



Old West Masonic Lodge #813



History of Freemasonry in the
Santa Clarita Valley

The Early Years

Masonry has been an integral part of California for more than 170 years. During the Gold Rush of 1849, thousands of settlers came to California in search of fortune. Many of these men were Masons and brought with them Masonic values and traditions. Not surprisingly, some of California's first Masonic lodges were established in the mining towns of the Gold Country. In 1850 - the same year that California became a state - the Grand Lodge of California was established in Sacramento.



Some of the early pioneers that came to the Santa Clarita valley were Masons. Among them was Sanford Lyon. In 1855, as travel between southern and northern California increased, a roadway was opened through the San Fernando pass (later to be known as Beale's cut). This created the need for stage stops. In 1855 Sanford Lyon along with his brother Cyrus acquired the depot that became known as Lyon Station. It was located at what is now Eternal Valley cemetery. The station consisted of a store, post office, telegraph office, tavern, and stage depot. In addition to his enterprise at Lyon Station, Sanford Lyon became an active participant in the birth of the oil industry in Pico Canyon.

As early as 1854, Sanford, along with William "Bill" Jenkins and Placerita Canyon gold discoverer Francisco Lopez, visited Pico Canyon to see (according to Jenkins) "the oil springs, from whence the Mission San Fernando took the oil in rawhide bags to the mission where it was distilled for lighting purposes."

In 1865, Sanford teamed up with Edward F. Beale, Andres Pico and others to form the first Star Oil Co. By January 1869, Sanford, Jenkins and Wiley had sunk the first oil well in Pico Canyon using the spring-pole method.

Based on Sanford's involvement in the oil industry, a post office with the name Petroleopolis was set up at Lyon Station in 1867. The Petroleopolis post office operated until 1871 with Sanford Lyon acting as its postmaster beginning in 1869.

The remains of the Pioneer Oil Refinery, now the oldest existing oil refinery in the world, can still be seen on Pine Street. The California Star Oil Co. eventually evolved into the Standard Oil Co. of California.

Sanford Lyon died at age 51 in 1882. He is buried in the Pioneer section of Eternal Valley Cemetery. The Square and Compass are carved into the stone that marks his final resting place.



Another early mason was Henry Mayo Newhall. Newhall was a California Gold Rush pioneer who was born in 1825 in Saugus, Massachusetts. He was working as an auctioneer on the East Coast in 1849 when news of the



discovery of gold in California reached him. He immediately packed his belongings, boarded a ship, and headed toward San Francisco through Panama.

Upon his arrival in San Francisco he began working as an auctioneer and within two years owned the auction house. As Newhall prospered, another up-and-coming enterprise captured his imagination — railroads. He began investing in fledgling new business ventures dedicated to building railroads to connect San Francisco with other cities in the West. By his fortieth birthday, Newhall had become president of the San Francisco-San Jose Railroad Company, and was completing California's first railroad track system, a line between San Francisco and San Jose to the south.

Real estate and ranching became Newhall's next great enterprise. He invested the profits of his auction and railroad businesses in San Francisco real estate and in the purchase of Spanish land-grant ranchos in central and southern California. Between 1872 and 1875, Newhall acquired 143,000 acres from Monterey County to Los Angeles County.

His most important acquisition was Rancho San Francisco, a parcel of more than 46,000 acres covering much of the Santa Clarita Valley which he purchased for \$2 per acre. He granted a right-of-way to the Southern Pacific Company, and the first tracks connecting the San Francisco area with Los Angeles were laid across his ranch. He named the station Saugus, after his birthplace in Massachusetts. And the railroad named the town site he had granted, Newhall.

Henry Newhall died from injuries sustained when he fell from a horse while riding around what became known as Newhall Ranch. The following was taken from his 1882 obituary; "The deceased was a member of the California Commandery, Knights Templar, and Oriental Lodge, No. 144, F & A. M.; also a member of the Territorial Pioneers, the Academy of Sciences and the Chapter of Royal Arch Masons. Mr. Newhall, during his life, was esteemed for his many kind qualities of hand and heart. There was none so ready to relieve distress nor more seriously generously open to the deserving needy. His character commanded respect equally as a useful citizen or a good man."

As the town of Newhall grew, more Masons moved to the area. In those days, local Masons attended Lodge in San Fernando where several of them were officers. In 1922, the Newhall Masonic Club was established. The stated purpose of the club was, ". . . to promote Masonic fellowship in this community with a view towards forming our own Lodge." The club originally met on Monday evenings at the Chevrolet Agency on Spruce Street in downtown Newhall.

One of the driving forces behind the formation of the club was John S. "Jack" Pilcher, P.M. He was a peace officer and in 1922 became the constable of Newhall.



During his time in law enforcement he faced everything from code violators and runaway children to bootleggers and gang members. An article in the L.A. Times said of him that he "engaged in numerous gun battles with rum-runners and bandits and in thrilling brushes with bad men and beat them to the trigger." Pilcher was tragically killed on duty when his partner accidentally dropped his gun and it discharged, striking Jack in the head. He

had a Masonic funeral service conducted by the members of the Newhall Masonic Club of which he was the president at the time of his death.

Another charter member of the Newhall Masonic Club Was Bro. Arthur B. Perkins. Born in 1891, A.B. "Perk" Perkins came to Newhall in 1919 to manage and



ultimately purchase the fledgling Newhall Water Company, the forerunner of the Newhall County Water District. He became a civic leader, served as justice of the peace (the local judge) in the 1920s, organized Newhall's first Fourth of July Parades, sold real estate and built many homes in the growing community. Upon retirement, Perkins made it his mission to assemble all the historical documents and photographs of the Santa Clarita Valley he could find. Perkins published a manuscript on the history of the Santa Clarita Valley in 1957. In 1962 he wrote a series of articles for The Signal newspaper, appropriately titled "Story of our Valley." Perkins was named "Outstanding Citizen of the Year" in 1964. He was consulted on local historical matters until his death in 1977.

In 1927 the Masonic club moved its meeting location to Lloyd Houghton's Hap-Lan Hall at the corner of Market St. and Railroad Ave. It was Newhall's community room — a place for parties, dances, banquets and Chamber of Commerce meetings. This photo, from 1928, shows that the building also housed the constable's office and was used by the Red Cross. Although it is hard to make out, the Newhall Masonic Club sign including the square and compass can be seen hanging on the side of the building. During the St. Francis dam disaster of March 12, 1928 the building was used as a temporary morgue where some 70 victims were brought for identification and transport to mortuaries. Afterward nobody wanted to use the building for social events anymore so it was razed.



In 1931 the Newhall Masonic Building Company Ltd. was incorporated to build a two-story combination Masonic Lodge and County Courthouse on the site. Completed in 1932, the courthouse occupied the ground floor and the Masons met upstairs, where Hap-A-Lan's salvaged dance floor was reinstalled. In 1960 the Newhall Masonic Building Company liquidated and the property was sold. The Spanish stucco building became known as the old courthouse and still stands at the corner of Market St. and Railroad Ave. in downtown Newhall.

Kingsburry Heads Masonic Club

From The Newhall Signal and Saugus Enterprise | Thursday, January 31, 1946.

“The Newhall Masonic Club, largely inactive during the war years, was reorganized at a meeting held at the Masonic Hall Monday night, and Charles Kingsburry was chosen president. Other officers elected were William Stonecypher, vice-president; Lou Taylor, treasurer; and Ted Kornelissen, secretary. Another meeting has been called by President Kingsburry for Monday night, Feb. 4, at which time an activity program for the year will be discussed.

In general, President Kingsburry stated, it is hoped to revive the social activities which made the Masonic Club one of the most active organizations in the community in pre-war years. About twenty Masons attended the meeting Monday night.”

The Kingsburrys were very active in the Masons, Eastern Star and the Presbyterian Church. In fact, Charlie had a small addition put onto their house so that he could coach budding Masons. He was also a member of the Sheriff's posse, usually riding at the head of that contingent in parades.

The Kingsburry House can still be visited today at Heritage Junction Historic Park in Newhall. The house, originally built in 1879 was first owned by J.O. Newhall, a cousin of Henry Mayo Newhall.



The motion picture industry became another important part of the development of the Santa Clarita Valley. Before long, motion picture production companies



could be found from one end of our valley to the other, preserving images of the old west. Many of our Masonic brethren became famous names of the silver screen. They included Brothers Cecil B. De Mille, Harry Carey, Hoot Gibson, John Wayne, Roy Rogers, Tom Mix and, of course, Gene Autry and his Melody Ranch in Placerita Canyon.

Brother Gene was a member of Catoosa Lodge #185, Catoosa Oklahoma and a charter member of the Old West Shrine Club.

Brother Tom Mix has a special connection to Old West Lodge. Tom Mix was a devoted freemason. He was raised on February 21, 1925, at Utopia Lodge No. 537, in Los Angeles. He joined both the Scottish Rite and The Royal Arch, and participated in the famed 233 club. The 233 was an entertainment industry social club which claimed over 1,700 Masons as members from the motion picture and theatrical industries. With the 233, Mix is said to have participated in traveling Craft degree team composed of actors. The pillars located in the lobby of Old West Lodge were reportedly created by Bro. Mix along with studio craftsmen.



Between 1919 and 1922 Tom Mix built seven “cottages” in Newhall forming a motor court catering to drivers on the old Ridge Route. These seven commercial structures were commonly known as “The Tom Mix Cottages”. The structures were used as lodging by people in the motion picture industry during local filming. Tom Mix used one cottage as a dressing room on several occasions. Two of the original “cottages” are still in use today, located at 24247-24251 Main Street (formerly San Fernando Road).



Remaining “Tom Mix Cottages” in downtown Newhall

Old West Lodge

The post-war era with its housing shortage resulted in a significant population growth in the community. Masons from various Lodges had moved to the Santa Clarita Valley. By the early 1960s the Masonic club joined forces with the Old West Shrine club to complete all the Grand Lodge requirements to institute a Masonic Lodge. In the fall of 1962, the club petitioned the Grand Lodge and was granted dispensation to meet under the name, "Old West Lodge."

On October 2, 1962, members and visitors gathered at the San Fernando Masonic Temple for Institution Ceremonies. Most Worshipful Guy B. Mize, Grand Master, appointed Alexander H. Campbell, P.M., to serve as the first Master. Charles Taylor, P.M. and George Mentzer were appointed as Senior and Junior Wardens, respectively. Worshipful Campbell made the following appointments: Dr. Everett Phillips, Treasurer; Omer Morgan, Secretary; Raymond Eaton, Chaplain; Melbourne Mosena, Senior Deacon; Serafin Rensen, Junior Deacon; Floyd Sands, Senior Steward; Oliver "Hap" Heximer, Junior Steward; Hiram Humphrey, Tiler.

As with any new lodge, there was a need for lodge furniture and paraphernalia. It was learned that a set of "rustic design" lodge furniture was available from La Cresenta Lodge. This unique furniture was designed and built in 1955 by Bro. A.W. "Bud" Smith, a member of Rim of the World Lodge #711. Bro. Smith constructed two sets of similar furniture. Rim of the World Lodge has one set and we have the other which we purchased in 1962.



On November 19, 1963, Most Worshipful Elmer Heald presented the Charter of Old West Lodge, #813. The Lodge celebrated its first regular Installation of Officers on December 17, 1963 at Hart High School. Miss Lynn Mitchell, Honored Queen of Bethel #249, Order of Job's Daughters, presented Old West Lodge with a beautiful Charter case. Brother A.B. Perkins, charter member of the original Newhall Masonic club wrote, in 1946; "This town needs the stabilizing influence of a Masonic Lodge more than ever. Towns don't become better places in which to live without strong leadership." Brother Perkins, the first Water Commissioner, and town historian, provided much of that leadership and was on hand to witness the realization of the Masonic Lodge he had hoped for since 1922.

In the early years, Old West Lodge met in Fellowship Hall at the Presbyterian Church, 24307 Newhall Avenue. Our Brother, the Reverend Joseph Robinson, pastored the church. The Lodge continued to use Hart High School for Installations and special programs until 1965, when a group of Masons, who lived in Friendly Valley, formed a Masonic club. Lodge installations and other functions were then held in the Friendly Valley auditorium, which is across the street from the present location of our lodge building.

In 1965, three years after dispensation, our membership had doubled. Worshipful George Mentzer and attorney Brother Paul Palmer were instrumental in the formation of the Old West Masonic Building Association. The purpose of this organization was to acquire a permanent location for our Lodge. Fundraisers were organized, including one in September 1966 when Brother Dr. Everett Phillips sponsored a Ham Dinner. In later years a Swiss Steak Dinner was added. These dinners became yearly events for more than forty years.

Another important tradition at Old West Lodge began in February 1970 when Worshipful Lowell Alexander proposed the adoption of the Western Tie as the "official tie" of the Lodge. His proposal was adopted and the tie became widely known among California Masons and is associated with Old West Lodge.

In May of 1970 a large lot in the Sand Canyon area was offered as an outright donation to the Old West Building Association by Wor. Harold Kempel and his wife, however, due to zoning restrictions the lodge was unable to build on the site. Then in 1972 the Building Association was successful in acquiring a 3.5 acre parcel on Sierra Hwy in Mint Canyon at a cost of \$11,500. Again, lack of water and building restrictions prevented construction on the site.

In October of 1974 a medical building in Friendly Valley became available. Wor. Duke Bowers, Master at the time, summoned the members of Old West to a meeting. The meeting was attended by 106 members. It was suggested that each member purchase a \$200 no interest no maturity certificate to help finance the purchase of the building. Over \$20,000 was raised in this manner.

On February 15, 1975, after five months of negotiations, and the heroic fundraising effort, escrow closed on what would be the Old West Masonic Temple. With funds raised from the certificates together with the proceeds from the sale of the property on Sierra Hwy., cash on hand and promissory notes from three brothers the entire purchase price of \$60,000 was paid without indebtedness to a commercial lender.



Planting trees in front of the lodge, 1975
 Pictured left to right; Sandy Campbell, Jerry Rensen,
 Bruce Ivie, Hap Heximer, Len Herendeen, Jack
 Vickers, Keith Flinn, and Oliver Johnson

Before occupying the building, it was necessary to refurbish and redesign the floor space to accommodate a Lodge room with an adjoining dining room and kitchen. The brethren, under the leadership of Oliver “Hap” Heximer and Mel McSpadden performed all the work on the building. In the words of Hap “the brethren of this and other lodges, their wives and anyone else that could swing a hammer or hold a paint brush rebuilt and refinished the two doctor suites, built new private entrances to those suites, tore out the wood floor in the lodge room, poured a concrete slab floor, installed

a 46 ft. 5000 lb. steel beam in the lodge room ceiling to replace a load bearing wall that was removed to enlarge the room and repainted and refurbished the inside and outside of the building. Only two commercial contracts were let, one for the carpeting and the other for the ceiling tiles.” This was a time when Old West Lodge rolled up its sleeves and went to work -hard work, day in and day out for six months, until the job was finished. And no one has forgotten the women of Old West. They were there too, providing food and refreshment for the working brothers. It was a team effort that bound those involved by yet another tie, and will long be remembered.

Old West Lodge met at the church for the last time on September 23, 1975. Two weeks later, on October 7, 1975, the Lodge held its first meeting in their new Temple. The officers during this important transition were: Keith Flinn, Master; Douglas Fortine, Senior Warden; Carl Krohn, Junior Warden; A. Bruce Ivie, Treasurer; Serafin Rensen, Secretary; Melvon McSpadden, Chaplain; Leo Anselm, Senior Deacon; Robert Bunce, Junior Deacon; John Stockwell, Junior Steward; and Lawrence Holtzworth, Tiler.

On January 15, 1977, the Old West Masonic Temple was dedicated at its present location. There were 315 guests present, including several Grand Lodge dignitaries. The elected officers present were: Carl Krohn, Master; Leo Anselm, Senior Warden; Robert Bunce, Junior Warden; A. Bruce Ivie, Treasurer, and Serafin Rensen, Secretary. Worshipful Krohn presented Most Worshipful Kermit A. Jacobson, Grand Master, with "a very distinctive gavel and sounding block resembling a branding iron, with his initials formed in the iron." On this date, there were 245 members of Old West Lodge

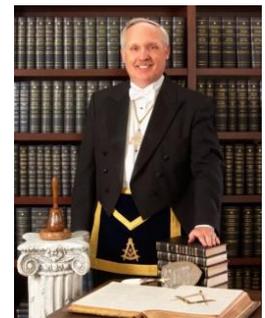


Wor. Jack Vickers, Inspector Wor. Carl Krohn, Master
 and Most Wor. Kermit Jacobson, Grand Master of
 Masons in California



Traditions Continue

Old West Lodge continues to thrive in the Santa Clarita Valley. Many members of the lodge have gone on to serve Freemasonry as Grand Lodge Officers, Committeemen, Inspectors and Masters of other lodges. In 2008 Wor. Larry Adamson, a member of Old West Lodge was installed as Grand Master of Masons in California. In 2012 Old West Lodge celebrated its 50th anniversary.



We reflect on the tremendous effort and sacrifice by those who have made this possible. We also look forward to the future with pride and the satisfaction that our contribution of Freemasonry to this community will never cease to elevate mankind and lift him upward. So mote it be!



The Masonic Club float is seen as it passed by the Soledad Hotel at the southwest corner of 9th Street and Spruce Street (now Main St.) on July 4 in this undated photograph from the 1930s.



Newhall 4th of July parade 2017

This history was compiled by Robert "Bob" Flinn, P.M. using notes and records from Past Masters Oliver "Hap" Heximer, Keith Flinn, Brody Rennels and information from the Santa Clarita Valley Historical Society