

The history of Fort Casper Chapter No. 4, Order of the Eastern Star, dates from October 3, 1894. Casper was then a frontier village. "The people here were then a little group of kindred spirits, living almost out of reach of the big world — like a people in a wilderness. When sickness, sorrow or misfortune came to any of them their friends rallied to their support with noble deeds, kind words and abiding confidence, and during those hours of trial, obligations were accumulated that never can be fully paid, and there is now a kindly feeling and a bond of friendship between the pioneers, equal to the "tie that binds" in the beautiful teachings of our Order of the Eastern Star." (Quoted from a history written by Sister Etta Taylor in 1927.)

Fort Casper Chapter may have come from a group of ladies called the Masonic Wives Reading Club. In the minutes of Casper Lodge No. 15, dated March 28, 1894, these ladies asked if they might be allowed to use the Masonic Hall for their meetings. The Hall was located above D. A. Robertson's Saloon. On October 3, 1894, fifteen Master Masons and 17 women met in the hall to organize a chapter of the Eastern Star. The meeting was called to order by John Leeper and a motion was made that the necessary steps be taken to proceed at once toward organization of a chapter. Elected by ballot were: Edness Kimball, Worthy Matron; John McGrath, Worthy Patron and Anna Calkins, Associate Matron. The chapter name was chosen and charter fee of \$2.00 was determined.

On November 30, 1894, under a warrant from General Grand Chapter, J. A. J. Stewart came to Casper from Independence Rock to institute Ft. Casper Chapter No. 4. He had been appointed Deputy Grand Patron by the General Grand Chapter and was a member from Waco Texas Chapter No. 12. Brother Stewart instituted the chapter and installed the officers. Fifty-six members names are on the charter. Regular meetings were held every two weeks.

The first birthday of Ft. Casper was celebrated November 28, 1895, at which time a supper was given and high-five was the card game of the evening. On March 12, 1895, an entertainment program of speeches, readings and singing was given which netted \$20.25 and this amount was the beginning of an organ fund; a ball given April 7 of that year added \$23.00. Charles Townsend ordered the organ from Chicago.

Edness Kimball and John McGrath held office for two terms. On May 14, 1896, the chapter adopted the policy of serving refreshments after each session and on June 25th, a generous committee provided three gallons of home-made ice cream and eight home-made cakes to be consumed by the 23 members present.

Meetings were held over Robertson's Saloon from 1894 to 1896. When the Odd Fellows Hall was completed in 1896, the meetings were held there. Fort Casper sub-rented from Casper Lodge No. 15 for \$100 per year.

On May 13, 1897, Most Worthy Grand Matron Sister Mary E. Partridge, from Oakland, California, visited the chapter.

On September 14, 1898, the eight Wyoming Chapters met in Casper at the Odd Fellows Hall to consider forming a Grand Chapter of the Order for the jurisdiction of Wyoming. Sister Sarah A. Bristol was elected Worthy Grand Matron, Laura McGrath was elected Grand Secretary and Edness Kimball was elected Associate Grand Conductress; the Grand Chapter of Wyoming was instituted on that date.

The year 1899 produced its quota of originality in entertainment for the community, under the leadership of Lillie E. Townsend and Edward Bargelt, Worthy Matron and Worthy Patron. A highlight was an Eastern Star carnival held in the Odd Fellows Hall, to which the entire community was invited, and responded. The festivity opened on April 12 and was in progress for three gala evenings, a midst a riot of brilliant color and novelty amusement attractions. Two rows of booths, each unit in charge of a costumed Mother Goose character, provided an enchanting "Midway" wigh surprises and delights galore, including a curiosity shop, art gallery, and illusion booth, together with

refreshment concessions. An orchestra, of which Charles Townsend was a member, provided lively tunes for the merrymakers enjoyment. Each evening's show opened with a spectacular "Mother Goose" parade with a bevy of storybook characters emerging from an enormous shoe and the orchestra playing martial music. They paraded around the room a few times before taking charge of their respective booths. Belle Patton as the Queen of Hearts, and Lillie Townsend as Mother Hubbard, were among the paraders. Net profit from the carnival was \$227.05, and the story of the affair was three columns of front page news in "The Derrick", published by Korn and Hays.

The leaders of the chapter in 1902 were Sister Berta Nye Wheeler and Charles H. Townsend, but in the midst of her year of service, Mrs. Wheeler passed away in July. This was a shock to the community, as well as to her fraternal Sisters and Brothers. It was also in 1902 that Brother Marion P. Wheeler served the Grand Chapter as Worthy Grand Patron.

In 1904 Brother Charles Townsend served the Grand Chapter as Worthy Grand Patron. His wife Sister Lillie served as Grand Treasurer from 1901 to 1905. Sister Lillie served the Grand Chapter as Worthy Grand Matron in 1907-1908. She returned to her duties as Grand Treasurer from 1914 to 1929. She also held nine Grand Representative commissions while serving the Grand Chapter.

In 1907 the Masons purchased land from C. H. Townsend for a Masonic Temple at First and Center Streets. Fort Casper Chapter purchased stock and members served on the building committee. The cornerstone was laid August 26, 1914, and the first Star meeting held there was in December 1914.

In 1908 a group called the "Dime Social" was formed which preceded the Tuesday Tea and Social Club. It was an active and enjoyable group for those Sisters who did not get out at night. Money raising entertainments were held as well as dinners and luncheons served for the Masonic bodies and the Masonic Service Association. One financial success was dinner for 400 Shriners during a Shrine Convention. Talented members made and donated pedestals, the ballot box and Marshal's baton (from a staircase spindle in Lillie Townsend's home). The Tea Club donated much of the paraphernalia of the chapter that is still in use today.

There were 518 members in 1926, and petitions or initiations in early every meeting in 1932. Being an Eastern Star or Mason gave eligibility to attend the many social functions and be involved in the many good works and it was an honor to belong.

Our Sister Harriet Eckerson served as Grand Secretary in 1933 and held this office until 1946. During the war years, members volunteered 10,687 hours of Red Cross work, furnished a Day Room for the 464th Squadron at the Air Base, purchased an ambulance, served at the Canteen for the soldiers, and then donated two tons plus 600 pounds of clothing which was shipped to the war stricken people of Europe.

In 1944 Fort Casper Chapter celebrated its 50th Anniversary with Bertha Talpers and Frank Blehr in the chairs. There were over 300 guests for "turkey and the fixings" plus covered dishes, served buffet style. Eleven charter members were present at the Golden Jubilee with many dignitaries present from over the state. Bertha Talpers wrote the history of the chapter for the program.

In 1945 the Eastern Star members had charge of the Red Cross rooms on Fridays. Sisters Effie Lowndes and Minnie Mitchell honored our chapter when they served as Grand Treasurer. Sister Effie Lowndes was Grand Treasurer from 1950 to 1956, and Sister Minnie Mitchell was Grand Treasurer from 1957 to 1966.

Our Sister Crystal Joelner served as Grand Secretary from 1967 to 1975.

In November 1970, the 75th Anniversary of Fort Casper was held with over 200 attending. Alice Hawley presided as Worthy Matron with Fred Meats as Worthy Patron. In attendance was Mae E. Mickelson, then serving as Most Worthy Grand Matron. Elsie Henn, Worthy Grand Matron was also in attendance. Jessie Guyot and Faye Eggert put together a skit for the 75th Anniversary which was very enjoyable. All members were in old fashioned frocks of the early part of the century. The

skit, portraying the history of our chapter, was also presented by many of the older members. Effie D. Lowndes and Alice Cook, Past Grand Matrons, were in this presentation.

A good sized crowd attended the 100th Anniversary on November 26, 1994, with a tea and program in the afternoon and a banquet at the Casper Shrine Club that evening. Sadly, the icing on the beautiful anniversary cake melted along with the first of the 100 candles as the last of the candles were lighted.

Our chapter has been honored by having eight Past Grand Matrons and six Past Grand Patrons.

Fort Casper's own Charles Townsend is Wyoming's only Past Most Worthy Grand Patron. He was a charter member of Fort Casper and served as Worthy Patron in 1902, as Worthy Grand Patron in 1904, and served the General Grand Chapter in 1940-43 as Most Worthy Grand Patron. Past Grand Matron Alice Elaine Blatt has served as Worthy Grand Esther. She also served as Grand Secretary for ten years and was honored with the title of "Grand Secretary Emeritus".

Past Grand Matron Sister Dorothy McIntosh is completing a term as a General Grand Chapter Committee Member.

Members of Fort Casper No. 4 have served the Grand Chapter of Wyoming for 100 years; with 69 years when our members served as Grand Treasurer or Grand Secretary, 14 years as Worthy Grand Matron or Worthy Grand Patron, and 54 years as other elected or appointed Grand Officers.

During the one hundred years we have come from travel by covered wagon to "Men in Space; from the Pony Express to E-Mail and Fax Machine. The membership has moved with the times and made those changes necessary to continue the peace and harmony for the life of our chapter. As we go into the 21st Century, it is our prayer that we are prepared to act with the same courage that our charter members exhibited in establishing Fort Casper Chapter No. 4