

## ***MASONIC LODGE/OLD METHODIST CHURCH***

The brick Methodist Church was contracted in 1881 to replace Washington's original frame Methodist meeting house from 1819 which sat just behind and to the right of this structure. Athens GA builder, M.B. McGinty, was hired to construct it. Planning began in 1880 with \$4000 quickly raised. Completed cost was \$5306. The old wooden church building was then purchased by John Floyd and moved to the corner of Main and Jefferson Streets, taking on new life as the community's Opera House.

The new brick edifice was dedicated on Easter Sunday, April 9, 1882, with Bishop George Foster Pierce officiating.

The rapidly growing Methodist congregation had already outgrown the facility by 1889 and, in February 1890, redesigned and extended the rear of the building. The original spire was taken down and the present distinguished cupola was erected with a total cost of \$3000. The edifice was electrified and illuminated in July 1893.

Great preachers of Methodism filled its pulpit, including Sam Jones, E.M. Bounds, and Bishop Pierce. But the most significant event was the elaborate funeral service for Confederate icon, General Robert Toombs. His service on December 17, 1885, brought guests and visitors from throughout the South to pack the church and grounds. The local pastor, Rev. W.H. LaPrade, presided, assisted by Episcopal Bishop John W. Beckwith.

As the Methodists continued to expand their membership, though, the brick church could not handle the growth. A new church, further west on Liberty Street, was planned with the cornerstone laid in May 1907. Construction immediately began and services were moved there during 1909. The new church was dedicated July 17, 1910.

By October 1909, the "old" church building had become the "Washington Gymnasium," an early 20<sup>th</sup> century "fitness center" for boys and men! It was certainly a memorable adaptive reuse.

Perhaps a more appropriate situation for the structure was arranged not long after. In March 1913, the Lafayette Lodge acquired the building from Boyce Ficklen and Son for \$3000. The Temple was dedicated during a huge Masonic Convention on April 12, 1914, by the Grand Lodge of Georgia with over 400 in attendance.