

History of Beach Lodge

Early History is Recalled

A chronicled history of Beach Lodge #639 would not be possible if it were not dependent on two very important factors: the many reminiscences and remembrances of our early brethren who related them to us verbally, and the great amount of written material available to scholars of Beach lodge history.

Our early brethren kept an enviable record of lodge events from (and prior to) our inception as a lodge. Thankfully this splendid habit continues to this day.

By the year year 2000 we could not have a friendly chat about our past with early or founding brethren. It was indeed possible in 1950 when we celebrated our 25th year. It was even possible in 1975 when we achieved the milestone of 50 years as a duly constituted lodge.

But not now.

To the Grand Lodge above, gone before us, are the great chroniclers of our past. These assiduous and wise brethren sensed, way back then, that we would enjoy a long and fruitful history.

And so we have.

And what a legacy they left us! It is entirely possible "to get the feel" of what transpired on a week-to-week meeting-by-meeting basis from our inception in 1925 to the present. The well-documented minute books of the Lodge and the many items of correspondence faithfully preserved are invaluable. The diaries and journals of the other Lodge committees are a virtual kaleidoscope of cares, directions and concerns.

The privileged reader delving into our records finds a pathos that would reduce us to tears one minute and elate us the next. You feel the anguish of their disappointments and the pride of their accomplishments. We feel no shame offering several letters lifted from our records verbatim.

Our aim in this research and compilation of this rendering was to bring to the reader an intimate and personal account of our day-to-day historical happenstance. The date Dec. 8, 1925, is an unforgettable beginning to a great journey that has taken us to the onset of the second millennium. As time is measured, it may be the blink of the all-seeing eye, yet in our time, a date impressed indelibly on our collective Masonic conscience.

Our early brethren bequeathed their testaments to us, allowing us to peer inside the man, the mason and their era. The underlying message they conveyed was that, foremost, they were conscientious Masons. They truly believed in the cornerstone of Freemasonry and that is charity. Though, at times, the Lodge treasury contained barely enough to meet the obligations thrust upon them, they helped others less fortunate.

The financial statements from early days often show time and again, the importance of benevolence and charity. Such as it was at Beach Lodge so very long ago. Ah, the memory of it all. Oh

to be there when it all happened - to bear witness to these early events!

One such event was attending a milestone divine service in the autumn of 1927. From our founding in 1925, Beach Lodge brethren attended divine service in goodly numbers. For nearly two years we held the services in the same church that had become our temporary home, but on this occasion, we walked from our brand new temple (roughly a mile) to our original home in the church. What a sight to behold! In full regalia did our brethren in procession two by two make their way to church. To a young boy witnessing this grand march it must have left an indelible impression. All that glitter! The "jingling and jangling" of all those silvery ornaments!

The march, the retinue, may not have been as solemn as you might suppose for animated conversation was taking place amongst our brethren as they made their way to their place of worship. Once there, idle conversation ceased for at this place, at this time, there was much to give thanks for. Not the least being the edifice that we had very recently erected to the glory of Freemasonry.

All attending gave their sincere and humble thanks. How unique our situation was in that our first Worshipful Master was the Reverend T.N. Lowe and our original home was a church.

Before any discussions can take place on the history and beginnings of Beach Lodge, a brief history of the inhabitants and their locale must be touched on. Without a grasp of the one, we cannot appreciate the other.

The Beach, as it is affectionately known, is a four mile sand-bar. It is an isthmus separating Hamilton from Burlington, and just as surely, joining them together. This strip of sand was the result of the last ice age, some 10 to 11 thousand years ago. Archaeologists know that it had been settled very early on. And little wonder - the surrounding waters teemed with fish and wildfowl. We are told that the native tribes who inhabited these shores guarded it jealously.

The arrival of our European ancestors in the mid to late 1700's coincided with the land grant given to the great warrior and celebrated Mason Thayendanegea (better known as Chief Joseph Brant). He brought stability to the area through his wise leadership. He was an educated man and the many letters sent to England and throughout Canada were simply signed "Joseph Brant. the Beach." Brant built his house overlooking Burlington Heights beginning in 1798. He moved into his home in 1802 and was called to the Grand Lodge above in 1807.

Thus, we know that Freemasonry already had its influence way back then.

Approaching the latter years of the 1800s we find the Beach undergoing a transformation. The wealthy elite of Hamilton and the surrounding districts "discovered" the Beach. Here, right on the doorstep was a summer playground wafted by gentle breezes from the lake or bay. Early photographs show row upon row of stately Victorian summer homes owned by distinguished merchants and Masons. Hives of activity during the summer months, they were boarded up in the fall awaiting the following spring and summer.

With the coming of the Great War and the period thereafter, a housing crisis developed. The arrival of the Second World War meant that a lot of these fine old summer homes were converted and winterized. Hamilton being the main "forge and arsenal" in Canada's war effort, and with the labour force it attracted, created a housing crisis. Gone were the pristine waters and wonderful fresh air.

In spite of these setback, the Beach developed into a lively and active community. We were a truly independent and autonomous community the folks on the Beach resenting any meddling in their affairs by other political bodies.

Growing up "down there" couldn't help but make you independent. We did it our way. As a community we no doubt raised the hackles of the powers that be in some quarters. So be it. They Beach, long ignored, now became a sought after appendage to Wentworth, Saltfleet, and the City of Hamilton.

We spurned them all.

The Beach relied on a group of administrators known as the Burlington Beach Commission (BBC). They were given the authority to conduct they day-to-day affairs on the Beach. For all of the services required, whatever they may have been, we looked only to "The Commission." Several Beach Lodge brethren were in the employ of the Commission after our formation creating an intimate relationship with the BBC.

By this time, Dear Reader, you can see why we loved out independence. We were born to it. The Beach became a vital and interesting community. A great number of Masons dwelt along the Beach. They made their way to the Lodges in Hamilton and Burlington in spite of the limitations of travel. Early summons from a variety of Lodges showed time and again that Beach brethren took an active part in the running of these Lodges.

So how could a group of Masons living on the Beach hope to form their own Lodge?

Quite simple.

By sheer dint of will, that's how.

Grand Lodge, at that time, may have had misgivings as to our formation as a Lodge. Many city Lodges withheld their blessings unaware of our determination. Perhaps they felt that forming a Lodge in "no-mans-land" might affect them adversely. All manner of obstacle were put in our path. In written form we can still read misgivings and negative responses but we changed our minds. Also available from other lodges are many letters giving us their unqualified support and assistance. We will ever remember them.

As is known, Beach Lodge did not own a temple at their inception as a Lodge on Dec. 8, 1925. Months prior to this date, our brethren went about the task of finding a suitable building to conduct meetings. A number of locations were considered, and after much discussion it was decided to meet in St. Andrew's Church.

St. Andrew's By-the-Lake Anglican Church building still exists. It has undergone conversion to a private residence, but it still retains most of its original architectural character. To a "Beachite" it was the "Church at Station 4", and fulfilled an important community role. Back in the mid-20s it was blessed with a large congregation and offered up its facilities to a wide variety of community pursuits.

Our early brethren had taken note of its large seating area and so decided to approach church officials to discuss the possibility of renting the premises for use as a Masonic Lodge room. Both groups were eager to accommodate the other. Many of our Lodge brethren and their families were

parishioners at St. Andrew's and so the decision to locate there, however temporarily, was relatively problem-free.

Permissions was granted by the church for us to rent their facilities as our Lodge room. One of the conditions was that at the close of our meetings we had to immediately transform the room back into its use as a church.

Can you imagine the work involved? Fortunately, the oak pews were not fastened to the floor so were moved to the sides for lodge seating. And, of course, our Lodge furnishings had to be put in place only to be stored away at Lodge closing.

Prior to the printing of Beach Lodge's 75th Anniversary History Book, many meetings were held in the homes of those comprising the committee. Differing opinions were expressed as to how this book should go together and what direction it should take. Beach Lodge brethren being Beach lodge brethren did not always conform to the exact standards of the day. The old Beach produced its share of "characters and mavericks." It couldn't be any other way, living in an independent community like The Beach, In any case, living down there allowed you to be different.

From the Anniversary Committee came the edict - no sugar coating of events even though they are controversial. It was further decided to lay the book out in chronological order so that our history would unfold year by year from our beginning right up to the present. This is easier said than done as events that follow will show.

Minute books on the proceedings of our Lodge contain the bulk of information required to help put a comprehensive history together. Along with Committee of General Purposes Books, finance and advisory documents and Lodge summonses, they give us a clear picture of events.

It goes without saying that our senior brethren have willingly handed down information invaluable to this story.

We are indebted.

Gleaning information from minute books can be a long and tedious chore. Every now and again you come upon a tidbit of information that you wish the recording secretary had elaborated upon. At times his written comments don't give you all you need. You get exasperated trying to "flesh out the story." By consulting other written information at your disposal, sometimes you get lucky and other times you run into a stone wall, I relate to you just such an example:

Beach Lodge minute book #3 spans the dates May, 1942, all the way through September, 1953. At the regular meeting on December 18, 1944, the minute book tells us that our Lodge conducted the "burning of the mortgage ceremony" and that our founding secretary, Very Wor. Bro. Richard D. Berry gave a very detailed address on the history and formation of Beach Lodge.

This was given on the 19th anniversary of our formation.

I spent considerable time pondering the contents of this address because it was given by our original secretary. Who better to give his impressions on our beginnings than he who was there. Try as I might, I would never be able to inform you of the contents of this address. So I gave up trying.

And then it happened! One night, before turning in, I thought I would organize the mess on my desk. I picked up a stack of Lodge registers and a five page letter, written in pencil, fell out on the floor. What I had dreamed of finding I found.

What was it doing in a Lodge register book? I asked myself.

I have given up questioning these matters and accept my good fortune. I believe this letter to be one of Beach Lodge's most precious and priceless jewels.

Wor. Bro. Richard Dowbiggin Berry was secretary of Beach Lodge from its inception in 1925 through until 1931. Wor. Bro. Berry was a meticulous record keeper. His good sense, his incisive wit and his feelings of compassion for his brethren literally springs from the minute books.

His works and words are a joy to read! (Of course this letter threw a monkey wrench into our aim of keeping matters in a neat chronological order. However, it is so pertinent to this book that we would not lift excerpts from this letter to "flesh out" our history.

We further agreed that the letter would be printed in its entirety, leaving out not one word.

Read on.

The present is the product of the past. It is the past. All those events that have transpired, all those influences and forces that have reacted upon one another have been integrated so as to make the present likewise the forces in operation today will make Tomorrow.

It is well, therefore, occasionally to observe the situation so that one may be properly informed as to what has happened since the formation of Beach Lodge. I will take you back to 1924, the year that a Lodge at the Beach almost came into being. The officers of that Lodge would have been R. D. Berry, Worshipful Master, W. Turner, Senior Warden, D. Laming, Junior Warden, Rt. Worshipful Brother W. F. Montague, Secretary, Rt. Worshipful Bro. J. Dixon, Treasurer. However, wise counsel prevailed and it was dropped. It was deeply imbedded in my mind that the brethren on the Beach could and would support the formation of a Lodge and when the Rev. T. N. Lowe was of the same opinion, we got busy and found out that what material was available as officers. Accordingly, on the 2nd Tuesday in November a meeting was called at the Beach Church. The Chairman of this meeting was Wor. Bro. W. D. Waines.

It was decided to form a Masonic lodge on the Beach and permission was granted to use the Beach Church as a Lodge room. The next item on the program was to get permission from the nearest lodges, Burlington and Stoney Creek. Wor. Bro. Pilling and myself (R. D. Berry) were appointed to visit Burlington Lodge and get their permission, which I am proud to say after discussion that our plea was granted. The Constitution calls for 50% of the nearest lodge, so we did not have to consult Stoney Creek.

I might add that we had considerable opposition from the city lodges and our gracious thanks goes to the late Rt. Wor. Bro. W. F. Montague and R. Wor. Bro. Dixon and Very Wor. Bro. Dan Evans or the faith they had in the brethren on the Beach. At a meeting at the Scottish Rite, the Grand Master asked these brethren for advice on the formation of a lodge on the Beach and on this advice in my opinion rested the fate of Beach Lodge. The following brethren were appointed at this meeting:

- *W.M. - Wor Bro. Rev. T. N. Lowe*
- *I.P.M. - Wor. Bro. J. Pilling*
- *S.W. - Bro. John Hunter*
- *J.W. - Bro. Harvey Revell*
- *Chap. - Bro. Cliff Revell*
- *Trsr. - Bro. M. D. Warner*
- *Sec. - Wor. Bro. R. D. Berry*
- *S.D. - Bro. Harry Statham*
- *J.D. - Bro. Fred Willis*
- *I.G. - Bro. H. S. Marshall*
- *Tyler - Bro. Leslie Hulbert*
- *S.S. - Bro. E. Barclay*
- *J.S. - Bro. Jim McDougall*

The next item on the programme was finances and \$5 was collected from the Brethren present as a charter fee. I collected \$200.00 before the lodge was instituted. The next item was furniture and again I want to thank Rt. Wor. Bro. Jim Unser for his able assistance.

After a visit to Jim we were able to make a respectable appearance at the Institution of the lodge which was called on Dec. 8, 1925 under instruction from R. Wor. Bro. Smith Waite, D.D.G.M. Hamilton District B for the purpose of granting dispensation to meet as a Masonic Lodge. This meeting was called to order at 7:45 p.m. by R. W. Bro. Smith Waite in the east who called on the following Brethren to fill the chairs,

- *S.W. - V. Wor. Bro. Herb Temple*
- *J.W. - V. Wor. Bro. Dave Shearer*
- *Chap. - R. Wor. Bro. F. A. Ratshaw*
- *DofC. - R. Wor. Bro. John Forth*
- *Trsr. - Wor. Bro. F. J. Brown*
- *Sec. - Wor. Bro. E. F. Martin*
- *S.D. - Wor. Bro. W. D. Connor*
- *Tyler - Wor. Bro. Geo. Britton*

The DDGM requested the officers and members of Beach Lodge to proceed to the Altar and after his address requested Wor. Bro. T.N. Lowe to proceed to the east and the officers to occupy their respective chairs. Thus came into being Beach Lodge UD (Under Dispensation), Wor. Bro. Tim Ross presented the Lodge with a pair of Deacon Wands on behalf of the Hindoo Koosh Grotto and lodge closed in harmony at 8:55 p.m. The JW invited all the Brethren present to a social hour at Depew Hotel. The Brethren sitting down to a venison supper donated by the J.W., Bro. Harvey Revell. Wor. Bro. M.D. Warner donated the ice cream.

The JW and his committee had a real job on their hands in the early days as the church had to be transformed into a lodge room and put back as a church before the stewards left. He also had to

supply refreshments without cost to the lodge. He would call up certain members and ask them for pies or cakes, or mashed potatoes or cold meats. In this way we kept a refreshment account down to practically nil.

At the regular meeting of January 12, 1926, a building committee was appointed consisting of Wor. Bro. M. Warner, Bros. Beecraft, Smith, Munger, Christian and Fernlund. We had great ideas, which certainly took shape fast. This initiative I think gave us a lot of friends. At this meeting, Acacia Lodge presented us with a full set regalia and Al Grafton two suits for candidates and Bro. George Britton, a Tyler's Sword, and as time went on our friends showered us with gifts for the Lodge, which today is one of the most complete lodges in the district.

The building committee turned out to be a very live bunch of brethren. At the regular meeting on march 9th, they brought a motion before the lodge to purchase lots at Station 6 for \$2,500.00 - \$250.00 cash and \$250.00 June 1, 1926 - balance at 5% interest - which was carried unanimously.

At the regular meeting, May 11, 1926, the secretary Wor. Bro. R. D. Berry informed the lodge that he had received the agreement of sale of the property at Station 6 from the treasurer, Wor. Bro. M. D. Warner in which the names of Wor. Bro. M. D. Warner, Bro. John Hunter, and Bro. Ed Christian as appointed by the Wor. Master as trustees.

At the regular meeting, Sept. 14, 1926, the building committee reported as follows:

Clause 1 - *resolve that we build a hall 30 feet by 70 feet.*

Clause 2 - *that members be approached to sell \$20.00 bonds bearing 6% interest yearly. Redeemable at 20 years up to the sum of \$2,000.00 to be used to cover purchase of lots and help in the furnishing of new hall. It was moved by Bro. Hec. Marshall, seconded by Harvey Revell that the Finance Committee be authorized to issue bonds to the amount of \$2,000.00. Carried.*

It was moved by Bro. Tom Grayson, seconded by Jim McDougall, that the building committee be empowered to go ahead with the building, all plans to be approved by the finance committee. Carried. Wor. Bro. Matt Warner and myself decided that we would wait and see how the bonds sold before we bought and if there were any left we would take them. We both got left out - they were all sold. An emergent meeting was called May 12, 1927, for the purpose of authorizing the trustees to secure a loan of \$5,500.00 from William Kenneth Lees, Barrister at law. Motion was put and carried. At the regular meeting June 24, 1927, the Hindoo Koosh Grotto wished to present the cornerstone for the new Masonic Temple, which was accepted.

Grand Lodge called a special meeting on Saturday afternoon June 25th, 1927 at 3:30 p.m. in the school house for the purpose of laying the cornerstone of our new Masonic Temple under the able leadership of R. W. Bro. W. M. Logan.

- *Grand Master - R. W. Bro. W. M. Logan*
- *D.D.G.M. - R. W. Bro. Mark Senn*
- *G.S.W. - R. W. Bro. Dargavel*
- *G.J.W. - R. W. Bro. Harris*
- *G. Chap. - W. Bro. T. N. Lowe*
- *G.S.D. - W. Bro. Bill Turner*
- *G.J.D. - W. Bro. Alex Robinson*
- *G. Pur. - W. Bro. Dick Berry*
- *G. Ryler - Bro. Alex Mathews*
- *G. Org. - Bro. John hunter*
- *Asst. G. Org. - Bro. Harvery Revell*
- *G. Sec - V. W. Bro. Dan Evans*
- *Asst. G. Sec. - W. Bro. Attig*
- *D. of C. - R. W. Bro. Smith Waite*
- *Asst. D. of C. - V. W. Bro. Spoule*
- *G. Std. Bearer - W. Bro. McCormic*
- *G. Std. Bearer - W. Bro. Jim Piling*
- *G. Sup. Of Works - R. W. Bro. John Forth*
- *Contractor - Bro. Oliver Beecraft*
- *G. Steward - W. Bro. Bill Turner*
- *G. Steward - W. Bro. McPherson*
- *G. Steward - Bro. Ed Christian*

The ceremony was put on in full form. All the grand lodge officers marching through a long line of Beach lodge brethren from the schoolhouse to the Northeast corner of the building. R. W. Bro. W. M. Logan as Grand master declared the stone well and truly laid according to ancient custom. The ceremony ended by singing the national anthem. I will always remember this occasion...a violent thunderstorm broke over the Beach, the rain came down in torrents and we all made for the schoolhouse. On September 1st, 1927, I received a communication from the Grand Secretary as follows.

Dear Sir and Wor. Bro., by direction of the M. W. the Grand Master I beg to notify you that an especial communication of Grand Lodge will be held at Hamilton Beach on Tuesday evening the 13th day of September, 1927 at 7:30 p.m. for the purpose of constituting, consecrating and dedicating Beach Lodge No. 639. Grand Lodge will assemble in the lodge room at Station 6.

*Yours Fraternally,
Rt. Wor. W. M. Logan Grad Sec.
(addressed to Wor. Bro. R. D. Berry)*

This ceremony was under the able leadership of D.G.M. R. W. Bro. R. B. Dargavel, assisted by 28 past masters with full Masonic ritual, and all the brethren expressed their admiration at the fine Masonic monument Beach Lodge had erected to Masonry.

On December 27, 1927, John Hunter was installed as W. Master by W. Bro. R. Clarke. On October 11 1932, I received a letter from the grand secretary granting concurrent jurisdiction with the city lodges. On December 13, 1932, W. Bro. Hec Marshall was elected secretary of Beach Lodge. On April 12, 1938, we were favoured by a visit - Most W. Bro. Dunlop. This visit and the John Hunter night are the two outstanding meetings ever held in Beach Lodge. W. Bro. H. S. Marshall was elected D.D.G.M. Hamilton Masonic District "B" at the regular communication held in July, 1941.

In conclusion brethren, we have a lot to be thankful for as tonight is the climax of a dream come true, we burn our mortgage and we thank all our friends who have been so good to us and to you worshipful sir for making this night possible. To the young officers we have set an example for you to copy and I wish to extend our sincere thanks to R. W. Bro. Hec Marshall for his services as secretary. Probably you do not know, but Beach Lodge has never paid its secretary. I started and Hec carried on. Would that there were more men fine enough of soul, large enough of sympathy, sweet enough of spirit to make masonry the fine organization it is.

After this inspiring address, R. W. Bro. E. G. Dixon, representing Grand Lodge, placed a lighted candle to the mortgage and placed it in the receptacle. During the burning, that beautiful hymn *O God Our Help In Ages Past* was sung. This part of the ceremony was followed by a prayer of thanksgiving. The memorial service that followed that prayer was a reading of all those called to the Grand Lodge above. The *Last Post* was played, the flags being lowered and the *Reveille*. The members then sang *Nearer My God to Thee*. Lodge closed in harmony at 10:00 p.m.

The end of the Second World War was not far off and this was the appointed evening for our members to offer up their heartfelt feelings to our fellow comrades and brethren. The ceremony was given with great sensitivity and compassion, and as an elder brother once told me some time ago, many in attendance on that special evening openly wept.