



District 3-12 Masonic Lodge History

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Families traveled the Oregon Trail drawn to the West Coast by opportunities to strike it rich in the gold fields, logging, fishing, and farming in the newly opened lands of California and the Oregon Territory. In 1853 the Territory of Washington was created including all the lands north of the Columbia River.

For the first settlers, the dense stands of fir, hemlock, spruce, and cedar represented a barrier to settlement. The great trees had to be removed to make agriculture possible. In the early years, the Puget Sound country could not support itself with locally produced foodstuffs. But Californians paid cash for all the lumber the Puget Sound mills could cut. Loggers felled trees close to water so that they could be floated in rafts to mills. As the cleared land advanced, oxen and horses dragged the bucked logs over skid roads. Animal power limited operations to about one mile from the beach.

By December of 1858, at the time of the establishment of the Grand Lodge of Washington, there were four lodges in Washington Territory originally chartered by the Grand Lodge of Oregon. These four Lodges were:

Olympia #1 chartered in 1853
Steilacoom #2 chartered in 1854
Grand Mound #3 chartered in 1858, and
Washington Lodge of Vancouver #4 in 1858.

Soon after the establishment of the Grand Lodge of Washington, the first Lodge chartered by the new Grand Lodge was at Teekalet, now Port Gamble, in Kitsap County. This was a company town run by the Puget Mill Company founded by Andrew Jackson Pope and Frederic Talbot. Franklin #5 was granted dispensation on December 13th, 1858 and chartered Sept. 5th, 1859. The original lodge still stands near the Pope & Talbot sawmill site. Port Townsend Lodge #6 was chartered in the same year, 1859. These early Lodges reflected the influx of families from the East Coast and mid-West to the lumber mills on the Olympic Peninsula and to the sea ports used to ship goods south to San Francisco. Franklin #5 was the first lodge in what would become District 12.

Kane Lodge #8 was established at the Port Madison sawmill on Bainbridge Island in 1860. Meetings were held on the second floor of the lumber mill offices owned by Brother George Meigs.

While settlers were growing in numbers on the North end of the Olympic Peninsula, Mason County encompassing the southern reach of Hood Canal and many bays and inlets of southern Puget Sound was growing too. After settlement, the mainstay of the economy was logging. In 1853, Major Hugh A. Goldsborough, Olympia pioneer Michael T. Simmons, and Wesley Gosnell built a water-powered sawmill on the south shore of Big Skookum at Oakland near present-day Shelton. By 1864, the farming and lumber industry was successful enough to support a Masonic Lodge. Mt. Moriah Lodge #11 was chartered Nov. 29th, 1864 at Oakland.

Union City (later Union) on the South end of Hood Canal was first established as a fur-trading site in the 1830's. Dreamers saw Union city as a logical terminus for the transcontinental railroad. Union City Masonic Lodge #27 was chartered there in 1878. Three railroads produced plans to serve the little settlement, which boosters touted as the Venice of the Pacific.

Soon after this, the Renton Lodge #29 was chartered in 1879 at Port Blakely. By the late 1800s Port Blakely boasted the world's largest sawmill.

Port Blakely and Port Madison, had large hotels, schools, foundries, and substantial shipbuilding enterprises. Most of the ships were built as large schooners for hauling lumber.

By the 1880s, mechanization in the form of steam geared locomotives and donkey engines greatly improved efficiency and profitability in the woods. Logging operations expanded and capitalists built railroads at Shelton, Clinton, and Kamilche to feed mills at Port Blakely, Port Gamble, and Seabeck. Shelton grew at Oakland's expense and in 1888; Mason County voters moved the county seat down the beach to the new, larger town. Oakland essentially became part of Shelton.



By the 1880s, the area to become District 12 of the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Washington now had five lodges: Franklin #5 at Port Gamble, Kane #8 at Port Madison, Mt. Moriah #11 at Shelton, Union City #27 on Hood Canal, and Renton #29 at Port Blakely. All of these, except Union City Lodge, were in mill towns. A map showing their location is on the left.

The Kitsap County seat was originally in Port Madison, but moved after a popular vote to Sidney in 1892, later renamed "Port Orchard". This was just after; the U.S. Navy sought a suitable location for another installation on the west coast, and found it with the assistance of Sidney's residents in Orchard Bay near the site which would become the town of Bremerton.

Union City still had dreams of becoming a railroad town in the 1890s. A construction crew from the Union Pacific Railroad had just landed to begin work in Union City when the Panic of 1893 scrapped all progress. The economic depression of 1893 also helped close the Port Madison Mill, and in 1908 the Kane Lodge there closed and turned in its charter. The Port Blakely Mill closed in the mid 1920s, 57 years after it began. The Renton Lodge #29, originally at Port Blakely, has continued on in the City of Bainbridge Island.

After the depression of 1893, expansion of the population and enterprise slowed on the peninsula. However Port Orchard, as the county seat, continued to grow. The Navy officially dedicated the Port Orchard Navy Yard in 1894, later to become the Puget Sound Naval Shipyard. The city of Port Orchard suffered a major fire the same year, but quickly rebuilt. In 1898, Port Orchard Lodge #98 was chartered and established on

Sydney Avenue. The original lodge building still stands in downtown Port Orchard and houses the Sydney Art Gallery.

Like most western Washington communities, the Bremerton area's first economic activities centered on the timber and lumber industry. In 1891, Navy Lieutenant A.B. Wyckoff purchased 190 acres of waterfront on Sinclair Inlet with the assistance of the residents of Sydney. This purchase provided the initial land and water access for what is now home to the oldest naval installation on Puget Sound.

With the continued expansion of the Navy installations in the area before and during the first world war, came three more lodges in the Bremerton area. Bremerton Lodge #117 was chartered in 1902, Wm. H. Upton Naval and Military Lodge #206 was chartered in 1915, and Steadfast Lodge #216 was chartered in 1916. Lodge #206 was founded by then Marine Col. Joseph Henry Pendleton, later to have the Marine Corp. Base that is located North of San Diego named after him.

As the population continued to expand, during the boom years before the Great Depression, lodges were established in the water front communities of Poulsbo and Gig Harbor. And an additional lodge was established in Bremerton.

Known as "Little Norway," Poulsbo was settled in 1892 by Norwegian loggers, farmers and fishermen who likened the fjord-cut landscape to their homeland. Warren G. Harding Lodge #260 was chartered and established there in 1924. This was not long after President Harding's death in 1923 after he visited the Northwest.

Commercial fishing and related industries, like boat building, dominated the local economy and rhythm of life in the Gig Harbor community for more than 100 years. Several sawmills also operated in Gig Harbor from the 1880s through the 1950s. John Paul Jones Lodge #271 was chartered and established there in 1926.

Charleston Lodge #269 was chartered in 1926 and was established in Bremerton. It operated out of the same Temple as Bremerton Lodge #117 and Upton Lodge #206. Like those two lodges, Charleston Lodge was heavily manned by Navy and Civilians personnel working at the nearby Puget Sound Naval Ship Yard and other local Navy facilities. In an act of Masonic Charity, Charleston Lodge merged with the faltering Wm H. Upton Lodge Naval & Military Lodge #206 that was having difficulty finding officers to operate the Lodge. In 1996 Charleston merged with Upton and, as traditionally the case, the Lodge with the lowest number continues on. Thus Lodge #206 now has traditions and history from two parents.

No further lodges were chartered in District 12 until the boom time of Masonry after the Second World War. Hood Canal Lodge #288 was chartered in 1948 at Belfair. Belfair serves as a gateway town for the Hood Canal region, and is the last town with services before visitors reach Tahuya State Forest, famed for its miles of off-road vehicle and mountain biking trails.

Silverdale Lodge #311 was chartered in 1985. Silverdale, like many towns in the area, was first explored by loggers. As the trees were removed, farmers moved in and being situated on the water allowed shipping farm goods to the larger cities such as Seattle. Silverdale's growth spurted after the U.S. Navy's 1971 announcement that it would be building its Trident Submarine Base at nearby Bangor. Many of the members of Silverdale #311 have Navy backgrounds linked to the Sub-Base.

By the end of the twentieth century, District 12 contained 12 lodges ranging from Franklin #5 to Silverdale #311. In 2005 District 12 was split into District 3 and District 12.

District 3 Lodges

Mt. Moriah Lodge #11 now co-located with
Union City Lodge #27 – Hwy 101 Valley Junction
Port Orchard Lodge #98 – Port Orchard
John Paul Jones Lodge #271 – Gig Harbor
Hood Canal #288 - Belfair

District 12 Lodges

Franklin #5 – Port Gamble
Renton #29 – Bainbridge Island
Bremerton #117 co-located with
Wm. H. Upton Nav. & Mil. #206 - Bremerton
Steadfast #216 - Manette
Warren G. Harding #260 - Poulsbo
Silverdale #311 - Silverdale

Photos of all these lodges are shown in lodge number (l-r) order at the top of the first page. A map of these lodges is available online here (url is one line):

http://maps.google.com/maps/ms?hl=en&ie=UTF8&q=98367&lr=lang_en&msa=0&msid=107640320950753108331.00045c390d712f94aac5d&ll=47.623752,-122.715912&spn=0.637729,1.07666&z=10

References:

- 1) <http://bremertonwa.com/heritage/>
- 2) http://www.ci.bainbridge-isl.wa.us/island_history.aspx
- 3) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Belfair,_Washington
- 4) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Port_Orchard,_Washington
- 5) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Port_Townsend,_Washington
- 6) <http://www.gigharborchamber.com/history2.html>
- 7) http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=7730 (Mason County)
- 8) <http://portorchard.net/heritage/>
- 9) <http://www.poulsbo.net/heritage/>
- 10) <http://www.ptguide.com/history/index.html>
- 11) <http://silverdale.net/heritage/>
- 12) <http://visitkitsap.com/default.aspx?ID=65>
- 13) <http://www.visitkitsap.com/cities.asp?ID=7>
- 14) http://web.mac.com/poulsbohistory/PHS/General_Info.html
- 15) <http://www.poptal.com/about/history.htm>
- 16) Kitsap Historical Society Archives
- 17) Bainbridge Island Historical Society Archives
- 18) Grand Lodge Region 7 Masonic Library - Bremerton
- 19) Not Made With Hands, Vol 1, Paul W. Harvey, 1958, GL of Washington
- 20) http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=cybertour.cfm&frame=6&file_id=7025