

SUMMARY of 1974 BANFF CONFERENCE

by

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The Banff Conference, or to give it its full name, the Conference of the Grand Lodge Officers of the Four Western Masonic Jurisdictions, is held annually at Banff in early September.

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The first meeting was held in 193~, then casual meetings were held from 1936 to 1940 and in 1941. I presume, the Conference was started in its present form as the 1974 assembly was termed the 34th Annual Inter-Provincial Conference.

The Thursday evening before the actual start of the Conference the delegates were welcomed at a meeting of Cascade Lodge No.5 in Banff where an address is given by a guest speaker. This year the speaker was W. Bro. Bob Wallace of Vancouver and Quadra Lodge No. 2. His topic was "The Gentle Persuasion of Masonry", which he defined as the effective teaching by precept and example of the basic moral and ethical values which are the foundations of Masonry. We are all learning and teaching throughout our lives in our contact with others and are bound to be influenced by the quality of the individuals with whom we come in contact. Masonry teaches friendship, morality and brotherly love and as we observe these qualities in our lodge, brethren are inspired to put them into practice, so will the quality of our own lives improve and provide an example for others. Regular attendance at lodge where we hear the beautiful precepts of Freemasonry presented in the lectures and charges will, through constant repetition, instill these in our minds and this Gentle Persuasion of Masonry will inspire in us a desire to be better men ourselves in our business dealings, our home lives and in our other contacts with our fellow men.

The following morning the regular conference business got under way in the Rimrock Hotel situated in a beautiful setting among the mountains, a short distance away from downtown Banff. Present were seven Grand Masters and seven Deputy Grand Masters including those: from Montana, Minnesota and Idaho as well as those of our four western provinces. Present also were twelve PGMs, four SGWs, four JGWs, three GR. Secretaries and two other PMs, W. Bro. Bob Wallace being one of them. A total of thirty-nine. The Conference was opened by the president, M.W. Bro. Wilfred Rogers, our own Junior PGM, who welcomed all present and then called on M.W. Bro., the Rev. John Morland of Alberta for the invocation. The business then commenced, the procedure being that certain delegates have been previously selected to present papers at the Conference, other delegates have been selected as moderators to lead the discussion on the papers.

The first paper, presented by R.W. Bro. Geoff Davies, J.G.W. of Manitoba, was entitled "Until time Shall be no More", the title being taken from the sentence in the Charge to the Brethren, "Finally----- until time shall be no more, a fervent and understandable wish, characteristic of the period in which it was written, but naive and incredible today when the future appears to be future shock; when relevance outweighs permanence, when the ephemeral supplants the eternal, when history and tradition are seen rather as dust bins than as treasure houses and when every code of laws, morals or ethics is being challenged or denied, perverted or subverted. We refer to Freemasonry as a time-honoured institution whose genuine tenets are to be transmitted, pure and unimpaired, from generation to generation, but its beautiful system of morality,

veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols cannot survive in this world of relevance and "tell it like it is", on past glory alone unless its influence is felt in the world outside of the Lodge through the practice of the Masonic principles of brotherly love, relief and truth by our members. He quoted Lord Tennyson's sonnet, "Ozymandias" to illustrate his point about the weakness of relying on past prestige.

Bro. Davies paper was so outstanding that the moderator felt unable to comment other than to praise it but he endeavored to foster some discussion on the matter of the high average age of our members and the need to interest young men in Masonry. He recalled a meeting when a member of the Order of DeMolay gave a talk to the lodge members and the DDGM asked him why so few young men joined the Masons. After a moment's thought he replied "The image we young people have of Freemasons is a group of elderly men, comfortably seated in rocking chairs, smoking pipes, smug, complacent and not wanting to change their ideas to meet changing times." This generated comment from some U.S. delegates where the age limit for admission has been lowered to eighteen years but as it was not the subject of Bro. Davies' paper the discussion was limited. (The moderator was R.W.Bro. K.L. Crockett, J.G.W. of Alberta.)

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The president called upon Bro. James Nixon to present his paper entitled "The Role of the Craft in the Community." The moderator was our own Grand Master, Bro. Lyle Barr. Bro. Nixon made the point that many organizations are seeking to provide assistance for some of the needs that are not taken care of by the public treasury and that Masonry supplies many of the leaders in these efforts without any Masonic recognition. Freemasonry itself is hampered by the restrictions placed upon the use of its funds. He suggested some relaxation of the regulations and participation in community activities that will provide a respectful recognition of our Masonic fraternity. Bro. Barr, as moderator, suggested that assistance to DeMolay would establish contact with youth and create a respect for the Masons leading to these young men coming into the Craft. This paper and the moderators comments generated considerable discussion on the subject of participation in activities that would give the Craft due recognition from the public. Bro. R.K. Muhs, the D.G.M. of North Dakota, opined that if we have laws and regulations restricting the use of funds, let us change them.

The next paper, "Freemasonry 'was', 'is now', and 'forever shall be'" was presented by our own D . G.M., Bro. Tom McLachlan. He prefaced his remarks by stating that when we speak of the universality of designs in Freemasonry we must remember that people from different parts of the world (no one would know that he was unless they heard him speak) have different interpretations of the meanings of what we read, write or hear and that reminded him of the story of a business man who needed a secretary. (Story) Just so we perhaps create our own problems because of different interpretation of the question. The theme of his paper was that Freemasonry will survive without advertising if we concentrate on the building of character, taking one good man at a time and making him a better man since quality, not quantity, will ensure the success of our order. The moderator, Bro. W.A. Milligan, D.G.M. of Alberta, stated that he would attempt to stimulate discussion by being a bit of the devil's advocate. Many admitted to the Craft were forced to join by their fathers, their mothers or other relatives and they joined just to keep peace in the family. He thought examining committees (his term) should look into this but believed that many of such committee members couldn't answer a candidates questions because they themselves didn't know the answers or what it was all about. The public believe that Freemasonry is shrinedom. Why? Because they advertise. While he would not suggest that we follow their method, if we are to build the individual we

must be prepared to educate him which is one of the principles of advertising. He was critical of the fact that no one appears to be willing to do this. The officers are too busy running the lodge; the P.Ms. have done their bit and don't feel any obligations. If Freemasonry seem to be losing its appeal we should apply the lines from Shakespeare's "Julius Caesar" wherein Cassius says, "The fault, Dear Brutus, lies not in the Stars, but in ourselves." This created considerable discussion. Bro. Fox, P.G.M of Alberta, stated that we know we are having trouble but we will never cure it by inventing all kinds of palliatives and floundering around for easy ways out that have nothing to do with Masonry, forgetting that what we are supposed to be doing is practicing Masonry which is the only way we will convince a man that Masonry is something he should have. There was a lot more said about advertising and Bro. C.L. Chamberlain, the S.G.W. of Manitoba told a story that would seem to be related to advertising or salesmanship.

The next paper was given by Bro. A.O. Aspeslet, S.G.W. of Alberta, entitled "Why am I a Mason." He thought that his first reason for joining was sheer curiosity and for this reason he would disagree with the idea that prospective candidates should be thoroughly informed of the aims and objectives of the Craft, having the feeling that we would be better off by maintaining the mystery of Masonry. He gave many other reasons for being and remaining a member. The moderator, Bro. L. Gwinn, S.G.W. of Saskatchewan outlined his reasons for joining but would not agree that his first reason was curiosity but rather a desire to be in the company of men he considered in many ways to be superior to himself, men he admired for their position and leadership in the community.

SATURDAY MORNING

The final paper was delivered by our own S. G .W. Bro. Alex Mitchell on the subject of "The attainment of Our Masonic Heritage", which was moral recognition which will be attained when we pattern our lives as closely as possible to the ideal of a Freemason as outlined in the concluding portion of the Charge to the Brethren. The moderator, Bro..L Chamberlain, S.G.W. of Manitoba, suggested

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that there were three points for discussion: first, the Masonic Order and its relation to life, to society to religion and to work. Second, the Order's indifference to the social conditions of the world. Third and most important the selection of candidates. This point brought a number of observations from the delegates.

This concluded the agenda and as some time remained Bro. Wilf. Rogers gave a short paper on "The Demands of Freemasonry." After a few brief comments and the invocation by Bro. Morland, the Conference closed at 10:40 a.m.

Note: Except for the introduction of each speaker, the simple title of 'brother' is used regardless of rank.