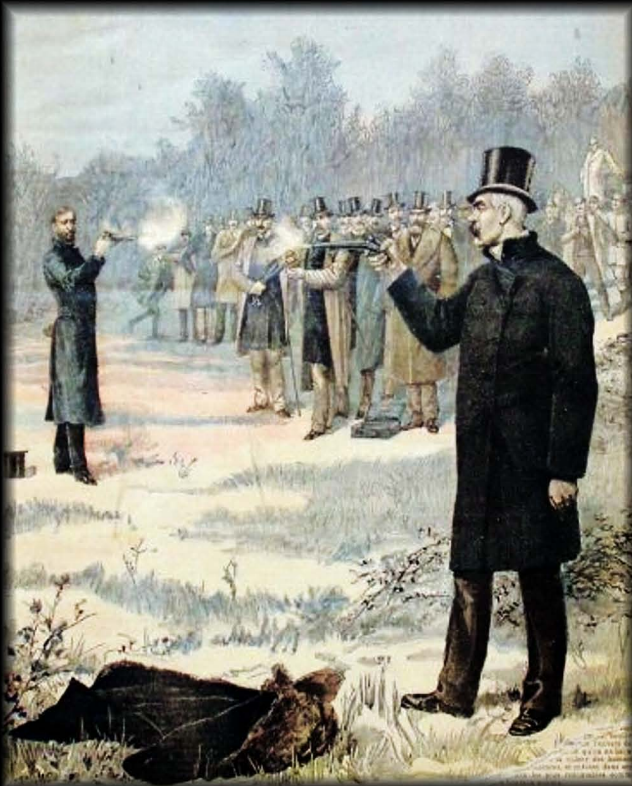


Dueling Masons

While dueling may seem barbaric to modern men, it was a ritual that made sense in a society in which the preservation of male honor was absolutely paramount. A man's honor was the most central aspect of his identity, and thus its reputation had to be kept unvarnished by any means necessary. Duels, which were sometimes attended by hundreds of people, were a way for men to publicly prove their courage and manliness. In such a society, the courts could offer a gentleman no real justice; the matter had to be resolved with the shedding of blood.

Dr. William H. Richardson and Dr. Benjamin Dudley were both physicians on the faculty of Transylvania College in 1818. Both were also Past Masters of Lexington Lodge No. 1. A dispute about an autopsy performed in Lexington led to both men publically insulting the other and resulting in a challenge to engage in a duel. Regardless of the fact that dueling was clearly un-Masonic conduct and against Kentucky law, the men kept their appointment. Although against the law, there was no penalty for its violation until 1849.



Dudley and Richardson met on a warm August morning in 1818 at Donnerail near Georgetown Road, a well-known site where other duels had taken place. The duel was well attended by spectators from the community. Dudley fired after the customary 10 paces, his bullet striking Richardson in an artery in his hip. The attending physician alone could not prevent Richardson from bleeding to death. Dudley walked to where Richardson was on the ground and observed the problem the attending doctor was experiencing and offered his assistance. Richardson's life was saved.

The next month at the annual meeting of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky which took place in Lexington, Richardson and Dudley were temporarily suspended from the privileges of Masonry. Henry Clay who would later become Master of Lexington Lodge No. 1, and Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky sat on that disciplinary panel. Both men patched up their differences and continued to serve on the faculty at Transylvania.

