

Westward, Ho!

Although in these troubled and busy days few stop to read history, there is no more romantic and inspiring story anywhere than that of the tide of humanity which rolled west. The winning of the Great Plains, the spread of civilization across the Rockies, the settlement of the Pacific coast, is a wild and adventurous tale, an heritage of glory to the sons of pioneers.

Freemasonry, too, has its story of the spread westward. Just how romantic it is has never as yet wholly^[1] been set forth. Some day a writer will delve and dig and then present the whole story of the spread of Freemasonry beyond the Mississippi, and the Craft will be his debtor as to few of those who have found inspiration in the history of the Ancient Craft.

He will uncover charters carried in saddle bags; he will tell of dispensations sent by messengers who were ambushed by Indians; he will report the early struggles of small weak lodges which were mighty in the determination of their members to survive. He will recount the good work of Freemasonry, bringing church and school to mining camp and lawless settlement. He will tell of the influence of the Craft in the dawning consciousness of civic pride and its accomplishments in law and order. He will limn the stirring tale of the Masonic Vigilantes, which cleared a great section of new country of the raider, the murderer, the cattle thief. And he will write for all to read of the power and the influence which Freemasonry had in the making of states out of territories and territories out of a wilderness.

Merely to outline the spread of Freemasonry across the Father of Waters — which is the that can here be attempted — is to touch the skirts of romance and feel the magic of great and stirring epic, of determination of pioneers to have and to hold and keep and guard, in strange and dangerous surroundings, the gentle touch of home and safety and decency and order represented by the Masonic lodge.

Five states have the Mississippi for eastern borders; from south to north, Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, Iowa, and Minnesota.

First of these to form a grand lodge was Louisiana in 1812. Five lodges took part in this historic event. One of them was chartered by the Provincial Grand Lodge of South Carolina; the other four had life from the present (not the provincial) Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania.

Missouri dates her grand lodge to 1821, when three lodges, all from Tennessee, formed that now great body. In 1838 Arkansas Grand Lodge was formed out of four lodges holding warrants, one from Alabama, two from Louisiana, and one from Tennessee.

Iowa's grand lodge, 1844, was formed by four lodges, all warranted by Missouri, and Minnesota, 1853, came from the determination of three lodges to form a grand lodge; these were lodges from Wisconsin, Illinois, and Ohio.

From these Mississippi River-bordered states Freemasonry spread westward.

The Grand Lodge of Texas owns Louisiana as her mother, three lodges being chartered by Louisiana in Texas, which formed her grand lodge in 1837. The Grand Lodge of Indian Territory was formed in 1874 of three lodges, all chartered by Arkansas; ten lodges in Indian Territory formed the Grand Lodge of Oklahoma Territory in 1892, and the present Grand Lodge of the state of Oklahoma came into being in 1909 with 177 lodges chartered by the Grand Lodge of Oklahoma Territory and 208 lodges chartered by the Grand Lodge of Indian Territory.

Kansas Grand Lodge was born in 1852 from three lodges, all springing from Missouri. New Mexico, 1877, came from four Missouri chartered lodges. When the Third Regiment of Missouri Volunteers set out to take part in the Mexican War, its Colonel, Brother John Rails, was grand master of Masons in Missouri. On June 12, 1847, he issued a Dispensation for Missouri Military Lodge No. 86, to be attached to his own regiment; a Charter followed on October 14, 1847. Between the time of its institution at Independence, Missouri, then the head of the Santa Fe Trail, and its first communication at Santa Fe, its members marched over nine hundred miles on foot. In the whole vast stretch of territory between the Pacific Ocean and the Missouri River and from Canada to Texas and Old Mexico, (now served by thirteen grand lodges), that meeting at Santa Fe was surely one of the first regular Masonic communications ever held. For two years No. 86 worked under difficult conditions, and the morale of the Missouri and Illinois troops owed much to its influence. The last meeting recorded in its minute-book was held in Santa Cruz, Old Mexico, July 5, 1848 five months after the signing of the Guadalupe-Hidalgo Treaty.

Col. Rails had approved a second lodge at Santa Fe, Hardin Lodge No. 87. It received a Dispensation dated October 9, 1847, and was instituted nine days later as a military lodge. Curiously enough, Hardin lodge was not mentioned in the grand lodge records of that date. Col. Rails apparently never filed any statements of the dispensation he had issued. More than half a century after, the original dispensation was found after which grand lodge inserted its name and number. The lodge was never chartered. It held its last communication August 14, 1848, leaving behind it seven members who later demitted to Montezuma Lodge, the first of all still-existing lodges to be constituted. In 1851, the Grand Lodge of Missouri issued a charter for a lodge at Santa Fe to be called Montezuma No. 109. It worked under frontier conditions and against great handicaps, typified by the fate of its first junior warden (Bent), killed by Apaches four months after taking office, and buried by the lodge, December 22, 1851. Anglo-Americans in Santa Fe and vicinity were few in number, with almost no women among them. Except for saloons and gambling halls, there were no social centers. There were no Protestant churches, there was not even a cemetery for the burial of Protestant dead. The lodge satisfied many of these needs. With the Odd Fellows, it established a cemetery; it brought men of like minds together, furnished them a social life more to their tastes, and knit many scattered men together with its invisible bonds of communal interests and mutual protection. For nine years it was the only lodge in the Territory, probably the only one within the radius of a thousand miles; when other lodges arose it assisted them in every possible way; and when the time came to organize a grand lodge it took the lead in that movement, working for it many years before its efforts were crowned with success in 1877.

One of three lodges to form the Grand Lodge of Nebraska in 1857 was a Missouri lodge, the others being from Illinois, partly a child of Missouri, and Iowa, wholly derived from Missouri. Across the vast land to the Pacific reached Missouri, contributing one lodge to California, and one to Oregon. She gave two lodges to the Grand Lodge of Wisconsin, and four to the Grand Lodge of Illinois.

From the Grand Lodge of Dakota Territory, 1875, formed from six lodges all originating in Iowa, came the Grand Lodges of South Dakota and North Dakota (1889). There were lodges in North Dakota chartered by Minnesota, but they did not have part in the *formation* of the grand lodge, joining that new body later on. That no grand lodges are the offspring of Dakota (either North or South) is a matter of chronology, all further west or south-western grand lodges having come into being prior to the formation of the separate grand lodges of the two Dakotas.

In the western states the currents and cross currents of Freemasonry are especially interesting and colorful. For Freemasonry in part at least came first to the far west and then spread backward. The discovery of gold in California caused a rush of men, both overland and around the Horn: some of them were wise and far seeing enough to bring their Freemasonry with them. The Grand Lodge of California, formed 1850, was of three lodges; one was chartered by Missouri, one by Connecticut and one was chartered by the District of Columbia.

A number of brethren in Washington desired to take with them into the new country a warrant to do Masonic work. At the communication of the grand lodge November 7, 1848, a charter was issued for "California Lodge No. 13" to be located in the town of San Francisco, Upper California.

A letter from Worshipful Brother Levi Stowell to Right Worshipful Chas. S. Frailey, grand secretary, dated March 27, 1850, gives a most entertaining insight into some of the early difficulties encountered:

The extraordinary circumstances existing at the time of my arrival in the country prevented my organizing the lodge until late in the year. No proper place could be obtained to hold a lodge, and so intent were all persons in their pursuit for gain that few, if any, could be persuaded to devote an hour's time to anything not affecting their own pecuniary interests; and, in order to preserve my charter from expiring by limitation it required constant and strenuous exertions on my part, by which I was enabled to erect and furnish a suitable building in which to hold the lodge; which was duly organized in the fore part of November last, under very favorable auspices.

By the latter part of December of the same year the lodge had a membership roll of twenty-three names, with several petitions under consideration, and immediately took a position of leadership in' Masonic matters on the West Coast. It became and now is No. 1, on the register of the Grand Lodge of California.

California soon passed on her Freemasonry to other territories. She gave four lodges to Arizona (1882) which had a fifth from New Mexico, White Mountain Lodge No. 5.

Under the laws of the Grand Lodge of California a lodge could not meet in a building on the ground floor. California required a lodge to meet in a second story. At organization of the Grand Lodge of Arizona in 1882, this lodge had persuaded a Globe citizen to build a two story building, and so was able to meet the requirements of the Grand Lodge of Arizona, which had adopted the Grand Lodge of California laws as its laws. The name of the lodge remained the same but the number was changed to No. 3. The altar, pillars and other lodge furniture were made by local carpenters. The jewels were of tin cut by a local tinsmith and suspended on blue ribbons.

To familiarize themselves with the ritual of the grand lodge, officers met in lonely cabins on the hills that surround Globe, a town in the center of the Apache Indian country. It was at the peril of their lives that the brethren came to lodge as many lived in the hills and had to drive in a buckboard or come in on horseback. Besides the Indians, desperados, outlaws and stage robbers were numerous.

Globe was strictly a mining town and a long way from the nearest settlement. The only means of transportation to the town was by stages and sixteen mule teams of the covered wagon type. In 1889 the grand lodge was to meet in Globe, at the invitation of White Mountain lodge. Due to an Indian outbreak, the meeting was changed, by order of the grand master, to the city of Tucson. It would have been too dangerous for the representatives of the several lodges to venture two to three days travel to reach Globe!

The organization of Carson Lodge No. 1 (Nevada) marked the advent of Masonry on the desert between Denver, Colorado, and Sacramento, California.

The cry of want from a Masonic widow stranded in Carson is said to have been the reason for calling together the Masons in Carson and vicinity to arrange assistance. At this meeting the necessity for the formation of a lodge in Carson City was discussed. The Grand Lodge of California granted Carson lodge a Charter on May 15, 1862 and it was numbered 154, California Registry. As this was the first lodge chartered in the Territory, it became Number 1, Nevada Registry, upon the formation of the Nevada Grand Lodge in 1865.

California contributed all eight lodges which formed the Grand Lodge of Nevada in 1865. And she gave two to Oregon (1851) which, as had already been noted, had the third of its original three lodges from Missouri.

Multnomah Lodge No. 1, (No. 84, Missouri Register) at Oregon City, Oregon, held the first Masonic meeting west of the Rocky Mountains.

In the first issue of the *Oregon Spectator* (February 5, 1846), the first newspaper published on the Pacific Coast, was a notice to Masons to meet February 21, 1846, "to adopt some measures to obtain a Charter for a lodge." This meeting was attended by seven Masons who prepared a

petition to the Grand Lodge of Missouri praying for a Charter. The petition was entrusted to the care of Brother Joel Palmer who made the 2,500 mile trip on horseback and the Charter was granted October 19,1846.

The Charter came to Oregon by wagon train over the “Old Oregon Trail” reaching Oregon City, September 11,1848.

The Craft were summoned the same day and the lodge commenced work on the second floor of a log building, with a rough packing box for an altar. Corn, wine, and oil were represented by a barrel of flour for the masters pedestal; a barrel of whiskey for the senior warden’s; and a barrel of salt pork for the junior warden’s!

Three candidates were given the degrees, Christopher Taylor receiving all three. The other two are reported to have likewise been raised, but this cannot be verified. Taylor was the first Mason raised west of the Rocky Mountains.

The original jurisdiction of Multnomah lodge was “all of the territory bounded by the Mexican border on the south, the Canadian border on the north, the summit of the Rocky Mountains on the east,; and the Pacific Ocean on the west.”

From Oregon Masonry spread to Washington, in 1854, by means of four lodges, and back “east” to Idaho, which was formed in 1867, with four lodges from Oregon and one from Washington.

Gold was discovered in the Boise Basin in the fall of 1862. Mining camps sprung up throughout the Basin and by the summer of 1863 thousands of miners and prospectors were flocking in. Idaho City became the center of population of the territory.

Women were scarce and children almost a curiosity. Almost everyone was known among his associates by some nickname or other; often the real name was unknown. Jonas W. Brown was widely known as “Sugar Coated Jonas.” There was Peg Leg Watson, Buckskin Jack, Rattlesnakes Jim, Club Foot George, Shorty Jones, African Tom, Three Finger Pete, Jersey Bill, Fightin’ Sal, High Stepping Jennie, and so on. Society was rough. Men worked long hours in the mines or shoveling gravel in the sluice boxes; luxuries were unknown; the restraining influence of home and the refining presence of women and children were hundreds, even thousands of miles away. The saloon, the hurdy-gurdy, and the gambling houses were the only places of recreation after the hard work of the gulches.

The Grand Lodge of Oregon met at Portland on June 20, 1864, John McCranchan, grand master. One paragraph from his report is as follows:

Upon the recommendation of Wasco Lodge No. 10 of The Dalles, Oregon, a dispensation was granted on July 7, 1863, to form a lodge at Bonnock City, Idaho Territory, named Idaho Lodge. I have learned recently that the lodge is in a thriving condition, and the brethren named in

the dispensation are active, zealous Masons, laboring to discharge their trust correctly and faithfully.

The first Masonic Hall was at Idaho City, built in 1863, the lumber for which was whipsawed by hand, costing \$2,000. It was constructed over the first story of the store of commission merchants, and \$20 per month rental was small for the privilege. The size was 18 by 40 feet, and the height at the sides was only seven feet and arched overhead. The total cost of erecting this hall was \$4,000 which was raised by subscription among the members. The square and compasses were made of tin and used until a set of silver ones could be obtained. At this time everything coming into the "Great Basin" came exclusively by pack train.

The lodge played a large part in holding men to the better standards of life. Once a week Masons met at the hall and recited the ritual, renewed their obligations, practiced the ennobling sentiments of charity and good will, initiated new candidates, talked over the problems of the day and went home with renewed faith in the old standards and fresh courage to carry on.

Meanwhile, Colorado (1867) was erected from three lodges, one from Kansas, two from Nebraska. Colorado chartered three lodges in Wyoming, which, with one from Nebraska, formed the grand lodge in 1874. Colorado gave two lodges to Montana, which were joined by one from Kansas to form that grand lodge in 1866.

Virginia City Lodge No. 1 (Montana) received a Dispensation from the grand master of Kansas on December 7, 1863, when that part of Idaho which is now in Montana was in the control of an association of robbers and murderers known as Henry Plummer's Road Agent Band.

The first master of Virginia City lodge U.D. was Paris S. Pfouts, some time before master of a lodge in St. Joseph, Missouri, and of Denver No. 1, of Denver, Colorado. Within ten days after the Dispensation arrived from Kansas, Pfouts was elected president of the Vigilantes, composed in the beginning almost wholly of Masons, foremost among them being Wilbur F. Sanders, soldier, patriot, leader, great orator, prosecuting officer of the Vigilantes. The principal work of the Vigilantes was to exterminate Plummer and his Road Agents, which they did in short order.

When Virginia City was created a city in 1864, Pfouts and John J. Hull, a member of Virginia City lodge, were rival candidates for Mayor. Pfouts, a strong Confederate sympathizer in a city of like sympathies, won over Hull, the Union man. Hull became the first treasurer of the Territory of Montana, which was created May 26, 1864.

Sanders became master of Virginia City No. 1, grand secretary, and the third grand master. No. 1 was the first lodge to receive a Charter in Montana. The second was Montana Lodge No. 2, of Virginia City, and the third was Helena Lodge No. 3, of Helena. These two were chartered by the Grand Lodge of Colorado on November 7, 1865; and Virginia City No. 1 by the Grand Lodge of Kansas on December 20, 1864. These three formed the Grand Lodge of Montana, with John J. Hull as grand master.

Utah (1872) had one lodge chartered by Kansas, one chartered by Colorado and one chartered by Montana when her grand lodge was formed.

The great Mother Grand Lodge of middle and far western grand lodges was Missouri. She chartered lodges which formed or helped form the Grand Lodges of California, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, New Mexico, Oregon, and Wisconsin. Indirectly, her influence was felt in the formation of Arizona — which partly derived from New Mexico, partly from California, both in part from Missouri; of Montana, Colorado, and Utah which partly derived from Kansas, Idaho, and Washington, which partly derived from Oregon; of Wyoming, which partly derived from Nebraska; of Nevada, which wholly derived from California; of Minnesota, which partly derived from Illinois and the Dakotas, which wholly derived from Iowa.

Missouri's Masonry came to the formation of her grand lodge in 1821 from Tennessee. Tennessee derived its Masonry from North Carolina, 1787. North Carolina received its Masonry from the Provincial Grand Lodge of North Carolina, seven lodges of which derived, through Joseph Mountfort, from the Mother Grand Lodge of England, and two lodges of which were directly chartered by England.

It is to be noted that some Tennessee lodges were the outgrowths of lodges originally chartered by the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania, and many Pennsylvania traditions and customs are to be found in the records of some Missouri lodges.

Thus does Freemasonry spread; a far flung band of craftsman flowing ever westward from the Mother Grand Lodge of England, first formed of four lodges in 1717!

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1. W. Ray V. Denslow's (P.G.M. Missouri) splendid Territorial Masonry is the story of Freemasonry and the Louisiana Purchase and does not attempt to follow all of Freemasonry's travels throughout the far west. [↪](#)

[*The Masonic Service Association of North America*](#)