Many Fraternal Groups Grew from Masonic Seed Part 2 1860 to 1920

By

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The Civil War is often used to divide American history neatly between its agrarian, colonial, and new republic periods and the increasing industrialization and urbanization that took place in the late 19th century. Tremendous changes in American society wrought by the war and the industrial revolution are reflected in the development of an unprecedented number of fraternal organizations through the 1920 s. As one author described it, The number of these organizations is increasing with the growth of civilization and the wants and necessities of mankind. New organizations were formed to address new problems, and older organizations adapted to changing conditions.

Freemasonry experienced a dramatic increase in membership in the years surrounding the Civil War.

Between 1826 and 1832, anti-Masonic sentiment had intensified during the so-called Morgan affair in Batavia, N.Y., in which William Morgan, a Mason of dubious standing, mysteriously disappeared after he threatened to expose Masonic secrets. The Masons of the area were accused of having murdered him.

The furor over this episode seriously reduced Masonic membership, particularly in areas of New York and New England. By 1828, it became an issue of national politics when the newly-formed Anti-Masonic Party nominated William Wirt for president. By 1832, the anti-Masonic movement had lost its momentum and Freemasonry gradually regained membership. During the civil War, the popularity of military lodges as a haven for soldiers far from home was probably an important factor in the renewed strength of the fraternity.

The revival of Freemasonry in the second half of the 19th century was also marked by subtle changes that echoed shifts in American customs and attitudes. Influenced by the Temperence Movement, Freemasonry ceased to resemble an 18th-century men s club, and carefully separated its ritual meeting from banquets and social functions. Still sensitive from the criticism of

clergymen during the anti-Masonic period, the emphasis of Freemasonry s teachings moved further from the 18th-century Enlightenment philosophy and deism to more closely parallel established 19th-century religion.

Many new organizations grew directly out of the divisiveness of the Civil War experience. The Knights of Pythias was organized in 1864 by a group of federal clerks in Washington, D.C., who felt that the nation urgently needed to rekindle a brotherly spirit. Justus H. Rathbone designed the ritual, which is based on the 4th century, B.C., story of the friendship of Damon and Pythias. Rathbone was a Freemason and a Red Man, and incorporated aspects of these organizations into his new ritual. The society s motto is Friendship, Charity, and Benevolence.

Another less altruistic organization also grew out of the turmoil of the civil War. The Ku-Klux Klan, originally founded by Confederate Army veterans in Pulaski, Tenn., for amusement and fraternal companionship, soon became a vehicle for disenfranchised white vigilantes to reassert their influence during the social and political upheaval of the Reconstruction era in the South. The name is a corruption of the Greek word kuklos , meaning circle. Members, dressed in sheets, rode at night to intimidate carpetbaggers and former slaves. These activities escalated to lynchings and floggings. The Klan was formally disbanded in 1869, but as late as 1871, the Ku-Klux Act empowered the President to use federal troops to abolish this conspiracy against the federal government.

The 20th-century revival, the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, traces its inspiration more to the intolerance of Know-Nothingism than the Ku-Klux Klan of Reconstruction. It was founded in 1915 by William J. simmons to foster white supremacy, anti-Semitism, and anti-Catholism. The organization has gone through a number of cycles of gaining and losing membership. It was particularly strong in the 1920 s, followed by decline in the 1940 s, reviving again in the 1950 s in response to civil rights activities, then declining in the 1960 s, and finding new life in the mid-1970 s and 1980 s. In 1965, the Committee on Un-American Activities reported that the traditional ugly image of the Ku Klux Klan is essentially valid preaching love and peace, yet practicing hatred and violence; claiming fidelity to the Constitution, yet systematically abrogating the constitutional rights of other citizens.

Following a tour through the post-civil War South for the Bureau of Agriculture, Oliver Hudson Kelly (himself a Freemason) helped found the Order of the Patrons of Husbandry, commonly called the Grange, as a fraternal organization to promote agriculture through cooperation, mutual benefit, and improvement.

Thanks to Kelly s niece, Caroline Hall, the order was among the first fraternal organizations to admit women as full-fledged members from its very beginning.

Meeting places were called granges, and the ritual and degrees were based on agricultural symbolism. Originally designed as a social, cooperative, and educational organization, the Grange came to serve as a powerful political lobby as 19th-century farmers battled with the railroad monopolies that shipped their produce to market.

The Grange still remains an active organization and its lasting effects can still be seen in farm cooperatives, scientific farming methods, rural Free Delivery of mail, and other programs benefiting farmers and their families.

Many of the organizations dating from the second half of the 19th century saw themselves as a new type of fraternal organization. In Pythian Knighthood, James R. Carnahan stated: We do not, as does Masonry, have clustering about our shrine the clinging ivy of centuries growth, nor is it yet wreathed about our altars the mysterious legends reaching back into the dim and musty ages of the long ago. We come with present relief for man s present necessities.

One of these necessities, reiterated by many organizations, was man s social nature and the need to find formal ways to meet and associate despite the more impersonal environment of cities. In an address to the Knights of Pythias at Fall River, Mass., the Reverend L.V. Price expressed this growing concern:

Much as man needs this (society), however, there is very little of it in our day. Men meet in a formal way, are respectful, and in a sense interested in one another, but there is no great degree of real socialness. Few, even in the same near neighborhood, meet as friends. All that has in it most of the real self is concealed beneath a studied politeness, a cultivated manner. This lack of socialness and the rarity of neighborhood society, were families meet for genuine, helpful intercourse, is very marked in our large towns and cities. It is a growing evil of our times. It is one of the tings widening the gulf between the different elements of the body politic, working serious harm to our common human life, and making it more than ever difficult to effect reform or regenerate mankind.

Some fraternal organizations also sought to provide insurance benefits for members, a growing concern for wage earners whose families would be left destitute if they were unable to work because of sickness or death. Beginning with the Ancient Order of United Workmen, founded in 1868, a large number of fraternal organizations began offering mutual insurance benefits to members.

John Jordan Upchurch, a Freemason who worked as a mechanic for the Atlantic and Great Western Railroad, began the Ancient Order of United Workmen in the hopes of reconciling the conflicting interests of labor and management. This goal soon gave way to fraternal insurance protection for members. Although other organizations followed its example, the A.O.u.W. remained extremely progressive in its approach. Life insurance for working-men was an innovation in the late 1860 s and was still only generally available to businessmen and manufacturers. The idea of life insurance was not even universally popular or trusted.

Some religious organizations opposed insurance because it implied lack of trust in God; and bankruptcies of commercial firms eroded public confidence. A.O.U.W. leaders were convinced that life insurance would succeed best in fraternal societies, and many other groups followed their lead.

While Freemasonry deliberately avoided any formal insurance program, other organizations made it a central part of membership. The Knights of Pythias introduced a fraternal insurance department in 1877 that later separated in 1930 to become an independent mutual life insurance company.

The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks originally began as a group of actors in New York City who met for lunch and refreshments, calling themselves the Jolly Corks. They soon organized as a secret, social and benevolent fraternity, adopting the elk as a distinctly American symbol and broadening the membership beyond entertainers. The Elks incorporated many Masonic influences, and eventually instituted benefit programs to spread the antlers of protection to its members.

Joseph Cullen root, a physician in Lyons, Iowa, was inspired by a Sunday sermon describing the pioneer woodmen clearing the forest to provide for their families to organize a fratemal assessment society that would clear away problems of financial security for members families. In 1883 he organized the Modem Woodmen of America with ritual and symbols mixing Roman dignity and forest freedom. When the society was founded, it barred prospective members in hazardous occupations such as firemen, balloonists, bartenders, and baseball players.

A few years after founding the Modern Woodmen, Root was expelled in a feud between himself and the head physician. He proceeded to found another organization, which he called the Woodmen of the World. A member of several fraternal organizations, Root designed rituals with a distinctly Masonic tone. The emblem of the society is a sawed-off tree stump and its motto is The Family, Fraternity, Protection, Service.

The Loyal Order of Moose was organized in Louisville, Ky., in 1888 by another physician. The organization did not prosper at first, but in 1906 under the direction of John Henry Wilson, a politician and labor activist, the group began to expand. In 1911 they decided to acquire property for a school. A dairy farm in Illinois was purchased and turned into Mooseheart, an incorporated village that houses the organization s headquarters and supports children who have lost one or both parents.

Even before the Civil War had ended, the growing problems of labor began to find expression in fraternal organizations. Railway workers were among the first to adopt this method of collective bargaining. The Brotherhood of Locomotive engineers was founded in 1863 by W.D. Robinson and others as a secret, fraternal, mutual benefit labor organization. The first goal of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers was to act as an intemediary between railway companies and locomotive engineers, particularly on the issue of wages. Later a plan for the payment of death benefits was also adopted.

The organization became a model for a number of fraternal societies of railway employees founded from 1868 to the 1890 s. Among them was the Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen organized in 1883, which based its secret ceremonies on the work and duties of railway workers.

The Order of Knights of Labor, founded by Uriah Stevens and other garment workers in Philadelphia in 1869, became the first mass organization representing the American working class. Stevens, a Freemason, included many features of Masonry in the ritual. Unlike the specific trade unions of the period, Stevens visualized an organization that would bring workers from all trades together in an effort to better their condition and reform the wage system.

The organization was able to attract large numbers of workers among Philadelphia artisans in the 1860 s, adding miners in the 1870 s and skilled urban tradesmen in the 1880 s. The Knights of Labor was also one of the few post-Civil War labor organizations that welcomed black members. Some locals were racially mixed, others maintained separate groups.

The statement in its Declaration of Principles that the alarming development and aggressiveness of great capitalists and corporations, unless checked, will inevitably lead to pauperization and hopeless degration (sic) of the toiling masses reflected the growing concern that skilled artisans would disappear in the face of industrialized factories using unskilled labor.

Many of the demands made by the Knights of Labor have been achieved. Among other things, they wanted the establishment of a Bureau of Labor Statistics; measures for health and safety of workers; recognition of trade unions; payment of workers in lawful money rather than credit; prohibition of child labor under 15 years of age; equal pay for equal work; and an eight-hour work day.

The Civil War had interrupted the nativist movement popularized by the Know-Nothing Party, but the stresses of large numbers of immigrants continued to intensify in the second half of the 19th century. Between 1880 and 1920, 40 million immigrants entered American society. Fraternal organizations helped to assimilate many of them by reinforcing democratic values and practices in rituals and by creating new social bonds in an otherwise alien environment. New fraternal organizations were established with the arrival of each new ethnic group.

In response to the large influx of working-class Jews from eastern Europe in the 1880 s and 1890 s, a concerned group met in 1894 to organize a fraternal benevolent society to help meet the needs of these new immigrants. The Workmen s Circle became a strong force in educating and assimilating Jewish Americans by providing insurance and English lessons.

In 1923, the organization offered 15 weeks of sick benefits at $8 per week, and death insurance from $100 to $1,000. Special benefits were provided for members suffering from tuberculosis, including nine months of treatment at the order s sanatorium in Liberty, N.Y. The organization was a keen advocate of social legislation.

Union St. Jean Baptiste was formed in Woonsocket, R.I., in 1900 to unite in a common spirit of brotherhood persons of French origin living in the United States and to promote their collective individual welfare. Consisting of many French-Canadians, the organization offers insurance benefits and supports student aid, patriotic and cultural activities, and programs for the retarded.

Between 1900 and 1910, the number of Italians who emigrated to America jumped from 650,000 in the previous decade to more than 2 million. In this ten-year period, the Italian population in New York City more than doubled.

Most Italians did not come to America with a strong tradition of fraternal mutual benefit societies, although Freemasonry had been an important factor in Italian unification and nationalism. In Italy, families traditionally provided aid in time of distress. Transplanted to the United States, newly-arrived immigrants quickly adopted the American fraternal model.

Of the many small societies providing social activites and benefits, the Sons of Italy, founded in 1905, became the largest and most influential. By 1921, it already numbered 125,000 members nationally.

Fraternal societies have been an important force in Ukrainian-American life. In 1910 a group of men, concerned that Ukrainian immigrants found it difficult to obtain employment and could not afford good insurance, formed an association to provide financial protection and inexpensive death benefits. First organized as the Ruthenian National Union, it later changed its name to the Ukranian Workingmen s Association and admitted members without regard to religious or political affiliated. The organization is open to men and women of Ukrainian descent between the ages of 16 and 65.

The Knights of Columbus, organized in 1882, departed from a purely ethnic affiliation and offered Roman Catholic men of varying backgrounds an acceptable fraternal organization. American Catholics found themselves unable to participate in the many fraternal organizations that offered insurance benefits because the Church had condemned so-called secret societies. A New Haven, Conn., parish priest, Michael J. McGivney, organized the Knights of Columbus as an alternative to proscribed organizations. Closely paralleling the structure of other fraternal groups with ritual, degrees, and passwords, the motto of Charity, Unity, Fraternity and patriotism accurately reflects the order s goals to support the church, combat anti-Catholic prejudice, provide assimilation into American society, and finance benevolent projects and insurance programs. The choice of Christopher Columbus as the fraternity s symbol stresses the important role of patriotic Catholics in a New world democracy. It deliberately downplayed associations with Old World traditions decried by anti-Catholic nativists.

Growing ethnic and religious diversity in late 19th-century America was accompanied by a resurgence of earlier nativist groups from the Know-Nothing period. A number of new patriotic organizations were founded in response to this new and even larger wave of immigrants.

One such group, founded in 1895 in Boston by members of the American Protective Association, was the Order of the Little Red Schoolhouse. It concentrated on a major concern of nativists: how to maintain the public school system against the growing influence of parochial education among Catholic immigrants. The order sought to inspire greater pride in America s public school system, which it saw as a major force in maintaining American values in the face of foreign influence due to large-scale immigration. Unlike other anti-immigration organizations, however, it was open to both citizens and non-citizens, regardless of religion or race. Members were required to take an oath of devotion to the United States, its flag, and its institutions.

Whether as agents of moral self-improvement, as vehicles for social reform in the labor movement, or as preservers of the status quo among nativist factions, fraternal organizations provided a model for cooperative action and mutual benefit. Burial expenses and benefits to widows and orphans offered economic security in the laissez-faire industrial era prior to social legislation. Self-improvement, stressed by many organizations, reinforced the social mobility in which Americans took pride. In 1904, Max Weber, a German sociologist, characterized fraternal organizations as typical vehicles of social ascent into the circle of the entrepreneurial middle class.

The enormous proliferation of fraternal organizations in the past has helped Americans confront ethnic and religious diversity, immigration, social reform, and the responsibilities of democracy. While membership in some organizations has fallen off since public programs replaced their mutual insurance benefits, other organizations continue to attract members with the appeal of community and shared fellowship. Some fraternal organizations founded in the 19th century have substantially altered their purposes to adapt to changing needs and concerns.

Writing for a time capsule in 1880, John Lindsay Stevenson of Boston, a member of some 20 organizations himself, suggested that inasmuch as the days in the year, nor the hours in a day will not be changed during the intervening time, that comparison may be fairly instituted between the capacity of an average man of today (1880) and one of 1980 in the duties of a Secret Society Man, who all the time conducts his own business with success while attending calls on his time.

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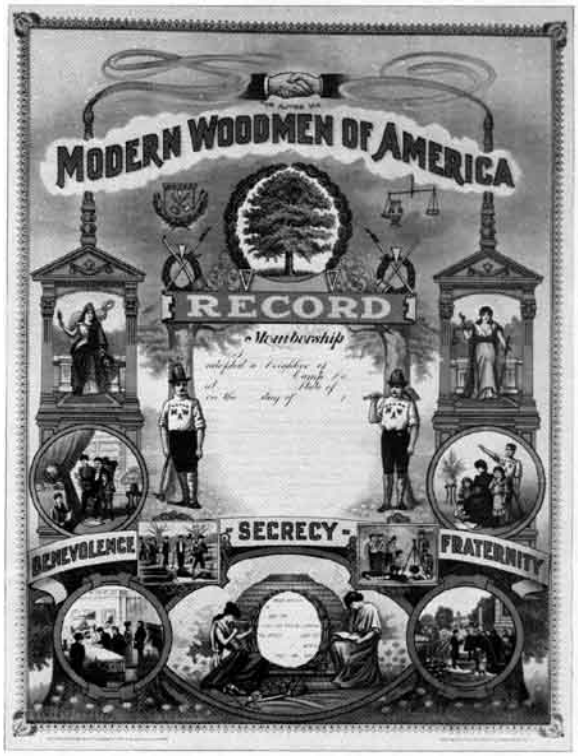
MODERN WOODMEN OF AMERICA
RECORD
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BENEVOLENCE
SECRECY
FRATERNITY