

Masonic Hall

308-310 Delaware Street

The original site of this block is described and the early owners traced in the summary of #300, the Kensey Johns Van Dyke house, In 1804, except for stables in the back, only two buildings are shown on the south side of Delaware Street in the Third to Fourth Street block, the large tavern house at the s.w. corner of Third, and a house of equal size in the tenure of Joseph Enos at the s.e. corner of Fourth,

The plot between the two buildings was still open garden in 1879 when the Masonic and Odd Fellows lodges of New Castle had arrived at a decision to build a lodge hall as a joint project. In 1868, Nathaniel Wolfe, who then owned the whole of the Delaware Street plot north of David Boulden the then owner of the Kensey Johns Van Dyke house, sold this plot, 98' on Delaware Street and 125' deep with the corner house at <sup>Fourth</sup> ~~Fifth~~ Street, to Mark and Isaac Cleaver. The corner house, an old two-story brick building, then covered with yellow stucco was in use at the time as the New Castle post office.

William Herbert, active, self-made, prosperous local business man in New Castle, who was the leader in the movement for a hall, hit upon this site and persuaded his associates to confirm the choice.

In 1879, Mark M. Cleaver of Wilmington sold the plot to Washington Lodge #5 I.O.O.F. of New Castle, the cost of the property

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including the corner house to the two lodges was reported as \$5,000. The hall was built under contract by Harry Lape, a Wilmington builder and the lowest bidder, \$20,585, making the total cost something more than \$25,000. The architect was Theophilus P. Chandler of Philadelphia, who was designer of the county court house at Wilmington, built 1880-81.

In the newspapers of 1879, the new building was described as being on the east side of the purchased plot, nearly 52' front by 100' deep, having three stories, an elaborate galvanized iron cornice extending around the roof and the whole surmounted by a galvanized iron cupola of "attractive design", the height from the pavement to the top of the vane rod being 116'. The auditorium on the second floor was 51' by 100' and seated 800 persons,

The dedication, September 13, 1879, was said to have been attended by 6,000 people. The building committee had staged an elaborate ceremony and celebration and most of the householders had elaborately decorated their dwellings and shops. Members of the committee were William Herbert, M. N. Wiel, G. F. Deakyne, Benjamin D. Groves, J. Hermann and Ira Lunt.

An indenture of 1891 is for a conveyance by Washington Lodge #5 I.O.O.F. to William Herbert for \$12,500, of the undivided one-half part of the brick hall and brick dwelling house and lot of land 125' x 98' at the southerly corner of Delaware and Fourth.