



History of Cecil Lodge No. 125, A.F.&A.M., Chesapeake City, MD 1866 - 2008

Researched and written by Past Master Lewis A. Collins, Jr.

A dispensation was issued on March 15, 1866, upon the recommendation of Union Lodge No. 48, Elkton, Maryland, by Grand Master, John Coats, Grand Lodge of Maryland, Ancient Free & Accepted Masons, to Brothers J. W. Harriott, William H. Kirk, William Lindsay, and six others to open a Lodge in Chesapeake City, Maryland. A Charter was granted two months later on May 14, 1866.

The first officers were John W. Harriott, Worshipful Master; William Kirk, Sr Warden; William Lindsay, Jr. Warden; J. T. Hedrick, Sect'y.; Powel Smack, Treas.; E. P. Bowen, Sr. Deacon; C. Rhodes, Jr. Deacon; and J. VanHorn, Tyler.

For the first few years the Lodge met in the Bohemia I.O.O.F. Hall in South Chesapeake City. Several of these members belonged to both Lodges. You have to remember that the mode of travel and transportation was a problem during that period of time. Communication was poor. Some letters on file indicate that attendance was a problem because all the teams (horses) were rented out for the day or night - before the days of the automobile and too far to walk. In 1866 mail was very slow and sometimes never reached its destination; Western Union had only been in operation for fifteen years; and the telephone wasn't invented until ten years later. Now you realize why these men wanted to start a Lodge closer to home. This was an evening of fellowship and entertainment for many of these men.

A letter from the Grand Lodge of Maryland to WM Dewey Plummer, dated April 28, 1938, indicated the following brethren were:

Charter and Early Members of Cecil Lodge No. 125, Chesapeake City, MD.

John W. Harriott	W. C. Karshner, M.D.	William Coleman
William Kirk *	William J. Barwick	James Cummins
William Lindsay	Samuel Powell *	William Spear
J.T. Hedrick	John Smithers	Rev. Wm. Taylor
Powell Smack *	Wesley Clayton	W. Smithers
James V. Wallace, M.D.	Rev. D. F. Ewell	James O. Vaughn
Charles Rhoades	Jos. H. Brooks	John O. Moore
James VanHorn	James H. Steele	
E. P. Bowen	Samuel Savin	

* The letter states that with the exception of Powell, Smack, and Kirk, all the others were members of Union Lodge No. 48, Elkton, MD.

Upon receipt of the dispensation from the GL of MD, the first organizational meeting was held on March 20, 1866, at which time they read the dispensation, elected, and installed officers. The important items of business were (1) a discussion and agreement to set the first and third Tuesdays for regular meeting nights - time to be 7:30pm during April through November and 6:30pm for December through March and (2) agreed to adopt Union Lodge No. 48 by-laws while operating under dispensation. The second meeting was conducted to practice and prepare for conferring the Entered Apprentice and Fellowcraft Degrees. And at the third meeting the Entered Apprentice Degree was conferred upon the first candidate, A. P. Cropper, by the Worshipful Master assisted by the brethren.

Early By-Laws

Back in those days, unlike today, in accordance with the by-laws a candidate paid ten dollars for the first degree when he submitted his application to become a member, followed by five dollars for the second degree and ten dollars for the third degree, and if for any reason a special meeting was requested by the candidate for conferring any of these degrees, the candidate would pay any extra expenses incurred. Dues are paid annually today as compared to quarterly in the mid to late 1800's payable within the quarter year they were due and any member who hadn't paid for two quarters was considered delinquent. Also noted in the minutes, there were numerous times when the lodge meeting was called off and resumed the next day at 1pm. Additional meeting dates were at the discretion of the Worshipful Master per the bylaws.

First Masonic Hall

Within a year of sharing space with the I.O.O.F Lodge most of the members were anxious to settle in quarters of their own and suggested building a Masonic Temple that they could call their own with income producing ground floor rental units to offset the cost of the building. A Building Committee was appointed; a parcel of ground in front of W. J. Barwick's store was leased from the US Government for a sum of one dollar per year and soon thereafter plans were submitted to the membership who agreed it was an excellent idea. This project became a reality between T. C. Strickland and the Building Committee on June 2, 1869, when an agreement (contract) was signed to build a three story structure for \$3,000 labor to be completed in a three month period with payment as work progressed. Some of the details included in the agreement were; the building was to be horsed up three stories high with horizontal weatherboard siding; one inch white pine floors throughout; sawed pine roof shingles; and glazed windows with all the trimming and blinds (shutters) included. As the work progressed the Building Committee decided to add a porch on one end and one side of the structure for an additional labor cost of \$300. The interior was plastered in a separate agreement at a cost of \$245. When the building was complete Brother Wm. J. Barwick leased one of three first floor units for a sum of \$300 a year. Records indicate that Cecil Lodge owed Bro. Barwick \$600 for miscellaneous work fitting out the first and second floors and agreed to credit him with two years rent.

Finances 1866 -1947

There is very little in the minutes about money except for the fact that it was never plentiful. Dues were one dollar each quarter of the year including Grand Lodge dues and assessments. This was considered expensive and many members would fall behind and eventually struggle to pay up. Early on lodge officers solicited money from its members for expenses such as paying for framing the Charter, hall rent, etc. They always reimbursed these members with dues money as it came in. The lodge paid traveling expenses for those attending the Grand Lodge Meetings in downtown Baltimore which was \$8/\$10 a trip and also expensive in those days compared with today's dollar. When the members started talking about raising money to build a Masonic Hall a suggestion was made to hold a fair to see how the public would react and a committee was appointed to see if it was feasible. The event called "The Grand Scheme" was organized and held for two weeks in the Methodist Church and was a huge success with a large profit. Minutes indicate that a sum of \$24 (a portion of the profit) was donated to the church for use of their facility for the fair. This was an indication that the public would support the Masons with their building project. The building committee formed a stock company after the ground was leased from the U S Government. They sold stock for twenty dollars a share, sometimes with a two dollar deposit which was another indication of tight money. The stock paid six percent interest to nonmembers. This money was used to fund the labor cost of the agreement to construct the building. There is every indication that the materials were paid for by some of the businessmen who were Masons and records indicate they were paid back after the construction was complete at which time the lodge mortgaged the new building for \$3,000 through the bank. When completed the three stores on the first floor were each rented for \$300 a year with a minimum two year lease. The Masons used the third floor for their meetings and the second floor was used by the local schools, organizations, clubs and as a "silent" movie theater (prior to sound) accompanied by a player piano. The only mention of income or expenses for this floor is cost of cleaning up at the end of the evening - the custodian was paid twenty-five cents per night by the lodge. The lodge often paid ten cents for some teenager to fire up the chunk burner on the third floor so the room would be warm for their meeting. The lodge sold the building for \$305 when the ground lease expired and it was torn down. The lodge really struggled after this loss. Having to move fast they rented the second floor of PM J. M. Reed's store for \$10 a month including heat and electricity. Minutes indicate at this point that there was no money left to even pay the rent.

Masonic Hall Loss

In late spring of 1937, Cecil Lodge learned that the Corp of Engineers would not renew the land lease where the Masonic Hall was situated and with that Cecil Lodge immediately filed a claim with the government to compensate them for the loss of the building. Even with the help of Congressman Allan T. Goldsborough this went round and round until official word was received in October 1937 that payment could not be recommended under any circumstance as favorable and the land lease would not be renewed after December 31, 1937. With this word the lodge accepted an offer from PM John M. Reed, Jr. to rent the upstairs of his store and the lodge furniture was moved to the Reed Building the following week. A committee was appointed to dispose of the building and its contents. Three bids were received for the sale of the building: Wm. W. Hanby \$50, H. H. Warfel \$150, and the Robinson Bros. \$305 and it went to the highest bidder. Wooden folding chairs were sold - \$10 for the lot (?) and a load of wood was given to a very worthy elderly lady according to the minutes. The player piano on the second floor was donated to the Elkton Chapter #84, OES. All in all the lodge came up on the short end. There is no mention of the tenants in the minutes at that point except for the fact that they had to make a fast move to vacate the building.

Franklin Hall

Cecil Lodge had been meeting in the "Reed Building" for ten years when Brother Harry Lovitz received word that the Conrey Building (Franklin Hall) he was renting would be sold soon. He had already announced his retirement and had no interest but passed the word on to the officers of Cecil Lodge who immediately contacted Brother PM James Weinroth, Attorney, who informed the seller of our interest. Several members inspected the building and made an offer of \$4,000. The seller had a set price of \$4,400 which both parties agreed upon and the lodge made a \$100 deposit based on Grand Lodge approval which was received shortly thereafter. The lodge mortgaged \$4,000 @5% interest and borrowed \$300 for the balance on a 90 day note to be paid upon receipt of cash for sale of US bonds. Final settlement was made a month later on November 23, 1947. Closing costs amounted to less than \$100. Then the work began on the third floor meeting room which had to be painted and some electrical changes were needed to accommodate the lodge requirements. New blinds and drapes were donated and wall to wall carpet was installed by the members - much different from the way carpet is laid today. All of this was completed and the lodge furniture was moved during summer recess (1948) from their present meeting room next door ready for a new beginning for the first fall meeting in September. Once settled on the third floor, the second floor and entrance way needed to be painted with some other changes here and there. The major work on the second floor was the installation of toilet facilities and refinishing the old floors which was done by the members.

Shortly after Cecil Lodge settled in Franklin Hall the business on the first floor closed followed by many discussions on the repairs needed to attract a new tenant. Fortunately there was an inquiry from a wholesale company who wanted to lease the first floor and block part of the area off as a storage vault for cigarets at their expense which suited fine since Cecil Lodge had no money for improvements. This all took place overnight and worked out fine for a few years when the business went bankrupt leaving overnight without notice. Cecil Lodge held an auction to clean out what was left behind, mainly pallets and plywood which realized a small profit of \$200 (equivalent of four months back rent). After the cigaret company left Cecil Lodge struggled financially for the next twenty years. Several youth groups occupied the first floor until the building was sold in 1974.

In late 1973 knowing that there was a community interest in Franklin Hall a committee was appointed to study the feasibility of selling the property and building a new Temple. As the committee was pursuing this idea they learned that there was a possibility of buying the Daughters of America Hall in North Chesapeake City. The two groups met and agreed on a purchase price of \$6,500 with \$100 down payment pending approval from the Grand Lodge of Maryland. In the interim the Chesapeake City Civic Association agreed to buy Franklin Hall for \$12,000.

Biddle Street Temple

With the Grand Lodge approval, the Bo Elk Holding Corporation was formed and property settlements were made and work began on the former Daughters of America Hall. With a difference of \$5,500 to spend for the necessary changes in the building, Brother Theodore Fish was appointed overseer in control of the project and finances. The largest expense was converting and replacing the store front with a brick A- frame appearance which required a professional to do the brick work. This was contracted after the crew of members replaced the old store front with a new wall. A group of members from lodges in Cecil and Harford lodges gathered together for a day and replaced the roof shingles. The windows in the meeting room were removed, framed and sheet rocked to match the walls. The interior wall was relocated to separate the banquet hall, restroom, anti room and heater room. The entire floor was first covered with an underlayment of plywood with wall to wall carpet installed in the meeting room and vinyl floor covering in the banquet room. A clean up area - sink, counter, etc. was installed in one corner of the banquet room. Upholstered theater seats replaced the antique wooden chairs in the meeting room. . Once the painting was complete the furniture was moved in place and the first meeting in this building was held on October 22, 1974.

Finances 1947 - 2008

In 1947 after renting the Reed location for ten years Cecil Lodge bought Franklin Hall and mortgaged it for \$4,000 and paid that mortgage over a twenty years period. Franklin Hall was a disaster in a sense because shortly after the lodge was settled in the building the slate roof began to leak and the fascia board needed to be replaced at a cost in excess of \$2,000 and the first floor tenant left in the middle of the night. As financial support for the men some of the wives who were members of the Elkton Chapter #84, OES tried to organize a Chesapeake City Chapter but both the Elkton and Chestertown Chapters objected two different times twenty years apart. The men talked about organizing a Square Club but it never went beyond the talking stage for fear the men would not support both groups. Again we can sum all of this up with a happy ending when Franklin Hall was sold and the lodge moved to North Chesapeake City in 1974. The lodge was debt free when they sold Franklin Hall for \$12,000 and bought the Daughters of America Hall for \$6,500 and used the difference to convert the building for lodge use. Twenty-five years later came community involvement on Canal Day which proved to be very profitable.

Community Involvement.

During recent years the Grand Lodge of Maryland encouraged the subordinate lodges to take part in community activities hoping to attract new members. Canal Day in Chesapeake City is one of the largest annual events in Cecil County drawing record crowds in excess of 10,000 people. Renting a space and selling sandwiches, bottled water, and sodas for several years has not only given the lodge exposure in the area but has been very profitable. After purchasing the necessary set-up equipment for Canal Day (tents, tables, freezer, etc.), the profits have enabled the lodge to replace the heating and air conditioning system plus upgrading and improving the appearance of the exterior of the building as well as some changes in the banquet room.

But let's not forget the community involvement back in 1870 when everyone in the community supported the "Grand Scheme" - the first Masonic sponsored community project to raise money for a new Masonic Hall. This was a very profitable event and with this support in mind Cecil Lodge went on to build a building with a whole floor devoted for community use for 67 years. Everyone commended the Masons for their foresight and respect for the community. The community referred to this as "Opera Hall". The schools and different organizations used it for meetings and plays. It was also used as a movie theater for silent movies accompanied with player piano music. The community was stricken with a major loss when the land lease was cancelled and the building torn down.

Two Special Highlights with Record Attendance

One Hundredth Anniversary Celebration

The 100th Anniversary of Cecil Lodge No. 125 was held on May 14, 1966 in the Fellowship Hall of the Methodist Church with 160 present for a roast beef dinner served by the Adult Christian Fellowship and an evening of entertainment. Bro. William Kupke, chairman, opened the program welcoming people from Union Lodge, Harmony Lodge, Elkton Chapter Order of Eastern Star and Hiram Lodge, Newark, DE. WM James Kirk introduced the officers of those lodges and our Grand Lodge representatives. A floral arrangement was presented to Bro. John T. Loveless - the only Life Member of Cecil Lodge. A talk entitled "What does Freemasonry Offer The World" was given by PM Lewis Collins. There was group singing with Mary Sutton playing the piano, followed by Robert Fears, Ernest Davis, Wroth Manlove and Galen Reynolds singing as a quartet. The Rev. Walden Pell, Rector of St. Augustine Episcopal Church and former Headmaster of St. Andrews School, Middletown, DE and Missionary to the Far East presented the main topic for the evening - a film presentation on his missionary work.

Grand Lodge Visitation

According to Grand Lodge records Grand Master William Koenig and his Line Officers made the first Grand Lodge visit in 113 years to Cecil Lodge on October 23, 1979 and to top it off GM Koenig invited Grand Master William Little and his Line Officers from Delaware to join them. After the date was set we had some fast thinking to do because we knew the hall would be over crowded. The secretary and treasurer's tables were moved out and chairs were borrowed - enough to seat 110 who came out for this special occasion. Once Grand Master Koenig was officially received and greeted, he took the East and introduced his Line Officers followed by an official welcome of Delaware Grand Master William Little, who joined him in the East and introduced his Line Officers. Grand Master Koenig and his staff conferred the Master Mason Degree on two Cecil Lodge candidates - Bros. Harry Money and Daniel Fletcher after which he presented each with a copy of the "Maryland Master Mason Handbook". WM Lewis Collins presented Grand Master Koenig with a pair of miniature decoys carved by Morrison Watson. A copy of "Ed Ludwig's History of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal" was presented to several other officers. Grand Master Koenig announced that Cecil Lodge was the sixth smallest of 129 lodges in the state. PM Sam Walls representing Pennsylvania introduced his group and on their behalf presented Cecil Lodge with a pair of "Keystone Door Knockers" for the Tyler's door. After a round of compliments the Grand Master Koenig closed the meeting .

Cooling Hall Dedication

In the year 2000 the banquet room was named "Cooling Hall" and was dedicated to Past Master Walter Frederick Cooling in honor of his dedication to Masonry. PM Cooling was the last member to receive the Master Mason degree in the original Masonic Temple which was home for Cecil Lodge for 68 years and torn down in 1938. From that evening when he began his career in Masonry he was the most dedicated member of Cecil Lodge serving as Worshipful Master in 1942 and 1987 plus many years as Treasurer. He did not have perfect attendance but sure came in with a close second and was always willing to fill in and help wherever or whatever the need might be. While the hall was dedicated and named "Cooling Hall" it is interesting to note that there are more Coolings on the 142 year membership roll than any other family name and they are all related.

Final Question and Answer

Cecil Lodge membership peaked at 90 members in 1968 and since then has shown a steady decline to 65 members in 2007. Very few members live within the area today. The question arises as to why we are forfeiting the charter after all these years. The answer is simple. Times have changed and there are too many opportunities in the world today without being committed to any one organization. There are twelve officers in each Masonic lodge and it takes eight at a minimum to conduct each meeting. They are each required to take part in the opening and closing of every meeting. This is witnessed by non members attending the "open installation of officers" in January when they can view step by step the work involved. The ritual in the three degrees (required to become a member) is lengthy and has to be memorized by the officers conferring the degrees. Two officers, PM Ralph Gary Pierce and PM John Rodney May have been rotating between Worshipful Master and Secretary for fifteen years and it is time for a break with no one willing to learn the rituals. Not one of the present officers lives in Chesapeake City. Cecil Lodge was the second lodge chartered in Chesapeake City and is the last one of eight lodges to forfeit their Charter.

Antique Lodge Furnishings

All of the officer's chairs plus the Altar, and Bible were purchased in Baltimore in 1872. The officer's chairs were upholstered in 1974 and the Bible was rebound and restored in 1955 by a Baltimore Bookbinding Co. The tables (sect'y and treas.) and two large pictures of George Washington date back to the early 1900's - exact dates unknown. The Lantern Slide Projector and slides came from the Grand Lodge of Maryland in 1938 through the request of our Grand Inspector at that time. The Lessor Lights also date back to the early days of the lodge although there is no information in the minutes as to where they came from. As we close our last meeting (February 26, 2008), three of these antiques will go on display in the Grand Lodge Museum - "The Holy Bible", "The Lessor Lights", and "The Lantern Slide Projector with the wooden slides".

Union Lodge No. 48, A.F.& A.M., Elkton, MD

Cecil Lodge has always had the support of Union Lodge No. 48, A.F.& A.M., Elkton, MD and just as they released a dozen members or so back in 1866 to open a lodge in Chesapeake City they have always been there when we needed them and are in 100% agreement to have us merge with them in 2008 as we forfeit our Charter on March 1, 2008. For more information about Union Lodge No. 48 & Masonry go to www.unionlodge48.org

Comments from the Writer

In 1938, as noted on the first page, the Grand Lodge of Maryland provided WM Dewey Plummer with the original information from the 1866 Grand Lodge records at his request. Having had the pleasure of knowing PM Plummer for over fifteen years when I first became a Mason (1951), we traveled together and often discussed how nice it would be if someone would write a history of Cecil Lodge. It has always been my intent to follow through and with this in mind, I have scrutinized the By-Laws, minutes, and notes that exist and put together the attached which I hope you will enjoy reading.

Cecil Lodge Tid-bits from “here and there” not included in the History

The minutes indicate throughout that money was always a problem and the officers were very cautious how they handled their expenses. One example is the fact that the Masons finished the third floor meeting room last so they could have rental income from the second floor to offset expenses as they progressed with their plans. The lodge purchased the furniture in 1872 and held their first meeting in the new hall late that year. As indicated in the history, they gave the one occupant, Bro. Barrick, two years rent for finishing off the first and second floors.

There was a “Corner Stone” in 1889 but no minutes (missing) with details. No mention of the “Corner Stone” in the 1939 minutes when the building was torn down.

The original “ballot box” contained both white balls and black balls (no black cubes).

Past Master Delmar Smithers who served as Worshipful Master through 1900 stayed active and attended lodge for another sixty years. He told many stories of how the lodge survived numerous challenges during his Masonic career. He passed away the year he received his “70 year pin”. His stories were sometimes boring but would have made history today.

Prior to 1959 you did not have to learn the “MM Catechism” and any Master Mason, prior to this date, who wanted to learn the MM Catechism when the rule changed, was presented with a certificate suitable for framing from the Grand Lodge of Maryland.

One of the regulars who met in the original Masonic Hall was the “KKK”. They were active in this area until the late 1920's. (Not something I would recommend for the history).

The eight lodges mentioned in the history are the: Independent Order of Odd Fellows; Rebeccas; Cecil Lodge A.F. & A.M.; Junior Order of United American Mechanics; Daughters of America; Shawmut Tribe No. 33 Improved Order of Redmen; Daughters of Pocohantas; and Shawmut Tribe of Chief Haymakers No. 33 ½ - a branch who met with Tribe No.33. These were referred to in the history as eight lodges - too lengthy to list individually.

The Chesapeake City Post Office was located in the Masonic Hall prior to moving from there to the Cropper home on the corner of Bohemia Avenue and First Street. There was a millinery shop operated by Ms. Nellie Reed and the Hudson Brothers barber shop. Specific dates unknown.