

San Juan Lodge Historical Vignettes



On March 25, 1909, to E. H. Nash, WM and 15 others; for San Juan Lodge at Friday Harbor in San Juan County; chartered as No. 175 on June 16th, 1909. This was the first Lodge in San Juan County. Following are some historical accounts concerning the Lodge and its members. Compiled December 2021

The Masonic Hall

Before the hall was built, San Juan Lodge 175 (the only Masonic organization in the county) met for an undetermined time in the second floor of the Wright drugstore building erected in 1900 at 200 Spring Street West. The hall was too small and a new building was planned. The Friday Harbor school district was building a new school building and had the old building for sale, a committee was appointed to look it over. After examining the building it was found to be unsuitable, advisable to remodel as a hall and the matter was dropped. In 1914 the present Hall was completed and the Lodge and San Juan Chapter of the Eastern Star moved into the new Hall which was dedicated soon after by a large number of Grand Officers.

As originally built in 1914, the Masonic Hall at 15 Second Street, Friday Harbor, was a two-story frame structure measuring approximately 40 by 77 feet. About 1928, the building was enlarged on the southeast elevation to its present dimensions of 60 by 77 feet. Surmounted by a parapet above a pent roof, the hall has clapboard siding and a recessed main entry defined by pilaster strips and a hipped roof with double boxed cornices



Two side entrances are on the northwest elevation and an exterior stair gives access to the second floor of the southwest (rear) elevation.

Fenestration on the facade is chiefly single-glaze square casements; secondary elevations feature one-over-one, double-hung sash. The first- floor interior was rented in 1976 by Napa Automotive Parts and Accessories, other renters came later. It retains its Wainscoting and chamfered support posts.

Built as a dance hall and so used for many years , the space with its hardwood floor was converted to a roller-skating rink around the time of World War II. The decor of the lodge room upstairs, which occupies the 1914 side of the building, appears largely unchanged: rows of wooden theatre seats, lodge standards and insignia flanking a tiered platform, oil paintings suspended from picture moldings, and door and window surrounds trimmed with cornice heads. The 1928 addition provides a dining room which is shared on lease with the Order of the Eastern Star and also rented as a studio by a dance school .

There is no known record of plans and specifications or costs for the new building, but members evidently supplied labor, materials, teams, and wagons, as evidenced by the grand master's expression of thanks contained in the lodge minutes at the conclusion of the project.

Source: Eric L. Erickson, historian of San Juan Lodge 175, June 24, 1980

Early History of San Juan Lodge #175

Established in 1906 at Friday Harbor
by, Brother Van E Sargent Sr.

Way back in 1903 when I first arrived in Friday Harbor looking back through the mists of time, I do not recall knowing of any Masons on the Islands. Prior to 1906, Masonry in San Juan County was at very low ebb. On San Juan Island there were about eleven known masons, Orcas Island four or five and two or three on Lopez Island. There were plenty of three links around but not a square and compass to be seen. At that time Gene C Gould, OH Culver and Van E Sargent applied for the degrees in Masonry in Fidalgo Lodge #77. However in 1906 when Gene C Gould, OH Culver and I (Van E Sargent) presented our petitions for the degrees of masonry to Fidalgo Lodge #77 of Anacortes. Masons came out of the woods from all directions, even the Lime Works at Roche Harbor. When we were accepted and made the journey to Anacortes to receive our degrees, we were accompanied by a goodly number of the Masons from the Island. . The trip was made on the little mail steamer "Buckeye" owned by Capt. Newhall in early November of 1906. Those were enjoyable trips. We raised and received our 3rd degree on December 26, 1907. Masonry came to life and in a very short time there began to be talk of forming a Masonic Lodge at Friday Harbor. There were a number of Masons living on the Islands at this time who if they wished to attend lodge would have to spend two or more days on a boat journey to the main land as the regular mail boats did not arrive at the main land until evening after an all day journey.

A meeting was held at Friday Harbor attended by practically all the known Masons on San Juan and Lopez Islands and one from Orcas. A committee was appointed with Brother E H Nash as Chairman and me (Van Sargent) as Secretary to do the necessary work to investigate the necessary steps to be taken and what would be required to form a Lodge. The duties of this committee was to contact the nearest Lodge because a new Lodge has to be vouched for by the nearest established Masonic Lodge. To provide a suitable meeting place together with the necessary furniture and paraphernalia for holding meetings. It was about two years before all these necessary arrangements were finished. Our first home for San Juan Lodge was the second floor of the drug store just west of what was then the Islander print shop and Newspaper where we rented a hall over Dr. George Wright's drug store. It was small but very cozy. As we were short of cash, we proceeded to build our own furniture and remodel and decorate the hall. As I (Van Sargent) had some samples of wall paper with a very attractive emblem in its Masonic Design, Brother Gould offered to purchase enough to decorate the Hall if I would hang it which I was more than glad to do. The middle Chamber Pillars were one of the most important and expensive items, so we decided to make our own. Brother Culver being Secretary of the school board ordered the globes from Lowman Hanford, our fluted columns were obtained from Joseph Groll who was in the lumber business and was one of our

first candidates. We were able to make them for less than the freight would have been on factory built ones. When our lodge hall was finished, it was one of the coziest little halls I have ever seen and did us very well. The ladies having organized an Eastern Star Chapter after which it really became over crowded. A picnic together was held each year.

I would like at this time to make known to the younger members of the lodge that San Juan Lodge is under lasting obligation to the San Juan County Bank for advancing enough cash to take care of the expense of preparing the hall and purchasing paraphernalia that was needed, before we could be in shape to conduct a Masonic Lodge. This was taken care of by the members of the lodge signing a note covering it.

At this time it was decided to circulate a Petition for a Dispensation to establish a Masonic Lodge at Friday Harbor. It was circulated and in due time the required number of signers were obtained and early in 1909 Brother OH Culver took this petition to the Most Worshipful Brother Jeramper Neterer at Bellingham, who was then Grand Master of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Washington, for his consideration. In their discussion Brother Neterer asked how many members San Juan Lodge would eventually have and Brother Culver thought at least 40 members. Now at this time there are around one hundred and forty in the last 55 years...

Our petition for a dispensation to start a Lodge was presented to the Grand Master, and one early morning around the 1st of March 1909, Right Worshipful Brother William Adkins, Grand Lecturer of Washington arrived in Friday Harbor with a Dispensation authorizing San Juan Lodge UD in Friday Harbor. For the next three days very intensive training in Masonry was held. Brother Adkins was a very good teacher for we were able to carry on from there without much trouble.

Our first meeting was held about March ^{Stn} 1909 with Brother Elijah H Nash as Worshipful Master, Brother OH Culver Senior Warden and Van E Sargent Junior Warden, Gene C Gould Senior Deacon and Frank P Christensen Secretary. The other officers were filled by members of the lodge. Each of the three degrees had to be conferred before we could receive a charter. This we did in full form together with all lectures and ceremonies on Brother Dr. Barton Muscott who later affiliated with San Juan Lodge. We considered this somewhat of a record as we had only about 2 Y months' time to accomplish all the necessary steps. This we did and a charter was granted to San Juan Lodge #175 at that Session of Grand Lodge in June 1909. Soon after this a boat from Bellingham bringing Most Worshipful Brother Neterer and about forty Brothers from Bellingham with our charter and San Juan Lodge No. 175 was constituted in 1909.

The early days of San Juan Lodge were busy days. Besides doing degree work fraternal visits were made to nearly all Masonic Lodges in Victoria BC and Bellingham, WA.

Our small hall was soon too small and we began talking about a new building. The Friday Harbor school district was building a new school building and had the old building for sale, a committee was appointed to look it over. After examining the building it was found to be unsuitable, advisable to remodel as a hall and the

matter was dropped. In 1913 the present Hall was built and the Lodge and San Juan Chapter of the Eastern Star moved into the new Hall which was dedicated soon after by a large number of Grand Officers.

Our early meetings were very well attended. Nearly 100% at each meeting, while we never had a flood of candidates we were kept busy with degree work at nearly all our meetings. We had a Masonic and Eastern Star picnic the first summer which custom has been continued since. I remember our Master Brother Nash wheeling an enormous lunch basket down Spring Street to the dock for a trip to Sucia Island for our first Masonic picnic aboard the Motor Launch "Concordia". The members of San Juan Lodge were very civic minded and patriotic. In World War I every drive was headed by a member of San Juan Lodge as its chairman; and needless to say they all went over the top —

About 1925 the building was enlarged by an addition of 20 feet on the east side making the Lower dance floor the largest in the county. The regular meetings are held on the 1st and 3rd Wednesdays of each month except in the summer.

The Master at the present time is Leroy Jensen of Lopez. Nordine Jensen Senior Warden Friday Harbor and Alfred McIntire Junior Warden, James E Browne Secretary Friday Harbor. Visitors are cordially welcome.

One of the reasons for forming the Lodge at Friday Harbor was it required about three days for a mason to attend a Masonic Lodge on the mainland. The mail and passenger boat left the main land early in the morning each day, arriving at their destination in the evening. So to attend a lodge meeting required three days and most of the San Juan masons were farmers or business men, and they could ill afford to spend the necessary time to attend lodge meetings.

The signers of the original dispensation were from different parts of the country. Some had carried their demits for years however they were all very dedicated masons.

One of the high lights of those early years was a trip to Bellingham during World War I. A big ocean going ship came in to the harbor and as Brother OH Culver was the custom officer, the Captain reported to him. This boat was a training ship for young officers for the navy. In the course of their talk Brother Culver mentioned that San Juan Lodge was making a visit to Bellingham in about 10 days to exemplify a third degree, and as both the Captain and First Officer were Masons, the Captain kindly offered to stop in and take the lodge to Bellingham, which they did. This was a ship about the size of a Liberty ship. Our little lodge didn't take up much room on that ship.

All this attention I am getting reminds me of an article I read in the Scottish Rite New Age a few months ago. Methuselah was the oldest man that ever lived. He lived some 995 years according to the bible. Son of Enoch, Noah's grandfather. His only claim to fame was his amazing span of life and his many bigots. I didn't have many begot so I am just another old man. When I came to Friday Harbor 60 years ago this fall - Masonry was at a very low ebb. When Gene C Gould, OH

Culver and I put in our applications to Fidalgo Lodge in Anacortes for the degrees of Masonry it brought to life masonry in San Juan County. It was not long after that a meeting was called and at that meeting it was unanimously decided to go ahead and a committee was appointed. I was Secretary of that meeting and had all the big work. A petition for a dispensation had already been signed by most of the masons on the Island but it had to be corrected. Most had signed their initials, which had to be first names.

The nearest lodge had to be contacted as they had to sponsor the new lodge. Lodge room and furniture and paraphernalia had to be purchased, and about all we had to do was learn our work. We decided to make our own furniture as we were short of funds. Our middle chamber pilfers cost us less than the freight on factory made ones. I had some sample of wallpaper that had among them a square and compass design. Brother Gould offered to buy it, if I would hang it which I was most happy to do. It made a very attractive small hall.

On one Saturday about the 1st of March 1909, Brother EH Nash, Brother OH Culver and I chartered a boat and went to Anacortes to demonstrate and try to convince them that we could conduct a lodge. Brother Gene Gould was to go but his son came down with a severe case of typhoid fever at the last minute and I had to take his place. It was pretty short notice to me.

We had nearby an all night session and it was rather trying as they put us in the chairs and we were on our own. All those old fellows setting there staring at us. I guess we must have done alright as they passed us.

Well Brother Culver took our petition to Bellingham and presented it to Most Worshipful Grand Master Brother Geremuer Neter who asked Brother Culver how many members we would eventually have. Culver said we would probably have 40 members in time. That estimate was quite conservative, as there is about 135 now.

Shortly after that the Grand lecturer Brother William Adkins dropped in one morning on the Seattle boat with our dispensation. He gave of three days of the most intensive schooling in masonry. He was a very fine teacher and later became Grand Master.

We got our degree work from a cypher which was the only way we could get it, but unfortunately the cypher that we had did not contain the unwritten work that was part of the lectures. We asked Brother Adkins where we could get it. he said get it where you got your other work. Well he took pity on us and came down to the bank and borrowed our typewriter and set down in the little front office and typed out a copy for the unwritten work of lectures of three degrees. Those early meetings were very interesting. We had almost a 100% attendance every body helped some times it was almost like the house of babble as our members came from all parts of the United States. One from England, one from Boston, master from Oregon, one Brother drove 30 miles through 40 degrees. I don't know how good our work was, but we made good masons. A good many later became Masters of the lodge.

We got our dispensation in about the 9th of March. We had to confer the 3rd Degree before we could get our charter. This we did by conferring the 3rd degree on a courtesy member of Anacortes, who had had his 1st and 2nd in Anacortes. He later became a member of our lodge. We got our charter the June at the Grand Lodge Session. We did this without the help of Past Master, Dist. Deputy Grand Master, Masters, Wardens and Deacons associations. Nothing but plain Bull headedness I guess. We had lots of good times.

We made a number of visits to Victoria BC. I guess all the lodges then, several to Bellingham. Once during World War I, a big training ship came in here and as Brother Culver was Deputy Collector of Customs here, he mentioned to the Captain that we were going to Bellingham in about two weeks to visit, I think it was Bellingham Bay #44. The Captain said well we will take you over and sure enough on the day we were to go the big steamer came in and took us all to Bellingham in Government stile. (I would like to mention in passing that in Wald War I every big drive, War Stamps, 1,2,3, Liberty Bond drives, WMCA you name it we had it. We had them all. It was headed by a member of the San Juan Lodge, and most went over to top.)

Source: Brother Van E Sargent Sr.

There was no official cyphers of the degree work of masonry in those days. I still have a copy of those cyphers of the three degree lectures and as near as I can tell they are very accurate.

The Roche Harbor Mausoleum

This San Juan Island landmark is the result of a lifetime of hard work. John McMillin thoughtfully incorporated symbols from Masonry, the Bible, Sigma Chi fraternity, and his own family unity. The San Juan Masonic Lodge performs their outdoor second degree candidate initiation here each Spring.

The McMillin family named the mausoleum the Afterglow Vista. They derived the name from the phenomenal play of colors in the channel's waters during Roche' summer sunsets. The Mausoleum stands tall in the center of a ten-acre forest plot adjacent to Roche Harbor Resort. You can reach the Mausoleum by a short trail passed fenced grave plots. You can access it by a pair of stairs, representative of the Masonic Order.

On the east side of the great structure, the winding stairs are in reference to the winding spiritual life of us all. It is not a straight path to spirituality as no one can see the future. The stairs were built in sets of three, five, and seven to represent the three stages of life (youth, adulthood, and old age). The five stairs play homage to the five orders of architecture (Tuscan, Doric, Ionic, Corinthian, and Composite) as well as the five senses. The seven stairs honor the liberal arts and sciences (grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy). The circumference and diameter of the columns are the same as King Solomon's temple. The massive size of the mausoleum is almost incomparable to the deep meaning behind this structure.

Why The Broken Pillar?

They intentionally built the broken pillar in two sections. The space between the chairs nearest the pillar was left for the sun to shine through at the Vernal Equinox. Historically, the sunshine takes the place of all family members of the McMillin family forgone but not forgotten. It is evident in the bright light making the column complete.

The broken pillar represents the broken line of life, how one often dies before his/her work is complete.



In the center of the structure is a round table of limestone and cement and six stone and cement chairs. The chairs are arranged in the same order as the traditional McMillian family dining table had been for decades. Each chair base also serves as crypts for the ashes of the family. This formal sitting position of ashes represents a very symbolic reunion after death. The placement of the chairs strategically allow the June sun to shine through the broken column on the crypts of John S. and his wife. This unites the couple in everlasting light.