

## Marker To Recognize Lodge's Contributions

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### **Brennen Smith/Decatur Daily**

John Allison, of the Morgan County Archives, and Neal Hudson, historian of Rising Sun Lodge No. 29, talk about the lodge's history. "This lodge has been involved with just about every historically significant event in Decatur," Allison said.

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**By Deangelo McDaniel Staff Writer | [0 comments](#)**

Clay packed between the logs of Dr. Henry W. Rhodes' cabin barely held back winter's wind as he gathered with some of Decatur's early settlers on Nov. 22, 1826.

It's not documented whose idea it was for the meeting near what is now Bank and LaFayette streets.

But records show the men organized Rising Sun Lodge No. 29, the oldest Masonic Lodge in Morgan County and first fraternal organization in Decatur.

About three months ago, the Alabama Historical Commission — in a change from its old requirements — agreed to allow a historical marker to be placed in Rhodes Ferry Park to recognize the lodge's historical contributions to the River City.

"In addition to recognizing historical buildings and events, the commission is now recognizing historically significant organizations," Morgan County archivist John Allison said.

"This lodge has been involved with just about every historically significant event in Decatur."

Lodge members, as they have for 188 years, will gather Aug. 15 to unveil the marker near the banks of the Tennessee River on property Dr. Rhodes owned. He was a charter member and one of Decatur's founding fathers.

Neal Hudson, who is the historian for the Masonic lodge, did most of the research for the writing that will appear on the marker. Although it organized in 1826, he said the lodge was not chartered until 1827 and its first Masonic hall was not constructed until 1834.

"The lower floor of the building was used for church and school purposes," Hudson said.

During the Civil War in November 1864, Union soldiers dismantled the building and used the lumber to fortify Decatur.

The fraternal organization met in as many as eight places before moving to its current location on the corner of Bank and Walnut streets.

Hudson's research and minutes of early Mason meetings revealed members have been elected officials, doctors, lawyers, businessmen and ministers.

Regardless of their professional status, Masons have a documented history of helping each other and community involvement.

When the yellow fever epidemic struck Decatur in 1888, doctors William G. Gill, Robert Williams and W. J. Young — all Masons — rushed to treat the townspeople.

"All of them died from yellow fever," Hudson said.

Gill, the oldest physician who practiced for 50 years, died Oct. 7, 1888. Williams, who had been in Decatur just one year, died the following day. Young, who was 40, died Oct. 26, 1888.

Hudson said he found the names of two Decatur police officers killed in the line of duty, but their names were not on the list of fallen officers in Morgan County.

One was Jesse "Lem" Jones, a Mason who was shot in the head while responding to an altercation at a "house of ill fame near the river," the local paper reported.

Jones died at his home Nov. 25, 1906, and was buried the following day in the city cemetery with "Masonic and Junior Order ceremonies."

Hudson said Jones was worshipful master of the Decatur lodge in 1901. He was the third Decatur police officer killed in three years, Allison said.

Masons are men who join a fraternity — they typically refer to themselves as Freemasons — and do a lot of charitable work. Masons Isaac Lane and Jesse Winston Garth — two of Decatur’s founding fathers — were directors for the Decatur Land Company, which laid out city streets. Masons also led the city’s rebuilding efforts during Reconstruction.

Most recently, the local Masonic Lodge awarded a scholarship to an Austin High student and raised \$12,000 during a fishing tournament at Ingalls Harbor to benefit wounded soldiers. The organization donated money and supplies to tornado victims in Limestone County and offer a free child identification program for children.

“Service and helping our neighbors have always been our top priority,” Hudson said.

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