

Continental Lodge

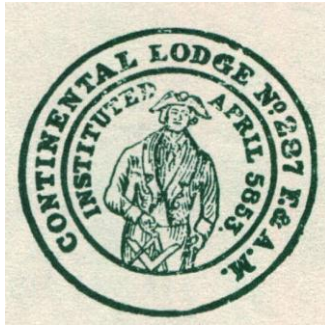
No. 287

A HISTORY in the lives of our founders

BY

R. G. POPE

1st ed.



CONTINENTAL LODGE HISTORY

by

Robert G. Pope

It is my goal to present a little of the history of Continental Lodge in the Context of New York City history, American History, and Masonic History. In doing so I will initially use the life and career of our founding father as a basis.

The history of any lodge is a history of men participating in the events of their time. It is with this in mind that I construct this brief history.

William Gurney of Arcana Lodge No. 246 was one of the men who founded Continental Lodge in 1853. The lodge had recommendations from Arcturus Lodge No.274, where Gurney was a lodge officer, and Doric No. 280.

W.M. Lyons was the 1st Master and Gurney was a Warden. 17 men made up that first lodge and tradition says they were the sons or grandsons of men who fought in the **Continental Army** during the Revolutionary War. To honor this, our symbol is a **Minuteman** and our worshipful master has, at various times from the very beginning, worn a **Tricorn** hat¹.

Other lodges were chartered between 1853 and 1855. Some by men who were friends of our founder. I speak of **St.**

¹ The Tricorn hat was used until 1890. It was used again in 1935.

Nicholas, Acacia, Adelpic, Neptune, and Montauk. By the early 1980s, these lodges would merge with Continental and take our name. I will include a bit of their histories and preserve their memories as they are a part of our lodge.²

William Gurney – of our Founding Fathers

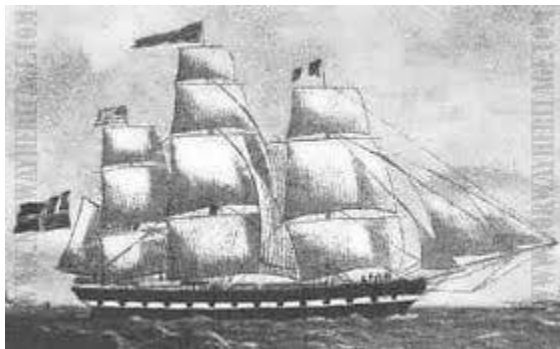


William Gurney was born in 1821, just outside of New York City in Flushing Long Island.

When Gurney was a child, the **Erie Canal** opened in Upstate New York. It was a freemason **Dewitt Clinton**, who had pushed for it to be completed. This canal transformed New York

² *In that era Soho was the center of New York City. There, Cast Iron buildings rose up including the **Haughwaut building** on Broome St. and Broadway which contained the worlds first passenger **elevator**. A new **Trinity church** had gone up less than a decade before down on Wall St. The **Marble Collegiate church** was a country church on 5th Avenue.*

City, turning us into the gateway to Europe and the gateway to the continent. New York would shortly come to handle more ships than all the ports in America combined. Many of our early brothers came to be in the shipping business and our symbol was once a **square-rigged ship**.



Joseph Smith and the Mormons

In 1823, in Palmyra, New York, a freemason named **Joseph Smith** claimed to see visions of an angel that directed him to a place where he found ancient golden tablets. By 1830, these tablets had been translated into the *Book of Mormon*. Thus the new Mormon religion was founded. Smith gathered about him a handful of disgruntled freemasons and left New York State with his followers heading west to Ohio and Missouri by 1831, then to Illinois in by 1838³.

³ While in Illinois, Joseph Smith was murdered by a mob in 1844.

The Morgan Affair

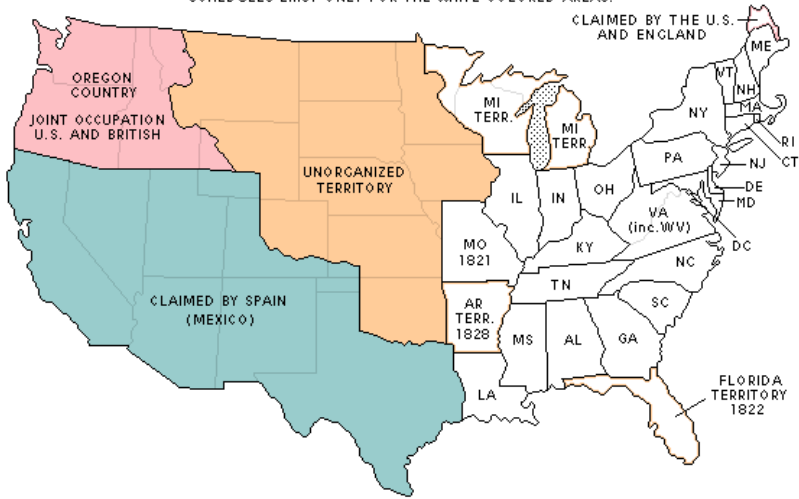
Just a few years after Joseph Smith founded the Mormon faith, Masonry was in trouble. **William Morgan** had disappeared in Batavia, New York after publishing lodge secrets. The mason's were blamed for his disappearance and murder – a body was found, but it was not Morgan's. This was 1826. The backlash was terrible and many lodges closed in an atmosphere of violence, intimidation, and open contempt. The anti-Masonic sentiment lasted till the mid-1840s.

Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormon faith, is said to have married the widow of William Morgan.

America in the 1830s and 1840s

Around America at the time, vast regions of the Midwestern, Southern, and Western United States were still wilderness. War with the Native Americans was common in the era. Much of what we know as the United States wasn't even ours. It belonged to Mexico and the United Kingdom.

1830 - FIFTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES. M19.
SCHEDULES EXIST ONLY FOR THE WHITE COLORED AREAS.



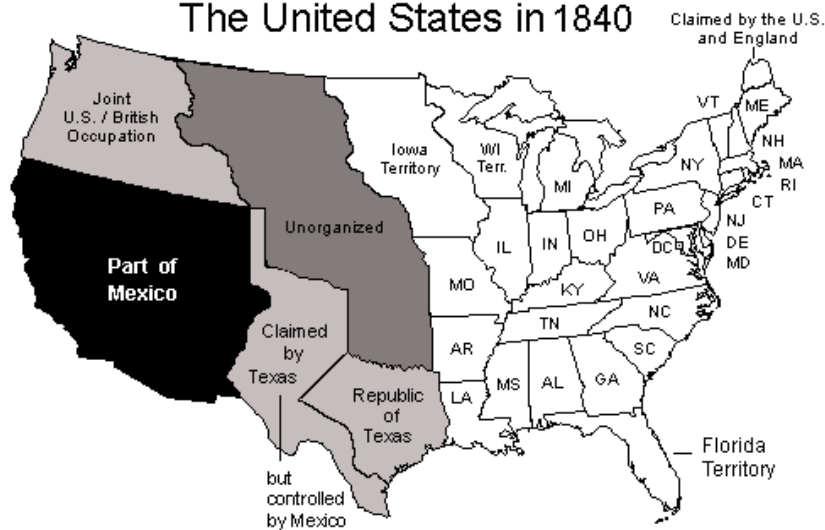
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The USA in 1830

The War with Mexico

Then in 1835, when Gurney was a teenager, the **Texans** went to war with Mexico. One of our future Lodge Brothers, **Brother James Hazzard Perry** of **Adelphic** and **Neptune**, dropped out of West Point to fight alongside **Sam Houston** in the Army of Texas. He had been sent to spy by a political enemy. It was Perry who reported back that Houston was smoking opium... again. They had their differences, but Perry went on to fight at San Jacinto, the battle that led to the capture of the Freemason **Santa Anna** and ended the war. Texas became a country. So many of the founders were Masons that Texas was almost a Masonic Republic.

The United States in 1840



Federal Censuses Exist Only For Those Areas In White

The Mexican-American War

Within a decade, by 1846, the **Mexican-American War** broke out. **Bro. John Drake Sloat** of our **St. Nicholas** lodge fought. He was celebrated for suppressing the Pirates in the West Indies and in 1846, it was Navy **Commodore Sloat** who seized Monterrey, raised the American Flag, and declared California to be the property of the USA. Brother Sloat became the military governor of California for 7 days.

There's a statue dedicated to him at the Presidio.

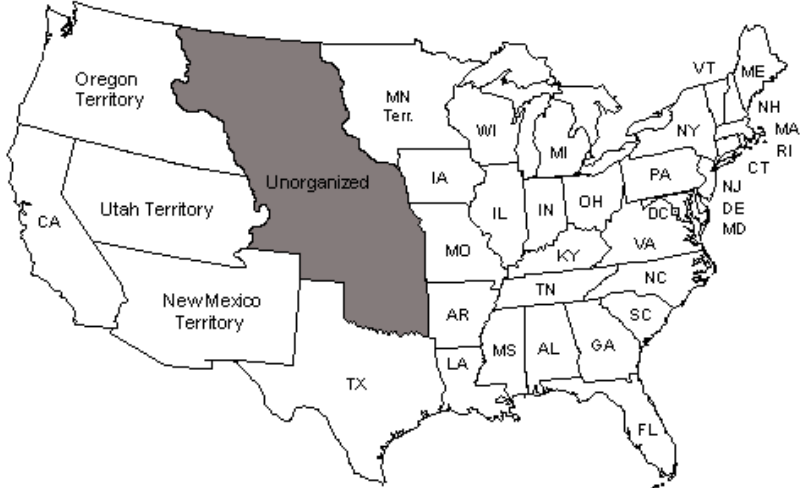


Bro. John Drake Sloat of St. Nicholas



The Sloat Memorial at the Presidio

The United States in 1850



Federal Censuses Exist Only For Those Areas In White

Worth Square

Later, when the headstone of the freemason **Major General Worth** was dedicated by Madison Square, our lodge brothers from St. Nicholas were in attendance.

Worth Square is by Madison Square, and it was here, about this time in 1847, that that the freemason **Andrew Cartwright** of the **Knickerbocker Club** created the game of **baseball** as we know it. Some of the 1st games were played in Madison Square and Hoboken. I mention baseball because over the years our lodge brothers would play an important role in its' development. Baseball was a gentleman's game back then, and it's

not unimaginable that some lodge brother played with the Knickerbockers.

Zeta Psi fraternity

Meanwhile, at New York University⁴ in Greenwich Village, Brother **John Bradt Yates Sommers**, founded the prestigious **Zeta Psi** fraternity. Along with William Gurney, he was a member of Arcturus Lodge No. 274, the lodge that recommended Continental, and he would later join our Adelpfic.



⁴ founded in 1831

The Five Points Mission

At that time endless numbers of **refugees** began to pour in through the port of New York. The largest groups to come were the masses of starving Irish along with political refugees from Germany. These were followed by a smaller number of people from the United Kingdom.

There were problems. There were riots, and there were terrible slums developing. The **Five Points slum** became notorious. In modern times we know it from the film *Gangs of New York*. To help alleviate the social ills in the Five Points, in 1848, Brother William Gurney helped found the **Five Points Mission**. They sponsored temperance meetings, a school, a chapel and they provided housing for poor families and the like. Gurney would have been about 27 years old at the time.



Within 5 years, when Gurney was 32 years old, he and others would found **Continental Lodge**. WM Lyons was the 1st master.

By this time Gurney was a military man. He'd served as a lieutenant in the prestigious 7th Regiment, a group he would maintain ties with for the rest of his life.

The other lodges that are now part of Continental

Alongside Continental were founded **other lodges**. Once again, I speak of St. Nicholas, Acacia, Adelphic, Neptune, and Montauk. These lodges were all founded between 1853 and 1855. Some were founded by friends of Gurney and had ties to Continental. Like **Acacia**, founded by **Stewart Woodford**. He affiliated with Continental and later served under Gurney in the Civil War. And **Neptune**, whose 1st Master was that very Colonel **James Hazzard Perry** who fought with Sam Houston in the Army of Texas. He was also a friend of Gurney.

So, some of the brothers from these lodges affiliated with us, and some of our brothers affiliated with them. Eventually we would all join together. 125 years later, more or less, between 1976 and 1982, we became one, and we are the inheritors of the memories and traditions of these other lodges.

St. Nicholas Lodge, whose symbol was Santa Claus, was founded by a group of members of the **Sylvan Grove lodge** - originally part of the **United Order of Druids** - who didn't want to

travel south of the Upper West Side where they lived to attend lodge. Druids met in “Groves”. Sylvan Grove derives from them.



St. Nicholas Lodge

St. Nicholas lodge had a tradition of meeting at **Delmonico's Steakhouse** on Christmas day. **Delmonico's** was the best-known restaurant in the USA in the 19th Century. And in 1856 **Lorenzo Delmonico** became a lodge brother of St. Nicholas.



Delmonico's Steakhouse

Adelphic Lodge, whose symbol was an angel, was founded by masons who resided at the **St. Nicholas Hotel** in Soho. At the time, this was one of the largest hotels in the world and the most luxurious hotel in the city. They'd leave the hotel for lodge meetings too often so they founded a new lodge that met near the hotel. They were friends with Continental.

There were a few interesting members of Adelphic at the time: One was Brother **John Bradt Yates Sommers** of Zeta Psi fame.



Adelphic Lodge

Adelphic Lodge and The Order of the Eastern Star

Another brother from Adelphic Lodge was **Robert MaCoy** – an immigrant from county Ulster, Ireland. He was a printer here in New York, and a producer of Masonic regalia. His company is

still in existence. MaCoy is also credited with developing the Chapter System of the **Order of the Eastern Star**.



Adelphic, Continental and Kane Lodge

Continental's founder William Gurney was also a member of Adelphic, as was Bro. James Hazzard Perry of **Neptune**. Perry knew **Egbert Viele** of Kane Lodge. And back in 1858, when **Kane Lodge** was new, Adelphic Lodge was their primary sponsor and friend.



Neptune Lodge

New York Masonic events of the 1840s and 1850s

Masonry was in trouble again: At the time these lodges were formed there were actually **two Grand Lodges** in the State of New York. In the late 1840s there'd been a schism over a parade. Some people wanted the parade. Some didn't. The people who didn't want the parade eventually won, and the Grand Lodges reunited in 1857.

Where we met

As to where these lodges met, some of these lodges moved around quite a bit. Continental met in 9 different locations in the first 20 years until they found a home at the new Grand Lodge building in 1874. The city was much smaller then so we met mostly in Lower Manhattan – at 68 East Broadway⁵ in what's now Chinatown, on the Lower East Side, Soho, Greenwich Village, and at 8 Union Square. One exception was **Montauk Lodge** of Brooklyn who met on Atlantic Avenue in Brooklyn Heights and later, after 1909, at the **Masonic Temple in Fort Greene**.

Some of these buildings are still there⁶. There are many Cast Iron Palaces in Soho that our Brothers would have seen rise, Brownstones, townhouses along Washington Square, and

⁵ then known as 'Botanic Hall' where other lodges met

⁶ Continental was burned out of 8 Union Square. They met at 594 Broadway between Prince and Houston, on the southwest corner of 12th and Broadway diagonally across from the Strand bookstore, on the Northeast corner of 13th and Broadway, also by the Strand, and in the older Decker Building at 33 Union Square. It was in the newer Decker building that **Andy Warhol** had his studio called the **Factory**.

McSorley's Ale house on 7th Street first opened when our lodge was new. Many churches arose at this time as well, including the Marble Collegiate Church on 5th Avenue.

Lodges moved around for a variety of reasons: money, fires, and political reasons. St. Nicholas lodge once left Grand and Center St back in 1858 because organ grinders were annoying them. They also didn't like the prostitutes and the pickpockets. When a lodge brother found that a pickpocket had taken the lodges money, St. Nicholas had enough and moved.⁷

In the era our lodge was founded, there were deep social ills in America. New York had its slums, but 4 million people still lived in **slavery** in the South. That's 1 in every 7 Americans. In some places half of the population were slaves. People were saying it reflected "the law of nature" where the strong dominate the weak. To be fair, it wasn't just the south. Many New Yorkers also supported the institution. Slavery had only ended a generation before in the North and New Yorkers were making literally boatloads of money in the cotton business.

The Civil War

I mention Slavery because it led to the **Civil War**. Many of our brothers served in the Civil War, including our Founder William Gurney. Gurney would raise the **127th Infantry** as a Colonel. His Lt. Colonel was our Brother **Stewart Woodford**,

⁷ It was in that year Central Park was begun and Prospect Park planned.

who'd served as Worshipful Master of Continental in 1859. If Continental had a military wing, the 127th would have been it.



127th NY Inf. flag

Colonel Perry of Neptune recruited men from Brooklyn and other states to serve in the newly raised **48th Infantry Regiment** – also known as “**Perry’s Saints**”. The 48th served in the 1st Brigade under **General Egbert L. Viele**, of Kane Lodge – the lodge that Adelpic helped and sponsored. General Viele was the very engineer in charge of getting both **Central Park** and **Prospect Park** built. It’s likely that Viele and Gurney knew each other early on because they had both been officers in the prestigious 7th Regiment. Gurney was a member of the 7th Regiment Veterans Corps.



48th Inf. Officers



48th flag

Continental Lodge also produced **Henry Honeychurch Gorringe** who served as a Naval Officer - I'll mention him again later - and **Edward M.L. Ehlers** who served in the 12th and then the 52nd New York, seeing action at Antietam and Fredericksburg. 1 out of every 50 Americans would be killed in the war – about 600,000 people in a population of 30 million. Bro. Perry died in 1862 and Bro. Gurney, the founder of Continental Lodge, was badly injured.

In the war, **Stewart Woodford** was promoted to Brigadier General. He became the military governor of **Charleston**, South Carolina, a job he passed on to William Gurney who'd also been promoted⁸. The Southerners respected Gurney. He'd stay there for years, going into the cotton business as a cotton factor, before returning to New York in the late 1870s due to health issues.

One curious character during the war was **Albert Pike**. He was 10 years older than Gurney. He was made the **Scottish Rite's Sovereign Grand Commander** in 1859, then became an officer in the Confederate Army, commanding a force of Native Americans – though originally he was from Boston. After the war he published **MORALS AND DOGMA**. That was in 1871. Pike was friends with people in South Carolina and it's likely he and Gurney would have met.

⁸ One source says Woodford became the Military Governor of Savannah, GA. Then went on to become the Lt. Governor of New York State c. 1867-68.

The Civil War had spread the game of baseball, making it a game of the people. And in July of 1867 **Continental** sponsored a Baseball match between clubs of Brooklyn and New York for the purpose of increasing the **Hall and Asylum Fund**.⁹

The Brooklyn Bridge

Speaking of the then “City” of Brooklyn. New York did business with them via ferry. But when the East River froze in 1867, commerce stopped. It was decided to build a great bridge - **The Brooklyn Bridge**. **Bro. Alden Swan** of **Adelphic** Lodge was chosen to be one of the commissioners who got the Brooklyn Bridge built.

New York and Masonry in the 1860s and 1870s

It was a romantic era. The Angel of the Waters was unveiled in Central Park. A year later the new Grand Lodge opened on 23rd and 6th and Continental moved in. This was 1874.

This was a golden age for fraternalism, but Masonry was again changing. It was in this era of the post Civil War 1860s and 1870s that a new movement in freemasonry was coming into play. In 1868 Members of the **Grand Orient** in Continental Europe began doing things differently. They discussed politics and were politically active. They let people of any race creed or religion join. And in 1877 they decided that belief in god should not be a

⁹ by this time half of the millionaires in the USA moved to New York City.

requirement to be a freemason. They also decided to admit women. This all became too much and too contrary to the English way of doing things so in 1877, the Grand Orient split from The Grand Lodge of England. They remain split to this day.

Gurney was 56 by this time.

Other external troubles, like the troubles with the Catholic Church, were to come later. Up to this time, from 1848 to 1876, **Pope Pius IX** was a Freemason. He was rumored to be a member of the Grand Orient.

In 1876, not far away from the new Grand Lodge, just an Avenue over in Madison Square, a French Freemason by the name of **August Bartholdi**¹⁰ put on display the arm and torch of his **Statue of Liberty**. An American Freemason named **Richard Morris Hunt**, then famous for designing oriental fantasy mansions for the hordes of *Nuevo Riche* who'd moved to New York after the Civil War, was tasked to design the pedestal, which the American's would pay for. To raise money for this pedestal, you could climb up to the torch.

It was hard to get money because New York was in the middle of what they called "The Great Depression", and wealthy New Yorkers thought the Statue would rally the working poor to rise up against them.

¹⁰ Bartholdi was already known to New Yorkers for his statue of the Freemason Lafayette which stands in Union Square.

Gurney, who had returned from South Carolina to New York about this time, would have seen the Masonic Hall when it was new, as well as the Statue of Liberty's arm and torch in Madison Square. Gurney would also have been present for the completion of the first phase of the new **7th Regimental Armory** on 67th St. and Park Avenue. It was completed in 1879, the year Gurney died. He was about 58 years old.

Had Gurney gone to the theater he would have seen one of our brothers, **Digby Bell** rising to fame performing in **Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore***

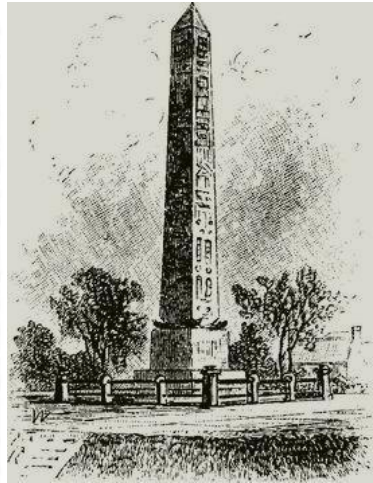


Digby Bell

Cleopatra's Needle and Continental Lodge

Speaking of curious Naval officers... In the year of Gurney's death, **Henry Honeychurch Goringe**, a brother from Continental, and naval officer who'd served in the Civil War, volunteered to go Egypt, where he supervised 100 Arabs, to transport a massive 71 foot tall, 3500 year old, 244 ton Obelisk nicknamed **Cleopatra's Needle** from Alexandria, Egypt to New York City's Central Park. After adventures, it arrived in 1881.

The Freemason William H. Vanderbilt financed this endeavor.
The Obelisk stands behind the MET.



That Obelisk was from those ancient times when the **Jews** had their Exodus from Egypt. Now in New York it was a harbinger... a forecast of another wave of Semitic peoples soon to arrive.

Changing New York in the 1880s

For it was in this year, 1881, that events happening in distant lands would change New York City forever. **Czar Alexander II** was assassinated, a murder some say was inspired by Russian Grand Orient Freemasons. The resulting disorder and persecution of the people led to new waves of immigrant refugees coming from Eastern Europe and the territories of the Russian

Empire – both Slavs and Semites. They would pour into New York by the millions... followed within a decade by **Italians** seeking better economic opportunities in the New World. The slum conditions that Gurney tried to alleviate with his 5 points mission would become worse as the Lower East Side became the most densely populated place in World History. It filled with crowded tenements, cafes, Orthodox churches, synagogues, and vendors with pushcarts. It was a culturally rich slum, but rife with disease, gangsters, death and vice. A book of photographs was published in this era called *How the Other Half Lives*. The photos were taken by an immigrant from Denmark named **Jacob Reiss**.

The Statue of Liberty and Continental Lodge

To greet these immigrants the Statue of Liberty would come to rise, almost as a beacon of hope for a better life in the new world. When the cornerstone for its' pedestal was laid in 1884, it was a Continental lodge brother, **COL Edward M.L. Ehlers**, acting as Grand Secretary, who inventoried the contents of a box placed inside. This was reported in the New York Times with his name and the name of Continental lodge.¹¹



That same year, the Pogrom in the Russian Empire would end.

As for these immigrants, part of becoming an American was to familiarize ones self with Baseball. Baseball, I believe, is a

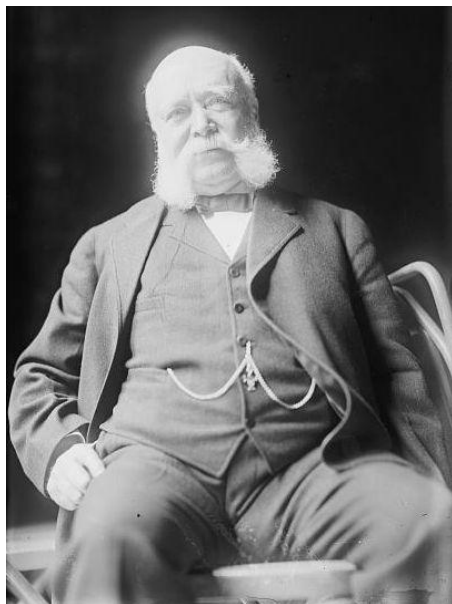
¹¹ When the Statue of Liberty was completed she was given the 1st Ticker Tape Parade from Battery Park to City Hall. In that same year the **Dakota apartments** were finished on Central Park West and 72nd street.

metaphor for life, and it was in 1884 that the **Brooklyn Dodgers** baseball team began playing – a team that would later have a connection to our lodge. I'll mention it later.¹²

Bro. Woodford and the Spanish-American War

Now Gurney had died a few years before, but his friend and Lodge Brother, Brigadier General **Stewart Woodford of Acacia and Continental**, would enjoy a longer life and continued doing great things. In 1897 he went to Spain as an Ambassador to negotiate over the issue with Cuba. But unfortunately, due to the explosion of the **battleship Maine** in Havana Harbor in 1898, and President McKinley's desire for conflict, America declared war on Spain. Brother Woodford, Worshipful Master of Continental Lodge in 1859, was vilified in the Spanish press and there were satirical cartoons of him. As he made his way home to Park Slope, Brooklyn, the **Spanish-American War** began.

¹² **St. Patrick's Cathedral** was completed. Greenwich Village was still seen as American and in 1889 a temporary **Arch** was erected there in Washington Square honoring George Washington. In 1892, **Ellis Island** opened, **Columbia University** began to build its new campus uptown, and the **Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine** was chartered as a house of prayer for all the people's of the world. A few years later the first of the great amusement parks opened in **Coney Island**, Brooklyn, and two great hotels acting as one rose up on 34th and 5th, the **Waldorf-Astoria hotel** – built by William Waldorf Astor and his cousin John Jacob Astor IV. This Hotel was torn down in 1929-30 to make way for the Empire State building. Then the Arch went up in the **Grand Army Plaza in Brooklyn**. This seems to be a grand era for Operative Freemasons.



Stewart Woodford

Due to this war, **Puerto Rico** and other former Spanish possessions became part of the United States. This too would change the character of New York a few decades later when waves of **Puerto Ricans** came to the City looking for a better life.

Bro. Woodford and the Borough of Brooklyn

When Brother Woodford came back to New York he was chosen to be part of the Committee for the consolidation of the various towns around New York City into the **Greater City of New York**. Woodford, who lived in Park Slope, represented **Brooklyn**¹³.

¹³ Woodford lived at 869 President St. His house still survives though the interiors were changed in the 1920s.

Brooklyn ceased to be the third largest City in the United States and became an outer borough of New York. Some in Brooklyn call this consolidation the “Great Mistake”.



President Theodore Roosevelt and Continental Lodge

A few years later, in 1901, **Theodore Roosevelt** became a Mason.¹⁴ A Continental brother, **COL Edward M.L. Ehlers**, noted already for his connection to the Statue of Liberty, presented Roosevelt with his apron during the first-degree ceremony while visiting Matinecock Lodge in Oyster Bay, NY... That year President McKinley would be assassinated in Buffalo, and Theodore Roosevelt would become **President of the United States**.



¹⁴ In 1900 the statue of William Tecumseh Sherman won the Grand Prix in Paris for best equestrian statue, and now sits in the Grand Army Plaza in Manhattan.

Charles Looney

In the years that followed, Continental saw men like **Charles Looney** from the Duke of Clarence Lodge in Dublin, Ireland. He was born in the year the Civil War ended and turned 14 years old the year Gurney died. Looney was Master of Continental three times - the first two in 1905 and 1906.¹⁵ He put us on a good financial footing and incorporated the lodge. Stewart Woodford was still alive. He was in his 70s at the time Looney was Master. So we still had a living memory of our founders. Had he lived, Gurney would have been in his 80s. Looney did great things for the lodge. He also had a fine personal collection of medals and other treasures which were donated to the Livingston library. Their **Charles Looney Memorial Collection** is housed in four cases in the museum.

¹⁵ The years before Looney became Master many things happened. The **subways** opened in Manhattan. A ship called the **General Slocum** caught fire and sank killing over 1000 German women and Children from the present neighborhood of Alphabet City) **Macy's** had moved north to 34th street from 14th street and The New York Times had moved from Park Row by the Brooklyn Bridge to Longacre Square, in what became known as **Times Square**, and started a new tradition of celebrating New Years there with a glorious fireworks display. Two more amusement parks opened in Coney Island. **Luna Park** and **Dreamland** While in Russia in that era, **Pogroms** against the Jewish people sent many to the USA. In 1906, Looney's last year as master, the great Architect **Stanford White was murdered** in a theater in Madison Square Garden. A year after that, in 1907, the **Plaza Hotel** opened by Central Park.

Continental and the Livingston Library

Continental has traditionally supported the **Livingston library** both materially and financially.

We have the donations of **Edward C. Ehlers** the son of Edward M.L. Ehlers. Like his father, he was a member of Continental. His donation to the collection consists of over 200 items. In fact it made up the largest part of the collection by 1934. There's a bust of him by **Gustav Borglum**, the man who carved Mount Rushmore. You can see it at the library.

The End of our Founding Fathers

Our present Masonic Hall began construction in 1907 and was completed in 1909. Stewart Woodford died a few years later in February of 1913.¹⁶ He was around long enough to sit in the Renaissance Room where Continental currently meets.

Later the same year Woodford died, the **Maine Monument** was dedicated at the Merchants Gate in Central Park. A speech was given by a freemason, namely President Taft. The monument honors all those that died when the Maine exploded, an event that

¹⁶ In those years between 1910 to 1913 many things happened in New York City. The **New York Public Library's main branch** on 5th Avenue was built, **Old Penn Station** (now gone) was built, **Grand Central Terminal** was completed on Park Avenue, **Ebbets Field** (now gone) was completed. As was the **Woolworth building**, the tallest building in the world in its day. There were also famous disasters. **The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire**, that killed 146 women – most of them Italian and Jewish teenagers, and **Titanic** sank killing over 1500 people. World War I broke out within a year after Woodford's death.

led to Woodford's departure from Spain and the Spanish American War.

This ends the chronicles of that Generation of our founders.

Notable's among the brothers that followed

In future generations Adelpic would welcome **Bro. Frederick Van Rensselaer Dey** who wrote stories for "Nick Carter" in the 1920s, a pulp fiction detective series, and **Edward P. Johnson**, General Manager of the Metropolitan Opera from 1935-1950.

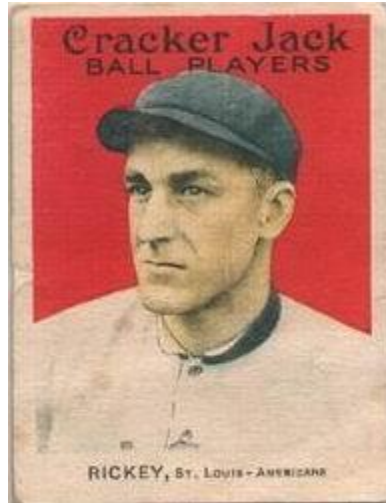
New York Masonic building projects of the Roaring 20's

By the late 1920s, an organization made up of freemasons built a hotel and club called the **Level Club** and Shriners built a theater on 55th street between 6th and 7th Avenues. Both were financially unsuccessful ventures and had to be sold partly due to the Great Depression. The Level Club is now a condominium and the Shriner's Theater is now a Broadway theater called the New York City Center.

Continental Lodge and Baseball

Montauk, out of Fort Greene, Brooklyn, would welcome one of the great luminaries in Major League Baseball, none other than **Branch Rickey**, a former player for the St. Louis Cardinals and an owner of the **Brooklyn Dodgers**.

Rickey was all about Baseball, Money, and God. If you like Baseball he was innovator and pioneer. He began the **Minor League Farm System** to develop new players. More famously he broke baseball's color barrier by bringing the 1st black player into Major League Baseball in 1947 when **Jackie Robinson** joined up to play for the Dodgers.



He pioneered the use of the **Batting Helmet**, and the Batting Cage. Then he and brother **George Barnewall**, a Past Master of Continental lodge, and a Vice President of the Dodgers, began **the Knothole Gang**, a club for young people that let them meet the players and get involved. It also gave away millions of free passes to Dodger baseball games to the youth of New York City in the 1940s and 50s.

Rickey had to sell the Dodgers. He demitted from Montauk and went to manage the Pittsburgh Pirates. While there, he brought **Roberto Clemente** into the game; the great ball Player

from Puerto Rico. Within the decade, Brother Barnewall had died, and the Dodgers had left for Los Angeles. They starting playing as the LA Dodgers in 1958.

But, enter **William Shea**. He wasn't a lodge brother, nor a mason as far as I know, but he was a member of **Zeta Psi** fraternity begun in 1847 by our lodge brother **John Bradt Yates Sommers**. In 1959 he proposed to create a new baseball league called the **Continental League**. The President of that League was **Brother Branch Rickey**. The league fell apart but new teams were created as a result, namely the **New York Mets**. It surprises me little that Continental Lodge once sponsored a game at **Shea Stadium** each year.

These are just some of the notable brothers who were once connected to our lodge. There are many less famous brothers, whose good works and dedication to the craft are important just the same. Let us feel fortunate that we all meet on the Level.

At this writing our present Worshipful Master is **Richard Lenchus** – a living legend in the Martial Arts. Time does not permit to expound upon his exploits, nor of the exploits of our other fine brothers present.

In closing I quote from **Walt Whitman** a man just 3 years older than our William Gurney, whose first edition of *Leaves of Grass* was published just 2 years after our lodge was founded.

From Crossing Brooklyn Ferry

What is it then between us?

What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years between us?

Whatever it is, it avails not--distance avails not, and place avails
not,

I too lived, Brooklyn of ample hills was mine,

I too walk'd the streets of Manhattan island, and bathed in the
waters around it,

I too felt the curious abrupt questionings stir within me,

Closer yet I approach you,

What thought you have of me now, I had as much of you--I laid in
my

stores in advance,

I consider'd long and seriously of you before you were born.

Who was to know what should come home to me?

Who knows but I am enjoying this?

Who knows, for all the distance, but I am as good as looking at you
now, for all you cannot see me?