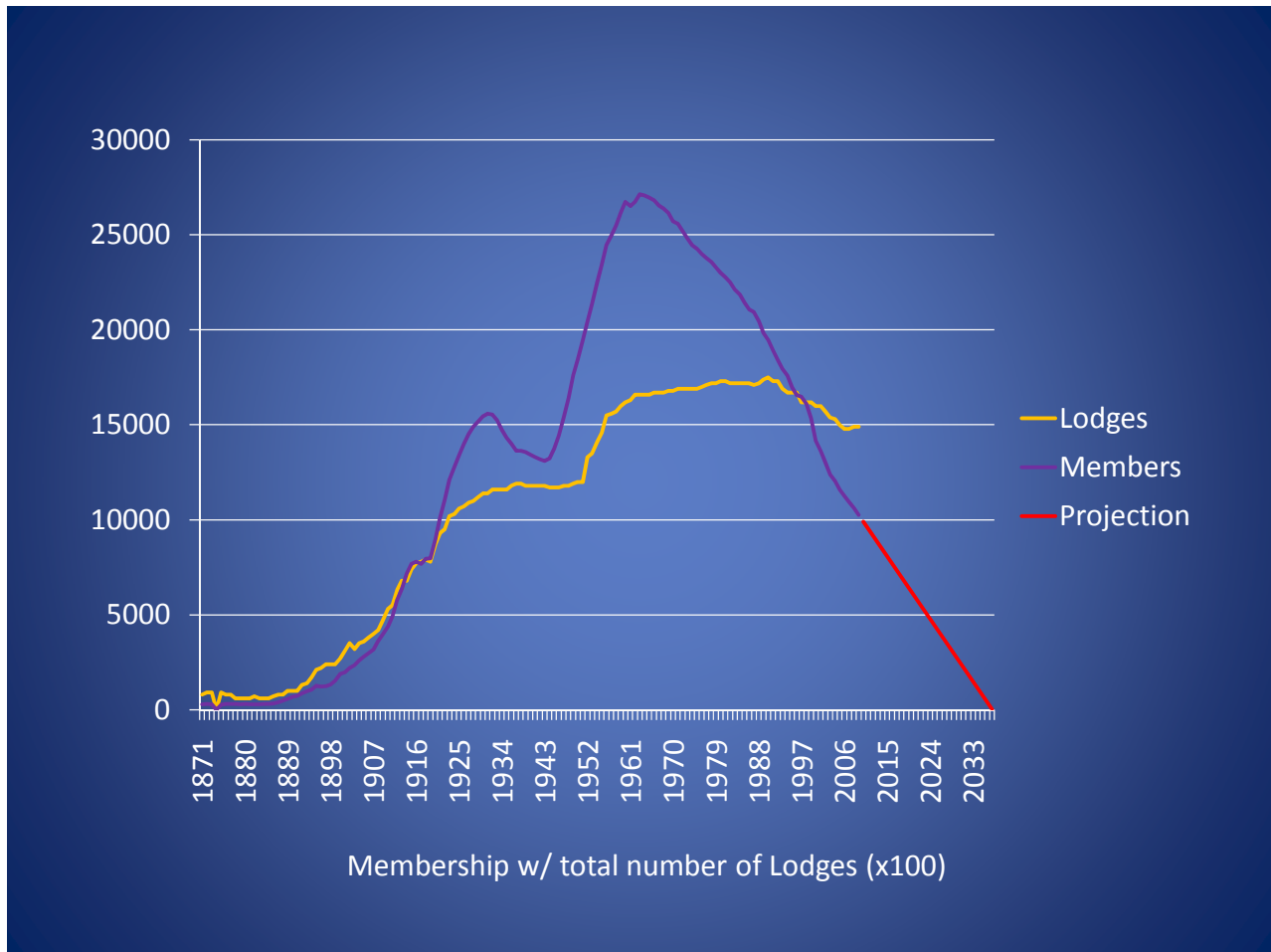


“One step back...the first step in masonry”

Wor. Bro. Tristan Baird, Vancouver Lodge #68

It is my sincere hope that this paper will appeal to the brotherhood for the betterment of the craft. I am not an anarchist; I am not seeking to destroy our institution. My aim is to see the craft prosper, and the more I reflect the more I am convinced that the way forward lies behind us. The future of our craft depends on our willingness to work together and consolidate the craft into fewer lodges and smaller districts, which will lead to an arrest and recovery of our current and protracted decline in membership. One step backwards, two steps forwards.

Annual membership with total number of lodges (X100)



Source: Grand Lodge of British Columbia & Yukon Website

Between 1871 and the early 1920's we see the foundation of Masonry in British Columbia take shape with a commensurate increase in membership and total number of lodges. Following the end of World War I we observe a significant rise in membership with only a slight increase in new lodges. This peaks at the onset of the Great Depression and continues to fall until the end of World War II where we again find a rise in membership and new lodges. Though, this rise is not nearly as dramatic as was observed pre-1920's. Masonry survived the counter culture movement of late 60's and early 70's as well as the resultant and steady decline in membership that this "missing generation" represented. This occurred in part because of the elevated level of membership per lodge. In the mid 1990's the canary in our mineshaft died. This was the point where we crossed the

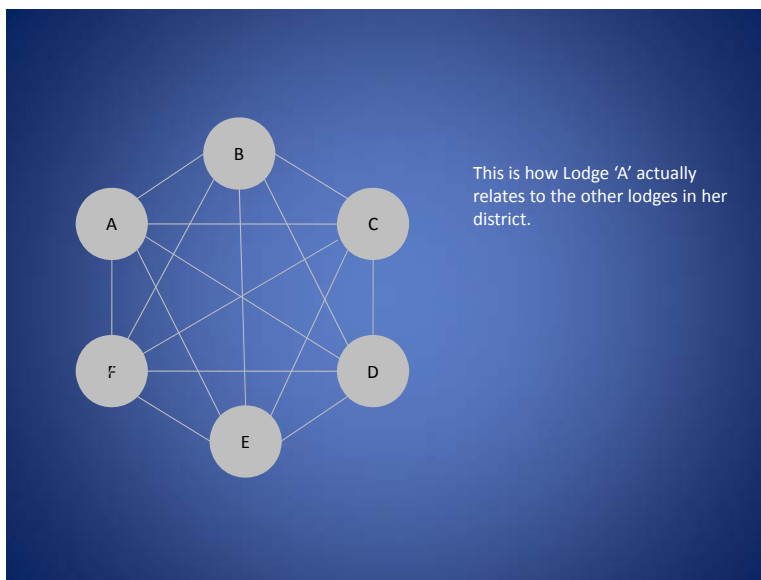
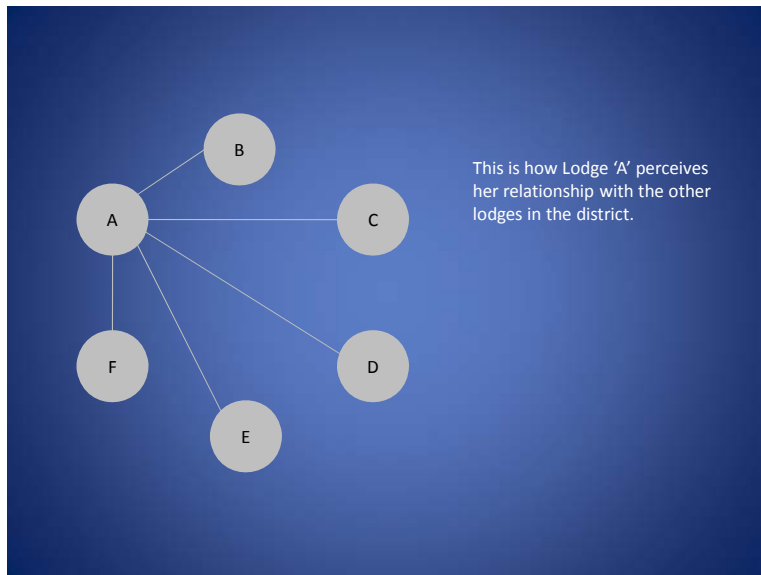
threshold, where negative membership growth dropped below this plateau; where we had for the first time, significantly more lodge than member. What we can observe over the past 14 years is a total reversal of the prosperity that we enjoyed for 80 plus previous years. Between 1963 and 2009, a 46-year period of steady decline, we have seen a loss of 16,868 members. This represents a rate of attrition of 366 members/year. At this rate Freemasonry in British Columbia will be half our current size by the year 2023, if not sooner. When we speak of "Status Quo", this is what we mean. Status quo is the free fall that we have been in since 1963; we have less than 25 years before the ground rushes up to meet us. Make no mistake, we are still falling.

There is a tendency to dismiss our decline in membership as being consistent with other organizations such as the Legion, the Elks, Kinsmen, and so on. This serves no other purpose than to allow us to throw our hands up and say that there is nothing we can do about it. Nonsense! We can do what others will not, we can do what needs to be done; we can regrow. We can be the exception; not the rule.

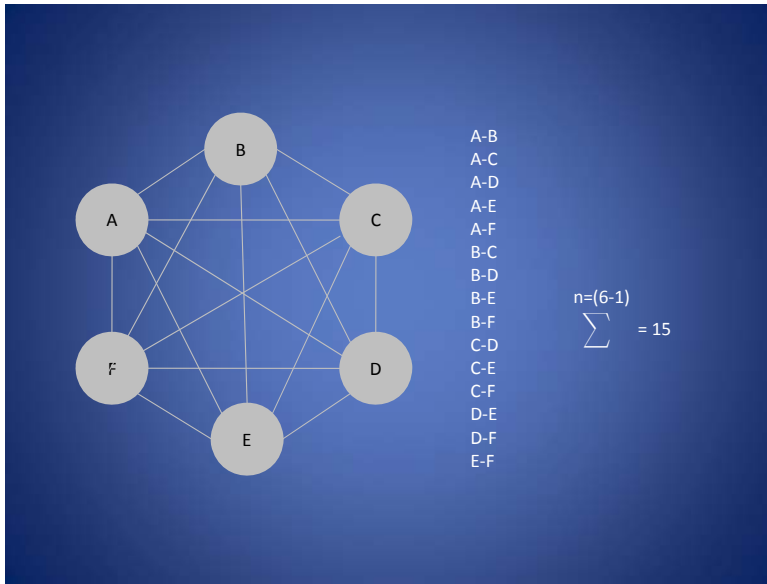
The solution is evident: **a dramatic reduction to the number of lodges in the jurisdiction while simultaneously increasing the number of active members by redistribution, combined with long-term planning to address growth and participation.**

And just how is this supposed to work? As it stands we are faced with the challenge of having too many lodges and not enough Brothers to fill them, and not only to fill them but achieve a sustainable level. When the lodge's active membership (those who actually show up to the meetings) drops below a certain level, stop-gap solutions begin to creep in. Reading rather than performing ritual work, premature advancement of junior officers, over-taxing senior members, and accelerating negative membership growth, just to name a few. However, when active membership is increased, this in turn spurs growth. Competition replaces apathy and complacency, and it introduces an atmosphere of merit based advancement and increased camaraderie. Growth begets growth, and when Brothers are active and content with the state of the Craft, they in turn attract new initiates.

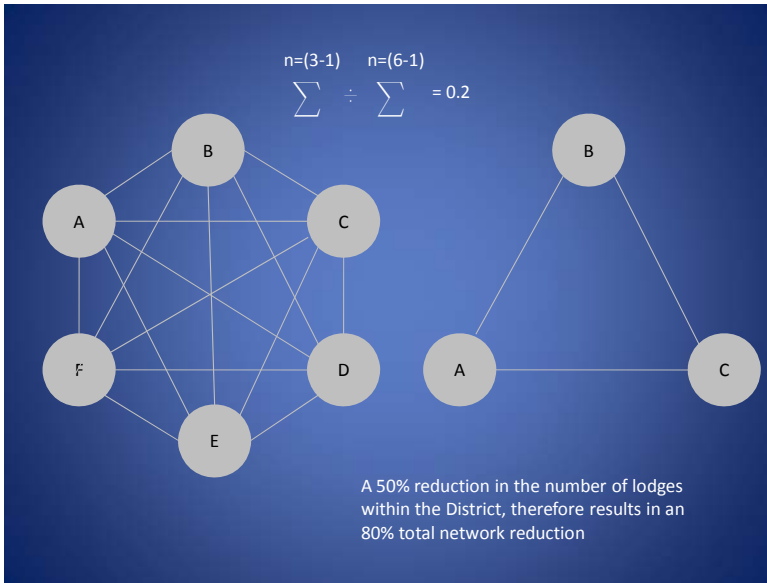
The size of Districts will also be greatly affected by the consolidation of lodges, and this is not necessarily a bad thing. The size of our districts and number of lodges within a given district was acceptable at the height of Masonry. We had the numbers to sustain us, and, more importantly we had an economy that allowed for men to dedicate much of their time to the Craft. You can thank inflation as much as you can the counter culture movements of the 70's or the influence of our detractors for much of our current situation. In the 1950's through to the 1970's, a man could support his family on a single income. His wife managed the home and saw that his lunch was packed and shirts were ironed. Today, families struggle to get by on two incomes, and with both partners working, both have to share in the household chores leaving precious little time for extracurricular or domestic pursuits. With six lodges in our District (District #13) and members and officers expected to visit all of them, it's easy to see why so many of the brethren simply feel spread too thin. A reduction in the number of lodges within our district will take a lot of pressure off of our members and make lodge and masonry a more pleasant experience.



As it stands our current model is a district which is constituted with six lodges. What's so bad about that? Well it turns out that there is an awful lot of time and energy that goes into maintaining the relationships that exist between each group in our District or network.



As you can see, it is not just a matter of one single lodge maintaining a relationship with the remaining five lodges of the district. Each lodge must have a working knowledge of fifteen unique relationships, the demand of this network relative to today's modern mason are considerably more than you would have had to contend with in 1963 at the height of Masonry. Today's Mason is not lazy or undedicated; they simply have far more demands placed on their time and energies. Reducing the number of lodges within the district can help to alleviate these demands.



Therefore, a 50% reduction of lodges will result in an 80% reduction in network relationships saving us time and energy. One might say that we as masons enjoy taking time to go to lodge, to do things traditionally, to slow down a little and not be so rushed. I'm not suggesting that we rush through the lodge experience, but we do need to be cognizant of the demands on a brother's time. Time is a commodity whose value has increased. And maintaining six poorly attended lodges in this district where three would suffice is irresponsible.

In a scene from the 1960 film "Inherit the Wind" Matthew Harrison Brady and Henry Drummond are sitting on the front porch of their hotel on a sultry evening discussing the state of society and each other's ideology, Matt

Brady says: "Why is it, my old friend, that you've moved so far away from me?"... to which Henry Drummond replies: "All motion is relative, Matt. Maybe it's you who've moved away by standing still." By continuing to do nothing and standing still, we are moving farther away from the craft's prosperity. On this subject the Pro Grand Master, the Marquis of Northampton has said "*It is clear, therefore, that doing nothing now is not an option, but knowing what to do and how to do it is something on which we should all concentrate our minds*".

This is no simple task, and there are many road blocks that stand between the craft and prosperity, the most notable of which is status quo bias (the devil you know) and lodge chauvinism (my lodge can beat up your lodge). Generally speaking, men do not change without a significant and compelling reason or incentive to do so. Why should we embark on this endeavor? Because the craft continues to suffer with underutilized lodges and we will become healthy again by pooling together. But, to do this requires brothers of the craft to divorce themselves of the idea that this does not affect them, that because your lodge may be active that you do not have to concern yourself with this; that weaker lodges should just fold into yours, because you don't want to change.

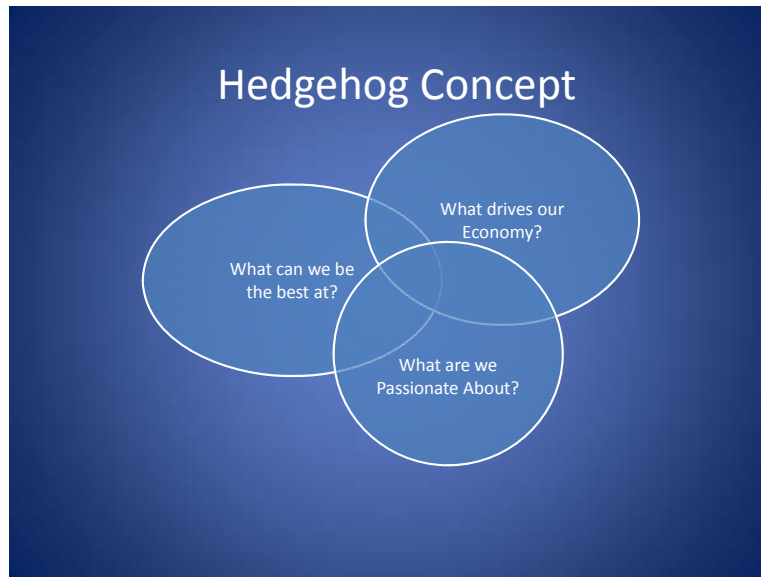
*"Your soul is burdened with that cowardice
Which often weighs so heavily on man
It turns him from a noble enterprise
Like a frightened beast that shies at its own shadow..."*

-Dante's Inferno (Canto II)

We must understand that two lodges consolidating are making an entirely new entity. It is not a question of one dominant lodge taking the lead, both must be understood to be equal partners in the enterprise, regardless of how many members one has on the rolls, or how much money the other has in the bank. Neither is worth anything if the lodge does not move forward and the craft is not at labour. The resultant lodge needs to move forward as a new lodge. Point of fact, the ceremony that is conducted to constitute the consolidated lodges is symbolic of death and re-birth, bringing to an end the various lodges and creating a new one.

Times have changed but we have not. We seem to be so paranoid and apprehensive about change that we reject the notion out of hand without thought or contemplation. We can no longer enjoy this luxury, we need to realize that for the past 14 years the craft has been in survival mode, because of our complacency and willingness to see and hear only what we wish our situation continues to worsen. It is only now that we are confronted with the reality of weak participation, raising dues to meet our budgets, and an inability to fill officer stations or even to open our lodges. This is compounded by the fact that newly raised brothers accept this state of the craft as normal. To the new brother this is the status quo, and if we cannot take the proverbial one step back now it may very soon be too late. Let me reiterate, status quo means a continued net-loss of 366 masons/year.

Consolidation alone will not fix our problems, but it is a significant piece of the solution. Author and satirist Henry Mencken wrote: "For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong". If all a craft lodge had to do was to merge under one banner, sooner or later we would be right back where we find ourselves now. What consolidation allows us to do is get enough people together to begin to achieve sustainable levels of active participation. It must therefore, be followed up with a plan to fully and completely integrate the brethren into the new lodge, and to devise a long term plan to retain active members and attract the next generation of freemasons to the craft.



Those of you involved in business may be familiar with Jim Collins' book "Good to Great" and his "Hedgehog Concept". I'm not suggesting that lodge or masonry should be run as a corporation, point of fact, I believe that would be disastrous for our order. However, I do believe that there are solutions that come from the private sector that we can adopt for the benefit of the craft, and this is one of them.

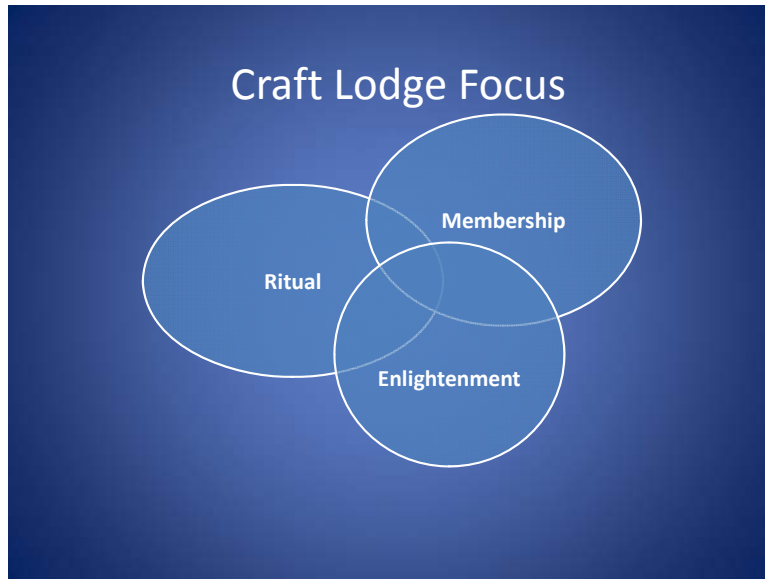
The hedgehog concept is a tool that we can use to define our core group of values and to evaluate our directions and decisions. It does this by asking three questions, of which I will offer my opinion only:

What can we be the best at? I would suggest Ritual. And how can we achieve this? Well we can start by presenting our ritual work, not merely reciting something that we have begrudgingly committed to memory. We can focus on the atmosphere of the lodge; our seekers are coming to use with great expectations and we are letting them down, let's give them an experience that is awe-inspiring. Turn the lights down, play some chamber music, let them feel some cold steel against their flesh. We can reinforce the sanctity of the lodge; our lodge should be the sanctum sanctorum of the modern age, leaving the outside world at the threshold. And finally, practice. There is nothing worse than having to sit through someone struggling with ritual.

What drives our economy? Masonry is a social economy; we don't exist to make money. We exist to craft men into leaders of society. As such, our economy is driven by our membership. Without our members we could not open a lodge. Not in the sense that we would not have the requisite number of members to form a quorum, but without people willing to follow, the lessons of leadership cannot be practiced. And more importantly, anyone who has ever found themselves in an open lodge brimming with brother masons will tell you that there is a great energy that surges within a tyled lodge. When every brother is of one mind, when "...such men are associated together..." as our ritual puts it, the lodge is electric. Our members provide support for leadership, and with that, criticism and differing points of view that exercises our ability to navigate multiple positions and perspectives. Our brothers provide a cross-section of society, allowing us to practice that noblest of contentions, of who best can work, and who best can agree. Membership also provides continuity of the lodge, and a type of social intercourse that society is losing through an increased reliance on technology, and one upon which we should be capitalizing.

What are we passionate about?... Enlightenment. Masonry has been the place where men have come to seek the hidden mysteries that lie within for centuries. These esoteric mysteries are not ours to provide, they are the truths of oneself that are discovered along the journey. Masonry is the hidden college, at which men master

themselves. This happens through the process of: Collegiate Discourse, Research and, the imparting of Masonic knowledge.



We have to start putting the needs of the craft ahead of our own. We can no longer say “What is good for the Lodge is good for the Craft”, we are beyond that point. We are all stewards of the Craft, and as such we are responsible to see that the craft is continuous through the ages. We have been in crisis for too long and what we need is to take action, restore our craft and create a stronger and more vibrant lodge experience. With everyone’s hand on the cabletow, we can achieve this. We can see our active membership rise to 50-plus members; we can see that healthy competition amongst our brethren return, which will in turn lead to better ritual work. We will be able to enjoy attending lodge as opposed to feeling burdened by it, and most importantly we can ensure the survival of the craft. But this comes down to you, are you prepared to make the sacrifice? Are you prepared to do what needs to be done? Are you prepared to lay aside your attachments to a lodge if that is what is required? Are you prepared to work toward a stronger craft for tomorrow, even if that means consolidation?

I will end this paper with a quotation from author and Professor of Business Peter Drucker; “Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things”.

Appendix A – Proposed Consolidation Steering Committee

The steering committee and lodge delegates will be charged with creating a proposed consolidation plan that will have to be brought before the members of each participating lodge, the members of the lodge will review the proposed plan and make changes and/or compromises that will need to be re-examined by the steering committee prior to the actual vote for consolidation. (see also Appendix B “Understanding the Process”)

1-Chairman (This position should be filled by an outsider)

2-Delegates from each interested Lodge would include;

- Worshipful Masters
- Secretaries
- Treasurers
- Trustees
- Other appointed brethren

3-Scope of Work

A-Consolidation

i-Goals / aims

- To reduce the overall number of lodges in the district and to raise the number of active brethren within the remaining lodge.

ii-By-laws (Secretary’s Sub-Committee)

- Name and Number
- Date of meeting
- Masonic Year
- Transitional Clauses
- Standing Committees

iii-Officers

- Transitional leadership, who will fill the offices and how? Elections?

iv-Sample Budget (Treasurers Sub-Committee)

- Dues and fees
- Start-up costs and costs associated with consolidation
- Liabilities / Expenses / Revenues

v-Proposed Investments (Trustees Sub-Committee)

- Class A Debentures
- Class B Debentures
- GIC’s
- Other Interest bearing investments
- Benevolence; accounts and committee

vi-Ritual Work to be adopted

3-Scope of Work

A-Consolidation (cont'd)

vii-Draft Notice of Motion

a-"To all whom it may concern, pursuant to Regulation R151 of the Book of Constitutions and Regulations of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon A.F.&A.M, I do hereby give notice that at the regular business meeting in _____ of _____ Lodge No. ____ I intend to move or cause to be moved that, _____ Lodge No. ____ become consolidated with those Lodges who have agreed to the articles of consolidation as proposed by the steering committee of said lodges and agreed to by this Lodge."

B-Integration (Junior Wardens Sub-Committee)

- i-Date of election of new officers
- ii-Date of consecration ceremony
- iii-Bonding activities and social events
- iv-Standards of ritual/ceremonial work

C-Long Range Plan (5-10year)

i-Criteria for Seekers

- a-strict adherence to regulations
- b-insist on attendance of social functions
- c-Demonstrable study of competency in the knowledge of their degrees.
- d-Non-rushed pace, allow the candidate to proceed when he feels he is ready.

ii-Visibility in the community

- iii-Development of communication tools
- iv-Dedication to Masonic education
- v-Continuous improvement of the lodge, lodge room and of the individual.
- vi-Visitation and fraternal relations

Appendix B – Understanding the process

The Consolidation Committee must Present a plan to the lodges which addresses the constitution of the consolidated lodge (Ducks in rows).

The lodges must agree to the proposed package before any notice of motion can be called. This 'loop' may happen several times.

Prior to any vote occurring, notice of motion must be inserted in each lodges notice for two consecutive months (R151), $\frac{3}{4}$'s of the brothers present are required to pass and 7 or more against kills the vote.

The Grand Master must give his consent to the Consolidation of the lodges, and he has the final say on the matter.

The Ceremony occurs according to Forms and Ceremonies- "Constitution and Consecration of a New Lodge"

Planning for consolidation must also address the task of integrating the several lodges into one unified mass.

