

ANCIENT FREE AND ACCEPTED MASONS

NANSEMOND LODGE No. 77

CHARTERED JANUARY 1, 1993

SUFFOLK, VIRGINIA

Nansemond Lodge No. 77, although chartered on January 1, 1993, was conceived in the merger of three individual lodges; Chuckatuck No. 77, Harmony No. 149 and Hiram No. 340. Therefore, the Masonic History and Traditions of Nansemond Lodge began in 1797 in Nansemond County, Virginia. Our founding brothers were the cornerstones of our churches, schools and government. They were farmers, teachers, ministers, merchants, soldiers, sailors, lawyers and just ordinary citizens.

On July 1, 1797, the Grand Lodge of Masons in Virginia issued a dispensation for the establishment of a lodge at Chuckatuck, in Nansemond County, Virginia. On November 29, 1797, a charter was granted to Chuckatuck Lodge No. 53; with John Holiday as it's first Master, Scarsbrook Godwin as Senior Warden and John Godwin as Junior Warden. Chuckatuck No. 53 continued as a working lodge until 1848; at which time it was suspended. On January 20, 1852, Chuckatuck Lodge was granted a new charter as Chuckatuck Lodge No. 77.

Harmony Lodge came into existence on February 2, 1856 when Grand Master of Masons in Virginia, Most Worshipful John S. Caldwell issued a dispensation for a lodge to meet at Yeates Lower Free Schoolhouse in Nansemond County, Virginia. John T. Kilby was installed as the first Master with John W. Ames as Senior Warden and William J. Lawrence as Junior Warden. L.H. Klingman, Joel M. Tartt, Eli Johnson and Charles Capps also signed the application. Chuckatuck No. 77 approved the location of a lodge at Yeates Schoolhouse in a certificate signed by John M. Cowling, lodge secretary.

The location of the lodge was designated in reports variously as Yeates Schoolhouse, Bellville Academy and Lower Schoolhouse. In 1874, Harmony Lodge No. 149 was meeting at Yeates Lower Academy and in 1875 the designation read "Meets in it's hall at Bellville".

With the coming of railroads; E.J. Driver who had served as Master of Harmony Lodge, founded the town of Driver some seven miles southwest of Bellville. The large scale farming of produce saw families impoverished by the Civil War regain a financial stake and creating large estates with attractive homes. As the new town developed,

Harmony Lodge moved to Driver; at a location across from where Berea Christian Church is now located and met there regularly after 1891.

The Masonic Temple at Driver filled the need for a community center in the 1890's and the first decade of the twentieth century. Grand parties, elaborate plays, lectures and speeches by civic leaders were held within its walls. One of the most distinguished citizens to speak at Harmony Lodge was William Jennings Bryant who spoke there shortly after his appointment as Secretary of State in President Woodrow Wilson's Cabinet in 1913.

The original officers of Harmony Lodge were John T. Kilby, Master; John W. Ames, Senior Warden; Joseph W. Mansfield, Junior Warden; William J. Arthur, Secretary; William W. Wright, Treasurer; Isham L. Jordan, Senior Deacon; Joel M. Tartt, Junior Deacon; and McKenny Lewis, Tiler. Other charter members were Lysander H. Klingman, Charles Capps, James A. Raby, Jeremiah Jones, John W. Ward and George W. Barnes. Many of the early masters served two or more years.

Harmony Lodge has been active since its founding, with exception of the period of war, between the states; when it was in captured territory. During this period of occupation; a Union Officer removed the original charter, lodge records, Holy Bible, jewels, and tiler's sword from the Lodge. He carried them north where they were placed in a Connecticut Lodge for safekeeping and would later be safely returned to Harmony Lodge.

In April of 1937, Harmony Masonic Lodge caught fire and was destroyed, along with most of the furnishings. The Lodge records, charter, Holy Bible and tiler's sword were removed from the building, even as it burned, and are preserved by the Lodge today. This building had served Nansemond County as a community center for many years and was a well know landmark.

A new Temple was erected on a new site in Driver on King's Highway. It was completed and dedicated on May 4, 1938. The original charter, lodge records, Holy Bible, jewels, and tiler's sword were presented at the dedication of the new Temple; they having been preserved in a bank vault in Portsmouth Virginia.

The early commerce of Driver Virginia was farm related and Harmony's meetings were held on Saturday mornings. Many Freemasons from Norfolk and Portsmouth would catch the early train to Driver, assist with the ritual, enjoy lunch and catch the evening train back to Portsmouth. During the Great Depression, Harmony Lodge changed it's meetings to Tuesday evenings. Old timers say that the meeting was changed because the members could not afford to feed the large number of visitors that came on Saturday mornings.

Hiram Lodge was conceived on December 6, 1921 when fourteen members of Suffolk Lodge No. 30 assembled at Suffolk Lodge to draft a petition for dispensation to form a new lodge. Present were J.C. Holladay, Sr., George H Balance, Jr., George F. Whitley, H.C. Barton, E.H. Rawles, W.C. King, A.J. Powell and Max S. Eley. Of those present, \$3.00 was collected from each. The petition for dispensation was forwarded to the Grand Lodge of Virginia along with a fee of \$25.00. At this first meeting, the following officers were elected: John C. Holladay, Master; George H. Balance, Jr., Senior Warden; and George F. Whitley, Junior Warden.

Most Worshipful John S. Bottimore, Grand Master of Masons in Virginia, issued a dispensation on December 17, 1921 and named those proposed as officers of the Lodge under dispensation. At the January, 1922 Stated Communication; by-laws were proposed and adopted. In February 1923, Hiram Lodge No. 340 received it's charter from the Grand Lodge of Virginia. The charter was formally presented at Hiram's March Stated Communication. On November 20, 1939 Hiram Lodge celebrated the raising of it's one hundredth candidate: Brother Marshall Franklin Driskill.

The years of World War II apparently produced no great change in the tempo of lodge activity, there being no noticeable increase or decrease in the volume of petitions for membership received. Many members left to serve in the armed forces of our nation although that fact is not reflected in the Lodge minutes. The year 1948 marked the silver anniversary of Hiram Lodge. Presiding that year was Worshipful Robert Letcher Small. Most Worshipful Clarence Freeman, Grand Master of Masons in Virginia, addressed the Lodge at it's anniversary celebration.

In June of 1992, a committee was appointed to investigate a possible merger between Chuckatuck No. 77, Harmony No. 149 and Hiram No. 340. The investigating committee determined that a merger of these three lodges was in the best interest of Masonry in General and recommended the merger take place. The new Lodge would have approximately 270 members, a strong line of officers, and the resources to build a new Temple. The merger was approved at the June Stated Communication of each Lodge. Most Worshipful John R. Dean, Grand Master of Masons in Virginia, granted a dispensation authorizing and empowering Nansemond Lodge No. 77 to meet for the purpose of electing officers. The meeting was held at the Masonic Temple in the Village of Driver, Suffolk, Virginia on December 17, 1992. Nansemond Lodge No. 77 was granted a new charter effective January 1, 1993.

Nansemond Lodge No. 77 moved into it's new Temple on Lee Farm Lane in the Bennett's Creek Area of Suffolk, Virginia in December 1996. Even as the original three lodges served their communities, the present Nansemond Lodge continues to be an important part of the community.