

NEBRASKA COURTHOUSES, MEN, AND LODGE HALLS

a Legacy of Ethics

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The history of Nebraska Is Interwoven with the history of Nebraska Freemasonry. Freemasonry has been described as a "way of life." That sentiment alludes to the fact that we are gentlemen of proven quality who strive to uphold a high standard of sterling ethical behavior.

I have visited numerous County Courthouses In various U.S.

States. Most are the "hub" of any County - usually housing such Important community officials such as County Clerks, County Treasurers, Registrars of deeds/Recorders of real-estate Deeds, and sometimes Sheriffs' Offices. A great majority of these Courthouses have cornerstones which were laid by The Grand Lodge of the respective state.

By far, the most elegant inscription I have ever seen on such an edifice is the wording on the Gage County Courthouse at Beatrice, Nebraska. It bears the beautiful and concise inscription: "Laid By The Masonic Fraternity, with the year "1890." That stone, laid with ceremonies nearly 125 years ago eloquently states that we are a "Masonic Fraternity", not a club, clique, or cult. The word "Fraternity" clearly denotes a Brotherhood of Men under the Fatherhood of Almighty God.

The Gage County Courthouse has stood the test of time. It is clearly seen on the east side of U.S.-Highway 77. Just a short distance away is the Beatrice Masonic Center. It Is another elegant building, with stained-glass windows. It is "home" for the Blue Lodge, Royal Arch Chapter, Council of. Cryptic Masons, and the Commandery of Knights Templar.

It would be interesting to know the number of Masons who have been inside both buildings (or, even In close proximity to both buildings). I find it Interesting that honorable "Oaths" have been taken inside both the Beatrice Masonic Hall and also inside the Gage County Courthouse building. Jurors, elected officials, people swearing truthfulness in notarized-documents take "oaths" in the courthouse before notaries or Judges. Quite likely, even a few marriage-vows have been spoken in civil ceremonies inside that courthouse. Then, just steps away at the Masonic Center: Multitudes of Brothers, Companions and Sir Knights have made solemn promises and



solemn vows when they took their various Masonic Degrees and Orders.

Gage County In general and Beatrice In particular -- is an excellent example of the survival of Ethics in our society. Masonry attempts to draw a good man and make him a better man. As one distinguished Brother Mason once told me when he compared the "rough ashlar" with a "perfect ashlar": Usually, a rough ashlar has SOME PRELIMINARY SHAPE, SIDES AND FORM. He noted that, "You can't take a pebble and transform it Into a perfect ashlar." I interjected: "You need some SUBSTANCE from the beginning to work with." He responded by saying, "Correct."

And, so it is with Freemasonry: We draw from men who already possess good traits. As a FRATERNITY, our gentle Craft via its Impressive degrees, imparts lessons which cultivate and allow a man to develop, practice, and live by a higher grade of ethical standards.

Beatrice, Nebraska is lucky to have such a beautiful Courthouse. By the same token, Beatrice is lucky to have such an impressive looking Masonic Center. In a fraternal setting:

Beatrice has been a "survivor" ... perhaps due to its larger population.

Consider these statistics. One of the earlier consolidations to occur in Nebraska Masonic Lodges was the consolidation of Parallel Lodge #152 at Liberty, Nebraska with Barneston Lodge #165 in the year 1940. Next, was Tyre Lodge #85 at Blue Springs, Nebraska consolidating with Wymore Lodge #104 in the year 1941. Only recently, in 2012 Wymore Lodge consolidated with Beatrice Lodge #26. Likewise, I am Informed that Barneston Lodge has also consolidated with Beatrice Lodge.

In many ways, many now-defunct Lodges across the nation have fallen, merged, or consolidated like falling dominoes or scattered dominoes; but, Beatrice Lodge #26 has held firm. Its survival has kept Masonry visible and alive In Gage County.

Many people do not realize that just down U.S. Highway 77 to the South is the town of Blue Springs whose "Blue Springs Cemetery" has stone signage designating it as "The oldest Recorded Cemetery in Nebraska." Recently, I paid respects to my ancestors and relatives burled there. My Great-Uncle James William "Will" Marples was Raised in Parallel Lodge in Liberty In the year 1916. A few years later his nephew Wayne Marples was Raised In the same Lodge. However, they took a "twist" and transferred their memberships from Liberty to Blue Springs and thence to Wymore Lodges ... they didn't follow the trend of demise. They demitted based on choice.



My Great-Uncle Will Marples was a County Supervisor/County Commissioner of a district In Gage County for many years. Both he and his nephews Wayne H. Marples belonged to the I.O.O.F. Odd Fellows Lodge In Blue Springs. Will Marples had another nephew, John William "Bill" Marples (1910-1997) (my father) who likewise belonged to both the Masonic Lodge and Odd Fellows Lodge in Wichita, Kansas. Wayne served as Noble Grand (presiding officer) of the Blue Springs Odd Fellows Lodge in the year 1934. My father also served as a Noble Grand In his Odd Fellows Lodge In Kansas. Additionally, my dad was a Past District Deputy Grand Master in the I.O.O.F. in Kansas.

My Great-Uncle J.W. "Will" Marples was a past chairman and past Director of the Gage County Insurance Company; as well as once being on the Board of Directors of the Dempster Company in Beatrice, Nebraska.

I note these facts to demonstrate that Masonry on a national-basis and and particularly Masonry In Nebraska has produced men who were (and still are) Immensely capable of guiding and governing their own personal-lives, yet equally capable of handling commercial businesses, endeavors, and enterprises -and lastly even serving in Government posts which benefited Nebraska citizens at-large.

The circle of dedicated members is what truly constitutes a "Lodge", not necessarily the building. Human presence is what determines an active presence. However, I am grateful for the historic buildings that Masons helped to erect and maintain. Their past efforts are a lasting legacy to maintain. The task for us, as Individual Masons, is to walk uprightly In our dally lives-regardless of whether we are at the County Courthouse, the post office, the grocery store, or simply Interacting with our neighbors.

By honorable ethical conduct: Masons and Masonry can "stand tall", Just like the fine buildings that we admire.

About the Author:

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Companion and Sir Knight Jim is a life Member of the Wichita York Rite Bodies (Wichita Chapter #33 RAM.; Wichita Council #12 R. & S.M.; and Mt. Olivet Commandery #12 K.T.). He is also a life Member of the Lincoln Nebraska Scottish Rite Bodies; The Robert-the-Bruce Association (California); The George Washington Masonic Stamp Club; Masonic Order of the Gordian Knot (Indiana); Masonic Order of the Sword of Bunker Hill; Kentucky Chapter #134 of National Sojourners and Heroes of '76; North Texas York Rite College #118 of Sherman, Texas; and Nebraska College S.R.I.C.F.

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Wymore, Nebraska Chapter Penny

