

EARLY FREEMASONRY IN THE CANADIAN WEST

By M. W. Bro. William Douglas, P.G.M. (Man.)

The Masonic student as well as the youngest Mason in this gathering, might reasonably ask, "When did Freemasonry make its appearance in organized form in the West?" We take the enquirer back to the days when the only settlement in the West was centred at "The Forks" and extended about twenty miles in each direction along the banks of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. There was no town, no village, no organized municipality and the place or rather the district was known to the outside world as Red River Settlement. Where the City of Winnipeg stands today were the McDermott, the Bannatyne, the Ross and the Logan homesites – and the prospect of opening a Masonic Lodge under such circumstances would seem hopeless. In all, there were probably ten dwelling houses adjacent to the location known to days as Portage and Main.

During the latter part of the summer of 1863 and the early fall of that year, Hatch's Independent Battalion of Calvary, Minnesota Volunteers was organized for the express purpose of securing the Sioux Indians who had been in revolt in 1862-63. This military establishment was sent to the International border and located at Pembina in Dakota Territory. Among the troops were a number of Freemasons and under the leadership of C. W. Nash, who became the Worshipful Master, a dispensation was obtained from the Grand Loge of Minnesota to open Northern Light Lodge at Pembina.

At the time this dispensation was issued the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Minnesota appears to have had a vision of the future. From a letter written by the first Master – C. W. Nash, we read, "the prayer of the petition was granted; the Grand Master remarking that by this step the brethren of Fort Garry would be able to secure, what for long time had been their desire. "That it would open the door to those who were worthy and well qualified. That it was hoped and expected that there would be a sufficient number apply for the degrees who were permanent residents of Fort Garry and vicinity to warrant the planting of a Lodge there, whenever the troops were moved away. If this should be the case the brethren upon a proper petition were to have a petition issued."

The original Northern Light Lodge held its inaugural meeting early in January 1864 using the officers' quarters for a lodge room. Five months later, on May 8th, the soldiers were moved to Fort Abercrombie, and all the papers, records, petitions and documents along with the dispensation were returned to the Grand Lodge of Minnesota.

Reference has been made to "the brethren" then residing in Fort Garry (1863). This matter has intrigued me because on account of the isolated location and the lack of transportation facilities, it was impossible for the residents to become members of a lodge. If there were any Masons they must have been recent settlers who had been made in other centres. A little research discloses that Dr. John C. Schultz had been initiated prior to his coming to Red River in 1860 and at the first meeting of the (military) lodge at Pembina he occupied the Junior Deacons' chair. Another Freemason was Charles Curtis, then a resident at Sturgeon Creek, who was employed in building the log huts for the soldiers at Pembina. A third brother in the person of Matthew Connor was also at Red River. This was the entire Masonic population in March 1864, when this news item appeared in the "Nor Wester" – the first newspaper to be published in the West and edited by William Coldwell, the Secretary of the Lodge when it was instituted.

"A party from this Settlement proceeded to Pembina a few weeks since to join the Masonic Order, through the Lodge established there. They took the necessary degrees to qualify them to open a Lodge here, which it is their intention to do so on receipt of a dispensation from the Grand Lodge, application for which has already been made."

It is evident the petitioners received all three degrees at the one meeting; such a procedure was not uncommon, a century ago. The candidates who participated in this eventful meeting were A.G.B.Bannatyne, William Inkster, W.B.Hall, Robert Morgan and William Coldwell.

Within two months from the day of this memorable visit to Pembina a petition was submitted to the Grand Lodge of Minnesota, as follows:-

"The undersigned petitioners being Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons, having the prosperity of the fraternity at heart and willing to exert their best endeavours to promote and diffuse the genuine principles of Masonry, respectfully represent that they are desirous of forming a new Lodge in the Red River Settlement, Rupert's Land, to be named Northern Light Lodge; they further pray for letters of dispensation, or a warrant of constitution, to empower them to assemble as a legal lodge to discharge the duties of Masonry in a regular and constitutional manner, according to the original forms of the order, and the regulations of the Grand Lodge.

They have nominated and recommend Brother John Schultz, to be the first Master, Andrew G. B. Bannatyne, to be the first Senior Warden, and William Inkster, to be the first Junior Warden of said Lodge.

If the prayer of the petition is granted, they promise a strict conformity to the constitution, laws and regulations, of the Grand Lodge.

Assinboia,
British America,
27th April, 1864.

Andrew G. B. Bannatyne
William Inkster
Charles Curtis
W. B. Hall
Robert Morgan
William Coldwell
John Schultz
Matthew Connor “

The dispensation was issued at St. Paul, Minnesota, under date 20th May, 1864 and in connection therewith it is significant that the Grand Master, A. T. C. Pierson, makes this reference in his address. “During the year, I renewed the dispensation of Northern Light Lodge removing it to the Red River Settlement.”

The inaugural meeting of the newly formed Lodge at Red River Settlement was held in the lodge room over the store of A. G. B. Bannatyne, on the evening of November 8th, 1864. This was the first regular meeting of a Masonic Lodge in the Canadian North West.

It is a sad corollary but we Canadians have been too busy in the advance against our huge frontiers to think of the tomorrow and what should be learned from a backward glance. Our meeting on this occasion is being held in the Province of Manitoba. To many people Manitoba is one of the young members of the Dominion with its story beginning in 1870. How many in this audience know that Manitoba is the central portion of a region that has been under one flag more continuously than any other part of continental North America? It has never been under any other flag than the British since Thomas Button arrived at the mouth of the Nelson River in 1612. We have no Masonic records of that far off day and cannot advance any claim to Masonic priority so far back but as Canadians we hold an enviable position.

However, on the shore of Hudson’s Bay, at Churchill, stand the ruins of Fort Prince of Wales, built by the Hudson’s Bay Company, about 1733-40. There, in the bleak solitude of the North, chiselled on each massive block of stone built into the fortress over two hundred years ago, we can still see the distinctive individual mark of the operative mason who cut the stone. Were these men speculative as well as operative Masons? Time may give an affirmative answer, but meantime we must content ourselves with the knowledge that they left their Masonic marks in the stones they cut.

When we study the period in Western history when “Fur was King” we became familiar with the names of men who blazed trails and established civilized customs among the nomadic residents. We seldom associate these fur traders with any other activity. But, like ourselves, they did have other interests. One of these individuals was James Finlay, who established for himself a reputation as a man of courage and enterprise. He was the first English speaking trader to penetrate “the lone land” after the French. In the year 1767 he located at Neepawie (Nipiwin) said to be the uppermost French post. Twenty-four years afterwards he was in charge of an outpost of the N. W. Co. and Sir Alexander Mackenzie makes reference to his being in charge of the newly established depot on the Peace River in 1792. His name is perpetuated by one of the northern tributaries of the Peace River, called after him, Finlay River.

He was chosen one of the twelve “most respectable citizens,” six English and six French, who drew up the articles of capitulation presented to General Montgomery in November, 1775.

Why make reference to these details in this address? James Finlay was a prominent Freemason. We learn that he was constant in his attendance at St. Peter’s Lodge, Montreal in 1771 and from 1776 until his death he held active membership and occupied the Master’s chair for some time. I believe we can regard him as the first Freemason to travel the western plains of Canada.

Another individual around whose name many stirring memories gathered was Archibald Norman McLeod, also a fur trader. He figured largely in the Seven Oaks affair and it appears he was the moving spirit behind the attempt to drive the Selkirk

Settlers away from Red River. His connection with Freemasonry is also centred in St. Peter's Lodge, Montreal, which he visited while sojourning in the City.

The two Craftsmen we have mentioned were undoubtedly the earliest contacts made by Freemasons in the West and no other brother appears on the scene until Northern Light Lodge was instituted at Red River in 1864. From that time onward we have a recorded history. The available material concerning the pioneer lodge – Northern Light – consists of the original dispensation and minute book which, however, ends with the meeting held 18th April, 1866. During its brief existence the members had been diligent and had initiated 17 members. There must have been a later minute book because from another source we learn that on 23rd December 1867, A. G. B. Bannatyne was elected Worshipful Master; Thos. Bunn, Senior Warden; and John Bunn, Junior Warden. From that date the life and work of Northern Light Lodge is obscure. Trouble had developed in the Settlement over the transfer of the territory and it is evident the members quietly decided to suspend activities and as a result the Lodge never met again. Masonry had, however, been introduced in the West.

There is a connecting link in the story of Freemasonry in the West with the events leading up to the creation of the Province of Manitoba. Let us briefly follow through.

In 1858, the Imperial Government passed the Rupert's Land Act, to provide for the surrender of Rupert's Land to the Crown and negotiations for the transfer of the rights claimed by the Hudson's Bay Company began in 1869. These arrangements met with a mixed reception at Red River. Suspicion and antagonisms were rampant in certain parts of the district and these finally developed into the Riel Rebellion. Riel seized Fort Garry in November 1869 and held it until August 1870, when the expedition under Lord Wolseley, then a Colonel, arrived and re-established constituted authority.

The troops, under Wolseley, left Collington, Ontario, on 21st May, 1870 and reached Fort Garry on 24th August, 1870. It is not surprising that in a body of soldiers numbering 750, we find several members of the Masonic Craft attached to the different units. In the course of their journey westward these men had frequent opportunity to fraternize, to discuss their Masonic experiences and affiliations and doubtless dream dreams for the future.

When the disbandment of troops took place at Fort Garry not a few decided to remain in the West. Within three months after their arrival the Freemasons in the group who did not return east met informally and organized "Winnipeg Lodge" under dispensation. The first meeting of the new Lodge was held on 10th December, 1870, and a month later it was decided to change the name to "Prince Rupert's Lodge" which name the Lodge has carried through the succeeding years. When the Grand Lodge of Canada met in Annual Communication at Ottawa in 1871 Prince Rupert's Lodge received its charter and was numbered 240 on the Grand Register.

It will be recalled that the original Masonic Lodge in Red River Settlement – Northern Light – was an outgrowth from a Lodge, the charter members of which were all members of a military establishment at Pembina. In the case of Prince Rupert's Lodge it is significant that here again all the charter members had been connected with the Wolseley Expedition. The Worshipful Master was R. Stewart Paterson, Chaplain to the Forces, Lieut. William N. Kennedy was Senior Warden; Sergeant-Major Matthew Coyne was Junior Warden; and of the others E. Armstrong was Quartermaster, D. M. Walker, Lieut., A. R. McDonald, Surgeon, Jas. T. B. Morrice, Paymaster and Henry T. Champion.

The first Worshipful Master of Prince Rupert's Lodge returned to Ontario five months after he had instituted the Lodge and never came back to Winnipeg. He came into the limelight some ten years later at which time he sought to petition a dispensation to open a lodge at Gibraltar with himself as W.M. The petition carried a rider to the effect that "the place of meeting should be ultimately removed to some city in Morocco." The dispensation was issued and the Lodge subsequently received a charter and the number sixteen (16) on our Register and was designated "El Moghreb al Aska Lodge."

An immediate objection was lodged by both the Grand Lodge of England and the Grand Lodge of Scotland. The whole proceedings, in our opinion, were irregular.

An urgent cable was sent to Brother Paterson instructing him not to constitute the lodge but it arrived too late, the ceremony had already taken place. Not only had Paterson constituted the lodge but he had convened what he termed "an occasional Grand Lodge" at which meeting he constituted a Territorial Grand Lodge. His actions were repudiated by the Grand Lodge of Manitoba who recalled the charter of the lodge, requested the return of all documents and revoked the commission issued to Brother Paterson. Our brother ignored these demands. The Lodge submitted a plea that they were innocent victims and had not been advised of the pronouncement of Grand Lodge. Subsequently the lodge was reinstated and domiciled in Tangier. The final act

in this drama is summarized in 1890 with the brief statement “suspended for failure to submit returns.” Evidently the sojourn of Brother Paterson in the wide open spaces of Western Canada had widened his horizon and given him ideas when he went to the Mediterranean.

This episode might be considered a digression but it is so closely associated with Freemasonry in the West these few paragraphs are justifiable.

The members of Prince Rupert’s Lodge did not long enjoy the distinction of being the only Masonic Lodge in Manitoba. On 20th February 1871, “Manitoba” Lodge under dispensation from the Grand Lodge of Canada, met for the first time at Lower Fort Garry. This Lodge, like its neighbour at Winnipeg, decided to change its name and consequently it became Lisgar Lodge No. 244, G.R.C. In 1879 the place of meeting was removed to the town of Selkirk where it has worked ever since.

The influx of new settlers and the enthusiasm of the brethren who had settled in Winnipeg made it necessary, in the judgment of one group, to organize a second lodge in the City. On December 9th, 1872, Ancient Landmark Lodge as instituted and in due course a charter was issued and the lodge numbered 288 on the Register of the Grand Lodge of Canada.

These three pioneer lodges did yeoman work under the difficult and trying conditions of a frontier town. When the Grand Lodge of Manitoba was organized in 1875, by reason of their priority Prince Rupert’s Lodge received No. 1, Lisgar Lodge No. 2, and Ancient Landmark Lodge No. 3 on its register.

From the earliest times the men who made their homes in this part of our wide Dominion have shown remarkable courage and enterprise and at times it seems as if an inspired vision had directed their efforts. What a vast expanse of territory came under the jurisdiction of the few brethren who organized the Grand Lodge of Manitoba. Do we realize today that the men who unfurled the banner of Freemasonry in this land were in truth Empire Builders. They unquestionably carried their obligation to make daily progress into practice by building churches, schools, hospitals, and in organizing all the necessary activities required in a civilized community.

The Red Letter Day in the Masonic history of the West was Wednesday, 12th May, 1875, because on that day the Grand Lodge of Manitoba was instituted. This was a bold adventure. There were only three lodges within the wide jurisdiction assumed by the young Grand Lodge and the combined membership was less than 200. The men who directed the course were ready and willing to accept the responsibility of governing not only the three duly constituted lodges but all the future lodges that inevitably would be instituted across half a continent. Thus sovereign Masonic authority passed from the Grand Lodge of Canada (in Ontario) to the Grand Lodge of Manitoba.

It would appear that four brethren stand out as the prime leaders of the sturdy pioneers who organized the Grand Lodge of Manitoba. William C. Clarke, a Scot who had been initiated in True Briton Lodge No. 14, Perth, Ontario; he was elected Grand Master; William N. Kennedy, Deputy Grand Master, had been brought to Masonic Light in Corinthian Lodge, No. 101, Peterborough, Ontario. James Henderson, another Scot, hailed from Zetland Lodge No. 21, Montreal and John H. Bell, a native of London, Ontario brought a certificate issued by St. John’s Lodge No. 20, London, Ontario. As Joseph Fort Newton so aptly said, “they were men of faith who builded better than they knew . . . They believed in the future, in the growth of large things from small beginnings.”

With the creation of the Grand Lodge of Manitoba it might be expected the members would organize new lodges without delay. This was not the case. The surrounding territory opened up for settlement slowly because there was no direct means of transportation to and from the East. The City of Winnipeg had been incorporated in 1873 and naturally it became the centre of activity. About two months after Grand Lodge was formed a dispensation was issued to St. John’s Lodge. The reason given for the formation of St. John’s Lodge was the several unaffiliated brethren hailing from the Maritime Provinces, from Western Ontario and the United States desired to work the ceremonies according to the system they were familiar with – thus the American or so-called York Rite was adopted by the new lodge and shortly thereafter by Ancient Landmark Lodge. A dispensation was also issued to Hiram Lodge – East Kildonan about the same time.

In 1876, Emerson Lodge was instituted at the border town of that name and in 1878 a dispensation was issued to Assiniboine Lodge to meet at Portage La Prairie. Thus we can see that new lodges did not come into being overnight. It is interesting to learn that by reason of Emerson Lodge being located in the centre of an isolated territory permission to initiate residents of the State of Minnesota and Dakota Territory was granted by arrangement with the respective Grand Masters.

Today we travel from Winnipeg to Emerson by highway in less than two hours. At the time the officers of Grand Lodge instituted the lode they were obliged to travel by steamboat and it required four days to make the visit.

The year 1878 was one of disaster in Manitoba Masonic circles. As unfortunate schism took place and two groups represented themselves as the Grand Lodge of Manitoba. The beginning of the rupture occurred at the Third Annual Communication held in June 1878. It is a long story and we won't make an extended reference to it here. Later in 1878 – toward the close of the year, the “schismatics” held a meeting which they designated “Third Annual Communication.” They elected offices and also installed them. Three weeks later, the same group, held the “fourth annual communication” and re-elected the same slate as had been previously

Elected. At this meeting they issued warrants to four new lodges none of which had previously obtained a dispensation nor been instituted. It is doubtful if this experience can be duplicated in Canada or elsewhere. Only two of the four lodges commenced to work right away, the other two were later instituted by the Regular Grand Lodge in proper form. Peace and harmony were restored at the Fourth Annual Communication largely through the offices of Brother S. P. Matheson, afterwards Primate of Canada.

We should note that during the cleavage no attempt to issue dispensations to new Lodges had been made by Grand Lodge but immediately the breach was healed Gladstone Lodge was instituted. We mention this event because the Grand Maser left a pen picture of his official visit in 1880 when he constituted the Lodge.

“I approach the subject of my visit to this lodge with remembrances of mud and water. Mud of such depth and tenacity as is only found in Manitoba when it happens to be muddy, and water of a coldness which still makes me shiver when I think of it, and which V. W. Bro. House says ‘nearly used hi up.’ This lodge is about one hundred miles from Winnipeg and the trip had to be made by team. At Portage La Prairie, R.W.Bro. McCuaig joined Brother House and myself, Bro. Small acting as guide. The latter said repeatedly, the roads were ‘not bad’ – we wondered what ‘bad’ meant – and Brother Small gave us the desired information. But beyond walking some miles, and occasionally helping the horses to pull the wagon, wet feet and muddy clothes, and wading a creek on our return, the coldness of the water causing Bro. House to utter strange sounds, we met no mishaps.”

Thus, in the ten year period, from the time the Province of Manitoba had entered Confederation in 1870, only eleven lodges had been instituted, the one at Gladstone, 100 miles distant from Winnipeg, being the farthest from the centre. But, evidence of Masonic activity was present in far off Prince Albert, N.W.T. Here we find a group of Masons with a problem on their hands. They wanted a dispensation to form Kinistino Lodge but the existence of two Grand Lodge in Manitoba, the nearest Grand Jurisdiction, raised doubts as to which one would receive the petition if sent there. Inasmuch as the North West Territories were beyond the boundary of Manitoba they applied to the Grand Lodge of Canada (in Ontario) and received their dispensation from that source. The first meeting of this lodge was held on Friday, 3rd October, 1879, the first Worshipful Master being Chas. F. Young, Kinistino Lodge was numbered 381, G.R.C. and continued under this Jurisdiction until 1882 when arrangements were made with the Grand Lodge of Canada who had issued the original charter and the Grand Lodge of Manitoba, to transfer its allegiance to Manitoba. Thus Kinistino Lodge became No. 16 on the Manitoba register. Subsequently when the Grand Lodge of Saskatchewan was formed Kinistino became No. 1 in that Jurisdiction.

Settlement was moving slowly westward and the horizons of the Grand Lodge of Manitoba expanded in the process. During 1882 petitions to form lodges were received from two widely separated points – Rat Portage in the District of Keewatin and Edmonton to the west. Dispensations were duly issued and subsequently, Saskatchewan Lodge No. 17 meeting at Edmonton and Pequonga, No. 22, meeting at Rat Portage were constituted.

To-day the City of Edmonton is the Capital of the Province of Alberta and the oil centre of Canada. By some strange alchemy the pioneer lodge which opened in 1882 seems to have been premature and ahead of time. It had difficulty in functioning and after striving against the odds for seven years it voluntarily surrendered its charter in 1889. The building of the railway in 1890-1891 brought an improvement in the situation and Masonic activity was revived in 1892 when Edmonton Lodge received its dispensation and carried on from there.

The brethren of Pequonga Lodge, Rat Portage, carried the banner of the Craft under the Grand Lodge of Manitoba until 1887, when they were compelled to transfer their allegiance, very unwillingly, to the Grand Lodge of Canada (in Ontario). The part of Keewatin Territory in which Rat Portage was situated was in dispute and in 1887 the Privy Council decided the town was in the Province of Ontario; consequently it was outside the territorial jurisdiction of Manitoba. Masonic precedent gave this lodge to the Grand Lodge of Canada (in Ontario).

As we consider the story of Freemasonry in the West we are apt to pay little attention to the impact made on the social life of the territory by the construction of the C. P. R. This phase did not occur to me until quite recently. Only a brief comment on this important fact can be given in a short address but it carries a human interest. Let us journey westward with the construction gang.

On July 26th, 1881, the S.P.R. ran its first train over Louise Bridge into Winnipeg. There was only one town of any size from Eastern Ontario to the British Columbia shore and Winnipeg itself did not have 8,000 inhabitants when construction of the transcontinental railway line began westward in 1881. The first sod of the section had been turned on May 2nd, 1881, and the construction gangs reached Calgary on 18th August, 1883. To the East the last gap north of Lake Superior was closed May 17th, 1885 and on November 7th of the same year the last spike was driven home. The first through train left Montreal on June 28th, 1886, and it arrived at Port Moody on July 4th. There was no City of Vancouver then, only a clearing in the forest primeval which had begun about 90 days before. This is the setting for the development of Masonic lodges clear across the prairies.

We cross the Red River then on the first train in July 1881 and follow the construction line westward. On the 22nd may of that year, a solitary shanty, built ty the original claimant on the S1/2 of Section 23, Tp.10, R19 W. – Robert Adamson, was, with the tents of the survey party, the only evidence of settlement where the City of Brandon was located. The first grading of the railway west of Portage la Prairie was soon commenced the same week and by June it had passed through Brandon. Six months after the arrival of the construction gang – on January 16th, 1882, Brandon Lodge No. 19 – G.R.M. was instituted with Peter McGregor, Worshipful Master.

The railway tracks reached the banks of the Wascana River on 23rd August, 1882. A site for the future City of Regina had been selected, jointly, by the Dominion Government and the C.P.R. The place was familiarly known at the time of construction as “Pike O’ Bones,” and when the first train pulled in the only sign of habitation was a group of tents. Our brethren of the Mystic Tie seem to have kept pace with the track builders and this is evidenced from the fact that six months after the steel was laid a dispensation was issued to 14 petitioners authorizing them to open Wasacana Lodge at Regina. The first W. M. was J. H. Benson, he date of the dispensation 20th February and the first meeting was held on 6th March, 1883.

By the month of December, 1882 the railway was open to Moose jaw and by the time the winter snow had disappeared the town had begun to have the appearance of a settled community. Under date 24th September, 1883, a dispensation was issued to 28 petitioners and on 9th October Moose Jaw Lodge was instituted. The first Worshipful master to preside over this lodge was E. H. D. D. Hall.

When construction work closed down in 1882 the steel had reached 25 miles east of Medicine Hat. In the following spring this prospective city consisted of two stores on the east side of the river and one on the west side. The owners anxiously waited the advent of the railway while a town of canvas sprang up as by magic. The steel reached Medicine Hat in 1883 but our Masonic brethren here did not act as promptly as they did elsewhere all along the line. Dispensation to Medicine Hat Lodge did not issue until 16th June 1885. The first W. M. was Thos. Macpherson in due time he arrived at Medicine Hat where he was employed on the construction of a narrow guage line to Lethbridge known to old timers as “The Turkey Trail.” Later in 1887 he was transferred by his employers to Lethbridge where he organized a lodge and became its first Worshipful Master. He along with his first Junior Warden – Thos. Tweed – were trailblazers in the realm of Masonry in Alberta.

The first train to pull into Calgary arrived in August, 1883. At that time the place consisted of a dozen log houses, he principal one being a trading post which supplied the trappers and wandering nomads of the foothills country. The only connection it had with the outside world was by means of “bull teams” which hauled its supplies from Fort Benton, the head of navigation on the Missouri river in Montana. A story from the days of railway construction tells about Herbert Holt, a young Irishman, chief engineer of construction for CPR. When the line reached the Bow River, the group of buildings was not so near the tracks as the residents wished. They wanted to move the Post Office nearer the station but the government did not move fast enough to satisfy the people even though the building was a mere shack. Holt solved the problem by taking a bull team to the building and moving it to a spot selected by the dozen or so residents. Since there was no one in authority or bulls to move it back again, there it remained and in a short time all the inhabitants followed suit. We cannot tell if any of the Masonic brethren took part in this episode – doubtless they did because some were located near by. On 10th January 1884, a petition signed by 24 brethren was granted and dispensation issued to open a lodge, designated Bow River Lodge and confirmed Neville J. Lindsay as first Worshipful Master.

We have travelled across the prairies in company with the men who constructed the Canadian Pacific Railway and it is evident the contemporaneous development of Masonry and the opening of these lodges was one of the earliest contributions to the community life. A fair sized volume could be developed from the particular phrase of activity, perhaps we have already expanded the subject too much for the present purpose. The temptation could not be resisted.

The jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge had widened to such an extent that at the ninth Annual Communication held in February 1884 it was decided to constitute a new District to comprise all the territory west of the Western boundaries of Manitoba. By this arrangement, Kinistino Lodge meeting at Prince Albert, Saskatchewan Lodge at Edmonton, Wascana Lodge at Regina, Moose Jaw Lodge at Moose Jaw, and Bow River Lodge at Calgary were formed into the sixth Masonic District. The first incumbent of the office of D.D.G.M. was Rev. Canon James Flett of Prince Albert – a fine tribute to the pioneer lodge of the district and also to the brother who was Worshipful Master of Kinistino Lodge at the time this Lodge transferred its allegiance to the Grand Lodge of Manitoba.

The construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway was not the only undertaking that caused the Grand Lodge of Manitoba to lengthen its cable tow. Gold was discovered in the Klondyke in the Fall of 1896, When news of the strike reached the outside world thousands started for the diggings. By 1898 some 18,000 persons were domiciled in the region. It was natural that in a population of this size there would be some Freemasons. How many must be left to conjecture. They, in common with other brethren who participated in opening new frontiers wanted their lodge, so on October 15th, 1898, a dispensation was issued authorizing Klondyke Lodge to be instituted at Dawson City, District of Yukon. The petition was signed by 21 charter members and William Edward Thompson named as Worshipful Master. Authority was given to Brother Thompson to institute the Lodge. It would appear that by reason of the irregularity of the mail service and the isolated position of the Yukon considerable delay was occasioned. When Grand Lodge met in Regina in June 1899 it was reported that no information had been received from Klondyke Lodge. Evidently the right of Manitoba to issue a dispensation was challenged by the Grand Lodge of British Columbia who enquired if Manitoba claimed exclusive jurisdiction in the Yukon. The reply was to the effect that Manitoba claimed no more rights in the territory than British Columbia. Another year passed by and again we read that no communication had been received from Klondyke Lodge. There is no record in Manitoba to indicate that this Lodge was ever instituted.

A second petition, signed by 14 brethren, was received in 1900 and on 20th October of that year a dispensation was issued to Yukon Lodge to meet at Dawson City; C. H. Wells was named as Worshipful Master. This Lodge was institute don December 27th, 1900 by Brother R. A. Cowan and in 1901 it received number 79 on the Manitoba register.

Another Lodge in the Yukon came to life in 1902. A dispensation was issued to open Whitehorse Lodge at Whitehorse on March 5th, 1902. There were 16 signatories to the petition and the first Worshipful Master was N. J. Lindsay. This lodge subsequently was registered as No. 81 Grand Lodge of Manitoba. It is interesting to note that the neighbouring lodges at Dawson City and Whitehorse were separated by a distance of 460 miles by river and 360 miles over the winter trail. These two lodges continued under the jurisdiction of Manitoba until 1907 when both petitioned for authority to surrender their charters and permit them to seek warrants under the Grand Lodge of British Columbia. It was resolved “That the petition of Yukon Lodge No. 79 and Whitehorse Lodge No. 81, be granted, to date not earlier than June the 25th, 1907, and that the charters be returned to the said Lodges after cancellation and subject to acceptance of such lodges by the Grand Lodge of British Columbia. The transfer was consummated and two lodges with a combined membership of 147 were lost to Manitoba. This closed an early contact between Manitoba and a distant part of the Dominion but let us return to the Prairies.

It is dangerous to draw conclusions and express opinions when dealing with historic events. Whether it was discontent or ambition we do not know and the story left to us does not disclose the reason behind a movement which existed in the Alberta District in 1890. It would appear some of the brethren desired a Grand Lodge of Alberta. All that has been preserved in connection with the matter is the comment of the Grand Master who reported: “I have been notified of the intention of certain brethren residing in the District of Alberta, to constitute a Grand Lodge to be known as the Grand Lodge of Alberta. Such a Grand Lodge would manifestly violate one of the fundamental laws of Masonic jurisdiction, viz. – ‘that each Grand Lodge must at least be co-extensive with some Province or State which has a seat of government of its own.’ Alberta is not a Province in this sense of the word. Should the lodges contained in the whole territory, under the control of the Governmental authorities at Regina, apply to us for recognition, the case would be entirely different.” Nothing came of the move and we hear no more about forming a Grand Lodge of Alberta until 1905; the year Alberta became a Province. At the next succeeding Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge of Manitoba, the Grand Master reported in these words:-

“The granting of Provincial autonomy to the Northwest Territories was followed by the organization of the Grand Lodge of Alberta, which important event took place at Calgary on October 12, 1905. All the lodges in the Province of Alberta, except one, were represented and the proceedings were characterized by the utmost harmony and good feeling. I had the pleasure of being present on the occasion and installed the officers of the new Grand Lodge ----- I would recommend that our official recognition be extended to the Grand Lodge of Alberta and that she be extended a hearty welcome into the sisterhood of Grand Lodges. I would recommend that the question of finances be taken into consideration at this Annual Communication ----- al the lodges in our jurisdiction have been contributing annually in the form of fees and dues. Our brethren in the new Province have done their full

share and I would recommend that we deal not only justly but generously with our offspring as they go out from the parental roof.” The first Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Alberta was Dr. George Macdonald of Calgary. The separation of 18 lodges in Alberta reduced the membership in Manitoba by 1,053.

The action of the brethren in Alberta could not remain unnoticed by the Freemasons in the adjoining Province of Saskatchewan. With the arrival of Spring in 1906 a group of brethren residing in Regina organized themselves into a committee to enquire into and report upon the advisability of forming a Grand Lodge of Saskatchewan. Later, a convention was held at Prince Albert on May 25th, 1906. Committees were then appointed to make preliminary arrangements and discuss matters with the Grand Lodge of Manitoba. Although the Annual Communication was held in Winnipeg three weeks later, no reference whatever was made in open session regarding the proposed new Grand Lodge. We learn from the attendance register that representatives from fifteen of the twenty-four chartered lodges in Saskatchewan were present and it is a reasonable deduction to presume the question was fully discussed.

A convention of all the lodges in Saskatchewan was held in Regina, on August 9th, 1906, and 25 out of 29 were represented at the meetings. The Grand Master of Manitoba, John McKechnie, I company with Jas. A. Ovas, Grand Secy. And Geo. B. Murphy, Past Grand Master were also in attendance. The Grand Lodge of Saskatchewan was then brought into being and the first Grand Master was H. H; Champion of Indian Head. The installation ceremony was conducted by Brothers McKechnie and Ovas of Manitoba. By the creation of this new Grand Lodge the jurisdiction of Manitoba removed from its register 29 lodges with a membership of 898.

In June 1908 a request was submitted by the Grand Lodge of Saskatchewan asking the same consideration with respect to Grand Lodge finances as had been promised to the Grand Lodge of Alberta in 1906. It was decided to make a grant of \$1,000 to each of the two recently created Grand Lodges and by the time the Annual Communication was held in 1909 the obligation had been fully discharged.

So, brethren, you have the story of “Early Freemasonry in the Canadian West”. I have used a lot of words to tell it but please keep in mind the vast territory in the term “Canadian West.” I have treated the word “early” as “the beginning” which required me to deal largely with “firsts.” In following this trend I have tried to narrate the starting points in the realm of Freemasonry. I have been obliged to abbreviate the details without destroying the substance and I trust my endeavour has been successful. It is truly a most interesting page in Canadian history.

Now let me add a final word. There is a tendency in some quarters to regard Grand Lodge as a piece of machinery, or as an institution, colorless and lifeless. This is a weird and unreal conception. When we carefully examine what our founders had to contend with we are amazed. They did not have the numbers, the facilities, the financial standing that exists today. Only a few composed our various Grand Lodges when they were first instituted. They were men of flesh and blood just as we are. There are times when they did not know what in the world to do, still they always managed to pull through.

Let us pay tribute to their grit, their valor, their refusal to say die, their ingenuity. Yes, they were just like ourselves in many respects. They too also enjoyed the refreshment hour after the labor of the evening was ended. They swapped their stories, laughed and sang their favorite songs till the “Wee sma’ Hours.’ They were human in every sense and when it was time to go home, like Craftsmen of our own day they found fellowship and brotherhood in the clasp of the hand and the message of their farewell song – For Ault Lang Syne.

May it ever be so in all our Lodges.

By M.W. Bro. William Douglas, PGM., Manitoba; Published in CANADIAN MASONIC RESEARCH ASSOCIATION, 1951, Part 1; republished by The Heritage Lodge No. 730; AF & AM, G.R.C.; 1986.

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