

# The Almighty is the Organizer: California Freemasonry and the Construction of a Civic Space

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## INTRODUCTION

*‘The Masonic organization is far more remarkable and wonderful than the noblest edifice it ever added to the landscape of history. Let us pause, brethren, on the word “organization.” That is the great word of the world. The Almighty is the Organizer...’—Thomas Starr King (1824–1864)*<sup>1</sup>

Organization was a frequent theme throughout the annexation and establishment of a government in California (whether practical or from a divine source). It underscored all facets of life as American settlers sought to establish familiarity in the new land. As described by the minister and orator Thomas Starr King in his 1863 lecture to the Grand Lodge of California, organization emanated from a divine source, and all living creatures were interwoven in a network of coexistence and cooperation: ‘We soon find in nature that no element, or force, exists unrelated....’<sup>2</sup>

Starr King was a popular Unitarian minister from Massachusetts who, despite his health condition, plunged headfirst into the social issues facing the new state. He fundraised for the United States Sanitary Commission (the precursor to the American Red Cross) and lectured across the state championing the Union cause for those who might have taken a side against it, or remained undecided. Of his influence, Glenna Matthews writes,

With King as the catalyst, California raised four times more for the USSC [US Sanitary Commission] than New York, which ranked second in fundraising efforts. Furthermore, nearly 17,000 Californians volunteered for military service...In such ways, they demonstrated their commitment to the Union.<sup>3</sup>

King’s speeches, written during the full fury of the American Civil War, emphasized order and the interconnectivity of all beings—especially humankind— was a timely reminder. However, his words were saturated with a familiar American sentiment that informed its citizens as the United States spread westward: that the nation’s peoples existed under an ordained system of rights governed by and for the people. To Starr King, this democratic system, though imperfect, reflected a transcendent order and a dependence upon it. Moreover, he believed Freemasonry was its agent (which will be discussed later):

A state, a nation, so constructed that the forces of all ranks of its inhabitants should be brought into play, and the rights of all ranks should be saved from pressure, would be a more marvelous and a

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<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of California at its Fifteenth Annual Communication Held in the Masonic Temple at San Francisco; Commenced on Tuesday, May 12 A.D. 1863, A.L. 5863, and Terminated on Saturday, May 18 A.D. 1864, A.L. 5863* (San Francisco: Frank Eastman, Printer, 1863), 112. Hereinafter referenced as *Proceedings GLCA*.

<sup>2</sup> 1863 *Proceedings GLCA*, 113.

<sup>3</sup> G. Matthews, *The Golden State in the Civil War: Thomas Starr King, the Republican Party and the Birth of Modern California* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 3. For a summary of the conflicting positions of the Californians, see pp, 2–7,

more inspiring structure than the material order and harmony of our solid globe. It is in the light of this principle that the value and nobleness of *Masonry* appear.<sup>4</sup>

And,

Everywhere, order is the great interest. What humanity needs is the fulfillment of these indications of nature, freedom with order, a proper consciousness of worth in every breast, a recognition by each man of the worth and claims of every other, and an acknowledgment by all of a common and controlling law. This idea of order, fulfilled in the architecture of nature, is committed as a trust to our Fraternity, and the proper reverence for it is poured out continually through the influence of our hallowed bonds.<sup>5</sup>

Starr King's choice of words reflects a unique perspective about the function of order and government within the expanding social space of the United States. Universal in outlook, it was intended to be enjoyed by those who would accept its laws and precepts as borne out from the people's struggle against monarchical rules and upheld by the new nation's constitution and the Bill of Rights. This was the underlining theme of Manifest Destiny and the pursuit of the West; it was believed that the perfection of American ideals would shelter everyone under its wing. All previous social structures and governments were imperfections, longing for completion. Historian Amy Greenberg noted that expansionism was equated with progress and defined 'as the introduction of domesticity into the wilderness...idealized as an essentially peaceful process...Americans were unified in pursuit of their destiny.'<sup>6</sup> According to historian Glenna Matthews, even Starr King professed 'an ardent nationalism that sometimes devolved into the rhetoric of Manifest Destiny...'.<sup>7</sup> But, she counters, 'that served as an effective counter to the prevailing localism in California at the time of his arrival.'<sup>7</sup>

Commenting on California's past before the new American order, William Day Simmonds, a friend, and biographer of Starr King, cheekily remarked in 1917 that

The story reads not so much like the orderly growth of a civilized community as a series of unrelated and episodic events. There is little of logical order or sequence and much of surprise, adventure, of conflict and crisis.<sup>8</sup>

The events before the annexation were not as episodic as Simmonds described. Instead, they were a succession of periods, whereby their transitions were marked by invading cultures that both clashed and overlapped. These were: (1) the Native American period, (2) the Spanish period, and (3) the American, or US, period. However, his sentiment was arguably a popular one and did not differ from the themes portrayed in John Gast's *American Progress* (1872). In it, the spirit of *Progress* hovers gracefully over a party of pioneers as they journey from a bright east to a dark wild west. Greenberg observes that Gast's painting suggests a post-Civil War reappraisal of history: that the specter, along with the women riding in covered wagons, represents the introduction of a tranquil 'domesticity to the wilderness', obscuring the 'violent process through which the United States gained control of the region.'<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> 1863 *Proceedings GLCA*, 114.

<sup>5</sup> 1863 *Proceedings GLCA*, 115.

<sup>6</sup> A.S. Greenberg, *Manifest Manhood and the Antebellum American Empire* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1–2.

<sup>7</sup> G. Matthews, 229.

<sup>8</sup> W.D. Simonds, *Starr King in California* (San Francisco: Paul Elder and Company, 1917), 19.

<sup>9</sup> Greenberg, 2–3.

The reappraisal is not necessarily limited to Gast or Simonds's respective eras. Their observations are a part of a collective narrative of 'how the West was won,' which did not exist as a recollection but was written *during* the conquest. It was a part of the new and evolving American mythos and based upon the ideals of order, decency, and the notion of individual morality, providing the necessary stability for the creation of new societies. Of course, these qualities were still a part of mainstream religious curricula. Still, they were also echoed within Masonic and Odd Fellows lodges, which were often formed before any other social associations in the new western territories.<sup>10</sup> Thus, these organizations provided a crucial link in perpetuating the American experience in regions that were formerly considered unpredictable, wild, and uncivilized. The standardized ritual further exemplified this focus on order, which guaranteed a similar initiatory experience shared over a large geographical area. These fraternal organizations also offered a civic space to share in 'charity, trade and political preferment, social activity, and the prestige of higher bodies and officeholding.'<sup>11</sup>

In the spirit of the colonial delegates who breathed life into a new democratic republic at Philadelphia in 1787, the establishment of a cohesive union was at the fore of the California representatives' concern when they met at Monterey on 3 September 1849 to construct a constitution, setting the course for eventual statehood. The region had been annexed as a US territory following the cessation of the United States' war with Mexico (1846–48) and the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (2 February 1848) which ceded large swaths of Mexican territory to the United States. Further, gold was discovered at Sutter's Mill near Sacramento just before the war's end.

However, for the California delegates, time was of the essence. Though now identifying itself as a civilian government, the (former ) military government was still operating under territorial, rather than Federal, law as the US Congress had gone into recess just as California was annexed as a territory. The explosion of gold fever and pressure from a rapidly expanding population was undoubtedly putting pressure on the nascent government to adopt a familiar structure:

If these States had any difficulty about the extent of their boundaries, they did not mind waiting two or three years. Congress was near to them and could come to some understanding with them in a short time. But we stand here, several thousand miles distant from the seat of Government, with an immense population from every part of the world. We have no laws to govern them. It is absolutely essential to our political existence that we have some substantial laws to govern this immense mass of beings who are within our borders – people who have lived under every variety of law and government, and many of them under no government at all. The protection of government is required to keep them from reverting to an absolute state of barbarism; and, sir, it is my earnest desire to secure it for them without delay. If ever there was a period, when delay would be fatal to us, it is now.<sup>12</sup>

The 'immense mass of beings' clamouring for the government envisioned by California's Constitutional Convention was the first of several waves of immigrants crashing onto the territory's shores. The quest for order—almost at all costs—influenced the North Americans' worldview as they eclipsed many of the other newcomers from Europe, Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere. The social dynamics between the US Americans, the Spanish-Mexican Californio populations, and the indigenous tribes are far too complex to

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<sup>10</sup> L. Duménil, *Freemasonry and American Culture, 1880 – 1930* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), xii; 13–14; 30, 93.

<sup>11</sup> Duménil, 14; 30.

<sup>12</sup> J.R. Browne, *Report of the Debates in the Convention of California on the Formation of the State Constitution, in September and October, 1849* (Washington, DC: John T. Towers, 1850), 200.

cover in this short paper. Suffice it to say, the latter two populations were eclipsed by the American age with its concentration on transporting the familiarities and comforts they enjoyed on the East Coast to the West. The California Gold Rush was a global phenomenon that heralded an entirely new society: a collision of diverse peoples pulled together by extreme (and seemingly sudden) circumstances and forced to create new ways of interaction and enter into the growing controversy (and eventual conflict) over slavery.<sup>13</sup> This event is arguably the inspiration for Simmonds's observation about the Californian chaos ('...much of surprise, adventure, of conflict and crisis.').

In the footsteps of the United States' founding fathers, those who achieved success during the Gold Rush also perceived themselves as paragons of civilization, forging order from chaos on the frontiers of an expanding American empire. This is where we see the rise of the railroad baron Leland Stanford or the respected military veteran, San Francisco real estate mogul, and first Grand Master of California, Jonathan Drake Stevenson (1800–1894). Others, such as the third Grand Master of Masons in California, Benjamin Hyam (1813–1893), redefined what Masons believed about the extent of the powers afforded to their leadership.<sup>14</sup> As Thomas Starr King solidified California's seemingly tenuous participation in the Union, John Swett (1830–1913) championed a state-run public school system. Many, believing in their civic duty, put themselves in harm's way, such as those who cared for victims of the devastating cholera epidemic in Sacramento (later the state capital). Just as the historical record heaves with those who met a nameless death and disappointment on the western frontier, there are those who, by virtue of their perspectives about American identity and the promises of its expansion beyond its heaving borders, carved their initials in the annals.

The biographies of these men highlight their successes and heroism and thus award their fraternal associations with a degree of positive notoriety as if these organizations played a definitive role. In some cases, evidence does exist, but there is a danger in oversimplifying these complex actors. Fraternal hagiographies lean toward what is most comfortable and beneficial—especially from *and to* a fraternal worldview; they create an alternative, mythical past that insists on sharing space with factual evidence.

Consider Lansford Warren Hastings (1819–1870), who demonstrated the inconsistencies between personal convictions and his adopted Masonic tenets, such as promoting tolerance toward other religions (Mormonism).<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, he was an ardent supporter of chattel slavery, proposing a Confederate colony in Brazil to preserve the rebel states' ideals and their cherished institution.<sup>16</sup> Hastings's contradictions, which may be perceived to violate the fraternity's central message of brotherly love, will be discussed at length. In brief, his conduct illustrates how individual perspectives interpreted the American constitution, Manifest Destiny, and social order. Hastings's curious story will be treated at length. By way of example, those mentioned lend a particular dynamism to the idea of Freemasonry as practiced in a young and developing republic and on an emerging frontier. They shock Masons and non-Masons alike as they promote a raw human dimension to an organization that seems so lofty and black and white in its morality. While their life stories might illustrate the danger of taking the Masonic connection too far, they exemplify the individual forces required to expand the civic space within the United States. In this paper, a broad view of Freemasonry's role

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<sup>13</sup> Browne, 44, 48–49, 138, 139, 142, *passim*; Matthews, 2, 68, *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> For a more in-depth examination of Hyam, see A. Kendall, 'The Scandals and Secret Rites of Benjamin Hyam, California's Third Grand Master', *Freemasonry on the Frontier*, ed. J.S. Wade (UK: Lewis Masonic, 2020), 341–372.

<sup>15</sup> There was already a large contingent of Mormons in California prior to the discovery of gold. In fact, Marshall was assisted by Mormons at Sutters Mill when the precious metal was found. See, Starr, 76–79 and Dolnick, 42. The author writes that as veterans of the Mexican-American War, members of Mormon battalions found work in California until the church leaders in Salt Lake City, Utah could properly feed the emigrating faithful. He states that '[m]any of Sutter's ablest employees were Mormons....'

<sup>16</sup> B.H.C. Weaver, 'Emigration to Brazil', *Journal of Southern History* 27, no. 1 (1961): 33–53. Retrieved from JSTOR, accessed 18 September 2021, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2204592>.

in the expanding civic space in California will be explored and how the individual, such as those mentioned above, played both heroic and controversial roles.

## EUREKA! THE CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH

Following the war with Mexico, California would not enter American society as a sleepy agrarian society. President James K. Polk's (1795–1849) desire for the territory to inherit the legacy of American progress would secure it as an example of a new empire that would spread from sea to sea.<sup>17</sup> But few could fathom just how rapidly this would become a reality. The discovery of gold at John Sutter's mill on 24 January 1848 precipitated one of the largest human migrations in United States history. By 1849, nearly 100,000 people emigrated to California.<sup>18</sup> In 1850, the United States Federal Census reported 92,597 (combining the populations of Whites and 'Free Colored' only). In 1852, the census was expanded (albeit imperfectly) to include 'Whites, Colored, Indians Domesticated, and Foreigners', yielding 255,122 inhabitants— an increase of 162,525 people.<sup>19</sup>

Fueled by rumour, fable, and media marketing, the Gold Rush became a worldwide sensation and was the catalyst for a social and cultural impact that still resonates to this day. The breathless enthusiasm for the event, which became translated into the 'California Dream', reflects similar hopes and dreams, even transforming the legends of the 1850s. For some, gold fever would develop into a dangerous mania. It infected young and old and inspired a new wave of international exploration as hundreds of thousands of people — primarily men — journeyed to California, thus redefining the American physical, cultural, and social landscape as they searched for adventure and prosperity.

The legendary 'wild west' and San Francisco's Barbary Coast culture became an international and media-driven sensation stoked by entrepreneurs who certainly generated more money than the would-be miners.<sup>20</sup> Get-rich-quick schemes ran rampant, promising a hopeful miner an advantage over his competitors. In reality, he would be quickly relieved of his money before arrival, or worse. For the intrepid adventurers, however, danger was a necessary wager that might leverage a slice of the legendary American dream, whereby they might leave the long-established confines of the East and reward them with personal wealth and, thus, more agency. The push West represented, in many respects, a part of a national mythology *and* an individual narrative.

The clarion call for those who read the adventure novels and breathless newspaper headlines was to make a run for the west and plunge into the wild, emerging triumphant and hopefully very rich. In the contemporary press and adventure books, they were heroic pioneers. Life in the mines was depicted as the epitome of freedom and masculine adventure, away from the familiarity of the home and family life, 'from the constraining traditions and Sunday admonitions that had ruled for generations'—qualities we still recognize and mythologize today.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> H.W. Brands, *The Age of Gold* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 30–32.

<sup>18</sup> J.S. Holliday, *The World Rushed In: The California Gold Rush Experience* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981), x; 'The Forty Niners', *California as I Saw It: First-Person Narratives of California's Early Years, 1849-1900* Collection, Library of Congress, accessed 2 January 2022, <https://www.loc.gov/collections/california-first-person-narratives/articles-and-essays/early-california-history/forty-niners/>.

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, '1850 California Census', 972; 982. Retrieved from the United States Census Bureau, 27 January, 2022, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/decennial/1850/1850a/1850a-47.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Holliday, 55–57.

<sup>21</sup> Holliday, 2; K. Starr, *California, A History* (New York: The Modern Library, 2005), xi. For a first-hand account of the day-to-day life on the ships to California and the excitement of landing in San Francisco, see M. Thorne and L. Stowell, "Bound for the Land of Canaan, Ho!: The Diary of Levi Stowell", *California Historical Society Quarterly* 27, no. 1 (1948): 33–50. Retrieved from JSTOR, accessed 18 September 2021,

Historians, however, have argued that a lack of family life and moral compasses would, like the hydraulic mining washing away the Sierra landscape, erode men's moral compasses and lead them to corruption. California historian Edward Dolnick reported that 'California's violence took its most gruesome form when it pitted race against race, but the gold-seekers happily did in one another even when they lacked any excuse at all.' He wrote that by January 1849, violence was so commonplace that 'life insurance companies refused to sell policies to anyone hunting gold.'<sup>22</sup>

With the desperate ambition to get to California at all costs, coupled with the wanton greed and violence associated with the goldfields, there was a strong possibility that instant riches would be elusive. It was almost inevitable that you would work for others, and they would enjoy the fortune from your back-breaking labour. You would be hungry. You would be lonely. You might even die without anyone knowing your name. The opportunity and environment to learn and receive trust would become a most valuable commodity.<sup>23</sup>

## FRATERNAL AND CIVIC SPACES

Competing communities and perspectives contributed to the diversity of California's legacy. At the same time, however, the dominant male population contributed to waves of violence. Outlaws and desperados terrorized the landscape or inspired men to settle their scores with duels or vigilantism. Mix in a furious hunt for gold, and the situation was going to be a bit tense. Towns in the gold country, beset by a constant flux of newcomers, experienced the limits of law and order. Families—at least in the early years of the rush—were scarce. This left lonely men to succumb to the darker angels of their nature, making fraternal associations such as Freemasonry and the Independent Order of Odd Fellows ideal promoters of decency, trust, and familiarity.

With new opportunities in California, Grand Lodges throughout the United States rushed to issue lodge warrants to establish themselves on the new frontier. In doing so, they transported sets of established Masonic values to their new western lodges, ensuring that although 'home' might be thousands of miles away, there was a familiar pattern and continuity. Lodges instructed and protected the new arrivals, assuring them a sense of continuity, although home might be thousands of miles away. Indeed, the Order was considered to be a subtle, hidden link providing a method of communication and community unknown to non-members:

The formation of a Grand Lodge for the State of California should be a subject of sincere congratulation to every Mason here and elsewhere for probably in no part of the habitable globe has its usefulness been made so manifest as in this country within the past year. Already does California number among its inhabitants persons of every nation and clime known to the civilized world, all seeking, by enterprise and industry, to improve their condition in life; and it not unfrequently happens that within the distance of a few hundred yards of a mining district, there will be found many persons laboring together who are strangers in language, heart, and in feelings; but if they be members of our ancient Order, each is the master of a language that all can understand, and there at once springs up that deep feeling of fraternal affection... and nowhere is this holy fellowship and brotherly love more frequently called into requisition than in this land of gold and promise; for nowhere is man more dependent upon his fellow man for all the necessary comforts of life than in

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URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25156078>.

<sup>22</sup> E. Dolnick, *The Rush* (New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2014), 266; Thorne and Stowell, 46.

<sup>23</sup> See Holliday, 397; 420–423. Holliday's narrative of the Gold Rush is bolstered by the valuable letters sent by those travelling California, particularly the young farmer William Swain of Youngstown, New York.

California...that all who have witnessed those influences have learned properly to appreciate the benefits of the Institution in a community like ours.<sup>24</sup>

Gathering disparate populations under the guiding principles of mutual aid and friendship provided the foundation for the new Grand Lodge's reputation as a guiding force of social order emerging from a wilderness, illustrating the Order's beneficence co-joined with American Manifest Destiny. In 1852, California's third Grand Master, Benjamin Hyam, expressed this succinctly:

[At] the extension of our order on the shores of the Pacific, even to its mountain fortresses, wherein a few months back, only the steps of the Red Man, and echo of the roar of the forest monsters were known establishing itself through our influence in the Islands of the Seas thereof, wherein darkness and ignorance but a few years back overspread the land ... Popular as Freemasonry is over the civilized world, and establishing itself concurrently, with religion and civilization. We invariably find her aiding to stimulate man's exertions, teaching him to subdue his passions and hold out the right-hand of fellowship to his strange brother, and sooner or later, as the tenets of our order overspread the earth, so will its teachings tend to moralise it.<sup>25</sup>

Hyam's words reflect a common perspective about the events unfolding in the territory: a new social order, defined by a particular interpretation, was promoted. Hyam characterized the Craft as an agency of human improvement when he stated, 'as Freemasonry establishes its foothold, in company with civilization...the condition of our fellow men must become inevitably ameliorated.'<sup>26</sup>

In this new land, which was becoming crowded with newcomers and a rising tide of extreme lawlessness, this amelioration took the form of governing members who often lacked the benefits of home life. Right thinking and lawfulness became watchwords as the early Grand Lodge took action against any insult to benevolence or fraternity, such as expelling any member engaged in dueling (even those killed during the act).<sup>27</sup> Charity became a formidable industry for fraternal orders, partially because they could attract members from diverse social sectors. As an essential mechanism in creating a familiar social order, the California Grand Lodge's commitment to relief was especially important for those traveling west as many endured crippling hardships during their sojourns.

Year after year, the jurisdiction's constitution expanded in complexity as the grand lodge reacted to the influx of immigrants. In 1852, Hyam proposed a per capita system to provide funds for orphaned children. The Grand Lodge also created a bridge with their sister jurisdictions by requesting cooperation in sharing in the monetary relief of their brethren crossing into California— which, if left solely to the Californians, would have bankrupted the Grand Lodge. Similarly, it also regulated how much a lodge could spend on charity to avoid insolvency, as was the case with Jennings Lodge and their relief toward the victims of Sacramento's cholera epidemic.<sup>28</sup>

In October 1850, Asiatic Cholera exploded in Sacramento, depleting the town's population as terrified people either died or fled from the grotesque and fast-moving disease.<sup>29</sup> The passenger ship 'New

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<sup>24</sup> 1850 *Proceedings GLCA*, 28.

<sup>25</sup> 1852 *Proceedings GLCA*, 148 – 1850.

<sup>26</sup> 1852 *Proceedings GLCA*, 148–49.

<sup>27</sup> 1854 *Proceedings GLCA*, 313.

<sup>28</sup> 1851 *Proceedings GLCA*, 80–81; 1853 *Proceedings GLCA*, 248; Whitsell, 121.

<sup>29</sup> 'History of the Hospital'. 'Cholera Epidemic Memorial: Old City Cemetery, Sacramento', Disaster Memorials on Waymarking.com, accessed 28 January 2022, [https://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WMNDA7\\_Cholera\\_Epidemic\\_Memorial\\_Old\\_City\\_Cemetery\\_Sacra](https://www.waymarking.com/waymarks/WMNDA7_Cholera_Epidemic_Memorial_Old_City_Cemetery_Sacra)

World' docked in Sacramento from New York carrying news that California had been admitted into the Union.<sup>30</sup> After leaving the vessel, an infected passenger collapsed outside and the epidemic would take only a few weeks to kill approximately one thousand people.<sup>31</sup> Of the forty physicians present to treat the afflicted, seventeen died.<sup>32</sup>

On-hand were three Masons from Tehama Lodge No. 3: Dr. John Frederick Morse, Sr. (1815 – 1874); the Sacramento's first mayor [elected in 1849], General Albert Maver Winn (1810 –1883); and Governor John Bigler (1805–1871). Writing in *One Hundred Years of Freemasonry in California*, Leon Whitsell recounted the relief effort:

With J. D. B. Stillman, also a physician, Morse organized and presided over the Masons' and Odd Fellows' Hospital at Sutter's Fort, the only institution of its kind in the city. Winn took charge of the general relief movement, exhausting the contents of his own purse and putting himself into severe financial straits in an heroic effort to relieve the suffering. ...Bigler walked among the sick and dying, serving wherever he could when the stench was so bad he had to keep a lump of camphor at his nose.<sup>33</sup>

There were only sixty-nine Masons in Sacramento, yet they spent \$32,000 for the relief of those in need, and accrued about \$14,000 in debt.<sup>34</sup>

That Freemasons, along with other fraternal organizations such as the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, were involved with the development of towns or providing assistance and relief during dire circumstances seems elementary in hindsight. The narrative has become so commonplace that it almost seems cliché when mentioned. However, their inclusion as a building block in the American experience may not be gainsaid. The works of Drs Margaret Jacob and Steven Bullock (to name a few) can attest to increased respect for these organizations' impact. Within American society, participation at every level of society was valued. It stands to reason that fraternal orders' – especially Freemasonry's – benevolent causes would find a home in the expanding republic. Indeed, fraternal orders, which reproduced in great numbers according to station and class, reflected those American ideals from those unique perspectives and became their stewards. It becomes problematic for the historian when determining where an individual's actions coincide or depart from their convictions. This is particularly difficult for Freemasons when they encounter behaviours that depart from established Masonic convention.

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<sup>30</sup> 'History of the Hospital', UC Davis Health, accessed 20 January 2022,

<https://agewell.ucdavis.edu/aboutus/150th-anniversary/articles/history-of-the-hospital.html>;

<sup>31</sup> G. Conner, 'History of weather observations. Sacramento, California, 1849-1948', 1. Retrieved from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association, 2005, accessed 29 January 2022.

<sup>32</sup> G. Conner, 1; 'The Seventeen Doctors of the Sacramento Cholera Epidemic', Historical Marker Database, accessed 2 February 2022, <https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=12485>.

<sup>33</sup> Whitsell, 466.

<sup>34</sup> Whitsell, 121. According to CPI Inflation Calculator this amount would be approximately \$1,143, 803,000 in 2022. See CPI Inflation Calculator, <https://www.officialdata.org/us/inflation/1850?amount=32000>, accessed 22 January, 2022. General Winn was the founder of the fraternal order, Native Sons of the Golden West. He also organized the first Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) lodge on the Pacific Coast and served as its inaugural Noble Grand. See 'General Albert Maver Winn', Native Sons of the Golden West, accessed 28 January 2022, <https://nsgw.org/general-albert-maver-winn/>.



The impact of Freemasonry on an individual Mason can often be demonstrated by looking at how his Masonic beliefs played out in the public arena. In the case of Lansford Warren Hastings, a member of Tehama Lodge No. 3 at Sacramento and a delegate to the 1849 California Constitutional Convention, his story also illustrates the danger of pushing the 'Masonic connection' too far, as again the situation of Hastings demonstrates. He had been an advocate for freedom of religion for members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormons) at the convention. Still, He went to his grave as an ardent defender of slavery for African-Americans.

Hastings tackled the delicate issue of allowing Mormons the freedom to practice their religion at the Constitutional Convention, and one might be tempted to believe that this was the result of the positive impact of Freemasonry on his character development. Mormons in the nineteenth century were a very controversial religious group. Their unusual religious beliefs, and some of their practices, such as plural marriages, had made them the victim of persecution as they moved from state to state, seeking freedom to practice their controversial religion.

After the murder of their founder, Joseph Smith, who was himself a Master Mason, the Mormons fled to the unoccupied territory around the Great Salt Lake in the 1840s. Mormons had been present at Sutter's Mill when Marshall discovered gold, and a question was raised at the constitutional convention about excluding them from the right to practice their religion. Hastings, however, made an impassioned plea not to exclude them from the protections of California's Declaration of Rights (the California version of the American Bill of Rights). The proceedings record his speech: 'First,' he said, 'we secure religious liberty to the full extent; next, deny religious liberty beyond a certain extent.' After heated debate, the convention adopted Bro. Hasting's position. The only acts the Declaration of Rights did not protect were licentiousness (which was not defined) and 'practices inconsistent with the peace or safety of the state.'<sup>35</sup>

But this was in 1849. Between 1849 and 1859, the United States was hurtling toward civil war, which broke out with Abraham Lincoln's election as president in November 1860. Lincoln's inauguration was followed by the rapid secession of the slave-owning states in the South and the formation of the Confederate States of America. On March 11, 1861, seven states met at Montgomery, Alabama, and adopted the *Constitution of the Confederate States of America*. Of particular importance was Article IV, Section 3, which clearly stated that each state of the Confederacy was to recognize the existence of slavery in every other state adhering to the Confederacy:

(3) No slave or other person held to service or labor in any State or Territory of the Confederate States, under the laws thereof, escaping or lawfully carried into another, shall, in consequence of any law or regulation therein, be discharged from such service or labor; but shall be delivered up on claim of the party to whom such slave belongs, or to whom such service or labor may be due.<sup>36</sup>

In addition, Section 3.3 of this same part made it clear that slavery would be permitted to exist in any new territory of state added to the Confederacy:

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<sup>35</sup> J.R. Browne, *Convention on the Formation of the State of California, in September and October, 1849* (Washington, DC: John T. Towers, 1850), 292–293. Retrieved from Google Books, [https://books.google.com/books/about/Report\\_of\\_the\\_Debates\\_in\\_the\\_Convention.html?id=81ksQ0j2VqQC](https://books.google.com/books/about/Report_of_the_Debates_in_the_Convention.html?id=81ksQ0j2VqQC). Accessed 29 September 2021.

<sup>36</sup> Confederate States of America, *Constitution of the Confederate States of America* (Montgomery, AL: Shorter and Reid, 1862), 19. Retrieved from Archive.org: <https://archive.org/details/constitutionof00conf/page/18/mode/2up>. Accessed 24 January, 2022.

(3) The Confederate States may acquire new territory; and Congress shall have power to legislate and provide governments for the inhabitants of all territory belonging to the Confederate States, lying without the limits of the several States; and may permit them, at such times, and in such manner as it may by law provide, to form States to be admitted into the Confederacy. In all such territory the institution of negro slavery, as it now exists in the Confederate States, shall be recognized and protected by Congress and by the Territorial government; and the inhabitants of the several Confederate States and Territories shall have the right to take to such Territory any slaves lawfully held by them in any of the States or Territories of the Confederate States.<sup>37</sup>

Although historians have, from time to time, maintained that the issue of slavery was not a cause of the secession of the Southern states and the formation of the Confederate States of America, the constitution adopted on March 11, 1861, should lay that question to rest. The issue of slavery had divided the American states from the formation of the United States Constitution in 1787. The issue continued to plague the nation until the issue was decided by the Union victory in the Civil War in 1865. These two clauses in the *Constitution of the Confederate States of America* directly addressed the Southern point of view on the issue of slavery and made it clear that slavery would be a protected industry.

In the decade leading up to the Civil War, California was divided. Although it had been admitted to the Union on September 9, 1850, as a free state, almost half the residents came from slave-owning states or were sympathetic to the practice of human chattel slavery. One of the reasons that Thomas Starr King was such an eager advocate for California to remain in the Union and not secede and join the Confederacy was his recognition that the goldfields of California would be an incalculably valuable asset for the Confederacy if California seceded and joined the Confederacy, or if it established itself as an independent republic with the intention of supporting the Confederate cause. Although none of the battles of the Civil War were fought on California soil, the issues of the Civil War were very much political issues in California.

Lansford Hastings supported the Confederacy, and he worked hard to convince Californians to secede and join the Confederate States of America. By this time, he was a resident of Yuma, Arizona, and served as the postmaster for that community –making him an officer of the federal government. As such, his attempts to detach California from the Union, and to promote the Confederacy, was treason against the United States. In 1864 he traveled to Richmond, Virginia – by this time the capital of the Confederacy and tried to gain the support of Confederate President Jefferson Davis for his efforts. Davis appointed him as an officer in the army of the Confederate States of America, with the rank of major. He urged Hastings to assemble a military unit in Arizona to detach California from the Union.<sup>38</sup>

When the Civil War ended, the Confederate States of America collapsed, and a movement arose amongst Southerners to establish a ‘Southern Homeland’ in Brazil. Hastings took a prominent part in the negotiations with the government of Brazil to create such a place of exile. Slavery was still legal in Brazil at this time, and the idea was that former slaveholders would emigrate to Brazil, taking their slaves with them. The idea appealed to Dom Pedro II, then the Emperor of Brazil and the city of Americana was created in the Brazilian state of São Paulo for the *Confederados*, as the Brazilians called them.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Constitution of the Confederate States of America*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> C. Clendenen, ‘Dan Showalter, California Secessionist’, *California Historical Society Quarterly* 40, no. 4, Civil War Commemorative Issue (1961): 320–322.

<sup>39</sup> B.H.C. Weaver, ‘Emigration to Brazil’, *Journal of Southern History* 27, no. 1 (1961): 35–36; 41.

Hastings might have been more successful with this enterprise had he not contracted yellow fever and died in 1870 at St. Thomas in the Virgin Islands.<sup>40</sup> His pro-slavery views are contrasted by his earlier persona as a delegate to the California Constitutional Convention of 1849. There he made a name for himself as a defender of religious liberty. Still, this commitment must be laid alongside his passion for human chattel slavery – something at odds with his earlier passion for civil rights and the cause of religious freedom, which he espoused in 1849. It would be difficult to defend his passion for the institution of slavery while at the same time defending his evident passion for freedom of religion. Hastings case clarifies the danger of attributing his support for freedom of religion as having an origin in Masonic principles.

However, before being too hard on Hastings, it is essential to remember that other prominent American Freemasons owned slaves. The most famous are presidents George Washington and Andrew Jackson. And to add to this dilemma, it needs to be noted that Jackson was not only a Freemason but a Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Tennessee in 1822. Hastings's position echoes the problems facing those at the CA constitutional convention when they debated the proposed state's position on slavery. William G. Gwin, a California Constitutional Convention delegate, also owned slaves in his native state of Tennessee yet was still elected as a state senator.

## CONCLUSION

Central to California's rapid growth and admission into the Union was its gold rush. Acquired by President Polk's battle-ready desire to extend the American experiment to the shores of the Pacific Ocean, even he was caught off guard when faced with just how much gold was freely available in California. The vigorous expansion of the Western frontier, the Second Great Awakening, and a series of financial hardships contributed heavily to a changing concept of how Americans perceived themselves and how their constitution reflected and justified this perception. California simply echoed the growing pains of the US, especially as it debated the usefulness and morality of its positions on slavery and state's rights, and so forth. The 1849 California Constitution would be tested as the discovery of gold promised both progress and avarice.

With its historical connections with the US Founding Fathers and its influence in developing a participatory social space in the nation, American-based Freemasonry is a crucial component. The fraternity became an anchor and an outlet for those carving the West's new social order. Like the constitution of the country and the state, it expressed ideals that were intended to bring equilibrium to the frontier. However, Freemasonry is a man-made organization that reflects a society rather than creates one. Like constitutions and other binding documents, it is subject to conflicting interpretations and abuses, leading to conflict and destabilization. Yet, the Craft and other fraternities *as institutions* provided a crucial link to a familiar and gentler expression of community and intelligence that was sorely lacking as gold fever became the *lingua franca*.

Some Masons may have embodied traits that are antithetical to the Craft's tenets and should not be surprising. There is no guarantee that being a Mason will necessarily influence a member's views on controversial subjects. Care should be exercised before attributing particular opinions held by a Freemason to the organization as a whole. Their struggles form the basis for the romantic mythology embodied in the mere mention of California. Indeed, the clash of cultures and heaving progress lends to the realization that order and stability do not exist in stasis and might be somewhat subjective and elusive. We have guidestones in our constitutions and social contracts, but the rest is yet to be determined. This is what is meant by the phrase 'American experiment'.

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<sup>40</sup> Hastings Family Genealogy Website, accessed 28 January, 2022, <https://web.archive.org/web/20091028162931/http://www.geocities.com/hastings1635/hastings.html>.