

A Building That's Seen A Lot!

By Ron Smith



Laying the Masonic Lodge Cornerstone in Scottsville, 1914

One of the great things about Scottsville is its obvious history. And, as visual testaments to that history are the town's historic buildings. Glancing around one can easily imagine some historical figure with which they are familiar strolling past or into one of these structures. The Scottsville Museum's annual Spirit Walk has provided many local residents with the opportunity to associate names that are familiar with buildings they might pass daily.

The Masonic building on East Main Street is one of these buildings. Home to Scottsville Masonic Lodge No. 45 for more than one hundred years, this building has seen a lot!

During the late 1800's and early 1900's Scottsville's Beal Building on the corner of Valley Street and Bird Street was "the place" to hold events, meetings or any other reason to gather a significant number of persons together in one place for a specific cause. A

fundraising dance was held there in 1902 to raise money to start the first "real" library in Scottsville.

Masonic Lodge No. 45, with its long and rich history, was chartered by the Grand Lodge of Virginia on December 17, 1851. Members met in a room on the second floor of the Beal Building until 1880 when they relocated to the upstairs of a private residence on Valley Street.

In a 2005 article by writer, Ruth Klippstein, former Scottsville Mayor Raymon Thacker remembered "his family first lived on the first floor of this home after moving to Scottsville and before they moved into their own home." The Masonic lodge actually bought the second floor of this house and then the whole house! Dr. Luther Randolph Stinson would come to own the home.

Wishing to have a building of their own, like other lodges around the country, the lodge decided to take the necessary steps to make that dream a reality. In 1914

Lodge No. 45 purchased a parcel of land on Main Street. Some records indicate the property was purchased from the town while Mayor Thacker remembered it being purchased from the county. Either way the town would soon benefit from a beautiful new building that would stand firm and tall and weather the forces of nature that would attack her in the years to come.

Regardless from whom the purchase was made, and with a deed dated October 14th, 1914, Lodge No. 45 now had their own tract of land. The purchase price was \$250 and with a \$4000 loan from the town the lodge was on its way to having its own permanent meeting place.

On June 17th, 1914, following a parade, and with speeches by visiting Masonic dignitaries and the presence of a large number of town residents, the cornerstone was laid and the Masonic Building we know today was, like an

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expected baby, about to be born into this world and the history of Scottsville.



Cornerstone at Scottsville Masonic Lodge 45

A Scottsville firm, Paulett and Grove, two names found in much of Scottsville's history, was chosen as the general contractor. The new two-story building had a suitable space for a business of some type on the first floor, while the upstairs would be the primary home of the Masonic Lodge.



Postmaster Samuel Gault and Ashby Mayo at Scottsville Post Office, 1915

Scottsville's postmaster, Samuel Gault, was a member of the lodge. The post office was housed in a storefront on Valley Street and needed a larger space as the town continued to grow. Gault suggested

the post office be relocated to the first floor of the new building and just below the Masonic Lodge.

The post office moved to its new location and remained there until 1964. Rent generated from the post office was used by the lodge to help with building maintenance, "not for a profit" as Mayor Thacker remarked.

While no one seems to remember who the architect for the project was, many think it may have been D. Wiley Anderson, who designed Victory Hall. He had relocated from Richmond back to Scottsville during the time frame that could have made him the obvious choice.

The National Register of Historic Places identifies the building as "Modified Edwardian" and at the time of Klippstein's 2005 article local architect Fred Schneider and Architectural Review Board Chairman Jeffrey Plank "suggested that 'modern commercial' might better describe a business, rather than a domestic structure." With its dark red bricks, the placement of windows, the white trim and flat roof, the building is similar to several other Masonic Lodge buildings that can be found around the country.

Another feature of the building is the metal ceilings. A number of buildings in Scottsville have the metal tile ceilings which became popular around 1885. The plaster work found in European buildings was attractive to people in this country. When these metal tiles came upon the scene it offered builders an opportunity to install ceilings that looked like their European counterparts but were easier and less expensive to have. The Masonic Building incorporated this type of ceiling on each floor and those ceilings remain in place today. The metal ceilings give an-

other hint as to Anderson being the architect as he was, from his work in Richmond, very knowledgeable on the subject of metal ceilings.

Sam Gault was a dedicated postmaster for Scottsville and actually lived in the post office! He occupied an apartment in the rear of the building. He also found it necessary to make some changes, one of which involved the post office safe.

You don't see many businesses today that have a big bulky safe prominently in view of the public although some do exist. Like most safes of the day, the safe was heavy enough to begin with, but add the contents and see what happens. The post office safe was too heavy for the floor on which it sat so Gault had an extra concrete pad made on which the safe could rest.

When Gault passed away in 1939, Mayor Thacker was asked to look for Gault's insurance policy. He found it in the apartment, and Gault's final expenses were taken care of. Gault rests in the Scottsville Cemetery with an appropriate memorial depicting the Masonic emblem.

R. W. Coleman operated his business there for a number of years. In 1997 Mark Stevens purchased the business. Stevens tells of past floods and their effects on the building. The 1969 arrival of Hurricane Camille devastated much of downtown Scottsville. After the storm left death and destruction in Nelson County, it headed this way. The Masonic Building lay in its path and suffered the effects of the storm. Hurricane Agnes in 1972 had much the same effect on this building as it did on the other structures near the James River.

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Stevens can relate stories of how the hurricanes damaged both the inside and outside of the building. In addition to the rear of the building's exterior being damaged with the loading dock disappearing down the river, the storms left mud everywhere. "Inside the building mud caked everything; the electrical fixtures, the electrical panel, but fortunately the walls were not damaged as significantly as they could have been," Stevens said in a 2005 interview.

While modifications were made inside in the 1980's to bolster the structural integrity of the floors, the upstairs, home to Lodge No. 45, has remained relatively modest. The costs of repairs continued to be a problem particularly for a small group with a limited amount of money to spend.

When an adjacent building was demolished, the exterior wall of the Masonic Lodge revealed a really bad mortar job that can be seen today and was always a source of concern to Mayor Thacker.

After Coleman's closed for business, the building's downstairs remained vacant for awhile. When negotiations were completed with a prospective new tenant and a great deal of interior renovation was completed, the Scottsville Supply Company, a business that serves those interested in beekeeping and a source for associated supplies and equipment related to beekeeping, relocated from their location on Valley Street to the Masonic Building, occupying the vacant first floor.

In June of 2019 Dimitri Hasson and Lucas RVP V, LLC, having purchased property on East Main Street, the former bus depot, another Scottsville site of historic importance, appeared before town

council with a proposal. They would remodel and improve the structure, and it would become a mixed use development that would consist of rental and retail. The town approved the request and work is currently ongoing.

As with any aging structure, maintenance issues continue to be both unavoidable and costly. When you have a building over a hundred years old, this is an inevitable fact. And, with fewer people joining civic and service organizations, revenue that can be used for maintenance is hard to find.

Hasson and Lucas have basically "come to the rescue" and purchased the building. A hundred year old building having only its second owner is most likely a real estate oddity. Brian Lafontaine, a member of Lodge 45, while not going into details, said the arrangement was "really in the best interest of everyone involved." The first floor tenant will continue to occupy that space and Lodge 45 will continue to have their space on the second floor.

The next time you stroll down Valley Street or Main Street or you pass one of Scottsville's historic residences, with a little imagination you might visualize one of the Jeffersons, Teddy Roosevelt, or some other historical figure going in or coming out of one of the buildings you are passing. The Masonic Building has seen a lot. And, with a new lease on life it is sure to see much more!



Scottsville Masonic Lodge No. 45 (top floor) and Scottsville Supply Co. (first floor), in 2020. Photos by Ron Smith