

Introduction

Freemasonry's origins are lost. While theories abound, no one knows exactly how or why the fraternity came to be.¹ Nevertheless, a few things can be said about its early development and organization. "Modern" Freemasonry evolved in England, Ireland, and Scotland during the late 17th-century. At the time, Freemasonry represented little more than a loose network of clubs known as "lodges". The first Masonic "grand lodge" - the Grand Lodge of England - was established at London's "Goose and Gridiron Ale-house" on June 24, 1717. Freemasonry's first constitution was published shortly thereafter in 1723. Often referred to as "Anderson's Constitutions", this document was prepared by the Rev. Dr. James Anderson, a Presbyterian minister, from a variety of historic and imaginative "sources."

There have been many attempts to define "Freemasonry." According to the United Grand Lodge of England:

Freemasonry is one of the world's oldest secular fraternal societies... a society of men concerned with spiritual values. Its members are taught its precepts by a series of ritual dramas, which follow ancient forms and use stonemasons' customs and tools as allegorical guides.²

"Symbolic", "Blue Lodge" or "Craft" Masonry, as Freemasonry is also known, consists of three "degrees." These are the "Entered Apprentice", "Fellowcraft", and "Master Mason" degrees. With each conferral, the candidate receives

¹ The prevailing theory, which has supporting evidence, is that the fraternity developed out of medieval stone mason guilds.

² "What is Freemasonry," The United Grand Lodge of England, 13 December 2005, <http://www.grandlodge-england.org/masonry/what-is-freemasonry.htm>, 1.

further “knowledge” about the building of King Solomon’s Temple. The real purpose behind this “work”, however, is to instruct members about certain key virtues – the most important of which are brotherly love, relief, and truth – and the duties they owe, as Freemasons, to the fraternity, their country, and their fellow man. Moreover, Freemasonry’s degrees seek to promote an active faith in God, though how one worships, or what doctrines a person accepts, is a matter of personal conscience.

Freemasonry came to North America with the first British colonists. In the United States, there are fifty-one “regular” grand lodges (“Ancient Free & Accepted Masons” or simply “Free & Accepted Masons”) - one for each state and the District of Columbia. There are also additional “grand lodges” which, for various reasons, may or may not be “recognized” by regular Freemasons. The most important of these are associated with “Prince Hall” Freemasonry. This separate Masonic line was founded in Boston in 1775. Its members are predominantly African-American.

Many famous Americans have been Freemasons. Fourteen Presidents, from George Washington to Gerald Ford, have been members.³ Other notable Freemasons include Benjamin Franklin, John Hancock, Paul Revere, Merriweather Lewis, William Clark, Davy Crockett, Samuel Clemens (Mark

³ The complete list of Masonic Presidents includes: George Washington, James Monroe, Andrew Jackson, James Polk, James Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, James Garfield, William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, William H. Taft, Warren Harding, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, and Gerald Ford. Lyndon Johnson is not normally included in this list as he chose only to complete the first, Entered Apprentice degree.

Twain), William Cody (“Buffalo Bill”), John Phillip Sousa, the Ringling Brothers, Harry Houdini, Henry Ford, Charles Lindbergh, Irving Berlin, Douglas MacArthur, Walt Disney, Glen Miller, Louis Armstrong, John Glenn, John Wayne and Alex Haley. Surprisingly, Freemasonry itself remains either unknown or misunderstood by many people today.

The first known Masonic meeting in Wisconsin was held on the “Feast of St. John the Evangelist”, December 27, 1823.⁴ Ten master masons gathered at the home of Br. George Johnston, a farmer living near Fort Howard, Michigan Territory.⁵ These men soon petitioned the Grand Lodge of New York for permission to form their own lodge.⁶ Menomonie No. 374 held its first regular meeting on September 2, 1824. Two years later, in June 1826, it was renamed “Menomanie” No. 4 when the first Grand Lodge of Michigan was established.

Both Menomanie No. 4 and the first Grand Lodge of Michigan dissolved sometime in 1830. Many early Michigan lodges were comprised of military men. Sudden transfers and discharges no doubt played a part in disrupting lodge activities. The real reason for these setbacks, however, seems to have been the period’s anti-Masonic climate.

The late 1820s to the early 1840s were a difficult time for America’s Freemasons. While criticism was not new, Freemasonry found itself the target of

⁴ It is a Masonic tradition that two special days be observed each year, the Feasts Day of St. John the Baptist (June 25) and St. John the Evangelist (December 27).

⁵ Fort Howard was built in 1816, on the west bank of Fox River near present-day Green Bay, Wisconsin. It was occupied until 1852.

⁶ At the time, the Grand Lodge of New York was the nearest Masonic grand lodge. During its short existence, this lodge would have as many as sixty-two master masons on its rolls.

an organized political movement. Detractors falsely accused Freemasonry of being a malicious cabal. Many members were forced to resign, devastating the nation's Masonic lodges. The growing hysteria eventually culminated into a national "Anti-Masonic Party." Its presidential candidate, William Wirt, ran for office in 1832. His political opponents were both Freemasons and Past Grand Masters - Henry Clay of Kentucky and Andrew Jackson of Tennessee. With President Jackson's election and vocal support, the fraternity ultimately recovered from these unfounded attacks.

Eleven years passed before a Masonic lodge reconvened in Wisconsin. The first to do so was Mineral Point No. 49. Chartered by the Grand Lodge of Missouri, this lodge received its initial permission to form in May 1841. The Grand Lodge of Missouri went on to create a second lodge, Melody No. 65, in Platteville in January 1843. A third lodge, Milwaukee No. 22, was organized under the Grand Lodge of Illinois in June 1843.

On December 18, 1843, representatives from Mineral Point No. 49, Melody No. 65, and Milwaukee No. 22 gathered in Madison to establish their own "Grand Lodge." Thus, the present Grand Lodge of Wisconsin, F. & A.M. was organized nearly five years before Wisconsin became a state. The lodges were renamed Mineral Point No. 1, Melody No. 2, and Milwaukee No. 3 according to their charter dates. All subsequent lodges created by the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin, F. & A.M. follow this same numbering system.

Middleton and its first Freemasons

Individual Freemasons appear early in Middleton's history. Col. Henry Dodge, who later became Wisconsin's first Territorial Governor, was "raised" a master mason in 1806.⁷ He was also elected three times as chief officer, or "Worshipful Master", of Louisiana No. 109 at St. Genevieve, Missouri. On May 25, 1832, Col. Dodge, accompanied by Col. Charles Gratiot and two companies of mounted militia, met with Winnebago Indian (Ho-Chunk) leaders at the Rowan-St. Cyr fur-trading post, located on Lake Mendota's northwest shore.⁸ The purpose of this meeting, held during the "Black Hawk War", was to determine the Winnebago's allegiance. Col. Dodge urged local Native Americans to keep the peace as Black Hawk and his followers retreated through the region.

Middleton's European settlers began arriving in 1841. How many may have been Freemason is not known. Individuals could have joined the fraternity in other states or countries and not affiliated in Wisconsin, thus there would be no local record. Even where membership evidence exists, labeling an individual as a "Freemason" can be problematic. Some men were Freemasons when they arrived. Others joined after moving to Middleton. There is also a problem with identifying men as "Freemasons" who subsequently resigned, allowed their memberships to lapse, or were expelled. For this historical account, therefore, a "Freemason" will be defined as anyone who received all three Masonic degrees.

⁷ Henry Dodge was appointed Governor in 1836 by fellow Freemason and U.S. President Andrew Jackson.

⁸ This site is approximately two and a half miles from Middleton's present-day city center.

One early Freemason was Elisha Bailey. Br. Bailey arrived in 1845 and is reputed to have been Middleton's fifth registered voter. He was town chairman for eight years and its treasurer for four. Br. Ebenezer Clewett also arrived in 1845. He opened Middleton's first hotel, the "Junction House," from which "Middleton Junction" later received its name. Ebenezer Clewett holds the further Masonic distinctions of having been the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin's first ceremonial guard, or "Grand Tiler", in 1843 and a continual Grand Lodge Officer until his death in 1872.

Wisconsin's Territorial Legislature established the "Town of Middleton" on March 11, 1848. Middleton held its first election later that April. Br. John B. Colton, a hotel owner, was among those chosen for public office. He became the town's collector, one of Middleton's first two school commissioners, and its treasurer. He too would later serve as a town chairman.

The Town of Middleton started with four villages. These were East Middleton ("Middleton Junction"), West Middleton, Pheasant Branch, and Middleton Station. Only Middleton Station (the present "downtown") and Pheasant Branch areas exist today. Freemasons - as pioneers, businessmen, and philanthropists - were instrumental in building these communities.

Br. Frank Gault came to Pheasant Branch in 1848. He was politically active - serving as town chairman, a state legislator, and Dane County treasurer. He was also an entrepreneur. In 1852, he built a flour mill with fellow

Freemason William A. Wheeler.⁹ Later, Br. Gault tried peat-cutting with business partner W.B. Slaughter.¹⁰ Br. James Dohr, reputedly Middleton's first German settler, came to Pheasant Branch in 1850 and opened a wagon shop. Another Freemason, John Lorch, started a competing wagon business in Pheasant Branch in 1851. This business lasted only two years. Thereafter, Br. Lorch relocated to Middleton Station where he opened a store. Br. John Prien arrived in Pheasant Branch in 1852. He was the community's first blacksmith and a charter member of the First German Lutheran Church of Middleton. Br. Fritz Elver, a livestock dealer, also came to Middleton in 1852. He later served as town chairman, a district assemblyman, and as a member of the local school board.

Middleton's train depot was constructed in 1856. Its presence assured Middleton Station of becoming the town's eventual center. Middleton's first doctor, Br. N.C. Rowley, arrived shortly after the depot's construction.¹¹ Br. Richard Green, a prominent businessman, arrived in 1861. Not only was Br. Green a successful grain-dealer, he later developed lumber and livestock businesses as well. Br. Samuel Barber came to Middleton Station as the railroad's station agent in 1863. Br. R.E. Davis arrived in 1865. He operated a grain business, served as post master, and later opened a general store. Br. Davis also

⁹ William Wheeler, it should be noted, is credited with making the first iron castings in Madison for the State Capital building.

¹⁰ This business earned Middleton the short-lived nickname "Peatville".

¹¹ Middleton's first three doctors, N.C. Rowley, A.A. Rowley, and Sumner Curtis Coolidge were all Freemasons.

served four terms in the state senate. Other prominent Freemasons who established themselves during this period were A.B. Kingsley, who owned a board mill and lumber yard, James M. Bull, who may have been Middleton's first attorney, Mansfield Arries, Jr., a produce dealer, and John Green, a local merchant.

By the mid-1870s, the Town of Middleton's combined population was approximately 1700 citizens, 300 of whom lived in Middleton Station (which was beginning to be called simply "Middleton"). Grain production supported the local economy. The community had four post offices, one for each of its four villages. East Middleton had a store, two churches and the town's only public cemetery. Pheasant Branch, though it lost its railroad bid, still had several thriving businesses and its own school. Middleton Station, however, was clearly outpacing its neighbors. It was the hub of all local business activity. It was also the town's growing cultural center. Middleton Station had a school, two churches (serving five religious denominations), six saloons, two temperance societies (the "Good Templars" and "Mendotas"), and six "secret" societies. One of these so-called "secret" societies was, of course, the "Masons."

Middleton Lodge No. 180

1870 to 1900

Individual Freemasons were instrumental in Middleton's early development. They were among the town's most valued craftsmen,

businessmen, and professionals.¹² Freemasons regularly served in public office. Freemasons helped to establish at least three of the area's first churches. As already noted, Br. John Prien was a founding member of Middleton Junction's First German Lutheran Church. Brs. A.A. Rowley and A.B. Kingsley helped organize and finance two churches in Middleton Station – a Presbyterian church and a joint Baptist/Methodist Church. Far from shadowy, Middleton's Freemasons were among the community's most visible figures.

Freemasonry prospered following the Civil War. No longer viewed with suspicion, Masonic lodges were a source of civic pride.

After the church and school, the Masonic lodge was often the most important institution established in a new town. Those lodges provided the stability and legitimacy for towns that were hoping to attract a railroad and other industries and to be awarded the county seat, a land grant college or other government benefits.¹³

Middleton No. 180's planning minutes are lost, though some details can be reconstructed. Local Freemasons obtained a tentative meeting space in early 1869. They probably submitted their petition to form a lodge to the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin around this same time. Contrary to what has been written elsewhere, Middleton No. 180's first "quarters" were not located above the

¹² In 1873, eight of the ten men listed in the "Middleton Business Directory," published as part of the Atlas of Dane County, Wisconsin (Madison, WI, 1873) 49, were Freemasons. These men included: James M. Bull, Attorney and Counselor-at-Law; A.A. Rowley, Physician and Surgeon; J.B. Colton, Hotel Keeper; Richard Green, General Produce Dealer; John Green, Dealer in Dry Goods; A.B. Kingsley, Proprietor of Steam Planing Mill; R.E. Davis, Farmer and Proprietor of Vinegar Distillery.

¹³ Mark A. Tabbert, American Freemasons: Three Centuries of Building Communities (New York: New York University Press, 2005) 89.

“Davis General Store.” Br. Davis did not even open his store until 1879. Instead, they were located in a building owned by Br. John Green.

Lodge records do not indicate who John Green was or where his building was located. According to the U.S. Census Report for 1870, there were two John Greens living in Middleton (Middleton Station). One, John W. Green, was a twenty-three year old clerk who owned no real estate or notable personal property. The other was a thirty-six year old “merchant”, who resided in town with his two young children. This John Green owned and operated a general store, the rooms above which must have served as Middleton’s first Masonic meeting place. The “J. Green and Co. Store” was located at the northwest corner of Hubbard and Parmenter Streets. Its building still stands today.

Middleton No. 180 received its temporary permission to form - known as a “dispensation” - on January 19, 1870. A little over a week later, the lodge convened its first regular meeting on January 27, a Thursday evening. Most members were transferees from Madison No. 5. These were James M. Bull, Hiram P. Rider, Elisha Bailey, W.J. Taylor, Charles Klauber, Richard Green, William A. Wheeler, J.B. Colton, Frank Gault, Eli Harding, A.B. Kingsley, N.C. Rowley, and A.A. Rowley. The lodge’s first Worshipful Master, Mansfield Arries, and C.R. Chipman came from Lodi Valley Lodge No. 99. The prior Masonic affiliations of R.E. Davis, Samuel Barber, and John Green are not known. Other regular attendees included John Prien, Fritz Elver, Fred Kohn, and James Dohr. They were all members of Concordia No. 83, a nearby German-language

lodge working in the French Rite of Freemasonry. Within a year, however, John Prien and Fred Kohn transferred their memberships to Middleton No. 180.

One of Middleton No. 180's first tasks was to prepare a set of bylaws. The lodge completed this work on February 10, 1870.¹⁴ Regular meetings were set on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month. The meeting time was either 7:30 p.m. between October 1 and April 1, or 8:00 p.m. between April 1 and October 1. Petitioners were required to pay a five dollar application fee (this amount was refunded if the applicant was denied admission), \$5.00 for conferral of the Entered Apprentice degree, and \$10.00 each for conferral of the Fellowcraft and Master Mason degrees. In addition, annual dues were \$2.30 per year. Of this amount, \$.60 was set aside for Masonic charity and \$.30 for the Grand Lodge's *per capita* assessment.

The Grand Lodge of Wisconsin issued a "charter" to Middleton No. 180 on June 14, 1870. Up until this point, the lodge had been operating on something like a trial basis. The charter formally established Middleton No. 180 as part of Wisconsin's Masonic community. One month later, on July 5, Past Deputy Grand Master David Wright conducted the lodge's first dedication and officer installation ceremonies. The event was styled a "Grand Lodge" meeting, though it appears to have been a simple affair. According to the minutes, only members

¹⁴ The bylaws, it must be noted, were beautifully copied by hand into the lodge's minute book by Br. William A. Wheeler, Secretary, *pro tem*.

of Middleton Lodge No. 180, Br. Wright, and three other visiting Freemasons attended.

Though small, Middleton No. 180 was active and its meetings well-attended. Br. Jeff Engel was the lodge's first petitioner and recipient of all three Masonic degrees. Br. Engel was "initiated" an Entered Apprentice on March 15, 1870. He was subsequently "passed" to Fellowcraft on April 4 and "raised" to Master Mason on May 5 that same year. The lodge often considered important business matters. Visits and assistance were arranged for sick, destitute, or dying Masons and their family members.¹⁵ The lodge also reviewed charitable appeals. One disbursement, authorized on October 17, 1871, was for "suffering" Masons in the "northeast" part of the Wisconsin.¹⁶ Another, on July 2, 1878, was for a Freemason at Mineral Point who had lost all his property to a "destructive tornado". Still another, also in 1878, was for the benefit of yellow-fever sufferers in the "South".¹⁷ At a time when Middleton had no bank, Middleton No. 180 approved interest bearing loans for its members. Sometimes there was an educational component to the meetings, though more frequently matters were wrapped up quickly so that a light meal could be enjoyed. Masons from as far away as New York and Pennsylvania are noted as visiting the lodge. On more

¹⁵ If requested, members would actually take turns sitting at a dying brother's bedside.

¹⁶ This was no doubt in response to the "Peshtigo Fire" which had occurred the preceding week. Wisconsin Masonic organizations raised \$7,000.00 for this cause, while an additional \$4,000.00 was raised by other Masonic grand lodge jurisdictions.

¹⁷ The 1878 yellow-fever epidemic claimed 13,000 lives in the lower Mississippi River Valley.

festive evenings, members enjoyed formal dinners – such as an annual “oyster stew” – and dances that were arranged for wives and family members.

Middleton’s first public Masonic ceremony took place on September 15, 1871. The occasion was Br. N. C. Rowley’s funeral. Freemasons from the surrounding area gathered at Middleton No. 180’s lodge room, where a special meeting was convened. Pallbearers were drawn from Middleton No. 180, the Chapter of Royal Arch Masons, and the Commandery of Knights Templar. The assembly proceeded first to Dr. Rowley’s home, where the body was collected, and then to a local church. Following a religious service, the funeral procession continued to Middleton Junction Cemetery, where Dr. Rowley was laid to rest with full Masonic honors. Dr. Rowley was particularly esteemed by Middleton’s Freemasons. Middleton No. 180 published a tribute to Dr. Rowley in the local Madison and Black Earth newspapers. The lodge even purchased a photograph of Dr. Rowley which, for many years, hung in its meeting room.

Middleton No. 180 enjoyed its quarters above Br. Green’s store. The lodge acquired books and other items necessary for its operation. It even hired a cleaning lady, Mrs. Gavin, to keep its rooms in order. But the rent was expensive, and the lodge never intended to remain at this location. In January 1872, Middleton No. 180 moved into Odd Fellows Hall, formerly located on the southeast corner of Parmenter and Slaughter (now Elmwood) Streets. The location had much to commend it. Just across the street and up a few doors from

Br. Green's store, Odd Fellows Hall had an attractive meeting space. According to a description published in 1880:

The lodge owns the lot and large frame building on same, the upper story of which is used for their lodge room, and which is also rented from them by the Freemasons and Encampment. The lower story is used for a store, by Davis Bros. The value of lodge property is \$1,500. The lodge room is very neatly furnished, and the order has regalia costing \$300.00.¹⁸

The Freemasons and Odd Fellows also shared several members. Middleton Lodge No. 158, Independent Order of Odd Fellows ("I.O.O.F"), was chartered in 1869.¹⁹ Dual members included R.E. Davis, John Prien, George Murray, C.R. Chipman, Dr. Sumner Curtis Coolidge, Jeff Engel, Charles Klauber, and the late Dr. N.C. Rowley. Most important, however, must have been the rent. Middleton No. 180 had been paying Br. Green \$80.00 a year in rent. Sharing space with the Odd Fellows reduced this expense to just \$24.00 a year.

Middleton No. 180's only Masonic trial was held on February 27, 1877. Br. George Murray was among Middleton No. 180's first petitioners. He was a well-known businessman and community member. He was also lodge Secretary for 1875 and 1876. Around August 31, 1876, George Murray disappeared from Middleton. His reasons for leaving were soon discovered. First, Br. Murray was

¹⁸ History of Dane County Wisconsin containing an account of its settlement, growth, development and resources; an extensive and minute sketch of its cities, towns and villages-their improvements, industries, manufactories, churches, schools and societies; its war record, biographical sketches, portraits of prominent men and early settlers; the whole preceded by a history of Wisconsin, statistics of the state, and an abstract of its laws and constitution and of the constitution of the United States (Chicago, 1880) 907.

¹⁹ The I.O.O.F. has much in common with the Masons. It began as an English "friendly society" in the late 1700s.

accused of fraudulently obtaining \$200.00 in business loans from Br. J.B. Colton. Second, it was alleged that Br. Murray had embezzled an additional \$15.00 from the lodge.

Br. Colton testified that on both August 25 and 29, 1876, he loaned Br. Murray \$100.00 to discharge certain debts. Br. H.P. Rider, as Trustee, then testified that a review of the lodge's books indicated that George Murray owed the lodge \$15.00, though there was some question concerning the accuracy of Middleton No. 180's bookkeeping. Br. Elisha Bailey, the lodge's Treasurer, could not confirm the amount alleged to have been embezzled.

George Murray was found guilty of both charges and expelled from the lodge. Middleton No. 180 sent notice of its judgment to the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin for publication. Though restitution was unlikely to follow, this action would, presumably, have precluded George Murray from joining another Masonic lodge or using his Masonic knowledge for improper purposes.

Freemasonry in Middleton continued to grow and develop with the town. By 1880, the number of German-Americans living in Middleton began to overtake, and would soon exceed, the number of "Old Yankees." This trend was also occurring at Middleton No. 180, where German surnames were becoming more common in the membership roster. Unfortunately, the lodge minutes for June 17, 1879 to April 6, 1897 are missing. It would be interesting to know what impact, if any, this demographic change had on the lodge.

Much of downtown Middleton was destroyed by fire in 1900, including Odd Fellows Hall. On June 19, around 6:30 p.m., a fire broke out at the Hoffman Mill.²⁰ This building was located on Slaughter Street (now Elmwood), just east of Parmenter Street. The fire quickly spread out of control and nineteen buildings were destroyed. According to the Middleton Times-Herald, the “Masonic order” suffered losses totaling \$16,000.00, \$8,000.00 of which was insured. Only Mrs. K. Gerds’ uninsured losses, which totaled \$16,000.00, and Brum & Brum & Co.’s reputedly well-insured losses, which totaled \$17,000.00, were the same or higher. But Middleton No. 180 did not own Odd Fellows Hall, nor is it likely that the lodge lost more than nominal furnishings or regalia to the fire.²¹ Therefore, the newspaper’s numbers, if they are accurate, must instead be losses attributable to the Odd Fellows, who were not mentioned in the article.

Middleton immediately began its rebuilding effort. Middleton No. 180 met only once between June and November 1900. This meeting took place in “Woodmen Hall”, the regular meeting place for Modern Woodmen of America Camp No. 2177.²² Later, on December 4, the lodge held its annual election at this location. The minutes for these two meetings are curiously silent about the fire or its impact on local Freemasons. The only indirect reference to the event is the lodge’s plan to purchase new furnishings.

²⁰ This was a regularly scheduled meeting night for Middleton No. 180.

²¹ In fact, Middleton-Ionic No. 180 still has its alter bible, minute books, and petitions from this period, leaving one to assume that someone had time to rescue these, and perhaps other items, from the fire.

²² The “M.W.A.” was a local fraternity and insurance organization that shared members with Middleton Lodge No. 180. It was chartered on March 6, 1894. Its first officers were W.F. Pierstorff, W.J. Manning, and E.V. Williams. Woodmen Hall’s former location is not known.

Odd Fellows Hall was reconstructed on its former site. Middleton No. 180 reconvened there on St. John the Evangelist's Day, December 27, 1900. It was a "special meeting", called for the purpose of installing new lodge officers for 1901. The mood must have been festive. Past Master Henry F. Prien gave a "neat little speech" concerning the destruction of "our Old Hall" and on "the first meeting in the New Hall and a compliment to the officers in procuring the new fixture(s) for (the) Hall..." The lodge officers were further instructed to "bind the Holy Bible in Plush to match the New Alter." On January 15, 1901, Middleton No. 180 approved a \$500.00 loan to the Odd Fellows, presumably to assist with their rebuilding costs.

One reason that Middleton's fire had been so destructive was the town's lack of a well-equipped fire department. The Middleton Times-Herald issued an appeal for "...20 or more of our vigorous young men (to) organize a hook and ladder company with a small hand engine and plenty of ladders, 'long enough'."²³ On February 4, 1901, a meeting was held at August Schroeder's Hall to discuss re-organizing Middleton Fire Co. No. 1. Among those leading this effort were Brs. W.H. Pierstorff and Otto H. Burmeister. On April 18, 1901, when the new fire company's officers were elected, Middleton No. 180 was conspicuously well-represented. Six out of nine were local Freemasons. H.F. Prien was elected Chief, W.S. Green, Marshall, W.H. Pierstorff, Treasurer, Otto

²³ Jacobs, Middleton Centennial Book, 9-10.

H. Burmeister, Foreman, G.B. Pierstorff, Assistant Foreman, and W.F. Pierstorff, one of three Trustees.

1901 to 1950

Masonic life at Odd Fellows Hall soon returned to normal. The members continued to enjoy the lodge's many social opportunities, including post-meeting meals at neighboring hotels. Middleton No. 180 also resumed its many charitable and benevolent activities. By early 1909, however, the lodge was ready to engage in a new project - building its own "temple".

Many Wisconsin communities already possessed a Masonic Temple. Indeed, Middleton No. 180 had donated money for, or helped to finance, several of these structures. On March 2, 1909, the lodge appointed a three-member building committee. This committee was charged with two tasks. First, it was to locate a potential building site. Second, it had to determine how much a two-storied Masonic Temple, with a public hall and lodge room, would cost. The building committee reported its findings on May 4. While there is no mention of where the building would be located, the estimated project cost was \$6,500.00. This figure exceeded lodge expectations and the project was, for the time, voted down.

Middleton No. 180 held its annual officer installation ceremony and dinner on December 27, 1909. Fifty-one people took part in the celebration. No doubt there was still considerable talk about building a Masonic Temple. An informal building committee was reconvened sometime in 1910. On December 6,

it presented a new plan to the membership. Rather than build a temple, Middleton No. 180 would purchase and relocate the old grade school on Terrace Avenue for use as a Masonic Temple. The lodge conditionally approved the plan on December 20, so long as its final offer did not exceed \$1,200.00.

Br. W.F. Pierstorff bought the building in early February, 1911, on the lodge's behalf. The agreed price was \$1,168.00. On February 21, the lodge voted to purchase "Mrs. Techam's Lot" for \$900.00.²⁴ With the building and construction site in hand, the remaining details, including financing, soon fell into place. By early March, 1911, relocation and remodeling of Middleton's first Masonic Temple was ready to begin.

Brs. H.F. Prien and W.S. Green supervised the work. A new foundation and cement-block cellar were prepared at the lot. The school house was then moved to its new location and modified into a workable lodge space. By early November, Middleton's first Masonic Temple was complete. It was officially dedicated on November 7, 1911. Invitees included Wisconsin's Governor Francis E. McGovern, the two Madison lodges, Mazomanie Lodge, Black Earth Lodge, Verona Lodge, the Order of the Eastern Star, wives and family.²⁵ Past Grand Master William H. Perry presided over the ceremony. Br. John Prien, being the lodge's oldest member in both age and service, was presented with a special arm-chair. The evening concluded with a banquet and music performed by a

²⁴ This lot was located on Hubbard Avenue and is the present site of Middleton's City Hall.

²⁵ It does not appear that Gov. McGovern attended the ceremony. The "Order of the Eastern Star" refers to Melody Chapter No. 150, Order of the Eastern Star ("O.E.S."). This affiliated Masonic organization was created in 1855 and has female members. Middleton's chapter was organized in 1904.

hired orchestra. It has been reported that the total cost of Middleton's first Masonic Temple was approximately \$2,500.00. From a finance report submitted on December 5, 1911, however, it seems that the true figure was \$5,390.81.

Few notable events occurred between 1911 and 1918. Middleton No. 180 experienced its first membership jump in 1911. Total members increased from thirty-seven to fifty master masons. Charitable giving continued to be important. On November 17, 1914, Middleton No. 180 donated its entire charity fund for distribution to flood victims in Ohio and Indiana. One sad occurrence was the death of Br. William Stekelberg. Br. "Willie" Stekelberg was killed during combat in France on January 26, 1917. Br. Stekelberg's picture still hangs at the lodge, though his memorial plaque, which had been placed on the first Temple's grounds, has been lost.

On March 18, 1919, Middleton No. 180 agreed to sell its building and grounds to the Village of Middleton. The sale price was \$5,000.00. Middleton's first Masonic Temple soon became the town's first Village Hall. The lodge bought Middleton's old high school, formerly located at the corner of Middleton and Franklin Streets, for use as its new temple. It obtained the property for \$2,000.00, though \$812.00 was later recovered by selling two unneeded lot sections.

Middleton No. 180 dedicated its second “Temple of Freemasonry” on July 27, 1920.²⁶ Grand Master Charles E. Schaffer , an honorary member of Middleton Lodge No. 180, conducted the ceremony. Past Grand Master John H. Corscot, however, may have provided some of the more interesting comments that evening. Identified in the minutes as “Br. John Corscott”, Br. Corscot claimed to have been present when Middleton No. 180 received its charter in 1870. The minutes for that earlier occasion, however, do not record his name. Whatever the truth, it seems to have been a pleasurable day for the lodge and its many guests.

The 1920s and 30s were very social years for Middleton Lodge No. 180. Indeed, lodge membership, which totaled 57 master masons in 1919, more than doubled to 139 by 1939. Members enjoyed regular picnics, father-son banquets, and dances. Its officer installation ceremonies were also more elaborate. Held jointly with Melody Chapter No. 150, Order of the Eastern Star, these programs included both a dinner and a full evening’s entertainment. For example, on December 28, 1925, Br. R. Divail and his orchestra kept guests dancing “until midnight” at the lodge. During the years 1937 to 1939, the lodge hosted “euchre” parties, film nights, hired music, skits and performances.²⁷ A nice description of this activity is recorded in the minutes for December 6, 1938:

Lodge was closed in due and ancient form. The program consisted of singing by those present, instrumental selections by some of our

²⁶ An interesting feature of the building was that the lodge room’s “East” was actually situated in the north part of the building.

²⁷ “Euchre” being a popular card game.

gifted members and visitors, a recitation by Bro. Williams, clowning by Brother Atkins and an instructive and highly entertaining talk by our guest speaker Rev. Ernest Barber. Brother Barber talked of his Masonic experiences in Massachusetts & Idaho and gave us a colorful account of Free Masonry as it exists in England.

Br. Atkins appears to have been quite a character. Just two weeks later, on December 27, Brs. Atkins and Burmeister are reported to have entertained the lodge with certain “hair-raising” acrobatics.²⁸ Lodge members and invited guests enjoyed a particularly memorable night on October 2, 1937. Worshipful Master Wesley J. Burmeister hosted a 150th “birthday” celebration for the U.S. Constitution. The key-note speaker was recently appointed U.S. Supreme Court Justice Hugo L. Black. Hugo Black, a fellow Freemason, advocated a “literal” reading of the Constitution. His comments that evening, perhaps foreshadowing his later rulings, were no doubt very interesting.

The Masonic Service Association of America spearheaded American Freemasonry’s response to World War II.²⁹ As one of its missions, the M.S.A. established forty centers near military camps, providing America’s armed forces with welfare services, entertainment, and comfort.³⁰ Wisconsin Freemasons donated \$26,563.00 to the M.S.A. in 1942. In 1943, the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin required that all Wisconsin Masons, approximately 51,000 in number, pay a \$1.00 assessment to support local Masonic Service Centers. During the M.S.A.’s 1943-

²⁸ This was probably Wesley J. Burmeister, though Otto H. Burmeister was also present that evening.

²⁹ The M.S.A. was established in 1919. Its four basic functions are: (1) Education/Publications; (2) Veterans Administration Hospital Visitation; (3) Disaster Relief; (4) Public/Media Relations.

³⁰ Locally, a “Masonic Service Center” was operated out of Madison’s downtown Masonic Center.

1944 "Special Gifts Campaign", Wisconsin's Masonic organizations raised an additional \$116,000.00 in support. In 1944, the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin established its own "War Relief and Rehabilitation Program". During 1944 and 1945, all Wisconsin lodges paid an additional two dollar *per capita* assessment, the proceeds of which were used to extend the life of Wisconsin's Masonic Service Centers and for "rehabilitation purposes among Masons, widows of Masons, and sons and daughters of Masons, who have served or are serving in the armed forces of the United States."³¹

One Middleton Freemason made his own contribution to the peace. Col. Ralph Schuetz, with the aid and support of Melody Chapter No. 150, O.E.S., arranged for Middleton No. 180 to ship clothing to needy persons in Germany. Br. Schuetz was also active in reestablishing Freemasonry in Germany and Japan, where the Fraternity had been banned and Freemasons were persecuted during the war.³²

Middleton No. 180 celebrated its "Diamond Jubilee" on June 16, 1945. In honor of its 75th birthday, Worshipful Master E.L. Nichols organized a special program at the Middleton High School auditorium. The evening consisted of an address by Past Grand Master David O. Stine, vocal numbers by the Zor Shrine Chanters, and a lecture on the lodge's history by Br. Henry Prien, who had been a master mason at Middleton No. 180 for more than sixty years. Approximately

³¹ Allan E. Iding, ed., Forward Freemasonry, vol. 1 (Dousman, WI: Grand Lodge of Wisconsin, F. & A.M., 1996) 341.

³² Br. Schuetz later carried on his charitable work in South Korea, directing relief to that nation's children.

two hundred people attended the event, including Freemasons from as far away as Chicago and Cincinnati.

1951 - 1998

Middleton No. 180 experienced rapid growth following World War II. In 1944, there were one hundred and forty-six master masons on its rolls. By 1958, that number had peaked at two hundred and twenty-six. Notwithstanding this degree work, life at the lodge continued much as it always had. In 1952, Middleton No. 180 established a special charity fund to support local philanthropic projects. In 1954, members were having fun by conferring mock Masonic degrees on each other. Known as the "Spoon, Knife, and Fork Club", the recipients of this "honor" were charged with organizing the light meals served after lodge meetings. The first holder of the "Fork" was Br. George W. Johnson, who was invested with his emblem of office on October 19 with all, "...appropriate honors due him as being wearer of the Fork."³³ In 1955, Grand Master Harry A. Speich requested that each lodge appoint an "historian". Br. Frank A. Rentz was duly equipped with a loose-leaf binder, a subscription to the Middleton Times Tribune, and a directive to collect any news items or other materials that might be of historic value to the lodge.

Middleton No. 180 did face one serious challenge at this time - its building. By 1950, Middleton's second Masonic Temple was showing serious signs of wear. The building was being used not only by the lodge, but by other

³³ The "Fork" was conferred with more or less regularity through 1955.


community organizations as well. For example, Middleton School District used the temple for band practices and to house elementary school children pending completion of the Sauk Trail Elementary School. Middleton No. 180 held several fund drives and purchased two adjacent lots, in 1959, as a building site. Its plans for a new temple, however, stalled.

On June 16, 1964, Middleton No. 180 appointed a new, nine member committee to revive its building program. The minutes do not record how often this committee met or what alternatives it explored. On February 1, 1966, the members voted to construct a new temple. It was to have been built at 7510 Century Avenue, but the lodge could not obtain a necessary variance. After further discussions with the City of Middleton, including a showing of neighborhood support, the lodge received permission on December 7, 1966, to use its existing property as a building site.

Middleton No. 180 broke ground with a golden shovel on June 7, 1968. On August 3, Grand Master Perry A. Risberg presided over the cornerstone ceremony.³⁴ Almost every member of the Grand Lodge was present, together with Past Grand Masters Doyn Inman and Ingvald Hembre. The ceremony began at 4:30 p.m. Br. Ernie Wisco, the lodge's Chaplain, opened the occasion with a prayer. Next, several items were deposited into a steel box for placement

³⁴ Masonic cornerstone ceremonies were once common in the United States. Communities took great pride in having Freemasons inaugurate construction of important public buildings. The U.S. Capital, the U.S. Supreme Court, the White House, the Smithsonian Institute, the Washington National Monument, and the National Cathedral are just a few of the prominent buildings that were commenced in this way.

in the cornerstone.³⁵ The cornerstone was set in place with the following inscription:

MIDDLETON LODGE
NO 180  F. & A.M.
AUGUST 3, AD 1968 AL 5968
PERRY A. RISBERG GRAND MASTER

Grand Master Risberg symbolically confirmed that the cornerstone was square, level, and plumb. He poured a small amount of corn, oil, and wine on top of it. Grand Master Risberg then concluded the ceremony with a benediction. All present adjourned for a turkey dinner planned by the Eastern Star and served by Rainbow Girls Assembly No. 20.³⁶ The dinner was held in Middleton's City Hall Community Center. Two-hundred and twenty-eight people attended the banquet, including local dignitary Mayor Walter Bauman. A musical performance by the "Chieftones", an all Native-American band from Canada, followed the meal.

By December 1968, Middleton's third Masonic Temple was ready for occupancy.³⁷ The lodge held its first meeting there on December 3. It was an election night and a special oyster stew was served following the meeting.

³⁵ These included: a list of Middleton No. 180's officers; a list of Middleton No. 180's members; a list of Grand Lodge officers; a 1963 Wisconsin Masonic Monitor; a copy of the July Wisconsin Masonic Journal; a copy of the Middleton Times Tribune with the ceremony's announcement; a list of Melody No. 150, Order of the Easter Star's officers and members, a list of Rainbow Girls Assembly No. 20's officers and members; photographs of Middleton second Masonic Temple and lodge room; a copy of Middleton No. 180's charter; copies of the ceremony's Invitation and Program; a set of miniature ivory Masonic working tools, a set of the new temple's building plans; a copy of the Masonic burial service prepared for the occasion by Br. Ernie Wisco.

³⁶ The Order of Rainbow for Girls is an affiliated Masonic youth organization. It was founded in 1922.

³⁷ There was actually quite a lot of finishing work left to be completed, much of which was performed by the members. The lodge, however, did not wish to incur the expense of heating two buildings during the winter.

Shortly thereafter, the old Masonic Temple was demolished to make space for a parking lot.

Past Grand Master Donald E. Krueger dedicated the new temple building on May 17, 1970. Almost the entire Grand Lodge was present. Two other events occurring around this time should be mentioned. On April 21, 1970, Middleton No. 180 became the sponsor of the Ernie Wilco Chapter, Order of DeMolay.³⁸ On December 27, 1975, the lodge reinstated the office of "Organist."³⁹ Br. Fred Bittner served in this role from 1976 to 1980. The post was subsequently filled by Br. Francis Jacobs in 1984. In 1996, this office was discontinued due to Br. Jacobs' declining health.

The 1980s found American Freemasonry in a difficult situation. National membership had been declining for some time. Between 1965 and 1980, the fraternity lost more than twenty percent of its members. This trend was also experienced at Middleton No. 180, though the lodge did attract new members and engage in a variety of social and civic-minded activities.

Middleton No. 180 continued to hold regular movie nights, lectures, card nights, dances, and family gatherings. One of the lodge's most popular annual events, its "pig roast" fundraiser or "Pigger", was first held on June 25, 1983.⁴⁰ On August 25, 1984, Worshipful Master Donald Asplin presided over a mortgage

³⁸ DeMolay is an affiliated Masonic youth organization for boys. It was founded in 1919.

³⁹ The position had been held only once before, in 1950, by Br. LaVern C. Lubcke.

⁴⁰ In 1994 and 1995, the "Pigger" was promoted with free radio and T.V. spots.

burning ceremony and celebration, the lodge having retired its building debt.⁴¹ During the late 1980s and early 1990s, Middleton No. 180 observed “Square and Compass Week”. Members made a point of wearing this emblem on their clothing and held an “open house” night for the public.⁴² Other activities included Middleton No. 180’s “slow pitch” softball team in 1993 and mixers with the local Knights of Columbus, a Catholic fraternal organization. In 1995 and 1996, the lodge participated in the City of Middleton’s “Good Neighbor Parade”. For these events, the lodge sponsored a tractor-pulled float and two marching units composed of Masons, the Eastern Star, Job’s Daughters, Rainbow Girls, and DeMolay.⁴³

During the 1980s and 1990s, Middleton No. 180 provided financial assistance to many worthy causes. Perhaps its most visible charity was its college scholarship award. It had become a lodge tradition to present one graduating student at Middleton High School with a \$500.00 check. In 1993, the award was increased to \$1,000.00. Renamed the “Raemisch Family Memorial Scholarship”, it is now administered through a program offered by the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin.⁴⁴

⁴¹ In 1970, the mortgage debt was \$35,000.00. Past Master Harold Wells had the honor of destroying the document, though many thanks were also due to Melody Chapter No. 150, O.E.S., which provided generous support in liquidating the amount owed on the building.

⁴² The open house was frequently used to honor local community members. In 1988, the lodge recognized Fr. Mack, a longtime priest at St. Bernard’s Catholic Church. In 1992, it was Gary Simpson, founder of M.O.M. (Middleton Outreach Ministry)’s Pantry, a local food bank.

⁴³ Job’s Daughters is another affiliated Masonic youth organization.

⁴⁴ Irene Raemisch, the principal donor, provided the \$10,000 seed money necessary to create this “perpetual” scholarship.

Middleton No. 180 earned two Masonic distinctions during the 1990s. On September 6, 1990, several members of Madison's Capital No. 2, Prince Hall Masons, visited the lodge.⁴⁵ Until that evening, members of the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin, F. & A.M. and Prince Hall traditions had never sat together in a "tiled" meeting.⁴⁶ According to the minutes, the lodge gave its Prince Hall brothers a "hearty welcome". More than thirty people enjoyed a bratwurst dinner before the meeting. Later, these guests were able to witness Br. Daniel Felland's Master Mason degree conferral. In June 1991, the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin held its 147th Annual Communication in Middleton. The event took place at the Holiday Inn West's convention center. On June 10, Br. Benjamin F. Detroy, a Past Master of Middleton No. 180, was installed as Grand Master of Masons in Wisconsin.

⁴⁵ Prince Hall Masonry traces its origin to March 6, 1775, when a man named Prince Hall and fourteen other free African-Americans were initiated by Lodge No. 441, operating under the Irish Constitution. This lodge was attached to the 38th Regiment of Foot of the British Army, garrisoned at Castle Williams, Boston Harbor. These men later formed their own lodge, known as African No. 1. Following the American Revolution, Prince Hall, after being rebuffed by the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, petitioned the Grand Lodge of England for a charter. His request was granted on September 29, 1784, renaming the lodge African No. 459. After Prince Hall's death, Freemasons in this tradition formed the "Prince Hall Grand Lodge" to honor their founder.

⁴⁶ A "tiled" meeting is one that is closed to non-Masons or Masons belonging to unrecognized Masonic traditions. Prince Hall Masonry came to Wisconsin in 1878. On June 11, 1990, the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin passed a resolution "recognizing" the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Wisconsin. One week later, the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Wisconsin voted to "recognize" the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin. There are many reasons "why" this authentic Masonic tradition developed apart from "regular" American Freemasonry. There are also many reasons "why" it took so long for the two organizations in Wisconsin to reconcile. It is now generally agreed, however, that racism was an underlying factor. Br. Benjamin F. Detroy, a member of Middleton No. 180, chaired the Grand Lodge subcommittee recommending recognition of Prince Hall Masonry.

Ionic Lodge No. 352

Brs. John H. Bier and Abraham J. Gast are credited as being Ionic No. 352's first promoters. Sometime in 1953, they pitched their idea for a Madison-area sojourner's lodge.⁴⁷ The concept was not new. Commonwealth No. 325, also located in Madison, had been chartered in 1922 for that very purpose. Grand Master Robert H. Gollmar, however, expressed concern about the proposal. He did not believe that there was sufficient interest or support in Madison to form such a lodge. As a result, the idea was initially dropped.

Two years passed without further action or discussion. Then, sometime in 1955, Br. Bier received a letter from Grand Master Harry A. Speich. The Grand Master wished to know if there was still interest in creating a new lodge in Madison. A planning meeting was held on November 4 at the Park Hotel. Those present included Brs. John H. Bier, Amos Wallen, Abraham J. Gast, Hoyt Oswald, George Stewart, and John E. Johnson. A second meeting took place on January 12, 1956. Br. Johnson was selected as temporary chairman and Br. Bier as secretary. The purpose of this meeting was two-fold. The planning committee needed at least twenty-five signatures to start a lodge. It also needed to find a suitable meeting place. Madison's downtown Masonic Temple, it seems, was unable to accommodate a new lodge.

⁴⁷ "Sojourners" are Freemasons who reside away from their home lodges and are not otherwise active in their present Masonic community.

The planning committee held additional meetings in February and March 1956. It obtained a lease on the Knights of Pythias Hall, formerly located at 829 Mound St., for Friday-night meetings.⁴⁸ Temporary lodge officers were elected on February 17, 1956. John E. Johnson (Eau Claire No. 112) was elected as Worshipful Master, John M. Hutchison (Philbrook No. 659, Davenport, Iowa) was elected as Senior Warden, Hoyt R. Oswald (Eau Claire No. 112) was elected as Junior Warden, Ross Richardson (Crandon No. 287) was elected as Treasurer, and John H. Bier (Masonic affiliation unknown) was elected as Tiler. On March 16, the brothers chose the name "Ionic" for their lodge (other suggestions had been "Silvercord", "Mosaic", "Pyramid", and "Eternal"). More importantly, the planning committee set March 30, 1956, as the date to close its membership list for submission to the Grand Lodge.

Ionic No. 352 had sixty-one charter members. Its list included not only Freemasons from Wisconsin, but from Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, and South Dakota. The planning committee met one last time, on April 6, 1956, to appoint Br. Keith E. McKenzie (Barneveld No. 319) to replace Br. Bier as Secretary. It seems that Br. Bier, for reasons unknown, found it necessary to withdraw his name from the charter petition.

The lodge received its dispensation on June 12, 1956, at the Grand Lodge Annual Communication. Ionic No. 352's first regular meeting was held on June

⁴⁸ The Knights of Pythias were founded in 1864. The fraternity was promoted as a means of uniting the country following the Civil War.

22, 1956. Thirty-five members attended. The brothers resolved two important business matters that night. First, they elected new officers for installation after the lodge was chartered. Second, they set their meeting nights as the 2nd and 4th Fridays of each month.

Ionic No. 352 received its charter on September 13, 1957. Regrettably, the minutes contain only a few details about this important day. A festive, pre-lodge banquet was held at the Edgewater Hotel. Later, Grand Master Alf E. Anderson installed the lodge's first elected officers.

From the start, Ionic No. 352 was very well organized. It had numerous committees steering its operation. Moreover, most meetings had a petition to review or a degree to confer. Ionic No. 352 initiated its first Entered Apprentices, Brs. Herman Marty and Ben Sweet, on September 21, 1956. Br. Marty went on to be the first Master Mason raised by the lodge on March 8, 1957. To mark the event, Br. Marty not only received his Masonic apron and a bible, he was given a hand-tooled billfold, made especially for him by Br. Cater Martin, as an additional fraternal token.

Membership grew rapidly. By October 28, 1960, Ionic No. 352 had raised its one hundredth member. Several factors contributed to this success. Many members were state employees who traveled during the week. They welcomed the lodge's Friday-night meeting schedule. Ionic No. 352 was also very social. It had three annual events. These were the St. Valentine's Day/ Sweetheart dinner and dance, a pancake breakfast fundraiser, and a lodge picnic. There were "table

lodges” and “Worshipful Master Night”.⁴⁹ Films, slide shows, and talks were offered. Perhaps most important, however, were the simple meals and conversation that followed lodge meetings.

In June 1958, Ionic No. 352 learned that its lease with the Pythians would soon end. The City of Madison had plans to redevelop this area.⁵⁰ Many local buildings were to be demolished, including the Knights of Pythias Hall.

The lodge considered various options for its housing problem. It even considered building a temple somewhere in the City of Monona. In January 1960, the members learned that the Odd Fellows Hall, located at 3822 Mineral Point Road, was available.⁵¹ Ionic No. 352 scheduled its annual St. Valentine’s Day party with the Odd Fellows to test the facilities. A vote approving the move was held on February 24, though the lodge did not actually relocate to this building until June 3.

Ionic No. 352’s first regular meeting at Odd Fellows Hall took place on June 9, 1960. The members were clearly pleased. Some even made items to decorate the lodge room. One offering was an ornate wooden kneeler complete with inlaid Masonic designs. Another was an American flag and standard. The minutes also record the pleasure felt by newly raised Master Masons – particularly with the lodge’s ceremony and fellowship.

⁴⁹ A “table lodge” is a special meeting conducted over a meal. It is usually enjoyed with numerous ritual toasts. On “Worshipful Master Night”, the Worshipful Master shared his life story with the members.

⁵⁰ The result of this urban renewal project is the “Triangle Park” section of Madison’s “Green Bush” neighborhood, just opposite Meriter Hospital.

⁵¹ The building was owned by Hope Lodge No. 17, I.O.O.F.

By 1966, Ionic No. 352 was ready to find a new meeting place. Despite initial enthusiasm, Odd Fellows Hall was proving to be a bit too small and ill-configured for some lodge functions. In early January, Middleton No. 180 invited the lodge to join its new temple project. Several meetings followed. Ionic No. 352, however, ultimately declined the offer. Its members' ties to Madison's "west side" were stronger than their desire to find a new meeting space. The lodge resumed its building search, though the Middleton "option" was never really abandoned. On the contrary, it was regularly reconsidered throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Ionic No. 352 even used Middleton No. 180's temple on June 26, 1970 for one of its regular meetings.

In 1969, Ionic No. 352 considered buying Madison's 2nd Christian Science Church. In 1971, a church building "on Spooner Street" was investigated as a likely site. Finally, the lodge even toyed with purchasing and remodeling Odd Fellows Hall. Despite numerous concerns, the lodge made an informal, "lowball" offer in February 1976. Not surprisingly, it was rejected and negotiations ceased.

The lodge conducted a poll in June 1976. The ballot presented four options: 1) continue renting from the Odd Fellows; 2) enter into a use agreement with Middleton No. 180; 3) enter into a use agreement with Verona No. 249; 4) enter into a use agreement with the Madison Masonic Center. The fourth option was the most cost-effective and probably decided the matter. The members voted to move to downtown Madison on September 2. The relocation date was

set for January 1, 1977 and the regular meeting nights changed to the 2nd and 4th Thursdays of each month, excluding July and August when no meeting would be held.

The 1970s and 80s were busy years for Ionic No. 352. Not only did it hold its customary events, including elaborate joint-installation ceremonies and dinners with its brother Madison lodges, it offered many other educational, social and civic activities as well. During “Officer Education Night,” all officers in the “line” moved up a “chair” to practice opening and closing a meeting. There were “Friends Nights,” “Birthday Nights” and outings to local events. Members attempted to “capture” the district’s “traveling gavel” by visiting other Masonic lodges. Ionic No. 352 held charity fundraisers. Its members volunteered as escorts at Madison’s Veterans Administration Hospital.⁵² Each year, one student at James Madison Memorial High School was given a college scholarship and treated to a special award dinner.⁵³ Finally, Ionic was an active patron of Masonic youth organizations such as DeMolay, Rainbow Girls, and Job’s Daughters.

Two events during the 1970s deserve special mention. Starting in 1968, Madison’s five Masonic lodges began restoring the John Catlin Memorial

⁵² One member and Past Master, Arthur N. Lund, was recognized by the V.A. on April 29, 1982, for his exceptional service contributions. As of that date, Br. Lund had provided 3,556 hours of volunteer service, donating every Tuesday, starting in 1970, to this work.

⁵³ By the 1990s, this \$1,000.00 award was also being administered by the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin. The \$10,000.00 needed to participate in this program was reputedly bequeathed to Ionic No. 352 by Br. Nelson Severson.

Chapel.⁵⁴ Located in Forest Hill Cemetery, this “Victorian-eclectic” structure was built in 1878. By 1920, however, it had fallen into disrepair and was being used as a tool shed. On May 17, 1970, this local landmark was reopened to the public with a Masonic dedication ceremony. On June 12, 1973, Past Master A.D. Anderson was elevated to Grand Master of Masons in Wisconsin. The ceremony took place at the Scottish Rite Cathedral in Milwaukee.⁵⁵ One of Grand Master Anderson’s most important accomplishments was to appoint the “Currie Committee.” This investigative body paved the way for mutual recognition of Wisconsin F. & A.M. and Prince Hall Masonry.

For twelve years, Ionic No. 352 made the Madison Masonic Center its home. Its members identified with their Madison location. They enjoyed friendly relations with Madison’s other Masonic lodges. Nevertheless, their satisfaction with their building arrangement had been deteriorating. On October 10, 1989, a three-member building committee was appointed.⁵⁶ Middleton’s Masonic Temple must have been on the “short list”. The lodge selected it as the site for its annual officer installation ceremony. On evening of December 12, with its new officers duly installed, Ionic No. 352 voted to leave Madison.

Ionic No. 352 held its first regular meeting in Middleton’s Masonic Temple on January 9, 1990. Not all members were pleased to be there. The lodge held a “re-obligation” ceremony on February 27, 1990, to promote fraternal

⁵⁴ Br. John Catlin was the first Worshipful Master to serve in Madison in 1844.

⁵⁵ Scottish Rite Masonry evolved in France in the late 18th-century and is an affiliated Masonic organization.

⁵⁶ It was composed of Brs. Harland Emerson, Howard Oertel, and Raymond Kokette.

accord. Members were reminded of their Masonic duties and encouraged to share their Masonic experiences. It apparently did not work. Less than three months later, the lodge was investigating a “west side” Madison church that had been placed on the market.

Lodge participation declined steadily during the 1990s. The problem was not new. In 1978, Ionic No. 352 reduced its meetings to one per month to boost attendance. Nevertheless, the lodge continued to do good work. It even had some new projects. For example, members tended a Masonic information booth at the Dane County Fair. They also participated in community park clean-ups. But by 1997, the lodge could barely fill its officer chairs.⁵⁷

Some members blamed the crisis on their meeting space. The Shrine’s Zor Temple building, located in southwest Madison, was offered as a possible solution.⁵⁸ It was new, had ample parking, and possessed nice facilities. The Shrine, however, would not guarantee the lodge a regular room or date for its meetings. Moreover, the Shrine operates a bar in their building. Masonic lodges can not normally meet where alcohol is served.

On March 24, 1998, Senior Warden Robert Luening submitted a report to the lodge. The report offered four options for consideration: 1) the lodge should continue in Middleton; 2) the lodge should relocate to the Zor Temple; 3) the lodge should merge with Middleton No. 180, Verona No. 294, or a downtown

⁵⁷ In fact, the problem was so bad that at least one member suggested forfeiting the lodge’s charter.

⁵⁸ The “Ancient Arabic Order of Nobles of the Mystic Shrine” is an affiliated Masonic body. It was founded in 1871.

Madison lodge; the lodge should disband and its members relocate themselves. The membership was polled to determine how Ionic No. 352 would proceed. Only the first and third options, it was decided, would be explored.

Ionic No. 352 conducted its first, tentative consolidation discussion on April 28, 1998. It occurred over a table lodge dinner. Worshipful Master John Albright, visiting from Middleton No. 180, was tested with the idea. Br. Albright believed that his lodge would respond favorably, if that was the course Ionic No. 352 chose to pursue. Ionic No. 352 conducted a second poll. Only two questions were asked, "Are you in favor of consolidating with Middleton?" and "Are you in favor of continuing Ionic Lodge as a separate lodge?" The lodge received thirty-nine responses. Of these, twenty-five favored a consolidation, four preferred to remain separate, and ten were undecided. On June 23, a motion was passed approving merger discussions with Middleton No. 180.

Middleton-Ionic No. 180

Ionic No. 352 held a small, informal meeting on July 13, 1998. Those present expressed their concerns and ideas about consolidating with Middleton No. 180. No roll call was taken and the talk was free and open. The meeting concluded in general agreement. It was hoped that a merger would be effected quickly so that "new relationships" could develop.

Ionic No. 352 and Middleton No. 180 began formal merger discussions in August, 1998. Initially, some Middleton No. 180 members objected to inserting

“Ionic” into the combined lodge’s name. Such disagreements, however, did not last long. On October 20, Ionic No. 352 was able to announce its intent to merge with Middleton No. 180. This was done at the Grand Lodge Area 9-3 meeting.

Ionic No. 352 and Middleton No. 180 held a joint table lodge meeting on October 27, 1998. Participants used this opportunity to hammer out all remaining merger details. On November 10, Ionic No. 352 passed a resolution canceling its upcoming officer election. It was decided instead that its 1998 officer line would continue until replaced or released. Middleton No. 180 was the first lodge to approve the merger plan. It passed a resolution to this effect on November 17. Ionic No. 352 held its vote on December 22. Ten members attended this meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Middleton No. 180 had 167 members on its rolls. Ionic No. 352 had 65. The two lodges officially merged on December 31, 1998. Pursuant to the merger agreement, Ionic No. 352 surrendered its charter. Middleton No. 180, on the other hand, was renamed “Middleton-Ionic Lodge No. 180”.

Both Middleton No. 180 and Ionic No. 352 found it necessary to conduct separate “wrap-up” meetings in early 1999. Middleton No. 180 held its final meeting on January 5. Ionic No. 352 held three meetings on January 12, 26, and 28 to clear its books. Sixteen members appeared for Ionic No. 352’s final meeting. There must have been a mixture of emotions that evening. Secretary Wilbur Zemlicka altered his *pro forma* closing in the minutes. Typically, Br. Zemlicka concluded with the phrase, “There being no other business, the lodge

was closed in due form and in peace and harmony.” Instead, his last entry concludes, “There being no further business, the lodge was closed in *finality* and in peace and harmony.”

Middleton-Ionic No. 180 held its first regular meeting on January 19, 1999. Br. Richard Nelson served as Worshipful Master, *pro tem*. By agreement, Middleton No. 180's officers filled the chairs that year. Later that June, Middleton-Ionic No. 180 was presented with a new charter at the Grand Lodge Annual Communication.

Middleton-Ionic No. 180 has been fully integrated for six years. It presently has 126 members on its rolls. Regular meetings are held on the 1st and 3rd Tuesdays of each month, excluding July and August when the lodge is “dark”. Members continue to enjoy a variety of social activities. There are suppers at the lodge, ladies' nights, table lodges, and the annual “Pigger”. The lodge is also active in the community. Individual brothers serve as escorts at the V.A. Hospital, while the lodge provides financial support to Masonic and community organizations alike. Examples of the latter include Masonic youth organizations, Madison's Scottish Rite Learning Center, the Chicago Shrine Hospital, the Four Lakes Council of Boy Scouts, the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin's Building Block Society program, and Middleton Outreach Ministry's food pantry program. In 2003, Middleton-Ionic No. 180, as part of a Grand Lodge initiative, helped purchase automatic external defibrillators for each school in the Middleton-Cross Plains Area School District. One of its new projects for 2005

and 2006 is to sponsor an entire youth soccer league through the Middleton Soccer Club. Approximately 100 six-year olds enjoyed the program during its first year. Finally, the lodge continues its tradition of providing two \$1,000.00 scholarships to graduating students at Middleton High School.

Conclusion

Freemasonry rightly describes itself as an “ancient” and “honorable” society. From its obscure origins in 17th-century England, Ireland, and Scotland to a worldwide organization in the 21st-century, the fraternity can boast of innumerable distinguished members and countless proud accomplishments. One of the first questions asked an Entered Apprentice by a Wisconsin F. & A.M. lodge is, “Who benefits from Masonry?” The answer is “everyone”. Freemasonry’s primary objective is to develop moral individuals who are committed to God, family, their countries, and communities.

Middleton has benefited greatly from its Freemasons. Freemasons were among the area’s first settlers. Freemasons were often among Middleton’s most important business and civic leaders. Even Middleton’s first Village Hall had been a Masonic temple. Such contributions, however, are mostly forgotten. Indeed, many residents seem oblivious to the fraternity’s presence and its work.

A little “light” has now been shed on “Masonic Middleton”. Like Freemasonry elsewhere, it has evolved, being different things at different times. What has not changed, however, is the fraternity’s emphasis on brotherly love,

truth, and charity. Middleton's Freemasons are finding new ways to promote these virtues in their lives and in their communities. These virtues remain the bridge between Freemasonry's earliest roots and the organization of today.

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