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Masons from Kentucky

Duels, Soldiers, Politicians & The Alamo

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While dueling may seem barbaric to modern men, it was a ritual that made sense in a society in which the preservation of male honor was absolutely paramount. A man's honor was the most central aspect of his identity and thus its reputation had to be kept unvarnished by any means necessary.

Duels, which were sometimes attended by hundreds of people, were a way for men to publicly prove their courage and manliness. In such a society, the courts could offer a gentleman no real justice; the matter had to be resolved with the shedding of blood.

Dr. William H. Richardson and Dr. Benjamin Dudley were both physicians on the faculty of Transylvania College in 1818. Both were also Past Masters of Lexington Lodge No. 1. Dr. Daniel Drake, a third prominent faculty member who was not a Mason, publicly disputed Dr. Dudley's autopsy

performed in celebrated Lexington death investigation.

The dispute led to each man publicly insulting the other and Dudley challenged Drake to a duel. Drake would not accept the challenge, but Dr. Richardson, volunteered to serve as his substitute. Regardless of the fact that dueling was clearly un-Masonic conduct as well as against Kentucky law, the men kept their appointment. Even though dueling was indeed against the law, there was no penalty.



Dudley and Richardson met on a warm August morning in 1818 at Donnerail near Georgetown Road, a well-known site where other duels had taken place. The duel was well attended by spectators from the community.

Dudley fired after the customary 10 paces, his bullet striking Richardson in an artery in his hip. The attending physician alone could not stop the bleeding. Dudley walked to where Richardson was on the ground and observed the problem the attending doctor was experiencing and offered his assistance. Richardson's life was saved.



The next month at the annual meeting of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky which took place in Lexington, Richardson and Dudley were temporarily suspended from the privileges of Masonry. Henry Clay, who would later become Master of Lexington Lodge No, 1 and

Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, sat on that disciplinary panel. The two men patched up their differences and continued to serve on the faculty at Transylvania.

John Cabel Breckinridge, at 36 years old, was the youngest person ever to serve as Vice President. By the time he was 45 years old, he had served as state legislator, U.S. representative, U.S. senator, major general and Confederate Secretary of War. His only political defeat came in 1860 when he lost the presidential race to another native Kentuckian, Abraham Lincoln.



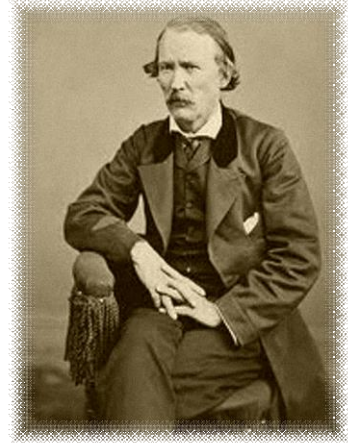
As brigadier-general he commanded the Confederate reserve at Shiloh, and later fought in the Vicksburg, Wilderness, Shenandoah Valley campaigns, as well as Stone River and in the battle of Chickamauga. Afterwards, he joined Robert E. Lee at the battle Cold Harbor. In 1865, he was appointed the last Secretary of War for the Confederacy by Jefferson Davis.

Breckinridge remained popular throughout Kentucky in spite of his participation in the confederacy; however, like so many of his generation, he never recovered from the financial ruin of the Civil War. He turned down all requests following the war to again enter politics. He returned to a small law practice in Lexington and became vice-president of the Big Sandy Railroad Company in Elizabethtown.

During a few years that Breckinridge lived in Burlington, Iowa he became a member of Des Moines Lodge No. 41 (now No. 1). Upon his return to Lexington he affiliated with Good Samaritan Lodge No. 174. He became the first Sovereign Grand Inspector General of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry in Kentucky and in 1875 he received the 33rd Degree of Scottish Rite Masonry from Albert Pike.

Christopher Houston “Kit” Carson was born in Madison County, Kentucky, in 1809. His family moved after purchasing land owned by the sons of Daniel Boone in Franklin, Missouri. The Boone and Carson families became close friends and intermarried.

Carson left Missouri at age 16 and traveled west where he became a living legend because of his exploits as one of the first fur trappers, early mountain men and Indian scout. Carson fought as an American cavalry officer on the Western frontier and was also very influential in securing peace treaties with many Native American tribes. He fought in the Mexican-American War and climbed through the military ranks from lieutenant to general.



His early reputation grew because of his long-time association, friendship and adventures with renowned frontiersman and mountain man, Jim Bridger. Carson and Bridger were among the first to trap beaver along the Yellowstone. Carson became a Freemason at Montezuma Lodge No. 109, in Santa Fe, New Mexico Territory in 1854.

Jim Bowie, most famous as one the final defenders at The Alamo, was born in Logan County, Kentucky. He is also remembered for the renowned and legendary “Bowie Knife, a deadly fighting weapon over nine inches long and two inches wide. Although Bowie is often credited with inventing the knife, it was actually designed and made by his brother Rezin Bowie.

Stories of Bowie as a fighter and frontiersman, both real and fictitious, have made him a legendary figure in Texas history and a folk hero of American culture. He was initiated a Freemason at L'Humble Chaumiere Lodge No. 19, Opelousas, Louisiana.

Bowie settled in Louisiana, where he spent most of his youth. It was there that he first acquired a reputation for his bold and fearless disposition.



Bowie commanded a volunteer force in San Antonio when William Travis arrived with regular army troops at the Alamo. Pneumonia disabled Bowie and he was confined to his cot at the time of his death during the battle.



Thomas Deye Owings owned and operated an iron furnace in an area now known as Owingsville, Kentucky. The Bourbon Furnace, as it became known, was the first iron-smelting operation built west of Allegheny Mountains, making cut nails, pots and other cooking utensils, horse shoes, axe blades, hoes, stoves, plow shares, pig iron and bar iron.

In 1836, Owings raised two regiments of Kentucky volunteers, many of which were Masons, at the request of a former Transylvania University student and friend, Stephen Austin, to travel to Texas and fight for independence from Mexico. Members of the Kentucky militia were massacred at Goliad, Texas, three weeks prior to the fall of the Alamo, where Col. William Travis, Davy Crockett, Jim Bowie and the other defenders waited for this militia to arrive as reinforcements.

Before that occurred, Owings had already established himself as a wealthy businessman and was recorded as a Master Mason for 1821-1822 in the Proceedings of the now defunct Owingsville Webb Lodge 55. Owings military service began at the Battle of the Thames, where Tecumseh died in battle and believed to have been killed by another Kentucky Freemason, and 9th Vice President, Richard M. Johnson. He also served in the War of 1812 as colonel under future Governor and then General, Isaac Shelby.



John Hunt Morgan was raised in Kentucky on the farm of his grandfather, John Wesley Hunt, an early founder of Lexington and one of the first millionaires west of the Alleghany Mountains. He became a Mason in 1846 at Daviess Lodge No. 22, in Lexington.

General Morgan is best known for “Morgan's Raid,” In 1863, he and his confederate Calvary rode over 1,000 miles covering an area from Tennessee, up through Kentucky, into Indiana and on into southern Ohio. This would be the farthest north any uniformed Confederate troops penetrated during the Civil War. Ultimately, he and his force of over 700 men were captured in Ohio. After a daring escape he would lead other raids into Kentucky, but his reputation was blemished due to reports of pillaging and the high causality rate of the unit.

In September 1864, he was reportedly ambushed and killed while attempting to escape capture during a Union raid on Greeneville, Tennessee. The Hunt-Morgan House, at 201 North Mill Street in Lexington's historic Gratz Park neighborhood, was the Morgan family home. A Civil War museum on the second floor displays swords, saddles, photographs, uniforms and other artifacts from Morgan and his men.

The John Hunt Morgan statue on the front lawn of Fayette County Court House was unveiled in 1911 and reportedly caused quite a local stir. Morgan is sculpted astride a conspicuous stallion instead of his well-known mare, “Bess.”

Simon Bolver Buckner graduated from West Point and later served as an instructor. He saw his first action in the Mexican-American War. He was commissioned a Brigadier General in the Confederate Army and put in command of forces in Central Kentucky and later Fort Donaldson in Tennessee.



Buckner, who had been a friend of General Ulysses S. Grant since West Point, was outraged when Grant demanded unconditional surrender of Fort Donaldson. Buckner has been attributed by some historians as referring to Grant as “Unconditional Surrender Grant,” thus giving him that historical nickname. At Fort Donnellson, Buckner became the first Confederate General to surrender an army; at New Orleans on June 2, 1865, having reached the rank of Lieutenant General, he became the last general in the east to surrender.

Buckner returned to Kentucky and became editor of the Louisville Courier. After being pardoned he entered politics, serving as the 30th governor of Kentucky from 1887-1889. He was initiated at Green River Lodge No. 88 in Munfordville Kentucky. Buckner died in 1914 making him the last surviving Confederate soldier above the rank of Major General.

The Role of Kentucky Freemasons in the Fight for Texas Independence

In 1836, at the request of Steven Austin, a Freemason, Kentuckians mobilized volunteers to enlist in the service of the Texas Army to fight for independence.

Thomas Deye Owings, a prominent Kentucky Freemason and acquaintance of Austin, enlisted an advanced regiment and outfitted them at his own expense. Many of these volunteers were Freemasons. The Kentucky regiment marched to and joined the Texas command at Goliad and was initially ordered to march to the Alamo to serve as reinforcements for Col. William Travis.



A surprise encounter with the Mexican army after arriving at Goliad resulted in their capture and subsequent massacre. Owings' son was among the seventy-five men from Kentucky who were executed.

Meanwhile, Thomas Deye Owings, with an additional 1,500 volunteers from Kentucky traveled to Texas and joined forces



with fellow Freemason General Sam Houston. He arrived the day following the Battle of San Jacinto where Houston defeated and captured Santa Anna and learned that his son was killed at San Jacinto.

Owings' volunteers remained in the service of the Texas Army until all Mexican troops withdrew from the new republic. Most Freemasons killed in service to Texas from Kentucky and other states were buried in the Masonic Cemetery in Washington County, Texas. Of the 257 men who died at the Alamo, eight were Kentuckians.



Santa Anna's surrender to Sam Houston following the Battle of San Jacinto three weeks after the fall of the Alamo.