

## Birth and Development of Freemasonry in Otago

*by W.M.*

The Otago Early Settlers' Association is interested in the history of the introduction and development of every organization now well established in Otago; and since many early settlers were Freemasons as are many of their descendants, including the writer, the following short account of the introduction and growth of Freemasonry into New Zealand, but more particularly into Otago, has been written.

The earliest published reference to Freemasonry in New Zealand occurs in the "New Zealand Herald and Auckland Gazette" of July 31st, 1841, where mention is made of the presence of Freemasons in regalia at the ceremonial laying of the foundation stone of St. Paul's Church in Auckland; but the first Masonic Lodges in New Zealand were not established till the following year, these being Lodge Ara in Auckland by the Grand Lodge of Ireland, and the New Zealand Pacific Lodge in Wellington by the United Grand Lodge of England.

The first Masonic Lodge in the South Island was formed by the French Settlers at Akaroa in 1843, but this had a very ephemeral existence. A gathering of English Freemasons took place in a store in Lyttelton in 1851, but the first chartered Lodges in Canterbury were Lodge Unanimity of Lyttelton and Lodge St. Augustine in Christchurch in 1852, both under the authority of the Grand Lodge of England.

As a matter of general information it may be noted that every genuine Masonic Lodge works under the authority of a charter received from one of the hundred Grand Lodges that control Freemasonry in the various countries of the world. Each Lodge has a name and a number. Until 1890 when the Grand Lodge of New Zealand came into being, all Lodges in New Zealand were sponsored by the Grand Lodges of England, Scotland or Ireland. In that year, or shortly afterwards, most of the 150 Lodges then established transferred their allegiance to the Grand Lodge of New Zealand though a few continued to work under the original charter. Thus there are in New Zealand to-day 500 Masonic Lodges with 50,000 members, representing four constitutions, but all working in complete harmony.

A gathering of Freemasons is known to have met in Dunedin in 1852, doubtless to discuss the formation of a Masonic Lodge in Dunedin. However, no such Lodge eventuated till 1860, when the newly-formed Lodge of Otago, No. 844, E.C., received its charter from London; and it is of some considerable interest that the first Wor. Master of this first Lodge in Otago was the same George Smith who had been the first Master of the New Zealand Pacific Lodge in Wellington probably the premier Lodge in New Zealand, eighteen years previously. He is thus entitled to be regarded as the father of Freemasonry in New Zealand.

The following year saw the introduction of Scottish Freemasonry into New Zealand when Lodge Otago Kilwinning, No. 417, S.C., was established in Dunedin. The Grand Lodge of Ireland did not establish a Lodge in Otago until 1866 when the Shamrock Lodge, No. 448, I.C., came into being. Of 21 Irish Lodges originally established in New Zealand only four to-day belong to the Irish Constitution.

The early years of the 1860's formed a prosperous period in Dunedin and Otago following the discovery of gold in Central Otago, hundreds of immigrants arriving from overseas during the "gold rush". Many of these were or became Freemasons and new Lodges were established not only in Dunedin but elsewhere in Otago. After a few years several Lodges ceased to function due to the departure of members at the close of the gold-mining boom. Such were the Hiram Lodge, No. 1127, E.C., Lodge St. Clair, No. 450, S.C., and Lodge Shamrock, No. 448, I.C.

This Lodge St. Clair was not named after the Dunedin suburb of that name, but after the St. Clairs of Rosslyn, who were the hereditary Grand Masters in Scotland prior to the constitution of the Grand Lodge of Scotland in 1735. Though Lodge St. Clair survived for only a few years, it numbered among its members several well-known Dunedin citizens including John Mitchell, of Ferguson and Mitchell (Stationers), Richard Oliver, M.P. and later a member of the Legislative Council; A. M. Hopper, secretary of the Benevolent Institution; and John Bathgate, a well-known solicitor and a member of the Legislative Council.

The original Lodge of Hiram, No. 1227, E.C., ceased to function about 1869 while the present Lodge Hiram, No. 2008, E.C., before it joined the G.L. of New Zealand was

constituted in the Commercial Hotel at Green Island and later moved to Hillside Road. Among the members of the earlier Lodge were Maurice Joel (Red Lion Brewery), Solomon de Beer (D. Benjamin and Co.), Henry S. Fish who served two terms as Mayor of Dunedin and two terms as a Member of the House of Representatives, Henry Wise (Wise's Directory), Richard Oliver (Minister of Public Works and later Post-Master General), Henry Driver (Member of the first City Council) after whom Drivers Road is named, and William Mills (gunsmith) the uncle of Sir James Mills.

The Shamrock Lodge is said to have had a short and somewhat stormy career. It opened in March 1866, and ceased five years later when its membership had dropped to fifteen. It is known to have been represented at the ceremony of laying the foundation stone of the second Lodge building in Moray Place East. Amongst its members were Charles Reeves (Mayor of Dunedin in 1876-7), Julius Hyman (watchmaker and jeweller), William Gregg (coffee and spice merchant), and Thomas S. Graham, a partner in the firm of Bing, Harris and Co. His wife was a daughter of Charles Kettle, who was the original surveyor of Dunedin. When Lodge St. Patrick was established in 1881 Thomas Graham became its first Wor. Master.

Other Masonic Lodges established in Dunedin prior to 1870 included Lodge St. Andrew, No. 432, S.C., ; Lodge Celtic, No. 477, S.C., and Lodge St. Patrick, No. 468, I.C., all of which are vigorous Lodges at the present day. Most of the information relative to the vanished Lodges has been collected by the late Col. George Barclay and published in 1935 as "The Extinct Lodges of New Zealand".

When the Grand Lodge of New Zealand was formed in 1890 there were in Otago some twenty-seven. Lodges-10 English, 16 Scottish and one Irish. These Lodges were stationed in Dunedin, Oamaru, Palmerston, Milton, Balclutha, Kaitangata, Port Chalmers, Naseby, Cromwell, Clyde, Alexandra, Tapanui, Lawrence, Clinton, Mosgiel, Outram, Waikouaiti and Portobello. To-day there are fifty Lodges in Otago and twenty-five in Southland with a membership of about 8,000.

But to return to the earlier period, where did the Lodges meet? The first Lodges had no Masonic home of their own and met in hotel rooms. The Lodge of Otago, first in the province, met for a time in Watson's Commercial Hotel in High Street and later at the Shamrock Hotel in Rattray Street. Lodge Dunedin also met in the Shamrock Hotel, and Lodge Otago Kilwinning met first at Mr. Mills' store in Stafford Street, then in Moir's Hotel in Manse Street, and later at the Shamrock Hotel.

The first Masonic home set apart for Lodge use only was a small wooden building situated at the back of Wain's Hotel, and reached through a right-of-way between the hotel and Brown Ewing's drapery emporium. According to one report it was brilliantly lit with the new illuminant known as kerosene. This building was in some ways unsatisfactory and was replaced by a second building in Moray Place. The lower storey was occupied by R. Hudson, the biscuit manufacturer. Apparently the building committee got into financial difficulties at one stage and report has it that for a time several members when the Lodge was in session used to wait outside to prevent the possible entry of the bailiff. This building was burnt to the ground in 1881, the Lodges losing all their regalia and Lodge furniture. The Princes Street Lodgeroom, though in use till 1872, was no longer available so the Lodges for a short time met in the Oddfellows' Hall in Rattray Street.

The Lodges next bought the Jewish Synagogue in Moray Place, converting it into a Lodgeroom which served till the present building in Moray Place finally became available. To-day there are ten Lodge buildings in use in Dunedin and twenty-one in other parts of Otago.