

A Brief History of the Past Master's Jewels Of Raritan Lodge #61 and Prudence Lodge #204

Perth Amboy, NJ, November 16, 1861

“At a meeting of several Free and Accepted Masons, at the house of Brother Peter R. Hawley in Perth Amboy, Brother M. N. Wisewell was elected chairman and Brother W. A. Masker, Secretary.

“After due deliberation, a committee was formed to frame a petition to be sent to the M.W. Grand Master of New Jersey, respectfully praying that a disposition be granted to the petitioners to open and hold a Regular Lodge at Perth Amboy. The same committee appointed Brother Hawley, who at the time was a member of Washington Lodge No. 33 of Elizabeth as W. M., Brother Isaac Ward of Jerusalem Lodge No. 26 of Plainfield as S.W., and Brother Robert Carter, who was not affiliated as J.W. A petition was then signed.

“The next meeting was held on November 23, 1861. The committee was informed that it would be necessary to procure the recommendation of the nearest Lodge to Perth Amboy, before the Grand Master would grant us a Dispensation. Resolved that the applying members would visit Lafayette Lodge No. 27 in Rahway, NJ (that being the closest Lodge), pass an examination and get a recommendation there from.

“No more meetings were held during the winter.

“The applying members visited Lafayette Lodge No. 27 in Rahway some time later, were examined, and received a recommendation which was forwarded to the M.W. Grand Master with application. The records of Grand Lodge show that a Dispensation to Raritan Lodge No. 61 F.&A.M. was issued by Grand Lodge on March 13, 1862.

“Upon the receipt of the Dispensation, the first meeting was held on March 27, 1862, when the by-laws were adopted.

“The Lodge was instituted at a meeting thereof held February 5, 1863 (the charter being granted at open Grand Lodge at Trenton, January 22, 1863). The Lodge was opened in due and ancient form in the M. M. degree. R. W. Brother Robert C. Bugby, D. G. M. in the East assisted M. W. Grand Master Isaac Van Wagoner, and other master masons. Installed were W. M. Peter R. Hawley, Brother Isaac D. Ward, S. W., Brother Edward Brinley as proxy for Brother Robert Carter, J. W.

“The next day, St. Stephens Lodge, No. 63 at South Amboy was instituted.

“From the beginning to the end, the Lodge seemed to always have the regular meeting on a Thursday.

“Huguenot Lodge No. 381 at Tottenville, NY, and Lafayette Lodge No. 27 at Rahway, NJ, exerted an early influence over the newer Lodge. Their officers and past masters assisted in the degree work and there was much visiting back and forth by the membership of these Lodges.

“The dues were \$4.00 a year until 1877 when that amount was raised to \$6.00.

“The custom of presenting each retiring Past Master with a jewel was inaugurated March 17, 1873 when Past Master Ward presented a jewel to Past Master Fred Harper, “who was going to leave us”. That same year, Brother Isaac Ward was presented with his Past Master Jewel for the years, 1864 and 1868 to 1871 (a total of 5 years that he served). Since then to the present time (1963) this pleasant custom has been continued (as indicated in Raritan Lodge’s 100th Anniversary program).”

It was thought in the mid-1700’s, the position of Immediate Past Master (I.P.M.), became an important rank. Although he is not elected or appointed, he assumes an office to which his experience, his knowledge, and his skill in employing that Knowledge entitles him.

The IPM had completed his spiritual temple and was now in a position to give counsel and advice to those who are still engaged in building theirs. In this point of view, there is a common denominator for such significance that an appropriate jewel would be necessary as a symbol of splendor.

Although the exact date that the first Past Master’s jewel appeared is not known, there are references in 1760 and 1762 that the Past Master “hath the Compasses and Sun with a line or cords about his neck”.

According to several web sites, in the early 1800’s Past Master’s jewels were usually purchased by the Lodge and then presented to the outgoing Master in appreciation of his service as a leader. The recipient would wear his Past Master jewel on his chest at Lodge events to signify his experience.

That then leads us to the Past Master’s Jewels of Raritan and Prudence Lodges. These jewels were presented to the Lodge by the Past Master or by the family of the deceased Past Master as a gift to display in the Lodge.

In 1979 when John Bergacs became Worshipful Master, the jewels hung in a non-secure display case in the East between the Worshipful Master and the Secretary. There was much discussion about the value of the jewels. In early 1980 gold soared to \$850 per ounce. It dropped back to \$300 to \$400 per ounce soon thereafter. Gold today has a value of \$1100 to \$1150 per ounce.

The jewels were appraised on February 12, 1980. The smaller jewel of 14K gold and a weight of 14.5 has a double scrap worth of \$348.00 and if replaced new \$652.50. The larger jewel of 14K gold and a weight of 29.8 has a double scrap worth of \$834.00 and if replaced new \$1758.00.

In 1980, John Bergacs, with donations from the Lodge, obtained a display case for the ante room. Two sections of jewels were placed in the display case prior to most meetings and removed after the meeting. The Lodge now kept the jewels inside of the large safe behind the secretary. The display case is not in the ante room of Lafayette Lodge.

Since 1999, when Raritan Lodge sold the Masonic Temple in Perth Amboy and moved to Theodore Roosevelt's Lodge Building in Carteret, the jewels have been kept in a bank safety deposit box.

The list of the Past Master's Jewels follows

1. Isaac Ward - 1864, 1868, 1869, 1870, 1871
2. Joseph Marsh – 1879, 1880
3. A.B. Marsh – 1881, 1882
4. Thomas Macan – 1886, 1887
5. David McClymont – 1892, 1893
6. W. Guy Weaver – 1894
7. John H. Ling - 1895
8. Charles K. Seaman – 1896, 1897
9. Walter Thompson, 1900, 1901
10. F.O. Pierson – 1902
11. C.F. Hall – 1903
12. Charles K. Seaman – dated 1903, but unsure why a second PM Jewel
13. Peter Damgaard – 1904
14. N.W. Pierce – 1905, 1906
15. George H. Coates – 1907
16. Fred Garretson – 1909
17. Chris Mathiasen – 1910
18. L.V. Emanuel – 1913
19. Jesse Seaman – 1914
20. John E. Sofield – 1917
21. William Maidment – 1918
22. William H. Nutt – 1920
23. Ingvaard Geisen – 1922
24. Truman Gand – 1924 – Prudence Lodge
25. Harry E. Comings – 1925 Prudence Lodge
26. James MacCrory – 1926
27. Thomas A. Garretson – 1929
28. Will W. Ramsey – 1930
29. Charles K. Seaman, Jr. – 1931
30. Emil H. Kurowski – 1932
31. Fred C. Beutel – 1933
32. Raymond N. Jensen (PGM in 1957) – 1935
33. Walter C. Christensen – 1937
34. R. Chris Miller – 1938
35. Francis C. Solt – 1954

In 1863, Americus Lodge No. 83 was constituted. Americus Lodge was also an off spring of Lafayette Lodge.

It must be noted that Raritan Lodge and Prudence Lodge both met in Perth Amboy. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Prudence Lodge asked to merge with Raritan Lodge, but Raritan Lodge declined. Prudence Lodge then merged with Americus Lodge in 1971. In 1992 Americus Lodge merged with Raritan Lodge. In 2004, Raritan Lodge merged back with the brethren of Lafayette Lodge.

As one can see, Raritan Lodge, Americus Lodge, and Prudence Lodge all returned to Lafayette Lodge, their mother lodge.