

The First 100 years of Monticello Union Lodge #155
F. & A. M.
(Free and Accepted Masons)
Monticello, Wisconsin

It is assumed the name of the Monticello Lodge was taken from that period in our national history immediately following the Civil War, Very little is known of the early history of Monticello Union Lodge because of a disastrous fire on December 8, 1896 which destroyed the original lodge hall located over a general store. From the December 9th, 1896 issue of the Monroe Sentinel we learn: "The Masonic Block on the south side burned last night at 11: 00 P.M. J. L. Hirsig had a stock of "Gents Furnishings and Goods" in the building. Nothing saved. Building insured for \$1,200. Contents were also insured, do not know the amount. L. W. Wilson's residence nearby was saved but badly damaged. F. W. Humiston's residence had a narrow escape. By keeping it well covered, with water it was kept from burning. The building belonging to the lodge was located on the present site of the Mrs. Meta Grunder residence, 103 South Main Street. All lodge records and furnishings were lost except the Tyler's sword. The handle was burned away and had to be replaced.

From a county history published in 1884 we get this information, "Monticello Union Lodge #155 F. & A. M. was organized under dispensation granted October 14, 1865. The charter was granted June 13, 1866. The first officers were James Butts, W. M., Sweting C. Taft, S. W., Joshua Crowell, ? . ?, J. Johnson, Sec. The following have served as past masters: James Butts, S. C. Taft, F. R. Drake, H. M. Barnes. The lodge now has a membership of over 30. Its regular communications are hold the first and third Tuesdays of each month."

This lodge has had four homes. The first which was destroyed by fire. We note that after the fire a resolution was passed on December 7, 1897. "That the Trustees should sell the lot where the hall and store were located for \$250.00 or more if possible." The second home immediately after the fire was in the old Gerber Block, then known as the Wittwer building. The building is now owned by Brother Raymond H. Gessler. The third hall was the second story of a commercial building located on Main Street.

The fourth and present hall we have been in since 1911. As we learn from the minutes of August 2, 1910 that a motion was made that we rent the hall of the new Bank of Monticello building at \$130.00 per year. At the *same* time it was voted to raise the dues from \$1.00 to \$3.00 per year beginning January 1, 1911. Brother Albert Knobel was the first to be raised in the new building. Since 1959 our present building is owned by Brother Paul E. Voegeli, using the first floor for his legal practice.

It was noted that in the early years of the lodge, minutes of the evenings proceedings were always read for correction and approval just before closing. The following meeting, after opening, the same minutes were again read for information.

In the early days Grand Lodge dues should not nave presented a problem. On June 7, 1898 a motion was carried that an order by drawn on the Treasury for the amount of \$10.90 for Grand Lodge dues.

Modes of transportation were different than today-as on October 18, 1904 a motion was carried that a team be hired to go to Albany for Monroe night. After the railroads came to Monticello many of the New Glarus members attending lodge would come to Monticello using a railroad hand car. Not only did the New Glarus brethren have to supply their own propulsion but they would also have to walk up to the lodge hall from the railroad depot, a distance of almost one mile. 1916 was not the year of a "two car family" as on May 2 and order was drawn on the Treasury for \$18.00 for auto hire to attend the Charles Wackman funeral.

In 1906 the lodge sent \$10.00 to California after the great earth-quake.

April 10, 1914 at a special meeting held the following Monticello members living in New Glarus appeared with a petition requesting the establishment of a lodge in New Glarus: Nicolas C. Duerst, Ernest Becker, M. E. Solbraa, E. J. Helgeson, Fred Marty, Clarence H. Hefty, Charles Dahlman, Henry M. Schmid, William Engler, Herman J. Zweifel, Paul E. Jackson, George L. Spaulding, Fred A. Stuessy, together with Robert Bartlett of Albany Lodge 36, 14 in all. A motion was carried without any dissenting vote that we recommend to the Grand Master the granting of the dispensation prayed for in the petition, in so much as it contributes to the good of the order.

During World War I the brethren evidently wanted to add to the food supply on the home front as a motion was made on March 5, 1918 for Bro. Fred H. Steinmann to see James Pratt to get price on land for a Masonic garden. Before the days of the water fountain, Bro. Lora Pease submitted a bill to the lodge on May 7, 1929 for a dipper and pail, \$1.00.

One of the faithful secretary's to serve the lodge was our late Brother Henry Holdrich. On November 19, 1918 a motion was carried that Brother Holdrich's picture be enlarged and hung over the Secretary's desk in honor of his long years of service to the fraternity. Another of our faithful Secretarys was our late Brother, Otto E. Bontly, He served for almost 30 years and was honored by a special evening in 1960.

Sometimes large events were held outside of our regular meeting rooms. On October 28, 1921 a special meeting was held at Karlen's Hall. Dr. Harry J. Horne was the Master. Harry A. Walters, now living in Monroe North Carolina who was here tonight, was raised to the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason. 145 visiting brethren were present. The secretary was unable to get the names of the local members attending. The work was followed by a luncheon and "smoker". (Cigars always furnished by the lodge) Several members of the Monticello Orchestra played selections. This was followed by a 2 reel comedy furnished by Brother Karlen. Again on April 29, 1926 a special meeting was held in Karlen's Hall, well attended by 203 visitors and 48 local members. Wilbert S. Hoesly was raised to the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason. Emil Rabe was the W. M. The New Glarus Master Mason team put on the work. In 1928 Bro. L. G. Marty was raised. Making the membership at that time 100. J. P. Zweifel was Master.

Through the years the names of the membership has changed. Names of the original charter members are no longer familiar in this area. As the west was developed many of the names with the Yankee and New England origin moved on to become a part of that part of American History. Since the turn of the century we find the names on our membership rolls reflecting the great immigration patterns that started about 20 years before from countries in central and northern Europe.

The heritage of this lodge was born of men who embraced the teachings of Masonry in less perilous times. When our country emerged as a nation from the bloody Civil War. When travel was long and tedious. Communications were primitive. When man depended on his neighbor for all of his community and social needs.

Today we are living in an age of instant communication, a nation faced with great national and international problems.

Our challenge is to continue the practice and teachings of the craft in this great era of social and world change.

Thus ends the first 100 years of existence of Monticello Union Lodge. What the future holds is just as uncertain as life on this earth has always been. But for the present let us in the

oft repeated words; "Resolve to maintain with greater diligence the dignified character of our profession."

Frederick S. Voegeli

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Monticello, Wisc.

Addendum:

True to the teachings of our craft, in June of 1931 \$250.00 was transferred from our savings account to the checking account to pay for the funeral services of a deceased Brother.