

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH  
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**FOUNDING OF THE MASONIC TEMPLE at VICTORIA, B.C.**

Part 1

by

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Delivered at the Banquet on October 26, 1979 commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the VICTORIA TEMPLE CORNERSTONE and DEDICATION CEREMONIES.

ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO

Distinguished Guests and Brethren All: A quick talk tonight on the subject of One-hundred Years ago Masonically and Civicly, the City of Victoria and the part that we played in bringing it to a state of well being. I think most of us know, sketchily, the history of the Masonic Community in Victoria. The first Lodge Room was above the offices of Hibben & Carawell on the lower corner of Yates and Langley Streets. That was in 1859 which was quite a long time ago. Very shortly the brethren outgrew these premises and took over part of the building built by Captain Stamp on Government St., moving there in 1865. A portion of that building was specifically set aside for the purposes of the Order.

As the Colony grew pressure built up to buy land and build a new temple. After much talk and no action it was the City that cast the final die. They wanted to extend View Street right through the middle of the Stamp Building, so, guess who got the heave ho. That was the final impetus to the Masonic Groups and they decided that they needed land to build a New Temple. In 1877 two lots on the corner of Douglas and Fisgard Street down to Herald Street were purchased for \$17,500.00; that was this lot and the next lot - the two lots. It is quite interesting today to read these accounts from the early Colonist of those days as it was right at this period of time that we went from the British Colonist to the Daily Colonist in 1878 so this was a time of change and growth in Victoria. We shook off, you might say, that colonial stamp when the daily press then went under its own banner.

Plans for the new structure were submitted by both, Brothers Thomas Trounce and John Teague. The Teague concept was accepted. The basic structure of this building is very similar to the City Hall with a Mansard-type roof and a very similar exterior. The clock tower and our tower bear marked resemblances. April 22nd, 1878 was the date set for the laying of the cornerstone. It is rather interesting how they went about financing this building. Today we hear so much about financing, particularly when the mortgage rate is up about 14 %. A joint stock company was formed with Victoria - Columbia subscribing for shares to the amount of \$1,400.00, Vancouver & Quadra \$400.00, Columbia Royal Arch Chapter \$300.00 and \$5,000 from the brethren. The estimated cost of this building by the architects was \$10,000.00. But the Daily Colonist commented that when furnished it would probably exceed \$12,000.00.

At the laying of the cornerstone a procession was formed outside the Stamp Building on Government Street and proceeded to the site. I'm going to deal with the procession a little later as it is rather interesting to show how the various

groups participated, that it certainly was a public ceremony and a public parade with full regalia. "On arriving at the site" and I am reading from the Daily British Colonist of April 23rd, 1878, I read as follows:

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"On arriving at the site of the building the procession halted, facing inwards on double column, The Most Worshipful Grand Master Eli Harrison, senior, and officers took their stations on the platform. The Grand Master then addressed the assembly as follows;

(I would like to point out to you that there were about 500 people present from all walks of life - mason, non-mason, women, children.) The Grand Master said:

"Men, women and children here assembled, be it known to you that we are true and lawful

free and accepted masons, faithful to the laws of our country, honoring the Queen and loving God, the Great Architect of the Universe. We have among us, concealed from all other persons, secrets which cannot be communicated except in accordance with the customs and manners of our ancient and honorable society. But these secrets are lawful and honorable and intended to benefit those to whom they are entrusted. No person can be admitted into our order unless they be of lawful age and reported as good men and true. Great and eminent men, have in all ages, been promoters of the craft and joined in our Assemblies. Monarchs have not thought it derogatory to their dignity to exchange the sceptre for the trowel on many occasions. Unless our order were good and our calling honorable we should not have existed for so many centuries, nor should we have been honored with the patronage of so many illustrious men in all ages who have ever been ready to promote our interests and defend us from all adversaries."

The print in the Daily British Colonist was not good in those days. It is not good today. It was even worse at that time. After the Grand Master had spoken for some length -

"the architect Bro. John Teague presented the plans which were then approved by the

Grand Master with the following observations, -"Bro. Teague, finding the plans which you have prepared for this New Masonic Hall are in accordance with the rules and regulations

of our venerable society and perceiving that the building will be an ornament to this city

and a credit to your skill as a craftsman, I have much pleasure in expressing my approval of

the designs and for your guidance I place them in your charge again, having full confidence

in your integrity and skill to complete the building with satisfaction to the brethren who have entrusted the work to your care." At this point the Architect presented a very fine silver

trowel to the Grand Master for the purposes of laying the cornerstone of this building."

Now we have had some discussion at dinner about the laying of the cornerstone and I am going to read you part of that ceremony by the Masonic Order in full regalia and Ample form. This was the Grand Lodge of British Columbia performing this ceremony. To give you some idea of how this was done we would just like to say that the cornerstone was suspended, it had a cavity in it and a casket was presented to the Grand Master to be laid in the cornerstone prior to laying. The basic piece of literature. that was to be put in that cornerstone was a scroll. The Grand Secretary then read the inscription on the

scroll as follows:

#### THE SCROLL

"By the favor of Almighty God, the Great Architect of the Universe, on the 22nd day of April, Anno Domini, 1878, and of the era of Freemasonry, Anno Lucis, 5878, and in the year of the reign of her Most Gracious Majesty, Queen Victoria; His Royal Highness, Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, being Most Worshipful Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of England; Sir Michael Shaw Stewart, Bart., Most Worshipful Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Scotland; His Excellency the Earl of Dufferin, K.G., K.G.B., being Governor of the Dominion of Canada; The Honorable Albert Norton Richards, Lieutenant Governor of the Province of British Columbia; Most Worshipful Brother Eli Harrison, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia, THIS CORNERSTONE of the Masonic Temple in the City of Victoria, dedicated to the Holy Saint John, the Evangelist and the Masonic Fraternity of the Province of British Columbia, WAS LAID by the Grand Master according to the ancient usages of Masonry; assisted by the Grand Lodge of the. Companions of Columbia Royal Arch Chapter No.120 on the register of the supreme Grand Royal Arch Chapter of Scotland, and the brethren residing in this province."

That scroll brethren is under the sidewalk as Kenneth told you and is probably going to be there until after Bill's election.

"The Grand Treasurer then deposited a casket in the cavity of the stone containing the following articles:

- 1 The Scroll (that I have just read)
2. A copy of the proceedings to organize the first Grand Communication of Grand Lodge of British Columbia with Constitution Proceedings of the sixth Annual Communication 1877.
3. Copy of the Canadian Craftsman
4. Copy of the Daily British Colonist
5. Copy of the Daily Victorian Standard (that is an early forerunner of Monday.)
6. Coins of the realm
7. A list of Grand Officers for 1878,"

Now Brethren all, I want you to pay particular attention to what am going to read to you now, which is the ceremony in detail of the laying of the cornerstone. And while I realize that this type of address can be a little tedious, I think you will find it vastly interesting since we, as masons in Victoria, very few of us, have seen a formal laying of a cornerstone.

"The stone was then lowered in place by three distinct steps. The band playing the National Anthem and the Brethren and spectators standing uncovered. After the stone had been tried by the J.G. Warden, the S.G. Warden and the Deputy Grand Master, they reported that the craftsmen had faithfully performed their duty. The Grand Master then finished the work, giving three raps with the gavel on the stone saying, 'Well made, truly laid, well proved, true and trusty. May the blessing of the Supreme Grand Architect of the Universe assist us in this our undertaking and we will ascribe the honor and glory to His Holy Name.' The grand honors were then given three times.

Corn, wine and oil were then presented to the Grand Master, who scattered the corn upon the stone saying, 'May plenty be showered on the people of this Dominion and may the labors of this craft be rewarded by the good and perfect gift'. He then poured the wine upon the stone, saying, 'May the health of the craftsmen employed upon the building be preserved to them'. He then poured oil upon the stone, saying, 'May the Supreme Ruler of the Universe vouchsafe peace and prosperity to all Her Majesty's Dominions and all the nations of the earth and continue to bless and prosper the ancient and venerable fraternity of Masons and protect them from every evil, assist us in the completion of this building, protect the workmen against every accident, long preserve this structure from decay and grant to us all a supply of the corn of nourishment, the wine of refreshment and the oil of joy'. 'A prayer was then offered by the Grand Chaplain, and the grand honors were given three times'."

This will interest you: "A collection was then made among the brethren and deposited upon the stone." So if we are stuck, there may be a small donation there for us.

What sort of building did the citizens of Victoria think this building was going to be? There was very little experience with Masonry and I must point out to you that the articles that I am reading were fully reported in the daily press. Even a little later on here you will find that portions of the ceremony, not usually disclosed, were reported in full detail. I think that we should bear in mind that the early years in

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Victoria the first Lodges were under two distinct jurisdictions, the Grand Lodge of England and the Grand Lodge of Scotland and consequently I think there was a good deal of individual freedom in the Colonies, as you might say, and any contrary instruction would be three months forthcoming, the mails were similar to what they are today. But it is interesting - throw your mind back a hundred years. The original Temple went as far as the entrance door here, as this hall was not as big as it is today and the entrance was out on Douglas Street at the corner, and the Grand Staircase came up from there to the anterooms. I'm not quite sure as to where all the bits and pieces were prior to the remodeling. But let us just hear what the Daily Colonist says on October 19, 1878. Under the heading - MASONIC HALL:.

"Decidedly one of the finest and most imposing structures recently erected in this city is the Masonic Hall which stands on the northwest corner of Douglas and Fisgard Streets. The building is 49 ft. x 67 ft., two stories high, surmounted by a Mansard roof. The main entrance is on the angle of the two streets, and immediately over it, running up from the roof, is a square tower, some 60 ft. high from the ground, which adds considerably to the comely appearance of the structure."

Isn't that a beautiful phrase, Bob, you can appreciate the simplicity of the structure of these sentences.

"The double doors, which are of massive description, open into the main hallway, which is 15 ft. wide and 25 ft. long. On either side of the hall is a lofty and spacious store, the one fronting on Douglas Street, being 30 ft x 40 ft. and that fronting on Fisgard Street being

22 ft. x 47 Ft. The ceilings of both have a height of 15½ ft. Immediately in the rear of the entrance hall is the grand secretary's office, and a large fire-proof vault for the preservation of records and other valuable documents. The grand staircase leads from the hall to the anteroom. The staircase itself is a fine piece of workmanship, the posts being most substantial in character and surmounted with elegant standards for gas. The ante-room is an apartment 16 ft. x 25 ft., its walls are beautifully marbled and from it the lodgeroom is entered."

"This room is one of the if not the finest in the city. Its height is 27½ ft., its width 30 ft. and its length 57 ft. The walls are marbled and divided into panels, papered with very handsome flock and gold, and the cornices are of beautiful design, enriched by ornamental plaster work. The ceiling or canopy is a masterpiece of work. It assumes the form of a dome and has first been tinted with a sky-blue shade and then studded with golden stars, fringed with clouds in representation of the firmament. At the eastern end of the room the rising sun is very faithfully depicted and at the western the wall is pierced by an organ gallery with circular head from which will droop costly drapery. The grand organ, which is now on the way to this city, will, it is hoped, be erected before the hall is dedicated on the 28th inst.

'The illumination of the room will be derived from two pendant six-light glass lustres, whilst the master and warden's desks will be lighted with handsome standards. The upholstery will be the richest and costliest manufacture and the floor is already covered with a Brussels carpet of the best make. The mantelpieces, which are of wood, are uniquely carved and artistically finished. The library, which is immediately over the main entrance to the building, is a most convenient although not very spacious apartment. (Things haven't changed in that department.) There are also a reception room for visitors, the janitor's room, five regalia rooms and all the other usual apartments appointed in the latest and most approved manner. At the head of the grand staircase there is a beautiful stained glass window, bearing several exquisitely wrought emblems of the Order."

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Ken Reid and I were talking about that - where that window could be -but if the staircase came up from the street at this end it probably was in the anteroom or reception area at the head of the staircase where it could be seen.

'The hall was erected at a cost of \$10,000.00 and when furnished will represent an expenditure of over \$12,000.00. Following are the names of the contractors:

Brick and plastering, late W.E. Wraight (He died very shortly after this building was commenced, quite suddenly, and John Teague took over the work of supervision.) Carpenter's work, John Bennett  
Iron work, Jos. Spratt  
Painting, Lettice & Mitchell  
Plumbing and Gasfitting, Stewart & Braden  
Tinning, David Heal  
Decorating, Eli Harrison (Eli Harrison, the Grand Master and his son were painters and decorators)

Upholstering, John Weiler  
Stone curbing, Georg Kirsop  
Organ, N.W. Waitt and Company, Agents.  
John Teague, Esq., was the architect of the building and under his personal supervision it has been most creditably erected. The structure is an ornament to the city and a credit to the Masonic Order!.

On October 26th - its quite remarkable when you think of it - the cornerstone was laid in April and on October 26th the building was consecrated for use and the Grand Lodge Officers came and dedicated the building. If you just think about that for a moment or two. It was begun in April and completed in the Fall - that was pretty good work. The procession which took place on that day in October, I think, warrants your attention for a few minutes. This is from the Daily Colonist of October, 29th, 1878: