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[EDITOR'S NOTE: Recently, from out of the past, we discovered an article concerning the first Keyhole Canyon. Written by Past Master Roy Campbell nearly 40 years ago (1963 to 2002), it gives an accurate account of the events leading up to and including that day.]

The First Open Air Lodge At Keyhole Canyon

W.: Roy Campbell, P.M.
1963

After much reflection on the proper approach to this subject, it seemed to me that the purely historical citing of facts and figures and quoting directly from minutes, would not be nearly so informative and colorful as describing the motives and the methods of those of us who were involved in organizing the first open air lodge in Keyhole Canyon in 1963. While I am quite aware of the pitfalls of depending upon memory to give to you the flavor and the attitudes of those times, still I am persuaded that it is worth the risk if I can leave you with some feeling of how the first meeting in Keyhole Canyon came about.

There was in Mt. Moriah Lodge #39 a much beloved and ardent brother, Harry E. Ulery. Harry was the kind of Mason who sets an example for his brothers. He was always concerned for his brother Masons and his Lodge, was ever ready to assist, seemingly spending his entire available time in Masonic labors. During conversations he often presented the idea of an open air lodge, and even suggested Keyhole Canyon as a possible location. I might add that, in addition to many other fine qualities, Harry was a most persistent man, and eventually Harry persuaded me as Master of Mt. Moriah Lodge in 1963, that the open air lodge was not only possible, but most desirable.

But rather than make this the project of a single lodge, we presented the idea to the Masters and Wardens Association of Clark County where it was warmly received and enthusiastically approved. This fine group saw as an opportunity to further a goal that had already been set, that of encouraging as much contact as possible between all lodges in Clark County and it proved to be an ideal vehicle to do just that. But not only did it bring all the Lodges in Clark County (at that time there were only five Lodges here), it also pointed up the fact that, as our first degree lecture points out, the word Lodge is analogous to that of Church, referring not so much to the place of meeting as to the persons assembled."

Of course, this has always been true of Freemasonry. The place of meeting is not the Lodge, although we sometimes tend to think in that perspective. In the first speculative Lodges we find many, if not most, Lodge meetings being held in taverns, military lodges were opened in army barracks and on board naval ships, lodges have been held in prisoner-of-war camps, and in countless other unlikely

places all over the world. Nor has it ever been necessary to hold Lodges indoors. Again, the lecture of the first degree states, "Our ancient brethren held their lodges on high hills or in low vales, the better to observe the approach of cowans and eavesdroppers, ascending or descending."

We have an even closer precedent in Nevada for holding an open air lodge. Many Nevada lodges have a framed reprint from the Virginia City Territorial Enterprise of September 9, 1875 detailing the events of the meeting of Virginia Lodge 3 atop Mt. Davidson. Due to the loss of the Masonic Temple by fire Virginia Lodge #3 had been meeting in the hall of the Odd Fellows, but it too was in turn destroyed by fire. There being no other suitable place to meet the Worshipful Master, Albert Hires, called a meeting of the Lodge in the open air of the mountain top.

This was a huge success, and attracted not only members of Nevada lodges. But sojourning brethren from many states and foreign countries.

With all this precedent to encourage them the Masters and Wardens Association plunged with energy and enthusiasm into the Keyhole Canyon meeting.

Each of the five lodges were fully involved, and it was well that they were because a great deal of planning, preparation, and work was and is involved for this meeting. Permission from the Grand Lodge, permission from the Bureau of Land Management, grading of access roads, directional signs and perhaps guides to be posted, provision for the presence of Masonic regalia and equipment, posting of perimeter guards, stationing of Tylers, and a clean up crew were among the duties to be performed. These and other duties were shared by all the lodges.

October 13th arrived as a lovely day in 1963. At 1:35 p.m. the Worshipful Master from each of the five lodges opened jointly in form on the third degree.

The candidate for the first Keyhole Canyon Open Air Lodge was Brother Murray S. Kachad of Oasis Lodge #41, but the ritual work was shared by all five lodges. There were no doubt some minor problems, but the only one really memorable is the same one we still have today, the Rocky "Carpet" being most trying to the candidate.

The Grand Historian for 1963 was Worshipful Brother Embree D. Wilson who was later to become Grand Master. A considerable part of his annual report was concerned with Keyhole Canyon, and I quote portions from that report.

[Quote] "And now, my brethren, I wish to dwell upon a very significant occurrence, which I feel could well become a traditional part of our Nevada Masonic history. This was an outdoor meeting in Clark County just four weeks ago.

Over a period of several weeks, plans were formulated, and at 1:30 p.m. on the beautiful Sunday afternoon of October 13, 1963, under a dispensation graciously granted by our most Worshipful Grand Master, James P. Whitmore, a group of 135 members of the craft gathered in Keyhole Canyon. A hidden, blind canyon on the western face of the Eldorado mountains; just to the east of Highway No. 95 and midway between Railroad Pass and the historic town of Searchlight." [Unquote.]

Most Worshipful Brother Wilson then listed the lodges and the officers conferring the degree and added.

[Quote] "This was indeed an outstanding Masonic occasion—The Masters and Wardens Association of Southern Nevada are to be congratulated upon the success of this very important undertaking and I predict that as this becomes an annual event, Masonry in Southern Nevada will continue to thrive, and Brother Masons from far distant places will strive to attend." [Unquote.]

Those who participated in the first Keyhole Canyon meeting share fond memories, and are most pleased that it has become an annual event. Although Brother Harry Ulery has since gone to his reward, the example that he set is still with us. One brother can provide the spark that founds an important tradition and inspires each of the rest of us.

Harry would, I am sure, be very happy that all Clark County lodges still meet together annually at Keyhole Canyon in peace, harmony, and brotherly love.