

Capitol View Masonic Lodge closes in the Rico Community

Lodge to Merge with Palmetto Day Light Lodge #755

By: Laurie Searle (May 16, 2019)



Capitol View Masonic Lodge # 640 F. & A. M. served the Rico Community and beyond since 1981. In May 2019, the Lodge sold its building and consolidated with the Palmetto Day Light Lodge #755.

Members of the Capitol View Masonic Lodge #640 F. & A. M. gathered for their last meeting on May 9, as they made the final preparations to close their lodge and merge with the Palmetto Day Light Lodge #755.

The lodge building, constructed by its members in 1981, is symbolic of Freemasonry, a fraternal organization dedicated to making good men better. Utilitarian on the outside, functional on the inside, constructed to be square and true, the building stands as a testimony to its members who have raised up generations of strong leaders and served this community well.

In the Beginning

The Capitol View Free & Associated Masonic Lodge (F. & A. M.) #640 dates back to July 29, 1913, when it met under dispensation in a call communication in the basement of Capitol View Baptist Church on Beattie Avenue in southwest Atlanta.

The Lodge was formally organized at this meeting, with the following members elected as officers: J.E. Wilheit (W.M), George Dickson (S.W.), J.A. Wesley (J.W.) C.J. McLendon (S.D.), J.M. Wilson (acting J.D.), Carl Dolvin (S.S.), W.C. Tumlin (J.S.), W.H. Steward (Treasurer), George Coleman (Secretary), J.M. McDonald (Tyler).

The Lodge was chartered on October 29, 1913, and by 1921 preparations were underway to build a temple at the corner of Stewart and Dill Avenues.



The Capitol View Masonic Temple at 1310 Metropolitan Parkway in SW Atlanta, served members from 1923-1979.

The temple and its surrounding area were later designated as part of the Capitol View Neighborhood Historic District in the National Register of Historic Places (100002063). The Register describes the temple as a Commercial-style building with classical elements composed of brick and marble. It was designed by Robert Smith Pringle in the years before his successful partnership with Francis P. Smith (Pringle & Smith). The first stone was laid September 1921 with the building completed in 1922. The building was named "Capitol View Lodge" because it sat on a small promontory with a view of the state capitol building. Originally, Lodge #640 was home to 550 Masons. The four-story lodge adheres to a tripartite formula with a base, shaft, and crown. The base was constructed for retail space. The second floor (and possibly the third floor) contains office space and the upper floor housed the Mason's auditorium and ritual space. Only the rear of the side elevation makes all four floors apparent, as the front façade exhibits windows on just three floors.

Merger and Move

During the late 50s and early 60s, Masonic membership in the U.S. was at its highest, with more than four million members nationwide and an estimated 970 members at the Capitol View Lodge.

Some contribute the early boom in membership to the returning vets of WWII and Korea. Others suggest that society was more involved in civic groups and membership-based organizations back then. Whatever the reasons, the early success was short-lived. By 1965, membership began a steady decline to just over one million members nationwide today.

As a result, some larger Masonic Lodges moved to smaller more affordable buildings, while smaller Lodges looked for opportunities to consolidate, or merge with others.

By 1976, Capitol View Lodge's membership had declined by 50%, but with 448 members remaining, the Lodge was still large by today's standards. Further south, the Rico Masonic Lodge #663, chartered in 1913, had lost all but 35 members. As a result, the Rico Lodge merged with the Capitol View Lodge on August 12, 1976. Both Lodges agreed that in due time they would relocate and construct a new Lodge in Rico, on the triangular plot of land owned by the Rico Lodge.

Capitol View Lodge continued to meet at its four-story temple until 1979, when circumstances beyond its control necessitated the disposition of its beautiful building. For the next few years, it met at the East Point Lodge #288 at 2835 Church Street in East Point, GA.



The Rico Masonic Lodge #633 met in the second floor of the building now known as "The Scout Hut" before it merged with Capitol View Lodge in 1976.



East Point Masonic Lodge #288 was the meeting place of the Capitol View Lodge from 1979-1981.

Building the New Lodge



The Capitol View Lodge members worked diligently over the next two years to secure the construction of their new home. They developed a beautiful yet functional design of a one-story building consisting of a lodge hall, kitchen, two rest rooms, anteroom and a small lobby.

Working with a good contractor, construction began in April 1981. By August, the exterior of the building was completed, and the lodge brothers went to work on the interior. They framed the interior walls, painted, added the special details to the main meeting room, placed the cornerstone from the old building in the lobby floor, and (it is rumored) placed a time capsule in one of the walls.

The laying of the cornerstone and dedication of the new building was held on September 5, 1981, under the direction of the Most Worshipful Grand Master, Brother William E. Graves. It was the hope of the brethren that when they moved into the new building, membership would improve and the Light of Masonry would be rekindled in the Capitol View Lodge.

A Closer Look at Freemasonry

The origins of Freemasonry can be traced back to the local fraternities of stonemasons, which from the end of the fourteenth century regulated the qualifications of stonemasons and their interaction with authorities and clients. The degrees of Freemasonry retain the three grades of medieval craft guilds, those of Apprentice, Journeyman or fellow (now called Fellowcraft), and Master Mason. The candidate of these three degrees is progressively taught the meanings of the symbols of Freemasonry, and entrusted with grips, signs and words to signify to other members that he has been so initiated. The initiations are part allegorical morality play and part lecture. The three degrees are offered by Craft (or Blue Lodge) Freemasonry. (Wikipedia)



The Square and Compasses, which are joined together, each leg of the compass pointing in opposite directions, is the single most universally identifiable symbol of Freemasonry. The Square is an emblem of virtue in which Masons must "square our actions by the square of virtue with all mankind". The Compasses exemplifies wisdom of conduct, the strength to "circumscribe our desires and keep our passions within due bounds". (Masonic lodge of education).

Capitol View Brethren – Making Good Men Better

Pat Long, Worshipful Master (W.M.) at the Capitol View Lodge says the Bible holds the place of honor inside the Lodge's meeting room, but Freemasonry is not a religion, nor is it a substitute for religion. According to the basic principles, Freemasonry requires of its members a belief in God as part of the obligation of every responsible adult, but advocates no sectarian faith or practice. Masonic ceremonies include prayers, both traditional and extempore, to reaffirm each individual's dependence on God and to seek divine guidance. Freemasonry is open to men of any faith, but religion may not be discussed at Masonic meetings. (Masonic Service Association of North America.)

When asked to put Freemasonry in simple terms, Pat said, "It's about making good men better." Pat recalls when as a kid he first learned about Freemasonry from his father, William (Bill) Long who was a long-time member and a Worshipful Master (2004). Pat was an active volunteer until he reached the age when he could begin his apprenticeship, then he soon followed in his father's footsteps. Later, when Pat's son Jason turned 21, he continued the family tradition. Jason said, "I couldn't wait to become a Lodge member. Back then, the Lodge didn't have many other members my age, so I worked through all three degrees at an accelerated pace so I was able to fully participate in all Lodge functions."

There are at least two other multi-generation lodge families in the Lodge. The Byrd Family includes: Harold Byrd, still an active member at 84 years old, who helped built the current lodge building; and his two sons Steven and Joseph, also active members, both of whom served as Worshipful Masters many times. The Collingsworth Family includes: Lewis, Warren, and J.L., all of whom served as Worshipful Masters.

And then there's the three walls of portraits in the dining room, displaying the photos of Worshipful Masters in the Capitol View Lodge and the Rico Lodge since they received their charters. While these represent but a few of the Lodge's members over its 100-year history, the many familiar names of local civic leaders illustrate that this lodge did indeed, make good men better.

These good men worked to make our community better by helping people in time of need. They prepared food boxes, fruit baskets, and gave toys to local kids at Christmas; offered a widows' fund for the wives deceased Masons in need of assistance; sold bricks to raise funds for the Veterans Park in Palmetto, and gave donations to Community Brickworks to close out the lodge. They also made donations (along with all lodges) to support the Masonic Children's Home in Macon.

We thank the Capitol View Masonic Lodge for its 106 years of service and wish them well in their new home in Palmetto. For more history on the Capitol View Masonic Lodge #640 see www.chatthillshistory.com.

May 9, 2019 – Last Meeting at Capitol View Masonic Lodge

For more photos and history of the Lodge, visit www.chatthillshistory.com



[1] Lodge brothers at the conclusion of their final meeting. Left to right: Jason Long, Rocky Rothrock, Steve Byrd, Warren Collingsworth, Pat Long, Harold Byrd, Joe McAlister, Bill Hart, Jeffrey Collingsworth, Joey Byrd

[2] Closing out the meeting. Left to right, foreground: Jeffrey Collingsworth, Warren Collingsworth, Joey Byrd, Pat Long, Jason Long.