

Grand President's Message

Grand President James King

It was suggested by our Editor, Brother Tom Widlund, that my first message to the entire order should paraphrase my installation speech since only a few could be there in person. So, if the following sounds familiar, that is why.

Against all the odds, despite broken bones and car crashes, I have survived to take a place in the line of my esteemed predecessors. I am honored by the trust that has been placed in me and it is my sincerest hope that I will prove worthy of this office.

Ultimately, I stand here today only because of the support and faith of others. The list is long, but it includes my wife, fellow Grand Officers, Past Grand President's, my Brothers in San Miguel Parlor and every other Parlor. We have joked and laughed, debated and argued, celebrated and planned. I thank you all for your friendship, your faith in me and your support.

Dats der vey mine vadder did it, dat's der vey I do it!

My father used to joke about my mother's family of hard-headed Nebraska "Dutchmen." Change can be painful and frightening at times, but often it is necessary for our very survival.

An organization like ours, steeped in tradition and glorifying the past, views change with a skeptical eye. But in the end, change we must, not for changes sake but to keep pace, to survive and thrive. To paraphrase part of a speech by Past Grand President Christeson: we must differentiate between valued traditions and habits.

Some changes will come about organically, as they should, in their own time. On Tuesday, 14 May 2019, we elected our first woman to the Board of Grand Officers. Our newly minted Grand Trustee Marcia Skelton did not run for office to make a point or to break down some wall. Brother Skelton ran, with an amazing resume qualifying her for the position (a resume that I am truly envious of), because she wants to serve our Order, nothing more. Congratulations, Marcia.

We live in a new age, an electronic age, yet we cling to our printed and mailed newsletter, an expensive and confining media, in an age of instant communication. It is imperative that we adapt. I am not advocating that we do away with our newsletter, it is potentially the best format for leaving a historical record of our work. What I am championing is the wholesale adoption of an electronic version, one that could be published monthly, one with color photos, live links to websites and email addresses, and no limitation to the number of pages that can be published.

Our website continues to evolve to better inform our members about the goings on in our Order. I hope to see it grow into a site where non-members will come to learn about our fair state and about the Native Sons' place in, and contribution to, its history. But, believe it or not, websites are already considered to be "old news" in this new age.

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Even Facebook, a phenomenon that I have never apprehended, is getting long in the tooth and losing favor among many. That may be just as well in the long run as I hear that our Facebook page seems to have become little more than a place for backbiting, complaining and the berating of others...speaking of things that MUST change.

Twitter is still a popular means of spreading news but our presence there is virtually non-existent. The last posting was almost 3 years ago. Instagram is another popular platform whereupon we are just starting to stake our claim. And there are others.

I am proud to announce that at the suggestion of my Grand Historian, Past Grand President Erik Christeson, the Native Sons of the Golden West will be producing a podcast, a popular way to entertain and inform. Equipment has been purchased and several interviews have already been conducted. The results, I think, have been even better than expected. When a suitable library of shows is ready, they will be published with links on our website and, hopefully, elsewhere.

Likewise, I have asked him to set up a YouTube channel where we can publish videos of Native Sons at our best, doing those things that we do; dedicating historical markers, presenting checks to hospitals, walking tours of historic sites or museums, hosting historical speakers, re-enactments, fishing trips, shooting events, meet your neighbor break-fasts...the list goes on. These may well turn out to be the first exposure to the Native Sons that some people have.

What seems like a lifetime ago, the first time I stood before Grand Parlor, I declared that part of our battle isn't just "that people don't know WHO we are, they don't know THAT we are." I believe that it was Brother Robert Santos who famously corrected a speaker once, when they referred to the Native Sons as extinct. Why would that person have thought that? Because we don't advertise ourselves. We don't write articles for our newspapers or invite our local TV stations to cover our activities, we only wear our membership pins on meeting nights, our parlor hats and t-shirts at Native Sons events and so on. I often wear my Grand Officer shirt to work on days that I am going to a meeting. My co-workers will stop me and ask about who we are and what we do. Most have never heard of us. Will they ever become members? I don't know. But it's a certainty that they won't if they never hear about us.

Our historical markers are lasting evidence that we are here. Our dedication ceremonies are an important opportunity to be seen, alive and well, by our communities. I am planning for an ambitious schedule of dedications and I hope my successors will follow suit. We have already begun planning to place at least one new marker in every county of California over the next four years.

We have to advertise that we are here, point to every-thing that we have done and what we continue to do for our communities and our State. We need to give people a reason to join and then we have to ASK them to join. Hopefully, mastery of new communication methods will help with the first part of the equation, it's up to US for the second part.

When a new member joins our parlor, we should all welcome them personally. I suppose that it is human nature to knot up with those whom we already know and are comfortable with but that is an almost certain way to lose that new member. Make a point to get to know them and include them in your conversations. We can change and, I promise you, it won't hurt.

A change in some of the ways we do business should be explored. We need to search for new sources of funding and investments that will provide a continuous stream of income to help take the bite out of the ever-rising costs of doing business.

Some changes are not for the better. "The Order of the Native Sons of the Golden West was founded up-on patriotism..." On this point, I believe that we should never change, that we must retain our patriotic roots, that we must forever honor our flag, "the living ensign of liberty and law," and during my term, the flag will be saluted whenever practical.

As an organization we must adapt to the new world when it is appropriate, but we must also resist those changes that are antithetical to what the Native Sons have always stood for if we are to leave a vibrant, relevant Or-der to the next generation. An Order that our forebears would be proud of. There are challenges ahead, but as I consider my fellow officers and our Brothers everywhere, I feel confident that we will do our part.

In friendship, loyalty and charity,

James King
Grand President 143rd Grand Parlor
Native Sons of the Golden West