

## **Shiloh Lodge, Yellowstone Lodge, & Bismarck Lodge of Dakota Territory**

Taken from Masonic Matters – a Masonic Education newsletter Written and published by Ed Halpaus, P.M.

The Grand Lodge of Minnesota each year publishes its proceedings of the Grand Lodge Communication, and every year there is included some other information about our Grand Lodge that is, (in my opinion at least,) very handy to have available. For instance, in Appendix E of the proceedings for 2001, (this information is in other issues too,) there is a list of “Lodges Lost Or Changed, With Cause.” That list shows the Lodge number, name, town, county, charter date, and the cause for the loss or change, and if a person were to look over that list carefully he would see in the column for the county something other than a county name. Such as; Manitoba, for Northern Lights Lodge #68; Dakota Territory for Yellowstone Lodge #88 at Fort Buford, Shiloh Lodge #105 at Fargo, and Bismarck Lodge #120, Bismarck, those three Lodges being in Dakota Territory at the time, and now all three would be in the boundaries of North Dakota. I also found information on Yellowstone, Shiloh, and Bismarck, in “Masonry in North Dakota,” by Brother Harold S. Pond, PGM of the GL of North Dakota.

At the 19<sup>th</sup> Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge of Minnesota, which was on January 9, 1872 Grand Master Charles W. Nash reported: “During the year I have granted a dispensation for a new lodge to Asa P. Blunt, as Worshipful Master, and the requisite number of Brethren, to form a Lodge at Fort Buford, Dakota Territory, to be named Yellowstone Lodge U.D.” At the same annual communication the “Committee On The Work Of Lodges U.D.” reported: “We have examined the records, papers, and returns of Lodges U.D., who have testimony in relation to the work done, etc., and would respectfully recommend that a charter be granted to the following Lodges herein named, to-wit: Yellowstone Lodge #88, Fort Buford, Dakota Territory.”

The Charter was granted on January 10, 1872. There were 29 Masons on the membership roll, at the end of the year the membership grew to 35, and by the end of 1873 it grew to 48. However, in 1874 the main garrison of Fort Buford was moved, and it included the three principal officers of the Lodge, and most of its members, so it was necessary for the Lodge to close. On January 12, 1875 M.W. Brother Charles Griswold, Grand Master of the GL of Minnesota announced that the Lodge had closed, and that he had directed R.W. Brother Benjamin L. Perry District Deputy for the 11<sup>th</sup> District to visit them, convene their Lodge and take such action as the circumstance seemed to warrant. Brother Perry did as ordered and came to the conclusion that the interests of Masonry did not demand the continuance of a Lodge at that point. This Lodge was not a Military Lodge, it might have been better for the members of it if it had been but, since it wasn't when the officers and members got transferred there were not enough Masons left it keep it going. By the way the DDGM – R.W. Brother Benjamin Perry was from Brainerd MN, in 1872 it was quite a trip to go from Brainerd to Fort Buford, but I'll bring him up again later. Also as a point of interest Fort Buford was the place Sitting Bull and several hundred of his starving followers were brought in 1881, they surrendered in front of the officers headquarters building. The surrender brought an end to the Indian wars in the Northwest.

There were two other Lodges chartered by the Grand Lodge of Minnesota, in Dakota Territory, Shilo Lodge #105 & Bismarck Lodge # 120, (Shilo Lodge after January 1, 1875 changed the spelling of its name to Shiloh.) These two Lodges are unique, there are others that are older but these two existed under three separate jurisdictions. Shiloh Lodge #105 received its charter January 14, 1874 from the Grand Lodge of Minnesota; it then became Shiloh Lodge #8 on June 7, 1879 in the Grand Lodge of Dakota; finally it became Shiloh Lodge #1 on June 13, 1889 in the Grand Lodge of North Dakota.

Bismarck Lodge #120 received its charter on January 12, 1876 from the Grand Lodge of Minnesota; became Bismarck Lodge #16 on June 8, 1880, in the Grand Lodge of Dakota; and finally Bismarck Lodge #5 on June 13, 1889 in the Grand Lodge of North Dakota.

The early pioneers, who were Freemasons and, who crossed the Red River in 1870 to establish the community of Fargo, before the end of 1872 petitioned the Grand Lodge of Minnesota to grant them a dispensation to hold regular meetings and to confer the degrees of Masonry. The dispensation was issued on November 22, 1872 with Brother Samuel J. Roberts as Master.

From the history of Shiloh Lodge #1 by M.W. Brother Frank Thompson, (Master of Shiloh Lodge from 1885 to 1890,) and M.W. Brother Sylvester Hill, (Master of Shiloh Lodge in 1884,) on the occasion of the Lodges 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary on November 22, 1897.

“On September 2, 1872, a few who were interested in Masonic Work met in the old Headquarters Hotel for the purpose of organizing a Masonic Lodge. On November 6, 1872, a petition was drawn up, signed and addressed to the Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Minnesota. On November 22, 1872. M.W. Grand Master Grove B. Cooley of Mantorville, issued his dispensation to the Masons of Fargo authorizing them to Enter Apprentices, Pass Fellow Crafts, and Raise Master Masons.” Of the Masons who signed the Petition, Brother (Captain) George Egbert held a membership in a Lodge in Minnesota, Brother Jacob Lowell Jr was a member of Social Lodge #48 in Minnesota. A paper was circulated at one of the very early meetings and 33 Brothers pledged their support of the new lodge. From the early minutes of the Lodge it was plain that it was due to the efforts of Brother Egbert that interest in a Lodge was aroused, and he did not cease his endeavors for the Lodge, in fact he erected a building to give the new Lodge a home. The furnishings of the Lodge were what one might expect in an early pioneer lodge, a dry goods box serving as an Altar, and the officers Jewels were made of tin, and they did practice regular Masonry. The first person Raised in Shiloh Lodge was Brother (Honorable) John E. Haggart on February 11, 1875. “He was perhaps the first in civil life raised in North Dakota, and those who are named in the charter of Shiloh, excepting the officers, Alexander Gamble and A. Francis Pinkham, are, in the order of their names, the first civilians raised to the degree of Master Mason in the state.”<sup>1</sup>

“After the issuing of the charter **Brother Benjamin L. Perry**, acting as the deputy of the Grand Master, constituted Shiloh and installed the officers. This was February 9, 1874. Brother James S. Campbell, then a member of Brainerd Lodge at Brainerd Minnesota, and a resident of that city, came to assist in the ceremonies. Brother Campbell moved to Fargo and affiliated with Shiloh, February 8, 1878, becoming the 48<sup>th</sup> member of the Lodge.”<sup>2</sup>

On June 22, 23, 24, 1875 the Grand Lodge of A.F. & A.M. of Dakota was organized at Elk Point, Dakota Territory. Through an oversight Shiloh Lodge and Bismarck Lodge did not receive an invitation to participate in the formation of the new Grand Lodge. Even though they were not invited to participate in the formation, both Lodges were however, requested by the new Grand Lodge to withdraw their affiliation with the Grand Lodge of Minnesota. It should be noted that the lodges forming the Grand Lodge of Dakota were all in the southern part of the territory, and there was no means of direct communication with those Lodges in the north. The Masons of Shiloh and Bismarck Lodges were not anxious to join the new Grand Lodge of Dakota.

St. Paul was the headquarters for business for those living in the territory along the line of the Northern Pacific Railroad; Minnesota was a major influence in this part of the territory. The business interests of the people living along the line (and the Fraternal tie of the Minnesota Grand Lodge,) bound the residents of the territory to Minnesota. So giving up affiliation with the Grand Lodge of Minnesota was a lot to ask of those Lodges, add to that these two things: To reach the city where the Grand Lodge of Dakota was held involved a trip by train to St. Paul, then to Yankton or Sioux Falls, and then by stage, involving not only hardships, but time, money, and energy: Then there was the fact of the slight of not being consulted or invited to the convention for the organization of the Grand Lodge, that slight was not forgotten. The result was: Shiloh and Bismarck refused to leave their mother Grand Lodge.<sup>3</sup>

The Grand Master, and Grand Secretary of Minnesota maintained that under the English rule of territorial jurisdiction the lodges had the right to remain with their mother Grand Lodge if they so desired. Thus a controversy between these two Grand Lodges began, and it was not a friendly controversy. The Grand Lodge of Dakota threatened to excommunicate the Grand Lodge of Minnesota of legitimate Grand Lodges. One might maintain that the controversy, that became much less than brotherly, may have eased a little with the passing of time, but to quote from the book Freemasonry in North Dakota: “The Grand Lodge of Minnesota refused to recognize the Grand Lodge of Dakota for several years and relations were strained – or non-existent—until, its annual communication of 1880.”

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<sup>1</sup> Masonry in North Dakota - Pond

<sup>2</sup> Masonry in North Dakota - Pond

<sup>3</sup> Masonry in North Dakota - Pond

The American rule of territorial jurisdiction, maintained by Grand Lodges generally, and the controversy, began to come to a conclusion 3 ½ years later when Shiloh Lodge asked permission to withdraw from the roster of Minnesota and affiliate with the Grand Lodge of Dakota, this was June 7, 1879 and Bismarck Lodge made the same request June 8, 1880.

From 1875, the year following the granting of the charter, Shiloh Lodge was always marked present in the Grand Lodge of Minnesota until it withdrew in 1879, however, it was not represented in the Grand Lodge of Dakota from the date of its affiliation in 1879 until a Grand Lodge session in Aberdeen in 1884.

Some Masons today think that attending a session of their Grand Lodge is inconvenient, and a hardship. To give you an idea of attending the Grand Lodge Communication in 1884 here is a quote from M.W. Brother Sylvester Hill, P.M. of Shiloh Lodge, & PGM. "I well remember some of the difficulties of the trip to Aberdeen made by the members from the north. From Fargo to Morris Minnesota, thence to Browns Valley by rail and team from there to Graceville where we reached the Fargo Southern, now the Milwaukee, which was then under construction and had reached as far as Graceville, and then changing again for Aberdeen. The return trip was made by way of St. Paul as the easier and quicker route."

Brother Hill includes in his account this [in my opinion] interesting, & humorous account from the minutes of Shiloh Lodge: "Under the date of 1889 I find this entry: 'At this time Brother Skuse presented a complaint against our Brother Bowers for his extreme proficiency with the setting maul, and in conclusion presented him with one in miniature. Brother Bowers was on this occasion the one 'knocked out' and so stated.' Brother Bowers continued using the 'maul' until his death in 1895."

On November 22, 1897 the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shiloh Lodge was celebrated. Special invitations were extended to the Grand Lodge Officers of both the Grand Lodge of North Dakota, and the Grand Lodge of Minnesota, Brother **Benjamin L. Perry** who delivered the charter and who was present to constitute the Lodge, as well as Brother Charles W. Rossiter, one of the early Past Masters of the Lodge, were guests of honor.

Finally on June 13, 1889 the Grand Lodge of North Dakota was formed and Shiloh Lodge became Shiloh Lodge #1 and Bismarck Lodge became Bismarck Lodge #5 of the new Grand Lodge of North Dakota.

O.K. Brother Benjamin L. Perry. District Deputy Grand Master from District #11 Brainerd Minnesota, the Representative of the Grand Master who traveled to Northern Dakota Territory to help the Lodges, constituting them and, instructing them in the work. When one reads about the formation of Lodges in Northern Minnesota in the last quarter of the 1800's we see Brother Perry's name as being a hard worker for Masonry. I won't profess to know a whole lot about him because I don't, but I was able to find out a little bit about him that I would like to pass on to you. I happen to have a copy of the centennial edition book of the Brainerd Daily Dispatch, which is the newspaper for Brainerd Minnesota, and it has some information in it about Aurora Lodge #100 A.F. & A.M. and also about our Brother Perry, not a lot of information, but a little.

Brother Charles Thayer was the first Master of the Lodge; he was the surgeon for the Northern Pacific Railroad headquartered at Brainerd. Brother Thayer was instrumental in getting the signatures of 23 Master Masons on a petition for a dispensation to hold a Masonic Lodge at Brainerd. Dispensation for Aurora Lodge #100 of Brainerd Minnesota was issued by the Grand Lodge of Minnesota on August 8, 1872 Among the 23 Masons who signed the petition for the dispensation was one Benjamin L. Perry, who became the junior Warden of the Lodge The Charter for the Lodge was issued January 15, 1873. The Brainerd History Book covering the years of 1871 to 1971 says that Brother Perry was the superintendent of schools in 1872 & 1873

Our Brother Perry must have been a very active Mason, but he must also have been a very dedicated Mason. It is quite a long way from Brainerd to Fargo but with the railroad the trip was made easier than it would have been without it. In looking in the Brainerd History Book I see where the first Baseball team in Brainerd was organized in 1873. It says the team played mostly soldiers from the Fort with other trips to Fargo. So it appears that rail travel from Brainerd to Fargo was not all that uncommon. Nevertheless, Brother Benjamin Perry obviously worked hard to help establish Masonry on the then frontier.