

REPORT OF
WORSHIPFUL GRAND HISTORIAN

Burrell G. Lirgg (93)

110TH ANNUAL COMMUNICATION

TWIN FALLS, IDAHO

Report of Grand Historian

To the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge A.F. & A.M. of Idaho

Brethren:

As a prefix to my message, I must mention my respect for my friend and Brother, John. B. MacKay, who was appointed by our Grand Master to serve this Grand Lodge as Grand Historian. His passing was a great loss to Masonry and to all who knew him-- he performed every task with dedication. He lived his Masonry, and if he were standing before you today, the message he would deliver would be a credit to his ability, and a pleasure for the Fraternity.

With his passing coming in the seventh month of the year, I was worried both for a topic and the time for research. But in the quietness of the Masonic Library in Boise, while waiting for a Communication to begin, I leafed through a large book of Past Grand Master's photos. One impressed me as being very distinguished, and I wondered what he was really like. I then closed the book of photos and attended the Communication.

Having decided to review the activities of this distinguished Past Grand Master, and as I started to compile information, I noted a few items which were a parallel to myself. This enthused me, and I knew I had selected the proper subject.

He, like myself, came west at the early age of fifteen years. He was born on September 29, 1835 in Franklin County, Ohio; and I was born on June 6, 1931 in Tuscarawas County, Ohio, almost 100 years later. He traveled west in an ox cart, and I came on the Portland Rose. He was a Master Mason in 1859, and I was made a Mason in 1959. This is probably the total of our similarities, except that his outlook on life and his desire to help his fellow-man and brethren (as recorded by many writers) was worthy of every imitation-- I find it to be as I would like to be.

His life was full of service to Masonry, and respect for his fellow creatures, but it also shows how any American citizen with drive and ambition can, within the framework of honesty and integrity, work his way from an inexperienced boy to a respected businessman, political giant, and Masonic leader of his community and State.

JAMES ALONZO PINNEY

James Alonzo Pinney was born on September 29, 1835 in Franklin County, Ohio, and moved with his parents to Iowa City, Iowa in 1840 where he was educated in the public schools of that city. He was fifteen years old when in 1850, by Overland ox team, he followed the great gold rush to the California coast. In 1853, only 18 years old, he took a pack train north into the region of Southern Oregon. As a pioneer, he did his part of military service during the blood-thirsty Indian Wars which raged in that country during 1854-1856. Using Jacksonville as headquarters, Pinney packed supplies for the army and immigrant trains during these Indian Wars. After nine years in Southern Oregon, young Jim Pinney left for Idaho and the mines of Florence-- again with his pack train, and hopes that money could be made hauling supplies for the miners. He arrived in Lewiston in 1862, and after a year headed for Idaho City to the new strike in Boise Basin-- then called Bannock City. He settled down for a few years, gave up packing, and established the first stock of merchandise there. Then in 1864 he received a commission served by President Lincoln to act as Postmaster of the new town, and served continuously until 1872.

James A. Pinney was made a Master Mason in Iowa City Lodge No. 4, A.F. and A.M. in May of 1859. This is between the time of leaving Oregon and his arrival in Idaho City. As we wander from our former home to other regions, many of us from time to time return to a former residence. This must have been the reason for his return to Iowa where the degrees of the Fraternity were conferred.

In June of 1864 he married Miss Mary Abbott. Her death occurred in June of 1869 after only five years together. He had erected around her grave a beautiful cast iron fence which can still be seen in the old Idaho City Cemetery. There was also a space for himself which he was never to use.

In 1865, on May 10th, at 10:00 p.m. the terrible fire started in Idaho City. It was said to have started in the second story of a "Hurdy Gurdy" dance hall, and was supposed to be of incendiary origin. It was estimated that the population at that time was 4,000 who were practically all left homeless. Men worth thousands of dollars found themselves penniless. Fortunes gained through years of toil were swept away in hours. There was no insurance on property, no government programs or assistance, the owners sustained the loss. Only a few scattered buildings were left on the outskirts of town.

During the fire, Postmaster Pinney saved all the mail, but lost his building and stock of goods worth approximately \$35,000.00. It has been estimated the total cost of the fire to have been around a million dollars. For that period in history this would seem like a lot of money, but during a gold strike, prices were greatly inflated.

The Masonic Lodge was destroyed, and not even a picture was saved. At the Oregon Grand Lodge in 1865, a communication was submitted by Idaho Lodge No. 35 and signed by Henry Allen, W.M., James A. Pinney, S.W., and Sona Sayrs, Secretary, stating that in the recent fire they had their Lodge room and furniture destroyed, saving nothing but the Bible and Charter. They reported that they had provided shelter for the homeless, food for the hungry, and clothing for the naked. They now solicited any assistance the Grand Lodge might be able to bestow. The Grand Lodge remitted their Grand Lodge dues for 1864 and 1865. Since Brother Pinney's name is on the Communication to the Oregon Grand Lodge as Senior Warden, it is apparent that he lost no time after his entrance into Idaho to start to distinguish himself in Masonry and become a part of Idaho City Lodge No. 35.

On May 27th, nine days after the great fire, a call was issued for Masons to meet in the school room to consider rebuilding. Henry Allen, W.M. presided, and Committees were appointed for proposals. At the next Stated Communication, and on motion, it was ordered that the proposition of James A. Pinney be accepted, and that James H. Wickersham act with the Trustees as a building committee. Committees were appointed to solicit subscriptions. This was the beginning of the old historic structure which still stands in the middle of the block facing north on Wall Street.

No one knows what the proposition of Brother J.A. Pinney was, but he erected the building under contract. The money raised for the building apparently did not pass through the Treasurer, so no record of the cost is in the minutes, but from various sources, it was estimated the cost at \$4,000.00.

At the October 4th Communication, it appeared necessary to raise some more money to clear the cost of the building, and a resolution was passed providing that stock be issued in the name of the Lodge and sold to raise another \$1,000.00, and that those who had already subscribed might have the same refund in stock. This stock was to bear interest at 3% per month and payable in one year.

I might add here that all was not quiet in those days, and some shootings did occasionally occur in the rough mining towns, and even the leading citizens were not exempt from flying lead.

Quote: "Talk of a Vigilante Committee was heard, and excitement prevailed in the city and adjacent mines after the shooting of James A. Pinney by Thomas Fitzhugh. Many were in favor of forming a vigilante committee to try the case outside the form of law. Better council prevailed however, and it was considered best to let the law take its course and abide by the results."

Pinney rebuilt one of his stores that has been destroyed, only to have the fire of 1867 destroy it also. This fire destroyed only the building, and the contents were handed out before the flames reached his stocks, and Pinney was able to set up business again in short order.

When the Grand Lodge was formed in 1867, James A. Pinney became a Charter member of Idaho Lodge No. 1 and served the Lodge as Junior Warden, and later as Senior Warden.

In 1869 James A. Pinney opened a book and stationery store on Main Street in Boise, on the north side and east of Falls. His first advertisement appeared in the Statesman on November 13, 1869. A faded photograph of a later date shows the same store with Pinney and customers standing out front. One of his employees was a Charles W. Mack who became very close to James Pinney. One of the predominant characteristics of James Pinney was his loyalty to his friends and associates, and during the great rebellion of the miners, he was loyal to the union cause. Between 1869 and 1872 Pinney operated stores in Boise and Idaho City simultaneously, but he continued to live in Idaho City where he was Postmaster.

As compared to our mode of transportation today, continuous travel between the two towns made a strong man weary. The mode of travel in 1869 was by horse drawn coaches. Between Boise and Idaho City it was an eight hour journey. If you took the 6:30 a.m. Stage, you would go to the north side of Hill Top summit, where a fresh set of horses were waiting. You would then continue to the East side of the canyon at halfway house where a meal would be served and fresh horses hitched. The third change was at Steermans grade, which would take you on to Idaho City-- arriving about 2:00 or 3:00 p.m. or possibly later. If you were to continue on to Center-ville or Placerville, a two-horse team would be used for the remainder of the journey.

In 1872 James A. Pinney resigned as Postmaster and moved to Boise. In 1873 he married Miss Mary Rodgers who was born in Salem, Oregon on September 24, 1857 of Scottish descent. After the death of her mother, she and a brother, Allen Rodgers, were brought to Boise by John Haley. She lived with the Haley family for a time, and later made her home with Mr. and Mrs. Alex Rossi. After becoming Mrs. James A. Pinney her graciousness and hospitality were well known and enjoyed by a wide group of acquaintances during Mr. Pinney's administration as Mayor of Boise and through his prominence in business and in Masonic affairs. To their union was born Ida Bell, James Rodgers, Paralee, and Annis Fuller. Ida Bell married Frank Bissell and moved to Wisconsin. Paralee married Harry Ferguson of Boise. Annis Fuller married Walter Mendenhall of Boise who continued to operate the Pinney Theater after Pinney died in 1914. James Rodgers died in 1914 while away at school in California.

Through the years that followed, Pinney became one of Boise's most respected, successful, and popular businessmen. In addition to the bookstore on Main Street, he developed other interests which would ultimately gain him his greatest fame: Theatrics, Politics, and Masonry.

When Peter Sonna opened his Opera House in 1888, upstairs over his new hardware building at 9th and Main, Pinney became its manager. He acquired a thorough working knowledge with the traveling theatrical troupes of the day by doing all the bookings, contracts, and arrangements until April 8, 1892. On that date he left Sonna and built the Columbia Theater which was a monument to Pinney's enterprise, and a source of Boise's pride. The theater was to have a rich 15 year history during its existence. It was built across from the present-day Elks building with the main entrance on Jefferson, and it covered almost the entire block.

In 1882 James A. Pinney was elected to his first term as Mayor of Boise, and served from 1883 to 1885. The Statesman reported:

"Boise elects James A. Pinney to Mayorship. James A. Pinney, Republican, was elected over S.H. Hayes, Democrat, by a plurality of 900 votes. Mr. Pinney carried every ward in the city and every precinct but number one in the third ward where the vote was a tie. The victory was celebrated last night in a rousing manner. The Columbian band furnished music for the demonstration, and bombs and fireworks were set off in profusion."

He was elected again in 1888, and served from 1889 to 1891.

Since it was during his three administrations that the foundations were laid for the modern city which is the Capital of the Gem State, some consider James A. Pinney as the Father of modern Boise. He found the town a primitive hamlet, with dirt walks, no sewers, and almost no modern improvements. During his first term as Mayor he erected the first building ever owned by the city-- it was the old firehall, a brick structure two stories high on Main Street near 6th. The second story was used as a council chamber, the first permanent home that body ever had. The Morris Hill Cemetary was established, the bridges leading into Boise were purchased, and the extraction of tolls from visitors was eliminated.

During his second administration he extended the limits of the city by annexing two additions, one on the south, and the other on the west and north of the city. A terrible epidemic of diphtheria brought concern for the lack of a sewer system and the absence of sanitary protection. It was Captain De Lamar, a shrewd businessman of great wealth, who said, "If James A. Pinney will run for Mayor, and should be elected, I will furnish \$90,000.00 for city bonds to construct a sewer system and build City Hall." Pinney was re-elected the third time on this platform. Captain De Lamar redeemed his promise, but it was necessary to get a special bill through the legislature to legalize the bonds before they could be sold. Nothing daunted Mayor Pinney and after working two years on this objective he was able to lay the first ten miles of sewer, putting Boise on a sound basis for the first time. He also set a splendid example of progressiveness by laying the first cement sidewalk which was a block long in the residential section, it happened to be in front of his own home.

James A. Pinney had done more than any other citizen in the State to promote good and clean amusements for the citizens of Idaho, building his first playhouse in Idaho City-- cramped though it was. At the time the population of Idaho City was about 10,000.

Pioneers of Boise claimed that it was Pinney's shrewd business sense, combined with his progressive ideas, which laid the foundation for Boise's prestige as "The Biggest Little City" in the northwest.

His influence was not confined to Boise alone, and had a great effect on the entire northwest area.

His next term as Mayor was from 1891 to 1893. In 1903 Pinney ran for Mayor again, but was defeated as a result of the strong campaign waged against him by the Statesman. The effectiveness of the campaign was remarkable in that the Statesman succeeded in getting exactly what it wanted, which was the separation of Pinney from the rest of the Republican ticket (which it supported) and his defeat at the polls.

The basic tactics used throughout the 1903 election battle was guilt by "support" rather than guilt by "association", since there was no evidence that Pinney was the associate of the undesirable Red Light and Vice district. In a series of scathing articles, the paper emphasized the fact that every gambler and saloon keeper in Boise was working to elect James A. Pinney. Without ever saying so directly, it hinted that there was a connection between the former Mayor and the undesirable elements trying to get him elected. It reasoned that since the Mayor directly controlled the Chief of Police, the gamblers were concentrating on getting that one office in their pockets through him. James H. Hawley, a seasoned lawyer and pioneer politician, received the Democratic and Union Citizen nomination, and was shrewd enough to see the possibilities in the issues raised by the Statesman. He pledged a complete shake-up in the Police Department and an all-out campaign against gambling. This not only won him the support of the normally Republican Statesman, but the support of the Civic League as well.

In 1905 the Republicans again unanimously nominated James A. Pinney, the Democrats nominated S.H. Hays, and once more the Statesman threw its support against Pinney. Surprisingly this time there was support for Pinney from some of the Labor Union leaders, presenting the curious spectacle of a Republican paper again repudiating the party candidate while union leaders supported him. The Capital News also backed Hays.

The Statesman declared, "if Mr. Pinney be elected, gambling will flourish here as in the days before the laws prohibiting it were enacted. There will be no restrictions on saloons, nor will there be any regulation of the underworld as the demands of decency dictate".

Warming to its task, the Statesman headlined its election morning story with lies put out in the Eleventh Hour, and committees against Pinney were busy distributing falsehoods on the last day of the campaign. It further stated that "there is no Politics in this campaign among the gamblers and saloon keepers. Every one of them is supporting J.A. Pinney for Mayor. So are the women in the Red Light district."

On Tuesday, July 11, 1905, the people of Boise elected J.A. Pinney by a landslide. His margin was nearly 2 to 1, prompting nearly every other newspaper in Idaho to chortle at the Statesman's discomfort. The scrapbook kept by Pinney at the time is filled with these items. Surely a source of satisfaction to the much maligned candidate. The Nampa Record summed up the defeat of Hays by saying that it would be charged "to his foolish friends who over-worked the morality racket."

Considering Pinney's long record as a virtuous, moral and temperate civic leader, it isn't surprising that the election vindicated him in 1905.

After completing his last term as Mayor, he continued to operate the Columbia Theater until 1907 when he decided to replace the obsolete structure. In 1908 he built the theater play-house which bore his name. It was four stories high, of pressed brick and stone, fire-proof, and had a long iron staircase. It was located next to the Elks building on 8th and Jefferson, and booked many movies, plays, and famous stars. At the time it was a structure which would do credit to a city several times the size of Boise.

We have established his devotion to his fellow creatures, and his willingness to serve his community and State, but he also had a great desire to bring to the people of the Boise area the finest entertainment available at the time. He also stocked his book store with the written word and the best from the literary world.

As Masons we must also recall his long service to the Craft of our State throughout his entire life.

We have already noted that he became a Mason early in life, his help during the great Idaho City fire, having been a Charter Member of Idaho Lodge No. 1, and serving that Lodge as Junior and Senior Warden. He affiliated with Boise Lodge No. 2 after he moved to Boise in 1881, and served as Master in 1883. He was elected Junior Grand Warden of the Grand Lodge of Idaho in 1891, Deputy Grand Master in 1892, and in 1893 was elected Grand Master of Idaho.

Pinney held his Grand Lodge Communication on the 27th of September, 1894 in Boise, and reported a membership gain of 21 members, making a total of 969 Masons in Idaho. There were 28 Lodges, the largest was No. 2 with 119 members, and the smallest was Genesee U.D. with 11 members.

Severe depression prevailed in 1894, and this could have contributed to the small growth. The extreme low price of Silver closed most of the mines, wheat was 49¢ in Chicago, butter & eggs at 6 & 8 cents, and farmers were rapidly reduced to poverty and need. The population in Boise was 2,300, Montpelier 1,174, and Weiser 900. The highest water in the history of the State, and the greatest strikes in the nation added to their problems.

We can reflect on the conditions and try to get the spirit of the brothers in the 1890's, as we note that in 1894 Brother Fred Mock, then the Grand Lecturer, wrote in the proceedings: "I have traveled 5,000 miles by rail, 100 by stage, and have been absent from my business for 47 days. Although my work has fallen short of what I intended to do, not being able to secure free transportation, I was compelled to stop because my expenses for the year have over-run the appropriated amount of \$73.00."

Brother Pinney was also a leader of many other Masonic bodies. We find his name affixed to the Charter of the Scottish Rite, Valley of Boise, as a 32° Mason. He was exalted to the Royal Arch Degree in Idaho City Chapter No. 1, R.A.M. in Idaho City on December 12, 1867, demitted in 1871 and affiliated with Boise Chapter No. 3 in 1872. He helped organize the Grand Chapter of Idaho in 1908, and was elected the first Grand High Priest. He had been a member of the Royal and Select Masters in Iowa City, Iowa in 1869, and helped establish Idaho Commandery No. 1, Knights Templar, in 1883 and was knighted in that same year. He later served as its Eminent Commander, and helped to establish the Grand Commandery-- becoming its first Grand Commander in August of 1904. He was then elected Grand Recorder of the Grand Commandery of Idaho and served for seven years. His membership in the Masonic Veterans Association of the Pacific Coast dated from 1875, and he continued to serve all his Masonic Bodies long after becoming a past presiding officer.

On February 4, 1914, the final day of life for Mr. Pinney, the Statesman reported:

J.A. Pinney Answers the Summons

"J.A. Pinney, pioneer expires, builder and well known citizen of Boise was called by the death angel Wednesday evening as the hour of midnight approached, after an illness of but 6 hours. While seated at his office desk, apparently in his usual health, Mr. Pinney suddenly became ill. A physician was at once summoned, who pronounced the trouble Quick Pneumonia. Everything that medical skill could suggest was tried, but within six hours death came."

No man in Idaho was ever more closely identified with the building of the State than Mr. Pinney, and many of the first improvements which marked the transition of Boise from a village to a city were the results of his efforts.'

He was burried in Boise' Pioneer Cemetery between Jefferson and Warm Springs, in the Masonic Section, on Sunday, February 8, 1914.

The Statesman carried the Description in ~~Sunday~~'s edition:

Honors For A Pioneer

The funeral rites over the body of the late J.A. Pinney will be held at 2:00 p.m. today. The casket will lie in the office of the Pinney Theater, where friends may call and where Bishop Funsten and Rev. D.H. Jones will speak briefly. The funeral cortege will start from this point, led by the Columbia band, after which the following line will be observed. Grand Commandery, K.T., Masonic Grand Lodge, Grand Chapter, R.A.M., honorary pallbearers, hearse pallbearers, members of family, Elks, Mayor and City Council, Police Department, Fire Department, Volunteer Firemen, and carriages of friends.

The presiding Grand Master, Brother Curtis F. Pike, lead the Grand Lodge Procession.

At his grave there are three large trees forming an almost perfect triangle, with the grave near the center. The stone has a Knights Templar cross and crown at the top, and on the right side etched into the stone is a beautiful column broken.

The end of a fruitful life, one who left his mark on the pages of history.

Fraternally submitted,
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Acknowledgments:

History of Idaho by Defenbach
The Statesman
Idaho State Historical Society
Bicentennial Report
Progressive Men of Southern Idaho by French
Idaho Masonic History by Lester Aschenbrenner
James Hawley, Sr. 2106 West State, Boise
Mrs. Kenny Poe 3518 Magnolia, Boise
Boise Little Theater Fort Street, Boise
Boise Public Library
Idaho State Historical Records 3rd & State, Boise
History of Idaho Lodge No. 1 Frank Kester, Boise