

HISTORY OF OLD WEST LODGE

The idea of a Masonic Lodge in the valley of the Little Santa Clara River was probably first discussed by Masons who came here and settled after serving with General Fremont during the Mexican Era and serving later during the Territorial Era with General Beale. Other Masons came in 1842 when gold was discovered in Placerita Canyon (less than five miles from our Lodge) which touched off the *first* Gold Rush in California. More Masons came to tunnel through Fremont Pass and build the railroad. A golden spike ceremony in the Santa Clarita Valley established the first rail link between Los Angeles and San Francisco.

In 1876, a township was established near the Saugus train station and was given the name of its founders, the Newhall family. Several of the Newhall men were members of Oriental Lodge, #144, San Francisco, California. In that same year, oil was discovered in Pico Canyon and the first oil refinery in California was built and still stands on Pine Street near downtown Newhall. Brother Cyrus Lyon was involved that oil production. The founding fathers also included Brother John Gifford, Railroad Agent and Brother Sanford Lyon, a businessman. The Square and Compass are carved into the stones that mark their final resting place in the Pioneer section of Eternal Valley Cemetery.

All the ingredients were here for the "old west" to come alive in the Santa Clarita Valley. We had Cowboys and Indians; trains and train robberies; saloons and shoot-outs. But the turn of the century brought law and order and . . . the movie industry. Film production companies could be found from one of our valley to the other keeping the legends of the "old west" alive. Many of our brethren in Freemasonry became famous names of the silver screen and contributed to the lore of the "old west." Those who lived and worked here included Brothers Cecil B. De Mille, Harry Carey, Hoot Gibson, John Wayne, Roy Rogers, and, of course, Gene Autry and his Melody Ranch in Placerita Canyon. Brother Gene was a member of Old West Shrine Club. In fact, the two beautiful Masonic pillars in the lobby of our Temple were constructed in the 1920s, by studio craftsmen, for silent movie cowboy, Brother Tom Mix.

In those days, local Masons attended Lodge in the City of San Fernando and many were officers. In 1922, John Pilcher, P.M., a resident and Constable of Newhall, was the driving force in the establishment of the Newhall Masonic Club. The stated purpose of the club was, ". . . to promote Masonic fellowship in this community with a view towards forming our own Lodge." The club first met in a storefront building on Spruce Street, now located at 24407 San Fernando Road. The membership was active and purchased a hall. The building still stands on the northwest corner of Market Street and Railroad Avenue. The Masonic Hall, as it was known, was the center of community social life and housed the first Justice Court and Constable's Office.

The Newhall Masonic Club remained active until the outset of World War II. However, several Masons left to serve in the military and others were employed long hours supporting the war effort. As a result, the club became less active "for the duration."

In the Minutes of a Masonic club meeting in 1946, Brother A.B. Perkins, Secretary, made the following entry: "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."

As World War II came to an end, the original Newhall Masonic Club became dormant. The post-war era with its housing shortage resulted in a significant population growth in the community. Masons from a variety of Lodges had moved to the Santa Clarita Valley and by the early 1960s, a new Masonic club had been formed and membership grew rapidly. In consideration of our valley's tradition and heritage, 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 of Masons and 12 Grand Lodge officers were present and participated. The Grand Master appointed Alexander H. Campbell, P.M., to serve as the first Master of Old West Lodge. Charles Taylor, P.M. and George Mentzer were appointed as Senior and Junior Wardens, respectively. Worshipful Campbell appointed the following Lodge officers for the first term: _____, Treasurer; _____, Secretary; _____, Chaplain; _____, Senior Deacon; _____, Junior Deacon; _____, Senior Steward; _____, Junior Steward; _____, Tiler.

On November 19, 1963, the Charter of Old West Lodge, #813, was presented by the Most Worshipful Elmer Heald, Grand Master of Masons. This was followed by our first regular Installation of Officers on December 17, 1963. Installation and reception were held at Hart High School. Miss Lynn Mitchell, Honored Queen of Bethel #249, International Order of Job's Daughters, presented Old West Lodge with a beautiful Charter case.

In the early years, Old West Lodge met in Fellowship Hall at the Presbyterian Church on Newhall Avenue, which was pastored by our Brother, the Reverend Joseph Robinson. However, the Lodge continued to use Hart High School for Installations and special programs.

In 1965, three years after dispensation, our membership had doubled. Brother Paul Palmer, Attorney at Law was instrumental in the formation of the Old West Building Association. The purpose of this organization was to acquire a permanent location for our Lodge.

This was also the year a group of Masons, who lived in Friendly Valley, formed a Masonic club. Lodge installations and other functions were held in the auditorium, which is across the street from the present location of our Temple.

In September 1967, our Brother, Dr. Phillips sponsored a Ham Dinner, as a fundraiser for the Building Association. This event started an annual tradition, which continues to this day.

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 is now widely known among California Masons and is associated with Old West Lodge.

Holding Lodge meetings at the Presbyterian was, to say the least, a challenge. All furniture and paraphernalia had to be set up before, and removed after, every meeting. This was also true for the concordant bodies, which also met at the church. The need for a Masonic Temple became greater as time passed.

Finally, on January 15, 1977, after a great deal of effort and sacrifice by many, the Old West Masonic Temple was dedicated at its present location. There were 315 guests present, including several dignitaries. The elected officers present were: Bob Bunce, Master; Leo Anselm, Senior Warden; Carl Krohn, Junior Warden; A. Bruce Ivie, Treasurer; and Serafin Rensen, Secretary. On this date, there were 245 members of Old West Lodge.

Old West Lodge has continued to thrive in the past two decades. Today, 21 years after the dedication of this Temple, we gather together for another important ceremony – our "mortgage burning." This day represents a tremendous effort by many and the satisfaction and gratitude of those present.

As we approach the 21st Century and the new millenium we recognize our heritage in this in this community and enjoy the brotherhood of Freemasonry which has been, and will continue to be the labor of love at Old West Lodge.

Researched and written by:
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Old West Lodge, #813
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