

A Brief History of Freemasonry

It is difficult to determine the exact date when Freemasonry, as we know it, started because Freemasonry has evolved. Most historians, when considering what we are now and where we all began, will start in 1390 with the writing of the Regius Manuscript.

The document came to light in 1840 when James O. Halliwell-Phillips [a non-mason] first had it published. It is a poem, 64 pages in length, written by, - we do not know who, - but was details of the moral duty of a Stonemason. The title, which is Latin, is translated: *Here begins the Constitutions of the Art of Geometry according to Euclid*. It would have a history of Euclid and his knowledge of Geometry. Included were 15 points about the moral duty of the Mason:-

- Do not harbour thieves**
- Do not take bribes**
- Attend church regularly etc.**

It also dealt with the operations of work at the building site. This poem was clearly for operative Masons – masons whose livelihood was made through building castles, cathedrals, and other such structures.

It is known when other manuscript were written, that certain manuscripts found to date are from several sources, and that many were copies of earlier manuscripts. Over 100 manuscripts have been found which are termed Gothic Constitutions.

Gothic Constitutions have the following sections:

- Invocation**
- Mythical legend of Ancient Masonry**
- Charges and regulations**
- An obligation**

and many of these manuscripts were still for operative stone masons.

There are some minutes which have survived from 1598-1599 from lodges in Scotland that tell us by this date Lodges were becoming places for others to belong apart from operative stone masons. We are now beginning the realm of Speculative Masons. The term is used of all Freemasons today who are members of a lodge and are explorers of the figurative understanding of building and tools to build with which now help them to consider the moral side of life through these symbols.

Records are found, scarce in nature, of minutes from certain of these lodges which were beginning to confer degrees or lessons of Freemasonry.

Prior to 1717 many lodges were active and all seemed now to have in their membership many men of various backgrounds, gentlemen landowners, scientists, literary figures, possibly statesmen, perhaps soldiers.

In 1717 four lodges in London, England, decided to come together and start a Grand Lodge with the intention of organizing a body which would regularize the formation of Lodges in London. And so the first Grand Lodge was founded. Up in York, England, some masons there were not happy with what had taken place in London and decided to form their own Grand Lodge, the Grand Lodge of All England, giving permission to form their lodges in that part of the country.

Realize that at this time lodges were now in Scotland as well as Ireland and all being formed simply by gentlemen who decided to create a lodge. The influence of forming lodges for gentlemen and enjoying the initiating of men into Freemasonry through a ritual was becoming popular. After 1717 one began to see Grand Lodges forming in many other areas of the world, Scotland, Ireland, France Germany etc., and even crossing the Atlantic Ocean and forming lodges in the new world, Massachusetts, New England, Virginia, and Carolinas.

Once established lodges were working, it required only three lodges to get together to form a Grand Lodge again as a regulating organization giving permission for men to form new lodges and work the degrees.

The schism between the original Grand Lodge and the Grand Lodge of All England, was resolved in 1813 when he two Grand lodges formed what is today called the United Grand Lodge of England.

British Colombia

Freemasonry began in July of 1858 when the following advert was placed in the local newspaper – The British Colonist.

July 10th 1858 – The members of the Ancient Order of F. & A. [Free and Accepted] Masons in good standing are invited to meet on Monday, July 12th at 7 o'clock, P.M. in SOUTHGATE & MITCHELL'S new store, up stairs. The object of the meeting is to consider matters connecting with the permanent interests of the Order in Victoria.

Seven brethren attended that meeting – we have n record of who attended, Robert Burnaby had arrived from England about the same time. He had joined Freemasonry in England so through his persuasion the application for a warrant was sent to England. It took two years to arrive in Victoria and again the following was written in the Victoria newspaper on August 22nd 1860.

MASONIC LODGE – We take great pleasure in announcing that a Masonic lodge under the name of Victoria Lodge No. 1082 was organized in Victoria on Monday evening last. This is the first lodge of the Order ever established here, on in fact, in any part of the British Possessions on the Pacific.

This was the start of Freemasonry here in our Province.

By 1870, nine lodges had formed in the province and of those some had applied to the Grand Lodge of Scotland, while others still applied to England. The reason for applying to another Grand Lodge was first the influence of Dr. Israel Powell, a local doctor who was a Mason of a lodge under the Grand Lodge of Scotland and second that many Masons had come to Victoria, during the Gold Rush, from California. Their ritual was nothing like that of the lodges already formed under England. So Applications were sent and approved by Scotland.

By 1871, the list of lodges in or part of Canada were:-

- Victoria Lodge No. 1 [Victoria ER]**
- Vancouver Lodge No. 2 [Victoria ER]**
- Nanaimo Lodge No. 3 [Nanaimo SR]**
- Cariboo Lodge No. 4 [Barkerville SR]**

- British Columbia Lodge No. 5 [Victoria ER]**
- Caledonia Lodge No. 6 [Nanaimo SR]**
- Mount Hermon Lodge No. 7 [Vancouver ER]**
- Quadra lodge No. 8 [Victoria SR]**

...and these lodges formed the Grand Lodge of British Columbia on December 26th 1871. One Lodge, Union Lodge No. 9, constituted in 1861, and already working in the Province, refused to join the others in the formation of Grand Lodge. The reason – because the refused to pay \$150 as a fee of formation. Had they joined in 1871 their number would have been lower n the list of lodges. They joined Grand Lodge in 1872, and were given the number 9.

Today, these lodges are:-

- Victoria-Columbia Lodge No. 1 (Victoria)**
- Vancouver & Quadra Lodge No. 2 (Victoria)**
- Ashlar Lodge No. 3 (Nanaimo) (amalgamation of Nanaimo Lodge No. 2 and Caledonia Lodge No. 6)**
- Cariboo Lodge No. 4 (Barkerville)**
- Mt. Hermon Lodge No. 7 (Vancouver) (daughter lodge of Union Lodge No. 899 ER and 1201 ER)**
- Union-Solomon Lodge No. 9 (New Westminster)**

Today 2012 we have 147 lodges, approximately 9,700 Masons some of whom are members of several lodges. The last lodge formed was Excelsior Lodge No. 195 in 2009 in Vancouver.

In addition to these constituent lodges, the Grand Master each year give special licence to Vancouver Funeral Lodge, and Victoria Funeral Lodge. These Lodges are specifically set up at assist in and memorial and funeral service requested by a brother and which the member's lodge requires support. Vancouver Lodge of Education and Research and Victoria Lodge of Education and Research also receive annual licence to work. These lodges are for presentation of research papers by members. Neither the Funeral lodges nor the Research lodges are allowed to confer degrees.

Every new lodge formed is given a number. Some lodges which amalgamate will hold onto a number of a lodge in order to continue the history of that lodge. For example, Mt Newton Lodge No. 89 amalgamated with Sidney Lodge No. 143 forming Saanich Peninsula Lodge No. 89.

Our jurisdiction is now termed the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon and is the second largest geographical jurisdiction in the world.

- Yukon Lodge No. 45 (Dawson City) is our most northerly lodge
- Lodges in Victoria are our most southerly lodges
- Elk River Lodge No. 35 (Fernie) is our most easterly lodge
- Queen Charlotte Island Lodge No. 189 on Haida Gwaii is our most westerly lodge

Rules of the formation of Grand Lodges are simple.

A minimum of 3 lodges may form a Grand Lodge. When one Grand Lodge seeks recognition of another Grand Lodge to offer mutual agreement to visitation rights, their recognition must adhere to the following rules:-

1. Legitimacy of origin – that the original lodges were founded by a legitimate Grand Lodge
2. Exclusive territory jurisdiction, except by mutual consent of by treaty
3. Adherence to the ancient landmarks – specifically a belief in a supreme being, and the volume of a sacred law as an indispensable part of the furniture of the lodge
4. Prohibition of the discussion of politics and religion.

Today, the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon is in amity with lodges throughout the world – about 190 different Grand Lodges. That permits us to connect with them, if travelling in foreign countries and to attend lodge with their brethren.

Visitation to other lodges is one benefit which many brethren have spoken over the years as being a most wonderful gift of joining the fraternity. When we have visitors from another jurisdiction, we are obliged to ensure that all their needs are met, that we make them feel at home and show them true hospitality.