

The Story of St. John's Lodge No. 3  
Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons  
New Bern, North Carolina  
by William L. Dill

**Masonic Beginnings in New Bern**

Much interest has been manifested in the beginnings of Masonry in New Bern. The question is frequently asked: In what year did Masonry actually have its start in New Bern? The answer to this question, so far as the actual year is concerned, is almost as difficult to pinpoint as is the same question applied to the beginnings of universal Masonry. When did Masonry, universally have its birth date?

There have been many answers to this question. To some Masonry is more fascinating than any fairy story – a thing so wonderful that one can never think of it without astonishment. The very existence of such an Order, thought by many to be older than any living religion, in one form or another going back into a far time where history and legend blend, like the earth and the sky on the horizon, is a fact amazing beyond words. If its real story were tellable, it would make other romances seem flat and tame.

Actually, however, proof by documentary evidence establishes the fact that permanent Lodges of Freemasonry had existed before 1400 A. D. Proof of this was found in the discovery of a manuscript which was given the title "The Regius M S". This important document which is now in the Royal Library of the British Museum, and has been there ever since King George II made the Museum a present of it in 1757, establishes the fact that Freemasons were in a class apart from other Masons, and that the Masonic fraternity had not grown out of the building Craft in general, but out of a highly specialized branch of it. This is the fraternity's oldest written historical record.

**Becoming a Gentleman – *The Americanization of Benjamin Franklin* by: Gordon S. Wood**

“Although the origins of Masonry supposedly went back centuries, it was only in 1717 in England that it had become the modern secret fraternity that expressed Enlightenment values. The institution, which worked to blur the distinction between gentlemen and commoners, was made for someone like Franklin. Although fewer than one in ten of its members in Philadelphia were artisans, Masonry became a means by which those men --- usually the most ambitious and wealthy artisans -- could mingle with members of the upper social ranks without themselves formally becoming gentlemen. (Maybe for that reason many of the gentry elite did not take their own membership as seriously as they might otherwise have.) Most of the Masonic artisans tended to belong to those crafts, like printing, that involved close association with gentlemen or large amounts of capital, and because of the high fees involved in membership they tended to be fairly well off. Since Masonry emphasized benevolence and sociability, all those members of the brotherhood who were still working artisans and tradesmen could believe that they were nevertheless participating in the world of genteel politeness and thus were separated from

the vulgar and barbaric lower orders beneath them. For such men Masonry became a kind of halfway house to gentility. Although the brothers wore aprons, a reminder of the organization's artisanal roots, their aprons were not the leather ones of common craftsmen but instead were made of soft white lambskin, befitting their quasi-genteel status."

"Not only was Masonry dedicated to the promotion of virtue throughout the world, but this Enlightenment fraternity gave Franklin contacts and connections that helped him in business."

Coincidentally, in New Bern, Masonry was generally thought to have had its beginnings in 1772, when the Masonic Charter was presented to St. John's Lodge – at that time designated in the Charter as St. John's Lodge #2, but subsequently given the title of St. John's Lodge No. 3 –thus authorizing the Masonic Brethren in New Bern to begin their activities as a duly constituted organization.

Naturally, these Masons had been living in New Bern for some time and, no doubt were an organized group, but proof of the existence of that was not established until recently.

Who was the first Mason to make his presence known in New Bern? We do not know.

When was a Masonic Lodge first organized in New Bern? We do not know this either.

But this much we do know, for it has been completely authenticated and documented! There was a Masonic lodge existing in New Bern for a number of years prior to 1772 the official date of the Constitution of St. John's Lodge! Prior to the Revolution a Grand Lodge was instituted in this Province in 1771 when the Grand Master of England made Joseph Montfort of Halifax the Provincial Grand Master of the Province. "He appointed a full complement of Grand Lodge officers to aid him in carrying on the work". This Grand Lodge is said to have "convened occasionally at New Bern and Edenton". Assuredly, The Grand Lodge would not have been meeting in New Bern had there been no Masonic lodge here.

But, note this also as further proof: In the issue dated December 21-28, 1764 of the "North Carolina Magazine or Universal Intelligencer". Published in New Bern by James Davis, the first State printer, there is an account of the arrival in New Bern that month, and of the festivities associated therewith, of "the Honorable William Tryon, Esq., Lieutenant Governor of this Province, with his lady". And of his **Masonic participation** in the festivities of that occasion.

The article – in 1774 read as follows:

"On Thursday, being the feast of St. John the Baptist, the members of the Ancient and Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons, **belonging to the lodge in this town**, met in their lodge room; and after going through the necessary business of the day, retired to the Long Room in the courthouse to dine where was

served up an elegant dinner; the Lieutenant Governor honored them with his company; where also dined many other gentlemen. The usual and proper healths were drank; and at drinking 'the King and the Craft' the artillery fired 3.3.3.”.

More recently, however, through the painstaking efforts and diligent skill in research of one of New Bern's most concerned and dedicated historians, a man blessed with an avid interest and broad knowledge of our Colonial history, Mr. Charles Duffy, Jr., another milestone in authenticated early Masonic history in New Bern was reached. Mr. Duffy, while examining some newspapers from Boston, saw an advertisement that made available a copy of a Masonic sermon preached in New Bern years ago. Mr. Duffy obtained the copy and, interestingly enough it was a Masonic treasure. It was a copy of a Masonic sermon preached in Christ Church, New Bern, in the year 1755 (17 years prior to St. John's charter)! Furthermore it was addressed to the “Master, Wardens and Brethren of the New Bern Lodge of Ancient and Honourable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons.” The sermon was preached by the Reverend and Brother Michael Smith, an Episcopal minister from Johnston County, on St. John, the Evangelist Day, December 27, 1755. This sermon was “published at the request of the Master, Wardens and Brethren of the Lodge” by the printer, James Davis, in 1756.

Now if there was a “Master” of a lodge present at this sermon in 1755, and if the same succession to office were followed then as now, the “Master” must have been a Mason for at least 7 years! Simply mathematics then might historically place a Masonic Lodge in New Bern as early as 1748!

Thus, Masonry in New Bern can definitely be traced as far back as 1755. How much earlier? Who can tell? Perhaps the specific date of its origin will be unfolded as time moves on. Certainly, however, the discovery of this sermon indicates that there was a lodge, an organized lodge, in New Bern, so firmly established, that one cannot refrain from speculating that New Bern's Masonic Lodge had been in operation for quite some time, possibly even longer than the one in Wilmington, which was assigned the position of Number 1 in North Carolina.

Officially St. John's Lodge of New Bern was chartered on January 10, 1772. To put this in a more historical context, this would be three years before the Battles of Lexington and Concord, which ignited the American Revolution and 4 years prior to the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776.

### **What We Do Know**

The Minutes of St. John's Lodge, No. 3, Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, constitute one of the best primary-source reference materials for the history not only of the lodge but also the City of New Bern.

The Grand Lodge of North Carolina celebrates its 219<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2006. St. John's Lodge of New Bern was already 15 years old when the Grand Lodge was established in 1787.

### **Constitution of St. John's Lodge**

Masonry actually was in existence in an organized form in New Bern prior to the year 1772, and, no doubt, with the number of Masons residing in New Bern at that time, their thoughts must have led them to think of their lodge as being part of a larger organization. Consequently, when Joseph Montfort, of Halifax, was appointed by the Duke of Beaufort who was then Grand Master of England, to serve as Provincial Grand Master of the Province, the local Masons realized that this was their opportunity to obtain an official charter for their organization. The name "St. John" apparently was their choice for their lodge's designation and they thought of themselves as Lodge No. 1; the members themselves chose this number. When they received the charter from Montfort, however, they were assigned the position of No. 2 and this displeased them very much. They made repeated efforts to have the number changed, but were unsuccessful. Much confusion existed among the few lodges in North Carolina concerning their rank status and in order that the matter might be put to rest, the Grand Lodge met in June 1791 to consider justifications from each of the lodges concerning their requests for rank. The Grand Lodge finally gave the New Bern Masons the rank of No. 3 and in January of 1795 the members of St. John's No. 3 finally "relinquished their claim to No. 2". Thus, St. John's Lodge, New Bern, is the only Masonic Lodge, probably in the entire nation that has been named St. John's Lodge No. 1; St. John's Lodge No. 2; and St. John's Lodge No. 3. There now hang on the walls of St. John's Lodge two official charters: the charter designating the lodge as No. 2, issued by Joseph Montfort as the Provincial Grand Master and designating Martin Howard, who was chief justice of the royal colony of North Carolina from 1767 to 1773, as the first Master of the lodge. The other charter designates the lodge as No. 3 and was issued under the authority of another famous North Carolinian who was Grand Master at that time, the noted Statesman, scholar, military leader and politician, William R. Davie, and designating Francis Lowthrop as the Master.

### **Early Meeting Places**

At first the lodge had no permanent meeting place and it moved around from place to place, sometimes holding its meetings at the home of its members, or more often meeting in some of the taverns of which there were many in the town at that time. References were made several times in the lodge minutes to meeting held "at the Kings Arms", which was one of the larger taverns.

Meanwhile the Palace continued to serve as a center of government, with the Assembly meeting there from time to time, but concerted efforts were being made to move the to move the capital further inland. The first governor of North Carolina, Richard Caswell who also became the second Grand Master of Masons in North Carolina, was installed as Governor of North Carolina in the Palace, and he himself had been made a Master Mason in New Bern, joining St. John's Lodge here during the last month of 1772. Richard

Dobbs Spaight of New Bern took the oath of office in the Palace as Governor of North Carolina, the last Governor to be inaugurated in its halls. And in July 1794 the Assembly said farewell to the Palace, this being its last session in New Bern before convening for its first session in Raleigh in December of that year.

Following this move, the Palace served a number of local purposes and St. John's Lodge thereafter held its meetings there.

In the meantime, the lodge had continued to occupy the Masonic room in the Palace until the night of February 27, 1798. On that night the Palace caught fire and a once majestic palace was consumed in flames.

Members of the lodge saved their jewels and regalia, however, before the flames completely enveloped the building. Minutes of the lodge dated March 7<sup>th</sup> of that year state:

“The thanks of the lodge was returned to Brothers McMains and Jacob Johnston for their assiduity in saving a great part of the treasures belong to the lodge from the flames on the 27th of February”.

After the fire the lodge continued to meet in various places, special reference given to “Mr. Stanley's office”. The lodge members, however, grew dissatisfied with this arrangement and in 1796 they appointed a committee to select a site on which a permanent building of their own could be erected.

This committee reported and on November 7, 1798 the lodge voted to purchase lots number 325 and 326 on Hancock and Johnson Streets to be used for the erection of a Masonic Temple and they began to raise funds with which they might construct a large building. The funds were raised and a very interesting framed copy of the names of the donors and the amounts they contributed is now on exhibit in the hall of the Masonic Temple.

The cornerstone for the new building, or “Mason's Hall” as it was designated at the time, was laid April 15, 1801 with an impressive ceremony. John Dewey, who designed and constructed the First Presbyterian Church here, was the architect and contractor for the construction of the Masonic Temple. Construction began and by 1804 the work had progressed so far that it was in use by the first part of the year 1804. Work continued and, finally, on the first Wednesday in May, 1809 the committee reported that the work was now practically complete and they set June 10, as the date for the dedication ceremony. It took nearly 8 years to complete, as much of the work was done by members on a voluntary basis by furnishing their labor or building materials. On June 10, 1809, the Masonic Temple was dedicated with appropriate Masonic ceremony. In addition to housing the Lodge Room, the building contained a theatre on the first floor and social room or ballroom on the second floor.

The building constructed thereon was described as **“the largest and most elaborate building ever built in New Bern up to its time, with the exception of Tryon Palace.”** It was highly praised by leading architects who say it ranks as one of the finest structures of the early nineteenth century anywhere in America.

Many people have admired the detailed studies of its doorways, of its cornices, of its mantel, and of the general room plan.

An interesting story concerning the cornerstone might be related here. In the cornerstone there were placed an engraved silver plate and three coins – a copper half cent dated 1797, a copper cent dated 1789, and a silver dollar dated 1800. These were taken from the cornerstone during the War Between the States by a Union soldier who was stationed here and carried north with him at the conclusion of the war. Subsequently, in 1876 this plate and the three pieces of money were carefully placed in a special new case, which was appropriately inscribed, and these were returned to ST. John’s Lodge No. 3 in 1878 by St. John’s Lodge No. 1 of Providence, Rhode Island. This northern lodge had come into possession of these precious relics through the aid of one of its members.

The original cornerstone, hollow and empty, was found forty-two years after the return of these cornerstone articles and this stone was placed on an appropriate foundation with suitable inscription in front of the Masonic Temple. The plate and the coins are kept in the lodge archives.

Although not complete, the new Temple was actually in use as early as 1804.

The lodge continued to grow and to prosper. In 1798, the lodge had a membership of 134 and it proudly boasted of having the most prominent men in New Bern among its members.

In 1847 the Temple was extensively renovated and re-decorated and about that time, in 1857, a fresco artist by the name of E. N. Medernach, who was a Mason, was commissioned by St. John’s Lodge to decorate the lodge room with appropriate Masonic symbols. His work remains on the walls and on the ceiling to this day as a tribute to his genius, for the lodge has never been able to duplicate or re-decorate the paintings; and it does not wish to destroy, or diminish the beauty of the original paintings. These paintings exist on the walls today as they were placed there originally by the artist and they tell the story of Masonry in a dramatic way.

His work remains on the walls and on the ceilings to this day, once marred only by bayonet and musket scratches on the walls from Union soldiers who used the lodge as a hospital during the Civil War. These grand and historic old painted rooms are open to the public only on very special occasions, through the courtesy of faithful and informed members of the lodge. These are rare opportunities for the public, especially non-Masons, to see the inside of a Masonic Lodge.

Mason's Hall, as it was called through the minutes and treasurer's accounts of that period, was perhaps the largest and most elaborate building ever built in New Bern up to its time, with the exception of Tryon's Palace.

Both its exterior form and its interior hand-carved woodwork are still highly praised by leading architects and architectural students, who say it ranks as one of the finest structures of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century anywhere in America. Detailed studies of the doorways, cornices, mantel and general room plan of the lodge room appeared in *The White Pine Series of Architectural Monographs* published in 1927 in New York

The theatre portion of the Masonic Temple was used until December of 1974, when it ceased operations. When it closed, it could proudly claim that it was the oldest theatre in the United States in continuous operation.

The upstairs "ballroom" served as a social center for the town during the latter days of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Named Lowthrop Hall for Francis Lowthrop who served as Master for 14 consecutive year, St. John's Lodge's past Masters' portraits now hang here on the walls of Lowthrop Hall. Among them you could find Dr. Joseph F. Rhem, known t Masons and Shriners as the "Daddy" of Sudan Temple. Look, and you will see Caleb D. Bradham, local druggist and inventor of the soft drink that became known as "Pepsi-Cola." In 1914, St. John's Lodge deeded the site and property to the New Bern Scottish Rite Bodies and in 1948, they constructed a handsome and majestic Scottish Rite Temple connected to the original lodge building. In 1972, the original Masonic Temple was listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

### **The War Between the States**

During the early days of the War Between the States the Masonic Temple was used as a Confederate arsenal. It was reported that young women freely volunteered their services in making cartridges and bandages for the Confederate soldiers.

However, after the capture of New Bern by northern troops under General Burnside in 1862, the Temple was used by Union soldiers as a hospital. These soldiers are also said to have made coffins here, storing them in the basement. Parenthetically St. John's Lodge was subsequently allowed a cash claim in 1900 by the federal government, after repeated requests. The amount of the claim was \$13,000.00 for the use of the Temple for hospital purposes and also for the damages incurred during the occupation.

### **Visits of Two Presidents**

St. John's Lodge has the unique distinction of having had the privilege of addressing two presidents of the United States who visited New Bern, both of whom were Masons. The first of these was the first president of the United States, Brother George Washington, who arrived in New Bern on April 20, 1791 and who was waited upon by the officers of the lodge with an appropriate address which they read to him. To this address, the president made a very appropriate reply and both the address and the reply are recorded

in the minutes of the lodge. Later, in April, 1819, President and Brother James Monroe also visited New Bern and the lodge likewise presented to him a formal address of welcome. Minutes of the lodge include a copy of the lodge's address and also the president's reply, dated April 14, 1819.

### **The Temple as a Theatre**

Practically from the beginning of its construction, the plan to use the building as a public theatre was adopted; it might be accurately claimed that the Masonic Theatre dates back to 1804, the year the unfinished theatre was legally transferred to the Theatrical Association.

Plays were produced in the Masonic Theatre as early as 1805 by the local Theatrical Association which leased the theatre from its owner, St. John's Lodge No. 3. From that date, it was frequently used for dramas and other public programs. However, during the early days of the War Between the States, the Masonic Temple was used as a Confederate Arsenal. After the capture of New Bern by Union Forces under the command of General Burnside in 1862, the Temple was used by the Union soldiers as a hospital.

The theatre, which dates its beginning to 1804, was once the cultural center of New Bern. Through the years the Masonic Theatre has been the scene of countless stage plays, home talent benefits, band concerts, vaudeville acts, political rallies, organization conventions, school graduation commencements, church services and community gatherings. Internationally known opera stars and legitimate stage actors as well as young amateurs have been acclaimed there. After having served as the town's chief place for dramatic entertainment for years, the theatre became a motion picture theater in 1917.

After having served as the town's chief place of dramatic entertainment for years, it became a motion picture theater in 1917 and remained so until 1974. It had been the nation's oldest continually operating theater when it closed its doors in December of 1974. It has served our community and our Masonic fraternity well.

In 1900 the entire building was again extensively renovated and was completed in 1905. Many theatrical productions had been given in the Temple and at that time the theatre was completely remolded and placed in continuous use, for theatrical purposes, justifying the proud claim of its being the oldest theatre in the United States in continuous operation until its closing on December 3, 1974.

### **Lowthrop Hall**

Lowthrop Hall which is situated just across the hall from St. John's Lodge room, is named for one of New Bern's most distinguished citizens, Francis Lowthrop, who was Master of the lodge for fourteen consecutive years, the longest on record. Brother Lowthrop died October 28, 1806 and he was considered one of the most outstanding of all the Masonic leaders in the history of the lodge. When George Washington visited here in 1791, Francis Lowthrop was on the committee to prepare the Masonic address of

welcome. This large room, recently re-decorated, was named for him/ This room also served as a social center for the town during the latter days of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century. Here the young people would gather for their social affairs, with the dance music being provided by a small orchestra occupying the elevated enclosure or pit which has been preserved.

Of special significance in St. John's Lodge annals is the fact that it had a portrait of this outstanding Worshipful Master painted in 1805 by the noted artist, William Joseph Williams, who a decade earlier had painted a portrait of George Washington for the Masonic Lodge of Alexandria, Virginia, of which the first president had served as its Worshipful Master.

### **Past Masters' Portraits**

In the year, 1944, the St. John's Lodge embarked upon a tremendous project involving the possibility of obtaining portraits of all the lodge's Worshipful Masters from the very beginning, 1772, with Martin Howard. All these photos were to be of the same size and the lodge proceeded at once to carry out the project. Visitors in Lowthrop Hall today are amazed at the tremendous success of this program, as they gaze upon the photographs of the large number of Past Masters who had served St. John's Lodge in times gone by.

### **Assistance to the Scottish Rite**

On November 2, 1914 St. John's Lodge had deeded the site and property on Hancock and Johnson Street to the New Bern Scottish Rite Bodies and thereafter the Scottish Rite continued to use the Temple for its regular meetings and reunions. St. John's Lodge had already earmarked not less than one half of its net receipts from dues, fees, and from the Masonic Theatre to apply on a bank loan for the building which the Scottish Rite had begun constructing July 7, 1948. It was a handsome, majestic Temple, connected to the original building and now valued at more than \$1,000,000.00. Members of St. John's Lodge assisted in the dedication of this Temple on November 17, 1949, when Scottish Rite dignitaries from all over the Southern Jurisdiction were present for the occasion.

### **Grand Lodge Meeting Here in 1961**

St. John's Lodge members began planning well in advance to have the Grand Lodge Annual Communication held in 1961 at New Bern, honoring the outgoing Grand Master Brother Harvey Ward Smith of Beaufort and also honoring the incoming Grand Master, Most Worshipful Brother James Woodrow Brewer of Greenville, both of whom were honorary members of St. John's Lodge. All Masons in the area cooperated in making this Communication a tremendous success and there was a feeling of satisfaction among everyone that history was repeating itself, now, after many years in having the Grand Lodge to meet here. St. John's Lodge was once again also signally honored when one of its distinguished Past Masters and long-time Secretary, Worshipful Brother Alfred A. Kafer, Jr., was installed as Senior Grand Stewart during the meeting of the Grand Lodge. Brother Kafer had been named to the position of Junior Grand Stewart during the

preceding April by Most Worshipful Brother Smith when the Grand Lodge Communication was held in Raleigh.

### **Bicentennial Celebrations**

St. John's Lodge had already celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1922 when in a mammoth pageant held on the lawn of the new Shrine home on Broad and East Front Streets there was re-enacted the visit of George Washington to New Bern. It was a colorful ceremony in which many members of St. John's Lodge participated, assisted by the ladies of the Eastern Star. Throughout the period of time following this celebration, the members of the lodge had been anxiously looking forward to the moment when it could commemorate its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1972. Plans subsequently were made for a two-day celebration on May 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> which would feature a gala banquet, in the banquet hall of the Scottish Rite Temple. This was followed by the pageant entitled "In The Beginning," and featuring the Constitution of St. John's Lodge in New Bern in the year 1772 with the principal theme of the pageant centering around the various numbers assigned to the lodge; namely, 1, 2, and 3. Following the pageant a delightful reception was held in the social room of Sudan Temple. Then on the next afternoon, Sunday, an impressive church service was held in the sanctuary of Christ's Church. The sermon used at this occasion was the same sermon that had been delivered by the Reverend Michael Smith in 1755 at Christ's Church to the original New Bern Masonic Lodge.

St. John's celebrated its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1972 by hearing that same sermon delivered in the sanctuary of Christ Church. The Reverend Robert L. Pugh, Past Grand Master in North Carolina and an honorary member of St. John's Lodge delivered the sermon this time.

This sermon is printed in full in Chapter 2 of "Years of Light", Volume 2, by Dr. Gertrude Carraway, a long-time friend and supporter of St. John's Lodge. A bicentennial plaque commemorating these observances was dedicated on Wednesday evening, January 10, 1973, the 201<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the date on which the first charter of St. John's Lodge was signed. The plaque was made in the same size and style of the plaque which had been given by Judge Shepard Bryan in 1934, of Atlanta, Georgia, commemorating the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary observance of the lodge. Both plaques were placed on the front outside wall of the left entrance of the Masonic Temple where they may be observed today.

The year 1974 was an important one in the history of New Bern since it marked the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the meeting of the First Provincial Congress which met in New Bern. The New Bern-Craven County Bicentennial Commission had made its plans for a week-long celebration, and the Masons of New Bern area decided that they would like to make some expression of the part that Masons had played in the formation of this congress as well as in the early history of New Bern itself. Accordingly, St. John's Lodge agreed to participate in this program and in August of 1974 Masons used two-days for its part in the celebration. A pageant had been written entitled "1774" and was presented to a large audience in Sudan Temple auditorium for two nights. The first night's presentation was preceded by a banquet attended by the Grand Master of Masons in North Carolina and

featuring a visit from the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Indiana. Following the pageant presentation there was an address on the first night by the Grand Master of Indiana and on the second night by the Lieutenant Governor of North Carolina.

Thus, St. John's Lodge has always participated in historical celebrations involving events in which Masons had always played such a prominent part.

### **The Lodge and Lodge Room as a Birthplace of Other Events**

The Lodge Room, the home of St. John's Lodge No. 3, has been witness to other Masonic units which have become outstanding in their growth and in their activities. The three York Rite Bodies of New Bern were organized in our lodge room as was the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry. Doric Lodge No. 568 A. F. & A. M. was also organized within our walls, as was Craven Chapter No.129, Order of the Eastern Star. Using our facilities, Berne Lodge No. 724 was begun.

In 1961, The Grand Lodge of North Carolina held its annual communication in New Bern with the assistance of all area Masons. Outgoing Grand Master Harvey W. Smith of Beaufort and incoming Grand Master James W. Brewer of Greenville were both honorary members of St. John's Lodge. At this communication in New Bern, St. John's was signally honored, when one of its most distinguished Past Masters and longtime Secretary (37 years) Alfred A. Kafer, Jr. was installed as Senior Grand Steward.

A 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the lodge was held in New Bern in 1922 in the form of a pageant and parade. More recently, in 1972, a 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration was elaborately planned over a two-day period. A gala banquet was held and another pageant featuring the early days of Masonry in New Bern enacted.

Continuing the custom of Masons participating in local historical events, in 1974, the lodge, in concert with other area Masons, celebrated the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the meeting of the First Provincial Congress, held in New Bern prior to the Revolution in opposition to British tax policies. A plan entitled "1774" was presented with a Masonic cast in wigs and colonist costumes to full house audiences for 2 nights at the Sudan Temple Auditorium.

Thus this historical room has been the scene of much activity and it has put itself in an enviable position where it can lay claim to having served as a great institution, from which many others have spawned and have had their growth.

### **Masons of Distinction**

Perhaps no other lodge in North Carolina can boast of contributing more of its distinguished members to the service of the Grand Lodge of North Carolina. St. John's can proudly claim a total of six Grand Masters who were members of this lodge at the time of their appointment to the Grand Lodge line and for the continued duration of their

service to the Grand Lodge until they were elevated to the exalted position of Grand Master. It is a long and distinguished record beginning with the election of John Lewis Taylor as Grand Master. This distinguished jurist who was also Chief Justice was elected Grand Master in 1802, 1803 and in 1804. Subsequently he was called on again to fill this exalted position in 1814, 1815, and in 1816. The next Grand Master from St. John's Lodge was Alonzo Thomas Jerkins who served as Grand Master in 1850, 1851 and 1852. Following him came another distinguished citizen of New Bern, Charles Cauthorn Clark who was Grand Master in 1870 and 1871. In 1938 Harry Thomas Paterson was Grand Master and he was followed in 1967 by Alfred Albrecht Kafer, Jr. This distinguished servant appointed another member of St. John's Lodge, Stephen Frank Noble, Jr. as Grand Stewart and in 1975, Brother Noble became Grand Master and he enjoyed the distinction of serving a part of his time during 1976 when the Grand Lodge of North Carolina embarked upon a state-wide program of bicentennial observances. Furthermore, there have been five Grand Masters who at one time or another had membership in St. John's Lodge and four Grand Masters who were honorary members of this same lodge. Surely this is an enviable record for any lodge and speaks most eloquently of the type of membership comprising St. John's Lodge No. 3.

### **Public Service**

Members of St. John's Lodge have gone into practically every known field of public and political service and all have made noteworthy contributions to the community, state and nation.

St. John's No. 3 has furnished:

- 3 Governors of the State of North Carolina
- 4 Chief Justices of the State Supreme Court
- 1 United States Senator
- 5 Members of the U. S. House of Representatives
- 10 Representatives to the Provincial Congress
- 2 North Carolina State Treasurers
- 10 Members of the Council of State
- 20 North Carolina State Senators
- 3 Speakers of the House of the North Carolina General Assembly
- 47 Representatives of the North Carolina General Assembly
- 8 Judges of the North Carolina Superior Court
- 9 Postmasters in New Bern

Plus educators, ministers, lawyers, doctors, and dentists and businessmen too numerous to mention or list here. In point of fact, there is hardly an area of public and private endeavor in which members of St. John's Lodge No. 3 have not been ably represented.

It is a magnificent story of successful achievement.

### **Conclusion**

With 280 members, St. John's Lodge No. 3, its officers and members reflect with pride on our past, are keenly aware of our present condition, and view with calm reassurance our Masonic future as we participate in celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Grand Lodge of North Carolina during 1987.

The concluding thought as expressed in the epilogue of the pageant "In the Beginning" provides the stirring challenge for present and future Masons:

"There is hardly on area of progressive living that has not felt the wholesome and dynamic influence of this great Mother lodge. Ever expanding in its membership and fraternal activities, it continues to serve as one of the giants of Masonry in North Carolina, a beautiful tribute to the wisdom and foresight of its founding fathers who longed for a better lodge and a better community as well as a worthy model for emulation by those who pick up the torch and carry it forward into a glorious future."

And as Past Grand Master Kafer has stated in the attractive souvenir program of that pageant:

"Let us never cease in our every effort to make Masonry a bulwark of moral and spiritual strength in this great land of ours. Thus we shall be able to transmit this glorious institution, unimpaired, to those who will have every right to look at us as worthy reflectors of the indomitable spirit of those Masonic ancestors of ours who were there 'In the Beginning.'"

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*Some Highlights in the History of St. John's Lodge No. 3 AF & AM of North Carolina, 1978, by Robert L. Pugh, 33<sup>o</sup>, PGM and Secretary, New Bern Scottish Rite Bodies*  
Dr. Scott was a native of St. George's County, Maryland and was perhaps the most able and talented medical man in North Carolina at that time. He was also the only practicing scientist in the Colony, having already been engaged in collecting and forwarding to English naturalists samples of the flora and fauna of North America, and later becoming one of the pioneers of smallpox inoculation in the South. Incidentally, the British

Museum still possesses his collections of botanical specimens. Clitheral and Carruthers were business men of New Bern, Clitheral, who was Senior Warden of the Lodge, distinguished himself in North Carolina history as being one of the very small number of colonists to send his son –James Clitheral – to Scotland for a university education. In 1755 – according to Dr. Thomas C. Paramore, author of “Launching The Craft – The Beginnings of Freemasonry in North Carolina” – the New Bern fraternity included some of the most remarkable men in North Carolina.

**St. John’s Masonic Lodge and Theatre**  
**516 Hancock Street**  
**ca. 1801-1809; remodeled and enlarged in 1904**

New Bern’s most stylish Federal-period public building, St. John’s Masonic Lodge and Theatre has significant historical associations with many of the city’s most prominent citizens. Although the building was extensively remodeled during the early twentieth century, it retains much of its original exterior form, along with some superb Federal-style woodwork and important mid-nineteenth century decorative wall paintings. The building is documented to have been constructed under the supervision of the active New Bern carpenter-builder, John Dewey.

Masons residing in New Bern had been loosely organized for nearly two decades by the time St. John’s Lodge was chartered in 1772. In its early years, the order met in various assembly places, including the Palmer-Tisdale house, and at Tryon’s Palace during the 1790s. In 1798, shortly after the Palace burned, the Masons purchased the present site from Elizabeth Haslen.

At a meeting of the Masons in 1799, it was

“Moved and seconded that Brother J. Dewey draw up a plan of a building fit for a lodge of the dimensions of 50 by 36 feet also an estimate of the expense to close the same in and building the chimneys and lay the same before the lodge.”

Dewey, who had been active as a house-carpenter and joiner since 1792, and who much later worked on the First Presbyterian Church, submitted his plans and estimates in 1800, seeking support from both members and the general public for the proposed six-room structure, which was to house both lodge activities and dancing assemblies.

The cornerstone was laid in 1801, and at least the first floor theatre and assembly-room were completed by 1805, when the lodge received the profits from a play held there. Work on the second-floor lodge rooms continued until 1809, when the building was officially consecrated; during that ceremony, John Dewey was referred to as the building’s “architect.” Both the lodge and theatre have remained in almost continuous use since the 1809 completion date. Although all available documentation clearly indicates that John Dewey served as the building’s contractor and that he prepared

preliminary floor plans, there is no proof that he was indeed responsible for its actual design.

The new Lodge and Theatre measured seventy-eight feet wide by forty-five feet deep, considerably larger than the original thirty-six by fifty-foot building specified in 1799. As such, it was then the town's largest public building and its most advanced example of Federal architecture. It stands two stories high on a raised basement, seven bays wide by four deep. The primary façade ornamentation is geometric in nature, consisting of a slightly-projecting five-bay pedimented pavilion containing a recessed colossal elliptical arch in the center of three bays. The use of such an arch reflects the designer's familiarity with the high-style Adamesque Federal work of Charles Bulfinch and others who began to employ this motif in the 1790's. Early photographs show the lodge to have originally had two entrance doors on the façade, both ornamented by flanking pilasters supporting full entablature. These likewise show the brick structure to be covered by scored stucco to give the effect of ashlar stonework. It is not known whether the stucco was original, or the result of a later remodeling. The building is covered by a low hipped roof rising from a handsome cornice of undercut modillions and a dentil course. It once had a cupola, constructed in 1806 by Benjamin C. Good, a local carpenter, and removed later in the nineteenth century because it was expensive to maintain.

The poor condition of the Lodge's cupola was observed by New Bern's sharp-tongue poet, Stephen M. Chester, in his descriptive poem published in the *Carolina Centinel* on October 17, 1818: