



The Overy Papers

Number 44 - The Future of Freemasonry in British Columbia and Yukon

This was my entry in the 1st Annual Writing Contest.

Fraternal Greetings Brethren,

We are now eighteen years into the 21st Century and 318 years from the start of our fraternity. We have moved from the horse and buggy era to the Space age and our fraternity has flourished despite the usual ups and downs in membership that occurs in any fraternity such as ours.

Looking to the future we will be facing similar problems as our pre World War One Brothers had to face, with the massive change in the social life following the First World War. Then the lodge membership changed from the predominately wealthy Brother to the not so well off Brother who wished to join our fraternity when they returned from the slaughter of the trenches and wanted the comradeship that Freemasonry had to offer.

The social changes that were needed to meet the needs of their changing world must have been difficult but the Masonic Changes were not that traumatic.

The military life of the army especially on long periods abroad had already given many like Bro. Rudyard Kipling a chance to become members and then by the end of the First World War the changing class structure gave many the first opportunity to join the craft. I know that it did not meet the dream of Bro. Rudyard Kipling but it was a move in the right direction.

I feel that Freemasonry survived then, not because of any major change but small changes that welcomed a different group of people to become members.

The well known Landmarks, we know today, stood firm and the rituals and the Lodge meetings would have been very similar to ours today.

Maybe the dress code was relaxed somewhat but members would have done their best to present themselves as smart as possible. The importance of the festive board would be maintained although the food would have been a different style but the toasts to the Crown and to Grand Lodge would have been given with pride.

In fact the lodges did make attempts to try and emulate the Lodges of the past in grandeur and importance of the occasion.

Today I think we are at another cross road in our society that could bring changes to our fraternity if we want to flourish into the future. This cross roads affects all levels of our society and is caused by the large influx of new immigrants.

I realize each lodge in our Jurisdiction will have their own ideas on how they move into the 21st Century and it is very important that we have the support of a strong Grand Lodge to be our guide.

I think we should look at immigration not as a problem but as a challenge and maybe we could address our membership at the same time. After all, we as Freemasons belong to an international, non religious, fraternity and that could give us an ideal opportunity to lead the way.

Today we live in a Province that has cities that often have a large population of people from India and Pakistan, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, Chinese and of course, First Nations, that today has become a voice to be reckoned with.

Abbotsford, like many communities in BC and Yukon is growing with a rapid increase in their population. But in Abbotsford immigration started much earlier with the Sikhs from India and Pakistan and Mennonites escaping from persecution in Eastern Europe. They arrived about the same time as our Lodge was constituted in 1913 so they are not "newcomers" and they joined the Western European and the three local First Nation communities that have always been here.

The thing I find surprising is that there have been very few members in our lodge from these groups. Were they not made welcome from the beginning? Did this attitude carry on down through the years with no attempt to seek them as members. Or was it that the immigrants did not feel that Freemasonry was worthwhile?

I know that the problem is not just with Freemasonry after all these groups have never really mixed together and today they are still separate. But one thing is certain Bro. Rudyard Kipling's vision in his poem "My Mother Lodge" did not materialize in Abbotsford.

So maybe now it is our time to try and bridge this gap. With our landmark of no religious affiliation maybe we have a special chance to bring our community together at last. But first we must look at ourselves and make sure we stand out as a contributor to the community as well. If we are asked the question "what do you do as a part of our community?" We need to have a good answer ready.

I know we have the Cancer Car and the Grand Master's charity support. But what does each individual lodge do to make them a welcome member of the Community?

Making a good impression would not only give us the base for more members but produce a society that is not as fragmented as it is today and lead to a new beginning in community understanding.

Remember we are a Universal Fraternity and we must get that information out to all the groups in our community. We must show our Community Spirit and make sure that it spreads into all groups not just the "Western World Immigrant" such as me.

I discovered that Abbotsford has a "Community Developer" that is attempting to bring all the various groups of the city population together. The hope is to improve the Community spirit by having a better understanding of each other.

I feel Freemasonry is well placed to act as a mediator in this and I have already volunteered to help in this endeavor. I have already discovered that Freemasonry does not have a good name among these groups; the TV has a lot to answer for. So I have offered to meet with the various groups and give talks that I hope will dispel the bad name we often appear to have.

The City has shown interest in the concept and I hope to do some talks in the near future and will be starting with the Inter Faith Religious group.

I think that, as we are one of the few fraternities or groups that do not have a religious mandate, we are well placed to bring our Fraternity into a new beginning in this new century.

It will take time and I expect there will be a few, on both sides, that will not be convinced but it has to begin somewhere.

We will need to use the 6 steps seriously as the team will have to deal with prospective members who could be unsure. Also a mentoring program might be not just a good idea but essential to clear away years of misunderstandings. As we get new members from these groups they will need Masonic Buddies and eventually they will be the Masonic Buddies to this new generation.

On The British Columbia and Yukon Facebook page was photo and statement from St-George's Lodge No 10 from Montreal Quebec. "The Greatest Masonic Lodge in human history with 40% Arab, 40% Jewish. No other organization ever was or will be. Truly sublime."

Well what about that for a challenge?

Of course there will have to be some small changes in our Freemasonry but as long as we keep strong the landmarks and each lodge meets the challenge in their own way. I think it will be well worth it, as we try and bring about the dream of Bro. Rudyard Kipling as we try to make good men better whatever their religion, nationality or background.

And for those who have forgot his words here is verse two of his "The Mother-Lodge".

We'd Bola Nath, Accountant,
An' Saul the Aden Jew,
An' Din Mohammed, draughtsman
Of the Survey Office too;
There was Babu Chuckerbutty,
An' Amir Singh the Sikh,
An' Castro from the fittin'-sheds,
The Roman Catholick!

Thank you and whatever I say may we continue in peace and harmony.

Bro. Bill Overy

Member of the Education Committee of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon.