

MASONIC LIFE OF WILLIAM STEWART

William Stewart was initiated into Freemasonry in St. John's Lodge, No. 562, G.R. England, at Charlottetown, P.E.I., on the 21st of September, 1858, and raised to the Master Mason degree on the 2nd November of the same year.

In July, 1859, he attended what he thought was the first gathering of Masons in British North America, now British Columbia, a meeting of the brethren in Victoria to bury Bro. Hazeltine, a marine engineer.

Bro. Stewart was in New Westminster during the winter of 1860, and attended the meeting held in Bro. Holbrook's office, when it was decided to ask the Grand Lodge of England for a charter to open a lodge there. He proposed the name "Reunion" as they had come from different jurisdictions, but after some discussion, the name of "Union" was decided on. Others present at that historic meeting were Dr. Seddall, R.E. Peacock, Geo. Frye of the Customs, and afterwards Master of one of the first Victoria lodges, Constable Hickey, S.D. Levi, store-keeper, after the first Treasurer of Nanaimo Lodge, No. 1090, G.R.E., and the first Master of Caledonia Lodge, No. 478, G.R.S., Nanaimo, and also the brother who moved the resolution to form the Grand Lodge of British Columbia, Bro. Boos, a partner of Levi's. The officers chosen by the brethren were Bro. Holbrook for Master, Bro. Dr. Seddall for Senior Warden, and Bro. Peacock for Junior Warden. The petition was sent to England but the request for a charter was not granted, as Bro. Peacock, a Scottish Mason, was not registered in the books of the Grand Lodge of England. Bro. Stewart said that if they had allowed his name to be inserted they would have got the Charter as he was enrolled a Master Mason in the books of the English Grand Lodge. The brethren in New Westminster sent a second petition to England and had the names of some Victoria brethren on it. In due time a Charter was granted to "Union" Lodge, No. 1201 G.R.E.. Bro. Stewart was in the upper country after the first meeting so just missed being a charter of this, the first lodge on the Mainland, and what was then British Columbia (Vancouver Island being a separate colony).

From the gold-seeking country Bro. Stewart next moved to Nanaimo. He crossed the Gulf in a canoe with Bro. Levi mentioned above. Many a trip he was to make by canoe in the years to follow, and in Masonry he was to be associated with Bro. Levi for some twenty years until the latter moved to New York.

On the 15 May, 1867, Nanaimo Lodge, No. 1090 G.R.E. was instituted at Nanaimo, and Bro. Stewart was the first Junior Warden. From this date he was to take an active part and interest in the Masonry of the district.

In November 1867, Caledonia Lodge was opened under dispensation by the Provincial Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Scotland, and Bro. Stewart was the first Senior Warden. He was Master of Caledonia Lodge in 1870 and 1871.

After the formation of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia, Nanaimo Lodge as No. 3 and Caledonia Lodge as No. 6, were authorized to unite. They opened for the last time as separate lodges on St. John the Evangelist's Day, the 27 December, 1873, finished what business was necessary, and closed in form. Then Bro. Stewart as the Senior Past Master, opened the United Lodges under the name of Ashlar and numbered 3 on the register of Grand Lodge. Following the opening he installed the officers for the year.

He himself was Master of Ashlar Lodge in 1876, 1878, and 1890.

He was the first Master of St. John's Lodge No. 21, in Wellington, B.C., this was in 1893, and was Master for the first two years. St. John's was one of the daughter lodges of Ashlar.

The proceedings of Grand Lodge show that Bro. Stewart was a regular attendant from the beginning of the Grand Lodge at its annual meetings, and taking an active part in the affairs of that body.

He was Junior Grand Warden in 1886.

And in 1892 he was Dist. Deputy Grand Master, but not being in accord with the Grand Master's ruling that one Lodge could take the rejections of another lodge in the same place he resigned.

He was Dist. D.G.M. later in 1899.

Besides a keen interest in Masonry in the Jurisdiction and beyond he was active in the business of his own Lodge. He was keen to see good ritual work and after the special session of Grand Lodge in 1892 at which Ashlar Lodge was made the model for the "Scotch" work, he watched closely with the other Past Masters of the Lodge, to see that the work was well done and no changes were allowed to creep in. He gave gladly of his time to go to other Lodges in the District when he thought he could be of service..

In 1890 the brethren of Ashlar Lodge presented him with a Past Master's Jewel for long continued services. The jewel is unique, as being a combination of the English and Scottish Past Master's Jewels. It was meant to show the origin of Ashlar Lodge from the union of Nanaimo Lodge and Caledonia Lodge, one chartered first by the Grand Lodge of England and the other by the Grand Lodge of England.

In 1896 Bro. Stewart was made an honorary member of Ashlar Lodge of which he been so long a member, and had the happiness to still be for some years.

On May 18th 1904, Bro. Stewart passed away to the Grand Lodge above.

Undated, unsigned typed manuscript in Grand Historian's files.