

50th Anniversary
Belmont Chapter No. 108, O.E.S.
November 24, 1956

In the Beginning... taken from Belmont Chapter's
50th Anniversary program

*“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works,
and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.”*

1906 - 1956

To review the history of a chapter, reading over records of by-gone years and pausing to reflect upon those who gave so much in time and energy to build a lasting foundation, particularly as that duty pertains to our beloved Belmont Chapter No. 108, O.E.S., has brought to the fore so very plainly the relationship of Masonry to the growth of the Town of Belmont.

Mrs. M. E. Watson Flett, the first worthy matron and mother of Belmont's present chairman of the Board of Selectmen, in her annual report, tells so vividly how it all started.

“One morning in October of last year my telephone rang, which is a very common occurrence but seldom does such an important event hinge upon its ringing. Upon answering I found an old friend of mine, Mrs. Benjamin A. Harris, and it did not take many minutes for her to tell me in her usual energetic manner that she thought our town was ready for an Eastern Star chapter. I replied as promptly that I thought not as we had very few members of the Order in the town and I felt that Belmont was an exceedingly difficult place to start anything in.”

Fifty years ago Belmont was a town of farms, gardens and estates, a purely residential town as it has remained ever since, and far enough from metropolitan Boston to be considered country. After Mrs. Harris and Mrs. Effie F. King, Grand Matron, had called upon Mrs. Flett to discuss the matter, they started out to call upon Eastern Star members residing in Belmont, and “through the kindness of Mr. Harris a comfortable carriage” was the mode of transportation and “considerable ground was covered.”

Nothing is impossible to a woman — even then — and on November 5, 1906, the organizational meeting was held in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Harris with thirty-nine residents of Belmont and Waverly (a part of Belmont)

signifying their intentions to be charter members of an Eastern Star chapter in our town. Fourteen of these were by affiliation and twenty-five by degrees.

Moving along at a fast pace, Belmont Chapter was instituted on November 8, 1906, by Grand Patron Charles H. Harrison, the degrees being conferred upon the new members by the officers of Magdalene Chapter No. 28 of Maynard, Massachusetts, the home chapter of the Grand Matron, Sister Effie F. King. Brother Harris at that time was also serving as patron of Magdalene Chapter, and we learn, too, that our first worthy matron demitted from Electa Chapter No. 19 in Waltham in order to affiliate with the baby chapter.

Sister Grace Grover, P.M., of Crystal Chapter was appointed instructress of Belmont Chapter.

Dinner on the evening of institution was paid for by assessing each gentleman fifty cents, which purchased coffee and ice cream. Ham, salads, rolls, etc., were contributed by the sisters. (Fifty years in that respect has offered no change!) The committee handling the dinner arrangements that evening tendered a special thank you to Mr. Irving Frost for his "liberal contribution of celery." The end of the record of that meeting states "The members of Magdalene Chapter were served refreshments all the way home, judging from the amount of celery taken with them on their return trip."

At the time of institution the fee for the degrees was \$3.00 and for affiliation \$2.00. Belmont lodges charge for rent was simply paying for the light and heat. The first secretary of Belmont Chapter No. 108 was a brother.

Signet Chapter No. 22 of Cambridge exemplified the degrees at the second meeting of Belmont Chapter, and initiated its first candidate — Penelope W. Flett. On January 23, 1907, Belmont Chapter officers exemplified the degrees for the first time, initiating four candidates.

The first regalia and jewels used by Belmont Chapter officers were redonated by "ladies of Belmont Chapter," the money for same being raised by giving whists and dancing parties. The "floor star" and batons were given to the Chapter by the gentlemen, and the chart and frame were gifts of Brother Benjamin A. Harris.

New England tradition and early American history found its way within our four walls when Brother John Truckses of Charlestown gave us the first gavel used. This gavel was made of wood from the old frigate *Constitution*.

A special meeting was called on Tuesday evening, April 30, 1907, for the purpose of constituting Belmont Chapter No. 108, O. E.S., at which Grand

Matron Effie F. King officiated, with Grand Patron Charles H. Harrison and other grand officers assisting.

Stated meetings of Belmont Chapter No. 108, O.E.S. were then held on the fourth Wednesday of each month, excepting July and August, and continued to meet on that day until September of 1915 when the, by-laws were amended to change the meeting date to the third Wednesday. It has continued to be our regular meeting date ever since.

Among our charter members we find many whose sons and daughters have carried on in the chapter with ability and distinction. Everett C. Benton served the Grand Lodge of Masons as Grand Master, and a Masonic lodge is named in his honor in East Boston. An other of our charter members, Willena R. Benton — the wife of Everett C. Benton — had her name chosen to designate a later O.E.S. chapter formed in East Boston, and it is interesting to remember that her son and daughter-in-law were it's first Worthy Matron and Worthy Patron.

Four daughters of Sister Anna P. Hastings are members of Belmont Chapter, two of them having served as Worthy Matron and one our present secretary.

In the early years, funds were raised to support the chapter with chafing dish parties, whists, dances, Pedlars' Parades, costume parties and clambakes. Tish Dolls somehow or other swelled the proceeds of several early fairs, and during the first World War years Movie Night at the Strand came into being, along with military whists, matinee bridge parties, aluminum parties, lobster luncheons and duplicate bridge tournaments.

Our senior past grand patron — Brother F. Alexander Chandler — petitioned for membership in Belmont Chapter on March 27, 1907, and was initiated April 24, 1907. He first served as Worthy Patron in 1913, with Sister Mabel E. Hatch as his worthy matron, and in 1918 he was elected Grand Patron of the Grand Chapter of the Order of the Eastern Star of Massachusetts. At a reception tendered him after his installation, he presented to Belmont Chapter a \$100 Liberty Bond to be used as the nucleus of its War Relief Fund.

During those years from 1914 to 1919, here is little mention in the record of the strain of the war effort, but we do find many contributions of Soldiers' kits to the Minute Men for the boys, parties for children, and generous offerings to the Near East Relief.

There is no record of a meeting in October, 1918: we find simply a notation on a page : "October meeting omitted — epidemic."

And again September, 1938, the meeting was omitted because of the hurricane!

Both of these disasters brought heartache, suffering and financial loss to many of our members, but in each year we found our chapter functioning at the next stated meeting and the members helping each other as sisters and brothers.

We joined the Masons temporarily in June of 1923 by participating in a Parade of National League of Masonic Clubs in Boston, with a Belmont Chapter float.

It cost 35¢ for members to have dinner at a chapter meeting in 1922; visitors paid 50¢. And the menus were monstrous.

The officers of 1924, presented new regalia to the chapter that year, and in December journeyed out to Hopkinton to present the old regalia to Summit Chapter No. 32, who were in need of it. During the twenties, our membership grew by leaps and bounds until in December, 1929, we attained our highest membership — 464. In that year we also conferred life membership upon all surviving charter members.

Belmont Chapter had previously participated as one of the sponsors of Waltham Assembly, Order of the Rainbow for Girls, but in December, 1930, our members voted to sponsor Belmont Assembly No. 31 and naturally withdrew its sponsorship of Waltham. Belmont Assembly No. 31 was instituted in January 1931, with one of our past matrons, Sister Luella M. McCausland, as its first mother advisor.

With the advent of the thirties, the lush years were over, and the depression caused our membership to fall below 350. Finances were strained, and a penny saved was better than two pennies earned. It was hard to each two pennies many of those years, and yet, in spite of struggles and hard times, our records have interesting reports of entertainments for the members, initiation of candidates and much evidence of Electa's spirit of loving kindness. During that period, the members voted to operate on a strict budget and because of this a safe pattern was woven which caused Belmont Chapter to become solid and establish a strong financial background, which has enabled it to function as a gracious and active chapter in the jurisdiction of Massachusetts.

In 1932 our officers journeyed to Orange and presented song books to the guests at the Home. It was in that year, too, that nine of the younger members banded together to form a bridge club (the ninth being a permanent substitute), and in the lieu of prizes each time they played 25¢ was contributed by each to

a fund to purchase an electric signet for Belmont Chapter. This group was so successful that in 1936 — at our 30th anniversary party — the electric signet was presented.

This was the beginning of the Junior League in Belmont Chapter, because at the close of 1936 the friendly association of the nine sisters was hard to break, and it was decided to invite newer and younger members to form the Junior League of Belmont Chapter. It has functioned every since as an energetic committee for each worthy matron.

Generous contributions have been made always to our Eastern Star charities, and we have been ever mindful of the children, contributing for many, many years to the Children's Hospital, Peabody Home for Crippled Children, and arranging baskets at Thanksgiving and Christmas for Belmont neighbors in need of a helping hand.

The 1940's brought a change in tempo, and we find our records indicating more petitions coming in (probably because the initiation fee was lowered), Red Cross work by our members for the soldiers overseas, entertainment in private homes of soldiers' and sailors of other lands quartered in Boston at holiday time, rugged faith at all times that "God is in the heavens and all's well with the world."

In May of 1951, one of the past matrons, Sister Margaret K. Benger, was elected Associate Grand Conductress of the Grand Chapter of Massachusetts, Order of the Eastern Star, and during that same year her younger sister — Ruth Holly Kruger — served as worthy matron of Belmont Chapter. As the years succeeded, we found ourselves the hostess chapter in Massachusetts with our won Margaret serving as the Worthy Grand Matron in 1954–1955. She was initiated in Belmont Chapter in December 1926, served as worthy matron in 1936, and as a Deputy Grand Matron of the Grand Chapter in 1947, serving Sister Alice F. Watson, Worthy Grand Matron and an affiliated member of Belmont Chapter. At her installation as Worthy Grand Matron in the Worcester Auditorium in May, 1954, the Bible on the Altar before which she stood to take her obligation was given to Sister Benger by Belmont Chapter's 1954 officers, and this Bible was used in each chapter at which she inspected or officiated during that ear of service to the Grand Chapter.

At our November meeting in 1956, a special fiftieth anniversary birthday party for the members of Belmont Chapter was held under the able leadership of Sister Ellen Libby and Ruth Holly Kruger, both past matrons, who wrote and produced "This Is Your Life — Belmont Chapter." The evening was dedicated to our special guest — Sister Effie F. King, Past Grand Matron, and a scrapbook of special notices, pictures, newspaper clippings and other data was presented at

the close of the evening, with the lighting of the fifty candles on the birthday cake, one for each worthy matron and worthy patron who have guided us with dignity and beauty from 1906 to 1956.

Belmont Chapter is one of the few in Massachusetts which has the distinction of each worthy matron's annual report being spread upon the record in her own handwriting. Much of the humor and personality of the years was obtained from these reports when collecting the material for this history.

We have been fortunate, indeed, in our worthy matrons, worthy patrons, and secretaries down through the years. Our records are accurate beyond comprehension, businesslike to read, and complete in every detail.

And so we are at the present — November 24, 1956 — earnest in our endeavor, strong in fraternal love, and ever hopeful that the years ahead will provide the challenge to keep us strong and righteous, giving and forgiving, loving eternally and practicing daily the principles of human kindness which we vowed to uphold at the altar of friendship in Belmont Chapter No. 108, OES.

*“He who doubts the future doubts the past
And beaten is before the struggle starts.
Tomorrow is the field for fighting hearts,
A scene unlighted now but wide and vast.
Where men in splendid roles shall soon be cast
And boys today shall rise to noble parts.
Many remember when men rose in carts
And fancied ten mile to the hour was moving fast.*

*Tomorrow holds adventure for us all,
Where now we see but dimly skies shall clear;
No man can tell what next old fact shall fall
Nor what discovery mark the coming year,
But from the past this truth we can recall;
Groweth and achievement mark men's journey here.”*