

Events leading up to the formation of

THE GRAND LODGE OF ALBERTA

by

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and

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The first masonic Lodge to be formed in what is now the province of Alberta was organized in Edmonton as Saskatchewan Lodge No. 17 on the register of the Grand Lodge of Manitoba. Their Charter was granted in the year 1882, but was subsequently surrendered about the year 1890.

The next attempt to establish Masonry in Alberta was made in Calgary in May, 1883, when a notice was issued calling upon all Masons to meet in Bro. George Murdock's store, which then stood on the east bank of the Elbow River, nearly opposite the present site of the barracks of the royal Northwest Mounted Police. Only five Masons presented themselves at this meeting, name, Bros. George Murdock, E. Nelson Brown, A. McNeil, George Monilaws and D.C. Robinson. Bros. James Walker and John A. Walker were to have attended, but were unavoidably prevented from being present. At this meeting the unanimous opinion of the brethren present was that the time was not opportune for the formation of a Lodge, as there was no suitable place in which to meet, there was not a sufficient number of Masons to successfully carry on a Lodge, and there was a scarcity of material to work on. After a few months had passed people began to arrive in greater numbers with the advent of the railway. The C.P. Ry. Track was laid through the site of what is now the City of Calgary on the 15th of August, 1883. A few days later the first freight train arrived, bringing with it the printing outfit of the Calgary Herald. In the first issue of that paper a notice was inserted calling upon all Masons interested in the formation of a Masonic Lodge to meet in George Murdock's store, east of the Elbow River. A photograph of this shack is still preserved in the archives of Bow River Lodge No. 1. To the surprise of all, a large number of Masons assembled. R.W. Bro. Dr. N.J. Lindsay, at that time D.D.G.M. of No. 1 (Essex) District, Grand Lodge of Canada and the present Grand Treasurer of Alberta, was elected chairman, and R.W. Bro. George Murdock, Secretary. Meetings were regularly held every Friday night, an attendance register kept and minutes of all proceedings recorded, but no Masonic work was done or examinations made until the petition for a Dispensation was about to be signed.

A petition was forwarded to the Grand Lodge of British Columbia asking for a Dispensation, the greater number of those signing it having lived in that Province. Discouraged at the long wait for a reply, petition was made to the Grand Lodge of Manitoba. A favourable reply was received from both these Grand Lodges at about the same time. However, on account of the easier communication with Manitoba it was decided to accept Dispensation from their Grand Lodge. This Dispensation was obtained about the 1st of January 1884, and the first meeting held on the 6th of January. R.W. Bro. Dr. N.J. Lindsay was elected first Worshipful Master. R.W. Brother Lindsay then attended the meeting of the Grand Lodge of Manitoba, held in Winnipeg on the 11th of February,, and at that meeting was elected Junior Grand Warden, At that meeting a charter was granted to Bow River Lodge, Calgary, numbered 28 on the Register of the Grand Lodge of Manitoba. Bow River is now No. 1 on the Grand Register of Alberta.

At the meeting of the Grand Lodge of Manitoba in 1884, charters were granted to Lodges at Regina, Moosimin and Calgary: these, with the Lodges at Edmonton and Prince Alberta, might legally have formed a Grand Lodge for the Northwest Territories, which comprised of the districts of Saskatchewan, Assiniboia and Alberta, all being under one Territorial Government. As even then it was deemed probably that Provincial formations were not far distant, it was recognized that a Territorial Grand Lodge would be broken up by the division of the territories into provinces. It was accordingly decided to leave in abeyance any desire to form a Grand Lodge.

The three Districts forming the Northwest Territories have now been divided into two provinces, Alberta and Saskatchewan, Assiniboia being absorbed by the other two.

Until the formation of the Grand Lodges of Alberta and Saskatchewan, the Grand Lodge of Manitoba claimed jurisdiction over all the Northwest Territories, although in their first Constitution it was declared that the Grand Lodge was formed in and for the Province of Manitoba; they also provided that in the absence of the Grand Master the officer next in rank should assume the duties of that office.

In 1893 Dr. Goggin, of Winnipeg, was elected Grand Master, and Thomas Tweed, of Medicine Hat (District of Assiniboia) was elected Deputy Grand Master. During the year Dr. Goggin was appointed superintendent of Education for the Northwest Territories and moved to the capital, Regina. This gave rise to a rather peculiar situation; the Grand Master had left the Jurisdiction and the Deputy had been elected from without the province, and to further add to this peculiar condition the Grand Lodge had decided to hold the Communication of 1894 at Banff, Alberta. To meet this difficulty an amendment to the constitution was proposed wherein the Grand Lodge would add the Northwest Territories to its Jurisdiction, thus making it the largest Masonic Jurisdiction in America, and the only Grand Lodge that ever extended its boundaries after being constituted. The proposal was at first opposed, but finally passed.

The political changes which culminated in the division of the old Northwest Territories into the Provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan on the 1st of September 1905, precipitated the division of the Manitoba Grand Lodge; for, though it was long considered by many brethren that the large number of masonic Lodges in the Canadian northwest, and their separation by hundreds of miles from the central authority, necessitated a change, the spirit of loyalty to Manitoba was so strong that nothing short of absolute necessity could change it.

“Provincial Autonomy” was expected in the spring of the year 1905, and accordingly the “Medicine Hat Lodge” No. 31, took the initiative. It was at their request that Bow River No. 28 (the oldest Lodge in Alberta), called a convention in Calgary on the 25th day of May, 1905, the result being the formation of the “Grand Lodge of Alberta” on October 12th, 1905; when, out of eighteen Lodges within the political boundaries, seventeen were represented by 79 delegates, and the change was adopted. The present Grand Secretary, Dr. George Macdonald, was elected first Grand Master.

No better exemplification of the beauties of Masonry can be adduced than the fact that W.G. Scott, the M.W. Grand Master of Manitoba, personally undertook the long journey to Calgary, in order to be present and invest the Grand Master of Alberta with authority over this Western province of Canada, on behalf of the Mother Grand Lodge, to facilitate its offspring on arriving at maturity.

And so came into being the Grand Lodge of Alberta.