

The Thirty-Third Degree

I believe that the time is ripe for a statement concerning this degree and the selection of those who receive it. The degrees in the Scottish Rite series from the fourth to the thirty-second, inclusive, are open to worthy Masons who have received the preceding degrees, and may be applied for and received upon a favorable and unanimous ballot. The Thirty-third degree is different. It cannot be applied for. It is conferred by selection. Those selected are supposed to be 32° Masons who by reason of sound character, distinguished careers, or extraordinary standing in their communities, and by loyalty and devotion to the Order, merit this honor. It is not to be conferred on good fellows who “have been around a long time”; it is not to be awarded to men who have simply been financially successful enough to have the price; it is not to be conferred merely because one has been politically successful enough to hold many Masonic offices; nor is it to be conferred merely because the recipient knows the right Mason of influence. The favorable consideration we have helped recently to obtain for Prince Hall Masonry has also put this Supreme Council on the spot. On the average we have a fine membership. We are justly proud of that fact. But we need more than ever to guard the prestige of this Supreme Body by carefully selecting those who sit in it. This brings me to say that we are helpless to do so unless our Councils of Deliberation in the individual states exercise the very greatest care in selecting those whom they recommend to us for elevation. They know the men in their jurisdiction. We do not. Most of the time the fraters recommended are known only to a few of us, and our vote represents our confidence in the local Councils of Deliberation. We have a right to insist, therefore, that these Councils shall merit this confidence by the sort of men they recommend.

Excerpted, verbatim, from the May 1948 allocution of Most Puissant Sovereign Grand Commander Sumner A. Furniss 33° delivered during the 67th Annual Session