

## Between the Ashlars

By W. Bro. Jason Whitehorn, MPS

When a man becomes a Mason, he learns the importance of the rough and perfect ashlar and how it relates to his life. Along with this important lesson, he also learns the importance of the working tools, most all of them used in properly working that rough ashlar to become a more perfect stone for that eternal dwelling.

Through the lessons taught, we learn that we should spend great time learning to use the tools we have at our disposal to form that ashlar – which is our life. When proper time, technique, and care is done to accomplish this, we become a better person: a better friend, a better father, a better husband, a better son, a better Brother. Sadly, over the years we have learned the shortcuts of working that stone – and in some cases even replacing the very stone itself with substitute materials – despite the lessons we receive. Sure, we can recite the recipe for how to form that ashlar backwards and forwards. We even teach the words and instructions to others – but we often conclude our instruction to younger newly-made Brothers by saying “memorize this in less than a month and we’ll have you repeat it to the lodge...then, we’ll let you take your next degree” while failing to truly explain what it all means.

Falling prey to this commonly occurring routine is likened to forgoing the use of bricks for a house and, in its place, using merely plywood. Sure, it may give shelter from some elements but, over the years the elements begin to take their toll on the flimsy wood and decay occurs. The structural integrity of the dwelling becomes unsafe – it soon begins to fall apart. “What should I do?” the young builder asks? Concerned about his home, he begins “patching” up the boards with more plywood. “Perhaps some more nails will do the trick,” he says, and thus his home is repaired.

Soon, the tolls of Mother Nature come again. The house meets the same fate as before. “There has to be a solution,” he thinks as he ponders what went wrong. Soon, he decides that doubling the plywood walls will provide more support. Again, he builds his home – this time adding more support. For a period of time, his home remains intact. Confident in his handy work, he goes about his everyday life until, once again, years of the elements cause both layers of wood to rot away.

“Why doesn’t he just use brick?” you say. The answer is simple. Finding a true stone for brick requires entirely too much time. First, a good stone quarry must be found. Then, the stones must be chipped away to become smooth and level so that they fit well together. Then, each brick has to be laid and mortar needs to be added to ensure they hold well together. It is simply too much work. Plywood, while only a short-term solution, is much easier to work with.

“There must be some point to this story,” you say – and there is. For quite a few years, our fraternity has been trying to find ways to forgo the stone solution and look for alternatives to build. We forgo lessons in ancient teachings – not just speaking the words

– and, instead, concentrate on how to “rebuild” our fraternity in new ways. Perhaps it is a billboard campaign for new members. Perhaps it is by concentrating financial support to those areas that will receive the greatest amount of publicity for the craft.

In truth, it is time that we start going back to the basics, and instructing our members on the proper way to form that rough stone and build their house one brick at a time. Sure, more “homes” can be built by simply using plywood. It is cheaper to do – and more homes equals more mortgages and rent – but when the walls start falling down, and the tenants start looking for other homes – I’d put my money on bricks. Which house would you rather live in...and which home would you rather build?