

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH
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WHY MINOR GRAND LODGES FAILED IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

by

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It would be hard to find a Mason in our Province who did not know that this year we are celebrating the 125th anniversary of the founding of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia. Yet few Brethren realize there were two earlier Grand Lodges in our region.

As was the custom in England and Scotland, when the number of Lodges reached an acceptable total, some local autonomy was granted. Both Grand Lodges of England and Scotland encouraged the formation of District or Provincial Grand Lodges, and two of these Minor Grand Lodges were established in British Columbia during the latter part of the 1860's. Robert Burnaby and Israel Wood Powell played prominent parts in their formation.

The Provincial Grand Lodge of British Columbia, holding under the Grand Lodge of Scotland, held its first communication in the Stamp Building in Victoria on Government Street where View Street is today on the 24th of December 1867. Worshipful Brother Israel Wood Powell, the recently named Provincial Grand Master, had only invited selected Masons to attend. Not surprisingly, most of these soon-to-be Grand Lodge Officers were members of Vancouver Lodge No.421, Scottish Registry, which was located in Victoria. The remainder were Freemasons from other Scottish Registry Lodges in the colony who were visiting that winter. After the commission from the Grand Lodge of Scotland in Edinburgh was read, the newly appointed Grand Lodge Officers were installed.

It should be noted that these Grand Lodge Officers were expected to pay fees for the honour of serving as well as fines for not attending meetings. The allocated fees were: Provincial Grand Master \$15, Deputy Grand Master \$10 and other Grand Lodge Officers \$5 to \$7.50, while the fines for non-attendance at communications were: Provincial Grand Master \$10, Deputy Grand Master \$5 and other Grand Lodge Officers \$1 to \$2.50.

These fees, fines, annual Subscriptions, along with charges for degrees, affiliations and dispensations would appear to have generated more than enough funds to finance the Provincial Grand Lodge. Actually, little money was raised because the membership was so small. It was estimated at about 150 Freemasons for all four Scottish Lodges. The Provincial Grand Lodge of British Columbia had financial problems from its start in 1867. In fact, it was necessary to borrow \$400 from Vancouver Lodge No.421 to buy regalia and other Masonic paraphernalia.

At the second Annual Convention held in Victoria on 1st May, 1869, representatives of all four Scottish Lodges in the jurisdiction were in attendance. However, the officers of Cariboo Lodge at Barkerville, Caledonia Lodge at Nanaimo and Mount Herman Lodge at Burrard Inlet were represented by proxies. It should be remembered that travel between Victoria and other centres was difficult and time consuming during colonial days.

In 1867, Freemasons practicing under the English Constitution petitioned the United Grand Lodge to issue a patent to Worshipful Brother Robert Burnaby to form a District Grand Lodge in the Colony of British Columbia. The Colonies of Vancouver Island and mainland British Columbia had been united in 1866. The

patent arrived from London in the Spring of 1868. Burnaby invited delegates from Victoria No.783 (formerly No.1085). Union Lodge No.899 (formerly No.1201) at New Westminster, Nanaimo Lodge No.1090 and British Columbia Lodge No.1187 at Victoria to meet in his home on 14th of March, 1868. This group of Freemasons approved Robert Burnaby's nominations for District GrandLodge Officers. The first

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formal meeting of the new District Grand Lodge of British Columbia was held on 20th August 1868 where District Grand Master Robert Burnaby was installed by Right Worshipful Brother Henry Holbrook of Union Lodge No.899. The remainder of the appointed officers were then invested by the first District Grand Master of B.C.

Like the Provincial Grand Lodge (Scottish Registry), the District Grand Lodge (English Registry) assessed fees, levied fines and charged for degrees, affiliations and dispensations. Like the other Grand Lodge of B.C., it had to borrow from the start. Victoria Lodge No.783 lent the new District Grand Lodge \$600 for regalia and other Masonic articles.

Why then, did these minor Grand Lodges of British Columbia fail? First, there were too few Masons for two Grand Lodges. A membership of 300 would be minimal for one Grand Lodge; to support two Grand Lodges this number was ridiculously small.

In B.C., transportation in the 1860's was very slow and very hazardous. There were few roads. At the coast, boats were usually used. Travelling from Victoria to Nanaimo would take three days and from New Westminster to Victoria could take a week. Imagine how long a trip from Barkerville to Victoria would take. No wonder proxies were used so often. With two minor Grand Lodges, twice as many Masons were needed to fill Grand Lodge offices and to attend meetings.

Financial problems were common to both minor Grand Lodges. Both were in debt from the start and both lacked enough Brethren to be financially responsible.

With the Provincial Grand Lodge of British Columbia (Scottish Registry) and the District Grand Lodge of British Columbia English Registry) the Masons of our Crown Colony were divided. Our early Brethren were separated over ritual, split over loyalties to mother jurisdictions and bisected over matters of membership. Only in the formation and administration of a much needed Benevolent Fund to assist needy Freemasons did both minor Grand Lodges work together. Was this successful cooperation a clue to a solution for their problems?.

Do You Know the Answer?

A supplementary detail prepared by Wor. Bro. Manfred Hermer P.M. Britannia Lodge No.73 of some

questions and Answers provided by the world's oldest Masonic Lodge of Research, Quatuor Coronati

Lodge No.2076 ER

The Master Masons' Apron

Q. Can you give me any information, please, about the history, design and especially the symbolism of the master masons badge in addition to that given by Bro. Colin Dyer in his book, Symbolism in Craft Freemasonry?

A. The present Master Masons' badge was designed by, or under the auspices of the Board of Works early in 1814. There was a great deal of unification to be done as a result of the union of the two former Grand Lodges on 27 December 1813

and a standard form of masonic regalia was one area which received early treatment, for the Board of Works presented a report to the March 1814 Quarterly Communication of Grand Lodge with proposals for the form of all masonic aprons, collars and jewels which were required at that time.

Prior to 1813, aprons were supposed to be made of a whole lambskin, unshaped and the only distinction was a different coloured lining for Grand Officers and those who had acted as Grand Stewards, otherwise there were no distinguishing marks and the aprons were supposed to be white. However, in the period from about the 1790's it appears that a fashion arose of ornamenting aprons with masonic symbols, in some cases relating to particular masonic degrees. This was more likely to be so in the case of those belonging to the Ancients Grand Lodge, for it was in that Grand Lodge - - - or rather in the private
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Lodges under their jurisdiction - that additional degrees were conferred over and above the three craft degrees. The Royal Arch was probably practiced under Ancient Grand Lodge Warrants from the 1750's and it is likely that by the 1770's and 1780's other degrees were given, for there was no separate Grand organization for them as early as that. The original Grand Lodge formed in 1717 kept strictly to the principle that pure ancient masonry consisted of three degrees and no more and when the union took place in 1813, this view was carried into the United Grand Lodge, subject to the acknowledgment of the Royal Arch but not under Lodge warrants, and without restricting the practice of additional degrees providing it was not done under the Grand Lodge.

You will therefore see the need for not only unification of regalia but also for cutting out anything which could be related to degrees other than the Craft. We do not know what principles inspired the Board of Works in their search for a suitable design. The Board of Works was a committee of Grand Lodge in the same way as the Board of General Purposes with which it was ultimately amalgamated. The simple design of a square cornered apron with a turn down flap for all purposes but with ornament and colour distinctions has stood the test of time and is still virtually the same. It seems apparent from the use of two and then three rosettes for the F.C and M.M. aprons that these can only indicate the number of degrees. The use of what we know as levels, but which are in fact perpendicular lines upon horizontal lines thereby forming several sets of two right angles on the badge of an Installed Master also date from the same time and appear to be a device (? that of being able to construct a right angle) much in mason's minds at that time as it comes up in other places.

The method of securing the apron in those days was by having a broad band of material or ribbon which went around the waist and was then tied in the front under the flap, the ends being permitted to hang down (as they still do in some of the additional degrees to this day). These broad tapes, lunging down at the sides and coming from under the flap were occasionally teased out into tassels and when, about the end of the 1830's, the design was slightly changed to permit the use of a waste band fastening such as we have today, those tassels were left in the design and have become the 'silver tassels' referred to in the description today.

There is no known instruction for these tassels to have seven or any other number of cords but no doubt that someone thought that seven was a good masonic number. One has always to bear in mind that a general description by Grand Lodge or one of its committees has to be carried into detailed execution by the regalia manufacturers and there must be a specified number of chords in a tassel. One must therefore accept that some detailed features have come in merely because a decision had to be taken in the course of manufacture. As an

example, if you tell, say, five different people's dove bearing an olive branch, someone is going to decide for you in which direction the dove points and the nature of its flight - hence the many designs of deacon's badges you find on regalia.

As to syrnbolism, as far as the design is concerned I doubt if the Board of Works had anything very involved in mind. As I have suggested, the basic layout had three degrees in mind. Others who have come since have seen meanings to them in what has been put there. if one finds inspiration, then there no reason for not saying so. As you will appreciate from my book, my main purpose is to try to find out what was meant by those who originated whatever it is what we are looking at, but moralizing on what is there is perfectly proper too.

Landmarks

Q. We frequently refer in the ritual to the Landmarks of the Order, yet they are nowhere specified or listed. What constitutes a Masonic Landmark and can you furnish a list of them?

A. This is one of the most debatable subjects in Masonry and it gives rise to very wide differences of opinion. Any good dictionary will define a 'Landmark', but Masonically the term requires a stricter definition. The best writers on the subject are unanimous on two essential points:

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1. A landmark must have existed from 'the time whereof the memory of man runneth not to the contrary'.

2. A landmark is an element in the form or essence of the Society of such importance that Freemasonry would no longer be Freemasonry if it were removed. If these two qualifications were used strictly to test whether certain practices, systems, principles, or regulations can be admired as landmarks it will be found that there are in fact very few items that will pass this rigid test.

Nevertheless the tendency, even among prominent writers who try to compile lists of landmarks,

seems to be to incorporate items which really come under the heading of Regulations, or Customs, or Principals, and tentative lists of landmarks range from 5 to 50 separate items. Without the least desire to be dogmatic, the following is an attempt to compile a list of acceptable landmarks that would conform to the two point test:

1. That a Mason professes a belief in God (the Supreme Being) the G.A.O.T.U.

2. That the V.S.L. is an essential and indispensable part of the Lodge, to be open in full view
when the Brethren are at labour.

3. That a Mason must be male, free-born and of mature age.

4. That a Mason, by his tenure, owes allegiance to the sovereign and to the Craft.

5. That a Mason believes in the immortality of the soul.

The first four items listed above are derived directly from the Old Charges, which date back to c. 1390 and are the oldest documents in the world belonging to the Craft. The last item on the list, "immortality", is implicit in the religious beliefs of that period.
