

A SHORT HISTORY OF PORTER LODGE No.284

Catasauqua, Pennsylvania

This history was prepared to commemorate the 125th anniversary of Porter Lodge in 1979 and originally appeared in a Porter Lodge publication for that purpose. The subsequent 25-year period is currently in the process of compilation.

The history of any organization must necessarily be a factual record of events if it is to merit the respect of the members of the body receiving attention. But it must also be attentive to those common-place anecdotes or asides that add savor and relish to the conversations an event such as its 125th Anniversary will certainly promote.

It is our intent to provide both the facts of history as well as those little known anecdotes which add flavor to such an account as time and space will permit.

To begin, research of old Lodge records presents an interesting sidelight concerning the date of Porter's constitution. It has generally been accepted that Porter Lodge and Bethlehem Lodge No.283 were constituted on the same day and just a few hours apart. Yet records of the Quarterly Communication held September 5, 1853, indicate a petition was presented for a new Lodge at Catasauqua which was followed by a petition for a new Lodge at Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. The petitions as presented received Grand Lodge approval, and the Catasauqua Lodge No.284 was constituted on January 30, 1854, and Bethlehem Lodge No. 283 was constituted on January 31, 1854; however, unaccountably, the Bethlehem Lodge was designated as No.283, and Catasauqua Lodge as No. 284. Of interest, too, is the fact that the Warrant presented to Catasauqua Lodge has the name Catasauqua crossed out, and the name Porter inserted as the name of the new Lodge.

The name Porter given to the new Lodge was taken from Brother James Madison Porter, District Deputy Grand Master of Easton, Pennsylvania. Brother Porter had great influence on the Fraternity, having served as a District Deputy over a long period of time. It was he who was instrumental in 1836 of reactivating Easton Lodge No. 152 with a nucleus of Master Masons from that Lodge and several surrounding Lodges who at the time had no Masonic affiliation near their homes in the Easton area. The need for reactivating Easton Lodge grew out of the infamous Anti-Masonry climate in America which took form in its more violent aspects in the early 1830's. Capitalizing on the rather mysterious circumstances surrounding the so-called Morgan Affair, unscrupulous politicians organized what was known as the Anti-Masonry Party in an effort to capture votes of the people who seemingly were easily misled. So great was the feeling against Masonry for a number of years that many of the Brethren suffered great hardships for the Fraternity. As a result of the animosity provoked by the proponents of Anti-Masonry many Lodges found it necessary to discontinue meetings;



some of the Lodges doing this with the consent of the Grand Lodge for a period of several years.

Porter Lodge No.284 was constituted at 3:30 p.m., Monday, January 30, 1854, in Gross' Hall, a part of what was then called the United States Hotel situated on the northeast corner of Front and Race Streets in a part of Catasauqua which, according to Brother John A. Frederick's [History of Porter Lodge-1936](#), was known as Biery's Port.



The officiating officers were:

- District Deputy Grand Master James M. Porter, acting Right Worshipful Grand Master;
- Brother Jesse Lines, acting Right Worshipful Deputy Grand Master;
- Brother John M. Siegfried, acting Right Worshipful Grand Senior Warden;
- Brother Jacob H. Hagenbuch, acting Right Worshipful Grand Junior Warden;
- Brother George W. Wagner, acting Right Worshipful Grand Marshal;
- Brother Samuel Wetherell, acting Right Worshipful Grand Secretary.

The following men, most of whom are thought to have been former members of Easton Lodge No.152, were installed as Porter Lodge officers:

- Brother Robert McIntyre, Worshipful Master;
- Brother Levi Graft, Senior Warden;
- Brother James McCleary, Junior Warden;



- Brother August H. Gilbert, Secretary;
- Brother Charles H. Nolf, Treasurer;
- Brother Frank B. Martin, M. D., Senior Deacon;
- Brother Charles Allen, Junior Deacon;
- Brother William Goetz, Senior Master of Ceremonies;
- Brother James Clugston, Junior Master of Ceremonies, and
- Brother William Biery, Tyler.

Following the constituting of the Lodge, a meeting was held at 6:30 p.m. at which four petitions were presented and acted upon. A fee of \$26.00 each was paid. In sharp contrast to our present day procedure concerning the entering, passing, and raising of candidates, the four candidates: Thomas Weaver, James R. Reese, Edward F. Martin, and Leslie Miller received their first degree at this meeting immediately after their petitions were acted upon. And to add a more interesting point, Brother Thomas S. Weaver received the second and third degrees at the same meeting.

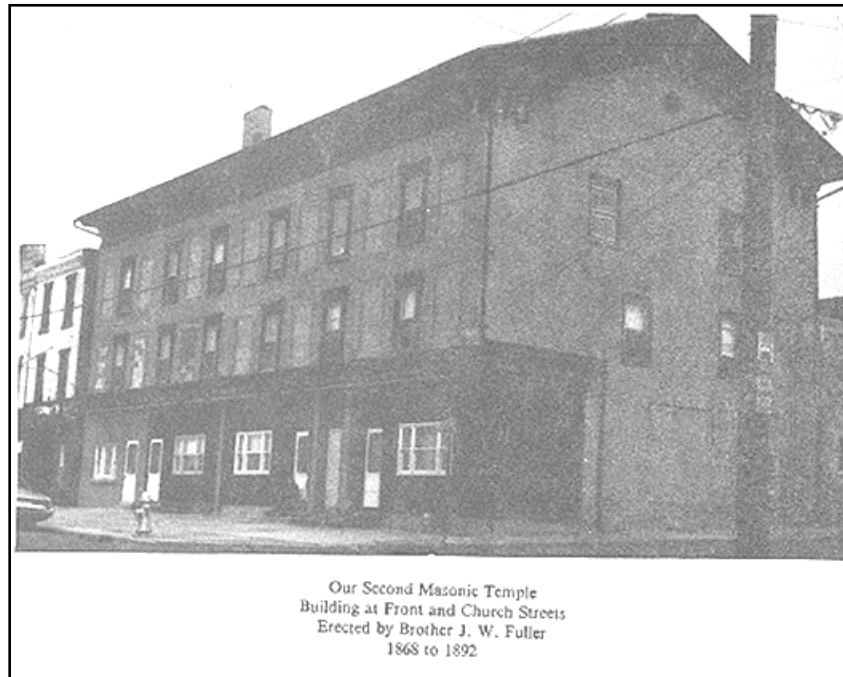
Further evidence of the part played by Easton Lodge No. 152 in sponsoring and shaping Porter Lodge is apparent from the minutes of May 12, 1854, which indicate that the committee designated to provide a set of by-laws for adoption by Porter Lodge recommended that the By-Laws of Easton Lodge be adopted by Porter Lodge as their own. The suggestion met with the favor of Porter Lodge members and the suggested By-Laws were voted upon and adopted that night. Although changes have been made from time to time in the By-Laws adopted then, one change sure to provoke interest and discussion concerns the change of meeting from the first Friday on or before the full moon which continued in effect until changed in the year 1900.

The installation of officers at the January 13, 1860, stated meeting was of significance to the officers taking part in the installation although they did not then realize the fact. Brother James M. Porter, Sr., D. D.G. M. was the installing officer, and he was assisted in the work by his son, James M. Porter, Jr., who later became Grand Master of Masons in Pennsylvania in 1878. He too was a member of Easton Lodge No. 152, but although he was installed in the highest office of Masonry in Pennsylvania, he served actively for only a short time because of illness. His duties were carried out by the Deputy Grand Master as a result of his inability to carry out the demands of the office.

In the early years of Porter Lodge, meetings for the conferring of degrees were frequently held in the afternoon, and the Lodge continued to meet in Gross' Hall at Front and Race Streets for fourteen years and one month. According to the minutes of August 16, 1867, a committee on rental was appointed to examine the possibility of renting rooms in a new building erected by Brother James W. Fuller, one of the charter members of the Lodge. The committee reported that two rooms on the second floor could be rented for a nominal sum, \$300.00 per year, and the last meeting in the original Lodge Hall was held on February 14, 1868, and the new hall was dedicated and



consecrated at 3:00 p.m. on March 5, 1868.



Brother Henry Davis, Secretary of Porter Lodge from 1876 to 1879, gave a brief history of Porter Lodge on the occasion of its twenty-fifth birthday. His history reports that up to January 30, 1879, a total of 211 men had been initiated and 22 had been admitted into Porter Lodge. He reported also that 135 had died, been suspended, or had withdrawn, leaving a membership at that date of 98 brethren.

His remarks explaining what he refers to as *"a great number who withdraw from this Lodge"* are pertinent to our somewhat cautious assertion that Porter Lodge, as Davis says, *"can justly claim the honor of having furnished the nucleus"* of several Lodges in our area. Many of those who had withdrawn had done so as Davis reports: *"for the purpose of becoming members at new Lodges formed at (closer to) their homes."*

Brother Davis lists the following as having been out-growths of men who were originally members of Porter Lodge:

Lehigh Lodge at Trexlertown	constituted April, 1858
Barger Lodge at Allentown	constituted April, 1859
Monocacy Lodge at Bath	constituted April, 1868
Slatington Lodge at Slatington	constituted April, 1869



Further research, however, shows that three of these are incorrectly listed and should be:

Barger Lodge	constituted May 27, 1859
Monocacy Lodge	constituted June 4, 1868
Slatington Lodge	constituted July 10, 1869

Davis continues, "We find in the minutes of a meeting held April 30, 1858, the following resolution which was unanimously adopted:

Resolved that the Worshipful Master appoint a committee of three to examine the Brethren to be the officers of the contemplated new Lodge at Trexlertown and to instruct them if found deficient.

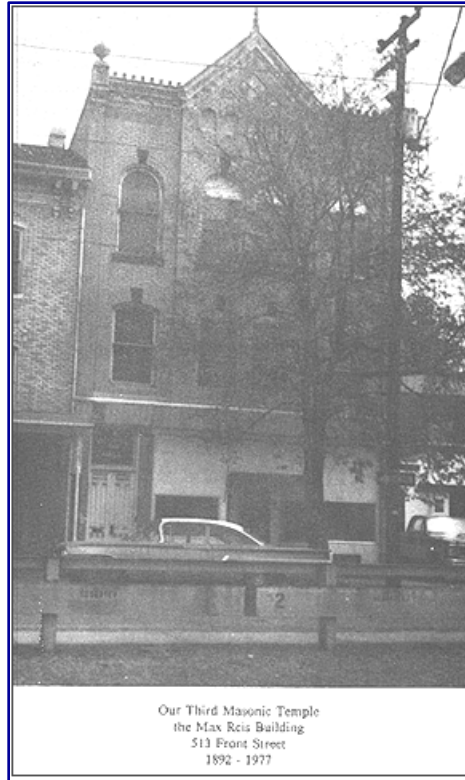
"We cannot find anything in the minutes that the Lodge was ordered to take this course by the Grand Lodge, and we can only conjecture that Porter Lodge did not wish anyone who had been a member of their Lodge to assume an office in another Lodge, the duties of which they were unable to perform satisfactorily."

The Lodge continued to meet in the Fuller building for a period of twenty-four years from 1868 to 1892. However, a change of meeting place must have been in mind, for the minutes of June 19, 1891, record a resolution that the place of meeting be removed to Brother Max Reis' new hall at 513 Front Street above Bridge Street. The minutes of the July 3, 1891, meeting record that thirty-four members were in favor of the move and ten members were against it. However, the move could not be effected without Grand Lodge approval, and records indicate it was not until March 11, 1892, that approval was granted for the change of location. The March minutes further show that it was decided to open the new hall to the inspection of the brethren and their families on April 7, 1892, and the first meeting was held immediately thereafter, on April 8, 1892.

The membership appears to have been certain of approval by the Grand Lodge, for the minutes reveal that on February 26, 1892, the Committee on Furniture was authorized to dispose of surplus furniture and authorization was also given to have the new hall papered and furnished.

Records show that there were fourteen living Past Masters in 1896, none of whom had been recognized as we do today by the presentation of a Past Master's Jewel. This was remedied at a meeting on December 18, 1896, when authorization was given by the Lodge to purchase fourteen Past Master's Jewels at a cost of \$175.00. They were presented to the recipients at a special meeting on February 5, 1897.





Up to this time, Porter Lodge had on its current rolls the names of charter members, but on January 14, 1896, a special meeting was called "to arrange for the funeral of the last surviving charter member, Brother William Biery, who died on January 12, 1896." Brother Biery had been initiated into Masonry in Easton Lodge No. 152 and was seventy-three years, thirteen days old at his death.

Nine years after moving to a new Lodge hall, Porter Lodge was given the opportunity to purchase the property they were occupying, for the minutes of September 6, 1901, relate that the property had been transferred to F. W. Wint & Company, and had been offered to the Lodge for the sum of \$9,265.20. Although Porter Lodge had at first declined the offer, it was again made on June 6, 1902, and further consideration resulted in acceptance of the offer. To effect the purchase, the Lodge authorized the sale of twenty-year bonds at \$50.00 each in a total amount of \$8,500.00.

The year 1904 marked the Fiftieth Anniversary of Porter Lodge. To celebrate the Anniversary a dinner was held on January 29, 1904, but no record can be found regarding exactly where the festivities took place other than "in Catasauqua, Pa.," as stated in the minutes of March 4, 1904. There were 135 members and their wives present at the dinner. The Right Worshipful Past Grand Master Edgar A. Tennis was a participant. And a bill found in the files for that affair lists the expenditure of \$3.00 for a "car to Coplay" which was probably the station at which Brother Tennis arrived for the affair. The minutes of the March 4th meeting contain the Banquet Committees report



which shows the dinner as having been held on Friday, January 29, 1904; however, the programs (menus) which were printed by a Philadelphia firm show the date as January 30, 1904.

Furthermore, bills rendered by the Committee show that chairs were loaned and transported from the Catasauqua Camp P.O. S. of A. It is possible the dinner was held in a room or rooms next to the Lodge at 513 Front Street. Some older members seem to recall that there was a door leading from the Lodge quarters to a hall over Schneller's Hardware store (presently Huber's Hardware) and a bill for "*Rent of rooms for Banquet, January 29th for \$12.00*" marked paid over the signature of Charles W. Schneller adds weight to this idea.

According to **An Historical Sketch** accompanying the menu (program) "*...36 brethren have been initiated into the mysteries of the Fraternity since organization of the Lodge, the present membership being 136.*" Further recognition of the part played by Porter Lodge in extending Masonry is found in a continuing note of that program which states "*Porter Lodge is the parent lodge of Lehigh County and furnished many charter members in the organization of neighboring Lodges.*"

Although the Lodge celebrated its fiftieth anniversary, it failed for some reason to celebrate a seventy-fifth anniversary, but did celebrate its eightieth year; however a shortage of finances made it impossible to carry out a one-hundredth anniversary, although a committee had been set up to carry out such a program.

The date June 5, 1905, saw a further result of Porter Lodge's effectiveness in promoting the growth of new Lodges, for on that date Chapman Lodge No.637 was constituted in neighboring Northampton, and was named in honor of Brother Charles W. Chapman, a Past Master and highly respected member of Porter Lodge.

Although this is Porter Lodge's opportunity to celebrate its own One Hundred Twenty-Fifth Anniversary, it had previously celebrated another one hundred twenty-fifth anniversary at a meeting held on September 25,1911. At that time it helped the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania celebrate such an occasion by holding a meeting at which the "*acting officers*" ranged in age from 57 to 84 years, and although the membership at that time was only 170, the attendance recorded indicates 115 members and 35 visitors helped to make the meeting a memorable one.

The purchase of the building housing Porter Lodge in 1902 was a move in the right direction beyond a doubt, and anticipated a move that many other Lodges in the area would take in due time by purchasing their own quarters. However, Porter Lodge has had those problems of up-keep faced by all who own property and try to keep it in the best repair.

A review of the Treasurers Reports over the years indicate some of the more



significant changes and repairs to the building, a recounting of which is certain to spark discussion and some debate among many senior members of our Fraternity. Ranging from the purchase of a Tyler's desk at a moderate price, and the installation of a telephone, both in conjunction with Catasauqua Royal Arch Chapter No.278, up to the major project in 1961 of the conversion and renovation of the heating system from steam to hot water for over \$4,000.00, the facts show that there has always been a concern for the beauty and care of the building and the Lodge room in particular. Financial limitations may have necessitated careful consideration of any changes, but the Treasurers' reports show the following as deemed necessary:

- 1916 A safe and Address-O-Graph purchased.
- 1923 Masonic tools (still in use) purchased.
- 1925 Blue Lodge furniture purchased from Allentown Lodges.
(Brother John S. Matchette, P.M. in a conversation June 1, 1979, suggested this date of purchase as made in 1923.)
- 1950 Spencer Boiler and two oil tanks installed - \$1,300.00.
- 1953 New roof put on building and Lodge Room and kitchen painted.
- 1954 New cesspool drilled to 255 ft. - \$1,147.50.
- 1955 Storm windows placed through courtesy of Porter Club.
- 1956 Building Brickoted, painted, and sewage connected \$2,453.00.
- 1957 Cooling fans installed on roof.
- 1958 Oil tanks replaced.
- 1959 Hardwood floors placed in club rooms by Porter Club.
- 1960 New roof placed on building - \$1,088.94.
- 1961 Heating system renovated and system converted from steam to hot water and zoned - \$4,100.00.

Continuing problems with proper maintenance of the building necessitated the formation of a Temple association to better facilitate building care and to aid in business transactions. Accordingly on October 4, 1968, a resolution was approved for the formation of the Porter Temple Association, and a charter was granted for that purpose by Lehigh County Court on April 1, 1969.

The realization of a need for a new Temple becoming more apparent with each passing year, a committee was formed to investigate the possibility of a joint temple association with the Chapman Temple Association. Chapman's need grew out of the necessity to find a new location to hold meetings of Chapman Lodge as they were asked to vacate the building which had served for many years as their place of meeting. A survey of both Lodges to consider the possibility of a joint meeting place was made and a report of the survey made on February 27, 1973, indicated an overwhelming positive response.

As a result of the survey, six members of Porter Lodge were elected to the Porter-Chapman Temple Association on December 7, 1973, to complement a similar



number from Chapman Lodge. A charter was granted to the new Association by Northampton County Court on April 22, 1974, and shortly thereafter, July 12, 1974, a lot consisting of approximately 1.11 acres situated near 10th Street and Howertown Road in Northampton, Pennsylvania was purchased with the intent of erecting a new Lodge building to serve both Lodges. However, in the light of a more advantageous possibility which occurred sometime thereafter, this lot was sold to help finance the purchase of a building in North Catasauqua known as the Charotin Social Hall for the sum of \$40,000.00 in May 1975.

Preceding the purchase of the building to be renovated for the use of both Lodges, Porter Temple Association received a request from Chapman Lodge No.637 to meet in the quarters at 513 Front Street, inasmuch as Chapman Lodge had been requested to vacate their quarters in the main building of the Cement National Bank in Northampton. In true Masonic tradition and spirit, the request was granted and Chapman Lodge began holding its meetings in the Porter Lodge Rooms during the summer of 1974. Both Lodges and Chapters occupied the same facilities until permission was received from the District Deputy Grand Master to occupy the new facilities at 1103 Sixth Street, North Catasauqua which had been under alteration and reconditioning since

The first meeting of Porter Lodge in the new Temple was its stated meeting of October 1977. The new Temple is a beautiful one. It bespeaks dignity and reserve; its simple, clean and functional decor promotes an atmosphere of harmony and tranquility which should be found in any Masonic Temple. However, all alterations and improvements have not been completed at the time this history was completed. Still to be done at this time is the social hall, kitchen, recreation room, utility room, secretaries and Treasurers office, and the final trim work of good craftsmanship already so apparent in the work completed.





Outside View of the New Building

Much of the transition from its former state to present use has been completed through the efforts of many dedicated and sincere men, but much remains to be done. It is the hope of all concerned that the means and incentive for completion of the project will soon be found.

