

A History of Wayzata Lodge

(Reprinted from 75th Anniversary Booklet)

On the northeast shores of rambling Lake Minnetonka nestles the community of Wayzata. Lake Minnetonka, located in western Hennepin County in the glacial moraine area of central Minnesota, is a fine deep lake of many bays and beautiful shores. Discovered in May of 1822 by four young men from Fort Snelling, including Joseph Snelling, son of Colonel Josiah Snelling, the lake soon attracted settlers.

After the Civil War, the lake area became popular as a resort center. During the 1880's, the people from the great cities of the south and central states came to the Wayzata and other Lake Minnetonka areas to spend their summers at the plush resort hotels along the shores. From the railway station in Wayzata, they walked down to the docks where porters touted the merits of the individual hotels. At the dock, lake steamers waited to take them to the hotels. The Belle of Minnetonka, just one of the many steamers, was a 300-foot side-wheeler with a capacity of 2500 passengers.

But this era soon passed and even before 1900 had arrived, Minnetonka was already changing from a summer and resort area to a community of year-around residents.

In the early 1890's, there were a number of Master Masons living in the Wayzata area. Many of these drove by horse and buggy, or walked to the nearest Lodge, the one in Excelsior, to meet with their brother Masons. But the trip was long and time consuming and before long, they developed an interest in forming their own Lodge. On July 20, 1891, 17 brothers, a majority of them from Excelsior Lodge No. 113, signed a petition requesting a charter from the Grand Lodge of Minnesota for a Lodge at Wayzata.

Included in the group were the following brothers: L. R. Thurston, H. L. Boomhower, William Bushnell, James Tibbetts, B. E. Newton, H. R. Tennant, H. M. Crawshaw, James McIlwain, T. H. Van Every, W. L. Dickey, J. B. Kingsley, H. L. Hoaglund, B. F. Christleib, G. A. Alley, A. S. Gardner, and C. W. Welch.

Their first meeting was held on October 19, 1891, presumably in the basement of the two-story red brick schoolhouse where the Lodge met for the first few months. This meeting was held under a dispensation from the Grand Master of Minnesota, the Most Worshipful Aphonse Barto. The first Master Mason Degree conferred by the Lodge was on Thomas Simpson on November 23, 1891. Frank F. Favrow was Master of the Lodge during the year and one-half before the granting of the charter.

Charter No. 205 was granted to Wayzata Lodge on January 12, 1893 with F. F. Favrow as Master and E. L. Kingsley as Secretary. At the time of the charter, the Lodge had 24 members and was already holding its meetings in the IOOF Hall on Lower Broadway.

In 1899, the Lodge had 37 members. Less than a year later, membership had grown to 66, with most of the new members coming from the Hopkins area. In September of 1900, a petition was presented to the Lodge by a group of members from that area to move Lodge No. 205 to Hopkins. The vote, held on September 24, 1900, failed to gain the necessary two-thirds majority. Later, a new charter was granted for a Lodge in Hopkins.

The Lodge continued to meet in the IOOF Hall from 1893 until 1922. But as the years passed, the brothers became increasingly anxious to own their own Lodge quarters. This eventually led to formation of the Masonic Building Association on July 20, 1920. This group proceeded to purchase the necessary land and to build a Masonic Temple. The building was built by Worshipful brother A. W. (Bert) Day and cost the Association \$17,000. The land cost an additional \$4,000.

The Temple, located on Lake Street between Minnetonka and Manitoba, was completed in 1922 and the brothers moved in with a very real sense of pride and achievement, and to discover that their financial woes were just beginning. Some time before the building was completed, a number of the brothers living in the Mound area decided to demit, form their own Lodge, and build their Lodge home in Mound. This reduced the membership, more particularly the membership of the Building Association, sufficiently to make it difficult to maintain payments on the bonds that had been sold. These difficulties were soon compounded by the market crash of 1929 and the resultant depression.

Membership dropped from 160 in 1928 to a bare 100 in 1938. Despite continued and even frantic efforts to raise funds by such means as dances, basket socials, and even "Monte Carlo" nights, the day came when the payments could not be met by the stockholders (the complete membership) and thus the building reverted to the bondholders. The numbers of these finally dwindled to four – Worshipful Brothers Day and George Hill and Brothers Nels Sjordahl and Alvin C. Frick.

But these brothers, with few sources of revenue other than the limited rent from the Lodge and the Eastern Star, which had been started by this time, found the whole thing a financially losing proposition. They eventually agreed something would have to be done. In a spirit of outstanding brotherly generosity, they decided to offer the building and land to the Lodge for \$10,000, a figure considerably below its prospective market value. If the Lodge accepted, fine. If it did not, the building would be placed on the open market.

The brothers, faced with this challenge, organized a drive to raise \$10,000. The response was good but still short of the goal when the Master, Clifford H. Meyer, decided to issue a command call for a dinner meeting to complete the drive. The dinner, well attended, was followed by a progress report and then an appeal for additional funds from the group, right then, to complete the \$10,000. The response was excellent, the goal was reached, and the building became, once again, the property of the Lodge, or, technically, of the Wayzata Temple Association.

This group took over at about the end of 1945, elected a Board of Directors and immediately found it was still in financial trouble. Pledges came in more slowly than expected and, as bills for operating expenses, plus certain past due accounts were organized, it was discovered the Association was operating "in the red".

For many years, it was nip and tuck as members struggled to meet costs and achieve needed and long postponed repairs. One was the installation of insulation over the entire ceiling, with members forming a “bucket brigade” line to pass sacks of vermiculite through the front port, up the stairs to the second floor and up a ladder to workers in the attic who then spread the material between the joists. Another was the installation of metal lath and re-plastering of three walls of the dining room. Still others were remodeling of the front entrance to form the present clubroom and the remodeling of the second floor front into offices for rental.

In 1950, the serving of a spring smorgasbord was initiated and persists to this day. At first, its primary object was the making of money. More recently, it is cherished as an opportunity to meet and greet and serve the general public, a public relations gesture. Also, instigated in 1950, was the publication of *The Trestleboard*, a four-page paper issued monthly during the Lodge year to narrate activities of the Lodge and its allied groups in the general field of Masonry and to repeat for its readers some of the basic teachings and tenets of our fraternity.

Even so, and despite increases in membership and dues, the financial status remained clouded. Finally in 1961, the Board of Directors, under the leadership of Worshipful Brother Harold Hansen decided to mortgage the property in order to build rental space on the front of the building. A two-story front was planned, the work was done by Brother Dean Wichter as contractor, the property was rented to the Wayzata State Bank and to a firm of attorneys and at last the Lodge settled down to something akin to financial solidarity. Not the least of the improvements was the installation of a new furnace to replace the old steam heat “monster” with its accompanying coal bin and its well known tendency for balkiness that led to many a meeting that saw members muffled in their “great coats” against the frigid temperatures. The kitchen was remodeled to twice its former size, the dining room floor was treated to asphalt tile, the ceiling to acoustical tile.

More recently in 1966, the main hall has been refurbished – new paint, new drapes, and more especially, new carpeting, the first since 1922 – all of these latter items made possible through a special bequest left the Lodge through the generosity of our late brother, Albert (A. K.) Johnson.

In the meantime, two items have provided particular interest. One has been the membership which, after struggling to a high of 160 in 1928, dropped to 100 in 1937, and then slowly recovered to about 130 by the end of 1944. Starting in 1945 and 1946, it has shown a spectacular increase to approximately 375 by 1961. Since then, yearly gains in new members have been somewhat offset by yearly losses as the onrushing years have tended to catch up with an elderly membership.

The other was participation in what is generally recognized as one of the better activities of the Grand Lodge of Masons in Minnesota, the raising of funds to make possible the present Minnesota Masonic Memorial Cancer Hospital as part of the Medical Center at the University of Minnesota. The first drive, for funds in the amount of \$1,000,000, was held in 1955-56, with the cornerstone being laid in 1957 and the building completed and open to the public the next year. The hospital is devoted to research in the field of cancer and to treatment and care of so-called “terminal” cases. It has proved to be far more, with many patients returning home with cancer either arrested or cured.

Our Lodge contributed markedly well in the campaign for funds which was conducted under the leadership of Worshipful Brother John Groff as chairman and Brother Philip Reuben as co-chairman.

By 1963, it had become apparent that more space was needed and so a decision was made to conduct another campaign for an addition \$1,100,000. On this occasion, Wayzata Lodge, with Brother Philip Reuben serving as chairman and Worshipful Brothers Donald Gunderson, Maurice Ovik, and George Kelly as captains, conducted a tremendously successful drive to the point where Wayzata rated first in the state in per capita contributions and among the leaders in the state in percentage of participation. This second drive added two more floors to the original two, increasing the space for research and for patient care. The added floors were completed in 1965 and the entire four floors have been functioning since that time.

In 1953, Wayzata Lodge No. 205 joined with Excelsior Lodge No. 113, and Mound Lodge No. 320 to co-sponsor the formation of the Tri-Tonka Chapter of the Order of DeMolay, an organization based on the general tenets of Masonry and open to all young men between the ages of 14 and 21.

Among individual contributions to lodge participation during its 75 years of existence must be listed those of Worshipful Brothers Holland J. Knapp and John W. Groff. Worshipful Brother Knapp in 1963 completed 25 years of consecutive service as Treasurer of the Lodge and Worshipful Brother Groff, as of January 1, 1968, is embarking on his 28th year of consecutive service as Secretary.

As of now, January 1, 1968, Wayzata Lodge is one of the 286 Masonic Lodges in the State of Minnesota with a combined total of 66,234 members. It is part of District 18, the other member Lodges of the district being Bloomington, Edina, Excelsior, Albert Pike of Hopkins, Paul Revere of St. Louis Park, Mound, Waconia, and Watertown. Wayzata's present membership is 384 and its present total cash net worth is \$8,554.90.

The Lodge's Earliest Days

One of the “movingest” organizations in Wayzata during its earliest history was the Wayzata Masonic Lodge while it was operating under special dispensation. Between July 20, 1891 when 17 brothers, the majority being members of Excelsior Lodge No. 113 who lived in the Wayzata area, petitioned the Minnesota Grand Lodge for a charter for a new Lodge, and January 12, 1893, when the charter was granted, the brothers held their meetings in no less than four separate buildings.

The first meetings were held in the basement of the two-story red brick school which faced on Broadway from ground where the Widsten School now stands. From there the meetings were moved to the second floor of Lamb Brothers' Store on the site of present Hart's Café. The next move was to the second floor of Gleason's Store, diagonally across the street from Lamb Brothers.

By the time the charter was actually granted, the brothers had moved into the second floor of the IOOF Hall across the street at Broadway and Mill Street where they shared facilities with the Odd Fellows. That building still stands and is still owned by the Odd Fellows. At one time, the first floor of that building was used as a theater.

The Gleason building was eventually torn down some time in the early 1960's. Lamb's Store has undergone drastic changes. The northern part of it was detached when Lake Street was widened in the 50's and became part of the Eastman building just to the east. In the late 50's, bowling alleys were added to the south. When the bowling folded, they were remodeled to form two present dining rooms.