

Freemasonry organization has long history in Kingston area

An Interview with Raymond S.J. Daniels by the Brockville Recorder

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The Masons are old-fashioned and out of step with the modern world -- and their provincial leader says that suits them just fine.

In Kingston to meet local members of the venerable order on Friday night, Raymond S.J. Daniels, the Grand Master, Most Worshipful Brother in Ontario, said the fraternal organization is trying to keep up its strength by being a throwback to an earlier age.

"What attracts young men to our organization is that people today are looking for something they have not found in the rest of society," he said. "They are looking for stability, they are looking for role models in a society that doesn't offer many role models.

"There's no stability in work any more, when people can lose their job at any time. There's no stability in marriage when you look at the divorce rate. What the Masonic Order offers is stability and there's no question that we're out of synch with the rest of society (but) that's because we want to be."

Daniels has heard all the jokes about the Masons being a secret order and could probably sing the Stonecutters theme if he had to. He argues it is neither a secret order nor a service club, although it supports charitable causes, but a fraternal organization of a kind little seen today.

Freemasonry traces its origins back at least 300 years and still has a worldwide membership of about five million.

Its members believe in a nondenominational supreme being, the exact nature of which is left open to the individual, with the tools of a mason, a square and compass, as the allegorical tools of ongoing study.

"We're not a secret society," said Daniels. "We're a society that anyone can join and what we do is not make the people who join better, they do that themselves through study and the application of Masonic principles.

"What we do is try to answer the big philosophical questions of life, questions like, 'Who am I?' and 'Why am I here?'"

The Masons call themselves either an esoteric society or a society with secrets, referring to private aspects among members and lodges pertaining to handshakes and other ways Masons recognize one another and the material that they study to advance in the order.

Freemasonry has a long history in Kingston and is perhaps more closely tied to the history of this area than elsewhere in Canada owing to the large Protestant population -- the Roman Catholic Church traditionally opposed Catholics joining the Masons owing to

the religious overtones of its studies--and the city's most prominent lodge member, John A. Macdonald.

The armed forces has also produced more than its share of members, particularly in the years following the Second World War when former servicemen joined in large numbers.

Daniels noted that not only were military personages such as Sir Arthur Currie Masons, but this year, Canadian Forces members and civilian contractors opened the first Masonic lodge in Afghanistan, on the grounds of Kandahar Air Field.

The Canada Lodge, connected to the lodge in Trenton, cannot initiate new members but it holds regular meetings at the vast airbase that serves as headquarters for coalition forces. Masons from other countries who are posted to Afghanistan attend the lodge, which has its own set of Masonic symbols made by members who are in country.

While traditional service clubs, ranging from the Legion to community organizations, have long lamented the decline of membership and the aging of participants that have forced them to scale back activities and even close chapters, Daniels said the Masons continue to initiate about 1,300 new members each year in the province. There are more than 53,000 members in the 44 Masonic districts in Ontario.

Kingston and area continues to maintain the strong Masonic tradition, which Daniels says he can see just on almost every street.

"So much of Kingston is built of stones," he said. "All you have to do is walk the streets and you can see the influence that masons have had here."

Note: At the time of publishing, this article was available on the web at the following address.

<http://www.recorder.ca/2010/04/17/freemasonry-organization-has-long-history-in-kingston-area>