

NORTH CAROLINA

SUMMER 2026

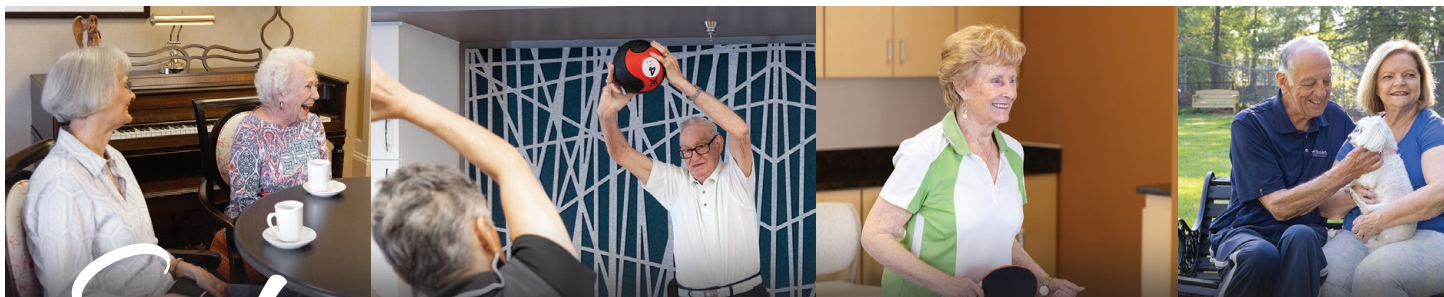
THE MASON

Official Publication of The Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of North Carolina



Above the Fray

Still On Duty



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From the Grand Master: Where Were You First Prepared?

By Steve Norris, Grand Master of Masons in North Carolina



When we begin our Masonic journey, we learn that the great light of Masonry is the Holy Bible, the inestimable gift of God to man. We are taught it is to be a rule and guide to our faith. We are also taught, that however men may differ in creed, all men agree that within the pages of the Holy Bible are found those principles which lay the foundation upon which to build a righteous life.

A frequent topic of this great light, the Holy Bible, is the heart, or the inner man. It is known as the center of oneself, the very core of a person.

We read in Proverbs 27:19, “As in water face reflects face, so the heart of man reflects man.”

Then in Proverbs 4:23 we find: “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”

With this biblical perspective on the heart of man, perhaps we have a better understanding how an obscure question came to be found in our first degree.

Masonry, being a fraternity striving to accept only good men, and then equipping them with the necessary tools to erect their individual temples, understood the necessity of searching the heart of man. Thus we are asked: Where were you first prepared?

You see, the only true initiation takes place within a man’s heart.

Our craft can direct your steps, it can provide you with working tools, but it’s entirely up to you to use them.

“That your heart might be taught to conceive, ere your eyes beheld the beauties thereof.”

Our degrees are structured to allow our hearts to conceive the beauties of Freemasonry without the benefit of sight. Why, may we ask?

Why do we close our eyes when we pray, when we cry, when we kiss, when we dream? Because the most beautiful things in our lives are not seen. They are felt within our hearts.

You see, real degree work happens not in the lodge, but in our daily lives. That’s when we and our craft are put to the test.

Once a man becomes a Mason he should have a deeper sense of his duty to God, his country, his family, his neighbor and himself. He should be more tolerant, less selfish, less prejudiced and more charitable.

If he is not, then the initiation had no value. He experienced a ritual. He received a degree. But he is not a Mason, he is simply a member.

A dear friend and Masonic mentor, WB Charles Somerset, past master of Shallotte No. 727, made a statement to me 40 years ago: "Masonry is faced with the fact that entirely too many of our members were only prepared in the preparation room, never in their hearts."

The truth of the matter is that the degrees and the principles they teach do not make a man a Mason. We are made a Mason every day that we choose to live by the principles each of us swore to uphold.

No degree, from the first to the last, is of any value unless the candidate truly seeks light in a real and inner way. Masonry is not a hobby, it is a lifestyle that requires a man to wage war against vice without ceasing, to continually journey towards the light of truth and to always labor for the good of all mankind.

Men who are truly engaged in these efforts are indeed builders. They are Masons not only in name, but also within their hearts. Our fraternity is not about building a better world; our rituals are intended to build better men who will go out to build better communities and a better world.

First Samuel 16:7 tells us: "For the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."

In Jeremiah 17:9-10 we find, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."

These passages of scripture parallel the explanations of two monitorial symbols or emblems found in our third degree, the sword pointing to a naked heart and the all-seeing eye, which are thus explained:

The sword pointing to a naked heart demonstrates that justice will sooner or later overtake us, and although our thoughts words and actions may be hidden from the eyes of man, yet that all seeing eye, whom the

sun, moon and stars obey and under whose watchful care even comets perform their stupendous revolutions, pervades the secret recesses of the human heart, and will reward us according to our merits.

I chose to feature these two symbols on this year's Grand Lodge pin. I hope that by wearing it you will be constantly reminded of that purity of heart so essentially necessary to our gaining admission into the celestial lodge above.



So, I ask you my brothers, "Where were you first prepared?"

My prayer is that each of you were truly prepared in your heart before you knocked on the door of Freemasonry; but if not, that once you beheld the beauties thereof, once you were exposed to the light of Freemasonry, your hearts were changed and fitted as living stones. I hope our craft has given you a deeper sense of duty to your God, your country, your family, your neighbor and yourself. I hope that by receiving our degrees you have become more tolerant, less selfish, less prejudiced and more charitable. But even more, I hope that each day, as you choose to follow the faith you profess, you also renew your commitment to the ideals of our gentle craft, and that you carefully and prayerfully recommend only those whose internal qualifications make them worthy and open to our lessons. I hope that each day you choose to be a Mason and practice out of the lodge the lessons taught within it, so we may always be able to convince mankind of the goodness of our order!

So mote it be.

Above the Fray:

Freemasonry and the Revolutionary Era

By Jonathan A. Underwood, Grand Secretary



As America approaches the 250th anniversary of its independence, it is fitting for North Carolina Masons to reflect not only on the Revolutionary generation, but also on what our Craft meant in that difficult and divided age.

Freemasonry was already well established in North Carolina before and during the Revolution. St. John's Lodge in Wilmington, Royal White Hart Lodge at Halifax, St. John's Lodge at New Bern, Unanimity Lodge at Edenton, and Union, later Phoenix, Lodge at Fayetteville all stand as reminders that Masonry was present in the life of colonial and Revolutionary

North Carolina. Many men associated with the Revolution and the founding generation were also associated with the Craft. Yet the lodges themselves were not political clubs, nor were they engines of rebellion or party feeling.

The Revolutionary era disrupted Masonic meetings across North Carolina and along the eastern seaboard. Men took sides in that long and bitter struggle. Passions ran high among those we now call Patriots and those we now call Loyalists. Families, churches, communities, and governments were strained by the conflict. And yet, where our early minutes survive, they are remarkable for what they do not say. We do not find lodges consumed by political argument. We do not find the Craft recording its resentment, discord, or frustrations over the war. We find the ordinary and enduring work of Masonry: opening and closing lodges, receiving petitions, conferring degrees, extending fellowship, and seeking harmony among brethren.

That does not mean those lodges were without tension. Doubtless they were. But it does suggest that Masonry, at its best, rose above the fray. A similar pattern appears during the Civil War. Even in seasons when the outside world seemed determined to divide men from one another, the lodge room remained a place set apart.

Masonry never was, nor is it now, about importing the quarrels of the world into the lodge. It is about quieting the heart, improving the man, honoring the Supreme Architect, and learning how to live more thoughtfully with our brethren and neighbors. We do not always agree. We are not asked to. But we are asked to meet upon the level, to subdue our passions, and to practice friendship, relief, and truth.

Masonry offers something better.

We live in trying times. But when has that not been true? The world will always offer anger, division, and unrest. Masonry offers something better: a disciplined peace, a sacred restraint, and a hope that the lessons taught within our walls may inspire greater love for humanity beyond them.

If the simple tenets of our fraternity were more widely understood and more faithfully practiced, the world would surely be better for it. And perhaps one of the truest ways we may honor the Revolutionary generation is not merely to remember what they built, but to understand the inheritance they entrusted to us—both as citizens and as Masons—and to labor faithfully to preserve it.



Introducing: Troy Nuss

Troy Nuss joins Masonic Home for Children as Director of Development and Communications

Troy Nuss, a fundraising professional with experience in education, human services and healthcare, joined the Masonic Home for Children at Oxford (MHCO) in May as director of development and communications. In this new position he will lead the 153-year-old Home's fundraising, marketing and communications efforts.

Nuss is a Certified Fundraising Executive and a member of Washington Lodge #1 AF&AM in Wilmington, DE.

"The mission of MHCO is especially meaningful to me, both professionally and personally," Nuss said. "I joined DeMolay at 14 and have been a Mason for 27 years, and my first fundraising role was with the Masonic Home of Delaware. I understand firsthand the values, traditions, and philanthropic spirit that guide Masonic charitable work, and I'm honored to contribute to the continued growth and impact of MHCO."

Nuss comes to the Home with experience in building and leading development teams and using communications to build awareness of an organization's mission and extend its philanthropic reach. At MHCO he will build a comprehensive advancement program to secure the funds necessary to sustain and expand the Home's programs and oversee its external communications. "I will help MHCO expand donor relationships, enhance its communications strategy and ensure long-term sustainability for the children and families it serves," he said.

He has a bachelor's degree in organizational management and a master's in management and public administration, both from Wilmington University.



**Troy
Nuss**

DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT
AND COMMUNICATIONS

☎ (919) 603-3941
✉ TNUSS@MHC-OXFORD.ORG

🌐 WWW.MHC-OXFORD.ORG
📍 600 COLLEGE STREET, OXFORD, NC 27565

THE NORTH CAROLINA MASONIC FOUNDATION: When a Lodge Closes, a Legacy Begins

by George Marut

For 28 years, the members of Eastgate Lodge No. 692 gathered on Sharon Amity Road in Charlotte — building friendships, serving their community, and embodying the ideals of Masonry. But by 2018, the math no longer worked. The building needed more than the lodge could sustain.

Rather than quietly dissolve, Eastgate's leadership chose a different path.

After consolidating with Matthews Lodge No. 461, the proceeds from the sale of their property became an opportunity. With guidance from the North Carolina Masonic Foundation, and the goal of establishing an eternal legacy — preserving the lodge's identity in perpetuity — the lodge directed a gift to the Foundation.

"We were blessed with this opportunity," said Todd McCranie. "We chose to donate to the Masonic Foundation and set up a legacy to forever carry the name of Eastgate Lodge, even as our Lodge no longer existed."

It's a story about what Masonry looks like at a pivot point: a lodge facing an incredibly difficult road and choosing, deliberately, to have a positive outcome.

But the story doesn't end there. Inspired by Eastgate's example, the North Carolina Masonic Foundation is launching the **Eastgate Open** — an [cid:61608A82-ED62-43A0-98FC-EF02307688AC](#) annual statewide lodge giving program that invites every lodge across the jurisdiction to support the Foundation. Giving will be tracked annually and cumulatively, and lodges that step forward will be recognized. The goal is simple: inspire others to do what Eastgate did — give to the Foundation and secure a lasting legacy for their lodge.

"My hope is that other lodges will be inspired and choose to be recognized as givers," said Foundation President George Marut.

Eastgate Lodge No. 692 may no longer meet on Sharon Amity Road. But its legacy — and the example it set — is just getting started.



NORTH CAROLINA
MASONIC
FOUNDATION



SMOKE UNDER THE OAKS

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CHILDREN 14TH
ANNUAL
HOMECOMING
BBQ COMPETITION

OCTOBER 9TH-10TH 2026

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MHCO Announces 14th Annual Masonic Homecoming Festival

The Masonic Home for Children at Oxford (MHCO) will host its 14th Annual Masonic Homecoming Festival October 9–11, 2026, welcoming Alumni, members of the Masonic Fraternity, local residents, and supporters from across North Carolina to its historic campus.

The annual festival celebrates the people, partnerships, and traditions that have supported MHCO's mission of serving children and families for more than 150 years. The family-friendly event draws thousands of visitors each year and offers a weekend of fellowship, entertainment, and community engagement.

Festivities begin on Friday, October 9, with the annual Chip Shots for Kids Golf Tournament, a long-standing tradition organized by MHCO alumni. Guests will also enjoy an evening of live music and fellowship on campus.

Activities continue on Saturday, October 10, beginning at 10 a.m. with complimentary

amusement rides, a gaming truck, vendors, campus tours, and other family-friendly attractions. At 11 a.m., North Carolina's largest Shrine parade will make its way through campus, featuring Shrine units, school bands, community organizations, youth groups, and the Homecoming Court.

Following the parade, attendees can gather under the oaks for a barbecue lunch while enjoying music and fellowship. Throughout the day, guests will have opportunities to learn more about MHCO's mission and impact across North Carolina through cottage, campus, and museum tours.

The festival will conclude at 3 p.m. on Saturday. Parking will be available at the campus ballfields, and all events are open to the public.

For additional information and event updates, visit mhc-oxford.org or follow the Masonic Home for Children at Oxford on Facebook.





SELF REFLECTION

Before You Judge a Brother, Check Your Own Ashlar

By Kenan J Denning

Brethren, I come before you today not only as a brother in this lodge, but also as a brother in Christ. Please hear me out. I am not here to preach to anyone. I speak only from my own experience and from the recognition of my own many flaws.

You see, it is easy—far too easy—to see the flaws in another man, another woman, our neighbor, or even in ourselves. That is exactly what the invisible enemy wants us to do. A careless word. An imperfect act. A moment of weakness. In that instant, we are quickly tempted to judge—to whisper, to conclude, and to condemn.

But pause... and reflect.

Have we forgotten the Ashlar? We are all imperfect. No one is perfect except The Great Architect of the Universe.

Brethren, this is one of the quiet and enduring lessons of our Craft: We are all Rough Ashlars. Each of us is unfinished. Each of us still bears the marks of imperfection. Each of us remains under the patient work of the working tools—of time, of trial, and of discipline.

So who are we to declare another man unworthy when our own stone is still being shaped? The real tragedy is not that a Brother has flaws. The tragedy is when we forget our own.

The Square does not first measure others—it measures us. The Common Gavel is not given so we may destroy the reputations of our Brothers, but to chip away at our own vices and superfluities. And the Perfect Ashlar we so admire is never achieved through criticism of others. It is achieved only through humble, consistent, and honest labor upon ourselves.

Before you speak against a Brother — pause.

Before you judge—reflect.

Before you condemn—remember: The very marks you see in him may very well exist in you, though they remain unseen.

Let us strive to be Brethren who build rather than break. Let us correct with compassion instead of pride. Let us remember that Masonry is not a place for perfect men, but a sanctuary for imperfect men who are sincerely striving toward perfection under the eye of the Great Architect.

So today, my Brethren, let the work begin where it always should: Not on the faults of another—but on the careful shaping of your own Ashlar.

W. R. PARKER

By Paul Vincent

“Dr. W. R. Parker...Born into a family of Hertford County leaders, he is adding lustre to the family record; as a good citizen, humanitarian, and sympathetic ‘country doctor...” — Roy Parker, July 1937.



A hoskie newspaper editor J. Roy Parker, writing in his weekly column for The Herald, no doubt saw in his former college roommate a steadfast commitment to the people of the Roanoke-Chowan area. He saw early on in this “country doctor” from

Northampton County an obligation to serve and help prosper the several communities in his part of northeastern North Carolina.

Born in Hertford County, in 1893, Walter Raleigh Parker was the son of a well-to-do farmer and merchant Charles W. Parker of Menola, N.C. The younger Parker would later attend Wake Forest College (now Wake Forest University) as well as the Medical College of Virginia, in Richmond, graduating in 1916.

After receiving his degree, Dr. Parker would relocate to Rich Square, in neighboring Northampton County, joining the medical practice of his relative, Dr. C. G. Parker. The young doctor’s term working under the tutelage of his uncle would be short-lived as the United States entered World War I, the following year, in April 1917. By that August, Dr. W. R. Parker would join the war effort, serving in the Medical Corps of the United States Navy.

Posted at the Naval Training Station in Hampton Roads, Virginia, Dr. Parker’s duty assignments included a stint at the Norfolk Naval Hospital. Physicals and other health checks were the norm although Parker saw, and perhaps treated, numerous cases of infection during the Great Influenza Pandemic of 1918.

In August 1919, the doctor resigned his post having obtained the rank of Lieutenant and returned to his home in Northampton County.

Following his military service, Dr. Parker would settle in Woodland, N.C., continuing his medical practice all the while assisting his fellow North Carolinians. In 1937, he took on the role of health director for Northampton and its contiguous counties, a position he held for over three decades. In that time, Parker greatly improved public health conditions within Northampton County, particularly in reducing infant and maternal mortality rates.

Dr. W. R. Parker was especially instrumental in helping revive Chowan College in the late 1940s. The institution’s closure in 1943 was brief thanks to the fundraising campaigns organized by the college’s board of trustees. Serving as board chairman, Dr. Parker and his team garnered both the financial and community support needed to reopen the school in 1949. Today, Chowan University serves the region offering both undergraduate and graduate courses of study.

During his lifetime, W. R. Parker no doubt added “lustre to the family record” as his friend J. Roy Parker once proudly stated. His many accolades, too great in breadth to detail here, wouldn’t do Dr. Parker justice as his service to the Roanoke-Chowan area was boundless. He was a General Practitioner, veteran of the Great War, public health pioneer, Masonic brother of Potecasi (now Pendleton) Lodge No. 418, and Woodland town council member to name a few.



The Museum of the Albemarle, in Elizabeth City, N.C., is working diligently to honor the legacy of Dr. W. R. Parker by conserving his military uniform.

Learn more about how you can help preserve Dr. Parker's officer's cap and tunic at: museumofthealbemarle.com/collections/adopt-artifact

From the Quarry

70-year Service Award

Waynesville No. 259



On April 14, 2026, a 70-year Masonic Service Award was presented to WB Hugh K. Terrell, Jr., who was raised to the sublime degree of Master Mason on 12/26/1955.

Pictured above with WB Terrell are: MW Berry Rigdon, Past Grand Master, WB Dave Cashion, Jr. Grand Deacon, WB Dwight Mooney, Master of Waynesville No. 259, WB Jim Henson, PM, and WB Ted Inman, PM.



The Craftsman's Companion

Grantham Lodge No. 725



The Craftsman's Companion was presented to WB Aaron Morris by Worshipful Master David Nyce. This worthy brother has stepped in wherever needed, teaching, checking our work, and he has also provided a lot of help to me, personally, that I didn't know I needed.

Diamond Jubilee

Steele Creek No. 737



Steele Creek celebrated 60 years since the granting of the Charter for our Lodge on April 20, 1966. We also raised a Brother to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason on his actual birthday. One of the most special things about this event was having Past Master WB John Freeman participate in the degree; he was one of the original five men raised in Steele Creek Lodge in 1966! WB Bob Braswell was also able to attend. After the degree, we shared a Celebration Luncheon with friends and family.



On Monday, April 20th, we had 13 Brothers travel to Charles M. Setzer Lodge #693 to retrieve the 32nd District Traveling Gavel to commemorate the actual date of our Charter. There was great fellowship with our Brothers from the several Lodges in attendance.



First Responder & Military Appreciation Luncheon

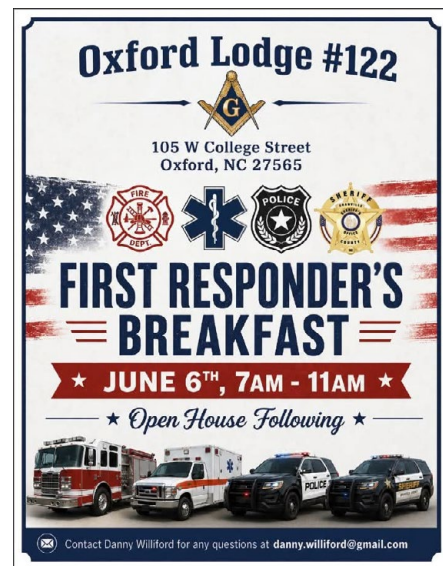
Doric No. 568 & St. John's No. 3



Lunch was served to First Responders including local military from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. The invitation was sent to all 14 Fire Departments, 4 Law Enforcement agencies, Rescue Squads, and Military in Craven County. The meal consisted of homemade baked ziti, salad, mixed vegetables and garlic bread.

First Responders Breakfast

Oxford Lodge No. 122



Brothers Kenneth Bentley, SW, and Dee Woodlief led the team preparing breakfast for our local first responders. Posters were sent to the fire, police, and EMS offices and stations, and the event was publicized by those groups during their meetings. Forty-eight first responders were served eggs, sausage, bacon, biscuits, fruit, and juice.

Charity Golf Tournament

Apex Lodge No. 584



The 1-day charity golf event was held on April 4, 2026, at Lakewinds Golf Course in Rougemont, NC, to raise funds for the Masonic Home for Children at Oxford (MHCO). The event raised \$5,000 through the generosity of golfers, sponsors, and donors.

Participants enjoyed a day of golf, fellowship, camaraderie, and food. Many golfers said they had fun and would like to return next year. Everyone left smiling, with the feeling that simply showing up to support the cause made the day a win for all.

The trophies were designed and crafted by WB Gilbert Sibelius, Master of Apex Lodge, from furniture and materials from the MHCO and the lodge.



Diamond Jubilee Award

Jefferson Penn Lodge No 384



At a stated communication of Jefferson Penn Lodge No. 384, after being received by the lodge, District Deputy Grand Master Clifford Shrewsbury asked the Senior Deacon to escort WB Paul Tutherow Sr. west of the altar. WB Tutherow was joined on his left by his son, Brother Paul Tutherow Jr.

The DDGM was joined by the DDGL Josh Payne, W.Master J.D. Paschal, Bro. Sammy Fulp, Chaplain, and Bro. Rocky Turner, Secretary.

WB Shrewsbury conducted the ceremony for WB Paul Tutherow Sr. receiving the Masonic Diamond Jubilee Certificate.

WM J.D. Paschal presented the Certificate plaque representing his 60 years of Masonic service,

Brother Tutherow Jr. placed the 60-Year Masonic Pin on his father's lapel and had very kind and personal words of love for his father.



DDGM Shrewsbury and DDGL Payne presented WB Tutherow with a framed miniature Masonic Apron as a special gift.

50-Year Veteran's Emblem

Ayden Lodge No. 498



On June 9th, Brother Bobby Ray Taylor of Ayden Lodge No. 498 was presented his 50-year Veteran's Emblem certificate and pin by Ayden Lodge No. 498 members WB Greg Roberson, Master and WB Barry Wood, Secretary.



60-Year Diamond Jubilee

Ayden Lodge No. 498



On June 9th, Brother Carlton Ray Rouse of Ayden Lodge No. 498 was presented his 60-year Diamond Jubilee certificate and pin by Ayden Lodge No. 498 members WB Greg Roberson, Master and WB Barry Wood, Secretary.





THE THREE Cs

Chalk, Charcoal, and Clay

By Elliot Chikofsky

Very early in our Masonic journey, we are introduced to a triad of nouns that all begin with the letter "C": chalk, charcoal, and clay. They are explained to us as emblematic of freedom, fervency, and zeal -- attributes that new Masons should emulate, as new apprentices served their Craft Masters throughout history. Yet, in another sentence or two, the lecture has moved on to other topics. Was that all there is to these three material substances? No. There is nothing in our Masonic ritual that does not deserve further examination and scrutiny. These three have further depths of meaning for us to explore. As we do, we will find that chalk, charcoal, and clay are material elements of education, creation, and that which is artistic in Man.

CHALK

We are told that there is nothing freer than CHALK, for the merest touch will leave a trace behind. It is interesting that this is presented in the context of an apprentice. He is, one would think, far from free. The apprentice is obligated to follow directions, serve, and learn from

the Master who has taken him on. So how is he free like chalk?

What he has gained by being taken on as an apprentice is a clear goal or direction for his life and livelihood. He comes to realize that he now will have, if he duly learns and applies himself, a skilled future and the means to support himself. He has acquired the economic freedom to learn, and, in time, perhaps the ability to pass on what he has learned to others. Thus, chalk for the apprentice represents and embodies education. Even a little education, properly learned, will leave a trace behind in all he will touch and do.

Creatively, chalk represents the ability to make marks, write, and communicate. In schools, teachers would teach with a chalkboard and students would write on a slate. Chalk gave them the ability not just to write words and simple figures but to erase, correct, and re-create. With chalk, we can leave traces behind with a purpose, learning to communicate and refine ideas. This, in time, leads on to the ability of the Master to mark his designs on the Trestleboard to direct the work of the Craft in the fulfillment of their mission and objectives.

CHARCOAL

We are told that there is nothing more fervent than CHARCOAL, which, when properly lighted, can produce forces that no metal will resist. But even when it is unlit, charcoal can unleash forces and strength that are hard to reckon with. Charcoal is a medium of communication. But unlike chalk, which is typically uniform in its appearance and written texture, charcoal opens a wide range of subtlety and expression.

Creatively, charcoal represents the ability to draw and illustrate. It lets the artist make drawings that come alive with shading and texture. The two-dimensional illustration begins to acquire the appearance of three-dimensional characteristics. Our simple learning can take on depth and nuance. Long before photography, mankind could capture the beauty and diversity of nature through art and illustration. Thus, charcoal is a key material element and an important precursor that enables architecture and other noble sciences.

CLAY

We are told that there is nothing more zealous than CLAY, our mother earth. As Adam was formed of clay, we are of the earth. Although we think of ourselves as somehow separate, we are physically of the earth and interact with its other parts in all we do. In time, we are bound to return to it and be renewed with the rest.

Creatively, clay represents the ability to shape, mold, and create in three dimensions. Our ancient forebears learned early on to form clay to make bowls, cups, and dishes. They turned to making artistic shapes directly, which led to figures and, in time, to statues, pillars, and columns.

Eventually, they learned to make and harden shape molds into which hot metal can be poured to create the vessels of the Temple, as the artisan Grand Master Hiram did on the clay grounds by the Jordan River. Clay enables that which is artistic in multi-dimensional Man.

Let's consider the potter versus the sculptor of stone. With clay, the artist builds up to bring forth the work. In contrast, the sculptor of stone cuts away and builds down. Both form works of value but come at it in opposite ways. Fashioning with clay and making pottery for useful items came to mankind well before metal working and the artful carving of large stones.

We know that, when well lighted, charcoal can make the strongest metal melt. But long before that melting point, the lighted coal of a furnace or kiln can slow heat clay to make its form hard, persistent, and resistant to liquid. The lower temperature and patient process of the kiln can be as useful and productive as the extreme heat and fiery ferocity of the blast furnace. There are lessons here deserving our further contemplation.

With chalk, usefully applied, we can have education, creation, adjustment, and re-creation. With charcoal, we can have shades of grey and different degrees of heat, allowing nuance and subtlety in our endeavors. And, with clay, properly formed and prepared, we can learn to cast the vessels and accoutrements for our spiritual Temple.

Elliot Chikofsky is newly affiliated with Eagle Lodge #19 in Hillsborough. He is Grand Representative for the Grand Lodge of Slovakia to the G.L. of Massachusetts

Still On Duty

By Don Barrier

At noon on May 20, 2026, before a crowd gathered in front of the Hezekiah Alexander Homestead, Worshipful Brother James Pugsley led four brothers forward and presented the colors. The act opened the capstone day, the last day of the Charlotte Museum of History's commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence. May 20 marks the day that declaration was made. The men chose their ground well. They posted the colors before the oldest house in Mecklenburg County, the 1774 stone home of Brother Hezekiah Alexander, who put his name to the cause the flag now carries.



When the colors were posted, the brothers carried the day indoors. They took their place in the grand hall as the highlighted exhibit, five men in the dress of the Revolution standing among the cases and the diorama of 1775 Charlotte.

Brother Klaus Meckenstock, Brother Michael Albertson, Worshipful Brother Troy Chandler and Worshipful Brother Michael Aycock stood with Worshipful Brother Pugsley. Look past the wool and the cocked hats and you saw something plainer. Each had already served the country in uniform once, in his own war and his own decade, before he ever put on the clothes of 1775. They are Master Masons and National Sojourners, and they wear the dress of the founders to teach what the founders risked.

That is the first thing worth saying. These men were not playing a part. They were keeping a duty. A soldier's oath does not expire on the day he hangs up the uniform. It changes shape. It becomes the work of keeping the country he defended worth defending, and of handing that country, whole, to the children who will hold it next.

On the hour, in the hall, the five gave the Toast

to the Flag. They did not read it. They recited it, each man taking his turn, from memory, the way the verse has opened Sojourner meetings for a hundred years. John Jay Daly published the lines in 1917. Daly served a short tour in the First World War and never became a Mason, yet his toast holds its fixed place in our calendar. The hall heard the red of it, the white of it, the blue of it, and the whole of it. Old words, spoken plain, by men who had worn the country's uniform themselves.

A Toast to the Flag by John Jay Daly, 1917

*Here's to the red of it—
There's not a thread of it,
No, nor a shred of it
In all the spread of it
From foot to head.
But heroes bled for it,
Faced steel and lead for it,
Precious blood shed for it,
Bathing it red!*

*Here's to the white of it—
Thrilled by the sight of it,
Who knows the right of it,
But feels the might of it
Through day and night?
Womanhood's care for it
Made manhood dare for it,
Purity's prayer for it
Keeps it so white!*

*Here's to the blue of it—
Beauteous view of it,
Heavenly hue of it,
Star-spangled dew of it
Constant and true;
Diadems gleam for it,
States stand supreme for it,
Liberty's beam for it
Brightens the blue!*

*Here's to the whole of it—
Stars, stripes and pole of it,
Body and soul of it,
O, and the roll of it,
Sun shining through;
Hearts in accord for it,
Swear by the sword for it,
Thanking the Lord for it,
Red, White and Blue!*



Thirty minutes later, in the same hall, they presented Build the Flag. Here the room changed. The program raises the flag in stages, and on this day the stars did not go up in the practiced hands of the brethren. They went up in small hands. Boys and girls came forward and hung the stars themselves, one at a time, until the blue field was full.

Watch a child reach up to set a star and you understand the purpose of the Order in a single gesture. The brothers did not perform the flag for the children. They gave the children the flag to build. That is the distance between a show and a charge.

This is what the Sojourners do when the costumes are folded away. They carry the country's story into rooms where the young can reach it, in a museum hall, in a schoolroom, wherever children gather. They turn an anniversary into an inheritance. The work is quiet, and it asks much of men who have already given a great deal.



We owe these brothers more than the applause of an afternoon. They earned our thanks first in service we will never fully see, on posts and in years they seldom name. They earn it again each time they stand and spend themselves to make a child love the flag enough to keep it. The first service kept the country alive. The second keeps it worth keeping.

Brother Pugsley and the four who stood with him gave Charlotte a fitting last word for its 250th. The young built the flag. The old men watched over the building of it. Between those two facts sits everything the day was meant to say.

That is the image to carry home: five sentinels still at their post, training the relief, not five old men in costume.

Looking Ahead

The capstone closed one celebration and opened a season of them. The Grand Lodge of North Carolina has more planned for the 250th: a 250th Anniversary Dinner at the Annual Communication in Winston-Salem on September 25, 2026, the Liberty Gala hosted by Historic Phoenix Lodge No. 8 in Fayetteville on October 3, 2026, and the Kings Mountain Battlefield Event at Kings Mountain on October 17, 2026.

Veteran brothers who would stand in that line are welcome. Contact WB James Pugsley through Grandview or at 97@nationalsojourners.org.

North Carolina currently has five chartered chapters: North Carolina Chapter 97 in Fayetteville, Camp Lejeune Chapter 329 in Jacksonville, Piedmont Chapter 504 in Raleigh, Old Fort Chapter 553 in Morganton, and 1776 Militia Chapter 560 in Elizabeth City. Two additional chapters are now being organized in Winston-Salem and Charlotte. For information about Winston-Salem, contact WB Jay Woods through Grandview. For Charlotte, contact WB Jose Suquinahua or Brother Rob Dull through Grandview.

The First Three Children of the Oxford Orphanage

By Dr. Creighton Lovelace



In February of 1873, on a cold and gloomy Saturday afternoon in Oxford, North Carolina, three children arrived at the doors of what would become one of the greatest charitable works in the history of North Carolina Masonry.

The building that received them was old, worn, and nearly abandoned. Windowpanes were missing. Furniture was almost nonexistent. Inside stood only a single table and one chair. Yet from those humble surroundings would grow the Masonic Home for Children at Oxford, an institution that would help shape the lives of more than 10,000 children over the next century and a half.

At the center of that beginning stood one remarkable man: John Haymes Mills.

Born in Halifax County, Virginia in 1831, Mills grew up in the turbulent years before the War Between the States. After attending Wake Forest College, he eventually settled in Oxford, North Carolina, where he taught mathematics

at the Oxford Female Seminary. By 1858, he had purchased the struggling school and became its president.

Like so many Southern men of his generation, Mills saw the devastation brought by the Civil War. During his years as editor of the *Biblical Recorder* in Raleigh after the war, he traveled extensively across North Carolina. Everywhere he went, he encountered poverty, hardship, and children left destitute by the conflict. Widows struggled to survive. Families were broken. In many cases, children had no stable home at all.

Those scenes deeply affected him.

When the Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of North Carolina met in Raleigh in late 1872 to determine what should become of the old St. John's College property in Oxford, Mills passionately argued that the buildings should become a home for orphaned children. After heated debate, the proposal narrowly passed. The Grand Lodge appropriated funds, the state legislature added a small contribution, and the first orphanage in North Carolina was born.

Mills himself moved into the deteriorating structure and immediately began preparing to receive children.

Then came that bleak Saturday in February 1873.

Years later, Past Grand Master Francis D. Winston recalled witnessing the arrival of the first orphan admitted to the institution. Winston was then a student at Horner Military Academy in Oxford and had brought donated clothing collected by fellow students.

As he remembered it, a man arrived at the door in a one-horse wagon carrying a pale young boy. Mills stepped forward and asked the purpose of the visit. Upon hearing the answer, Winston said the large-framed Mason lifted the child from the wagon "with the paw

of a lion,” embraced him tightly, and kissed him with tears streaming down his face.

“It was indeed the caress of the lion,” Winston later wrote, “but it was truly the caress of love.”

That child was ten-year-old Robert Lee Parrish of Granville County.

He did not come alone.

Also arriving that day were his older sister, Nancy Parrish Seate, and a young girl named Isabelle Robertson Blair. These three children became the very first residents of the new orphanage.

Their stories reflected the larger tragedy facing North Carolina in the aftermath of the war.

Isabelle Robertson had lost her father, Zachariah Roberson, during the conflict. Serving with the 30th North Carolina Regiment, he was captured in Virginia in 1864 and later died in a Baltimore hospital from chronic illness brought on by wartime conditions. Isabelle’s mother had already died years earlier. The death of her father left the family in desperate circumstances, eventually leading to her admission into the orphanage.

Nancy and Robert Parrish also came from a family shattered by the war. Their father, Elijah Parrish, served in the 53rd North Carolina Regiment after being swept into Confederate conscription during the desperate manpower shortages of 1862. Military records show periods of arrest, punishment, and eventual desertion late in the war. Afterward, he largely disappeared from surviving records, leaving his children in uncertain conditions during Reconstruction-era North Carolina.

These were not merely names on old ledgers.

They were frightened children arriving at an unfamiliar place during one of the hardest periods in Southern history.

Yet Oxford became more than a refuge. It became a home.

The orphanage grew rapidly. During its

first year alone, 136 children were admitted. Donations increased. Support spread throughout the state. What began in a weathered building with broken windows soon became one of the defining charitable missions of North Carolina Masonry.

The lives of those first three children also moved forward.

Isabelle Robertson later married Charles Wesley Blair and raised a large family of her own in North Carolina. Nancy Parrish married James W. Seate and spent much of her later life in Henderson. Robert Lee Parrish — the little boy lifted from the wagon by John H. Mills on that cold February day — also married, raised children, and built a life in Vance County.

In an interesting turn of history, Robert married Annie Elizabeth Roberson, a relative of Isabelle Robertson’s family, forever intertwining the stories of two of Oxford’s first children.

Today, more than 150 years after those first arrivals, North Carolina Masons can look back with gratitude upon the vision of John Haymes Mills and the generations of brethren who supported the orphanage that grew from his dream.

The Masonic Home at Oxford was never simply about providing food or shelter. It was about restoring dignity, stability, and hope to children whose worlds had collapsed.

The image still remains powerful: a cold afternoon, a battered building, three children arriving at the door, and one Mason embracing a frightened boy with tears in his eyes.

From that moment, a legacy began.

And for thousands of children across North Carolina, that legacy changed everything.

WB Creighton Lovelace currently serves as Master of Forest City Lodge No. 381. He has served as Master of Spindale No. 673, Western Star No. 91 and the Civil War Lodge of Research No. 1865. He has served as Pastor of Danieltown Baptist Church since 2004 and is a history teacher at Trinity Christian School in Rutherfordton, NC.

WHAT MAKES A GOOD MASON?

It's your story to tell the next generation

By Alex Edmisten

My Masonic journey started when I was 9 years old. I watched on the WLOS news about a young kid who was severely burned. He was sent to the Shriners Hospital in Greenville. I remember riding by the hospital and my father saying, "That's where that young man is. The Shriners are taking care of him."

Then every parade in Hendersonville I saw superheroes in a red fez. I was always told, "Those are the guys that helped him." I always wanted to be that Shriner to help kids, not knowing the process of how to be one.

Fast forward 23 years. I asked a good friend about becoming a Mason. Not long after that, I'm walking down Main Street handing out candy in our Christmas Parade, wearing a red fez, with my son beside me. His view of being a Mason is a view of his dad helping others.

Then my journey transitioned to helping kids with speech and language programs with North Carolina Scottish Rite. Amazing programs that help kids just like me when I was young. I always wanted to find a way to give back in a way that I was helped by a reading teacher. Another opportunity to help kids, another opportunity to help our community. More importantly, an opportunity for the next generation to see what charity and giving should look like.

Brothers helping brothers with open arms, not closed. Open mindsets of what we CAN DO, not what we can't. Willingness to accept that ways we have to work with our charity changes over time. We need to adapt, not argue. We need to help build our brothers with love and patience. We need to pass down the knowledge we have learned with understanding the vision may change. Sometimes we need to look at the future of

Masonry watching us and seeing if we truly act on the Square or not. Are we showing Faith, Hope, and Charity?

I am the combination of all Masons that have coached, mentored, and spent time helping learn our craft. Sometimes we get out of the routine of coming to stated meetings due to other Masonic bodies we join—Shrine, Scottish Rite, York Rite, and others. Here is my charge to all North Carolina Masons in 2026.

- I ask if you could not attend a meeting last year, please join us...
- I ask if you haven't been to a meeting in over 5 years, please join us...
- I ask if you have not been to a meeting in over 10 years, please join us...
- Either way, please join us, the lodge needs all members to be active, more today than ever before.

The answer is, we will find out one day if we hear 3 knocks. No matter how long you have been a mason, you have a story to tell. Make today the day you tell your story. Until then Brethren, Be you, Be awesome and be the example of a Mason you want the World to see. /G\





The 2026 Carolina Pig Jig Results

GRAND CHAMPION

Green Level Lodge No. 277

PEOPLE'S CHOICE

Rahmkatte Lodge No. 827

Runnerup: Amran Shrine

THE "BIG PEACHES"

TEAM SPIRIT AWARD

Unity Lodge No. 462

BEST DESERT

Doric Lodge No. 30 (Team Peach)

BEST SAUCE

1st - Green Level Lodge No. 277

2nd - Oak Grove Lodge No. 750

3rd - Doric Lodge No. 30 (Team Peach)

BEST TURKEY

1st - Green Level Lodge No. 277

2nd - Widow's Son Lodge No. 4

3rd - State College Lodge No. 770

BEST PORK

1st - Excelsior Lodge No. 21

3rd - Central Children's Home

2nd - Doric Lodge No. 30 (Team Peach)



We Three are Present and Agree

By A. Gene Cobb, SGIG - Scottish Rite Orient of North Carolina



Every year, our nation celebrates three very connected holidays without connecting them. The first is Memorial Day. It is a time to remember people who gave their lives in service to the nation. To be truly recognized

on Memorial Day, one must have died. The living owes it to the memory of the brave men and women to pause, reflect, and remember the sacrifices that brought us the freedom we enjoy. Memorial Day always happens near the end of May.

The second connected holiday is June 14. We call that Flag Day. It is a day we reflect on what this country is like. The thirteen stripes on the flag represent our beginning as a nation and hosts a field of 50 blue stars in the upper left-hand corner that includes one star for each state in our union. Some might say that the flag, which represents the United States, does not truly represent all people. Unfortunately, there have been times when “all” has meant “some” in our history. Nevertheless, it is the third holiday that brings the connection to light.

July 4, 1776, was the day this nation declared its independence from a government that was either out of control or all about control. Freedom cannot survive like that. The Declaration of Independence is often referenced. Think about the meaning behind the words in context of a break from government that was all about the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer. Read it. Consider what it said in 1776 and what it says today.

Yes, those words were fighting words and words of high treason, but they led men and women to die for a nation under a flag we call, the Star-Spangled Banner.

In the calendar year, and over a six-week period, we celebrate Memorial Day, Flag Day, and Independence Day. In recent years, a fourth holiday “Juneteenth” has emerged to acknowledge a painful part of our history—when those rights were not for all people because of the practice of slavery. Thank God we saw that wrong and stopped it!

These six weeks offer us an opportunity to pause, reflect, and remember particularly on this 250th Anniversary of where we came from, where we are, and where we are going as a people. This year it also offers us an opportunity to act as a people—to vote our opinions with decency and respect that honors the choices that are made of the people, by the people, and for the people, even if those choices differ from our own.

You see, integrity does not hide behind deception, lies, and deflection.

Honesty does not cheat one group of people to promote another group forward.

Superiority is attained through humble service, not bullying tactics that prove inferiority.

Greatness of character comes by building people up, not tearing them down.

We are grateful for the integrity, honesty, superiority, and greatness of the men and women who served this country and laid down their lives for our freedoms, wherever they were. We are grateful they fought under a banner that represents the hope of freedom for this world. We are grateful for the courage of those men who risked everything to make America happen. They were the greatest and always will be.

And we are grateful to all who continue making America great through their integrity and honesty by building people up to be their absolute best!

Messages from the Potentates



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Tim Farris, Potentate

The relationship between the North Carolina Grand Lodge and the Masons of North Carolina with Oasis Shriners and Shriners across our state is one rooted in shared values, mutual respect, and a common commitment to service. Freemasonry provides the foundation upon which Shrine membership is built, and together we uphold principles of brotherhood, charity, and integrity.

By working hand in hand, we can strengthen our bonds through increased communication, joint events, and a renewed focus on mentorship—encouraging Master Masons to continue their journey within the Shrine.

Supporting one another's charitable efforts, particularly the mission of Masonic Home for Children Oxford and Shriners Children's, allows us to amplify our impact in the communities we serve. As we look to the future, let us remain united in purpose, honoring our traditions while embracing opportunities to grow our relationship and ensure both organizations thrive for generations to come.

Robert Way, Potentate

Iwould like to take this opportunity to speak with you about relationships. As we continue our journey in pursuit of more light; we must remember how we started. On this road we travel, we run into Brothers from all walks of life and often look for fellowship and friendship. We are in the business of making good men better, and that carries over to our appendant bodies.

Masonry is strong in the "Old North State" and I for one am proud of the relationships we as Shriners have with our Grand Lodge of NC. Continue to work for our children and communities to be the positive light that is truly needed.



**Shriners
Children's™**



Jeff Taylor, Potentate

Membership is often defined as belonging—being part of a group or organization. But anyone who has led an organization knows it's far more than a line item on a budget sheet.

The real question isn't how do we bring in more members? It's how do we keep the ones we already have?

Retention is built on value—not monetary value, but human value. Why did someone join in the first place? The mission? Fellowship? The opportunity to serve? These motivations are rooted in connection, purpose, and belonging.

The true value of your organization is your members—their character, their commitment, their willingness to work together for something greater than themselves. When members act as one, others will see that strength and want to be part of it.

Membership isn't just about numbers. It's about people.

The Grand Lodge of North Carolina, AF&AM
2921 Glenwood Avenue
Raleigh, NC 27608

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

250th ANNIVERSARY EVENTS

25 Sep 2026

250th Anniversary Dinner at the Annual Communication – Winston-Salem

17 Oct 2026

Kings Mountain Battlefield Event – Kings Mountain

3 Oct 2026

Victory Dinner, Phoenix Lodge – Fayetteville