

## Saco Lodge #9

The depression years 1930-1940 left Saco Lodge with a sound nucleus of fairly substantial membership - not great in numbers but we could carry on and we did.

The War Years created a desire to join social organizations, to be with people to be a part of activities they possibly could not afford in the previous 20 years. Saco Lodge was an important one of these organizations, I don't know its peak membership but in 1960 it was at 350. Star, Chapter and Council were probably at their peaks prior to that as well.

From 1950 on television, along with age, kept many people's evenings satisfied and the desire to join waned. The downsizing had begun.

### The Lean Years 1960-2000

Incoming Masters found it necessary to use past Masters to fill many chairs. If we raised 2 or 3 members a year it was considered a success. We lived by the rule, and still do, that a man must ask to become a member. We couldn't go looking for them.

Along with declining membership, we began to realize that our lodge premises was getting shabby. Nothing had been done since the big preparations for the 150th anniversary in 1952. Some of us were concerned that the Saco and Biddeford Savings Bank's need for space might cause us to be evicted. Our rent was low and we wouldn't be missed if they so desired. Hence in the 1970s we began cleaning and

upgrading. First we sent letters to all members of all four bodies asking for donations to offset expected costs.

The first energy crunch in 1973 caused the bank to insulate the entire building and replace all the large windows on the 3d floor at a cost of \$4,500 each. When the bank took over the 2nd floor they installed an elevator from the Main St. door to the 3d floor. Prior to that it was forty-two steps from the entrance to the 3d floor, we got our exercise.

With no insulation, heat, dirt, dust and smoke (we all smoked) passed through the plaster ceiling and showed every lathe. It was necessary to clean all that accumulation off for paint to stick. With special sponges we thoroughly cleaned the ceilings and walls and gave them two coats of paint afterwards. We papered and painted the entry and the hall to the card room and installed carpeting in the area in front of the elevator. Worthshipful Bud Tripp painted the hall and ceiling to the card room. Worthshipful Don Fogg loaned us staging which was necessary throughout our activities because of the high ceilings.

The dining room was next and was going to be a major job as it measured 30' wide, 60' long and 19' high. Six "school house" light fixtures with non-replaceable globes was a good challenge. The acoustics of the dining room were so poor that conversation was impossible. The answer was the green drapes on one wall which was eminently successful. Sheer curtains on the windows were held in place by velcro for easy removal and cleaning. The floor was sanded professionally and urethane at a cost of \$2,100.

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We lost about 15' of the dining room when the bank opened the 4th floor for offices and needed a fire escape. The good part of that was that all of the electrical service had to be upgraded to code. Our knob and tube wiring was gone and it cost us nothing.

The next major project was the lodge room, 30' wide X 60' long X 18' high, cleaning with special sponges did wonders. It took 6 dozen of them to clean 60 or more years of dust and dirt but the walls and ceiling looked like new.

Brother Bob Boston deserves high praise for painting the entire ceiling, including the murals. The carpet was steam cleaned and Scotchgard was applied to cut static. The major expense of the lodge room was reupholstering all the furniture. The individual pieces were carried out into the dining room where a professional upholsterer removed all the fabric and pads and then, eight-way hand-tied every spring and reupholstered every chair and bench. It took him weeks to complete.

Through a special deal with the House of Lights in Scarborough, we obtained the six chandeliers which the bank's electricians hung for us while wiring the 4th floor.

The Saco Lodge No.9's fortunes changed quite dramatically in the late 1990s when Joel Tripp and Carl Marsano became members and entered the chairs in time to make our 200th anniversary a success.

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Somehow an influx of new, younger members began to make an impression and the Lodge went from 175 members to over 200 in defiance of the trend throughout Maine.

The last two decades of the "Lean Years" did see an important change. Awareness of the Masons to the outside population. It seems that not every one knew we existed. This awareness was a result of outreach programs such as several very successful, 100+ pint Blood Drives and Child Identification Programs which were well advertised in the schools. These events brought people in to the lodge and we received many positive comments such as, "I didn't realize that such a beautiful room existed in Saco". Outside activities included Mary's Walk participation, twice yearly trash pick up on the Jenkins Rd. and Salvation Army Bell Ringing at Walmart, for which the entire 18th district participated and which has now been going on for 30 plus years, with no group raising more money for that organization than the Masons. We also sponsored a scholarship at Thornton Academy and Masters and Wardens served coffee at the Veteran's home in Scarborough. With Grand Lodge encouragement, we held "special ladies" luncheons to tell our deceased brother's widows that they were not forgotten. These activities, both in and outside of the Lodge, have made a difference in the public's perception of us and undoubtedly have spurred interest in Masons and our Lodge.