

AN OVERVIEW OF MASONRY IN CHRISTIAN COUNTY, KY

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Approximately one of ten American males over the age of 21 are members of the Masonic fraternity. Freemasonry is the oldest and, by far, the largest fraternity known today. The membership is made up of men from all walks of life. Its ranks include laborers, clerks, educators, merchants, lawyers, members of the armed services, doctors, farmers -- the whole spectrum. Although during the past 250 years, its ranks have involved the great and the near great, including 15 Presidents of the United States, thirty-one of the fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence, 33 of the 39 signers of the Constitution, 33 of the Justices of the Supreme Court. In Kentucky, more than half of the Governors have been members of the Masonic order as have a majority of the state's elected senators and representatives. The four Masonic Lodges in Christian County have a combined current membership of 869, nearly equaling that of all other service clubs and fraternities combined.

With a membership and potential influence of this magnitude, it is surprising that comparatively little has been written about the fraternity, its organization and its history. This paper is an attempt to provide an overview of the 168 years of the organization in one small and, perhaps, typical rural community - Christian County.

Masonry is not a secret organization. Certainly the members do not hide the fact of their membership, its buildings and facilities are well known, its activities and its charities are well accepted by the general public. Masonic lodges come in all sizes, ranging in membership from twenty or so Masons to more than a thousand. Each lodge is presided over by a master, assisted by a senior and a junior warden, just as in ancient times. The master of a Masonic lodge is vested with much greater authority than that given the presiding officer of almost any other democratic organization. There are several lodge offices below the ranks of master and wardens and in most instances a Mason progresses through this line of officers until eventually becoming master. In some lodges all officers are elected; in others only the higher officers are elected, the master appointing the lesser officers. The membership, by its votes, determines

who will fill offices, and it transacts the general affairs of the lodge.

All over the world individual lodges have come together to form grand lodges, this to ensure harmony, unity, and conformity. There is a grand lodge in each of the United States, except in Hawaii. (Lodges in Hawaii operate under the authority of the grand lodge of California.) There is also a grand lodge in the District of Columbia, making a total of fifty grand lodges in the United States. In 1978, the Ohio Grand Lodge had the largest membership and the Alaska Grand Lodge the smallest.

The organizational structure of a grand lodge is basically the same as that of a lodge, its officers usually being called grand master, grand senior warden, etc. The business of a grand lodge is transacted during annual meetings, delegates from the member lodges usually constituting a majority of those entitled to vote therein. The grand lodge exercises complete authority over each and every one of its member lodges but, as can be noted from the foregoing, the lodges, through their delegates, have the say about who will govern them, and how.

There is no central or supreme Masonic authority in the United States, each grand lodge exercises complete control of its own destiny and total Masonic authority within its jurisdiction, recognizing and respecting the right of each other grand lodge to do likewise. Top officers of the fifty grand lodges meet together periodically, nationally and regionally, to maintain fraternal harmony and to share information and ideas.

The grand lodges maintain ongoing fraternal relations and correspondence with each other and with most grand lodges in other countries. If a grand lodge should adopt policies or engage in activities contrary to those held to be properly Masonic by another grand lodge, it is probable the fraternal relations between the two will be severed. Several grand lodges in Europe, for example, have over a period of time dropped the requirement that the Holy Bible be always present and open upon the altar while a lodge is meeting, and this has resulted in the grand lodges here and most of those abroad withdrawing fraternal recognition of the offenders. When fraternal recognition is

withdrawn it means the withdrawing grand lodge no longer recognizes the other grand lodge or its members as being Masonic.

Having been elected to receive the degrees of Masonry, the candidate proceeds to do just that. (In a few states a candidate is balloted upon between each of the degrees, in all other states one election is for all three degrees.)

The first degree is that of entered apprentice and during it the candidate is introduced to the basic principles of Freemasonry. It might be noted that the symbolic use of various building tools is employed to impress upon him moral truths and doctrines. The degree is serious throughout and, contrary to some wild tales occasionally circulated, there is never any horseplay or frivolity involved and this is true of all three symbolic degrees. Upon completion of the degree, the candidate begins learning a catechism in which he must become proficient before he may receive the next degree.

In the second degree he becomes a fellow craft, learning still more of the principles and teachings of Freemasonry, especially of its close alliance with the arts and sciences. Again, he must commit a catechism to memory before proceeding to the next degree.

The third and final degree is that of master mason, teaching still more of the moral truths of the fraternity, culminating with an impressive lesson concerning the rich rewards awaiting all good men. In most states the candidate must also memorize a catechism on this degree, in others it must be learned only if the new Mason desires to take additional steps, and in others it is not required at all.

The catechisms a Mason is required to learn as he progresses through the degrees are often, at the outset, regarded as considerable chores and candidates sometimes wonder why they are required at all. But they serve useful purposes for the fraternity and - although he may not realize it at the time - they are particularly useful to the Mason all through his life. It would be an extremely rare thing to ever hear a Mason regret having to learn the catechisms.

In committing the catechisms to memory the candidate is of necessity further impressed by the lessons and instructions

he received in the degrees, for this is what the catechisms are all about. He thus begins his Masonic career a much more knowledgeable Mason than would otherwise be the case. He learns to memorize, an ability that will serve him and Masonry well through the years. When he visits a lodge in which he is not known to be a Mason, the knowledge he gained in learning his catechisms will enable him to prove his eligibility to visit. He will, as a good and active Mason, have many occasions to feel thankful for the lessons he learned in his catechisms.

Sometimes, despite their professions of good intent, men seek Masonic membership out of mere curiosity. The requirement that candidates learn the catechisms will often weed these out at an early stage, their motivations will not lend themselves to the effort required.

The catechisms pose no problem for men of reasonable ability and energy. It is rare to hear of anyone failing to learn the catechism if he really wanted membership.

Having attained the Master Mason's degree, members are then eligible and are solicited to become members of the Scottish Rite or the York Rite. The Scottish Rite being comprised of 32 degrees and the York Rite being divided into three different bodies, the Royal Arch Chapter, the Council of Royal and Select Masters and, finally, the Christian order of Knights Templar. Masons who have attained the 32 degree in the Scottish Rite or the order of Knights Templar in the York Rite are eligible to become members of the Ancient Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine. Shriners being well known for their fun making, their colorful fezes, parades, circuses - and their great philanthropy of completely supporting 21 Crippled Childrens Hospitals and three burns institutes.

Kentucky Freemasonry came directly from Virginia; that of Virginia had its origin in England, Scotland and Ireland. The first English organization of Masonic groups came into being in 1717 when four London lodges operating in and around St. Paul's Church yard came together to form the Grand Lodge of England. There is considerable evidence that there were a number of other local lodges in existence not only in London but

throughout England. York was an early center of activity. The earliest record carries Kilwinning Lodge in Scotland back to 1598. Freemasonry in Ireland supposedly dates from 1688.

Lodges in the 17th century were informal in nature including any and all Freemasons from the general area who wished to participate in their social affairs and discussions. Dues were not charged, there was little in the way of ritual and membership was attained with little in the way of initiation. It should be noted that England in the late 1600's had developed a rather large and literate middle class and whose members did meet in clubs and fraternal organizations of various kinds. Coffee houses, taverns and ale houses, the forerunners of today's pubs, were the typical meeting places to discuss the news and events of the day.

Site of the initial organization of a Grand Lodge of Freemasons, the Goose and Gridiron Ale-house in St. Paul's Churchyard by lodges in the vicinity is interesting and may well point up the earlier origins of Freemasonry. The plague had swept through London in the 1660's and then in 1666 fire destroyed most of the city, including St. Paul's Cathedral. Sir Christopher Wren, a noted architect and, by tradition, a Freemason, was commissioned to plan and supervise the renovation of the magnificent edifice. From centuries earlier the master craftsmen, builders and workers in stone of the magnificent cathedrals and castles of Western Europe and the British Isles had kept their secrets well - passing them along to selected and trusted apprentices largely by practice and by word of mouth. That members of such guilds of master builders were an elite and much envied group is apparent. They were highly skilled and their mastery of the secrets of operative masonry were highly prized. Visualize for a moment, one example of such building skill, St. Paul's Cathedral, which was destroyed in the London fire of 1666, a floor plan 600 feet long and 300 feet wide with a dome nearly 500 feet in height. Few cathedrals were this immense but there were hundreds of such smaller structures. Such gothic structures were constructed entirely of stone without metal framework of any kind. The craftsmen's methods and

knowledge were kept strictly to themselves and never reduced to writing thus preserving the secrets of operative masonry to a small oathbound group. Over a period of years, gentlemen and the nobility as well as the common man began to seek the friendship and the society to be found in the guilds and organizations of these master builders. Cathedral and castle building, too, was beginning to wane as less expensive and time consuming structures came into being. By the mid-1700's most guilds or clubs of masons were comprised of members other than operative and were termed speculative masons. The tools of the builder's trade i.e. the trowel, the compass, the plumb line, the square, etc., continued to be used to teach or inculcate the great moral or philosophical lessons around which the group increasingly centered their attention.

With the formation in 1717 of a Grand Lodge of England emphasis became almost completely speculative in nature, quarterly meetings of representatives from the local Lodges were held. By 1723 a constitution was formulated and a ritual of sorts encompassing three degrees was adopted. The meeting site of the group was moved from the ale house to Stationers Hall adding further to the prestige of the order. The Duke of Montague was nominated as Grand Master in 1721 and he was, in turn, succeeded by Philip, Duke of Wharton, in 1722, thus beginning the English tradition of nobility heading the Masonic order. Membership and Lodges, too, increased as the fraternity gained in prominence and appeal.

A Grand Lodge of Scotland comprised of about a third of the nearly 100 Lodges there was organized in 1736. A similar organization had come into being in Ireland in 1725. With London as a world trade center and with trade and colonization efforts in the New World it was a next step that Masonry would find its way to America.

That many members of the Masonic fraternity were among the English, Scots and Irish settling Virginia in the early 1700's is obvious from the scattered independent Lodges that were springing up. Some were being sponsored - and later chartered by the Grand Lodge of England, the Grand Lodge of Scotland and the Grand Lodge of Ireland.

One of the earliest was the Fredericksburg (Virginia) Lodge whose recorded minutes are in existence back to September, 1752. These records note the initiation of George Washington into the three degrees on November 4, 1752, March 3, 1753 and August 4, 1753 respectively. Ultimately Fredericksburg applied for and received a charter from the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1758. Other early Virginia Lodges included Norfolk, Blanford, Winchester, Yorktown, Williamsburg, Alexandria, and Portsmouth.

Masonry was widespread by the beginning of the Revolutionary War. The conflict, of course, severed not only political ties with Britain but what little Masonic ties that had existed. On May 6, 1777 representatives from six of the larger Lodges met at the Williamsburg Lodge with a view to establish a Grand Lodge of Virginia and to elect a Grand Master. This was accomplished several weeks later with the convention selecting George Washington as the first Grand Master. The Grand Lodge of Virginia continued to meet either in the Lodge room or at the Raleigh Tavern until 1780 when the group voted to move their annual sessions to Richmond. Early Virginia Masonic leaders in addition to Washington, included John Blair, James Mercer, Edmond Randolph, and John Marshall. During the Revolution, military leadership quite often were members of the fraternity and the Masonic movement spread rapidly during this period. After the war as pioneers moved westward, interest in Masonry followed close behind. A petition from Lexington in the District of Kentucky was received and the Grand Lodge of Virginia issued a charter for Lexington No. 25 on November 17, 1788. Paris #35 followed in 1791, Georgetown #46 in 1796, Frankfort in 1797, and Shelbyville had received dispensation in 1798 but was not formally chartered until after Kentucky formed its own Grand Lodge. Thus, there were five Masonic Lodges in Kentucky in 1800. Political ties were, of course, severed with Virginia when Kentucky achieved statehood in 1792. Masonic leadership in the new state, too, saw little reason for continued leadership from far-away Richmond, Virginia and efforts began for a Grand Lodge of Kentucky.

It was natural that the state's oldest and largest Lodge,

Lexington #25, would take the leadership role in establishing a new Kentucky confederation of Masonic Lodges. Accordingly, a call went out from the Lexington Lodge to the other Lodges inviting them to a Convention of Delegates to be held on September 8, 1800 at Masons Hall in Lexington to consider separation from Virginia and the formation of a Grand Lodge of Kentucky. Names of those Kentucky Masons present or in leadership roles for this session represent a fair cross section of state leadership at the beginning of a new century: Levi Todd, Green Clay, James Morrison, John Hawkins, Isaac Gano, Richard Anderson, John Fowler, John Maxwell, among many others. John Hawkins, Georgetown, was elected to chair the sessions and Thomas Bodley, Lexington, as clerk. A resolution addressed to the Grand Lodge of Virginia was drafted respectfully requesting separation from that body. This business completed, the group adjourned, awaiting Virginia's reply until October 8. The Kentucky group meanwhile went about the task of setting up a temporary organization, James Morrison, as the senior Past Master present was asked to serve as temporary chairman and Thomas Bodley as Secretary. A reply in the affirmative was received from Virginia and the October meeting was held as scheduled. After the ballots were cast, William Murray of Frankfort was elected as the Grand Master. Constitution and by-laws of the new body were approved. Lodges then in existence were renumbered: Lexington #1, Paris #2, Georgetown #3, Hiram Lodge of Frankfort #4, Solomon's Lodge of Shelbyville #5. The new Grand body in Kentucky was in existence, the first in the west, and ample work lay before it. The early efforts of this Grand Lodge of Freemasonry would extend into nine other western states within the next twenty years.

Grand Master William Murry called the next session of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky for February 9, 1801. Twelve representatives of the five Lodges were present. A petition from Masons in "Bairdstown" for a Lodge was presented and a charter, No. 6, was granted to them. James Morrison, Lexington, was elected Grand Master and served two terms. Harmony Lodge No. 7 in the Mississippi Territory was chartered in October, 1801. Abraham Lodge in Middletown, became No. 8 in 1802 and

Jerusalem No. 9, Henderson, in 1804. John Jackson followed Morrison as Grand Master who was, in turn, succeeded by George M. Bibb who was to serve for four terms, 1804-08. John Allen, Frankfort, who was later to be killed in the War of 1812 succeeded him for three terms to be followed by Joseph H. Daviess, Frankfort, in 1811-1812 only to be killed in the battle of Tippecanoe during the War of 1812. Daviess' term was completed by Anthony Butler, Russellville; James Moore, Shelbyville, was next to serve followed by Daniel Bradford, William H. Richardson, Thomas Bradley and Samuel Woodson, all of Lexington, and Henry Clay who served in 1820-21.

Organization of new lodges was progressing rapidly, Philantropic Lodge in Nashville 1805, Cincinnati No. 13 in 1806, Vincennes in the Territory of Indiana was organized in 1809, Madison No. 21 in what is now Huntsville, Alabama in 1812, two Lodges in Arkansas, three more in Indiana Territory, and one in Louisiana Territory. In Kentucky, Russellville was chartered in 1809, Washington in Mason County in 1811, Winchester, 1812, and, among others during these early years, Hopkinsville in 1816.

Masons in and around the village of Hopkinsville petitioned for and were granted a charter - No. 37 - at the Grand Lodge session of 1816. Charles Caldwell had been selected as the first Master. Except for the years 1830-39 during the height of the Anti-Masonic movement the Lodge has remained active becoming now the oldest in Southwestern Kentucky and among the dozen or so oldest in the state. One Kentucky Grand Master, Dr. Robert M. Fairleigh - in 1876-77 - was a member and past Master of No. 37. Today, after 168 years, the Lodge lists a membership of 402 with D.C. Nichols serving as Master, William G. Hinton, Secretary.

One of the few Lodges organized in Kentucky during the turbulent years of the Anti-Masonic movement was Cowan Lodge No. 98 located in Lafayette. Membership in the fraternity state-wide dropped nearly in half during the heyday of the movement, 1828-1838 and many local Lodges surrendered their charters due to inactivity and community pressures or attitudes.

Still, Masonry in Kentucky fared better in this regard than it did in many states. Politically, Kentucky Masons were able to rally behind Henry Clay, a Past Grand Master, and Andrew Jackson, likewise a Past Grand Master of Tennessee. Certainly, the Anti-Masonic movement's leadership of Thaddeus Stephens of Pennsylvania, Thurlow Weed and William H. Seward of New York found few followers in Kentucky although these names were to crop up again on the national scene during the turbulent times of the next three decades.

Cowan Lodge was chartered in August, 1836 in Lafayette, a town at that time paralleling Hopkinsville in size and activity. The Lodge struggled but existed for 21 years finally giving up its charter in 1859. In the meantime, however, another group of Masons in the community were organizing a new Lodge and in 1851 Lafayette No. 151 was chartered. The few remaining members from the old Cowan Lodge merged with the new Lodge. Y.E. Watson, a Past Master of Cowan, was elected Master, with J.P. Flint, secretary-treasurer. Names still familiar in south Christian, Hall, Boyd, Greenwood, Fuqua, McKenzie, Clardy, White, Williams are noted among the membership. Lafayette Lodge No. 151 with a membership of 42 is at work today with Lester B. Guier serving as its Master.

Marcus M. Tyler from Kuttawa in Lyon County was one of Kentucky's most active Masonic leaders during the early 1850's and his influence in and around Christian, Caldwell and Trigg Counties resulted in the formation of a number of new Lodges. Tyler was to serve as Grand Master in 1854-55. The Lodge, Mark Tyler No. 319 in Wallonia, was named in his honor. While Tyler's influence was felt in Southwestern Kentucky, the period just preceeding the War Between The States was a period of rapid growth for Masonry state-wide and nation-wide.

In addition to Lafayette, two other Lodges were chartered in Christian County in 1851. Fairview No. 214 was organized in the town of Fairview on the Christian-Todd County line. William Lackey was the first Master, James Little, Senior Warden, and M.M. Ray, Junior Warden. This Lodge was in existence until April 1916 when its charter was surrendered.

Hopkinsville and Lafayette both organized second Lodges during the same year, 1851. While the old Lodge, Hopkinsville No. 37, suffered large losses in membership during the Anti-Masonic period, it did survive and come back strongly in the decade of the 1850's. York Lodge No. 225 was chartered in Hopkinsville in August 1851 with James Moore as its first Master, Rufus Latham, Secretary and George Poindexter, Treasurer and 24 members. Stated meetings were to be held on Friday nights succeeding the full-moon each month. Life of this second Hopkinsville Lodge was to be short lived, no returns were submitted for the year 1855 or the following year and its charter was surrendered in 1857. Most of the membership of York returned to the mother Lodge. Apparently there had been cooperation between the two groups. York had used the building and paraphernalia of the mother Lodge. Hopkinsville evidently was simply not ready for two Lodges. The other Lodge in Lafayette, on the other hand, was at the verge of becoming defunct and the new group provided the requisite leadership for Masonry and the community.

While the Lodge in Hopkinsville that James Moore was to start never survived, he apparently was instrumental in beginning a Masonic Lodge in Pee Dee the following year, 1852. The Lodge was, in fact, named for him - James Moore No. 230. Tandy Trice was the first Master, Rev. George P. Street, Senior Warden, and C.J. Dabney, Secretary-Treasurer. Meetings were held on Fridays before the first full moon each month. This Lodge at Pee Dee was in existence until January, 1933.

The year 1854, now with Marcus Tyler as Grand Master, saw two new Lodges chartered in the County, Pembroke No. 288 and Forest No. 308 in Beverly. Pembroke's initial Master was Thomas Buck with J.R. Grubbs serving as Secretary-Treasurer. The names Lackey, Pendleton, Atkins, Mason, Holland, Blankenship, among other members are well known in the community today. The Lodge at Pembroke flourished until 1926. Forest Lodge at Beverly listed Winston J. Davie as its first Master with R.W. Henry as Secretary. Like many other Lodges, stated meetings were held on Wednesday evenings succeeding each full moon of the

month. The community of Beverly supported this Lodge until 1913 when its charter was surrendered.

Grand Lodge Proceedings for the year 1855 noted a resolution "That a charter be granted to Pond River Lodge, U.D., at Fruit Hill, Christian County, to be known by the name and style of L.M. Cox Lodge No. 327; and that James M. Wilson be the first Master thereof..." A.M. Dulin was named Secretary-Treasurer. Leander M. Cox had served as Grand Master in Kentucky in 1943-44. Some years later this Lodge moved to Crofton where it is active today with Mack Craddock serving as Master and listing 120 members.

Some ten years lapsed before the next Christian County Masonic Lodge was organized, 1864, when Dick Barnes Lodge No. 398 was chartered in the community of Cave Springs, now known as Bainbridge. The Lodge was situated on the second floor with the Methodist Church occupying the first floor of the structure. Rev. J.E. McCord served as the first Master and Milton Clark, Secretary with 50 members. Fire destroyed the building in the early 1890's and the Church united with the one in nearby Cerulean Springs. Many members of the Lodge did likewise and the charter was surrendered in October, 1893.

Two years later, in October 1866, two more rural lodges were chartered, Consolation No. 421 located on the second floor of the Consolation Church in Era, northwest Christian County. Rev. John E. McCord, held dual membership with this Lodge and served also as its first Master. This Masonic Lodge continued to function until 1935. This same year of 1866, Longview Lodge No. 426 was chartered at Longview in South Christian. Colin Roberts served as Master and R.W. Leavell as Secretary. Among the charter members was Austin Peay with many other names quite familiar today in this part of Christian County. The Lodge served for nearly 40 years going out of existence in May, 1904.

Nearly 50 years went by before another group was chartered. A group of Masons in and around Gracey petitioned the Grand Lodge in 1910 and a charter was duly issued to Gracey No. 834.

J.P. Sholar was the first Master and C.S. Coleman was elected secretary. This Lodge, unfortunately, was in existence but nine years, surrendering its charter in April 1919 with many of its members transferring to Cerulean Springs and to Wallonia.

The last Masonic Lodge to be chartered in the county was on the military post at Fort Campbell on October 17, 1951. Then commanding General Wayne Smith was instrumental in the establishment of the fraternity on-post. The Lodge thrived with a large majority of the members being active duty military. With the coming of military regulations relating to use of post facilities by outside groups and with increasing emphasis on desegregation, the Lodge membership saw fit to purchase properties in nearby Oak Grove where they constructed a permanent Lodge Building. Fort Campbell Lodge No. 946 remains active today listing 305 members with Jack Fain serving as Master.

As is the case state, nation and world-wide, the four active Lodges in Christian County today have suffered significant losses in membership since the membership boom following World War II and through the decades of the 50's and 60's. Still, a combined membership of 869 makes the fraternity by far the largest organization in the County with membership coming from all walks of life. The Masonic fraternity membership has been cyclical over the years with lows as mentioned previously in the 1830's and 40's and again at the turn of the 20th century. Competition for member's time with television, with other groups of a social or service nature, ease of transportation, etc., all have had their impact on the venerable old fraternity. But as has happened over more than 300 years, leadership view the future with a great deal of optimism fully believing that the fraternity will take an increasing number of men who believe in the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man - and who make the request - and try to make still better men out of them.