

JOHN BARNEY 1780-1847

Born in October 1780 in Litchfield County, Connecticut the son of a tailor, John Barney learned his fathers' trade. Shortly after 1800, John Barney moved to Weathersfield, Vermont where he worked as a tailor and at farming when he could not find work in his trade. It was at Weathersfield that he married Lucy Ann Hubbard. Shortly after the wedding, Barney and his bride moved to Charlotte, Vermont - about 1807.

Never a man of good health. Barney continued the tailoring trade doing such other labors as he could get to add to his meager income. Even so, he and his family lived in what may be described as honest poverty. In 1810, at the age of 30, John Barney joined Friendship Lodge. A quiet, studious man, possessed with a remarkable memory. Barney soon became a zealous Mason. There were those who said that Barney let his zeal for Masonry interfere with his breadwinning. Perhaps such criticism may have been justified, but we must also consider that due to poor health plus the fact that work as a tailor was not always to be had we may excuse him to some degree. Nevertheless, Barney was admired by his Brothers for his proficiency in the ritualistic work.

Somehow, Barney learned of the work of Thomas Smith Webb of Boston who was regarded as the leading ritualist in America at that time, having learned the lectures from an English Brother certified by William Preston to teach the same. Barney determined to go to Boston for the best instruction available in America. The Brothers of Friendship Lodge provided Barney with funds for the trip and funds for his family while he was away. Barney's arrival in Boston was an embarrassment to Webb who had no knowledge of his coming and had more requests for instruction than he could handle. To accommodate Brother Barney, Webb made arrangements for Barney to study under Brother Benjamin Gleason. Webb himself would hear Barney recite the lectures and certify as to their accuracy.

Returning to Vermont, Barney appeared before the Grand Lodge Session in October of 1817, recited the lectures and was presented a certificate as "Lecturing Master" and at the same Session the Grand Lodge also adopted the Preston-Webb work as the only ritual allowed in Vermont. Barney was now able to add to his meager income by traveling about the State giving instruction to his Brothers. Thus it was that a standard ritual for Vermont came into being.

In 1822 he left Vermont and moved to Willsboro, New York where he resided until 1825. That year he returned to Vermont on his way to his old home in Canaan, Connecticut, stopped to visit a few old friends and renew his contacts with Vermont Masons. On this short stay, Brother Samuel Wilson prevailed upon Barney to remain long enough so that he, Wilson, could write the ritual out in a master copy. Barney recited it, Wilson wrote it out in longhand and Barney checked it for correctness. Barney then left Vermont, never to return, but leaving a priceless heritage in the "Black Book" that has been so valuable to Vermont Masons. Brother Barney resided in Connecticut until 1830 when he moved to Ohio. Due to the Anti-Masonic Period there was little call for instruction but as light returned his ability became recognized and he was elected Grand Lecturer of Ohio in 1836 and re-elected annually up to and including 1843. As Grand Lecturer of Ohio he attended the Baltimore Convention in 1843 to determine if a General Grand Lodge should be formed and what ritual would be adopted. Barney, a member of the Ritual Committee, proposed the Preston-Webb work and it was mostly through his efforts that it was adopted with few changes. The proposal for a General Grand Lodge never came into being. In 1844 Barney moved to Michigan to help that state's

Grand Lodge revive Masonry and bring about uniform work. Needless to say Barney took the Webb work with him which was later adopted by the Grand Lodge of Michigan. In 1845 Barney moved to Illinois as Grand Lecturer of the state, imparting instruction to the Brothers of Illinois and Indiana from his home in Chicago. At the request of the Grand Master of Illinois, Barney went to the Grand Lodge of Missouri in 1847 to establish a ritual for that Grand Lodge and settle a division among the Brothers there. He succeeded and Missouri settled on the "Baltimore Work" later to become known as the "Barney Work". Returning from Missouri, Barney, sick and worn out stopped at Peoria, Illinois and there on

June 11, 1847 he died. Humble, poor, obscure, and unsung his death passed almost unnoticed in the news of that time. Only his Brothers in states scattered from Vermont to Missouri mourned the loss of a well beloved Brother and Mason.

Annually Vermont pays honor and homage to Brother John Barney with the award of a medal in his name.

Author unknown: acquired from Cedric Smith, PMWM Masons of Vermont