

Pentalpha Royal Arch Chapter – The First 100 Years

A report Presented at the 100th Anniversary Celebration by David C. Blunt Chapter Historian

In tracing the history of Pentalpha Royal Arch Chapter, it might be well to present a brief account of the bodies from which it sprang.

The oldest of these bodies is Orphan's Hope Lodge. Orphan's Hope was first constituted on June 8th, 1825. The meetings were held somewhere in Weymouth Landing. Due to the anti – Masonic feeling stemming from the Morgan affair, the Lodge surrendered it's Charter in 1830. For the next 21 years nothing was done until September 13, 1851, when it was rechartered. The meetings were held in a hall over Loud's Furniture Store on Broad Street. Later it shared the apartments with the Odd Fellows in Crescent Hall. On October 17, 1884 the Lodge dedicated it's own building on the site of the present Temple. Their meetings were held in that building until January 15, 1912 when the building was destroyed by fire. On January 12, 1914, exactly two years to the day from the time of the fire, the present Temple was dedicated and has been in constant use by Orphan's Hope since that time.

The second Lodge that was involved was Delta Lodge, at that time a Weymouth Lodge. Delta Lodge was constituted June 9, 1868 and held their first meetings in Good Templars Hall on the corner of Front and Washington Streets. In 1870 they moved to apartments in an ell attached to the home of Elias Richards. I believe the address was 78 Washington Street, but I have no way of proving it. From all accounts, these were very sumptuous apartments. These quarters were occupied until 1890 when, the owner having died and the heirs having jumped the rent considerably, Delta moved to Pythian Hall in the Landing. About 1900 they decided to become a Braintree Lodge and moved to the Pythian Hall in Braintree, or Storrs Square. This hall was in the Lyceum Building where the Warren Block is now. In the year 1907, Delta Lodge dedicated the present Temple on Washington Street and have met there ever since.

The body from which Pentalpha directly sprang is Pilgrim Royal Arch Chapter, which was chartered December 10, 1861 and has given birth to several Chapters. Pilgrim Chapter holds it's meetings in Abington and is still a very lively Chapter.

The First Twenty Five Years 1870 – 1895

The first meeting of what was to become Pentalpha Chapter was held May 9, 1870 in Washington Hall in Weymouth Landing. Companion George W. Locke was elected chairman and Companion Samuel Bates, Secretary. This meeting had been called by a group of Companions who felt that they could overcome the disadvantage of traveling all the way to Abington for Chapter Meetings by having a Chapter of their own. When we stop to consider the mode of transportation extant at that time, we can understand their problems, not with Pilgrim Chapter of course, but with their wives. If a Chapter meeting closed at 10:30 or 11:00 P.M., as they frequently did, and the only means of transportation from Abington to Weymouth Landing and East Braintree is by horse and buggy, we can well believe that it was in the wee small hours when they arrived home and we can also believe that the women folk took a dim view of it.

Not wanting to give up Chapter Masonry and feeling that there was a good a good field of endeavor near home, they called this meeting to consider the advisability of starting a Chapter nearer home. The response to the call was such that they decided the attempt should be made. Their first order of business after making their decision was to elect a slate of officers. This slate consisted of –

- Stephen S. Bradford ----- High Priest
- William Humphrey ----- King
- Alanson A. Holbrook ----- Scribe
- Amos D. White ----- Treasurer
- George W. Locke ----- Capt. of the Host
- Alden W. Nash ----- Principal Sojourner
- William S. Wallace ----- Royal Arch Capt.
- Reuben Tirrell ----- Master of 3rd Veil
- Alvah Raymond ----- Master of 2nd Veil
- Augustus Vining ----- Master of 1st Veil
- John W. Walsh ----- Tyler
- Samuel A. Bates ----- Secretary

Companion George W. Locke, who was one of the men most influential in getting the Chapter started, declined the office of High Priest as he was about to become the second Master of Delta Lodge.

That those Companions were very much in earnest is attested to by the speed with which they worked. They held three meetings in May of 1870. The first on May 9th, the second, May 20th and the third May 23. During the course of these three meetings they petitioned Pilgrim Chapter for permission to form a new Chapter, they requested permission of Delta Lodge to use their quarters for meetings and they formed committees to inquire into the cost of setting up a Chapter and to acquire the necessary Regalia. They drew up a tentative set of By-laws and decided that the name of the Chapter would be Norfolk, that meetings would be held on the Tuesdays after the full moon (thereby making it a moon Chapter), that the fees for the degrees would be \$35.00 and \$5.00 for membership.

They learned that the cost of setting up the Chapter would be about \$1100.00 dollars and that Pilgrim Chapter would give them permission to start a new Chapter. They rescinded the vote on the name of the Chapter and decided to call it Pentalpha. Delta Lodge informed them they could have the use of Delta Lodge's quarters for the sum of \$200.00 per year, the building to be heated and lighted. They then petitioned the Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Massachusetts for permission to institute their Chapter.

On June 14, 1870, five weeks from the first meeting, Most Excellent Henry Chickering, Grand High Priest of the Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Massachusetts and his suite came to Weymouth Landing to Institute Pentalpha Royal Arch Chapter. The Dispensation was read, the officers installed. 20 applicants were read in and Pentalpha Chapter was on it's way.

The first twenty – five years were rather hectic ones for the new Chapter. There was much that had to be done before the Chapter would be fully established and truly independent.

On June 28 they held a special Convocation when 5 candidates received the Mark Master Mason Degree and 1 petition was read in. They evidently conducted business on Specials in those days. As candidates continued to come in, they held meetings right through the summer. As proof that relations with Pilgrim Chapter were good, they received a release of Jurisdiction from them and also a request to work the degrees on some Pilgrim Chapter candidates.

At the 6th Regular Convocation held November 15, 1870, they felt strong enough to petition Grand Chapter for a Charter. They also revised the By-laws by changing the meeting night from Tuesday to Thursday after the full moon. The time set for the meetings was 7 P.M. October 1 to April 1 and 7:30 P.M. April 1 to October 1. The committee on regalia reported that they had purchased the necessary regalia for \$900.00. Dues were also set at \$2.00 per year plus Grand Chapter assessments payable at the July Convocation.

The first Official Visitation to Pentalpha Chapter was held December 20, 1870 when Excellent Companion C.W. Romney, High Priest of St, Andrews Chapter was present to examine the work of the Chapter.

The next big night came on January 24, 1871 when Most Excellent Henry Chickering, the Grand High Priest of the Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Massachusetts, again journeyed to Weymouth and had his Grand Secretary read the Charter. The ceremonies were held in the Masonic Hall with a Banquet at Washington Hall, the officers and members of Pilgrim Chapter being present at the ceremony.

During the next year much work was accomplished. The Chapter voted to join Delta Lodge in buying an organ. A seal for the Chapter was designed and an attempt was made to buy the property in the Masonic Hall with Delta Lodge. At the Annual Meeting it was noted that 43 petitions had been read in. 41 were accepted and 1 had been rejected and there had been no report on one.

In the year 1877, there was a misunderstanding with St. Matthews Chapter when St. Matthews worked a candidate without the proper release of jurisdiction. In the end, St. Matthews turned over to Pentalpha the fee collected and the candidate became a member of Pentalpha Chapter.

The next year saw the Chapter and the Lodge securing a ten year lease on their hall for the sum of \$200.00 per year.

The year 1879 saw the start of a rivalry that has continued to the present day. St. Stephens Chapter of Dorchester petitioned Pentalpha Chapter for permission to remove to Quincy. At first, Pentalpha refused permission but after some persuasive talk on the part of St. Stephens they changed their minds and granted the permission. From then on things happened. Over the years each Chapter has gone to Grand Chapter to complain about the other one, usually over jurisdiction. When they aren't fighting with each other, they spend the rest of the time working Degrees in each others Lodge Room and having a good time doing it. I am happy to say that for the last fifteen years, relations have been very peaceful.

About this time the Chapter went through a rather trying time as far as candidates were concerned. Due probably to a business recession, or panic as they called them then, there were no candidates from 1878 until 1883 and at times very few at the meetings. On May 17, 1881 it was noticed that there were not enough present to open but by 1883, candidates had started to come in again.

In 1885, a communication was received from the Grand Chapter forbidding intercourse with the Grand Lodge of Mark Master Masons in England unless they revoked the warrants issued to Mark Lodges within the jurisdiction of the Grand Chapter of Quebec. It was also ordered that, no candidate should receive the Royal Arch Mason Degree unless his Mark was registered. The next year a Brazen scaffold was obtained for the Most Excellent Degree and a lattice door for the Mark Degree. In 1888 the By-laws were amended dropping the Initiation Fee to \$30.00, which turned out to be good for business as candidates started to come in.

It was also in 1888 that our Chapter felt that they were now old enough to have a skeleton in the closet, so they proceeded to acquire one. Exactly what happened is hard to ascertain at this date. That year the newly elected line of officers resigned and a dispensation had to be obtained to elect a new line. The incident seems to have carried over for several years with the Chapter attempting to prefer charges against one of the former officers, even to the point of going to Grand Chapter about it. They evidently didn't make it stick, as a few years later there is a record of the Chapter voting to pay their proportionate share of this Companion's funeral expenses.

During the later part of the 1880s there seems to have been quite a bit of trouble with the heirs of the late owner of the Masonic apartments. Several times the Chapter and the Lodge met to try to resolve the difficulty. Failing in their attempt, Delta Lodge decided to go to Pythian Hall in the Landing and Pentalpha, after meeting with the trustees of the Temple in East Weymouth, decided to meet in the East Weymouth Temple. April 8, 1890 was the date of the first meeting held in the Temple that was formerly on this site. The change in location necessitated a change in the meeting night and it was voted to change from a moon Chapter to a set date. The date picked was the second Thursday.

The next year, 1891, Pentalpha had its first District Deputy when on December 1, John A. Fogg visited his own Chapter. That night there were 35 members and 47 visitors present. During this period there were as many as 30 members present at every meeting and at Official Visitation. By 1892, 57 members and 73 visitors attended the meeting with a banquet following the meeting. At the public installation of the Officers in the year 1895, when the Grand High Priest did the installing, there were 250 present.

The Second Twenty – Five Years 1895 – 1920

Pentalpha Chapter was now strongly established and things started to be a little more routine. Of course, there were the occasional arguments with St. Stephens Chapter over jurisdiction with the two Chapters working degrees back and forth between the arguments. The rent for the Temple went up to \$200.00 per year and the dues went to \$4.00 payable in two installments, the first of April and the first of October. The Secretary must have loved that.

During 1904 the Chapter sent a letter to Grand Chapter asking advice on what to do with Chapter members who had no Blue Lodge affiliation and in 1906 it was voted to pay one third of the cost of the telephone that had been installed in the Temple.

In 1905 the By-laws were revised to comply with the regulations set by the Grand Chapter and in 1907 it was voted to buy more regalia to replace that which had been worn out. In 1908, the Chapter voted to give the sum of \$15.00 to the Chelsea Fire Relief Fund, to initiate it.

On January 15, 1912, at 4:45 P.M., Pentalpha Chapter had a fire of it's own to worry about. On that date, the Temple that stood on this site was totally destroyed and many valuable models of excellence were lost to the Craft. Fortunately for Pentalpha Chapter, the records of the Chapter were at the home of the Secretary as they are still complete. The financial records and other papers were lost although the books of Marks also seemed to have escaped.

For the next two years much work was accomplished. The Chapter held meetings in various halls about the District, some in Braintree Temple, some at the Hingham Temple and most of them at Crescent Hall, the Odd Fellows home. The Chapter realized the full amount of their insurance policy, which was of great help in replacing the lost regalia. Petitions continued to come in and the Chapter continued to grow and prosper.

It was at this time that the present South Shore Masonic Association was formed by the members of Orphans Hope Lodge, Pentalpha Chapter, South Shore Commandery and Temple Council to replace the lost Temple. At this time, the dues were again raised to \$6.00 per year and still payable in two installments. The building committee reported that the building could be replaced for the sum of \$29,937.00 with \$5,000.00 needed for furnishings. Bonds were issued, money raised and the present building was built. The first Convocation of the Chapter was held on December 11, 1913 and the Temple dedicated January 15, 1914, just two years to the day from the destruction of the old building.

During 1914 and 1915, the By-laws were again amended to the effect that the stated Convocations would be held on the third Thursday of the Month and the Annual Meeting on the third Thursday of September, the present meeting night.

There is a rather curious entry in the records for February 17, 1917. It states that the Chapter voted to reimburse Companion Fred W. Baldwin for damage to his clothes. We wonder what went on.

The Chapter continued to gain in strength and members with members on the side lines at the meetings and on June 6, 1920, with South Shore Commandery, they celebrated their joint fifty years of life with a

service at the east Weymouth Methodist Episcopal Church and on June 7 they had a banquet with ceremonies in the Lodge room when the histories were read.

The Third Twenty – Five Years 1920 – 1945

The early part of the third quarter of our Chapter's history was a very prosperous time. Candidates were coming in and attendance at the meetings was at an all time high. Fifty and 60 members present was a common occurrence. There is an entry for February 25, 1923 where they note 50 members present but no work done as the Temple was too cold.

April 20, 1923 was celebrated as Reuben Tirrell Night. Companion Tirrell was the last of the Charter Members.

In 1920 a group of Chapter masons from Hingham petitioned Pentalpha Chapter for permission to start a Chapter in Hingham. Permission was given and Wompatuck Chapter, under the direction of Excellent Winthrop Cushing, came into being. Pentalpha Chapter voted to give the new Chapter a suitable gift in honor of the occasion.

During these years there was much intercourse between the Chapters of the District with the different Chapters working the Degrees in other Lodge rooms.

On April 4, 1920, Pentalpha and Wompatuck Chapters held a joint reception to honor Most Excellent Winthrop J. Cushing on his election as Grand High Priest.

April 18, 1929 marked the passing of Companion Reuben Tirrell, the last of the Charter Members.

February 18, 1932 saw Samoset Chapter at East Weymouth to work the Mark Master Mason Degree on two candidates. That night there were 60 members present as well as 16 visitors.

The year 1930 saw the membership of the Chapter at the high water mark. That year the secretary noted 411 members. From then on, however, things began to change. The effects of the Great Depression began to be felt. Although members still came in, the demits and suspensions outnumbered them by far. By 1935 the membership had fallen to 315 and by 1938 was down to 227 members.

During the year 1936 we find the first mention of what was to become the Pentalpha Members Association. This Association started out as line officers only. As time went by, the Past High Priests were included and at last it was opened to all members and their families. Over the years it has proved to be of great assistance to the Chapter. We still have many with us who saw this organization start.

1936 also saw the revision of the By-laws to what is now the code by which we are presently governed, (with some amendments).

With the Convocation held February 16, 1939, the Chapter stood in silent tribute to Excellent Companion Joseph E. Gardner, our Treasurer. Excellent Companion Gardner was exalted in 1876. He became High Priest in 1887, serving until 1889. He was elected Treasurer in 1890 and continued in that office until his death on January 21, 1939, a period of 49 years. He had been Master of Orphans Hope

Lodge, Illustrious Master of Abington Council, Commander of South Shore Commandery, Senior Past Patron of Mayflower Chapter O.E.S., a member of Allepo Shrine, which he attended a few hours before his death. He was also Treasurer of the Mt. Hope Cemetery Association. Few men have left a greater record of service to Masonry than did Excellent Companion Gardner.

The Last Twenty Five Years 1945 – 1970

The last twenty five years of our century of existence have been interesting in that a good many of us who are present here tonight have had a part in making them so. We have had our ups and downs as far as members are concerned. During the fifties our membership rose to over 200 but is now at a low ebb.

During the last twenty five years the Chapter has been very active with what might be called extra – terrestrial activities. The first and oldest has been the Members Association which meets the first Saturday of the month from October to May. This Association has done much to bring the wives and families of the members into the scope of the Chapter and has done much in explaining Chapter Masonry to the uninitiated.

The next activity that has done much for our Chapter has been the “Widow Degree”. This group was formed about fifteen years ago with Ex. W. Clement Brooks as King Solomon and Ex. John Morrison as Degree Master. After the retirement of Excellent Companions Brooks and Morrison, Ex. Companion William J. Williams carried on. Through the efforts of this group much of the Chapter regalia has been replaced or renewed.

Another activity has been the Most Excellent Master Degree Team. This Team, with much extra regalia and a large cast, has exemplified the Degree in most of the Chapters in the District as well as some outside the District.

It might as well be mentioned that a good many of Pentalpha’s Past High Priests have been very active in the Kohanim Club of the 7th District. The Chapter has also tried to contribute it’s share of success to the 7th District Charity Ball that was instituted by Rt. Ex. Thomas A. Stevens and Ex. Frank E. Nelson of St, Stephens Chapter.

As we come to the close of our first hundred years we can look back with a certain amount of satisfaction but as we look into the future we see that there is a tremendous amount of work to be done if we are to keep our Chapter alive. Times have changed since our Chapter started as some of the old values have lost their importance. Although the Ancient Landmarks must be adhered to, we also find that new Landmarks are appearing on the horizon. These too must be recognized. We cannot spend too much time looking into the past if we expect to proceed into the future.

There have been many people who have contributed of their time and treasure to bring Pentalpha Chapter through the first hundred years. To name them all would be impossible but our sincere thanks go out to all of them for what they have done. During the course of the years one of our members became Grand High Priest, two became Grand Scribe and one Deputy Grand High Priest. We have had

seven District Deputy Grand High Priests and three of our present members hold the Benjamin Hurd Medal.

In our one hundred years we have had 8 Treasurers. Two of these men served only one year each and two served two years. Ex. Companion Gardner served for 49 years and Rt. Ex. George M. Winters has served for 23 years.

In closing this history, I would like to extend my thanks to all who have assisted me in this endeavor, to the Past Secretaries for what they entered, or did not enter into the records. Part of the charge in the installation ceremony of the Secretary is a warning about discretion about what to commit to paper. It is surprising how discreet a Secretary can be at times. He gives you just enough to whet your appetite and then completely ignores the rest of the incident, to Most Excellent Archie M. Simons, Grand Secretary of the Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Massachusetts, and to Companion Franklin N. Pratt for the tremendous amount of information he afforded me. My thanks also to the Centennial Committee with Ex. LeRoy C. Bestick as Chairman.

It is my sincere hope that in the next twenty five years there may be more pages added to this history and that Chapter Masonry will be still dispensing Light to the uninformed.

David T. Blunt Historian

June 5, 1970
Masonic Temple
610 Broad Street
East Weymouth, Mass.