

A Concise History of Garden City Lodge

In the fall of 1952, a small group of Masons gathered together and discussed the idea of forming a new Lodge to accommodate the increasing Jewish population of Newton, Massachusetts. After carefully analyzing each step and to ensure conformance with the high principles of Freemasonry, they carefully proceeded and formed a Masonic Club. This club decided that no more than ten members would be admitted from any one lodge and also no current officers would be accepted from any existing lodge.

As the membership increased, meetings moved from private homes to Temple Reyim, and thence to the Newton Centre Woman's Club. As the lodge expanded to 99 members, meetings were then held with the Grand Master to discuss the possibility of forming a new Masonic Lodge in the City of Newton.

This was not an easy task and there were many hurdles to overcome. But, Garden City Lodge was organized on November 30, 1954, when a dispensation was requested of M.W. Whitfield W. Johnson, Grand Master, allowing Garden City Lodge to operate. The Grand Master signed the dispensation on December 4, 1954 to be effective on December 9, 1954 as the date of Institution. This was the official response to a group of "99 Master Masons of the Hebrew faith," according to the Grand Lodge proceedings of 1954. Despite having proposed a slate of qualified and competent officers of the "Hebrew" faith, Rt. Wor. Thomas G. Walters, PDGM, was chosen by the Grand Master to be Garden City Lodge's first Master and Rt. Wor. Carl C. Peterson, PDGM, was chosen to be the Lodge's first Senior Warden. Wor. Joseph Balcom was chosen to be the Lodge's first Junior Warden. As plans became finalized, the Newton Masonic Associates made space available in the Newtonville Masonic Apartments for Garden City Lodge to use the first and second Thursdays of each month. Following a year of operation under a dispensation, a full and unconditional Charter was issued on October 13, 1955. Since its forming, Garden City Lodge has had 1,026 men sign its bylaws.

Bro. Herbert Shapiro was one of the first men initiated into Garden City Lodge in December, 1955. He was raised in April, 1956, 61 years ago, and signed the bylaws in May, 1956. On September 1, 1962, Brother Shapiro became the first “home-grown” member of Garden City Lodge to be installed Worshipful Master. Brother Shapiro is still alive today at the age of 88 and is living in St. Louis, Missouri.

During the initial years, Garden City Lodge, as with many other lodges, processed candidates at almost record rates, with many months having special communications to confer degrees. Many of these new Masons having recently been discharged from the Service were looking for a vehicle whereby they could continue bonding with other men as they did while in the Service.

On October 15, 2005, Garden City Lodge celebrated its 50th Anniversary with a gala celebration. More than 100 people gathered in Newtonville to celebrate this important milestone including M.W. Fred K. Bauer, PGM, and M.W. Chester R. Isles, PGM of the MWPHGL of MA. Rt. Wor. Ernest A. Pearlstein, the presiding Junior Grand Warden represented the presiding Grand Master and offered his best wishes to the Lodge. A commemorative book was published detailing the first fifty years of the Lodge and was distributed to all attending the gala celebration. That book is once again being updated to be kept current.

Garden City Lodge has had its fair share of members become active in either other lodges, grand lodge, or appendant bodies. Just how serious members of Garden City Lodge take their Masonry and love for the Fraternity can be shown as follows.

Garden City Lodge has had five men serve as District Deputy Grand Masters, beginning with R.W. Robert Seder from 1974 – 1976; R.W. Dana A. Jackson from 1989 – 1990; R.W. Stephen C. Cohn from 1998 – 2000; R.W. David C. Kramer from 2006 – 2008; and R.W. Joseph Goldstein from 2014 – 2016.

We have also had a few of our recent members serve in other Grand Lodge positions such as Grand Stewards including R.W.

Robert Seder, R.W. William Szathmary, Wor. Scott M. Sherman, R.W. David C. Kramer, and Wor. Christopher N. Kelley. And Wor. Joseph A. Manzo, Jr. is the current Senior Grand Deacon. In addition, R.W. Donald H. LaLiberte, who, while raised in Garden City Lodge, served as Master in another lodge and was chosen to serve as Deputy Grand Master in 2014 – 2015.

Many of our members and past masters have also served as Masters in other lodges. They include Wor. George E. Burns in Fraternity-Fuller Lodge and John T. Heard Lodge; Wor. Jonathan A. Cohen in Bethesda Lodge; Wor. Jeremy L. Muller in Brotherhood Lodge; R.W. Stephen C. Cohn in Adelphi-Noddle's Island Lodge; Wor. Leon Rabin in Revere Lodge; Wor. Roger W. Appell in Perfection Lodge; Wor. Roger H. Ambuter in Norfolk Lodge; Wor. Robert H. Brown in Shawmut Lodge, the Massachusetts Lodge of Research, and a charter member of Scimitar Lodge in Wilmington, MA; Wor. Christopher N. Kelley in Daniel Webster Lodge; and R.W. Donald LaLiberte in Norfolk Lodge.

Three members of the Lodge have been selected Grand Representatives: R.W. William Szathmary from the Grand Lodge of Uruguay, R.W. Stephen C. Cohn from the M.W.P.H.G.L. of Wisconsin, and R.W. Donald LaLiberte from the Grand Lodge of New York.

Six of our past masters have been Masters of the district's Lodge of Instruction: Worshipful Brothers Nathan Goldstein, William Szathmary, Stephen C. Cohn, Harvey S. Levine, George V. Anastopoulos, and Roger H. Ambuter,

Many of the Lodge's members have worked exceptionally hard to improve the Lodge and serve it and the district well. They have been awarded with one of Grand Lodge's most coveted awards, the Joseph Warren Distinguished Service Award. Those ten Brothers are Worshipful Brothers Carl M. Frutkoff, Dana A. Jackson, Robert H. Brown, Leon Rabin, Stephen C. Cohn, Mal H. Lemeshow, David C. Kramer, Roger H. Ambuter, Joseph Goldstein, and Kirk Knowlton.

Three Brothers have worked exceptionally hard in the quarries and have supported Grand Lodge in its programs and have worked hard to either write training manuals and books, and create programs to train incoming officers, create money saving programs, or to save money in banking. Those three brothers, Bro. Marshall M. Sloane in 2004, R.W. Stephen C. Cohn in 2012, and R.W. Donald H. LaLiberte in 2015, have been presented with the Henry Price Medal, the highest award given by this Grand Lodge, by Grand Masters for their dedicated service and deep commitment to the fraternity.

While many brothers are committed and active in some of the appendant bodies such as the Shrine and Royal Arch, two members continue to distinguish themselves. They are Wor. Robert H. Brown who is the First Ceremonial Master at Aleppo Shrine and in the progressive line to become Potentate in 2022. Brother Brown is also a Past High Priest of St. Andrew's Royal Arch Chapter, a Past District Deputy Grand High Priest for the Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Massachusetts, and Past Illustrious Master of Boston Council, Royal and Select Masters. R.W. Dana A. Jackson is also a Past High Priest of the same Royal Arch Chapter, and has also served as a District Deputy Grand High Priest and Deputy Grand High Priest. Bro. Jackson was recently installed as the Most Excellent Grand High Priest of the Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Massachusetts. This is quite an honor and achievement for a member of Garden City Lodge.

The lodge has meant a lot to most of its members. This is no truer than with one family who is now in its fourth generation of membership in this Lodge. I think we can call this "Masonic Genealogy!" Bro. Charles Brown (1890-1967) was the father of Bro. Leonard Brown (1913-2001), who was the father of Wor. Robert H. Brown (1948 -), who is the father of Wor. A. David Brown (1977 -) and Bro. Steven Brown (1981 -). Further rounding out that family of Masons is Bro. Paul Brown who was also Bro. Charles Brown's son and Bro. Leonard Brown's brother. Then there is Wor. Paul S. Koss who married Bro. Leonard

Brown's daughter Betty (Wor. Bob Brown's twin sister) and Bro. Jeff Lipman who married Wor. Paul Koss's daughter Andrea (Bro. Len Brown's grand daughter).

We have two sets of two generations of past masters, one in Wor. Nathan Goldstein (1915 – 2009) who served from 1958 – 1959, who was the father of Wor. Robert N. Goldstein (1948 -) who was raised in 1969 and served as master from 1979 – 1980, and Wor. Robert H. Brown who served in 1981 – 1982, who is the father of our current master, Wor. A. David Brown whom he raised in 2001. We also have brothers who have served as Masters; Wor. Leonard S. Gitner in 1990 – 1991, and Wor. David S. Gitner in 1992 – 1993. Their father was Bro. Melvin Gitner who sadly just passed away.

We also have R.W. Dana A. Jackson who served from 1980 – 1981 who was proud to raise his son Greg in 2007; Wor. Mal Lemeshow who served from 1995 – 1996 who was proud to raise his son Joshua 2008; and Bro. Brad Seidel who saw both of his sons become Masons, Bro. Isaac Seidel in 2013, and Bro. Jacob Seidel in 2014. And our Chaplain is Bro. Francis A. Kelley whose son is Wor. Christopher N. Kelley who served from 2012 - 2014.

Members of this lodge are not just in this area. Garden City Lodge has members in 16 States and two foreign countries.

One thing Garden City Lodge can be counted on doing is providing all Grand Lodge reports to them on a timely basis, usually the first in the district and one of the first in the state to do so. This is a credit to the lodge in placing its confidence with the Treasurer and Secretary who have been working together for the past 24 years as such. This Lodge is held in high esteem in Grand Lodge and you have a lot to be proud as a result.

Only until recently, did Garden City Lodge have the good fortune of having many of its Charter Members still alive. Bro. Myron Idelson, was our sole surviving Charter Member and a former writer for comedian Henny Youngman during the vaudeville era. He used to organize and produce large performances for the Lodge and mostly at his own expense. Sadly,

Brother Idelson passed away in 2016, literally just days after he produced a huge big-band concert for the Lodge. The Lodge performed a Masonic Service at the request of the family and also provided the Eulogy. Myron was a Prince among Princes and is still very much missed today.

Just how did the Lodge do it back then? When we had more than 300 members 30 years ago we had children's holiday parties that attracted more than 70 people including almost two dozen children. We had professional entertainment for the kids as well as clowns. Bros. Dave Winer and Ira Seskin did all the cooking and boy was it good. We had Masonic Awareness breakfasts every year with M.W. Phil Berquist, PGM, doing the speaking honors. We had Post-Passover bagel breakfasts, again with Ira and Dave doing the cooking. We were bringing in many new members every year! We had trips to the Cape, Bahamas, Puerto Rico, Switzerland, and many other "exotic" places back in the 60's and 70's, and outdoor events in some of the local parks. Garden City Lodge even spearheaded a drive in 2000 to procure and provide a Torah for the Chapel at the Masonic Home which made Masonic History with donations coming in from Masons across the country.

Today, at 184 active members, Garden City Lodge is experiencing the downside of new members as are many lodges across the country. But it is still a vibrant and active organization whose members take pride in their Masonic membership and who still strive to be that "perfect ashlar" which always seems to be just out of reach.

But we need your help in keeping the dream alive. We need members willing to step forward and take an active role in the leadership of the lodge. And we need new members to enable us to survive. It's not an easy task, but it IS a very rewarding one. I, for one, and I will wager that this applies to many past masters in this room, can attest that I would not be where I am today if it were not for the experiences gained and lessons learned in this Lodge, the training received from Grand Lodge, and those fine Masons I

have met both here and in my travels throughout the state and country.

In closing, Garden City Lodge is now planning for its 75th anniversary to be held in a mere 13 years in 2030. There will be a lot of work to not only put on another gala celebration, but more so to ensure we will have a lodge to celebrate. This can only be accomplished with a lot of hard work from the members by acting in such a way as a Mason that your friends will want to emulate you and join this wonderful organization. It is true that this is not our grandfathers or father's Lodge, it's not even my Lodge any longer. It's now belongs to the younger generation. Let's try to turn our numbers around by stemming the suspensions for non-payment of dues and selling Masonry and Garden City Lodge to our friends. But in order to maintain interest we have to show them that we are doing things to keep up their interest by involving spouses and families. The keys to tomorrow's Masonry are not in my hands, but in yours. How you will use them to open doors and keep them open is up to you. Let's work cooperatively to ensure we are relevant for the next generation who will walk through these doors long after we're gone. To quote Brother Idelson from the book on the history of the Lodge I will say the same thing to you that he said to me, and that is, "*Keep the dream alive!*"

*Rt. Wor. Stephen C. Cohn
December 14, 2017*