

Sandusky Masons celebrate 200 years

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Provided photo

A group of Sandusky Masons pose for a photo during an installation ceremony earlier this year. The organization is celebrating its 200th year in Sandusky.

SANDUSKY

In June 1818, Sandusky was a small village of about 100 inhabitants, many of which were Masons. These early Masons, desiring to gather in a fraternal union, applied to the Grand Lodge of Ohio for a charter, or dispensation, to operate as a lodge. A dispensation was granted to

Science Lodge No. 50 in July 1818. In December of that year, officers of Science Lodge No. 50 were listed as:

Hector Kilbourne, worshipful master; Kilbourne was the surveyor of the original plat of Sandusky and also the first worshipful master of the Science Lodge. He is responsible for arranging the streets of Sandusky in the form of the square and compasses, a Masonic emblem.

Samuel B. Carpenter and Henry Fuller, wardens

Eleutheros Cooke, secretary; Cooke was the first attorney in Sandusky and went on to become a U.S. senator.

Grand Lodge representation was handled usually by Kilbourne, Cooke and others who all played important roles in early Sandusky history.

In 1849, cholera struck Sandusky and delivered a fatal blow. Hundreds of citizens were lost to this terrible disease with local Masons being no exception. Included were Erastus Cooke and Rodney Lathrop, signers of the most recent charter petition. But, following the epidemic, the Science Lodge, as well as Sandusky, began to grow in size and prosperity. During the mid-1850s, the lodge was busy with degree work. There were numerous evenings that two separate degrees were presented but not to the same candidate.

In 1855, it was the first year that Masonry was listed in the Sandusky City Directory.

In 1860, an event took place which had a profound effect on Masonry in Sandusky while George R. Morton was serving the fifth of his eight terms as worshipful master. Minutes from the Jan. 2, 1860, meeting indicated that a petition had been sent to the Grand Lodge of Ohio for a new lodge to be founded in Sandusky. Perseverance Lodge No. 329 was granted a dispensation on March 2, 1860, followed by a charter dated Oct. 18, 1860. Perseverance Lodge No. 329, located within the 300 block of Wayne St., still boasts a major Masonic presence in Sandusky.

Civil War and Johnson's Island

During the Civil War, many of the local citizens went off to war, including some of the brethren. So called "emergency degree work" was apparently practiced throughout the state to hurry up the process of becoming a Mason before the new members left for Army duty. Union troops were stationed as guards at the Confederate prison camp on Johnson's Island during this time. As a result, Science Lodge No. 50 often accepted petitions from and raised these soldiers away from home.

On one occasion, in 1864, a Union trooper successfully petitioned but died before he could be initiated. The minutes note that his initiation fee was returned to his young widow along with

the condolences of the lodge. The minutes record numerous instances of the Science Lodge granting charity for the Masonic brethren held as prisoners on Johnson's Island. This charity went primarily for clothing. Recent research, conducted by Kenneth R. Dickson, confirmed a long held belief that Science Lodge No. 50 played host to Confederate Masons imprisoned on Johnson's Island, allowing them to participate in meetings at the lodge. Naturally, as one would expect, the Confederate prisoners were returned to Johnson's Island after each meeting. As Brother Dickson wrote, "Science Lodge No. 50 stands out as a true example of Masonic charity, extended from Brother to Brother, in times of war, and the lodge should be publicly recognized for its service."

Years later, in 1886, a survey of Confederate graves on the island indicated 28 of our Confederate Masonic officers had perished while being held prisoner. The minutes note that, in 1865, the lodge was "draped" for 30 days in memory of the assassination of our U.S. president, Abraham Lincoln, even though Lincoln was not a Mason. Prior to 1900, this was the practice observed whenever any Mason was called to "that house not made with hands."

Great growth

The year 1866 witnessed the first joint installation of officers with the Perseverance Lodge. This custom, with very few exceptions, has continued until the present time.

The charitable activities of our early Masonic Brethren should not be overlooked. Already mentioned was the relief given to Confederate prisoners, but the list of charity funds would include many more, including the following: the 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the Chicago fire in 1871, Cincinnati floods, the cyclone at Circleville and widows and orphans of Masonic Brethren.

Membership in Science Lodge No. 50 grew in earnest. The active role reached 200 in 1911, 300 in 1920 and, after the Great Depression, it passed the 400 mark in 1954. Peak number of members totaled 428 in 1965. Probably one of the most important causes for the large growth was the improvement in transportation. The streetcar and interurban train were in full use, and the automobile was rapidly being perfected.

World War I, again, had an impact on the life of the lodge. Members were once more called to serve their country. In 1918, C.M. King was present for his installation as worshipful master but then left for the Army, never again to assume the gavel.

The secretary's minutes of Oct. 20, 1919, list a special meeting called with the names of 250 officers, members and guests present. But absolutely no purpose for the meeting is spelled out. Newspaper accounts of the two days preceding, however, indicate that this was the celebration for the 100th anniversary of Science Lodge No. 50.

Included in these meetings were addresses by prominent local Masons and by Most Worshipful Grand Master Mathew Smith. Dinner, piano and organ recitals, and the conferring of the master mason degree, completed the day's strenuous activities. Proceedings of Grand Lodge for 1920 give the grand master's account of the event.

The cannon fire of World War II rumbled around the earth in 1941. And, once again, the Sandusky Masons went into the military to do their part. A plaque in the anteroom of the temple indicates the depth of sacrifice. Because of gas rationing, these years showed fewer visitors for inspections. Also, because of the rationing, a joint inspection was held with perseverance in 1945. This was also a time for remitted dues to those serving in the military.

Tragedy strikes, Masons persevere

The year 1943 was tragic for another reason. In January, Sandusky Masonry was dealt a cruel blow by a major fire in the temple. The alarm was turned in at 11:15 p.m., and control of the fire was not reached until 3 a.m. It was also noted that the weather was extremely cold, and water froze, forming thick coatings of ice shortly after leaving the nozzles of the 11 lines of hose.

Flames were confined to the third floor, attic and loft, although heavy smoke and water damage befell the first and second floors. Gone were the pipe organ, the robes, the uniforms and many, many irreplaceable artifacts and photographs. Fortunately, most of the records were spared.

Following the signing of the Japanese Peace Treaty, membership increased rapidly to pass the 400 mark in 1954.

But membership is not the complete story. The important thing is what we have accomplished in the past, what we stand for today and where we are going in the future. Our rich heritage is due to the dedication and efforts of the founders and the officers and the strong men of Science Lodge No. 50 down through the years. And now, we are in the middle of our yearlong celebration of our 200th anniversary of Masonry in Sandusky. As we are celebrating our 200th anniversary, the city of Sandusky is also proudly celebrating its 200th anniversary.

This is a great time for the City of Sandusky and Science Lodge 50.