



The Springer-Van Bramer Building with the masonic square and compasses logo over the third-floor window in the gable was owned by Mount Hermon lodge members James Van Bramer and Benjamin Springer. It was the fourth meeting place of lodge members and was located on the northwest corner of Cambie and Cordova Streets in Gastown.

Early Vancouver Masonic Lodges

by James R. Harrison, Masonic Historian

THE VARIOUS HOMES of Mount Hermon Lodge parallel the history and development of Burrard Inlet and the City of Vancouver. The first home for Mount Hermon Lodge was the Masonic hall at Moodyville, now North Vancouver. During the early years at Moodyville the lodge had a very small membership, between fifteen and twenty.

Eighteen hundred and eighty-six was a big year for the lodge. Vancouver was commencing to grow and promised to become a large city, while there was at that time no immediate growth expected on the North Shore. Vancouver, on the other hand, did not have a Masonic lodge at that time. On February 20th the lodge voted unanimously to move to the south side of Burrard Inlet.

A suitable lodge room was obtained at Keefer's Hall, also known as United Workman's Hall. No sooner had the lodge moved to Vancouver, when fire destroyed the new city, including the new home of Mount Hermon Lodge.

Mount Hermon returned to their former location at Moodyville for a brief period until a suitable lodge room was prepared in Vancouver above the Cordova Street store of Mount Hermon member Henry Arkell. This became known as Arkell's Hall.

Mount Hermon met at Arkell's Hall for less than a year. With the rapid growth of lodge membership these facilities soon became inadequate. In the meantime, the Worshipful Master and the Treasurer of Mount Hermon Lodge were actively engaged in constructing a large building at the corner of Cambie and Cordova Streets. Ben Springer, the Worshipful Master, and his partner, Captain James Van Bramer, Mount Hermon's Treasurer, offered to lease the third floor to Mount Hermon Lodge as a lodge room. The offer was accepted and on September 4, 1888, Mount Hermon moved to its fourth home, the Springer-Van Bramer Building, more commonly known as the Masonic hall. The building remains today and forms part of Vancouver's historic Gastown area.

Mount Hermon Lodge remained at the Springer-Van Bramer building for ten years. In 1898 the lodge moved to the McKinnon Block, the fifth home for Mount Hermon Lodge, which was located on the southwest corner of Hastings and Granville Streets. It remained here for twelve years. During this period the three lodges that met at the McKinnon Block, Mount Hermon, Cascade, and Acacia Lodges, were active in the promotion of having their own hall and not leasing buildings as they had been doing. Subscribers for the building were arranged throughout the membership of the three lodges and on March 15, 1910, the Masonic hall at Seymour and Georgia Streets was opened. This was the first lodge hall in Vancouver that was wholly owned by the Freemasons and became the sixth home for Mount Hermon Lodge.

The seventh home for Mount Hermon Lodge was a temporary location at the Dunbar Masonic Hall located in the Point Grey district of Vancouver. Mount Hermon moved to this location in 1968 after the Masonic hall at Seymour and Georgia was sold. On August 24, 1974, the new and present home of Mount Hermon Lodge, was officially opened at the Masonic hall 1495 West Eighth Avenue, Vancouver. Mount Hermon was the first lodge to meet in the new Masonic hall that September.



Israel Wood Powell, a medical doctor by profession, set up a practice in Victoria in 1862 to cater to the needs of Cariboo gold miners. He was British Columbia's first Superintendent of Indian Affairs, the first Grand Master of the Masonic Lodge of British Columbia and the Yukon, and a major land speculator in Vancouver. Although more sympathetic to First Nations people than most of his contemporaries, Powell amended the Indian Act to outlaw potlatching. Vancouver's Nihonmachi or Japantown, was originally called "Powell Street".

The more enthusiastic Freemasons not only received their Master Mason, or third degree, which gained them entry into the fraternity, but some went on to become 33rd-degree Freemasons and Shriners. This ring belonged to a 33rd-degree Scottish Rite Mason.





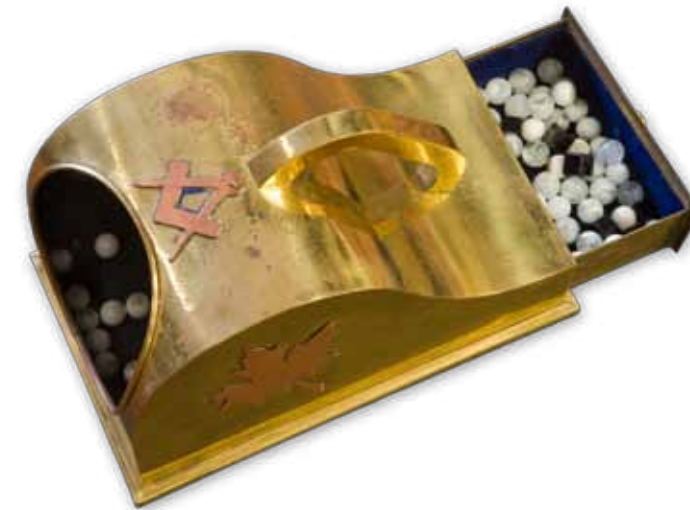
Past master jewels from Vancouver's Mount Hermon Lodge presented to Josias C. Hughes in 1878, William John Bowser in 1900, and Andrew Wallace in 1907, respectively. Wallace started Wallace Shipyards in False Creek and then moved to the foot of Lonsdale in North Vancouver, where it changed into Burrard Dry Dock.

Prominent British Columbian Masons included: Sewell Prescott Moody, Benjamin Springer, Richard H. Alexander, and John Hendry—pioneer lumbermen; David Oppenheimer, Frederick Cope, Henry Collins, James F. Garden, Thomas O. Townley, Thomas F. Neelands, Alexander Bethune, Charles S. Douglas, Malcolm P. McBeath, Charles E. Tisdall, Gerald G. McGeer, Jonathan Cornett, Charles E. Thompson, and Frederick Hume—all Mayors of Vancouver; Amor de Cosmos [William Smith], William J. Bowser, Alexander Davie, Byron Johnson, John D. McLean, Sir Richard McBride, W. A. C. Bennett—all Premiers; Henry J. Cambie, William Downie, W. F. Salsbury—CPR executives; Henry T. Ceperley, James W. Horne, J. J. Miller, and Henry H. Stevens—all pioneer realtors; Samuel G. Churchill—Reeve of Point Grey; Nat Bailey—original owner of the White Spot Restaurant; Henry O. Bell-Irving—pioneer in the west coast fishing industry; Francis


J. Burd, Victor W. Odlum, T. F. Paterson, and Robert Crombie—newspaper publishers; Reverend H. G. Fiennes-Clinton; Samuel Hughes and Arthur Currie—military leaders; Frederick W. Howay, Robie L. Reid and E. O. S. Scholefield—British Columbian historians. Other Masons were Henry Larsen, RCMP explorer; Major James S. Matthews, founder of the Vancouver City Archives; Frederick “Cyclone” Taylor, hockey legend; J. Edward Bird, lawyer for the *Komagata Maru*; Austin C. Taylor, Chairman of the BC Security Commission; Charles E. Hope, Honorary Secretary of the White Canada Research Committee; William C. Ditmars, President of the Canadian Club (1927). The number of Freemasons in British Columbia peaked in 1963 at 27,128.



Freemason Henry Josiah DeForest studied drawing and painting in London, Paris and Edinburgh. He travelled and sketched in England, France, Italy, Egypt, Palestine, Germany and Switzerland before first coming to British Columbia in 1891. His sense of humour is apparent in his painting of the Mount Hermon Freemasons' Hall in Moodyville, which shows a goat at the rear of the building. Popular belief suggests that Masonic initiates are required to ride a goat prior to acceptance into the fraternity.




An early Vancouver Masonic lodge ballot box. Traditionally black and white balls were placed on one side of the box. Members voting on whether or not a candidate was worthy of entry into the order would deposit a white ball through a hand opening if they were in favour of the candidate, and a black ball, if they were opposed. One black ball was enough to prevent a candidate's entry into the fraternity, which is how the term being “blackballed” originated. As members aged and their eyesight deteriorated, black cubes replaced the black balls to aid in their recognition.



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