

**Victoria Lodge of Education and Research  
650 Fisgard Street, Victoria, BC V8W 1R6**

**March/2002**

**(The opinions expressed in the following paper are those of the writer and do not necessarily express those of the Lodge of Education and research)**

**The Order of Women Freemasons: Lodge Victoria No. 124  
by Brother Stephen Godfrey, P.M. Haida Lodge No. 166  
presented to the Lodge of Education and Research, Victoria B.C.  
March 19<sup>th</sup>, 2002.**

*In March 2001, Wor. Bro. William Down presented to me a case and a box. In the case were articles of clothing, some Masonic regalia and several books and papers. In the box were books. Both items had been given to him by-Mrs. Phyllis McDougall, a member of the Oak Bay Chapter of Eastern Star, and wife of the late Bro. Mel McDougall P.M. of Malahat Lodge No. 107 G.L. of B.C. & Yk. Mrs. McDougall had herself been given the case and box, with contents, by the nephew of a lady who was a member of Eastern Star and a woman Mason. This lady was Mrs. Annette Pohl, who was the charter Secretary of the Lodge Victoria No. 124 when it came into being in April 1960.*

*The purpose of the paper is to give a brief history of the Order of Women Freemasons, some detailed history of Lodge Victoria No. 124 and to present officially to the Victoria Lodge of Education and Research, the books and paraphernalia to be placed in the archives of this lodge.*

From the early life of any Mason in Freemasonry, it is clearly understood that no woman can be made a Freemason, and it is not surprising that this fact is adhered to since no one sees women attend our Masonic meetings and join in our work. But to many the surprise that, in our long and varied history of Freemasonry, there has been the occasional story, when a woman has been made a Mason. The celebrated story of Hon. Elizabeth St Leger, daughter of Viscount Doneraile, County Cork, Ireland is probably the most well known of all stories, and I will only suggest to the reader that he look at the end of the paper in the bibliography for references and enjoy the reading of these stories at another time. (Carr: 1985, pp.282-3)

The fact is that historically, a few women have become Masons, and have become Masons of Lodges for men but usually under some special circumstances. This evening, however, I give you the story of the Order of Women Freemasons, which began in England about 100 years ago, an order which is a complete duplication of our Masonry in every way possible, with the one exception - all their members are women. It is so exact a copy of our Freemasonry that even concordant bodies for Women have all been established parallel to those we have as concordant bodies, with the equivalent Grand Lodge bodies ruling them as well.

The Honourable Fraternity of Ancient Masonry is open to all women of full age (over 21 years), of good report and who believe in a Supreme Being. It is a:

...genuine Masonic organization, exclusively for women, and...claim that Masonic secrets came into our possession of the Order in a clear and regular way, given freely to women by Masons. [Golden Jubilee Souvenir 1958]

Let me briefly dwell on two words in that quote, *regular way*. This phrase immediately caused me concern. How regular a manner did they receive the Masonic material and all of the esoteric work of our rituals. It **we** had adhered to our obligations in our EA degree, *-I will not write, indite, print, stamp, stain, cut, carve hew, mark or engrave them -* then perhaps the Order of Women Freemasons would not have even started. And if we also adhered to the promise of never divulging any of our secrets but keeping silent, then again perhaps we would not have had an Order of Women Freemasons. Someone, somewhere gave to them access to ritual, or spoke to them about our work. Accept this fact and let us enjoy the story of this remarkable group of Women, and their even more remarkable work.

In its present day organization, where did it start? In 1882 the *Les Libres Penseurs (The Free Thinkers)* lodge in France decided that women should become freemasons by being initiated. The first initiate was a lady by the name of Mile. Maris Desraimes. Once this action, had taken place, the lodge could not have gone back to its original status. So it did the next best thing, it separated itself from its Grand Lodge (*La Grande Loge Symbolique de France*) and

formed a new Grand body known as *La Grande Loge Symbolique Ecossaise*. The body was under the direction of a Charter from the Ancient and Accepted Rite (Scottish Rite), and the development of this lodge became known later as the Universal Order of Co-Masonry. Interest in Co-Masonry began to spread quickly. The movement was first known in England in 1902 with the first Co-Masonry Lodge formed on 26<sup>th</sup> September of that year.

Several years passed and a small group of members of the Co-Masonry did not appear satisfied with the governance of their lodge with their parent body (The Supreme Council). The desire of the dissatisfied group was to have a Grand Lodge similar to the United Grand Lodge of England, "exactly parallel... both in constitutions, ritual and in breath of interpretation," [Golden Jubilee Souvenir, 1958], but for Co-Masonry only. The Rev W. F. Geikie Cobb D.D., Rector of St. Ethelburga's, Bishopsgate, in London, was selected as Grand Master. Three Lodges were formed:-

- Golden Rule No. 1
- Emulation No. 2
- Lodge of Unity No. 3

And all three were consecrated on June 20 , 1908.

The Grand Master, similar to the United Grand Lodge of England, remains in office until he/she decides to step down. Following Grand Master Cobb, all Grand Masters thereafter were women.

In the first few years of operation, it seemed logical for men to seek membership in a lodge under the United Grand Lodge of England. I speculate as to the reasons for such a consideration. First perhaps is that the United Grand Lodge of England may have made a clear statement to its membership that suspensions would be waiting for any brother who chose to join the Co-Masonry. Second, perhaps those initiated into a regular Masonic lodge learned quickly that if they treasured their Masonry, that they should not consider joining Co-Masonry. In any case, I suspect that in England it was very difficult to find men to join. So the Grand Lodge of England (Co-Masonry) agreed that any men who were members of their Grand Lodge were allowed to stay whilst later applications were directed to a lodge under the United Grand Lodge of England. Apart from two original charter members of the Co-Masonry lodges, all members thereafter were women, and thus it has been since. Since that time, the name of the Order is, The Honourable Fraternity of Ancient Masonry: The Order of Women Freemasons.

In time the number of lodges began to grow, as did the need for The Order to have its own temple. Today their temple is at Pembridge Gardens, Bayswater, London. The lodge room is typical of any lodge room you would see around the world, with the Master's Chair in the east and the altar directly in front of the Master. Paneling from floor to ceiling graces the four sides of the room. Large square columns attached to the south and north walls support wooden beams across the lodge. The floor is completely checkered. The Senior and Junior Warden's pedestals are in the appropriate places. The Grand Master's Chair is a Venetian Throne and believed to be from the Palace of a Bishop or Doge. It has a tall back with carved sides, back and top. Arms are beautifully carved, as is the base of the chair, which appears to be solid. There are the suggestions of four legs, but the spaces between them are filled with further panels of wood. All of it is the colour of gold, except the back, which is a dark blue cloth behind the elaborate wooden carved panel. The whole probably stands about 6-7feet high. [See black and white photo Vol. 37, No. 133, May 1966.] The Grand Lodge Room is indeed grand and worthy of the center of Women Freemasonry.

During the first 20 years of its life, 10 lodges were formed - and all in England. In 1928 the Order decided to spread itself beyond the boundaries of England. Lodge Mercury No. 11 was consecrated as a traveling lodge, similar in style to Military lodges in England and Ireland. The purpose was for the Lodge to travel to centers where some women were already known as Masons, to set up a lodge and initiate other women until such time as a sufficient number were ready to form their own lodge. To give you an idea of the extent of the work of Lodge Mercury No. 11, in 1958 a new Lodge Mercury No. 11 1 was formed to cover the northern part of England, whilst Lodge Mercury No. 11 continued its work "south of the River Trent only." [Golden Jubilee Souvenir p.23]

In 1948 Lodge Mercury No. 11 traveled to Scotland, the first time a Lodge under this Order had gone outside the country of England.

During the post war years, traveling became easier, and many women visiting England and having knowledge of the Women Freemasons began to inquire if they could become members while visiting the country. In 1950, a special lodge named Lodge Voyagers No. 40 was formed for those from overseas to be installed as a Mason and to be

connected with the order in England through membership of this lodge while residing in their own country. This concept became so popular that at the consecration of Lodge Voyager in December 1950, 425 members formed its founding membership.

It is the membership of this lodge that spurred women to begin to form small pockets of Women Freemasons about the world, not as Lodges but simply as clubs. Later several would apply to England for their own lodge as did happen in Canada.

Lodge Pioneer Hope No. 72 Toronto (No. 1 in Canada) consecrated in October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1954, London  
Lodge of Accord No. 78 London Ontario (No. 2 in Canada) consecrated in May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1955, Lodge  
Trillium of York No. 79 Toronto (No. 3 in Canada) consecrated May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1955. Lodge Heritage No. 84  
Oshawa (No. 4 in Canada) consecrated May 9<sup>th</sup>, 1956.

And we have to wait for another 4 years before a group of ladies in the city begin to make requests for their own lodge here in Victoria. One can only surmise that ladies in Victoria had been members of Lodge Voyagers No.40 and/or members from a lodge in Ontario and moved to Victoria to create a core group interested in forming their own lodge here in our capital city of British Columbia. This part of the history of Lodge Victoria No. 124 is not available, but it would certainly be worth seeking other sources to find out the names of members of Victoria Lodge who were the sponsors of this lodge. Some can be surmised from the list of early members in *The Gavel*, the official Journal of the order.

What history found of the Lodge Victoria No. 124 has been gleaned from the Grand Lodge Journal, *The Gavel*, - the appendix lists the copies that are at hand, - and some of the other books and papers in the packages given to me. In Vol. 31, No. 118, dated May 1960, the journal reports of the various ways that members of the Grand Lodge of the order, and members of the Lodge Voyagers No. 40, made their way to Victoria to be present at the Consecration of Lodge Victoria. Three brethren (ladies) left England on the S.S. Saxonica, - probably landing in Montreal, - flew to Calgary, then by train to Vancouver, and finally by boat to the Island. Seven Brethren traveled from Ontario by bus leaving Ontario on April 13<sup>th</sup> arriving five days later. (For England this was big news; such traveling time across one country was unheard of.) Three others traveled by train from Ontario and took "equipment" needed for the ceremony. The Grand Master and Deputy Grand Master had flown to Amsterdam and then by polar route to Vancouver. They both had a day to relax and plan and then through morning, afternoon and evening sessions they initiated, passed and raised 29 members. "The group will stay at the Empress for 10 days," reported the Daily Colonist, dated April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1960. As a matter of interest, following the consecration in Victoria, they all packed and set off to Vancouver to initiate, pass and raise another 17 members and Consecrate Vanguard Lodge No. 125, in Vancouver. [*Gavel*, May 1960 p.5] (*Again, it has to be noted that another organization began in Victoria first before organizing a lodge in Vancouver!*)

The Consecration of Lodge Victoria No. 124 occurred on April 26<sup>th</sup>, 1960. Most Worshipful Grand Master, Miss Mary Gordon Muirhead Hope, (photo in the Golden Jubilee souvenir booklet p. 48) and her Deputy, Miss Dorothy Allen Taylor arrived in Victoria to initiate 29 ladies the lodge. In an article from the Daily Colonist dated April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1960, Rt. Wor. Bro. T. D. Robinson, the District Deputy Grand Master of District No. 1 said, "Such an organization could not possibly be recognized by our members." Mrs. Doris Watson, Grand Matron of the Order of the Eastern Star said that she had never heard of the Women Freemasons. "We... are an order of relatives of Freemasons."

In responding to those comments, the Grand Master, Most Worshipful Brother Mary Hope, said, "We are not a subsidiary or auxiliary of masculine Masonry." She then explains that there were at that time 126 lodges throughout the Commonwealth including Canada. There were orders auxiliary to masculine Masonry admitting female relatives of Masons, but then reported that they admit women of good standing, on their own merits and not on those of relatives.

No records are available of the installation of the officers of that first Victoria Lodge. Information of who the Worshipful Master, Treasurer and Secretary can be found in copies of *The Gavel*. In the latter pages of each edition is a list of each lodge identifying the place it meets, the three officers, (Worshipful Master, Treasurer and Secretary in that order) their addresses, and a list of meetings that had been held during the year. Each meeting is a single line description of the main program of the evening. For example:-

- 8<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting, February 10, 1961 3° Bros. Joyce Eleanor Baggaley and Gladys Eleanor Jones.

- 9<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting, March 10, 1961 1<sup>o</sup> Mrs. Jemima D. Florence
- 10<sup>th</sup> Regular Meeting April 14, 1961 2<sup>o</sup> Mrs. Jemima D. Florence

[Gavel: Vol. 32, No. 121.]

Several editions of The Gavel, (printed in March, May and November, and later just in May and November), have the full slate of officers of the lodge listed. [November 1961, May 1962, November 1962, November 1964]

In March 1961 edition, [Gavel, No. 120, Vol.32 p.85] the following entry is made for Lodge Victoria No. 124 (No 5 Canada)

Meeting at the Knights of Pythias Hall 723 Cormorant Street, Victoria BC

W.M. Mrs. E.R. Figg address and phone number

Treas Mrs. J.A. Coates address

Sec Mrs. A. Pohl address

...then a list of meetings for the year including the name of an initiate Mrs. Joyce Eleanor Baggaley, possibly the first initiated that the lodge had after it being consecrated.

A list of Installed Officers appears in Vol. 33, No. 122, dated November 1961.

- |  |            |            |
|--|------------|------------|
| • W. Bro. Harriett M. Finbow   |            | W.M.       |
| • Bro I. R. Randall  | S.W.       |            |
| • Bro D. K. Kitt   | J.W.       |            |
| • Bro E. Little  |            | Chaplain   |
| • Bro L. McBurney  |            | Treasurer  |
| • Bro A. Pohl  |            | Secretar   |
| • Bro M. Leheim  | DofC       |            |
| • Bro. H. McLaren  | S.D.       |            |
| • Bro D. A. Davis  | J.D.       |            |
| • Bro I. R. Van Clieaf   |            | Asst. DofC |
| • Bro. P.B. Bingham  |            | Almoner    |
| • Bro H. Kinloch   | Asst. Sec. |            |
| • Bro. E. Weydert  | I.G.       |            |
| • Bros . O.M. Caughlin, D.E D Dunbar R.D Fuller,<br>F.M. MacDonald F White and B. L. Whitney | Stewarc s  |            |
| • Bro. M. A. Anderson  |            | Tyler      |

a total of 20 ladies.

On the reverse of a small pink ticket [for an entry to an Eastern Star function], is a list of officers for 1963-1964.

WM	Pohl
SW	Davis
JW	Shade
IMP	Randell
Tres	McLauren

(Hilda, Wife of Rt. Wor. Bro. Vern Archer (Malahat # 107)

Sec	Wilson
SD	Archer
JD	Leheim
DoC	Dunbar
Act. DoC	Kitt
Chap	Kinloch
Aim	Bingham
IG	Caughlin
T	Caiman

....and under the list and a line drawn across the card are three further names, Weydert, Coates, Adams.

In another program dated April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1972, we have one copy of the installation program of the lodge - The Installation of Bro. V.J. Marshall as Worshipful Master. Installing Master is W. Bro. Hilda V. Archer, P.A.G.Purs. assisted by W.

Bro. F. Butler (SW) W. Bro. E. Thomas (JW) W. Bro. D. Dunbar, P.A.G. St.B. (Chaplain and Secretary) W. Bro. M. Shade, P.A.G.Purs., (DoC), and W. Bro. M. Burt (IG)

Officers of that year are:

WM	V.T.Marshall
IPM	F. Butler
SW	H. Archer P.A.G.Purs.
JW	E Thomas
Chap	H. Bingham
Tres.	D Shalo
Sec.	H. Marsden
DoC	D. Davis
SD	K. Watson
JD	S. Turtle
Almn.	R. Moffat
IG	W. Hilling (?)
Stew	—
T	M. Shade P.A.G.Purs

On some odd pieces of paper in books, one finds first names of officers and instructions for them on floor work.

In the edition of *The Gavel* dated May 1965 [Gavel: Vol. 36, No. 130] the information about each lodge under the Grand Lodge of Women Freemasons was printed for the last time. Thereafter only the list of lodge names and numbers in alphabetical order were given. At that time, in 1965, the lodge was still meeting in Cormorant Street in the Knights of Pythias Hall. Wor. Bro. Marjory Agnes Shade was Worshipful Master, Bro. Hazel McLauren was Treasurer, and W. Bro. Isabelle Randall, Secretary. I have heard that they met later at the Norway House on Hillside Avenue.

As I have mentioned, the work of the members of Lodge Voyagers No. 40 is probably the initial start of Lodge Victoria No. 124. From what I have read through several editions of *The Gavel*, it is these women who having been initiated in the lodge in England did yeoman service to bring Women Freemasonry to many other countries. Lodge Voyagers was acting similar to a Military Lodge in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century. The difference being that these ladies were not a lodge unto themselves meeting regularly in a lodge hall, but met as groups of women with similar interests. They also traveled for the purpose of assisting Grand Lodge officers to consecrate new lodges by initiating, passing and raising members for a new lodge, and then consecrating the lodge formally.

In the subsequent copies of *The Gavel*, we can gather small snippets of information and make some sense of what this lodge for Women Freemasons was doing. Clearly they acted as a typical lodge as we know it, regular meeting and practices, initiating passing and raising candidates to become members. Rt. Wor. Bro. Vern Archer, Past Master of Malahat lodge No. 107 G.L. of B.C. and Yukon, had informed me that most of the members came from those ladies who had been members of the Order of the Amaranth in Oak Bay.

In the article from the Daily Colonist, dated April 19<sup>th</sup>, 1960, the Grand Master, M. W. Bro. Hope "explained that special charitable work outside of the Order was mainly hospitals and home for the aged. 'Our very special protege is the Florence Nightingale Hospital in London. There are more, but another where we do a lot of work is a convalescent home in the north of England. We try to choose hard-up hospitals.'"

Lodge Victoria No. 124 decided to support similar charitable work by purchasing items for the local special care facilities. The following information can be found from photographs printed in their journal and from the captions written beneath them. Some time in early 1965, the lodge purchased a heat lamp for therapy for the patients of the Gorge Hospital. [Gavel: Vol. 37, No. 131]. In 1969, the lodge presented a cheque for a special shoulder wheel to the George Pearkes Clinic for Handicapped Children. [Gavel: Vol. 41, No. 142, November 1969]. The money had been raised in 1967-1968 but the clinic had not been opened until 1969. So the presentation was delayed for that purpose. Another photo of lamps presented to Gorge Hospital in 1971. It is in the caption of this photo that we read the Gorge Hospital "is the Lodge Victoria's local charity." [Gavel: Vol. 41, No. 146]. A special wheelchair for double amputees, was presented in 1972 [Gavel: Vol. 41, No. 148], a cheque for \$300 for pulsating mattresses, was presented in 1973 [Gavel: Vol. 41, Vol. 150], and \$700 cheque presented to Glendale Hospital in 1975, [Gavel: Vol. 41, No. 153]. For

their efforts, the Lodge Victoria won Charity Sashes - recognition from England for their charitable works. Lodge Victoria was mentioned twice over the years of the lodge's existence.

One of the trends brought from England, was for each lodge to have a unique banner representing the lodge. Lodge Victoria made their banner. The photo was printed in the journal of May 1971 [Gavel: Vol. 41, No. 145]. The photo was black and white but there is a description of the banner on page 13 but under the title Lodge Victoria No. 134(sic) (British Columbia) No. 5 Canada. The design is interesting. It makes every effort to describe the location of the lodge. The banner was dedicated by R. W. Bro. I. Mullen, Asst. G.M. on April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1969. The following is a description of the banner-It is hand embroidered on dark blue satin and white ribbon with gold braid trimming. The dogwood flower is shown in the top left corner and the Maple Leaf in the right top corner. The crown and royal cipher, (VR) reminds us that the city of Victoria took its name from Queen Victoria. The insert is surrounded by a rope [the ends tied together with a reef knot] symbolizing the long naval traditions associated with Victoria. [An old fort bastion represents Fort Victoria.] The Pacific Ocean with the setting sun and the mountains of Vancouver Island in the background, showing we are the furthest point west.

[Gavel: Vol. 41, No. 145, p. 13]

Two columns, J and B are placed left and right side of the banner creating the borders of the design. On the bases of each are a level and a plumb. A tessellated pavement stretches between the columns from the base of the columns towards the centre, where it meets three steps, each smaller than the one it rests on. On the top step is the open bible with the S & C. From the photo it is difficult to see in what degree the S&C are placed. Finally, in the centre on the rod, which holds the banner at the top, is a five-pointed star, with the apex pointing to the heavens. The star is not that of the Eastern Star logo.

In The Gavel dated November 1976, Wor. Bro. Dorothy Dunbar, P.A.G.St.Br., informed London that the reception of the journal is enjoyable as it links Victoria with the rest of the Masons. "We are so far away and now that our Lodge Victoria No. 124 is not working we are scattered and rarely meet. [Gavel: Vol. 43, No. 156] The last reference to Lodge Victoria No. 124 is in the list of lodges under the Order of Women Freemason in November 1979, [Gavel: Vol. 45, No. 162.] Less than 20 years of life, this small group of women played an active role in our community as charitable ambassadors, and gave much enjoyment for themselves in the philosophy of Freemasonry, exactly as we practice it.

Their ritual books are emulation work - Nigerian emulation work. They wore aprons like ours and officers wore collars as we do too. Their dress was usually a long white gown over a black skirt and white blouse. Past Grand Lodge Officers wore dark blue aprons as we do, and with gold trim if a Grand Lodge Officer. Their lodge was identical to ours. They knew all our secret work.

In England the Order also created their own Royal Arch Chapters with a Grand Chapter governing body, Mark Masons Lodges, Cryptic Degrees (Royal and Select Masters), the Order of the Knights of the Red Cross of Babylon, the Royal Order of Scotland, Red Cross of Constantine and the Knights of the Holy Sepulchre and St. John the Evangelist, The Religious Order of the Temple and the Order of Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem, Palestine, Rhodes and Malta, the order of the Rose Croix of H.R.D.M., Grand Elected Knight Kadosh (30° of Scottish Rite), Royal Arch Knight Templar Priest. In all they were exactly like us, except, we are male and they were female. Masonically what we know, they knew. What ritual we learn, they learned too. The degrees we present, they presented also.

We have a copy of the by-laws of Lodge Victoria No. 24. Dated March 1962, it has 9 articles. The first gives time and place of meeting. I have already mentioned the location of their hall. They met on the 4<sup>th</sup> Monday of April (Installation), May, October, November, January, February and March. They had a lodge council consisting of the Master, Immediate Past Master, Wardens, Treasurer, and Secretary. Three formed a quorum.

Rt. Wor. Bro. Archer, in a talk at the Official Visit of the DDGM in November 2001, mentioned that the demise of the lodge was due to a lack of interest in the lodge and no young members being initiated. Their source of new blood was limited if it was to come from the Order of the Amaranth since it itself has been small in recent years.

As an anecdote, the tessellated carpet, which sits in Malahat Lodge No. 107, is a gift from the Lodge Victoria No. 124 to Malahat Lodge. Rt. Wor Bro. Vern Archer probably encouraged the gift., whose wife, Hilda was a Past Master of

the Lodge Victoria. When the lodge folded, the tessellated carpet found a new home. What happened to their other furniture is a mystery, although I know there might be several members of our body who might know. They have their own stories of the Women Freemasons.

I inquired of Bro. John Hamill, of the United Grand Lodge of England, when he was touring our part of Canada in October 2000, if the Order of Women Freemasons was still in existence, and he confirmed that it was. He quickly pointed out that the United Grand Lodge of England does not recognize them officially. It can't under the Landmarks. But he did say that the members of the U.G.L.of.E. do meet socially with the Women Freemasons, and that his Grand Lodge does recognize the tremendous work the women perform for charity under its Grand Lodge.

The Journal of the order, *The Gavel*, has some remarkable articles in them, which could be used for further education at this lodge and any other lodge. At this time. I present the material to the Lodge of Education and Research and trust that what books there are in this collection will be used wisely and identified as from W. Bro. Annette Pohl, via her grandson, the charter Secretary of Lodge Victoria No. 124, Order of Women Freemasons.

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