

Rocky Mountain Masonic Conference 2021:

Is there Hope for the Future by Returning to the Past?

An Oration by Worshipful Brother Joseph A. Milner

Grand Orator, Grand Lodge of Utah

Officers, Distinguished Guests, Brethren All,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Joe Milner and I'm serving this year as the Grand Orator of the Grand Lodge of Utah. With me here is Worshipful Brother Joey Sanders, who serves this year as our Grand Chaplain. The focus of our presentation is a topic that I think we all consider frequently, "Is there Hope for the Future by Returning to the Past?"

Worshipful Brother Sanders and I decided that the best way to approach the session is to first have me present to you an oration, and following that, Brother Sanders will present some data and research, and then lead us all in a discussion. We would like to see what everyone else here thinks, as this is an issue that affects all of us, and we would love to learn together with you. And now I will warn, you, brethren, that I love stories. I personally learn from the stories of the struggles and triumphs of our forefathers. So please bear with me, as I try to address this topic as best as I can, by taking us all on a journey into the past.

Brethren, the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick "Barbarossa" the First, King of Germany, Frankfurt, Italy, and Burgundy was born on April 24th, 1122, into incredible wealth and power. He was the son of Frederick the Second, Duke of Swabia, and Judith of Bavaria. He was raised

with a degree of privilege and indulgence that would be nearly impossible for us to understand today. At the age of 25, he followed his Uncle, and, against the strong objections of his father, he took the vow of the crusader. His father, the king, was so upset that he berated his brother in public, for encouraging his son to follow him. The following year, without a mature understanding of the world, and completely convinced of the absolute certainty of his victory, Frederick joined the Second Crusade, and set out to conquer the Holy Land. A full year later, after suffering heavy losses, he finally arrived at the gates of Damascus, to which he laid siege with his army. A mere five days later, his army was crushed in a humiliating defeat, and he took the survivors and headed towards home, while being constantly harassed by the enemy on his rearguard as he ran away.

Brethren, let us stop for a moment and reflect on this story to the point I have described it so far. I think that most of us, if we were in Frederick's shoes, would conclude that perhaps, just perhaps, it was not in our best interests to try to conquer the Holy Land, that we were lucky to survive, and that we should pursue other interests. Being wealthy, we could return to Germany and live in luxury for the entire rest of our lives. But not young Frederick. No, no. He spent the next 42 years of his life carefully gathering more power, adding more titles to his name, and regrouping and restrengthening his military forces. And in 1189, feeling that he had sufficiently prepared, he set out with the Third Crusade, this time knowing, just knowing, that he would be victorious.

Our late Brother John J. Robinson, whose expertise was the history of the crusades and related time periods, recorded what happened next, quote: "Frederick... decided not to wait for Henry of

England or Phillip of France, nor to seek any alliance with them. He had no need for an alliance with anyone, because he alone commanded the largest army ever to go on Crusade. His hundred thousand followers comprised [an army so large, that] on the march, the army was strung out for miles and took days to pass a given point. The size of the army alone created logistical problems beyond any that the German leaders had ever experienced. Even limiting the troops to just two meals a day would require a million and a half meals each week.” end quote.

It was impossible for the army to carry such enormous supplies with them on the march, so Frederick was required to spend large amounts of his precious gold, purchasing food from local sources as he took a full six weeks to slowly, slowly march across Hungary. He later took the time to get into some petty skirmishes along his route, nearly starting a full scale war in Greece due to an insult by the local ruler, which required him to stop marching and park his army for a full winter. Starting his march again in the spring, Frederick entered the territory of the Seljuk Turks, where he was now in fully hostile territory, with an army that was already tired and hungry.

The famously brilliant enemy military leader, Saladin, quote: “responded by sending letters to the Muslim potentates in the north, urging them to make every effort to impede the march of the German Crusade, and to remove or destroy all of the food supplies ahead of them. Saladin knew that every day lost by the German army would mean the fast dwindling of their stocks of food... The Turks hung around the German column as it moved. Stragglers were killed, and foraging parties sent out to look for food were wiped out. Any German who wandered away from the main column, for whatever reason, was a dead man.” end quote.

Brethren, if I could have whispered words of good council in the ear of our dear Frederick at this point, I would have told him, “You fool. You fell victim to one of the classic blunders—The most famous of which is ‘never get involved in a land war in Asia!’” Brethren, it was now the month of May, and we must remember that this army was originally from Germany. The extreme Turkish heat, which they were not familiar with, and the water shortage, due the inability to forage for supplies, were beginning to take a heavy toll on the men. Frederick’s soldiers were beginning to die from the harsh marching conditions alone.

As the army spied the clear water of the Saleph river in the distance, Frederick, who a contemporary cleric noted was now hot, tired, thirsty, and feeling entitled, did not let his soldiers access the water first. Instead, he led his personal knights and his personal bodyguard out in advance of the main body, to reach the water for himself. Quote:

“History remembers what happened then, but not how it happened. With no enemy in view on the plain, Frederick left his bodyguard for a few minutes to go to the river. We do not know if the emperor slipped, or if his horse slipped. We don’t know if he cried out. All we know is that when his bodyguard reached the water, the emperor was on the river bottom, held there by his heavy armor. By the time his men could drag him out to the riverbank, Frederick Barbarossa was dead. The news flew back among the German column. For many of the men, Frederick had been their ruler for their entire lives. They couldn’t imagine life under another emperor... They were not here because of any religious zeal, but because the venerable Kaiser Friedrich had ordered them to follow him. His second son... took command of the disintegrating army. Remembering his

father's desire to be buried next to Christ's own tomb at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, the duke had his father's body preserved in a cask of vinegar to carry along with his dejected troops." End quote.

Frederick's army fell apart, with many desertions. Only a third of the original force remained at this point. His son pressed on, with the weight of his father's dream, hauling with the army the body of his dead father in vinegar, like a giant barrel of pickles. Even this strategy began to slowly fail, as the vinegar gave out. As Frederick's body began to rot away, his son had Frederick's heart and inner organs removed from the barrel and interred in Tarsus as the army passed through. By the time they had reached Antioch, the fleshy portions of his body were fully rotten, so Frederick's body was boiled to remove the flesh, which was buried, and his bones were dried out and put in a bag. What was left of him was finally interred when his son and his exhausted remaining troops reached the cathedral of Tyre. Frederick's mortal remains had now been scattered ignominiously across the Middle East. The remaining army was further reduced by sickness, and of the original 100,000 troops that Frederick mustered, only 700 survived to reach Acre, where his son died of Malaria. The remaining troops scattered and returned to Germany, ending the army's crusade.

Brethren, this is an interesting story. It shows the extent that men can be driven to through hubris, by getting their minds firmly set, and never changing them. Never adapting. Never listening to those around them who point out their follies. It shows what can happen to men when they think that they already know the best approach to a problem, regardless of the fact that they have failed at the task in the past, and are currently failing at it again. They repeat the same

approach, over and over, until at last, completely devoid of dignity, everything they had hoped for is lost. It seems easy to see the problem from the outside, but it is much more difficult when you are the person leading your troops across the wilderness. Brethren, with this lesson and warning, let us next look at an opposite example, as a comparison.

On Saturday, June 16th, 1866, a nondescript 30 year old named Reuben arrived in Salt Lake City, Utah. Born in Burlington, Iowa, Reuben had been made a Mason in Bellair Lodge No. 133. But Iowa didn't work out the way he wanted it to, so he moved to Arkansas to improve his fortunes by practicing law. But that didn't work out the way he hoped it would, so he changed his mind and he emigrated to Montana to seek his fortune in the gold rush. When he didn't find the results he was looking for in Montana, he decided to change course and move to Nevada, where he opened a law office, shortly thereafter being elected Judge of Madison County. But when his life in Nevada was not going the way he wanted it to, he decided to move to Salt Lake City, to start a law practice there. And it was in Daft's Hall on Main Street, on Friday, November 30th, 1866, that Reuben Howard Robertson became the first Worshipful Master of Wasatch Lodge Under Dispensation, Grand Lodge of Montana. This lodge would later become Wasatch Lodge No. 1 in Utah, and is one of the three lodges that organized the Grand Lodge of Utah almost exactly 150 years ago in 1872. Brother Robertson would later be appointed the Grand Lecturer, and the Chairman of the Committee on Jurisprudence, and he was elected our second Most Worshipful Grand Master of Utah in 1873. He would die happy, surrounded by his family, in 1879.

Brethren, what was the difference between these two men? Why was one successful in achieving the goals and achievements he sought, while another was not? Was it wealth? No, no. Kaiser

Frederick had more money. Was it more followers, or more power? No, no. Frederick had both. Brethren, I think it was being willing to travel light, to evaluate new conditions on the fly, to gaze back, with some humility, at the stars that are guiding you, and to change. To change which direction you are going. To change what your new goals are. To change what you consider to be the most important results you are driving toward. It was being willing to make quick changes on his feet, rather than getting bogged down with pride, with vanity, with past history, and with an unwillingness to alter his course for any reason.

Brethren, we should not bog our lodges down with heavy suits of armor, we should make our lodges operate like light cavalry. We should not force our lodge officers and members to follow us in a death march. We should give them the vision, and let them find the best path themselves. We should offer them the cool, refreshing water, before taking it ourselves. And we should never think that we already know the best approach to any problem. We should not think that we ourselves already have it all figured out, and that we know the best course for others. We should not set a path and refuse to acknowledge that maybe, just maybe, we could be moving in the wrong direction, losing our army along the way, slipping under the weight of our own expectations and drowning, until we find ourselves truly in a barrel of pickles. Because when that happens, brethren, it will be too late, and there will be no way out.

But there are some, brethren, that are able to see clearly the value and the challenges behind our cherished traditions. The famous American automobile industrialist Lee Iacocca once told a story about meeting Henry Ford II. At the time, Lee was only a young employee of the Ford Motor Company, and he met Henry Ford II in the Executive Dining Room. Lee hung on every word

that his leader and the president of the company said, so he was fascinated when Henry Ford II said that he loved eating Hamburgers, and that his tradition was to eat them every day, but that for some reason, only the Chef of the Executive Dining Room knew how to make good ones. Nobody else could seem to make a decent hamburger. After the meal, Lee Iacocca walked back to the kitchen, determined to solve the mystery, and found the chef whom he asked asked about the hamburgers. With a wry smile, the chef told him, “Let me show you”, after which he walked to the fridge, pulled out a beautifully marbled New York Strip Steak, put it through a grinder, formed a patty, and threw it on the grill, and then said, “Amazing what you can cook up, when you start with a [\$50] hunk of meat.”

Now, brethren, this Henry Ford II was actually the grandson of the Henry Ford you are probably thinking of, and the famous Henry Ford certainly did not grow up with steak hamburgers. Instead, Henry Ford was born on July 30, 1863 into poverty on a family farm in Michigan. His father was an immigrant from Ireland, and his mother was born to immigrants from Belgium. The family struggled, but they were a strong family, and the parents loved their children. At the age of thirteen, Henry Ford’s mother died, leaving him devastated. He later said, quote, “I never had any particular love for the farm—it was the mother on the farm I loved.” The year before, his father had given him an incredible birthday present – a pocket watch, which was truly a princely gift from a family farmer to a twelve year old in 1875. Fascinated, Henry took the watch completely apart down to the gears, which is not very surprising for a twelve year old. What was surprising was that he managed to put the watch back together, and it still worked. Henry was fascinated, and although he had no particular love for watches or timekeeping, he immediately

loved the precision engineering of the watch. He began taking apart and repairing the clocks of his neighbors, and gained a reputation as a young mechanic.

While looking for greater challenges as a teenager, he was fascinated one day when he saw, rumbling through town, a Nichols and Shepard “Road Engine”. This was considered, in some ways, one of the earliest cars, but it wasn’t really a car. It was, in essence, a monstrous steam locomotive, placed onto gigantic wooden wheels, rumbling and groaning through the country like some horrific beast, belching black smoke and hissing billows of white steam, while the driver frantically shoveled coal into it. But Henry was fascinated. He immediately thought of how he could improve on the invention, and he began thinking about cars, which would become his life work. But at the time, he didn’t have a lot of money to do much, and in order to support his family, at the age of 16 he left home to work as a machinist in Detroit, where he studied business and book keeping, and was later hired by Westinghouse to work on steam engines. By the age of 28, he had become an engineer with the Edison electric company, but his fascination with cars had never dimmed. And finally, at the age of 33, he had enough time and money to return home to his family’s barn, and try to build a better car from scratch. The end result was a gangly wooden contraption powered by a two-cylinder, four horsepower gasoline motor with two gears, which was connected to one of the rear wheels by a chain. It was lightweight and sat on 28” bicycle wheels with rubber tires, a foot brake, and a three gallon gas tank, and could be throttled up to an impressive 20 miles per hour. He lovingly named his invention the “Quadricycle”, and over the course of two years, he drove that wild contraption over 1,000 miles through the farm land and back country of Michigan. And when he was confident he had improved it enough, he actually presented his idea for the car to Thomas Edison himself, and

asked him for feedback. Thomas Edison congratulated him on his invention, and with this necessary reassurance from the mentor he looked up to, Henry Ford set out to change the world.

And, brethren, change the world he did. Within twenty-five years of founding the Ford Motor Company, the majority of registered automobiles in the world were Fords. Over 15 million Model T's alone were built and sold, at a time when the United States only had 18,000 miles of paved road, and a population of only 100 million people, meaning there was a Ford Model T for every eight people in the United States, and 800 Model Ts for every mile of paved road. The Ford Motor Company would become one of the largest family owned companies in the world, and by 2012 the company had produced 350 million cars, which represents building and selling a new car every ten seconds, on average, 24/7, for over a century.

Now, brethren, it is important that I note that Henry Ford also made a lot of mistakes, and was horribly wrong in many ways. But if there is one thing that Henry Ford accomplished, it was changing traditions, brethren. Henry Ford sure seemed to be good at changing traditions. He changed his family's business tradition from farming to manufacturing. He changed the tradition of manufacturing itself, from whole construction to the assembly line. He changed centuries of traditions in worker rights, greatly improving working conditions and pay. And, although it wasn't his goal, he certainly put a lot of buggy whip makers out of business.

At the turn of the century, the city of Westfield, Massachusetts, was known as Whip City, a nickname that it still goes by today. Whip City was home to over 40 different buggy whip making companies. As Henry Ford began selling cars, the market for horse whips suddenly

became less lucrative, and then more competitive, and finally began to completely dry up. This was heartbreaking for many of the whip making companies, which were often family run and built on centuries of tradition. But as the market began to quickly change, the whip makers began to quickly go out of business. That is, brethren, except for one company. The Westfield Whip Manufacturing Company was able to clearly see that there was no future in buggy whips. But in contrast to the other whip making companies, they didn't feel that the tradition of their company was buggy whips. They didn't think that manufacturing whips was their core skill set or their core value. Instead, they realized that what they were really experts in, where the true foundations of their traditions lied, was in expert leather working. They sure knew how to work with leather. And so, in 1910, they changed their business, and they started making leather driving gloves, which every good automobile owner seemed to desperately need. And they started making leather dog collars, and leather hardware for caskets, and other leather items. And out of the 40 whip manufacturers in Whip City at the turn of the century, the Westfield Whip Manufacturing Company is the only company that survived, brethren, they are the only company that survived. The Westfield Whip Manufacturing Company is actually still in business today. In the 1950's, after all of their competition had folded, they were able to return again to their original product, and today they run a small, proud business that makes extremely niche horse riding whips for dressage competitions. They have a simple website, and I was pleased to see that they actually still sell a buggy whip. You can order one from them for \$79.95, if you happen to need one.

You see, brethren, the secret to traditions is that they are about balance. We can't prevent our traditions from ever changing, because the world itself is always changing. If we try to protect

our traditions too much, they get brittle and they end up breaking and falling apart anyway. And yet, we should never toss out our cherished traditions, because they are what give our fraternity value. Our traditions are what define us, and differentiate us from all other organizations. What we need is to understand what the actual underlying value of the traditions are, and protect that value, instead of protecting all the fluff that has become layered on top of it throughout time.

Henry Ford would have agreed with balancing tradition, as he was our brother, raised in Palestine Lodge No. 357 in Detroit, Michigan. When he received his 33rd degree in the Scottish Rite in 1940, Henry Ford said, quote, “Masonry is the best balance wheel the United States has.”

Brethren, there is certainly value in looking to the past for ideas. But we need to do that with our eyes open to the circumstances of the present. Because the ideas that worked in the past worked within a different reality, within a past reality. We need to chart a course through an uncertain, future reality, and the best way to do that is not to look backward, it's to look forward.

Brethren, ultimately, it's not about the hamburger we eat every day, it's about the New York Strip that it's made out of. That's where the value is. It's not about the family farm, it's about the strength of the family running it. We need to look at the underlying value of our traditions, and use that value to craft new ideas, new approaches, and new traditions, that will be valuable in today's world, and in the world of the next generation. That is how our fraternity will flourish. Because it's not worth trying to sell buggy whips, if the world desperately wants to buy our driving gloves.

Thank you, Brethren. At this point I'd like to turn the time over to Worshipful Brother Joey Sanders, and then to what I am sure will be a lively discussion.

References:

Wasatch Lodge No. 1: Lodge History: [wasatch lodge.org/publish/lodge-history](http://wasatchlodge.org/publish/lodge-history)

Grand Lodge of Utah: Most Worshipful Brother Reuben Howard Robertson:
utahgrandlodge.org/gl-past-grand-masters.php

Per above, Proceeding of the Grand Lodge of Utah, 1879, page 51, 52.

Dungeon, Fire, & Sword: The Knights Templar in the Crusades by John J. Robinson

Wikipedia: Frederick 1, Holy Roman Emperor:

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_I,_Holy_Roman_Emperor

Wikipedia: Siege of Damascus (1148): [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Damascus_\(1148\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Damascus_(1148))

Rotten Tomatoes: The Princess Bride – Movie Quotes

Wikipedia: The Third Crusade: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Third_Crusade

Wikipedia: Lee Iacocca

Wikipedia: Henry Ford II

Food and Wine: From Burger Eaters to Billionaires

Wikipedia: Nichols and Shepard

Wikipedia: Ford Motor Company

Ford Corporate: Our History

Auto blog.com: Ford Focus

Wikipedia: Westfield Whip Manufacturing Company

Wikipedia: Westfield, Massachusetts

Westfieldwhip.com

Masonry Today: Henry Ford