

History of Masonry in Hawaii

By Hon. Herbert Gardiner, PGS

On Saturday, May 20, 1989, in the City of Honolulu, on the Island of Oahu, the twelve Masonic Lodges of Hawaii instituted The Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of Hawaii. Our Grand Lodge constitutes as the fifty-first regular Grand Lodge to be established in the United States.

We are an island State comprised of approximately 132 islands, reefs, and shoals. The eight main islands -- Hawaii, Maui, Oahu, Kauai, Molokai, Lanai, Niihau, and Kahoolawe (in descending order of size), make up over 99 percent of the total land area of 6,425 miles.

Freemasonry in Hawaii has prospered under five different forms of government since it was formally introduced to the Kingdom of Hawaii in 1843, during the reign of Kamehameha III (Kauikeaouli). The Craft first worked during the time of the Hawaiian Monarchy, next during the Provisional Government, then under the Republic of Hawaii, next when Hawaii was a Territory of the United States, and presently as the 50th State of the Nation.

Lodge Le Progres de l'Oceanie

Freemasonry was formally established in Hawaii by Joseph Marie Le Tellier, Captain of the French whaling barque "Ajax" when he warranted Lodge Le Progres de l'Oceanie No. 124, of the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of the Supreme Council of France on April 8, 1843, in Honolulu. This was the first Masonic Lodge to be instituted in the Sandwich Islands as we were known in those days, and quite likely the first Lodge to be founded in the Pacific, West of the Rocky Mountains. Captain Le Tellier sailed the Ajax into Honolulu Harbor on March 30, 1843, to have the ship refitted. It was during the period when the vessel was undergoing repairs that Joseph Marie Le Tellier, Sovereign Prince Rose-Croix, 18th Degree, and Special Inspector of the Supreme Council, instituted Lodge Le Progres de l'Oceanie, No. 124, A.A.S.R., in the store of Jules Dudoit, a businessman and French consul at the time. Dudoit Lane in the Waikiki section of Honolulu is named for him. He hailed from Port-Louis, Mauritius.

Hawaiian Lodge

Hawaiian Lodge No. 21, Free and Accepted Masons, was the second Lodge to be founded in Hawaii. On December 8, 1851 a meeting of Master Masons was held in the home of Captain John Meek where it was resolved to petition the Grand Lodge of California to grant a charter to the petitioners to form a Master Masons' Lodge in Honolulu, and "Hawaiian" to be in the Lodge name. The second meeting was also held at the residence of Captain Meek, where the brethren were presented with a dispensation dated January 12, 1852 to Hawaiian Lodge (as requested). The first regular meeting of Hawaiian Lodge U.D. was held on February 19, 1852. The Lodge was chartered, Hawaiian Lodge No. 21, F. & A.M. on May 5, 1852 by the Grand Lodge of California, Free and Accepted Masons, and was the first American Lodge founded in Hawaii. Its charter shows the location of the Lodge to be, the City of Honolulu, Island of Oahu, of the Sandwich Islands. Paty Drive in the Woodlawn-Manoa section of Honolulu is named for Captain John Paty, one of the founders of Hawaiian Lodge.

Grand Lodge of California

The Masonic Lodges of Hawaii had a long association with the Grand Lodge of California going back to 1852, when Hawaiian Lodge was Chartered by California. In subsequent years eleven other Lodges were chartered in Hawaii by the Grand Lodge of California, some were originally chartered by California and others transferred their allegiance from other jurisdictions to California.

Lodge Le Progres de l'Oceanie No. 124, A.A.S.R., transferred its allegiance from the Supreme Council of France to the Grand Lodge of California in 1905, having been a functioning Lodge in Hawaii for seven years before the Grand Lodge of California was founded in 1850. Honolulu Lodge was originally instituted as Pacific Lodge No. 822 in 1895 under the Grand Lodge of Scotland, operating through the District Grand Lodge of Queensland, Australia. The Lodge transferred its allegiance to the Grand Lodge of California in 1910 and became Honolulu Lodge No. 409. The Hawaiian Islands had indeed become part of the Jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of California, and remained within the folds of California until May 20, 1989 when the Grand Lodge of Hawaii was instituted. The last Lodge to be founded in Hawaii and warranted by the Grand Lodge of California, was the King Kalakaua Daylight Lodge No. 838, which was chartered on October 15, 1985.

Captain James Cook

Some accounts of Freemasonry in Hawaii have recorded that Captain James Cook, considered by many to be the greatest Pacific explorer and navigator, and the first to discover the Hawaiian Islands, was a Freemason. The exact date that the early Hawaiians discovered the Islands is unknown, but most archaeologists agree that they have been here for at least a millennium, give or take a few years. Cook was the first westerner to discover the Islands, and this he did on January 18, 1778. Cook's expedition consisted of two converted Colliers, the HMS DISCOVERY and the HMS RESOLUTION, with a combined crew of 192 officers and men. The sailing Master was William Bligh, who 13 years later commanded the HMS Bounty which ended in the most celebrated mutiny in maritime history.

In spite of the oft-told story of Captain Cook being a Freemason, this has **never been confirmed**. The United Grand Lodge of England advised us that a thorough search of their Grand Lodge Register going back to the 18th century, did not include his name, and that no evidence in their archives indicated that Cook was ever a Freemason.

Captain Cook named the Islands the Sandwich Islands, in honor of his friend and patron, John Montagu, Fourth Earl of Sandwich and first Lord of the Admiralty; a name which the islands were known by for many years.

The Grand Lodge of Hawaii

The idea of a Grand Lodge of Hawaii was not something born in the twentieth century. The concept of a Grand Lodge of Hawaii had its roots in the 1800s. On several occasions the Brethren of both Hawaiian Lodge and Lodge Le Progres de l'Oceanie discussed the idea as a future possibility.

When Hawaii was granted Statehood on August 21, 1959, many Hawaii Freemasons thought that like all of the other States except Alaska (at the time), the principle of the American Doctrine of Exclusive Territorial Jurisdiction would be applied to the State of Hawaii. The point being that each State plus the District of Columbia has its own Grand Lodge. Perhaps it was naively assumed that such action would be initiated on behalf of Hawaii by the Grand Lodge of California. However, no such action was initiated, nor was it encouraged by California. The mood appeared to be that of "carry on as usual." Certain segments of the Grand Lodge of California were of the opinion that Hawaii was too small to justify or sustain a Grand Lodge of its own, and did not encourage any movement in that direction.

The majority of Hawaii Freemasons fully supported the idea of a Grand Lodge and felt that it was long overdue. Other Hawaii brethren supported the idea in principle, but had some reservations about the Hawaii Lodges as a whole to finance their own Grand Lodge.

After almost thirty years and two unsuccessful attempts to form their own Grand Lodge after Hawaii became the Fiftieth State, the Freemasons of Hawaii on their third attempt, were finally successful in establishing the Grand Lodge of Hawaii. It was a time-consuming job that required a herculean effort on the part of the brethren that were actively involved in the project.

The First Attempt

The first serious attempt to create a Grand Lodge of Hawaii was initiated in the 1960's shortly after Hawaii became a State. In spite of the tremendous effort and thought put into the proposal by several very capable and prominent Freemasons of Hawaii, the project seemed to be plagued with obstacles. Compounding the problems was the less-than-enthusiastic support rendered by some of the key members of the Grand Lodge of California. The effort dragged on into the 1970's and ended as a noble endeavor, but nevertheless unsuccessful.

The Second Attempt

The second effort to form a Grand Lodge of Hawaii was conducted by our second Grand Master, Most Worshipful Ernest Y. Yamane, who at the time was Master of Hawaiian Lodge. He was appointed Chariman of an Ad-Hoc Committee to study the feasibility of forming a Grand Lodge of Hawaii, by the Grand Master of California. This committee was comprised of the 1979 Masters of the Hawaii Lodges. In the absence of a decisive favorable vote at the completion of the study, the matter was temporarily shelved. However, the effort was not wasted, for the succeeding Grand Master, Robert O. West, recommended that the incoming Grand Master appoint a committee to study the feasibility of forming a District Grand Lodge of Hawaii, subordinate to the Grand Lodge of California. Grand Master Harry L. Maynard believed that this recommendation had considerable merit and appointed such a committee in 1983. The committee's work provided the ways and means which ultimately set the stage for the creation of the Grand Lodge of Hawaii.

Rejection of District Grand Lodge Idea

A key factor which helped pave the way for the establishment of the Grand Lodge of Hawaii were two recommendations contained in the report of 1983. These were Recommendations No. 2 and No. 3 of the "Report of The Special Committee to Study the Feasibility of the Formation of A District Grand Lodge of Hawaii", which was chaired by Vernon L. Gordon, P.G.M. and included our first Grand Master, Most Worshipful William K. McKee, Jr., who at that time was an inspector, and our late Brother Oswald J.B. Lau. The idea of a Hawaii District Grand Lodge under California was rejected. All other aspects of the committee's report aside, Recommendations No. 2 and No. 3 generated some positive action toward establishing our Grand Lodge, but only after some years had passed. Essentially, these recommendations terminated the edict that prohibited any activity on the part of the Hawaii Freemasons to engage in any action to form a Grand Lodge of Hawaii, and proposed that a committee of fifteen qualified representative members of Hawaii's Lodges be appointed to develop plans and procedures for the formation of a Grand Lodge of Hawaii. Also, that the proposal to form a Grand Lodge of Hawaii be submitted to a vote by the membership of Hawaii's Lodges. This idea to form a Grand Lodge of Hawaii, essentially took the form of a Grand Master's Recommendation by Most Worshipful Harry L. Maynard and was adopted during the 1983 Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge of California.

Hawaii Freemasons take steps to forming a Grand Lodge

The recommendation, although adopted was dormant until Most Worshipful Jack R. Levitt took the necessary steps to implement it. Grand Master Levitt was motivated to take action when he learned that a number of Hawaii Freemasons were initiating an independent action to establish a Grand Lodge of Hawaii in 1987. Once again some members of the Craft in Hawaii wanted their own Grand Lodge, and felt compelled to take the appropriate action to achieve this end. The lead role in this movement was launched by some of the members of Lodge Le Progres de l'Oceanie. Frederick H. Overstreet, PGM and Jerome Borro, PM were the prime movers in this endeavor. In 1983 the edict (issued by a former Grand Master of California) that prohibited any activity on the part of Hawaii Freemasons to engage in any action to form a Grand Lodge of

Hawaii had been terminated. The lifting of this ill-conceived decree enabled the Hawaii Freemasons to once again pursue what had appeared to be an impossible dream, that of establishing their own regular Grand Lodge.

After learning that Hawaii was once again on the move to form its own Grand Lodge, Most Worshipful Levitt lost no time in contacting the Master of each of the twelve Lodges in Hawaii and explained that the procedure to move ahead to undertake a "Feasibility Study for a Grand Lodge of Hawaii" would be conducted in accordance with the provisions exclusively adopted for that purpose by the Grand Lodge of California in 1983, (which were identified in the Grand Lodge proceedings). As a result, a Special Committee of Hawaii Freemasons was created. The members were nominated by their respective Lodges, with the actual selection made by Grand Master Levitt. The committee was composed of a representative from each Hawaii Lodge, plus an additional member from three of the Lodges with the greatest membership. Consequently Hawaiian Lodge, Lodge Le Progres de l'Oceanie, and Pearl Harbor Lodge each had two representatives on the committee, for a total of fifteen committee members. Worshipful Levitt and the committee was activated. The committee performed all of its work in Hawaii. However, all the work was accomplished in accordance with the requirements set forth by the Grand Lodge of California, which meant that if any progress was to be made, the "ground rules" established by the Grand Lodge of California would by necessity be adhered to.

Hawaii gets approval to form its own Grand Lodge

At the 1988 Annual Communication of the Grand Lodge of California, Frederick H. Overstreet, PM subsequently the Grand Master of Masons in Hawaii, was at the time chairman of the Special Hawaii Committee, and he presented the "REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON THE FEASIBILITY STUDY OF A GRAND LODGE OF HAWAII", and the "RESOLUTION FOR A PROPOSED GRAND LODGE OF HAWAII." The resolution was APPROVED.

The Hawaii Committee set about to develop the necessary procedures that would enable every Hawaii Freemason the opportunity to vote "YES" or "NO" as to his choice of establishing a Grand Lodge of Hawaii. The committee also continued to work with Most Worshipful Leo Mark who succeeded Jack Levitt as Grand Master of Masons in California. Some of the meetings with Most Worshipful Mark took place in Honolulu, and on occasion some high intensity negotiations occurred. The committee also developed the structure, functions and budget for the proposed Grand Lodge of Hawaii.

After nine of the twelve Lodges in the State of Hawaii, and 65.5% of the voting members voted for a Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Hawaii, Worshipful Frederick H. Overstreet, committee chairman, convened a meeting at the Honolulu Masonic Temple on Makiki Street at 9:30 AM on April 8, 1989. The voting results were announced and tabulated by Roy Ota, the Senior Inspector Present. The results of the voting were subsequently sent to Most Worshipful Stanley L. Channon, who was the Grand Master of Masons in California at that time.

Le Progres, Hawaiian, Honolulu, Kona, Kilauea, Waikiki, Maui, Ko'olau, and the King Kalakaua Daylight Lodge had all voted to form a Grand Lodge of Hawaii. Pearl Harbor, Schofield, and Kauai Lodge voted against forming a Grand Lodge of Hawaii.

Grand Lodge of Hawaii is Instituted

On May 20, 1989, a convention was held at the Honolulu Scottish Rite Cathedral for the purpose of instituting The Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of Hawaii. All Hawaii Freemasons were invited to attend, and the Scottish Rite Cathedral was filled to capacity.

At 9:14 AM Most Worshipful Frederick H. Overstreet who also chaired the convention, called the brethren to order to start the proceedings.

Brother Charles C. Kippen, Past Master of Lodge Le Progres de l'Oceanie, opened the program with the following prayer:

Almighty and Eternal God! Great Architect and Ruler of the Universe! At whose creative fiat all things first were made! We, the creatures of Thy universe humbly implore Thee to pour down upon this convocation, assembled in Thy Holy Name, the continual dew of Thy blessing.

As we meet this day to form a Sovereign Grand Lodge of Hawaii, make us mindful of our many forebearers who have led the way for 146 years of Freemasonry in Hawaii. On the great Level of Fraternal Love, Thou hast made possible innocent brotherly affection between admiral and apprentice; governor and gardener; captain and clerk; patrician and plebian. Hawaii's Masonic endeavor has been truly blessed by Thee.

Our leadership has excelled, kings, princes, governors, and publishers have been among our number. Judges and educators have graced our posts of authority.

Now, by the exercise of franchise and with the blessings of our Mother Grand Lodge, Hawaii Freemasons embark upon a new beginning. One fraught with hazards and uncertainties as well as with opportunities.

Wouldst Thou be pleased to grant, Heavenly Father, that our doings begun and entered into this day may be pleasing to Thee, righteous in Thy sight and helpful to Thy greater glory. Amen.

Brother William K. McKee, Jr., Past Master of Waikiki Lodge, and later elected to be the first Grand Master of Masons in Hawaii, led the assembly in the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of our country.

Chairman Overstreet then introduced the members of the Special Committee, whose efforts and dedication, made the Grand Lodge of Hawaii a reality.

The long awaited election of Grand Lodge officers was next on the agenda. Each Lodge had four votes; the Master, Senior and Junior Wardens, and a Past Master who represented the Past Masters of the Lodge, were the only brethren eligible to vote. A maximum total of 48 ballots were cast.

The elected officers were as follows:

Grand Master: William K. McKee Jr. (Waikiki Lodge No. 774)

Senior Grand Warden: Ernest Y. Yamane (Hawaiian Lodge No. 21)

Junior Grand Warden: David K. Lindsey, Jr. (Honolulu Lodge No. 409)

Grand Treasurer: John G. Simpson (Lodge Le Progres de l'Oceanie No. 371)

Grand Secretary: Glenn R. Petty (Honolulu Lodge No. 409)

Grand Treasurer: Louie C. Ondo (Pearl Harbor Lodge No. 598)

The elected officers were then installed at 11:28 AM by the convention chairman, Frederick H. Overstreet, which was followed by an adjournment for lunch.

Grand Lodge of Hawaii Opens for the First Time

At precisely 1:00 PM the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of Hawaii opened on the Third Degree of Masonry for the transaction of Grand Lodge business. Arrangements were made to honor the Masters of the twelve Lodges by having them occupy the chairs for the opening ceremony.

They were as follows:

David N.E. Kaohelaulii (Hawaiian Lodge No. 21) as Grand Master

Melvin Kau (Waikiki Lodge No. 774) as Senior Grand Warden

Dewey Sturges (Honolulu Lodge No. 409) as Junior Grand Warden

Flip Grisolano (Ko'olau Lodge No. 801) as Grand Treasurer
Bernard Suganuma (Lodge Le Progres de l'Oceanie No. 371) as Grand Secretary
Louie C. Ondo (King Kalakaua Daylight Lodge No. 838) as Senior Grand Deacon
Eugene Simon (Lodge Maui No. 472) as Junior Grand Deacon
Art Martin (Kilauea Lodge No. 330) as Grand Chaplain
Clifford Hiatt (Kona Lodge No. 836) Senior Grand Steward
Jim Sullivan (Schofield Lodge No. 443) as Junior Grand Steward
Mike Warren (Pearl Harbor Lodge No. 598) as Grand Marshal
William Hicks (Kauai Lodge No. 598) as Grand Tiler

The major business activities conducted included the following: Adopting the California Masonic Code, subject to a few minor changes relating to local conditions and geography, adoption of a proposed budget and approval of a per-capita assessment, and adoption of the Ritual of the Grand Lodge of California. **Action was also taken whereby all constituent Lodges in the Hawaii jurisdiction would discontinue the use of Lodge numbers, and be identified by name only.**

The formal installation of elected and appointed Grand Lodge officers took place on July 1, 1989 at 3:00 PM at the Honolulu Scottish Rite Cathedral. Most Worshipful Stanley L. Channon, Grand Master of Masons in California honored our newly instituted Grand Lodge by serving as the Installing Officer.

Grand Lodge Installs its Officers for the First Time

As a result of the thoughtfulness of the Brethren of Lodge Le Progres de l'Oceanie, the Past Masters Jewels of our late brethren, King David Kalakaua and John O. Dominis, Consort of Queen Lili'uokalani, were made available to Most Worshipful William K. McKee, Jr., and Right Worshipful Ernest Y. Yamane respectively, and worn when they were installed. This was the most appropriate gesture as both of our late brethren were very active in the Craft, and members of Lodge Le Progres de l'Oceanie.

The Very Reverend David N.E. Kaohelaulii, Grand Chaplain originally from the neighbor island of Niihau, gave the Devotional Services in Hawaiian.

Masonic dignitaries from Hawaii, California, Nebraska and Japan were in attendance.

The Royal Order of Kamehameha presented the Hawaiian Flag which was followed by everyone singing Hawaii Pono'i. The Kamehameha Chapter 439 of the National Sojourners led the entire group in singing our National Anthem. This was followed by a "Toast To The Flag" which was performed by the Heroes of '76 who were dressed in colonial costumes of the type worn during the War of Independence. It was a very impressive tribute to the flag of our country, and to the men and women who fought so gallantly to create this great nation, and to all those who fought in subsequent wars to preserve our way of life.

Hawaiian societies represented were: Hale O Na Ali'i, Ahahui Kaahumanu, Royal Order of Kamehameha, and the Daughters and Sons, Hawaiian Warriors.

Most Worshipful William Kamalalawalu McKee, Jr. was thus installed as the first Grand Master of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of Hawaii in a manner that was reminiscent of the close ties which existed between Freemasonry and the Hawaiian Monarchy. The Installation Ceremony was concluded on a joyous note with everyone holding hands and singing "Hawaii Aloha."

A Grand Banquet was held that evening at the Hale Koa Hotel with Hawaiian and Filipino entertainment.

After 137 years to the month, (when Hawaiian Lodge was chartered), May 5, 1852 - May 20, 1989, of being a part of the California Jurisdiction, Hawaii the 50th State at long last established its own regular Grand Lodge.

Leeward Lodge

When the Grand Lodge of Hawaii was formed, it "inherited" the lodges that were created through the auspices of other jurisdictions such as the Grand Lodge of Scotland, the Supreme Council of France and the Grand Lodge of California.

On May 2, 2003, the Grand Lodge of Hawaii under the leadership of Most Worshipful Grand Master Lyle Phillips, granted Leeward Lodge its charter. This constituted a major event for the Grand Lodge of Hawaii and Hawaii Freemasonry as a whole, for it marks the very first time the Grand Lodge has given out a charter to form a new Lodge.

However, Leeward Lodge's creation did not happen over time. Many brethren from different lodges (but most of them members of Hawaiian Lodge) wanted to see a lodge on the Leeward side of the island of Oahu. Like all great endeavors, they sacrificed time, money and energy to make the dream of forming a new lodge a reality. It also took almost three years to complete, spanning three Grand Master terms.

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