

Commonwealth Lodge No. 156

A LODGE HISTORY

Address to the Lodge by RW Bro. Pete Davey at the Fiftieth Anniversary Meeting, 16 March 2004

I am one of the four surviving Founder Members of this lodge. The other three being RW Bro. Gerry Churley, originally from Unity Lodge No. 106; VW Bro. Worth Connolly, our perennial organist, who was and still is a member of our mother lodge Southern Cross No. 44, and Bro. Ralph Mander, who was our first chaplain, and who now resides in New Zealand. Bro. Mander was at that time a member of Lodge of Peace No. 322 in New Zealand and had been posted here in Vancouver by the Union Steamship Co. of New Zealand, by whom he was employed. He served as chaplain until his company called him home early in 1955, to take another posting. He was granted an honorary membership at that time. As for myself, I was and still am a member of my mother lodge Britannia No. 73 in Victoria.

In order for me to tell you how this lodge came into being, I must first take you back not 50 years but 98 years, to 1906. At that time there were quite a number of Australians who had made their home here in Vancouver. Some of these had been attracted by the prospects offered by a thriving young city, at a time when much of the most populated area of Australia was suffering from not only a prolonged drought, but also a somewhat depressed economy. Some also came from Alaska and the Yukon after the great Gold Rush of '98.

Some of these Australians had formed a social club named "The Australian Club". Shortly after the formation of this club the freemasons among them decided to form a masonic lodge and in due course, the Grand Lodge of British Columbia granted permission for such a lodge to be instituted, and for it to practice the Australian ritual. Thus Lodge Southern Cross No. 44 was instituted on 15 June 1906. This was the first lodge outside of Australia to practice that ritual.

And now, "fast forward to 1953."

In the years following the end of World War II, Freemasonry experienced an exceptional growth rate, and by 1953 several new lodges had been formed in this jurisdiction. Lodge Southern Cross was one of the lodges that had experienced considerable growth, to the extent that there was practically a line-up of brethren anxious to become more involved by taking an office. In order to speed up the process, several of the brethren got together and decided to explore the possibilities of forming a new lodge to further expand the exposure of Freemasonry as practiced in the Australian ritual.

News of this intention was passed around by word of mouth, and in due course those interested were invited to attend a meeting to be held in what was probably the last place that one would expect such a meeting to take place—a funeral parlor, this venue being graciously offered by Bro. Jack Chapman, a member of Mount Hermon Lodge No. 7.

This first meeting took place at the Chapmen Funeral Home on West Broadway, on Sunday, 1 November 1953, and was attended by 24 interested brethren, 13 of whom were from Lodge Southern Cross and the other 11 from lodges within the jurisdiction, and from Australia and New Zealand.

The meeting was chaired by Bro. James Allison, acting as temporary chairman, and with Bro. Eric West acting as temporary secretary. Both of these brethren being from Lodge Southern Cross.

The results of this meeting being positive, it was decided to move forward with plans for the formation of a new lodge practicing the Australian ritual. Over the course of the next two and half months, four more organizational meetings were held. Three of these were held at the Chapman Funeral Home and the fourth in the banquet room of the Dunbar Masonic Hall at 4470 Dunbar St.

Some of the most important decisions made at these meetings were as follows:

- That the place of meetings would be the Dunbar Masonic Hall at 4470 Dunbar St., at a monthly rental of \$30, which also included the use of the banquet room and all of its equipment,
- That the name of this new lodge would be Commonwealth Lodge,
- That there would be two meetings a month, on the first and third Thursdays, with July and August excepted.

The following dues and fees were established;

Yearly dues	\$ 15
Initiation fee	\$ 125
Charter member fee	\$ 20 (<i>members signing the petition for the new lodge</i>)

The following slate of officers was elected or appointed from a list submitted by a committee;

<i>Worshipful Master</i>	W Bro. Fred Simmons
<i>Immediate Past Master</i>	W Bro. Ernest Beaver
<i>Senior Warden</i>	Bro. James Allinson
<i>Junior Warden</i>	Bro. Sam Cosh
<i>Senior Deacon</i>	Bro. Jim Currie
<i>Junior Deacon</i>	Bro. Eric West
<i>Chaplain</i>	Bro. Ralph Mander
<i>Inner Guard</i>	Bro. Bob Hawthorne
<i>Senior Steward</i>	Bro. Fred Eddy
<i>Junior Steward</i>	Bro. Arthur Bunbury
<i>Outer Guard</i>	Bro. Gerry Churley
<i>Treasurer</i>	Bro. H.J. Young
<i>Secretary</i>	W Bro. Jack Hamilton

The secretary, W Bro. Hamilton advised that he had in his possession a copy of the Australian ritual, dated 1900, that had been brought to Canada by MW Bro. J.J. Miller, and had been used by him at the founding of Lodge Southern Cross at it's founding in 1906. He also advised that he had produced copies of this ritual which were then presented to the officers in order that they could commence practices for the various degrees

The final organizational meeting was held on 10 January 1954, in the banquet room of the Dunbar Masonic Hall. Practices by the officers, on the opening and closing, and the work of the three degrees, had commenced in December and would continue through January, at which time it was felt that we were then ready to submit to an examination by Grand Lodge. The petition to institute this new lodge was therefore drawn up and submitted to the Grand Master.

In due course we were advised that a special meeting would be convened at the Dunbar Masonic Hall on 11 February 1954, at which time the District Deputy Grand Master for District 15,

RW Bro. Leslie Liddell would be in attendance for the purpose of ascertaining the proficiency of the officers in all three degrees. The minutes of that meeting record an attendance of 15 officers, 19 members, 3 visitors, and the District Deputy Grand Master, for a total of 38.

The lodge was opened at 8:00 pm and over the next 3 hours and 50 minutes all three degrees were exemplified, with Bro. Cyril Morgan of Lodge Southern Cross acting as the candidate. A period of refreshment was called after each of the first two degrees.

Prior to the lodge being closed in long form at 11:50 pm, the District Deputy Grand Master expressed his pleasure for the way the proceedings of the evening had been carried out, and that while he wasn't able at that time to express his findings, we would no doubt hear from the Grand Secretary very soon.

Shortly thereafter we were summoned by the Grand Secretary to an emergent meeting to be held at the Dunbar Masonic Hall on 11 March 1954. The purpose of the meeting was the Institution of Commonwealth Lodge Under Dispensation. The minutes of that meeting record an attendance of 118, which include;

- 14 Grand Lodge Officers
- 42 Commonwealth Officers and members
- 57 Visitors from other lodges in BC
- 5 Visitors from outside BC

Aside from the 14 Grand Lodge officers and the 42 Commonwealth officers and members present, the remaining 62 visitors came from twenty other lodges.

On this occasion the lodge was opened in the Master Mason degree by W Bro. Fred Marshall, the Worshipful Master of Lodge Southern Cross, our mother lodge. The DDGM, RW Bro. Leslie Liddell and his retinue of Grand Lodge officers were then received into the lodge, and the DDGM began the institution ceremony.

The dispensation from Grand Lodge was read out by the Grand Secretary, and the DDGM proceeded with the investiture of the officers.

Following the proclamation by the Grand Chaplain, VW Bros. William Menzies, PGM, the DDGM then handed over the gavel of authority to W Bro. Fred Simmons who proceeded with the rest of the business of the evening.

He then called upon the secretary to read out the greetings and felicitations that had been received from lodges "down under", the first being from the Grand Secretary for the state of Victoria. The next three were from lodges bearing the same name as us; Commonwealth Lodge No. 324 in Brisbane, Queensland; Commonwealth Lodge No. 186 in Miraboo North, Victoria; and Commonwealth Lodge No. 404 in Sydney, NSW. The fourth was from the mother lodge of our mother lodge, Lodge Southern Cross No. 44 in Southern Cross, West Australia.

This was followed by several presentations of various items of lodge furnishings, and, after the DDGM had retired, the lodge was closed in long form in the Master Mason degree.

Following the meeting close to 110 brethren sat down, in the dining room, to a sumptuous dinner that had been prepared by a group of wives of some of the brethren.

The next meeting of the lodge was on 18 March, and would be the first regular meeting Under Dispensation. At this meeting it was announced that petitions for initiation had been received from 12 applicants.

From that date to 20 May a total of seven meetings would be held: four emergent and three regular.

During that period the twelve applicants were balloted on and approve. Of these, nine were initiated, seven were passed, and three of these were raised. These first nine were later designated as Charter Members.

Regrettably, time has taken its toll, and there are only two of those original nine still with us, and I am happy to say that both are also here this evening. They are Bro. Bob Allinson, who is the son of our founder Senior Warden, RW Bro. James Allinson, and was the first candidate to be raised to the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason, and W Bro. Tommy Back who later became our ninth Worshipful Master.

The meeting of 20 May would be our last until after the annual Grand Lodge communication in June.

Following this meeting our application for a charter, together with all of our lodge records, was submitted to the Grand Secretary, and we literally ceased to exist until after the Grand lodge annual communication in June.

At the Grand Lodge annual communication that was held on 17-18 June in Victoria, the committee on lodges Under Dispensation submitted a report on eight lodges that were currently U.D. at that time. Their report recommended that four of these be granted warrants, and the remaining four be continued U.D. until the next annual communication. Unfortunately, Commonwealth was not one of those recommended for a warrant, which would have meant that we would have to remain U.D. for another year.

The report was regularly moved and seconded, and in the discussion that followed our Worshipful Master, W Bro. Fred Simmons, rose to speak to the motion, at which time he very eloquently presented reasons why Commonwealth should also be among those being granted a charter. He then moved an amendment to the original motion, to add our name to those being granted a warrant. This was then put to a vote and the result was so overwhelming in favour that a counted vote was not necessary, and our name was then added to those receiving warrants.

Subsequently, we were officially notified that we were granted a warrant of constitution as Commonwealth Lodge No. 156 on the Registry of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia, and that a meeting would be convened by the Grand Master, MW Bro. Karl P. Warwick, at the University Masonic Hall at 4426 West 10th Avenue, at 8:00 pm on Friday, 30 July 1954, for the purpose of Constitution and Consecration. All of our books and records were returned to us at that time.

Incidentally, the date of that meeting coincided with another memorable event taking place that same evening, the opening ceremonies of the 1954 British Empire and Commonwealth Games that were being held at Empire Stadium here in Vancouver that year.

The minutes of that meeting that were recorded by our secretary, W Bro. Jack Hamilton, indicate a total attendance of approximately 140. Following the ceremony of constitution and consecration, at which the officers of Commonwealth were duly installed by the Grand Master and other officers of Grand Lodge, and we were presented with our warrant, the brethren retired to the banquet room where they were treated to sumptuous meal that had again been prepared and served by a group of wives of our brethren.

During the course of these festivities many toasts were proposed and responded to, one of these being the toast proposed by our Bro. Gerry Churley to the lodges "down under" with whom we bear

an affinity, namely, Commonwealth Lodge No. 324 of Brisbane, Queensland, Commonwealth Lodge No. 404 of Sidney, New South Wales, Commonwealth Lodge No. 186 of Miraboo, Victoria, and Lodge Southern Cross No. 44 of Southern Cross, West Australia.

This toast was most eloquently responded to by Bro. Tom Donnet of Burnley Lodge No. 299 in Richmond, in the state of Victoria, who that evening was unofficially representing the other eleven members of the craft in the Australian contingent at the Empire Games who could not be with us that evening but sent their best wishes.

Thus my brothers, after five organizational meetings, on institutional meeting, and eight regular and emergent meetings while under dispensation, and lastly, the meeting at which we received our charter, Commonwealth Lodge No. 156 on the Grand Registry of B.C. and the Yukon, was officially launched.

From that date in 1954 until the spring of 1956 our meeting place would be the Dunbar Masonic Hall at 4470 Dunbar St. Unfortunately, that building was leased from the Imperial Oil Company and in early 1956 we were advised that the lease would not be renewed as they had other plans for the property, and that we would have to find other accommodations. We would however be able to use the facility until our summer recess in June.

Fortunately we were able to obtain accommodation in this new building that was then under construction, but would be ready for us to move into in September, after the summer recess. The only change necessary would be the days of our meetings. Instead of the first and third Thursday of every month, we would have to change to the first and third Tuesday, which presented no problem, and which it remains to be to this day.

This, our 50th Anniversary meeting, is our 547th regular meeting. In between we have held another 416 emergent meetings and countless meetings of the Board of general Purposes. In short brethren, it is the culmination of fifty years of dedicated masonry, and I trust that it is only the beginning of another fifty years or more of the same.

The complete details will be contained in "A History of the First 50 Years" that hopefully will be completed and printed for distribution to the members later this year.