

Bicentennial Celebration

By Donald D. Thomas, PGM

On Friday, June 6, 1806, nine Master Masons from Laurel Town, New Castle, Newark and Wilmington met in the Old Town Hall in Wilmington. These men, all well trained in Masonic principles and protocol by the Grand Lodges of Pennsylvania and Maryland, met to discuss the formation of a Grand Lodge in Delaware. Whereas previous attempts to form a Grand Lodge had failed, this one succeeded. The following day they, with the exception on one, were joined by four others and met and elected Gunning Bedford, Jr. as Grand Master, Jesse Green as Deputy Grand Master, and warranted Washington Lodge Number 1 in Wilmington, St. John's Lodge Number 2 in New Castle, Hiram Lodge Number 3 in Newark and Hope Lodge Number 4 in Laurel Town. Thus was the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons of Delaware Formed.

Two hundred years later, almost to the date at the same location, about 140 Masons and their friends gathered together to commemorate and reenact that auspicious occasion. Most Worshipful Ronald W. Conaway, Grand Master of Masons in Delaware and Lady Ruth were joined by Right Worshipful Ronald A. Aungst, Grand Master of Masons in Pennsylvania and his Lady Norma, Most Worshipful Ronald W. Belanger, Grand Master of Masons in Maryland and his Lady Karen and Most Worshipful Douglas Policastro, Grand Master of Masons in New Jersey and his Lady Patricia. Also, in attendance at the ceremonies at Old Town Hall were Thomas Carper, United States Senator for Delaware and the Governor of the State of Delaware, Ruth A. Minner.

Following the reading of the minutes from the June 6th and 7th, 1806 meeting by Past Grand Master Ronald Jefferson, Senator

Carper addressed the gathering and expressed his pleasure in being invited to this outstanding observance by the Masonic fraternity of Delaware. Senator Carper noted to those in attendance that this was indeed a memorable occasion and that he knew Freemasons were well known for their charitable service to all humankind. He also noted the dedication of his own father to the fraternity.

Governor Minner was, once again, extremely gracious in her remarks regarding the generosity of the family of Freemasonry and her pride in being a member of the Order of Eastern Star. The Governor commented that many former Delaware Governors (18) were members of the fraternity and on her pleasure in having serving with Governor Sherman Tribbitt (Past Senior Grand Warden of the Grand Lodge in 1962 and Past Master of Union Lodge Number 5).

The visiting Grand Masters in attendance congratulated the Grand Lodge for its dedicated service and expressed their sincere appreciation for the opportunity to be a part of this occasion.

In recognition of the 200th anniversary of the Grand Lodge, a State of Delaware Historical Marker was unveiled, to be placed at old Town Hall commemorating the formation of the Grand Lodge at that site.

That evening a gala banquet was held at Harry's Savoy where over 200 members of the Family of Freemasonry joined together in celebration. Past Grand Master Glenn F. Davis recognized visiting out state Grand Masters and their Ladies; Past Grand Masters Craig, Litteton, Westerside, Fulmer Wadkins, Lengel, Russell, Carey, Mower and Thomas and their Ladies, the heads of the Appendant and Concordant bodies in the persons of William Neal,

Grand High Priest, Arthur A. Loveless representing Grand Council, Dr. Charles A. Depfer, Grand Commander, Edward A. Burke, NUR Shine Potentate and their Ladies; Ann Street and Bud Hainey, Order of the Eastern Star and Marian Taggart, Administrator of Highfield. In addition, nine presiding Worshipful Masters were present with their Ladies representing Union Lodge Number 7 – John D. Hiott, Temple Lodge Number 9 – George Jester, Temple Lodge Number 11 – L. Allan Spayd, Harmony Lodge Number 13 – Frank H. Furr, III, Lafayette Lodge Number 14 – Robert A. Benson, Armstrong Lodge Number 26 – Terrance Van Gorder, Christiana Lodge No. 35 – William Joyce and Solomon Lodge Number 36 – James Russell.

Most Worshipful Grand Master Conaway expressed his sincere pleasure to all for their continued support of this Bicentennial and acknowledged that, as fine as the events of the day were, the best was yet to come as we move forward into our next century.

As part of the teachings rehearsed in the Lodge, we are reminded that "...time, patience and perseverance accomplish all things...". In 1981, when the Grand Lodge celebrated its 175th Anniversary, it was thought appropriate that a reenactment of that ceremony at Old Town Hall and the placing of a marker there would be a significant manner of recognizing the event. Circumstances prevented that from happening, perhaps so it could happen in this our Bicentennial year.

For all those over the past two hundred years that have enabled us to celebrate this year, our dedication to the Brotherhood of Man under the Fatherhood of God, was say thank you. Indeed, the best is yet to come!