Abraham Lincoln was President of the United States of America and the nation was embroiled in a civil war when nine men petitioned Most Worshipful Grand Master Thomas J. Turner of the second Grand Lodge of Illinois for a Masonic charter. The charter members for Kinmundy Lodge #398 were Benjamin H. “Bus” Bodwell, who served as Worshipful Master, Edward. R. Rison, Senior Warden, Isaac Smith Sweney, Junior Warden, James Potticary, Montgomery Wilson, Isaac Hodgen Elkin, Joseph O'Brien, William R. Boothe and William L. Arnold. The first Kinmundy Lodge meeting place was the upstairs of Col. William R. Booth's home, located on Fourth Street near where Peggy Harvey lived.

Wor. Bro. Bus Bodwell was born in Geauga County, Ohio. Geauga is an Indian word meaning “raccoon.” His family moved to Henry County, Tennessee where he married Elizabeth Poyner, and had several children. Bro. Bus then moved to Fayette County, Illinois where he took the job of Postmaster for several years. While serving as Postmaster, Bro. Bus applied for the Kinmundy Lodge #398 Masonic Charter. Since he applied for the Masonic charter very soon after arriving in Illinois, it is presumed that Bro. Bus took his degrees in Henry County, Tennessee. Bro. Bus was also a member of Farina Lodge #671, Farina, Illinois. He lived in the Farina-Kinmundy area until after 1870, when he and his sons moved to Eastland, Texas to work as teamsters driving wagons. At least one of his sons served with the Texas Rangers.

Bro. Edward R. Rison was born in Tennessee and lived in Henry County, Tennessee at the same time that Bus Bodwell resided there. Both moved to Fayette County, Illinois about the time Kinmundy Lodge was chartered in 1864. Ed later moved to Vandalia where eventually he died. It is likely that Bro. Ed Rison was also a Master Mason from Henry County, Tennessee.

Bro. Isaac Smith Sweney Jr. was born 1830 in Ohio. He was a doctor and moved to Marion County, Illinois with his wife, young son, father and sister about 1858. It would appear that Bro. Isaac was made a Master Mason in Marion County, Ohio, which is where he was married in 1854. His brothers were also well respected doctors, and they all likely attended the same medical school. Isaac’s father, Isaac S. Sweney Sr., died at Marion County, Illinois in August of 1864, two months before the Kinmundy Lodge charter was issued, which tells us it was the junior Isaac who was the Kinmundy Lodge charter member. Bro. Isaac Sweney Jr. demitted from Kinmundy Lodge #398 in 1871 and died a few years later at his home in Marion County, Ohio.

Wor. Bro. James Potticary was born 7 May 1839 at Ontario, Canada. He was a farmer, and lived in Marion County, Illinois during the 1860 and 1870 censuses. Wor. Bro. Potticary was also a charter member of Farina Lodge #671, Farina, Illinois in 1871 and served as Farina Lodge’s first Worshipful Master. He was also a member of Mason Lodge #217, Mason, Illinois.

Wor. Bro. Montgomery Wilson was born 1837 at Pike County, Ohio. He was a boot and shoe salesman and served as Worshipful Master of Kinmundy Lodge #398 in 1871, 1872, 1874, and 1875. He lived in Marion County from the time he was a minor until he was a Master Mason, and so he likely received his degrees from another lodge in the general area. Whether before or after he became a charter member of Kinmundy Lodge #398, Wor. Bro. Montgomery Wilson was also a member of Decatur Lodge #8 at Decatur, Illinois.

Wor. Bro. Isaac Hodgen Elkins was born 1820 at Clay County, Kentucky. He was a Baptist circuit preacher after his father, David Elkins. His father performed the funeral services for Abraham Lincoln’s mother, as the Elkins’ were close friends of the Lincolns. Wor. Bro. Isaac Elkins lived at Oskaloosa, Clay County, Illinois. He later served as Worshipful Master of Kinmundy Lodge #398 in 1868. Our lodge photo of Wor. Bro. Elkins gives his first initial as “J,” which was misread from the cursive letter I for Isaac.

Bro. Joseph O’Brien was born about 1822 at Virginia. His parents moved to Macon County, Tennessee by the time he was two, and then to St. Clair County, Illinois by his teens. He then moved back to Tennessee and had two children before moving to Marion County, Illinois by 1860. Joseph was apparently a farmer who kept mostly to himself; he likely received his Masonic degrees in Tennessee.

Bro. William R. Boothe was born 1824 at Tennessee. He married Mary Jane Monfort at Fayette County, Illinois and they raised five children in Kinmundy, Illinois beginning around 1854. Their residence was approximately 317 W. 4th St. in Kinmundy and served as the first Masonic Lodge in Kinmundy, although their house is now gone. After 1870, Bro. William Boothe and some of his children moved further west to Missouri and Kansas.

Wor. Bro. William L. Arnold was born 1840 at Alabama. His parent’s family moved to St. Clair County, Illinois before he was five, and his father died 1845 at St. Clair County. His mother died at St. Clair County when William was fifteen. Bro. William Arnold married Almeda Conant at Marion County in 1870 and raised his family at Foster Township on their family farm. In 1871, Bro. Arnold was also a charter member of Farina Lodge #671, Farina, Illinois, and he served as Worshipful Master there in 1873.

These Masonic brethren came from different regions of the expanding United States, and were already raised as Master Masons in their previous home towns. The brethren who chartered Kinmundy Lodge #398 were latter day pioneers with various skills at a period when the local communities were still in an early stage of development. Some remained in the area with their families; others continued their Westward trek while further spreading their Masonic influence.