

Recollections of Early Syracuse

by Ill. : Richard Husted Parker, 33^o

b. 22 Jan 1831, Onondaga Hill - d. 3 Jan 1911, age 79

Found in the Jun 1867 - Sep 1876 Minute Book of Central City Commandery No. 25, Syracuse, New York
[Sir Knight R. H. Parker served as Guard and Sword Bearer in the Commandery during this entire period]

Transcribed by Gary L. Heinmiller, Area 11 Historian, Grand Lodge, F&AM, of the State of New York,
Director, Onondaga Masonic Districts Historical Society [OMDHS]
August 2000, updated Feb & May 2002

Notes [see Supplemental Notes following his 'Recollections']:

BLUE LODGE MASONRY: Grand Lodge No. 76710; Raised in Central City Lodge No. 305, Jul 1863, Member No. 248, aged 32. Treasurer 1866-1892. He was the proprietor of a cigar store located at 11 South Salina Street, between the Syracuse House and the railroad depot, as noted in an advertisement in the Journal of 22 Dec 1865. An editorial in the 10 Jan 1879 Courier stated that he was elected president of the Central City Masonic Relief Association at a meeting held in their rooms at the Larned Building on 9 Jan. This organization was described as a mutual insurance company organized in 1875 for the benefit of Masons. Parker was also listed as a director.

ROYAL ARCH MASONRY: Richard H. Parker appears as Member No. 157 on the Register of Syracuse Chapter No. 70, RAM [predecessor of Central City Chapter No. 70]. He was Proposed 13 Nov 1863, and took the Degrees of Mark Master 8 Jan 1864, Past Master and Most Excellent Master 12 Feb 1864. This Register is in the archives of Liverpool Syracuse Lodge No. 501.

He served this Chapter as King [1870 & 1871] and High Priest [1872 & 1873] and was Grand High Priest of the State of New York in 1889. Parker was also Grand Representative Grand Chapter, District of Columbia from 1883 to 1907.

He was Principal Conductor of the Work, 1872, of Central City Council No. 13, Royal and Select Masters.
In Central City Commandery No. 25 he served as Commander 1880-1883.

SCOTTISH RITE: In a great find, an old Minute Book turned up at an Oswego antique dealer's shop. By the good graces of R. : W. : Kenneth W. Sweet of Phoenix, NY, this book was purchased 4 Apr 2001 and donated to the OMDHS. In this Minute Book [AASR, Central City Chapter Rose Croix No. 3, vol 1, 27 Dec 1862 – 20 Apr 1906], Richard H. Parker appears on 3 Feb 1866* as follows:

“Application of the following named Princes member of C.C.C. P. : of J. : were rec'd, referred, favorably reported on, balloted for, accepted, admitted & Deg's conferred.”

On 9 May 1872 Bro. Parker was elected M. 'E.' P. 'K.' S. 'W.' of the Rose Croix Chapter, serving until the election 29 May 1877.

At the Election of 14 May 1885 he was elected M. 'W.' P. 'M.' of the Chapter, serving as such until the election of 19 May 1887 [new Officers were installed 19 Sep].

In the Council of Princes of Jerusalem, Sovereign Prince, Parker served as High Priest, 1866-67, 1870 and 1872.

In Consistory, he served as Orator, 1887-1892.

He is recorded as Honorary Thirty-Third Degree Mason, Central City Consistory, A.A.S.R., as of 20 Sep 1887.

Per conversation with Sharon Swan, A.A.S.R. office, Centerville Masonic Memorial Centre, 14 Feb 2002, Ill. : Parker received all of the A.A.S.R. Degrees [Lodge of Perfection, Prince of Jerusalem, Rose Croix & Consistory] on the same day, 3 Feb 1866, at which time he became a 32^o.

Ill. : Parker was Member No. 56 of the Masonic Veteran's Association of Central New York [MVA].

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My father Jared Husted Parker was born in Cherry Valley in 1795 . . . in the town of Paris, Oneida Co. & . . . thereto Jared H. [attended] Alexander Hamilton College at Clinton afterward Fairfield Medical College where he graduated at 18 [January 1822 Degree of Doctor of Medicine, College of Physicians and Surgeons of the Western District of New York]. Immediately located at Onondaga Hill then the . . . where he commenced the practice of his profession. He **married Mary Pease** daughter of **Samuel T. Cheney** of **Manlius** formerly of Rockingham VT – a

manufacturer of silk lace [?]. Subsequently Syracuse & Salina being located on the canal had far advanced in a business point beyond Onondaga. Consequently by a vote of the Co. the Co. seat was removed to the two villages as a compromise and the Court House & Jail were built on North Salina at exactly on the dividing line of the two village[s]. Across the street opposite west where Town Hall now stand[s] James R. Laurance had erected a large frame four story hotel with extensive barn[s] open sheds &c & named it the Center House. My Father had now built a large and lucrative practice but on account of ill health having contracted rheumatism by his long horse back rides in all kinds of weather through sparsely settled county was obliged to give up his practice & seek other business.

1831 Jany 22 I was born. In that year father leased the Center House for a term of four years at the annual tent of 450 & took possession Oct 1 with Charles Spafford as Manager. Therefore I was 8 months & 8 days old when I first made my appearance in the Village of Syracuse then boasting of between four & five thousand inhabitants which was destined to become (possibly on account of my advent) the great beautiful & prosperous city of to day.

[If my memory would serve me that I might recount the local events that I have been cognizant of the many interesting incidents that have come within my notice I am sure it would make greater a book]

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My father had purchased salt block no 1 located on the Oswego canal Willow & Pearl st & built a house on the latter st. At the expiration of his lease of the Center House in 1835 moved into the same & engaged in the manufacture of salt afterwards built a house on Willow st near the bridge an[d] there until his death Feby 23 – 1864.

He was quite active in politics [was a whig until the organization of the Rep Party] was elected member of [New York State] Assembly in 1830 again in 1833. He was Village Trustee, assessor, Sup of Co. Poor, was trustee of pub School No 5 for many years. He was a Mason having been raised in Onondaga Valley Lodge [98] afterwards affiliated with Old Syracuse Lodge [102?].

My earliest childhood recollections are while living in the Center House Many incidents are impressed upon my memory seem as fresh as if but yesterday. My first recollection is having inflam[m]ation on the lungs & afterwards whooping cough and they sending courier by horse back to Albany for my father who was then member of Assembly – Again I remember one very windy day my Sister myself & several other children getting into a room on the upper story . ripping open a bed & throwing the feathers out of the window to see it snow but more strongly is the recollection of the appearance of the house keeper & the impression left by her on my back –

I remember seeing in the office a large colored poster with a Negro dancing printed across the top Jim Crow. Prospect Hill was covered with a second growth of white oak there was a foot path starting at Willow st running up over the hill. My sister & myself had been down to the Village . . . went further into the woods to pick wild flowers & lost our way It was near [dark] before they found us.

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At that time the only houses on Salina st between the Court house & the Oswego canal bridge was that of James R. Laurence at the corner of Salina & Ash st. Another a large square frame house painted white with green blinds owned by Mr. Wales afterwards by his widow on the west side of Salina st being near the bridge north of the Court house just before reaching the Salina village proper was the palatial residence at the corn. Of Danforth, owned & occupied by . . . Cook. Subsequently the trees were all cleared of from Prospect Hill nearly as far Hickory [?] st the rest as far as Miller [?] st was left & made a beautiful green where 4th of July celebrats, Pick Nicks &c were held. The hill was all seeded with grass & a fence built entirely around it. The reason I remember so well about the fence is the posts were all of red Cedar & pieces off from them were nice to whittle. The second hill, called Liberty hill, the top & the east side down as far as Lock st was covered with pine trees. On top of this hill was located a powder house until 1836. Martin Van Buren & Wm. Henry Harrison were candidates. Van Buren was elected.

This campaign I have no recollection of but the campaign of 1840 when there were again candidates & Harrison was Elected. Although but nine years of age many events of the campaign are fresh in my memory. I have [in] a scrap book the following . . .

Page 1 B 1840

A Washington correspondent wrote:

“Mr. Van Buren is evidently a main man, and his vanity lies within a known circle. He is fond of pomp & show and the trappings of power as all his actions declare. He dresses in the height of fashion and his equipage is the most magnificent that dashes through the avenues of this magnificent city. His public dinner parties are also splendid beyond description. The table is decked out with all the ornaments that the richest jewelers can produce. The center is garnished with a pyramid of fantastic finery and a complete service of gold plate has recently been added to the furniture of the

White House to dazzle the eyes of the visitors. The service comprises knives forks & spoons of gold – dishes of gold & urns of gold.”

The truth of which was never denied. They said of Harrison, “he is a poor old man who lives in a log cabin and has nothing better to drink than hard cider.” The truth of this was never denied and this became the over cry of his following: the Log Cabin and Hard Cider candidate against the Autocrat.

The hard cider & log cabin party built a large log cabin on North Salina st corner Church [now West Willow] where the Onondaga House now stands. The logs were brought here by canal and unloaded on the tow path side between Salina & Clinton st bridges where **Masonic Park** now is [now Clinton Square]. One very dark and rainy night a number of the other party, mostly Salt Pointers, assembled at the Syracuse House crossed over and succeeded in rolling a large number of the logs into the canal before they were discovered by the watchers in the Mansion House which stood where the Empire House now is who scattered them in quick order by discharging fire arms at them after that the watchers were increased and they were more vigilant so they had no more trouble from that source –

I remember the day they raised the log cabin a drizzling rain set in and continued all day with scarcely an intermission. A large number of wood choppers came in from the country bringing their axes with them to prepare the logs and [assist in rainy?] not daunted by the rain steadily continued their work until the last log was raised.

After it was completed a barrel marked hard cider stood inside the door whether there was any cider in the barrel or not I was too young to investigate but I often heard it said there was plenty in the cabin where all was welcome to partake who wished. On the other side of the door there was stretched and nailed to the logs a coon skin.

The inside was profusely decorated with flags banners and many stuffed wild animals – lions wolves & panthers & coons. This was the head quarters of the party. Almost daily & nightly many men held there.

Page break . . . [the present transcriber could not locate the ‘missing’ page or pages]

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. . . black muck. Subsequently when the German emigration set in hundreds of families being amasted here by the Salt work came by canal in line boats and landed here and many of them “squatted between the hills” I presume many of them thought they had a pre-emption site built small shanties fenced in small pieces of ground & soon had both hill sides & valley covered with their quaint structures. In time presenting the same appearance the fences built of every conceivable material sticks driven in the ground barrel staves box covers fastened together with string wire & nailed.

They being an industrious class of people & the soil being well adapted for the purpose soon had the hill sides & valley converted into hundreds of small vegetable & flower gardens. Viewed from the top of the hills it presented one of the most picturesque yet grotesque scenes imaginable. They raised quantities of celery & early onions & flowers. Early morning could be seen droves of women & children leaving there with market baskets filled with their products going from house to house disposing of the some to ready buyers.

That settlement was the nucleus of the great German population of the old 2nd 4th ward now the [4th?]

After their removal from the Prospect Hill grounds – they went further north & east purchased lots built themselves homes & to day many of them or their offspring are counted among our most wealthy & influential citizens - & can look back with pleasurable remembrance to his settlement between the hills.

Furman’s [Freeman’s ?] torch light parade & Politick [?] Clubs would march over the hill presenting a novel appearance of a long stream of fire they could be seen from all parts of the village as there was no tall building to obstruct the view. Large bonfires were often built . . . & 4th of July salutes were fired from the top of the hill.

I remember a man by name of Cunningham had his arm blown off by the premature discharge of a cannon at a time during the campaign of . . .

the Whigs [?] raised a tall ash pole on the hill & had to have a guard stationed there constantly for fear the democrats would cut it down – An eccentric character by name of Lathrop squatted at the foot of the hill on Lock st near Willow & commenced to build a one story shanty. He kept adding to it room after room with second hand material that he could beg – doors & casing window sash &c. until he had built up the side hill a hundred or more feet one side he had his the sides a smaller window his living apartments were . . . yet present . . he dare not cut down any trees which were quite thick there so they were left standing coming up through the roof of his house.

If those two hills could only have been preserved for a public park what a beautiful place it would have been within the half mile circle from the brow of the first hill so high as to command a view of the surrounding country. But

it was otherwise they were cut down. Townsend st filled it to its present height. Much of the dirt from the first hill went to fill in the Old Mill Pond on Clinton st – where the Army [Armory] now stands.

The old Mill pond was formed by a dam across the creek Water st. It covered a space as far south as Onondaga st east by Clinton st which was almost under water in the spring of the year. West about where the creek now is. The pond was made for the purpose furnishing water to the old . . . mill which stood where the old high school now stands only it stood further in the street about one half of W. Genesee st – On Water street was a large sash & blind factory at the time it was destroyed by fire Phla [?] N. Rust was Chief Engineer of the fire department volunteer of . . . on the bank of the canal were piles of lumber on [which] many people had climbed to witness the progress of the fire Engine. Rust was impressing every one into the service of the Engine – he asked one man to work when he told him to go to hell we wont go work. Rust promptly thru him into the canal. There were many logs that had floated down the creek & were hauled ashore on the Clinton st . . . from x I have caught a basket full of fish in a short time of which there were quantities in the pond –

Fayette st Franklin st ran directly into the pond. Many people were accustomed to drive in to wash their wagons – The NYC on a long trestle bridge running from Franklin to the West st - The village “burying ground” was located on Franklin st between the RR & Water st now occupied by the Am . . . & the track of the Northern RR.

The Onondaga Creek about where the North Shire RR crosses the little creek entered it was the waste water from the & on James st there were several large elm trees in fact there were large Elm trees all the way into Genesee st Not at this particular place then there several larger than the others & the place was known as the big Elms the water was very deep here it was favorite place from for fishing in the Spring of the year in the summer it was a great resort for bathing.

Belen [?] about where

was a dam across the creek a dike ran straight across the marsh to Salina & furnished water for a saw mill & grist mill located on the banks of the Oswego Canal where the Haskin [?] Salt Mills then afterwards. This dam also furnished water for running a . . . & . . . mill located on the West side of the creek at the dam. It was moved by the state & moved logs & turned plugs & faucets for the salt works. This was also a great place for fishing. The fish would swim up from the lake as far as the dam where they were retarded from going further.

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[The following additional two pages were also included:]

page 1 – Prospect Hill

Prospect Hill extended across Willow & James it was graded down for these two street leaving quite a hole between the two streets

At the south East corner of Lock no 2 on top of the hill was the residence of Rev Mr Gilbert and it was an orchard of apple trees the house was afterwards occupied by The hill was grand [?] & was gradually taken away to the line [?] of Willow & Lock no 2 to put on the streets leaving the house standing alone on the small surface the hill it was finally moved down & the rest of the hill removed –

The hill at the corner of Lock & Foot st now James & N State met . . . the same fate

The hill opposite where the now stands was much higher with a barn on top which was moved down * is still on James st & the hill also removed

[on reverse of this page]

The second or Liberty Hill also extended down across Willow & James where the residence of E. W. now is.

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The Grand State ratification Meeting . . . seems to me now as if it was miles in length and I believe was. There were civic & military Society Clubs &c. and a . . . variety of floats of every conceivable design. What impressed me most was a full rigged ship with sails set & manned with Sailors. There were many barrels [?] & hay sacks [?] gaily decorated & filled with women & children but

the majority of floats were log cabins O& wheels. There was one . . . large one with a full men [?] band of music and drawn by 40 teams of oxen.

The floats all carried tall poles most of them trees with the top brush left on flying flags & streamers. They all seemed to vie with each other as to who could carry the tallest it was only a question of the weight of the wagon or float to hold the base down. There was no limit to the length as there were no Electric or water [?] lines to obstruct their passage. The facilities for travel were far different from now. People came from miles distant starting days before bringing their lunch with them. Impressions every variety of vehicle that could stand alone onto them secure [?] and the canal with every variety of craft that would float filled to their utmost capacity assisted to swell the immense numbers that were here. It is doubtful if Syracuse will ever again witness such a spectacle.

[End of Pages transcribed]

Transcriber's notes:

I do not find reference to J. H. or Jared H. Parker in the minutes or returns of Onondaga Lodge No. 98, copies of which are in the archives of the Onondaga Masonic Districts Historical Society {OMDHS}, nor does he appear in any of the early consolidated listings of Onondaga Masonry, excepts as noted above.

Richard H. Parker is in the Register of Central City Lodge No. 305 [viewed 4 Oct 2000 at Fayetteville] as follows:
Grand Lodge No. 76710; Lodge No. 248; age 32; born, Onondaga Hill; Raised Jul 1863; Died 3 Jan 1911; Tobacconist.

As a general note, the Commandery minute book in which the above 'Recollections' were found was fire and water damaged from the devastating fire which was experienced by the Central City Temple when it was located on Salina Street. Portions of the ashes are still to be found between several pages of the book.

Supplementary Notes

Ref: Peacher, William G., M.D. "History- Central City Chapter No. 70, Royal Arch Masons – 1821-1962, pg. 61-62.

At one time there stood on the fourth floor of Syracuse Masonic Temple, in the Ill.' William L. Cummings 33° Library, a large grandfather's clock inscribed as follows:

Jared Parker
1800
*Jared H. Parker
1831
Richard H. Parker
1864
Presented to Central City Lodge No. 305 F&A.M.
by
Richard H. Parker
1911

*J. H. Parker, Dr., [presumably Richard's father] appears in the minutes of Syracuse Lodge No. 102 under application date of 24 Feb 1853, elected 10 Mar 1853; no other data is given. [This minute book is in the archives of Liverpool Syracuse Lodge No. 501 as of May 2002]. It would appear from the above clock inscription that Dr. Parker was Raised in another Lodge in 1831 [?].

In his 1890 Report to the Ninety-third Annual Convention, Grand Chapter, Royal Arch Masons, M.E. Parker commented that it had been his pleasure to visit the annual convention of the Grand Chapter for twenty-one consecutive years with one exception. Sixteen of these years were served in an official capacity, six by appointment, and ten by favor of suffrages.

He remained active in all branches of Masonry throughout his busy and productive life. He was a constant attendant and a conspicuous figure for thirty-seven years at the annual convention of the Grand Chapter.

On 3 Jan 1911 he died, with Masonic Services being held at the Central City Masonic Temple by his Craft Lodge on 6 Jan. Reverend Calthrop conducted the Episcopal Church Services followed by the 33^o ritual by Illustrious Abel G. Cook, Active Member of the Supreme Council, and fifteen honorary members.

Fraternally,
R.:W.: Gary L. Heinmiller, Area 11 Historian - August 2000
Notes updated Feb & May 2002

Armory Square was part of the historic Walton tract, and site of Walton's millpond that fed a mill (1805) located on Genesee St. In 1849 the millpond and its surrounding swamp were filled in with soil from Prospect Hill, helping to eliminate frequent epidemics of malaria. The area was graded, existing streets extended, and the oval-shaped Jefferson Park, site of the first Armory (1859) and parade ground, was established.

So dense was the forest about Syracuse in 1819, that two young ladies, the present Mrs. E. W. Leavenworth and Mrs. M. D. Burnet, in taking a morning stroll over "Prospect Hill," became bewildered among the thick brushwood, and finally rambled about till the day was far spent, when they found themselves in the vicinity of the Lodi Locks, greatly fatigued with their labors, and not a little rejoiced at the prospect of deliverance from the terrors of passing a gloomy night in the wilderness. Here they recognized familiar ground, and returned home in safety, after a day of much anxiety and no little inquietude of mind.

Source: Onondaga or Reminiscences of Earlier and Later Times, Vol. II, by Joshua V. H. Clark, A.M., Published by Stoddard and Babcock, Syracuse, N.Y., 1849, pp. 83-107