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The Birthplace of Alabama Freemasonry Helion Lodge #1 Huntsville, Alabama

Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society

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: The Birthplace of Alabama Freemasonry Helion Lodge #1 Huntsville,



Helion Lodge #1 on the corner of Lincoln and Williams

Huntsville Historical Review, Vol. 24 [], No. 1, Art. 4
THE BIRTHPLACE OF ALABAMA FREEMASONRY
HELION LODGE #1
HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA

Compiled by David Milam from earlier histories

Only six years after John Hunt built his cabin near the Big Spring in 1805, the Masons organized what became the first Masonic Lodge in Alabama. Madison Lodge, which later became Helion Lodge #1, was given a dispensation on August 2, 1811. At this time Madison County was still a part of the Mississippi Territory. According to the original minutes of this group,

“A petition from a number of brethren residing in the County of Madison, in the Mississippi Territory, praying for a warrant to constitute a Lodge in said County, was presented and read, accompanied by a recommendation from brother Ward, P.M. of Philanthropic Lodge No. 12.

Ordered, that a dispensation be issued for holding a Lodge as aforesaid to be called Madison Lodge, and that Brother Marmaduke Williams be the master, John C. Hamilton, Sr. Warden, and William Harrison, Jr. Warden.”

One year later, August 28, 1812, Madison Lodge received a second dispensation from the Grand Lodge of Kentucky.

“A return from Madison Lodge, held under dispensation, was presented Brother Louis Winston, together with the dispensation under which the said Lodge worked.

Whereupon,

Resolved, that the return be received, and a Charter issued for holding a Lodge at Huntsville, in Madison and known by the name of Madison Lodge No. 21. That Louis Winston be the first master, Thomas Fearn, Senior Warden, and John T. Winston, Junior Warden.”

Master masons on the rolls included:

Marmaduke Williams
Anthony Winston
William Leslie
John W. Walker
Dr. David Moore

John C. Hamilton
William Ingram
Stephen Neal
Joseph Acklen
William Houston

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William Wyatt
Francis Camper
John Reed
John Hunt

Daniel Leonard
John Brahan
William Simpson
John P. Hickman

The second Lodge to take part in the formation of Helion Lodge No. 1 was Alabama Lodge No. 21. On April 6, 1818, dispensation was issued to William Atwood and others, to open a Lodge at Huntsville, Alabama, to be named Alabama Lodge No. 21, by the Grand Lodge of Tennessee. On October 14, 1818, a Charter was granted to Alabama Lodge No. 21 by the Grand Lodge of Tennessee with William Atwood, Master, John P. Hickman, Senior Warden, and Edwin Hickman, Junior Warden.

On December 18, 1822, Alabama No. 21 changed its name to Bethesda No. 2. Then in December of 1824, Madison Lodge No. 1 and Bethesda Lodge No. 2 combined to form Helion Lodge No. 1. The first joint meeting of these two Lodges was held on January 7, 1825, at which time officers were installed. The minutes of the Alabama Grand Lodge Proceedings dated December 1824 stated:

“Brother Uphart presented the proceedings of a joint committee on the part of Madison Lodge No. 1, and Bethesda Lodge No. 2, by which it appeared that the said Lodges wished to be consolidated and become one Lodge - whereupon. on motion of the representative of Madison Lodge No. 1, in conjunction with the representative of Bethesda Lodge No. 2, and for considerations presented by the joint committee of said lodges, held on the first day of November last (November 1, 1824), it is ordered and allowed that those lodges be consolidated, retaining the precedence (sic) of the Madison Lodge No. 1, that the present members of the consolidated Lodge, by the name of Helion No. 1, organizing officers elect to wit: Isaac Williams, Worshipful Master, William Feeny, Senior Warden, and Samuel Coltart, Junior Warden to operate from and after the second Monday in January next (from January 1825), when or presently thereafter, the said officers and their subordinate officers are to be installed: the consolidated Lodge to retain the jewels and furniture of Madison Lodge No. 1 and Bethesda Lodge No. 2.”

Thus with the consolidation of these two Lodges, Madison No 1 and Bethesda No 2, the resultant Lodge, Helion No. 1 was engendered and still operates as such.

The minutes from Madison Lodge No. 1 state that on August 21, 1823, a committee was appointed to caucus with Bethesda Lodge No. 2 for the purpose of making arrangements with William Price of Nashville to obtain a suitable lot upon which to build the Masonic Hall. It is assumed, though not proven, that the property was selected and purchased by Brother Price.

The cornerstone of Eunomia Hall was laid on November 22, 1823, as supported by the minutes of Madison Lodge No. 1. Further evidence is given by the minutes from the proceedings of the Grand Lodge of the State of Alabama dated December, 1824, which read:

“The Right Worshipful Senior Grand Warden, Anderson Hutchinson, made the following report: That on November 22, 1823, he in behalf of the Grand Lodge, directed ceremonies of the laying of the foundation of Eunomia Hall in Huntsville; and on November 22, 1824, he in like manner, directed the ceremonies of its dedication—that is a spacious brick edifice; and, that the surplus of funds of Eunomia Chapter V and of Madison and Bethesda Lodges have been applied to its erection.”

While under construction, Madison Lodge No. 1, Bethesda Lodge No. 2, and Eunomia Chapter V may have rented a room in some other building in the community in which to meet until the new Lodge could be completed.

According to the minutes of Helion Lodge No. 1, dated July 14, 1825, the following report was given on the contributions to the building fund.

“The report of the building committee to preside over the building of Eunomia Hall was read and ordered spread on the minutes. (Here is listed the amounts paid by the individual brethren for the construction of the Lodge.) The total cost of construction – \$5889.12 1/2, The following amounts contributed to the building fund:

Eunomia Chapter	\$769.64
Late Madison Lodge	\$391.88
Late Bethesda Lodge	\$851.12 1/2
Helion Lodge No. 1	\$363.65

Total = \$2369.29 1/2

Still Due - \$481.65

Whole Amount Subscribed = \$3996.00”

In addition to the first building with its grounds, Helion Lodge No. 1 also acquired the adjoining lot property. This appears in the Lodge minutes as follows:

“Helion Lodge No. 1 December 12, 1848. Committee appointed to purchase adjoining Lot.

: The Birthplace of Alabama Freemasonry Helion Lodge #1 Huntsville, Helion Lodge No. 1 December __, 1848. Committee purchased lot from estate of William H. Pope, deceased, for \$305.00, payable in 1 and 2 years by Helion Lodge 1, Eunomia Chapter, and Eureka Council.”

Thus was completed the acquisition and construction of the first Lodge building for Helion Lodge No. 1, which was named “Eunomia Hall.” The furnishings of the Lodge were a combination of furnishings of the old Madison Lodge No. 1 and old Bethesda No. 2. To these furnishings were added the furnishings of Triana Lodge No. 29 (Triana Lodge No. 92 per old Lodge minutes prior to 1841), which were presented to Helion No. 1 in 1841.

The first edifice was used as a regular meeting place of the brethren of Helion Lodge No. 1 and the other associated Masonic Bodies. In addition, the first floor was periodically used to serve other non-Masonic groups. Reported from the minutes, a room was rented in Eunomia Hall by Mrs. Jane H. Childs for a school room in 1848-1853 (page 110 of the 1848 minutes). The Baptist Society also rented a room in Eunomia Hall in which to hold their meetings. The Jewish community used the building as well, as evidence is found in an announcement on page one of the June 16, 1897, (Huntsville) *Weekly Democrat*:

“The Masonic Temple, the lower floor of which is used as a Jewish Synagogue, is a victim of stone-throwing boys--sons of gentlemen--who have mutilated the building in a disgraceful manner, by throwing stones at it. The window-panes and blinds have been broken, and in some parts irreparably injured. These boys have been spotted as sons of gentlemen, and unless the gentlemen curb the stone-throwing propensity of their progeny and instil (sic) principles of *meum* and *tuum* with a paddle, they will have a fine to pay.”

The old Lodge building survived all the various trials and tribulations of the time, including the War Between the States, and continued to be a regular meeting hall until 1915, at which time, due to its increasingly dilapidated condition, it was decided by the membership of Helion No. 1 to begin investigating the possibility of construction of a new lodge building and during which year fund raising projects were commenced to raise the necessary capital in order to construct the new building.

During the ensuing year, many attempts were made by several committees to devise plans for the construction of a new building or to obtain an existing structure. One consideration was to attempt to purchase the VanValkenburgh home at 501 Franklin Street, which at that time may have been purchased for a figure between \$20,000 and \$30,000. However, this plan was abandoned.

On July 28, 1916, a special communication was called at Helion Lodge, and Brother J. L. Kendall, recent chairman of the new building committee, discussed the new committee's investigations. At that time, the plans called for an addition to the existing lodge building which would cost approximately \$11,000. After construction of the new building addition, it was also shown by Brother Kendall that the old Lodge building could be torn down at a later date, and the new Lodge could be completed for \$7,000 to \$8,000. Brother Kendall showed the members a water color sketch (which is retained in the original lodge minutes, dated July 28, 1916), and after discussion among the members present, the plan was unanimously approved.

On April 6, 1917, the building committee reported that the total cost of the new building would be \$15,000. The plans were drawn by architect Brother Edgar L. Love, who also designed the Carnegie Library, the Central YMCA, and several other local structures.

On May 2, 1917, the Lodge minutes report that the building was being erected, and on June 5, 1917, it was recorded in the minutes that the cornerstone was to be laid on June 5, 1917, by Brother Walter Smith, Alabama Grand Master. On November 6, 1917, the new building was completed, and the lodge furniture was moved into the new building. On November 20, 1917, the first meeting was held in the new building. Because of its attachment to the old building and the uninterrupted existence of the north wall, the building has retained the name, "Eunomia Hall," even after the old building fell in and was razed. The basic construction of the new building includes glazed brick tile walls, with the exception of the brick north wall in the entry foyer. The aforementioned wall, the oldest Masonic edifice in Alabama, contains a time capsule deposited by the Grand Lodge of the State of Alabama on June 14, 1970, which is to be opened in the year 2020.

On March 15, 1920, a column in the *Huntsville Telegram* reported that a wall of the old temple had fallen during a wind storm. Shortly thereafter, the old building was razed and the north wall was sealed. The only remaining furniture in the original building at the time was a piano and an old organ. It was reported that the piano was saved unharmed but the organ was damaged beyond repair.

The internal structure of the building is made of rough hewn oak which has been bolted together. The main lodge room has an oval ceiling, the supports of which are hand-hewn, and are approximately 10 inches wide by 8 inches thick and have been bolted together. All internal walls and ceilings are plastered with the original plaster and paint on the walls retaining the original color scheme.

Upon entering the front door of the Lodge a wide stairway leads to a stair-level foyer where there are several cases of artifacts and memorabilia. On the landing

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A copy of Gilbert Stuart's portrait of George Washington, known as the "Landsdowne Washington" rendered by William I. Halsey



Exhibits depicting the history of the Lodge

at the head of the stairs is a large painting of Brother George Washington which was purchased from William I. Halsey, Senior Warden, for the sum of \$106.00. On this level, another stairway on the left leads upward to a third level balcony which used to be the upper doorway into the original lodge building and has since been sealed.

A right turn on this level leads around the stairs and back to the left into the Tiler's room. The two small rooms on the left and right of the Tiler's area are bordered by the inner and outer doors of the main lodge room.

Entrance into the main lodge room reveals a room which is approximately 36 feet wide by 54 feet long. The oval ceiling at its highest point is approximately 21 feet above the floor. Elaborate plater moldings adorn the room around its borders, columns, and pilasters. Massive white columns adorn the Master's station, the Senior Warden's station, and the Junior Warden's station. The capitals of the columns of the respective stations are formed into different Masonic shapes.

A baby grand piano occupies the northeast corner of the Lodge room, and the Secretary's desk occupies the southeast corner. The furniture of the Master's station, Senior Warden's station, Junior Warden's station, and the chairs for the Chaplain, Senior Deacon, Junior Deacon, Stewards, and Treasurer are not the original pieces. They were replaced sometime between 1900 and the present. It is believed that the original members' seats were church pews (which are presently in the dining hall of the lower level of the Lodge around the perimeter of the room).

Stairs lead to a small room on the third floor of the building, which to date has been used only for storage and exhibits no special architecture, decorations, or known significance. The lower level of the Lodge has been refurbished into a dining room, and a Secretary's office has been added to the rear of the building.

Although Helion Lodge #1 is still the largest of these fraternal organizations, there are five other masonic organizations in Huntsville which have been established as the city grew from a small county seat to a large metropolitan area.

APPENDIX

Past Masters of Helion Lodge No. 1

1811	Marmaduke Williams	1858	Wm. Gormley
1812	Louis Winston	1859	Wm. Gormley
1813	David Moore	1860	Wm. Gormley
1818	Wm. Atwood	1861	Wm. Gormley
1821	E.G. Kyle	1862	Wm. Gormley
1821	Alexander Erskine	1863	J.E. Young
1822	Thomas Wollidridge	1864	J.E. Young
1823	W.A. Hutchinson	1865	E.B. Clapp
1824	W. John Grimes	1866	J.J. Dement
1824	Isaac Williams	1867	J.J. Dement
	* Alabama No. 21	1868	J.J. Dement
1825	Wm. Feeny	1869	S.J. Mayhew
1826	Wm. Feeny	1870	S.J. Mayhew
1827	John J. Fackler	1871	M.C. Baldridge
1828	John J. Fackler	1872	M.C. Baldridge
1829	Wm. Feeny	1873	W.S. Reddick
1830	John Acklen	1874	B.F. Ludwig
1831	W.A. Hutchinson	1875	B.F. Ludwig
1832	W.A. Hutchinson	1876	M.C. Baldridge
1833	W.A. Hutchinson	1877	M.C. Baldridge
1837	James Penn	1878	John L. Rison
1838	James Penn	1879	John L. Rison
1839	James Penn	1880	John L. Rison
1840	James Penn	1881	M.C. Baldridge
1841	James Penn	1882	M.C. Baldridge
1842	James Penn	1883	M.C. Baldridge
1843	Ellison Smith	1884	M.C. Baldridge
1844	James Penn, MWGM	1885	M.C. Baldridge
1845	James Penn, MWGM	1886	M.C. Baldridge
1846	J.M. Davidson	1887	H.C. Weaver
1847	J.M. Davidson	1888	M.C. Baldridge
1848	Arch E. Mills	1889	M.C. Baldridge
1849	J.M. Davidson	1890	M.C. Baldridge
1850	Fred Gate	1891	M.C. Baldridge
1851	J.J. Sample	1892	Amos B. Jones
1852	J.J. Sample	1893	Amos B. Jones
1853	J.F. Steele	1894	Thomas Taylor
1854	Wm. Gormley	1895	Joseph Skinner
1855	Wm. Gormley	1896	Alfred Moore
1856	Wm. Gormley	1897	W.C. Wheeler
1857	Wm. Gormley	1899	W.C. Wheeler

1900	L.R. Wellman	1944	Abe Pizitz
1901	H.C. Pollard	1945	Clyde Martz
1902	H.C. Pollard	1946	Jas. A. Williams
1903	A.F. Evans	1947	John W. Walker
1904	H.C. Pollard	1948	Wm. B. Allen
1905	F.P. Culver	1949	John H. McGaha
1906	Leroy Suggs	1950	L.L. Baucom
1907	Leroy Suggs	1951	Wm. B. Jones
1908	R.C. Brickell	1952	E.H. Hall
1909	J.H. Ballentine	1953	Wm. H. Ealy
1910	J.H. Ballentine	1954	Lum Duke
1911	H.C. Pollard	1955	D. Shelby Vaughn
1912	J.W. Battle	1956	Doyle W. Ealy
1913	J.L. Kendall	1957	Wm. A. Cobb
1914	J.L. Kendall	1958	Dan L. Warden
1915	J.L. Kendall	1959	J.D. Harris
1916	A.F. Kendall	1960	W.L. Guthrie
1917	G.H. Heymann	1961	J.C. Beeler
1918	H.C. Pollard	1962	Wendell McKinney
1919	A.M. Dunn	1963	Carl Pickens
1920	J.B. McCord	1964	Randolph Rush
1921	W.R. Laxson	1965	Robert F. Jean
1922	S.C. Alexander	1966	James W. Bass
1923	S.C. Alexander	1967	James G. Williams
1924	Frank H. Ford	1968	William W. Byrd
1925	Sam S. Rice	1969	C.D. Rozell
1926	C.O. Rolfe	1970	Chas. Keathley
1927	Robert C. Chase	1971	E.J. Ferguson
1928	F.J. Schick	1972	Marlin Hinkle
1929	Jas. D. Rice, Jr.	1973	Hubert Lemaster
1930	John S. McLure	1974	Hollis L. Sharp
1931	John S. McLure	1975	R.M. Slaughter
1932	Wm. B. Allen	1976	Robert J. Cannon
1933	Wm. B. Allen	1977	Fred Beddingfield
1934	P.S. McCormick	1978	Clarence W. Landrum
1935	Joe B. Hill	1979	Robt. Kachelhofer
1936	Cowan Y. Wilson	1980	Ronald W. Thomas
1937	T. Pickens Gates	1981	B.J. Nelson
1938	F. Floyd Broyles	1982	Alvie Berry
1939	John S. McLure	1983	David Allen
1940	Henry R. Martin	1984	Lee D. Parker
1941	Henry R. Martin	1985	Johnie Wilbanks
1942	Clyde Martz	1986	James Garry Smith
1943	Clyde Martz	1987	James Wesley Reach

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1988	Wayne Dee Jordam	1992	Charles Raymond
1989	Clarence M. Albright		Kirch
1990	Donald Douglas Beal	1993	Shelby Aston
1991	David K. Hall	1994	John Herron
		1995	Danny Lamont