

The Three Masonic Homes of Washington State

Bro. Adam S. Alsobrook, AIA; University Lodge No. 141, Seattle, Washington

April 6, 2020

EARLY EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH THE MASONIC HOME

In the early 1890s, Freemasons in Washington State began to see the need to establish a place to care for distressed Masons, their wives, widows, and orphans. In 1892, Grand Master Thomas Amos asked the Grand Lodge to appoint a committee to look for a potential location for the home and recommended that part of Grand Lodge income be dedicated to the creation of the Masonic Home. A severe economic depression brought on by the Panic of 1893 hampered the efforts to establish the Masonic Home during the remainder of the 1890s. No substantive action was taken until 1900, when the Grand Lodge once again resolved to establish a Masonic Home and appointed a committee to take up the search for a potential site. The following year, the Grand Lodge established a levy on Lodges in the state to raise funds for the creation of the home, and by 1904, this fund had grown to \$10,870 (about \$316,000 in 2020 dollars). Past Grand Master Yancey C. Blalock was appointed as chairman of the Masonic Home committee, and in 1905 he recommended that the Grand Lodge not construct the Masonic Home at that time. Another committee was appointed, of which MWB Blalock was also a member, and this committee reported to Grand Lodge in 1906 that the only offer for a potential location of the home had been received from Port Townsend. Additional committees were formed and reports made to the Grand Lodge in the following years, but the matter continued to languish until 1909, when Grand Master Royal A. Gove recommended that the levy on Lodges be raised to increase the amount of funds coming in for the establishment of the Masonic Home. Four offers of sites were made to the Grand Lodge in 1910, and Grand Master Jeremiah Neterer appointed yet another committee to investigate the potential locations for the home.

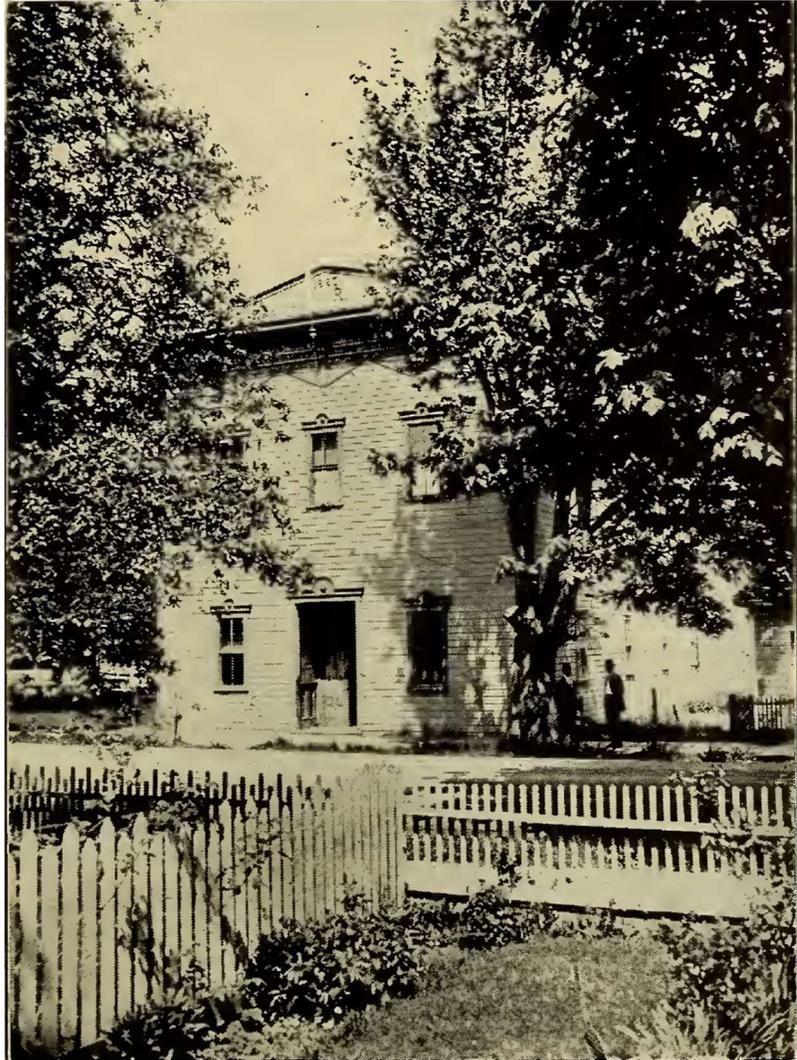
THE FIRST MASONIC HOME IS ESTABLISHED

At the 1911 Grand Communication, offers for sites were received from Anacortes, Bellingham, Castle Rock, Clarkston, Kent, Kirkland, Monroe, Pasco, Puyallup, Rosalia, Vancouver, Tacoma, and Walla Walla. All the offers except those from Walla Walla and Puyallup were subsequently eliminated, and Puyallup was ultimately selected as the site for the new Masonic Home. Corinthian Lodge No. 38 of Puyallup made the successful offer, which consisted of 20½ acres of land, 12 acres of which was rich valley land suitable for gardens and crops to help sustain the home. There was also an eight-room house, a four-room house, and two barns already located on the property that could be quickly and inexpensively converted into living quarters. The Puyallup site was formally conveyed to the Grand Lodge on December 11, 1911, and after rapid renovations were made to the buildings the first Masonic Home in Washington State informally opened to residents on February 12, 1912. The first resident of the home was Bro. John Thomas of Tacoma Lodge No. 22, who was born in Nazareth, Palestine and was made a Mason in Glasgow, Scotland. At the time he moved into the home, Bro. Thomas was 84 years of age and had been a Mason for fifty years.

On June 11, 1912, a special chartered train carried Grand Lodge representatives from Seattle, where the Annual Communication was being held, to Puyallup for the formal opening of the Masonic Home. Grand Master David S. Prescott formally dedicated the facility, and afterwards the Masons and their wives toured the home and grounds and were treated to a luncheon which naturally included the famous Puyallup Valley strawberries.

The First Masonic Home, 1912

This photograph likely dates from late 1911 or early 1912 and shows one of the first dormitory buildings of the Masonic Home at Puyallup. This building was already located on the property where the Masonic Home was established and was demolished after the permanent building was completed in 1913. (Image from the book *History of the Order of the Eastern Star*, published in 1917.)



THE SECOND MASONIC HOME IS CONSTRUCTED

The two existing houses on the property were merely temporary quarters for the first residents of the Masonic Home, for one of the items on the Grand Lodge agenda at the 1912 Annual Communication was the approval of architectural plans for a permanent building on the Masonic Home grounds. Bro. Frederick Heath and Bro. George Gove of the Tacoma architectural firm of Heath & Gove drew the plans for the new building to replace the existing residential quarters at the Masonic Home. (Bro. George Gove was a brother of MWB Royal A. Gove, who was Grand Master in 1908 to 1909.) The general construction contract for the new building at the Masonic

Home was awarded to the Kelly Brothers of Auburn, who bid \$19,730 for the work (about \$526,000 in 2020 dollars). M.A. Thompson & Company bid \$3,040 (about \$81,000 in 2020 dollars) to provide the plumbing and heating for the building, which featured a concrete foundation and exterior walls of solid 13-inch-thick paving brick. The cornerstone of the new building was laid on February 12, 1913. During the June 1913 Annual Communication in Aberdeen, Grand Lodge received a report that the new building would be complete around September 1st but was not completed and occupied until around mid-October 1913.



The Second Masonic Home, circa 1913-1916

This postcard dates from circa 1913 to 1916 and shows the second, permanent Masonic Home building designed by the Tacoma architectural firm of Heath & Gove and completed in 1913. (Author's collection.)

By 1915 the Masonic Home was occupied by 37 adults and 9 children. In 1916, the Masonic Home Association hired Seattle architect Andrew Willatzen (later spelled as Willatsen) to design a 3-story brick masonry dormitory building to supplement the existing quarters. Contractor Joe Hanson of Tacoma constructed this new building for \$23,277 (about \$552,000 in 2020 dollars). The William B. Coffee Plumbing Company of Tacoma installed the heating system, and the plumbing contract was awarded to P.J. Glennon of Seattle. The dormitory building was built perpendicular to the existing building and the two buildings connected with a one-story enclosed passageway.



WASHINGTON STATE MASONIC HOME, PUYALLUP, WASHINGTON – JUNE 9, 1914

During the Grand Lodge 1914 Annual Communication in Tacoma, 100 automobiles donated by Tacoma Masons carried visitors and their wives on an inspection trip to the Masonic Home in Puyallup on June 9, 1914. This photograph is in the collection of Corinthian Lodge No. 38, Puyallup, Washington and was provided courtesy of VWB John R. Adamson. The original image was restored by Steve Heeb of Inside Track Productions.



FAITH – HOPE – CHARITY



The Second Masonic Home, circa 1940s

This photograph dates from around the 1940s and shows the 1913 Masonic Home designed by the Tacoma architectural firm of Heath & Gove and the 1916 dormitory designed by Seattle architect Andrew Willatzen. (Photograph courtesy of the Beta Club Collection and included in the book *Puyallup: A Pioneer Paradise*, printed by Arcadia Publishing in 2002.)

In 1919, Grand Master Alonzo Emerson recommended that the Lodge levy be increased so that additional funds could be raised in order to provide accommodations at the Masonic Home for Masons who were physically incapacitated. By 1920, 33 men and women resided at the Masonic Home, along with five orphan children. The inmates of the Masonic Home, as they were listed in the census records, were looked after by the superintendent, the matron (the superintendent's wife), an assistant matron, and six servants.

THE THIRD MASONIC HOME IS PLANNED

Grand Master James H. Begg reported to Grand Lodge in 1921 on a visit that he had made to the Pennsylvania Masonic Home, which had recently been constructed on a 992-acre tract at Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania at a cost of almost \$1.8 million (about \$26 million in 2020 dollars). MWB Begg suggested that the Grand Lodge of Washington financial model used by the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania to dramatically increase the amount of available funds for the Masonic Home. At MWB Begg's suggestion, Grand Lodge instituted an assessment of \$10 (about \$140 in 2020 dollars) on petitioners for the degrees and for affiliation to go toward the Masonic Home fund. This assessment increased to \$20 in 1927 (almost \$300 in 2020 dollars). While \$20 seems like a trifling amount to us now, bear in mind that in 1924 the average worker in the United States

earned about \$1,300 per year (about \$20,000 in 2020 dollars) and a brand-new Model T Ford automobile could be purchased for \$290 (about \$4,400 in 2020 dollars).

In 1922, the Board of Trustees of the Masonic Home recommended that Grand Lodge appropriate \$80,000 (over \$1.2 million in 2020 dollars) to construct an additional dormitory at the Puyallup property. In addition to the resolution for an additional dormitory, Yakima Lodge No. 24 introduced a resolution to appropriate \$100,000 for a new Masonic hospital and sanitarium. Grand Lodge declined to fund either of these ventures, and instead appointed a committee to decide whether the existing Masonic Home should be expanded, or another site selected for a completely new Masonic Home. The committee quickly found that the existing Masonic Home site in Puyallup was not suitable for a large-scale expansion of the facilities. There was considerable debate over the findings of the committee, and some Masons in the state wished for Grand Lodge to expend funds to build a modern sanitarium facility at the Puyallup property capable of caring for Masons with physical and mental challenges. However, the Grand Lodge ultimately granted the incoming Grand Master the authority to appoint a committee to choose the new location for the Masonic Home and construct the necessary buildings on the new site.

THE THIRD MASONIC HOME IS CONSTRUCTED

After soliciting advice from all the Lodges in the state and inspecting numerous potential locations, in 1924 the committee decided to purchase a tract of land at Zenith, Washington for the new Masonic Home. This 82-acre site was purchased for \$78,624.95 (almost \$1.2 million in 2020 dollars) and an architectural firm was engaged to develop the plans for the new buildings. Bro. George Gove of the firm of Heath, Gove & Bell of Tacoma was sent on an inspection tour of Masonic Homes in California and the eastern United States. The firm drew up plans for the new facility in time for the 1925 meeting of the Grand Lodge, when \$700,000 (about \$10.3 million in 2020 dollars) was appropriated for the construction of the new building at Zenith. Grand Master Morton Gregory presided over the groundbreaking ceremonies on August 28, 1925, and not long after the contracts for construction were let, which came in at a total of \$671,282 (about \$9.9 million in 2020 dollars). Construction of the new building proceeded rapidly, and the new Masonic Home at Zenith was dedicated on June 21, 1927. Members of the delegation to the Annual Communication in Seattle traveled by automobile to the festivities, which was attended by twenty Past Grand Masters and several Past Grand Matrons of the Eastern Star. Shrine bands from Seattle and Tacoma played on the lawn and entertained the guests, which numbered around 1,800 Masons. Grand Master Walter F. Meier addressed the large gathering that filled the chapel and dedicated the new Masonic Home “to the service of Love.”

THE THIRD MASONIC HOME IS OPENED

The 59 residents of the Masonic Home in Puyallup moved into the new facility at Zenith on July 12, 1927. WB Arthur Elliott, who was a Past Master of Corinthian Lodge No. 38 in Puyallup, was placed in charge of the Masonic Home at Zenith. He had served as superintendent of the Masonic Home at Puyallup since 1918, alongside his wife, who served as matron. WB Elliott and his wife

oversaw the Masonic Home until their retirement in 1937. A total of 107 residents were housed in the new building during its first year of operation.



The Third Masonic Home, 16 March 2015

This photograph shows the third Masonic Home building designed by the Tacoma architectural firm of Heath, Gove & Bell and completed in 1927. (Photograph by the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation and used under a Creative Commons license.)

Between the opening of the Masonic Home in 1912 and the opening of the Zenith home, the number of Masons in Washington almost trebled, from less than 18,000 to about 48,000. The architects apparently accounted for this increase in their designs for the massive new building, which rose five stories and contained about 130,000 square feet of floor area. The building could house 225 residents and boasted 226 sleeping rooms, glassed-in solarium porches on all levels of the building, a large dining hall with kitchen, a social room, chapel, library, and infirmary. A Lodge room was also included for the use of the residents. The final cost of the building project was reported to Grand Lodge in 1929, which was \$870,540, or over \$13.1 million in 2020 dollars.

As the 1920s gave way to the 1930s, the onset of the Great Depression began to have an adverse effect on the Masons in Washington. Between 1930 and 1943, the fraternity lost more than one-fifth of its membership. Fewer petitioners for the degrees meant that less money was available for the operation of the Masonic Home. In fact, in 1932 the Grand Lodge almost defaulted on a

payment due on \$300,000 worth of promissory notes issued in 1926 to help finance the construction of the Masonic Home at Zenith. Only the quick action of the Grand Lodge finance committee members averted the loss of the home to their creditors. The finance committee convinced 10 Lodges to loan the Grand Lodge the entire \$72,500 due on the notes, with \$3,500 personally paid by a member of the Masonic Home Board. Strict austerity measures instituted by Grand Lodge helped to alleviate the financial problems, and the loans were all repaid by 1937, when the remaining debt on the Masonic Home was retired.

LEGACIES OF THE MASONIC HOMES

The former location of the Masonic Home in Puyallup was put up for sale in 1926 when the new facility at Zenith opened. However, the property languished and remained unsold until 1938, when the Lutheran Church purchased the 26-acre tract and opened a retirement home. The Lutheran Church later constructed a hospital and physical rehabilitation center adjacent to the existing buildings on the Puyallup site. This hospital later merged with the Good Samaritan Hospital in Puyallup to form the Puyallup Valley Medical Center, which is currently named the MultiCare Good Samaritan Hospital. The Masonic Home buildings built in 1912 and 1916 remained on the hospital campus until they were demolished between 2012 and 2019.

Masonic Lodges across Washington State, in concert with the Grand Lodge and the Order of the Eastern Star generously supported the operation of the Masonic Home since it was constructed in 1926. Masonic Lodges paid Masonic Home fees assessed by Grand Lodge, and the Masonic brothers and sisters of the state contributed time, money, and food to the home's residents. However, as the 1950s progressed into the 1960s, more and more retirees opted to stay in their own homes rather than move into retirement communities. The average age of residents in the Masonic Home rose, which also meant that the home needed more nurses and attendants to care for the older residents. The Grand Lodge debated the construction of a hospital, but the major economic and logistic hurdles prevented these efforts from progressing beyond the discussion stage. Also, since the Masonic Home was dedicated to the relief of indigent Masons and members of the Eastern Star, along with widows and orphans. As the twentieth century progressed, fewer and fewer indigent Masons were finding themselves wards of the Masonic Home. Additionally, changes in hospital and nursing home regulations at the state and federal levels continued to add administrative and staff costs to the ever-increasing amounts of money required to care for the aging residents of the Masonic Home.

In 2004, the Grand Lodge decided to transition the Masonic Home to a more traditional retirement community that would be open to both Masons and non-Masons. However, an economic recession caused the suspension of these plans, and the building continued to be used as an event center that hosted weddings, film shoots, and meetings. Rising maintenance costs spurred Grand Lodge to offer the property for sale 2013. After several years on the market the Masonic Home at Zenith was sold to a property developer in August 2019, thus ending over 125 years of Masonic Home history in Washington State.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The author wishes to extend his sincere thanks and pay Masonic wages to VWB John R. Adamson of Corinthian Lodge No. 38, Puyallup, Washington for providing the photograph of the Grand Lodge visit to the Masonic Home on June 9, 1914. This original image is in the collection of Corinthian Lodge No. 38 and was restored by Steve Heeb of Inside Track Productions.

BOOKS

Harvey, Paul W. *Not Made With Hands: The Centennial History of Grand Lodge Masonry in Washington and Alaska, 1858-1958*. Tacoma, Washington: The Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Washington, 1958.

Kenaston, Jean M'Kee. *History of the Order of the Eastern Star*. Cedar Rapids, Iowa: The Torch Press, 1917.

Price, Lori and Ruth Anderson. *Puyallup: A Pioneer Paradise*. Arcadia Publishing, 2002.

Proceedings of the Twenty-Third Annual Session of the Grand Chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star of Wisconsin. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Evening Wisconsin Company Catalogue Printers, 1913.

PERIODICALS

“Dormitory.” *Building and Engineering News*, 5 Jul. 1916, p. 19.

Guernsey, Mellie Wheeler. “Brief Glimpses of the Masonic Home in the State of Washington.” *The Eastern Star*, Volume 27, Number 1, Jun. 1914, pp. 2-3.

“Masonic Home – Puyallup.” *The Pacific Coast Architect*, Jul. 1912, p. 482.

“Puyallup, Wash.” *Engineering and Contracting*, 5 Jul. 1916, p. 48.

NEWSPAPERS

“1800 Masons at Ceremony.” *The Spokesman-Review* [Spokane, Washington], 24 Jun. 1927, p. 8.

“City Briefs.” *The Tacoma Times* [Tacoma, Washington], 17 Feb. 1912, p. 3.

“Elect Wilson Senior Warden.” *Spokane Chronicle* [Spokane, Washington], 18 Jun. 1925, p. 18.

“Grand Lodge of Masons Meeting.” *Spokane Chronicle* [Spokane, Washington], 12 Jun. 1913, p. 6.

- “Masonic Lodge Elects Officers.” *The Spokesman-Review* [Spokane, Washington], 16 Jun. 1911, p. 12.
- “Masons.” *The Washington Standard* [Olympia, Washington], 6 Sep. 1912, p. 4.
- “New Masonic Home is Opened.” *The Spokesman-Review* [Spokane, Washington], 16 Feb. 1912, p. 16.
- “Notices.” *The Semi-Weekly Spokesman Review* [Spokane, Washington], 14 Aug. 1912, p. 13.
- “Prescott Attends New Home Opening.” *Spokane Chronicle* [Spokane, Washington], 15 Feb. 1912, p. 6.
- “Spokane Mason Will Be Deputy Grand Master.” *Spokane Chronicle* [Spokane, Washington], 16 Jun 1926, p. 1.
- “Start New Masonic Home.” *The Spokesman-Review* [Spokane, Washington], 4 May 1926, p. 4.
- “Washington Brieflets.” *The Lynden Tribune* [Lynden, Washington], 20 Feb. 1913, p. 7.
- “Washington Masons Take Tacoma By Storm Today.” *The Tacoma Times* [Tacoma Washington], 9 Jun. 1914, p. 2.
- “You’ll Find It Here.” *The Tacoma Times* [Tacoma, Washington], 14 Jun. 1912, p. 8.
- “You’ll Find It Here.” *The Tacoma Times* [Tacoma, Washington], 5 Sep. 1912, p. 8.
- “You’ll Find It Here.” *The Tacoma Times* [Tacoma, Washington], 10 Feb. 1913, p. 8.
- “You’ll Find It Here.” *The Tacoma Times* [Tacoma, Washington], 15 Oct. 1913, p. 8.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bro. Adam S. Alsobrook is a registered architect and architectural historian. He was born in Washington, D.C. and grew up in Maryland, Georgia, Virginia, and Texas. A graduate of the University of Texas at Austin, he worked in both the private and public sectors before he moved to Seattle, Washington in 2014. He is a member of University Lodge No. 141 of Seattle, Washington, where he was initiated on September 15, 2018, passed on December 17, 2018, and raised to the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason on April 20, 2019. Bro. Alsobrook is the owner of a cultural resource management and historic preservation consulting firm in Seattle.

This is the second research paper that Bro. Alsobrook has written on the history of Masonic buildings in the Puget Sound region. He is currently working on a history of the Masonic Building at the 1909 Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition in Seattle and plans to write a series of articles in the future about other Masonic buildings in the Puget Sound region and Washington State.