



The Overy Papers

Number 27 - Changes in Freemasonry

Fraternal Greetings Brethren

There is an old Joke that says how many Freemasons does it take to change a light bulb? And the answer is none, because Freemasons don't do change.

Actually change is inevitable whether we like it or not.

300 years ago, this year four lodges got together in London and formed what became the Grand Lodge of England. Each one of those lodges must have made and accepted changes to form the first "organised group" of lodges in the world.

By the way I know that there were older lodges in existence as I am often informed by those who come from Scotland but I am talking about the Grand Lodge system that was introduced and brought together Lodges into a standardized group.

My Lodge today has been a Lodge for over 100 years and in that time we have had a few changes.

This we must all agree and accept but I feel that there are two types of change, positive and negative. And whatever type of change it is they should not, in any way, affect the 25 Land Marks of our fraternity.

At each Grand Lodge Communication changes are submitted and after discussion, they are voted on. Whether we like the decision or not, and I am sure some have disagreed with some of the decisions made, it is accepted in the spirit of harmony and democracy.

In our Lodge we have a similar system, on a smaller scale, and every time we have a motion or a request for approval a vote is taken and most times this causes "change".

The favourite of mine was one that RWBro Con Neudorf put in history of our lodge. It was reported in the minutes in 1924 that "the lodge would no longer provide the cigars for the festive board. Members would have to provide their own but should always bring extra cigars for our visitors".

That I would consider a positive change that occurred to meet the demands of a changing world and today smoking would not have been allowed in the first place.

And this brings me to negative change and this occurs through apathy.

Take our Festive board for example. It was, in the past, an important part of our Lodge meeting a time of getting together and meeting old and new friends. Even so it had its formal parts. It started with a *Grace* when we invoked the Grand Architect of the Universe to bless our festive board. Somehow he often gets forgotten or remembered in the lodge room with some of the brethren already at the festive board room eating. If we forget him maybe he also feels like forgetting us.

The toasts are also an important part. It is a way of us paying respect to our national leaders, the Grand Lodge, and our visitors and this is then followed at the end by the Tyler's Toast when we remember the poor and distressed Masons.

Today it is often a quick rush to get at the sandwiches and coffee and starts before all of the brethren have arrived from the Lodge room. The toasts are forgotten in the rush to eat and go home.

The toasts do not have to be long drawn out speeches such as at a wedding but it is to show respect to those who govern us and those friends who have taken the time to visit us.

Another lost art is the twice monthly visit to our lodge. When we joined we were told that we had to expect to do this as an important part of our fraternity.

There are often good reasons why you cannot make it on a given night but I notice that nearly 70% of our Lodge do not bother to come or even give an excuse.

Every month your Worshipful Master sends you a summons and requests you attend the meeting. How many show their respect to him by replying to him or the secretary that you cannot attend and give the reason. For those of you who live away or are too infirm a simple one time apology should be enough but at least the WM and the brethren knows the reason and does not feel you just can't be bothered.

This is obviously not a new problem and referring to RWBro Con's history again, from our early Lodge minutes, when the secretary commented, "Let it be noted that all Brethren except those who are paralyzed, bed-ridden or henpecked are expected to attend."

When I did the Historic lecture on Pacific Lodge I reported about a member, from Agassiz, who took the two handled pump trolley down the Railway line to the lodge in Mission and back again. That is dedication taken to the extreme but I take my hat off to his resolve.

This brings me to the other issue we have acquired, a change through apathy, and that is members not being active in the lodge.

When I look back on the old notices the committees that allow the efficient running of the lodge were always manned.

Today there is so little commitment to our lodge that the 30% of Active members have to double up. I do four jobs Education, Historian, Librarian and part time secretary, and I know I am not the only one.

We have started to introduce "The 6 steps to Initiation" of how prospective members are interviewed and this should be followed by a Mentoring Program to show how their progress is monitored. This shortage of active members will suddenly become very much more important. I ask myself are our Lodge meetings so boring that the interest has fallen by the wayside.

Well it is about time for us to make a change and go back to what we once were and maybe back to a time when RWBro Con was just an Entered Apprentice.

At our last meeting we had the Burns Supper. I would like to say a big thank you too all those who made it such a memorable event even though I was off sick and only got to do the initial washing up of our old original table ware.

Still we were blessed with 40 Freemasons present and all lodges in the district as well as our sister lodge down south were represented.

Following this event, that I consider was a great success, it has been suggested to me by a Brother of German extraction who will remain anonymous. That if he can carry the Haggis for Burns night, it would be a good idea if we had a beer night for Oktoberfest.

I agreed with him wholeheartedly and mention has been made he wears lederhosen I also told him not to forget that this year we will also be celebrating the 300th anniversary of the first Grand Lodge of England. Why not have a full festive board on June the 24, St John the Baptists day when our early brothers gathered at the Goose and Griddle public house, it is a Saturday by the way. So why not really push the boat out and what better time for all of us to make the effort to really make a difference.

It will not happen without you all taking part. Let us invite our Brothers from other lodges and use our china with pride. I will even promise to help with the washing up, but everyone who can, must take part.

Who knows our visitors may look at each other and say "What Changed".

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.