

**CARPENTERS' HALL
AND ITS HISTORIC
MEMORIES**

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Carpenters' hall and its historic memories by Richard K. Betts

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RICHARD K. BETTS

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CARPENTERS' HALL,

(Chestnut Street, bet. 3rd and 4th.)



AND ITS

HISTORIC MEMORIES.

BY RICHARD K. BETTE.

REVISED EDITION

(One hundred and tenth Thousand.)

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1891

CARPENTERS' HALL
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WHEN we survey this quaint old building, situated at the head of Carpenters' Court, on Chestnut street, between Third and Fourth streets, and consider that when erected it stood beyond the outskirts of the city, we cannot but admire the public spirit of its founders.

The Carpenters' Company, of the City and County of Philadelphia, is one of the oldest Associations of Pennsylvania, being instituted about forty years after the settlement of the province by William Penn, and maintaining an uninterrupted existence from the year 1724. Among its early members were many prominent in colonial history, and whose architectural tastes are impressed upon buildings that yet remain, memorials of that early day.

The object of the Association, as expressed in its Act of Incorporation, was to obtain instruction

in the science of architecture and to assist such of its members as should by accident be in need of support, and of the widows and minor children of such members. Yet matters pertaining to their business as Carpenters held an important place with them, as is evident by the establishment of a "Book of Prices" for the valuation of carpenter's work, "on the most equitable principles," so "that the workmen should have a fair recompense for their labor, and the owner receive the worth of his money." This system was declared to be "not inferior to any other in use in any city in his Majesty's dominions," and which is retained at the present time. It was not a sliding scale of prices, to which each member was bound to conform, but fixed and unvarying. All carpenters were at liberty to work at such discounts off, or per cent. on, as they might agree to with their employers, and as changes in the wages of workmen might necessitate. In its internal workings, the Company is in as active, vigorous life, as at any former period. It is "not beneficial, but benevolent." No one but a "Master Carpenter following the business" is eligible to membership. Any member, who through age or accident is incapacitated to support himself, or the widow of any member left without adequate means for her support, is placed upon the "list of annuitants," and

receives a "quarterly allowance" during life. A prudent care over its investments, and economical administrators of its estate has made its funds more than ample for its most benevolent action in these respects.

James Portius, whom William Penn induced to come to his new city to "design and execute his proprietary buildings" was among the most active of its founders, being himself a member of "The Worshipful Company of Carpenters of London," founded in 1477. The armorial ensigna of this company are identical with those of that ancient body, the officers bore the same designations, and its declared objects, ceremonials and privileges were in futherance of the same ideas. At his death in 1736, he gave his choice collections of architectural works to his fellow members; laying the foundation of their present valuable library.

The original "entrance money," four pounds sterling, led to the formation of rival associations, at a less fee of admission; those, possessing inherent strength, soon saw their mistake, and "The Second Carpenters' Company" united with "their elder brethren" in 1752. The "Friendship Carpenters' Company" after several years negotiation were united with "their elder brethren" in 1786, each member paying into the funds the "original entrance money."

The officers consisted of a Master, Assistants, and Wardens, and the meetings were occasionally held at their houses, but most generally at the "Masters," where the books belonging to their library were deposited. The records show an early attention to the erection of a Hall, but it was not until after an existence of forty years that these efforts were crowned with success.

The Hall was erected in 1770, amid the excitement in the public mind occasioned by the persistent attempt of the "Mother country" to "bind the colonies in all cases whatsoever," which resulted in a general demand for a union of the colonies.

The State House being used by the existing government, the Hall of the Company became the great centre of the gatherings of our patriotic citizens, whether to petition for a redress of grievances, or for the assertion of their rights. Almost all the "Town Meetings" of that eventful period were held on the lawn in front or within its walls. It began thus early to be used for civil purposes. The "town meeting" of 1774, demanding the convening of the Assembly, met therein, and sent therefrom their committee to Governor Penn, whose reply was read on their return that "he saw no necessity for calling the Assembly together," which was undauntedly met by the appointment

of another deputation to "wait on the speaker of the Assembly and require a positive answer whether he would do it or not."

Among the early events in the history of Carpenters' Hall, were the memorable sessions of the "Committee of the City and County of Philadelphia," to initiate measures for calling a Provincial conference—to effect which an invitation was extended to the various counties of the Province, to meet the Philadelphia Committee in conference on the 15th July then next following. On FOURTH OF JULY, (by a singular coincidence) 1774, the latter appointed a sub-committee to prepare "instructions," which the then great leader of Constitutional Rights, John Dickinson, thought "a duty, in order to be ready for the Provincial Committee when it should meet." This great "Provincial Committee," (so it was styled), pursuant to the call referred to, also met at Carpenters' Hall, and remained in session there till its important and effective labors were completed, July 22d, 1774. Its chairman was Thomas Willing; clerk, Charles Thomson. The members were from—

Philadelphia.—John Dickinson, Peter Chevalier, Edward Pennington, Thomas Wharton, John Cox, Joseph Reed, Thomas Wharton, Jr., Samuel Erwin, Thomas Fitzsimmons, Dr. William Smith, Isaac Howell, Adam Hubley, George Schlosser, Samuel Miles, Thomas Mifflin, Christopher Ludwick, Joseph Moulder, Anthony