

**History of
Nansemond Lodge No. 77 A.F. & A.M.
Chartered under the Grand Lodge of the Commonwealth of Virginia,
Ancient Free and Accepted Masons
On January 1, 1993**

Nansemond Lodge No. 77, although chartered on January 1, 1993, was conceived in the merger of three Lodges: Chuckatuck No. 77, Hiram No. 340, and Harmony No. 149. Therefore, the Masonic history and traditions of Nansemond Lodge began in 1797 with the charter of Chuckatuck Lodge No. 53 under the Grand Lodge of the Commonwealth of Virginia, Ancient Free and Accepted Masons. Our early members were the cornerstones of our churches, schools, and government; they were farmers, teachers, merchants, ministers, and public servants.

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

Harmony Lodge No. 149 came into existence on February 2, 1856 when John S. Caldwell, Grand Master of Masons in Virginia, granted a dispensation for a Lodge to meet at Yeates Lower Free Schoolhouse in the County of Nansemond, Virginia. John T. Kilby was installed as its first Worshipful Master. John W. Ames and William J. Lawrence were installed Senior and Junior Wardens. The application for the charter was also signed by L.H. Klingman, Joel M. Tartt, Eli Johnson, and Charles Capps. Chuckatuck Lodge No. 77 approved the location of a Lodge at Yeates Schoolhouse in a certificate signed by John M. Cowling, secretary.

The location of the Lodge was designated in reports variously as: Yeates Schoolhouse, Bellville Academy, and Lower Schoolhouse. In 1874; Harmony Lodge was meeting at Yeates Lower Academy and in 1875 the designation read "meets in its hall at Bellville".

With the coming of the railroad, E.J. Driver, who had served as Master of Harmony Lodge, founded the town of Driver Virginia, some seven miles southwest of Bellville. The large scale farming of produce saw families, impoverished by the Civil War, regain their previous financial positions and

rebuild their farms and homes. As the new town developed; Harmony Lodge relocated 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 distinguished leaders were held within it's walls. One of the most notable to speak at Harmony Lodge was William Jennings Bryan; who in 1913, shortly after his appointment as Secretary of State in President Woodrow Wilson's Cabinet, spoke at a large public gathering.

The original officers of Harmony Lodge were: John T. Kilby as Worshipful Master, John W. Ames as Senior Warden, Joseph W. Mansfield as Junior Warden, William J. Arthur as Secretary, William W. Wright as Treasurer, Isham L. Jordan as Senior Deacon, Joel M. Tartt as Junior Deacon and McKenny Lewis as 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 it's founding with the exception of that period during the war between the states; when it was in captured territory. During this period of occupation; a Union Officer removed the Lodge records, original charter, minutes book, Bible, and saber from the Lodge and carried them north where they were placed in a Connecticut Lodge for safekeeping until returned to Harmony Lodge at a later date.

In April 1937 Harmony Lodge was destroyed by fire along with most of the furnishings. The Lodge records, charter, saber, and Bible 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 known landmark. A new temple was erected on a new site in Driver on Kings Highway. It was completed and dedicated on May 4, 1938.

Because the early commerce of Driver was farm related, Harmony's meetings were held on Saturday. Many Tidewater Freemasons from Portsmouth and Norfolk would ride the early train to Driver, assist with the ritual, enjoy lunch, and catch the evening train home. During the Great Depression, Harmony Lodge changed their Stated Communications to a Tuesday evening. Old timers say that the meeting was changed because the members could not afford to feed the large number of visitors.

Hiram Lodge was conceived on December 6, 1921 when fourteen members of Suffolk Lodge No. 30 assembled in the Suffolk Temple. Present were J.C. Holladay, Sr.; George H. Balance; George F. Whitley; H.C. Barton;

E.H. Rawles; W.C. King; A.J. Powell; Max Weyman; J.M. White; J.B. Norfleet; F.J. Oliver; H. Woodward; J.E.B. Holladay and H.S. Eley. Of those present; three dollars was collected from each. A petition for dispensation to form a new Lodge was forwarded to the Grand Lodge of Virginia along with a fee of twenty five dollars. At this first meeting; the following officers were elected: John C. Holladay as Worshipful Master, George H. Balance, Jr. as Senior Warden, and George F. Whitley as 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 during 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 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 1992; a committee was appointed to investigate a possible merger of Chuckatuck No. 77, Harmony No. 140, and Hiram No. 340. The investigating committee recommended that a merger of the three Lodges was in the best interest of Masonry in general. The new Lodge would have approximately 270 members, a strong line of officers and the resources to build a much needed new temple. The merger was approved at the June 1992 Stated Communication of each Lodge. Most Worshipful John R. Dean, Grand Master of Masons in Virginia, granted a dispensation authorizing and empowering "Nansemond No. 77" to meet for the purpose of electing officers. The meeting was held at the Masonic Temple in Driver, Virginia on December 17, 1992. Nansemond Lodge No. 77 was granted a new charter; effective on January 1, 1993.

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