

Valpo Masonic Lodge Predates The Civil War

By Ron Shufflebotham

PORTER LODGE 137, F & AM, moved to new quarters in Valparaiso on Saturday, Nov. 16, thus opening still another chapter in a fraternal history which predates the American Civil War.

It was in May of 1842—nineteen years before the Civil War—when six Masons gathered at the rural Valparaiso home of Adam S. Campbell for Porter County's first recorded Masonic Order meeting.

The Campbell home was situated one-quarter mile east of the Washington - Center Township line, just north of what is now Indiana 2. From these six men sprang a fraternal organization which has touched the lives of thousands of Porter County men in the intervening 121 years.

One month later—on June 22, 1842—these first Masons were granted dispensation to organize a lodge in Valparaiso. They were granted a charter as Mason Lodge, No. 49 on May 24, 1843.

This initial attempt at Masonic organization failed almost as soon as it began due to an unfavorable report from the Indiana Grand Lodge Charter Committee.

Official Masonic records show a six-year lapse in

the county's Masonic history. However, family names of at least two of old Lodge 49's charter members are recurrent in the early history of the current lodge.

Porter County Masons were granted a second dispensation to organize a lodge on June 25, 1850. The charter for Porter Lodge 137 was granted by the Indiana Grand Lodge on May 27, 1852.

Records of most Masonic events in the county's 121 years of Masonic history are carefully preserved despite a March 15, 1961 fire which destroyed the local Masonic Temple at 113 E. Lincolnway.

Unfortunately, original charters of both Lodge 49 and Lodge 137 were lost in this \$500,000 blaze but other irreplaceable mementos of the lodges were saved, including pictures of the more than 80 local men who have served as Masters of Lodge 137 since its foundation in 1852.

The altar of the newly opened temple—constructed on the same site—was among the ritualistic items rescued from the blaze that chilly March evening. Bibles of the various Masonic bodies, Masonic robes, and other lodge furnishings were also salvaged for use in the newer, modern lodge.

Dishes and silverware, folding chairs, and some other furnishings were miraculously salvaged from the smoking ruin.

Thus, while fire destroyed the structure which housed Porter County Masonic rites from 1925 through 1961, the binding strings of tradition remain unbroken and seemingly endless.

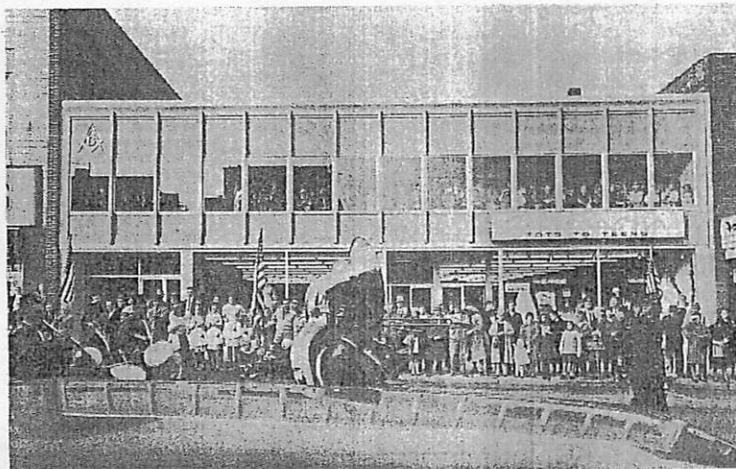
If anything, this tragic fire—which for a time threatened at least an entire block of downtown Valparaiso—has served to regenerate community interest in the 111-year-old Masonic Lodge.

The new temple was two and one-half years in reaching completion. The building is as fireproof as humanly possible. The irreplaceable photographs of Lodge Masters long deceased have themselves been rephotographed for preservation in a fireproof bank vault.

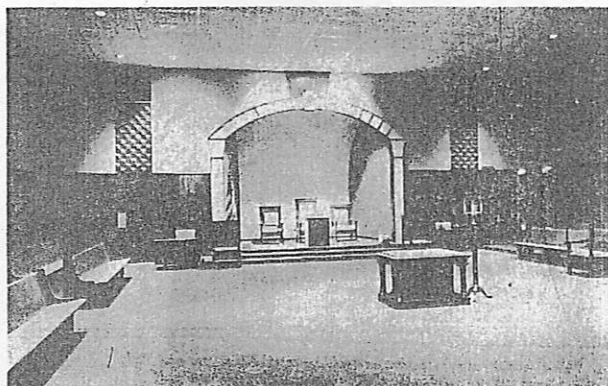
Minutes of early lodge meetings have also been placed in fireproof bank vaults. These



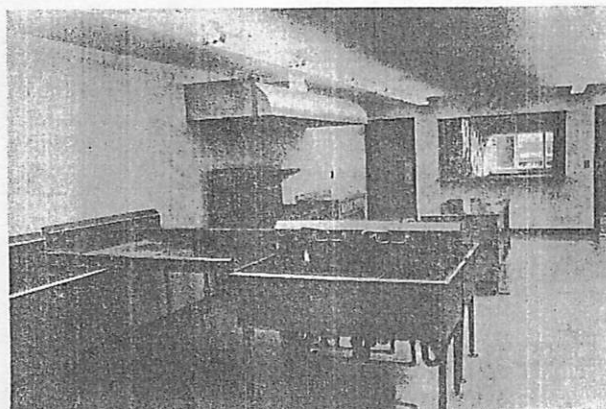
More than 400 Masons and Shriners took part in a parade recently in Valparaiso as part of dedication ceremonies for the new home of Porter Lodge 137, F&AM.



Right: Parade reaches new lodge building in Valparaiso. Lodge uses second-story quarters for Masonic activities, while various business properties are located on the first floor.



This is the lodge room in new Masonic Temple. Altar was salvaged from ruins of the old building.



Kitchen in new Masonic temple is located in the northeast corner of the structure.



Arthur A. Osburn, left, grand master of Indiana from Marion, attended dedication of new temple. To the right of Osburn are Arthur W. Cushman, master of Porter Lodge; John A. Clay, secretary of trustees, and Arne Ekerman, chairman of program committee.

historic items will thus be preserved for future generations which will some day recall dedication of the newest Masonic temple with nostalgia as time turns all to history.

Among these treasured photographs is one of bearded-spec-



George C. Buell
(1st Master, Lodge 137)



Mark L. McClelland
(Master, 1864, '65, '69, '70)



Mark Leslie Dickover
(Master, 1902-'03)

tacted George C. Buell, first master of Porter Lodge 137. Buell served as Master of the lodge in 1852-53, 1856, 1858-59, 1862-63, 1866 and 1878.

Another visage preserved for future Masons is that of Mark L. McClelland. He served as Master in 1864, 1865, 1869 and 1870. McClelland later moved to Hobart to become a charter member and namesake of that community's M. L. McClelland Lodge.

Still another is a photograph of Mark Leslie Dickover—local banker and amateur historian who died in 1962 after more than 60 years as an active member of Lodge 137.

It was written in a June 28, 1952 program marking celebration of Lodge 137's One Hundredth Anniversary, "Brother Dickover has known every Past Master of Porter Lodge, except one who died before he was born, and has witnessed the raising of more candidates in the Lodge than it now has in numbers."

Dickover was Master of the lodge in 1902-03. At the time of his death he was the only living Mason who could remember acquaintanceships with those early Porter Lodge masonic pioneers.

Another Past Master, Edgar D. Crumpacker (1888) was elected eight times to the U.S. House of Representatives from the old Indiana Tenth District. A Republican, Crumpacker served from 1897 through 1913. He died Dec. 19, 1920 after retiring from politics.

These are but a few of the several thousand who have contributed to the colorful and inspiring history of a lodge which currently numbers 677 active members.

Lodge records for the period covered by these men show local Masons have met in only nine locations since their charter in 1852.

As chronicled by the Masons themselves, one or more meetings have been held in the Campbell home mentioned in the organization of Lodge 49; the Hamill residence which occupied the site of the current Valparaiso Women's Club building; Hughart's Hall located at 53 W. Lincolnway; quarters at

7 E. Lincolnway; the Academy of Music Building, destroyed by fire in 1926; the former lodge at 113 E. Lincolnway, destroyed by fire in 1961; temporary quarters (1961-63) located on the second

floor at 53 Franklin St.; and the new lodge recently completed at 113 E. Lincolnway.

Lodge 137 F & AM had fortunately moved from the "Academy" building in 1925, just one

year prior to a February fire which destroyed the Academy and an adjoining building. Two out-of-town firemen and one local volunteer were reported killed fighting this blaze.



Taking pictures of the colorful dedication parade is Ted Nehmelman, Rt. 5, Valparaiso, member of Porter Lodge and Orak Shrine.



Photo above shows Gary Fire Dept.'s ladder truck and personnel assisting Valparaiso firemen in battling \$500,000 blaze that destroyed Porter Masonic Temple on March 15, 1961. Photo below shows another former lodge home that burned in November, 1924, shortly after Porter Lodge had moved out. This old building was known variously as "Valparaiso Hall" and the "Academy of Music."

