

## FORT DEGREE

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Joseph F. Curry, June 16, 2014

**P**almer Lodge No. 372 hosted an international Masonic event June 13 – 14, 2014 to commemorate 200 years of friendship and brother love between the two great nations of Canada and the United States following the War of 1812-1814. Palmer Lodge is a successor to Fort Erie No. 5, a military lodge founded by Sergeant Joseph Palmer a British Army NCO.



The Harmonie Lodge No. 699 degree team enters Old Fort Erie

The weekend kicked off with brethren from both sides of the border packing into the quaint and beautifully appointed little temple on Jarvis Street, Fort Erie, to see the The Valley of Buffalo Colonial Degree Team exemplify the first degree of the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Free & Accepted Masons of the State of New York. These brethren, costumed in splendid period dress, complete with white wigs and coat tails, duly impressed the Canadian brethren assembled with their superb ritual work. The degree is, of course,

'...DULY IMPRESSED THE CANADIAN BRETHREN WITH THEIR SUPERB DEGREE WORK.'

quite similar to ours; however it is arranged and the floor work is conducted differently. The most conspicuous example of this is in that they do not “square the lodge” as we do. The area between the greater and lesser LL. and the W.M. is known as the “Master’s Carpet” and they dare not tread upon it save when perambulating with C. At first I cringed when I observed them walking to a fro from E. to W. and almost instinctively called out “Stop! You’re going the wrong way!”

Following the completion of the floor work, and before the C. is restored to his comforts he is placed in front of the W.M. and the sequence of events for the entire degree up until that point is repeated in question and answer form. This must be committed to memory and

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The Valley of Buffalo Colonial Degree Team pictured with RW Bro David T. O'Neil, DDGM Niagara B District, and W Bro Matt Stickland, WM of Palmer Lodge No. 372

repeated in full in order to P. to the F.C. degree. We have only the short version of this when the C. "proves" in the first degree.

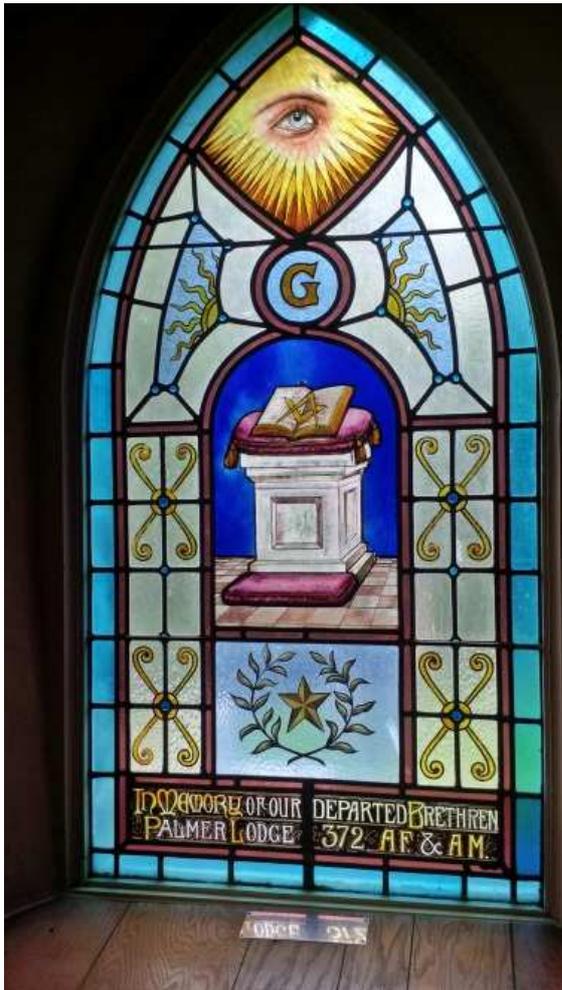
During their equivalent of the J.W. lecture there is an explanation of the point within a circle bordered by two perpendicular lines. They do not however, have an allusion to seven stars, or to the Egyptian philosophies.

Two things that I really appreciated about the way they conducted their degree were the following. When perambulating with the

C. they move at the pace of a slow march. For those of you civilian types, that is about half the speed we normally move at with our C. Secondly, when the C. is taking the S.O. of an E.A all brethren come down and stand on the level. Together these added to the solemnity of the occasion, and included all in attendance in the covenant being enacted at the A.

I hope that if my dear American brethren read this they do not take it as a criticism of their ritual, but rather a biased appreciation of the ritual that I have been raised with. I found their

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Stained glass window installed 1893

ritual did not possess the same eloquence of prose and poetic turn of phrase that we have in our ritual. Nevertheless we all came away with an incredible appreciation for the quality of the work that our brethren demonstrated.

We then retired to the banquet room for an abundance of food generously donated for the occasion by the owner of the Port Colborne No Frills grocery store, W. Bro. Brent Tarabalka. A wee dram or two of scotch later and I

was ready to retire and prepare for another exciting day.

The following morning we reconvened at St Paul's Anglican Church, to which Palmer Lodge has a long standing connection. Brother Sergeant Palmer, after whom the lodge is named, is buried in the church cemetery. In the large stained glass window over the chancel of the church St. John the Baptist is depicted as a Tyler, standing on three steps between two pillars with sword in hand, his feet forming the angle of a S. A large rose window over the entrance of the church contains 9 round panes, each depicting a masonic symbol. Unfortunately the rose window was away being repaired and I was not able to see it. In the



Right: St. John the Baptist

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The Rose Window at St. Paul's Anglican Church, Fort Erie

vestibule is a beautiful stained glass window depicting an altar with the 3 G.L. of Masonry, together with other Masonic symbols and dedicated to the memory of departed brethren of Palmer Lodge 372 AF&AM. It was installed a few short years ago in 1893.

Following a continental style breakfast I gave a talk on military lodges and Masonry in the War of 1812, following which Bother John Newton presented me with a donation from Palmer Lodge to the Toronto Military Family Resource Centre in the amount of \$250 – a very generous donation

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indeed that will be faithfully applied to assist the families of veterans.

With the taste of fresh croissants and muffins still on our palates from the late breakfast we headed back to the lodge for yet another meal and an afternoon of fellowship. I must say that our brethren at Palmer Lodge certainly know how to put on an amazing spread for their guests and visiting brethren!

In the evening we moved to Old Fort Erie where the lodge furnishings had been moved and set up under the setting sun for the main event: the Fort Degree. Who knew one could rent out a bona fide War of 1812 fort?! The gate of the fort was Tyled within and without. As

the business of the evening was conducted the Tyler would sometimes move from the door up the ramparts to peer over the wall, squinting into the distance to ensure no Cowan approached.

'THE GATE OF THE FORT WAS  
TYLED WITHIN AND WITHOUT'

The brethren of Harmonie Lodge Lodge No. 699 of Buffalo New York conducted an emulation of the 1<sup>st</sup> D. in War of 1812 in period dress as Buffalo Militia. Their lodge had been warranted at the beginning of the war as a military lodge for the Buffalo Militia; however, due to the circumstances of the war they were not able to meet until the end of the war. These brethren demonstrated superb ritual skills and the degree was thoroughly enjoyed by all. We looked around us at the walls and ramparts of the old fort, watched this ancient degree



Looking South West

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being delivered just as it might have been 200 years ago, and for a time felt transported back in time, united with our brethren of old.

The weekend's events were an excellent and fitting memorial to the incredible friendship of our two great nations that survived that terrible, unnecessary and excessively brutal war.

Occasionally, within the cruelty of war, our forefathers recognized, remembered and respected the bonds of fraternal friendship. It was a friendship that did not die in the war, rather it has flourished and strengthened these 200 years hence. May the Great Architect of the Universe grant our two great nations an eternity of friendship, and brotherly love. (JC)



Setting up for the Fort Degree