



History of Freemasonry – Part 1

(Submitted by James R. Brisbin)



This is the first of a three part series on Freemasonry leading up to an Open House at the Masonic Lodge building on McConnell Street behind the OPP Station here in Exeter. The Open house will be on Saturday June 3rd from 10-4 and the public will be most welcome to drop in and learn more about the Masonic Institution in Exeter.

2017 marks the 300th anniversary of Freemasonry in its contemporary form. No one knows with certainty how or when the Masonic Fraternity was formed. A widely accepted theory among Masonic scholars is that it arose from the stonemasons' guilds during the Middle Ages. The language and symbols used in the fraternity's rituals come from this era. The oldest document that makes reference to Masons is the "Regius Poem", printed about 1390, which was a copy of an earlier work. In 1717, four lodges in London formed the first Grand Lodge of England, and records from that point on are more complete.

Within thirty years, the fraternity had spread throughout Europe and North America. Freemasonry became very popular in Canada. Sir John A. MacDonald our first Prime Minister was a Mason. Tim Horton (hockey and franchise fame) was a Mason. Bill Davis (Premier of Ontario) was a Mason. John Molson (brewer) was a Mason. Dr. James Naismith (basketball creator) was a Mason. Glenn Ford (Canadian actor) was a Mason. Sir Sanford Fleming (engineer and inventor – standard time) was a Mason. John Diefenbaker (Prime Minister) was a Mason. Timothy Eaton (business man) was a Mason. Tommy Douglas (CCF and NDP leader) was a Mason. General Sir Arthur Currie (Vimy Ridge) was a Mason. Chief Tecumseh Brown Eagle (War of 1812) was a Mason. The list goes on and on, not to mention the hundreds of thousands of other men who have joined the craft in Canada over the last 300 years.

Over the centuries, Freemasonry has developed into a worldwide fraternity emphasizing personal study, self-improvement, and social betterment via individual involvement and philanthropy. During the late 1700s it was one of the organizations most responsible for spreading the ideals of the Enlightenment: the dignity of man and the liberty of the individual, the right of all persons to worship as they choose, the formation of democratic governments, and the importance of public education. Masons supported the first public schools in both Europe and North America.

During the 1800s and early 1900s, Freemasonry grew dramatically. At that time, governments had provided no social "safety net". The Masonic tradition of founding orphanages, homes for widows, and homes for the aged provided the only security many people knew.

Today in North America, the Masonic Fraternity continues this tradition by giving almost \$1.5 million each day to causes that range from operating children's hospitals, providing treatment for childhood language disorders, treating eye diseases, funding medical research, contributing to local community service, and providing care to Masons and their families at Masonic Homes.

The over 3.2 million Masons worldwide continue to help men and women face the problems of the 21st century by building bridges of brotherhood and instilling in the hearts of men ideals for a better tomorrow.

(With files provided by the Masonic Service Association of North America)

Next Week – Freemasonry in the Province of Ontario