

IT HAPPENED LONG AGO

**A Few Episodes in the
Annals of our Grand Lodge**

By

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Grand Historian

*"Therefore when we build let it be such work as our
Descendents will thank us for."*

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Twenty-three years ago, in 1940, Grand Lodge created a new office - that of Grand Historian. At the same time it was enacted that a member of Grand Lodge would be elected each year, to carry out the duties assigned to the office. Whether it has been for the good of Grand Lodge, or simply following the line of least resistance, you will have to decide, but the fact remains that over this long period you have continued the same incumbent. This honor is highly appreciated. It has been a wonderful experience and I trust the several topics dealt with, from time to time, have enlarged the minds of the brethren. On this occasion I set sail on a new course - a review of some happenings that have taken place right here in our jurisdiction. This opened up a very wide field and I had difficulty in reaching a stopping place.

I am sure the brethren realize the difficulty, in fact, the impossibility, of pin-pointing the first Freemason to set foot on the soil of Western Canada. We know, from contemporary records, that some of the pioneer fur-traders and explorers who came this way were members of the Craft but we do not regard them as permanent residents. There was no settled community in their day of western exploration.

When it comes to the period of community settlement, which started at the beginning of the Nineteenth Century, there is little doubt who was the pioneer Brother of the Craft. Remember there was no Dominion of Canada nor Province of Manitoba as we have them today. The honor rests with Brother John Palmer Bourke. His original certificate of membership was presented to Grand Lodge, by his descendants, at our Annual Communication in 1960, and a reproduction of this historic document will be found in the printed proceedings for that year.

Brother Bourke was born in Ireland about 1791. He came to Red River Settlement with the second party of Selkirk Settlers in 1812 and was attached to the Colony establishment of Lord Selkirk. Four years after his arrival he had the misfortune to be one of the unfortunates at the Seven Oaks Massacre in 1816. Twenty-one innocents, including Governor Semple, lost their lives. Brother Bourke was wounded in the affair and after the noise of battle had ceased he was taken prisoner by the North West Company officials and sent to Montreal to stand trial. The trial did not take place until 1818 and Brother Bourke was acquitted. However, he was unable to return to Red River until 1819 at which time he entered the service of the Hudson's Bay Company. He remained with the Company until 1823 when he retired from the service and took up his residence in St. James, Manitoba, where he remained for the rest of his life.

During his enforced visit to Montreal he had an interesting experience and it is unfortunate that we cannot give an on-the-spot account of his life in the big city. However, we do know that while sojourning in Montreal, awaiting trial, he was initiated into Freemasonry, in Wellington Perseverance Lodge, No. 20, on the Registry of Lower Canada. This Lodge was under Irish jurisdiction and doubtless his fellow countrymen extended their typical Irish hospitality - to one in distress. This is my deduction and the fact that they accepted him into their Lodge and conferred the degrees surely justifies this conclusion.

Taking a quick glance at his home locality at that time what do we find? There was no Masonic Lodge. The population was scanty and one can readily understand the absence of community organizations when he scans the census reported by Nicholas Garry, in 1821. Here are his figures

Scotch Settlers	221	of all ages.
Meuron Settlers	65	
Canadians	133	

	419	
	154	of whom are females

Members of Freeman at Pembina about 500.

From these figures we can see at a glance why Brother Bourke could not possibly avail of the fellowship of Lodge life. There is no evidence to indicate that he ever disclosed the fact that he was a Freemason even after Northern Light Lodge was instituted in 1864. Regardless of his silence on the subject we do honor him as the first Freemason to take up residence in what became the Province of Manitoba in 1870. We are proud of the fact that his lineal descendants are active in St. James Lodge No. 121, and members of this Grand Lodge.

We have already mentioned Seven Oaks, the scene of the blackest crime ever committed in our fair Province. One of the victims to give his life was John Rogers, a native of Cornwall, England. He was attached to the Selkirk Establishment, not the Hudson's Bay Company. From his writings, which are preserved in the Public Archives of Canada, we can infer that he had been allotted a special assignment apart from the settlement of the incoming families. He makes vague references, from time to time, the language of which suggests to me that he was a member of the Craft, but this is more deduction. I have conducted an extensive research in England but have failed to establish his membership. However, I honestly believe he was indeed a Brother Mason. Let me recite what I have discovered.

In 1809, Lieut. John Rogers conceived and executed a design in inscribed lines and painted in appropriate colors upon a large rock near Pendrift, Cornwall, England. This was known as "The Jubilee Rock," and it is known to this day by the same name. I have in my possession a photograph of this memorial and included in the design are two Masonic emblems, carved on the upper surface, each measuring about 18 inches by 24 inches. At one time there was a brass plate affixed to the rock with some descriptive verses engraved thereon. These had been written by John Rogers. It so happens that through his papers we find snatches of verse written on the spot while he resided here. Our John Rogers came from that part of Cornwall, the family estate being nearby.

Personally, I cannot conceive that a non-Mason would include Masonic emblems on a memorial which was planned, conceived and executed by himself. My conclusion is that he was a Masonic Brother and lost his life at Seven Oaks in 1816.

A very long time had to elapse before organized Freemasonry was established at Red River. The event took place in 1861, the date, November 8th. The Worshipful Master was John Christian Schultz, who, in order to receive the degrees of Freemasonry was obliged to travel by cart. from Fort Garry to St. Paul, Minnesota, in the Fall of 1863. That was the nearest Lodge to his residence at the time. The authority to open Northern Light Lodge was granted by the Grand Lodge of Minnesota. A few days after the Lodge had held its inaugural meeting the brethren welcomed the first visiting brother to come to the pioneer settlement. His arrival did not coincide with a meeting night and no reference is made to it in the minute book. However, we have other sources of information and Captain Sennett was there at the time. Here is the story.

It seems the Hudson's Bay Company ships, sailing into the Bay that year, had met with disaster. The "Prince Arthur," headed for Moose Factory, and the "Prince of Wales," bound for York Factory, had both run aground in the vicinity of Mansfield Island. The former was completely wrecked; the latter had managed to make port with her crew and passengers. There was no alternative but to lay up for the winter. Captain Sennett and two of his officers, rather than hibernate under Arctic conditions, set out for Red River, en route to Great Britain. The Captain had a troublesome journey over the ice between York Factory and Red River. In crossing Lake Winnipeg a crack in the ice took place in the vicinity of the Captain's carriage. Water gushed, very rudely, from the gap, and in an instant the gallant sailor was submerged by his accustomed element. Wet to the skin and with his clothes freezing around him it was with difficulty he reached a hut near Grassy Narrows. Once indoors he vented his indignation at everybody and everything in typical style; and I leave it to you to judge the purity of language that filled the air.

In due course, despite his misfortune, Captain Sennett reached the Settlement at Red River where he was delighted to find a few of his Masonic brethren. It was an auspicious occasion. The Lodge had only opened a few days earlier and hospitality was lavished on the first visiting brother to reach the pioneer community.

A few days later, on St. John's Day, December 27th, 1864, an assembly of the officers and members of Northern Light Lodge, U.D., was held. The public was admitted to witness a formal ceremony of inauguration and after the usual speeches the party adjourned to enjoy dinner and a social time. This was the first time the Festival of St. John, that time-old ceremony of the Craft, was celebrated in this part of Canada. We might take a leaf out of their book and re-interest our Lodges in this important ceremony that has come to us from time immemorial.

I remarked at the outset that this would be a review of past events. You will observe I am not following any particular pattern, chronologically or otherwise. I now turn the page to an interesting feature in Manitoba's history. From the time this Province entered Confederation, in 1870, it was jokingly referred to as "The Postage Stamp Province." And there was good reason for the nickname. If you will take the trouble to examine a map of the Dominion for that period you will quickly see that the boundaries indicated an area right in the middle of the continent just as if a stamp had been affixed. It was diminutive, without doubt. The southern boundary ran along the International Boundary Line; the northern limit lay in the neighbourhood of

Oak Point; to the east our jurisdiction did not reach as far as the Whitemouth river; going westward, Brandon, Rapid City and Souris were outside our boundaries and the town of Gladstone was just within the fringe. These facts may be hard to believe but there you have the story and it takes little imagination to understand why the jokers in the East called it "The Postage Stamp Province." But we have come a long way in the intervening period.

The original boundaries I have mentioned existed until 1881 when we stretched out just to the north of Lake Winnipegosis and west to what is now the Saskatchewan border; eastward we touched the present Ontario border. Once more, in 1912, the boundaries of Manitoba were extended. This time we reached Hudson's Bay. Now this province covers that part of the North American continent which has been under one flag, continuously, longer than any other part of North America. We might keep this undeniable fact in mind when we hear the subject of a national flag being discussed. Keep in mind, also, that Thomas Button arrived at the mouth of the Nelson river in 1612 and spent a winter there. He erected a marker, taking possession of the land for the British crown, and it has remained within the Commonwealth ever since.

In the realm of Freemasonry, the Grand Lodge of Manitoba was formed by three Lodges (Prince Rupert's, Lisgar and Ancient Landmark) who had all been chartered by the Grand Lodge of Canada (in Ontario). This event took place in 1875. The first Lodge to be chartered by the newly created Grand Lodge, outside the Winnipeg area, was opened at Emerson in 1876. Today, with the rush and bustle of modern transportation, we can travel from Winnipeg to Emerson, by highway, in less than two hours. Contrast this with the experience of the Grand Master, William N. Kennedy, and three of his officers when they instituted Emerson Lodge. They left Winnipeg by steamer on the evening of July 28th, 1876, and conducted the ceremony the following day. However, because of the lack of regular transportation, they did not arrive back home until August 1st. It required a lot of time to visit a rural Lodge ninety year ago.

Shortly after the Lodge at Emerson had been instituted the Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Minnesota, James C. Braden, exemplified in a very practical manner the principle of Brotherly Love. The matter of jurisdiction was involved. Because of the lack of Lodge facilities and the remoteness of the locality, Brother Braden issued an open waiver giving residents in his own jurisdiction permission to petition for membership in Emerson Lodge. This privilege was taken advantage of and later, the Grand Master of Dakota Territory extended a similar privilege. The fraternal relationships generated by these simple acts have continued through the years and form a delightful association of brethren.

With jurisdiction extending over such a vast area, comprising thousands of square miles, one wonders how Grand Lodge managed to carry on. True, they were confronted by many problems. Perhaps the most serious occurred in 1878. There arose a group of dissidents who, regardless of Masonic rules and customs, set up what they called "The Grand Lodge of Manitoba." This schismatic Grand Lodge was energetic in several ways. In 1879 they claimed that petitions for Dispensations had been received from Morris, Boyne Settlement (Carman), Winnipeg, and Rockwood

(Stonewall). Warrants were ordered to issue, without any preliminary action, to King Solomon Lodge No. 8, Morris; Oakland Lodge No. 9, Boyne Settlement; Northern Light Lodge No. 10, Winnipeg; and Rockwood Lodge No. 11, Rockwood. Of the four, only King Solomon and Northern Light Lodge came into existence under the schismatic Grand Lodge. One is tempted to remark that these Lodges had a most unusual beginning. They had never had the usual Dispensation with waiting period; warrants were issued in response to their petition and numbers on the Register assigned. All this without having been instituted in the first place. A remarkable situation in the annals of the Craft.

Another unusual occurrence took place in 1878; this time in the legally constituted Grand Lodge of Manitoba. Early in January 1878, a Dispensation was issued to Assiniboine Lodge, Portage la Prairie. At the Annual Communication of Grand Lodge, held in June the same year, a warrant was authorized for Assiniboine Lodge to be numbered "7" on the Register. At a subsequent session of Grand Lodge, the Grand Master reported in these words: ". . . he had appointed the Deputy Grand Master to constitute Assiniboine Lodge No. 7, and install their officers to whom a warrant had been issued by the Grand Lodge yesterday, and that the Deputy Grand Master had reported having performed the duties imposed upon him. It is quite evident that our predecessors interpreted the requirements of the Constitution, not according to ancient usage and custom, but to suit the occasion.

We have already mentioned the vast expanse of territory operating under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Manitoba. One can visualize the wide area from the following items. In 1880 a dispensation was issued to Prince of Wales Lodge meeting at Minnedosa, N.W.T., also, in the same year, to Corinthian Lodge, Rapid City, N.W.T. You will observe neither Lodge was located within the geographical boundaries of Manitoba. Two years later, in 1882, authority was issued to Wascana Lodge to meet at Regina and Moose Jaw Lodge to meet at Moose Jaw. In 1884 we lengthened our sights to the foothills of the Rockies and granted a Dispensation to Bow River Lodge to meet in Calgary. This hurried mental visit across the wide prairies will, I am sure, indicate part of handicaps confronting the officers of your Grand Lodge in the early days. It is amazing that so much successful development took place under the existing conditions before the railroad came our way.

We get a glimpse of these far-off days when the brethren at Gladstone received their warrant. The year is 1880. The Grand Master, John Headley Bell was in charge of the ceremony. We can understand his experience best in what he said himself: "I approach the subject of my visit to this Lodge (Gladstone) with remembrance of mud and water. Mud of such depth and tenacity as is only to be found in Manitoba when it happens to be muddy, and water of coldness which still makes me shiver when I think of it, and which Brother House says `nearly used him up. "

"This Lodge is about one hundred miles from Winnipeg and the trip had to be made by team. At Portage la Prairie, R. Wor. Brother R. McCuaig joined Brother House and myself, Brother Small acting as guide. The latter said repeatedly, the roads were 'not bad' -- we wondered what 'bad' meant - and Brother Small gave us the desired information. But beyond walking some miles, and occasionally helping the horses to

pull the wagon, wet feet and muddy clothes, and wading a creek on our return, the coldness of the water causing Brother House to utter strange sounds, we met with no mishaps." I am sure this trip was long remembered by the participants. Incidentally, it would be interesting to know the elapsed time it took our good brothers to make the journey and then compare it with the time it took our Senior Grand Warden, whose home is in Gladstone, to come here to take his chair at the opening ceremony yesterday.

Let us take a glance at an amusing incident which occurred at the Annual Communication in 1891. The Grand Master was that fine old veteran, James A. Ovas. He had been requested to give approval to a by-law submitted by Stonewall Lodge No. 12. We can visualize that there had been some officers and others in that Lodge who were careless, dilatory and latecomers when the hour to open Lodge arrived. Whatever the cause, the Lodge had passed a by-law which read: "Officers not attending the Lodge at the time fixed by the summons, nor sending a written notice of such absence, nor giving a reason which shall be accepted is satisfactory at the next Lodge meeting, shall be fined as follows: W.M., S.W., J.W., 50 cents; S.D., J.D., Secretary, Treasurer and Tyler, 25 cents; to be added to the Charity Fund."

The decision of the Grand Master in making his dissent was quite emphatic and to the point. "Disallowed on the ground that Masons are bound to the discharge of their duties by motives more powerful than any which could be furnished by the fear of a pecuniary penalty. To allow a breach of these obligations to be satisfied by a money payment would in my mind, be to detract from their solemnity and binding nature."

Two years before that, in 1899, the vexed question of liquor control came under discussion. A motion was formally presented by which it was required to amend the Constitution of Grand Lodge. The suggested clause read: "prohibit intoxicating liquor in the lodge room or in the ante-room appertaining thereto." The motion brought an amendment motion which sought to compel each lodge to pass a by-law covering this prohibition. A third group came up with an amendment to the amendment, and despite the fact that it was contrary to Masonic jurisprudence, they managed to carry the day and so it was decided to "lay the motion on the table for six months."

It might be remarked, in passing, that this subject has cropped up from time to time at our Annual Communications but Grand Lodge has wisely refrained from legislating on matters concerning the social life and habits of its members. There is no evidence that I know to indicate that the brethren in Manitoba have ever conducted their meetings and social activities in any other but an orderly and well disciplined manner.

Retracing our review still further back we are proud of the fact that the Grand Lodge of Manitoba issued a Charter to Pequonga Lodge No. 22, meeting at Rat Portage, Keewatin Territory. This was in 1883. In the course of time that part of Keewatin became Ontario, territorially. A bitter legal controversy ensued and the cause found its way to the Privy Council. The final judgment was that Rat Portage was within the boundary limits of the Province of Ontario. This meant that Pequonga Lodge was obliged to change its allegiance from Manitoba to the Grand Lodge of Canada (in Ontario). For five years, since the Lodge was first opened, a happy and harmonious

relationship had existed. The necessary change was accomplished in a brotherly spirit to the satisfaction of everyone concerned.

At the Annual Communication held in 1887, the following resolution was passed: "Resolved, that the Grand Lodge desires to place on record its high regard for Pequonga Lodge No. 22, and for its efficient discharge of the various duties devolving upon it. The Grand Lodge desires further to express its regret that it is necessary to cede that Lodge to the Grand Lodge of Canada and trusts in its new relations Pequonga Lodge may be, at least, as happy as in the old."

It was further decided that after the details of the transfer had been concluded the Charter and Lodge documents be returned to Pequonga Lodge as historic mementos of its origination in the Grand Lodge of Manitoba.

The passage of time, the emergence of new generations, cause us to forget some of the stalwart brethren who unfurled the banner of Freemasonry in the pioneer days. That seems to be the case as far as Robert Morris is concerned. In his own day he was acknowledged to be one of the outstanding Craftsmen. He served as Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Kentucky, 1838-39; was a prolific writer, his field covering a wide range including Masonic history, jurisprudence, Rituals, Biography, etc. In addition he was a poet of note.

At our Annual Communication held in February, 1888, this gifted brother was an honored guest. He was accorded an official welcome and in making acknowledgment of the tribute paid by our Grand Master, Thomas Clark, he read, and presented to Brother Clark, an original poem. The records tell us that "it was composed and respectfully inscribed to our Grand Master." The title of the poem is "In White Array." There are five verses in all but I will read but two. These, I am sure, will be an appropriate conclusion to our rambling excursion through the archives and records of Grand Lodge.

What are these, in white array,
Gathered round yon Book of God?
While the pictured walls display
Emblems ancient and adored;
Whence are these, whose practised skill
Waits upon the Master's hand,
Prompt to do the Master's will
And obedient to command?

These, from many a land and clime,
These, from many a home, have met;
Age, and Youth, and Middle Time,
Mingle here in concord sweet.
In one solemn, holy vow,
They are bound for others good;
Heart and hand are woven now,
In the world-wide Brotherhood.

These words bring to memory the original decorated walls of the Blue Room at the Masonic Temple in Winnipeg and those who hear these words must recall the happy times spent with our fellow members.

Brethren, my earnest hope is that this brief and rambling review of some of the happenings right in our own Grand Lodge will excite in your minds a deeper appreciation of the debt we owe to the men who broke trail and laid the foundation of what we enjoy today. They certainly "built better than they knew."