

# Masons get ready for 100-year party

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Rainier's Masonic Hall will celebrate its 100th anniversary on Sunday, March 27. The public is invited to attend.

# Masons get ready for 100-year party

By Doug Rose

On February 19, members of Rainier's Masonic Lodge No. 24 gathered to paint the inside of their lodge.

Now, that isn't the sort of thing that usually warrants front page news — let alone an entire article. After all, local fraternal and service organizations are always getting together on projects of one kind or another.

What set the Masons' painting party last Saturday apart from similar activities is that it is part of the preparations they are making for the celebration next month of the 100th anniversary of their lodge hall.

"The hall was dedicated on March 27, 1894," past master Elton 'Red' Gamble," says. "We're planning a big celebration, with the Oregon grand master and his family and representatives from most area lodges.

According to Paul Geipel, another past master of the Rainier lodge and its current secretary, the centennial celebration will be open to the public.

Refreshments will be available, and the public will have a chance to look at historical photos and articles from the lodge's long history in Rainier.

And it is a long history indeed. You see, the Rainier Masonic Lodge is even older than the venerable building on the corner of Third and C, that has been its home for nearly a century.

"The lodge itself was formed in 1858," Gamble says. "It was started by a few local men who had been in the Clatskanie lodge."

The lodge took the No. 24 designation because they were the 24th lodge to form in the Oregon territory.

The Masons originally met above Duane Blanchard's general store on First Street near the present-day boat launch. One of Rainier's founding Masons, Blanchard was a prominent local businessman.

Blanchard ultimately donated the site for the current lodge and much of the materials used in its construction.

Today, much of the Rainier lodge's long history is stored upstairs in the hall. Indeed, the walls are crowded with photographs of past members.

Charles Moeck, who built the home that now serves as Rainier's "1888 House," looks down from an old photo, as does E.W. Conyers, the 50-year member that was the lodge's first master.

You can flesh out the history of the lodge even further by looking at its old ledgers.

"Two stoves for \$18," Geipel reads from the ledger the lodge kept during the building's construction. "One day of plumbing was \$3 and 20 feet of galvanized ¾-inch pipe cost \$3."

In the beginning, the Masons had around 15 members. But the early years were a struggle for the group at times. For a while, the lodge even lost its charter because of Indian troubles in the territory.

"Everybody wanted to move to Fort Vancouver for safety," says Geipel, the lodge's informal historian.

Within a short time, however, the lodge once again became active.

If it seems remarkable that the Rainier Masons can trace their origins back to the days of Indian trouble, you should know that the Freemasons, as they are formally called, trace their heritage back to lodges founded by "freeman stonemasons" that built cathedrals in Europe and England during the Middle Ages.

Because of widespread illiteracy at the time, much of the craft and lore of the early lodges were instructed through elaborate rites and with symbolism.

By the close of the Renaissance, "speculative" Masons had begun to be admitted to the lodges to serve alongside the "operative" members from the building trades.

The first Grand Lodge was chartered in 1717, and Symbolic Lodges were soon chartered worldwide. Boston was the site of the first North American lodge, established in 1733 — 43 years before the Revolutionary War.

"George Washington was a Mason," Gamble says.

A list of other well-known Masons would include Harry Truman, Benjamin Franklin, John Wayne and Buzz Aldrin.

From its very beginnings, a hallmark of Freemasonry has been a commitment to public

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service.

"The Masons spend more than \$2 million a day nationwide on charities," Geipel says.

The Shriners Hospital for Crippled Children and the Burn Institute are by far their most visible projects.

Located in Portland and other large metropolitan areas throughout Canada, the United States and Mexico, the hospitals are the world's largest privately-maintained charitable institutions. They provide free medical care to

children suffering from major medical problems, regardless of whether the children have an affiliation with the Masons.

Locally, the Masons have made the Rainier Senior Citizens Center the focus of their community service work.

"The seniors moved into the hall in 1973," Gamble says. "We were very happy to be able to help them out."

Since the seniors moved in, the Masons have made extensive repairs and renovations to the building.

"We built the walkway around the side of the building so it would

be accessible to wheelchairs," Gamble says. "And in 1992 we completely redid the kitchen down to the timbers.

In addition, in recent years the lodge has remodeled the bathroom, overseen the repair of the center's stove, and installed siding on the outside of the building. They also were responsible for having the parking lot improved.

Gamble says that he believes both the seniors and the Masons benefit from their arrangement because keeping the building warm and in use daily ensures that it will last longer.

"We're good for the seniors and they're good for us."

Currently, the Rainier Lodge has approximately 80 members. Requirements for admission are simple: You must be 18, be of good moral character, and believe in a supreme being and an afterlife.

Unlike some organizations, you are not sponsored into the Masons by someone else — you have to ask to join on your own.

The Order of the Eastern Star is one of the women's arms of Freemasonry. Masonic girls can

join the Order of Rainbow for Girls and young men can join the Order of DeMolay.

Between now and Sunday March 27, the lodge members will be hard at work, sprucing up the hall for its upcoming birthday

party.

And after that?

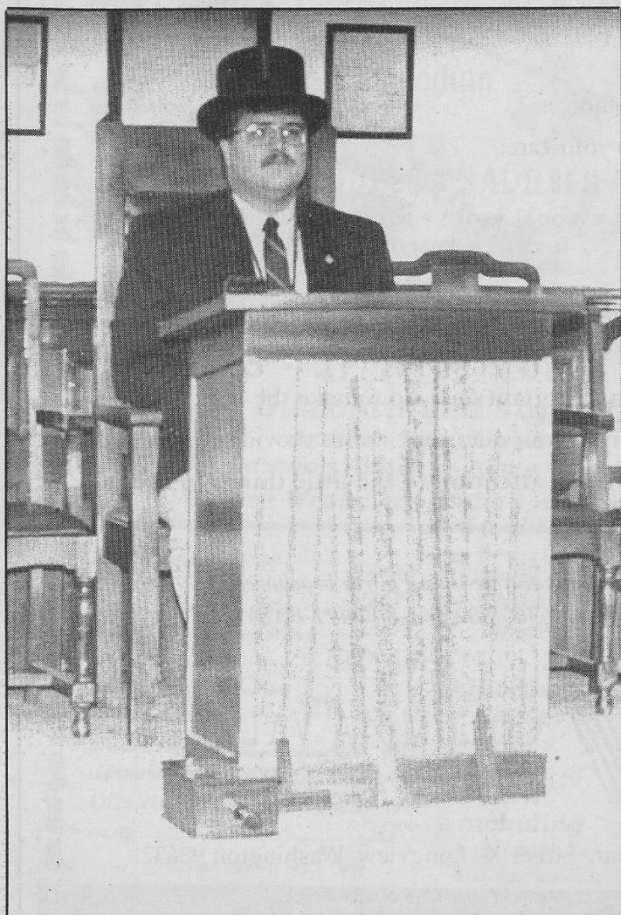
Well, in addition to their usual projects, the Masons probably should start thinking about the lodge's 150th anniversary. Believe it or not, it's only 14 years away.

**Hollywood Star Kevin McCarthy**  
in "Give 'Em Hell Harry!"

SAT. MARCH 5, 8:00 PM \* All seats reserved \* 423-1011

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Rainier Masonic Lodge No. 24 A.F. and A.M. Master Steve Beck will preside over the lodge hall's 100th anniversary on Sunday, March 27.