

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE OFFICE OF DISTRICT DEPUTY GRAND MASTER

By Trevor W. McKeown

Constituted in 1871, the Grand Lodge of British Columbia was not divided into districts until 1887. That year MW Bro. Alexander R. Milne, who was to officially visit only the three lodges in Victoria, appointed six brethren from around the jurisdiction—one from each of the other lodges—to report to him on “the state of the craft”. Serving a second term in 1888-1889, Milne was then authorized to appoint four Deputy Grand Masters to four districts: No. 1 on Vancouver Island, No. 2 in New Westminster, No. 3 in Yale-Kootenay and No. 4 in the Cariboo. Although no rank or title appears to have been voted on, their names appeared in the 1889 *Proceedings* preceded by “Right Worshipful”.

In 1889 a resolution was adopted to add: “D.D. Grand Masters to rank after elected officers”.¹ At the time both the Grand Chaplain and Grand Tyler were elected offices. The constitution was not reprinted until 1895 when their respective rank was clarified so that they followed the Grand Secretary and preceded the Senior Grand Deacon. By then the constitution listed five districts: No. 1 to include Victoria and Esquimalt and No. 5 to include Nanaimo and Comox, “Or any such further number as shall from time to time be ordered by Grand Lodge.”²

The qualifications for a District Deputy Grand Master were first described in 1895: that he be a past master, a resident and a member of a lodge in the district, and not be a master of a lodge. He was authorized, in the absence of the Grand Master, to preside in every lodge of his district, to examine its books and records, and to summon any lodge or brother to attend with the charter, books, papers and accounts of the lodge. It was his duty to exercise a general supervision over the Craft and visit all lodges in his district, to see that the returns were forwarded to the Grand Secretary, and that brethren petitioning for new lodges were qualified. He also had to give an annual report to Grand Lodge, which was published in the annual proceedings.

It was also in 1895 that the appropriate occasion for the wearing of regalia was clarified:

“ 142. Grand Lodge regalia is only to be worn when in Grand Lodge, or when acting in any official capacity or on any ceremonial occasion, installation, etc, etc.”³

What the *et ceteras* covered, and the definition of “official capacity” is unclear but what is clear is that Grand Lodge regalia was not to be worn while attending lodge meetings except officially, or church parades without dispensation. The records show that very few dispensations were requested and even fewer granted. In 1903 the members of Grand Lodge felt that Grand Lodge officers were taking liberties and the phrase “installation, etc, etc.” was dropped from the constitution.⁴

The Grand Master in 1908, William J. Bowser noted that in addition to constituting four lodges, he had visited twenty-three lodges, but that it was becoming impossible for the Grand Master to visit all 43 lodges. The majority of his visits were to regular lodge communications with most conferring degrees.

By 1910 the constitution authorized conferral of permanent grand rank.⁵ Although the Grand Master, Francis J. Burd recommended that his District Deputy Grand Masters be granted permanent rank in 1912, the committee reviewing his address at the time had expressed the opinion that this was “not expedient.”

Echoing the sentiments of MW Bro. Angus McKeown back in 1890, in 1917 a resolution to elect District Deputy Grand Masters was proposed but referred to the Committee on Constitution. The committee reported in 1919 that they believed this would deprive the Grand Master of a valuable prerogative and that they did “not think it to the advantage of Grand Lodge to have lodges say who their inspector is to be.”⁶ In 1920 delegates from Corinthian Lodge No. 27 in Trail proposed that the District Deputy Grand Masters be elected. The committee disapproved and the motion was defeated. In 1925 an edict was issued prohibiting the canvassing for Grand Lodge appointive officers, an edict that remains in our current constitution. Recommendations to elect District Deputy Grand Masters were again made by the Grand Master in 1931 and 1932.

Nothing more was heard on the question of permanent rank until 1922 when a resolution to grant “the rank of Right Worshipful” to the District Deputy Grand Masters of 1921-1922 and to every other Past District Deputy Grand Master whose lodge applied on his behalf was approved. The resolution was amended to include a requirement that the Grand Master approve any application for granting of “past rank”.⁷

In 1922 the constitution was also amended to allow Past District Deputy Grand Masters to wear an apron similar to Grand Lodge officers with an embroidered level but without the gold trim—a privilege not granted to other past grand lodge officers until 1988.⁸ This was not published until 1928.

Years later, in 1971, a special committee report on District Deputy Grand Master aprons noted that the wearing of Past District Deputy Grand Master aprons was permissive and not obligatory, therefore Grand Lodge should not assume the cost of presentation.⁹ This remains unchanged although it is the rare lodge or district that does not present their outgoing District Deputy Grand Master with both an apron and jewel.

The 1924 report of the Committee on the Reports of the District Deputy Grand Masters included a recommendation to grant permanent rank to all the 1923-1924 District Deputy Grand Masters. The committee of three, chaired by E. Duncan McLaren, was replaced with a new slate of six members who, in 1925, considered that the time of the District Deputy Grand Masters was too much occupied with ceremonial work rather than the examination of the books and condition under which each lodge was working. No recommendations for grand rank were proposed.

In 1926 the District Deputy Grand Master for District 1, William P. Marchant—later to be Grand Master in 1942—suggested that names should be assigned to the fifteen districts, a suggestion endorsed by the committee reviewing the reports.¹⁰ They praised the District Deputy Grand Masters but made no recommendation for permanent rank. Upon recommendation of Enderby Lodge No. 40, The Grand Master conferred the title “Right Worshipful” on Arthur Reeves—perhaps the first, certainly the first recorded.¹¹ Later in the session he confirmed District 1’s Samuel McLure’s “use of the title, Right Worshipful”.¹² The following year there were three titles granted by the Grand Master and another five in 1928.¹³ That year the committee was three, again chaired by McLaren—they recommended that the District Deputy Grand Masters have conferred on them what the committee mistakenly styled “the rank” of “Right Worshipful”.

The earliest record of the district names is found in a report of a special committee in 1927: Victoria 1, New Westminster 2, Kamloops 3, Cariboo 4, Nanaimo 5, West Kootenay 6, Boundary 7, East Kootenay 8, Okanagan 9, Atlin-Yukon 10, Prince Rupert 11, Vancouver 12, Vancouver 13, Vancouver 14, and North Vancouver 15.¹⁴ A report of a committee on redistribution of districts in 1928 added another three: South Okanagan 10, North Vancouver 17, and Fraser Valley 18.¹⁵ Atlin-

Yukon 11, Prince Rupert 12, Vancouver 13, Vancouver 14, Vancouver 15, and Vancouver 16 were renumbered.

The responsibility for recommending permanent titles for District Deputy Grand Masters was assigned in 1928 to the committee reviewing their reports, and the Grand Master's approval was no longer required.¹⁶ In 1929 retroactive titles were "granted to and conferred upon" twelve past District Deputy Grand Masters and the 18 current District Deputy Grand Masters were all similarly honoured. There would be seven retroactive conferrals over the next three years. In 1933 one District Deputy Grand Master who had not submitted his report in time was not granted permanent title.¹⁷ The title was retroactively granted the following year.

In 1934 the Grand Master, Dr. Andrew Henderson, recommended that Grand Masters leave the supervision of lodges to their District Deputy Grand Masters and restrict themselves to ceremonial duties, a position endorsed by the committee appointed to review his address. This led over time to the Grand Master visiting fewer lodges to observe the conferral of degrees and the evolution of ceremonial district visits, often meetings of two or more districts together, four in the case of the Vancouver area in 1939.¹⁸ This practice of multiple districts combining to receive the Grand Master continued until 1965 when the Grand Master, James H. McKergow, reduced the number of his lodge visits and visited every district.

In the early years it was rare but not unprecedented for a District Deputy Grand Master to serve consecutive or subsequent terms, although 1935 was noteworthy when four of the District Deputy Grand Masters appointed had previously served in the office.¹⁹

Further districts were added as the membership grew and the duties of the District Deputy Grand Masters continued to evolve. In 1953 they were encouraged to appoint "Supervisors of Masonic Education." The same year the Grand Master, Laurence Healey—referring to the "minor details of particular rituals,"—advised his District Deputy Grand Masters to "avoid becoming involved in local disputes about matters which are not of vital importance."²⁰

Healey was the first Grand Master to send a circular to his District Deputy Grand Masters, advising them of their duties. It ran 13 pages in the printed proceedings that year,²¹ highlighting two differences from current practice: only members of Grand Lodge were to accompany the District Deputy Grand Master in his suite, and the installation night was not considered an official visit so he was not to wear "full regalia." Although Healey noted that lodge installations were not considered official visits, he did ask his District Deputy Grand Masters to wear their grand lodge aprons, marking the transition to our current practice where they—and all grand lodge officers—are now expected to wear their grand lodge regalia everywhere.

In 1984 a District Deputy Grand Masters guidelines handbook—based on Healey's notes—was circulated. This fifteen-page document continued to be distributed, with amendments, until the turn of the century. It included a number of anomalies such as the mistaken belief that a District Deputy Grand Master, during an official visit to a lodge in his own district, should as a masonic courtesy defer his constitutional right to rule the lodge to the Deputy Grand Master if he is present. By 2001 the guide had been enlarged to 17 pages and in 2004 to twenty pages. The fifty page version in 2008 no longer advised the District Deputy Grand Master to surrender the gavel to the Deputy Grand Master but had introduced the idea that he had to be present and take charge of a lodge to receive any grand lodge officer who had been invited to make an official visit.

From 1888 until 1986 the reports of the District Deputy Grand Masters were printed in the annual proceedings of Grand Lodge. In the early years the District Deputy Grand Master often accompanied the Grand Master and made no other visit to a lodge, In later years, as the Grand Master reduced his itinerary to district rather than lodge visits, the District Deputy Grand Masters visited each lodge, once officially and once for the installation of officers. This was the general pattern until shortly before the Second World War when the practice of conferring degrees at emergent communications became the norm and District Deputy Grand Master felt obligated to make two official visits to properly observe both the degree work and the business of the lodge.

In 1994 the appointment of district education officers was promoted, replacing the long-lapsed programme of supervisors of masonic education. They weren't included in the constitution until 2002 and they had to wait until 2005 to be assigned a collar and collar jewel.

For most of our history the District Deputy Grand Master was presented with his "letters patent" when he was installed. In 1997 the Grand Master, Alexander Reid, chose to present the certificates at the completion of his term—although the wording describing the duties remained unchanged. This has had the unintentional result of introducing the current practice of presenting all Grand Lodge officers with certificates.

The rôle of District Deputy Grand Master has evolved over the years as the number of members and lodges grew, and then diminished. Today he is not only expected to inspect the lodges and report on their condition to Grand Lodge, he also is expected to promote the projects and programmes of his Grand Master and the various Grand Lodge committees, and he is expected to appoint a district education officer. In 2016 he was given the added responsibility of membership on the Grand Lodge Board of General Purposes. The job description will continue to evolve.

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- 1 *Annual Proceedings*, Victoria : Grand Lodge of British Columbia, 1889, p. 86.
 - 2 *Constitution and General Regulations of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of British Columbia*, Victoria : Grand Lodge of British Columbia, 1895, p. 19.
 - 3 *Ibid* p. 40.
 - 4 Sec. 98, *Constitution and General Regulations of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Ancient, Free and Accepted Masons of British Columbia*, Victoria : Grand Lodge of British Columbia, 1903. p. 33.
 - 5 Sec. 60, *Constitutions*, Victoria : Grand Lodge of British Columbia, 1910.
 - 6 *Annual Proceedings*, Vancouver : Grand Lodge of British Columbia, 1919. p. 119.
 - 7 *Annual Proceedings*, Vancouver : Grand Lodge of British Columbia, 1922. p. 136.
 - 8 *Annual Proceedings*, Vancouver : Grand Lodge of British Columbia, 1923. p. 159. *Also see* 1988. p. 75.
 - 9 "Report of a Special Report on D.D.G.M.'s Apron." *Annual Proceedings*, 1971. p. 157.
 - 10 *Annual Proceedings*, Vancouver : Grand Lodge of British Columbia, 1926. p. 77.
 - 11 *Ibid*. p. 24.
 - 12 *Ibid*. p. 175.
 - 13 *Annual Proceedings*, Vancouver : Grand Lodge of British Columbia, 1927 p. 18.
 - 14 *Ibid*. p. 157.
 - 15 *Annual Proceedings*, Vancouver : Grand Lodge of British Columbia, 1928. p. 155.
 - 16 *Ibid*. 1928 p. 163. *Also see*: Sec 69 [1939 [printed 1941]] "The rank of Right Worshipful may be granted by Grand Lodge, to those District Deputy Grand Masters who may be recommended for the honour by the Committee reviewing their reports." [p. 32]
Sec 70 [1939 [printed 1941]] "The rank of Right Worshipful may be conferred by Grand Lodge, on those Members who held the office of District Deputy Grand Master prior to the year 1928 upon the application of their respective Lodges." [p. 32]
 - 17 *Annual Proceedings*. Vancouver : Grand Lodge of British Columbia, 1933. p. 243.
 - 18 "Grand Master's Address," *Annual Proceedings*. Vancouver : Grand Lodge of British Columbia, 1939. p. 15.
 - 19 *Annual Proceedings*. Vancouver : Grand Lodge of British Columbia, 1936.p. 211.
 - 20 *Annual Proceedings*. Vancouver : Grand Lodge of British Columbia, 1953. p. 92.
 - 21 *Ibid*. 1953 pp. 86-99.