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The occasion of this gathering tonight is not only a matter of great pride to the members of Isle of Patmos lodge, but also of special interest to Masons everywhere. One hundred eleven years viewed nearly as a matter of time does not occasion much concern but viewed as a fact in the life of a state, or in what is of greater interest to us tonight, the life of an organization, is indeed a matter of much interest. The fact that this lodge is so ancient presents some interesting ideas for our consideration.

First among these is the fact that more than a century ago Masonry was instinctive and very pronouncedly a part of the American Pioneer spirit. It is like the instinct for education and religion. Wherever the church and school house found there way the Masonic Lodge soon followed and just as religion played a large part in creating the fine physical fibre and moral stamina of our first settlers in Vermont, so Masonry put a kind of moral iron in the blood that helped mightily toward making a race of courageous, steady, honest and reliable men.

To bring this fact a little more vividly to your attention may I ask you to let your imagination draw a picture of what community life might have been on these Islands at so early a period. Consider first of all that the first actual settlement was made by the French at Alburg in 1782 only ³⁰nine years before the Isle of Patmos lodge was given its charter. To pioneer the wilderness and make it fit for the habitations of men is not an easy task and it does not require much effort for the imagination to produce a fairly accurate picture of the stupendous task that lay before those men and women who domiciled themselves in the heart of our Island forests. Today we feel that good roads are vitally essential in our state. To the man of a century ago the problem of roads must have been a perplexing one and yet it proved no barrier to the support that the organizations of the community sought and recieved from these early settlers. If one will review the secretary's records of the meetings of this lodge held a hundred years ago, one will frequently find the names of at least thirty men in attendance. There were no railroads, automobiles, airplanes, radios or telephones, yet in spite of these primitive conditions that called for extreme sacrifices Masonry drove its roots down deep into the soil of community life, drawing to itself the best men within a wide area and becoming a bond that held them to the highest and best mutual endeavor.

I mention with regret the fact that the lodges records, the real source from which we might expect to gather our information are exceedingly meager in details. If Brother Alson Landon who signed his name to the records as secretary on May 16, 1825, had only known that his records would have been read more than a century later he surely would have been moved to include incidents of community and masonic interest which would have proved of historic value today. Added to this was the still more unfortunate fact that the secretary's records for the first four years from 1821 to 1825 are missing. This is without a great loss. For our very limited information regarding the beginning of the lodge we are indebted to the Grand Lodge records and the charter. The Grand Lodge records read under date of Tuesday Oct ~~27~~ 10, 1821, as follows, - "The same committee made report on the petition of sundry brethren in South Hero and Grand Isle that in their opinion the Prayer thereof ought to be granted which report was read and excepted and a charter ordered to be issued accordingly. The charter bears the following names, Abner Keeler, Nathaniel Healy, Alson Landon, Abial Adams, Ephraim Beardsley, Bird Landon, Ebenezer Allen, Jonathan Worthing,

William Gale, Consider Belding, Franklin Robinson and Timothy Allen. Aside from this meager information we have nothing authentic from which to present the origin of number 54 Isle of Patmos Lodge. Some of these names are of special interest to us today. First is that of Abner Keeler worshipful master in 1825. Mr. Keeler was a brother of brother Homer Keeler's Grandfather, came to So. Hero in 1806. For a number of years he conducted a mercantile business here and being a shrewd and careful business man he accumulated a very substantial fortune. We judge Mr. Keeler to have been a very strong and aggressive mason from the fact that besides being worshipful master in 1825 he was at times intrusted with large responsibilities.

Another name that sounds familiar is that of Alson Landon Secy in 1825. Mr. Landon was the son of Thaddeus Landon one of the Earliest settlers on the island his records were kept with precision and care and bespeak a man of education and intelligence.

Mr Bird Landon a distant relative of some of the present members was treasurer during the years of 1825-1827.

The system of dues was somewhat different from now the requirement being a fee of ten cents at each meeting.

Another familiar name is that of Robinson; Franklin Robinson the grandfather of brother Juan Robinson came to the island in 1802. He had the distinction of being the first to carry the U.S. mail from Burlington to North Hero at the enormous salary of 100 dollars a year. Twice each week winter and summer he made the trip carrying the mail in bags astride his faithful horse. It may be noted that Brother Franklin Robinson was not only one of the original charter members but also one of the two who helped to bring about the re-organization of the lodge in 1850.

Regarding the spirit of Isle of Patmos Lodge and the work accomplished during those years information is very meager. From the reports made to the Grand Lodge we gather that from 1823 to 1825 17 were made Master Masons that during the next two years nine were reported raised and during the following two years three more were made members. No record of any kind is given of the lodge after Dec. 1828.

Coming to the housing of the lodge it is interesting to note that the first home occupied the upper part of a store owned by Abner Keeler and was located by the railroad crossing on the property once owned Stephen Wadsworth. In 1827 this store a wooden building was moved back to give place to a large building said to be the finest of its kind in which Mr. Keeler carried on a mercantile business. During this period the lodge moved its quarters to the home of John Knight in North Hero where it remained for about two years supposedly returning at the end of that time to South Hero, When the anti-masonic period began. To the honor of the lodge it may be said its charter was never voluntarily surrendered and that during those days which were ^{dark} for Masonry, Franklin Robinson, B.F. Hodkins Seneca Tobias and one or two others would ride by wagon north to the Hurlburt farm cross by boat to the home of John Knight where they secretly meet at frequent intervals for the sole purpose of maintaining there Masonic Charter. In 1849 Isle of Patmos Lodge was given one year to organize under their old charter and on January 5 1850 at the home of John Knight the lodge was reorganized under its new number 17 naming brothers D. Nott W.M., James Tobias W.W., Franklin Robinson J.W. S. Macomber Tres., Charles Perrigo, Sec'y., E. Parks, S.D., J. Williams, J.D. and J. Knight, Tyler.

From this date until now Masonry has grown by leaps and bounds until now it has become a mighty force in the land. Nowhere has any lodge felt the benefit of this increase more than Isle of Patmos Lodge for today it is a strong and healthy lodge of about 130 members.

In 1891 Forty one years ago the lodge moved to the stone building, opposite the Keeler homestead, which was purchased from Peter Troville for the small sum of two hundred dollars. During the years many improvements were made in the building making it neat and comfortable.

On Jan. 5, 1909 a delegation was sent to Winooski, O. E. S. for initiation and during the same month Island Chapter no. 73 O. E. S. was constituted with Lucy Gorden worthy matron and Horace T. Wadsworth worthy patron. Since that date the Order of Eastern Stars and the masonic fraternity have harmoniously made their abode in the same temple. And as we dedicate this building we are happy to share with them our new home.

Due to the increase in our number of members and to the limited space of our quarters we find in the secretaries record of October 5, 1922, that the question was raised "Shall the Lodge erect a new building". A committee was appointed consisting of Brothers Horace T. Wadsworth, H. O. Reynolds and Robert Atkins to submit plans, locate grounds and to get estimates of costs of the same. On Nov. 2, 1922, the committee respectfully reported and it was decided the proposition was too expensive and the matter was discussed relative to enlarging our present stone building. This matter was also dropped and never again seriously considered.

Our present building which we are to dedicate tonight was at one time owned by the Methodist Society of this town and Grand Isle. When the two churches here federated this building was left vacant. Wishing it to be of some service they gave it to the town for the purpose of a school with the understanding that whenever the town did not want it longer for school purposes it should revert back to the Methodist Society. During the summer of 1929 the school board feeling that the building was becoming inadequate to meet their needs decided to erect a new school house. This again left this building vacant.

At a regular meeting on March 13, 1930, the subject of obtaining from the Methodist Society their building was brought up. A committee for information consisting of brothers O. D. Fifield, H. O. Reynolds and Robert Atkins was appointed. At the next meeting April 10, 1930 the same committee was instructed to get estimates on repairing the building. However not until Nov. 17, 1931, were negotiations completed and the building accepted. The master and wardens were appointed a committee to repair the buildings and finance the same.

For more than a hundred years a fine fraternal spirit has been maintained in this Masonic organization. Jealousy and petty discord have been kept out to a large degree. Moreover the Masonic atmosphere has been kept morally clean.

The following resolution was made by the late brother S. P. Wadsworth at a regular communication dated Jan. 25, 1866. "Resolved that every member of Isle of Patmos lodge No. 17, who shall spit on the floor or smoke in the lodge shall pay a fine of 25 cents for each offence to be paid to the treasurer of the lodge, also there shall be no talking about the lodge while at labor without leave from the W. M. Also that every member of Isle of Patmos lodge shall guard against the use of profane language in or about the lodge.

It would be tempting to discuss, at some length the lodge of these *latter days*.

Its fine personell,prosperity and oppertunity for aggressive work in behalf of real masonry but you are familar with these things and any statement I might make would only be going over grounds with which you are now very well acquainted.

In closing I wish that I might be able to impress upon your minds the tremendous challange that comes to masonry today. Masonry as I understand it is not a conglomeration of signs and symbols altho we are sometimes prone to make it, that and that only. There is not one thing in masonry that the whole world mi might not know so far as the legitimacy and upright character of our work is concerned. But there must be a fence high enough that the man who is not a mason may not look over and share in certain rights and benefits for which he has not been duly and trully prepaired, whorty and well qualified. That , and that alone is the meaning and significance of the secret element in masonry. As masons we must have some distinguishing mark that we get in our signs symbols and passwords. But masonry has a positive element in it too. Dont forget that. You cannot expect thousands and tens of thousands of men to band themselves together unless they band themselves for something good or ill. Masonry stands for principles ,positive principles the exercise of which if faithfuly persued cannot fail to mean a moral uplift to society.

Read by
John H. Fresen
at
dedication 1932