

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH  
650 Fisgard Street, Victoria, B.C. V8W 1R6  
1994 - 1

### **FREEMASONRY IN JAPAN**

by

Wor. Bro. N.E. Bowman, Victoria Columbia Lodge No. 1, B.C.R.

Brother Commodore Matthew G. Perry's historic visit to Japan in 1853 and 1854 opened the Japanese Empire to the Western World after two centuries of virtual isolation, thus insuring treaties, establishing consulates and restricting residential and commercial privileges to foreigners.

In 1854, the Twentieth Regiment of Foot arrived in Yokohama from Hong Kong, to guard the British Legation. Sphinx Lodge No. 263, Irish Constitution, was attached to the Regiment, and on January 27th, 1865, held the first meeting in Japan. This Lodge met regularly until 1866, during which time several foreign civilian Masons became members. \* (Coil tells us there is no reliable evidence to support this traditional story.) \*\*

The first English Lodge chartered by the United Grand Lodge of England was Yokohama Lodge No. 1092, in 1866. There were four other Lodges warranted during this period :- O Tentosama Lodge No. 1263 at Tokyo, in 1869; Nippon Lodge No. 1344 at Tokio in 1870; Rising Sun Lodge No. 1401, at Kobe in 1872 and Tokyo Lodge No. 2015, at Tokyo in 1883. A Provincial Grand Lodge was patent in 1873.  
\*\*

The first Lodge warranted by the Grand Lodge of Scotland was Hiogo & Osaka Lodge No. 4989 at Kobe in 1870. Two others followed :- Star of the East Lodge No. 640 at Yokohama in 1879 and Nagasaki Lodge No. 710 at Nagasaki in 1885. \*\*

Masonry was permitted by the Japanese by agreement that they would not admit Japanese or make any outward public display. Masonry however, was displayed to the public when Bro. G.W. Guthrie, the U.S. Ambassador to Japan, an active Mason died, The Japanese Government invited the Provincial Grand Lodge to assemble in regalia at his funeral. Despite the ban on Japanese becoming Masons several did while overseas.. There were notably two;- Amane Nishi and Mamichi Tsuda in La Vertue Lodge No.7, at Leyden, Netherlands in 1874 and also Tadusu Hayashi, the first Japanese Ambassador to England was a member of Empire Lodge No. 2108, in 1903. He was Past Master in 1904 and Past Senior Grand Warden in 1905.\*

During the 1920s and 1930s anti-Masonic material appeared in the media and intensified as World War 2 approached and Lodges went dormant. After the end of this war General Douglas MacArthur, a 33rd Degree Philippine Mason was instrumental in revitalizing Masonry in Japan, under the Jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of the Philippines. The following eleven Lodges. were established :- Yokosuka Naval Lodge No.120, at Yokosuka, in 1948; Far East Lodge No. 124, at Yokohama, in 1949; Tokyo Masonic Lodge No.125, at Tokyo, in 1950; Square and Compasses Lodge No. 126 at Tachikawa in 1950;Kyushu Lodge No. 127, at Kyushu, in 1952; Torie Lodge No.132, at Nagoya, in 1952; General John S. Pershing Lodge No. 135, at Denai, in 1953; Nippon Lodge No. 138, at Sasebo, in 1954; Amori Lodge No. 139 at Misawa, in 1954; Kaute Lodge No. 143, at Tokyo in 1956 and Kansai Lodge No. 145, in Kobe, in 1956, The members of these Lodges were English and Japanese. The first Japanese -language Lodge in the world wasKaute Lodge No. 143, when the rituals were first translated into Japanese. \*

In 1952, the Philippine Lodges in Japan had some 900 members. In 1956 it was

reported there were about 10,500 members. The Grand Lodge of Connecticut had issued a dispensation for Tokyo

1.

American Lodge at Tokyo in 1947 and the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts authorized the removal of Sinim Lodge from Shanghai, China to Tokyo. Though the former does not appear on the Connecticut Roll for 1951, it does on the Massachusetts list for that year. \*\*

In 1951, the Grand Lodge of England had five Lodges in Japan:- at Yokohama, Yokohama Lodge No. 1092 and O Tentosam No. 1263; at Tokyo, Tokyo Lodge No. 2015; at Kobe, Rising Sun Lodge No. and Albion in the Far East Lodge No. 3729. Four of these were the original English-warranted Lodges that were dormant in 1940 due to the Second World War, with Albion in the Far East being warranted after the War. The Grand Lodge of Scotland had Star in the Far East Lodge No. 640 in Yokohama and Hiogo & Osaka Lodge No. 498 in Kobe. These were two of the original five existing before the War. \*\*

By 1950, the Scottish Rite, Scottish Jurisdiction was established and the York Rite started in 1952. The Grand Lodge of Japan was established in 1957, with the Venezuelan Ambassador to Japan, a Past Grand Master of Venezuela serving as Grand Master. In addition to the Lodges mentioned previously being under the Grand Lodge of the Philippines there were Cherry Blossom Lodge No. 14 at Itazuke, and Moriah-yama Lodge No. 7 and Nippon Lodge No. 9 at Tokyo.\*\*

After the establishment of the Grand Lodge of Japan most other Grand Lodges withdrew their Charters thus enabling those Lodges to be under the Jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Japan. Currently there are twenty Chartered Lodges and one Research Lodge under dispensation. Other Grand Jurisdictions still with Lodges in Japan are:- English, one; Scottish, two; Massachusetts, one; Philippines, two, and Prince Hall (Washington), four.\*

The center for Masonry in Tokyo is the Tokyo Masonic Association. The present site was purchased in 1950 by Tokyo Masonic Lodge No. 2 (formerly No.125). The Scottish Rite joined them in developing the property. The Association was formed in 1955 for charitable purposes, and is governed by a Board of Trustees with Tokyo Masonic Lodge No. 2 and the Scottish Rite bodies each having three members. It is amazing the charities it supports or sponsors. Twenty-two are listed in its Brochure, and for example include: - a Telephone Counseling service in Japanese, established in 1971 with 28 centers in Japan, In a typical year more than 30,000 telephone calls are received at the Tokyo Center and deal with marital, family and suicide problems; --- the Toy Library is a program dedicated to helping retarded and handicapped children and their parents. Children helped by this program are between two and ten years of age. The Library is operated by volunteer groups.. Volunteer workers teach each child how to play with a particular toy, and if the child shows particular interest in a toy it is loaned to the child. The only obligation is that the parent and the child must return the toy in about a month for another session. This is a support project with the Local Welfare Conferences, City or Ward Offices and Volunteers in their own centers. --- other projects include carnivals for orphans, Braille library, athletic meets for the handicapped, etc. \*\*\*

Th 1981 the new stone and glass Masonic Building was dedicated. It is the center for Masonic activities in the Tokyo area. It is comprised of two Lodge rooms, - one for the Blue Lodge and one for the Scottish Rite. These are also used by York Rite, Shrine, Demolay, Eastern Star and Rainbow Girls. Each Lodge Room seats 125 people comfortably with adjacent dining and meeting areas. The Lodge Rooms appear very impressive as seen in the brochure picture.

References: \* Chater-Cosmo Transactions Vol. 13

\*\* Coil's Masonic Encyclopedia Page 76

\*\*\* Tokyo Masonic Association Brochure.

\*\*\*\*\*