

History

Masonic Lodges of Front Royal, Virginia

First Lodge Chester No. 61 at Front Royal in Fauquier County, Va.

Chartered December 11, 1799 John Hickman, Master  
Wm. Reynolds, Senior Warden  
Moses Payne, Junior Warden

No report in 1805 and became extinct.

Second Lodge Front Royal Lodge No. 102 at Front Royal in Frederick County, Va.

Chartered December 11, 1816 Cyrus Baldwin, Master  
James B. Rice, Senior Warden  
Henry Van Meter, Junior Warden

No report in 1823 and became extinct.

Third Lodge Unity No. 146 at Front Royal, Va.

Chartered December 13, 1870 Thomas N. Ashby, Master  
Charles W. Fish, Senior Warden  
Thaddeus Haynie, Junior Warden

The first meeting of Unity Lodge was held on the upper floor of the Academy in Front Royal, Warren County, Virginia on Friday Evening, March 25, A. D. 1870, A. L. 5870. A dispensation was presented from the Grand Master, Most Worshipful T. T. Owens, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Virginia, by Right Worshipful John Dove, Grand Secretary.

This dispensation bore the date of March 14, 1870, appointing Brother Thomas N. Ashby, Worshipful Master, Charles W. Fish, Senior Warden, Thaddeus Haynie, Junior Warden and Brother Thomas N. Ashby made the following appointments:

Thomas Roy, Secretary  
James T. Hope, Treasurer  
George W. McCormick, Senior Deacon  
George Petty, Junior Deacon  
William Batthus, Tiler

Brothers Thomas N. Ashby, James T. Hope and William Batthus were former members of Front Royal Lodge No. 102.

Unity Lodge continued to work under this dispensation from the Grand Master until December 3, 1870 when they made application to the Grand Lodge of Virginia for a charter to become a regular Lodge in the State of Virginia. This charter was granted on December 13, 1870 by Most Worshipful Brother T. T. Owens, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Virginia and presented at the Stated Communication of Unity Lodge on December 24, 1870 by Brother Smith S. Turner.

A warrant issued by Grand Master T. T. Owens, bearing the date of January 3, 1871, A. L. 5871, under the seal of the Grand Lodge of Virginia and addressed to Right Worshipful Richard Parker, D. D. G. M. District No. 18, directing him to install and set to work the Worshipful Master and Wardens of Unity Lodge No. 146, agreeably to the customs

and usages of Ancient York Masonry.

At a Special Communication held in Front Royal, Virginia on Wednesday Evening, January 18, A. D. 1871, A. L. 5871, the first officers of Unity Lodge were elected and installed as follows:

- Brother Thomas N. Ashby, Worshipful Master
- Brother Charles W. Fisk, Senior Warden
- Brother Thaddeus Haynie, Junior Warden
- Charles A. Brown, Senior Deacon
- Thomas Almond Ashby, Junior Deacon
- G. B. Samuels, Secretary
- George W. Leache, Treasurer
- David W. Jones, Tiler

Charter Members

- |                     |                   |                     |
|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Thomas N. Ashby     | John N. Buck      | A. E. Senseney      |
| Charles W. Fisk     | Thomas W. Petty   | Gibson E. Roy       |
| Thaddeus Haynie     | Charles A. Brown  | Walter S. Roy       |
| George W. McCormick | John W. Boone     | Alvin D. Buck       |
| James T. Hope       | George W. Leach   | Smith T. Turner     |
| William Batthus     | Thomas A. Hoffman | Green B. Samuels    |
| Ewell Baker         | Jaquilin Buck     | Thomas A. Ashby     |
| Thomas Roy          | Thomas W. Buck    | Thomas A. Blakemore |
|                     | David A. Jones    |                     |

Section II

The following is a brief report of the organizational activities of the Lodge since it was granted its Charter in 1870.

The first and foremost project in the minds of the Brethren was to purchase a permanent building or to erect a Masonic Temple. The following events took place before we finally purchased the present building.

- (1) First meetings were held on the third floor of the Academy Building and continued to be held there from March , 1870 until March 8, 1873.
- (2) Several committees were appointed by the W. M. to locate a suitable room or rooms to be used to hold their stated communications, but each committee reported negative results, as they could not locate anyone willing to rent a room for their exclusive use.
- (3) From March 8, 1873 to April 1, 1877, a committee managed to rent a room in the Free School Building, but this room was also used by the Friends of Temperance, Oddfellows and Red Men and was not too satisfactory as the rent was split between the three organizations with Unity Lodge having to collect the rent and being responsible for it being paid to the School Trustees.
- (4) Another committee finally located a room in Union Hall in September, 1880 and meetings were held there until August of 1896.
- (5) A room was finally built on the third floor of the Free School Building and title held by Unity Lodge. This room was also used by

the Red Men, Oddfellows and Friends of Temperance. This arrangement was better than the others since the use of the Hall was for the Masonic Lodge and rents from the other organizations went to Unity Lodge. The Oddfellows moved to their own building sometime in 1906--the records were not clear on this item. Many other committees were formed and discharged but the urge to own a Temple was still strong and foremost in the minds of all the Brethren and on May 24, 1907, a resolution was presented by H. E. Naylor and passed to take \$10.00 from each initiation fee and put it in a special account in the bank to be used as a Building Fund.

On January 17, 1908, they purchased the Boyd lot for \$2550.00 and Hugh E. Naylor, George W. Forsythe and R. H. Jackson, were elected Trustees. The Lodge moved from the Free School Building and sold their room on the third floor of the Free School Building to the Trustees of that school for their use and rented the Oddfellows Hall from August 19, 1910 until September 16, 1910, when they moved to the upper floor of the Murphy Building and meetings were held here until it burned out on April of 1914. Meetings were again held in the Oddfellows Hall until November 11, 1914. The Lodge purchased the Cass Rust Lot on Royal Avenue for \$600.00 and had difficulty getting title to the same until September 16, 1910 when title was realized. The Murphy Building was repaired and meetings were again held in this building starting November 20, 1914. The Lodge sold the Boyd Lot to R. B. Murphy for \$5000. on September 17, 1915.

During the next five years committees were appointed and discharged, each having the authority to purchase a lot and erect a Temple without having to obtain permission of the Lodge.

On April 8, 1921, the committee purchased a lot on Main Street from W. W. Sonner for \$5000. This lot was kept by the Lodge until March 13, 1925, when a committee of seven, composed of Bros. James H. Shiner, Chairman, H. R. Millar, Julian N. Major, S. F. Rhodes, C. A. Stokes, T. A. MacNamara and C. Oma Maddox, sold it to Mr. Wm. H. Proctor for \$6000. and purchased the property of Mr. R. E. Purdum on Main Street for \$10,500. Plans were made and formulated until agreement was reached on the erection of a hall in the rear of the newly purchased property so that W. M. Thomas MacNamara was to run the Masonic Temple, appointed the following Managers: J. L. Borden, three years, E. Barre Samsell, two years and W. G. Dearing, one year.

The last meeting was held in the Murphy Building on August 14, 1925 and were held in the Oddfellows Hall. On March 12, 1926, the Board of Managers were authorized to borrow \$15,000. to complete the hall and erect offices on the first floor to be rented to help pay off this debt.

The Lodge Hall was dedicated at a Special Communication of Unity Lodge on July 29, 1926. The W. M. at this dedication was Thomas MacNamara, James H. Shiner, Senior Warden, L. C. Willey, Junior Warden, Geo. N. Buck, Treasurer, C. A. Kidd, Secretary, L. B. Cary, Senior Deacon protem, Geo. W. Buck, Junior Deacon protem, H. W. Shannon, Chaplain, H. O. Millar, Tiler protem and Brothers Mark B. Turner, Hugh E. Naylor, A. N. Carroll, J. B. Stokes, H. M. Thrush and P. M. Shirey.

Most Worshipful Chas. H. Callahan, Past Grand Master, representing Most Worshipful Ben W. Beach, presided at this dedication. The address of welcome for Unity Lodge was given by Brother W. G. Dearing. Most Worshipful Brother Chas. H. Callahan, the principal speaker of

the evening, gave an excellent address and congratulated the Lodge on this achievement.

Other Grand Lodge Officers to address the Lodge were

- Rt. Wor. C. Vernon Eddy - Eminent Grand Commander of Virginia.
- Rt. Wor. E. A. Joachin, Grand High Priest of Royal Arch Masons.
- Rt. Wor. W. T. McFadden, Grand Senior Deacon.
- Rt. Wor. C. A. Kidd, District Deputy Grand Master District No. 3.

- There were 66 members of Unity Lodge present
- " " 5 members of Treadwell Lodge No. 213, Berryville, Va.
- " " 17 members of Spurmont Lodge No. 98, Strasburg, Va.
- " " 25 members of Hiram Lodge No. 21, Winchester, Va.
- " " 6 members of Blue Ridge Lodge No. 303, Marshall, Va.
- " " 2 members of Turner Ashby Lodge No. 232, Markham, Va.

and several Brethren from Washington, D. C., New York, Alexandria, Va., Elkton, Va., Upperville, Va., Harrisonburg, Va., Martinsburg, Va. and Charlottesville, Va., making a total of 135 Masons present.

At the Stated Communication of August 13, 1926, W. M. Thos. MacNamara appointed the following solicitation committee to solicit subscriptions for the Masonic Temple: L. C. Willey, P. M. Shirey and W. G. Dearing. At the Stated Communication of September 10, 1926, the W. M. appointed S. C. Payne, P. M. Shirey and J. B. Harnesberger as a committee to meet with the Board of Managers and arrange to rent the hall for use by Unity Lodge. This was accomplished and the rent set at \$180. a year.

W. M. J. H. Shiner appointed E. Barr Samsell to the Board of Managers of the Temple on December 27, 1927.

W. M. E. Barr Samsell appointed Joseph L. Borden to the Board of Managers of the Temple on December 27, 1929.

W. M. E. Barr Samsell appointed Brothers I. G. Bierer, P. M. Shirey, L. B. Cary, Geo. N. Buck and L. C. Willey a committee to devise ways and means of paying off the indebtedness of the Temple.

W. M. Z. J. Compton appointed Bros. A. N. Carroll, Jos. L. Borden and Geo. N. Buck to restore the Masonic History of Unity Lodge to the Lodge room on February 12, 1932.

W. M. T. W. Downing appointed the following committee as the Board of Managers of the Temple J. L. Borden, three years, W. G. Dearing, two years and E. Barr Samsell one year on December 27, 1932.

W. M. S. M. Boyd, Jr. appointed A. N. Carroll to the Board of Managers for a three year term on December 27, 1933.

W. M. R. J. Turner appointed E. Barr Samsell to the Board of Trustees replacing J. L. Carson, deceased on June 11, 1935.

W. M. R. J. Turner appointed Bro. Geo. N. Buck to the Board of Trustees in place of E. Barr Samsell, who resigned on August 9, 1935.

In spite of the efforts of the Board of Managers and the various committees appointed to decrease the mortgage on the Temple, they managed only to meet the operating expenses and were in danger of losing the Temple through foreclosure by the bond holders.

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W. M. R. J. Turner dismissed the Board of Managers and appointed the Trustees to take over the management of the Temple on August 31, 1935. A total of \$267.09 was in the Temple Fund at this time. The Trustees being I. G. Bierer, P. M. Shirey and Geo. N. Buck.

The

The first \$1000. bond of indebtedness was paid off by the Trustees on September 23, 1936 and the loan of \$14,000. due on the building was refinanced at 5% interest instead of 6% interest during 1936.

One \$1000. bond was paid off each year thereafter and on July 14, 1939 the Trustees entered into an agreement with the Warren Rappahannock Mortgage Corporation to exchange a right of way for a lot adjoining the South end of the present Masonic lot and the endorsement and transfer was adopted on September 8, 1939.

Brother T. W. Downing was appointed Trustee on December 8, 1944 by W. M. Henry Crewdson, Jr. in place of I. G. Bierer, deceased. The Lodge authorized the Trustees to give 25 feet off the South corner of the Masonic lot to the Town of Front Royal for a new street extension on July 13, 1945.

On May 10, 1946, the Lodge authorized the Trustees to sell the lot on Jackson Street, reserving a right of way and the right to build over that right of way if necessary.

The sale of the lot on Jackson Street, south of the Masonic Temple took place in August of 1946 for \$8000. and the indebtedness of the Temple paid off in full and we now had a debt free Temple. The burning of the bonds took place on December 13, 1946 with Brother A. B. Honts, acting W. M. in place of W. W. Messick, W. M. Brother A. N. Carroll was appointed Trustee by W. M. Stewart Parson on August 14, 1953 in place of Geo. N. Buck, deceased.

The two rooms in front of the Temple on the second floor, formerly occupied as an office and waiting room by Dr. Elizabeth Sherman, were ordered remodeled and an air conditioner to be installed in the Lodge room and three laboratories built and installed, two on the second floor and one on the first floor. This job, which was done by the members of Unity Lodge was started on April 10, 1953 and completed on AUGUST 14, 1953 at a cost of \$5100.00 Brothers A. E. Warrick, W. C. Brown and R. F. Wilson were in charge of the project.

At the meeting on September 14, 1956, the Lodge authorized the Trustees to erect an extension to the front of the present Temple and install offices on the second and first floors of the new building. It will extend 18 feet closer to Main Street and will eliminate the front porch of the old building, giving a new front and a more modern building. Tentative plans were also discussed and approved for the building of a banquet hall at the rear of the present hall at some future date. As you can see from the above short summary, we owe a debt of thanks to the First Trustees, P. M. Shirey, Geo. N. Buck and I. G. Bierer for their loyalty and perseverance in bringing the Lodge out of an almost certain foreclosure in 1935 to a debt free building in 1946, with plans for the new front and funds to pay for it in 1956.

The first by-laws for the government of Unity Lodge were drawn up and adopted at a Special Communication on October 12, 1870. These by-laws were a direct copy of the Grand Lodge Digest. These by-laws were revised and adopted on March 4, 1876.

The Lodge celebrated the 100 year Centennial of Masons in Front Royal on June 23, 1899 with Geo. W. Forsythe, W. M. presiding, C. W. Trenary, Senior Warden, H. M. Kearns, Junior Warden, Oder Harrell, Senior Deacon and Wm. R. Buck, Secretary. After the business of the Lodge was over and the Lodge closed, the public was admitted to the Lodge room to hear the Commemoration Address by Bro. F. P. Berkely and to witness the unveiling of the plaque or tablet which now hangs on the wall of the Lodge room just south of the Junior Warden's station. The Tablet reads--Chester Lodge No. 61, John Hickman, W. M. Charter December 11, 1799. This tablet is erected to commemorate the One Hundreth Anniversary of the establishment of Free Masonry in Front Royal, G. W. Forsythe, W. M., Unity Lodge No. 146, June 23, 1899.

The by-laws were again revised October 3, 1919. Each time the by-laws were revised they became more and more realistic and met the current needs of the Lodge, being specific in nature instead of general.

The Lodge participated in the laying of the Cornerstone of the R.M.A. Memorial Gateway on May 14, 1923 with L. B. Cary, W. M. presiding, J. P. Borden, Senior Warden, A. N. Carroll, Junior Warden, Thos. MacNamara, Senior Deacon, J. H. Shiner, Junior Deacon, W. C. Deming, Secretary, A. W. Berryman, Tiler, H. W. Shannon, Chaplain. Grand Officers present were Grand Junior Deacon R. W. John T. Cochran, D. D. G. M. to District No. 3 Rt. Wor. L. H. Morgan.

The cornerstone of the Randolph Macon Academy was layed by the Lodge on September 1, 1927 with Jas. H. Shiner, W. M. Presiding, L. C. Willey, Senior Warden and E. Barr Samsell, Junior Warden, Geo. N. Buck, Treasurer, P. M. Shirey, Secretary protem and H. W. Shannon, Chaplain. The cornerstone was layed in accordance with Masonic customs.

The by-laws were again amended and re-written on September 8, 1933. The committee on revisions were P. M. Shirey, J. L. Borden and J. A. Shiner. These were the first set of by-laws that definitely covered the growing needs of a Lodge in the fast moving action towards acquiring a Lodge building of their own.

The by-laws were again revised and rewritten on May 13, 1949. P. M. Shirey, J. L. Borden and W. W. Messick were the committee. Not much change in laws but it specified annual dues and meeting time and dates.

The by-laws were revised on June 8, 1956 which covered the final needs of the Lodge and specified the duties of the Trustees and at the same time raised the membership fees and dues as well as the initiation fee that were felt necessary, due to increased cost of running the Lodge building.

The above was intended as a brief history of the activities of the Lodge since its inception in 1870. It was presented in hope that it would be of interest and give each a brief outline of what has taken place, the struggle of the Lodge for existence until we reached the comfortable position which we now enjoy.

Section III

Resolutions and Gifts

(1) Minutes of Front Royal Lodge No. 102 presented to Unity Lodge No. 142 by Wor. Bro. T. A. Ashby on July 28, 1887.

(2) A gavel made in the quarries of Jerusalem of the white stone that was used in the Ancient Temple was presented to the Lodge by Bro. J. H. Light on January 13, 1911. A silver plate was to be placed on it and engraved with "Presented to the Worshipful Master of Unity Lodge by Bro. J. H. Light" for his use in the Lodge room. Bro. P. M. Shirey to do the engraving and Bro. L. B. Carey to make a suitable case for it to be kept in the Lodge room--May, 1917.

(3) A resolution was adopted to collect \$0.25 per capita to be deducted from the membership dues and put in a special fund for financial assistance to distressed Brother Master Masons and their widows and orphans--December 27, 1930.

(4) A resolution presented June 14, 1935, adopted July 12, 1935 and amended August 9, 1935 by J. B. Harnsberger.

Resolved that the Trustees of Unity Lodge No. 146 A. F. & A. M. take over the management of the Masonic Building and that the Trustees of the Lodge be ordered and empowered to employ a Manager for the said building for the express purpose of leasing, renting and to collect all rents and to allow a commission of 5% of such receipts, except such receipts that are paid by Unity Lodge No. 146, Hiram Royal Arch Chapter No. 45 and the Order of the Eastern Star, Chapter No. 6.

Be it further resolved that the Trustees of Unity Lodge require of the Manager of the said Masonic building to furnish bond that will be satisfactory to said Trustees and the premium on the bond to be paid by the Trustees of Unity Lodge.

Be it further resolved that this resolution is to take effect on August 31, 1935.

Amended August 19, 1935 to read Trustees to employ a Manager at our expense not to exceed 5% of the receipts.

A motion was presented and carried that the Secretary be instructed to draw orders on the treasurer monthly for rent except at such times that he is aware that the funds in hand are not sufficient to permit payment.

A motion was presented and carried that the Ministers of the Gospel who are members of Unity Lodge shall pay the same dues as other members of the Lodge.

Three gavels, made of Zapote Wood were presented to the Lodge by Bro. Henry Crewdson, Jr. on December 28, 1942, to be used by the stationed Officers.

A cabinet for the members' Aprons was presented to the Lodge by Wor. Bro. L. B. Cary on April 4, 1949 with Wor. Bro. J. H. Shiner furnishing the board to make this cabinet. The board was 30 years old.