

LODGE HAS COLORFUL HISTORY OF PIONEERING, PROGRESS

By RUTH TAUNTON

Free American Institutions—that was what the Masons brought with them to San Diego.

More than 90 years ago, they quietly began taking over the new government of the little Spanish pueblo around Old Town plaza, first incorporated as an American city in 1850.

And still without interest in public fanfare, only members of uniformed Masonic bodies will march up Fifth ave. From the former Masonic temple at Ash st. to the big building that will be dedicated Saturday afternoon at 4—another bulwark of strength in things that George Washington held dear, and another landmark in the part Freemasonry has played in building a great city.

COLORFUL HISTORY

San Diego Lodge 35, F. & A. M., was first granted its dispensation Aug. 1, 1851. One of the Masonic bodies that will occupy the temple on Cedar st. at Fourth ave., its history is as colorful as that of New Town itself.

Probably the first Mason to come to San Diego, in the years when the Spanish and the Mexicans were making their contribution to the development of this area, was Kit Carson, of what now is Lodge No. 1 of New Mexico

The American scout was here in 1828, and he was here when his countrymen were taking over in 1846. In 1836, Richard Henry Dana was in town, writing his "Two Years Before the Mast." Commodore Sloat, who brought his U. S. warship to the California coast in 1846, was a Mason.

And there was Lt. George H. Derby, the U. S. army engineer sent here to divert the San Diego river into Mission bay, and who remained to have a brief fling at editing the San Diego Herald, at writing the "John Phenix" brand of humor, later perfected by Mark Twain and Bret Harte.

Derby was in Old Town when the first American elections were held early in 1850—and so were other Masons.

In that year, William C. Ferrell, later to be the first master of San Diego's first Masonic lodge, was elected district attorney.

John Hays, another Mason, presided over the first district court. Joshua Bean was the first major, and D. B. Kurtz, master of San Diego lodge in 1868, succeeded Bean as head of the city government.

MET IN ADOBE

Ferrell, the lawyer, had come from Charleston, S.C. Other members of the brotherhood were likewise from the south, and when the Civil war broke out on the Atlantic seaboard, it also broke in San Diego Lodge 35.

But before we begin fighting the Civil war, there should be listed the names of the founding fathers – the men who signed their names to the application for dispensation. One night in June, 1851, they met in a one-story adobe house in Old Town.

They were Ferrell, John Judson Ames, founder of the San Diego Herald, this city's first newspaper; William H. Moon, Daniel Barbee, W. H. Davis, John Cook, J. W. Robinson and R. F. Raymond.

The grand lodge signed the petition two months later in San Francisco, and local officers were elected Nov. 20, 1851. With Ferrell as worshipful master, northerner with strong sectional leanings began joining the new lodge. The immediate rumpus getting a jump on the outbreak of hostilities in the east, was such that the dispensation was continued for another year, and not until the partisans on both sides of sectional issues had cooled down was the charter granted, May 6, 1852.

DIDN'T KNOW RITUAL

Ferrell lost the count, and Robinson was voted in as first master under the charter. The lodge records thereupon disappeared, and it was not until August that another meeting could be held.

Derby had been delegated by the grand lodge to install the officers, but somewhere in the middle of the ceremony it was discovered that Robinson didn't know the ritual. The army officer already secretary of the lodge, installed himself as acting master, and his record book is now said by collectors to be worth a fortune.

But if Robinson didn't know the Masonic brotherhood's secret ritual, he did know that when his wife wanted something, she was determined. And when he was leaving for lodge meeting one night, she told him that one thing she wanted without another day's delay was a free public school in San Diego.

WIFE VISITS

"Nothing wrong with having a school, but there's nothing we can do about it tonight," said Robinson. "I'm late to the meeting."

“You can do something about it tonight,” Mrs. Robinson persisted. “Tell the Masons to have Judge Coutts appoint Ferrell as county superintendant of schools at 9 tomorrow morning, and tell Ferrell to have a school running by tomorrow night.”

Col. Cave J. Coutts, army officer then serving as district judge, and a Mason, appointed Ferrell by 9 the next morning. In another hour, the superintendant had appointed Robinson, Louis Rose, and E. W. Morse, energetic little Mason with long whiskers, as trustees. By noon they had rented a room and hired a teacher.

That afternoon Mrs. Robinson enrolled her 10-year-old son, along with other youngsters who spoke English. Public schools in San Diego were born.

CROSTHWAITE ELECTED

By 1853, the lodge was meeting in its first temple, a two-story house in Old Town (New Town was not laid out until A. E. Horton came in 1867) with bougainvillea shading the front porch, and by 1854 the lodge had elected Philip Crosthwaite, who apparently had the ritual down pat, and thus became the first master to be installed under the charter.

In the meantime, things were not standing still outside lodge meetings. Two members, Coutts and Abel Stearns, married the beautiful Bandini sisters, and established permanent homes. In 1853, Stearns brought the first carriage to the city.

But if there was romance for the Masons in San Diego, there also were the Indians. They were starving in the camps around the city, and the Masons formally took on the job of feeding them from the time they were organized until 1857.

DIED WITH BOOTS ON

The Masonic brothers also had to help their own kind. Immigrants were arriving by pack-train, stage coach, and old sidewheelers, and many hadn't enough to buy a square meal. The lodge made loans. The records show that, if the pioneer live, he usually repaid. But the debt frequently had to be written off with: “He died with this boots on.”

Masonry proved sufficient to smooth the stormy waters in the lodge itself during the pre-Civil war years, and during the 1860's. Ferrell said his say, then shook the dust of San Diego from his feet in 1859, and lived in Lower California until his death 24 years later.

Despite Masonic rules against it, however, two of the boys decided that nothing short of a duel would do. So J. Bankhead Magruder and George P. Tibbets arranged for seconds Lt. Derby, whose sense of humor was working wonders with the sectionalists in the lodge, quickly thought of a way to make a duel seem

ridiculous, and got bullets made of candles and colored with charcoal into the weapons.

Magruder was so outraged, when his bullet spattered as it hit Tibbets square in the forehead that he threatened to shoot Derby and both seconds. But when he got over feeling silly, that was the end of it.

Poor Derby! Full of the fun of living, he nevertheless was an army officer, and did not hesitate when his country was in danger. He returned east in 1861, and one month after the first shots were fired at Ft. Sumter, he was dead, at 38.

On his gravestone at West Point is this inscription, by his wife: "The light of my life is gone." But the light of Derby's youth and laughter must have burned on, in the memory of San Diego Mason lodge, to ease the tension of the hard years in which a modern city had to be built on the desert hills down the bay from Old Town.

For years after the mother lodge had received its charter, it acted as a Protestant, undenominational church for Sunday afternoon services.

MUTUAL VISION

When Horton began building New Town, 18 years after Ferrell first accepted office as master of the new lodge. It was the Masons who worked closely with him. There was the mutual vision of the beautiful San Diego that was to be, and it made no difference at the time that no railroads came here, that the inadequate supply of water had to be hoarded, and sold from door to door, day by day.

Thirty years after the lodge was instituted in 1851, the Masons moved into their second home, a hall at Sixth ave. and H st. Patiently keeping pace with the growth of the city, they erected a new temple at Fifth ave. and Ash st. in 1910.

The temple to be dedicated Saturday is their fourth home in 91 years of history. The mother lodge will share it with Blackmer Lodge 442 F. & A. M.; S. W. Hackett Lodge 574, F. & A. M.; San Diego Chapter 61, Royal Arch Masons; San Diego Council 23, Royal & Select Masters; San Diego Commandery 25, Knights Templar; San Diego consistory and coordinate bodies of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry; and Al Bahr temple, Nobles of the Mystic Shrine.

ASSOCIATION OWNER

The temple also will house the Scottish Rite Woman's club, the Social Order of the Beauceant, and the Daughters of the Nile.

Owner of the temple is the San Diego Masonic Temple association, composed of representatives from the lodges that will occupy the building, and first organized in 1901. Judge Joe L. Shell is president.

No charter members of the mother lodge are living, but William John Mossholder, master from 1892-1893, and charter member of most of the other Masonic bodies that will use the temple, still makes his home in San Diego, at 2008 Fifth ave. The present master is Charles W. Webb.
