

TABLET UNVEILED TO JAMES BUCHANAN

By WILLIAM FREDERIC WORNER

On Wednesday, February 7th, 1917, a bronze tablet—mounted on a piece of oak from an ancient tree that long had cast its generous shade over the spacious lawn of Wheatland,—was unveiled in the main assembly room of Masonic Hall, 13 West King street, Lancaster, to the memory of the most distinguished brother of Lodge No. 43—ex-President of the United States, James Buchanan. The notable event was arranged as a centenary commemoration of Mr. Buchanan's entrance into the Masonic fraternity. It drew together as large a concourse of members of Lodge No. 43, invited guests from city and county lodges and other distinguished members of the fraternity, as had filled the historic hall in years.

The anniversary was, indeed, of far more than local interest. From the very nature of the occasion it bore a national significance, which was enhanced by the fact, that so far as known, it was the first time that the one hundredth anniversary of a President of the United States having been made a Mason, was publicly observed in this country. As a matter of course, therefore, the exercises attracted a large company of distinguished guests of the fraternity from a distance, among whom was numbered United States Senator Charles Fletcher Johnson, a Past Grand Master of the State of Maine, and one of the most eminent thirty-third degree Masons in the country. Past Grand Master J. Henry Williams, of Philadelphia, was also a guest, as was Grand Master Louis A. Watres, of Scranton; Grand Secretary, John A. Perry, of Philadelphia; secretary to the Grand Master, George F. Knight, of Philadelphia; District Deputy Grand Masters Samuel M. Goodyear, of Carlisle; George H. Kain, of York; Milton P. Schantz, of Allentown; Charles A. Sullivan, of Coatesville; and Will S. Snyder, of Harrisburg; Ben W. Murch, Past Grand Master of the District of Columbia; Carter Keen, Robert H. Young, Edgar P. Copeland, G. Wilson Foot, Carl H. Claudy, Walter J. Gilpatrick, Roe Fulkerson, Edwin Wolfe and William Staid, of Washington, D. C.; Hon. Robert Conklin, of Harrisburg; Charles D. Weirich, of Lebanon; S. F. Burge Kinsloe, of Philadelphia, and Dr. Nathan C. Schaeffer, state superintendent of Public Instruction, of Harrisburg.

The celebration also partook of an unusual feature in that the tablet to Mr. Buchanan was the only one occupying a place on the walls of this, one of the oldest and most historic Masonic halls in the State, in use continuously since the year 1800. Placed to the left of the Worshipful Master's chair, the tablet was hidden by the folds of the American flag, until, at the conclusion of the address by District Deputy Grand Master Thaddeus G. Helm, on "Buchanan, the Mason." The response was delivered by Worshipful Master Martin W. Witmer, after which the tablet was unveiled by Simon W. Raub, the oldest member of Lodge No. 43, and one of the few who was present at the funeral of Mr. Buchanan. It bore the following inscription:

James Buchanan
Made a Mason in Lodge No. 43
December 11, 1816
Worshipful Master
1822-1823
President of the United States
1857-1861
Born, Stony Batter, Franklin Co., Pa.
April 23, 1791
Died, Wheatland, Lancaster Co., Pa.
June 1, 1868.

In the winter of 1816-17, Hon. James Buchanan, then but twenty-five years of age, and already having served two terms as representative in the State Assembly, made application to become a member of Lodge No. 43, Free and Accepted Masons, and was duly admitted to its rolls. It was on December 11th, 1816, that Mr. Buchanan's application was approved and he was accorded the first degree of the craft. At this time, the officers of the Lodge consisted of: Worshipful Master, George H. Whitaker; Senior Warden, Thomas Jefferies; Junior Warden, Jacob Brenner; Treasurer, Benjamin Ober; Secretary, Frederick Hubley.

Mr. Buchanan was entered by Worshipful Master Brother John Reynolds—editor of the Lancaster Journal and the father of three distinguished sons: General John Fulton Reynolds, who fell at Gettysburg; Rear-Admiral William Reynolds and General James Le Fevre Reynolds; and raised by Worshipful Master Brother George H. Whitaker, on January 24th, 1817. About three years later, December 13th, 1820, Mr. Buchanan was elected Junior Warden of the Lodge; and two years afterwards, December 23rd, 1822, he became its Worshipful Master. At the expiration of his term of office, he was appointed the first District Deputy Grand Master of this district; and during his occupancy of the White House he was elected honorary member, March 10th, 1858. He had also been a member of Chapter No. 43, Royal Arch Masons.

Preceding the speech of District Deputy Grand Master, Thaddeus G. Helm, on "Buchanan as a Mason," a reception of the Grand Lodge officers of Pennsylvania and other Masonic jurisdictions, was held in the hall; and as the tablet was unveiled, Worshipful Master, Martin W. Witmer, delivered the dedicatory remarks. Then followed short addresses by Grand Master Louis A. Watres, Past Grand Master J. Henry Williams, and Past Grand Master of the District of Columbia, Ben W. Murch.

At the conclusion of these exercises, the members and guests repaired to the banquet at the Stevens House. Rev. Dr. W. Stuart Cramer, pastor of the First Reformed church, Lancaster, delivered the invocation. First Deputy Attorney General William H. Keller, presided over the festive table; while the programme was pleasantly interspersed with selections by Roth's orches-

tra. Rev. Dr. H. M. J. Klein, of the department of history of Franklin and Marshall College, in an able address entitled, "Buchanan, the Citizen," dwelt upon the ex-President's life among the people of Lancaster; and Senator Charles Fletcher Johnson spoke on "Buchanan, the Statesman." At some length, he outlined the course of Mr. Buchanan's life from the time of being admitted as a lawyer to the bar of Lancaster county, to his final retirement at Wheatland. The address showed diligent research and a keen appreciation of the ambition, the reverence, the love of President Buchanan for the Constitution; and of the obstacles that darkened the path of his administration when the issue of slavery came nearer and nearer to creating the "Irrepressible Conflict." Himself a man of commanding physique and a personality that at once impressed itself upon his hearers, Senator Johnson possessed a magnetic style of oratory that held the closest attention of his listeners during the able address.

The piece of oak on which was mounted the bronze tablet to Mr. Buchanan, was taken from a tree that grew on the Wheatland grounds while the ex-President was alive. It was presented to Lodge No. 43, by Mr. George B. Willson, who at the time of the anniversary (February 7th, 1917), was the owner of Wheatland and a member of the Lodge.

"Lancaster itself is advanced in the esteem of mankind whenever the name of James Buchanan is honored."



JAMES BUCHANAN

MADE A MASON IN LODGE NO 43

DECEMBER 11, 1816

WORSHIPFUL MASTER

1822 — 1823

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

1857 — 1861

BORN, STONEY BATTER, FRANKLIN CO., PA.

APRIL 23, 1791

DIED, WHEATLAND, LANCASTER CO., PA.

JUNE 1, 1868