

# Lee Lodge History

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Lee Lodge No. 209

December 9, 2017

*A Brief History of Lee Lodge No. 209 in Celebration of Their 150th Anniversary  
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Freemasonry had flourished in Augusta County and Staunton since the days of the American Revolution. In an early attempt to establish a Lodge, Waynesborough-Union Lodge No. 103 was chartered in December 10, 1816, existed a few years, and was declared dormant by the Grand Lodge of Virginia in December 1825.

Waynesboro was fertile ground for its own Masonic Lodge following the American Civil War, with many soldiers returning home and many veterans choosing to remain in the Shenandoah Valley. The new Lodge at Waynesboro was begun by a group of Masons from Staunton Lodge who requested dispensation from Most Worshipful Edward H. Lane, Grand Master of Masons in Virginia, in a letter dated December 11, 1865.

Lee, the name chosen for the Lodge at Waynesboro, was one of great importance in that period. Tradition tells the Lodge requested and received direct permission from General Robert E. Lee to use his family name. It is

believed this was the only time General Lee ever gave approval for his name to be used for any such purpose.

There is also believed to be a direct connection between the current Lee Lodge No. 209 and the traveling Confederate Military Lodge No. 209, issued in December of 1863 by the Grand Lodge of Virginia to Wickham's Brigade of the 4th Virginia Cavalry.

On January 19, 1867 (Robert E. Lee's 60th birthday), the first meeting of Lee Lodge was held under its new charter, granted the previous month by the Grand Lodge of Virginia on December 12, 1866. Dr. Samuel Kennerly, Jr. served as the first Worshipful Master. The meeting was held in the second story of a brick home located along New Hope Road owned by Charles Hanger. The early deeds show only that the house was called "Mason's Hall" and that it was never owned by the Lodge. The house, now known today as the "Arnold House", still stands at the corner of New Hope Road and Ohio Street and is owned by the City of Waynesboro.

In the mid-1880's, the Lodge moved to North Wayne Avenue and occupied a building known as "The Masonic Hall and Opera House." The second floor was used by the Lodge and the ground floor was a theater, or place for meetings, which was rented to the general public, usually for a fee of five dollars per meeting.

Very little is known of the early history of the Lodge because of a fire which destroyed all the records on February 23, 1898. Although heroic work was done by the Waynesboro and Basic City fire companies, everything belonging to the Lodge was consumed.

Again, fire brought hardship to the Lodge on December 21, 1924. The fire started in the corner building operating a restaurant and then spread rapidly to adjoining buildings. Many of the furniture and fixtures from the main Lodge Room were saved, but the furniture and fixtures in the dining room and kitchen were lost. This second and most devastating fire destroyed the building beyond repair, and there was no choice but to rebuild. It was decided to construct a new Lodge on the same site.

The corner stone was set on May 26, 1925. A procession was formed at the corner of Eleventh Street and Walnut Avenue, led by the Fishburne Military Cadet Band, and marched to the new Lodge building on Wayne Avenue. There, the cornerstone was laid on the North East corner of the Lodge room with full Masonic rights.

In 1958 the Lodge added to its property by purchasing the fire house, a building adjacent to and north of the Lodge Hall. The top floor of the new building was made into a new and very attractive Lodge Room. It was somewhat smaller than the Main Lodge Room, but ideal as a meeting place for the appendant bodies and occasionally, the Blue Lodge. This building served the Lodge and appendant bodies for many years.

Discussions were held in the late-1980's to construct a new Masonic Temple on property the Lodge had purchased on Hopeman Parkway. Architectural renderings and plans were drawn, but were never constructed. In 1995, the Lodge instead moved to its current prominent location at 1600 West Main Street. The beautiful stone building with cathedral ceilings and large stained-glass windows was purchased from the Seventh Day Adventist Church who were seeking larger facilities.

On April 8, 1995, the cornerstone for the new Lodge was laid with Masonic ceremony and honors by the Officers of Lee Lodge and the Grand Lodge of Virginia. Most Worshipful Thomas Frederick May, Grand Master of Masons in Virginia, presided over the ceremonies.

Waynesboro Freemasons continue to carry on the heritage of contributing to the common good in their personal lives, their families, their churches, the community, and the nation every day. In recent years, many of Lee Lodge's members have advanced to serve the Craft at the highest levels. The first was Right Worshipful Brother James S. "Stan" Johnson, who, was to serve as Grand Master of Masons in Virginia in 2007. Regrettably, he passed away just three months shy of this Grand Office his while serving as the Deputy Grand Master.

That same year, Right Worshipful Brother William T. "Terry" Ellison, Jr. was elected to the Grand Line and, on November 12, 2011, was installed as Grand Master of Masons in Virginia – the first member of Lee Lodge No. 209 to hold

this honorable and prestigious office. His theme: "Spreading Masonic Light: Faith, Hope and Charity".

Other members who have served as leaders in other Masonic bodies include Right Eminent (and Most Excellent) James A. "Jim" Fields, who served as Grand Commander of the Knights Templar in 2006 and also as Grand High Priest of Royal Arch Masons in 2013; Most Excellent Russel G. "Russ" Snodgrass, Grand High Priest of Royal Arch Masons in 2002; and Illustrious Sir Timothy L. "Tim" Southern, Illustrious Potentate of Acca Shrine in 2015.

Many Appendant Masonic Bodies currently enjoy meeting at the Lodge on West Main Street. These include: Waynesboro-Union Royal Arch Chapter No. 2; Stevenson Commandery No. 8; Waynesboro Chapter No. 105, Order of the Eastern Star; Valley Council No. 56, Allied Masonic Degrees; and the Acca Shrine Center Hillbilly Unit, all of which call the Lodge home. Bethel Chapter No. 23, Job's Daughters, organized in 1951, and the John T. Smith Chapter, Order of DeMolay, organized in 1955, were sponsored by the Lodge but fell to inactivity in the 1970's and 80's.

For more than 150 years, Freemasonry has flourished and continues to prosper in Waynesboro. The real story of Lee Lodge is best told not in the story of its meeting halls or in the triumphs of the exceptional few, but in the lives of the hundreds of Brethren who have been Raised to the Sublime Degree of Master Mason. Some were wealthy and prominent, others were strong in character and modest in means, but all were rich in that

Brotherhood that serves mankind and enriches the years and souls of the initiated with light sublime.