

MASONIC HONORS

The honors awarded by United States Grand Lodges are not confined to the familiar Past Grand Masters' Jewels, given in a majority of the forty-nine Grand Jurisdictions, nor the grand Masters' and Past Grand Masters' aprons, awarded in some of them. Nor is the title of Most Worshipful, Very Worshipful, Right Worshipful, some of which all Jurisdictions use, the extent of recognition given for distinguished Masonic service.

In the final analysis, doubtless the real honors of Freemasonry are the respect and veneration in which the Craft holds those who have worn the purple with distinction to themselves and service to the Fraternity but a number of Grand Jurisdictions also confer titles badges, medals, certificates or other concrete evidences of appreciation.

Commonest is the "Fifty Year Button" which twenty-eight Jurisdictions give to those venerable brethren who have been members of the Craft for half a century. In the nature of the Craft, no man less than seventy-one years of age may wear it, and often he is much older. In only ten of these twenty-eight Grand Lodges must the winner have been continuously a member of a Lodge, or Lodges, and in good standing; in the others, if he can show fifty years' membership, even if it has been temporarily interrupted at some time or times, he is still eligible for the distinction.

Many Grand Lodges make quite a ceremony of these presentations, calling the fifty-year brethren to their feet in Grand Lodge; others have them presented in the Lodge in which the elderly brother to be honored holds membership.

The honor here is not in the intrinsic value of the button, the average cost is less than three dollars, but in the rarity of the badge, since comparatively few brethren survive half a century of Craftsmanship.

To make membership for a given length of time more attractive, one Grand Lodge, at least, has arranged for silver buttons to be awarded, at the expense of the particular Lodge, but with Grand Lodge approval, to those of its members who have paid dues for twenty-five years.

Thirteen Grand Lodges award Honorary Memberships. This is one of the really distinctive decorations of Freemasonry in the United States, since in the forty-nine Grand Jurisdictions are but seventy-one living Honorary Members, and twenty- nine of these are in one Jurisdiction. One Grand Lodge has but one Honorary Member; others but two. A few give Honorary Memberships to all visiting Grand Masters who attend annual communications.

Honorary Memberships in Grand Lodges are usually evidenced by certificates, signed by the Grand Master and Grand Secretary. Some of these are very elaborate and beautiful hand work, the work of artists skilled in the ancient art of illuminating manuscripts. Attested by the Grand Officers and sealed with the great seal of Grand Lodge, such documents, of course, are highly prized by their owners.

Ten Grand Lodges award the title of Honorary Past Grand Master, and fifty-four brethren have been so honored in these Grand bodies. One Grand Lodge gives the title to all visiting Grand Masters at annual communications.

Seven Grand Lodges give honors unique and peculiar to their own Jurisdictions.

Georgia presents a watch charm for distinguished Masonic service, the choice being made by a committee reporting to the Grand Master at Grand Lodge.

Massachusetts awards the Henry Price and the Joseph Warren medals, at the pleasure of the Grand Master. The Henry Price medal bearing the portrait in bronze of the famous Freemason of 1733, is given for such effort service or attainment as in the opinion of the Grand Master warrants its bestowal; it is not confined to members of the Grand Lodge or the Craft in the Bay State, but may be, and has been, given to distinguished Craftsmen all over the nation.

The Joseph Warren Medal is more intimate and personal to the State, and is usually awarded to brethren who have not received other distinctions at the hands of Lodge or Grand Lodge; the old Tiler who has been faithful for many years; the brother whose care of the sick in his Lodge has been outstanding, the member who has served in some obscure place or way but whose efforts have been unselfish for his brethren, such as these prize, and have a right to prize, this decoration given by the Grand Master.

New York awards annually a medal for distinguished services in the arts. This is the only Masonic decoration of its kind in the country, all the others being confined to recognition of Masonic service. New York's medal is highly prized by artist Craftsmen, because so difficult to win.

Nebraska has an old age medal which has unique features. M. W. Robert Carrell Jordan was the first Grand Master of Masons of Nebraska. After his death, a medal was struck off in bronze. One of these medals is given to each Lodge and by it presented to the member who has been a Master Mason for the greatest number of years. At his death, it is returned to the Lodge, and is again presented to the brother entitled to wear it.

The Grand Lodge of Nebraska later procured a duplicate of the bronze medal, in gold. The Grand Secretary keeps track of the oldest members of its Lodges, and this gold medal is presented to the brother, member of a Nebraska Lodge, and residing in Nebraska, who has been a Master Mason for the greatest number of years. Brother Albert E. Baker, 92 years of age, member of Oliver Lodge No. 38, Seward, Nebraska, who was made a Master Mason on May 11, 1865, and therefore has been a Master Mason for more than 70 years, now wears the Gold Jordan Medal. Upon his death it will be presented to the brother who is entitled to wear it. The Gold Jordan Medal is always presented by the Grand Master in person, if it is possible for him to do so. If not, he gives his proxy to some brother, usually a Past Grand Master, to make the presentation for him.

North Dakota gives a life membership to brethren who reach seventy years, and have been Craftsmen for thirty years; to her fifty-year Masons she extends an invitation to attend Grand Lodge where the venerable brethren are received with honor and acclaim.

Rhode Island has recently created badges of merit in the form of silver and bronze medals. According to the provisions of the Grand lodge enactment creating these distinctions, no more than two of the medals for service in each of three classes, distinguished, exemplars and meritorious service, may be awarded in any one year. The selection is left to a committee, which recommends to the Grand Master.

South Carolina has just created the Albert Gallatin Mackey Medal, and none has been awarded as yet. It bears a likeness of the famous South Carolina Masonic jurist and authority, and will be given by the Grand Master, in his discretion, to such Craftsmen of the State or out of it as he deems worthy to wear it.

A great honor is paid in a majority of the nations Grand Jurisdictions in the selection of brethren to be recommended to other Grand Lodges for the positions of representatives near the Grand Lodge suggesting the name. If the Representative of Grand Lodge B., near the Grand Lodge of A, should die or leave the Jurisdiction permanently, the Grand Master of Grand Jurisdiction A suggests to the Grand Master of Grand Jurisdiction B the name of Worshipful Brother John Doe. If the Grand Master of Grand Jurisdiction B is pleased with the suggestion, he appoints Worshipful Brother John Doe the representative of Grand Lodge B near the Grand Lodge of A, and, later, sends him a certificate to that effect. The appointment, of course, is reported to Grand Lodge for its confirmation and approval.

The Grand Representative system is supposed to enable each Grand Lodge to have an observer at the communications of the others, and such representatives are supposed always to be present at all communications, and to communicate with the Grand Lodges appointing them all matters of interest which occur in the Jurisdictions in which the representatives live and attend. Alas, not always are these honorary posts valued by their winners; it is not unusual when the roll of Grand Representatives is called in Grand lodge to hear but half of them answering to their names. In some Grand Lodges a Grand Representative of Jurisdiction B who fails to appear in Jurisdiction A three times in succession, will be notified that the Grand Master of A is recommending to the Grand Master of B that another be appointed in his place. Titles are honors in all Grand Jurisdictions. "Most Worshipful" are Grand Masters in forty- eight, Pennsylvania uses Right Worshipful even for the Grand Master, and in Texas a Past Grand Master drops from "Most" to "Right." In some Jurisdictions "Right Worshipful" is given to all Grand Officers not Grand Masters, including District Deputies; in others, none below the Grands Wardens have a qualifying word before the "Worshipful." Titular honors given Grand Chaplains differ, Right Reverend, Very Reverend, Reverend and Worshipful, Right Reverend and Worshipful, all have their places in American Freemasonry.

In a majority of our Grand Jurisdictions, Past Grand Lodge officers retain for life the title of honor; in a few, only the Past Elective officers have that privilege.

Is it a greater honor to be appointed than elected? At first glance the answer would seem to be negative, but the American system is to advance the "line" from year to year, even if at times it brings some man less than best qualified to the top. In the three Jurisdictions in which Deputy Grand Masters are appointed, Iowa, Massachusetts and Mississippi, while the Deputy Grand Master knows that his appointment confers no hope of advancement to the Grand East, it is regarded as a very great honor indeed. The same may be said for those Jurisdictions in which Grand Wardens do not expect to be elected Deputy. In these "Past grand Warden" is a title highly valued by those who possess it.

To be appointed or elected to any office in Grand Lodge is an honor. There are many from whom a choice can be made; every Jurisdiction has sons who can, and do, acceptably fill the various "line" offices. Two positions in the official family, however, have few who wish them, and less who can fill them. Those who win these appointments and fill them with distinction can well be considered as honored above a majority of their fellow Craftsmen.

The Fraternal Correspondent and the Grand Historian are often more honored by neglect than attention, to the shame of most Craftsmen he it said, for no more selfless and self-sacrificing brethren give whole-heartedly of their time and knowledge than these.

The Chairman of the Committee on Fraternal Correspondence, or Fraternal Correspondent, as he is usually denominated, reads and digests the Proceedings of the Grand Lodges of the world, often sixty or even seventy in a year, and then writes a review of each for the benefit of those interested in what other Grand Lodges are doing. A few Fraternal Correspondents attempt the even more difficult task of writing a report under topics, so that all that has been done in all Grand Jurisdictions is reviewed under such headings as "Dual Membership," "The N.P.D. Problem," "Social Service," "Charity" and the like.

A good Fraternal Correspondent must know Freemasonry well; its background, history, laws, symbolism, ritual, practice, ancient usages and customs. He must possess a sane and balanced judgment and a power of condensation which will reduce the essentials of a thick volume to as many sentences as it has pages. He must be interesting, entertaining, and write with humor and toleration; a spirit of charity and friendliness marking him off from the majority of his fellows. He must do a vast amount of work for a very small fee, indeed many Fraternal Correspondents spend on clerical hire more than Grand Lodge pays. Finally, he must be content with a thankless job, for the readers of his labors are far fewer than those labors deserve.

The Grand Historian has an even harder and still more thankless task, as his labors show so seldom in public. Yet the Grand Historian who keeps a history of his Grand Lodge up to date, or who has produced one of those monumental volumes which set forth the story of Grand Lodge from the beginning, has rendered a service to his Craft not measurable in terms of money or gratitude.

Occasionally he may see his work recognized; the most recent opportunity for forty-nine Historians is in the new Scribner Edition of Gould's History in which in two volumes the story of Freemasonry in this country has been set forth by a well qualified historian in each Grand Lodge.

The Historian is a patient delver into old records; he is a compiler of that which has been, that those who come after him may interpret what is and may be in the light of precedent and the romance of an older day. He works usually without much recognition and almost invariably simply for the love of his work and his Craft.

To Correspondent and Historian the Craft owes more than it can ever pay. Perhaps the great honor of their selection to fill these important if little known, positions is some compensation for the labors they so willingly and lovingly perform.

All in all, American Freemasonry gives honors but sparingly; her decorations are few and hard to win, her titles to be worn only after long service. It is the gentle Masonic way to make them valuable by holding due respect for distinctions won by brethren who have given so largely of themselves; by making evident to the brethren who have been willing servants that Craftsmen know they have not labored without receiving their Master's Wages of appreciation and fraternal Affection.