



Freemasonry and the Community — and the Development of Modern Society

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- What is our sense of community?
- How does it relate to Freemasonry?
- Has our sense of community changed? If so, why?
- When?
- Has our sense of Freemasonry changed?
- Has it changed with society, or is Freemasonry a beacon by which society should change?

A lot of questions! Questions which deserve consideration, or reconsideration at this juncture in our history.

Why? Because, when one reviews the history of Freemasonry, one cannot help but notice the number of well known leaders who have been Masons, and who have, in one way or another, influenced the building of the foundations of our present world — at the very least, the foundations of the Western world.

Is it a mere coincidence that many of our past leaders were Freemasons? Did Freemasonry by coincidence shape the minds, views and actions of those leaders? And if so, what was it about Freemasonry in particular that influenced them?

We take great pride as Freemasons in reciting famous persons who were once part of our institution. Was it our institution of men that fostered their prevalence, or did the philosophies inherent to Freemasonry influence their actions — or merely reinforce the truth of their actions?

On reflection, why are these questions most related in the past tense? Why do so few now have or can boast of any connection to Freemasonry? And if there has become a disconnect, is a reconnection to Freemasonry in the making?

All of these questions are open for consideration at the upcoming Masonic Spring Workshop, 28 to 30 April 2006 at Kananaskis.

As part of the theme *Freemasonry in the Community and the Development of Modern Society*, here are some further points for consideration.

In some respects, the definition of “community” (*American Heritage Dictionary*) of SHARING, PARTICIPATION and FELLOWSHIP defines Freemasonry.

But has our definition of ‘community’ changed, and with it, our definition of ‘Freemasonry.’ So it may seem that as our geographic definitions of ‘community’ broaden, growing from the viewpoint(s) of a village to the world, so must our related institutions grow. Or, has Freemasonry always incorporated a ‘world’ view?

As certainly as our viewpoints may have broaden, so have our choices, or the choices that we must make. “The ability to make these choices creates the opportunity for the formation of whole new ‘communities of interest’, bound together by *choice* rather than geography.” (*Jen Clodius, 1997 Conference on MUDs.*) This in essence, underlines Freemasonry’s predominant patronage of democracy and democratic ideals.

As a community, and in shaping communities in the past, Freemasonry has to have had certain ‘shared interests’ and ‘shared values.’ The greatest distinction between past and present is, perhaps, the emphasis on “shared” interests and “shared” values... not necessarily ‘common’ interests and values.

It would seem that in the past, the most significantly shared “community” interest of Freemasons was in other people, and frequently in people different from themselves. What was valued, then, was simply the right to be heard. There can be no doubt that Freemasonry at times, on subjects of importance, encouraged debate rather than avoiding it — thus the continual broadening of viewpoints and fostering of great minds amongst Freemasons. Thus the ability of men, often with opposing allegiances, to share and value each others company rather than avoiding it. Thus the best interests of the ‘community’ were able to be served, rather than neglecting it.

What was valued, at least in our ancient past, was the (informal) agreement to disagree. Thus the fostering of good and at times great leadership within our public as well as private avocations.

And rather than an over reliance on sets of ‘official rules,’ it would seem that Freemasons may have associated within a informal system of shared social values; that is, within a community of behaviors more easily defined as being *not acceptable* — in practice, men who “did the good act, not for [themselves], but for the cause of good” (*Masonic General Charge*).

These are assertions we intend to explore at the upcoming Masonic Spring Workshop. To help us, we have invited as our keynote speaker, Mark Tabbert — author of the book *American Freemasons, Three Centuries of Building Communities*.

While Mark Tabbert has devoted his energies to exploring the Masonic connections of his American heritage, the Workshop is encouraging consideration of how our institution as a whole has influenced the growth of the Western world... and may continue to do so, by reconnecting our Masonic past with contributions that Masons can make in the definition of their community(ies) in the future.

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2006 Masonic Spring Workshop