

Masons celebrate 300 years in Canada this year

By Bill Rea

Freemasonry is marking 300 years in Canada, and two local halls marked the occasion with open houses recently.

Freemasonry is a world-wide fraternity dedicated to brotherhood of man under the fatherhood of a supreme being. It is not a religious organization, although members are encouraged to be devoted to their individual faiths.

There have been many famous men throughout the years who were masons, including George Washington, Clark Gable, John Wayne, Don Rickles, etc. Prominent Canadians who were masons included former prime ministers John A. Macdonald, John Abbott, Mackenzie Bowell, Robert Borden, R.B. Bennett and John Diefenbaker, as well as the likes of Harold Ballard, Tim Horton and Gordon Sinclair.

Peel Lodge 468 opened in 1904, and the current hall on Old Church Road was opened in 1957.

The True Blue Lodge 98 in Bolton was started around 1875, according to Past Worshipful Master Derek Paterson, and it used to occupy land where the branch of CIBC is currently located.

The first lodge was known as the Western Light Masonic Lodge, which started meeting at the Masonic Arms Inn, where CIBC is. A banner dating from the 1840s still hangs in the True Blue hall. The Lodge was founded in 1858 by William Graham. Paterson said his great-great-great-grandsons are still active in the Lodge, adding he was James Dick's great-great-grandfather.

‘It was a way for the common farmer to meet with the business man,’ Paterson commented, referring to how Masons became established in their communities. He said it was a way for the men from different backgrounds to exchange ideas.

The open house was actually held the day after the new Worshipful Master Alistair Jolly took over his new position, which will last for the next Masonic year, which runs from September to June., closing down in the summer.

‘Every installed Master tries to make their own unique spin,’ Jolly commented, adding he's hoping to focus on Masonic history and education.

He also said anyone interested in joining the Lodge should contact him at alistairjolly@hotmail.com

Paterson said Freemasonry was founded in London in 1717.

‘Through the spread of empire, we ended up with a Masonic Lodge here in Bolton,’ he said.

He also said the site of the current hall on Nancy Street was acquired for \$1, and the brethren raised the money in the mid-1870s to build the current hall. He also said the Bolton hall is quite ornate, by lodge standards.

The building of the hall included some in-kind contributions. A Mason was passing through town at the time and needed place to stay. Another Mason put him up, and in return, the traveller paid for the wallpaper which is still inside.

There is a Bible on the altar in the hall. And while religion is part of Freemasonry, Paterson said it's not stressed.

‘We are a secular organization,’ he said, adding they don't discuss things like religion or politics in the hall because that could be divisive. ‘Being Masons is what unites us. That's our common bond.’

‘In here, we're all on the same level,’ he added. ‘Nobody has a higher rank than anybody else.’



Past Worshipful Master Derek Paterson points to the banner dating from the 1840s, which is painted on both sides.



This portrait of William Graham still hangs in the True Blue Lodge in Bolton.



Those on hand for the recent open house at Peel Lodge 468 were past Worshipful Masters Bob Presant and Eric Wenger, Right Worshipful Past Deputy Grand Master Manoj Dave, Worshipful Master for the Mount Moriah Lodge Gerry Taylor and Toronto West District Secretary and Past Worshipful Master John Lloyd. Photo by Bill Rea