

# THE ORIGIN OF FREEMASONRY IN WASHINGTON

by W.B. Dale Boudreau

"No record exists from which we can point with dogmatic certainty to any particular minute as marking the absolute dawn of Masonry on the North Coast". So wrote P.G.M. Wm. H. Upton in 1902, It is unfortunate that many of the early records were not carefully kept, little thought being had of their great interest to future generations. Several of them have been lost or destroyed but such facts as are available I can here relate.

What is now the State of Washington was originally part of "the Oregon country", and as such the first Masonic lodges in our State were originally instituted and labored under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Oregon. In this respect then, we must therefore begin at the beginning.

The far West was opened up by the fur trade in the early nineteenth century when several companies established trading forts along the North Coast waterways. The Oregon Country, which at one time comprised the modern states of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, the western halves of Montana and Wyoming and the lower part of British Columbia to 54.40", was claimed by the United States by virtue of Lewis and Clark's exploration, and also claimed by the British and overseen by the ever-present Hudson Bay Company. The Hudson Bay Company, established in 1670 had been in the area since 1821, so long that it was said the initials H.B.C. was short for "*Here Before Christ*". The Chief Factor appointed by the Company to govern its holdings in the Columbia Watershed was a man well up to the job, Dr. John McLaughlin. McLaughlin was a stern faced man, six foot four with an abundant head of white hair. The natives called him the "Great White Headed Eagle" and he ran the district from Fort Vancouver like a feudal baron. He was a fair man, he kept the peace, his influence was wise but his word was law. In 1828, McLaughlin claimed the area around the Willamette Falls for the Company to utilize the water power to run a saw mill. He surveyed, platted and erected several other buildings in what would eventually become Oregon City and encouraged former trappers to settle nearby.

American settlers began arriving in the Willamette Valley in the 1840's and while McLaughlin was under orders to discourage American settlement he soon realized that he could do little to keep them out. In what is thought might have been an attempt to control that emigration, he began to encourage American settlement to the valley, much to the incensement of the Company. Many American settlers arrived West in near destitution and were generously aided by McLaughlin who sent Hudson Bay boats to the Dalles to ferry endangered emigrants to the Valley, directed them to the best land and sold them goods on credit. In 1845 McLaughlin purchased the Willamette Valley from the Company and retired to Oregon City after he was demoted because he defied the Company's orders concerning the American settlers. Soon the British residents of the area were far outnumbered by the Americans. The heavy American settlement south of the Columbia River made it almost certain that that particular area had been all but lost to her.

Among the early settlers striking out West in these days were several members of the Masonic fraternity. When circumstances introduced them it was only natural that they would long to set up a new altar to the Great Architect of the Universe in their new home. It is not surprising therefore, that we find in the advertising columns of the very first issue of the Oregon City SPECTATOR, of February 5, 1846, the following:

"MASONIC NOTICE"

*"The members of the Masonic Fraternity in Oregon Territory are respectfully requested to meet at the City Hotel, on the 21st inst., to adopt some measures to obtain a Charter for a Lodge.*

February 5, 1846.

Joseph Hull,  
Peter G. Stewart,  
Wm. P. Dougherty."

Four members of the fraternity answered the call, to wit: Fendal C. Cason, Leon A. Smith, Frederick Waymier and Lot Whitcombe. The seven men consulted, prepared and signed a petition addressed to the Grand Lodge of Missouri as William Dougherty was from that State and had been initiated in Platte City Lodge, No. 56.

There was virtually no mail service at that time between Oregon and "the States" and it required several months for communication to reach the nearest settlements in the Mississippi Valley. Bro. Wm. P. Dougherty entrusted the petition to a Hudson Bay Co. messenger Joel Palmer, who afterward became a member of Lafayette Lodge, No. 3. in Oregon. Bro. Dougherty included a letter with the petition which were both addressed to Bro. James G. Spratt, of Platte City, Missouri. Bro. Spratt was an old friend and the financial agent of Dougherty, and at his direction Spratt presented the petition to the Grand Lodge of Missouri. Dougherty later wrote: *"My letter of instruction to Brother Spratt was to pay for the charter out of my own funds, which were then in his possession."*

*"The petition was duly received, was recommended by Platte City Lodge, No. 56,"* in which both Dougherty and Spratt held membership, *"and was graciously granted by the Grand Lodge of Missouri, October 17, 1846."* The resulting charter named Bro. Joseph Hull, Master; Wm. P. Dougherty, S.W.; and Fendal C. Cason, J.W. of Multnomah Lodge No. 84, a name suggested by Bro. Peter Stewart.

Owing to the great distance and the then infrequent departure of emigrant trains for the Northwest, it was several months before an opportunity was found to transmit the charter to Oregon. Brother Spratt entrusted it to Bro. P.B. Cornwall, who stated in a letter to Bro. Thomas M. Reed:

*"The charter was placed in my care at St. Joseph (Missouri), late in the month of December, 1847, or early in January 1848. I had a small party of five persons on the way to California, and we were spending the winter in St. Joseph. In April, 1848, we crossed the Missouri River a little above Council Bluffs and traveled up the south side of the Platte River on our way to California."*

Arriving at Ft. Hall at the divergence of the California and Oregon Trails in August 1848, Bro. Cornwall turned the charter over to Orean and Joseph Kellogg, a father and son on their way to Oregon, -"whom," he relates, "I had tested and found to be Master Masons." Bro. Joseph Kellogg had with him a small cowhide trunk, which he had made in 1834, and in it he placed the charter and carefully conveyed it to Oregon City, delivering it to Bro. Joseph Hull on the 11th of September, 1848, The first Masonic Lodge on the Pacific Slope.

Before this Lodge was duly constituted, Bro. Dougherty, who had been named as Senior Warden in the charter, had removed to the gold country of California. However, fortune did not there serve him well and he did not remain there; and on November 6, 1852, he demitted from *Multnomah Lodge* and resettled at Steilacoom where he was a charter member of that Lodge, then *Steilacoom Lodge No. 8.*, of the Grand Lodge of Oregon, and in which he maintained his connection with it until his death April 15, 1897.

In 1851 two additional Lodges in Oregon Territory; *Willamette Lodge* at Portland and *Lafayette Lodge* in that town, were constituted under charters granted by the Grand Lodge of California, which had been organized April 19, 1850. On September 15, 1851, these three Oregon Territory Lodges formed the Grand Lodge of Oregon with jurisdiction including the present States of Oregon, Washington, Idaho and parts of Western Montana and Wyoming and an undefined border in present British Columbia.

### OLYMPIA LODGE NO. 1

The first lodge chartered in what is now the State of Washington was *Olympia Lodge No. 5.*, June 15, 1853, of the Grand Lodge of Oregon A.F. & A.M. While the "Ancient" usage was retained in Washington Territory even as late as 1865, this jurisdiction has now abandoned the usage. On June 13, 1853, Grand Master Berryman Jennings of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Oregon, remarked in his annual address:

"On the 25th of November last (1852) I granted a dispensation to sundry brethren residing at Olympia, Puget Sound, to open a Lodge, under the name of Olympia Lodge"...and naming Thornton F. McElroy Worshipful Master. Benjamin F. Yantis as Senior Warden, and Michael T. Simmons, Junior Warden. *Olympia Lodge No. 5., U.D.* held its first meeting on Dec. 11, 1852 in a two story wooden building on Second Street in Olympia where a commemorative plaque marks the site.

The first meeting under charter was held Saturday evening, July 2, 1853, and Grand Secretary T. M. Reed infers that the ceremony of "constituting" the Lodge occurred upon that occasion. The record, he records, is silent upon the subject; but he mentions the election of the following officers that evening: T.F. McElroy, W.M.; B.F. Yantis, S.W.; M.T. Simmons, J.W.; B. Close, Secretary; Ira ward, Treasurer; and Smith Hays, Tyler. Brother McElroy continued as Master of Olympia Lodge until it ceased to be a constituent of the Grand Lodge of Oregon Territory. Grand Secretary Reed some years later commented: "Olympia Lodge has from the date of its organization maintained a healthy degree of prosperity, and has done a large amount of work in the conferring of degrees and in the reception of members, although its

membership, at any given period, has rarely exceeded 100 Master Masons on the official role. It being the first Lodge established north of the Columbia River, very many of those who at one time were members, either through initiation or affiliation, have identified themselves with other lodges, removed permanently from its jurisdiction, or have passed over 'the silent river of death'."

## **STEILACOOM LODGE NO. 2**

*Steilacoom Lodge No. 8.*, chartered June 13, 1854, of the Grand Lodge of Oregon Territory lost its charter and all its records in a fire in 1868 making it difficult to recount the early history of this lodge in the entirety desired. From the minutes of Olympia Lodge January 21, 1854, we know that "the petition of Bro. W.H. Wallace, Lafayette Balch and others" addressed to the Grand Lodge of Oregon asking for a dispensation to open a lodge at Steilacoom was received and recommended by Olympia Lodge. In June of 1854, acting Grand Master J.C. Ainsworth reported that he had granted that dispensation. This would then suppose the date would have been subsequent to the untimely death of Grand Master John Elliot, on February 1, 1854; but unfortunately Bro. Ainsworth gave no names attached to the petition short of Bro. Wallace, and the records of the Grand Lodge are also negligent as at that time the Grand Lodge of Oregon did not print a list of the members of her lodges. In 1878 Bro. Dougherty, who had as was mentioned resettled in Steilacoom and was a charter member of that lodge, reported that Bro. Wallace had given him, from memory, the names of the petitioners as follows: William H. Wallace, Wm. A. Slaughter, James M. Bachelder, Lafayette Balch, John M. Chapman, Wm. P. Dougherty and Leon Smith.

The brethren of Steilacoom Lodge determined early on to construct a lodge hall. In June, 1860, invitations were addressed to the other lodges to be present at the laying of the cornerstone and the "new Masonic Hall" which was dedicated February 22, 1861. Seven years later, on May 10, 1868, a fire burned this lodge hall and it was replaced with a new brick building. The lodge stood next to Fort Steilacoom for several years which would possibly indicate that many of these brethren were soldiers in the U.S. army. In 1855, William H. Wallace became Captain of a company of volunteers raised in Pierce County for service in the Indian War of 1855-1856. That war arose after the killing, in September, 1855, of special Indian agent Andrew J. Bolon, a member of Olympia Lodge, while traveling on a mission of peace from The Dalles toward Atahnam. Another member of Olympia Lodge, Lieut. James McAllister, and two members of Steilacoom Lodge, Lt. A Benton Moses and Lt. Wm. A. Slaughter, were also among the slain. The death of Slaughter, in particular, was felt throughout the Northwest. His body was borne to Steilacoom, where he had a family, and buried with full Masonic and military honors. The Grand Lodge of Oregon and the Legislature of Washington each paid tribute to his memory: "No officer of the army ever came to Fort Steilacoom who so endeared himself to the citizens of the Territory as did this gallant and enterprising gentleman." Kitsap County and the town of Auburn, Washington originally bore his name.

### GRAND MOUND LODGE NO. 3

The minutes of Olympia Lodge record that at the February 7th stated meeting 1857, a petition for dispensation was addressed to the Grand Lodge of Oregon to open a Lodge of Masons at Grand Mound Prairie, Washington Territory and subscribed by; Bros. Rev. Charles Byles, Jason Byles, J. Axtell, W.B. Newman, E.B. Baker, B.C. Armstrong, B.F. Yantis and R.L. Doyle. That petition for dispensation was addressed at Grand Lodge in Salem, Oregon, June 8, 1857 by Grand Master A.M. Belt. The dispensation was issued by his successor, Grand Master Benjamin Stark; and, in the absence of any evidence whatsoever, either in the Lodge or the Grand Lodge minutes, as to its exact date, we have to give credence to the estimate of Bro. Thomas M. Reed as "about September 1, 1857,"- though the Grand Secretary charged himself with the \$50.00 fee on "Nov., 1857" and yet another date of July 13, 1858 is recorded in the book "Not Made With Hands".

Grand Mound was emphatically a rural Lodge, in fact at the time no village existed in the area but only scattered farms. Situated near the southern line of what is now Thurston County, along the interstate 5 highway, is a curious natural phenomenon, an extensive, partly wooded prairie of several square miles and at the time called "Mound Prairie" owing to the fact that "throughout a great portion of its surface is... a constant succession of regular mounds of uniform shape and similar size. Circular in shape, appearing, to a casual observer, perhaps fifty feet in diameter at their bases and six or eight feet in height, the slope of one mound has melted into the level of the prairie for but a few yards before another similar mound arises. And so on, for miles." Amid this prairie of common mounds a singular "sugar-loafed prominence, some hundred feet in height gave the name of 'Grand' Mound to the Lodge...". Standing alone on the prairie was erected a two story wooden building, one to four miles distant in any direction of human habitation. It had been called a school-house, and as such the lower floor served for many years, but the minutes of the Lodge indicate that it was not a school-house occupied in part by a Masonic Lodge; but erected by the members of Grand Mound Lodge and their neighbors as a Masonic building, the lower floor devoted to education and public worship, while the Lodge occupied the upper floor. "The Masonic Hall" was situated in the central part of the prairie, the better to be accessible to as many of the surrounding settlers -who were , almost without an exception, farmers and stockmen."

The Lodge, having received a charter granted by the Grand Lodge of Oregon at its communication held at Astoria, July 13, 1858, formed a Masonic procession and marched into the school room connected with the Lodge building where the officers elect were duly installed, Bro, Thorton F. McElroy officiating as Deputy Grand Master, and Bro. T.M. Reed officiating as Grand Marshall. The Grand Lodge of Washington was instituted Dec. 15, 1858 and Bro. Thornton F. McElroy installed as Grand Master.

Since the founding of the Lodge there had been little if any increase of population in the vicinity, from which to add to the membership and assure the prosperity of the Lodge. "Some of the original as well as of the later members had either died or

removed to other localities or forfeited their membership. Meetings of the Lodge were ill attended and sometimes entirely omitted." In 1861, for instance, two blank pages separated the minutes of August 24th with no meeting recorded until April, 1862. Participation improved after a few years and then dropped again and as most members resided in or conveniently near Tumwater, in December, 1866, the officers of the Lodge applied to Grand Master T.M. Reed for permission to remove the Lodge to Tumwater. Tumwater, however, was within the territorial jurisdiction of Olympia Lodge, in fact, just three miles from its hall and when Olympia Lodge was requested to recommend the change, it refused. But Grand Master Reed, "feeling an earnest desire for the life and future prosperity of Grand Mound Lodge," issued a dispensation January 14, 1867, granting Grand Mound Lodge permission to convene as a Lodge at Tumwater, but with the express provision and condition that the Lodge in all matters, except location, should be exclusively confined to its original jurisdiction and in no respect trespass upon the territorial jurisdiction of *Olympia Lodge No.1*.

*Grand Mound Lodge, No.3.*, held its first meeting "at their Hall in Tum Water" Jan. 20, 1867, according to the secretary's minutes. While *Olympia Lodge No.1*. might have acquiesced the arrangement with Grand Mound Lodge, at the very next meeting of Grand Mound Lodge, the members received a petition, and in March initiated, a candidate -a Brother who later would become Grand Master- and who not only resided within the jurisdiction of Olympia Lodge but who had rejected the man for membership in 1865. Unfortunately, the vote fanned the flame which ultimately destroyed Grand Mound Lodge and the next year, after a particularly late stated meeting, a resolution was offered and unanimously passed;.

"To the Most Worshipful Grand [] of the Territory of Washington:

At a regular communication the following resolution was passed:-"Resolved, That Grand Mound [], No.3., A.F.& A.M., hereby surrenders her Charter, By-Laws, Books and all property belonging to the [] to the Most Worshipful Grand [] of the Territory of Washington.

Tum Water, W. T., September 19th, 1868, A.L. 5868."

The Grand Lodge accepted the surrender of Grand Mound Lodge, regretfully extinguishing the altar fire of one of the "four old lodges" to which the Grand Lodge of Washington owed its existence. The action, however, was both necessary and wise and even beneficial. By surrendering its charter, Grand Mound Lodge strengthened other Lodges and the Fraternity in general.

#### **WASHINGTON LODGE NO. 4**

On the north bank of the Columbia River, seven miles from the mouth of the Willamette, the Hudson Bay Company established its Oregon headquarters in 1824, and the United States founded Fort Vancouver in 1850. Settlers soon built a small town and in 1857 brethren of the Craft applied to the Grand Lodge of Oregon for

authority to open a lodge in Vancouver. Neither the date of the petition nor the names of the petitioners survives history, but the date is recorded again in "Not Made With Hands" as July 13, 1858, and the principal officers named were Brothers Lewis Van Fleet, W. M.; Ira Patterson, S. W.; and Levi Farnsworth, J. W. of the eight charter members.

*Washington Lodge No. 22.* of the Grand Lodge of Oregon unlike the other three pioneer lodges of Washington Territory, did not immediately undertake to build a lodge-room, but in January 1858, took a five year lease for the exclusive use of one from Bro. Gay Hayden. This Lodge had some usages also not prevailing in the other Lodges of the Territory. There was, for instance, until 1863, a separate ballot for each degree; as well as opening and closing through all three degrees. When a petition was presented, a vote was taken as to whether it should be "received", and if favorable the candidate was "sent for". During the eight months that Washington Lodge was under dispensation, it initiated and passed twenty candidates and raised eleven, as well as rejecting five applications.

The formation of the Grand Lodge of Washington Territory was achieved in the minds of Bro. Thornton F. McElroy, the Master of Olympia Lodge, and the undaunted efforts of a young Brother, Thomas Milburne Reed. Bro. Reed has often been credited with the chief role in the establishment of the Grand Lodge. He was well versed in Masonic government and undoubtedly the leading Masonic scholar in Washington Territory. Reed received the three degrees of Masonry in Holloway Lodge, No. 153 in Kentucky in 1847, and served that lodge as Secretary that same year. He came out to California in 1849 by way of the Isthmus arriving in San Francisco on July 26th. He was at that time 23 years old, trying his hand at gold mining for two years before taking on a position as a merchant and agent for Wells, Fargo & Company in Georgetown, California. He was Worshipful Master of *Georgetown Lodge No. 25* in 1853-56 and of *Acacia Lodge, No. 92 (U.D.)* 1855-57. In 1857 he removed to Olympia, W.T. where he was again appointed agent of Wells, Fargo & Company, as well working a variety of positions from merchant to Deputy Collector for the United States Internal Revenue.

Pursuing their desire to form a Grand Lodge the two Past Masters made several visits to the lodges at Steilacoom and Grand Mound to gather support for their project. They also sought and gained the support of Judge O. B. McFadden, a Past Master of Washington Lodge at Vancouver, who was at the time Chief Justice of Washington Territory. The "four old lodges" agreed to convene on Dec. 6. 1858 at the Masonic Temple at Olympia to consider "the propriety of establishing a Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons" for Washington Territory. This convention, chaired by W.B. Charles Byles of Grand Mound and Bro. T.M. Reed as Secretary, met for several days examining credentials, appointing officers and electing the first officers of the Grand Lodge.

The four lodges of our new Grand Lodge had a combined membership of only 113 Master Masons, from a territorial population not far from 9000 settlers. It is interesting that these days some lodges bemoan low memberships and few petitions and seem resigned to that condition. We could take a lesson from these few pioneer brothers who on Dec. 8, 1858, with more

inspiration than members, established the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Washington.