



## The Secretary

*Brother ....., you have been elected (or appointed) Secretary of this Lodge, and I now invest you with the jewel of your office. It is your duty to record the proceedings of the Lodge, proper to be written, collect the subscriptions, and issue notices for the assembling of the Brethren. Your good inclination to Freemasonry and to this Lodge in particular, will, no doubt, induce you to discharge the duties of your office with fidelity, and by so doing you will merit the esteem and applause of your Brethren.*

Installation, Canadian Work, Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon

### secretary

[ˈsekɹəˌterē]

NOUN

1. a person employed by an individual or in an office to assist with correspondence, keep records, make appointments, and carry out similar tasks.
  - an official of a society or other organization who conducts its correspondence and keeps its records.
  - an official in charge of a government department.  
"Secretary of the Treasury"
  - a writing desk with shelves on top of it.

## Historical

The oldest craft regulation concerning the appointment of a lodge secretary is to be found in the Second Shaw Statutes dated December 28, 1599 primarily addressed to the Lodge of Kilwinning but with provisions that applied equally to all lodges in Scotland.

*“The warden and deacon, together with the masters of the district (quarter maisteries) shall elect a well known notary (constituted famous notary) as clerk and secretary (scribe) who shall make out and sign all indentures, discharges, and other writings whatsoever, pertaining to the craft, and no writ, title or other evidence shall be admitted by the warden and deacon, except it shall have been executed by this clerk and signed by him.”*

The statute required the senior officers of the lodge to ‘elect, choose and constitute “ane famous notary” (i.e. a reputable notary or lawyer) to act as clerk and scribe and to be responsible for drawing up all indentures and other documents relating to apprentice, as well as other documents relating to lodge activities. No document was official and recognized as valid until it was “made” by the clerk. The clerk in those days was paid a modest income for his services. Subsequent regulations by Kilwinning lodge indicated that every apprentice at his “booking” paid the clerk or secretary 40 pence (Scots money)

There is no evidence that there was uniformity of practice in Scottish lodges however, minutes of many lodges have survived because of this practice. Early English Lodge minutes are very scarce.

The oldest minutes of the Lodge of Queen’s Arms, St Paul’s Church Yard (now Lodge of Antiquity, No2) go back to 1736. But the first mention of an election of a secretary was in July 1737

*“Grand Lodge was in its earliest days a modest organization. Its officers were as Grand Master (elected annually) and two Wardens. Its members were the Masters and Wardens of the ‘four old lodges’ that had founded it and any lodges that afterwards adhered to it. (as to which we know little) These private lodges each had its Right Worshipful master, a Secretary, sometimes Treasurer, a Tyler or somebody acting as Tyler, and Stewards or Brethren acting as Stewards. In many lodges until after 1813 the Treasurer, when there was one, was junior to the Secretary.”*

Freemasons’ Guide and Compendium by Bernard E. Jones

## The Secretary’s Annual Subscription

In some jurisdictions the Secretary is paid a fee for his service. While in others historically the Secretary (Clerk) was exempted from the payment of lodge dues. Some lodges exempt the Secretary from paying lodge dues but he must pay Grand Lodge assessments.

## Secretary's Jewel



His Jewel is the Crossed Quill Pens

## Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon

### *The Duties of the Secretary;*

*“to record all proceedings of the Lodge proper to be written....” You hold an office that requires many skills, zeal for your lodge, and great personal integrity. You must work closely with the Worshipful Master, assisting him in the planning of the meetings and the laying out of his program in advance for the year. Be ready to advise him on the Constitutions of Grand Lodge and the by-laws of your lodge, and guard against any infringement of them. You should be approachable and courteous and able to work in harmony with the other officers of the lodge. You should arrive at the lodge with all your records in order for the meeting, early enough to allow sufficient time to discuss with the Worshipful Master any matters pertaining to the meeting he may have in mind, and to confer with any of the brethren who may have business to transact, or require information or assistance. You come into personal contact with the brethren of your lodge more often than any other officer, and thus have a great opportunity to be a friend and promoter of harmony. You are virtually a “strong right arm” to the Worshipful Master in the conduct of the business. Therefore, your regular attendance at all communications is essential. The following directives are given for your assistance. You should make frequent references to the Book of Constitutions for more detailed information.*

Lodge Officers Guide, Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon

### Another Opinion;

The Secretary is the Lodge's Recorder.

The Secretary's Lodge Officer Duties require a high degree of lodge experience, Masonic knowledge, diplomacy and, above all, detailed paperwork skills. The Lodge Secretary is the backbone of any Masonic Lodge and he holds a position of great responsibility. He sits to the left of the Master. His duties require him to handle all correspondence to the members, minutes of

Lodge meetings, petitions of new candidates, continuous lodge member count, and many other administrative duties. He compiles an ongoing list of each new candidate and which degrees that candidate has undertaken. From his member list, he sends out the annual dues notices and receives dues payments. He communicates with other Lodges and the Grand Lodge, types letters, retrieves the mail as well as handles many other details.

The Secretary's Lodge Officer duties are many, not the least of which is that he must be well versed in Grand Lodge By-Laws for his jurisdiction and his Lodge By-Laws. He keeps the list of Lodge members and helps the Master organize his meetings. A very experienced member usually resides in this chair...many times he is a Past Master of the Lodge. While it is not a prerequisite, due to the number of hours that this position requires, most (not all) Lodge Secretaries are retired and therefore able to devote the many hours required, which are necessary to this position. The Secretary's position is similar to a corporate C.O.O., (Chief Operation Officer).

## **The Lodge Secretary Position**

Some might say the Lodge Secretary runs the lodge. Well, that may be true in some lodges, but this is not generally the case. It is true, however, that an effective and efficient Lodge Secretary plays a pivotal role in the success of any lodge. It's not for everybody and not everyone should be a Lodge Secretary.

For those who aspire to this important office there are some key skills and traits you need at your disposal, including communication, interpersonal, management, leadership, and technical. You also need the right personality that allows you to work with a variety of different people, personalities, and backgrounds. All these must come from a variety of sources: naturally, with training, or with personal growth. You don't need to be an expert in any given area, but you do need to be aware of the role each one plays. Having a working knowledge of each and the ability to keep learning are key success factors.



### *Carefully Filling the Position*

It is not uncommon for a member to suddenly find himself the secretary of his lodge. There are times when, for a variety of reasons, the Lodge Secretary position suddenly becomes vacant. During these times an Assistant-Lodge Secretary, if one exists, can seamlessly move into the position. If your lodge does not have an Assistant-Lodge Secretary, you should seriously consider filling this position. Given the measurable ramp-up time to be effective you are doing a disservice to both the new secretary and the lodge by not having a succession plan.

This role should not be filled with just a warm body to satisfy some requirement to do so. It should be thoughtfully and carefully filled with someone who is qualified or can prepare and

learn quickly. Given some lodges may lack the resources to do so, those lodges should request guidance from Grand Lodge.

### *Skills and Traits*

The Lodge Secretary wears many hats: manager, project manager, organizer, arbitrator, record keeper, writer, listener, liaison, diplomat. Taken together, it can be said that the Lodge Secretary is in the business of communication and interpersonal relations, and thus needs all the skills associated with those roles.

Since these traits are required to be an effective Master, one might say a lodge should consider a Past-Master to fill the role of Lodge Secretary. In most cases this may be true. They will argue that he will already be familiar with developing the monthly notice, Masonic protocol, Grand Lodge rules and regulations, creating a meeting agenda, selecting an investigating committee, etc. However, just because a man served as Master, doesn't guarantee he will serve well as a Lodge Secretary. He can fall victim to the Peter Principle, where one tends to aspire to his or her level of incompetence. For example, a great software programmer may not be an effective software manager. The right man, with the right skills and the ability to quickly learn and apply new material, who may not be a Past Master, can quite nicely fulfill the position.

To help you decide if you possess the right stuff to be the Lodge Secretary, here is a list of some soft skills and traits you should have or acquire:

REPORT THIS AD

***Effective note taking:*** having the ability to take good notes and be able to read them a few days later is critical to your success. Comprehensive notes during a monthly meeting, without interrupting the flow of the meeting, is a must have skill. Everyone has a few tricks we learned while in school. Utilize those and learn a few more. Get a good book or check online for training and tips.

***Sound listening skills:*** you may be the first person approached to answer a question, resolve a conflict, or provide advice on protocol or process. Being able to listen attentively, utilize reflective listening, and trying first to understand before making yourself understood are productive arrows in the listening skills quiver. Sound listening skills allows you to better understand what is being said or asked, and results in members being more apt to approach you. Get a good book or check online for training and tips.

***Effective writing:*** this includes how to write a business letter for those times you need to communicate officially with Grand Lodge, a lodge member, or a candidate for the degrees. You also need to create concise and complete meeting minutes and assist with writing the monthly meeting notice. As in honing your listening skills, get a good book or check online for training and tips.

***Effective speaking:*** this is useful for those times when you must read a report; or update the Master and lodge with information from the district, Grand Lodge, or another source. Concentrate on clear pronunciation, pace, projection, properly timed emphasis, and grammar.

***Patience:*** they say patience is a virtue and for the Lodge Secretary this could be considered a fifth cardinal virtue. As mentioned, the secretary wears many hats and deals with many people within and outside the lodge, some with abrupt personalities and short fuses. While manifesting sound communication skills the secretary needs to practice patience if he wants to continue to work effectively in all his roles. For some, patience almost comes naturally; for others, not so much. Everyone has a boiling point, but the more the secretary can control his emotions, the better life will be for everyone. If patience does not come naturally to you, there are other positions within the lodge that may be able to utilize your other skills and talents.

### ***Accuracy and Attention to Detail***

Part of being an effective communicator is getting the facts right and being aware of the details. Incorrect and or insufficient information can be harmful and an inefficient use of time, requiring additional clarifications and corrections. Done enough times, your credibility and reputation can be compromised. Taking the time to get it right the first time reaps rich reward. You need to be mindful of the big picture, but you also must provide the right amount of accurate detail without losing your audience.

### ***Time Management, Prioritization, and Organization:***

Like in any other important role, professionally or personally, the Lodge Secretary must practice sound time management skills along with the ability to be organized and effectively prioritize work.

There is a steady stream of communication that flows to and from the secretary's desk, from a variety of internal and external sources. This includes general paperwork, applications for membership and affiliation, letters, emails, phone calls, text messages, invoices, cash receipts, candidate material, and awards. The secretary also needs to be aware of a variety of deadlines imposed by Grand Lodge, candidate degrees, tax reporting, District Deputy official and fraternal visits, etc. To deal with the above items the secretary needs a sound method to organize his work.

Without a sound system to effectively receive the information, properly process and distribute it to the correct recipients in a timely manner, and organize it, all with a sense of proper prioritization, the inexperienced secretary can be easily overwhelmed. Knowing this before assuming the secretary role and preparing for it in advance will make life a lot easier for everyone.

Develop, through online material, training, books, or a friend a system of organization that is simple, effective, and supports the way you work. Follow the same steps to learn effective time management and prioritization methods

### ***Trust, Confidentiality, Judgement and Discretion***

As mentioned, the Lodge Secretary is often the “go to” guy and first point of contact for information and guidance, sometimes during difficult times. Like any other personal relationship, a level of trust must be developed where confidentiality and discretion are its cornerstones. Once trust is established people will be more candid and know they can confide in you with sensitive, possibly embarrassing information. The Lodge Secretary must be able to maintain this level of trust and confidentiality, while balancing it with sound judgement and discretion, especially when someone’s safety or the interest of the lodge is at stake. The secretary must be able to use all the soft skills at his disposal to assess and judge a given situation, maintain trust and confidentiality, and practice unbiased discretion to determine what next steps, if any, are necessary.

### ***Software Application Proficiency and Online Skills***

You don’t have to be a techno-nerd to serve as Lodge Secretary, but you do need to have a minimal working knowledge of word processing, spreadsheet creation and maintenance, and publishing. Microsoft and Apple products provide such a tool set, but there are other discreet products. However, the more standard the product, the better the chance that others will be able to communicate without software compatibility issues. If you don’t feel comfortable with your skills in any of these areas, seek education via the least expensive channel that works best for you.

### ***Relationship with the Master***

It is vitally important that a strong and respectful relationship exists between the Master and the Lodge Secretary. It is also important that this relationship is a two-way street. Friction between these two officers manifests itself in a variety of different way, often at the most inopportune time. Like any relationship their mutual respect must be earned and continually fostered. For the good of the lodge they must both leave perceived slights and an unproductive attitude at the door of the lodge.

The secretary must be able to respect the Master’s boundaries and authority, and must resist the temptation, especially if he is a Past Master, to control the presiding Master. Even with a weak Master in the East, the secretary must respect the fact the he is not the Master. Instead, the Lodge Secretary/Past Master can better serve the lodge as a mentor to the presiding Master. Sound guidance and council, timely reminders, following the Master’s preferred communication

method (ex. Phone, email, text) proactive assistance, discretion, in addition to utilizing the skill set described in this article are beneficial to all.

### *In Closing*

The Secretary job is an important one without question and it is a great honor to be a Lodge Secretary. Master's come and go, but the Secretary remains year after year.

There are many things to consider in deciding to assume the office of Lodge Secretary. You need an understanding and sufficient level of proficiency in soft and hard skills, so strive to improve your skill set in all areas. Beyond this, consider the following steps to prepare for the Secretary position: take Lodge Secretary training provided by Grand Lodge; study the Lodge Secretary's Handbook that is available through Grand Lodge. If possible, for at least a year; form a mentor-protégé relationship with the current secretary,

Finally, lodges should incorporate a succession plan by selecting a qualified member to serve as Assistant-Secretary, who can seamlessly fill a vacancy, planned or unplanned, in the Lodge Secretary position. Some lodges may not have the resources to fill the role but must continually seek to do so. Lodges cannot run effectively without a competent Master; likewise, it also cannot run effectively without a competent Lodge Secretary.

### *References*

The Secretary, by Richard H. Ryder, 2018

The Freemason at Work by Harry Carr

