

FARMERSVILLE MASONIC LODGE NO. 214, A.F. & A.M.

I. CONTEXT

Farmersville is located in east Collin County within the Blackland Prairie region of northeastern Texas, at the present-day intersection of U.S. Highway 380 and State Highway 78. The original settlement, founded in 1845 near the Republic of Texas National Road, was first known as “Yeary’s Store” and later as “Sugar Hill.” Settlers later named their community Farmersville for their principal occupation.¹ Walter Yeary (b. January 2, 1820, Maury County, Tennessee), and his father-in-law, the Reverend Moses Malcolm Jones (b. October 10, 1813, Ashton, Macoupin County, Illinois) were among the founding party of seven families.²

On March 4, 1859, William Gotcher (b. August, 1806, Tennessee), deeded land two miles southwest of Sugar Hill for the public square “to the use and benefit” of the town of Farmersville. Gotcher’s gifted land was part of the William W. Williams survey of 3,605 acres, the original patent dated November 16, 1845, from Dr. Anson Jones, president of the Republic of Texas.³

Farmersville incorporated on June 2, 1873. The 1880 census noted the steady growth of the city to a population of 230. Although the first railroad track was laid in Texas in 1852, it wasn’t until 1876 that the Missouri, Kansas and Texas Railroad was built from Greenville to McKinney through Farmersville. With the means of shipping out farm goods, the town prospered and by 1885 Farmersville supported over 100 businesses.

Farmersville Masonic Lodge No. 214 (c.1888), on the north side of the town square, is an excellent example of Romanesque architecture and a late 19th century 2-story Commercial Style Building consisting of a second floor fraternal hall above first floor mercantile space. One of the earliest surviving buildings in Farmersville and constructed of locally quarried limestone, the lodge was built to withstand the fires which routinely destroyed parts of the downtown commercial district.

¹ Hall, Roy Franklin and Helen Gibbard. Collin County: Pioneering in North Texas. (Quanah, Texas: Nortex, 1975), pp. 118-119.

² Pitts, Alice Ellison, and Champ, Minnie Pitts. Collin County, Texas, Families. (Curtis Media, Inc. Hurst, TX c. 1994).

³ Rike, Charles J. A History of Farmersville, Texas: 1845-1973. (Tyler, TX: Tyler Print Shop, 902 Bellaire Drive, c. NC). p. 3.

II. OVERVIEW

Collin County deed records dated September 7, 1893, indicate payment in full of a promissory note to Farmersville Lodge No. 214 A.F. & A.M. by Anna M. Bain, owner and holder of the notes.⁴ Anna Melissa Hicks Bain, widow of John Alexander Bain, purchased six and three quarters acres of prime Farmersville real estate in 1865, which included the east side of the square and adjacent property on the south side of College Street for a homestead. Over the next forty years, Anna Bain sold some of the undeveloped land as lots and reserved other lots to build commercial buildings. In 1888, Anna Bain sold the lot at the corner of North Main and College Street to the Masonic Lodge. The described land was one lot 27 feet by 127 feet situated in Farmersville N.E. of the Public Square and bounded as follows beginning 27 feet N. of the NW Corner of a lot owned by Dr. W.A. Bell.⁵

The Farmersville Masonic Lodge received its charter in 1858 and the Masons met in a frame building until the lodge was built on the north side of the town square. Lodge members voted to spend \$4375.00 to build a new two-story rock and stone temple on September 22, 1888.⁶ Local historian Charles J. Rike noted the source of the stone to have been the rock pit of R.A. Rike at Rock Quarry. A local banker by the name of R.A. Taylor remembered riding on a wagon with his father who was delivering the stone for the Masonic Lodge.⁷

The Rev. J.M. Brooks delivered the oration at the cornerstone laying ceremonies on October 25, 1888. A uniformed local brass band of twenty-five members directed by Z.A.C. Harris played in honor of the occasion. The first meeting in the new lodge building was held on January 19, 1889, although the building was not yet completed. *Proceedings of the Seventy-Fourth Annual Communication of the M.W. Grand Lodge* (1909) note that a Duplicate Charter was issued to Farmersville Lodge No. 214 on December 12, 1889, the original charter having burned in the 1886 fire. *Transactions of the Sixty-Sixth Annual Convocation of the Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Texas* note the charter date to be December 12, 1890. In 1891, during an acute water shortage, the lodge voted to furnish its own water system and a cistern was built on the

⁴ Records of Deeds of Collin County, Texas. June 6, 1888, vol. 37, pp. 8-9.

⁵ Records of Deeds of Collin County, Texas. March 8, 1888, vol. 37, p. 8.

⁶ Phone interview with Sandra Tedford of Farmersville, Texas, by Elizabeth Buuck of Bedford, Texas, on March 18, 2004.

⁷ Phone interview with Bob Poole of Dallas, Texas, by Elizabeth Buuck of Bedford, Texas, on March 6, 2004

property at the cost of \$41.⁸

The masons served an important social and ceremonial role in the community and most of the prominent citizens of early Farmersville were members of the lodge. Among the most noteworthy is Sam R. Hamilton. On its front page on August 3, 1910, *The McKinney Daily Courier-Gazette* published word “. . . of the death at Farmersville of Hon. Sam R. Hamilton, one of the most prominent citizens of this part of the state, and one of the best known members of the Masonic order in Texas.”⁹ A portrait of Samuel Randolph Hamilton hangs today in the c.1966 Farmersville Masonic Lodge on Highway 78. A most honored and valued member of the Masonic Order, Sam Hamilton served as Worshipful Master when the c.1888 Farmersville Masonic Lodge No. 214 A. F. and A.M. was built; achieved the rank of Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Texas in December, 1898; and revised, corrected and rearranged The Taylor-Hamilton Monitor of Symbolic Masonry by William M. Taylor in 1907.¹⁰ Sam Hamilton served as Postmaster of Farmersville, Texas, when the post office was re-established on May 20, 1870 to July 19, 1870, and from March 28, 1881, to November 26, 1883.¹¹ He was cashier of The Exchange Bank located in the rear of the Aston Brothers store on South Main Street. Sam Hamilton’s historical account of the Methodist Episcopal Church of Farmersville from 1856 to 1903 is all that survived when the church building and all its records were destroyed by fire on December 28, 1924.

Dr. David Moses Yeary, born February 3, 1855, at Old Sugar Hill to Walter and Margaret Jones Yeary, was a lifelong resident of the area and a pioneer physician who practiced medicine in Farmersville for over fifty years. Dr. Yeary attended Farmersville schools, graduated from Memphis School of Medicine, Memphis Tennessee, was a member of the First Baptist Church, and a Royal Arch Mason of the Masonic Lodge. He is remembered for his passionate interest in the development of Texas and particularly of Farmersville and for giving unselfishly for the benefit of the community.

In 1954, Jack Ball became the second Mason affiliated with Farmersville Lodge No. 214 A.F. & A.M., to achieve the high honor of Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Texas. A

⁸ Phone interview with Sandra Tedford of Farmersville, Texas, by Elizabeth Buuck of Bedford, Texas, on March 16, 2004.

⁹ *Daily Courier Gazette*, McKinney, Collin County, Texas, August 3, 1910, p.1.

¹⁰ Taylor, William M. and Hamilton, Sam R. The Taylor-Hamilton Monitor of Symbolic Masonry, Fourteenth Edition (1907).

¹¹ Collin County, Texas, Postal Records, pages 162, 163, 640, 641. National Archives & Records Administration, 7th St. & Pennsylvania Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20408

graduate of Farmersville High School and the University of Texas Law School, Jack was the son of T.E. Ball, known locally as the Bois d'Arc Man. An abundance of bois d'arc growth made Farmersville a shipping point for wood used to make fence posts, paving blocks and for building purposes.

The Farmersville Masonic Lodge celebrated its 100th birthday with a formal program at the high school auditorium on January 24, 1958. John B. Honaker and Milburn D. Honaker were introduced as 50-year members of the local lodge. At that time the roster listed 155 members.¹²

A number of tenants have occupied the c.1888 lodge building through the years. The Peavey-Robinson Barber Shop opened in the lower room of the Masonic Building when the November 5, 1890, fire destroyed several buildings of wooden construction along the north side of the square. The Warner Bakery was a tenant in 1901 when an independent telephone exchange was started in the lodge building but failed to go over due to lack of subscribers.¹³ A Sanborn Map dated December 1908 records a grocery and bakery in the building. The most notable tenant continues to be *The Farmersville Times* which printed its first issue on March 23, 1885, and which began its operation in the building in 1956 when Burton and Martha Fielder moved their press from the adjacent building which was subject to leaking during heavy rains. The Fielders sold the newspaper to Bob Poole in 1959.¹⁴

In 1965, lodge officials approached Bob Poole about purchasing the building so that they could build a new lodge home on State Highway 78 as many members were having difficulty negotiating the stairs to the second story meeting room. The sale was completed in early 1966.

H.W. Fullingim of Waco, Grand Master of Masons in Texas, participated in cornerstone-leveling ceremonies at the new temple on Highway 78 on October 29, 1966. Worshipful Master Jerry W. Hart invited a large number of visiting Masons to join in dedicating the new lodge built entirely by its membership. As in the case of the c.1888 lodge building, although the main meeting room was completed, interior work remained to be done.¹⁵

¹² *The Farmersville Times*, "Centennial Celebration for F'ville Masonic Lodge", January 23, 1958, p. 1

¹³ Rike, Charles J. *A History of Farmersville, Texas: 1845-1973*. (Tyler, TX: Tyler Print Shop, 902 Bellaire Drive, c. NC, pp. 16, 19.

¹⁴ Phone interview with Burton Fielder, San Angelo, Texas, by Elizabeth Buuck of Bedford, Texas, on March 18, 2004.

¹⁵ *The Farmersville Times*, November 3, 1966, on microfilm at the Charles Rike Memorial Library, Farmersville, Texas.

Bob Poole and his brother Tom Poole, Jr., formed a corporation, *The Farmersville Times, Inc.* in April 1980.¹⁶ Chad B. Engbrock and his wife, Sonia A. Duggan, owners of C&S Media, Inc., purchased the lodge building from Bob Poole in June, 2000, with the intent to pursue its restoration. C&S Media, Inc. purchased *The Farmersville Times* (c. 1885) and *The Princeton Herald* (c.1970) from The Farmersville Times, Inc. on April 1, 2000. Both weekly newspapers currently operate on the first floor of the Farmersville Masonic Lodge with Mr. Engbrock as editor and publisher.¹⁷ Chad Engbrock and Sonia Duggan pursued listing the lodge building in the National Register of Historic Places (2005-03-30) and began restoration of the building on June 1, 2005. Work was completed six and a half months later.

III. SIGNIFICANCE

Occupying the corner lot at the intersection of South Main Street and College Street, Farmersville Masonic Lodge No. 214, A.F. & A.M. is a two-story, two-part commercial block with a rectangular floor plan. Approximately 4,800 square feet in area and Italianate in style, the building is constructed of locally-quarried, rough-faced, coursed limestone and features double-door entries, narrow double-hung windows, a west-facing Roman-arched second story window, and a corbelled parapet. The commercial block is a flexible building type, taking on various types of ornament to convey a wide range of styles. Usually sharing a party wall with neighboring buildings the front elevation is dominant and usually consists of storefronts on the first floor with a more heavily ornamented second floor. The Farmersville Masonic Lodge is an example of a commercial block adapted to the Italianate style which was popular in the last decades of the nineteenth century for both residential and commercial buildings. Inspired by Italian villas, Italianate buildings adapted classical details and are often characterized by vertical massing, quoins and cornices articulated by brackets. The paired brackets, the combination of arched and squared windows of the Lodge are all characteristic of the style.

Concrete sidewalks border the front (west) and the north façade adjacent to city streets. A paved area extends from the east side of the building, and the south side abuts a one-story commercial building that currently houses an antique shop. The east and south building facades

¹⁶ Phone interview with Bob Poole of Dallas, Texas, by Elizabeth Buuck of Bedford, Texas, on March 6, 2004.

¹⁷ www.insidetxbiz.com, *Inside Collin County Business*, "Chad Engbrock Serving East Collin County", May 26, 2004.

are similarly constructed of random rubble limestone. The east elevation features a centrally located door opening, transom and windows on either side.

The primary façade features two first floor entrance doors. The door to the south leads into mercantile space and is centered between two identical display windows. A third display window is positioned to the north. A second door to the right leads to the interior staircase. Two recessed, one over one, double-hung windows with smooth faced lintels flank a central round arch mullioned window on the second floor of the building. A bracketed pressed tin cornice, the most prominent element of the primary façade, is supported by four sets of double brackets with modillion brackets on either side of a legibly stamped Masonic emblem centered between the letters A.F. and A.M. The date 1888 appears above the Masonic emblem and between two decorative shell motifs which grace the western edge of the parapet.

A granite cornerstone on the northeast corner of the building is inscribed on its north face with the Masonic emblem, Farmersville Lodge No. 214 A.F. & A.M., and October 25, 1888. Five double-hung windows with smooth limestone lintels are spaced along the second story.

Facing west at the intersection of South Main Street and College Street, Farmersville Masonic Lodge No. 214, A.F. & A.M. (c.1888) is a contemporary of the similarly constructed Aston Building to its south. The masons, and later the Order of the Eastern Star (Chapter 940 chartered October 28, 1948) conducted meetings on the second floor of the building from 1889 until 1966 when a new lodge building was constructed on State Highway 78. One of the earliest surviving buildings within the central business district, its prominence on the town square street corner, its unique construction from locally-quarried limestone, and its long-held association as a fraternal lodge, continue to support its importance as an important landmark in the town.

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