

Position Paper

The Office Of District Deputy Grand Master

by
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"Solomon, my son, forget not my law, but let thine heart keep my commandments, and remove not the ancient Land-Mark, which thy Fathers have set."¹

In my research of the District Deputy System, I have concluded that it grew out of a "Visitor-Inspector" System. In the Proceedings of the Grand Lodge 1777 to 1823, Page 154, states that on April 13, 1791 William Waddill, Past Master of Williamsburg Lodge No. 6 and Charter Master of Richmond-Randolph Lodge No. 19, offered a resolution to Grand Lodge which led to the appointment of Grand Visitors. He was appointed a Grand Visitor in 1793 and it was interesting to me that he reported as follows on his visit in November 1796 to Manchester Lodge No. 14:

"I find this Lodge more strict in their discipline than any that I have hitherto visited, but attended with much harmony and regularity."²

Our District Deputy or "Grand Visitor" system was begun in the year 1792 when the Proceedings of the Grand Lodge for December of that year state, "A Dispensation was issued appointing the Worshipful Robert Mercer a Grand Visitor in conformity to the sixth chapter of the Constitution."³ Undoubtedly, the Grand Visitors or Inspectors had some of the duties of the District Deputies of today. The actual provision in the Grand Lodge law for the office was adopted on Tuesday, December 9, 1806 as follows:

"Whereas, it is essential to the promotion of an uniform mode of working throughout the communication, as well as to the advancement of the interests of our society, generally, that each Lodge should occasionally be visited by an officer of the Grand Lodge; and whereas, the widely dispersed situation of the lodges under this

jurisdiction renders it impracticable for the Grand Master, or Deputy Grand Master, to whom the duty appertains, to visit them in person: Therefore, resolved, that as soon after the end of the present, and every succeeding Grand Annual Communication, as may be, the Grand Master, for the time being, shall cause the Lodges under this jurisdiction, to be laid off in convenient districts, and shall appoint to each district some Master of a Lodge, or Past Master, of respectability and Masonic skill, as District Deputy Grand Master, which appointment shall continue in force until the Grand Annual Communication next succeeding the date thereof, unless sooner revoked by the Grand Master by whom it shall have been made. Every District Deputy Grand Master, so appointed, shall be furnished with a Warrant of his Appointment, signed by the Grand Master, or his Deputy, and attested by the Grand Secretary, with the seal of the Grand Lodge affixed. The duties of the District Deputy Grand Masters shall be as follows, and each of them, by virtue of his appointment, shall possess full power and authority to carry these duties into full effect: That is,

Every District Deputy Grand Master shall visit every Lodge in his District, at a Stated meeting, at least once during the term of his appointment, of which visit he shall give the Master or Secretary of the Lodge timely notice. At every such visit the District Deputy Grand Master is to preside in the Lodge, after it is opened and he is introduced. He is to examine the records of the Lodge, and see if they are regularly kept, to inform himself of the number of

members, and whether they are generally punctual in their attendance; to enquire whether the Lodge be in a flourishing or declining state; to point out any errors he may happen to observe in their conduct or manner of working; to instruct them in every particular wherein he may conceive them to be in need of it; to recommend attention to the moral and benevolent principles of our institution, caution in the admission of candidates, and a punctual representation of their Lodge at every meeting of Grand Lodge. When any District Deputy Grand Master shall discover, either in his own district, or in any part of the jurisdiction of this Grand Lodge; any Masonic error or evil, whether it appertain to an individual or to a Lodge, he shall immediately endeavor, by Masonic means, to arrest its progress, and if he shall judge it expedient he is forthwith to forward to the Grand Master or Grand Secretary full information of the whole subject. Previous to every annual meeting of the Grand Lodge, every District Deputy Grand Master shall, so far as is proper to be done, make out in writing a candid and faithful report of the state of each Lodge in his District, and forward it to the Grand Secretary, to be laid before Grand Lodge. Immediately after every appointment of District Deputy Grand Masters, as aforesaid, the Grand Secretary is to forward to each of the subordinate lodges, a list of the names of the persons appointed, with the lodges composing the Districts, placed under their superintendence respectively. In the Grand Lodge, the District Deputy Grand Masters shall sit as a distinct body, and in all questions shall have one vote collectively. All former laws, ordinances, and regulations whatever of this Grand Lodge, relative to Grand visitations and inspections, shall be and the same are hereby repealed."⁴

Most Worshipful L. B. Blakemore, Past Grand Master of Ohio, said that in the Nineteenth Century a number of Grand Lodges began to expand the Deputy System, to perfect it, and to make it a permanent constitutional organization. They divided their Grand Jurisdictions into

districts, each one with twenty or more lodges in it. At the beginning of his term, the Grand Master personally appoints a deputy, or deputies, for each District; large Districts have several; these Deputies stand in the Grand Master's stead within the circle of a certain number of specified duties; they speak in the Grand Master's name, with his authority, and are the Grand Master's alter ego, his personal agent or representative. ...it is a wise and extraordinarily useful system, because it is as if the Grand Master were himself constantly close by each and every Lodge under his care. The Deputy can visit any Lodge in his District when and as often as he wishes; he does not have to ask for admittance but announces he is about to enter; after entering he can take the gavel at will; he inspects the Lodge, examines the books, and acts as a consultant to the Worshipful Master. Officially he inspects every Lodge at least once each year.

One of the methods for successfully handling a strong and live Lodge is for a Worshipful Master to make full use of his District Deputy - a Worshipful Master who is too indifferent or too timid to do so, or who refuses to do so out of a grudging jealousy is not a competent ruler of his lodge. A Grand Jurisdiction consists of hundreds of Lodges which are closely knitted together and which have in and among themselves a great reservoir of power, service, wisdom, and talent; a Grand Lodge has in its own officers, committees, and properties another such reservoir. The whole of these resources of a Grand Lodge and its Grand Jurisdiction are free and open to any lodge and its Grand Jurisdiction are free and open to any lodge for use and enjoyment. A District Deputy is a channel through which a local Lodge can tap that reservoir; an agency by which the whole of Grand Lodge resources can be brought into any Lodge, however small and remote it may be; a means by which a local Lodge of fifty members can have behind it the power of 500 or more Lodges and a whole Grand Jurisdiction. A charge would be levied for the use of such resources in the world of business, or finance, or manufacturing; in Freemasonry there is no

charge; and through his District Deputy, a Master continuously has freedom of access.⁵

In recent years, many of our Masonic leaders have acknowledged weaknesses in our District Deputy system. Many of us have been hearing that "Drummer" with increasing velocity. It is important that we recognize that we are living in an age of unprecedented change. I submit that in this busy, complex world, we don't take the time to sit down and talk together, think together, create together, dream together, or plan together! We find ourselves chained to antiquity - doing the same old things, the same old way, year after year ... wondering why the young, educated, professional men somehow cannot become excited about those old things.

I happen to believe the time has come for changes in our District Deputy System - "Fine tuning" the system to provide for better qualified District Deputies who are knowledgeable in Masonic law and in the ritual of our Grand Lodge. Section 1.87 of our Methodical Digest, Qualification of District Deputy Grand Master, is covered by one sentence..."Every District Deputy Grand Master must be a Master or Past Master of a Lodge, and should be well-skilled in the laws of the Grand Lodge of Virginia and in the work of all degrees as taught by the Grand Lodge." Unfortunately, far too many are not skilled, particularly in Masonic law, and, thus, are not as effective as they should be. How can we expect more, since there is precious little time for experience, study or preparation? And, brethren, we cannot prepare them for this important office in one day or afternoon.

I suspect that one of the problems is in the selection process. Under our law, Sec. 1.86, subordinate lodges make recommendations for District Deputy Grand Master, but, of course do not bind the Grand Master to appoint any brother so recommended. No knowledgeable Mason would disagree that far too often unqualified men are recommended based on popularity, without thought of qualifications and ability. We are caught up in what, at best, can be called mediocrity! I ask: How many times can

we turn our heads and pretend that the problem is going to go away?

Now, more on the selection process....The so-called "Rotation" system within a given district. Doesn't this violate Masonic law - wherein a lodge makes a recommendation by "Rubber stamping" a name whom they do not know? I believe this violates law. But we do it.

Let me quote to you from the Report of the Past Grand Masters at the 1937 Grand Lodge:

"We heartily agree with the Grand Master that no brother should be appointed to the high and responsible office of District Deputy Grand Master simply to honor him with the title of the office. Nor should he be selected because he hails from some particular lodge, or because of an understanding among the lodges that the position should rotate."

At Grand Lodge in 1945, Grand Master John M. Stewart spoke disparagingly of the custom of rotation among lodges in a district so that each had its turn whether they had a qualified man or not.⁶ Moreover, on February 8, 1955, Most Worshipful Hugh Reid in his Address to Grand Lodge, said:

"To make this situation worse, the lodges in numerous districts have entered into political deals by which power to bind all the lodges in the District is rotated, and one lodge makes a nomination and all the others súpinely follow the leader, to the detriment of the Grand Lodge."

There is no question in my mind that this abominable selection process by rotation should be discontinued.

Now, may I salute the tenure of office of District Deputy Grand Masters. The "One year" tenure must go. I ask: How in the world can we select each year fifty-eight (58) new District Deputy Grand Masters who are prepared, experienced, qualified, capable, skilled and confident? In like manner, why do we not have

a new committee on Work or a new Masonic Home Board each year? I suspect it is because we need the continuity of experienced, trained, and well-versed veterans to meet and solve the problems of this decade. But we say, "it shall" in the case of the District Deputy system.

Around the year 1870 the lodges were called upon to make recommendations for this office, in which they usually served two to three years. Time and circumstances would require certain changes in the system, but the Grand Lodge has been slow in providing a change for the times.⁷

In 1964 Grand Master Millard H. Robbins recommended that a study be made of the matter of creating a pool of Past Masters who are qualified for the office of District Deputy Grand Master. This would include the establishment of a set of standards covering knowledge of our laws, usages and customs, and require an examination by an authority established by the Grand Lodge, which authority would have the duty of issuing certificates to those qualified. To be eligible for appointment, the brother recommended by his lodge would have to possess a certificate from this authority.⁸

Most Worshipful John Powers Stokes was appointed chairman of a special committee on qualification of prospective District Deputies, who was assisted by Rt. Wor. Allen E. Roberts, and he recommended, on behalf of the committee, that section 1.101 be amended as follows:

"Every District Deputy Grand Master must be a Master or Past Master of a lodge and must be well-skilled in the laws of the Grand Lodge of Virginia and in the work of all degrees as taught by the Grand Lodge. On and after January 1, 1970 each Brother recommended for the office of District Deputy Grand Master shall present himself before a member of the Committee on Qualification and prove himself familiar with the laws of the Grand Lodge and the customs and usages of the fraternity. When he has satisfied the committee he shall receive from it a Certificate of Qualification

to be forwarded to the Grand Lodge office at the time he is recommended for appointment. Any Past Master wishing to take such an examination may do so and, if qualified, may receive the certificate, which shall be good for a five year period from its date and subject thereafter to renewal upon re-examination.

We further recommend to the Grand Master that he appoint a committee of brethren well-skilled in the laws of the Grand Lodge, brethren well-skilled in the ritualistic work of the Grand Lodge and brethren who are familiar with the usages and customs of Freemasonry and charge them to prepare and present for his approval a proposed reference manual of anything proper to be written in connection with the laws, rituals, usages, and customs upon which the examination for a Certificate of Qualification shall be based.

As soon as the manual has been printed and distributed, the Grand Lodge is requested to appoint one member from each of the eight Lecturing Divisions of the state to form the Committee of Qualification. The brethren appointed should meet as soon as practicable thereafter and formulate the questions upon which the examination for the first year shall be based. Annually thereafter a list of such questions shall be formulated by the committee so that every applicant for the certificate may be examined on the same subjects and in the same manner.

We further recommend that upon the adoption of this plan the Grand Secretary be requested to present a proposed certificate to the Grand Master for his approval and thereafter to have the certificates printed; numbered and forwarded to the members of the Committee on Qualification for issuance to qualified brethren.⁹

This was presented as Resolution No. 10 at the 1968 Grand Lodge (Proceedings - Page 52) and not adopted. In my opinion it was an excellent resolution but Rt. Wor. Allen E. Roberts told

me, in his wisdom, it wouldn't fly. So, brethren, here we are seventeen (17) years later seeking to improve the District Deputy System. I ask: Does the Craft of Virginia consider it reasonable and proper for a brother to hold a position, and often do nothing, and earn a life-time title in one year — I submit many of those holding that title, are still trying to earn it.

So, as a result of my research and observations over these many years of service to Freemasonry, I submit the following recommendations concerning the office of District Deputy Grand Master:

1. All Masters or Past Masters who would aspire for service as District Deputy Grand Master shall be certified as to proficiency in the law by the Committee on Jurisprudence and examined in the ritual by the Committee on Work, or by such other committee or committees so designated for that purpose.
2. Only those holding such designation or certificates of proficiency shall be nominated for District Deputy Grand Master by subordinate lodges.
3. All nominations shall be referred by the Grand Secretary to the Council of Administration for review and cataloging, and thence to the Grand Master. His power of Appointment is final and absolute, and no appeal therefrom is possible.
4. Such certifications shall be good for three (3) years' period from its date and subject thereafter to renewal upon re-examination.
5. Each District Deputy Grand Master may be appointed annually over three (3) successive years of service.
6. Only after three (3) years of service may he retire with the rank of Past District Deputy Grand Master and the title of Right Worshipful.

7. A District Deputy Grand Master shall not be eligible to serve in such capacity for more than three (3) years in succession.
8. I recommend that the Masonic Districts in the Commonwealth be reduced to thirty (30). With our current three hundred and fifty-six (356) subordinate Lodges in our Grand Jurisdiction, this would average about twelve (12) Lodges per district.

This Position Paper, howsoever imperfect, is an attempt to improve and strengthen the District Deputy system. In the short eleven (11) years between now and the Twenty-First century, our Fifty-nine Thousand (59,000) Masons in the Commonwealth will face an abrupt collision with the future; for many of us, the future will have arrived too soon. I submit that the "Good old days" is 1989. Change is avalanching upon our heads which will test our capacity to adapt. Will we come to terms with it? I hope.

Endnotes

- 1 Holy Bible, Proverbs, Chapter 3, Verse 1; Chapter 22, Verse 28.
- 2 Proceedings of Grand Lodge 1777 - 1823 (Dove).
- 3 DDGM Duties and Responsibilities (Rt. Wor. Donald M. Robey)
- 4 The District Deputy System, Virginia Research Lodge No. 1777, A.F. & A. M., issued 1963 (Bartholomew) Page 15.
- 5 Blakemore "Masonic Lodge Methods" (Macoy) Pages 19-20.
- 6 The District Deputy System, Virginia Research Lodge No. 1777 (Bartholomew) 1963, Pp. 30.
- 7 100 Years on the James (History of James Evans Lodge No. 72) Mt. Wor. William T. Watkins, Pg. 57.
- 8 1964 Proceedings, Grand Lodge of Virginia, Pg. 112.
- 9 1967 Proceedings, Grand Lodge of Virginia, Pgs. 62-63.