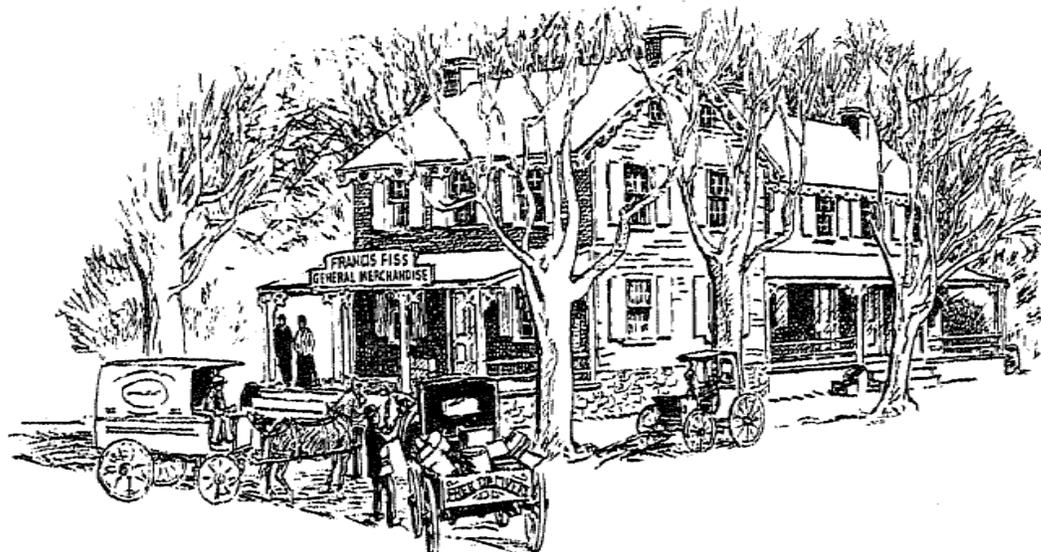


Thomson Lodge No. 340 Celebrates Sesquicentennial Anniversary

Richard E. Kurtz

On August 1, 1860, eight members of the Masonic Order met in a second-story room over the Francis Fiss Store in what was then Garrett's Siding, now Frazer. This began 150 years of Masonic community service, which continues today, in the area around Paoli. The Masonic community service rendered by the brothers of the Lodge have included financial assistance to the families of destitute Masonic brethren and aid to the families of soldiers during the Civil War and all subsequent military actions in which the United States became engaged.



By 1877 the Lodge had outgrown the meeting room at the Fiss store. A three-story building still standing near Paoli Hospital was purchased for use by the Lodge. [See photo on opposite page.]

This building served Thomson Lodge well for many years. The Lodge had a love-hate relationship with the Pennsylvania Railroad, whose busy Main Line was right behind the Lodge Hall on Old Lincoln Highway, across from Villa Maria Academy. Numerous executives of the Pennsylvania Railroad attended Thomson Lodge, but this did not deter frequent interruptions of Lodge meetings by the busy and noisy train traffic. Thomson Lodge activities included "frequent railroad nights" at which railroad executives and workmen were honored.

By 1957, the Lodge Hall was again becoming inadequate for the size of the membership. The property of the old Methodist Church in Paoli was acquired and converted to Masonic Lodge use.

The Lodge Hall stands today as a tribute to the Masons who have served the community well in history and in present practice.

On Wednesday, June 12, 2010 approximately 100 members of Thomson Lodge No. 340 met in the Lodge Hall to have dinner, a Masonic tradition, and to celebrate 150 years of service to the community.

The Lodge was founded in 1860 at the conclusion of a difficult time for Masonry in the United States. In early 1800, Masons in New York were accused of pursuing and kidnapping a man who was alleged to have divulged the private ritual of the Masonic Order. "Anti-Mason" sentiment was high in Pennsylvania and particularly in the area of the Upper Main Line. Farmer's Lodge, a defunct Lodge of the Masonic Order, which met in the Wayside Inn in Paoli, ceased its existence in the early 1800s. Apparently the "Anti-Mason" movement had declined sufficiently by 1860 that the area was ready for the formation of Thomson Lodge.

A few examples of local Masonic charity typify the purpose of the Lodge. Early minutes of the Lodge confirm contributions of five dollars or more for various charity causes which arose in a wide area surrounding Paoli. In September 1868, Thomson Lodge granted Brother Nathan Garrett \$150 for the loss of his cattle after his barn burned to the ground. The Lodge sent \$50 for the benefit of Masonic Brethren who suffered in the Great Chicago Fire. The history of the Lodge states: "Of the many contributions given over the years, the minutes show that each case was always given much thought, investigation, and was settled on its merits." This charity has been achieved while adhering to the principle of frugality. During the recession of 1921, cigars were eliminated from the traditional dinner meetings at a savings of "eight dollars to eighteen dollars per month." Community service and impressive rituals have been hallmarks of Thomson Lodge on the Upper Main Line.



The Thomson Lodge Hall prior to 1957. The building now serves as a day care center. *Photo from Thomson Lodge courtesy of Jack Ansley Photography which scanned it for publication.*



The current Thomson Lodge building on South Valley Rd. in Paoli.
Tim Lander