**The Birth, Death and Resurrection**

**of Alna Lodge No. 43**

By C. Weston Dash

In the years immediately following the formation of the Grand Lodge of Maine on June 24, 1820, Freemasonry in Maine was healthy and expanding. At the time of the consecration there were 31 working lodges. Two new lodges were added in 1820, three more in 1821, and five in 1822, bringing the total to 41 when, on October 12,1822, a group of nine Masons resident in or near the Lincoln County town of Alna gathered and determined to petition the Grand Lodge for a charter to establish a new lodge at Alna. Most were members of Lincoln Lodge No. 3 at Wiscasset and Herman Lodge No. 32 at Gardiner.

James Loring Child, Esq. of Alna, Grand Secretary of the Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Maine and Past High Priest of Jerusalem Chapter No.4 at Hallowell, was designated to draw up and present the petition.

The opportunity came on January 9, 1823 at the Grand Lodge Communication at Portland “on behalf of John McLean and others”, according to the 1872 reprint of the Proceedings, by Stephen Berry, Printer, who was also Grand Secretary at the time. The Proceedings indicate that on the next day, January 10,1823, the petition having been reviewed by the Committee on Charters, it was voted that a charter be granted to John McLean, George Jones, Samuel W. Clark, Daniel Carleton, Jr., James L. Child, Charles Wilkins, Elias Cobb, Levi F. Eldred and Aaron Young. It is dated January 14, 1823.

[There is a discrepancy in the petition date and date of the precedence in the Proceedings which indicate the date as a day later in each case, out the records of those sessions are dated as noted above.]

An Act of Incorporation for the new lodge was introduced into the Maine House of Representatives on January 18, 1823, given three readings, passed and signed by Benjamin Ames, Speaker. It was then introduced in the Maine Senate, given two readings and passed on January 20, 1823, signed by Daniel Rose, President, and attested by Albion K. Parris on January 21, 1823.

The first official meeting of Alna Lodge was held in Masons Hall at Alna on February 21, 1823, at which seven of the original petitioners attended, plus several other area Masons, including Jeremiah Carleton, David Otis, and Elisha Palmer. Elias Cobb called the meeting to order, and James L. Child was elected as chairman, and Samuel W. Clark, a Past High Priest of New Jerusalem Chapter No. 3 at Wiscasset and a Grand Chapter officer, as secretary. The charter was read, Divine Blessing invoked by Aaron Young, after which the Lodge proceeded to elect the officers:

Worshipful Master James Loring Child, Esq. of Alna

Senior Warden Elias Cobb, Esq. of Pittston

Junior Warden John McLean, Esq. of Alna

Treasurer David Otis of Alna

Secretary Samuel W. Clark, Esq. of Alna

Senior Deacon Charles Wilkins, Esq. of Alna

Junior Deacon Daniel Carleton, Jr. of Alna

Senior Stewart Jeremiah Carleton of Alna

Junior Stewart Elisha Palmer of Alna

The new officers were apparently installed the same evening [by whom is not known], committees appointed to draft By-Laws, and to procure a seal, regalia and furniture, with all steps taken to put the Lodge in working order. Measures were also taken “to enlist the services of one skilled in architecture as an instructor”.

At this first communication, petitions from two Alna residents, Jeremiah Pearson and Carleton Dole, Esq., were received, referred and voted, and they were initiated, passed and raised. [Such speed was not unusual in the early days!] Before the communication was closed, “a portion of the time was devoted to lectures, noting the observance of strict rules and regulations of the order.”

In the year 1823 there were forty-four meetings held, with an average attendance of seven members. Eleven new candidates were raised during the year.

The annual meeting and election of officers was held on December 31, 1823, with Elias Cobb elected and installed as Master. James L. Child was appointed as proxy to attend the next Grand Lodge session in Portland in January 1824. Cobb only served until March 5, 1824 when he resigned and Child was elected to serve until a new election could be held on March 17, 1824, when Samuel W. Clark was elected and installed as the third Master.

With his experience in the Grand Royal Arch Chapter, Child was quick to work into the inner affairs of the Grand Lodge and at that January 1824 session, was one of those appointed to gather, sort and count the votes for Grand Lodge officers, when William Swan was elected the third Grand Master. Child was also appointed as Junior Grand Deacon, the first member of Alna Lodge appointed to Grand Lodge office.

On June 19, 1824, the Lodge voted to procure 30 new aprons for members, and to have the Deacons’ and Stewarts’ rods properly painted. There was also a meeting on June 30 which was closed to permit the formal consecration of the Lodge on the following day, July 1, 1824, by RW Robert P. Dunlap, Deputy Grand Master, of Brunswick. [No mention of the consecration of the Lodge is made in the reprinted Proceedings; however, they were apparently reported in detail in the Lodge History published in 1874.]

The records show that there was “a great turnout of Masons from miles around” who came to attend the ceremonies, many of whom were members of Lincoln and Hermon lodges, at Wiscasset and Gardiner.

The Grand Lodge was organized at 10 a.m. and proceeded to Masons’ Hall where they were received by the officers of Alna Lodge and the elaborate ceremonies undertaken. Following the ceremonies, refreshments were served and another procession was formed including a band, which proceeded to the Alna Meeting House where an anthem was sung by a choir of townspeople, a prayer offered by the Rev. Samuel Johnson, and an address delivered by Right Worshipful James Loring Child, the first Master of the Lodge and Junior Grand Deacon of the Grand Lodge.

The Lodge was consecrated in due and ancient form, and the officers installed by Deputy Grand Master Dunlap with the assistance of the following “pro tempore” officers:

Right Worshipful Master Samuel W. Clark

Senior Warden Elisha J. Ford

Junior Warden Aaron Young

Chaplin David Young II

Treasurer Jeremiah Jewett

Secretary Jonathan Young

Senior Deacon Daniel Carleton, Jr.

Junior Deacon Nathaniel Plummer

Senior Stewart Elisha Palmer

Junior Stewart Joseph Blish

Tyler Elisha Mckenney

Following these ceremonies, a procession was again formed and proceeded to the home of Elisha Palmer, “where they partook of an excellent dinner in a cool retreat on this hot July day!” [Obviously the ceremonies must have been open to the public!]

During 1824, five more members were added to the Lodge roster, and on December 8, 1824, Elisha J. Ford was elected as Master. There appears to be no record of other meetings until another election held on February 22, 1826, more than a year later, at which Aaron Young was elected as Master.

Meanwhile in the Grand Lodge session of January 1825, James L. Child was appointed as Corresponding Grand Secretary (which today is the committee on Foreign Correspondence). At the same meeting, Child was appointed as one of the committee to wait upon Brother and General the Marquis de Lafayette on his visit to Portland on June 25, 1825.

Aaron Young was to be installed as Master on March 1, 1826, but when the hour arrived, he declined to be installed, and the duly elected Senior Warden, Junior Warden, and Treasurer also declined installation. Quite apparently there was some considerable dissention within the Lodge.

Elisha J. Ford, then being still officially the Master, also resigned! No further meetings of the Lodge were held for some seven months.

On October 11, 1826, interest again was aroused and Elisha J. Ford was again elected as Master. At this meeting William Hitchcock presented his petition, was accepted and raised on November 20, 1826. The week following Ford’s election, on October 18, the remaining vacancies in the officer line were filled, and Ford and the officers were duly installed.

The next month, on November 8, 1826, thirteen Master Masons residing in the “Damariscotta River area” [probably Newcastle and Damariscotta Mills] sent a communication to Alna Lodge offering to join the Lodge if arrangements could be made to hold meetings in alternate years in Newcastle and Alna. The proposition was referred to a committee appointed to consider it. Meanwhile, on November 20, the same thirteen brothers were elected to membership, including John D. McCrate, David Dennis, Daniel Waters, John Madigan, John Cottrill, Jesse Dunbar, John Borland, Henry Little, William Hitchcock, (who was yet to be raised), Charles Boyles, John Cox, James Erskine and Joseph Merrill. On December 9, 1826, James Thurston also was elected to membership.

On December 1, 1826, William Bickford, on behalf of more “Damariscotta River Brethren”, met a committee of Alna Lodge officers and informed them that there were at least twenty more Master Masons in good standing residing in the area who would join and pay the usual dues, if the proposition [to meet in alternate years in Alna and Newcastle] was approved by the Lodge. They also offered to provide a hall, guarantee reasonable rent, and, at their own expense, provide furniture for the lodge and pay the expense of moving from Alna to Newcastle.

One of the strange conditions of acceptance by the Alna brethren was that a solemn assurance be given *that the Lodge would never be moved east of the Damariscotta River!* With this agreement, the Lodge accepted the proposition.

A petition for the move was prepared and presented by James L. Child in Grand Lodge in Portland in January 1827, which was granted. On January 31, 1827, a meeting was held at Alna which was well attended and new officers elected:

Worshipful Master William Bickford

Senior Warden John Cottrill

Junior Warden Jesse Dunbar

Secretary Elisha J. Ford

Senior Deacon David Dennis, Jr.

Junior Deacon William Hitchcock

Stewart John Madigan

It must be noted that about half of the new officers were from among the new members from Newcastle, and the remainder from Alna. It was voted that the next meeting be held in Newcastle, and subsequent meetings in 1827, in Capt. John Borland’s Hall, just north of Lincoln Academy (later the headmaster’s residence) on Academy Hill.

The first meeting in Newcastle was held on February 14, 1827, attended only by the Damariscotta River brethren. For some reason, perhaps regional rivalries, none of the Alna brethren attended any of the 1827 meetings. During this year, however, twenty-five new members were admitted, including three clergymen.

But on January 30, 1828, the annual election of officers was held at Alna, attended only by the Alna brethren and Elisha J. Ford was again elected as Master. A week later, on February 6, 1828, the last meeting was held in Borland’s Hall at Newcastle—in fact, the last meeting of the Lodge for more than 22 years.

Without a doubt, a combination of the local dissentions in Alna, the regional rivalries between Alna and Newcastle, plus the complexities of the so-called “Morgan Affair” which decimated Lodges as the anti-masonic was organized by political and some religious zealots, devastated Freemasonary during the years from 1826 until the 1840’s.

The properties, furniture, working tools, records and the “Great Lights” were stored during this era in Capt. Borland’s Hall at Newcastle.

Early records of Alna Lodge 1823-1849 are missing, and copies of the several histories of the Lodge written in 1874, 1880 and 1890 are unavailable in either the Lodge records or in the Grand Lodge vault. In 1954, Harold W. Castner, Damariscotta historian and a 50-year member of Alna Lodge, wrote a definitive history of the Lodge up to that year; however, its historical accuracy at many points is now questionable. [I have tried to straighten out some of the conflicting information, where possible, from other records and from Grand Lodge Proceedings. cwd]

As the hysteria of the anti-masonic years subsided in the latter part of the 1840’s, a few of the still-living members of the old Lodge, along with some newly-made Masons, principally from Lincoln Lodge No. 3 in Wiscasset, showed signs of reviving interest. The District Deputy Grand Master in his 1834 report said that no meetings had been held in Alna Lodge since 1828.

But James Loring Child, now of Augusta, first Master of the Lodge, and still active in the Grand Royal Arch Chapter, was appointed as Deputy Grand Master by Most Worshipful Thomas Webb Smith in 1844, and in the absence of the Grand Master, was given his proxy to be installed for him and to make the necessary appointments, and to preside in the Grand Lodge in June 1844. Right Worshipful (by this time) Bro. Daniel Carleton, Jr. was appointed by RW Bro. Child as Grand Sword Bearer. Child and Carleton, over the “dark” years of Alna Lodge, had loyally represented it in each of the Grand Lodge sessions when they could attend. Thus it had still not been committed to the “grave” as many lodges were.

Masonic charity appears to have continued for brethren of Alna Lodge, for in January 1845, an acknowledgement from a “Brother West” of Alna was recorded as having received a donation, probable through RW Bro. Carleton.

In May 1849, a communication was sent to the Grand Lodge by the few remaining members of the Alna Lodge, including Bro. John D. McCrate, offering to surrender the charter of the Lodge for safekeeping “until they shall be able to use it with advantage to the Craft.” The charter was ordered received by the Grand Secretary for safekeeping, with the privilege of having it restored when they again to make use of it. The Grand Lodge, as recorded in the Proceedings, highly praised the Alna brethren for their action, and recommended that similar action be taken by other Lodges in the same circumstances.

In November 1850, a group of Damariscotta and Newcastle Masons held a meeting in an attempt to revive the long dead-but unburied Lodge. The meeting was called in the Odd Fellows Lodge Hall in Damariscotta, with Wor. Bro. John Taylor, one of the last surviving members of the old Lodge, as temporary chairman.

Thomas B. Johnson, a Past Master of Lincoln Lodge in Wiscasset was elected as Worshipful Master pro tempore, and filled the other offices by appointment. Opening a Lodge of Master Masons, the pro tempore officers were:

Worshipful Master Thomas B. Johnston

Senior Warden John S. Wright

Junior Warden Ezra B. French

Treasurer William Hitchcock

Secretary John Madigan

Senior Deacon George Q.H. Putnam

Junior Deacon S. Albee

Senior Stewart Henry Mellus

Junior Stewart John Taylor

Tyler Isaac Chapman

“It appearing that the Charter of Alna Lodge No. 43, having been surrendered to the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge for safe keeping, and that more than seven members of that Lodge now reside in this vicinity who are anxious to reorganize themselves under it, upon motion of Bro. William Hitchcock, it was:

“Voted, that a petition be drawn up and the necessary steps taken as required by the general regulations of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge, to procure the assent of Lincoln Lodge, and also of the R.W. Deputy Grand Master,

“Voted, that Bro. Ezra B. French be requested to act as a committee to prepare and forward necessary papers, and to receive the Charter of said Lodge, and a dispensation to open a working Lodge in Damariscotta.

“After a lecture by Bro. Johnston, the Lodge was closed in due form.”

On December 31, 1850, a second meeting was held in the Damariscotta Odd Fellows Hall with Wor. Bro. John Taylor again acting as Master pro-tempore. Bro. French reported that he had obtained the Charter and the required Dispensation to work again as a Lodge. At this meeting were admitted to membership Bros. John S. Wright, Henry Mellus, Isaac Chapman and Ezra B. French. The Lodge proceeded to the election of Bro. French as the new Worshipful Master. Further elections were deferred until the next meeting.

Ezra Bartlett French was a prominent Damariscotta attorney and political figure. It is not now known just when or where he was raised a Master Mason. Grand Lodge of Maine records show it was in Lincoln Lodge in 1850; however, a careful check of that Lodge’s records for both 1849 and 1850 make no mention of him in any way, nor do the By-Laws indicate his signature as a member.

Bro. French’s commanding appearance and manner immediately brought him to the forefront in the December 1850 meeting, resulting in his election. He was also delegated to present a petition to the Grand Lodge in May 1851 for the formal restoration of the Charter, and to permanently move the Lodge from Alna to Damariscotta, which was granted.

At the next meeting of the Lodge on January 28, 1851, with Wor. Bro. French presiding as Master, the remaining officers were elected:

Senior Warden Peaslee M. Wells

Junior Warden Isaac Chapman

Treasurer William Hitchcock

Secretary William Jones

Senior Deacon George Q.H. Putnam

Junior Deacon Lemuel Hubbard

Senior Stewart Henry Mellus

Junior Stewart John Taylor

At this meeting applications for the degrees in the gift of the Lodge were received from Hon. Abner Stetson and Charles Jones, Esq., the first candidates for the newly revived Lodge.

Wor. Bro French served the Lodge as Master in the next three years, until December 14, 1853, when Everett W. Stetson was elected as Master. French was appointed as District Deputy Grand Master for the Fourth (now Tenth) Masonic District in May 1853. In his first three years as Worshipful Master, there were forty-five candidates raised in the Lodge. In May 1854, he was elected as Senior Grand Warden, and again in May 1855.

His political life, however, was making inroads on his Masonic activities. In 1855, Governor Anson P. Morrill appointed him as State Commissioner of Banking, and after many more years of service in both the State Legislature and Senate, he was elected as Secretary of State in 1845-1850. More and more of his fraternal activities were overshadowed by his political activity. He was a leader in the formation of the Republican Party in Lincoln County and, with Everett Stetson and Hon. Abner Stetson, published in 1854 a newspaper known as the *American Sentinal*, obviously of political intent.

Nevertheless, in December 1858, he was again called by Alna Lodge as its Worshipful Master for his fourth year. During these years, some 52 candidates were raised in the Lodge.

In the election of 1860, he was an ardent advocate of Abraham Lincoln, and in August 1861 President Lincoln appointed him as Second Auditor of the U.S. Treasury in charge of military accounts during and following the Civil War, which position he still held at his death in Washington, D.C. on April 24, 1880. His Masonic burial was a highlight event of that year.

Bro. French became interested in Royal Arch Masonry in 1851 and was exalted in New Jerusalem Chapter No. 3 at Wiscasset in that year. While elected as an officer, his other activities precluded performance during that term; however, in 1876 a group of Royal Arch Masons in Damariscotta organized a new Chapter, naming it in his honor as Ezra B. French Chapter No. 42, charted by the Grand Royal Arch Chapter on January 10, 1877.

Unfortunately, Bro and Companion French never had the opportunity to sit in the Chapter named in his honor; however, that Chapter joined with Alna Lodge in the Masonic honors paid to him at his burial.

Truly, Bro. French was a guiding force in the resurrection of Alna Lodge, and without doubt, with his friend and brother Peaslee M. Wells, was the “father” of Bristol Lodge No.74 of which Bro. Wells was the first Master, and of which your writer is now Master.

Reprinted by

Barry W Knott Jr.

Secretary of Alna-Anchor Lodge #43