

EARLY FREEMASONRY IN NEW ZEALAND

From a paper by By V.W. Bro. FRANK HOWARTH, P.G. Lee., P.M

We first hear of Masonry in New Zealand as early as 1837 when four French whalers called at Port Levy, Akaroa, Banks Peninsula. There were Masons aboard these ships and an informal gathering took place during their stay in port. Akaroa was the site of the proposed French settlement, but the arrival of H.M.S. Britomart on the 10th of August, 1840, and the taking possession of the South Island in the name of the British Crown only a few days before the arrival of the first French immigrants must have been a severe blow to their plans. A French Lodge under the Grand Orient of France was established at Akaroa on the 1st of February, 1843, but the Lodge just never seemed to function.

In the new township of Auckland it was soon evident that there was a great need for a house of worship. The Governor, Captain Hobson opened up a subscription list, a site was selected overlooking the then waterfront which was called Emily Place after the Governor's wife, and plans were drawn for the first church. The first published notice calling Freemasons together in the colony was in the "NZ. Herald and Auckland Gazette" on the 17th July. 1841. and contained the following:-

To the Freemasons of Auckland.

It being suggested that Freemasons should on the occasion of laying the first stone of the church appear in their robes. I beg to request the attendance of all the brotherhood at Wood's Hotel on Tuesday, July 20th at ten o'clock to make the necessary arrangements.

W. Mason, G.S.P.W.C.S.

On the 28th July, 1841, the Freemasons of Auckland with the decorations and insignia of their order attended the laying of the foundation stone of the first Church, St. Paul's. It is obvious that it was through these gatherings that the brethren were encouraged to establish a Lodge, and as communication with the homeland was so irregular they applied to the "Australian Social Lodge," No. 260, Irish Constitution at Sydney. On the 5th September, 1842, a dispensation was granted to the brethren of Auckland, but as the Australian Lodge would not trust the mail of the day it was left to a responsible brother to deliver it in person. The dispensation did not arrive until February 1843, and the first meeting of the Lodge was held on the 9th February, 1843.

At the colony in Wellington the settlers had worked under extreme difficulties to establish their settlements, and their thoughts soon turned to the amenities they had left behind in their homeland. The Masonic pioneers had obviously been working to this end for some time for the following notice in the "Colonist and Port Nicholson Advertiser" of August 9th, 1842, suggested that plans had already been made for the establishment of a Masonic Lodge.

Freemasonry

"The brethren of the above order are requested to attend a meeting of the fraternity at the "Southern Cross Hotel" this evening Tuesday, August 9th at half past eight o'clock, to consider the propriety of applying for warrant to hold a lodge in Port Nicholson".

Realising it would be many months before they would receive a charter from England they applied for a dispensation to the "Lodge of Australia," No. 548 English Constitution meeting at Sydney. Leaving nothing to chance they appointed as their W.M. elect - a Past Master, W. Brother George Smith and invited him to proceed to Sydney and deliver their application in person. On the 9th of September, 1842, the dispensation was granted, and eleven days later, at a meeting of the "Lodge of Australia," W. Brother George Smith was Installed as Master of "The New Zealand Pacific Lodge." Five weeks later, on the 23rd of November 1842 the first meeting of a regularly constituted Lodge took place when W. Bro. Smith called together the members of "New Zealand Pacific Lodge." This meeting in Wellington surely must be regarded as the most important Masonic event in New Zealand history.