

## **Official Visit to Buchanan Lodge No. 550**

**December 7, 2006**

### **Lecture**

## **CHANGE!**

*“Change is the one constant in our lives and Freemasons have done little to keep up with it.”* This was the report given by a special task force appointed by the 2004 Conference of Grand Masters in North America to study the condition of Masonry in their jurisdictions.

It is not an up-lifting report. Are we not keeping up with the times? Could it be true that we are not reaching our own potential? Could we be more than what we are? Could we at least, be more significant in the lives of our own members?

In my travels around the Hamilton Districts, I have noticed that, clearly, there has been a continuing increase in initiations in the last two to three years. I have also noticed that new initiates are younger. It is nice to see their young faces in the Lodge. It is even nicer to see them in the Lodge doing ritual work. They are curious, they are dedicated and they are eager to belong. In conversation with some of them I have learned that, for the most part, they have joined the Craft in search of fellowship, in search of strong values, and in search of the opportunity to grow and become builders in their communities. Isn't it true that we take good men and make them into better men? The problem is that we can only make them into better men if we can keep them in the Lodge. The Grand Lodge Committee of Masonic Education has recently reported that Freemasonry is experiencing a deficit between new initiations and demits and suspensions. 27% percent of new Masons end up leaving the Craft within a few years after they join. Sure, it is easy to bring the men into Masonry. It only takes about forty-five minutes. The real challenge is to keep these intelligent and curious young men interested and active in the practice of Freemasonry for the rest of their lives. Could it be that a Lodge must be more than a degree mill; more than a social club. A meeting must have more than the reading of minutes, the conduct of routine business, and the dutiful conferral of yet another degree. The lodge must be a place of lively learning – an experience that is rewarding through active participation, study, and discussion – education and constant self-improvement. If we are to build our lodges into these places of learning, into places of participation and spiritual growth we may have to bring about a new approach. I am not talking about a change of approach in promoting our Craft, but what I am talking about is a new approach in the way we treat the Mason already in the Order. I believe a change in what goes on in the Lodge is to become our newest challenge. That's where we need to concentrate. This is what we, together as Brothers, need to improve. I assure you, we already have many of the good men in this town as members of our Craft. Now we need to pay honour to our Fraternity and make the

Lodge a place where the good men come to stay and grow. Make the Lodge a place where a man comes to learn to live under the precepts of Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. If that is what the new Mason is looking for, and that is what we practice; he would never leave.

Now, “change” is an interesting concept. For some it has a positive connotation, for others it is a sign of weakness. Some may even consider “change” as something unnecessary and risky. - But “change” is a natural part of our lives. “Change” is not a new, modern concept. Change is life itself. Change means we are alive. We could ask any of our senior members here this evening, what changes they have seen in their days and we could be here for hours. More than two centuries ago, Bro. Robert (Bobbie) Burns, the Scottish poet and song writer said: *“Look abroad through Nature’s range and you will see that Nature’s mighty law is change”*.

In my line of work as a history teacher, it is my mandate to teach my students to identify and analyze change. I often ask of them to imagine and list the problems and difficulties Sir John Alexander Macdonald, Canada’s first Prime Minister, a Freemason himself, may have faced when he went about trying to convince four of the colonies of British North America to unite and change into the new Canada. He did not have jets to fly around in. No faxes to communicate with other politicians in distant places. No emails to get quick answers to his proposals. Not even a cell phone. The little Scottish guy did all his travels by steam-boat, train or horse and buggy. Most of his communication, if not in person, was done by hard copy and delivered by land mail. A hard and slow way to go about building a country, don’t you think? But yet, he brought about a change that one day would have a tremendous impact on the birth of a nation. It took some convincing of many different folks near and far. But with hard labor, perseverance, and opportunity, he made that change into a reality.

Let us not underestimate Masonry; we also need to realize that an organization as old as ours, could not have been able to survive through out the centuries without some concept of “change” and with some capability to deal with it. So change is not new to Masonry.

The formation of the independent Grand Lodge of Canada, November 10, 1855, under the leadership of M.W. Bro. William Mercer Wilson, the first Grand Master, is another great example of ‘change way back then’. It was a new idea brought to reality. It became a reality by the determination and perseverance of a few good men. They had a dream, a vision of how “change” could make it more practical to practice our Craft in Upper Canada. They knew that, “adapting” Old World principles and customs to meet

the needs of their Brethren in the New World, would strengthen the Fraternity here in North America.

If we stop to think about what entitles to transform ideas into realities, we definitely have to admit that it takes strong courage, firm determination, and let us never forget Brethren, it also takes divined guidance. With these three elements, we are up to a good start.

M.W. Bro. R. Johnston – Grand Master of New South Wales in 1991 said: *“The successful innovator is one who conceives new ways to carry on the old traditions.”*

William Jennings Bryan (1860-1925), Secretary of State under President Woodrow Wilson, during the first World War wrote: *“Destiny is not a matter of chance, it is a matter of choice; it is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved.”* I personally love this quotation because it gives me the sense that I am alive. It tells me that I can choose my own destiny. It tells me that I have the power to be free. Oliver Wendall Holmes (1809-1894), a professor of anatomy and physiology at Harvard Medical School during the late 1800’s, once said: *“The great thing in this world is not so much where we are, but in what direction we are moving.”*

Finally, my Brethren, the report of the special task force, which was named “It’s About Time: Moving Masonry into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” published in 2005 begins with this wake up call quoting Michael Hammer, a business organization consultant: *“One thing that tells me a company is in trouble is when they tell me how good they were in the past. Same with countries; you don’t want to forget your identity. I am glad you were great in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, but that was then and this is now. **When memories exceed dreams, the end is near.**”* The report concluded with a call to arms advising us to *cast off negative attitudes, to turn the problem around and make it a challenge, to encourage and reward open and positive communication, to share ideas.*

*Let us humbly pray that we have the wisdom, the courage and the strength to turn Masonry in the direction it needs to go in order to meet the needs of the new Freemasons of today. All within our Constitution and by following the principles of our Wise and Ancient Craft, let us make our fraternity into the institution that we want – brother by brother, lodge by lodge, and day by day.*

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