

# Early History of Covington Lodge No. 109, F. & M. Covington, Kentucky

This abbreviated account of the early history of Covington Lodge No. 109 (hereafter called the Lodge) is based upon a “Chronological History of Covington Lodge No. 109” compiled by Worshipful Brother William T. Moran, who served as Master of the Lodge in 1937. His compilation covered the years from 1838 to 1938 and was published upon the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Lodge.

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It is interesting to note that the City of Covington had progressed from its humble beginnings to being formally established by an Act of the Kentucky Legislature on February 8, 1815. The principal individuals involved were Richard M. Gano, John S. Gano and Thomas D. Carneal, who had paid \$ 50,000.00 for the original site of the City of Covington. They intended to subdivide the land and sell lots for homes and commercial use. Incidentally, John S. Gano and Thomas D. Carneal were later Masters of Temple Lodge, which was the first Masonic Lodge in Covington.

In August 1820, during the term of Brother Henry Clay as the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, Temple Lodge No. 64 was chartered. This Lodge was the forerunner of Covington Lodge, and was the only Masonic Lodge in the Covington area from 1820 until it surrendered its charter in August 1834. Good Faith Lodge No. 95 had been chartered during this time, but it was then located in Florence, Kentucky.

Temple Lodge held its meeting on the second floor of a building located on the western side of Scott Street, between Third and Fourth Streets. Temple Lodge had a difficult time from its beginning, both financially and for lack of interested members. Also contributing to its problems was a wave of anti-Masonry that swept over the country due to the uproar caused by the Morgan Affair. This period of prejudice and persecutions against Masons resulted from the 1826 disappearance (and presumed murder) of a printer in upstate New York named Morgan. This man, who was a member of the Masonic Order, had prepared and was attempting to publish a book. This book was said to contain the ritual for all Degrees, along with the signs and secrets of the Order. The Masons in the area were accused of abducting and killing Morgan, as well as burning the print shop where the book was being printed. These accusations caused an outcry around the country and fed the prejudice and hatred of the anti-Masonic critics of the day. A

national anti-Masonic political party was formed which even ran an unsuccessful candidate for president. Some governors were elected by this party, and it gained more influence and did more harm to our beloved Fraternity than we can easily imagine today. Thousands of local Lodges were forced to disband, and many Grand Lodges went dark during this difficult time. Nationally, Masonry existed at a very low level from 1826 until about 1840 when the most intense anti-Masonic fervor had begun to subside.

To give an example of how hurtful this anti-Masonic feeling and persecutions had been, at the meeting of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky in 1838 held in Lexington, Kentucky, the following were present: 22 representatives of subordinate Lodges, 12 Grand Lodge officers, 3 Past Grand Masters, and 11 Past Masters for a total of 48 present. The anti-masonic fever had begun to subside, and their political party had carried only one state in the election of 1836. The Grand Lodge report of 1838 shows there were 40 Lodges in the Commonwealth, including 4 under dispensation, of which Covington Lodge was one.

Thus, in the spring of 1838 a group of Masons formerly involved with Temple Lodge decided that the time was ripe for the formation of another Masonic Lodge in the Covington area. Brother W. W. Southgate and Jephtha J. Kendrick started a petition for a new Lodge to succeed to the place made vacant by the dissolution of Temple Lodge. They sought and obtained the consent and recommendation of Good Faith Lodge No. 95. The then Master of Good Faith Lodge, Henry Stuck, presented a petition for the formation of Covington Lodge, U. D., to the Grand Lodge at Lexington on August 28, 1838. The request was granted, and the following officers were to serve: Past Grand Master W. W. Southgate, Master; J. G. Arnold, Senior Warden; and J. D. Stuart, Junior Warden. The Lodge was chartered on August 27, 1839, and the old charter of Temple Lodge No. 64 was presented to Covington Lodge as its successor.

A short review will be made of the general conditions our early Brothers faced every day in and around Covington in the year 1838. Martin Van Buren was serving as the eighth President of the United States. Brother James Clark was serving as the Governor of Kentucky. There were 26 states in the Union. There was one railroad in Kentucky running from Louisville to Lexington. Almost all travel was by horseback, steamboat or stagecoach. If you had the desire and fortitude to go to Texas, it was then an independent republic having recently gained its freedom from Mexico. According to an advertisement in the Licking Valley register, the stagecoach from Lexington to Cincinnati took 16 hours, leaving Lexington at 4:00 A. M. and arriving at Cincinnati at 8:00 P. M. The fare was \$ 5.00.

The value of real estate in Covington had depreciated until in 1830 it was less than at the beginning of the City. There were fewer than 1,000 inhabitants in the City in 1830. There were seven streets running south from the Ohio River. These were Garrard, Greenup, Scott, Madison, Kennedy, Washington and Market. There were six streets parallel to the river, which were numbered First through Sixth.

In 1837-38 the channel of the Licking River was cleared, and rocks had been removed from its mouth making it navigable. The financial panic of 1837-40 was distressing the nation (we call them "recessions" today), but some bright spots were on the horizon. The first trans-Atlantic steamship navigation service was inaugurated. Friction matches were invented and placed in general use, and Samuel Morse had applied for a patent for his telegraph.

Covington Lodge was set to labor using candles (cost 13 cents per pound), and later whale lamps for illumination. It was the days of snuff boxes, the high beaver hat, and hoop skirts. The Lodge dispensation was in long hand and written on parchment with a quill pen. The formal date of opening Covington Lodge was November 24, A. L. 5838, A. D. 1838 and the first set of By-Laws were adopted. These By-Laws provided, inter alia, dues were 25 cents month, or \$ 3.00 per year; the Lodge met at 7:00 P. M. from March 20<sup>th</sup> to September 20<sup>th</sup> and at 6:00 P. M. from September 21 to March 19. There were elections for officers twice a year on the St. John's Day in June and December.

From the beginning the Lodge opened on the Entered apprentice Degree, read the minutes and transacted all business on that Degree. Then, if necessary, they opened the Lodge on the Fellow Craft or Master Mason Degree for the purpose of passing or raising candidates. It is interesting to note that the Lodge hired a band to play at their Masonic funerals. The expense of hiring these bands was a major one for the Lodge, and many times the cost of the band required half their ready cash. The discussion regarding hiring a funeral band was the most important item in the minutes of many meetings. The members wore black crepe arm bands in public for 20 days following the death of a member.

The records do not reflect where the Lodge met for its first meetings. However, in February 1839, the Lodge voted to move to a new Lodge room on Market Street for an annual rent of \$ 60.00 per year.

The Lodge began conducting regular business and initiating members for the next several years. The Lodge started to work under dispensation with 9 members. The membership grew steadily with many of the leading Masons of the day visiting the Lodge and often conferring the Degrees. The day of the election of officers the Lodge met at 9:00 A. M. for the officers' reports and the elections. Lunch was served, and the members generally made a full day of the semi-annual elections.

On June 24, 1843 the Lodge conducted its semi-annual meeting for the election of officers. Also, on that day the cornerstones of the Covington City Hall and Trinity Episcopal Church were laid with Masonic ceremonies by Grand Master Henry Wingate. This was, so far as is known, the first cornerstone laying in Northern Kentucky. The ceremonial implements were borrowed from Cincinnati Lodges. Many visiting Brethren from Cincinnati and surrounding Kentucky and Ohio Lodges were present. Following the

ceremonies, a dinner hosted by Covington Lodge was served at the Presbyterian Church. The minutes say the dinner featured many “flowery speeches.”

On January 4, 1844, the Lodge voted favorably to the Grand Lodge that a dispensation be issued for Licking Valley Lodge No. 135 to be located in Newport, Kentucky. It was the first Lodge organized in Campbell County. It ceased work in 1856. H. H. Mayo, treasurer of Covington Lodge, demitted in order to become the first Master of Licking Valley Lodge.

On November 23, 1844 the Lodge published a notice of its meeting in a newspaper under a Masonic emblem. The paper was the Licking Valley Register which was owned and edited by Brother Richard C. Langdon, Past Master of Covington Lodge. Bro. Langdon died in a southern state on March 5, 1845. Owing to his death in the South and the time it took to transport his body to Covington, his request for a Masonic funeral had to be denied.

On July 29, 1847, a meeting of Covington Lodge was held to help organize Col. Clay Lodge No. 159. On October 25, 1847 several former members of Covington Lodge were installed as officers of Col. Clay Lodge, including the new Master, Brother W. H. Glore, who was elected on December 27, 1847,

On February 26, 1849, the Lodge moved from its old hall to a new hall located on the east side of Scott Street, situated between Market Space and Fourth Street. The new hall was leased for the period of 10 years. This Lodge hall was destroyed by fire in July 1852. The Lodge then met in the Odd Fellows Hall temporarily until May 1853. They then moved to a new hall located near the site of the former meeting place, on the east side of Scott Street, between Market Space and Fourth Street.

On February 12, 1855, an audit of the books showed a balance of only \$ 2.13. The minutes say, “this was the poorest we ever were.” However, on December 10, 1855, the Lodge paid \$ 4.00 for columns for the officers’ stations. The minutes noted that such columns had not been used for years.

The Lodge minutes reflect dissension within the Lodge during the years leading up to the outbreak of the Civil War in 1861. However, no direct mention is made in the minutes of any animosity between the members on political disagreements. We know from other sources that some members, who were Union sympathizers, were dissatisfied and left to form Golden Rule Lodge No. 345, which was chartered by the Grand Lodge of Kentucky on October 14, 1857.

On April 16, 1859, Grand Master Rob Morris presided at the conferral of the Master Mason’s Degree in the Lodge. Brother Morris was not only Grand Master but was later Grand Commander of the Knight Templars in Kentucky, as well as being the founder of the Order of the Eastern Star.

The many problems resulting from the Civil War became so difficult that on May 16, 1864, the Lodge surrendered its charter to the Grand Lodge. After the war ended in April 1865, the former members of the Lodge on February 19, 1867 called a meeting asking for a dispensation from the Grand Lodge for a reorganization and reinstatement of the old Covington Lodge. This action was taken by the Grand Lodge on October 24, 1867, and on November 25, 1867 all the old jewels, records and papers of the old Lodge were returned along with the old number 109 restored.

Thus, a difficult time was overcome, and the Lodge started on its successful way which has lasted until the present time. The later history of the Lodge has not been without its problems as we well know, but we pray that with the blessings and guidance of the Grand Architect of the Universe, this Lodge will endure for many more years in which we can enjoy great fellowship and disperse more Masonic light.

**Edwin L. Vardiman**  
**Past Master**  
**May 21, 2012**

**Editor's Note:**

On February 22, 2014, Covington Lodge No. 109 and Golden Rule Lodge No. 345 consolidated to form Golden Rule-Covington Lodge No. 109.

A longtime member of Covington Lodge No. 109, and Golden Rule-Covington Lodge No. 109, Edwin L. Vardiman served as Master of William O. Ware Lodge of Research in 1989-90. On Nov. 7, 2018, W. B. Vardiman was named the Lodge's first William O. Ware Research Fellow.