



Postcard from the archives of the Marvel Museum showing what the original Masonic lodge on East Market street and the railroad looked like.

Georgetown Historical Society

FallBack Friday in Georgetown's History Timeline - 1872

In 1827 the Delaware legislature authorized a lottery for the purpose of funding the construction of "an Academy and Masonic Hall." Land was purchased in 1840, and construction commenced the following year. The building was formally dedicated on December 28, 1842. The Georgetown Academy had a prestigious reputation and was attended by students from throughout the county. Classes at this private institution were discontinued in 1885 when a new public school was built in the town. In 1889 the Trustees of the Academy conveyed their interest in the property to Franklin Lodge #12. The building was remodeled to its present appearance in 1920.

Franklin Lodge #12's history

On June 27, 1823, a charter was granted to Franklin Lodge No.12 by Grand Master James Derrickson, naming Caleb Layton – Worshipful Master, Kendal Batson – Senior Warden, and Asaph Buck – Junior Warden. Their meeting place was the third story of the Eagle Hotel where they continued to meet until 1838.

Freemasonry and Georgetown have become synonymous in Sussex County, since the town was founded in 1791 and a lodge in 1792. This first lodge was chartered by the Grand Lodge of Maryland, only to become dormant four years later in 1796. Just recently has the only known return of this early lodge been located, dated 1794 and listing thirty-six members. A study reveals that the majority of these first Sussex County Masons continued to spread their Masonic Light by assisting in the chartering of five additional lodges between the years 1794 and 1823, three of which continue to labor today.

After a twenty-seven-year lapse of Masonic activity in Georgetown, Franklin Lodge No.12 came to light in 1823. This lodge was one of six to survive the Morgan Affair. During this period of anti-Masonic activity, twelve Delaware lodges were to become dark and the membership decreased from 365 to approximately 150 before the cloud passed. over a twenty-six-year period (1833-1859) we find four Grand Masters emerged from Franklin Lodge No.12 to guide and direct the Grand Lodge of Delaware for twelve of its most crucial and trying years. By the time of the Civil War, there were again thirteen lodges in Delaware as 13,000 Delawareans answered their country's call to the colors.

One of the most colorful Delaware heroes of the war between the states has to be General Alfred Thomas Archimedes Torbert who was born and educated in Georgetown, and later entered the United States Military Academy at West Point. He was made a Mason in Franklin Lodge while serving as a Lieutenant before the Civil War. At the outbreak of the war, he was appointed a Colonel in the Peninsular Campaign, fought in the second Battle of Bull Run and Antietam. At Gettysburg he served as a Brigadier General. Two years later he was made a Major General and transferred to command a corps of cavalry under General Philip Sheridan in the Wilderness Campaign against General J. E. B. Stuart. General George A. Custer, who served under him, once said that Torbert leading a charge with his whiskers blowing over his shoulders was an inspiring sight. After the Battle of Fisher's Hill, when his attempt to trap Jubal Early's army was foiled by the Confederate Cavalry, he was criticized by Sheridan. A few days later he received the famous order: "Whip or get whipped". Torbert did just that, wiping out General Rosser's Confederate forces. After the war he was appointed by President Grant to various diplomatic posts in San Salvador, Havana and finally Paris. Thus, the brethren in Georgetown were aware of their responsibility, fourteen years before the formation of the Grand Lodge of Delaware, of projecting their Masonic image and still continue to labor to that end.