

IN TOKEN OF FRIENDSHIP

Early Fraternity Medals at the College of William and Mary

Robert W. Storm, Jr.

September 11th, 1973

Before history was first recorded, men gathered themselves into groups of friendship and ritual. Whether as a substitute for that love which is the fulfillment and motivation of life, or as a demonstration of the keen human interest in magic and the mysterious, or as a satisfaction of the desire for distinction of the self among others, the concept of a secret society obviously arose from a very real yearning deep within the soul of mankind: for such societies have existed in every age, in every race, in every land. And they flourish in this day too.

One of the oldest and best-known secret societies is that of the Freemasons. Formed in medieval England, the Masonic Order spread through all classes and all parts of the kingdom. When the island realm sent forth voyages of exploration and colonization in the late Renaissance, adherents to masonry sailed the oceans and settled wilderness or manned dingy trading-posts. Lodges, or local associations of masons, were established in the British North American colonies early in the eighteenth century. The first lodge in Virginia was chartered at Fredericksburg in 1752, but it had almost certainly already been meeting there for several years. Williamsburg's lodge did not receive its charter until 1773, although it had been meeting since 1762 or before. The lodges were small, but they included many of the most important and most respected men of Virginia.

These same men often sent their sons to the College of William and Mary in Virginia to finish their academic educations. At the

College of William and Mary, such youths met others of their wealthy and aristocratic classes in the year or two they would spend in Williamsburg. Indeed, although the tiny faculties had taught the students (about sixty were usually in attendance at any time) rather well since the college was established by royal charter in 1693, William and Mary in the mid-eighteenth century furnished as much a social education as an academic one. Young men met those who, with them, would dominate Virginia a generation later, and they learned the customs and manners of their parents. Inevitably, they too formed secret societies.

The concept of the collegiate fraternity as a social organization with various secrets of membership seems to be indigenous to British North America. Student clubs and unions, such as the German Studentenverein, had existed in European universities since the Middle Ages; the Spanish had brought the idea with them when they established universities in America in the sixteenth century; and a literary society may have existed at Harvard as early as the 1720s. But none of these bears much resemblance to the social fraternity born at William and Mary on November 11th, 1750.

On that day, six students met in a Williamsburg tavern or in their own lodgings and with excited whispers organized a society devoted to the principles of friendship, charity, and science. During the next three decades, enough men were initiated by a secret ritual so that there was always a membership of exactly six students, despite occasional difficulties. With subscriptions

collected from the members, a library of dozens of volumes was established. The frequent meetings probably included as much pleasurable dancing, dining, and simple fun as earnest conversation, but little is known with certainty of the F.H.C. Society, for its journal and records have disappeared. Some information concerning the Society can be gleaned from the letters of its members, for they included such colonial aristocrats as Thomas Jefferson, John Harvie, John Walker, John Page of Rosewell, Lewis Burwell of Carter's Creek, Dr. James McClurg, Warner Lewis, St. George Tucker, Colonel James Innes, Beverley Randolph, Thomas Davis, William Yates, Robert Baylor, Walker Maury, Emmanuel Jones, Jr., and perhaps Bishop James Madison. Yet the medal which each member purchased furnishes the most information about the Society itself.

In 1909, President Lyon G. Tyler of William and Mary was given a photograph of an F.H.C. Society medal, though by that time the Society had been forgotten at the College. Mr. Tyler was an assiduous chronicler of the College's history, however, and by 1916 he had found the medal itself--then possessed by Mr. Harold Randolph of Baltimore, the great-great-grandson of its original owner, Col. James Innes (who had belonged to the Society in the early 1770s). The beautifully-engraved medal remained with the Randolphs but, unfortunately, by the 1960s all trace of either the medal or the family had been lost.

However, on May 31st, 1933, Mr. Otis M. Geddy of Williamsburg gave a nearly-identical medal to the College. Mr. Geddy had found his specimen in a drawer of a desk which had belonged to

his family for at least a century and a half. The Geddy medal may have been made by the younger James Geddy, who was a Williamsburg silversmith from the 1750s until 1777.

There is a loop at the top of the Innes medal, through which was placed a ring; the loop of the Geddy medal has been snapped off, and the engraving is not so exquisite as that on the Innes medal--but, except for some minor details of balance and interpretation, the medals are the same. The Geddy medal is very thin--about three-quarters of a millimeter in thickness--and about thirty-nine millimeters in diameter (it is almost perfectly round). At the very edge of the obverse, a simple wavy line (perhaps made by a jeweler's wheel-tool) encloses the entire face of the medal, on which are engraved the letters F H C in ornate script; below the "H", in the exergue, is the founding date in abbreviated Latin: NOV. XI MDCCL in three lines of small, simple letters. This design fills the obverse with a pleasantly-flowing symmetrical scheme. The reverse is also bounded by a wavy line; within is an ornamental interpretation of the fraternity's coat-of-arms. At the center is a chaplet with horizontal hatching (indicating the color blue): a chevron (silver or white, for it is not marked) across the middle bears a heart at its apex (with vertical hatching, signifying red) and three annulets on each side to represent the six members (the second from the left bears traces of tiny dots, heraldic shorthand for gold); below it, two cuffed hands (also white or silver) grasp one another with the Society's secret clasp. Above the chaplet is placed a torque (or cloth band)

with six strands (the first, third, and fifth from the left are shaded--probably to represent blue--and the others are plain), and above this is a rose; to either side of the chaplet are delicately-engraved sprays of roses, rushes, and other plants, and around the chaplet is fanciful scrollwork: on some of the plainer bands is the Society's Latin motto, STABILITAS ET FIDES --"Steadfastness and Loyalty".

What can be learned from this medal? A great amount; fleshed-out by the scraps of known written information, almost enough to reconstitute the fraternity. "FHC"--the letters may have stood for "Fraternitas, Humanitas, et Cognitioque" (approximately the Society's ideals of friendship, charity, and science), but those who did not know the secret Latin words yet were acquainted with the Society's studious members nicknamed it the "Flat Hat Club" (perhaps in reference to collegiate headdress). "NOV. XI MDCCL"--the founding date of a society that lived for three decades and spawned the hundreds of collegiate fraternities that are alive now, more than two centuries later. And its arms: "azure, a chevron argent with six annulets or thereon and a heart gules in the apex thereof, in base two clasped and cuffed hands of the second; the crest a rose of the fourth". That the arms, the full emblem of the fraternity, <sup>was</sup> ~~was~~ placed beneath a rose-- "sub rosa"--symbolized the secrecy of the Society. Not only did the F.H.C. Society give America the basic concept of a secret social organization of students within a college, it also supplied many of the auxiliary attributes: a secret name known only by

its initial letters, a secret symbology and ritual of initiation, certificates and oaths of membership, a secret handclasp, a motto, a coat-of-arms, a fraternity flower, fraternity colors, visible and worn insignia of membership, a system of dues and treasury, a library, a journal, a fraternity seal, regular meetings, and possibly written laws of constitution.

The Geddy medal weighs about four and nine-tenths grams. It shows a uniform gray patina, particularly on the obverse; both sides are smooth, yet the reverse, bearing the arms, is more scratched and worn. The medal seems to have been cut from a sheet of silver (perhaps rolled in America by melting European coins) after a circle was traced upon the sheet with a mathematical compass. A modern analysis of the medal would indicate a European origin of the silver, from the second half of the eighteenth century: about ninety-two percent of the medal's weight is silver, more than six percent is copper, about eight-tenths of a percent is gold; there are traces of tin, lead, zinc, mercury, nickel, and iron.

Major Innes Randolph, the great-grandson of Colonel James Innes, believed that the medals were worn on the watch-guards of the members. It is much more probable, though, that (at least on ceremonial occasions) the medal was suspended from colorful ribbons (perhaps blue and red, the Society's colors) worn around the neck. It was customary for English masonic officers to display their badges in this manner at least as early as 1724, and Virginian masons were following this practice by 1765 or earlier; the

knights of England sometimes wore the jewels of their orders from neck ribbons; and Britain's naval and military heroes often wore their medals in the same fashion. It is very possible that the young men at William and Mary would have copied this method of displaying their fraternity's emblem, for they may have seen it followed by local and respected masons or in mezzotints of Great Britain's eminent men. The  $\phi$ .B.K. Society slavishly imitated the F.H.C. Society in many matters; the records of its Alpha of Massachusetts chapter (Harvard) contain another hint that the medal was worn on the breast, pendant from neck ribbons, for on June 19th, 1782, it was voted "that all the members at the celebration of the Anniversary, have their medals suspended with pink and sky blue ribband".

One other F.H.C. medal is known to exist. In 1958, Mrs. Kelly M. Kendrick of Suffolk, Virginia, gave the College a crude little medal which she had received from her aunt, a Mrs. Moncure, in 1919 or 1920 with some old coins "to cut her [Mrs. Kendrick's] daughter's teeth on". Mrs. Kendrick thought that medal may have first belonged to a Causey, Chamberlayne, Christian, Douglas, or Brown ancestor.

The round Kendrick medal weighs a hefty eight and six-tenths grams. Though smaller (slightly less than twenty-four millimeters in diameter) than the Geddy medal, the Kendrick medal is also thicker (slightly less than two millimeters). It too seems to have been marked on a silver sheet and then cut out, for scored lines are faintly visible at the medal's edge (just outside the



simple engraved line which has replaced the tooled wavy lines of the Innes and Geddy medals), and the rim is irregular, beaten and marred. On the light gray surface are cut the roman letters F H C , with serifs and horizontal hatching; on a second line is NOV. 11. and, on a third, 1750. ; the arabic numerals are italicized. This obverse is pitted and scratched, but the reverse--probably closer to the wearer's clothing--is even more damaged. At the sides and base of the reverse, within the circle, is engraved STABILITAS ET FIDES. . Above the motto, in the medal's center, is the fraternity's coat-of-arms, now placed on a shield: the chevron is inverted, but the heart is still at its point and each arm still bears three annulets; above the chevron, at the top of the shield, the hands (with simple cuffs now) hold each other in the Society's thumbless clasp. The very top of the medal is flat; it may have been filed after a loop (which could once have been part of the medal) snapped off. The holes which now are in the tops of the Geddy and Kendrick medals appear to have been punched, from the obverses (and perhaps with the same tool in each case), some time after the medals were engraved. It is possible that the Kendrick medal was made from American bullion during the Revolution, for it contains scarcely eighty-four percent silver by weight, nearly fifteen percent copper, two-tenths percent gold, and varying amounts of lead, zinc, tin, nickel, iron, cadmium, and mercury.

Evidently, the F.H.C. Society flourished without a rival at William and Mary for more than two decades. Then, on March 12th,

1773, other students formed the P.D.A. Society. Its letters also stood for Latin words which summarized the fraternity's ideals, and perhaps for a pious Latin phrase as well. Unlike the F.H.C. (which left not only two medals to posterity, but also a book from its library, a copy of a certificate of membership, and numerous references in the letters of its members), the P.D.A. of colonial times is known only from a brief notice in a letter written in 1831, the probably unreliable oral tradition of the present Society, and a single fraternity medal. That medal is now owned by Mr. John Page Elliott of Alexandria, Virginia, a descendant of Major John Hartwell Cocke--who was probably the medal's original possessor.

The medal is very thin, a slightly-irregular ellipse in shape, and somewhat more than twenty-five millimeters in length. At its top was once, it appears, a loop which was snapped off sometime after the medal was made--but no hole was punched in this medal. On the obverse are engraved the shaded roman letters P D A ; below is the date of the fraternity's establishment, March 12 1773. , in two lines of simple script. The reverse bears the Society's motto, MENTEM SPECTATO ("You will look beyond the mind") on two lines, surmounted by two hands in ruffled cuffs joined in the fraternity's secret clasp. Both sides of the medal are bordered by wavy lines not too dissimilar from those on the Innes and Geddy F.H.C. medals (and, like those, probably made by a jeweler's wheel-tool).

This medal, and the many like it now lost, ~~may have been~~

may have been suspended from around the wearer's neck by green and white (or green and red) ribbons, colors which the modern fraternity claims are traditional. The modern Society also claims that there has always been a limit of seven members, including three officers (a president, secretary, and treasurer), among the men at the College of William and Mary; and, curiously, both the second "7" and the "3" on the medal's obverse are underlined.

The P.D.A.'s traditions maintain that the Society during Revolutionary times was a Christian and enlightened group of gentlemen who, offended by the conceit and arrogance of a fellow-student--John Heath--voted in 1776 to refuse his application for membership. But William Short, President of the Ø.B.K. Society from 1778 to 1781, wrote to Edward Everett of Harvard in 1831 concerning the birth of the Ø.B.K.:

There had existed for a long space of time another society at William and Mary. The initials on its medal, (P.D.A.), were understood to indicate Latin words. There was at the same time at College a youth whose reputation as a Hellenist was so far beyond that of others, that he valued himself, as I remember well, exclusively on it. The P.D.A. Society had lost all reputation for letters and was noted only for the dissipation and conviviality of its members. Whether they had refused to admit our Hellenist, or he was unwilling to join them I do not now recollect, but so it was that he determined to get up another Society in opposition--and in conformity with his own reputation formed and adapted the Greek phrase indicated by the initials. Whether it be pure I would not now say. But at that time none of us supposed anything more pure could have been formed in Athens, such was our opinion of the great learning of our founder.

Barred from membership in the F.H.C. and P.D.A., or disdainful of it, John Heath did form a rival Society. Meeting on December 5th, 1776--perhaps in the Apollo Room of Williamsburg's Raleigh Tavern--John Heath and four other students established the Ø.B.K.

Society, clearly patterned on the F.H.C. and P.D.A. but differing from them in three important respects: in its use of Greek letters, in its unlimited membership, and in its establishment of branches or chapters. In all other essential respects the  $\phi$ .B.K. resembled its predecessors; at the very first meeting, the design of a silver medal was adopted. Though fifty men were initiated in the fifty months of  $\phi$ .B.K.'s existence at William and Mary, only one of the original fifty-seven medals (one was made for each member and for each chapter) is still extant, that of Peyton Short (who was initiated on April 13th, 1780). Robert A. Brock, the nineteenth-century antiquarian and member of the Virginia Historical Society, was said to have had a second  $\phi$ .B.K. medal, but this has since disappeared--perhaps in the Civil War.

The Short medal was given to William and Mary in June of 1927 by Miss Mary Short of Louisville, Kentucky. Probably worn around the neck from sky-blue and pink ribbons, it is as thin as the Geddy F.H.C. medal (a little less than three-quarters of a millimeter) and nearly square (about twenty-six millimeters wide and as many high) with a loop rising eight millimeters above the top; the entire medal was cut from a single sheet of silver. The surface exhibits a deliciously soft tawny patina; either it has been polished recently, or the medal has been protected very well for two centuries. The slightly irregular surface seems to show faint ripple marks, perhaps left by the rollers of a jeweler's mill through which the silver sheet may have been put. The engraving is as crude as that on the Kendrick F.H.C.

medal, and may have been executed by the same hand. On both sides a tooth-and-dot design (perhaps made by another wheel-tool) forms a border around the designs. Within it, on the obverse, are the letters Ø B K in the center (in simple shaded letters much like F H C on the Kendrick medal); above the Ø and B, in the upper left quarter of the field, are engraved three five-pointed stars; in the lower right corner of the field (below the K) is engraved a simply-cuffed right hand, with its index finger extended and pointing to the three stars. On the reverse, the upper half of the field displays the intertwined letters S P , executed in an ornate script (resembling that employed for the letters F H C on the Innes and Geddy medals); the lower half is occupied by the two-line date December 5 1776 (in the same style as the date is engraved on the P.D.A. medal). The surface of each face is rather smooth, though particularly the reverse is somewhat scratched and dented. Surprisingly, the loop is still intact; but at the medal's top the border has broken through the medal, so that the loop and very edge of the medal are separated from the rest of the silver by a tiny gap a few millimeters long. The Short medal weighs about three and nine-tenths grams; its metallic content is more nearly that of the Kendrick medal than that of the Geddy medal: about eighty-eight percent silver and eleven percent copper, with traces of lead, gold, zinc, tin, nickel, cobalt, cadmium, mercury, and iron. From the designs, contents, and styles of the five medals, it seems possible that all may have come from the same shop: the Innes and Geddy medals

perhaps made by the younger James Geddy before the Revolution; and the Kendrick, Cocke, and Short medals perhaps made by apprentices or successors (the Kendrick and Short medals possibly by the same man) during the Revolution.

The  $\phi$ .B.K. adopted the colors of the F.H.C. (blue and red) in a lighter form (sky-blue and pink), the slightly-altered handshake of the P.D.A., the flower of the F.H.C. (a rose), the officers of the P.D.A. (a president, clerk, and treasurer); and also took from its predecessors the name "fraternity" and the concepts of brotherhood, motto, medal, seal, constitution, initiation ceremony, collegiate membership, regular meetings, literary exercises, and social occasions. But the  $\phi$ .B.K. Society significantly altered two of those concepts and added a third of its own.

Although the initials S P represented the Latin words "Societas Philosophiae" ("Philosophical Society"), the Society's name was derived from the Greek phrase "*φιλοσοφία βίου Κυβερνήτης*"--"Philosophy the ruler of our life" (that philosophy was symbolized by the three stars on the medal's obverse--fraternity, morality, and literature). Further, the  $\phi$ .B.K.'s membership was not confined to a statutory number, as in the F.H.C. and P.D.A.; indeed, after 1778 it was not even restricted to students; soon the  $\phi$ .B.K. surpassed both its predecessors in size.

But the important innovation of the  $\phi$ .B.K. was in its establishment of branches in other areas of the country. Five charters were issued for chapters in Virginia, but these seem never to have materialized. In December of 1779, charters were granted for

chapters at Harvard and Yale; these took firm hold, and still exist.

Events were not so fortunate for the societies at William and Mary. As the British army advanced on the nearly-deserted College in January of 1781, all three hurriedly suspended their activities. When the College recommenced in the Autumn of 1782, neither the F.H.C. nor the  $\phi$ .B.K. was revived. The F.H.C. was all but forgotten by 1819; on June 14th of that year, Thomas Jefferson replied to the question of his supposed membership in the  $\phi$ .B.K.

Sir

Monticello June 14. 19.

Your favor of May 19. has been received, but of the subject it respects I know nothing. I have heard of the Alpha, Phi, Beta and Kappa society, but never understood either it's location or object. When I was a student of Wm. & Mary college of this state there existed a society called the F.H.C. society, confined to the number of six students only, of which I was a member, but it had no useful object. Nor do I know whether it now exists. Accept my salutations and assurances of respect.

Th. Jefferson

Mr. Thomas Mc.Auley.

When President Tyler of the College realized, in 1909, that the F.H.C. was America's first fraternity, he determined to capitalize on this knowledge to aid the reputation of William and Mary (the College, once the wealthiest and finest academy in British North America, had through war and decay become primarily an inferior training institute for public-school teachers by the early twentieth century); accordingly, the student newspaper was christened "The Flat Hat" in 1910. And, ten years later, a new "Flat Hat Club" was established; when it became obvious a few years afterward that this had been just a nickname and not a proper title, the

name was changed to "the F.H.C. Society". In 1943, as a result of the war-time drain of men from America's colleges, William and Mary suspended all social fraternities. The F.H.C. was not revived until 1972; its active membership now consists of sixteen men: six juniors, six seniors, and four professors.

The P.D.A. Society also exists today. Its rich if questionable tradition claims that the Society was reconvened at the College after the Revolution, and that it adopted the strictest secrecy in the late 1780s--which it maintained until the Spring of 1972, when it began to plan the celebration of its bicentennial. The membership is still limited to seven men, undergraduates at the College of William and Mary. Like the F.H.C., the P.D.A. never established branches at other institutions; however, it claims that a secret society still extant at the University of Virginia (either "the Secret Seven", or "Z", or perhaps both), and founded there in the first half of the nineteenth century, was closely patterned after the P.D.A. Society.

The Ø.B.K., though less aristocratic or exclusive, was much more prodigious in its development. The Society at William and Mary was reconstituted in 1849, suspended when war came again in 1861, and at last reestablished in 1893 as the College celebrated its two-hundredth anniversary. But it flourished at other universities: through the chapters at Harvard and Yale, and later through a central organization, the Society spread across the nation in scores of different chapters. In the first half of the nineteenth century, as other Greek-letter fraternities (such as KA, 1825;



and  $\Sigma\phi$ , 1827, both of Union College) based upon the  $\phi$ .B.K. began to challenge it, the Society renounced its social character and became America's first honorary fraternity. Sororities for women (such as  $\Lambda\Delta\eta$ , 1851, and  $\phi M^c$ , 1852, of Wesleyan College), professional fraternities (such as  $K\lambda$ , 1819, Transylvania College; and  $\phi\Delta\phi$ , 1869, University of Michigan), and honorary fraternities (such as  $T\eta$ , 1885, and  $\Sigma\Sigma$ , 1886) all patterned themselves after the  $\phi$ .B.K. There are now hundreds of fraternities and sororities in the United States, many with numerous chapters, but they have added only three important ideas to that of the fraternity: the fraternity house, where active members may live and meet; the fraternity periodical; and the fraternity convention.

Yet the basic concept of collegiate brotherhood within a secret organization, together with many of its attributes, was first conceived by the F.H.C. Society; developed by the P.D.A.; and disseminated by the  $\phi$ .B.K., all at the College of William and Mary two centuries ago. It is this concept, so important in the lives of millions of American men and women, which is represented in these few small pieces of engraved silver.

CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE GEDDY, KENDRICK, AND SHORT MEDALS

	Geddy (F.H.C.)	Kendrick (F.H.C.)	Short (Ø.B.K.)
Silver	92.139%	84.077%	87.909%
Copper	6.254	14.593	10.977
Gold	.799	.220	.246
Tin	.118	.216	.168
Lead	.048	.425	.048
Zinc	.044	.314	.178
Mercury	.037	.017	.020
Nickel	.033	.050	.054
Iron	.022	.033	.017
Cadmium	a trace	.032	.027
Cobalt	a trace	a trace	.034
Arsenic			a trace
Manganese			a trace

The three medals were examined on August 14th, 1973, by Mr. George Reilly in the Crowninshield Research Building of the Winterthur Museum in Wilmington, Delaware. The Energy Dispersive X-Ray Fluorescence Analysis method was used. The figures given above are an average of the results obtained for both sides of each medal, and refer to the percentage of the weight of each medal constituted by each substance; the percentages do not total to one hundred.

MEASUREMENTS OF THE GEDDY, KENDRICK, AND SHORT MEDALS

	Geddy (F.H.C.)	Kendrick (F.H.C.)	Short (Ø.B.K.)
Weight (grams)	4.9	8.6	3.9
Thickness (millimeters)	.7	1.9	.7
Diameter (millimeters)	38.9	23.7	about 26 square, 34 tall with loop

Measured on August 10th, 1973, by Mr. Henry D. Grunder and the author in the Earl Gregg Swem Library of the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia.

#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Jane Carson, James Innes and His Brothers of the F.H.C.;  
Williamsburg (Virginia): Colonial Williamsburg; 1965.

Various issues of "The Phi Beta Kappa Key".

Various issues of "The William and Mary Quarterly", first and second series.

Documents from the William and Mary College Papers, Folders 166 and 186; and from the Jefferson Papers, Lot 2, Folder 4. All these papers are preserved in the Earl Gregg Swem Library of the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia.

The oral tradition of the P.D.A. Society. The author believes this information to be of very dubious reliability.

The author has carefully examined the Geddy, Kendrick, and Short medals; he has seen photographs of the Innes and Cocke medals.

The author is deeply grateful for the extremely generous assistance and interest of Miss Margaret C. Cook (Curator of Manuscripts at the Swem Library) and Mr. Henry D. Grunder (Curator of Rare Books at the Swem Library). He also appreciates the cooperation of Mr. John Page Elliott of Alexandria, Virginia; and of the staffs of the Winterthur Museum (Wilmington, Delaware), the Phi Beta Kappa (Washington, D.C.), and the George Washington Masonic Temple (Alexandria, Virginia).