

RECIPIENTS of the HIRAM AWARD

Other than electing a member to the Oriental Chair, this is the highest award a lodge of Masons may confer upon a brother who has given continuous service over a period of years. Authorized by the Grand Lodge of California, no more than one Hiram Award may be presented in any Masonic year. Selection is usually made by a committee at the request of the Worshipful Master.

*Clarence B. McFee, PM

*Arne Digerud, PM

Stanley M. Emerson, PM

*Ben Alden Oliver

*Donald D. Robertson

Irving W. Scible, Sr.

Warren C. Sheldon, PM

Harold L. Swank, PM

*Louis C. Jacobi, PM

Raymond R. Walker, PM

*George O. Harvey, PM

Skip A. Hash

George T. Scott

Edward L. Wagoner

George J. Mascote

Floyd Tinkham

David E. Wolfe, PM

* deceased

LIFE MEMBERSHIP

The life membership program at Suisun Lodge No. 55 began in 1982. A life membership is obtained by contributing 21 years of dues to the Life Membership Fund. This is an endowment fund and only the interest may be spent. The treasury receives the interest payments for as long as the lodge exists. If Suisun Lodge should merge with another lodge, the newly formed lodge will absorb the fund. If Suisun Lodge should surrender its charter, the California Grand Lodge will receive the fund. Thus a member may participate in the welfare of this lodge in perpetuity.

At this writing (2004) there are 31 members on the Life Membership Roll:

- | | |
|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Warren C. Sheldon, PM | 16. David E. Wolf, PM |
| 2. Kirk N. Sheldon | 17. Lawrence E. Hicks, Jr. |
| 3. *Arne Digerud, PM | 18. Harold L. Swank, PM |
| 4. Willard J. Butler | 19. Verner N. Bendsen |
| 5. Pedro L. Morales, PM | 20. Charles J. Seabrook |
| 6. James A. Janssen, PM | 21. Leonard C. Faria |
| 7. Melvin R. McCormick | 22. Richard F. Janssen |
| 8. *Ward C. Sheldon, PM | 23. *Louis C. Jacobi, PM |
| 9. Walter H. Erdman | 24. Raymond R. Walker, PM |
| 10. *Maurice Q. McGee | 25. Henry Clayton, Jr., PM |
| 11. George S. Mascote | 26. Sid R. Burnham, PM |
| 12. *Roy E. Cooper | 27. Glenn L. Secrest |
| 13. Skip A. Hash | 28. Kenneth Abernathy, PM |
| 14. Joe McKnight, Jr. | 29. *Paul Bryan |
| 15. John Jay Smith | 30. Ward C. Sheldon II |
| | 31. Edward L. Wagoner |

*deceased (2004)

MASONIC CEMETERY

How Suisun Lodge acquired a cemetery is a question that will go unanswered. The earliest marked burial is Alexander Hurley, who died November 28, 1854, at age 30, when Suisun Lodge was just six months old. There is no record of him in lodge archives. The Odd Fellows believe that Captain Waterman gave them the property, which was out in the country in those days, and they gave some of it to the Masons and the Methodist Church because it was believed the cemetery would never be filled. Other reports say they sold it. The writer is not in a position to argue with the Odd Fellows but since the Suisun Odd Fellows lodge was established in 1858, the Masonic grave dated 1854 does raise a question.

At the stated meeting of January 18, 1908, (Ralph M. Sheldon, Master) new rules were enacted and deeds were prepared for members of Suisun Lodge No. 55 to prove ownership of their plots. The cemetery was laid out in contiguous blocks of sufficient size to hold eight occupants in two rows of four. The blocks were separated by narrow pathways just wide enough for one horse to draw a hearse between them. The hearse would be drawn through the larger main gate on Union Avenue (Cemetery Road in those days) and turn down the narrow pathway to the appropriate plot. After the committal, the horse would continue to the next road and leave by one of the smaller gates located at the north end of the Masonic Cemetery or the south end of the Odd Fellows Cemetery. With the advent of the automobile, the narrow pathways are no longer utilized for equestrian traffic and have been turned over to single burials in a north-south configuration.

In the year 2000, the keeper of the burial record for Suisun Lodge was also the keeper of the record for the other organizations. He commented to the writer that the method used by Suisun Lodge No. 55 had proved to be excellent. There were very few errors where someone had been buried in the wrong

place or a burial had not been recorded. At the time, this excellent record had been in place for at least 100 years.

Members were given the blocks on a pre-need basis and sojourners were sold spaces, as needed, for a small amount. If a sojourner was without funds, the space was given him. This practice continued until the mid-1960s when it was feared the space would be gone too quickly and the new rule was a free space for each member and his wife with additional space for their children as needed. By this time, modern technology had provided a way to accommodate ten persons in each block instead of eight, (if buried in doubles, it would be twenty) so the concern was alleviated for the moment.

In 1922 the Suisun-Fairfield Cemetery District was formed. Its purpose appears to have been to care for the cemetery and provide personnel to dig and fill graves as needed. The board members consisted of representatives of the organizations owning unoccupied property in the cemetery. These organizations were Suisun Lodge No. 55 F&AM; Odd Fellows Lodge No 78; the Methodist Church; and St. Alphonsus Catholic Church (located, at the time, in Suisun). In addition, there was a small triangular piece of ground owned by Wm. Hansen, owner of the Hansen Funeral Home in Suisun and a member of Suisun Lodge. He used that piece for babies, and others who could not afford a space.

Owners of plots were expected to care for their own burial sites. At the time the writer's grandfather died in 1934, he was preparing for his annual trip to the cemetery to hoe the weeds and whitewash the boards around the plot. The plot containing the remains of the writer's great-grandfather and great-great-grandfather had been planted with ice plant because it kept the weeds down and did not need watering.

When the writer became Master in 1982, he questioned the collection of public tax money for the care of religious and fraternal cemeteries. The explanation received was no one is ever denied burial in that cemetery. If (s)he is not Masonic, Catholic, Odd Fellow, or Methodist, the Odd Fellows or Methodists will sell them a space. The system worked well with everyone looking

out for everyone else. The fees were reasonable and there were no complaints. In addition, cemetery income was great enough that money was being loaned back to the county government creating interest income.

Membership on the Suisun-Fairfield Cemetery District Board had always been by invitation of the Board when a vacancy occurred with the organization losing a representative providing a new one. This all changed in the early 1990s. Membership became a political appointment and there was a move to enlarge the cemetery. Land between the cemetery and Samuel G. Bransford Elementary School was purchased from the Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District where the Cemetery Board installed about 500 pre-lined graves. In addition, there were building improvements on property owned by the fraternal organizations without the permission of those organizations. Additionally, a move was mounted to take the entire cemetery from the organizations owning it. An eminent domain proceeding was launched with a hearing date of February 27, 2001.

Suisun Lodge No. 55, being philanthropic, had no funds to speak of and, ultimately, had to start charging members for each burial site. In addition, the Masonic portion of the cemetery was opened to the public at a charge of \$800 per gravesite. This was necessary in order to raise funds for legal fees. Of course the Cemetery District had use of County Counsel and courts at no charge. In addition they could charge for opening and closing graves, providing grave liners, etc.

The Catholic Church withdrew and began to maintain its portion of the cemetery through a diocesan organization that looks after Catholic cemeteries. It does so today. The Catholic portion of the old Suisun-Fairfield Cemetery is now known as St. Alphonsus Cemetery, presumably after the St. Alphonsus Catholic Church in Suisun that burned down about fifty years ago.

Late in 2000, the Catholic Church filed a complaint against the undertaking firm that oversaw the various cemetery properties. The defendant was a member of Suisun Lodge and had kept the record well. In the course of the District Attorney's

investigation, all lodge cemetery records were confiscated and the County held them in spite of the fact that the complaint of the Catholic Church had nothing to do with Suisun Lodge No. 55.

Among the items being held were the blank deeds needed for the new owners of burial spaces. Since the procedure had to be changed anyway, new deeds were designed and printed for new owners with the old deeds expected to serve owners of record.

In August of 2001, the court ruled that the Suisun-Fairfield Cemetery District could not hold Suisun Lodge No. 55 responsible for reimbursement of care since the formation of the cemetery district seventy-five years earlier. The proposed cost of caring for the Masonic cemetery was prohibitive, however, and Suisun Lodge was unable to take on that burden and the cemetery district discontinued care of the grounds.

Rather than pay what was considered an excessive fee for care, the Masonic Building Association entered into an agreement with Fairmont Memorial Park near the Masonic cemetery for care of the property.

The Suisun-Fairfield Cemetery District offered to purchase the unsold burial spaces for \$125 each, initially, and later raised their offer to \$95,000 to be paid over a period of ten years. Since Suisun Lodge clearly had to divest itself of the property, other possibilities were considered before entering into an agreement with the cemetery district.

In September of 2001, the Grand Lodge of California approved a proposal by Fairmont Memorial Park to purchase the unsold portion of the Masonic cemetery for a one-time payment of \$75,000. This offer was considered better, financially, than the one made by the cemetery district. The area would continue to be known as the "Masonic Section" and members would have the option to purchase burial sites at half-price for a period of two years. The owner, however, was expected to be Fairmont Memorial Park.

Having been turned back by the Superior Court of Solano County, the Suisun-Fairfield Cemetery District Board appealed the case to the Appellate Court in San Francisco.

The Appellate Court Justice must have done his/her homework as the court's opening statement at the September 2002, hearing was, "This appeal to the court is denied."

The matter was then scheduled to be heard in the Superior Court of Solano County, in Vallejo, on October 28, 2002. The writer is unable to explain why a Vallejo court was to hear the case when the cemetery and the lodge that owned it were situated within sight of the Solano County Courthouse in Fairfield.

Before the October 28 hearing could take place, the county's legal counsel determined that the Masonic Cemetery had never actually been turned over the Building Association. The intent was there as indicated in minutes dated 1984, but the paperwork had never actually been accomplished.

Therefore, County Counsel announced plans to file, again, the case that had been thrown out of court with a new defendant; this time, Suisun Lodge No. 55.

The October 28 hearing took place as scheduled with Judge Franklin Taft requesting both parties to confer in an effort to see if the matter could be settled without a trial.

After a full day of negotiations, it was determined that the matter was close to a conclusion but neither party was willing to go the extra mile. Negotiations ended late in the day with a pre-trial conference scheduled for November 8 and an expected five-day jury trial scheduled to begin on November 15.

A 1970 survey conducted by Bro. Paul Bryan concluded that there was enough room in the Masonic cemetery to meet the lodge's needs for at least another one hundred years and the members felt secure in seeing their needs met. The Suisun-Fairfield Cemetery Board made it clear, through their publicly funded attorney, however, that they intended to have the Masonic cemetery "built out" (full) in ten years.

By the end of 2002, the situation had progressed to the point where Suisun Lodge No. 55 and the Suisun-Fairfield Cemetery District Board were about to agree that the cemetery district would own the land and Suisun Lodge No. 55 would own the burial rights. The fee would rise to \$800 per gravesite with 35% going to the cemetery district. This price would apply to everyone, including members of Suisun Lodge No. 55.

In addition to the price of the gravesite, the cemetery district would add other costs. These included \$300 to the endowment fund and another \$300 for opening and closing graves. There would also be an additional charge for the sarcophagus (liner) chosen by the family of the deceased.

It was clear the lodge could no longer own the cemetery under the conditions that had been created by the cemetery district and Raymond R. Walker, PM, was authorized to sign whatever documents were, in his opinion, necessary to end the struggle and keep burial rights.

Today, (2004) the Masonic Cemetery is known as the Masonic Section of the Suisun-Fairfield Cemetery. The cemetery district owns the land and Suisun Lodge No. 55 owns the burial rights.

Burial in the Masonic section is open to anyone and members of the lodge receive no preferential treatment.

Gravesites must be priced no less than the price charged in the rest of the cemetery. The Suisun-Fairfield Cemetery District takes thirty-five percent of the sale and the broker's commission is ten percent. The fifty-five percent returning to the lodge will help maintain the present building but the goal of the cemetery district is to have it full by the year 2014. Therefore, the demographic survey conducted in 1970, which came to the conclusion that the Masonic Cemetery would provide burial site for members until the year 2070 is void.

Current costs to anyone wishing to be buried in the Masonic section will approximate costs anywhere else in the entire cemetery: \$800 for a grave site; \$300 to the endowment

fund; \$300 for opening a grave; \$300 for burying cremated remains; \$??? For a liner; \$??? For a casket and service.

For Masons, the cost of dying in Fairfield and Suisun has been subjected to exponential growth.

**Deceased Members of Suisun Lodge Buried
in the
Masonic Cemetery**

Allen, Wm. Wallace, d. 4/16/1868
Battelle, Kenneth M., d. January 30, 1980
Beebe, Larry C., d. November 8, 1944 Signal Corps
Blakley, John W., d. 2000
Borland, James Llewellyn, d. January 16, 1965
Bowen, Jerome, d. 1965
Bowen, Jerome, d. 1974
Bowen, Wm., d. 1935
Bransford, Samuel A., d. 1985
Bransford, William Richard, d. 1921
Burdick, Anson C., d. 1927
Chadbourne, Grant, H., d. 1965
Chadbourne, Joseph R., d. March 27, 1863
Chadbourne, Joseph R., Jr. d. May 19, 1979
Chrisler, Chas. d. November 29, 1957
Coffran, Chas., MD. D. 1865
Coghlan, Oscar R. d. October 28, 1903
Davisson, Benjamin F. d. 1908
Davisson, John G. d. 1953
Davisson, Wm. C. d. 1920
Davisson, Wm. H. d. 1932 13TH INF WW I
Dickie, Albert Alexander, d. August 6, 1907
Downing, Chas. Hawkins
Downing,, W. G., MD. d. 1915
Eby, Lester, d. 1997
Fotheringham, George Henry
Frawley, Louis, d. June 19, 1985
Gregory, John Munford, d. June 3, 1899
Haines, Wesley, d. February 28, 1938
Hitchcock, Abraham. Farr, d.
Hollar, Raymond Glenn, d. August 1, 1988
Hollowell, Charles T. d. 1920

Hopkins, James B., d. 1925
Hopkins,, Kenneth J., d. 1976 AIR SERVICE WW I
Hoyt, Julian Buel, d. September 1, 1897
Hunnewell, Ralph, d. 1950
Johnson, Walter J., d. 1985
Jones, Philip W., d. January 2, 1913
Kennedy, Karl Forsythe, d. 1953
Knowles, Kay W., d February 13, 1985, USMC WWII
Leland, Jack Erwin, d. April 22, 1970, WW II, KOREA,
VIETNAM
Long, E. E. d. 1934
Malchi, John , d. 1920
Mason, Fred A. d. 1967
Maynard, Milton Allen
Meister, Frederick, d. 1872
Meister, Frederick, d. 1898
Melbourne, Thos. d. 1907
Merrill, Sallumith O., d. October 13, 1905
Merrill, Wm. Davis, d. October 4, 1896
Miller, George, d. 1944
Morrill, Fred Lewis, d. 1937
Morrison, Julian Francis, d. September 28, 1970
Newton, Ambrose, d. August 12, 1894
Palmer, John W., d. August 14, 1856
Payne, Carl David, d. June 21, 1974
Peebles, John, d. November 3, 1998
Prather, James R., d.1987
Prather, James Hiram, d. 1926
Priebe, Walter S., d. October 14, 1986
Reams, James Lewis, d. 1927
Reed, Albert, d. 1920
Reeves, Columbus Palestine, d. 1910
Reeves, Davis Duke, d. 1884
Roberts, Chester, d. 1967
Robinson, James B., d. April 9, 1906
Rush Frederick Winn, d. February 6, 1942

Rush Frederick Winn, Jr., d. 1977
Rush, Benjamin F., d. September 8, 1940
Rush, Hiram Stewart, d. 1963
Sheldon, Milton Jerome, d December 15, 1942 (BATAAN)
Sheldon, Ralph M., d. 1932
Sheldon, Roy J., d April 7, 1958
Sheldon, Ward C., d. April 30, 1990
Sheldon, William Boyd, d. January 18, 1960
Sheldon, Winfred C., d. June 1, 1934
Shellady, John
Simmons, Earl, d. 1985
Simpson, Wesley G., d. March 3, 1991
Slater, Frank, d. September 22, 1970, MM I USNR WW II
Smith, Frank
Steward, Edgar L., d. January 5, 1943
Torp, Charles, d. September 23, 1941
Trill, Larry, d. 1970
Votyka, John, d. November 16, 1914
Waldrop, Olin, d. 1982
Walp, Andrew Nevin, d. 1950
Weir, David Andrew, d. July 31, 1971 (WW I)
White, Dan H., d. January 5, 1943
Williams, Francis Ellard, d. October 26, 1972
Williamson, Ralph D., d. 1937
Woodford, Owen S., d. September 4, 1975
Woods, Emer, d. September 23, 1972, USAF
Woods, John, d. November 18, 1893
Woods, Marvin T., d. November 11, 1960
Woods, Robert, d. 1907