

778 N  
STEELE  
MASON INSTALL

You ask me if I am acquainted with Thomas H. Brown, and also desire to know when he came to Sioux Falls, and the circumstances under which he was elected the first Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of the Territory of Dakota.

I have known Thomas Henderson Brown since the year 1866 or 67. At that time I was living on my father's farm in the town of Evansville, Rock County, Wisconsin, and Tom Brown, who had been in the three months' service as a member of a band - I think of the 15th Wisconsin - at the close of the Civil War came to Evansville to go to school, and built a board shanty on a lot opposite my father's house, and, with some other young chap, did their own housekeeping and went to the Academy.

In 1871 Bill Bloom came to Sioux Falls from Broadhead, Wisconsin, with his wife and sister, and they took pre-emption claim on land about four or five miles west of Sioux Falls, on the south side of Skunk Creek, just west of where that stream enters the Sioux River. Bloom built a house in Sioux Falls and built a store, late in the fall of 71, upon a lot which is now the corner of 8th and Main Streets. I think the same building stands on that corner which he constructed in the fall of 71. It belongs to August Beck.

Late in the fall of 1873 Bloom went back to Broadhead and in the spring of 73 Thomas Henderson Brown, who had purchased Bloom's house and his half section of land, moved to Sioux Falls with his family and engaged in various enterprises.

At the time Brown came to Sioux Falls there were four Masonic lodges in Dakota, for Dakota embraced what are now the two states of North and South Dakota, and reached to the British line. One Masonic lodge was at Yankton, the second lodge was

at Vermilion, the third at Elk Point, and the fourth at Canton.

Brown organized or secured the organization of Minnehaha Lodge No. 5, located at Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and he induced me to allow him to administer the degrees of a Master Mason so that we would have enough members to organize the lodge.

A year or so after the lodge was organized the Yankton Lodge called a convention at Vermilion for the purpose of organizing the Grand Lodge of Dakota. The convention was called at Vermilion and as, at that time, there were no railroads in Dakota we had to drive across the prairie. There were no settlers, after leaving Canton, between Sioux Falls and Vermilion, and so the delegates of Minnehaha Lodge No. 5, composed of three members - Tom Brown, myself and someone else - went to Vermilion by the way of Canton and picked up the Canton delegates. From Canton we drove across the prairie and, as I recollect it, there was no road, and we made about half the distance the first day and staid overnight in a hay-stack of some settler who had put up some hay, but had not yet built his house.

When we reached Vermilion we found the Yankton people had a complete program all worked out. They were going to elect Major De Witt of Yankton Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Dakota, and George Hand, who had been the secretary of the Territory, Grand Secretary. They were going to elect the Junior and Senior Wardens from the other lodges and simply wanted us to ratify the program.

My brother was keeping a general store at Vermilion at that time, and his brother-in-law, V. E. Prentice, was running a bank at Vermilion. I was well acquainted at Vermilion because the Land Office was there and I often went there to conduct contests and to secure filings for settlers upon homestead and pre-

emption claims. I was well acquainted all over Dakota because I was a government surveyor and had contracts for surveying the public domain every summer, and the Surveyor General's office was located at Yankton, so that I knew practically everybody.

I told the Yankton people that I was opposed to having a slate made up previous to the meeting of the delegates to the Convention that was to organize the Grand Lodge of Dakota, and thought we should go into our meeting without any slate or program and talk the matter over, but to that the Yankton delegates would not agree. They said Yankton was the capital and the only place of importance in Dakota, and all the carpet-bag territorial officials resided there, and that it was the proper place for the Grand Master and the Grand Secretary.

We had no candidates for either of these offices; neither did the delegates from the Canton Lodge, of which Mark Bailey was the most prominent, and, when I found that the Yankton people were determined to put through their program, I talked with the delegates from the Vermilion Lodge and also the delegates from the Elk Point Lodge, and I proposed to them that we elect Thomas Henderson Brown, Grand Master, Mark Bailey, of Canton, Grand Secretary, and that we should elect the Senior Warden from Vermilion Lodge and the Junior Warden from the Elk Point Lodge.

I had no trouble in making the arrangement. There was great prejudice against Yankton, which was a village of perhaps 1200 people, because all of the federal officials lived there and the federal officials were all carpet-baggers, and so, when the convention convened, we immediately proceeded to elect Thomas Henderson Brown Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Dakota, and Mark Bailey, Canton, Grand Secretary. The two Wardens were

elected according to program, and then I named George Hand for Grand Tyler of the Grand Lodge of Dakota, and Hand indignantly declined - said it was an insult to Yankton, and I remarked that George Hand was not so great, or Yankton so important but that they should feel very highly honored and accept without possible question the dignified office of Grand Tyler of the Grand Lodge of Dakota.

The lodges of Dakota at that time were under the jurisdiction of the State of Iowa, and Major De Witt, who was a government contractor and a dignified man of considerable intelligence - much miffed because he was not made Grand Master - and Hand, the man who believed much in his personal importance because he had been the carpet-bagger secretary for the Territory of Dakota, immediately wrote to Parvin, who was Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of Iowa, and asked him to refuse recognition of the Masonic Grand Lodge of the Territory of Dakota. After Parvin had received their communications - in fact, I am sure they both went down to see Parvin - Parvin communicated to Brown the substance of their protest, and Thomas Henderson Brown and I went to Iowa City, or Cedar Rapids (I forget now which place was the residence of the Grand Secretary of the State of Iowa) and presented our side of the case. I think I made a written statement similar to the one now made and, as a result, Yankton - in spite of its protest - was compelled to recognize the jurisdiction and authority of the Grand Lodge of Dakota.