

RESPONSIBILITIES AND OPPORTUNITIES OF A LODGE SECRETARY

by

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For the purpose of this paper we are going to assume that the office of Secretary in a Lodge is vacant. The Lodge is faced with the necessity of choosing a Brother for election to this important office. I suggest we consider some of the qualifications that should influence the Lodge in its choice.

Must the Brother be a Past Master? The answer to this question is of course, no. Some Lodges apparently confine their choice to Past Masters. As a matter of fact I have met Brethren who were under the impression that our Constitution required a Brother to have attained the rank of Past Master before he was eligible for election to the office of Secretary. This of course is absolutely incorrect. There are certain advantages in having a Past Master for Secretary. The principal advantage is that he has gained wide Masonic experience and knowledge through his services as an officer and finally as Worshipful Master. However, I also find that where the Secretary is a Past Master he frequently becomes "the utility man" when Degrees are being conferred. Masters are inclined to get into the habit of looking to him to do any Degree work that they themselves are not sure of or that they have not been successful in assigning to some other Past Master. This, in my opinion, is not conducive to the development of efficient, self-reliant Worshipful Masters. Having a Past Master for Secretary has both advantages and disadvantages.

Any Master Mason in good standing in a Saskatchewan Lodge is eligible for election to the office of Secretary and in my opinion the primary, qualifications that should be considered are: Efficiency, friendliness and a deep-rooted love for Freemasonry.

I also wish, without any thought of being unkind, to caution against another factor that frequently influences members in their choice of a Lodge Secretary.

I accept the responsibility for having made the statement on many occasions: "A Lodge should hardly ever elect a Brother to the office of Secretary because he needs it." If the Brother needs the concession of membership without dues or the small remuneration that goes with the office of Secretary in some of the larger Lodges, then nine times out of ten he is not the best man for the position. The very fact that he needs the small remuneration that may accompany the office suggests that he has not been a success in his chosen walk of life. There are, of course, exceptions such as well qualified Brethren who as a result of superannuation have a very small income and considerable free time and are only too glad to direct their talents to Lodge Secretarial work. Then too, there are other exceptions, but taking it as whole the Brother who needs it is not generally the most desirable for election to the office.

The office of Lodge Secretary calls for a Brother who is highly efficient and who would be a success in any field of endeavour where tact, efficiency and friendliness are qualifications.

If the office of Secretary in your Lodge becomes vacant and if a member who needs a helping hand is up for election, don't elect him Secretary because of that need. Consider first his qualifications for office and be governed thereby. If he is not eminently qualified for the office of Secretary don't elect him - extend a helping hand in some other manner. Don't let unthinking sentiment jeopardize the attractiveness of your meetings, the reputation of your Lodge and its general prospects for the future.

Some years ago I made a statement to the effect that I was convinced that I could form an accurate opinion as to the type of Secretary in office from an inspection of the Lodge Attendance Register. I have had no reason to alter that opinion.

In my personal opinion the Lodge Attendance Register, over a period of years, will reveal a true picture of the type of Secretary the Lodge has in office. There are fluctuations in the Attendance Register barometer as a result of some Worshipful Masters being more aggressive than others but in my personal opinion, over a period of years, it is the Secretary's qualifications for office that are revealed by a study of the Attendance Register.

A considerable amount of the work of a Grand Secretary's office has to do directly with the Secretaries of Constituent Lodges. A Grand Secretary very soon learns the type of Secretary in office in each Lodge. I find the great majority of Saskatchewan Lodge Secretaries are well qualified to discharge the important duties of their office. They are faithful, hard-working, efficient and often misunderstood Brethren who are making a splendid and unselfish contribution to the advancement of Freemasonry. Too often, unfortunately all too often, they are the subject of unthinking criticism and fault finding by some of the members of their Lodges.

"If the Secretary writes a letter, it is too long.
If he sends a post card, it's too short.
If he attends a committee meeting, he's butting in.
If he stays away, he is a shirker.
If the attendance of members is slim, he should have called them up;
If he does call them up, he is a pest.
If he duns the members for dues, he is insulting.
If he fails to collect dues, he is slipping.
If the meeting is a big success, the officers are praised;
If not a success, the Secretary is blamed.
If he asks for advice, he is incompetent,
and if he does not, he is bull-headed.
If he writes his minutes complete, they are too long, and
If he condenses them, they are incomplete.
If he talks to a motion, he is trying to run things, and
If he remains quiet, he has lost interest in the Institution.
Ashes to ashes,
Dust to dust,
If others won't do it,
The Secretary must."

These lines are not intended to be humorous.

I suggest that Brethren do a little mental stock-taking and see if many of the suggestions in those lines are not applicable to their Lodges. I know they are too many.

The routine duties of a Secretary are referred to in the Constitution, in the Lodge By-laws, and in the Installation Ceremony. A Secretary who confines himself to the carrying out of these listed routine duties will be a very ordinary type of Secretary.

A Lodge with an efficient, alert, interested Secretary has a great advantage over a Lodge whose Secretary falls below a reasonable standard with respect to these qualifications. Some Secretaries cannot be stirred out of their drowsiness while others are constantly alert and looking for new ideas as to how they can better serve their Lodge.

It is the duty of a Secretary to officially notify the applicant of his application having been favourably balloted upon and to instruct him as to the date of the meeting at which he shall attend to receive his first Degree. On the night of the Candidate's initiation he is conducted to the Secretary's desk to sign the Bylaws of the Lodge. From the time he makes application for initiation he possibly comes in closer contact with the Secretary than with any other officers of the Lodge. The Secretary therefore has a good opportunity of further developing the enthusiasm of the new member.

A Secretary's minutes should not only be a fair record of all things proper to be written but should contain a most comprehensive account of all business transacted. Degrees conferred, and correspondence dealt with. A mere recital of the routine affairs of the Lodge is not enough. Such minutes become too stereotyped, and are quite uninteresting to the other officers and to the members sitting on the side benches. The recorded account of every meeting becomes a valuable chapter in the history of the Lodge. Names, dates and events are historically important.

To receive all monies due to the Lodge would be a pleasant duty were it not for the fact that some of the members insist on being dilatory, delaying payment as long as they can and then becoming offended if they are reminded that Lodge dues are payable in advance. Lodge Secretaries should not be expected to assume the status of collecting agents. Every member has affixed his signature to the Lodge Bylaws and by that very act has pledged himself, among other things, to pay his dues in advance. A good Mason regularly and promptly pays his Lodge dues. This financial quality is one of the hallmarks of a good Mason. Masonry does not go to law to collect its dues; the most that it does is suspend for non-payment. It never does this where a Brother is unable to pay and makes that fact known to the Master or Secretary. Poverty may prevent a man from becoming a Mason but it doesn't cause him to be cast out of Masonry. A good Mason pays his dues as long as he is able and thereby makes it possible for his Lodge to meet its financial obligations and dispense needed charity to the distressed. Freemasons should be fair to their Lodge, should be true to their pledged word as indicated by their signature to the Lodge Bylaws and they should procure their current year's receipt for dues card in January.

Because of his experience the Secretary is usually an important member when the officers get together for a discussion of Lodge problems.

I think it will be conceded that in many of our Lodges the Secretary is the real power behind the throne. He frequently holds office from year to year and is the connecting link between successive annual administrations. He, better than anyone else in the Lodge, knows the administrative routine. He is often the counsellor for each incoming Master.

To the ideal Secretary many wonderful opportunities for real fraternal service is offered. He is the one whose duties bring him into close personal touch with the membership. He it is who records their attendance at meetings, he it is to whom they pay their dues, and from whom they receive their notices. He it is who is nearly always the first one called up when

there is death or sorrow or distress in a member's home. The Secretary has a large part in the success or failure of a Lodge, both materially and spiritually. The ideal Secretary is first in attendance at the Lodge room on the occasion of each meeting, regular or emergent. This enables him to extend a friendly greeting to the Brethren as they enter and to have time for a little visit with them when they come to his desk.

No office in a Lodge provides as great an opportunity for Masonic service. It should be the most sought after office and should attract to it the most loyal, efficient and best skilled member.

A Lodge is fortunate when it can place a member in the position of Secretary who is capable of keeping good records, is a good correspondent, and willing to devote time and energy to helping the other officers in making the Lodge a live, active unit in the Masonic family. The office should be respected by the membership and not be considered a clearing house for all complaints. An occasional compliment will be appreciated and make him feel that his efforts are worthwhile. After a Brother is elected to the office of Secretary he finds that writing minutes, sending out the notices of meetings and receiving dues constitutes a very small part of the many and varied duties he is called upon to perform.

The Secretary's jewel, the crossed pens, has a world of symbolism. Why two pens and why are they crossed? One pen represents the records of the Lodge, the other those of the individual member, and these two kinds of records cross each other in fraternal union.

A good Secretary is without price, but a poor one is dear at any price.

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