
 From Mirt's Back Porch

**FREEMASONRY'S MARK ON
MONTANA'S HISTORY**

No postage stamp conveys a greater story of the protection afforded by Freemasonry, or of the high principles of the Craft, than the 3¢ statehood stamp of 1939 (No. 858), which shows an outline map of Montana and the location of Helena, the state's capital. The stamp was issued to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the statehood of Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota and Washington, and also bears the maps of the other three states.

The early history of Montana is a history of Freemasonry in that territory. The two are inseparable, because it was the pledge which binds one Mason to another that brought about law and order in an area where lawlessness was rampant and where guns speared bullets on little or no provocation.

In the early 1860's adventurers were attracted to Montana (then Dakota Territory) by the discovery of gold and other valuable metals. The first settlement was opened up at what is now Bannack. It was a settlement of the rawest sort. All around was the barest creation. Every stranger was regarded as an enemy. A spirit of anarchy was abroad, and there was no law. Lives were snuffed out with impunity. It was unsafe to voice publicly any opposition to this situation.

In 1863, there was the first gathering of Masons. A brother before his death had requested Masonic funeral services. No one knew the numerical strength of Masonry in that territory, because there was no lodge. A notice was posted. When the brother was consigned to his grave, 76 Masons who had proved themselves under rigid examination were present to drop sprigs of evergreen upon the casket.

This surprisingly large outturn set the Masons to thinking. They decided then and there to establish a working lodge, not only for the fellowship it afforded but as a united front against the lawless element which then ruled. The Grand Master of Nebraska on April 27, 1863, granted a dispensation for a lodge at Bannack. Before the dispensation arrived, most of the Masons had moved to more fruitful regions of Montana, and the lodge never met under that authority.

But the idea of Masonic lodges was not abandoned. Three were established in rapid succession elsewhere—Virginia City No. 43 under a charter from

the Grand Lodge of Kansas, and Montana No. 9 and Helena No. 10, at Helena, under charters from the Grand Lodge of Colorado.

On January 24, 1866, representatives of these three lodges met at Virginia City and formed the Grand Lodge of Montana. The brethren from Helena trudged through blinding storms and snow of unprecedented depths to attend, traveling 120 miles.

Meantime, the Masons had gathered around them other law-abiding citizens and had organized the Vigilantes—a group which was determined to bring law and order out of chaos. Their efforts met with signal success. The assassin and the tyrant, who had killed or insulted with confidence of no punishment, were driven out. Towns sprang up where just a few years before savage men and beasts roamed. An empire was in the making.

The rapid progress of Freemasonry in Montana was a matter of astonishment to the new brethren who came from the States. But, when it is recalled that the Masons met for mutual protection against a common enemy, this growth is not surprising. The brotherhood of the Craft afforded an opportunity for defense against surrounding evils. Thus, the traditions of Freemasonry spread quickly in those western wilds and good men were attracted to its altars.

It is fitting, indeed, that when Helena, the present state capital, became a city, the first four mayors to be elected were Masons. When the cornerstone of the state capitol was laid on July 4, 1899, the Grand Master of Montana was called upon to perform this service with the ceremonies of the Craft.

That is the story one postage stamp could tell, had it the power to speak. It is a story which I found in the proceedings of the early years of the Grand Lodge of Montana.—John A. Mirt in "Masonry on Postage Stamps."

Continued

Additional Information



Scott No. 858. The stamp is based on a sketch made by Bro. Franklin Delano Roosevelt while he was President of the United States.

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