands as a testimony to the foresight of its builders. Over time, the public-facing elements of the temple have allowed it to thrive even as membership in the fraternity nationwide has declined by 75

percent. Now there’s evidence that the decades-long drop in membership is bottoming out, and that interest among millennials might reverse the trend. If so, the California Masonic Memorial Temple remains firmly rooted in place, ready to serve the needs of the fraternity—and the community—for years to come.

Writing about his hopes for the yet-to-be-built temple in 1953, Ernest Bashor, whose “one day’s labor” call helped fund construction and instilled a sense of shared ownership in the structure, summed up his feelings neatly. “We are now confronted with the desire and deep determination that a real monument may be established ... one that will be useful for present-day activities, and one that will stand the ravages of time and forever be for our children and our children’s children a commanding landmark, and an inspiration to all Masons and the public at large.” ♦

The California Masonic Memorial Temple remains firmly rooted in place, ready to serve the needs of the fraternity—and the community—for years to come.



MORE CONTENT ONLINE

Learn more about the California Masonic Memorial Temple, including a time-lapse of the building’s construction, at freemason.org/cmmt



WHAT'S
LD IS

NEW AGAIN

The
Temple

Inside Freemasons' Hall, a collision of the past and future of Masonic lodges.

BY LEILANI MARIE LABONG

WHEN ARCHITECT KEVIN HACKETT was approached about creating a new lodge hall to be housed inside the California Masonic Memorial Temple in San Francisco, his design inspiration came from another age and place. In Britain and Europe, lodges for centuries met in small, cramped spaces either inside, above, or sometimes beneath neighborhood bars and taverns—a practice that lasted until the middle of the 20th century, in many cases.

It therefore seemed appropriate that the only space available for the new lodge room in San Francisco was a corner of the windowless exhibition hall directly beneath the Masonic auditorium, a thundering Live Nation music venue. “Once you choose an esoteric route in life, you end up in some really interesting spaces,” jokes Hackett, the co-founder and principal of the San Francisco design studio Síol and a member of **Logos № 871** and **Mission № 169**.

Five years later, the new Freemasons' Hall is the meeting place of no fewer than eight Masonic lodges, including Hackett's Logos № 871. And far from being some dank bar basement, the lodge room is a triumphant blend of rich midcentury aesthetics (clean lines, brass detailing, organic materials) and timeless classicism (marble columns, stepped wooden moldings). But even amid such elevated trappings, the spirit of those bygone gatherings in humble watering holes prevails. To Hackett and others, the result

The interior of the new Freemasons' Hall, inside the California Masonic Memorial Temple, is a blend of midcentury aesthetics and timeless classicism.

The Temple

Below: Members including designer Kevin Hackett (second from left) celebrate a festive board at Freemasons' Hall. Bottom: The library and lounge area outside the lodge room invite members to stay a while.



points to the next step for lodges in California: small, special, and endlessly meaningful. "When bigger lodges splinter into more intimate groups, that will be the evolution of Freemasonry," Hackett says. Here, the architect gives a tour of California's first "urban microlodge."

SOCIAL STUDY

Inherently cozy owing to its interior location in the building, Freemasons' Hall has a maximum capacity of just 50 people. Accessing the lodge hall requires passing through an adjacent lounge, library, and gathering space, well-appointed with marble columns, channel-tufted velvet sofas, and framed portraits of past grand masters. The **handsome library** is stacked with Masonic texts, and a central hearth is marked by a mounted sculpture of the Masonic handshake.



Above: The Freemasons' Hall lounge area and hearth features a mounted sculpture of shaking hands, recovered from the Grand Lodge temple that burned in the 1906 fire.

Left: Members play cards in the library.

THE BIG G

Hackett's entrée into Masonry came through the fraternity's historic connection to builders like himself. "They talk about [building] symbolically all the time," he says. His lodge design pays homage to that tradition. A **pentagon-shaped altar**, cut from Italian Carrara marble, represents the spiral creation from the golden ratio. Custom brass screens contain **concentric shapes**—a circle, triangle, and square—exemplifying oneness among the soul, spirit, and body. French oak stepped molding, also installed throughout the lodge, references the philosophy "as above, so below," and suggests the duality in engineering between tension and polarity—key in the construction of the pyramids. Even the temple's barrel-vaulted ceiling is a nod to ancient crypts like the Parisian catacombs and Rome's Mithraic temple ruins.

Below: The textural gradient of the wall recalls the transition from rough to smooth stone.



Above: Members pose in front of the eastern "dawn wall." A pentagonal altar, visible at the bottom of the photo, is cut from Italian Carrara marble.

THE DAWN WALL

The theatrically illuminated **sculpture** on the temple's east wall may bring to mind a glowing white moon but in fact reflects the rising sun. Meanwhile, the textural gradient of the marble is a nod to Masons' lifelong work perfecting the rough ashlar to polished stone. Achieving the effect required a range of tools and techniques from Los Angeles stonemason Nathan Hunt, including a hand-point chisel, bush hammer, and sandblaster.

SOUNDS OF SILENCE

The lodge room's location under one of San Francisco's major concert venues posed a challenge to the quiet and contemplative nature of Masonic rituals. Acoustical engineer Charles Salter masterfully decreased the decibels using a combination of strategies, from 24-inch-thick walls with sound-absorbing air gaps to double-layered acoustic Sheetrock. Even the full-height **tufted-leather banquettes** built along the perimeter of the temple contribute to sound-proofing. The result is that a person speaking in hushed tones can be clearly heard by others around the space, their faint echo lending a reverential air to the proceedings. "In rituals, you're repeating words that were said centuries ago and never written down," Hackett explains. "There's a lot of power in the oral tradition of the Freemasons." ✦



MASONIC ASSISTANCE

A Temple on the Hill

IN UNION CITY, THE SIMINOFF MASONIC LODGE HAS A HISTORY GOING BACK GENERATIONS. BY IAN A. STEWART

EVEN FOR A FAMILY whose connection with Masonry goes back generations, one day stands out in the Adamsons' long tenure. It was early 2008, and Larry Adamson was several months into his term as grand master of California. Together with his brother Richard, he'd traveled to the Masonic Homes campus in Union City, where their father, Doc, lived with their mother. That day, Larry Adamson would lead the installation of their dad as the new master of **Siminoff Daylight No. 850**, surrounded by family and hundreds of their closest friends, neighbors, and Masonic brothers.

"My father wasn't a real talkative guy, but that day he looked at me and said, 'Thank you for doing this,'" Larry Adamson recalls. "That was a special moment for me, and probably the most sincere moment I ever had with him."

It wasn't just the familial nature of the moment that made it special, Adamson says. It was also the setting. Before they passed away, Adamson's parents lived at the Masonic Homes for nearly a

dozen years. As a result, the Homes remain deeply important to the family—so much so that Adamson later became chairman of its board, partly out of gratitude for his parents' treatment there. There, in the Siminoff lodge room, which had hosted special Masonic events for more than 100 years, the family was able to celebrate not just a father and his sons, but generations spent in Freemasonry.

A HISTORIC HOME

Bathed in the colored light of its stained-glass windows and surrounded by Masonic antiques and relics going back to the earliest days of the fraternity, the Siminoff lodge room in Union City is one of the most important places in California Masonry—and one where that feeling of tradition is palpable.

The history of the lodge room in Union City goes back almost to the founding of the campus itself. Just four years after the first residents were admitted to the Masonic Widows and Orphans Home in Decoto, as it was originally called (using the earlier

FIFTY-SIX PANELS OF BRIGHTLY COLORED STAINED GLASS WRAP AROUND THE SIMINOFF CENTER AT THE MASONIC HOMES IN UNION CITY.

PHOTO BY MARTIN KLIMEK



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name for Union City), a wealthy Bay Area Freemason named Morris Siminoff presented a gift of \$30,000—more than \$1 million in today's dollars—to erect a Masonic temple on its grounds. Siminoff, a Russian immigrant who'd become a successful textile manufacturer in the Bay Area, was a member of **Fidelity № 120** in San Francisco as well as belonging to each of the chapters of the Scottish Rite. Not much else is known about Siminoff, although at one point he is recorded as having donated a shipment of coats and cloaks for the young orphans who originally lived at the Decoto Home. Tragically, he died suddenly in 1907, at the age of 44, likely a result of injuries suffered falling off a horse during a parade of the Knights Templar in San Francisco.

Siminoff's gift, made alongside his wife, Emma, paid for the construction of a "splendid temple" (as it was described by grand master at the time) of brick and stone. The temple contained the lodge room, an assembly hall, and 16 new rooms for elderly residents. The addition of those rooms allowed the home to convert a former dormitory into its first widows' quarters. (At the time, women and men were housed separately.) The donation also funded the installation of a 350-pipe, electric-powered organ.

The cornerstone for Siminoff Temple was laid on April 22, 1903; six months later, the building was formally dedicated by Grand Master Orrin S. Henderson. More than 3,000 Masons made the trip to the East Bay hills to witness the event. On November 14, **Eucalyptus № 243** of Hayward conferred the first Masonic degree inside the temple; in subsequent months, **Sequoia № 349** of Oakland and **Alameda № 167** of Centerville (now part of Fremont) would use it for third-degree conferrals.

Yet for more than 100 years, no lodge permanently called the temple home. That wasn't the original plan: In the *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge* in 1903, Grand Master Henderson "endorsed and advocated for the many advantages, too numerous to mention, that are to be derived" by forming a lodge at the home. He even went so far as to suggest a name: Preston Lodge, in honor of Past Grand Master Edwin Preston (1895), who had died earlier that year.

"It's really an experience. It's an experience to go and see the history that's there."



EXTERIOR VIEW OF THE ORIGINAL, CIRCA-1903 SIMINOFF TEMPLE IN UNION CITY. THE TEMPLE WAS SHUTTERED IN 1976 AND REBUILT AS THE SIMINOFF CENTER IN 1989.

HENRY W. COIL
LIBRARY AND
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It's unclear why that lodge never came into being, but for more than a century, Siminoff Temple remained a sort of Masonic home away from home, with nearby lodges using it to host special events or degree conferrals, but no group meeting regularly there. By 1976, the temple had fallen into disrepair and was shuttered by state officials for failing to meet earthquake-safety standards.

A NEW LODGE IS BORN

For the next decade, the campus was without a Masonic lodge entirely, culminating in the demolition of the original temple in 1986. That same year, though, an ambitious new construction plan for the Masonic Homes brought the old temple back to life—sort of. As part of a \$16 million development that included the construction of the 120-bed skilled-nursing facility named for benefactor Hugo Lorber, plans included building a new Masonic lodge room, to be housed alongside the campus chapel. Ground was broken on the project in 1987, and the new Siminoff Center, comprising the lodge room, foyer, and chapel, was dedicated by grand lodge officers on May 7, 1989.

The new facility was built from scratch, but designers went to lengths to include elements of the original Siminoff Temple in its design. Bricks from the 1903 temple were salvaged to construct the face of the new building, while the original altar was repurposed and reconditioned. Even the elaborate gas-powered chandelier that had once hung in the temple's entryway was refurbished and made electric. It now hangs above the lodge room.

However, the design flourish that commands the most attention is the expansive set of stained-glass windows. Each of the 56 panels, measuring 4 by 4.5 feet, was fabricated by Judson Studios, the oldest family-run stained-glass maker in the country, and depict Masonic symbols including the square,

plumb, and anchor. In addition to being so near the Masonic Homes' chapel room, the colored windows lend the lodge room a special feeling of reverence.

Despite having a brand-new space available, it wasn't until 2006 that the first seeds of a permanent lodge finally began to flower. That year, a degree team comprised of Masonic Homes residents began meeting and practicing on campus. The team performed for several lodges in the Bay Area, "contributing where we could and sharing our expertise," according to Bobby Joe McCain, one of the original members of the group.

Recognizing an opportunity to make real a dream that at that point had been 103 years in the making, the Grand Lodge in 2006 issued a dispensation to Siminoff Daylight U.D., and on October 6, 2007, the lodge received its formal charter—the day before ground was broken at the neighboring Acacia Creek Retirement Community.

In the 15 years since, the lodge has grown from an initial group of 67 to a lodge of 105 members today, including master Joseph Pritchard, who is also the chief operating officer of the Masonic Homes. The lodge isn't just for residents, either: Just over 40 percent of the members now live off campus. And another dozen members are residents of Acacia Creek who had not previously been Masons—meaning the lodge has more than a few 50-year veterans, as well as several newbies. For many of those members, it's the lodge building itself that inspired their initial curiosity about Freemasonry. Says McCain, "I think we have a very impressive-looking lodge room. It's quite a draw."

McCain points for emphasis to the pair of hand-painted murals by John Dahle Jr., a member of the lodge and Masonic Homes resident who has worked for years as a commercial artist. The murals on the north and south walls depict scenes from the building of King Solomon's temple and feature old west typography, echoing the large mural he painted several years ago in his home lodge, **Nevada № 13**. "They're gorgeous," McCain says of the twin artworks. "They both incorporate a lot of the teachings of Freemasonry. They're more than just a piece of artwork in the building."

To Adamson, who as a member of the Masonic Homes board visits the Siminoff lodge often, the space still holds a special place in his heart. "It's a beautiful complex," he says. "But it's not just that. It's really an experience. It's an experience to go and see the history that's there." ♦



DONOR PROFILE

Mark Pressey

MEMBER SINCE 1993

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California Freemason: As chairman of the California Masonic Memorial Temple board, what do you find especially meaningful about the building?

Mark Pressey: Besides being a wonderful building that supports the charitable efforts of the California Masonic Foundation, I love how it also serves as a war memorial. My father served in WWII, and his father became a Mason around the time the CMMT was being built. It was a great honor for him to make a donation and see it get constructed. Whenever I enter the Grand Lodge, I can feel what my grandfather felt then, and it's something I'll never forget.

CFM: What's your favorite thing about the CMMT?

MP: Walking into any lodge, there's this great energy where everyone greets you and you all catch

up. That energy is multiplied a hundredfold when I go to Annual Communication. The building really is a shared experience and a shared history for all of us in the fraternity.

CFM: What can other lodges learn from the CMMT about using their halls to tell the story of Freemasonry to the public?

MP: We hope people see the CMMT and Freemasons' Hall as an example of how to renovate their own lodge space to make them relevant for the next generation. We're adding QR codes around the building, which will link visitors to information about the building as well as about the history of California Freemasonry. We hope this gives lodges some ideas to take home and pursue in their communities.

CFM: Any other favorite memories of the building?

MP: When I was a young parent, I remember pushing my son in a stroller up Taylor Street, the steep hill that leads to the building. My thighs were burning, but I really wanted him to experience coming into Grand Lodge there. ✦ —JUSTIN JAPITANA

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PHOTOGRAPH BY
JR SHEETZ



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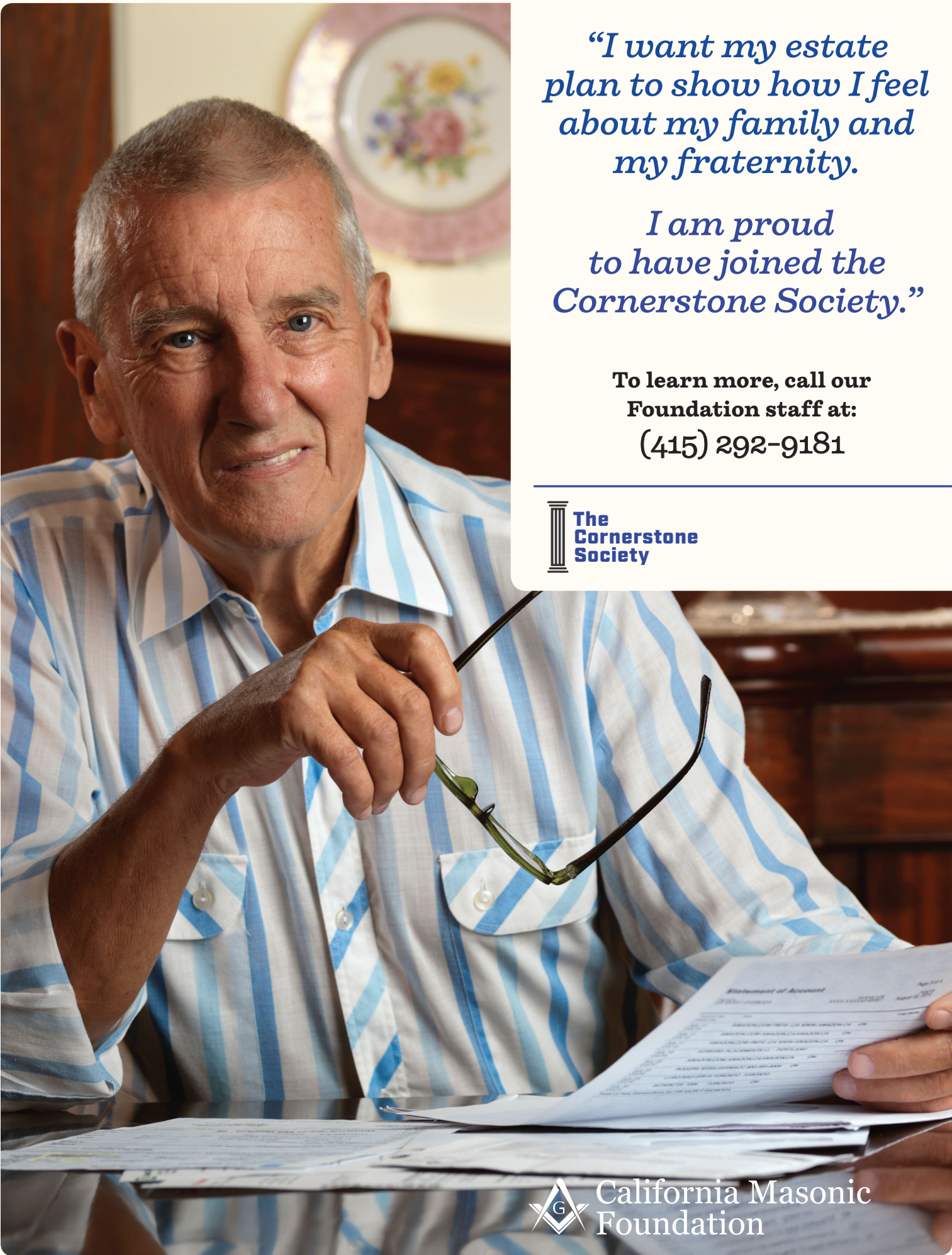
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COVER ILLUSTRATION
BY FAYE PASSOW
RIGHT: PHOTO BY
MATTHEW REAMER



INCOMING AND OUTGOING MASTERS JOHNNY RAY WELLS (LEFT) AND JAMES MORGAN INSIDE THE RUSTIC LODGE ROOM OF BIG BEAR № 617

Small Town Charms

From **Ferndale** (population 1,396) to **Big Bear** (5,068), California's small-town lodges have their own unique character—and offer a model for Masonic involvement in the community.

The Wig Party

CUSTOM AND TRADITION are important concepts to Masonic lodges around the world. At Nevada No. 13 in Nevada City, that's never more in evidence than during the town's annual Constitution Day Parade, when a cohort of the local lodge dons tricorne hats, powdered wigs, breeches, and hose as part of the yearly re-enactment of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. "Oh, it's a big deal," says lodge master Lee Wilbourne. "It gets us a lot of exposure, and people around here definitely look forward to it." —*Ian A. Stewart*

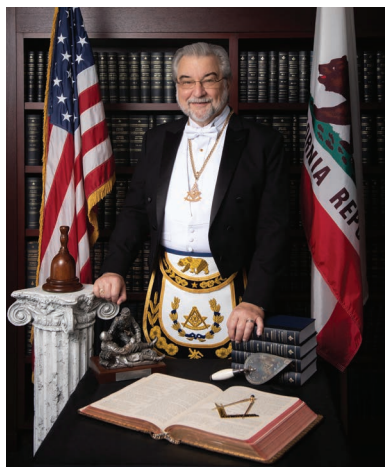


MEMBERS OF NEVADA No. 13 PREPARE FOR THE CEREMONIAL SIGNING OF THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE. FROM LEFT: PAST GRAND MASTER JOHN TRAUNER, DENNIS LEWIS, GREGG NOVOTNY, JOHN CARLISLE IV, TIM HORNER, LEE WILBOURNE, BERYL ROBINSON, BRIAN MARTIN, TIM BROWN, JIM FLAHERTY, AND BRIAN BERG.

PHOTO BY CHRIS KAUFMAN

CIVIC CENTERS

*In small towns, lodges show what
Masonry in action looks like.*



CALIFORNIA IS FAMOUS for many things. Hollywood, the Golden Gate Bridge, Silicon Valley, beaches, mountains, tacos, avocados. But it's also a state made up of hundreds, even thousands, of small towns, each of which is distinctive and special. Get away from the big cities, and you'll experience a very different lifestyle—one that can be quite seductive.

As a grand lodge officer, and now as grand master, I've had an

opportunity to visit many of our small-town lodges. Just last month, I attended a degree ceremony at **Visalia No. 128**, a historic lodge that exudes that small-town feel. (For more, see page 22.) People in places like these seem to really know one another—and that gives them extra incentive to help. Masonic lodges in places like that find themselves in a position to truly make a difference in the lives of their neighbors—and they revel in that opportunity.

Our small-town lodges may not have enormous memberships, but they do offer a blueprint for the way a small group can make a big impact on its immediate community—something we all strive for as Masons. A few years ago, the Camp Fire destroyed the town of Paradise. One of the only structures that remained standing was the local Masonic temple. That wasn't an accident. Firefighters rallied around the hall to make their stand, in part because they understood that the lodge was both an important symbolic icon to the town, and also a real community asset. Today, the temple remains integral to the town's recovery and stands as a testament to the community that saved it (for more, see page 26.)

Masonic lodges in towns like Paradise can't hide or make themselves obscure. They're obligated to be of service to those around them. That's something every California Mason can learn from. By simply being present and making ourselves of service to others, our lodges can provide relief, improve their communities, and contribute to the well-being of their town. And isn't that the essence of Masonry in action?

Randall L. Brill

Randall L. Brill

Grand Master of Masons in California

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CALIFORNIA FREEMASON

ISSUE 01 • VOLUME 71 • WINTER 2022-23

USPS #083-940 is published quarterly by the Masons of California, 1111 California Street, San Francisco, CA 94108-2284. Periodicals Postage Paid at San Francisco, CA and at additional mailing offices.

Postmaster: Send address changes to California Freemason, 1111 California Street, San Francisco, CA 94108-2284.

Publication dates are the first day of March, June, September, and December.

Subscriptions: *California Freemason* is mailed to every member of this Masonic jurisdiction without additional charge. Others are invited to subscribe for \$12 a year or \$15 outside the United States.

Permission to reprint: Permission to reprint original articles in *California Freemason* is granted to all recognized Masonic publications with credit to the author and this publication.

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LANDMARKS

The Invisible Architect

**IN LOS ANGELES, A SHUTTERED ICON
REMAINS A TESTAMENT TO THE
ARTISTIC VISION OF ITS CREATOR.**

BY AVRIL ANGEVINE

THERE ARE MANY Masonic temples around the world that, in and of themselves, are works of art, from Zedekiah's Cave in Israel to St. Peter's Spiritual Temple—also known as the Voodoo Village—in Memphis. But only one has hosted artworks by the likes of Cindy Sherman, Takashi Murakami, and Glenn Ligon. That honor goes to the former Scottish Rite temple on Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles—one of the most distinctive and artistically important Masonic landmarks in the country. 📍 Built in 1961, the temple has commanded significant attention from the art world since the Scottish Rite moved out in 1994. Most recently, Paul and Maurice Marciano, founders of the Guess jeans empire, transformed the complex into the Marciano Art Foundation, a privately-owned museum housing their 1,500-work contemporary art collection. Following a splashy opening in 2017, the museum abruptly closed in 2019.

The international art dealer Larry Gagosian recently set up shop in the space.

Despite that spotlight, there's one artist associated

A MURAL ON THE BUILDING'S SOUTH SIDE DEPICTS TEMPLE BUILDERS THROUGH HISTORY.

PHOTO BY
MATHEW SCOTT



with the building who has largely been overlooked: Millard Sheets, the real-life Renaissance man who designed it and executed much of its artwork.

Though relatively few people know Sheets's name today, many know his work. A prolific painter, muralist, and mosaicist of the early 1930s, Sheets was also an important—though never licensed—architectural designer. He is credited with more than 100 buildings, including 42 Home Savings Banks in California, many of which can still be seen. Bank founder Howard Ahmanson offered him the commission in 1953 with this challenge: “I want buildings that will be exciting 75 years from now.” For the Hollywood branch at Sunset and Vine, Sheets combined a 500-name mosaic Roll of Stars, an elaborate stained-glass window depicting the Marx Brothers and Keystone Kops, and a mural honoring the site as the filming location of the of the 1914 film *The Squaw Man*, the first Hollywood movie.

Possibly Sheets's most famous mosaic is the University of



“It’s one of the most beautiful Scottish Rite temples that ever existed.”

Notre Dame’s *Touchdown Jesus*, a 324-panel piece on the school library’s facade depicting Jesus with upraised arms above a collection of Christian saints, thinkers, and writers, all visible from the football stadium.

ABOVE: THE SCOTTISH RITE TEMPLE ON WILSHIRE BOULEVARD IN L.A., DESIGNED BY MILLARD SHEETS AND COMPLETED IN 1961.

That artistic versatility seems to have been an innate gift. Born in Pomona in 1907, Sheets was something of a prodigy. He began teaching art at the Chouinard Art Institute (now CalArts) even before he graduated. Prizes and scholarships enabled him to travel to Europe, South America, and Central America. In the 1930s, his oil paintings and watercolors helped define the California Regionalist style, combining a slightly abstract approach with a muted palette in subtle, evocative landscape scenes. Sheets completed a controversial, WPA-sponsored mural series called *The Negro’s Contribution in the Social and Cultural Development of America* for the Department of the Interior building in Washington, D.C., and worked with David Siquieros, one of Mexico’s greatest contemporary muralists, on a now-covered mural at Chouinard. He even illustrated a 1939 *Fortune* article on migrant workers written by John Steinbeck.

As an architectural designer, Sheets did three projects for the



ABOVE: MILLARD OWENS SHEETS, ARTIST, ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNER, AND PROFESSOR, IN 1947.

Masons, beginning with the L.A. Scottish Rite temple, which he called “one of the most exciting projects I ever had anything to do with.” Though Sheets wasn’t a Mason himself, Ellsworth Meyer, then the head of the L.A. Scottish Rite and a Superior Court justice, nevertheless approached him directly about working on the design for a massive new temple for the order. A special committee of Scottish Rite Masons also approached nine other architectural firms about the commission, all of which included fellow Masons as principals, but ended up selecting Sheets to design the \$4.5 million project.

The 110,000-square-foot marble and travertine building remains an endless source of fascination for passersby. On the exterior, eight 14-foot-high sculptures of important Masons, real and mythic, loom over the site, and a 70-foot-tall mosaic tells the story of temple building throughout time. Inside, the marble-clad interior once held a mosaic history of Masonry in California, and it still boasts

terrazzo floors, a stained-glass window featuring the double-headed eagle, as well as two decorative, non-Masonic murals. According to art historian Susan Aberth, “It’s one of the most beautiful Scottish Rite temples that ever existed.”

As a non-Mason, Sheets had much to learn about Masonic symbolism. As he did, he grew increasingly intrigued by the project. “I do feel that [Masonry is] a tremendous attempt toward the freedom of man,” he said in a 1970 oral history. “They wanted to depict this in every form.”

That can be seen most stunningly in the four-story-tall mosaic on the east of the building. The image depicts a series of temple-builders, beginning with King Solomon. Moving up the image, one encounters crusaders at Acre, in Jerusalem; a worker at the gothic Rheims Cathedral; the Italian general Guiseppe Garibaldi; and King Edward VII outside Buckingham Palace. At the top is the first grand master of California, Jonathan Drake Stevenson, being installed in Sacramento.

Sheets was energized by the size of the commission—four floors and a basement, including a huge auditorium, 1,500-seat dining room, and a library—and felt that his designs needed to reflect the scale of the organization. The temple opened its doors to 12,000 members in 1961, including **Los Angeles No. 42**, and ever since, has stood as a testament to both the imagination of Sheets and to the generations of Masons who’d built the fraternity. They are gone, but traces of their grand ambitions remain. ♦

POP CULTURE

A TYLER IS A DOORKEEPER AT THE SECRET MEETINGS OF THIS FRATERNAL ORGANIZATION FOUNDED BY STONEWORKERS

Clued In

FREEMASONRY HAS LONG enjoyed a reputation for being shrouded in mystery. But when it comes to a certain long-running trivia gameshow, it’s more like an old familiar standby. In fact, according to the website *Jeopardy!* Archives, which tracks clues and responses covering the 38-year history of *Jeopardy!*, the terms *Mason*, *Masonic*, or *Freemason* have been referenced at least 70 times on the show. Among the most common clues are “Mozart’s *Magic Flute*,” “the Shriners,” and “the Anti-Masonic Party” (the early 19th century third political party).

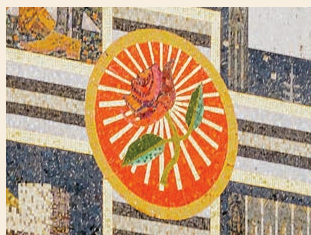
Here’s a bit more Masonic *Jeopardy!* trivia: On at least three occasions, entire categories were devoted to Masonic themes, and in April 2015, contestant Tom Imler wore a Masonic lapel pin during the game and was introduced as a member of a lodge in North Carolina.

Curiously, however, according to the online archives, only once has Masonry been the answer to Final Jeopardy. Now that’s a mystery.

—Ian A. Stewart

A MASONIC PORTFOLIO

A peek into Millard Sheets’ fraternal commissions



LOS ANGELES SCOTTISH RITE TEMPLE (1961)
4357 WILSHIRE BLVD.

Designed structure and executed interior and exterior murals.



SAN FRANCISCO SCOTTISH RITE TEMPLE (1963)
2850 19TH AVE.

Designed interior and exterior murals and double-eagle frieze.



CALIFORNIA MASONIC MEMORIAL TEMPLE (1971)
1111 CALIFORNIA ST., SAN FRANCISCO

Directed a refurbishment of the interior auditorium.



MEMBER PROFILE

Shinji Hara

Member
since 2018
Anaheim
No 207
Airbrush
Artist

SHINJI HARA ISN'T AFRAID to follow his curiosity, even when it takes him in unexpected directions. So it was that, just a few years after arriving in Southern California from Gifu, Japan, he found himself visiting **Anaheim No 207**, despite knowing little about Masonic lodges and speaking very little English. The same spirit of inquiry also led him to his life's work. Hara, 52, is one of the most celebrated airbrush artists in Southern California, where his low-rider designs have won numerous awards. *California Freemason* spoke with Hara (through interpreter Masato Francis Taguchi, of **Culver City-Foshay No 467**) about his twin passions. —IAN A. STEWART



WATCH HIM WORK!

See a video profile online at
californiafreemason.org/shinji

California Freemason: The low-rider style of your artwork is strongly associated with Chicano culture in California. How did you get immersed in that world?
Shinji Hara: About 30 years ago, my childhood friend got a low-rider in Japan. I've always liked the sound of old American V8 engines, and I was fascinated by

lowriders and airbrush murals. After that, I got a 1970 Lincoln MK-3 and eventually my hobby developed into a job. In order to earn a living as a painter, I needed to become familiar with Chicano art and learn about the Maya and Aztec civilizations, mythology, and their characters. I feel like this is where my thirst for knowledge began.

CFM: How did you get interested in the fraternity?

SH: Seven years ago, a customer asked me to paint a mural based on the Sistine Chapel on a 1964 Chevrolet. In researching other religious paintings, I noticed many hidden symbols. This sparked my interest in symbolism and sacred geometry, and I began researching Freemasonry.

CFM: What was it like to memorize the degree work in English, your second language?

SH: When I got my degree, English was hardly a second language! Still, I was intrigued by the art and culture. One day, my brother Francis reached out to me when he heard I needed help in order to move forward with the degrees. I will never forget that. I am truly grateful for my new friends and brothers. I guess you could say Freemasonry is now my native language.

CFM: Have you been able to bring your talents to your lodge?

SH: Two years ago, I designed a medal for our lodge's 150th anniversary. Currently, I am drawing illustrations for T-shirts and pins. My power is by no means strong, but if I have the opportunity, I would like to continue to contribute to the lodge and my brothers with these kinds of design. ✨

FRATERNALISM

Freemasonry's Family Tree

MASONIC LODGES WERE BORN OUT OF OPERATIVE TRADE GUILDS. THEY WEREN'T THE ONLY ONES.

IN EUROPE TODAY, there exists a secretive and ancient brotherhood of tradesmen whose progression from apprentice to master is one of elaborate rituals, and shrouded in mystery. And then there are the Freemasons.

Masonry is hardly the only trade guild to evolve into the “speculative”—as opposed to “operative”—form. Even today, a wide constellation of similar groups remain active, sometimes with as little as a few dozen members. Think of these as Freemasonry's distant cousins, or branches on the same fraternal family tree. Each has its own initiation rituals and degrees of membership, and in that way shares DNA with our own lodges. Here, a few of the most notable. —DAVID HARRISON

LES COMPAGNONS DU DEVOIR (FRANCE)

These fraternal tradesmen include woodworkers, stoneworkers, leatherworkers, and textile workers, each with its own patron saint, feast day, and ritual customs. Collectively, there are an estimated 12,000 members today. Apprentices can spend six months in a particular town mastering their craft, only to move on to another to study under a new master. Most famously, members of the woodworking *compagnon* produce highly detailed miniature models of curved staircases. These miniatures are then paraded through town by their makers, their beauty serving as a showcase of skill and symbolizing the journey from apprentice to master.

THE LONDON LIVERY COMPANIES (ENGLAND)

London's version of a brotherhood of workers' unions, the livery companies include 110 groups—including the Worshipful Company of Mercers, the Worshipful Company of Grocers, and the Merchant Taylors' Company—each of which involves initiatory rituals.

MINIATURE MODEL WINDING STAIRCASES ARE THE SIGNATURE OF THE FRENCH WOODWORKERS' COMPAGNON, A FRATERNAL COUSIN TO FREEMASONRY.

Many of the oldest livery companies still own ornate meeting halls and continue to govern certain aspects of regulation, wages, and credentialing within their field.

Like Freemasonry, however, today their operative roles often take a back seat in public life to charity and support for education.

THE OPERATIVES (WORLDWIDE)

One of the many “side orders” of Freemasonry is the Worshipful Society of Free Masons, Rough Masons, Wallers, Slaters, Paviers, Plaisterers, and Bricklayers—also known as the Operatives. The order is open by invitation to Master Masons, Mark Master Masons, and Royal Arch Companions and is “dedicated to the preservation of the history and workings of operative guild masonry.” The Operatives have a seven-degree structure and celebrate what they describe as an operative form of Masonry, according to their modern founder, Clement Edwin Stretton (1850-1915). ✨

FRATERNITY

Gen Z Is in Charge Now

MORE AND MORE, 20-SOMETHINGS ARE ENTERING THE LEADERSHIP LINE.

DUANE SCOTT practically grew up in the **Mountain View De Anza № 194** lodge room. His father, Glenn Scott, served as lodge master four different years, and as a result, Duane spent countless hours among its members, many of whom came to feel like extended family. He recalls being picked up from school and waiting in the clubhouse while his father went upstairs for his stated meetings. “In some ways, I think the guys still see me like that—15 years old, doing my math homework around the big table downstairs,” Scott says. “They have stories of me as a toddler running around on the floor.”

It must have been a strange scene, then, when the younger Scott was installed last January as lodge master. “These guys are like uncles to me,” he says. “But they’re also my brothers.”

At 24 years old, Scott is among the state’s youngest lodge masters. He’s also a harbinger of a larger change, as the fraternity has seen a significant injection of youth in its local leadership ranks, which have historically tended toward older members. In all, there were some 65 lodge masters in California in 2021-22

under the age of 40. Eight were in their twenties.

It isn’t known whether those numbers are a historical anomaly. But at least anecdotally, it’s become more common to see millennial and even Gen Z Masons don the ceremonial top hat, says Jordan Yelinek, the assistant grand secretary and head of the Membership Services department at the Grand Lodge.

That would seem to track with a larger demographic shift happening in California Masonry. The average age of members, after decades of growing older due to the swell of members who joined in the middle of the 20th century, has been falling for years. Currently, the average of prospects and Entered Apprentices is 36 and 45, respectively.

Unsurprising, then, that the officer line is also trending younger.

By and large it’s been an amicable shift, say some of the current cadre of twentysomething masters, even if the experience of presiding over a roomful of baby boomers is an unfamiliar one. “It’s an interesting dynamic to be working with guys who were master before I was even born,” says T.J. Elliott, 26, master of **Fellowship № 668**, just east of San Bernardino. “With some members, I’m like half or even a third their age.”

What younger lodge officers say they bring to the east is a fresh perspective. “A lot of the older leadership tends to be inundated with how things have been done in the past. I feel like I don’t have that burden,” Scott says.

The relationship cuts both

ways. Where young leaders are able to provide energy and a new perspective, they also gain confidence and support from the stability of longtime members. “The fact that the members put their trust in me—I’m still trying to internalize the love and respect they’ve shown me,” Scott says.

In the case of **Home № 721**, the idea of a young master is old hat. Two years ago, Artin Aladadyan was elected lodge master at age 26. The following year, his brother, Andre, then 30, took over. And this past year, 28-year-old Peter Vogelsang took the reigns for the group. “I think the older membership wants to see younger guys coming into the line,” Vogelsang says. “They want to ensure a future for the fraternity. It assures them there’s going to be a next generation of Home Lodge.”

As for what changes the ascendant leaders bring to their groups, there’s no single answer. Improving their lodges’ reputation with the public is a common refrain, as is a renewed focus on the ritual. Vogelsang’s Home

№ 721 is one of several in the “traditional observance” style that emphasizes an elevated lodge experience, right down to wearing tuxedos for lodge dinners. “Oftentimes, I’ve found that the younger guys are into the more formal aspects of Masonry,” he says. “The older guys want to hang out, have social events, kind of goof around together.”

If there’s one thread that unites the lodges being skippered by youngsters, it’s

technology. Whether it’s putting more effort into their Instagram presence or meeting over Zoom, these Gen Z leaders are certainly digital natives. Vogelsang, for instance, implemented a Slack channel that members and prospects can use to chat and ask questions. “It’s a great way to keep everyone in the loop,” he says.

And as for having the lodge embrace that quintessentially Gen Z medium, Tik-Tok? Scott chuckles at the thought, before adding, “We’ve talked about it.” —IAS



PHILANTHROPY

A Show of Strength

MORE THAN 250 California Masons, school administrators, parents, and students were on hand at Chollas-Mead Elementary School in San Diego this fall for one of the fraternity’s largest and most successful Public Schools Months celebrations ever. Organized by members of the San Diego-region Public Education Advisory Committee, the event was meant to celebrate the success of the district’s Raising A Reader literacy program and its larger partnership with the California Masonic Foundation. The visit included a tour of classrooms where Raising A Reader’s program has been implemented and ended with a check presentation to Principal Kristi Hunter-Clark.



SMALL TOWN MASONRY

By Ian A. Stewart
& Tony Gilbert

History, tradition, and community loom large in California's small-town lodges.

TEXAS № 46
SAN JUAN BAUTISTA

There's a parade

coming through town. It might be Independence Day, or Christmas, or Memorial Day, or something much more niche. In **North Bloomfield**, in the Sierra foothills, the tiny burg hosts an annual Humbug Day parade that boasts of being the shortest procession in the world. In **Gridley**, near Chico, it's a firefighter-themed Red Suspenders Days festival. Other towns have their own traditions. In just about every case, though, you'll find evidence of the local Masonic lodge.

There may be no surer sign of small-town life than the big parade. Which is why it's no surprise that, up and down the state, California Masons make a point of flying their colors in these processions. In places like **Penryn** (population 878), **Shasta** (1,639), and **Taft** (8,651), Masonic lodges enjoy an esteemed role in civic life and retain an important connection to local history. "In these towns, the lodge has always been part of the fabric of the community," says Deputy Grand Master Sean Metroka, a member of several Sierra foothill lodges.

That makes the experience for small-town Masons unique. While the the degrees, lessons, and philosophy of Freemasonry are unchanged, the focus of lodge life could hardly be more different than in Los Angeles or the Bay Area. "We don't have the same number of people to draw from, so we've got to really promote the lodge to get our name out there," says Lee Wilbourne, master of **Nevada № 13 in Nevada City** (population 3,114). "Being visible in the community, that's our face. That's who we are."

It cuts both ways. While financial challenges and member-recruitment problems are constant in small towns, those same lodges are often in a stronger position to make an impact in their communities.

That may be as simple as lodge members volunteering at a clothing drive or lending their hall for a school fundraiser. Or manning the grill at a high school football game or handing out a scholarship to a local student. Kevin Herrick, the assistant lodge secretary at **Texas № 46**, in San Juan Bautista, puts it plainly. "Our purpose as a lodge is to be known as a charitable contributor to the town. The idea of improving yourself, that part comes on its own—almost as a side effect."

That's an important lesson, and one that lodges everywhere would do well to heed. Even if no one throws them a parade. ♦

"In these towns, the lodge has always been part of the fabric of the community."

PHOTO BY WINNI WINTERMEYER

Downtown Ferndale, on the rugged North Coast, is home to one of the most picturesque downtowns anywhere in the state—at the end of which is the Masonic lodge hall, built in 1891.

Bottom right: Revelers pack into town for the annual Independence Day parade, which the lodge features prominently in.

FERNDALE NO 193

Ferndale No 193



Main Street Appeal

WALK TO THE SOUTH end of cozy Main Street in Ferndale, with its historically preserved taverns, inns, and Victorian storefronts, and you're sure to run into the handsome Masonic lodge. That's what the tourists all seem to do.

"People come down Main Street and end up standing in front of the lodge," says past master Lee Astorino. For years, Astorino worked in a picture-framing shop just a block away. Whenever out-of-towners asked about the majestic-looking building down the street, he'd grab his keys and give them an impromptu tour. "I'm happy to show the lodge off, because I love it."

The Ferndale lodge may seem too picturesque—too charming—to be true. Built in 1891 by lodge member Ira Russ, the hall is an example of the 19th-century Eastlake-Stick architectural style. The building survived earthquakes a century apart, in 1906 and 1992, and today remains the meeting place of the local Masons, plus chapters of the York Rite, Eastern Star, and all three Masonic youth orders. It's also part of the Ferndale Main Street Historical District, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. But members say there's more to it than venerable antiquity. "There's a real camaraderie here. Everybody just gets along," says past master and current lodge secretary James Grinsell. "Every Monday, whether we're practicing or not, we go up there and have coffee."

Astorino concurs. "We're a friendly group," he says. "I think we're a great bunch of guys. I'm a little prejudiced on that, but when I was a kid, my dad had a lodge, and I always wanted a group of friends like he had. I found it here."

Ferndale No 193 fits neatly into its bucolic surroundings. The lodge fields the biggest float in the town's annual Independence Day parade, and it hosts an annual cleanup day at the nearby Ferndale Cemetery, where many of the headstones date back to the 1860s. Every year, the lodge also sponsors an essay-writing contest with local schools and gives out a pair of college scholarships.

That sense of tight-knit community is especially important to Astorino. In the wake of his wife's death, he says, his fellow Masons rallied around to support him. "Without the Masonic family, I couldn't have made it through," he says. "Anything I needed, almost before I'd even asked, it was there that day. That's the type of lodge we have. You have a need, they're there." ♦



COURTESY OF VISIT FERNDALE



INDIAN WELLS VALLEY No 684

Center: Lodge master Steve Goad meets with fellow lodge members at Indian Wells Valley No 684.

Right: The Parade of 1,000 Flags is a yearly highlight in the town of Ridgecrest.



Indian Wells Valley No 684

Signs of Life



INDIAN WELLS LODGE No 684, in Ridgecrest, is situated amid wildly contrasting terrains. It's within an hour of both the highest and lowest points in California: Mt. Whitney to the north and the Badwater Basin to the east. To the west are the snowy slopes of the Sierra Nevadas. The serenity of the scene is occasionally pierced by the booming sound of fighter jets above, on their way to or from the nearby China Lake flight-testing facility. Many of the lodge's members

are veterans, civilian support technicians, or active-duty servicemen from the Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake—a base larger than the state of Rhode Island.

Current lodge master Steve Goad first came to China Lake as a Navy test pilot. Keenly aware of the community's connection to the military, he says, the lodge has strong ties with veterans groups, including the VFW and American Legion. It actively supports local Memorial Day and Veterans Day events, which are a mainstay in the community.

Goad views the lodge as a pillar for the community, with a key role to play in keeping civic life vibrant. The lodge sponsors a float in the city's annual Parade of 1,000 Flags, and members including Goad have



even volunteered to lead tours of the nearby Coso petroglyph district, a canyon range that includes more than 100,000 Native rock paintings dating back some 3,000 years. (Goad says he's arranged tours of the range for visiting Masonic dignitaries.) Since 2016, the Ridgecrest Petroglyph Festival has become one of the largest draws for the town, with some 20,000 visitors touring the grounds and listening to Native American music and performances.

Jeremy Carroll, the lodge secretary, grew up in the area and recalls seeing the Masonic square and compass

on cornerstones around town. That brought him to the low-slung Indian Wells Valley Masonic Lodge. "I basically researched for a few years and then finally petitioned

because I liked what I saw," Carroll says. "It was only after I joined that I found out I've had Masons in my family for generations."

Goad, for his part, is cognizant of the competition for attention that Masonry faces today, and he pays particular attention to cultivating Masonic education and enrichment through quality ritual work and tiled discussions. "Some, but not all, of our members are seeking that connection with esoteric ideas," he says. "I'm encouraged when I see that." ✦



Then-Grand Master of California Jeff Wilkins, his wife, Liz, and current Deputy Grand Master Sean Metroka led the way during September's Constitution Day parade in Nevada City. Nevada № 13 has sponsored the annual event since the late 1960s.

Nevada № 13



Testing their Constitution

THERE'S NO MISSING the members of Nevada № 13. They're the ones in the powdered wigs and tricorn hats. At least they are one weekend a year, when one of the most anticipated events in the quaint foothills town of Nevada City occurs.

Every year since 1967, members of Nevada № 13 have donned their ceremonial 1770s garb to take part in a historical reenactment of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, a highlight of Nevada City's annual Constitution Day parade. Billed as the largest such parade in the West, it was first organized by lodge member Col. Bill H. Lambert. Today, a prize in his name is given in recognition of outstanding contributions to the community.

Since Lambert's time, the parade has grown to include a rubber-duck race down Deer Creek, organized by the Rotary Club; a procession of marching presidents and first ladies cosplayers; a Revolutionary War reenactment; and a concert. Today it's among the scenic town's most popular events of the year, with visitors numbering in the thousands. Nevada № 13 continues

to underwrite the festivities. The parade director is typically a past master of the lodge, and the Grand Master of California is almost always honored as its grand marshal.

"It's a big deal," says Lee Wilbourne, current master of the lodge. "It gets us a lot of exposure, and we open up the lodge all weekend so anyone who wants to come over and have breakfast can come in. We're all very tight with people in town."

While the parade is a highlight of the lodge calendar, it isn't the lodge's entire *raison d'être*. Indeed, the lodge has distinguished itself in recent years as one of the most charitable in the state. In 2018, it pledged \$370,000 to the California Masonic Foundation's Let's Write the Future campaign. And its philanthropy committee has directed more than \$40,000 to local nonprofits in recent years. Says Wilbourne, "That's how we get ourselves out there. In addition to being a good thing to do, it helps our profile. It shows we're real human beings. Otherwise, as Masons, we tend to be crappy at promoting ourselves."

Other than the costumes, of course. ♦



Scenic Big Bear Lake is marked by the namesake reservoir. At right, lodge members gather for a degree ceremony inside the rustic lodge hall.



Big Bear No 617



The Destination Lodge

JAMES MORGAN DESCRIBES his home lodge, **Big Bear No 617**, as a “destination lodge,” and with good reason. A stunning lakeside resort town 7,000 feet above sea level in the San Bernardino National Forest, Big Bear is known for its idyllic mountain landscapes and world-class skiing.

Unsurprising, then, that the local lodge should play frequent host to out-of-towners. In fact, the lodge is perhaps the state’s most-called-upon spot for lodges looking to confer a degree in a special setting. “We’re way up

“We’re different from your usual city lodges.”

in the mountains, and we’re different from your usual city lodges,” Morgan says. The lodge embodies its mountain surroundings to a tee, especially with its interior clad in rustic knotty pine. Tables are held up by tree-trunk legs, and on one wall a giant bearskin is stretched out beside a Masonic square-and-compass set inside deer antlers.

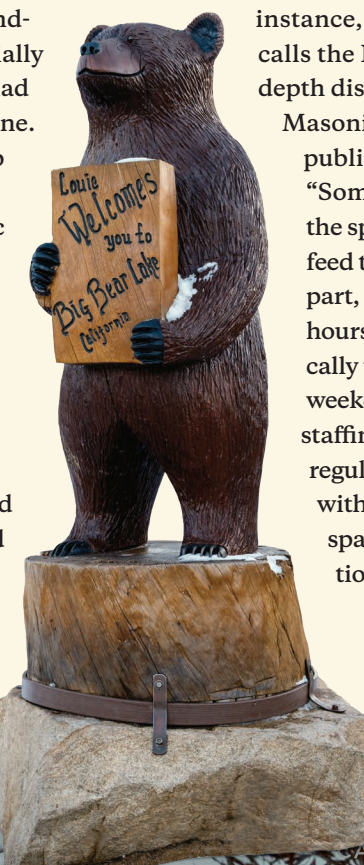
Unlike much of the town’s population, which rises and falls with the ski season, Morgan is a Big Bear lifer. “I remember getting run off from the lodge parking lot for skateboarding when I was a kid,” he says. Amid the comings and goings of tourists and visitors, lodge members are similarly rooted in the community. They use the hall to host several community-service events, including an annual blood drive, a Halloween festival, and a clothing and food drive. Members also make a point of being

active in local government, with a group from the lodge attending school board, city council, and chamber of commerce meetings. The lodge even hosts a series of non-partisan candidate forums and debates in the runup to local elections.

That means Big Bear No 617 is seen as particularly invested in civic life, Morgan says. “Our installation of officers is covered by the local newspaper,” he points out. Current master Johnny Ray Wells says that community leaders often attend that event, as well as other public functions at the lodge.

Wells, Morgan, and others have also cultivated efforts to strengthen the member experience. Wells, for instance, founded an initiative he calls the Northeast Corner, an in-depth discussion on the nuances of Masonic ritual. For all the lodge’s public-facing efforts, he says, “Some members are looking for the spiritual side of Masonry—to feed the soul.” Morgan, for his part, kicked off regular office hours for lodge leaders—practically unheard of elsewhere. Each weekday, members take turns staffing the lodge hall during regular business hours, meeting with visitors, giving tours of the space, and answering questions about Freemasonry.

A big effort, yes. But, he says, anything is worth it to make a more welcoming destination. ♦



PHOTOS BY MATTHEW REAMER



Visalia Nº 128

Visible in Visalia



THE MEMBERS of Visalia Nº 128 have been known to wear their affection for Freemasonry on their sleeves. And their chest. And their calves. In fact, the popularity of Masonic tattoos is something of a running joke at lodge. “I look around sometimes and think, ‘We look like a bunch of trestleboards walking around,’” says lodge master Ronald Morrison with a chuckle, referring to the illustrated Masonic poster charts.

Morrison, who goes by Shorty, counts himself among that group. On his elbow, he has a tattoo of the 47th problem of Euclid (also known as the Pythagorean Theorem), a geometric principle that holds special symbolic meaning to Masons. However, tattoos aren’t the only way lodge members put their membership on display. More than most, Morrison says, Visalia Nº 128 has worked to make itself an integral—and visible—fixture in town.

The lodge certainly has a long history in that regard: Formed in 1859, it was for several years the fraternity’s only outpost between Stockton and Los Angeles. Many of its earliest members helped found the towns of the San Joaquin Valley, including Thomas Baker, a charter member of Visalia Nº 128, for whom Bakersfield is named. Another important namesake was early lodge member Nathaniel Vise, who legend has it, along with his wife, Salia, lent his name to the frontier town. Ever since, the

lodge and its members have played an important role in developing Visalia from a small farm town into what is now one of the fastest-growing metro areas in the state.

The lodge continues to make an effort to be seen in the community. Each year members team up with the local branch of the Red Cross to host a large blood drive at the lodge hall, handing out branded T-shirts and other merchandise. They also sponsor a Teacher of the Year award, presented annually at the lodge, alongside scholarships for several local public school kids. First-time visitors are always given a tour of the distinctive, circa-1935 Art Deco Masonic temple on West Mineral King Avenue.

In every case, the idea is for the community to see Freemasonry in action.

This fall, Visalia Nº 128 lived up to that mantra for a special event. Working with eight other valley lodges, the lodge hosted its first-ever movie night at the restored Visalia Fox Theatre. The screening—of the 2004 Nicolas Cage film *National Treasure*, with its veil of Masonic imagery—was open to the public and free of charge. Past Grand Master Richard Hopper, a member of the lodge, reports that the event drew more than 120 attendees, including many non-Masons. “It was a tremendous event,” he says, “and one I hope we try again.”

Welcome Nº 255

A Home Away from Home



THE MEMBERSHIP of Lemoore’s Masonic lodge, **Welcome Nº 255**, reflects the military character of the town. Since the 1940s, the armed services have been a major employer in the area, both for active duty and civilian personnel, and many veterans retire there. Today, Naval Air Station Lemoore is home to the Navy’s largest master jet base, with the Strike Fighter Wing Pacific and Carrier Air Wings squadrons stationed there attached to aircraft carriers including the USS *Nimitz* and USS *Ronald Reagan*.

As a result, the lodge is made up primarily of military men—as many as 80 percent of its 169 members are affiliated with the base in one way or another, estimates Pedro Bautista Jr., the current lodge master. Bautista is one of them, a Navy veteran who discovered Freemasonry at a military lodge in Guam while still on active duty as a chief petty officer.

Because military life is often transient, requiring quick deployments to far-flung locales, a military lodge like Lemoore’s can serve as a home away from home for military

Masons. That makes Welcome Nº 255, well, a welcome sight for Masons who find themselves stationed in Kings County. But it also means members must sometimes ship out unexpectedly after several months of degree preparation. “Time seems to move slower in a small town than in a big city,” Bautista says. “So there’s plenty of time to learn the craft, to be proficient, and when the time comes for our active-duty brothers to move on, they’ll be ready for their next travels.”

Bautista says that frequent shuffling makes it even more important for the lodge to attract a stable base of members from the surrounding community.

“We make ourselves visible through the local schools,” he explains. The lodge sponsors a robust annual scholarship for students from four high schools and is now planning its first fundraiser for the elementary school located

next door to the Masonic hall. The lodge also organizes frequent picnics, camping trips, and family dinners, and contributes a float to the town’s

annual Christmas parade, with a hand-built illuminated square and compass. Bautista sees efforts like these as part of his obligation as a Mason. “It’s incumbent on every member to reach out and be present in the community,” he says. “That’s what it all about.”

“Time seems to move slower in a small town.”

Members of North Butte № 230 gather for their yearly pancake breakfast, during which the lodge issues college scholarships to local high school students.



NORTH BUTTE № 230



North Butte № 230

Back to Basics



IT HASN'T BEEN a straight line back to normal from the depths of the pandemic for most of us. Certainly that's the case for members of **North Butte № 230**, a small, historic lodge in the northern Sacramento Valley, at the base of the Sutter Buttes mountain range.

Like many farm towns, Gridley today is still working its way back. The tree-lined downtown, which extends a few blocks along Hazel Street, includes several pleasant brick storefronts, but many of them remain empty. The distinctive North Butte № 230 lodge hall, with its domed roof, sits just around the corner. It, too, is trying to make a comeback.

Sometimes, these things start small—with, say, the resumption of time-honored traditions. By that measure, this year represents an important turning point.

This fall, North Butte № 230 was able to restart its 15-year-old scholarship program, which had been paused during the pandemic. Historically, the lodge selects two students at each of the area's three high schools to receive a modest college stipend, which it hands out at an annual pancake breakfast. (The lodge extends the scholarship for those who remain in school a second year.) Since it began, members have given out more than \$40,000 through the events, not only helping local kids make a dent in higher-education costs, but also establishing the lodge as an ally of local schools. "We're trying to get it built up again," says master John

"We're a community—our whole district. So we do our part to help each other."

Gill, a third-generation Mason whose father also belonged to North Butte № 230. "COVID really set us back. We'll get there, it's just going to take some time."

Things haven't gone entirely dark over the past couple of years. Even with the scholarship program on hold, the lodge, located across the street from Sycamore Elementary, has managed to stay active with the school district in other ways: It hosts Sycamore's yearly book fair in its banquet room, with lodge members volunteering and hosting an ice-cream party. The lodge also sponsors a high school basketball tournament, which provides important

publicity. Says past master John Neiswanger, "It gets us out in front of the community. I

don't know if people pay attention to the name North Butte № 230, but they know the name of the Masons. They know we're the Masons here, and they know what we're doing."

Formerly the kiwi capital of the world, Gridley remains an agricultural town, although today its main exports are rice, almonds, and stone fruit. (One large kiwi vineyard remains in town.) Gill says the lodge retains its rural character. "When I lived in L.A., I didn't know my own next-door neighbor," he says. "Here, we're a community—our whole district. So we do our part to help each other." ♦



Table Mountain No 124

The Phoenix

TO SAY THAT Table Mountain No 124 has risen from the ashes may sound cliché. But in this case, it's really true.

Four years ago, the Camp Fire tore through the area of Butte County known as Paradise Ridge. More than 150,000 acres burned, including 18,000 structures. Eighty-five people died. Fire damage was estimated at \$16.5 billion, making it the most destructive conflagration in state history.

The fire decimated everything in its path—almost. Miraculously, the lodge's circa-1936 hall is still standing. Five strike teams of fire-fighters worked diligently to save the building and an adjacent library, even as the fire consumed a shopping center across the street and the building next door. On every side of the lodge, the landscape was reduced to rubble. Yet the structure stood fast, albeit with significant smoke damage to its interior, plus to the electrical and plumbing systems. "We say providence provided for us," says Douglas Campbell, the junior warden, choking up at the memory.

Once the immediate threat had passed, the few members who remained in the area gathered at **Chico-Leland Stanford No 111** to decide on their future. In Paradise, the fire had levelled an estimated 95 percent of the structures. Most of the region's 70,000 evacuated residents chose not to return. In fact, the overall population of the town remains about one-fifth what it was before the fire. In lodge terms, out of a roster of 75, only about 20 members stayed in the area.

Still, those present were adamant. "The first meeting, [lodge master] Bill Richards asked everyone if we wanted to fold or consolidate," recalls current master Woody Nelson. "It was unanimous. The resounding answer was, *Hell no!*"

Instead, the group met in Chico while soldiering through months of repairs in Paradise. The first year back was a struggle. But by continuing to meet, the group established

"I tell people we really were reborn as Masons."

a foothold. In late 2019, they returned to the Paradise hall. A few months later, when COVID-19 brought in-person meetings to a halt, the group stayed close over Zoom.

Though the lodge was unable to gather inside the hall, they put the building to good use, renting it to church groups, governmental agencies, and relief providers. The lodge soon became one of the most important and recognizable landmarks left in town. "In a way, I think we're more present now," Campbell says of the lodge. "We're more visible, more known, and more involved than ever before."

Increasingly, members checked back in—and a few new ones began to inquire. Campbell says the lodge has brought in an incredible 12 new members this year. "I tell people we really were reborn as Masons," he says.

It was with that spirit in mind that the lodge decided to host a special kind of celebration this fall: An outdoor, nighttime degree.

Nelson, who lives on a ranch 20 miles north of town, hosted the event. A team of members helped clear brush for a makeshift lodge room, while others used chainsaws and more than a little elbow grease to fashion officers' stations, an altar, and lodge regalia from trees felled during the fire.

Finally, on October 15, nearly 70 members gathered to see Justin Harju raised to the third degree. Among the visitors were representatives from Chico-Leland Stanford No 111 and Scepter No 143, both invited in recognition of the support they'd lent the lodge during the aftermath of the fire. "We're coming out of the ashes," Nelson says. "I can't tell you how proud I am of this group." ♦

Nearly 70 members gathered in October for a nighttime outdoor degree performance.

Bottom right: The circa-1936 stone facade survived the Camp Fire.



TABLE MOUNTAIN No 124

TEXAS Nº 46

The 1869 lodge hall in San Juan Bautista

Right: a fundraiser event at the lodge featured a Vietnamese pho cooking demonstration.



Texas Nº 46



The Road Trippers

IT WOULD MAKE SENSE for members of **Texas Nº 46**, in San Juan Bautista, to focus their lodge efforts close to home. After all, their hall dates from 1869, making it either the longest- or the second-longest continuously occupied lodge in the state. The blue and white Italianate Victorian structure, with its arched windows and molded pediments, is among the most striking buildings in the mission town.

Yet just as frequently, Texas Nº 46 sets its sights on the outside world.

"We're always trying to come up with ways to make our lodge experience unique or provocative," says Kevin Herrick, the current senior warden. Each year, the presumptive master polls the membership before planning the following year's events. "We like to tailor our activities each month to the needs and desires of our brothers. So that might be a motorcycle ride to Monterey, or going whale watching with our wives."

The result is a lodge calendar that's far from typical. Among the recent activities was a trip to Virginia City, Nevada, where lodge members marched in a parade honoring Captain Edward F. Storey, the first master of Texas Nº 46. Storey, who also founded **Visalia Nº 128**, moved to Virginia City in the 1850s, following the Comstock Lode, where he was elected captain of the local militia. He died there in a fight with the Paiute Indians, and at

"We have to be creative in finding ways to appeal to people."

his funeral, local Masons formed plans for what would become **Escorial Nº 171**. That lodge continues to honor Storey's memory each year at the site of his grave.

More than a dozen members of Texas Nº 46 and their families made the trip to Nevada for the event, which included a Civil War re-enactment and Masonic funeral service.

That wasn't the longest trip the lodge has made this year. A few weeks earlier, a team of Masons from Texas Nº 46 rented a van for the 12-hour drive to Prescott, Arizona, to attend the third-degree ceremony for Garrett Wright, who was initiated in San Juan Bautista before moving south for work. Before that, the lodge took advantage

of its circa-1850s "traveling degree" charter, which allows it to host meetings within seven miles of the lodge, to put on a third-degree ceremony for Charles

Baylacq. The event was held at scenic Fremont Peak state park.

"We have to be creative in finding ways to appeal to people," Herrick says. That extends to charity work, which includes partnering with nonprofits like the local food bank and school district. "They key is to have an active calendar, so that you can have meetings that are meaningful and are able to make a real connection with the local community," Herrick says. "Then it feels good to raise money. People feel good about being a Mason." ♦

EUREKA № 16

The circa-1916 Masonic Hall in Auburn, home to Eureka № 16, is one of the Gold Country town's most distinctive buildings.

Below, members greet Don Ales during his first-degree initiation in November. Afterward, the lodge held a traditional festive board.



Eureka № 16

Stronger than Ever

"THIS PAST MONTH was huge for us," begins Douglas Tucker, a past master of **Eureka № 16** in Auburn. The lodge hosted several community events, including a chili cook-off to benefit Masons4Mitts, held its yearly first responders appreciation dinner, and transformed the lodge hall into a polling place for election day. In addition, the lodge also threw its annual picnic—to which family and friends are invited—and past master Rick Hodkin hosted a long-discussed Dungeons and Dragons game night. On top of all that, the lodge initiated four new members, held one second-degree night, and accepted two new affiliations.

Looking forward, the calendar was just as full.

Since resuming in-person meetings in 2021, it's been full steam ahead at Eureka № 16, which was chartered in 1851, making it is one of the state's oldest lodges. Yet another first-degree night was being planned for later in the month, with a further eight prospects lined up in the queue. Add to that a series of scholarship programs to administer, a community outdoor-movie night program to restart, and an ongoing partnership with the Forgotten Soldier Project, which uses Eureka's space for restorative yoga classes for veterans, and there's seldom a dull moment in the circa-1916 lodge hall. Says Tucker,

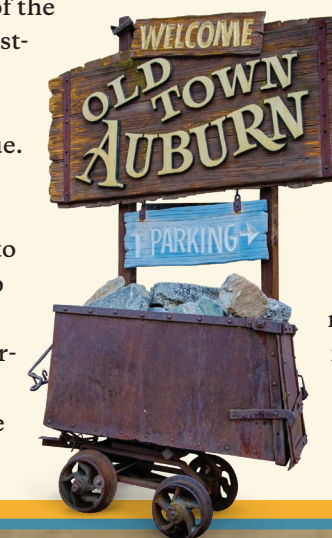
"The guys we have right now on our roster want to be Masons. They want to be active."

That's music to the ears of longtime Auburn Masons. Having survived a fallow period a few years back, during which the lodge saw several officers step away, the lodge has experienced a recent revival. "We have a fantastic group in place right now," says master Steve Bodick.

Members credit that to a strong string of recent officers, plus a renewed commitment to community service projects and a particular focus on performing excellent degrees. "We have a lot of pride and a little bit of competitiveness about it," Tucker says of the lodge's obsession with the ritual. "We consider ourselves a premier lodge in that regard. It's part of our culture. People here try to be word-perfect as a matter of personal pride."

That enthusiasm extends to community service, where the lodge has made a point of strengthening its volunteer and charitable efforts. That, in turn, helps raise the lodge's profile locally. "It's a small community," Bodick says. "Being out there helps us with word-of-mouth interest."

The more interest, he says, the more inquiries. And the more inquiries, the more degrees, the more events. It doesn't bring any relief to the packed calendar, he says—but that's a good thing. ♦



PHOTOS BY CHRIS KAUFMAN



Blythe-Needles № 473



The Rescue Mob

IN THE SUMMER, when temperatures might reach 117 degrees, the desert town of Blythe can be downright dangerous. Even without the heat, the scrubland near the Arizona border is an unforgiving place, one that unprepared campers, backpackers, and day-trippers too often find themselves unable to manage.

When that happens, it's up to the local search and rescue team to save the day—with an unseen assist from the local lodge.

Over the past five years, **Blythe-Needles № 473** has developed a close relationship with the all-volunteer Riverside County search and rescue. Three members of the lodge, including past master and district inspector Stu Ryan, are volunteers with the program, which is run through the sheriff's department. The team uses the lodge building for its training sessions and as a general headquarters during emergencies—all free of charge. The two bodies also team up on fundraisers including a yearly raffle for the duck and dove hunters who pour into the area each fall, which lodge master Larry Wuertz says help pay the considerable cost of outfitting vehicles to bushwhack through the desert.

During the summer, the town of Blythe largely shuts down. In fact, the lodge recently won approval to go dark three months of the year, in order to save on what had become an unmanageable electric bill. During the fall, however, the town sees an influx of campers and outdoorsmen on their way to the Colorado River. And in winter, it more than doubles in size for the annual Desert

Gardens International Rock, Gem, and Mineral Show in nearby Quartzsite, Arizona. "In the summer, you wonder why there are so many gas stations here, but then in the winter you see why," explains lodge secretary Kevin Crain.

Some of those out-of-towners find their way into the lodge. "We never know who's going to show up for a stated meeting," Crain says.

Far from a part-time resident, Crain is one of the town's most deeply rooted residents. His father, John, was master of the lodge and president of the Palo Verde College board, while his brother, Robert, served as mayor for 16 years. Those kinds of close relationships help the lodge make its impact felt locally. "There's a lot of love for the lodge in this community," Ryan says.

That's most evident during Blythe's annual Christmas parade, which Crain's family has run for more than 20 years. This year, the local Shriners, plan to show up in their signature go-karts.

"That out to spruce things up a bit," says Wuertz with a laugh. ✨



MASONIC ASSISTANCE



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A Heroic Act of Simplicity

WHEN FIRE THREATENED THEIR COMMUNITY, KERN RIVER VALLEY № 824 OPENED ITS DOORS. FOR THAT, THEY'VE EARNED THE JOE JACKSON AWARD FOR OUTREACH. BY IAN A. STEWART

AFTER THE FIRST FIRE, Charlie Malear knew the next time, he'd have to be better prepared. His lodge would, too.

This time, they were. And by leaning into the fraternity's apparatus of relief services—and creating some of their own—they showed just how impactful a lodge can be in a time of crisis. For those efforts, this fall, Malear and **Kern River Valley № 824** were recognized with the Joe Jackson Award, the Masonic Homes of California's annual honor for outstanding lodge outreach.

The lodge's actions during the 2021 French Fire were extraordinary, but also necessary, Malear says. That was his takeaway from an earlier crisis, the 2016 Erskine Fire, which had torn through the

mountains above Lake Isabella, in Kern County, killing two. Malear was one of 285 residents who lost their homes to that blaze, including five members of the lodge. For the thousands of others who were evacuated, the overwhelming feeling was of confusion and helplessness. "People were sleeping in the school gym, in public campgrounds," Malear recalls. "That was the start. We knew we had to be ready."

So, in summer 2021, when fire again threatened the area, Malear and his lodgemates were determined to take action. That they did, offering up their lodge as a refuge for those in need of temporary shelter—and demonstrating the value of a bit of advance planning, as well as thinking on the fly. Says Sabrina Montes, the chief strategy officer for the Masonic

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Homes of California, the Kernville example shows what can happen when a lodge sets out to make itself a true community asset. “They took such initiative and were so creative,” she says. “Being proactive, getting ahead of the curve—they really raised the bar in terms of being a safe harbor for their community.”

That started on August 18, 2021, when a small brush fire broke out in the Isabella Highlands to the west of Lake Isabella, pushed east by unusually strong winds and bone-dry conditions. Within hours, the French Fire had ballooned from 50 acres to more than 2,000, prompting evacuation orders. Over the coming days, the fire would grow to 26,000 acres.

The lodge sprang into action. Master Tom McKinney oversaw a phone committee that reached out to each member of the 50-person lodge, as well as several more lodge widows and members of the Kern River Valley No. 643 chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star. Ultimately, 12 of them were evacuated—including McKinney and his wife. Just before they left town, McKinney, then 84, helped a lodge widow load up her belongings so she could evacuate to her son’s home in Lancaster.

The phone network helped connect evacuated members to potential hosts outside the range of the fire and smoke. Others were directed to the Masonic Outreach Services hotline, which connects callers with local service providers and, if necessary, emergency funds. “Hats off to Camile Salinas and the Masonic Outreach Services team,” Malear says. “They’re the ones that got us through this.”

Meanwhile, Malear and others turned their attention to opening the lodge to those who’d been displaced. Two members parked their RVs in the parking lot, which was outfitted with a 50-amp electrical hookup. Jeffrey Swartz, the current master of the lodge, rounded up several cots and delivered them to the lodge from his home in Bakersfield, 60 miles away, so that displaced residents could sleep in the air-conditioned lodge room.

“We have this beautiful lodge, and for what? For 56 members to enjoy? It’s important for us to open it up to the community.”

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That proved prescient. On August 21, a team of firefighters pulled into the parking lot and asked to camp out at the lodge. The team was pulling all-day shifts and sleeping in tents in the 100-degree heat. The lodge welcomed them in enthusiastically, and that night, between 15 and 20 firefighters slept on the floor of the lodge room. Another member, Anthony Miller—who’d only been initiated into the lodge a month prior—and his wife cooked dinner for the crew, while others showed up to brew coffee and deliver supplies.

Sensing an opportunity to transform the lodge hall into a true community resource, Malear worked with department officials to formally establish the lodge as a temporary CalFire headquarters. Thanks to that designation, in the future, the department knows it can tap the lodge as a command center during another crisis. Says Malear, “We have this beautiful lodge, and for what? For 56 members to enjoy? It’s important for us to open it up to the community.”

Michael Dornner was among those who found refuge there. Along with his wife and brother, he slept at the lodge for more than a week while his home in Wofford Heights was under evacuation orders. “If it hadn’t been for Charlie and the Masons, I don’t know what we would have done,” he says. In the end, Dornner was one of the lucky ones: His home withstood the fire and his insurance claim came to just a few thousand dollars.

For McKinney, the lodge’s actions during the fire were a heartening reminder of the good the group is capable of. “It was a tremendous effort,” he says.

Seth Babcock, the lodge’s junior deacon, was similarly gratified. “Everybody came together to help, and everyone helped,” he says. “I’m proud to be part of that. I’m proud to be part of this lodge.”

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DONOR PROFILE

Mike Tagulao

TRANSPORTATION BROKER
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SAN LEANDRO № 113

California Freemason: How did you first get involved in Freemasonry?

Mike Tagulao: My dad and brother were both Masons, although they never discussed it in our house. But I kept hearing about Masonry in movies and on TV shows. It was like a hint. One day, I was back in Virginia visiting my brother, who's in a military lodge there, and I saw him wearing his Masonic ring. So I asked him about it, and he told me my time would come.

CFM: How did you wind up in the Bay Area?

MT: I was born in the Philippines and migrated here when I was 16. My dad was in the Navy and was stationed in Virginia, and then in San Diego. His last assignment was at Port Chicago in Concord, and he ended up retiring here. So that's where we stayed.

CFM: You entered the officer's line really quickly. What made you want to get involved in lodge leadership?

MT: I just like to help out the brothers—especially the new members. They come in and have no idea that Masonry is so huge. There's so many opportunities for learning. I'm still learning. So I've been involved in a lot of things with the lodge. I'm a Masons4Mitts captain. I've been a district inspector for three years. I'm involved in all sorts of boards of trustees and associations. I'm also on the board of directors for the Rainbow assembly here. Masonry's really in my blood.

CFM: You've also been a generous donor to the California Masonic Foundation. What made you elect to give back in that way?

MT: Masonry is all about charity. When I'm interviewing someone about becoming a Mason, I'll ask them what they think is in it for them. Basically, why do they want to join? And a lot of people think they want to join because of the benefits, or because of the connections they'll make. But it's not about that. It's about wanting to help out. And that's not just about money. It's also your time and your knowledge. There's always something you can share. ♦ —IAS

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PHOTOGRAPH BY MARTIN KLIMEK

A Room of One's Own

Meet Gene Goodman, artist. When she moved to Acacia Creek, she took up painting as a form of physical therapy. And once she started, she found it impossible to stop. She transformed her apartment into a space that is at once an art studio and gallery—and 100% her own.

MAKE YOUR LIFE A MASTERPIECE

At our nonprofit continuing care retirement community located adjacent to the Masonic Home at Union City, aging successfully is what it's all about. Our **Certified Center for Successful Aging** continues to receive accolades for its emphasis on all four components of health: physical, mental, social, and spiritual. By actively working to improve themselves and their campus on a daily basis, Acacia Creek residents are redefining what it means to age.

LIMITED TIME OFFER!

For a limited time, **select apartments are being offered as rentals**—without the entrance fee requirement! Now, you can move to Acacia Creek for less, a rare opportunity!

These beautiful 1- and 2-bedroom apartments range from 859–1500 sq. ft. Rent includes three meals a day, weekly housekeeping and laundry service, pool and fitness facilities, activities and programs, transportation, 24/7 security, fellowship, and more!

These apartments will go quickly. **Call us today!**

acaciacreek.org | (877) 902-7555



ACACIA CREEK
RETIREMENT COMMUNITY

 RCFE #015601302 | COA #246



KEEP YOUR INFORMATION CURRENT

To receive special member email and other important information, please keep your contact information current. Log in and update it today at freemason.org!

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