

## 175th Anniversary of Mt. Moriah Lodge #37

Hello everyone, as previously aforementioned my name is Dakota Marett, and I am the current Senior Warden of Mt. Moriah Lodge #37. I'd first like to thank my wife for allowing me to take time out of our busy schedule of raising two kids to be a part of such an amazing and honorable fraternity. I'd also like to thank the many mentors I've had along the way, most notably, our Worshipful Master Roger Short.

One hundred fifty years ago, the present town of Coldspring did not exist. This and the surrounding area was nothing more than plowed or open fields. The primary and virtually only industries in this part of Texas were farming and raising livestock. Many large plantations surrounded the site, and agriculture was carried on an extensive scale.

Some of you may know of the little town of Swartout, which resides on FM 1988 between Camilla and Livingston. It currently only consists of an old church and a historical marker that sits out front. But in the mid-nineteenth century Swartout was one of several boat landings serving the communities along the river. Supplies were discharged at these landings and cotton, the principal crop, was loaded for shipment to Galveston and other ports.

Swartout was also the original site of Trinity Lodge #14, where our brethren met before Mt. Moriah #37 was established. But unfortunately after losing the election of becoming the county seat for newly established Polk County in 1846 to Springfield (Current day Livingston), and with the rise of the railroad industry, Swartout eventually became a ghost town. And Trinity #14 moved their Lodge to Livingston. This caused an immense inconvenience for the brothers who lived on the west side of the Trinity river accounting for the fact that transportation was by horse, horse drawn carriage, or by the will of how far your feet could travel. This ignited a fire in our previous brothers' hearts to establish their own lodge. Hence why we are even standing in this room today.

The newly established Mount Moriah Lodge convened at Mount Pleasant which was situated several hundred yards north of the intersection of Highway 156 and FM 945 on the 6th day of March, 1847. This first meeting was held in an old store in the

community. Brother A. S. Ainsworth, as proxy of and by warrant from the Grand Lodge of the State of Texas, duly installed the officers of Mount Moriah Lodge (then #36.),

Three of the officers, Ralph McGee, David Kincaid and James Berry were original grantees of land in Polk and San Jacinto Counties. \*G. L. Martin, charter member, was the first Chief Justice of Polk County. This lodge, although handicapped because of a small membership of only nine members, began conferring Masters Degrees in July of 1847.

Until 1848 this lodge had worked under the warrant issued by the Grand Lodge of Texas, which at this early date was located in Houston, Texas. A charter was issued to Mount Moriah Lodge on the 15th of January, 1848 and the number assigned to the lodge was #37. The first minutes which recorded the Lodge as #37 were written on May 6, 1848. The people of the small village of Coldspring were very busy during this year. In addition to this Lodge, The Coldspring United Methodist Church and The First Baptist Church of Coldspring were organized.

General Sam Houston, one of our great Texans, lived in this area for many years after the war between Texas and Mexico was won. He made his home at Raven Hill in the northern part of San Jacinto County and made frequent trips to Coldspring visiting friends and also to Swartout to pick up freight and supplies. We are told by many of the "Old Timers" that General Houston visited Mount Moriah Lodge on several occasions.

During this era automobiles were unheard of. The only land communication was by horseback and horse drawn vehicles. Many members lived ten to twenty miles away from the lodge and rode this distance once or twice a month to attend the meeting here. because of the long distance, they would spend the night with friends or at the local hotel.

In October 1848, Brother O. L. Williams was present to take his Masters Degree. But in his preparation, he found that he was in a most embarrassing situation; he was without sufficient funds to be raised to the degree. On motion of the secretary, the treasurer was instructed to loan Brother Williams \$10.00 and take his note for that amount.

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In 1850, the lodge room, which was the old store building

mentioned before, was sold and a new meeting place had to be found. Some of the members obtained permission from Professor H. F. Gillett to hold meetings in his school house at Firemen's Hill, which was only a short distance from Mount Pleasant.

The Lodge contributed \$5.00 to the Washington National Monument Fund to aid in the progress of that building in August of 1851.

The Lodge moved to Coldspring, that is the old town of Coldspring, and met for the first time on the 6th of November, 1852, in Mr. J. W. Sanders's store building. Mr. Sander's store was the first store in Coldspring and was built under a giant, spreading live oak tree which, we believe, still stands in the "old town" today.

The Lodge, after moving to Coldspring, bought the old house from Mr. Gillett for \$50.00 and had it moved to Coldspring for \$75.00.

In 1854 it was determined that the old lodge building was inadequate so the members began to look into the details of building a new lodge room in Coldspring. Two offers of a meeting place were made at the Lodge at this time. One by "The Good Samaritans and Daughters of Samans" to accept title of one third interest and pay one third of the cost of their hall then being built for use thereof. The second offer, which Mount Moriah Lodge accepted in October 1856, was from the Eureka Chapter #38 of Royal Arch Masons. Mount Moriah Lodge paid \$300.00 for one half interest in the new hall of the Eureka Chapter and held their meetings in this building from then on.

The membership from 1847 until 1856 averaged about 18 members but reached 33 in 1859.

From the time the Lodge was formed in 1847 until 1859, visiting Brothers came from the States of Louisiana, Oklahoma, Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, Oregon, Illinois, and Missouri.

No record of the Lodge could be found from 1861 to June 1866 due to the war between the United States and the Confederate States of America. Several of the members joined units of the Confederate Army and the Lodge became quite inactive. However, in 1868 this Lodge was instructed by the Grand Lodge of Texas to provide records of these years as soon as practical.

San Jacinto County was created in August of 1870 from parts of Polk, Liberty, Montgomery and Walker Counties, and in 1874 the lower story of the lodge room was used as the County Courthouse.

In November of 1876, the Lodge passed a resolution that hereafter all dues payable to the Lodge must be paid in U. S. Currency. Evidently some of the Brothers were still digging up some old Confederate currency which at this time was practically worthless.

By 1879 the membership had dropped to 28 after reaching 46 members in 1874

At a stated meeting of the Lodge in June of 1880, the Worshipful Master called the attention of the lodge to the destitute financial condition of the widow of a deceased Brother. The sum of \$10.50 was appropriated to be placed in the hands of this lady.

On August 2, 1884 this Lodge, on an invitation from Trinity Lodge #14, assisted that Lodge in laying the cornerstone of the New Courthouse in Livingston.

In 1900, Galveston, Texas had the most damaging and destructive storm of its existence. Hundreds were killed or drowned and thousands were left homeless. Though the amount was small for such extensive damage and suffering, Mount Moriah Lodge contributed to those people at Galveston.

From the year 1880 until 1896 the average membership of the lodge was about 32 members. However, in 1897 the membership reached 45 and remained at this figure for several years. By 1918 there were only 33 members. In this same year, which marked the end of World War I, the Grand Lodge of Texas granted a special dispensation to Brothers Davis and Dick Hale so that they might receive all three degrees at one time. This request was made due to the military duties of these two brothers.

In 1915, the Courthouse at Coldspring burned and parts of the town property had begun to cave and wash so badly that it was decided to move the town to a new location. The current site was chosen and laid out as a town site. Many of the business houses were moved up to the new location and construction on this courthouse was started in 1916.

In 1920 the Lodge began plans to move to the new location but it was not until April 1923 that the Lodge was moved to the new town of Coldspring at a cost of \$228.00.

In early 1917, the Lodge was involved (indirectly) in state politics. F. O. Fuller, one of our members and a member of the Texas Legislature, was Speaker of the House for the 35th Legislature of Texas when impeachment proceedings were filed against Governor James Ferguson. He was impeached in September of 1917.

By 1936 Mount Moriah Lodge had been in existence 88 years and had been through every hardship known to man but nevertheless had continued to progress in every way. But the early thirties brought a change, not only in the Lodge, but in the nation as a whole. As we all know, the Great Depression brought financial instability to a great majority. However, the membership of this Lodge remained fair until 1936, having a membership of 50 in that year. By 1937 there were only 20 members and by 1941, the membership had dropped to 18. On May third of that same year, F. E. Moore visited this Lodge for his first visit in 30 years. He stated that in 1909 he walked from Oakhurst to Coldspring, a distance of 16 miles, to be raised to the Degree of a Master Mason. These were very hard years of the Lodge. From 1940 until 1946, the Lodge was very inactive. But due to the untiring efforts of four or five members, this Lodge was kept together. In 1946 the Lodge became more active and had 27 members in that year and 38 in 1947. At its meeting in December 1947, the Grand Lodge of Texas appointed Brother J. B. Short, District Deputy Grand Master of Masonic District #27. This was quite an honor for Mount Moriah since Brother Short was the first member of our Lodge ever to be appointed as an officer of the Grand Lodge of Texas. After the death of our Brother and District Deputy Grand Master, J. B. Short, Brother Fred Stenzler, was appointed District Deputy Grand Master in Brother Short's place.

On June 24, 1948, at our 100th Anniversary, Mount Moriah Lodge #37 was opened at 4:30pm in the District Court room with the following regular officers:

D. M. Hale, W.M.

J. W. Warren, S.W

Walter Carter, J.W.  
Fred Stenzler, Secretary  
Guy C. Lilley, Treasurer  
C. L. Campbell, S.D.  
E. R. Dabney, J.D.  
Joe J. West, Tiler  
M. D. Trapp, S.S.  
J. R. McGowen, J.S.

The Worshipful Master stated that the purpose of this meeting was to officially receive the Grand Lodge officers present who were in waiting.

The officers of the Grand Lodge of Texas were then escorted to the Altar and introduced to the Worshipful Master by the Past Masters of Mount Moriah Lodge.

After receiving the Grand Officers, the Worshipful Master, Brother D. M. Hale, welcomed the Grand Lodge Officers personally and for the members of the Lodge, as well as all visiting Masons.

After other remarks by Brother Hale, he presented his gavel to Brother Horace K. Jackson, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Texas, who in turn proceeded to open a representation of the Grand Lodge of Texas.

After congratulations to the Lodge upon achieving her 100th birthday, Brother Jackson called the Worshipful Master to the Altar and awarded a "One Hundred Year certificate" to Mount Moriah Lodge, Brother Hale receiving it.

The Grand Master then called the Senior Warden of the Lodge, Brother J. W. Warren, to the Altar and thru him presented to Mount Moriah Lodge #37 a beautiful gavel with the Lodge's name, number, date of charter, engraved thereon. This was a personal gift to the Lodge from Brother Jackson and he presented it with this reservation - "that when Mount Moriah Lodge has completed her second one hundred years, that this gavel be returned to the Grand Lodge of Texas to be placed in the Archives of said Lodge so that future generations may see the progress made by Mount Moriah Lodge #37." This very gavel still sits in our display case by the front door. Brother Jackson requested that the above

reservation be recorded in the minutes of this Lodge so that his request could be carried out "One Hundred Years from this date".

In 1958 the Lodge voted to build a new lodge building. The old building was 102 years old and was in terrible condition. But as the time approached to tear down the old building, some of the members wanted to restore it. But The new lodge building was completed in the early 1960's.

In 1998 at our 150th Anniversary, the Lodge had 82 members. Sitting officers on our 150th Anniversary were:

James Starkey, W. M.

David Rice, S.W.

James Lotspeich, J.W.

Jeff Francis S.D.

Norman Dow, J.D.

John Boyce, Secty.

Charlie Bennett, Treas.

Bert Campbell, S.S.

Kirby Cowles, J. S.

Warren Ford, Tiler

Tom Anderson, Chaplain

Our Lodge received a "Historical Marker" from the Texas Historical Commission in 1990.

Mt. Moriah #37 currently has a membership of 63 Master Masons.

We are very pleased with this Lodge's accomplishments and what it has meant to its members and the citizens of surrounding communities for the past one hundred and seventy-five years. And we hope we can continue for another 175 years to come. It's amazing to believe that all it took was a few faithful brethren with the will power to continue the legacy of this honorable fraternity. Which we as the Freemason's of Mt. Moriah Lodge #37 will continue to carry on. Contributing wherever we can to make this dark world we live in, a much better place. I am a firm believer in the fact that each and every day you have the power

to change someone's life. And for 175 years Mt. Moriah Lodge has changed or impacted the lives of our community, more especially our Brothers, as men.

I'd like to thank each and every one of you for your attentive ear. I hope you leave here today with a better understanding of the role we've played in our history of Coldspring, Texas. And if given the opportunity to help someone in need, you make no hesitation to extend your helping hand, like our previous brothers did, before us.

Thank you.

Dakota Marett







