

Southern California Research Lodge F&AM

Some Thoughts on Service Clubs and Fraternal Organizations

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Freemasonry, of course, in its present form antedates service clubs by almost a couple centuries as far as I know. Freemasonry, in the early 1700s, was, in the words of Benjamin Franklin, as I recall them, a self improvement organization with groups of men gathering together from time to time to educate and improve themselves both morally and intellectually.

Service clubs were formed to be exactly what this designation tells us, service to their area as well as the rest of the world. But in meeting together to do this they inculcated certain ethical standards in their work so could also be considered a self improvement organization as they exchanged information about their work or profession that could benefit each other.

As this is addressed to an audience of Freemasons, some being service club members, our tenets are well known. But what of those of the service clubs? As I am familiar with and am a Rotarian let me give you, we have no secrets, our Four Way Test:

THE FOUR-WAY TEST

Of the things we think, say or do...

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| First | Is it the TRUTH? |
| Second | Is it FAIR to all concerned? |
| Third | Will it build GOOD WILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS? |
| Fourth | Will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned? |

Rotarian and Western Australia Past Grand Master Arthur Smith, when addressing his Rotary Club in 1991 pointed out some similarities:

Both Rotary and Freemasonry are based on fellowship with special bonds of friendship formed between members.

Both have criteria for membership and both must have approval by their organization.

Both emphasize equality among the members. (RAH: note "the dignifying of each Rotarian's occupation".)

You don't join Rotary or Freemasonry for what you can get out of it.

Both have an international aspect.

Both set standards of conduct and ethics.

A principal difference is that nobody becomes a Rotarian until he or she is invited by a Rotary Club to do so while, conversely, one will never be asked to become a Freemason.

Can one cross over into the field of the other?

The 1800s Grand Lodge Proceedings included a review of what was going on in other jurisdictions and what was going on in other jurisdictions could easily be termed service to the community just as performed today by service clubs, witness the following extracted from the 1848 Proceedings of the Grand Lodge of Illinois:

The cause of education has received in the State of Kentucky the most flattering impulses from the lodges. A Masonic college, with a president and three

professors and two adjunct professors, was established, under the auspices and patronage of the Masonic fraternity, about three years ago at Lagrange; and at the expiration of the third year in July last (1847), the number of pupils instructed therein was one hundred and seventy, of whom twelve were beneficiaries, maintained at the expense of the institution.

Indiana, which recommends common schools, under the direct patronage and control of the Worshipful Master, Wardens and brethren of each subordinate lodge.

Missouri - The report of the committee on the college gives every encouragement to its friends that could be expected. The donations in money and land amount to \$31,348.50; of which about \$2,000 are in lands and town lots. The committee state that "the stupendous building is under roof, and in rapid progress of completion; that in a few months more we shall be able to place the cap-stone and present to the world a spectacle like honorable to the hearts and hands that made it.

Recommendation by committee for education in Illinois: Begin with a plain school-house, sufficient to accommodate fifty scholars which will cost from three to five hundred dollars. Employ at first a young man as a teacher, who will board in the family and take charge of the school, who can be engaged at a salary of \$300 per annum, including his board. The school to be at first devoted entirely to English studies. For commencing an establishment of this kind an outlay of \$2,500 will be necessary at the beginning. The yearly expenses will be as follows:

For Steward and family.....	\$ 400.00
For Teacher.....	\$ 300.00
For Family stores.....	\$ 500.00
For stationery, &c.....	\$ 100.00
Showing an annual expenditure of.....	\$1,300.00

In other words, Freemasonry strayed into the service club area at one time as there were no service clubs as we now know them and someone had to do it. Many small towns or communities were built around a little red school-house, a little white church and a little blue lodge.

Speaking of "someone had to do it" we have only to look at the shoulder patch of the Montana Highway Patrol with 3-7-77 thereon. The 3 for the first meeting of Freemasons on a hill top and a monument is there for credibility. When a Freemason in a mining camp died 7 Freemasons planned his funeral with 77 attending. There came a situation when outlaws literally controlled the town, the sheriff their leader, and "someone had to do it" so the "someones" painted 3-7-77 on the door of one who they knew to be an outlaw as a message that he had to be out of town by dawn or whatever, resulting in lawful replacing lawless.

Now back to the beginning wherein we said "Freemasonry, in the early 1700s was, in the words of Benjamin Franklin, as I recall them, a self improvement organization with groups of men gathering from time to time to educate and improve themselves both morally and intellectually". Let's digress a minute and digest the following words from *Dare We Be Masons* (1966) by Thomas Sherrard Roy, Past Grand Master of Massachusetts:

First of all, it is demanded that we treat Freemasonry as a force, and not just accept it as a form. A force is something that we can use and direct, but a form is something that we serve and protect. The only hope for continuous achievement in Freemasonry is through the generation of a force, and not just the perpetuation of a

form. Continuous achievement will come, not through our interest in glorifying an institution, but in making the institution glorify life through its service to mankind.

The danger in an organization such as ours is that, while it begins with ideals and principles, the organization may become the greatest enemy of those ideals and principles. Some person has imagined a conversation between the devil and some angels. The angels proudly told the devil that a way had been found to defeat him. When he asked how it would be done, they told him that God was going to give to men lofty ideals and challenging principles to be proclaimed to the world. The devil just laughed, and told them that he could not be defeated that way, for all he would have to do would be to institutionalize the ideals and the principles, and it would only be a matter of time until men would forget the ideals and principles as they tried to keep the institution alive. As I once heard a friend of mine explain it, "first the idea creates the organization, and then the organization chokes the idea." We can become so concerned about keeping an organization alive that we forget the ideas and ideals that gave it birth. We begin by having a great ideal force our thinking and acting into new channels, and we end by serving an organization. Freemasonry must be a force to be used, and not a form to be served.

My opinion, and I will have to admit that I am critical, even of myself, is that we do not, generally speaking, exceptions admitted, follow the pattern of the early 1700s as outlined herein, do not follow the pattern of the 1800s as outlined herein and then became more of a form than a force in the 1900s with degree conferring and business meetings taking over.

Receiving bulletins from various jurisdictions note that it is common practice in many to have a Stated (business) meeting and confer degrees at the same time. This would, of necessity, make the business of the lodge very brief. We do not do this in California as we tend to make an evening of just business, debating almost every action down to its very minutia. Don't we, when we do this, do exactly as quoted above in *Dare We Be Masons* "when we can become so concerned about keeping an organization alive that we forget the ideas and ideals that gave it birth"?

Why not shorten the business, be efficient, and use the time saved to do a better job of instilling Freemasonry into our members. Go beyond the ritual and catechisms and inoculate them with our ideals and principles and the **ability to explain them to others**. One cannot be enthusiastic about something one knows little about. Then when someone asks one of our members, now a Freemason, what Freemasonry is about he can give an intelligent answer. If we do this we will have created a sales force for our fraternity.

Must add that this discussion, these thoughts, were based on activities at the local level for both service clubs, as I have observed, and, generally speaking, fraternal organizations. Freemasons are definitely charitable, witness their support for their homes, the Masonic Student Assistance Program and, just to cite one as an example, for there are many, the Masonic Cancer Research Building on the University of Minnesota campus. In the appendant organization area we have the Shriners Hospitals with a budget of over half a Billion dollars, the Scottish Rite Childhood Language Disorders Clinics and York Rite projects with which I am not familiar. At the local level my service club expends thousands of dollars each year on scholarships and local public projects as well as supporting international projects such as the elimination of polio world wide. Now I know that I am going to be deluged with stories of lodges with local projects but, to be fair, aren't they the exception rather than the rule? My answer: Lodges are not and should not attempt to be service clubs, just take good men and make them into better men - but do it!