

Victoria Lodge of Education and Research

MY EXPERIENCES IN QUEBEC

by

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It is indeed a great pleasure and privilege to have been invited to the Victoria Lodge of Education and Research tonight as guest speaker.

Your notice indicates my subject for this evening is 'Masonry in Quebec'. However, before getting into this subject, it is my intention to relate to you some of my experiences as an exchange teacher in the Province of Quebec, as well as the general feeling, thinking and mentality of the native Quebecois people.

In early 1970 I made application for a position as an English exchange teacher in Quebec. It was a pleasant surprise to learn of the acceptance of this application. In short, a French Canadian teacher came to my school in Sooke and I went to his in Drummondville. In June, my wife and I drove East and got settled in our new environment. In my life I have always loved a challenge, but little did I realize how frustratingly tough it could be. My knowledge of the French language was of the thirty-year-forgotten-Grade 12 variety. My school was very large, with 1,000 students and 112 teachers, none of whom spoke hardly any English. What a traumatic feeling it was, to find suddenly that I was a minority.

Looking back I think it was good therapy on my mind, as it gave me plenty time to think and eventually eliminate prejudices which I once held for these people. I make this statement well knowing that there is a strong element in Quebec which has no love for any English Canadian, or American for that matter, and their sole aim and desire is to have a separate Quebec nation. As one of my best French Canadian friends told me, "individually, I like some English speaking people, but as a group, have no earthly use for them". Another friend of mine, a real separatist, related to me how bitter he was to the Quebec Fathers of Confederation of 1867 for selling Quebec down the river. He is certain that his Province would get along well on its own. He stated that today there are three general blocks, namely, the Communists, the European Common Market, and the United States. Quebec, he states, will form the fourth block along with many of the West African countries and parts of South America where their church is doing missionary work.

As for my teaching experience in Drummondville, it was very difficult during the first three months. Discipline was quite good, and I became very fond of my Grade 11 students. They usually had a five minute French lesson for me at the beginning of my classes. I will never forget a boy student asking me, "Monsieur Gibson, est-ce vous etes un protestant?" (are you a protestant?). My reply to him, "Yes, I am a protestant; my religion is in my heart, not the big church". As time progressed I found I was gradually learning to speak their language and even thinking in it. By June I was able to give my farewell speech to the teachers, entirely in French. This is the key to their hearts; if you show them you are sincerely trying to learn their language, you are their friend for life. I might add that I would have liked to teach there for another year, chiefly because of my great desire to learn their language better. My school year came to a close far too quickly and I was very sad to say farewell to my many student and teacher friends.

Drummondville, situated as it is between Montreal and Quebec City, gave us many weekend opportunities to explore the heartlands of 'la Belle Province,' to see and learn some of its unique cultures, as well as to meet and intermingle with its interesting people. We were soon to learn that Quebec is truly a Province of four distinct seasons. When we arrived it was summertime, soon to be followed by the most beautiful autumn. The variegated colours of the leaves, spread through the verdure of the sloping

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countryside, is difficult to properly describe. Little did we realize that this was only a prelude to the worst winter Quebec has had since the turn of the century. Recorded snowfall was over thirteen feet and the cost for snow removal in Greater Montreal was over 23 million dollars. Then came a most welcome spring with the return of migratory birds from the south and maple sugar time. We had the pleasure of participating in several sugaring-off parties, which were held in areas where there were many productive maple trees.

Masonry in Quebec is much alive, although they are having their problems. The Grand Lodge of Quebec celebrated its 100th year of existence on October 20th, 1969.. Masonry however, existed many years before 1669. I was informed that both General Wolfe and General Montcalm were members of the Craft. There are 111 Lodges in Quebec with a membership of about: 15,500. Some of the highlights for me during the year were as follows.

Coeurs-Unis #45, Montreal: This is a most interesting Lodge, and I had the extreme pleasure of seeing a degree put on half in French and half in English. All the officers were bilingual and for the most part were French Canadian.

Thetford #88, Thetford Mines: The evening of my visit was the occasion of the annual visit of the Grand Master, M. W. Bro. G. Egerton Brown.

Golden Rule Lodge #5, Stanstead: On the occasion of my visit to this Lodge, a joint meeting between Grand Lodge representatives from Quebec and neighboring State of Vermont, met to ratify an agreement whereby members on the American side of the border, could join or affiliate with Golden Rule Lodge. This Lodge has a great history of existence during the 1812 -14 conflict between Canada and the United States, and how masonry played a great role in eliminating many of these differences.

St. Francis Lodge #15;Richmond. I visited this Lodge on several occasions, and found it quite active. On one occasion I saw a Brother initiated into the Craft who was an active Knights of Columbus and still active in his church.

Owl's Head: This was indeed the highlight of all communications for me. Since the year 1857,Golden Rule Lodge #5, Stanstead, has held an open-air meeting on the top of the Owl's Head Mountain. Some of the brethren walk up this 2,000 foot Mountain while others take the winter ski lift. The meeting room is similar to a small crater and the brethren sit on its slanted sides. The altar is made of several large boulders, and on each side of it are the Canadian and American flags. An Entered Apprentice Degree was put on, the candidate being the brother of the Master. The father of the two brothers was there to assist in the ceremony. It was interesting to note that the father had initiated the 'Master at the same place, only seven years earlier. The newly-appointed Grand Master, M. W. Bro. K. W. Aldridge was in attendance.

Unfortunately, all my visits were not too good. One visit in particular, I had been invited to be guest speaker and show slides about British Columbia. Upon arrival, and to my dismay, I found only three officers and two members to greet me. This Lodge is over 100 years old with an enrollment of 83 members and had a past history of a very active Lodge. This may be a sign of the times, indicative of an ever-changing world. As I sat there that night I couldn't help but think, 'could this happen to my Lodge; other Lodges?'

Thank you brethren for giving me this opportunity to speak to you on some of my most: unforgettable experiences during my year's sojourn in Quebec.
