

FREEMASONRY IN PHELPS
Sincerity Lodge No. 200 F & AM
Written by John M. Parmelee
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Masonry or Freemasonry is a 600-year-old fraternity with a 600 year old tradition, the prototype of most modern fraternal societies and service organizations. The fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons is the oldest, largest and most widely known fraternal organization in the world. It is a universal fraternity of friends and brothers who seek to become better men through their association with one another and their families.

In a recent society whose moral values are severely tested, Masonry brings men together for fellowship and the promotion of integrity and good citizenship. Not a religion, Masonry does require a belief in God and urges its members to be faithful and devoted to their own religious beliefs.

Not political, it encourages its members and their families to be good citizens and to choose their own best means of political expression. Not a welfare institution or benefit society, its selective charity and good works in the community are valuable.

The basic belief of Masons is "The Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man". As a rule, no one is ever asked to become a Mason but by his own desire and with the assistance of a relative, friend, or acquaintance who is a Mason.

Freemasonry in Phelps started with Philetus Swift, who was the "Father of Masonry" for the entire area. Philetus was born in Litchfield County, Connecticut, in 1764, the son of Elisha and Mary Ransom Swift. He married a girl from Vermont and moved to Rutland County, Vermont. His wife died six months after marriage. Philetus came to Geneva in 1759 with Oliver Phelps. In 1792 he purchased 320 acres (Lot 1), Township 11, Range 1, when he built the cut stone house on his property in 1816. He also built a flour mill "Swift Mills", in the rear of the house on the Canandaigua Outlet. In 1793 he married Sally, the eldest daughter of Seth Deane. They had one child Lieutenant Deane Swift, who died in 1818 as a result of wounds from the War of 1812.

Philetus was a Major when he came here, advanced to Captain in 1799, to Lieutenant Colonel in 1805, and to Brigadier General in 1812 while commanding a regiment at Black Rock on the Niagara River. He was a member of the State Assembly for Alleghany, Genesee, and Ontario Counties in 1807, 1808, and 1823. In 1811 he was elected to the Senate, and reelected each year from 1812 through 1818. When the Town of Phelps was formed in 1796, he served as Town Assessor and Commissioner of Highways, and was Supervisor of the Town from

1818-1822. At one time he served as County Judge, and filled the office of Lieutenant Governor and President Pro Tem of the Senate. Philetus died July 24, 1828.

John Swift, the older brother of Philetus, came to the area in 1789 with Philetus. John was a General in the Army and fought in the Revolution at the age of 18 years. John, with Colonel Jenkins, bought the entire Township 12, Range 2 of the Phelps-Gorham Purchase. On his land he founded a village called Swift's Town. Soon after, the town was renamed Palmyra after the Biblical city. In 1825 Marcus Swift, son of the General, moved to Michigan where he founded a village, now Garden City, in Nankin Township, west of Detroit. John died July 12, 1814 after the War of 1812, while commanding his regiment at Fort George. He was shot by a prisoner who had been taken in action.

John and Philetus Swift were active Masons prior to coming to this area. In 1802 they decided to found Mount Moriah Lodge #112, with permission from Grand Lodge to meet alternately between Palmyra and Phelps. The original petition was signed on Dec. 24, 1802, by five Masons living in Palmyra and five living in Phelps Township. The Phelps men were Gain Robinson, Dr. Joel Prescott, Seth Deane (Worshipful Past Master), Philetus Swift, and William Burnett. Most officers were Palmyra men. The lodge was recommended by Ontario Lodge #23 of Canandaigua, the only lodge in the Phelps-Gorham Purchase, founded in 1792. The warrant for work was granted by Grand Lodge on June 1, 1803. Lodge meetings were held in Palmyra at the residence of Stephen Phelps and in Phelps at the residence of Stephen Holland on Old Preemption Rd. north of Gifford Rd., and later at the John Wolvin farm. There were about 40 meetings held before the year 1807.

The distance between the town meeting places of 20 miles proved to be too inconvenient, and so on March 9, 1807, a petition was made to Grand Lodge to meet only in Palmyra. The petition was endorsed by DeWitt Clinton, Grand Master, on June 2, 1807, and granted on Sept. 8, 1807. Mount Moriah Lodge forfeited its charter in 1835 and was succeeded by Palmyra Lodge #248 in 1852.

The Freemasons in Phelps wanted their own Masonic Lodge, but in 1805 Geneva wanted a lodge. They submitted a petition with the endorsement of Ontario Lodge #23 in Canandaigua. For reasons unknown, the petition was denied. In 1807 Mount Moriah Lodge endorsed a second petition for Geneva. The petition was approved by the Mayor of New York City, DeWitt Clinton, as Grand Master, on Sept. 21, 1807. This Ark Lodge #160 was born in 1807 in Geneva. Ark Lodge changed its number to #33 in 1839. Philetus Swift and members from Phelps were able to accomplish this. Seven of the ten officers were from the Town of Phelps.

The officers in Ark Lodge in 1807 were:

Philetus Swift - Worshipful Master - Phelps
Polydor B. Wisner - Senior Warden - Geneva
Wells Whitmore - Junior Warden - Phelps
Joel Prescott, MD - Treasurer - Oaks Corners
David Cook - Secretary - Oaks Corners
William Burnett - Senior Deacon - Phelps
Samuel Lawrence - Junior Deacon - ?
Luther Root - Senior Steward - Phelps
Oren Aldrich - Junior Steward - ?
Erastus Cary - Tiler - Phelps

On January 11, 1808, Mt. Moriah Lodge authorized Philetus Swift to obtain the charter for Ark Lodge. In 1805 Mt. Moriah refused petitions for Geneva, Junius, and Augusta, and also a petition for a lodge in Orleans. In March 1808, Philetus Swift was appointed Right Worshipful Grand Visitor for Ontario, Genesee, and Alleghany Counties. In May 1811 he was appointed District Deputy Grand Master, which office Grand Lodge created to replace the Grand Visitor. He held this office until 1817. Philetus was also the first senior warden and one of the charter members of Geneva Chapter No. 36.

In 1810 Phelps Masons wanted their own lodge. So, on Jan. 8, 1811, a petition was submitted to Grand Lodge for the organization of Sincerity Lodge. Ark Lodge recommended the petition on Feb. 6, 1811. On May 7, 1811, a dispensation was granted by DeWitt Clinton, Grand Master. The first officers were installed by R. W. Philetus Swift.

The first officers were:

Wells Whitmore - Worshipful Master
William Burnett - Senior Warden
Alfred Witter - Junior Warden
Luther Root - Treasurer
John McCay - Secretary
Michael Musselman - Senior Deacon
David Saunderson - Junior Deacon
Russell Flint and Joseph Daniels - Stewards Erastus Car; - Tiler

On Dec. 11, 1811, Sincerity Lodge was constituted and the first regular officers were installed on Dec. 27, 1811. The installation was held in Geneva at the Ark Lodge room in Powell's Hotel in the public square.

The first regular officers were:

William Burnett - Worshipful Master
Michael Musselman - Senior Warden
Luther Root - Junior Warden
Nathaniel Wilson - Treasurer
Elias Cost - Secretary
David Saunderson - Senior Deacon
Theodore Bannister - Junior Deacon
John Warner and John Hawks - Stewards
Stephen Dunwell - Tiler.

The lodge room was in Root's Tavern. In 1818 they had a membership of 50 Masons. In 1821 Sincerity Lodge negotiated with the East Vienna School District to build a school and lodge room on Church St. This building was built in 1822 and is now the St. Francis Catholic Church Rectory. The school had the lower floor and the Masons had their lodge room on the second floor. They met there until 1826.

Between 1826 and 1845 the Morgan Incident occurred because of the anti-Masonic sentiment throughout the country. Anti-masonry started in Europe in the late 1700's. By 1801 no fewer than 18 pretended expositions of Masonry had been published. They intended to destroy the organization. It was well known that a Capt. William Morgan was a direct instigator and cause of agitation in Western New York. He was the alleged author of an expose of Freemasonry which had been widely distributed and Freemasons were said to have reacted with alarm. On Sept. 11, 1826, he was arrested in the Town of Phelps, having been taken from the public house in Orleans and conveyed to the Canandaigua jail. From thence certain persons paid the debt for which he was imprisoned, and were said to have had him taken in a closed carriage to Fort Niagara, where he disappeared. Many believed that Morgan had been drowned in Lake Ontario by Freemasons. After several trials, the crime of murder was not established. When the old jail in Canandaigua was replaced, Sincerity Lodge was given a building stone from the jail cell where Morgan was held in 1826. This stone is still in the lodge room in Phelps.

It was upon this question that the anti-Masonic Party was organized in Western New York and extended until it became national. There was an Anti-Masonic candidate for Governor in 1828 and on the State ticket for 1830. In 1831 a national Anti-Masonic convention was held and William Wirt of Maryland was nominated for President and Amos Ellmaker of Pennsylvania for Vice President. The national Anti-Masonic movement came to an end with the election of Andrew Jackson, and in a few years, it ceased to be an element in politics.

As a result of this incident, the populace reacted against what they believed to be Morgan's murder by Masons. Some 450 of the 490 lodges in New York State were, by decreased membership, to forfeit or surrender their charters. By 1839 Masonic brothers dropped from 20,000 to 3,000 in the State.

Sincerity Lodge surrendered its charter June 5, 1835. All records of the lodge after 1822 are not available. It is believed that persons broke into the lodge rooms in the early '30's and stole all the records. Secret lodge meetings were held in several different private homes after the charter was surrendered. Between 1826 and 1831 secret meetings were held in the brick home of Benjamin Wheat on Wheat Rd. near Orleans. This lodge room was kept as unchanged as possible in 1957 by Paris Trail Meetings were also held in the Cobb/Hicks home on Rt. 96E.

The Masonic Lodge which Philetus Swift started in 1811 surrendered its charter in 1835. The Freemasons continued to promote its principles during the time of Anti-Masonry. When this wave of ignorance and fanaticism had rolled by and spent its fever, a group of Master Masons met, in the year 1857, from time to time to arrange the preliminaries for establishing a new lodge in the Village of Phelps. A petition to Grand Lodge was prepared by William N. Crosby, Principal of the Union & Classical School, Rev. Calvin H. Carpenter, Thaddeus A. Lawrence, Benjamin F. Salisbury, and other Masons. The petition was recommended by Canandaigua Lodge #294 and Newark Lodge #83 and was submitted on March 13, 1858. A disposition was issued by Grand Lodge on March 15, 1858. The charter was issued to Sincerity Lodge #443. At the meeting of June 14, 1859, the Worshipful Master reported as our representative to Grand Lodge had changed the number back to the original #200. Grand Lodge approved the number change on June 11, 1859.

The first meeting was held in 1858 in the Odd Fellows Hall on the corner of Main and Exchange St. (now the Callaway Block). From 1859 to 1870 meetings were held in the original lodge building on Church St. In 1870 the Presbyterian Church and the lodge building were sold to St. Francis Catholic Church. The lodge building then became the Catholic Rectory.

The first officers installed December 28, 1858 were:

William M. Crosby - Worshipful Master
Rev. Calvin H. Carpenter - Senior Warden
Thaddeus A. Lawrence - Junior Warden
David B. Sweet - Treasurer
Justus H. Dawley - Secretary
Jerome B Jackson - Senior Deacon
Benjamin F. Salisbury - Junior Deacon

Joseph June - Tiler

In 1869 the Lodge acquired the right to build a third floor on the Gibson Block, after a fire destroyed the upper floor and roof. On March 16, 1869, the Lodge negotiated with the builder to build the addition for \$2600. In Nov. 1869 they moved to the new lodge rooms and dedicated them on Sunday, Dec. 27, 1869, at the Methodist Church. There was a large attendance of Masons from neighboring towns. The dedication was followed a few days later by a large social function in the lodge rooms. Meetings were held in the anterooms until Jan 18, 1870, when the lodge room was ready for use. The present furniture was purchased for \$500 at that time. The number of Masons was small then, so it was difficult to raise the necessary funds. The Gibson estate required \$1000 in August 1869, so ten members gave \$100 each. Other members gave smaller amounts but they lacked about \$900 of the amount required to pay for their new home and furnishings. In a few years they succeeded in paying off the debt. Masonic balls were very popular in those days so several of these provided most of the funds.

Sincerity Lodge purchased the spacious public hall (Gibson Hall) on Feb. 7, 1930. It was made into a banquet hall. In May 1935 the Lodge also purchased the west end of the Gibson Block. On the second floor (the room over Jim's Hidden Treasures) was converted into a Masonic Club Room for use of their members and friends, complete with a pool table, billiard table, card tables, etc. A kitchen was added for the banquets held there. Years ago, basketball was played there. One row of chairs was placed around the perimeter of the small court. The old school did not have a gymnasium and the hall was the largest area to play. The first store sold by Dave White, who bought the building from the Gibson family, was the drug store. It and the room above it was sold to Druggist Fred Hutchens. He sold it to William Whitson, who sold it to the present owner, Dorothy Meath. There was always a drug store in the present location, ever since the building was rebuilt in 1869. The Astoria Restaurant bought their store when they started their restaurant. The rest of the entire building was bought by Raymond Howard in 1978. The entire second floor was made into apartments and the entire third floor remains empty.

In 1978 Sincerity Lodge bought the property at 67 Ontario to build a new lodge building. In June, 1978, they poured the foundation. The marble cornerstone was placed at that time. The building was erected mostly by lodge members. Some of the members who donated their time and expertise were Elwood Moyers, Ray Howard, Bill Sheppard, Doug Gover, Leonard Hackney, Ralph Hart, Jack Weyneth, and several others. The building was finished and dedicated in 1979, with the first meeting held there Jan. 16, 1979.

The upper floor contains the lodge room, a lobby and preparation room, and a store room. The lower floor has rest rooms, a storage room, and a large dining

room with a pool table, and more storage at the south-west end. The main dining room has folding tables and chairs and a complete kitchen at the east end of the room. There are exits at both ends of the lower floor.

A covered barbeque area was built just south of the parking area in the rear of the building. The Masons are noted for their barbequed chicken and pork suppers, organized and prepared by the Eastern Stars #425, wives of the Masons. This area is available to other organizations.

Similar to most organizations today, it is difficult to obtain men who are interested in becoming Masons. There is a different life style today when cars are available for everyone. Ninety percent of the working people work out-of-town, both husband and wife work, TV and computers occupy most of our spare time, and family life has suffered. People are not interested in their neighbors or in donating time to civic, church, or fraternal organizations. This year there is more interest in family values, to try to correct drug addiction and teen pregnancy, to better schools, and to a return to the basics. It is hoped that this trend will continue. If so, the Masonic Lodge could be a leader in this movement. Now Sincerity Lodge has 75 members. In 1964 we had 181 members and in 1927 we had 249 members, which was the peak of our membership.

John M. Parmelee
M. 1942 WM 1947
Phelps Town Historian 1996

Bibliography:

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Masters of Sincerity Lodge #200

1811-1997

1811	Wells Whitmore	1812	William Burnett
1813-18	Michael Musselman	1819-20	Thomas Smith – first attorney in Phelps
1821-22	James P. Barth – first Master Newark #83	1823-25	Michael Musselman
1829	Jacob Cooper	1830-35	No record
1858-59	(part) William M. Crosby	1859-62	Dr. C. H. Carpenter
1863	Phillip 3. Rogers	1864-66	Ezra J. Peck
1867-70	P. S. Rogers	1871-76	Dr. Fred D. Vanderhoof
1877-88	P. S. Rogers	1879-83	Dr. F. D. Vanderhoof
1884	John Wolvin	1885-86	Dr. F. D. Vanderhoof
1887-93	Russell B. Cobb	1894-96	William L. Crothers
1897-98	William A. Judd	1899-1901	Charles H. Burt
1902-03	Seymour Fridley	1904	R. B. Cobb
1905-06	U. Grant Burnett	1907-08	Albert Bosshart, Jr.
1909-10	Elmer G. Miller	1911-12	George W. Salisbury
1913	Earle S. Warner	1914	Leonard S. Partridge
1915	Maurice E. Warner	1916	Leon W. Van Deusen
1917	Reed B. Curry	1918	Maurice E. Warner
1919-20	U. Grant Burnett	1921-22	Fred C. Vanderhoof
1923	Stuart S. Caves	1924	Charles E. Eacker
1925	Alonzo S. Rathbun	1926	Orin K. Happel
1927	John A. Page	1928	H. S. G. Loveless
1919	John W. Backus	1930	Hugh E. Hammond
1931	James H. Weston	1932	Fred N. Mecker
1933	Clifford Jones	1934	Leslie A. Champion
1935	J. Walter Caves	1936	Leonard C. Avery
1937	Leon A. Westfall	1938	Robert C. Burnett
1939	John H. Hildreth	1940	James F. Cudebac
1941	Theodore E. Davey	1942	J. Carleton DeVall
1943	Richard L. Rathbun	1944	J. Louis Fitzgerald
1945-46	Merton W. Tiffany	1947	John M. Parmelee
1948	Herbert V. Parmelee	1949	Roy E. Cheney
1950	Asa F. Avery	1951	Anon B. Wilbe r
1952	Robert L. Glass	1953	John W. Carney
1954	George Weidenheimer	1955	Ernest J. Darrow
1956	Earl F. Dewey	1957	Henry J. Smith
1958	Gerald M. Weyneth	1959	George H. Landstrom
1960	E. Platt Soper	1961	Lewis R. Margeson

1962	Frank S. Dows	1963	Ralph B. Hart
1964	Donald W. Tiffany	1965	Frederick L. Wheeler
1966	James W. Liberator	1967	Paul W. Adams
1968	Floyd A. Clark	1969	Raymond A. Gordner
1970-71	Douglas Gover	1972	Elwood Mowers
1973	Eugene Fletcher	1974	Lloyd L. Aikin
1975	Ronald W. VanCamp	1976	Lewis W. Williams
1977	John C. Carney	1978	Larry D. Gelder
1980	Raymond A. Howard	1981	Kenneth C. Overslaugh, Jr.
1982	Roger H. Cheney	1983	Dobby L Dorgan
1984	Chris Howard	1985	Gary Clock
1986	Gary J. Yancey	1987	Leonard P. Hackney
1988	Daniel Guth	1989	Douglas A. Gover
1990	Raymond A. Howard	1991-92	Robert Lash
1993	Raymond A. Howard,	1993-94	Lowell Falkey, July '93-
Jan-	June	Dec. '94	
1995	David R. Roll	1996	Paul McIntyre

SINCERITY LODGE #200 GRAND LODGE OFFICERS

RW	F. D. Vanderhoof	DDGM	1883-85
RW	Charles H. Burt	DDGM	1899-1900
RW	William A. Judd	GSB	1901-02
RW	George W. Salisbury	DDGM	1919-20
RW	Alonzo S. Rathbun	GD of G	1936-37
RW	E. Platt Soper	DDGM	1961-62
RW	Ray Howard	DDGM	1985-86
RW	Leonard P. Hackney	DDHN	1961-62

Assistant Grand Lecturer

Russell B. Cobb	1693-94 M
Maurice E. Warner	1920-21
John W. Carney	1955-56
Ray Howard	1981-82

Grand Chaplain

Leonard P. Hackney 1965

Officers, 1996-97

Worshipful Master	Clayton Ruggles
Senior Warden	Paul McIntyre
Junior Warden	Jack Carney
Senior Deacon	James Carney
Junior Deacon	David Smith
Secretary	Paul Adams
Treasurer	David Roll
Senior Master of Ceremonies	Terry Adams
Junior Master of Ceremonies	Charles Morton
Senior Steward	Paul Scherbyn
Junior Steward	Stephen Phillips
Marshall	Donald Tiffany
Tiler	Glen Webster

Trustees

Lee Walters
Lowell Falkey
Glen Webster

Members between 1858 & 1911: 500
Members in 1964: 181 Members in 1927: 249
Members 1996 - 1997: 75 Masons