

***Historical
Sketch
of
Freemasonry
in
Alabama***



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As printed in the Masonic Manual of Alabama 1952

Introductory

Several times spasmodic efforts have been made by the Grand Lodge to secure the preparation of an adequate history of Freemasonry in Alabama. It was seriously broached in 1858 and Sterling A. M. Wood, Past Grand Master, was designated to do the work. He was entirely competent but his health and the Civil War, which soon came on, put an end to the effort. In 1866, Daniel Sayre, then Grand Secretary, compiled the "Historical Synopsis" which has since appeared in our Codes and which is an excellent piece of work of its kind. It, however, comes down only to and including the year 1836. The undertaking was renewed in 1866 and Samuel H. Dixon was assigned to the task. He made some, but not important progress before death put an end to his labors on July 10, 1869.

In the American Edition of Robert F. Gould's HISTORY OF FREEMASONRY THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, (Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, 1936), in six volumes, there appears in Vol. V, page 1, a sketch of Freemasonry in Alabama by the present writer, but it also is not what the Craft of this State should have.

At a celebration of its 100th Anniversary, held by the Grand Lodge on December 6, 1921, and found at page 159 of the Proceedings of that year, is a historical address also by this writer entitled "Freemasonry in Alabama One Hundred Years Ago." This deals almost exclusively with the condition of Freemasonry when Grand Lodge was organized. The foregoing with the Annual Proceedings of Grand Lodge and a few fugitive local sketches about exhaust the printed sources for the history of Freemasonry in Alabama.

The following sketch is appropriate only to accompany our Manual and can by no means be regarded as meeting the requirements of an adequate history of the Craft in our State. The task still remains for some competent brother with the time and means at his command necessary to such an undertaking.

The history of Freemasonry in Alabama may be conveniently

divided into the following periods:

I. Pre-Grand Lodge, 1811-1821

II. From the organization of Grand Lodge on June 11, 1821 till its collapse and reorganization, 1821-1836.

III. From the reorganization December 7, 1836 till the breaking out of the Civil War, 1836-1861.

IV. Civil War and Reconstruction, 1861 to 1874.

V. From 1874 to date.

In a sketch like the present, it is not practicable or desirable to attempt to deal with these periods *seriatim* or altogether separately, but it will be an aid to both the reader and the author to fix these several periods quite clearly in mind.

I.

1811 to 1821

Pre-Grand Lodge Era. Organized Freemasonry had its beginning in Alabama in 1811. At that date there were only two white settlements in what is now our State, Mobile and its vicinity in the extreme southwest corner and Huntsville and its vicinity on the extreme northern border. Between the two lay an almost unbroken wilderness of about 250 miles, occupied by the Cherokees, the Chickasaws, the Creeks and the Choctaws. While the settlement of Mobile began in 1702 under the French, it was in 1811 held by the Spanish. Not until April 15, 1813, did it become a part of the territorial possessions of the United States. The first white settlement at Huntsville or vicinity, (then a part of Mississippi Territory), was made in 1805. The first settler there was John Hunt from whom that city gets its name. Six years thereafter, namely, on September 6,

1811, the first Masonic lodge in the State was formed in the new town of Huntsville, (then called Twickenham), by the institution of Madison Lodge No. 21, under dispensation issued by the Grand Master of Kentucky, on August 29, 1811. This dispensation designated Marmaduke Williams to be Worshipful Master; John C. Hamilton, Senior Warden, and William Harrison, Junior Warden.

We know that other Masons in and around Huntsville at that date were Louis Winston, Anthony Winston, William Ingram, William Leslie, Stephen Neal, Joseph Acklin, William Wyatt, Daniel Leonard, John Braham, Francis Camper, William Simpson, John Hunt and Peter Perkins.

In the year 1811-12, the following other Masons were made in Madison Lodge, No. 21: Jesse Searcy, Benjamin Cash, David Love, John Williams Walker, David Moore, John Read, John P. Hickman, Thomas Fearn, Clement C. Clay, Reuben A. Higginbotham, Waddy Tate, William H. Winston, Alexander Gilbreath and John F. Moore. In this list are the names of many of the prominent people in that community at that day. So that in 1812, Madison Lodge, No. 21, reported 31 members, including three Fellow Crafts and two Entered Apprentices. During the long period, (1702-1813) of French and Spanish occupancy, we hear not a word of Freemasonry in Mobile or vicinity. Not until September 4, 1813, does Masonry give evidence of its existence there, when Friendship Lodge was chartered by the Grand Lodge of Louisiana with James Lyon as Worshipful Master; S. H. Garrow as Senior Warden and Charles Stewart as Junior Warden. But the soil apparently was not fertile and the laborers were probably few and unskilled, as its charter was declared forfeited on July 1, 1820.

The lodge established at Huntsville in 1811, however, still exists as Helion No. 1, and to Huntsville, therefore, must be accorded the honor of being the birth place of Freemasonry in Alabama.

Prior to the erection of Grand Lodge thirteen other lodges were formed in the State. We perhaps cannot do better than reproduce here in substance, Brother Sayre's account of their formation.

Friendship Lodge No. 65, at St. Stephens, was chartered by the

Grand Lodge of North Carolina. The charter was forfeited in 1816.

Alabama Lodge No. 21, at Huntsville. Dispensation issued by the Grand Master of Tennessee, April 6, 1818, to William Atwood and others. Charter granted October 14, 1818. Delegates were sent to organize the Grand Lodge, June 11, 1821.

Washington Lodge No. 23, at Hazel Green. Dispensation issued by the Grand Master of Tennessee, July 6, 1818, to Daniel S. Leonard as Worshipful Master; Samuel Noble, Senior Warden and Sutton F. Allen, Junior Warden. Charter was granted October 6, 1818. This Lodge declined to unite with the Grand Lodge of Alabama and continued under the jurisdiction of Tennessee until 1829, when it surrendered its charter.

Eureka Lodge No. 16, at Blakely. Chartered by the Grand Lodge of Louisiana, March 27, 1819, with William Coolidge as Worshipful Master; Sylvester Bell, Senior Warden, and E. G. Sheffield, Junior Warden. It was organized June 5, 1819, and forfeited previous to June 1821.

Alabama Lodge No. 51, at Claiborne. Chartered by the Grand Lodge of South Carolina, June 25, 1819, with John Murphy as Worshipful Master. Delegates were sent to organize the Grand Lodge June 11, 1821.

Rising Virtue Lodge No. 30, at Tuscaloosa. Dispensation issued by the Grand Master of Tennessee, August 2, 1819, and charter granted, October 5, 1819. Delegates were sent to organize the Grand Lodge June 11, 1821.

Halo Lodge No. 21, at Cahaba. Dispensation issued by the Grand Master of Georgia, February 21, 1820, to John Taylor, Worshipful Master; Thomas Wood, Senior Warden and John Brown, Junior Warden. Charter granted January 24, 1821. Delegates were sent to organize the Grand Lodge June 11, 1821.

Moulton Lodge No. 34, at Moulton. Dispensation issued by the Grand Master of Tennessee, May 2, 1820, to George A. Glover and others. Charter was granted October 4, 1820, and George A. Glover was installed Worshipful Master. Delegates were sent to organize the

Grand Lodge June 11, 1821.

Franklin Lodge No. 36, at Russellville. Dispensation issued by the Grand Master of Tennessee, October 3, 1820, to Richard Ellis and others. John S. Fulton signed the Constitution as representative of this Lodge under the name of Russellville Lodge No. 36, and the Lodge was chartered as No. 7.

Tuscumbia Lodge No. 40, at Courtland. Dispensation was issued by the Grand Master of Tennessee, March 3, 1821, and charter granted December 18, 1821. Surrendered charter in 1824 and united with Grand Lodge of Alabama.

Farrar Lodge No. 41, at Elyton. Dispensation issued by the Grand Master of Tennessee, March 6, 1821, to Thomas W. Farrar, and others. Delegates were sent to organize the Grand Lodge June 11, 1821.

St. Stephens Lodge No. ____, at St. Stephens. Dispensation issued by the Grand Master of North Carolina, April 12, 1821, with Silas Dinsmore as Worshipful Master; Israel Pickens, Senior Warden and Samuel St. John, Junior Warden. Delegates were sent to organize the Grand Lodge June 11, 1821.

Marion Lodge No. ____, at Suggsville. Dispensation issued by the Grand Master of Georgia, May 28, 1821. This Lodge united with the Grand Lodge of Alabama and received charter December 18, 1821, as No.12.

Two of these as we see, promptly folded up: Friendship No. 65 and Eureka No. 16, but the other twelve were still alive when on June 11, 1821, a convention assembled in the hall of Halo Lodge No. 21, at Cahaba, the then State capital, to consider the formation of a Grand Lodge. Three of the twelve did not attend this convention: Washington No. 23, Tuscumbia No. 40 and Marion No. ____. Tuscumbia and Marion subsequently adhered, but Washington never did and it surrendered its charter in 1829.

Nine of the existing lodges participated, surrendered their old charters and accepted charters under the new grand lodge as follows:

No. 1. Madison, at Huntsville. It still exists as Helion No. 1.

No. 2. Alabama, at Huntsville. Consolidated with No. 1 and is now Helion No.1.

No. 3. Alabama, at Perdue Hill. Consolidated with Monroeville No. 153 in 1917, moved to Monroeville and is still in existence.

No. 4. Rising Virtue, at Tuscaloosa. Still in existence.

No. 5. Halo, at Cahaba. Became defunct in 1872.

No. 6. Moulton, at Moulton. Still in existence.

No. 7. Russellville, at Russellville. Surrendered in 1824.

No. 8. Farrar, at Elyton (now Birmingham). Changed name to McCarty-Farrar in 1997.

No. 9. St. Stephens, at St. Stephens. Forfeited 1834.

Thus we see of the nine participating lodges six are still active, not a bad showing after the lapse and vicissitudes of 178 years. Pathetic, however, is the fact that two of these lodges now defunct were located at two former capital cities of our State, St. Stephens and Cahaba.

The names of the following brethren appear in the proceedings of the convention:

From Madison No. 21 and Alabama No. 21, at Huntsville, were Gabriel Moore, Dr. David Moore, Clement C. Clay, John M. Leake and Frederick Weeden.

From Alabama No. 51, at Claiborne, were George W. Owen, John Murphy and James H. Draughon.

From Rising Virtue No. 30, at Tuscaloosa, were Constantine Perkins, Thomas Owen and Dugald McFarland.

From Halo No. 21, at Cahaba, were William B. Allen, John H. Thorington, Rev. David McCord, Thomas O. Meux, Horatio G. Perry, Luther Blake, John Cox, Thomas Amis Rogers and Robert B. Watson.

From Moulton No. 34, at Moulton, were Anderson Hutchinson and Lewis B. Tully.

From Russellville, (or Franklin), No. 36, at Russellville, was John

S. Fulton.

From Farrar No. 41, at Elyton, were Thomas W. Farrar, John Brown and Bartholomew Labuzan.

From St. Stephens No. ____, at St. Stephens, were Israel Pickens and Benjamin S. Smoot.

From Mobile, Lodge not stated, were Rev. John B. Warren and John Elliott.

There were also present, whence not stated, Seth W. Ligon, George Kreps and a "Brother Davis."

Only a casual acquaintance with the history of our State of that day is necessary to demonstrate the high character of the men who formed our grand lodge. Several subsequent governors, United States senators and congressmen were found among this small group of 33 men.

The convention organized by electing Thomas W. Farrar, chairman and J. H. Draughon, secretary. A constitution was adopted, which may be consulted in the reprint of its Proceedings, and the following officers were chosen: Thomas W. Farrar, Grand Master; Horatio G. Perry, 1st Deputy Grand Master; Frederick Weeden, 2nd Deputy Grand Master; John Elliott, 3rd Deputy Grand Master; John Murphy, Senior Grand Warden; Thomas Owen, Junior Grand Warden and Thomas A. Rogers, Grand Secretary. To economize space we will not in this sketch set out the names of grand officers chosen from year to year as these may be found in our Annual Proceedings.

It is of interest to note that the convention which formed grand lodge was in session five days while we can now barely spare two days to our annual communications. The first and second Annuals were in session nine days each. When we further bear in mind that it required of many of the brethren at least four days each way to make the trip to and from grand lodge, it gives us some conception of the devotion of our old brethren. This appreciation is heightened if we will recall other difficulties under which they labored.

The northeastern portion of Alabama, embracing the counties of

Marshall, Blount, St. Clair, Calhoun, Cherokee, Etowah and DeKalb was in the Cherokee nation and was destined so to remain for fourteen years longer. Settlement had only begun in all eastern, western and middle portions of the State. In fact the year 1816 may be said in a general sense really to mark the beginning of serious settlement of all that portion south of Tennessee River and north of the Junction of the Alabama and Tombigbee Rivers. The first settlement at Tuscaloosa was made in 1815, and very few places in Alabama can show white settlement prior to that date. Settlement at Montgomery began about 1816, and in Dallas County, in which Cahaba was located it began about the same date. In 1820, Dallas County boasted only 3,324 white residents and 2679 negroes. Cahaba itself had been formed less than three years prior to the formation of Grand Lodge. What settlements existed in 1821 were few in number and remote from each other. In short the whole State was practically a wilderness, though the processes of civilization had set in with vigor. Perhaps no region ever boasted a more sturdy and intelligent class of "new comers" or "movers," as they were called, yet the present generation can scarcely visualize the comfortless conditions under which our forefathers lived and laid the foundations for our Grand Lodge.

The home was a cabin, often with a dirt floor; the farm a "new ground" of a few acres, hard to cultivate and not overly productive. The conveniences of the household were scanty indeed; no such thing as a cook stove or a sewing machine. Light was afforded by a log-fire or at best by a home-made tallow candle or tallow-dip. The use of kerosene for lighting purposes had never been dreamed of; this use dates back only to 1853. The spinning wheel and the loom in the hands of the housewife, the neighborhood hatter and shoemaker were the "clothiers to the family" of that day.

If the inconveniences at home were great, they were even greater if one tried to get away from home. There were few towns and to reach them often called for long journeys. No such thing as a railroad existed and the steamboat was a new invention. There were very few roads and they of the worst. The fashionable mode of travel was the stage coach or carriage, but the ones most common were those by wagon or on horseback. A journey from the north to the south end of

our State was then as formidable an undertaking as would now be a trip to Europe. It was under conditions like these that Freemasonry was taking root in Alabama in 1821.

II.

1821 to 1836

Thomas Amis Rogers. We shall not convert this sketch into a booklet of obituaries, but feel it worthy of note here that, as its very first act on the first day of its Annual Communication December 11, 1821, Grand Lodge was called upon to conduct a funeral service for its Grand Secretary, Thomas Amis Rogers, who had died on November 22nd. He was the first of the official roster of Grand Lodge to be called by death; the list is now a long one. Brother Rogers was a remarkable man, dying at the early age of twenty-nine, he had been admitted to the bar; had represented Shelby county in the first constitutional convention; was secretary of the Senate in 1819; and Secretary of State, 1819 till his death. He erected the first court house for Shelby county, a very humble affair, if we may judge from the amount paid him, fifty some odd dollars.

Charter of Grand Lodge. Promptly after its formation, Grand Lodge was legally incorporated by the Legislature in 1821; a new charter was enacted in 1849 and still another in 1859 and this in turn was amended in 1875. These Acts now constitute the Charter of Grand Lodge. The Supreme Court of Alabama decided in 1938, that this charter is a contract and that it is beyond the constitutional power of the Legislature to impose taxes on the property of Grand Lodge or its subordinate Lodges which is employed by it in its charity activities.

Grand Lodge had a promising beginning. It had nine lodges in 1821; six months later, that is, on December 11, at its Annual

Communication, it was able to boast fourteen lodges; a year later they numbered seventeen; by 1828, there were twenty-eight, an increase in lodges in eleven years of 250 per cent. It may be reasonably presumed that the membership increased in like proportion. There are available no statistics of membership till 1827, at which Annual there were reported 454. Five lodges made no report. Making allowances for these five lodges, it may be reasonably calculated that the total membership was about 650. Compared with modern figures, these seem small and they are small, but our State was then small in numbers and less than ten years old. Our brethren had good reason to look with confidence to the future. But before proceeding with the narrative let us note a few of the interesting if not curious actions of our early brethren.

Page the Labor Unions. Questions of eight, six or five-hour days did not trouble our brethren of that day. Those who founded Grand Lodge began their labors at seven o'clock in the morning; "adjourned" to reconvene at "early candle light," reminding us of the announcements we used to hear, when a boy, of the hour for preaching in the country. They continued till well in the night and "adjourned" again till "seven o'clock tomorrow morning."

"Lights". One item of expense allowed the grand tiler was \$5.17½ for candles. This reminds us that in this same year the first attempt in the United States to light with gas was made in Baltimore, but without success. Kerosene as already stated was not utilized for this purpose till 1853 and electricity of course came very much later. This helps us also to understand why our ritual refers to "burning tapers" and not to lamps or electric lights.

"Major General". For some unexplained reason Grand Master Farrar was not present at this Annual and the First Deputy Grand Master, Horatio G. Perry, presided. A curious but fitting resolution was adopted that the words "Major General" used in the Lodge charters and dispensations "preceding the name of the W. G. Master be stricken out, and that they be not used in any transaction of the Grand Lodge." It seems that the Grand Master was a major-general of militia and in an excess of pride he had prefaced his signatures as

Grand Master with his military title. This action of Grand Lodge is in keeping, of course, with true Masonic traditions. One wonders if Grand Master Farrar had gotten wind of this contemplated action and had remained away from this Communication to save himself embarrassment. He was present and presided at the Annual of 1822.

Visitors. Another resolution not quite so truly Masonic, as we think, adopted in 1821 was that “no brother, other than a member (of Grand Lodge) be admitted into the Grand Lodge” with the proviso that “a brother of eminence and of rank of Master, having business or whose attendance is necessary in a point of evidence or intelligence may be admitted upon motion or leave asked and given.” Of course, this illiberal rule did not long prevail.

Nominations. At the first Annual it was resolved that it was “unmasonic to put candidates in nomination for any office in Masonry,” a rule which has ever since prevailed in Alabama, but one whose spirit is sometimes violated by an aspiring brother staging a campaign for election, to the discredit of both himself and the Craft. Some Grand Lodges have a carefully regulated system of nominations for grand lodge offices.

E. A. Lodges. It is undoubtedly true that anciently the E. A. Lodge was the governing body of the Craft and that all business was transacted in that lodge. The practice is not yet uniform throughout the world, but our Grand Lodge in its first Annual went on record that “No Fellow Craft or Entered Apprentice has a right to vote in a Lodge or are entitled to ballot for candidates in their degrees.” This is still our law. Evidences are numerous that in ancient operative Masonry the great majority of Masons were entered apprentices and they were able to hold their power. But, when Masonry became Speculative and Entered Apprentices were few, they naturally lost control. Besides our rule is better adapted to changed conditions.

General Grand Lodge. In its early history, the Grand Lodge of Alabama betrayed a decided leaning in favor of the formation of a General Grand Lodge for the entire United States. In 1822, a resolution was adopted by Grand Lodge approving the proposal and William Kelly, United States Senator from Alabama, was designated

as its delegate to a convention called to consider the question. The movement, however, fell through, but, like the cat of many lives, it continued to come back. Several times the proposal has been renewed from different quarters. Once or twice since Grand Lodge has given its approval, but later its attitude changed and now for many, many years it has consistently declared itself opposed to all such movements. A similar drift has manifested itself in nearly all the Grand Lodges in the United States, so that the possibility of a General Grand Lodge appears more remote today than ever before.

P. M. Degree. At the 1822 Annual Communication the grand officers were installed in a Past Master's Lodge. The minutes say, "the members present who were not Past Masters having retired, a Past Master's lodge was opened. The Grand Officers were then installed in due and ample form." In the early part of the last century, a determined effort was made in both England and America to engraft the Past Master's degree on Blue Masonry. It failed in Alabama as at the 1823 Annual the above practice was abandoned and expressly forbidden at the 1824 Annual. Several years ago Brother Henry Sadler, of England, proved that the practice was an innovation.

Marquis De Lafayette. At the December 1824 Annual the following resolution was unanimously adopted:

"Resolved that in the event of our illustrious friend and brother, Lafayette, visiting the State of Alabama, this lodge be convened at the call of the most Worshipful Grand Master, at such place as in his discretion seems most advisable, to give him a suitable reception." No mention is made of this matter in the 1825 Proceedings, from which we conclude that this program was not carried out, doubtless due to the uncertainty of the time of Lafayette's arrival owing to the travel conditions of those times and to the brevity of his visit. It should be remembered that there were then no railroads or telegraphs and that Lafayette approached from Georgia where no steam-boats were available. Reliable information could not be sent ahead and Grand Lodge could not be assembled on short notice. As is well known, Lafayette was a member of the Lodge of Nine Sisters in Paris, France.

William Morgan Episode. From 1821 to 1827, Masonry, as we

have seen, progressed in the State; its numbers and its zeal showed gratifying increase. But it was in the year 1826 that there occurred the unfortunate and much exaggerated William Morgan incident at Batavia, N. Y. It was charged that this unsavory person was spirited away and murdered by Masons because he threatened to reveal the secrets of Freemasonry. The facts were never ascertained. At once a group of discredited politicians, (some who had previously enjoyed and some who afterward attained prominence), seized on the circumstance and for ten years used it to the great damage of the Fraternity and discredit of themselves. By the 1828 Annual the effects were being felt in Alabama, nearly one-third of the lodges making no returns and membership showing a decline. By December 1834, the time for its Annual meeting, Grand Lodge had gone so completely to sleep that no communication was held. None was held in 1835.

It is difficult now to conceive the bitterness and rancor which accompanied this political onslaught on Freemasonry under the leadership of shrewd but shameless demagogues. Thurlow Weed of unhappy memory was its leader. It drew within its circle such men as William H. Seward and Millard Fillmore.* An "Anti-Masonic party" was organized and it even put a candidate in the field for president in 1832 and carried Vermont. Incredible stories were told. The excitement disrupted political parties, entire communities, churches and families. Timid Freemasons deserted by the thousands. It was like a prairie fire, it sprang up quickly, burned furiously and quickly died away. Thurlow Weed, in his autobiography brazenly admits that by 1833 "opposition to Masonry had lost its hold on the public mind" and that "its leading object, namely, to awaken and perpetuate a public sentiment against secret societies had signally failed." That was very true where the thing began but its reverberations lingered for several years in remote places after the conflagration had died at its source. It was dead in New York (1833) before its worst effects were felt in Alabama in 1834-36. At the appointed time for Grand Lodge to

* It is interesting to note that twenty years later Millard Fillmore as president of the United States, assisted by the Grand Master and Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia, laid the corner-stone of the extension of the National Capitol.

meet in 1836, the Grand Master, the Grand Secretary and the representatives of only 6 out of 35 Lodges that had been constituted met. These brethren waited three days and none other appearing, "it was the opinion of the brethren that, owing to the lapsed state of Masonry, the subordinate Lodges to this Grand Lodge had suffered said Grand Lodge to become extinct." As a contributing cause to this complete collapse of Masonry, there must not be overlooked the great financial depression that swept the country between 1836 and 1840. It was, thereupon, on December 7, 1836 resolved, "that this convention do now form a Grand Lodge of the State of Alabama." A new constitution and "laws and regulations" were adopted. It was further resolved "that Lodges which have been working under charters from the Grand Lodge of the State and which stand now forfeited and not surrendered, upon proper application to the Grand Master or Deputy Grand Master, and for good reasons shown might be reinstated." All lodges working under their dispensation were declared "legal and have full power and authority to work and perform all things under their dispensation until the next annual communication." The regularity of this reorganization was never challenged and the work of this body of Masons has always been regarded as only a revivifying of the Grand Lodge of Alabama and not as the creating of a new Grand Lodge. John C. Hicks was elected Grand Master and J. H. Vincent as Grand Secretary. This faithful grand Secretary was the father of the subsequently noted John Heyl Vincent, bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church. And thus Masonry in our State was again set on a long period of progress, harmony and prosperity from which it has never completely lapsed down to this date, however much it may have vacillated in times of stress.

Committee on Correspondence. There are three great committees of Grand Lodge: Correspondence, Work and Masonic Jurisprudence. Grand Lodges throughout the world keep in touch with each other and thus in a measure avoid isolation through Correspondence Committees. It is the duty of such a committee to review the printed proceedings of the several Grand Lodges of the world, to gather Masonic news and information from all available

sources and to make report thereof to its Grand Lodge. This results in more or less uniformity of views and procedure among Masons throughout the world. Such grand bodies as do not have such committees accomplish the same result through some grand official. The Grand Lodge of Alabama has had such a committee since 1826, but it apparently found nothing deemed worthy of report till December 1828. Till 1840 domestic as well as foreign communications received its attention. Until 1841, the Committee was appointed at the same communication at which it was expected to report, which of course rendered impossible anything like the reports we are now accustomed to. This practice was changed in 1841 and since then the Committee has been appointed at one communication and reports at the next. In 1844, for the first time the report took the form of a review of jurisdictions, a form it has since retained with few exceptions. The 1844 report while covering 20 states filled only two pages. It was prepared by Leroy Pope Walker, subsequently Secretary of War of the Confederacy.

This committee of our Grand Lodge has usually but not always consisted of a single member and the Chairman has usually but not always discharged the duties of “reporter.”

The following have served as chairman of this Committee: December 1825, Henry Goldthwaite, Montgomery; December 1826, James W. McClung, Huntsville; December 1827, Thomas W. Wooldridge, Tuscumbia; December 1828, Walker K. Baylor, Elyton; December 1829, William I. Mason, Athens; December 1830, William W. Payne, Tuscumbia; December 1831, James G. Aikin, Tuscaloosa; January 1833 and '34, James B. Tart, La Grange; December 1835, no communication because of low state of Masonry due in part to the financial depression and in part to the Morgan Excitement; December 1836, G. W. Esselman, Hayneville; December 1839, R. H. Dalton, Livingston; December 1840, William Little, Jamestown; December 1841, Nathan W. Fletcher, Marion; December 1842, Robert T. Clyde, Tuscaloosa; December 1843, James Penn, Huntsville; December 1844, Leroy Pope Walker, Huntsville; December 1845, Stephen F. Hale, Eutaw; December 1846, Sterling A. M. Wood, Florence; December 1847 and '48,

Nimrod E. Benson, Montgomery; December 1849, Rufus Greene, Mobile; December 1850 to 1855, Daniel Sayre, Tuskegee; December 1856, Robert H. Erwin, Camden; December 1857, William A. Ferrill, New Prospect; December 1858 and '59, Sterling A. M. Wood, Florence; December 1861, Lewis B. Thornton, Tuscumbia; December 1862 and '63, John A. Loder, Cahaba; December 1864, William C. Penick, Wetumpka; December 1865, John G. Stokes, Wetumpka; December 1866 to December 1869, William C. Penick, Wetumpka; December 1870 to 1873, Richard F. Knott, Mobile; December 1874, William T. Walthall, Mobile; December 1875 to December 1881, Oliver S. Beers, Mobile; December 1882 to December 1897, Palmer Job Pillans, Mobile; December 1898 to December 1913, William Yates Titcomb, Anniston; December 1914 and '15, N. L. Mewhinney, Birmingham; December 1916 to 1922, Oliver Day Street, Guntersville; December 1923 to December 1926, Fred Wall, Athens; December 1927 and '28, Francis M. Stillwell, Selma; December 1929 to December 1935, William B. Clemons, Geneva.

In this list will be recognized many of the distinguished citizens of our State. Of the foregoing there stand out conspicuously Daniel Sayre, Sterling A. M. Wood, William C. Penick, Richard F. Knott, William T. Walthall, Oliver S. Beers, Palmer Job Pillans and William Yates Titcomb. Some of these labored long, others briefly in this field but all strove with intelligence, zeal and ability to spread Masonic light and knowledge. For length of service, Bros. Pillans and Titcomb far eclipse either of the others, each of those two having submitted sixteen successive reports. Bro. Sayre submitted six, Bro. Penick five, Bro. Knott four and Bro. Wood three. Bro. Walthall prepared only one, that of 1874, but in his single effort, by skillfully combining the topical and the review forms, he proved himself the equal of any who has ever performed this service for the Grand Lodge of Alabama.

These reports scattered through our printed proceedings during a period of more than one hundred years are a veritable mine of Masonic learning. They touch every phase of Masonic knowledge, history, tradition, symbolism, jurisprudence, doctrine, moral precepts and religion. Scattered through them are passages of wisdom

and gems of eloquence and poetry which can scarcely be excelled. We hope the Grand Lodge will some day open up and make accessible to the Craft this vast store of information by preparing and publishing an adequate index to it. Masonic knowledge would be much more abundant if its contents were better known to the Craft.

The Alabama Work. The effort to settle, adopt and propagate a form of “work” for Alabama dates back to the Annual Communication of 1826. Hailing from several jurisdictions each brother thought his “work” the best. This, of course, led to great confusion. But at the Sixth Annual Communication of Grand Lodge held in December 1826, a committee, consisting of Dugald McFarland,* James Penn, B. R. Wallace, Amand P. Pfister and Thomas K. Wooldridge, was appointed “to exemplify the mode of work, which they may believe to be the most correct on the first three degrees of Masonry.” Three days later this committee, under the leadership of Brother Penn, “gave,” to quote the language of the record, “a most splendid and interesting exemplification of the mode of work agreed upon by said committee in the first three degrees of Masonry, which was received with great and deserved applause.” This was Brother Penn’s introduction to Grand Lodge and it established him as the recognized authority on the “work” until he left the State in 1846. When he left, this recognition fell on James Brundidge, an initiate and pupil of Brother Penn’s, and till his death in 1901, Brother Brundidge was the accepted final authority on the ritual. He was in turn succeeded by his pupil Angus M. Scott who held undisputed preeminence in this field till his death in 1915. Gould’s History of Freemasonry (American Edition, Charles Scribner’s Sons, Vol. V, p. 8), says that Brother Scott “was second only to Brundidge for length of service, for knowledge of the work and for skill in imparting it.” We see that the lives of these three masters of ritual covered a period of 89 years of Grand Lodge. Add to this the lives of

* Brother McFarland’s name is variously printed in the Proceedings, sometimes McFarland and sometimes McFarlane. We are in doubt which form is correct. We have followed the one that appears in the Minutes of the convention which formed Grand Lodge.

hundreds of Masons, who were initiates and pupils of Brothers Brundidge and Scott and who are still with us, and we have an unbroken period of well over 100 years. We are justified in the conclusion therefore, that we have today practically unchanged the “work” which James Penn bequeathed to us in 1826. Gould’s History, above quoted, further says of these three masters:

“By their sweetness of spirit, their nobility of character, their charm of person and their ability as instructors, these three men left a lasting impression upon the Masonic Fraternity in this State.”

There is little doubt that the unwritten “work” thus established in 1826 and since practiced in Alabama is chiefly based on the system taught by Thomas Smith Webb early in the last century.

For eighty-two years our Grand Lodge had no printed monitor of its own. The so-called “Written Work” had to be learned much in the same way as the secret “work.” A brother aspiring to “brightness” must resort to a monitor of Webb or Cross or one based upon them and make the necessary interlineations. In 1903, Grand Lodge promulgated a monitor of its own based in the main upon Webb but with many of Cross’ changes and additions. It will also be found to follow rather closely much of Preston’s lectures of nearly two centuries ago.

The burden of preserving and teaching our “work” both secret and written until recent years fell mainly upon the shoulders of our Grand Lecturers and the chairmen of our Committee on Work. To this group a great share of the credit for the present prosperous condition of Masonry in Alabama is due. The office of Grand Lecturer began with the organization of our Grand Lodge in 1821 and it existed till 1857. It was then abolished and was not recreated till 1889, at which time Brother James M. Brundidge succeeded to the position. He was succeeded on his death in 1901 by Brother Angus M. Scott and the office again became extinct with the death of Brother Scott in February 1915, and it still remains so.

Worthy to be placed on record here are the names of those who have filled this important position. They are Dugald McFarland, Thomas K. Catlett, James H. Weakley, James Penn, John Craig, Rev.

John C. Hicks, Rev. J. H. Thomason, Edward Herndon, Rev. Eugene V. Levert, Rev. James T. Sawrie, William A. Ferrill, James M. Brundidge, Thomas Henry, Benjamin Blakely, Martin K. Clopton, C. N. Wilcox and Angus M. Scott.

Close collaborators with our Grand Lecturers have been the chairmen of our Committee on Work. They have been David Moore, Charles Whelan, Edward Herndon, Nimrod E. Benson, William A. Ferrill, Rufus Greene, Martin K. Clopton, S. A. M. Wood, William C. Penrick, Richard F. Knott, James M. Brundidge, Myles J. Greene, Robert J. Redden, Angus M. Scott, Thomas C. Bush, James M. Pearson, William T. Whitaker, Samuel A. Moore, William A. Arnold, George U. Potter, Joseph D. Pruett, Cage E. Bullard, Irving E. Farmer, Shelton H. Hendrix and George W. Persell. Their contributions have been large to the propagation of the “work” and the maintenance of its purity.

Another valuable agency in this field has been the present system of District Lecturers. It began in 1891. Grand Master Henry H. Brown in his annual address of that year urged “the importance of a more efficient system of lecturing the subordinate lodges in the work of conferring the degrees.” Brother James A. Bilbro, of the Committee on Work, submitted a report from that committee dividing the State into nine districts and constructing the system much as we have it today. From nine districts it has now grown to thirty-four, or about two counties to the district, with a lecturer for each district. For a number of years the system functioned feebly but for many years the volume and quality of its labors have greatly increased. Of the District Lecturers a high standard of proficiency is exacted and they are invested with large powers and weighty duties in the teaching of the “work.” The system has become one of the most important instrumentalities of Grand Lodge in putting through its charity as well as its teaching programs.

No account of the Alabama “work” would be complete without reference to the Baltimore Convention of 1843 and of Alabama’s share in the calling of that noted gathering of Masons. Students of Masonic history in their reading frequently meet with references to

the “Baltimore Convention.” It was the Grand Lodge of Alabama, which at its 1839 Annual started the movement that culminated in the holding of that famous but ill-starred Masonic gathering at Baltimore, Maryland, in May 1843, by adopting the following resolution.

“Resolved that all the Grand Lodges in correspondence with the Grand Lodge of Alabama be requested to elect one delegate to meet in general convention on the 1st Monday in March, 1842, in the City of Washington, for the purpose of determining upon a uniform mode of work throughout all the lodges of the United States and to make other lawful regulations for the interest and security of the Craft.”

At the 1840 Annual, our Committee on Foreign Correspondence reported that Connecticut, New York and Maryland had approved the suggested Washington convention but that Kentucky had disapproved. This Committee suggested “to grand lodges of the different states that this Grand Lodge would be gratified in having an expression of their opinions in relation to it.” This suggestion was “concurred” in by Grand Lodge.

At the 1841 Annual, Grand Secretary Pfister reported that he had entered into “epistolary correspondence” with the several grand lodges of the United States touching the proposed Washington Convention in March 1842 and that Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Michigan, Tennessee and Mississippi had “kindly responded.” It is evident that they had not committed themselves deeply. A special committee to which was referred this correspondence reported that it was satisfied that the proposed convention would be of “utmost benefit to the security of the Craft” and “that there should exist at least in the United States a uniformity of work” and it recommended that a delegate be appointed to this convention. The report was adopted and Brother William W. Payne was chosen as our delegate, with power to appoint a proxy in the event he could not attend. It seems that Brother Payne attended in person.

At the December 1842 Annual, the Committee on Foreign Correspondence reported on the Washington Convention that, not being able to settle on a uniform mode of work, it recommended that

each Grand Lodge appoint one or more skilled brethren to be styled Grand Lecturer who should meet and agree upon “the course of instruction, necessary and proper to be imparted to the lodges and the fraternity” and who should be “required to convene at some central place at least once in three years to compare their lectures and the correct variation.” The Washington convention also recommended that the first meeting of the Grand Lecturers be held in the city of Baltimore on the 2nd Monday in May 1843. This report was referred to another Committee on Foreign Correspondence which reported approving the proposed Baltimore Convention and directing the Grand Lecturer to attend it as the representative of the Grand Lodge of Alabama. It is evident that this report was adopted but the minutes do not show formal action.

At this time Brother Edward Herndon, of Gainesville, was Grand Lecturer and he accordingly attended the Baltimore Convention in May, 1843.

The work of this Convention at once became a subject of warm, if not acrimonious, controversy throughout the country. Its reverberations have not wholly ceased to this day. Doubt has always existed as to the degree of agreement reached and as to the extent of the changes that were made. Of course, Grand Lodge was keenly anxious to hear at the 1843 Annual the report of Brother Herndon on the secret “work.” But lo! when Grand Lodge assembled Brother Herndon was not there; he merely sent a communication “stating his inability to attend.” Some thought that Brother Herndon shirked the ordeal of attempting to defend his action in Baltimore.

It resulted that in the Proceedings of 1843, there is a rather peculiar record. Grand Lodge seems to have been skeptical; a resolution was passed “that a committee of three be appointed to procure a messenger to insure the attendance of the R. W. Bro. Herndon, Grand Lecturer, at the present sitting of the Grand Lodge.” The committee were Walker K. Baylor, James Penn and William Hendrix. They procured the services of Bro. Lewis Ethridge to carry to Bro. Herndon, at Gainesville, a “suitable communication.” Bro Ethridge returned and presented a “second communication” from

Bro. Herndon “stating his inability to attend the present communication.” The Finance Committee reported that it was “with deep regret that they had learned that ill-health had prevented Bro. Herndon from attending” and that they thought “it important that Brother Herndon should have been present at this communication to have disseminated for the benefit of Masonry the work agreed upon by the convention at Baltimore.” Bro. Ethridge was paid \$20.00 for his services and \$200.00 was appropriated to reimburse Bro. Herndon his expenses in attending the Baltimore Convention.

By the assembling in December of the 1844 Annual, the controversy had grown warmer. Brother Charles W. Moore, of Boston, had added to the heat by the publication of a monitor which he entitled THE MASONIC TRESTLE BOARD and which he claimed set out the true “Baltimore Work.” This claim was questioned in many quarters. Brother Herndon appeared at this Annual and submitted a written report in which he stated that fifteen grand lodges, forming a decided majority of all the grand lodges in the United States, were represented; that much harmony prevailed among the members;

“That it was with almost entire unanimity that the convention came to the determination as to what was the ancient mode of work in the several degrees under the control of the Grand Lodges; that the work agreed upon by the convention is substantially the same as that which is taught and practiced in a majority of the Lodges working under the jurisdiction of this Grand Lodge, with some slight variations and that it received the approbation of the National Convention, with but one dissenting voice (the delegate from the Grand Lodge of New York), and that even that dissension was only to a small part thereof.”

At this Communication, Brother Herndon did exemplify before the Grand Lodge the Baltimore Convention “work.”

It appears very probable that the Alabama “work” was not affected by the Baltimore Convention for two reasons: First, Brother Herndon tells us that our work was left “substantially the same with some slight variations.” Second, Bro. Herndon was immediately

succeeded by Bro. E. V. Levert as Grand Lecturer. Bro. Levert was not at the Baltimore Convention; hence it is possible, indeed probable, that these “slight variations” were never taught in Alabama. The Committee on Work December 1844, of which Brother Herndon was the chairman reported that they had “had under investigation the plan of work recommended by the convention held at Baltimore” and after several days labor had “come to the conclusion that the mode of work should not be adopted by this Grand Lodge without further investigation;” that having given all its time to this subject the Committee “had no work to report on” and asked to be discharged. Brother Herndon himself submitted this unfavorable report. At this Annual, Grand Lodge, after having just purchased sixty copies, expressly repudiated and rejected Moore’s TRESTLE BOARD.

It will be remembered that the Baltimore Convention provided for the holding of a national convention each three years. The one for 1846 was scheduled to be held at Winchester, Virginia, on the 2nd Monday in May of that year. Representatives of only five grand lodges, (some say eight), appeared. Alabama was not among them. Brother James Penn had been selected as a delegate and Brother William Hendrix as his alternate. Neither attended. Those present adjourned *sine die* and thus ended the ambitious movement begun by Alabama in 1839 for a uniformity of “work” throughout the country. Its failure was so complete and it was so provocative of ill-feeling that no serious attempt has since been made to bring about national uniformity of “work.”

On account of Alabama’s leadership in this famous episode in the history of Freemasonry in America, we feel that we are justified in devoting this much space to this subject. We venture no opinion of our own as hundreds can be found coming from able Masons who were either participants or contemporaries. In Gould’s History, (American edition), in the chapter on “Freemasonry in Maryland,” by Brother Gustav A. Eitel, it is said that “this convention was perhaps the most important Masonic assemblage ever held in America.” Brother Eitel presents an altogether favorable view of the convention. It is a curious piece of irony that the Grand Lodge of Alabama should have so completely rejected the work of the body it had been chiefly

instrumental in originating.

Military Lodges. A dispensation for a traveling lodge to be attached to the Alabama battalion bound for the seat of war in Mexico was granted by Grand Master Rufus Greene in 1848. It began its labors at the city of Orizaba, Mexico, and later worked at St. Juan, where it closed its labors and all of its papers were deposited in the archives of Grand Lodge.

A petition for a traveling lodge to be connected with Hannon's Fifty-third Alabama Regiment in the Civil War was denied at the 1864 Annual.

It seems that no effort was made to obtain a dispensation from this Grand Lodge for the formation of a military Lodge during the World War.

In order to afford our brethren in the American Expeditionary Forces in Europe an opportunity for Masonic association the ban against the visitation of Symbolic Lodges under the regular Scottish Rite governing bodies was raised at the 1917 Annual.

III.

1837 to 1861

This period showed substantial growth of strength, both in numbers and finances. It began with 382 members reported in 1837 and ended with 8,454 in 1860, the last communication before the breaking out of the Civil War. By 1856, the funds of Grand Lodge had accumulated so greatly beyond its needs that it was deemed necessary to refund the greater portion to the subordinate lodges. A reading of the Annual Proceedings afford many evidences of the happiness and prosperity of the Craft during this period. At the 1850 Annual the announcement was made that the prosperity of the Craft exceeded

that of any other previous period. This condition continued right up to the breaking out of the war.

Masonic Jurisprudence. Though authorized by the Rules and Regulations of 1852, no Standing Committee on this subject seems to have been appointed till the Annual Communication in December 1855, at which time Grand Master Sterling A. M. Wood announced the appointment of a committee of seven members with David Clopton as chairman. By resolution this committee was “continued and required to report at the next Grand Communication.” It has ever since been listed as a standing committee and, as a rule, has been composed of men distinguished for their ability and knowledge of Masonic law. Its chairmen have been David Clopton (14 years); Stephen F. Hale (1 year); Richard H. Ervin (3 years); Joseph H. Johnson (20 years); Henry Clay Tompkins (5 years); Francis L. Pettus (3 years); George P. Harrison (21 years); Lawrence H. Lee (3 years) and Archibald H. Carmichael (15 years). All these men were eminent members of the legal profession except Dr. Johnson who was a distinguished physician and educator. Thus for a period of eighty-five years only nine men have presided over the deliberations of this Committee.

The distinguished ability and high character of these men need no comment; and they account for the fidelity with which the Masonic laws of Alabama conform to the best traditions of the Craft.

Library. At the 1856 Annual, that enlightened Mason, Sterling A. M. Wood, then Grand Master, in his Address called attention to the fact that Grand Lodge possessed no library. He said that, while other Grand Lodges were busy accumulating books from which Masonic knowledge was to be obtained, “we are standing with folded arms, listless, inactive and seemingly indifferent.” He urged Grand Lodge to place in its hall “those sound Masonic writers whose works have thrilled the world and whose fame will never die.” On motion of J. H. Danforth, a resolution was adopted appropriating five hundred dollars to make a beginning. This aim has never since been lost sight of and, under the intelligent direction of such capable grand secretaries as Amand P. Pfister, Daniel Sayre, Myles J. Greene, H.

Clay Armstrong, George A. Beauchamp and Guy T. Smith, the Grand Lodge of Alabama now possesses a creditable library of about 6500 volumes.

IV. 1861 to 1874

The Civil War. Freemasonry in Alabama does not seem to have suffered greatly during this critical period. From December 1860 to December 1862, the total membership it is true showed a net loss of 1,593, but in the remaining three years, December 1862 to December 1865, all this loss had been regained. Not only so, but the figures at the first Annual *after* the close of the struggle (1865) exceeded those reported at the last Annual *preceding* the beginning of the war (1860) by 1,029. The financial showing was equally favorable. Cash balance 1860, \$611.89; balance 1865, \$1,410.64. Besides at this last date, Grand Lodge owned Confederate bonds and certificates totaling \$5,000.00, which were rendered valueless, of course, by the result of the war. Apparently its great losses, not measurable in terms of numbers and money, were the lives of many brethren, tears and the rending of hearts.

Reconstruction. The ten years immediately following the close of the Civil War is known as the Reconstruction era in the South. So much has been written and spoken by demagogues and partisans on both sides, that one is constantly meeting with surprises. The “redemption” of Alabama from that “night-mare” is placed as the year 1874. One would expect, from the picture of destruction so often presented, to find Freemasonry in shambles or going on crutches. So we are agreeably surprised to find the reported membership was in 1874 nearly 3,000 greater than it was in the year the Civil War broke out. We should also remember that in 1872 began one of the severest

financial and business depressions ever known in the country. So with three such calamities as war, reconstruction and financial panic coming upon the country in quick succession, it must be admitted that Freemasonry in Alabama did fairly well.

V.

1875 to 1940

From the purely Masonic point of view this period has been one of progress, peace and harmony. No disturbing occurrences have arisen within Masonic circles. Our fraternal relations have been pleasant both at home and abroad. The prosperity of the Craft, if this is to be judged from mere numbers, has greatly fluctuated at times, but on the whole there has been progress. After the so-called “redemption” of the State in 1874, one naturally expects to find substantial increase in the number of Masons, but in fact we find a loss in 1875 of over 1,300. This decline steadily continued until 1886 when the all-time low since before the Civil War was reached, to-wit, 6,724. This was fewer than Grand Lodge boasted in 1858 by 646. This decline was undoubtedly due to the severe business depression which began in the ‘70’s and extended in a measure over into the ‘80’s. Beginning in 1887, there was a steady but slow rise in these figures till 1893, showing a net gain in seven years of 4,649. This coincides exactly with the moderate business prosperity that prevailed during that period.

Again, we know that from 1893 to 1899 one of the worst depressions of our history swept the country. During it we just about held our own, the figures for 1893 being 11,373 and those for 1898 being 11,345. It is certain, however, that had it not been for that depression this period would have witnessed a gain of several thousand.

Then came with the new century a long period of almost uninterrupted business prosperity and during the first fifteen years of the nineteen hundreds we had an increase in numbers of 16,257, a gain of more than 140%. During this period of prosperity we accomplished two of our long cherished purposes, the erection of a Temple of our own and the establishment of the Masonic Home for indigent Masons, their widows and orphans.

Grand Lodge Temple. The seat of Grand Lodge has always followed the State Capital; Cahaba from 1821 to 1825; Tuscaloosa from 1826 to 1846; Montgomery from 1847 to date. Until 1898, Grand Lodge boasted no Temple of its own. At Cahaba, it apparently met in the “Halo Lodge Room;” at Tuscaloosa its first four communications were held in the “Masonic Hall” which was no doubt the Hall of Rising Virtue Lodge No. 4. Where it met in 1830, we are not told, but the “Masonic Hall” had evidently been lost in some manner as Rising Virtue came forward with a proposal to erect a “New Masonic Hall in the town of Tuscaloosa.” At this communication, Grand Lodge authorized the expenditure of not exceeding \$2,000.00 for the erection of a Hall jointly by the Grand Lodge, the Grand Chapter, Tuscaloosa Chapter and Rising Virtue Lodge. It was built at a cost of \$6,225.00 but was not completed in time for the December 1831 Annual. No communication was held in 1832 because of a change in the date of meeting. The January 1833 and 1834 communications were held in this building. There were no meetings of Grand Lodge in December 1834 and 1835 because of the financial depression and the low state of Masonry resulting from the Morgan excitement. Before Grand Lodge convened in December 1836, this Temple had been lost by sale under execution for the cost of its erection. In 1837, Grand Lodge was held at “Cantley’s Room;” in 1838, in the Hall of Rising Virtue Lodge. The last gasp at an effort by Grand Lodge to secure a Hall of its own in Tuscaloosa was at the Annual of December 1844, when a proposal was made to purchase the “Old Court,” but it had already been sold to other parties. Three years later Grand Lodge removed to Montgomery.

There for four years it met in the Odd Fellows’ Hall. In 1851, a Masonic Hall was leased and \$1,362.00 was spent on furnishing it;

but we are not told where it was located or for how long it was leased. At the 1854 Annual “oil chandeliers” were dispensed with and “gas chandeliers” substituted. This Hall seems to have been located on Market Street, (now Dexter Avenue), between Court and Perry and to have been used till 1872, when Grand Lodge moved into the “New Masonic Temple” erected by private enterprise of Bibb Street, on what is now the site of the Greystone Hotel. Here Grand Lodge met from 1873, with increasing dissatisfaction, till 1898, when it moved into its own Temple on Washington and South Perry and there it will doubtless continue to meet for years to come. This location is excellent, the building is good, but it greatly needs modernizing.

Masonic Home. Certainly as early as the 1851 Annual, Grand Lodge began seriously to consider the need of a Masonic Orphans’ Asylum. The matter was referred to a committee of which Robert G. Earle was the chairman with instructions to report at the next Annual. At the 1852 Annual, Brother Earle submitted a favorable and very sympathetic report, accompanied by a full set of resolutions establishing an “Orphans’ Asylum,” providing for a board of trustees, with authority to choose a site for the erection of a suitable “edifice” and in the meantime to procure a “temporary house” until the permanent building could be erected, to employ “suitable persons for superintendents, matrons, teachers and nurses” and to employ an agent to solicit funds. The report was temporarily laid on the table. Two days later Brother Earle moved that “all papers in relation to the Masonic Orphans’ Asylum be taken from the table,” but on motion of W. P. DeJarnette the further consideration of the matter was “indefinitely postponed.” The project was premature, Brother DeJarnette’s motion and the action of Grand Lodge was wise. But like Banquo’s ghost, it would not stay down and it continued to rise again and again. Apparently all agreed upon its desirability, but financial consideration each time defeated the proposal. The Civil War and Reconstruction contributed to a postponement of favorable action.

In 1882, agitation in favor of a Masonic Home and College was renewed under the leadership of James A. Bilbro and it continued fitfully for a period; then earnestly, until, after many defeats and

discouragements, the aim was attained in 1913. It had taken 61 years. Another whose name should be mentioned in this connection is Thomas H. Holt, of Birmingham, who was one of the most persistent and enthusiastic advocates of a Masonic Home. Time after time he renewed the proposal; time after time the subordinate Lodges defeated the proposal. The final struggle for the Home began in 1897, again under the leadership of Brother Bilbro, then Grand Master. It took another sixteen years to accomplish it, Brother Bilbro always its earnest advocate. We must, therefore, recognize Brother Bilbro as the father of our Masonic Home though all agree that Bro. Ben M. Jacobs is entitled to chief credit for the successful finish. The Home was opened on January 18, 1913, and has in the main fulfilled the hopes and expectations of the Craft, though it has at times severely taxed the financial resources of Grand Lodge. This burden has, however, been somewhat lightened by the creation and administration of the Emergency Fund designed for the relief of needy and deserving cases outside the Home, but we do not believe that the possibilities of this Fund have been fully realized and utilized as a relief not only of those in need but also as a partial relief from the burden of the Home. The Home is located near Montgomery on a tract of 276 acres with buildings and improvements estimated at more than a quarter of a million dollars.

Research and Study. Grand Lodge almost from its very beginning has taken great pains to see that our "Work" has been kept pure and that letter perfection is maintained. It has done little to educate the Craft as to the meanings of its signs, symbols, tokens, words and ceremonies, or to stimulate members of the Craft to educate themselves. A pious resolution now and then and an endorsement of some work on the ceremonies, history or symbolism of Freemasonry is about as far as its efforts in this direction have gone. Grand Lodge has authorized, under some restrictions the formation of clubs for the study of these subjects and the publication of Masonic periodicals but has taken no decided initiative of its own in the doing of this work or seeing that it is done. The natural result is that all but a small percentage of the Craft know nothing about Masonry except what they see and hear in the prescribed ceremonies

and lectures, which we denominate the “work.” All well informed Masons know that these are but the A B C’s of Freemasonry and are chiefly designed to arouse and stimulate first the curiosity and then the intelligent interest of the initiate in the multitude of subjects Freemasonry is really intended to teach.

The World War and Its Effects. We arrive now at the greatest tragedy of this century, perhaps of all the centuries, the World War, which broke out in August 1914. It has vastly affected Masonry in our State as it has everything else in the entire world. Its immediate effect on us was to slow down our increase as it slowed down everything else until England achieved undisputed command of the seas. In 1914, 1915 and 1916, we showed a gain of only about 2,000 whereas in the preceeding three years it has been about 3,000. We ourselves became involved in April 1917; at once our increase bounded. For 1917 and 1918, the net increase was 3,942. This rapid rise did not cease with the war; it continued right on at even a more rapid rate till 1926, when the peak was reached at 54,538, a net increase since 1917 of 84.57%. Thoughtful Masons had already begun to wonder if this phenomenal growth was an unmixed blessing. As premonitory but slight pains often precede the onset of disease, so it was with Masonry in Alabama. Between 1926 and 1929, before we knew that a business panic was on us, we lost over 3,000 members. Then in 1929, the bottom fell out. From 1926 to 1939, a period of thirteen years, we have had a net loss of just about as many members as we had when the World War broke out, or just about as many as we now have left, that is to say about 27,000. Every intelligent Mason knows why.

During the World War we allowed our sympathies to run away with our judgment, we lost sight of the requirements that a petitioner should be of good report and well recommended. Thousands not mentally and morally qualified rushed for the outer door, expecting to find Masonry helpful to them in the stress of war. They had no conception that they assumed any obligations to the Craft. Of course when the war was over nearly all who sought Masonry with such motives fell away and it was a good riddance to the Craft.

But the “rush” did not cease with the war and here we are to blame

more than were the petitioners. A boom was on; an ambitious building fever struck the Craft; magnificent Temples must be built; the modest "Masonic Hall," that grand old name, went out of style; the Temple (spelled with a capital T), must be gorgeously furnished; money must be found to do all this; we forgot the prohibition against "the improper solicitation of friends," we got around that in some manner; those who had the fee, came; we did not inquire as we should; we sold the honor of being a Mason for the initiation fee. Who can deny this indictment? These, too, soon fell away in greater part and what have we to show for this spree? The money was squandered, wasted or lost in unwise and over-ambitious projects. It came easy and it went easy. Mostly what we have left is a long list of n. p. d.'s and a headache. We now have exactly the same membership that we had when the World War broke out twenty-five years ago. But those who have stayed through the thick and the thin are the ones worth while. So in twenty-five years we have lost nothing but have learned a valuable lesson; let us profit by it, let us in future "guard well the outer door;" turn away all who are not of "good report" and "well recommended;" or who come from "mercenary motives" or who are influenced by the "improper solicitation of friends." This lesson in the long run ought to be worth all that twenty-five years of experience has cost us. Of course, great numbers of those who have dropped out have done so for unavoidable reasons; they are well worth getting back. Reclaim them, but, for goodness sake, do not say a word to the others.

Finances. There is one lesson Masons of Alabama should learn even from a hasty survey of their own history, and that is in dealing with the grand officers who handle money, take nothing for granted because of the fact that they are Masons or that they are fine fellows. The experience of Grand Lodge along this line began early and has been the cause not only of the loss of much of its funds but of heartaches even more bitter than those resulting from the mere loss of money. Deal with every person who holds Masonic office and who handles Masonic funds on a strictly business basis. Put them under an adequate bond, see that every dollar that comes in is accounted for; see that all expenses are strictly regular and paid by and through the

proper channels and finally see that every dollar that ought to be on hand is in fact on hand at the precise moment when it should be on hand. Another lesson we should learn is that the power of collecting grand lodge funds and the power of disbursing them should never be entrusted to the same person. These cautions should be taken as much for the protection and security of the brother who assumes responsibility for the handling of funds as for the protection of Grand Lodge. These observations hold good for subordinate lodges as well.

The Outlook. Let not this gloomy picture of our recent past discourage us. Our credit is first class; we have at times had to borrow large sums, we had no difficulty doing so; we have never defaulted on our debts. Banks feel no uneasiness about a debt due them by Grand Lodge, but borrowing by such institutions is bad business. Let's get away from that necessity; let's get out of that habit. We can and we will do it.

Let us resolutely and confidently face the future and profiting by our mistakes make of Freemasonry in Alabama a better, a greater and a more useful institution than it has ever been in the past.

Our Companions and Friends. Bodies of all other commonly recognized systems of Masonry and its concordant orders exist in Alabama, namely, Grand Chapter, Grand Council, Grand Commandery, Scottish Rite, Eastern Star and Red Cross of Constantine and the greatest harmony prevails among them all. Each has an interesting and instructive history of its own, but we are, of course, here concerned only with that of the Grand Lodge and the Lodges and Masons of its obedience.

We are keenly sensible of the inadequacy of this sketch and hope that the day is not far distant when we shall have an exhaustive and adequate history of the Craft in our State.