IV. LAYING OF CORNER STONES OF
PUBLIC BUILDINGS AND
MASONIC HALLS

These ceremonies are conducted only by the Grand Master in person or by some brother acting for him, under his special written authority, assisted by the Grand Lodge Officers and such of the Craft as may be invited or may choose to attend either as lodges or as individual brethren.

No corner stone should be laid with Masonic honors except those of acknowledged public structures, churches or schools, or buildings, which are to be used for Masonic purposes and then only by special request of the proper authorities.

The stone preferably should be produced from the quarries, be rectangular in form, and not less than eighteen inches in its smallest dimension.

The following is a suitable inscription:

A.D.________________________A.L.___________________

Laid by the Grand Lodge of Iowa, A.F. & A.M.

_________________________________
Grand Master

It is proper for the lodge or lodges where the building is to be erected to invite neighboring lodges and other Masonic bodies. The chief magistrate and other civic officers of the place may also be invited.

Music should be provided. The brethren wear the proper jewels and aprons.

The Grand Marshal should visit the site where the corner stone is to be laid and determine the approach in the line of march. He should see that a table at least three feet square or preferably four feet by six feet is accessible where the vessels, candles, etc., may be deposited.

The Grand Marshal will see that there is no smoking during any part of the ceremonies.

The special communication of the Grand Lodge is opened on the Third Degree by the Grand Master or his Special Deputy. The Grand Marshal forms the procession, which may be by particular lodges, the oldest having the lead, or in the following order:
Procession

Flag

Grand Tyler
with drawn sword

Junior Grand Steward  Senior Grand Steward
Master Masons  Master Masons

Past Master with
golden vessel containing corn
Past Master with
silver vessel containing
  oil
Past Master with
silver vessel containing
  wine

Architect with
square, level, and plumb

Custodians of the Work

Deputy Grand Secretary  Grand Musician
Grand Secretary  Grand Treasurer
Junior Steward  Senior Steward

Past Master
with Great Lights

Grand Chaplain

Past Grand Officers

Public Officials

Master Mason with
blue candle
Master Mason with
red candle
Junior Grand Warden  Senior Grand Warden

Master Mason with
white candle

Deputy Grand Master

Master Mason with
Book of Constitutions

Junior Grand  Grand Master  Senior Grand
Deacon  Deacon
Should Commanderies offer themselves as escort they should precede the Grand Lodge. Should other bodies offer, they should precede the Commandery. The procession proceeds to the place of laying the corner stone. When it arrives within a proper distance, the Grand Marshal gives the commands, “Open order, MARCH; HALT; inward, FACE.” The Grand Marshal passes through the lines and escorts the Grand Master and Grand Lodge Officers through the lines, in reverse order, to the platform. While the Grand Officers are taking their places there should be appropriate music.

The following introductory remarks were written by Paul H. Wieck, P.G.M., Grand Secretary emeritus. They are optional but add greatly to the ceremony and give the profane a better understanding of the purpose of Masonic cornerstone ceremonies.

CORNERSTONE LAYING CEREMONY
OPENING REMARKS

The ceremony of laying a cornerstone dates from antiquity. In the time of the builders of the ancient cathedrals of Europe the first stone of a building was placed with extreme care and with reverent ceremony. It was of great importance that the stone be square, level, and plumb, because the exactness of the entire building was dependent on the trueness and the position of the cornerstone. It was checked carefully by the workmen with their tools, the square, the level, and the plumb, and only then was it approved by the Master in charge of the project.

As time passed and the building sciences became more exact and far more mechanized, the cornerstone laying ceremony became more symbolic and less practical. As late, however, as two hundred years ago, when George Washington presided over the Masonic ceremony of laying the cornerstone for our nation’s capital, the stone did continue to be laid as a symbol of the beginning of the construction project. In more recent years, it has frequently been placed as a building is ready to be put to its intended use. Such is the case today.

And so we now enter upon the traditional ceremony which has been conducted by the Masonic Fraternity for generations.

GRAND MASTER: From time immemorial it has been the custom of the ancient and honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons, upon request, to lay, with their ancient forms, the corner stones of buildings erected for the worship of God, for educational or charitable objects, for Masonic uses, or for the purposes of the administration of justice and free government, and of no other buildings.
This corner stone, therefore, we may lay in accordance with our ancient law, and we gladly do so, thereby testifying our obedience to the law and our desire to show publicly our respect for the government under which we live.

As Freemasons we are taught that we should never enter upon any great and important undertaking without first invoking the blessing of Deity. Let us, therefore, give attention while our Grand Chaplain offers prayer.

**GRAND CHAPLAIN:** Almighty and Eternal God, by Whom all things are made, grant that the building here to be erected may be to Thy glory and to the honor of Thy great name.

Bless the members of this ancient Craft wheresoever dispersed around the globe, make them true and faithful unto Thee, and when the end of our labor is drawing near, graciously enable us to pass through the “valley of the shadow of death” supported by Thy rod and Thy staff to the mansions beyond the skies where love and peace and joy reign forever before Thy throne. Amen.

**RESPONSE:** So mote it be.

After the prayer, the choir will sing a selection or the band may play something appropriate.

**GRAND MASTER:** Right Worshipful Grand Treasurer, it has ever been the custom upon occasions like the present to deposit within the cavity prepared for its reception, a casket containing memorials of the time in which we live, so that, should the lapse of time, the ruthless hand of ignorance, or the devastations of war lay bare these foundations, an enduring record may be found to bear testimony to the energy, industry, and culture of our time. Has such a deposit been prepared?

**GRAND TREASURER:** It has, Most Worshipful Grand Master, and the various articles are safely enclosed in the casket now before you.

**GRAND MASTER:** Right Worshipful Grand Secretary, you will read, for the information of the Craft and the people here assembled, a record of the contents of the casket.

Grand Secretary advances and reads the list prepared.
GRAND MASTER: Right Worshipful Grand Treasurer and Grand Secretary, you will now deposit the casket in the cavity prepared for it, and may the Great Architect of the Universe grant that ages shall pass away ere it again be seen by men.

Grand Treasurer and Grand Secretary deposit the casket.

GRAND TREASURER: Most Worshipful Grand Master, your order has been obeyed.

The Architect delivers the square, level, and plumb to the Grand Master.

GRAND MASTER: Right Worshipful Deputy Grand Master, Senior Grand Warden, and Junior Grand Warden, receive these implements of your respective offices. (Presents.) With your assistance and that of the brethren here assembled, I will now proceed to lay the corner stone of the edifice, here to be erected, according to the custom of our ancient Craft.

Worshipful Grand Marshal, order the craftsmen to lower the stone.

The Grand Marshal with the aid of the workmen will then see that the stone is properly placed in position.

The Grand Master will spread the first trowelful of mortar. (During this time, have appropriate music.)

GRAND MASTER: Right Worshipful Deputy Grand Master, what is the proper jewel of your office?

DEPUTY GRAND MASTER: (steps forward) The Square.

GRAND MASTER: What are its moral and Masonic uses?

DEPUTY GRAND MASTER: Morally, it teaches us to square our actions by the square of virtue, and by it we prove our work.

GRAND MASTER: Apply the implement of your office to the corner stone and make report.

DEPUTY GRAND MASTER (applies the square and gives the military salute): Most Worshipful Grand Master, I find the stone to be square. The craftsmen have performed their duty.
GRAND MASTER: Right Worshipful Senior Grand Warden, what is the proper jewel of your office?

SENIOR GRAND WARDEN: The level.

GRAND MASTER: What are its moral and Masonic uses?

SENIOR GRAND WARDEN: Morally, it teaches us equality, and by it we prove our work.

GRAND MASTER: Apply the implement of your office to the corner stone, and make report.

SENIOR GRAND WARDEN (applies the level to the stone and gives the military salute): Most Worshipful Grand Master, I find the stone to be level. The craftsmen have performed their duty.

GRAND MASTER: Right Worshipful Junior Grand Warden, what is the proper jewel of your office?

JUNIOR GRAND WARDEN: The plumb.

GRAND MASTER: What are its moral and Masonic uses?

JUNIOR GRAND WARDEN: Morally it teaches us rectitude of life and conduct, and by it we prove our work.

GRAND MASTER: Apply the implement of your office to the corner stone, and make report.

JUNIOR GRAND WARDEN (applies the plumb to the stone and gives the military salute): Most Worshipful Grand Master, I find the stone to be plumb. The craftsmen have performed their duty.
GRAND MASTER: This corner stone has been tested by the proper implements of Masonry. I find that the craftsmen have skillfully and faithfully performed their duty, and I declare this corner stone to be well formed, true and trusty, and correctly laid, according to the rules of our ancient Craft. May the building, here to be erected, be constructed and completed amid the blessings of plenty, health, and peace. Amen.

RESPONSE: So mote it be.

GRAND MASTER: Worshipful Grand Marshal, present the elements of consecration to the proper officers.

The Grand Marshal presents the vessels of
Corn to the Junior Grand Warden
Wine to the Senior Grand Warden
Oil to the Deputy Grand Master

JUNIOR GRAND WARDEN (advances to the corner stone with the vessel of corn): I scatter this corn as an emblem of plenty. May the blessings of bounteous heaven be showered upon us, and upon this and all noble undertakings, and may the Great Architect of the Universe fill us with virtue, wisdom, and gratitude. Amen.

RESPONSE: So mote it be.

The Grand Marshal places a taper of blue wax on the south side of the stone.

SENIOR GRAND WARDEN (advances to the corner stone with the vessel of wine): I pour this wine as an emblem of refreshment. May the Great Architect of the Universe so refresh and strengthen us that we may never become weary in well doing, and may the spirit that shall go herefrom cheer and refresh the weary and heavy laden. Amen.

RESPONSE: So mote it be.

The Grand Marshal places a taper of red wax on the west side of the stone.
DEPUTY GRAND MASTER (advances to the corner stone with the vessel of oil): I pour this oil as an emblem of joy and gladness. May the blessing of heaven abide with us continually, and may the Grand Master of Heaven and Earth shelter and protect the widow and orphan, and vouchsafe to them and the bereaved, the afflicted, and sorrowing everywhere the enjoyment of every good and perfect gift.

RESPONSE: So mote it be.

The Grand Marshal places a taper of white wax on the east side of the stone.

The Grand Stewards advance and place flowers upon the corner stone.

GRAND MASTER (advances to the corner stone and extends hands): May the corn of nourishment, and the oil of joy be abundant among men throughout the whole world. May the blessing of Almighty God rest upon this undertaking. May He protect the workmen from every accident. May the structure, here to be erected, be contrived by wisdom, executed in strength, and adorned with beauty. May it long be preserved as a monument of the energy and liberality of its founders, and of this free and enlightened government, under whose protecting care it is our privilege to live. Amen.

RESPONSE: So mote it be.

GRAND MASTER (strikes the corner stone three times with his gavel): Brethren, unite with me in giving the Public Grand Honors of Masonry.

GRAND MARSHAL: Most Worshipful Grand Master, I present to you __________, the architect of this building, who is ready with craftsmen for the work.

GRAND MASTER: Worthy sir, having thus, as Grand Master of Masons in Iowa, laid this corner stone according to the rules of our ancient Craft, I now deliver these implements of operative Masonry into your hands with the fullest confidence that by your skill and tact, aided by faithful craftsmen, a fabric will rise which shall add new lustre to this city and state. May there be no envy, discord, or confusion among the workmen. May the important duties confided to you be performed, not only to the satisfaction of those who have entrusted you with their fulfillment, but in such a manner as shall secure the approbation of your own conscience, and thereby redound to the honor of our common country.
Worshipful Grand Marshal, you will make the proclamation.

**GRAND MARSHAL:** In the name of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Iowa of Ancient, Free, and Accepted Masons, I now proclaim that the corner stone of the structure, here to be erected, has this day been proved square, level, and plumb, true and trusty, and laid according to the rules of our ancient Craft by the Grand Master of Masons. This proclamation is made to the East (*one blast of the bugle*), to the West (*two blasts*), to the North (*three blasts*), to the South (*four blasts*), that all persons having due notice may govern themselves accordingly.

All present now join in singing a –

*Closing Ode.*

After which may be delivered a suitable –

*Oration*

**GRAND MASTER:** The benediction will now be pronounced by the Grand Chaplain.

*Benediction*

**GRAND CHAPLAIN:** Glory to God on high, on earth peace and good-will toward men! O Lord, we most heartily beseech Thee with Thy favor to behold and bless this assemblage; pour down Thy mercies, like the dew that falls upon the mountains, upon Thy servants engaged in the solemn ceremonies of this day. Bless, we pray Thee, all the workmen who shall be engaged in the erection of this edifice; keep them from all forms of accident and harm; grant them health and prosperity in life, and finally, after this life, may we all, through Thy mercy and forgiveness, attain everlasting joy and felicity in Thy bright mansion, Thy holy temple, not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Amen and Amen.

**RESPONSE:** So mote it be.

After which the Grand Lodge, with escort, under the direction of the Grand Marshal, returns to the place whence it started, and is closed.

The lodges and other Masonic bodies return to their respective halls.