The Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania met June 25th, 1804 at Pittsburg, Pennsylvania, and before the lodge came a letter dated May 7th, 1804 from Bro. James Edgar who was living in Kaskaskia in the Indiana Territory. Bro. Edgar desired to send a petition for the purpose of obtaining a dispensation to hold a Masonic lodge in Kaskaskia, “until a society should be formed, when application might be made for a warrant.”

It would appear the requested petition was sent the following year. The petition read in part:

"To the R. W. Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania GREETING :

"PETITION FOR DISPENSATION FOR THE WESTERN STAR LODGE, NO. 107."

"The subscribers, and many others of our brethren in the counties of St. Clair and Randolph, beg leave to approach your worshipful body and state to you that they are far removed from those social enjoyments which they once as Masons have experienced; that from the growth of population many worthy and respectable brethren have settled, and many more will soon come to this country; and that your suppliants, from a sense of duty incumbent on them as Masons and as men, to promote their mutual happiness, the happiness of their neighbors, and as far as in their power lies, humanize society, and, furthermore, to impress on their memory what has long been written on their hearts. Wherefore, your suppliants thus presume to approach your worshipful body and request that, if in your councils you think it expedient, your worshipful body will grant to your suppliants a warrant, or if that can't be obtained, a Dispensation, authorizing them to hold a regular Lodge in the town of Kaskaskia, appointing such of your suppliants to preside therein as may seem proper to your worshipful body, sending with the said warrant your constitution, all other necessary instructions, and the amount of expenses attending the same, which will be duly remitted by your suppliants, etc., etc.

ROBERT MCMAHAN, Stanton No. 13.

JAMES EDGAR, Lodge No. 9, Philadelphia.

JAMES GALBREATH, No. 79, Chambersburg.

ROBERT ROBINSON, Stanton, No. 13.

WM. ARUNDEL, St. Andrew's Lodge, No. 2, Quebec.

MICHAEL JONES, No. 45, Pittsburg.

RUFUS EASTON, Roman Lodge, No. 82, New York.

Dated in "Indiana Territory. Kaskaskia, March 9, 1805."

The dispensation issued by Grand Master Israel Israel, Esq., bearing the date September 24, 1805 was issued for the term of six months, and granted the first authority for a Lodge of Freemasons in the "Indiana Territory," now the State of Illinois.

The first proceedings dated December 14th, 1805 were held and James Edgar served as Worshipful Master at Kaskaskia in the Illinois country, by virtue of the dispensation. He took to his assistance Rufus Easton as Senior Warden; Michael Jones, Junior Warden; Robert Robinson, Senior Deacon; Alexander Anderson, Junior Deacon; and William Arundel, Secretary, whom he found on due trial to be Master Masons. After transacting business the Lodge closed in harmony 27th December, 1805.

Lodge again opened and after transacting business closed in harmony January 1st, 1806. James Galbreath, on due trial, was found a Master Mason, and afterwards admitted when the By-Laws were adopted and signed by James Edgar, Michael Jones, James Galbreath, Robert Robinson, Alexander Anderson and William Arundel, who thereby became members of the said Lodge.

Western Star Lodge #107 operated from the first public building built of bricks in the Mississippi Valley in Kaskaskia. It was the meeting place of the Territorial Legislature, and afterwards, the State Legislature; and then a courthouse until the removal of the county seat to Chester in 1848. It was also used by the Supreme Court of Illinois, and in this modern building of the time, Western Star Lodge was instituted, and frequently held its meetings.

When the foundations of Illinois Freemasonry were being established, Illinois was not yet a state. West of the Mississippi was still virgin territory. The men and women who lived in, and those who were moving into the Illinois territory at that time, were true pioneers. They were men of good standing in their communities from back East who fought in the Revolution, and who devoted their lives to building a new civilization for the benefit of all.

Among the newcomers was Shadrach Bond from Maryland who joined Western Star Lodge #107, who worked through the chairs, and who served as the first Governor of Illinois when Illinois became a state August 26th, 1818. After his term as Governor, Shadrach Bond then worked with the brethren of Libanus #29, Western Star #107, Olive Branch #5, Albion #9, Eden #11, Union #10, Vandalia #8, and Lawrence #34 to form the Grand Lodge of Freemasons for the State of Illinois. Bro. Bond was elected as the first Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Illinois on December 11, 1822. The Grand Lodge of Illinois was established at the State House in Vandalia, Illinois and held meetings there.

All was going well for the new Grand Lodge in the new State of Illinois until four years later in 1826. In Batavia, New York, William Morgan was abducted three months before his book, Illustrations of Masonry, was to be published. Illustrations of Masonry was an expose of the ritual of the Masonic organization including the full three degrees. The abduction of William Morgan led to strong anti-Masonic sentiments throughout the United States, which was only fifty years old. Lodges throughout the United States either went dark or went extinct, including the Grand Lodge of Illinois in 1829.

A complete and detailed history of the first Masonic lodge in Illinois, and the first Grand Lodge of Illinois is available in PDF format on our OLP website in the book folder of the files section. The book was written by General John Corson Smith in 1903.