

WILLIAM STEWART (1834-21 May 1904)

William Stewart was a soldier's son, born in Halifax, England, in 1834. His father, with his family, on release from military duty, came to Prince Edward Island and settled on a farm near Charlottetown.

In 1858, he became a member of St. John's Lodge in that city. This lodge had been established in 1797 by the Grand Master of Ancient York Masons for the Province of Nova Scotia and its dependencies as No. 26. It continued on the register of the Athol Grand Lodge until 1829, when it received a warrant from the United Grand Lodge of England as No. 833; subsequently on the closing up of the numbers in 1832, it became No. 562, which it held when Mr. Stewart joined it in 1863. It became 397, and on the formation of the Grand Lodge of Prince Edward Island in 1875, it became No. 1 on its register.

In 1860, he was a police constable in New Westminster, and became one of the charter members of Union Lodge. Later he was appointed the Keeper of the Provincial Gaol at Nanaimo and resided in that city until his death on May 21, 1904. He took part in the formation of Nanaimo Lodge in that city, which, like Union Lodge, had an English charter, and used the English ritual. This was not the work used in his mother lodge and he did not like it, so, as soon as the Provincial Grand Lodge was established, he, with others like himself, who were better versed in what they called the "Scotch Work" but was really the American form of ritual, broke away from Nanaimo Lodge and founded Caledonia Lodge. Later the two amalgamated as Ashlar Lodge which used the "American Work."

His zealous attachment to all matters pertaining to the Craft in British Columbia will not soon be forgotten.

Robie L. Reid, *Historical Notes and Biographical Sketches*, Vancouver : Chapman & Warwick, 1935. pp. 14-15.

MORE OF WILLIAM STEWART

Again it was the vitriolic Scot of Caledonia(n) Lodge No. 478 SR who provided a couple of flashes of light on those days, when on February 9, 1871 he wrote to Brother Heisterman that Caledonia Lodge had unanimously approved the resolution for the establishment of a Grand Lodge. But this alone did not entirely satisfy him. He, being a Scotsman, wanted to know if there were any new fees to be paid for a charter from such Grand Lodge; if there would be any increase in the dues to be paid for it; and, above all, would the "Ancient" work (by which was meant the work as still practised in Ashlar Lodge No. 3 BCR) be used and "*none other.*"

Again on March 9, 1871, he wrote Brother Heisterman. Stewart's letter illustrates his feelings towards the English lodges and probably those of others, so far had the circumstances of the time embittered the relations of Freemasons among themselves it read:

“ I hear that Bro. Burnaby (Dist. G.M. England) has summoned his go between for this day Thursday, also the Nanaimo Lodge (English) would not take any action on your communication as Burnaby intends the Board of General Purposes to act for them. We had a discussion in our lodge at our meeting on Monday last in regard to the work, if there is the least change Caledonia will remain as they are now. *I should be better pleased if the English do keep out of it altogether as it may cause discord, etc.*

“ Please let me know by return what answers you have received from Cariboo and Mount Hermon Lodges, also how the English is going to act in the matter.”

His zealous attachment to all matters pertaining to the Craft in British Columbia will long be remembered. It is interesting to note that one of his grandchildren has said that: “What burned up Grandfather was the fact that his parents let him be born in Halifax, England, rather than in his beloved land ‘North of *the* Border’.”

John T. Marshall, *History of Grand Lodge of British Columbia 1871-1970*, Victoria : The Colonist Printers Limited, 1971. p. 92.

CALEDONIA LODGE, NO. 475 S.C.

As we have seen, (p. 43, *et seq.*) a masonic lodge had already been established in the little town of Nanaimo. Its charter was from the Grand Lodge of England, as at the time of its formation the Grand Lodge of Scotland was not known here. The membership was about equally divided between those who had been members of Lodges which used the English ritual, and those who had been members of Lodges which used that form of ritual known as the “American” Ritual, otherwise, the ‘York Rite’, or, in British Columbia as the “Scotch” work. This latter class were uneasy while the English ritual was forced upon them, but they stood it for a time, as they had no option in the matter.

Then came word to the Nanaimo Freemasons that Vancouver Lodge had been formed in Victoria; that it had a charter from the Grand Lodge of Scotland, and that it used the American work, camouflaged under the name of the “Scotch” work. The devotees of that form of ritual then saw their way out. They would form a new Lodge, no matter how small, with a charter from the Grand Lodge of Scotland, and they would use the ritual they loved. Among them, and probably the most energetic, was Bro. William Stewart, of Scottish parentage but of English birth.

He had learned the lessons of the Craft in Prince Edward Island where the family had gone when the father’s term of service in the army had expired, in St. John’s Lodge, now No. 1 on the roll of the Grand Lodge of that Province, which, like all the Lodges of the Maritimes, uses the American ritual, under the label “Scotch”. This form of ritual he considered to be the only one worthy of the Masonic Craft. As a good Freemason (and

there was none better), when he was a resident in New Westminster, he had taken part in the formation of Union Lodge, the only lodge available to him, which had an English charter, and, of course, under RW Bro. Holbrook, there could be no other ritual than the English. When he was transferred to Nanaimo, he found there a masonic lodge, Nanaimo Lodge, No. 1090, ER, using the English ritual, and under the control of some English Freemasons of long standing. He became a member of it, of course, for, in his eyes, an English lodge with an English master was better than none, but a condition of things which should only be countenanced when there was no other option.

When word came from Victoria that a Masonic lodge, Vancouver Lodge, No. 421, S.C. had been founded there, with a charter from the Grand Lodge of Scotland, and that it was using the ritual which had become his second nature in the old Lodge in Charlottetown, he saw the light, and he took measures accordingly, no doubt with the concurrence of the other members of the Lodge who held the same view as to ritual that he did.

He took steps to divide Nanaimo Lodge, by taking from it the devotees of the American work, and establishing a lodge which would agree with his ideas on ritual. The supporters of the English side of the matter thought that Bro. Stewart's ideas should be acted on, as they felt that the members on both sides would be better off if each could use the ritual he preferred. So arrangements were made by which the liabilities as well as assets should be divided equally, though there were few assets and considerably more of the former than of the latter. Each took half. Two petitions were signed by the Lodge under its seal. One was to the Scottish Grand Lodge asking for a charter for a new lodge at Nanaimo which was to be called Caledonia Lodge, and, as that would take considerable time; the other was addressed to RW Bro. Powell, the Provincial Grand Master of the Provincial Grand Lodge which had been established in British Columbia. Both were granted in due course. The dispensation from the Provincial Grand Master was issued without any delay on the part of the Provincial Grand Master and the Caledonia Lodge, UD was instituted on November 18, 1867. Bro. Solomon David Levi, a member of Fidelity Lodge, No. 120, San Francisco (he put it in a Porch Book as 125 by mistake) became W. Master, Bro. Stewart was the first Senior Warden, with Bro. James Harvey, as J.W.; Bro. Arch. Muir (60), Treasurer, and Bro. Arch. McAlister as Secretary. The charter for the Lodge as No. 478, S.C. did not arrive from Scotland until April 5, 1869, when the lodge was duly constituted.

W. Bro. Wm. Stewart, our good Scotsman from Prince Edward Island, made the new lodge as Scottish as possible. Not only did he give the Lodge a Scottish name, and saw to it that it used what he called "the Old Scotch work", but he also had it copy the regalia of Lodge Canongate Kilwinning, No. 2, S.C. This was used later by Ashlar, No. 3, B.C.R. when the two little lodges at last combined to form one Lodge in later days. Ashlar Lodge stuck doggedly to the "Scotch" work, just like Vancouver Lodge. The English Freemasons of standing had gone away, and the remaining members of the lodge were satisfied with the American work.

The consequence of the formation of a second Lodge in Nanaimo was that there were two masonic lodges merely existing, where one lodge would have flourished. So small was Caledonia Lodge in 1859, that when the officers were in their chairs, there were only four Master Masons left, even if they were all present; that is if we do not include the Earl of Dalhousie, the Grand Master Mason of Scotland, who had been made an honorary member, but whose attendance was merely an unexpected possibility.

The effect on Nanaimo Lodge itself is evidenced by the fact that in 1871, after the officers were seated, there were only eight Master Masons, and two Past Masters who might be expected to attend.

It is needless to say that both lodges found it difficult to carry on under these conditions. For such small Lodges to pay the ordinary expenses, rent, light, heat, *etc.* together with the dues to their respective District and Provincial Grand Lodges, was to put a burden on the members which was difficult to bear, for the members were, for the most part, men of small means. In 1873, soon after the Grand Lodge of British Columbia was established, and as soon as W. Bro. Stewart had succeeded in persuading all the brethren to accept the "Scotch" work, the inevitable happened and the two lodges amalgamated, under the name of "Ashlar" Lodge, No. 3, the number of the senior lodge. Since that time the amalgamated lodge, under its new name, has been one of the leading lodges in this jurisdiction.

Robie L. Reid, *Historical Notes and Biographical Sketches*, Vancouver : Chapman & Warwick, 1935. pp. 40-41.