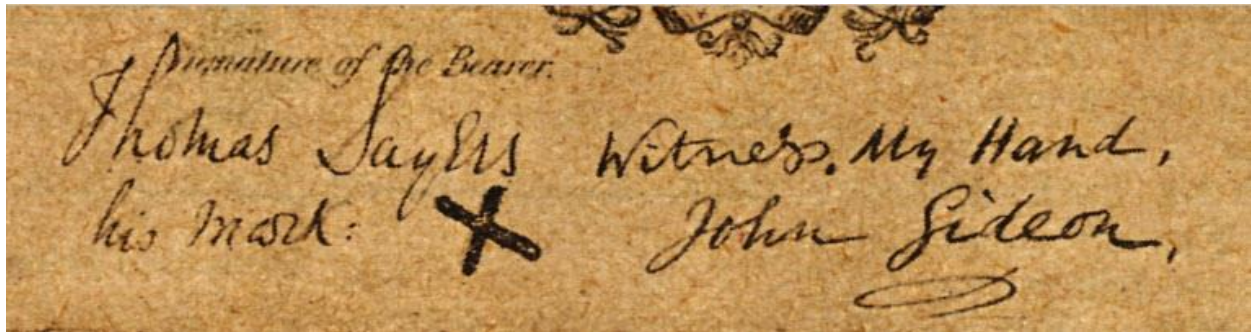


Take Me as I Take You

Let's, for a brief time, think about hands, their importance to man and especially to us as Masons. A man's hands are oftentimes an indication of the craft and skills of their owner. Long tapered fingers are usually found on an artist or a musician. Big expansive hands are found on a blacksmith, construction worker, or bricklayer.

There are some who believe that the past, as well as your future, can be read in the delicate lines that traverse the palm of the hand. Inasmuch as your feet have just as many lines, if not more, I wonder if the lines on your feet reveal more than the lines in your palm...just wondering.



Back to the hands....to be legal, a signature must be in a man's 'own hand'. Our ancient brethren could not write as we do today, so many documents were affixed by one of two methods: he either made his mark with an "X" or a thumbprint, or he imprinted the parchment with his teeth. Another manner of binding a contract is found the Hebrew tradition of taking off your shoe and giving it to your neighbor as a mark of your sincerity. Yet another method was the exchanging of a coin. This latter method is still used when we read "in consideration of the dollar in hand, receipt of which is hereby acknowledged, etc." In daily life we use such expressions as "Hand delivered" to learn "first hand" "I bought it second-hand" a clock has "Hands" rather than pointers. You get the idea.

A runner wins a race "handily" instead of "footily"....you're right, it's not a word. If a race horse is said to be "handicapped" we at once know what has happened to the horse. This usage harkens back to ancient athletic games when a wrestler, who was much larger or stronger than his opponent, had one hand tied or 'capped', thus he was 'handicapped'. We "lend a hand" even when our help is only the loaning of some money. In the era of uncivilized man, the upraised open hand was a sign that no weapon was being concealed and was therefore a sign of "peace." Still later, when knights wore armor, to remove a gauntlet and extend a bare hand was a sign that even though the knight was dressed for battle he came in peace. Even today we usually remove a glove to shake hands. Though we may never have known the reason for this display of etiquette, we are stating by action rather than words, "I won't hurt you, I will gladly take your hand because I trust you."

Ancient Greeks, in order to prevent the ghost of a suicide victim from haunting them, would cut off a dead person's hands and bury them separate from the body. It was thought that without hands, a ghost couldn't navigate in the dark. There are pleasant thoughts relating to hands, such as the Eskimo tradition of carving a mask for the hunting ceremony. On the mask was depicted two hands and a hole was drilled through the hands. This symbolized the need to allow some of the hunted game a chance to 'pass through the hands' to insure future generations the opportunity of the hunt. Since king's hands have in all times been symbolic, it is fitting that they, too, have special powers. In 18th century England, the disease known as scrofula (we know it as tuberculosis) was called the "King's evil" and it was claimed that this malady could be cured by the king's touch.

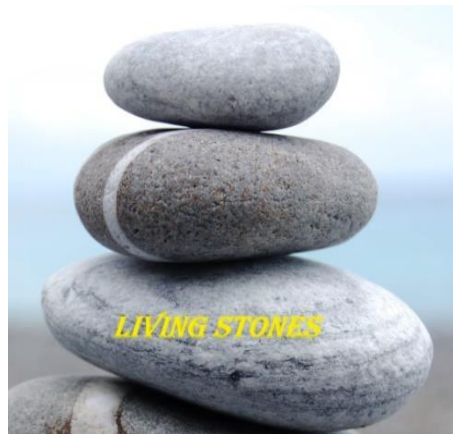
In all ages, and all parts of the world, 'hands' were an important part of traditions, communicating, making a living, and dealing with others. It seems only fitting that "Hands" were used with significance in Freemasonry from its earliest times. Indeed our ancient Brethren, the operative Mason, made his living with his hand tools. Can we be surprised then at the use of "Hand to back", or of the Apprentice being instructed that a sign of fidelity was an image of two right hands joined, or by two figures supporting each other by the right hand?



Fidelity has its own sign. We use it when we pledge allegiance to the flag and in many Jurisdictions when we are at prayer.

Your hand can work for the good of the Craft when you take the time to call another Brother on the phone, or e-mail him. No matter if he is sick or well; or his need great or small, just reach out and touch his life. That touch is universal. Touch is the expression of love. After all, a vase of priceless beauty and value was once a lump of clay until molded by the touch of two hands.

We must be in awe of mankind's accomplishments in space and technology. Human hands assembled the vast machines that we now occupy in space. So to, "The strong grip of a Master Mason" can accomplish many things. Shake the hand of your Brother with pride. Be proud of your Lodge. Be proud of Freemasonry. Don't lose your grip, my brother....you have earned the right...to take me as I take you.



Living Stones - Masonic Thoughts for Today's Mason
Douglas M. Messimer, LEO Fraternal Lodge No.53 3-19

Source: portions adapted from a presentation by Wor. Harold Grainger, King Solomon Lodge No. 31, Washington, D.C., *Ancient Times-Handiwork*, and other related Web sources.