

March 2017

For the Cause of Good: Masonic Charities and Benevolence

Freemasonry is not a service club. Since the earliest days of Masonic Lodges the institution has exhorted its members to practice relief and charity, both for the benefit of its own members as well as for the needy in their district. In 1724 the first Grand Lodge developed a centralized charity scheme which has evolved over the centuries. But this has always been additional to the charity support provided by individual Masons, their Lodges and, later, by Provinces and Districts. Charity formed part of the masonic legacy our early Freemasons brought to North America and particularly to Canada.

The *Upper Canada Gazette* of June 28, 1797 carried a notice about the Lodge of Philanthropy at Newark (today's Niagara-on-the-Lake), No. 4 (Upper Canada) that ". . . At a meeting of the Lodge in their room, Newark, it was resolved that a fund should be established for the benefit of Free Masons' widows, the education of orphans, and indigent brethren's children." And as early as 1799 the surviving written By-Laws of the Lodge at Grimsby, No. 15 (Upper Canada), required that Masons attending Lodge meetings would make a donation ". . . to be put to the fund for indigent brethren." These Lodges were not alone in providing charity and relief to the distressed in Upper Canada. Today Ontario's Masonic support to charitable and relief efforts are not limited to Ontario, but can be provided across Canada and abroad.

The first Constitution of our Grand Lodge, approved in 1856, provided for the formation of a Standing Committee on Charity. Originally Grand Lodge's own general funds were used to create a Charity Fund, the interest earned to be used for charitable purposes. By 1872, \$3,575 had been contributed through 98 grants. Beginning in 1871 monies were regularly spent on disaster relief (such as Hurricane Hazel in 1955) and in supporting a Special War Service Committee when homes were opened to bombed-out and evacuated British children. Over the years funds have been contributed to the Scouts Canada and the Girl Guides of Canada, the Canadian Arthritis and Rheumatism Society, CNIB Canada, Canadian Red Cross, St. John Ambulance, Salvation Army Canada, the Society for Crippled Children and the Society for Retarded Children.

In 1964 Grand Lodge created a charitable foundation under a private act of the Provincial Legislature. According to the Act, "The objects of the Foundation are to receive, maintain, manage, control and use donations exclusively for charitable purposes within Ontario." Thus was the **Masonic Foundation of Ontario** established (www.masonicfoundation.on.ca). Today the interest earned from the Foundation's capital fund (\$14.6 million on March 31, 2016) is used exclusively in Ontario for the relief of poverty, advancement of education and the advancement of other purposes beneficial to the community. The Foundation is committed to funding bursaries, hearing research, drug and substance abuse education in the school systems and other specific and community projects which fall within its guidelines.

At the Annual Communication of Grand Lodge in July 2016, examples of charitable activities were reported. Some of these include (a) Red Cross Blood Service which has been supported by Ontario Masons since the first records were started in Hamilton in 1941. Blood donations totalling 13,710 units in 2015 were reported by our Masonic Districts; (b) projects targetted at various cancers including "Project Prostate Hope," specifically designated by the Grand Master in recognition of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Masonic Foundation of Ontario, to fund projects to strengthen identification and treatment of prostate cancer; (c) Camp Trillium, a Childhood

Cancer Support Centre; and (d) Child Identification Program which has seen 42,000 child ID kits provided free of charge to Ontario families as dramatic, time-sensitive recovery tool for authorities.

Grand Lodge is not alone in these efforts in support of individuals and communities across Ontario, Canada and in other parts of the world. Most Masonic bodies operate parallel charity programs often with the assistance and support of their female units. To name a few, Ontario's Royal Arch Grand Chapter provides support for post-secondary education and medical research; Ontario's Cryptic Rite assists research into Alzheimer disease. National bodies such as the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite are active in support to research to learn and reduce childhood mental diseases such as Autism and Canada's Shriners support hospital programs focussing on Children's needs.

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in the Province of Ontario

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