

# Freemasons made peace at the mill

Have you ever worried that your job application, or membership into a group, might get “black balled?” Or what about feeling as though you might not have been treated fair and “square,” or “on the level?”

This is part two of a three-part series.

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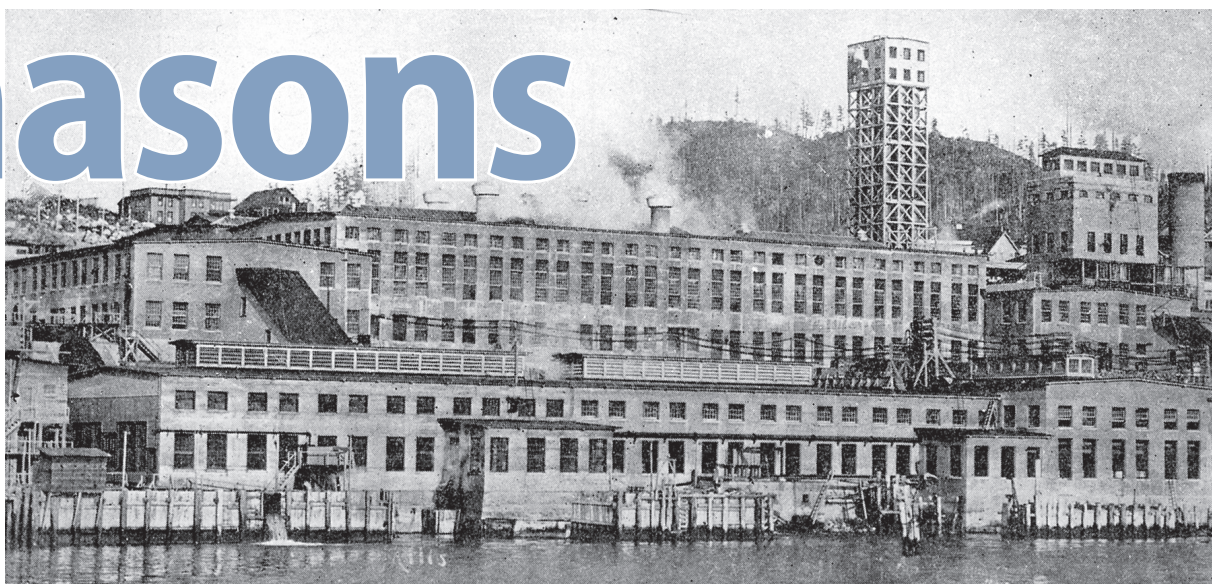
If so, did you know that these phrases come directly from the ceremonies and rituals of Freemasonry? Indeed, Freemasonry has influenced Canadian and Powell River society in many subtle but important ways.

## Black-Balled

The expression “black balled” is a reference to the voting procedures that Freemasons use to reject an inappropriate applicant into the Masonic fraternity. Freemasons cast a secret ballot by privately dropping either a black or white marble into a wooden ballot box. A single black ball is all that is required to terminate a petitioner’s application. The only justifiable reason for black balling an applicant is that the petitioner is known to be unethical or immoral.

## The Third Degree

In novels, and later in Hollywood movies, the third degree referred to a difficult interrogation (a hard-nosed New York policeman grilling a tough criminal, for instance). In Freemasonry, the third degree (or Master Mason degree) is the highest degree conferred in a Masonic lodge. To pass to the third degree and become a full Master Mason, the initiate must demonstrate that he has memorized long passages from the ancient ritual, and he must likewise be able to answer correctly a series of standardized questions based on the information conveyed in the earlier two degrees (the Entered Apprentice and the Fellow Craft degrees).



**SITE OF THE STRIKE:** Triune Masonic Lodge provided a forum for building respect and understanding between management and union members in the years after the papermakers’ strike in 1913.

Getting through the third degree is a difficult and somewhat arduous process, and it is easy to understand how its reputation inspired the still common references in popular culture.

## Fair and Square and Square Deal

The masonic phrase “square deal” was made popular during the American presidential campaign of in 1912 when Theodore Roosevelt used the expression to try and convince voters that he would fairly and ethically balance the interests of big corporations against those of big labour.

It was also, no doubt, a thinly veiled effort by Teddy Roosevelt (who was a Freemason) to reach out to his fraternal brethren and remind them that he was the candidate who would live up to masonic principles.

Roosevelt was running against fellow Freemason (and incumbent president) Howard Taft. Roosevelt’s statement that his rival had failed to provide Americans with a square deal over the previous four years was tantamount to an accusation that Taft’s behavior as president had been unbecoming of a Mason.

Powell River’s freemasons have also worked to ensure that people within this community have been given a square deal.

Up until the late 1920s when the city got its first independent newspaper, and the 1950s when it had its first municipal elections, Triune Masonic lodge was an important place for people with different perspectives who wanted to meet on the square and try to build respectful relationships across political and economic divisions.

When the original papermakers in the mill organized into a union in 1912, and then in 1913 called a strike demanding that the Powell River Company recognize an eight-hour-day working shift, the town was divided into camps.

Tensions were high. People were not speaking to one another and many worried that violence would break out between strikers and employers. Company and union leaders had few places where they could meet on the level and talk peaceably.

Few places, that is, other than Triune Lodge.

While few will be surprised to learn that Company superintendents were early members of the local Masonic lodge, many likely do not realize that in 1921 the president of the papermaker’s union, local 142, also became a member of Triune Lodge. There he joined a large group of tradesmen and labourers who twice per month attended meetings where they socialized with doctors, lawyers, and the Powell River Co. elite.

Few other organizations at that time offered such opportunities for building relationships and understandings across class lines.

Over the past 100 years of Triune Lodge’s history, Freemasonry has waxed and waned in popularity. In 1911 nearly two per cent of the total population of British Columbia were Freemasons.

That number becomes more impressive when you consider that only men over the age of 21 could become Freemasons, that the Pope discouraged Catholic men from joining the fraternity, and that Chinese men of that era typically affiliated with a separate unrelated fraternity known as Chinese Freemasons.

By 1931 roughly 10 per cent of the adult Protestant male population of the province counted themselves as Freemasons. And though diminishing membership numbers have recently inspired some critics to proclaim that Freemasonry has ceased to be vibrant, the ongoing use of ancient Masonic terminology among the general public reminds us of the historic influence and legacies of Freemasonry.

To learn more about Freemasons in this area, visit [www.northshorefreemasons.com/triune.htm](http://www.northshorefreemasons.com/triune.htm) 



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