News of the Ark

A Monthly Publication of the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons of Kansas

From the Grand Master of the 3rd Veil

Excellent Companion Kelly J. Long, Grand Master of the 3rd Veil

The Most Excellent Grand High Priest has asked the current Grand Chapter Officers to write articles each month for this supplement.



Greetings Companions.

November is quickly and quietly rolling toward us, rapidly cooling off from a hot summer. Soon our thoughts will turn toward the holidays.

Recently I attended an excellent performance of Les Misérables, produced by Music Theatre Wichita, and on National Tour. Honestly, I had avoided Les Misérables for years, thinking it would be a dismal story of everything going wrong for the hero, and ending on a depressing note. Then my wife wanted to see this one and all my preconceptions were wrong.

Les Misérables was a book written by Victor Hugo, 1802 – 1885, who was a French Romantic author, poet, essayist, etc. Brothers in the Craft have debated long whether Hugo was a Freemason or not. While records proving his membership are scarce, his writings contain numerous veiled references to Masonic values. But this is neither the time nor place for this debate. Instead, I wish to share with you two memorable characters, the hero and the villain, from Hugo's story, which was set in Paris June Rebellion of 1832.

The main character is a man named Jean Valjean. He is introduced in the first act as a prisoner who served 19 years in a French prison for stealing a loaf of bread. He cannot find work or a place to stay and ends up eating supper at a church. After eating, he steals a silver cup and runs. The next day, the police bring him back to the church and ask the bishop to confirm he is a thief. Instead, the bishop replies that he did eat with them but left before the bishop could give him two silver candlesticks to go with the cup, which he then placed in Valjean's bag along with the cup. The bishop teaches him to pray and tells him to use the silver wisely. A powerful lesson on the value of mercy. Valjean becomes a philanthropist and spends his life in service to others too numerous to discuss here, often at risk of his own life, and always dodging Inspector Javert.

The other character, presumably the villain of the story, is, of course, Inspector Javert. A powerful and relentless police officer who hunts Valjean for decades, knowing he has broken the law and regardless of how he has lived his life, must be brought to justice. It would be easy to call Javert the villain of this story, as he narrowly captures Valjean on several occasions. But the reason he is so relentless in his cause is not so simple. It turns out he is a righteous man who truly believes that he has a mandate from God to bring those who break the law of the land to justice, and that justice allows no room for redemption. In other words, he has missed the whole point of mercy.

November, 2026

Gary B. Strout

Most Excellent Grand High Priest

2026-2027

The story of these two characters culminates around the barricades of the rebels in Paris. Inspector Javert had been pretending to be a rebel while trying to stop them. The inspector is "ratted out" by a young rebel and captured. Valjean, who was trying to save the life of another character in the story, takes charge of Javert and removes him from the area, supposedly to execute him for his betrayal. Instead, he releases Javert, warning him to leave and stop pursuing him. Valjean then returns to the barricades and Inspector Javert, in a powerful soliloquy, is forced to come to grips with his own internal emotions after having been granted such an incredible showing of mercy by his life-long enemy. He is unable to reconcile his own beliefs, emotions, and how God must surely be judging him. In the end, he commits suicide by jumping off a bridge to stop the turmoil since he can no longer pursue Valjean and cannot reconcile the mercy shown him with his mandate from heaven.

Now that I have completely ruined the story for you, read the book or go see the stage performance! And consider further the marvelous concept of mercy mandated by the Great Architect of the Universe. Then get ready for the Holidays, they fast approach.

Fraternally,

Kelly Long

Traveling To Other Jurisdictions

One of the great benefits and joys of Freemasonry is the ability to travel. We can travel to other masonic bodies who meet outside of our regular area. We can travel to other states and jurisdictions to meet and become acquainted with Brothers from those areas. Travel even affords us the opportunity to travel to other countries and to interact and learn about their masonic practices. Travel is an important part of the masonic experience.



Many of the members of Kansas are busy traveling to other places. Excellent Companion Kelly Long has spent time in Texas visiting masonic bodies in that jurisdiction. Most Excellent Companion Gary Strout travels each year to the jurisdiction of California and meets with masons from the state. Right Excellent General Grand Companion Patrick Carr travels to other states and spends time with our Brothers learning what makes their jurisdiction special and why these jurisdictions do the things they do within the tiled recesses of their masonic bodies.



When we travel, we not only learn about the masonic practices and customs of those areas, but we also learn more about the Brother masons we meet. Each has their own unique story and they are always as willing to share those stories of their masonic experiences as you are to listen to them. Many of our Brothers spent time this past September on the Grand Master's Trip which included Washington, D.C., Pennsylvania, and Virginia.



If you are able, get out there and travel! You will not regret the time (and money) you spent getting there, meeting the Brethren, and enjoying the fellowship. It is a special thing we have in masonry and something we should constantly be willing to nurture and take advantage of.