

The Roots of Frontier Lodge #28

by Sam J. Whitley, Worshipful Master 2006-2007.

How long has it been since you attended a Masonic funeral service? Many years ago, funerals were well attended by the entire community, and Masonic funerals would bring out dozens or even hundreds of Masons. Those days are likely gone forever. If you have recently attended a Masonic funeral ceremony, there were probably only a handful of Masons present. The Masons each wore a plain white apron perhaps white gloves, the Worshipful Master wore a hat and his jewel, and the entire ceremony was over before you knew it.

What if, instead, you watched mourners lift a wooden coffin to their shoulders, form a procession, and solemnly march to the open grave?and what if all the Masons wore hats and brightly decorated aprons?

In late 2004, a handful of Texas Masons sought and received dispensation from the Grand Lodge of Texas to hold 19th Century Masonic funeral services “for demonstration purposes” to educate the general public. These Masons realized that the Masonic burial ceremony is one of the few opportunities non-Masons have to see Masonry in action. Their belief was that this ceremony would generate questions from the public and give them opportunities to speak to non-Masons about the benefits of Masonry. They began holding the funeral ceremonies at Texas history events in early 2005. This effort has been very well received and has offered wonderful opportunities to tell non-Masons about the good works that Masonry has provided and of the tremendous impact Masonry has had on Texas.

If you have seen a Masonic funeral service like the one described above, replete with brightly colored aprons, it is almost certainly the work of this same group of Masons. The antique ceremony has now been adopted as a public outreach effort of Frontier Lodge No. 28, a “legally constituted” Lodge chartered by the Grand Lodge of Texas. But where did Frontier Lodge No.28 come from?

During the waning days of the Republic of Texas, at a time when there were *fewer than* three dozen Lodges in all of Texas, seven Masons signed a petition to form a new Lodge to be named Frontier Lodge, located in the city of Corpus Christi,. The petition identified the charter officers as W.H.L. Kinney, Worshipful Master, W. Mann, Senior Warden, and J. Hays, Junior Warden. The wording of their petition is not available, but would have been in conformity with standard petitions for forming a new Lodge. As such, they would have promised “they promise a strict conformity to... the laws, rules, and regulations of the Grand Lodge of the Republic of Texas.”

In due time, their petition was acted upon and a charter prepared. This charter was granted on November 30, 1845, during the tenure of Grand Master B. Gillespie. From this date, and published charter dates from other constituent Lodges, it was likely not the last Lodge chartered under the Grand Lodge of the Republic of Texas, but numerically, it is the certainly the last Lodge chartered during the Republic Period.

It is a matter of significant interest that no records exist to show that the officers were installed, nor is there any record to indicate the lodge building was ever consecrated as a Lodge. Indeed, there are no records to prove that these men ever opened, or that the Worshipful master ever even sat in the East. As no written records of the Lodge activities are known to exist, it is surmised they met under dispensation, if they met at all. In any case, in 1847, the DDGM for the district arrived to deliver their charter and found neither Lodge building nor members. It is believed that the Lodge members were at that time engaged in hostilities with Mexico. The DDGM had no choice but to return the Charter for Frontier Lodge No. 28 to the Grand Lodge of Texas, and the Lodge was demised. It would have been at that time a “legally constituted Lodge” for less than two years.

Frontier Lodge No28 remained dark for 159 years, until a petition for restoration of its Charter was tendered by 36 Master Masons in good standing. The request for restoration of charter included a request to relocate the Lodge to West Columbia, home of St. Johns No. 5. After much work and deliberation, the Grand Lodge of Texas approved the petition, and the restored charter was delivered to the Lodge on 2

August, 2006 by the Most Worshipful Brian Dodson, Grand Master of Masons in Texas. The officers were installed, and the Lodge set to labor. Subsequently, the Grand Master granted the members of Frontier No.28 dispensation to regularly wear the highly decorated aprons of yesteryear as part of our Lodge traditions.

Frontier Lodge No. 28 was restored with one primary goal; to promote Masonry and make Masons. We will be heavily engaged in research, though we are not a Research Lodge. In public outreach, we inform the general public of the great, rich heritage that Texas Masonry has known and of the huge impact Masonry had on Texas. To support these primary goals, one of the secondary goals set out for Frontier Lodge is to hold called meetings in as many venues as possible, especially at Texas History events that attract numbers of “living historians” or reenactors (e.g. Washington on the Brazos, Liendo Plantation),

Many Masons become reenactors for the love of history. Reenactors spend many hours afield practicing their avocation at locations about the country. In other states, especially in Civil War reenactments, Masonic Lodges have been opened in the field with great success and with exceptional reviews. Frontier Lodge hopes to attract these Masons and give them an additional reason to attend these “living history” events by offering them an opportunity to attend Lodge in an antique setting and under conditions in which their ancestors would feel at home. To this end, we have constructed Lodge furniture that is portable to allow us to set up Lodge in any empty room of sufficient size. We will meet at these far-flung locations by dispensation from Grand Lodge and will always seek the approval and support of Lodges located near the venues. It is not our intention to start a competition between Lodges, but we believe that meeting in varied locations will benefit Masonry. We also believe that Frontier Lodge offers something very different and special to members and visitors alike. Meetings held at the George Ranch Historical Park and Liendo Plantation have resulted in statements like, “This is the most meaningful Lodge meeting I have ever attended.” Our future plans include holding outdoor degrees and meetings, and meeting at such locations as Goliad (Fannin massacre), San Jacinto, Galveston, and others as we identify them.

If your Lodge meets in a vintage lodge room, or if you are located near the site of a Texas History celebration, expect to hear from us before too long. We may submit a request to open Frontier Lodge in your Lodge room, or to have you participate with us in your area during a Texas history function. If you receive such a request, we hope you will look upon it as an opportunity to gather with some good folks and learn more about our great Fraternity. We believe you will come away inspired. We do.