

A Brief History of Hiram Lodge No. 7, F&AM, Franklin, Tennessee

The history of Hiram Lodge No. 7, F&AM is intimately connected to the history of the Grand Lodge and to the State of Tennessee. Hiram Lodge No. 7, like all of the other early masonic lodges in the state of Tennessee, was chartered by the Grand Lodge of North Carolina, which from 1803 to 1813 was the Grand Lodge of North Carolina and Tennessee. In fact, the organization of the Grand Lodge of Tennessee was first proposed in a resolution offered by Thomas Claiborne, a Nashville lawyer, who represented Hiram Lodge No. 7 (DeMott). That resolution resulted in the establishment of a convention that was held in Knoxville, Tennessee, on December 2, 1811. During that convention, the resolution was adopted and sent to the Grand Lodge of North Carolina and Tennessee, where it was read and unanimously approved (Masonic Education Committee). A North Carolina charter was issued to Hiram Lodge No. 7 of Tennessee on December 11, 1808 (Church [and Driber] 19).

On December 27, 1813, in Knoxville, representatives of eight lodges met in the lodge room of Tennessee Lodge No. 2 and formed the Grand Lodge of Tennessee. During that assembly, the representatives laid the foundation for Freemasonry in Tennessee by establishing nine "Pioneer Lodges" that included Harmony Lodge No. 29 (No. 1 of Tennessee), Tennessee Lodge No. 2, Greenville Lodge No. 43 (No. 3 of Tennessee), Newport Lodge No. 50 (No. 4 of Tennessee), Overton Lodge No. 51 (No. 5 of Tennessee), King Solomon Lodge (No. 6 of Tennessee), Hiram Lodge No. 55 (No. 7 of Tennessee), Cumberland Lodge No. 60 (No. 8 of Tennessee), and Western Star Lodge No. 61 (No. 9 of Tennessee) (Masonic Education Committee). With the formation of the Tennessee Grand Lodge, a charter was issued from the Grand Lodge of North Carolina, which is thought to be the only instance in which one Grand Lodge chartered another (DeMott).

The Grand Lodge of Tennessee having been established, its first Grand Master, Thomas Claiborne of Hiram Lodge No. 7, called the inaugural Quarterly Communication of the Grand Lodge to be held in Nashville. The Constitution that had been adopted at the convention in Knoxville stipulated that the Grand Lodge "shall" meet quarterly in the city where "the Legislature shall sit." Prior to 1812, the seat of the Legislature was Knoxville. However, from 1812-1815, the seat of the 9th, 10th, and 11th General Assemblies was Nashville. While the Legislature returned to sit in Knoxville in 1817 (and from 1819-1825 in Murfreesboro), the first Quarterly Communication of the Grand Lodge of Tennessee, in 1814, was held in Nashville, and it has continued to meet in Tennessee's capitol city ever since (Masonic Education Committee). Originally affiliated affiliated with its parent Lodge No. 55 in North Carolina, Hiram Lodge No. 7 surrendered its North Carolina charter when the Grand Lodge of Tennessee was constituted in 1813, and it received its present charter in 1815.

On November 14, 1817, the Tennessee General Assembly authorized Hiram Lodge No. 7 to conduct the first legal lottery in Tennessee to raise capital to fund the construction of a Masonic Hall (Church [and Driber] 15). Until that time, Masons in Franklin had been meeting in various locations, including the Court House, as attested by the minutes of the Williamson County court for July 12, 1812 ("History of the Masonic Building"). Constructed using handmade bricks, Hiram Lodge No. 7 was completed in 1823 and became the first three-story building in Tennessee and the tallest building west of the Allegheny Mountains.

In addition to its distinctive three-story construction, Hiram Lodge No. 7 is notable for its unique

blending of the flat Federal style and the ornate Gothic Revival architectural style, especially the latter, with its “pointed arches, battlements[,] and finials on the pilasters” (“History of the Masonic Building”), which would not come into vogue in America until the 1840s. To this day, Hiram Lodge No. 7 remains not only one of the oldest examples of Gothic Revival architecture in the country (predating the magnificent Gothic Revival architecture at Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, and the Downtown Presbyterian Church, Nashville) but also one of the oldest masonic lodges in continuous operation in the same location in the United States.

Many prominent figures from the early history of Franklin and Nashville were members or guests of Hiram Lodge No. 7. For example, Andrew Jackson, the 5th Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Tennessee (1822-23) and the 7th President of the United States (1829-37), and James Robertson, the founder of Nashville, attended Hiram Lodge. Also, Felix Grundy, author of the Code of Tennessee and friend of Andrew Jackson, figured importantly in the initial stages of Hiram’s history. Colonel Guilford Dudley, who had served heroically in the American Revolutionary War, was one of the lodge’s first officials.

Just as members of Hiram Lodge No. 7 had been instrumental in the foundation of Freemasonry in Tennessee, so too have they been involved in many other significant religious, historical, and social events. For example, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church was founded on August 27, 1827, in a room of the lodge by a group of persons “friendly to the formation of an Episcopal church in the area” under the leadership of Reverend James Hervey Otey (Quin), a Past Master of Hiram Lodge No. 7. In addition to founding St. Paul’s, the “Mother Church of the Diocese of Tennessee,” Reverend Otey established several other churches and on July 1, 1829, organized the Episcopal Diocese of Tennessee at Nashville. He was elected the first bishop in June 1833[.] ... [His] dreams for a ‘Literary and Theological Seminary’ for the region were realized by the establishment of the University of the South at Sewanee in 1857 (Quin). The Fourth Avenue Church of Christ in Franklin also emerged from meetings in Hiram Lodge No. 7. Alexander Campbell preached at Hiram on December 7, 1830, and Church of Christ congregations held services at Hiram while waiting for the construction of its church to be completed in 1852 (Warwick). During the 1970s, St. Philip Catholic Church, which is located next door to Hiram on 2nd Avenue South, held its Sunday School services in the lodge hall until its building expansion program could be completed (Church [and Driber] 18).

On August 31, 1830, The Treaty with the Chickasaw was negotiated on the front steps of Hiram Lodge No. 7. President Andrew Jackson, accompanied by John H. Eaton, the Secretary of War, and General John Coffee, commissioners appointed by the President, met in council with the chiefs and other leaders of the Chickasaw Nation of Indians to conclude a treaty that resulted in the cession of Chickasaw lands east of the Mississippi River in exchange for lands west of territory of Arkansas (“Treaty with the Chickasaw”). After the signing of the treaty, President Jackson and the Chickasaw representatives participated in a Peace Pipe Ceremony inside the lodge hall (Church [and Driber] 18). This occasion marked the first time that a President of the United States had personally participated in treaty negotiations (Warwick). Regrettably, though, this treaty was one of many “voluntary” treaties to follow as a result of the Indian Removal Act, signed into law by President Jackson on May 28, 1830, which led to the migration— often forced—of Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee-Creek, and Seminole people (or the “Five Civilized Tribes”) from their ancestral lands. Their sad and tragic story is better known as the “Trail of Tears.”

During the tumultuous years of the American Civil War, Hiram Lodge No. 7 was used alternately by Confederate and Union soldiers. For example, Confederate spies climbed to the roof to observe troop movements at Fort Granger, a Federal post across the Harpeth River. During the Federal occupation of Franklin, the wooden furniture and floors were broken down and burned as firewood for heat (Church [and Driber] 17). After the Battle of Franklin, on November 30, 1864, the lodge hall served as a hospital for wounded Union soldiers (Warwick). In 1912, forty-five years after the Civil War, the United States government paid reparations to the lodge for damage done to the building by Federal troops. As a result, new stairs and floorings were installed ("History of the Masonic Building"). The lodge still possesses the minutes of Hiram Lodge No. 7 dating as far back as August of 1877; unfortunately, the minutes from the ante-bellum and Civil War years, which were stored in a Franklin bank after the war and subsequently lost, have not been recovered and may no longer be extant. What does remain from that period, however, is Union graffiti written on the lodge's inner walls, discovered during renovations to the lodge. The best preserved inscription reads, "Sgt. James Cuttrel, Co. G, 14th Michigan Infantry, August 25, 1863, Franklin, Tennessee," which is accompanied by a few other names and dates that are less legible (Church [and Driber] 17). In this respect, the lodge's walls function as a time capsule from the period of the Battle of Franklin.

Four Worshipful Past Masters of Hiram also have served as the Most Worshipful Grand Master of the State of Tennessee: Thomas Claiborne (1813-14), Oliver Bliss Hayes (1819), Benjamin S. Tappan (1834-35), and John Lawrence Palmer (1997). Thomas Claiborne (born, May 17, 1780 in Brunswick County, Virginia—died, January 7, 1856 in Nashville, TN) was a lawyer, admitted to Bar at Nashville in 1807, a Member of Tennessee House of Representatives, 1811-12, presiding as Speaker during the latter session, a Major serving on General Jackson's staff during the Creek War, a member of Congress from the Nashville District, March 4 1817 to March 5, 1819, Mayor of Nashville, 1818. As noted previously, Claiborne represented Hiram Lodge No. 7, as well as Cumberland Lodge No. 8, at the formation of the Grand Lodge December 27, 1813, when he was elected Grand Master. He affiliated with Cumberland Lodge No. 8 at Nashville, June 18, 1818, and he was a charter member of Cumberland Chapter No. 1 Royal Arch Masons ("Most Worshipful Past Grand Masters").

Oliver Bliss Hayes (born, May 21, 1783—died November 19, 1858), was a lawyer and a Presbyterian minister ("Most Worshipful Past Grand Masters"). Many of the streets in Nashville are named after members of the Hayes family.

Benjamin S. Tappan (born, February 25, 1799 in Newburyport, Massachusetts—died March 1, 1866 and buried in City Cemetery, Vicksburg, Mississippi) was a merchant and businessman. He was also Past Grand High Priest of Tennessee, 1837-38, Past Grand Master of Mississippi, and Past Grand High Priest of Mississippi ("Most Worshipful Past Grand Masters").

Most recently, John Lawrence Palmer (born in Jackson, Tennessee) is an electrical engineer who earned his Master of Science Degree from Tennessee Technological University. He served ten years in Army Reserve, rising to rank of Captain. He served as Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge from 2005 to 2007 and currently serves as Editor of Knights Templar Magazine. He is the recipient of the DeMolay Legion of Honor and is a 33° Scottish Rite Mason ("Most Worshipful Past Grand Masters").

Today, Hiram Masonic Lodge No. 7 is listed on the National Register of Historic Places for its historical as well as its architectural significance. Located in the Franklin Historic District, Hiram was designated a National Historic Landmark on November 7, 1972. It is an active lodge with

approximately three hundred members on the rolls. The lodge is also home to Franklin Chapter No. 2, Royal Arch Masons; Franklin Council No. 134, Royal & Select Masters; DePayens Commandry No. 11, Knights Templar (chartered in 1871); and Franklin Chapter No. 449 Order of Eastern Star (chartered 1954). Many of Hiram's members participate actively in the Nashville Valley of the Scottish Rite, the Williamson County Shrine Club, and the Tennessee Lodge of Research. Hiram Lodge No. 7, located at 115 2nd Avenue South, holds its Stated Meetings on the third Monday of every month, with dinner at 6:00 PM and the meeting at 7:00 PM.

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