

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH
650 Fisgard Street, Victoria, B.V. V8W 1R6
1997 - 1

USING PRIMARY SOURCES

by

V Wor Bro Gordon Smith, Grand Superintendent of Works, B. C. R., 1996-97

When we are about to write a paper on some aspect of Freemasonry, we usually consult a readily available and reliable reference book such as Marshall's "History of Grand Lodge of British Columbia 1871-1970", Mackey's "Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry" or the illuminating pages of "Quatuor Coronatorum." However there are hundreds of Masonic documents and other pertinent items lying about waiting for us to rediscover. In Lodge libraries and in display cases throughout our province as well as in the British Columbia Archives are Masonic materials that tell the story of Freemasonry in our jurisdiction. These original documents or historical articles may be referred to as primary sources.

Glancing about this library (in the Masonic Temple on Fisgard Street in Victoria) we cannot help but notice examples of primary sources: that piece of timber engraved with the Masonic emblem from the bark William W. Case; that silver hot chocolate server in the corner of the glass case, presented to Simeon Duck, and that framed letter, on the south wall, sent to Olympia Lodge No.1 in 1865. All these primary sources have a story to tell.

A major supply of primary sources is the British Columbia Archives. This invaluable collection and service is located adjacent to the Royal B.C. Museum and is opposite the Centennial Carillon Bells. The Provincial Archives are the main storehouse for tens of thousands of important historical documents concerning our province. Over the years, the volume of these irreplaceable materials has grown so much that the archivists have run out of store space and many, many items must be stored off-site.

In the mid 1960's, some Masonic Lodges on the Island and the Mainland deposited historic materials with the Provincial Archives for safe keeping. Many had been urged to do so by R.W. Bro. John T. Marshall, Grand Historian, who was compiling the "History of Grand Lodge of British Columbia" that was published for our Masonic Centenary. These Masonic manuscripts included: porch books, minute books, various ledgers, letters and other materials that tell the story of Freemasonry as well as the history of our province. The largest and most significant collections were from Victoria-Columbia Lodge No.1, Vancouver and Quadra No.2 and United Service Lodge No.24. Researchers wishing to use these articles must first receive written permission from the Grand Secretary of the Grand Lodge of B.C. and must follow the usual registration procedure.

The primary source that will be used this evening is the Minute Book of Victoria Lodge No.1085 (English Registry) that covers the years 1860 to 1866. The transparencies that you will be viewing are the actual minutes of that historic meeting when the Officers of British Columbia's premier Lodge were installed on Monday, 20 August 1860. There are three pages that for some reason start with the number 2. What will these one hundred and thirty year old records tell us?

The handwriting is that of the illustrious Freemason, Amor De Cosmos, editor of "The British Colonist", first Secretary of Lodge No.1085 and later second Premier of British Columbia. Page 2 also tells us where the meeting took place. Today, Bastion Square Parkade is located at the intersection of Yates and Langley Streets but the meeting was held above Hibben and Carswell's store

that was probably located across the intersection at the southeast corner Most of the nine charter members who had signed

1.

the petition in December of 1858 were in attendance. Looking over the list, what names do we recognize? Other than Southgate, Pearkes and De Cosmos, they seem unfamiliar historically. Yes, Southgate Street in Fairfield was named after the first Worshipful Master of the Lodge. No, the famous general and former Lieutenant-Governor was not a descendant of this George Pearkes. Yes, Amor De Cosmos, born William Alexander Smith, helped lead British Columbia into Confederation with Canada but was later so disillusioned that he died in an asylum. According to these minutes, Past Masters Robert Burnaby, of various London and Surrey Lodges and Henry Aguilar of H.M. S. Grappler based at Esquimalt installed Bro. Joseph J. Southgate as Worshipful Master, who in turn invested the Officers of Victoria Lodge No. 1085. Page 3 of the Minute Book lists the Officers that were installed on that evening in 1860. Brother Thomas Harris was invested as proxy for the Senior Deacon, Bro. William Thain. All the Officers paid their entrance fees with the exception of Bro. R. I. McDonell (McDonald ?) who for some reason never did join. Notice that I.O.U.s were used for payment in most cases. Also note that the fees were paid in dollars rather than in pounds sterling, In 1860, most of Victoria's commercial and trading contact was with San Francisco and not surprisingly most of the banks of the little "City of Shacks" were American. The official currency was still the British pound but the everyday currency was the American dollar. The Minute Book tells us that the date for the regular monthly meeting was set for the first Thursday and Victoria Columbia Lodge No.1, as we know it today, still meets on that date over one hundred and thirty five years later.

Page 4 reminds us that Lodge notices of meetings were advertised in the local newspaper in the 1860's. A vote of thanks as well as letters of appreciation were given to the Brethren who assisted in the installation. Past Master Robert Burnaby became a member of Victoria Lodge on 29 August 1860, was a leader in the formation of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and gave his name to the large municipality in Greater Vancouver.. Past Master Henry Aguilar probably sailed away to another posting in the Royal Navy. Finally, "The. [] (Lodge) then adjourned to Saturday at 8 P.M. in due and ancient form."

This concludes my presentation of "Using Primary Sources." Brethren, are there any questions?

Thank you, for this opportunity to take you back in time to that meeting above the store at the corner of

Yates and Langley Streets when Victoria Lodge No.1085 (English Registry) installed its Officers for the

first time on Monday 20 August 1860. and practicing Freemasonry became a reality in what is now

British Columbia.

References:

"Forward with Canada, Number 8, Canadian Capitals" by Leonard Knoll; "History of Grand Lodge of British Columbia" by John T. Marshall; "Ledger 1860-1864, Victoria Lodge No.1085" (B.C. Archives, Add Mss. 2 vol.206); "Linked in Progress, 125 Years of Freemasonry in British Columbia"; "Minute Book. Victoria Lodge #1085: 20 August 1860 - 25 January 1866"; B.C. Archives, Add Mss. 2 vol.168), "Pageant of B.C." by B. A. McKelvie.

(Editors note. Pages three, four and five are Xerox copies of pages 2, 3 and 4 of the hand written minutes of the inaugural meeting of Victoria Lodge No.1085 E.C., held August 20, 1860 and do not accompany this presentation but are

available from the Secretary.)

THE OLDEST SURVIVING MINUTE BOOK

"The 9th day of January in the year of God 1598; upon which day Robert Widderspoon was made a Fellow of Craft in the presence of.. etc."

The above Lodge Minute, (in modern language) is a copy from the Minute Book of Aitchinson's Haven Lodge, titled (once again in modern language) "The Book of the Acts and Ordinances of the Noble
2.

Mysteries and Fellows of Craft of the Lodge of Aitchison's Haven." This Lodge Minute, dated 1598, is the earliest known minute of a meeting of any Scottish Lodge, and is probably the oldest Masonic minute in the world.

Aitchison's Haven Lodge, which became extinct in 1853, was situated in the village of Aitchison's Haven, (which also no longer exists), in Midlothian, S.E. of Edinburgh. We know that the Lodge was in operation before 1598, for the Minute Book makes reference to a Bro. being made a F. of C. If this would have been a first meeting, surely this would have been mentioned in the minutes.

When the lodge became extinct in 1853, its Minute Book disappeared. It surfaced again in 1981 when it was put up for auction in London. The Grand Lodge of Scotland was successful in its bid and the book now rests in the museum, where it is on display for all to see.

Now let us turn our attention to the history of Aitchison's Haven, which at one time was the proud owner of the oldest minute book in the world. On 30th November, 1736, 32 lodges, including Aitchison's Haven, met in Mary's Chapel, Edinburgh, to elect a Grand Master and form the Grand Lodge of Scotland.

On St. Andrew's Day 1737, the G.L. met and the following is an extract from its minutes; "It is resolved that all the Lodges holding of the G.L. should be enrolled according to their Seniority, which should be determined from authentic documents which they produced. Those producing none to be put at the end of the roll".

Under this ruling, Mary's Chapel, now the Lodge of Edinburgh Mary's Chapel was enrolled as No.1. On such evidence as Lodge Minutes, Aitchison's Haven should have taken precedence over Mary's Chapel for its minutes date from Jan. 1598, whereas Mary's Chapel date from 31 July 1599, making Aitchison's Haven the senior by 18 months. It appears that their minute book was not available at that time, and the why has never been explained.

The Brethren of the Lodge, not obtaining satisfaction as to the order of seniority agreed "not to trouble the Grand Lodge nor themselves further, they choosing to stand on their own footing, and rights as they had done these many years and ages past. The Grand Lodge Committee thereupon decided "that Aitchison's Haven be deleted out of the books of Grand Lodge, and no more called on the rolls upon the Clerk's highest peril."

Aitchison's Haven rejoined the G.L. of Scotland in 1814, it was numbered No.33. In 1853 the Lodge became dormant and was erased from the Roll.

V. W. Bro John Salmon, Mt. Zion Lodge No.120 Chilliwack, B.C.
