

**WHY MARION NEEDED A
MASONIC LODGE IN 1844,
AND WHY IT MAY
STILL NEED ONE**



**A paper delivered by
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WHY MARION NEEDED A MASONIC LODGE IN 1844, AND WHY IT MAY STILL NEED ONE



With such a kind introduction, one might easily expect some truly distinguished personage to appear—one who might stand on his head, recite and translate several *Odes* by Horace, and simultaneously juggle fiery objects with his feet.

Unfortunately you got me instead.

There are some present who have heard me deliver myself of trenchant remarks in the past. I hope they had the foresight to visit Hy-Vee or Fareway yesterday, and to assemble an ample arsenal of soft and decaying fruits and vegetables.

I invite them to move toward the front of the room, where my person will provide an immediate and corpulent target.

If, however, there are those who have instead procured watermelons and coconuts, I would prefer—as would the management—that you defer your assault until I have removed to the sidewalk outside.

On the other hand, if you do not intend to participate materially in the festivities of the day, but would rather pass the time in more somnolent and solitary endeavors, I ask you to repair to the rear of the room, and to limit your snoring to a resonance acceptable in polite society.

I am delighted to address the relationship between Freemasonry and the City of Marion. It's a long and proud history, but one which might not be easily noticed at first.

I hasten to say that it is not my intention to rehearse the particulars of the wonderful exhibition prepared for our examination by the Marion Heritage Center and Marion Lodge No. 6. That exhibit you can examine for yourself at your leisure, and I urge you to do so.

With only an exception or two, I want to examine the *why* rather than the *what* of this remarkable and even symbiotic relationship between Marion and Freemasonry.

We begin our consideration about 175 years ago, and we should know what was going on around these parts about then.

The English American colonies became the United States of America following the Revolutionary War and the succeeding period when our Constitution was written and ratified. There was some vague public sense that there was a big piece of land west of the Appalachian Mountains. The Northwest Territory, roughly the land around the western part of the Great Lakes, had been established. France owned a fair amount of real estate west of the Mississippi River, and governed it from New Orleans.

In 1803 President Jefferson purchased from France all the land between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains, and from the (sometimes vague) Canadian border to the Gulf of Mexico. Lots of folks thought this was a dumb move. The price of \$15 million seemed extortionate. There was nothing there but a vacant lot and some Indians.

While the Lewis and Clark Expedition of 1804-1806 allayed this criticism somewhat, there were still plenty of scoffers. Why...there was no *there* there! There was...*gasp*...no civilization!

It was not long, however, before other intrepid explorers began to report the riches and wonders of the new acquisition. Sure, there were questionable critters of both two-legged and four-legged varieties, but there were equally wondrous things to behold.

Meanwhile, Congress established Michigan Territory in 1805 from much of the former Northwest Territory. It would eventually comprise most of what today are the states of Michigan, Indiana, Illinois,

Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and North and South Dakota. Indiana broke off and became a state in 1816, and Illinois did the same in 1818.

In 1836, in preparation for Michigan's statehood in 1837, Wisconsin Territory was organized from what was left, and comprised modern Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, and the Dakotas.

Folks in the east now began to think, if uncertainly, about Iowa.

To be honest, that uncertainty hasn't changed in some quarters, where they still confuse Iowa with either Ohio or Idaho.

The earliest European exploration of what became Iowa happened in the 1680s, when the French explorers Marquette and Joliet explored the Mississippi River on Iowa's east coast.

Before the Louisiana purchase, there were, of course, traders of European—particularly French—extraction who roamed around in Iowa, but it wasn't until after the Lewis and Clark Expedition and the War of 1812 that potential settlers began to cast covetous and acquisitive eyes on the prairies and woodlands of Iowa.

Nonetheless, Iowa remained firmly in the hands of its Native American inhabitants until June 1, 1833, when the treaty ending the Black Hawk War opened the area to Euro-American settlement.

Chief Black Hawk had lost the war, and was now in the slammer.

Many of his adherents were forcibly and grumpily removed to an Indian area in what is now northeastern Iowa.

On June 1, 1833, settlers from the east began to cross the Mississippi and Des Moines Rivers into Iowa, still part of Michigan Territory. Iowa Territory officially came into being on July 4, 1838, and its capital was established in the river city of Burlington. In 1841 the seat of territorial government was moved to Iowa City, then a newly incorporated hamlet above the Iowa River.

Iowa Territory comprised modern Iowa, Minnesota, and much of the Dakotas. Interestingly, Minnesota territory was not formed until 1849, three years after Iowa's statehood, and then only after an acrimonious battle in Congress.

As a native Iowan, I've often wondered what those early pioneers thought when they crossed into Iowa.

To be sure, many Native Americans lived here, but, with some famous exceptions, most strife between them and the settlers had been resolved by the Black Hawk War.

The prairies and woods, the streams and rivers, the gently rolling hills must have been beautiful almost past imagination. The deep, rich soil the settlers and their families discovered must have seemed a miracle—as indeed it is.

There were some slightly unusual aspects of early settlement in Iowa. Settlers came as *families*, rather than as individuals, and most of them had lived at least two other places previously.

The earliest settlements were within traveling distance of growing towns, and generally along the Mississippi. By 1836, the important centers were Dubuque, the site of important lead mines; Bellevue, Bloomington (later Muscatine), Burlington, Fort Madison, and Keokuk.

Many of the men among the settlers were Freemasons.

Freemasonry had weathered its own storms of the Anti-Masonic movement of the 1820s and early 1830s, and the fraternity was beginning to grow again. Masonry was an important social focus and moral compass for many of the new Iowans[.

But why should Freemasonry have been such an important factor in the early days of Iowa territory?

I think it has to do with what Freemasonry is—and what it *isn't*.

Freemasonry *is* a fraternity.

Freemasonry *is* a profound moral philosophy of living a good, kind, full, and generous life.

Freemasonry *is not* primarily a “service club,” and is fundamentally different from Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, and so forth.

Freemasonry *is not* a religion, a cult, a diabolical conspiracy for world domination, a hoarder of untold wealth, or a group of devil-worshippers—though it wouldn’t take much time on the internet to learn it’s all of those.

Freemasonry *is not* anti-Christian, nor is it anti-Jewish, anti-Muslim, anti-Buddhist, or anti-any-other-religion. It simply does not concern itself with its members’ religious beliefs. That said, there *are* Masonic orders that are specifically Christian.

Let’s deconstruct that.

Freemasonry is a *fraternity*. It’s a whole lot more than a “club.”

The word “fraternity” has as its root the Latin word “frater,” which means “brother.” A group of brothers is a fraternity. A group of sisters is a “sorority,” from “soror,” or sister.

So Freemasonry, at its most fundamental level, is an organization specifically for *men* who consider themselves brothers. And that is a good thing.

Historical anthropologists tell us that every emerging or emerged society has rites of passage for its members as they move from youth to adulthood. Almost always there are separate rites for young women and for young men, as the older members of society initiate them into adulthood. As societies themselves come of age, these ceremonies can become more and more formal.

On this continent, many Native American societies had elaborate ceremonies and trials for their young women and young men as they gained full status as adults.

Freemasonry is an initiatic organization—that is to say that it requires its members to undergo an initiation, or sessions of instruction, before gaining full membership.

There are three levels of initiation in American Freemasonry—they are called “Degrees.” Masonic degrees are theatrical—they use plays to teach deeper truths about what it means to be a man in our society.

In the initiatic degrees—the first three Degrees and those practiced in every legitimate Masonic Lodge in the world—the central image is the building of King Solomon’s Temple, about 700 years before the Common Era. This story is part of all three of the great monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

These three degrees are further based in the legends and practices of the Medieval guild of masons, those men who built the great Gothic cathedrals of the Central Middle Ages.

Modern (or Symbolic) Freemasonry—called “speculative Masonry,” as opposed to the “operative Masonry” practiced by stonemasons—appropriated the tools of stonemasons, and uses them symbolically to represent moral truths.

Some of these uses have crept into our common expressions. A statement can be “on the level.” A person can give you “a square deal.” Those are Masonic idioms.

And here is the point at which many of Freemasonry’s most rabid critics simply fail to understand what Freemasonry is all about.

Freemasonry is, before anything else, symbolic in nature, rather than literal! Our most outspoken critics insist that language used in Masonic Degrees must certainly mean what it says, and that the surface meaning conveys the whole meaning.

Nothing could be farther from the truth. That language has a deeper meaning, sometimes very much at odds with its superficial meaning. When we speak of building King Solomon’s Temple, for example, we are

not talking about building a structure of wood and stone. We refer instead to every man's duty to construct his own spiritual temple as a worthy residence for his eternal soul. King Solomon's Temple is thus an allegory.

Indeed, *all* Freemasonry is a vast allegory of human life. Every aspect of every Masonic degree, every word and action, has a *symbolic* meaning apart from its obvious and literal meaning.

It is the job of every initiated Freemason to tease out these meanings as he himself understands them. And, yes, that means that every Mason may, and actually *should*, have a different interpretation of the meaning of Masonry. That, in fact, is the whole point.

Clearly there are commonalities. Freemasonry requires, for instance, that its members believe in "a Supreme Being."

For Christians, that Being is known in English as God. For Jews and Muslims it is also God—but may be known instead as Jaweh, or Allah. In other religions, the Supreme Being has different names. Much of the difference, I submit, is linguistic rather than theological.

Freemasonry insists on this belief, because men of faith—*whatever* faith—are already interested in and open to ideas that can improve their spiritual conditions on this earth, and by professing a belief in a Higher Power, they indicate their willingness to consider matters of the spirit as well as of the physical world.

This is the point at which fundamentalists of several religious stripes begin to pitch conniptions.

"The God of Freemasonry," they fulminate, "is not AND CANNOT BE the God of (_____) *whatever religion.*"

Well, that's true enough. Freemasonry, you see, doesn't recognize a specific definition of "God"—it consciously does not use the term—and it simply doesn't make any difference to other Freemasons what a man's individual religion may be. In short, there simply IS no "God of Freemasonry."

Freemasonry does not concern itself with such matters, and it is, in fact, forbidden to discuss religion in a Masonic Lodge.

What DOES happen is that every initiate into Freemasonry is encouraged—in fact, *urged*—to take his own religious beliefs and practices very seriously. And there it stops, at least in the non-sectarian Masonic orders.

Is there a Bible on the altar in a Masonic Lodge? Yes, in predominately Christian lodges there is.

But in predominately Jewish Lodges that book is the Holy Torah. In Islamic Lodges it is the Holy Quran.

The stipulation in Freemasonry is that the book on the altar be a book of Holy Law, as interpreted by the Masons present. I belong to a lodge in Des Moines where we regularly have *four* books open on our altar, to honor all Masons present and their various religious traditions.

We address in prayer at every meeting the Supreme Being we call "The Great Architect of the Universe," and every Brother interprets that phrase according to his own beliefs.

Freemasonry does *not* have teachings devoted to salvation, nor to attainment of eternal life, though there is a Masonic belief in the immortality of the human soul. All Masonic lessons are symbolic, and none is sectarian in any sense.

"But—but—but," some will splutter. "You guys are some sort of secret cult, and you don't let anybody else in on what you do inside that Lodge room!"

"Secret cult?" Not guilty, your honor!

"Don't let anybody else in during meetings?" Absolutely correct.

So let's see how secret Masonry is.

Seems to me there's a big sign on a building about a block north of here that says the building is a Masonic temple—WAIT A MINUTE! A *TEMPLE*? That's some sort of place of worship, right?

Let's deal with that first. In the eighteenth-century sense of the word "temple," a temple is a building dedicated to any lofty cause. It's a center of enlightenment. It may be artistic—the Beverly Hills Temple of the Performing Arts. It may be literary. Or it may be philosophical, as a Masonic Temple is.

But anybody who wants to know where the Masonic Temple in Marion is can ask around, and find a building with a very public sign. Same's true with virtually every Masonic meeting place in Iowa. Times for meetings are posted on highway signs and even published in newspapers.

Yup. We're sure secret about where and when we meet!

But closed meetings?

ABSOLUTELY.

I already said we're an initiatic organization. One of the things that means is that only those who have been initiated can participate in our deliberations.

I would guess that the meetings of the boards of local banks, for instance, are not open to the public.

If you tried to barge into your neighbor's house in the middle of an important family meeting, you might not be welcome.

Even PUBLIC boards meet "secretly" when discussing, for example, personnel matters.

"WHADDAYA DO IN THERE, THEN, IF I CAN'T COME IN?"

"HUH?"

"WHADDAYA DO IN THERE?"

Well, we do Mason things.

We do things to initiate new members. We have ceremonies to open and close our meetings. We discuss paying our bills and fixing the roof if it needs fixing.

And sometimes—even often—we talk about things we are more comfortable talking about with other *men* we know well and trust implicitly. Our brothers.

Let me give you an example.

I have a friend who became a Mason in a small Lodge in another state. When he received his Third Degree—the highest honor in Freemasonry, by the way—his father and two of his uncles took the most important parts in the degree. Occasionally he goes back to visit that little lodge.

One time a few years ago, he was visiting his "mother lodge." Toward the end of the meeting, there is a time when the presiding officer asks if anyone has something else to bring up.

One of the elderly members, a man well known and much loved, rose slowly to his feet. "Yes," he said, "I have something I need to talk about.

"This last week my wife went to see our doctor, and I went with her. She just hadn't been feeling right for a while.

"Well, the doctor told us that she has cancer, and that there's nothing he can do to cure it. He can make sure she's not in a lot of pain, but that's about it. She will die soon.

"My brothers, we've been married 62 years.

"I just don't know what to do."

And he sat down.

There aren't many places where a proud man could say such things, but a Masonic Lodge is one of them.

I leave it to your imagination to figure out what happened. I wonder if you already know how he and his wife were treated in the following few months, while she still lived, and how he was treated in the months after she left.

But back to the secrets of Masonry. Oh, sure, there are “secret” words, and handshakes, and signs, and steps, and all that. If you’re interested, you can learn about all of them online in about 15 minutes.

So I guess I don’t count those as very important secrets.

But make no mistake: there are *genuine* Masonic secrets, and they are very important secrets indeed.

Moreover, they will *remain* secret.

And here’s something even more peculiar: those secrets are different for every single Mason in the world.

“Oh, c’mon, Klaus!” you say. “That’s just flat-out ridiculous! How can there be a secret if at least *two* people don’t share it?”

You see, Masonry is based on the singular premise that good men, when associated with each other in a safe and secure environment, can become even better men than they were to start with. Not, as we say, better than other men, but better than themselves.

I’ve already said that it’s the duty of every Mason to figure out what Masonry means, and how it applies to his own life.

As he discovers the meanings of Masonry’s symbols in his own life, and as he puts the lessons he learns into practice, he will discover much about the world, but even more about himself.

What he learns will be unique, and applicable only to his own life.

He stores up what he has learned in his heart of hearts, and those discoveries become a part of the very fabric of who he is.

Those, my friends, are the *real* secrets of Freemasonry, and they are secret because there are no words to express them.

They are nevertheless very real and very important, and they can change a man’s life for the better.

“OK, fine. I *might* be able to swallow all that mumbo-jumbo,” you say. “But aren’t you Masons plotting to take over the world?”

Well...yes. Yes, we are. And we’re not keeping it a secret, either. Only problem is that it’s not happening fast enough.

It’s been explained a lot of times, but nobody I know about ever said it better than a guy named Joseph Fort Newton.

Joseph Fort Newton was born in Texas in 1876, the son of a Civil War veteran who was a Baptist preacher turned attorney—and a Mason. The younger Newton studied at Southern Baptist Seminary and Harvard University, where one of his primary professors was the great American philosopher William James.

Joseph Fort Newton was ordained as a Baptist clergyman, and served his first pastorate in Paris, Texas. He moved to Dixon, Illinois, where he served a Universalist church. In Dixon he became a Master Mason in 1902.

Between 1908 and 1916 he was pastor of the Universalist Liberal Church in Cedar Rapids, and it was during this time that he entered the Scottish Rite, and served the Grand Lodge of Iowa as Grand Chaplain between 1911 and 1913. It was in Iowa that he began his prolific career as a writer on theological and Masonic topics.

He left Cedar Rapids to become pastor of City Temple in London, but returned to the United States because of World War I. He held pastorates in New York and the suburbs of Philadelphia, and eventually became an Episcopalian priest. He died in 1950.

Newton wrote what is the soul of the Masonic conspiracy, and, far from being a secret, it is quite literally written in stone on the façade of the Iowa Masonic Library and Museums on First Avenue in Cedar Rapids. Stop and read it sometime.

Until then, I'll read it to you. He wrote this in 1923:

The Spirit of Masonry

Gentle, gracious, and wise; its mission is to form mankind into a great redemptive brotherhood, a league of noble and free men enlisted in the radiant enterprise of working out, in time, the love and will of the Eternal.

There, in one sentence, is the whole Masonic conspiracy.

What in the *world* does all of that have to do with the history of Marion, Iowa?

A great deal, I would suggest.

Marion, as everyone here already knows, takes its name from the South Carolina Revolutionary War general Francis Marion, the Swamp Fox, who was one of the first American military commanders to use modern guerilla warfare—much to the consternation of British forces. While General Marion's military exploits have been examined (and sometimes severely criticized) by military historians, his career as a Freemason has received less attention, and there's a reason for that.

Marion probably became a Mason sometime in the late 1750s or early 1760s, and there is reference to his having been a Mason "in the Charleston area." However, fire destroyed the archives of the Grand Lodge of South Carolina in the 1820s, and the archives of many early Lodges around Charleston were lost in the Revolutionary and Civil Wars.

In any case, there is no reason to believe the scant records of his Masonry are false.

Marion, Iowa thus was named for a Freemason.

All right.

Goody!

What's the point? How are Marion, Iowa, and the Masonic Fraternity related?

Marion Lodge No. 6 and the Marion Heritage Center have worked together to provide an extraordinarily illuminating exhibit on that very topic. I see absolutely no reason whatsoever to belabor again what they have done with such remarkable skill and expertise.

If you spend a little time with this exhibit, you will learn that the history of Marion and Freemasonry in Marion are bound up together. You will discover that an important cross-section of Marion's early settlers, including a surprising number of its early "movers and shakers" were Freemasons. You will likely find out that Marion would be a far different place had it not been for the Masonic fraternity. As I said, you can learn all this through spending a little of your time with this wonderful exhibit.

I would, however, like to talk about the very earliest settlers of Linn County.

Hold on. It's all relevant.

There are four men, several with their families, who may have been the first Euro-American settler in this part of the world.

Those are the ones who stayed, of course. When Iowa was opened for settlement in 1833, there were probably a number of others who checked out this part of the world, and even before then there were probably some intrepid, if illegal, explorers sniffing around.

All four of those who stayed have some claim to being the first settler. All arrived to stay sometime during the spring or summer of 1837. They didn't much give a hoot about whether their moving to a new home was "historic" or not, so the records aren't very specific, and certainly nobody fomented a contest to see who could show up first!

The un-named author of *The History of Linn County, Iowa*, refers to himself (and it was probably a "he") only as "The Historian." The Western Historical Company published the volume in Chicago, and the preface is dated August 1878.

The author, writing from personal conversations and written documents, insists that the first settler in Linn County was Edward Crow, who was still living in 1878.

Mr. Crow came to Linn County and staked a claim in Buffalo Township in July 1837. He cleared some land near where Matsell Bridge Park is today, and put up a sort of rude hut on the property. He then went back to Illinois to bring his family to Iowa, and they showed up in early 1838. So there's claimant number 1.

Charles C. Haskins apparently settled just south of the present town of Lisbon during the summer of 1837. He arrived with his family, and moved several times during his first few years in the area. Not much more is known about him, but he's claimant number 2.

Claimant number 3 is Daniel Seward Hahn, who arrived from Ohio in the early summer of 1837 with his wife Permelia, and settled on about 300 acres in what is now the south-east corner of Mount Vernon. St. John's Catholic Church, the Mount Vernon Quarry, and most of the present Mount Vernon Cemetery are now located on that land. Mr. Hahn opened the quarry, and most of the stone in King Memorial Chapel on the Cornell College campus came from that quarry.

Daniel Hahn died in 1899, at the age of 91. Some of the old folks I knew in Mount Vernon in the 1960s remembered him.

The person who most interests us this afternoon is claimant number 4, one William Abbe. Of these early settlers he is perhaps the most interesting and the most complex.

Certainly he was afflicted with Wanderlust!

William Abbe was born about 1800 in either New York or Connecticut—the sources vary. He moved with his parents and siblings to the region around Elyria, Ohio, when he was a child. As early as 1836 he came overland from Ohio to Rock Island, Illinois, crossed the Mississippi, and followed the Iowa and Cedar Rivers northwest to what is now somewhere just south of Mount Vernon.

He set off across the countryside, and found a really beautiful tract of about 400 acres just a couple of miles west of Mount Vernon. The Abbe Creek School on Old Highway 30—the school and the creek are named for him—is located in the northwestern corner of his original claim.

Then he went back to Ohio.

In early 1837, Abbe and his family returned with a team of oxen and a wagon. They built a log cabin roofed with birch-bark, and moved in. Later that fall they built a larger three-room cabin, complete with a loft reached by a ladder.

There were many Winnebagos living in the area, and William and several of his children became fluent in their language. Some of the younger children recalled in old age that their favorite playmates were Winnebago children.

William Abbe's first wife died about 1839, and was buried in what today is Spring Grove Cemetery, across the road from Abbe School. A year or two later he married again, and three more children were added to the three living children by his first wife.

About 1842 William sold the original homestead and bought another one a few miles south of where Marion is today. Later the family moved into Marion, and Susan Abbe, William's daughter and the first schoolteacher in Cedar Rapids, reported that the family lived in Dubuque for a short while.

William Abbe was an early Justice of the Peace, an Indian Agent who delivered food to Fort Atkinson and to the soldiers at Prairie du Chien, and a Senator in the Territorial Legislature for two terms. He was the first jailer and an early sheriff in Linn County.

He was also an early Territorial Commissioner, and it was in the Abbe cabin where the Commissioners met to declare Marion the county seat of Linn County. The county seat moved to Cedar Rapids only in 1919, and some folks in these parts are still honked off about that.

This William Abbe cut quite a figure. He was more than six feet tall and thin as a rail. He could walk across the prairie 50 miles in a day without breaking a sweat.

His son Augustus said that there never was a horse his dad couldn't mount and ride.

He was a very outgoing man—larger than life, apparently—and the Abbe home was a gathering place for travelers and neighbors, Euro-American and Indian alike.

Now we need to return to Freemasonry.

When Iowa Territory was established in 1838, breaking off from Wisconsin Territory, President Van Buren appointed Robert Lucas, former governor of Ohio, as territorial governor.

Governor Lucas was a Mason, as was the man he brought to Iowa as his personal secretary. The secretary was Theodore Sutton Parvin, one of the heroes of Masonry in Iowa, if often an irascible one. But that's a whole different story.

Remember that Burlington was the capital in those days. By frontier standards it was quite the town. If we talk about "the Sovereign State of Des Moines" these days, they probably talked about "the Sovereign State of Burlington" back then.

So Lucas and Parvin showed up in Burlington some time in the second half of 1838. Both of them Masons.

The third Iowa Territorial Legislature was called to order in Burlington on November 2, 1840. Three days later a notice appeared in the *Iowa Territorial Gazette*:

MASONIC NOTICE

The regular members of the Masonic fraternity of the Territory of Iowa are requested to meet at the rooms over the store of Ralston and Patterson, near the National Hotel, in the City of Burlington, on Wednesday evening next, 11 November A.D. 1840, A. L. 5840, at 6 o'clock p.m.

A. Mason

November 5th.

Nobody knows who put this ad in the paper—but we have some suspicions concerning the governor's secretary...

Well, the hour came, and T. S. Parvin showed up. Nobody else was there, and the place was dark. Ol' T. S. was not a happy bunny.

However, the next evening, Parvin made his way to the carpenter shop of Evan Evans, where he and 11 other Masons, including Governor Lucas, held the first Masonic meeting ever recorded in the history of Iowa.

Within less than a month, they had organized a Lodge and petitioned the Grand Lodge of Missouri for a dispensation to form a recognized Lodge. Their petition was accepted, and Des Moines Lodge No. 41, later to be No. 1 in Iowa, was formed.

The Grand Lodge of Missouri soon issued dispensations to three other Lodges in Iowa: one at Bloomington (later Muscatine), one at Dubuque, and one at the brand-new village of Iowa City.

There were several other Lodges formed in Iowa Territory under the aegis of the Grand Lodge of Illinois, but, for complicated and political reasons, they did not prosper.

By 1841, Governor Lucas had determined that the capital city of Iowa needed to be farther west, closer to the population center of the growing territory. He decreed that Iowa City would be the capital.

The Territorial Legislature was meeting in Iowa City in January 1844, when Masonic Lodges from Burlington, Muscatine, Dubuque, and Iowa City met in convention in Iowa City to form the Grand Lodge of Iowa, independent from the Grand Lodges of any other jurisdictions.

It was a belligerent session, even by the official record. The long and short of it is that the man who probably should have been the first Grand Master of Masons in Iowa, Ansel Humphries from Muscatine, was not elected.

At the time, Humphries was the Deputy Grand Master for Iowa Territory of the Grand Lodge of Missouri. He was one of the most expert Masonic ritualists in the whole United States. He had a nearly photographic memory, and had studied ritual with some of the best teachers in the country. He was an expert in Masonic jurisprudence, and in the customs and courtesies of the Fraternity.

But there was some vicious internecine fighting at the convention, and Oliver Cock, Master of the Lodge in Burlington, was elected Grand Master. Brother Cock was not even aware he might become Grand Master, and was a relatively unknown quantity, even among the several hundred Masons in Iowa. In the final analysis, though, he did just fine.

But, shoot! He wasn't anywhere *near* Iowa City when he was elected. He was at home in Burlington.

Enter William Abbe. Remember him? The guy from here?

T. S. Parvin, who *was* present at the convention, and was in the thick of things as he was always to be for almost 60 more years, writes that William Abbe was monkeying around with the Iowa Legislature, where he was not a member, but, according to Parvin, "had some ax to grind."

Now, Abbe was NOT a delegate to the Masonic convention, but he *was* a well-known member of the Fraternity.

He volunteered to ride from Iowa City to Muscatine, and to bring Brother Cock to Iowa City to be installed as Grand Master.

This shoved a huge fly into Brother Abbe's own ointment.

He may have had a legislative ax to grind, but he also had a Masonic ax to grind. He really, really, *really* hoped that, as soon as the Grand Lodge of Iowa was formed and the four founding Lodges established as charter members, he could submit a petition for Marion, and make Marion Lodge the *fifth* Lodge—number 5.

He went to Burlington to fetch a Grand Master instead.

The boys from Wapello, led by the Speaker of the House of Representatives in the Legislature, saw an opportunity and scurried off home to draw up their *own* petition as Number 5. Wapello is not all that far from Iowa City, Abbe was headed the other direction, and Wapello got back to Iowa City first—and became Wapello Lodge Number 5.

Bill Abbe was all bent out of shape, and Marion didn't submit its own petition until several weeks later.

It *did* manage to become Marion Lodge Number 6. William Abbe was the first Master, and he was a good one.

Brother Abbe was always looking for something exciting, and Marion was getting pretty urbanized for his taste. When word came around in 1849 that there was gold in California, off he went, leaving his family in Marion until he could get established in the West. He returned in 1851, picked up his son Andrew, and went west again.

Luther A. Brewer and Barthinius L. Wick, writing in *History of Linn County, Iowa* in 1911, tell us, in quoting from a remembrance by William Abbe's daughter Susan:

When he was away in California, we were much interested in his letters and we all wanted to go. When our father returned we asked him all sorts of questions about the gold camps of the west, and what he had experienced, and we spent whole evenings listening to his conversations. He did not take us at that time, but wanted to seek out an ideal location and get settled before he took us out there. But the day never came, and we never saw him again when he left on his second trip to California in 1852. All that we knew was that my mother received a letter from a Masonic order in Sacramento that the order had taken care of him in his sickness and had seen that he received a suitable burial. He was sick only a short time and none of his old friends was with him when he died. ...

William Abbe was only one of the local Freemasons important in the history of this city. The others, and their histories and contributions, are brilliantly displayed in the exhibit available to you here today.

But why is it important that Freemasons were so involved in the early days of this wonderful city? And, as a corollary, might it be important that influential men of good will continue to be Freemasons in this prosperous and progressive city today?

I think it's not a coincidence that so many of Marion's founding leaders were Masons, nor is it a coincidence that many of Marion's leading citizens have been Freemasons in the years between the 1840s and today.

Men who hold, practice, and share the central Masonic tenets of Brotherly Love, Relief, and Truth—and who propagate those tenets among others—are precisely the sorts of men who could establish and maintain a just and sound community based in those same values and beliefs.

Nor are those beliefs and values any less important as this community heads toward its bicentennial in a few more years. In fact, they may be even more important today than they were then.

I'm not suggesting that only Masons hold and practice these kinds of beliefs. There are many people of good will. I *am* suggesting, however, that every—or nearly every—Freemason holds these values, thinks about them, and acts according to them.

Let me return to Joseph Fort Newton.

In the same brief article in which he described the spirit of Masonry, he listed the characteristics of a Freemason.

Here's what he said:

When is a Man a Mason?

- When he can look out over the rivers, the hills, and the far horizon with a profound sense of his own littleness in the vast scheme of things, and yet have faith, hope, and courage—which is the root of every virtue.
- When he knows that down in his heart every man is as noble, as vile, as divine, as diabolic, and as lonely as himself, and seeks to know, to forgive, and to love his fellow-man.

- When he knows how to sympathize with men in their sorrows, yea, even in their sins—knowing that each man fights a hard fight against many odds.
- When he has learned how to make friends and to keep them, and above all how to keep friends with himself.
- When he loves flowers, can hunt birds without a gun, and feels the thrill of an old forgotten joy when he hears the laugh of a little child.
- When he can be happy and high-minded amid the meaner drudgeries of life.
- When star-crowned trees and the glint of sunlight on flowing waters subdue him like the thought of one much loved and long dead.
- When no voice of distress reaches his ears in vain, and no hand seeks his aid without response.
- When he finds good in every faith that helps any man to lay hold of divine things and sees majestic meanings in life, whatever the name of that faith may be.
- When he can look into a wayside puddle and see something beyond mud, and into the face of the most forlorn fellow mortal and see something beyond sin.
- When he knows how to pray, how to love, how to hope.
- When he has kept faith with himself, with his fellowman, and with his God; in his hands a sword for evil, in his heart a bit of a song-glad to live, but not afraid to die!

Such a man has found the only real secret of Masonry, and the one which it is trying to give to all the world.

(end of quotation)

These are the kinds of people, women as well as men, we desperately need in our public life today.

Think we don't need them? Watch the news. Read the newspapers.

Freemasonry helps men to become these kinds of people, and has done so effectively for 299 years, since 1717.

That, I submit, is not an inconsequential contribution to this world, this country, this state, this county, and this city.

All right!

Before I stop, I'd like to ask all of my Masonic Brothers present to stand.

These are the kinds of men I've been talking about. Remember who they are, and discuss Freemasonry with them. They know a lot more than I do. Brothers, you may be seated.

Now.

Those slumbering in the rear may now stand up and stretch. Those possessed of vegetative armaments may now dispatch their several volleys.

Thank you for your generous attention!

I will gladly respond to questions, either now or more informally later.