265# Masonic Lodge (Script by Joanna Grey Talbot and Peggy Macdonald)

Did you ever wonder what really goes on inside a Masonic Lodge? Contrary to popular opinion, the Masons are not a religious order. Membership is open to anyone age 18 and up—except for agnostics or atheists. Masons are all believers in a supreme being. Masonry’s origins can be traced to guilds for the stone masons who built medieval castles and cathedrals. Knowing the Masons’ secret handshakes enabled stone masons to find work at other jobsites, much like being a member of a trade union.

Recently, the Masons were approached about turning Gainesville Masonic Lodge Number 41 into a Gainesville rock ‘n’ roll history museum. Originally, Gainesville’s Masons met in a variety of places, including the third floor of the Dutton Bank building. Chartered in 1857, Lodge Number 41 later purchased a lot from the Episcopal Church.

The cornerstone for this Masonic Lodge, which was built in the Beaux Arts style, was laid on September 9, 1908, in front of a crowd of over 2,000 people. The building was constructed of Tampa artificial stone and was formally dedicated on April 29, 1909. Its unique architecture includes Doric columns; large, wooden front doors with Masonic sunburst carvings; heart pine wood floors; and a decorated plaster ceiling on the second floor.

Local Jewish businessman Marcus Endel became a member in 1875. He was elected as Master of the lodge three times and would go on to be elected Senior Grand Warden of the Grand Lodge of Florida, Deputy Grand Master, and in 1893 the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Florida. He was the first member of the lodge to be elected Grand Master.

During World War II, soldiers from nearby Camp Blanding would come to Gainesville on weekend passes and the Lodge opened its doors to house them. On Sunday mornings, volunteers from the Lodge would cook a hearty breakfast for the men. By the end of the war, the Lodge had served over 10,000 servicemen.

The Masonic Lodge was added to the U.S. National Register of Historic Places in 1988. Gainesville Masonic Lodge Number 41 is still active in the community today.