

# Footmarks Across Our Border

By Walter C. McDonald

P.G.M.. Manitoba

*We are indebted to Most Worshipful Brother McDonald for providing this bit of "International Flavor" which so effectively illustrates the "Mystic Tie" of the Masonic Brotherhood.*

This title is suggested by the poet Longfellow. In the imagery of verse, he conjures up a picture of Great Men leaving them their mark, an inspiration to others for guidance and posterity. One of the pleasures of life is to stand at some window of remembrance of Golden Yesterdays and intimate associations. When the right window is found and the right time chosen then the unfolding view becomes a vista of intervisitations beyond our political boundaries, for Freemasonry transcends all such limitations. There is brought into perspective the full meaning, a greater understanding between men and the beautiful lifelong friendships made. With this thought in mind, there is recalled a bit of the past in vignette form. It is realized that one cannot relate all of the experiences involving our two nations, extending as they do from "sea to sea," yet in great measure those experiences may be repeated many times, in other locations and under different circumstances.

Freemasonry entered into what is now the Province of Manitoba by way of the Grand Lodge of Minnesota in the year 1864. That Grand Lodge was then in its infancy. The territory under its jurisdiction was in the process of pioneer growth. The original warrant was granted to members of the Craft to open and work Northern Light Lodge, U.D., to be located at Fort Pembina in Dakota Territory. The founding members were a part of a contingent of cavalry sent to Fort Pembina by the Government of the United States under command of Major Hatch, a Freemason. Serious trouble was thought to be developing with a tribe of the Sioux Indians that had recently moved across the international border into what is now the Province of Manitoba, then known as The Red River Settlement. After the formation of the Lodge, a small group of men from the settlement, desirous of becoming Masons, journeyed to Fort Pembina with the purposes of being admitted into the Lodge instituted there.

It was later that same year when the anticipated trouble with the Indians had been resolved that the cavalry contingent was ordered to be withdrawn from the Fort. The Grand Lodge of

Minnesota was then petitioned by the Worshipful Master of Pembina to continue the Warrant of Authority, but to transfer the location to Fort Garry (now Winnipeg) at The Red River Settlement in Rupert's Land by the same name of Northern Light Lodge, U.D. The request was granted on May 24, 1864. The Lodge at Fort Garry was never Constituted. The Riel Rebellion in that area threw life into such turmoil that lodge meetings could not be held. In 1870 the Grand Lodge of Minnesota revoked the Warrant of Authority granted to Northern Light Lodge, U.D., at Fort Garry.

The revival of Freemasonry in Manitoba took place in 1870 with the Grand Lodge of Canada, in the Province of Ontario, issuing a Dispensation to nine petitioners for the formation of Prince Rupert's Lodge, U.D. The Lodge was constituted in July, 1871.

This brief recital of facts is believed necessary to explain the connecting links between the Grand Lodges of Minnesota, North Dakota and Manitoba. For many years the relationship between these three were as frail as gossamer threads but later were to develop into ties as strong as hoops of steel.

With the influx of new settlers into this hitherto undeveloped land, there was created a great interest in Freemasonry. The result was an ever-growing Masonic membership in Manitoba. It is logical that Concordant Bodies of Freemasonry should also parallel that growth. It was on April 10, 1880 that the Winnipeg Lodge of Perfection, Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry was instituted. In June of that year, Albert Pike, 33 ø, Sovereign Grand Commander of the Southern Jurisdiction of the United States, visited Winnipeg under dispensation granted by The Supreme Council, 33 ø, of Canada. On June 24th, Brother Pike delivered a masterly address to the Masons of Manitoba under the auspices of the Grand Lodge. The title of his address was "SYMBOLS OF FREEMASONRY." The visit of such an eminent Freemason left an imprint not eradicated to this day.

The Grand Lodge of North Dakota, recognizing the close historical ties existing between their Grand Lodge and the Grand Lodges of Minnesota and Manitoba, planned a celebration, international in character, to commemorate the earlier founding of the Lodge at Fort Pembina, almost fifty years before. The event was held on June 21, 1921. A bronze plate mounted on a granite marker had been erected bearing this inscription: –

"On this site once stood the building in which the first regularly organized Masonic Lodge within the present State of North Dakota originally met.

"The first meeting was held in January, 1864, and for several months the Lodge was active. A number of candidates from Fort Garry (now Winnipeg) were made Masons.

"In 1869 this Lodge practically ceased to be ... It was in existence long enough to lay the foundation of Masonry, not only in North Dakota, but also in the Canadian Northland, more particularly the Province of Manitoba." To commemorate the event, engraved invitations were sent to every English-speaking Grand Lodge in the World, and to distinguished Freemasons in

Canada and the United States. Grand Masters M.W. Brother Frederick E. Jenkins of Minnesota; M.W. Brother George N. Jackson of Manitoba; and M.W. Brother Allen V. Haig of North Dakota were present. Masons on both sides of "our border" numbering between 1,500 and 2,000 took part in the ceremonial parade.

That evening the Grand Lodge of North Dakota provided a sumptuous banquet to the officers of the Grand Lodge of Manitoba and other distinguished guests. Greetings were tendered to the guests by M.W. Brother Walter L. Stockwell, P.G.M. and Grand Secretary.

It happened in the year 1943 that a small group of Grand Lodge officers from the Grand Lodge of Minnesota spent a day visiting in Winnipeg. They were entertained at a luncheon presided over by R.W. Brother Benjamin C. Parker, P.G.M. and a small group of officers of the Grand Lodge of Manitoba. As the guests were about to depart the question was asked for the reason the Manitoba Brethren had never attended the Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge of Minnesota. "Because, Sir, we have never been invited," was the reply. The following year that invitation was given. Six members of the Grand Lodge of Manitoba paid a fraternal visit to the Annual Communication held in St. Paul, Minnesota. They were honored by being invited to conduct the Ceremony of Installation of the newly elected Grand Lodge officers. Those six members from Manitoba were outstanding Freemasons. Although almost forty years have passed the memory of M.W. Brother Benjamin C. Parker; M.W. Brother William Douglas; M.W. Brother Harry Woods; M.W. Brother George R. Calvert; and M.W. Brother John T. Boys is still fresh in the minds of many Brethren from Minnesota and North Dakota.

It was on the occasion of that visit to Minnesota that another event took place which was the beginning of a fraternal association of great significance which continues to this day.

Worshipful Brother Emmet Christissen of St. Paul invited those from Manitoba and M. W. Brother Charles M. Pollock, P.G.M. of North Dakota as guests to a luncheon. Year after year following that initial gesture of good will as shown by him there would be added another guest or two until those who had been favored with the luncheon invitation suggested that the expense should be shared by those attending from Manitoba and North Dakota. The guests from Minnesota, North Dakota and Manitoba gradually grew in number to approximately thirty. The spirit of friendship shown at each annual gathering was delightful. It was the brief occasion when old friendships were renewed and lasting new friendships made. At each such gathering, however, there was observed a more sobering and serious note. At each reunion there would be times when one or two of the old familiar faces, because of death, were not present. There is recalled one such occurrence when the Chairman, conducting the memorial tribute to those whose chair was vacant, quoted G. K. Cherton in this tribute to the memory of Charles Dickens:

"We have a long way to travel before we get back to what Dickens meant ... But this at least is part of what he meant: that comradeship and serious joy are not interludes in our travel; but that rather our travels are interludes in comradeship and joy, which through God shall endure forever. The inn does not point to the road; the road points to the inn. And all roads point at last

to an ultimate inn, where we shall meet Dickens and all his characters; and when we drink again it shall be from the great flagons in the tavern at the end of the world."

During the almost forty years in which those luncheons have been held annually in St. Paul, many outstanding Freemasons from the three Grand Lodges have traveled to that "Ultimate Inn." Their memory is enshrined and revered by those who knew them. Over the years others of recognized international stature have been privileged to be present as guests. Among those were M.W. Brother Carl H. Claudy, W. Brother John D. Cunningham, and M.W. Brother Conrad Hahn. The last year he attended before his death, Brother Hahn made the comment--"Nowhere on the North American continent does such a group of Masonic Brethren meet where the warmth of International Fellowship is so evident as it is here."

Mention has been made of the address given to the Manitoba Masons by Brother Albert Pike in 1880. One hundred years later, on September 9, 1980, M.W. Brother Stanley F. Maxwell, 33 ø, Sovereign Grand Commander of the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction of the United States, addressed a large Masonic gathering in Winnipeg, held under the auspices of the Manitoba Chapter of the Quatuor Coronati Lodge of Research. The title of his address was "Freemasonry, a Foundation for a Free Society." Truly it may be said that the footmarks of such great leaders do leave an imprint that can never be erased. Their message is so timely it will continue to serve as a mark for others to emulate.

The names of those men from Minnesota, North Dakota and Manitoba who are no longer with us, have laid a firm foundation for friendship so evident in past years. It is for those who are still living to further cultivate that tradition and in their own right leave "footprints" to inspire all others who follow.

"Three thousand miles of Border line; Nor fort nor armed host,  
On all this frontier neighborground, From East to Western coast.  
A living proof to all the world of faith in Brotherhood.

(Guy Willis Bilslund)

*STB - August 1981*