

A HISTORY OF BURLINGTON LODGE NO. 763, F. & A. M.

INTRODUCTION

What follows is a survey of the events leading to and resulting in the formation of Burlington Lodge. These events have been reconstructed through conversations, information, interview and reviews of Lodge Bulletins and Minutes. Some information may be a little sketchy. This is to be expected because over thirty years have passed since the idea of forming a Lodge in Burlington came into being. In addition, the archives of the Lodge hold little information may be a little sketchy. This is to be expected because over thirty years have passed since the idea of forming a Lodge in Burlington came into being. In addition, the archives of the Lodge hold little information about the early days and the memories of those who were present then have been clouded by the passing years.

The information contained here should be scrutinized; especially by those who had first hand knowledge of these events. This material is not "written in stone." It may be updated or corrected at any time. Indeed, we would appreciate any additional information or ideas anyone would like to offer.

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CHAPTER 1. ERA OF DISCONTENT

The year is 1955. Burlington is a small but busy community on the outskirts of Knoxville. It is imaginable that the residents of this community rarely travelled over a mile or two from their homes in the course of an average day.

It must have been frustrating, however, for a Mason living in Burlington. He could do his shopping, send his children to school, attend church and perhaps even work within a short distance from his home. To attend Lodge, however, he had to travel to downtown Knoxville or across town.

John Howard "Corky" Moulton and Wheeler Mitchell Moulton operated a service station in what was then the center of the Burlington community and both were Masons. Their Masonic brothers would come by to get gas before heading across town to attend Lodge and it is not improbable that their disappointment about not having a Lodge home nearby was frequently voiced. In those days, the Lodge you could join was determined by the area of town in which you lived. For example, Corky Moulton lived on Buffat Mill Road; therefore, he had to petition Bright Hope Lodge in the Fountain City Community.

Lothar Jackson "Pop" O'Barr was a member of Masters Lodge No. 244. He and other members of Masters discussed the prospects of having a Lodge in Burlington. Understandably, some of his fellow members objected to the idea because it might draw members away from their Lodge. So, for a long time the idea remained dormant.

Although not documented, it is likely that similar thoughts and conversations took place at the various other Lodges around Knoxville among those who lived in the Burlington area but had to attend Lodge meetings elsewhere.

A number of Burlington Masons were members of nearby McCalla Avenue Baptist Church. Here also, frequent conversations took place concerning the need for a Lodge in their community. Interest may have been even stronger here, because Everette Warren Rust was the Pastor of this Church and was Past Master of his Lodge. For many, this was the only opportunity to meet with their Masonic brothers, because their Lodge memberships were scattered throughout Knoxville.

It is plain that a growing number of men were in agreement on a problem that affected them deeply. To any other group of men, the problem would have been discussed, pondered, and then forgotten. These men, however, were Masons.

It is difficult to reconstruct, but our information so far shows that the following men were among the original fifteen: Parnick Victor "Mule" Majors, John William "Corky" Moulton, Wheeler Mitchell Moulton, Lothar Jackson "Pop" O'Barr, Everette Warren Rust, Fred Wright, Charles Lyle, James Blair, Albert M. Craig, Marion L "Doc" Ailshie, Ivan Cornelius Lusk, Rhea E Miller, and Mel Miller.

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CHAPTER 2. FROM IDEA TO ACTION

One Sunday afternoon in 1955, a group of men decided to have a supper meeting to see how many were serious about having a Lodge home in Burlington. It was decided that each person would make phone calls and try to have as many men as possible come to the church that night.

It had to have been a little disappointing when only fifteen men attended the meeting. However, they were at least inspired by the fact that they were doing anything at all. This inspiration must have been strong, because they decided to forge ahead and attempt what had to have seemed an impossible task.

Since he was not only a Mason, but Past Master of his Lodge, Pastor Rust wanted to help in any way he could. He offered the church premises as a meeting place for the group. Having a meeting place, a strong commitment and a few dollars collected from each member of the group to obtain supplies, the men set to work.

The first order of business was to gather information about what had to be done to obtain their charter. After all, only a few of these men had remained active in their respective Lodges because of the distance they had to travel. Roy Louis Akard was a very serious and dedicated Mason, Past Master of his own Lodge, and had a knack for detail. He is given credit for much of the early leg-work and fact-finding duties, including several trips to the Grand Lodge in Nashville. Others went to their own Lodges, discussed the idea, and sought advice from their Masonic leaders. It is unlikely that the information they received was accompanied by much encouragement.

Having been advised to write to the Grand Lodge, they received a Petition for Charter. The most central location in Burlington and the one frequented by many Masons was Corky and Wheeler Moulton's service station.

The petition was left there and the word was spread throughout the local Masonic community. In order to qualify, the petition required fifteen signatures. When it was submitted, it contained one hundred forty-two. It required the signatures of two Past Masters. These were Roy L. Akard and Albert M. Craig. In addition, two other Lodges had to sign. Understandably, some were reluctant to do so for fear that a new Lodge would take

members away from them. But, Masonic wisdom and charity prevailed and two Lodges, Knoxville and Woodward, graciously agreed to sign. Finally, they needed a place to meet. Masonic leaders had advised the group that McCalla Avenue Baptist Church would not qualify under Grand Lodge rules. Search was then made which resulted in the conclusion that there simply was no place to meet in Burlington. Nearby, however, on Washington Avenue was an old grocery store whose upstairs served as the meeting place for the Junior Order. This group agreed to allow the men to use the building on Monday and Thursday nights at a cost of five dollars per month.

Over the next 4 to 6 months, meetings were held about once a month in the basement of McCalla Avenue Baptist Church in the area designated "Young Adult 1" and at the Junior Order hall. This was not yet a Masonic Lodge, but a group of Masons. These meetings were for organization and planning and were most certainly filled with pep-talks to assure that the enthusiasm did not falter. Unlike today, these meetings were very short and to the point. We have grown accustomed to at least having peanut butter and crackers, a few cookies and coffee at our meetings, but this group had about five dollars in the treasury and could not even afford these minor luxuries. Unfortunately, this group was not formally organized, so no minutes exist for these crucial early meetings.

When the Grand Lodge held its Annual Communication in March of 1956, several men in the group travelled to Nashville and checked into a very economical hotel around the corner from the Grand Lodge. They arrived on the Monday previous to the Grand Lodge meeting for the interview that was required before the Grand Lodge would consider granting dispensation. This interview has been described as more like an inquisition or hearing. The men were grilled on all aspects of their petition so that the Grand Lodge could assure itself that this was a serious and feasible effort, it must have been a great relief when the Grand Secretary announced "Burlington Lodge, U.D.". With dispensation in hand and encouragement in heart, the men returned to Knoxville.

The first Stated Communication of Burlington Lodge, U. D. F. and A. M. was held on April 12, 1956, at the Junior Order hall on Washington Avenue.

The first Master Mason Degree conferred was on a courtesy degree for Brother Norris Clayton Hendricks Jr. of Toxy Lodge No. 750, A.F. & A.M. of Toxy, Alabama.

The first officers of Burlington Lodge U.D. F. & A. M. were:

Roy L. Akard	Worshipful Master
Albert M. Craig	Senior Warden
James A. Blair	Junior Warden
M. L. Ailshie	Secretary
P. V. Majors	Senior Deacon
L. J. O'Barr	Junior Deacon
Frank P. Henry	Senior Steward
William C. Cardwell	Junior Steward
James P. Davis	Chaplain
Ray Miller	Tiler
Harold K. Melton	Treasurer

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CHAPTER 3. THE SEARCH FOR A HOME

The accommodations at the Junior Order Hall on Washington Avenue, although appreciated, still did not satisfy the intent of the group. After all, the main purpose was forming a Lodge to meet in Burlington, not in Park City. The size of the building was not really a problem, because only a small portion of those who signed the petition actually attended these meetings. Many of those who had signed the petition did so only to assist in obtaining dispensation, not to permanently transfer their Lodge affiliations. So, the active group was small, but they were very determined as well.

The solution to the problem was very simple: build a new Lodge in Burlington. It wasn't so simple, however, for a small group of men with a meager treasury. Not to be defeated, a Building Committee was appointed to study the feasibility of erecting a Masonic Temple in the Burlington Community. The Committee was chaired by Hugh E. Bolin Jr. and Dr. Paul Hahn served as Co-chairman and Treasurer.

One piece of property which was considered was across from Corky and Wheeler Moulton's service station. Providence must have had a hand in the decision not to pursue this property, because it was in the middle of what is now Ashville Highway!

Another piece of property was located and it was determined that the owners were willing to sell, it was no less than a miracle that the Building Committee obtained options to purchase this property in a single evening! If this were attempted today, you would need real estate appraisal, a legal staff and a few weeks or months to obtain a purchase option on a piece of property. In the summer of 1956, however, most of the resident accepted one dollar and a handshake as a legal and binding contract. The events which followed were, likewise, almost miraculous.

It was not financially feasible to build a two-story building to be used only as a Masonic Temple. Instead, it was proposed that the ground floor be leased to a merchant tenant. In a meeting with Dwight McDonald, Hugh Bolin struck an agreement to lease the ground floor of our Temple to White Stores, Inc., which needed a new store in the area.

The Burlington Masonic Temple Association, later incorporated, was formed to be the governing body of this project. In order to finance the effort, one hundred fifty thousand dollars had to be obtained. Hugh Bolin, who was associated through his business activities with Claude Meyers at the Fountain City Bank, asked that institution to assist us with a bond issue. Somewhat reluctantly, Mr. Meyers agreed to issue fifty thousand dollars in bonds at five percent interest. Until that time, no other bank would even consider the matter. However, following Fountain City Bank's approval, the remainder of the sum needed was issued.

The following is an excerpt from the Lodge Minutes of August 9, 1956:

"The Burlington Masonic Temple Association project outlined in the Lodge a Called Communication to our entire membership dated August 3, 1956, was presented by Brother Hugh E. Bolin Jr., General Chairman, and Brother Paul B. Hahn, Co-Chairman and Treasurer of The Burlington Masonic Temple Association for consideration an official approval of the Lodge. Brother Bolin stated that the forty members of Burlington Lodge U. D. had approved the formation of Burlington Masonic Temple Association, that his committee had secured and recorded options for property on which to erect our Masonic Temple, that plans for financing would involve the selling of five percent interest-bearing revenue bonds to obtain money to purchase the property, that lease on the property would provide money to build the structure and that the entire cost would be amortized by revenue from the long-term lease of the ground floor designed for that purpose. A motion for Lodge approval of the entire project was made by our Senior Warden, Brother Albert M. Craig and duly seconded by Brother Charles E. Lyle. After discussion, a vote was taken and resulted in a unanimous, standing vote for approval. The members present immediately pledged to the purchase approximately ten thousand dollars worth of bonds."

Commenting upon the action, Parnick Victor "Mule" Majors said, "He (Hugh Bolin) came out with the enormous figure of \$175,000.00 for a Lodge building and, at that time, if I remember correctly, we had five dollars in the building fund and seventy-five dollars in the treasury. And I felt like jumping out of the second story window!"

In the meantime, the Lodge had the responsibility of any other Masonic Lodge: with the added pressure of a Lodge under dispensation to perform all of these duties in an exemplary manner. Among the problems in meeting at the Junior Order Hall was having to prepare candidates in a less than pleasantly aromatic men's restroom. Stated another way and quoting from Mule Majors – "It stunk!"

The first Master Mason Degree conferred on a brother of our own Lodge was on October 4, 1956. The brother was Sanford Harrison Widner.

On October 11, 1956, the membership of Burlington Lodge convened in a corporation meeting to adopt and approve a charter of incorporation issued September 12, 1956, and proceeded to organize the corporation according to the general powers and limitations set forth in its charter.

March 27, 1957, is a date which will long live in the memories, not only in the minds of the men present at that time, but in all who ever belong to Burlington Lodge. Thirty-five to forty members of the Lodge made the journey to Nashville for the Grand Lodge session that year. They waited with great anticipated for word that the charter was granted to Burlington Lodge No. 763, F. & A. M. One of those present, Parnick Victor "Mule" Majors said, "I've never seen a prouder group of men!"

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CHAPTER 4. BUSY HANDS ARE HAPPY HANDS

There were lots of busy (and dirty) hands around Burlington when work began on the new Masonic temple. Several houses, including a log cabin, had to be removed, the land had to be cleared of vegetation, and a large drainage ditch had to be filled.

Under usual circumstances, this would be a very costly process. Burlington Lodge, however, is not your "usual" Lodge. Members of the Lodge worked on Saturday, on evenings after putting in a hard day of work at their usual avocation or took vacation time to assist in the labor required to prepare the property for construction.

Bulldozers were needed to clear the ground. These were donated to the Lodge. All that was required was that they be cared for and the fuel replaced. The dirt required to fill in the drainage ditch could have been a costly factor. This too was donated free of charge, as were the trucks needed to bring it to the site.

When the property had been prepared, the foundation and frame of the building was erected at a substantial discount by a local construction firm. All of the steel required was donated and the workers donated their time as well.

During construction, one iron worker fell from the building. Fortunately, he suffered only a broken arm. As a steel-worker, however, the injury was still very damaging, since he could not perform his duties until his arm had mended. The members of the Lodge collected donations in the amount of one thousand dollars to assist him and his family through his rehabilitation.

In listening to those who worked on the Lodge building, several themes become clear. First, it was a dedicated and committed group of men who toiled at this very difficult undertaking. In fact, the only contention seemed to be among those who were trying to see who could do the most and work the hardest. Second, it was an enthusiastic group of men. Much of the work had to be done only on Saturdays. The trucks and bulldozers which were donated could only be used on that day. Finally, it was a proud group of men. That pride echoes in their voices and beams from their faces whenever they talk about this part of their lives.

It would be very difficult to mention the name of every person who contributed and sacrificed in this effort. It is true that some contributed more than others; but, the more important issue is that they worked together, never gave up and never lost sight of their goals. They set the goal because they were good Masons; they accomplished it because they are Burlington Lodge Masons!

One thing that was prevalent then as now is the frugality of the members of Burlington Lodge. The only difference is that our founders had no choice, because they had no money. The aprons they used were made by their wives. The furniture was built and donated by B. S. Gilliam and Ted Witt.

There are instances throughout our Lodge's history where we have been beneficiaries of the kindness and charity of others; some of whom were not even Masons. It has already been stated how much members of the business community helped with the construction of the Temple.

One person whose big heart was greatly appreciated by the Lodge was Bill Wade. His bakery was located near the Lodge and whenever the Lodge needed biscuits, cookies, or other bakery items, he would provide them; often without charge. Robert C. Burnette recalls that Mr. Wade would hand him his purchase and, when asked how much was owed, he would reply, "When you can afford it, I'll send you a bill." Those bills did not come for a long time.

Brother Burnette also recalls that early one morning near Christmas he received a phone call from "Fats" Parsons. Brother Parsons said, "Come on we're going to catch some chickens." Brother Burnette replied, "Chickens?" Brother Parsons explained that the Lodge would only be charged ten cents apiece for each chicken they caught. That morning, they captured one hundred fifty chickens, killed, cleaned, and froze them and included them in the Christmas baskets they delivered that year.

Other examples, too numerous to mention, have helped Burlington Lodge tremendously. What is equally or more important is that the kindness and charity of others have helped Burlington Lodge to do what it was built for in the first place. That is, to do as much as possible to provide for the members of the Lodge, residents of the community and others as their needs may require. In short, we take what we can get so that we can give even more.

HISTORY COMMITTEE

John "Corky" Moulton

Lothar "Pop" O'Barr

Mel Miller, Chm.

COMPOSITION BY:

Mike Esslinger