

MASSENA LODGE 513, F. & A. M.

*(Compiled for Massena's 100th Anniversary,
September 30, 1961)*

Although Massena Lodge 513, F. & A. M., has reached its 100th anniversary, Masonry in Massena goes back to the very first settlers. First permanent residents in Massena from 1799 to 1809 included such Masons as Elisha Dennison, Daniel Robinson, John Policy, Ira Kellogg, Thomas Colburn, Ezekiel Colburn, Willard Seaton, Captain John Polley, Dr. William Goss, Thomas Stedman, John Stone Jr., Robert McChesney, William Stowell, Elisha Barber, Benjamin Willard and others.

They petitioned for the formation of Olive Branch Lodge of Massena. Several of the petitioners were members of Olive Branch Lodge of Chester, Vt., which had received its charter Oct. 14, 1797 from the Grand Lodge of the State of New York having jurisdiction over all the territory from New Hampshire to Michigan.

The Grand Lodge Proceedings for March 1, 1809, shows that the petition for Olive Branch Lodge of Massena was received but does not actually indicate that letters of dispensation were granted.

Hamilton Lodge of Waddington and Harmony Lodge of Potsdam also sought letters of dispensation. DeWitt Clinton was grand master.

The first authentic roster of existing lodges was recorded in 1816. Hamilton and Harmony Lodges are listed, but Olive Branch Lodge is missing.

Whether Olive Branch Lodge ever received its charter, or who its officers were may never be brought to light in this late day, but it is known that in 1809 John Bullard sold under contract to Masonic Trustees Thomas Stedman, Willard Seaton and Daniel Robinson of Massena and Elisha W. Barber and Benjamin Willard of Louisville, the property known as Village Lot No. 9, Massena, west side of Main St., the site of the Syakos-Clopman Block.

On this lot the Masons erected a three-story frame structure, using the first two stories for an inn or tavern and reserving the upper story for use as a Masonic Hall.

No local records of Olive Branch Lodge exist; there is nothing in Grand Lodge records except the notation that the petition was received.

But as Massena Masons petitioned the Grand Chapter of Royal Arch Masons for a chapter to be formed here, and as St. Lawrence Chapter 24, R. A. M., was chartered by the Grand Chapter on Feb. 8, 1809, about a month before the Blue Lodge petition was received, it can be assumed that Olive Branch Lodge was active, despite the lack of records.

On Feb. 21, 1821, St. Lawrence Chapter 24 was moved to Potsdam, where it continued until 1829 when it was obliged to suspend owing to the high state of excitement that prevailed throughout the country on account of the Morgan episode. This chapter was revived in 1851 and is still working under its original charter as St. Lawrence Chapter 24.

When Olive Branch Lodge became inactive and the chapter had moved to Potsdam, the contract for the property was taken up by John Stone Jr. and this building became one of the leading hotels of the town. Mr. Stone was followed as owner by Benjamin Phillips and Hiram Marston, the latter operating it under the name of the Marston House. It was destroyed by fire in 1853, and the present brick block was erected on the site of its ruins. The seven petitioners to form Massena Lodge 513, were: Martin J. Chamberlain, 31, merchant..... Norfolk Lodge 405

Orson J. Davis, 56, mechanic Racket River Lodge 213

Charles P. Gray, 23, mechanic.. Adoniram 42, Vt.

W. S. P. Garvin, 32, mechanic Norfolk 405

Henry S. Ransom, 36, merchant... Norfolk 405

Amos Ransom, 74, physician Rainbow Lodge, Chateaugay

Henry H. Hawkins, 55, farmer ... Aurora Lodge, Fort Covington

The first officers were to be, according to petition: Martin J. Chamberlain, master; Orson Davis, senior warden; W. S. P. Garvin, junior warden.

Norfolk Lodge 405 at a stated communication Feb. 28, 1861, adopted a resolution recommending to the Grand Lodge that the petition be granted.

The dispensation was granted Mar. 4, 1861, to be effective until May 25. It was signed by John W. Simons, grand master, and James W. Austin, grand secretary.

The report to Grand Lodge for the period Mar. 14 to June 1, 1861, recorded the following work:
Jason Denison Mar. 28 Apr. 23 Apr. 25
Horatio G. Clark Apr. 4 Apr. 23 Apr. 25
Charles C. Nightingale Apr. 4 Apr. 23
Apr. 27

C. C. Nightingale signed the report as secretary. The warrant and the number 513 were granted to the new lodge June 6, 1861.

Thirteen more men were raised as Masons during the following year, and Massena Lodge was well started.

Other records in Grand Lodge show that several members of the new lodge went to fight for the Union. These notes follow: Charles P. Gray, gone to the army; M. J. Chamberlain, 106th N.Y.S. Volunteers; Orson Davis, gone to the army; W. S. P. Garvin, 142 Reg. N.Y.S. Volunteers; C. P. Gray, 92nd Reg. N.Y.S. Volunteers; G. L. Sutton, surgeon in the army.

Norfolk Lodge 405, which recommended the petition of Massena Lodge, became involved in difficulties two years later. Two candidates, said to have been soldiers, were initiated, passed and raised at a special communication without the permission of the Grand Lodge. The district deputy, at the direction of Most Worshipful Clinton M. Paige, investigated the case and demanded the surrender of the warrant. His action was upheld by the Committee on Grievances and the warrant was declared forfeited June 10, 1864. An application for a new lodge, recommended by Racket River Lodge 213, was not granted.

Racket River Lodge of Potsdam, from which one of Massena's charter members came, was warranted Mar. 4, 1851. Some of its organizers were old members of Harmony Lodge 187 which had flourished in Potsdam between the years 1808 and 1822.

Rainbow Lodge, which furnished another Massena member, was warranted at Chateaugay, Franklin County, in 1812. Its warrant was surrendered in 1831 at the height of the Morgan anti-Masonic excitement.

Aurora Lodge, the number of which Bro. Hawkins apparently did not know, may have been any one of several lodges which bore that name before 1830, but it was probably No. 383, still active in Fort Covington, Franklin County.

Officers named at the first meeting of Massena Lodge 513, in addition to the master and wardens named in the petition were: H. G. Clark, treasurer; C. C. Nightingale, secretary; C. P. Gray, senior deacon; H. S. Ransom, junior deacon; Jason Denison, tyler.

Elected at the first annual election, Dec. 19, 1861, were: Martin J. Chamberlain, worshipful master; Orson Davis, senior warden; W. S. P. Garvin, junior warden; James Kirkbride, treasurer; C. C. Nightingale, secretary; H. S. Ransom, senior deacon; H. G. Clark, junior deacon; John McPhee, tyler; William Stevens, senior master of ceremony; Israel M. Tracy, junior master of ceremony.

Masonic records were destroyed when the Cubley-McDonald Block was badly damaged by fire May 22, 1925, but a talk given by H. S. Ransom, a charter member on Nov. 23, 1886, on the 25th anniversary, gives light on that first quarter of a century of Masonic history. This paper has been carefully preserved by Mrs. Frank Cline.

He recalled that he and two other men went to Norfolk to be initiated, passed and raised, in order that the necessary number of seven Masons could apply for a charter. He was postmaster in 1861. He reported that the first meetings were held in the small brick building on Phillips St., now razed, which was then used as a post office. Meetings could be called only after post office hours. There was no upper room. Outside sentinels were posted to observe the approach of cowans and evesdroppers. The furniture consisted of chairs with a shoe box on end by the master's station, a drygoods box with a piece of carpet over it for an altar, three candlesticks two and one-half feet high in due Masonic order placed about the altar, with goose-dipped candles in them.

Jason Denison, 25, a farmer, was the first to be initiated in Massena Lodge 513. He received his first degree Mar. 28, 1861.

Brother Ransom recalled that by the time the first officers were elected Dec. 19, 1861, the lodge moved to the second floor of the residence of James Mastin, a year or two later to the brick store known as the Joy-Clary Block, now the Syakos-Clopman property, 20-22 Main St. These rooms were brightened up and a considerable

amount of money was spent. The Masons secured a hemp carpet for the floor, a table with some shelves for the secretary's desk, chairs, chandelier, some regalia and jewels for the officers.

Jason Denison, the first member to be initiated and serving as tyler, made the two columns, placed as Masonic history informs us at the entrance to the middle chamber of King Solomon's temple. Visiting brethren often remarked how well the work had been executed, Brother Ransom reported.

In 1874 the lodge moved to the adjoining block, then known as the Stearns Building, 22-24 Main St.

In 1886, the lodge moved to the Kirkbride Block on the east side of Main St., 33-35-37. Brother Ransom in his talk congratulated the lodge on its pleasant and commodious rooms.

In 1889, the lodge moved to the Cubley-McDonald Block, 48-54 Main St. The lodge continued meeting there until the fire occurred May 22, 1925.

From 1925 to 1932, the lodge was located on the third floor of the Smith Block, east side of Main St. at Phillips, 27-31 Main St.

In 1932, the lodge moved to the Phillips-Daly Block, and remained there until 1949 when the new temple was completed.

As early as 1920, a Masonic Building Association was formed. In 1922 this was incorporated as the Massena Masonic Temple Association, the members being Robert T. Danforth, Elon A. Horton and Andrew J. Hanmer.

About \$3,100 was collected to be applied toward the purchase of a site with or without a building. Many places were considered, including the stone house on Andrews St., opposite the end of West Orvis; the land where Andrews St. Park is today with the present home of Stephen Syakos; the Alfred M. Button property on W. Orvis, now a part of the Schine Inn property. Each location had its partisans, many meetings were held, but the Masons finally decided to continue saving money and defer making any commitments.

By 1929, the sum of \$6,500 had been set aside. The Massena Masonic Temple Association was empowered to buy the property on the northeast corner of E. Orvis and Glenn, for \$10,000. The

plans were to erect a Masonic Temple on that location.

Due to the depression, plans had to be delayed and when the George Hall Corporation, Ogdensburg, offered \$9,000 for the vacant property in March, 1937, the Masons voted to accept it and consider some other site.

Late in 1945, the Masonic Temple Association, after a favorable vote from the various Masonic bodies, secured an option on the one-story Pratt Block, then housing the W. L. Smith Hardware Store and Harvey O'Brien's Bowling Alleys. The building had been constructed by the late Assemblyman Walter L. Pratt and building engineers gave assurance that a second story could be added. Price paid was \$27,500. Fire gutted the building Dec. 10, 1947. The Masons then decided to rebuild, with three commercial establishments on the ground floor and the new second floor to be used entirely for lodge purposes.

A complete set of plans and specifications were drawn by engineers, members of the craft, employed by the Aluminum Company of America. They drew up the plans in their spare time at no cost to the lodge.

In 1949, the contract was let for \$60,500.

The cornerstone was laid Sept. 15, 1949 by the Most Worshipful Frank M. Totton, then grand master of Masons in the State of New York. This cornerstone was cast of aluminum, a gift from the Aluminum Company of America. It was the first aluminum cornerstone ever used.

On Dec. 28, 1957, the mortgage was burned in a public ceremony by John H. DeKlyn, Walter D. Clark and John R. Boyce, then trustees of the Masonic Temple Association.

This beautiful temple is the home for the other Masonic bodies and organizations: Massena Chapter 300, Royal Arch Masons, chartered 1905; Massena Commandery 72, Knights Templar, 1918; Cretona Chapter 516, Order of Eastern Star, 1912; Massena Court 70, Order of Amaranth, 1920; the Grandmothers Club, Masonic War Veterans.

History compiled by —
Walter D. Clark
Leonard H. Prince