

HISTORY OF TUSCULUM LODGE No. 86

ANCIENT FREE & ACCEPTED MASONS

Jim Rumsey

Member of the Texas Lodge of Research

Worshipful Master, Pine Tree Lodge No. 1396

History of Tusculum Lodge No. 86, Ancient Free & Accepted Masons

The year is 1847. The Texans had gained their independence from Mexico, survived as a Republic, and been accepted as the twenty-eighth state of the Union. Masons had played key roles in the development of Texas as a nation and as a state. Founding fathers and political leaders such as Stephen F. Austin, Anson Jones, Sam Houston, and Mirabeau B. Lamar molded Texas from wilderness to civilization, from a Mexican Territory to an Independent Republic and ultimately to a pre-Civil War state of the United States of America. During this time of settlement, Masons transformed unincorporated areas into towns and cities, established schools, and were the pillars of their communities, just as Austin, Houston, and Crockett were the pillars of the State. Communities throughout Texas sprang up with churches, schools, and Masonic lodges. The community of Pine Tree was no different. ¹

Today, the community of Pine Tree has been annexed into the city of Longview, the county seat of Gregg County. The name Pine Tree survives in the names of the school district (Pine Tree Independent School District), the Masonic lodge (Pine Tree Lodge No. 1396), and various churches and businesses. The city of Longview is divided into three school districts (Longview ISD, Spring Hill ISD, and Pine Tree ISD) so there is ample pride for the Pine Tree community. Sitting lonely on the eastern edge of the original Pine Tree School campus is a humble church. The church is noticeable to the passerby only because it sits at an awkward angle to the road and adjacent buildings. The church is the Pine Tree Cumberland Presbyterian Church, founded in 1847. While the building bears renovations of the current era, the church is the oldest in Gregg County. It sits as a window to the past, to a bygone era, and reminds those who take the time to reflect that the community can trace its roots to a three pronged base: the church (Pine Tree Cumberland Presbyterian Church), the Lodge (Tusculum Lodge No. 86), and

the school (Pine Tree Independent School District).

The setting was quite different 162 years ago on the parcel of land that now belongs to the Pine Tree Independent School District. There were no buildings, paved roads, oil wells, overhead power lines or water pipes. The community was called Awalt and was located in rural Upshur County deep in the piney woods of East Texas. Its namesake, Solomon Awalt, was a Presbyterian minister and a Master Mason from Tennessee. In 1847, The Cumberland Presbyterian Church was chartered by Reverend Awalt. The congregation met in various places, as no building for the church had been built, most commonly in the shade beneath a grove of pine trees near a water spring. Reverend Awalt began negotiations with Joseph Castleberry to acquire the parcel of land for the church. Elmira Castleberry began holding Sunday School classes for children in the shade of the pines. The Sunday School class grew in size and in the frequency of its meetings. The popularity of Mrs. Castleberry's Sunday School classes prompted Reverend Awalt to begin holding school for all of the children of the community and prompted her husband Joseph to deed three acres of their land to the church and school. On 10 October 1847, the Pine Tree School was founded and the church became the Pine Tree Cumberland Presbyterian Church. The following year, the United States Post Office Department opened the Pine Tree Post Office. By early 1850, a small log cabin was completed which housed both the church and school. The only thing missing from Awalt was a Masonic Lodge. This was soon to change.²

On 27 December 1850, Reverend Awalt and a group consisting of eight other Master Masons met in the small one-room log cabin of the Pine Tree Cumberland Presbyterian Church and discussed masonry, particularly the need for a local Masonic Lodge. Their meeting resulted in a handwritten letter addressed to the "Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of the State of Texas"

requesting to charter a new lodge. The letter stated:

The petitioners humbly show that they are ancient free, and accepted Master Masons. Having the prosperity of the Fraternity at heart, they are willing to exert their best endeavors to promote and diffuse the genuine principles of Masonry. For the convenience of their respective dwellings and for other good reasons, they are desirous of forming a new lodge in the neighborhood of the Pine Tree Post Office, Upshur County, Texas, to be named "Tusculum."

In consequence of this desire and for the good of the craft, they pray for a charter or warrant to empower them to assemble as a legal lodge to discharge the duties of masonry in the several degrees of Entered Apprentice Fellowcraft and Master Masons in a regular and constitutional manner according to the ancient form of the fraternity, and the laws and regulations of the Grand Lodge. They have nominated and do recommend G.S. Templeton to be the first Master, Simeon W. Weaver to be the first Senior Warden, and R.L. Askew to be the first Junior Warden of said Lodge. That if the prayer of the petition should be granted they promise a strict conformity to all the constitutional laws, rules and regulations of the Grand Lodge.³

The letter was signed by Solomon Awalt, G. S. Templeton, R. L. Askew, B. R. Crosby, B. W. Witcher, J. J. McGee, Simeon W. Weaver, Augustus Mosley, and T. R. Mings, as well as eight officers of Gilmer Lodge No. 61.⁴

The letter resulted in the issuance of a warrant by the Grand Lodge of Texas on 25 January 1851 and bore the signatures of Deputy Grand Master Andrew Neill and Grand Secretary A. S. Ruthven. Thus the Tusculum Masonic Lodge was set to work under dispensation and was authorized to "admit, make, pass and raise Free Masons, according to the most ancient usages and customs of the Craft, in all Ages and Nations throughout the known World and not otherwise." The warrant further authorized the charter officers "to hear and determine all matters and things relate to the Craft within the jurisdiction of the said Lodge."⁵

The name Tusculum has no history with the Craft, but can be traced to Tennessee Presbyterianism. Brother Awalt, a Tennessee Presbyterian minister, was almost certainly familiar with the Tusculum Academy, a Presbyterian college chartered in Tennessee 1818. In 1844, two years before Awalt left Tennessee for Texas, Tusculum Academy became

Tusculum College. Tusculum Academy (and subsequently Tusculum College) took its name from the ancient Tuscan city, Tusculum, near Rome. Cicero, the famed Roman educator and philosopher was from Tusculum. Cicero “identified the civic virtues that form the basis of the civic republican tradition, which emphasizes citizens working together to form good societies that in turn nurture individuals of good character.”⁶

The virtues of Cicero are mimicked in the Charges of a Freemason, “A Mason is to be a peaceable subject to the civil powers, wherever he resides or works, and is never to be concerned in plots and conspiracies against the peace and welfare of the nation.” Tusculum, though not a Masonic term, was a suitable name for a Lodge in a newly-formed Presbyterian community on the American frontier. After all, the church, the Lodge and the school are the results of the citizens working together to form a good society. That society nurtured individuals of good character. That character was the character of Masons.⁷

The nine Master Masons who signed the letter requesting the issuance of the warrant quickly got to work. The Lodge met in the church and school building and the first meeting under dispensation was held on 1 February 1851. During this meeting, the officers of the Lodge were duly installed in due and ancient form by District Deputy Grand Master D. F. Banecroft.

The charter officers of Tusculum Lodge were:

Worshipful Master: G. S. Templeton
Senior Warden: Simeon Weaver
Junior Warden: R. L. Askew
Secretary: J. J. McGee
Treasurer: Solomon Awalt
Tyler: Ben Witcher

Upon completing the installation of officers, the Lodge received five petitions of worthy candidates for the first degree in Masonry. The petitions were received and a “committee on character” was appointed. The Lodge also received a petition from an Entered Apprentice Mason

belonging to Gilmer Lodge No. 61 to affiliate with the Lodge. Permission was granted from Gilmer Lodge and the petition was received. The members of the Lodge then established their regular stated meeting date and time to be on the second Saturday of each month at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. The Lodge was then closed in due and ancient form.⁸

The subsequent meetings of the Lodge occurred regularly at the stated time and place. The course of business of the Lodge was not all together different from the business of modern lodges with few exceptions. Lodges were opened in all three degrees instead of just one. The length of the stated meetings was extreme by modern standards and often lasted between four and six hours. The minutes reflect that only four called meetings occurred during the first year. The language of the minutes appears more elegantly written than those of modern lodges.⁹

A nineteenth century forum took place at a special communication of the Lodge on 18 September 1851, and the Right Worshipful H. D. Woodsworth, Grand Lecturer was in attendance. Right Worshipful Woodsworth presided over the Lodge and “gave to the Craft a lecture upon Masonry generally.” He then gave the “lecture and explanations” of the three degrees of Masonry. The meeting had to be called to refreshment and completed the following day.¹⁰

The order of business varied in the stated meeting for November 1851. The membership issues of balloting, examining, and degree work took place as usual, and were followed with a resolution that no dues be paid to the Lodge or fees collected for the degrees from any “Minister of the Gospel” and that any member of the Lodge that is a “Minister of the Gospel” be not required to pay subsequent dues to the Lodge. Additionally, the Lodge appointed a three member committee “to draft a code of By Laws for Tusculum Lodge and report at the next regular communication.”¹¹

The December communications were equally busy. In addition to receiving petitions, the bylaw committee made their report to the Lodge. “Brother H. O. Palmer Chairman of the committee on By Laws reported a code of Laws to govern Tusculum Lodge. After which said Law was taken up by the secretary amended and adopted.” The annual election of officers then took place. The officers elected for the 1852 Masonic year were:

Worshipful Master: G. S. Templeton
Senior Warden: H. O. Palmer
Junior Warden: S. H. Castleberry
Secretary: J. J. McGee
Treasurer: Solomon Awalt
Senior Deacon: Simeon Weaver
Junior Deacon: J. H. Rucker
Tyler: Joseph Fuller

At a called meeting on 27 December 1851, one year to the day that the original nine Master Masons met in the church and drafted a letter to the Grand Lodge of the State of Texas requesting permission to form a Lodge in the area of Pine Tree Post Office, the Lodge Secretary certified the Returns to the Grand Lodge.¹²

The original nine members who petitioned the Grand Lodge of Texas for a warrant or charter authorizing them to work as Masons worked diligently during the first year to spread Masonry throughout the rural countryside. The annual returns to Grand Lodge for 1851 reflect that the Lodge received seventeen petitions for initiation, initiated fifteen Entered Apprentice Masons, passed eleven Fellowcraft Masons, and raised nine Master Masons. The Lodge submitted a roster of twenty-seven members including twenty Master Masons, two Fellowcraft Masons, and five Entered Apprentice Masons.¹³

Tusculum Masonic Lodge No. 86 was chartered by the Grand Lodge of Texas on 23 January 1852, two days shy of the one year anniversary of the issuance of the warrant to work under dispensation. The charter was issued at the fifteenth Grand Communication of the Grand

Lodge of Texas in Austin and bears the names of Grand Master J. Sayles, Deputy Grand Master A. Neill, Grand Senior Warden E. H. Tarrant, Grand Junior Warden J. C. Harrison, Grand Treasurer E. B. Nichols, and Grand Secretary A. S. Ruthven.¹⁴

Business slowed for the members of Tusculum Lodge in 1852. The minutes and records of the lodge have been lost to time but the annual returns indicated that the Lodge initiated three Entered Apprentice Masons, passed five Fellowcraft Masons, and raised four Master Masons. The roster of the Lodge lists twenty-four Master Masons, one Fellowcraft Mason, and three Entered Apprentice Masons.¹⁵

On 3 December 1853, the Lodge met in regular communication and elected to change the date of its regular stated meetings. The Lodge changed its stated meetings from the second Saturday of each month to the Saturday on or preceding the full moon in each month. J. J. McGee, Lodge Secretary, submitted a letter to the Grand Lodge requesting approval of the change.¹⁶

According to the annual returns between 1853 and 1881 the Lodge membership fluctuated between the low of twenty-six members in 1853 and the high of forty-two members in 1872. Other peculiarities worth noting that were discovered in the returns include that the T. G. Doyle served as Worshipful Master for seventeen non-consecutive years between the years of 1853 and 1878, T. Stinchomb and B. W. Brown both served as Master for three non-consecutive years, and W.W. White, D. B. Rodden, and W. W. Payne each served twice. During the time of the Civil War, the officers of the Lodge did not change and those members serving in the Confederate Army are documented in the Returns. In 1862, thirteen Master Masons of the Lodge served in the Confederate Army, eight in 1863, and ten in 1864.¹⁷

In 1857, a two story building was erected on the parcel of land acquired from Joseph

Castleberry to replace the single room log cabin. Following the customs of the era, the Lodge met upon the second floor while the congregation and school met upon the first floor. The congregation soon moved into their own building, but the Lodge and school remained in the two story structure until it was replaced by a brick building in 1932.¹⁸

In 1870, the Grand Lodge Returns indicate that the Tusculum Lodge's address changed from the Pine Tree Post Office in Upshur County, Texas to the Longview Post Office in Upshur County, Texas.¹⁹

In 1873, the Grand Lodge Returns indicated that the Tusculum Lodge address changed from the Longview Post Office in Upshur County, Texas to the Longview Post Office in Gregg County, Texas.²⁰

The newly-formed Gregg County was named for Confederate Army General John Gregg, and was established by the 13th Texas Legislature on 12 April 1873. The county was composed of lands from southern Upshur County and northern Rusk County. During the same year, the city of Longview was named the county seat instead of the community of Awalt when the Texas and Pacific Railway was built through Longview, bypassing Awalt.²¹

The establishment of the new county seat at Longview began the demise of Awalt. The railways moved commerce into Longview and south toward the Sabine River. By 1900 Awalt could not be found on any maps. ²²

Longview Masonic Lodge No. 404 was chartered by the Grand Lodge of Texas on 4 June 1874, and in 1881, with no known reason other than the development of the nearby city of Longview, Tusculum Lodge No. 86 surrendered its charter to the Grand Lodge of Texas.²³

Today, Pine Tree Independent School District is a thriving 4-A school district in Longview, Texas. The Pine Tree Cumberland Presbyterian Church still stands on the parcel of

land donated by Joseph Castleberry in 1847. The Pine Tree community, once called Awalt, was formed like so many other communities of the era by Masons. A Master Mason, Solomon Awalt, pastored the church, established the school, and helped charter the Tusculum Masonic Lodge. While the Lodge did not survive, Masonry survives through the actions and deeds of the members of Tusculum Masonic Lodge No. 86.

Notes

1. James D. Carter, *Masonry In Texas: Background, History and Influence to 1846*, 2d ed. (Waco, TX.: Committee on Masonic Education and Service of the Grand Lodge of Texas, A.F. & A.M., 1958).
2. [Pine Tree] *Cutlass*, 2 May 1997, 1.
3. Solomon Awalt and petitioners of Tusculum Masonic Lodge to the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of the State of Texas, 27 December 1851, Archives of the Grand Lodge of Texas, A.F. & A.M., Waco, Texas.
4. Ibid.
5. Grand Lodge of Texas A.F. & A.M., Warrant for Tusculum Lodge No. 86, Archives of the Grand Lodge of Texas, A.F. & A.M., Waco, Texas.
6. Tusculum College, *Tusculum College Catalog 2008-2009*, 7. Retrieved from <http://www.tusculum.edu/catalog/pdf/2008-2009/section1.pdf> on 1 August 2009.
7. Grand Lodge of Texas, *The Laws of The Grand Lodge of Texas A.F. & A.M.*, Revised 2008, 58.
8. Minutes of Tusculum Lodge No. 86, 1 February 1851, Archives of the Grand Lodge of Texas, A.F. & A.M., Waco, Texas.
9. Minutes of Tusculum Lodge No. 86, 1 February to 27 December 1851, Archives of the Grand Lodge of Texas, A.F. & A.M., Waco, Texas.
10. Minutes of Tusculum Lodge No. 86, 18 September 1851, Archives of the Grand Lodge of Texas, A.F. & A.M., Waco, Texas.
11. Minutes of Tusculum Lodge No. 86, 8 November 1851, Archives of the Grand Lodge of Texas, A.F. & A.M., Waco, Texas.
12. Minutes of Tusculum Lodge No. 86, December 1851, Archives of the Grand Lodge of Texas, A.F. & A.M., Waco, Texas.
13. Returns of Tusculum Lodge No. 86, A.F. & A.M., 1851, Archives of the Grand Lodge of Texas, A.F. & A.M., Waco, Texas.
14. Grand Lodge of Texas A.F. & A.M., Charter for Tusculum Masonic Lodge No. 86, A.F. & A.M., Archives of the Grand Lodge of Texas, A.F. & A.M., Waco, Texas.
15. Returns of Tusculum Lodge No. 86, A.F. & A.M., 1852, Archives of the Grand Lodge of Texas, A.F. & A.M., Waco, Texas.

16. J. J. McGee to the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Texas, 3 December 1853, Archives of the Grand Lodge of Texas, A.F. & A.M., Waco, Texas.
17. Returns of Tusculum Lodge No. 86, A.F. & A.M., 1853 - 1881, Archives of the Grand Lodge of Texas, A.F. & A.M., Waco, Texas.
18. [Pine Tree] *Cutlass*, 2 May 1991, 1.
19. Returns of Tusculum Lodge No. 86, A.F. & A.M., 1870, Archives of the Grand Lodge of Texas, A.F. & A.M., Waco, Texas.
20. Returns of Tusculum Lodge No. 86, A.F. & A.M., 1873, Archives of the Grand Lodge of Texas, A.F. & A.M., Waco, Texas.
21. Suzanne Perry, "Gregg County," *Handbook of Texas Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/GG/hcg10.html> on 5 July 2009.
22. Christopher Long, "Awalt, Texas", *Handbook of Texas Online*. Retrieved from <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/AA/hraud.html> on 5 July 2009.
23. Grand Lodge of Texas A.F. & A.M., Charter for Tusculum Masonic Lodge No. 86, A.F. & A.M., Archives of the Grand Lodge of Texas, A.F. & A.M., Waco, Texas.