

Canadian Free Press Thursday, 15 July, 1852
Laying the Corner-Stone of the Elgin County Buildings

This ceremony took place on Tuesday last at St. Thomas, with the customary Masonic ceremonies amid a numerous concourse of the inhabitants of St. Thomas and neighbourhood. Shortly after eleven o'clock the procession formed opposite the Town Hall in St. Thomas and, after making the circuit of the town, proceeded to the site selected for the buildings and for the construction of which considerable preparation has already been made. The procession was headed by the St. Thomas Band followed by the Town Fire Company – the Cadres of Temperance – and the Division of the Sons of Temperance belonging to the town – the Pioneer Division S. of T. of London – the London Brass Band – the London Lodge of Odd Fellows, which numbered very strong – the Southwold Cavalry from Fingal – the London Rifle Band – the London Lodge of Free Masons – the Regular Artillery Band from London and the Free Mason's Lodge from Port Stanley.

The ceremony of laying the cornerstone of the Court-House was performed by the Middlesex Lodge 211 of Port Stanley, assisted by St. John's Lodge 208 of London; Mr. Hale of the former being the officiating Master Mason. In a cavity under the stone was placed a glass jar containing the various dates, the Township population and names of the municipal officers in the new County of Elgin, several newspapers, coins, etc.

On a large and elevated stand erected opposite the scene of operations, about 500 of "the fair" of St. Thomas were accommodated with seats from which a good view of the operations could be obtained. On the speaker's platform were noticed the Township Councilors and Reeves of the new County of Elgin - also the warden of the United Counties of Middlesex and Elgin, William Niles Esq. - and a number of clergymen of the neighbourhood.

On the conclusion of the ceremony Mr. Hale addressed the assembly in explanation of the ceremonies of Free Masonry as follows:

Brethren, Ladies and Gentlemen – in addition to the important duties that I have been this day called upon to preform, viz.: to lay the cornerstone of the County of Elgin Municipal Buildings, in ancient Masonic form; that of addressing a few words to you in reference to the ceremony you have just witnessed, has also devolved upon me; it is one that however agreeable to my inclination, I should yet have much preferred to see entrusted to some one more able to do justice to a most noble theme.

Having, however, undertaken this duty, I will endeavor in a brief space, to afford you, in addition to a short glance at the origin of ancient masonry, some slight explanation of the ceremony we have just performed, and of the reasons for which our Fraternity are so often called upon to officiate upon similar occasions; and while content that the subject, however feebly handled on the present occasion, will possess great interest for the minds of the Brethren present, I shall endeavor to render these remarks also interesting and profitable to the uninitiated who now do me the honour of listening to them.

Free Masonry then, is an institution of the most moral tendency, and of the most elevated principles. It is an institution formed upon a system that if properly adhered to, cannot fail to prepare its members for the rewards promised us in a future state, by the Great Author of all being.

Freemasonry also, is undoubtedly, the oldest association instituted by man alone and since in the earlier stages of its existence, the members of the fraternity were actually operative masons, so the first authentic accounts we possess of their proceedings are during the erection and completion of the most sumptuous and costly building that probably was ever formed by man - this building was no other than the Temple commenced by Solomon, King of Israel, in the 4th year of his reign in a. m. 3000; 1004 years B. C. or nearly 4000 years ago. And as we are told in the Bible, even at that early period the brethren were very numerous; those actually employed in the erection of this gorgeous edifice consisting of 3300 officers, who ruled over the people that wrought in the work, three score 10,000 that bore burdens, and fourscore thousand hewers in the mountains – thus making the aggregate of 153,000 human beings, and according to the most authentic computation of the relative value of gold and silver in ancient and modern times the enormous sum of *984,630,230 stg. devoted by Solomon to the construction and adornment of a temple for the worship of God. As may be easily comprehended by referring to the astounding facts just related, this temple was completed in seven years, although such was the perfection of the masonic art even then, and such the wise regulations ordained by Solomon, that we also are told that “the house when it was in building was built of stone made ready before it was brought thither; so that there was neither hammer nor saw nor any tool of iron heard in the house while it was in building.” Such my friends, was the commencement of masonry as an organized association. And it is one whose original regulations and mysteries have been handed down from generation to generation and have been represented and fostered in every clime through the long course of ages that have elapsed since its first establishment.

I have dwelt on this branch of my subject for reasons, the most prominent of which are, 1st That all the most valued associations of ancient craft masonry, are connected with the Temple of Solomon and also that many interesting events are associated with its *Site*, which was upon one of the eminences of Mount Moriah. It was to this *Sacred Spot* that the steps of the Patriarch Abraham and the unsuspecting Isaac were directed by God when he put the strength of his servant’s faith to the severest test, by requiring of him the immolation of his only son upon the altar, which was built upon an elevated point of that holy mountain. That spot was subsequently the scene of the *Crucifixion* of our Blessed Lord. Time has changed the features of the place, but time will never obliterate from the mind of man the scenes which have transpired upon *Calvary*.

The traditions of our craft also associates with that spot tales of *Defection* and *Treachery* whereby the *noble* and *virtuous* perished. 2nd. I am enabled to enter more easily into the second part of my engagement, viz., the explanation of this ceremony, and our Fraternity are called upon to officiate on such occasions. Thus, in ancient times, operative masons or architects, like other cultivators of the Arts had an existence almost coeval with the

transition of society from its nomad or patriarchal form into established communities. The knowledge of the Arts and Sciences being limited to few, the possession thereof was most valuable and often clothed the possessor with much power. These arts were handed down from Father to Son, as they still continue to be in the East, and those who were great proficient therein ranked with the Princes of the land. Indeed, the great importance of a knowledge of the ancient Arts and Cabala of the Craft induced Kings and Princes to seek admission thereto. Hence we find that Solomon, King of Israel, and Hiram, King of Tyre, became partakers of the privileges of the craft and improved and regulated the organization thereof with the wisdom and skill that has perpetuated it without material change, down to the present day. They also, at the same time, effected the distinction between operative masons and Free Masons, a distinction which has caused much confusion in the history of the institution, for when distinguished men were thus admitted to an association designed only for *Operative* Masons they were termed by way of distinction “Free” in contrast with the *Operative* Craftsmen and “accepted” in token of their having been received and regarded as if they were Masons. This system of amalgamation of Operative and Free and Accepted Masons continued from the period of the building of King Solomon’s Temple and spread from land to land, each taking their part, the Operative executing and the Free and Accepted Mason planning, and acting as patrons and advisors, until in process of time the Free and Accepted Masons became so numerous as to warrant the origin of *Speculative Masonry* which was grafted upon the ancient system during the 17th century. The system of instruction had in fact been developed at a much earlier day. In pursuance of ancient custom, the Operative Masons were always called upon to erect all important buildings, and about the date alluded to, it became necessary for some chief officer of a lodge or lodges of *Speculative Masonry* to conduct the ceremony of commencing the building by laying the Corner Stone generally in the north east corner if practicable, in the same manner that you have this day seen it performed. I do not deem it necessary to mention instances as they have been always public, and are consequently matter of history, and do not bear upon the present address, which is intended merely to show that the services of our Fraternity and the observances of their ancient forms on similar occasions, have been and are in request up to the present day.

I have thus concluded that part of my address that more particularly pertains to masonry. There remains for me to express the obligations I am under to Sir Knight James Daniell, to the W. M. and Brethren of St. John’s Lodge and to the P. M., Officers and Brethren of the Lodge over which I have the honour to preside. I am however convinced that that they will be satisfied with the encomium of my saying that they have done their work faithfully and truly, such being the highest meed and praise for a Free and Accepted Mason. I have also to thank those of the uninitiated for the patience and attention with which my remarks have been received. And though last, not least, to the ladies whose presence have graced this meeting, and I now say to them, when you hear a Mason reviled – when you hear a Mason condemned as belonging to a secret society, I beg to remind you that charity is the best and noblest attribute of our Fraternity; and that the Mason or his widow and his orphan if in distress, are sure of prompt and speedy succor.

Mr. B. Drake, the Chairman or Master of Ceremonies for the day, then introduced the several speakers, whose addresses were followed by an air from one of the bands on the ground.

Dr. Hall said that they had met there that day to commence an era in the history of this section of the country, the erection of the Court House and Jail for the new County of Elgin. It was a fit event for their congratulations, this commencement of doing their business at home ; he hoped that those who needed it would tremble at the thought of a jail. However, he was glad that there was few of the latter class. It was natural that they should feel elated now that success had crowned their efforts, opposed as they had been by the stronger and more important half of the old County with stronger friends – while they were the weaker yet ‘better half.’ They had occasion to rejoice even that their land was cleared, for over that ground many who now stood before him had chased the wild animals in their native haunts. He then gracefully indicated the changes that had taken place, by referring to the army of beauty, loveliness and grace that he now ranged before him. Perhaps he was prejudiced in favour of his native soil, but he ventured to say that a better and richer soil, or more enterprising population was not to be found in the Province than the new County of Elgin; a better country was never beheld. Much was said about the enterprise of the Western States, but much healthier enterprise existed here than there. In these states you might see mills and factories that cost 20, 30 or 40 thousand dollars, renting for 30 dollars a year, while here every enterprise that was undertaken proved both profitable and successful – England was celebrated for her fertile soil induced by cultivation, for at one time naturally it produced but little. Here, nature had done a great deal, as so had the enterprise of those around him. He felt pleasure then in adopting the line of the poet - no one here need be ashamed to own it –
“This is my own , my native land”

Here we had Schools that any country may be proud of. Our general institutions were of a character not excelled. We can also boast of our Courts of Law, and that justice is well-maintained, - our trifling differences are speedily arranged by them. Our criminal business is small and the weightier crimes of other countries are rare. We may well be proud of our ministers of the Gospel; and even our Lawyers may be boasted of as a credit to the country. Of physic I shall say nothing, the Doctors are a pretty hard set, I suppose. (Laughter) At the present day there is scarcely any bitter question or political dispute. He saw before him men who were not the serfs of the soil, but men who really own their farms &c. themselves, and this was what could be said of but few counties in the world. The doctor concluded his highly humorous remarks on the evidences of prosperity which the country exhibited, by stating that in one point only were we deficient – in that of railways – but that with the commencement that had already been made and the acknowledged enterprise of the inhabitants, it would not be long before this country would be as well covered with railways as any other.

John McKay Esq., was then introduced. After the lengthy explanations of the history of the mystic craft and the evidence of our prosperity, afforded by the previous speakers, there would be but little time left for him to give some outline of the efforts which were made to rescue the success which that day crowned these efforts, and as he had always taken an active part in the exertions that were made, he was perhaps the best able to

describe them. It will be just six years next month since the first meeting was called to agitate for a division of the Southern Townships, and the old St. Thomas bands now before me went round to induce by their sweet tones the attendance of those interested at the meeting. We were then told that our cause was a hopeless one, to attempt to separate the Talbot Street from the large and overgrown County of Middlesex. Yet the adjoining County of Norfolk, with a population of less than one half of that contained in these townships was separated and also the County of Oxford similarly placed in respect to population. But you expressed your willingness to agitate for it and here you have obtained it in six years while the County of Norfolk although previously distinct, did not until after an agitation of ten years obtain a second County Town and set apart. We knew it was with the greatest reluctance that the North would part with us. When we began by petitioning the District Council they treated us as an old Scotch Judge once did a suit brought before him and refused to listen to our petition. This Judge after having patiently heard the council (counsel) on one side, when the council on the opposite was preparing for his address interrupted him by saying "it was useless – as his (the judge's) mind was already made up." "But you are not still open to conviction," asked the attorney. "Yes, he was open to conviction, but nothing that he could say would alter his judgment." (Laughter) Yet this was the oldest, the richest and the best-settled part of the whole County, and it is from our wealth, from the taxes drawn from here that the rival Town of London has been built up. The South has been like a fine milch cow to the North, a large calf with a big mouth, and now we have thrown down the fences, and sent the Northern calf to find its own pasture. St. Thomas has been, of course, the headquarters of the agitation for a division, just as London was the headquarters of our opposition. They said we wished to revolt from them and in conversation and through their newspapers the *Free Press*, *The Times* and the *Western Globe*, they stigmatized us as revolters. We petitioned the Parliament and set down 3000 signatures in 1847, and it was graciously received but that would have been the last of it. In 1849 we sent down another petition. It met with the talented opposition of the Member for London: I do not say he shed tears of vexation but with the drops of sweat running down his face from the exertion he used – he begged, he prayed – that they would at least postpone the division for another year. In 1850 again, and in this the third time we hoped to be successful, but we were again defeated. Again, and for a fourth time it was tried, and we were successful. It was maintained that the representatives should be guided by the wish of a majority of the County – but whoever heard of a County seeking to divide itself in this way -The hon. Members justly deemed that they should be guided only by a majority of that part seeking the division. To the honorable conduct of the Members of the Legislature are we indebted for our success. A great deal of capital was attempted to be made by the opposition out of the cost of the new County building. The cost is not much 3000 Pounds is about the estimate of the contractor. At 5000 Pounds it would be but one d in the pound for ten years to come. That is, if you are assessed for 100 Pounds only, it will cost you but ten pence currency a year for the advantages which you will possess after October next. Mr. M concluded by trusting that as this had been the first occasion for rejoicing over the first great step they had made in enterprise, the next would be the turning of the first sod on the line of the Niagara and Detroit Rivers Railway.

Asa Howard, Esq. followed in the best delivered speech of the day. (Our limits will not admit of our giving more than a very brief outline of the rest of the speakers.) He congratulated them on the auspicious event which they had met to celebrate, and their joyful anticipations for the future. He said Mr. McKay had anticipated him in some of his remarks. When the separation was first started about six years ago, it was a fearful and hazardous undertaking. But fortunately we had a few individuals who were equal to the emergency – and to them great credit was due, several of them had labored night and day. Yet the justice of our case could not be withstood – our population is now 20,000 – and yet we are taxed to the amount of \$100,000 for the construction of a Railroad to destroy our ports on Lake Erie. Their thanks were justly due to the Hon. F. Hincks, to John McKay Esq., to the Township Councilors for Elgin, to the Legislature for passing the Bill – and to our noble Governor General (after whom the county was named) for his cordial assent to the Bill. He stated that as yet they had paid nothing for the erection of the buildings, or even the corner stone, nor would they have to do so before the end of 1852.

S. Price, Esq., of Port Stanley, objected to the long-winded and irrelevant speeches of those who had preceded him, on subjects which had now better be buried forever. He would congratulate them on the event of the day, not as inhabitants of St. Thomas, but as inhabitants of the County of Elgin. The separation of the County of Elgin was not designed for the benefit of any particular locality, but for the general benefit. He could not appreciate that kind of patriotism – patriotism was not to be confined to so narrow a sphere, it included the benefit of the County and the Province at large. He believed that this division would aid the general prosperity, and for that reason he had supported it. He regretted the allusions that had been made – they were in exceeding bad taste altogether. He would not have offered the slightest cause of offense to the humblest individual there present from the North. We must feel grateful for their coming here today. He should feel sorry indeed, if, in making these allusions, the people now before him considered the speaker who had used them as their organ. Sincerely did he thank those gentlemen who had attended from the North on that day – their attendance was an earnest that after the contest had been fairly decided, they felt as they should feel towards their neighbours in this part of the County.

Mr. Price's remarks were well received.

Mr. Green of Union promised the virtue of brevity. He stated that they had heard too much of the past to-day but they must not overlook the fact that St. Thomas had also a future. A railway from the east to the west with a depot in the town, will be the next event. This day will soon come. But they must be united for the good of the County in all their efforts. He doubted not that St. Thomas must ultimately become the Lake port.

Colin Munro, Esq., said that nothing regarding the great celebration of the day gave him so much pleasure as to see so many of the inhabitants of the County of Middlesex present. It was a proof that if they have opposed us on this question, now that it is decided they are willing to rejoice with us. He paid a high compliment to the enterprise and energy of the inhabitants of the County, and regarded it as a tower of strength to it. In these qualities and in the array of beauty before him, he believed the County before any other, and he had just returned from visiting nearly every County in the Province. He

stated that had time permitted Mr. McKay to conclude his remarks that gentleman intended to express his gratification with the attendance from the North, on this occasion, as an evidence that this was the last occasion on which these necessary differences would be alluded to. For his, the speaker's part, he felt a pang at being separated from the County of Middlesex; in common with the other members of the Council he had battled for the people's rights and regretted to quit the scenes of their former struggles and triumphs. And he, and everyone there present, must feel deeply grateful for the attendance of the Warden, and so many of the Councilors and friendly societies from the neighbouring County of Middlesex.

The exercises of the day were then adjourned for an hour, which afforded time for a heavy shower to exhaust its fury and for the various societies to do justice to the ample fare provided for them at the different hotels. On resuming in the afternoon, athletic sports were kept up with great spirit, ending in the evening with a brilliant display of fireworks.

In justice to the inhabitants of St. Thomas, we must state that we did not find one individual who justified the allusions to the "north" by one or two of the speakers. In fact, when it is stated that fully one half of those composing the procession were from the Town of London, it would seem strange were the opinion at St. Thomas otherwise. Allowance must also be made for the speaker on the ground, as stated by Mr. Munro, that he had not time to close his remarks. We would not give the party referred to the credit of a desire to insult everyone who was so unfortunate as to hail from the "north," yet we cannot conceal the close resemblance that the act bore to such an intention.