

From Whence Came You?

Acacia Lodge No 94, A.F.M.

By: W/B James A. Neal (May 18, 2009)

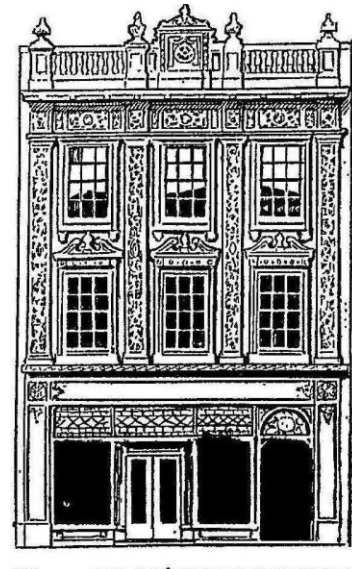
From Whence Came You? This is a question asked of every Mason before being allowed to take the obligation of a Master Mason. The answer is not readily understood since the importance of the three cornered threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite remains vague. Indeed, the question is perhaps more understandable than the answer. Thus we sometimes miss the true meaning of this question. That being: if you don't know where you have been, you will not know where you are going.

Where does Acacia Lodge No 94 come from? The Masonic Temple at 1518 Hampton Street has been home to Acacia Lodge for 60 of its 150 years. But where did it meet during the years prior to moving to the present location in 1949.

Acacia Lodge No 94 was chartered on November 15, 1859 under the Grand Lodge of Ancient Free Masons of South Carolina. Since the Lodge records, plus all other belongings from 1859 through 1865 were lost in the burning of Columbia, minutes from those meetings are not available. It is believed that Acacia Lodge No 94, Richland Lodge No 39 and True Brotherhood Lodge No 84 met during the war years at the Masonic Hall located on the West side of Main Street between Hampton and Washington over John H. Heise's confectionary store.

Just 68 days following the city's destruction, Acacia Lodge No 94 was reopened for regular communications on April, 27, 1865 with WM Robert McDougall presiding over the meeting held on the campus of South Carolina College. At that first meeting, Acacia Lodge No 94 was asked by Richland Lodge No 39 to confer the Master Mason's degree on a candidate in waiting. This appears typical of the close relationship between these two Lodges during this period.

In 1866, Acacia Lodge No 94 began to use the meeting hall of Palmetto Lodge No 5, Independent Order of Odd Fellows located in the block bounded by Lincoln, Gadsden, Washington and Hampton Streets.



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By the mid-1890's Acacia Lodge No 94 was meeting in a Masonic Hall on the third floor of the Independent Steam Fire Engine Company building located on Washington between Main and Assembly. In addition, Richland Lodge No 39 and Columbia Chapter No 5, R.A.M. made this their meeting hall. In 1905, a dispute between the Independent Steam Fire Engine Company and the tenants resulted in a lawsuit against the Masonic bodies for breach of contract. The plaintiff claimed the Masonic bodies did not live up to an agreement to pay for part of the cost of the building, used the hall for purposes other than Masonic meetings and that they wanted to move out before meeting their obligation. The case eventually was heard by the Supreme Court of South Carolina which affirmed the ruling in favor of the plaintiff. Acacia Lodge No 94 minutes report selling their share in the interest of the building for \$400.

Around 1915 Richland Lodge No 39 constructed a Masonic Temple on Main Street that replaced an earlier one that burned. R.L. Bryan Company occupied the first floor for a number of years. Acacia Lodge No 94 was one of the Masonic bodies using the facilities for meetings.

For a short period of time while the Masonic Temple was under construction, Acacia Lodge No 94 met in the Elks House.

In the 1930's, Acacia Lodge No 94 met at 1107 Hampton Street and later at 1726½ Main Street. By the year, 1942, Columbia Lodge No. 326 met at 1512 Marion; Richland Lodge No. 39 at the same location; both the York and Scottish Rites met at 1512 Marion and both maintained offices in the Palmetto Life Building, site of a previous Masonic Temple, located at the corner of Sumter and Lady.

Who first championed the idea of a third Masonic Temple in downtown Columbia remains to be discovered. Records of the Lodges from that era show frequent dates on which visitation from the other Lodges occurred, degree work being shared and joint installation of officers. In addition, members of the three Lodges would see each other at York and/or Scottish Rite meetings. Thus it is not surprising that there was apparently wide spread support for finding a location for another Masonic Temple.

Movement toward the dream of a Masonic Temple, began with formation of The Square and Compass Corporation which was chartered on February 12, 1942 with the stated purpose to: "to own, buy and sell and to mortgage real

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estate – to maintain lodge rooms for the Masonic fraternity-to perform deeds of charity and all things incidental thereto.”

The Square and Compass Corporation original members were Richland Lodge No. 39, Acacia Lodge No. 94, Columbia Lodge No. 326, Columbia Chapter #5 Royal Arch Masons, and the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry. The first officers were: Oliver Pennington, President, P.T. Berry, Vice-President and A.M. Pate, Secretary/Treasurer.

On February 10, 1943, the Square and Compass Corporation purchased the 1518 Hampton Street property from Caldwell Jones and Reaux Jones for the sum of \$5 plus other considerations. (These are not specified in the deed but there is reason to believe the other consideration was the property located on Marion Street used by Richland Lodge No. 39, Columbia Lodge No. 326, Columbia Chapter #5, RAM, and the Scottish Rite.)

Once know as Plain Street, the tract of land that eventually became 1518 Hampton Street was sold by William H. Caldwell to Annie Caldwell Jones for \$2000 on August 3, 1892. By 1897, the Columbia City Directory shows a home on the lot occupied by Willie and Annie Jones. It appears that the home was sold some time in the early 1900's but returned to the Jones family in 1937 when Annie Caldwell Jones purchased the home from Louise B. Kendell. It was occupied then and remained so until 1946 by Mrs. Bessie Petty.

The visionaries had not counted on World War II but times being difficult at best, nothing much happened to the property until 1946. Acacia Lodge No. 94 voted to give \$5000 to the Square and Compass in 1946 for the new facility on Hampton Street and \$10,000 in 1947. The immediate post war years were golden years for Masonry with all Lodges experiencing unprecedented growth and Shandon Lodge No. 370 and Earlewood Lodge No. 371 chartered.

Earlewood Lodge No. 371 had close ties to both Acacia Lodge No. 94 and Richland Lodge No. 39. Both Lodges had a number of their members demit to form Earlewood Lodge No. 371 (18 from Richland). So it was not surprising that in 1948, Earlewood Lodge No. 371 presented an appeal to use the Temple for its Hall. The appeal was approved provided that it would be accommodated subsequent to first choice of dates by the existing

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members. Shandon Lodge No. 370 rented space in the building for a brief period while it was securing a facility.

During these years, the Square and Compass member bodies provided funding for financing and construction of the new Masonic Temple at 1518 Hampton St. In addition, the members approved acquiring additional funds to complete construction through a lien on the property.

The building was occupied by the new owners during the summer of 1949 and on September 22, 1949 it was dedicated in due form by the MW Grand Master James F. Risher attended by a properly constituted Grand Lodge.

The sixty years that Acacia Lodge No 94 has called 1518 Hampton home has provided a level of stability that did not exist during its first 90 years when it met in at least 10 different locations. Hopefully 1518 Hampton will remain Acacia Lodge No 94's home for many more years. What ever the future holds, Acacia Lodge No 94's history demonstrates that it can survive the destruction of all its possessions and being forced to find space to rent as a meeting hall when needed.

Sources:

Acacia Lodge No. 94 minutes.

Clerk of Court – Deeds: Book – FM/441 and V/503

McCall, Clare. *A History of Richland Lodge No. 39 Ancient Free Masons of South Carolina at Columbia, South Carolina*, Richland Lodge No 39, Columbia, SC 1991.