

THE DEVELOPMENT OF FREEMASONRY IN CANADA BEFORE 1750

by

Bro Frank P Merritt, Chemainus Lodge No 114, B.C.R.

The development of Freemasonry in Canada is traced back to the earliest recorded activity which resulted from the conquest by the British in 1710. The locale of this activity was the Atlantic Provinces, namely Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland. Their histories were closely interwoven until some seventy five years ago.

The following facts are the early keystones of Masonic activity in Canada.

1. Some time between 1721 and 1723 saw the first Masonic activity in Canada in Annapolis Royal. This was possibly the first Masonic activity in North America. It is claimed, on plausible evidence, that there was a Lodge existing in the period 1721~1723.

2. In 1737-1738 the first Provincial Grand Masters were Captain Robert Comyns, "Provincial Grand Master for Cape Breton and Louisbourg", appointed by the Earl of Darnley, Grand Master of England, and also Major Erasmus James Philipps, Provincial Grand Master for Nova Scotia, appointed by Henry Price, Provincial Grand Master of New England, and later of North America.

3. The first duly constituted ledge established on Canadian soil was formed at Annapolis Royal in June 1738, under authority from Henry Price of Massachusetts.

4. Lodge No.85 (Irish) was the first military lodge to function in America. This ledge consisted of Frampton's (30th) Foot which was garrisoned at Louisbourg in 1746.

5. The first warrant granted for a lodge in Newfoundland was granted by Thomas Oxnard, Provincial Grand Master, Massachusetts, December 24, 1746 for a lodge probably in Placentia.

6. The oldest Craft lodge in the British Commonwealth Overseas is St. Andrew's Lodge No.1, G.R.N.S., Halifax, under authority from Major E.J. Philipps, Provincial Grand Master, and later No.4 on the Provincial Register 1757; No.155 on the English Register (Ancients) 1768, and continuing with dormancy to the present day.

TRADITION AND SURMISE (1604-1710)

Early Canadian Masonic history is most interesting and in some cases lacking in positive evidence, A fascinating example of this is the Masonic Stone of 1606. In 1605 Champlain, the French explorer, established the settlement of Port Royal on the West side of Annapolis Basin. This settlement was the predecessor of the more noted Port Royal and Annapolis Royal, built some miles to the northward. This was the scene of many sieges and history-making events, including the organization of the first Masonic Lodge on Canadian soil.

In 1827, there was discovered on this site what some Masonic students and historians have regarded as the earliest trace of the existence of Freemasonry on this Continent, namely certain marks on a stone found on the site of this

early settlement.

There are two accounts of the finding of this stone. The first from the pen of the Hon. Thomas Chandler Haliburton (the famous author of "Sam Slick the Clockmaker") was written in the year of the finding of the stone, or very shortly thereafter. This record is found in his History of Nova Scotia, published in 1829.

The stone is described by Haliburton as "about two feet and a half long and two feet broad, and of the same kind as that which forms the substratum of Granville Mountain. On the upper part are engraved the square and compass of the Free Mason, and in the centre, in large and deep Arabic figures, the date 1606. It does not appear to have been dressed by a mason, but the inscription has been cut on its natural surface."

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"The date is distinctly visible, and although the figure 0 is worn down to one-half of its original depth and the upper part of the figure 6 nearly as much, yet no part of them is obliterated - they are plainly discernible to the eye and easily traced by the finger."

The other account of the finding of the stone is from the pen of Dr. Charles T. Jackson of Boston, the celebrated chemist and geologist and was written in June 1856.

"When Francis Alger and myself made a mineralogical survey of Nova Scotia in 1827 we discovered upon the shore of Goat Island, in Annapolis Basin, a gravestone partly covered with sand and lying on the shore. It bore the Masonic emblems, square and compass, and had the figures 1606 cut in it."

"Judge Haliburton, then Thomas Haliburton, Esq., prevailed on me to abandon it to him, and he now has it carefully preserved."

About 1837 the stone was given by Robert Grant Haliburton (son of Judge T.C. Haliburton) to the Canadian Institute of Toronto with the understanding that the stone should be inserted in the wall of the building then being erected for the Institute.

Sir Sanford Fleming wrote that he received the stone from Mr. R G. Haliburton in order that it might be properly cared for. There is an entry respecting it in the minutes of the Institute, acknowledging its arrival and receipt.

"When the building was erected on the northwest corner of Richmond and Bertie Streets, Toronto, instructions were given by Dr. Scadding to build it into the wall with the inscription exposed; but very stupidly, it is said the plasterer covered it over with plaster, and even the spot cannot now be traced, although the plaster has been removed at several places to look for it

I further offered a reward of \$ 1,000 for the stone if it could be found, but it was all to no purpose. If ever the present building be taken down, diligent search should be made for the historic stone, perhaps, the oldest inscription in America."

The theory that the stone might commemorate the establishment of a lodge of Freemasons has virtually nothing to support it, though there are some who profess to see such a lodge in the famous "Ordre de Bon Temps", established by Champlain in the winter of 1606-7.

The theory that the stone marked the last resting place of one of the settlers would seem to have more to support it than any other. It was found in or near the burying ground shown on Champlain's map of the settlement, and we know, too, that at least one of the colonists died in the year 1606 and Champlain gives the date of his decease as November 14, 1606.

In the spring of 1606, Poutrincourt induced Marc Lescarbot, an advocate of Paris, to join the colony. They reached Fort Royal on July 27th, where they remained August 28th. At this time Poutrincourt began an exploratory voyage down the American coast, as far as Cape Cod, leaving Lescarbot behind in charge of the colony. We learn from Lescarbot's "New France" that among the settlers were "numerous joiners, carpenters, masons, stone cutters, Iocksmiths, workers in iron, tailors, wood sawyers sailors, etc., who worked at their trades."

In a battle with the Indians at Cape Cod, one of the settlers was wounded. He was brought back to Port Royal and died on November 14, 1606.

At this time the carpenters of France had their own mystery or trade guild worked on lines somewhat akin to operative masonry and using the square and compasses as their emblem.

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It would seem that the stone marked the grave of a member of a French trade or craft guild who died in 1606, and to this extent the stone may be regarded as the earliest known trace of Freemasonry in the New World

THE SCOTTISH COLONY (1628-1632)

After the destruction of Port Royal by Argall of Virginia in 1614, the inhabitants returned, rebuilt their houses and continued there until the advent of Sir William Alexander of Menstree and his Scotch colony about 1628.

Alexander became the proprietor and grantee of the colony under a patent from James I (James VI of Scotland) in 1621. His powers and privileges were virtually regal over the territory now comprising the Maritime Provinces and parts of Maine and Quebec, and designated the patent as "Nova Scotia". After exploratory expeditions and financial difficulties which threatened to frustrate the venture, Sir William sent out his son, also known as Sir William, with four vessels containing 72 settlers, who took possession of the old French fort in the spring of 1628. After two years of struggle, Sir William, the younger, returned to Scotland, leaving Sir George Rome in charge of the colony. With the Peace of St. Germain-en-Laye in 1612, the whole of Nova Scotia was restored to France and the majority of the settlers returned to Scotland, though some joined the Puritan Colony in Boston, Massachusetts Bay and others are said to have gone to the French settlement at LaHeve, in Nova Scotia. As partial compensation, the older Sir William was created Viscount Stirling and Viscount Canada. The son thereupon assumed the honorary title of Lord Alexander

This bit of history is given by way of introduction to the statement that in the minutes of the Lodge of Edinburgh is found the record, that on "the 3rd day of Joulay, 1634" Lord Alexander, the Younger, Sir William Strachan of Thorntoun, and Sir Anthony Alexander, who was at that time "Master of the Work" to Charles I, were "Admitet felowe off the Craft". As no other record of Lord Alexander's Masonic career has been found, it has been suggested that he may have been initiated in the Nova Scotia colony. These same craftsmen later took a most active interest in the affairs of the Lodge.

Exhaustive search and inquiry in Scotland has failed to discover a list of

sellers as the basis for further investigation. In support of this theory, however, it should be stated that during the reign of James VI, we find a recognized connection between the sovereign and the Craft, appointment to the Master of the Works, being made by the King's authority. The "Schaw Statutes" of 1599 required that E.A.'s should serve four years before being admitted F.C.'s.

Other than this the theory of Lord Alexander's initiation in Nova Scotia has nothing to support it, and is dismissed by most writers who refer to it as mythical.

THE QUEBEC LODGE OF 1721.

Dr. Emanuel Rebold, last Deputy of the Grand Orient of France, in his "General History of Freemasonry", published in 1880, asserts that, "The activity of the three Grand Lodges of Great Britain, and, above all, of that of London, was not confined to the establishment of lodges in Europe between 1727 and 1740; they had already transplanted Masonry to Bengal, to Bombay, the Cape of Good Hope, New South Wales, New Zealand and Java and as early as 1721, lodges of Masons were established in Canada." Apart from Bengal, where Masonry had a beginning in 1728, nothing has been found to support this statement.

By "Canada". Rebold undoubtedly meant the present Province of Quebec and Ontario constituting the former Province of "Canada". It is a curious fact that in 1851, nine years after the publication of Rebold's work, Albion Lodge No.17, received a letter from LaLoge Clemente Amitie of Paris, France, which begins with the statement, "You have one of the most ancient Temples of Freemasonry, since its erection dates from 1721." 3. Quebec in 1721 was in the hands of the French. It is of course possible that Freemasonry may have been transplanted into New France by military officers, or the governing or merchant class of whom there was a large number at the time in Old Quebec. If there is any substratum of fact in the 1721 tradition, the proof must be found in the archives of the Grand Orient of France where rest the unsorted and unclassified records of scores of lodges, civil and military, existing prior to the formation of the Grand Orient. Until an exhaustive examination of these records has been made, the Quebec lodge of 1721 must remain a tradition.

In the same category must be placed the statement of Jean d'Ebrie who, writing in 1883 on "Freemasonry in the Province of Quebec" stated that a lodge of Masons was in existence in Quebec in 1755. Nothing to support this statement has been found since.

ANNAPOLIS ROYAL AND EARLY MASONRY

Between 1710 when Port Royal (renamed Annapolis Royal) fell to the besieging forces from New England under Col. Francis Nicholson until the American Revolution, there was the closest sort of intercourse military, civil, commercial and social, between Annapolis Royal and Boston.

In 1717 Col. Richard Philipps of South Wales was appointed Governor of Nova Scotia and of Placentia in Newfoundland, continuing to hold office until 1749, although for most of that period he resided out of the Province, governing the country by means of lieutenant-governors.

At the time of Philipps' appointments in 1717, Annapolis Royal was garrisoned by four independent companies of Foot. These companies with four others at Placentia and two additional companies were in that year organized as

one regiment under the command of Col. Philipps, and later known as the Fortieth Foot, the first of several British regiments organized in Canada

In 1720 Col. Philipps organized the first Council for the Province of Nova Scotia composed almost entirely of Boston men and it is a curious fact that these Boston men were all closely identified with King's Chapel, and it is a theory that there was a Masonic lodge, or at least Masonic activity, at Annapolis Royal between 1721 and 1725 owing to its origin to men from Boston such as John Adams, Paul Mascarene, Edward How, Arthur Savage, Captain Cyprian Southhach and Hibbert Newton who along with Rev. John Harrison and his successor, Rev.. Robert Cuthbert were, all to some degree, and several, very intimately, associated with King's Chapel, Boston, where tradition says Masonic meetings were held in the same period.

In the "Concise account of the Rise and Progress of Freemasonry in the Province of Nova Scotia 1786", it is stated that "It is certain that as soon as the English took possession of the colony they took care to encourage this charitable institution". There is a sort of corroboration of this in the statement of M.W. Bro. Major-General J. Wimburn Laurie, Grand Master of Nova Scotia, in his address to the Grand Lodge of Nova Scotia in 1884, who after referring to the receipt by him of a photographic copy of the ledger of St John's Lodge, Philadelphia, dated 1731, forwarded as evidence that it was the first Masonic lodge organized in America during the colonial period, proceeded;

"From circumstances that have come to my knowledge believe it to be quite within the bounds of possibility that evidence will in due time be forthcoming, that a Masonic Lodge regularly met and transacted Masonic business at a much earlier date than 1731 in our own Province. I have been for some time promised the documents by a gentleman who is not a member of the craft, and I trust his disinterested efforts to obtain them will be successful I may be disappointed either in obtaining the documents or their authenticity, so hesitate to say more."

Bro. Laurie had previously made a similar statement when addressing the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts in 1883 when he stated that "certain antiquarians had recently discovered what they were

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inclined to believe were vestiges of a Masonic lodge which had existed in Nova Scotia very early in the eighteenth century."

Any Masonic activity prior to 1731 in Nova Scotia must have been either at Annapolis Royal (then the capital) or possibly at Canso, where during the fishing season some 2,000 New Englanders made their base of operation.

Among the officers of Philipp's Regiment at Annapolis Royal in 1726, was Ensign Erasmus James Philipps (born April 23rd, 1705) a nephew of Col. Richard Philipps, being the son of his brother Erasmus.

In August 1731, he was a Commissioner along with Dr. William Skene and Otto Ilamilton of H.M. Council of Nova Scotia, and four others from Rhode Island, to mark out and settle the boundaries between the province of Massachusetts Bay and the colony of Rhode Island. Philipps was

in Boston from August 1737 to June 1738.

The records of "The First Lodge" Boston show that on Nov.14, 1737, Major Philipps was made a Mason in that Lodge and that accompanying him was Bro, Wm. Shereff who affiliated with the Lodge on this occasion. As Sheriff had been a continuous resident of Annapolis Royal from 1716 until 1737, it is evident that he must have been made a Mason in Annapolis Royal.

In the Boston Gazette of March 13, 1738, we find the following paragraph;

"We are inform'd, that M4or Philipps is Appointed Provincial Grand Master over the Free and Accepted Masons, in the Province of Nova Scotia, and that a Deputation is getting ready for that purpose.

On returning to Annapolis in June 1738, Philipps took with him a deputation from Henry Price to form a lodge at Annapolis Royal with himself designated as the first Master. The record reads that "Mr. Price granted a Deputation at Ye Petition of sundry Brethren at Annapolis in Nova Scotia to hold a Lodge there. This Petition was undoubtedly signed not only by Philipps and Shereff, but by Col. Otto Hamilton and Dr. Wm. Skene both Masons and residents of Annapolis Royal for many years. The ledge established in 1738 was the first lodge

LOUISBOURG AND CANSO

After the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713,. the French at once took possession of Cape Breton Island renamed it Isle Royale removed a number of families from Placentia, Newfoundland, (which had been ceded to Great Britain) to Havre al'Anglais, renaming it Louisbourg, and took steps to fortify it.

For the next twenty-five years or more they expended huge sums of money on fortifications, rendering it one of the greatest military strongholds in the world "The Dunkirk of America". During the period of construction a very considerable commerce developed and vast quantities of supplies were imported from French Canada, the Island of St. John (now Prince Edward Island) the French West Indies, and from Boston and New England.
