

FEATURE

United Service Lodge celebrates 100 years

By Jan Blanchard
News Contributor

The United Service Freemason Lodge has shared a long history with Esquimalt and now, on July 15, 16 and 17, it will share the 100th anniversary of its founding.

Walter Phillips, the historian for United Service Lodge A.F. and A.M. No. 24, B.C.R., says the first meeting of the 27 original founding members took place in Esquimalt Village (now part of Dockyard) on December 18, 1893 in the "Blue Ribbon Hall" — a building built for a Temperance Society. The Lodge rented the hall for \$10 a month up until January 1900, when it bought the building for \$1,500. Lodge members continued to meet there until the constant repairs to the building became too expensive. In 1936, the Blue Ribbon Hall was torn down.

Phillips says the Lodge then moved into the Shrine Hall on View Street in Victoria but, when that became a dance hall, it moved to a Masonic Hall across from the Bay and continued to meet there until 1958. At that time, the Lodge was able to move back to Esquimalt to meet at St. Paul's Parish Hall, and Phillips says that members were happy to return to the community.

But problems with storage of the furniture needed for their meetings forced the Lodge to move to a new hall at the Esquimalt United Church in 1966. The Lodge continued to meet there until other group meetings at the hall had increased to the point where it was no longer a quiet place.

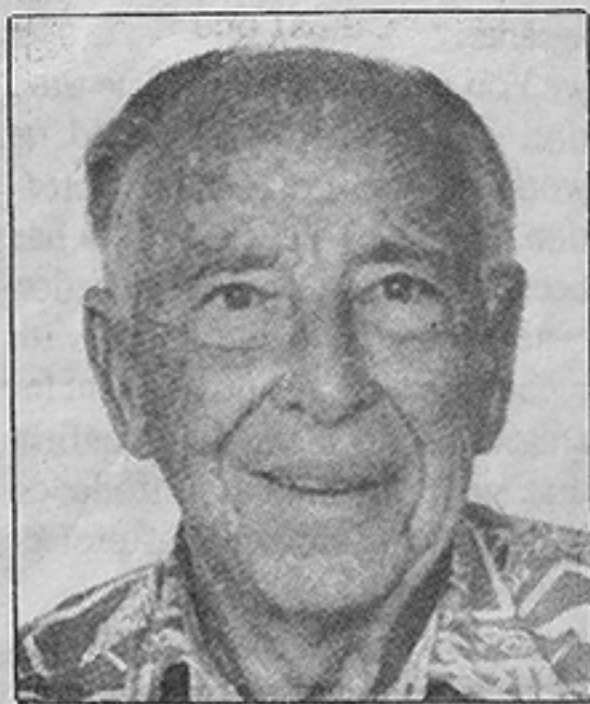
The Lodge then had to set its sights on a new meeting place and, in 1973, chose to meet at the Goldstream Masonic Hall in Langford. Its charter, says Phillips, continues in Esquimalt, even though over the years, they have gained new members from all over the Western Communities. Some of the original "Esquimaltites" would like to return one day to the community of the Lodge's origins.

This weekend, Esquimalt will be the place of celebration beginning Friday, July 15 with a wine and cheese informal gathering from 7 - 10 p.m. in the Pioneer Room at the Esquimalt Recreation Centre.

On Saturday, July 16 from 2 - 4 p.m. at the Jubilee Hall in the Rec. Centre, the Lodge will receive the

Most Worshipful Grand Master of BC, Douglas W. Hargrove; the Esquimalt representative, former Mayor Ray Bryant (a member of the Masons); and Navy representative Commander A. Cond. A short history will be presented and some 50-year pins will be awarded to deserving members.

Saturday evening, the celebration will continue with a dinner and dance, again at the Jubilee Hall — cocktails at 6 p.m., dinner from 7 - 9 p.m. and dancing from 9 p.m. to midnight, music provided by the Naden Navy Combo "Riptide".



Walter Phillips

Including members, friends and family, Phillips says they are expecting about 150 people, some from up-Island, the Mainland and perhaps Eastern Canada.

He adds that members hope the Lodge's oldest member, Wilfred Pember, 91, will be able to attend the celebration but Pember is not well and Phillips says it is unlikely he will be able to attend. Pember joined the Lodge in 1930 when he was a member of the Royal Navy.

The Lodge will come together on Sunday morning, July 17, in full masonic regalia to attend the regular church service at 10:30 a.m. at St. Paul's, with Reverend Ken Collison, presiding. Phillips says Lodge members felt the service at St. Paul's would be fitting because of the strong historical ties to the group's beginnings.

The United Service Lodge — now with more than 150 members — would like to continue to expand but, as the Masonic family does not like to solicit new members, sometimes, says Phillips, it is difficult for an interested person to discover how to approach the fraternity for membership. He suggests interested people approach a Freemason or call the local Masonic Lodge.



The Blue Ribbon Hall, above, was the first meeting place of the local chapter of the Freemasons. The group rented the hall for \$10 a month until 1900, when it bought the building. This weekend, the Lodge celebrates its 100th anniversary.

Photo contributed

Masons serve local community

Freemasonry is the oldest and largest fraternity in the world, its roots dating back many centuries to the stonemasons who built the great cathedrals of Europe in the Middle Ages. It is not a secret society and it is not a religion.

"A Freemason binds himself to like-minded men in a brotherhood that transcends all religious, ethnic, social, cultural and educational differences" says a brochure. "A Freemason is a man of faith, who uses tools of moral and ethical principles to serve mankind." Locally, this means the Freemasons of BC run a Volunteer Driver Program, which operates on the Lower Mainland and on Vancouver Island and provides transportation, free of charge for cancer patients to and from the various cancer treatment centres. This project has approximately 250 volunteers — 90 per cent of whom are Freemasons — and operates in conjunction with the Canadian Cancer Society.

Each year, Freemasons contribute many thousands of dollars toward providing medical equipment to hospitals, health centres and to local community projects



throughout BC. Financial assistance is also directed to schools for handicapped children, assistance to the elderly and bursaries for deserving students.

To mark its 100th anniversary, the United Service Lodge, A.F. and

A.M., No. 24, BCR has chosen to award an annual \$500 scholarship to a deserving student at Esquimalt Secondary High School, called the United Service Centennial Scholarship. This will start in the fall of this year.