

MASONIC ORDER IN RAINIER

By KATHERINE TOLLESHAUG

A Masonic Order had been instituted in Rainier while this town was still in Oregon Territory. This was one hundred and fourteen years ago and this Lodge was number 24.

A dispensation was granted November 18, 1857, and the Charter granted July 14, 1858.

The first officers and members were William F. Strong, W.M.; George Barlow, S. W.; W. R. Strong, J. W.; Wm. R. Hutchinson, Treasurer; W. F. Minear, Secretary; E. W. Conyers, Tyler; Seth Catlin, I, D. Anderson, John Rigdon, John Fox, S. J. Mitchell, Jack Parcher.

The river was the means of travel and some of these early members came from parts around Rainier and from the north side of the river.

The following years were hard years. Many distracting events

occurred. Gold was discovered in the Fraser River country and in southern Oregon and the California gold fields beckoned to those who were footfree. The Civil War was fought. There were several bad Indian scares, a very cold winter and experiences with high water. So, in 1863, the little lodge just folded up and turned in its charter.

In the fall of 1863, Dean Blanchard came to Rainier and began his many activities that so helped shape this struggling town. Mr. Blanchard had been in St. Helens as early as 1854 as a salesman in Captain Knighton's store. In 1855 and 1856, he did army service and then came back to St. Helens. In 1857 he became auditor for Columbia County while this county was still under Territorial rule, which position he held for two years. And following Oregon's admission to the Union in 1859 as a State, he served as first Clerk of Columbia County. He then went back to Portland and then to Rainier in the fall of 1863.

Some of these early members appear in other records:

Quoting from the "History of the Rainier Schools" in Columbia County Historical Publication in Vol. 3, we find: "In 1853 and 1854, Riley Strong, the first teacher, taught at Rainier. There is some confusion about the name; some have it William Strong. Fred Lockley in his "History of the Lower Columbia," uses the name Riley Strong. Riley Strong taught at Monticella in 1855 and 1856 and then at Rainier in 1857 and 1858. "William" or "Riley," it could have been either one of the Mr. Strongs.

Wm. R. Hutchinson was a carpenter who built several buildings in Rainier.

W. F. Minear owned the land claim from Fox Creek to the eastern boundary of present Rainier and he became discouraged and in 1863 sold what was left of his holdings to Dean Blanchard and with his followers pulled up stakes and moved to The Dalles, where things were beginning to boom.

Enoch W. Conyers was an early pioneer of Clatskanie, Oregon.

Seth Catlin (quoting from Peter Crawford's Cowlitz Journal), "1949 . . . Jonathan Burbee having moved down from the Kalamia River with his large family of boys, and H. D. Huntington from Oregon City with his growing family, and Nathaniel Stone and his family from a point near Portland. They looked around for locations. Amongst them is Seth Catlin, a man of considerable means and a large family of boys. James Porter and R. C. Smith made shingles for the California market. (Seth Catlin staked his claim at what is West Kelso and the others nearby on the south bank of the Cowlitz River.)

Across the Columbia was a point called Barlow's Point where the Barlow family lived.

In the fall of 1870, Dean Blanchard and Enoch Conyers rowed to Astoria to make application for a reinstatement of the Charter

for Rainier Lodge Number 24. The application was granted and the Charter was restored in 1871.

Officers of the lodge in 1872 were: Dean Blanchard, W.M.; Charles Perrine, S.W.; James H. Pollard, J.W.; George Barlow, Treasurer; R. C. Smith, Secretary; Enoch Conyers, S.D.; Byron Barlow, J.D.; James Gilbreath, Tyler.

Charles Perrine was from Rinearson Slough below Rainier and it was called Perrine Slough in those days on boundary maps.

James Gilbreath was an uncle of Grace Reid and the Gilbreath family had a mill and home at Hudson. Mr. Gilbreath was the first Sheriff of Columbia County.

On the south wall of the present meeting room is a picture of Dean Blanchard and a picture of a small country store building. This was the home of Rainier lodge and they met over the store in a room that was 24'x38'. The side walls of the meeting room extended only four feet above the floor, and then the rafter slope began, thus rendering the floor space very small. The question arose many times about more commodious space and not until 1886 was any action taken. A building committee was appointed and Dean Blanchard donated two lots where the building was built in 1891. The dedication was held in March, 1894, and there were only fourteen members at that time. Mr. Blanchard gave most of the furnishings for the lodge and left his library to the lodge.

An item from the Rainier Review of December 30, 1898, states: "Dean Blanchard and the Mesdames Dibblee, Pomeroy, Muckle and Richardson were in St. Helens Tuesday evening attending a banquet given by the Masonic Order there."

Also an item that the lumber to build the first Masonic Hall in St. Helens came from the mill Mr. Blanchard had purchased when he came to Rainier.