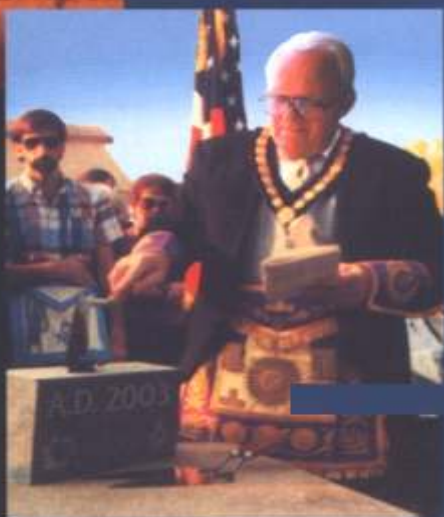
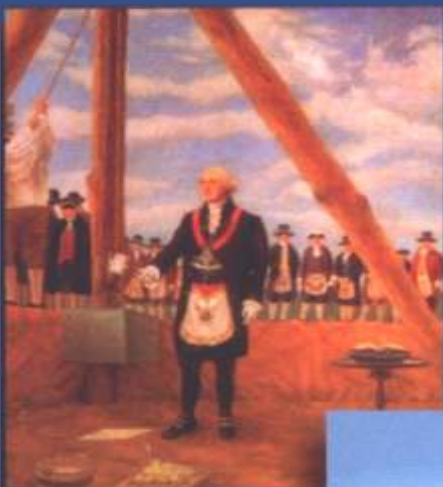


CORNERSTONES

A Masonic Tradition
of Dedication

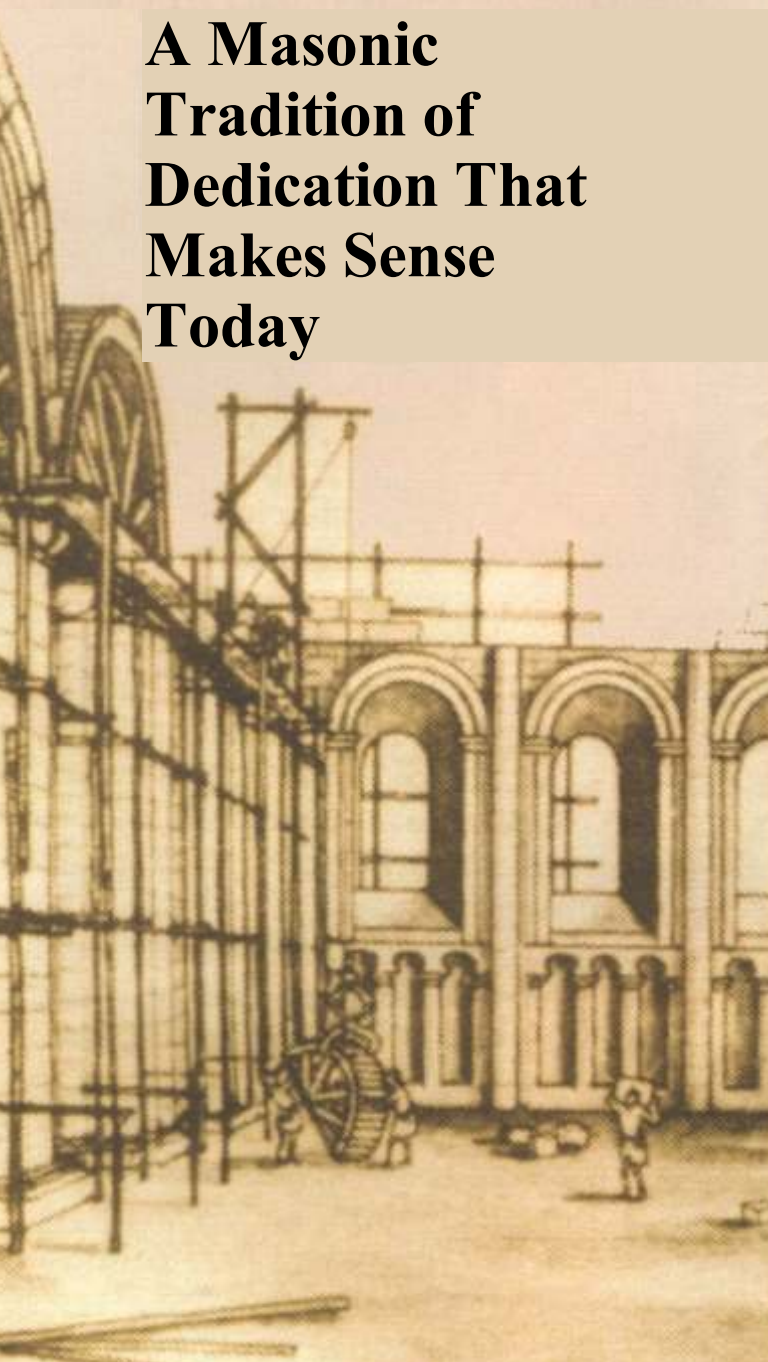


...That Makes
Sense Today



CORNERSTONES

**A Masonic
Tradition of
Dedication That
Makes Sense
Today**



WHAT IS A CORNERSTONE?

Until the development of steel-frame construction in the 20th Century, most buildings were erected by stacking stone on stone. Each part of the building was marked by ceremonies. The foundation stone was the first stone placed underground at the beginning of the building's foundation. The cornerstone was the first stone placed above ground level. It is a massive stone, marking the northeast corner of the building. At the top of the building was the capstone.

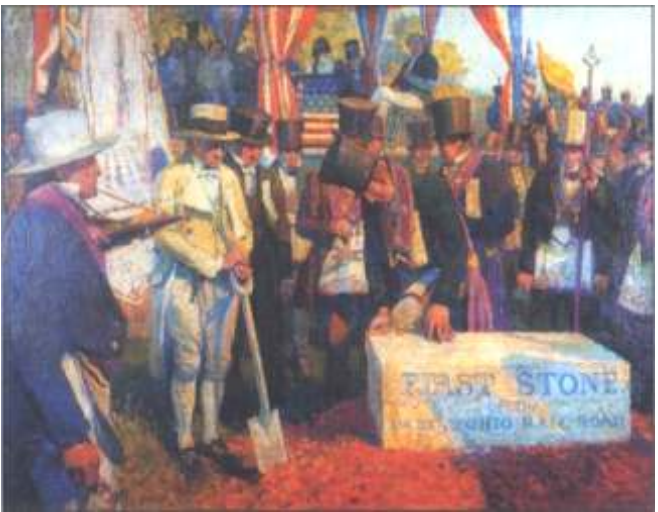


The ceremonies of placing those stones were under the direction of the stonemasons who built the building, although the highest officials of the church and state usually participated, including the king or his representative. These ceremonies were occasions for public celebrations and fairs, each marking the progress of the construction of the cathedral or castle.

Cornerstones have played an important role in the history of our nation as well as Europe. George



George Washington, A Freemason, laying the cornerstone of the U.S. Capitol with Masonic Ceremonies, September 18, 1793.



Laying of the First Stone of the B&O Railroad by the Grand Lodge of Maryland, July 4, 1828.

Washington laid the cornerstone of the nation's Capitol building, both in his role as President of the United States and as a Freemason. Before that, Benjamin Franklin, while Grand Master of Pennsylvania, established the tradition beginning with the cornerstone laying of the state house in Philadelphia.

Cornerstones have traditionally shown the date, the name of the Grand Lodge, the Grand Master, and the Masonic emblem. Such a cornerstone has been part of the construction or dedication of many federal buildings and seats of state government since these early beginnings. Sometimes, instead of a traditional cornerstone, a plaque is mounted on a building to mark its dedication or rededication. Technically, it is called a "commemorative stone," though it is not a part of the actual structure. The Masonic ceremony is appropriate for these stones as well.

WHY DOES THE MASONIC FRATERNITY PLACE CORNERSTONES?

The Masonic Fraternity, the Freemasons, developed from the guilds of stonemasons of the Middle Ages. We are the oldest and largest fraternity in the world, with a tradition dating back hundreds of years. In North America our forefathers laid the first cornerstones, and we continue in their tradition.

Many organizations do things in the public interest, things related to their own heritage. The

V.F.W. holds ceremonies in cemeteries on Memorial Day to honor the men and women who gave their lives in defense of the nation, The American Legion presents American flags to schools and gives programs on flag etiquette. Freemasons conduct cornerstone ceremonies on public buildings that are dedicated to religion, education, civic service, and philanthropy. Many such stones are placed each year.

WHAT IS THE CEREMONY LIKE?

The ceremony has changed very little since George Washington laid the cornerstone of our nation's Capitol with full Masonic honors and ceremonies. The clothing has changed, of course, and much smaller stones are used now but the rest is about the same. There are two elements to the event, the ceremony itself and the celebration preceding and following it.

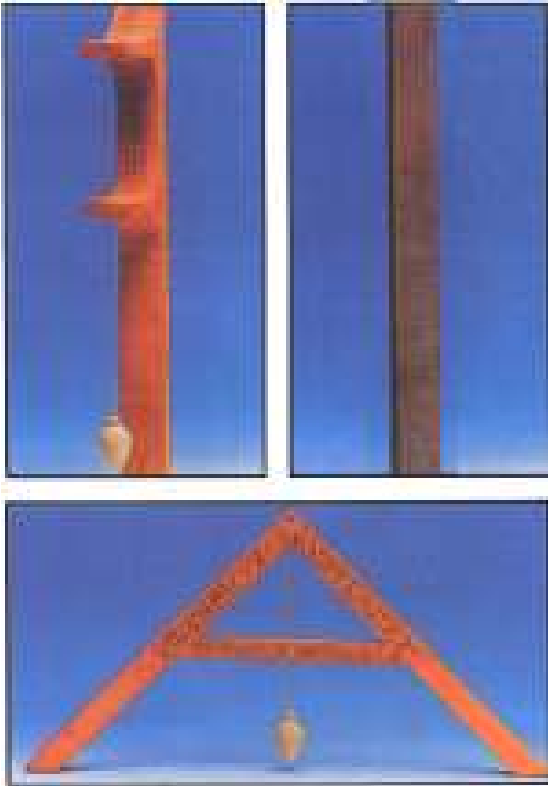
Usually the audience is called to order, a color guard presents the American flag, and everyone joins in the flag salute. A prayer is then offered. What follows next depends on the wishes of those responsible for the building. You may want remarks by local officials (mayor, local clergy, council members, etc.) to precede the Masonic ceremony, or you may want the Masonic ceremony to go first. The Masonic



The ceremony is virtually the same today as it was when George Washington laid the cornerstone of the U.S. Capitol in 1793.

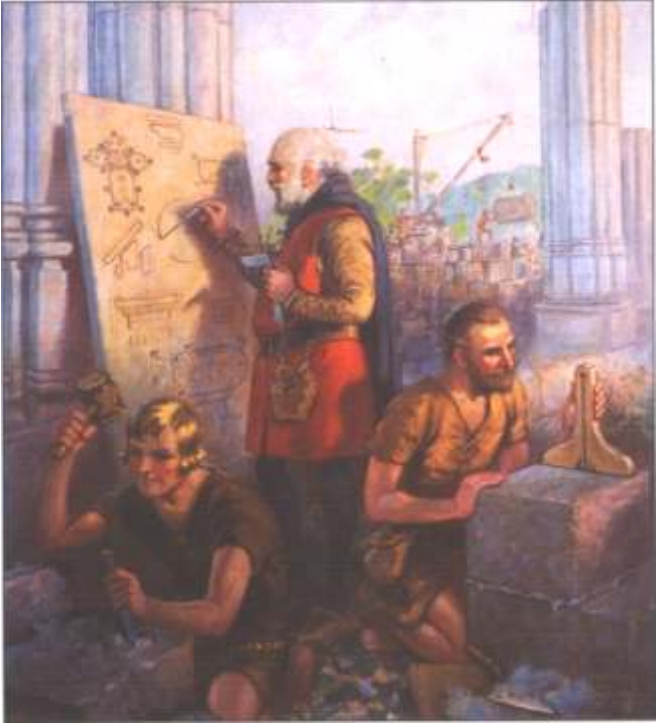
ceremony itself is short. The Grand Master (or a designated officer of the state Grand Lodge) makes a few remarks, introduces the officers participating in the ceremony, and explains their duties. Objects are then deposited into the cornerstone. The ancient working tools of the stonemasons are applied to the stone: the plumb, the level, and the square. With each application of the tools, the officers attest to the fact

that the craftsmen have done their work correctly and with skill. The Grand Master or appropriate officer then symbolically tests the stone with three knocks upon it, dedicates or rededicates the building, using



Ancient Working Tools: Found in the tomb of Sennedjem at Deir el-Medina, Egypt. The plumb (above left), the cubit measuring stick (above right), and the level (above) are among the most ancient tools of operative masons ever discovered.

the symbolism of corn, wine, and oil, and continues with the wishes of good health and peace bestowed upon the workmen and the people of the state. These three elements have been used in dedications of buildings since the time of ancient Rome, and represent nourishment and plenty (corn), joy (wine), and peace, healing, and comfort (oil). The ceremony ends with an oration about the symbolism attached to a leveled cornerstone and a prayer.



Operative masons of the 10th century, circa 900, at a site showing building methods used at that time.

THE CORNERSTONE DEPOSIT

From the time of ancient Mesopotamia to the present, “deposits” have been made in the foundations of buildings or behind cornerstones. Now deposits usually include information about the building, the ceremony, artifacts of the time, and other material sealed away for posterity. For many years, boxes of soldered copper were used to protect the deposit, but today containers made of PVC are used. They are more permanent and far less likely to leak. The Fraternity will provide some of the items for the deposit, but, for the most part, the selection is up to you. Providing the



The deposit usually includes data about the building, artifacts, and other material sealed for posterity.



The Statue of Liberty was conceived and designed by Frederic Auguste Bartholdi, a Mason.

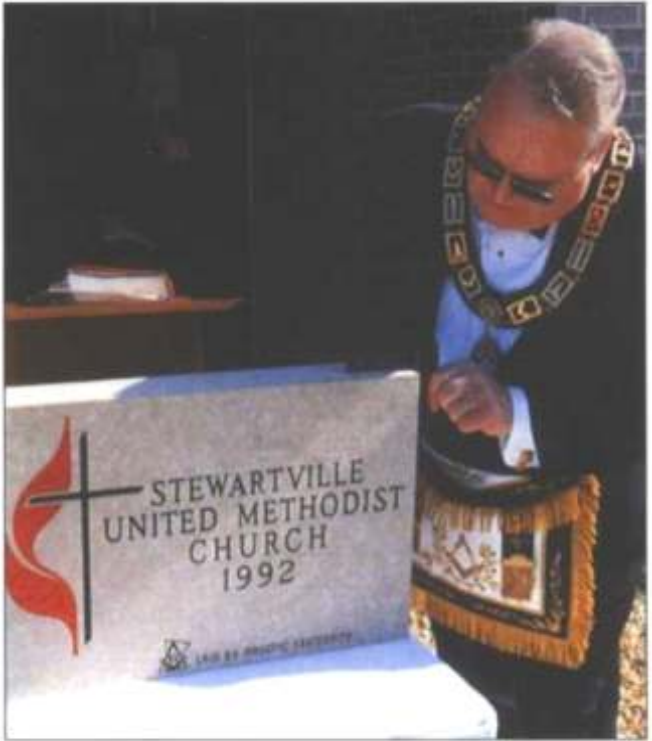
Masons laid the cornerstone of its foundation in 1884 and contributed to its restoration in 1984.



deposit can be one of the most exciting parts of the cornerstone event.

THE CORNERSTONE

No size requirements have been established for the stone. Traditionally it is cubical in form with an inner portion cut out to receive the deposit container.



Warren Clark, Deputy Grand Master in Minnesota, makes sure "the stone is square" during the Masonic cornerstone laying ceremony for the Stewartville United Methodist Church.

However, the wall or pillar where it is to be placed determines its thickness. Usually the architect or engineer should be consulted to determine size. The face of the cornerstone is usually carved with the name of the Masonic group dedicating the stone, the date, the Square and Compass, and other appropriate information as desired.

THE COMPANION STONE

Sometimes a companion stone is set next to the cornerstone. It is the same size and can be engraved to fit the occasion. If the stone is set at a school, the companion stone might show the names of the architect, the building, and the school board. If it is set at a church, it might show the names of the minister and church board or elders. If it is set at a city hall, it might show the names of the mayor and city council members. Whether or not there is a companion stone and what it says are up to you.

HOW DO YOU ARRANGE FOR A CORNERSTONE?

Arrangements are made through your local Masonic lodge. Generally, there is no cost for the Masonic portion of the celebration. Often, the Grand lodge, local Masonic Lodge, or other Masonic group pays for the cornerstone and, if appropriate, a companion stone. The only cost to you is any event you may decide to hold along with the celebration, such as a public picnic, contest, or concert, and the cost of having a local brick mason actually set the stone in its position in the wall after the ceremony is over. Such ceremonies are almost always covered by the local press, but be sure to notify your local newspapers and television stations many weeks prior to the occasion, just in case the word did not get to them.

ANCIENT CUSTOMS

No one can say when special ceremonies first were accorded the laying of cornerstones. What is certain is that it is indeed an ancient custom. In the Louvre are two terra-cotta cylinders recovered from the ruins of the city of Lagesh in what was then southern Babylonia. Covered with cuneiform writing, these cylinders were foundation deposits to mark the construction of a temple built about 3,000 B.C. by Gudea, ruler of Lagesh. These cylinders were deposited just as coins, medals, and other mementos are deposited during the Masonic ceremony.

Gudea's temple had no cornerstone *per se*, as it was built entirely of brick, but in all other respects one can imagine a solemn celebration, not unlike a Masonic cornerstone ceremony today, surrounding the deposit



King Solomon directs the unloading of materials for the building of the Temple. The stone and timber actually had to be brought by land from the port of Joppa.

of cylinders. Of particular interest to Scottish Rite Masons is the totem of the city of Lagesh: the storm bird, a double-headed eagle which stood proudly as the visible emblem of power and dominion.

Some 2,500 years later, Zerubbabel laid the foundation of the Temple of the Lord, rebuilding the Holy House erected by Solomon. The scene described in Ezra 3:10-12, is both joyous and poignant, with the “young people” happily rejoicing future greatness and the “old men” tearfully remembering former glories:

And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the Lord, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites the sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise the Lord, after the ordinance of David king of Israel. And they sang together by course in praising and giving thanks unto the Lord; because he is good, for his mercy endureth forever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised the Lord, because the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid.

But many of the priests and Levites and chief of the fathers, who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy.

Why A Cornerstone?

Why would you want a cornerstone on your civic building?

- It's traditional. County courthouses, city halls, and public office buildings in many towns have a Masonic cornerstone. So do many schools, churches, buildings on university campuses, and recreational facilities in state parks. In the United States some buildings had cornerstones laid prior to statehood.
- It helps instill civic pride. Ceremonies of dedicating a new building by placing a cornerstone bring a sense of completion and participation in a major project.
- Cornerstones and their deposits or time capsules are a way to preserve the history of your community for its citizens of the distant future.
- Cornerstone ceremonies are a way to unite the citizens of the community in a celebration all can share. Each group and interest can be a part of the activities surrounding a cornerstone ceremony.
- By rededicating a historic building you have a chance to reflect on past accomplishments and share in optimism for the future. Rededications of existing stones can also combine an appreciation of the past with a commitment to the future and serve as a bridge between generations.



As depicted on its surface, this "Stone of Friendship" was laid with the participation of two Grand Lodges in Canada.

Planning The Event

Planning makes all the difference. Some things to consider include:

Determine the size of the event

The event can be very small—the Grand Lodge team and a few local officials can simply place or rededicate the stone with such citizens as happen by. It can be quite large—a two-or three-day event with public barbecues, dances, contests, family events, and many other activities. (Some additional ideas are listed on the following pages.) Most events will fall somewhere in between.

Decide when you want the event to be held

It is important to start planning early, since it may take a couple of months to find a date convenient to your community when the Grand Lodge cornerstone team is available. Weather is also a factor. If the event is planned for outside, it's best to avoid both the dead of winter and the height of summer. If a suitable space is available, the ceremony can be conducted inside, but that limits community participation.

Make a “mud list”

Part of the ceremony is the spreading of symbolic cement (“mud”) on the stone. Community leaders, representatives of groups, the architect, school children, etc., are often asked to participate. You will want to make a list of those people (and invite them) before the event.



A Joint Grand Lodge Cornerstone Ceremony conducted in Iowa generated a good deal of public and media attention.

Decide who will participate

The Masonic part of the ceremony is fairly brief. You will probably want to ask some guests and civic leaders to make remarks before or after the cornerstone laying itself—perhaps the mayor, or your state senator or representative. Select the people you would like to have speak and invite them (it's a good idea to suggest a time limit such as 5 or 10 minutes). Be sure to have a list of names and titles ready to give to the Masonic Grand Secretary before the event begins.

Make a deposit list

If there is a time capsule, it will be very helpful if you make a list of the materials to be deposited. The list does not need to be too detailed. It's better to say "business cards from citizens" rather than listing the names of each person who deposits a card. A copy of the list should be printed in the Grand Lodge Proceedings for the year. In that way, if someone in the future needs to know what is behind the stone, a list will be available in a permanent record.

Decide if you want a companion stone

A companion stone may be set next to the cornerstone. The companion stone might show the names of city council members, or school board members, or if the building is to be dedicated to some well-known citizen, the companion stone might give a brief biography of the person.

Invite the media

The more advance publicity you have, the better turnout from the citizens you can expect. It will be helpful to contact local radio and television stations as well as print media, and get them "on board," asking for help in spreading the word and building public excitement for the ceremony and surrounding events.



Some Idea Starters

- **Community Picnic/Barbeque**
- **School Poster/Essay Contest**
- **Town Concert**
- **Family Activities:** As part of the celebration, set aside time and space for group activities such as horseshoe pitching, three-legged races, etc.
- **Video Archive:** Announce a contest for the best videotape chronicle of the events of the celebration.
- **Time Capsule Deposits:** If a new stone is being laid, or if an original stone is being rededicated, invite the community to provide deposits for the time capsule.
- **Pictures of Townspeople:** Have photographers taking pictures at a booth near the event.
- **Historic Costumes:** Especially if an older stone is being rededicated, invite the citizens and the local participants in the ceremony to dress in the clothing of the period when the stone was placed.



A parade, like this one in Iowa, can be a great way to showcase the Cornerstone event.

Jim Tresner prepared a brochure for the Grand Lodge of Oklahoma titled *Cornerstones*. From that original brochure (edited for general use) the Masonic Information Center was given permission to publish this booklet. Special thanks to Jim Tresner for his assistance, together with John Boettjer, Editor, *The Scottish Rite Journal*, Richard Curtis, Editor, *The Northern Light*, William Feingold, Consultant, William Borman, Graphic Design Artist, Richard Fletcher, Executive Secretary MSA!MIC.

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The Masonic Information Center is a division of the Masonic Service Association. The Center was formed in 1993 by a grant from John R. Robinson, well-known author, speaker and Mason. Its purpose is to provide information on Freemasonry to Masons and non-Masons alike and to respond to critics of Freemasonry. The Center is directed by a Steering Committee of distinguished Masons geographically representative of the Craft throughout the United States and Canada.