

A HISTORY OF MASONRY IN WYOMING  
AND THE BIG HORN BASIN.

AT  
LOVELL, WYO.

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banquet of the Big Horn Basin  
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From all that can be learned about the early Masonic Meetings in Wyoming, it seems that the first meeting was held on top of that high granite boulder, known as "Independence Rock", where the highway crosses the Sweet-water, on July 4th, 1862. The Masons attending this meeting were on their way to the Pacific Coast, and stopped for a few days rest. The Bible used at that meeting is now the property of the Wyoming Grand Lodge, and is kept at Casper.

The first four charters issued to Lodges in what is now Wyoming are as follows:

- No. 1, to Cheyenne, in 1868, from Colorado, known as Colorado No. 16.
- No. 2, to South Pass, in 1869, from Nebraska, known as No. 28.
- No. 3, to Laramie, in 1870, as Colorado No. 18.
- No. 4, to Evanston, in 1873, as Colorado No. 24.

We shall now come down to our own Big Horn Basin Lodges, and find out some interesting facts and circumstances about them.

First on our list comes the twin lodges of Thermopolis and Meeteetse, both being blessed with the coveted dispensation in December, 1900, and both receiving their charters on September 4th, 1901.

In 1897 the land where Thermopolis now stands was thrown open for settlement, and a tent and shack town sprang up, later to be replaced by substantial buildings for those days. This little hamlet was 150 miles from Casper, the nearest railroad. There was no canyon road in those days and Birds Eye Pass was Waterloo for many stage drivers and freighters.

Malta Lodge No. 17 of Thermopolis originally consisted of ten members, and as so often occurs they were not from the same states. The Master had the Nebraska

work; the Senior Warden the California work; the Junior Warden the Ohio work; but they soon revamped the rituals to suit their idea as to what it should be under the Wyoming ritual and everything went along smoothly. Their first meeting was held in the McCoy building, next the McGrath store,

Now we shall <sup>trace</sup> up to the head of the Greybull River, and take a look at Signet Lodge No. 18, Malta's twin brother. Here again the pioneer spirit showed itself as the men of the Greybull valley made ready for their charter. A. C. Thomas, George Taylor, Tom Osborn and E. P. Bowman, in order to house the new arrival, formed the Meeteetse Hall Company, and raised from the brethren and some other residents some \$6500.00 to build a proper lodge hall, and they did not stop there, but had the lumber shipped from the Pacific Coast to Red Lodge, and freighted over to Meeteetse, a distance of 115 miles.

In those early days, the Meeteetse country, as well as the new Masonic Lodge, had jurisdiction over a large part of the Big Horn Basin, an area of nearly 14,000 square miles. All other Lodges of the Big Horn Basin, if they search their members' demits, will find some member, in all probability, from the Meeteetse Lodge on their old rolls.

James I. Patton, so loved by the early Masons of the Basin, was the Master of Signet Lodge for some time, and he lived at Basin, some 65 miles down the river. But Brother Patton never missed a regular meeting. He drove the 130 miles round trip in a buckboard and was always on hand to open and close his lodge.

In the spring of 1901 the town of Basin was born, and soon civic pride began to show itself, and it was not long before a group of Masons from the Meeteetse Lodge, with others, asked for a Charter for the Basin country. Thus Temple Lodge No. 20 was conceived, in

October, 1902, and born in Sept., 1903, with James I. Patton, Master and C. A. Zaring Senior Warden.

From then on the Brothers from both sides of the Big Horn River and its tributaries attended lodge at Basin. Many an exciting time was had by the boys from Shell, Bonanza and Hyattville, swimming the Big Horn River in the spring and summer and fighting blizzards in the winter, to be on hand when the gavel fell.

Probably the first gathering of masons to take place in the Big Horn Basin took place at Basin in the spring of 1897, when Patton, Quiner, Dyer and Duhig met at Basin at Mr. Patton's call, and around a stove, seated on boxes, they discussed the possibility of organizing a lodge at Basin. They gave up the plan at that time as there were too few masons in the vicinity.

Soon after Temple Lodge No. 20 at Basin was organized, the men of the Cody country and the North and South Fork, decided that Meeteetse was too distant for them to get there as often as they should and attend the regular meetings. Shoshone Lodge No. 21 was granted a charter in September, 1903, and we still have with us some of the original members, such as Sam Parks, W. J. Kissick, and Harry Robertson, of Cody. This lodge started, as so many did, with meager furniture and equipment. The Altar consisted of two nail legs and a pine slab, while the seats were of plank and boxes. But this did not last long, as the members got busy and it was not long until they had a very nice place to meet in the Odd Fellows Hall. Later, however, they went through the throes of financing a large Home, and built a splendid Masonic Building at Cody, which they moved into in 1913.

Whether Sam Parks and Harry Robertson disliked the name "STINKING WATER" so long by their doors I am not sure, and history

persuaded the State Legislature to change the name of this sometimes odoriferous stream to "Shoshone", and thus the most scenic fifty miles in America, from Cody to the Ark, was advertised as Shoshone Canyon, and this lodge acquired its name.

But things were now happening on the Big Horn also. The Methodists of Worland were in the notion to build a church, and needing assistance some one had the happy thought that the lodges of that town should move in and rent the church and help pay for it. His suggestion bore fruit and it was not long until the Bonine Brothers, and Bothers Coulter, Howell, Foster, Gates, Keys, and others petitioned for a Charter. Thus Cloud Peak Lodge No. 27 was formed, with the whole-hearted assistance of the Basin Masons. The first meeting was held in the office of the Hanover Canal Co., Mr. B. C. Buffum was the first Master and Dr. Foster and Harry Bonine held the other chairs. The first initiates were Ashby Howell and Roger Culbertson. They then moved into the Worland Grit building for a short time, but on completion of the church they were ready to move in and did so. They remained there for several years and then moved into Kent Hall, but now have a fine new Hall, built for Lodge purposes.

The first Bible used was borrowed from Dr. Foster, and the first square and compasses were bought from the local hardware store.

The Lodge gets its name from that majestic 14,000 foot peak of the Big Horns to the East, so plainly seen from Worland.

But "TIME MARCHES ON", and we next find the Powell Flat, with its spacious valley and new canals filled with water, gathering the small farmers and new settlers into their midst, and soon it felt the need of a Masonic Home. So in the spring of 1910 the Cody Masons instituted the Lodge at Powell, and thus Absorkee Lodge No. 30 received its charter in the fall of 1910.

Two story buildings were scarce in Powell,

as in other towns of the Big Horn Basin, and it was hard to get quarters; but soon Loftsgarden Hall was built, and the Lodge secured the top floor. Later on they moved to the upper floor Lyric Theatre building. The Masons here as at towns, looked forward to the time when they could own their own home, and today Absarooke Lodge of Powell owns and occupies one of the finest buildings of its size in the State. Like Cloud Peak Lodge, they admired the mountains to the west, and took to themselves the name Absarooke, after the Absarooke Range of the Rockies.

In the spring of 1911, Greybull, in its infancy, but believing in the future as an oil center and railroad division point, decided that it should have a Lodge. Greybull was then in the Basin territory and Temple Lodge hated to see the Greybull boys pull away from them, and at first did not enthuse over losing the members; but after more careful consideration of the matter, appreciated the position that the Masons at Greybull were in, recognized the justness of their requests, and entered whole heartedly into the plan to secure a charter for them. Ray B. West, Master of the Basin Lodge gave his consent, and in September, 1913 the Charter was received. Some of their charter members are Brothers Knode, Heron, Clement, and Meade, while Homer Lamb and Charles Lampman were the first to be initiated.

Greybull Lodge is the father of the idea of the Big Horn Masters Club, and is entitled to the greater credit for its organization. At its request Basin and Worland Masons met with the Greybull Masons in the Greybull Lodge room on December 8th, 1916, and organized the Masters Club. From that small beginning as a nucleus, this splendid and outstanding organization has grown. Today it is known throughout the State for its size, accomplishments and personnel. Whether the Lodge took its name from the town, the river, or the Gray Bull that guarded the crossing of the lower Greybull River is a secret.

Next comes Deaver, and like Powell, enjoying the influx of settlers under their new canal, decided that it would pull away from the home ties of Absarooke at Powell, and walk by itself. Thus, in 1919, Brother Blakesley, as Master of Absarooke Lodge installed the new officers.

This Lodge had the distinction of starting off with nearly <sup>4</sup>/<sub>5</sub> its new officers well trained in Masonry, as they were most of them East Masters of other Lodges, such as Barnett, Peterco; Bagley and Dillavou, who had been Masters of the Powell Lodge. Rev. Jones was the first initiate.

The Lodge for some time suffered a continuous loss of its officers by the men being transferred to other locations on the work, or into other towns and States, as this was a reclamation project, and some of them were not there long, Powell gaining by the transfers, usually. The survivors, however, kept up the good work and built up a personnel and membership that was a credit to the Order.

Following the precedent set by some of the other Lodges, it took to itself a name, local in color, i.e., "TRI-MOUNTAIN", after the three mountain ranges always in view, the flat top Pryors to the north, the rugged Big Horns to the east, and the majestic Rockies to the west.

Next in line comes Lovell, who, like Greybull, was suffering from "growing pains", and as early as 1915, was becoming restless and desiring its own Lodge.

Like Deaver, Lovell was withing the jurisdiction of Absarooke Lodge at Powell, but the distances and condition of the roads made it difficult to be at the meetings, so by 1918, the desire had matured sufficiently for Brothers Torjuson, Stryker, Neilly, Green, Mitchell, McClay, Hoskins and Little to sign a petition for a dispensation to organize Lodge. With the help of Brothers Brand, Schweiger, Harris, Richardson, Boyle, Howard, Dodd, Skidmore and others, it materialized in July 1920. Deputy

Grand Master Hudson W. Darrah, of Cody, installed the new officers, and thus Lovell Lodge No. 36 became a reality; and I am pleased to hear that Lovell, too, soon plans to have its own Home. Like some others that I have mentioned, it acquired its name from the home town, which in turn had taken its name from that Old Cattle Baron, H. C. Lovell, who was such an outstanding citizen of this community in its early days.

And now, last but not least, comes the Baby of the Masonic Lodges of the Masters Club of the Big Horn Basin, "TENSLEEP", #46, and like Meeteetse, handicapped for lack of railway facilities, but displaying that pioneer spirit, and making the most of its natural advantages, near the mountains and in a stock raising country, it developed into a strong and sturdy youngster, and has made older and larger lodges look well to its laurels at these meetings.

Thus the youngest and the oldest lodges of this club are situated at opposite stations, clear across the width of the Big Horn Basin, and each basking under the great mountain ranges in their back yards.

Tensleep lodge was granted a charter in 1927, with Brothers Shaw, Nowles, Anderson and the Woods boys, Miller, Moses, Jacobs and Inghram got away to a flying start and is young and full of pep and enthusiasm.

This lodge and the town of Tensleep derived its name from the Indians, meaning ten slaeps, or ten days travel from Old Fort Laramie. Thus I end my pilgrimage to the Big Horn Basin Lodges, and may they all thrive and prosper in this land of feed, seed and sugar, among God's Chosen People.