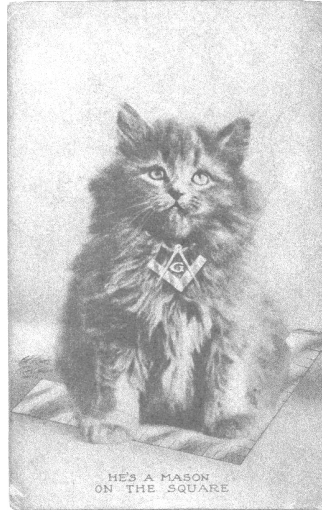


## The Symbolism of 'The Masonic Cat'

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In discussing the symbolism of Masonry, most people conjure-up images of the "Working-Tools" of the ancient stonemasons such as the 24-inch gauge, 12-inch ruler, common gavel, plumb, square, level, trowel, and all the other implements of Masonry ---which are indiscriminately utilized on an "as needed basis". It may sound odd, but it makes perfect sense: Our modern Speculative Freemasonry (as an Ancient and Honorable Fraternity) utilizes a wider-range of Symbols, to instill in us the need to be mindful and attentive to the world around us. Most Masons have wives, children, extended family, friends...and even pet animals. It is an old cliché that "A Dog is a man's best friend". That comes from the sentiment that a dog can be a "watchdog" (a man's protector); or "a hunting-dog" (a man's helper) or just that a dog can be a valued pet (a man's companion). Many elderly and disabled-people depend on dogs as "Service-dogs" (such as "the Seeing-Eye Dogs," which help people navigate on unfamiliar territory or terrain). For decades, Police have had K-9 Dog Patrols in law-enforcement to either sniff-out illegal drugs or substances OR deploy as police bloodhounds to help track-down the trail of lost or kidnapped people, especially missing children. In short: a Dog (or, a Cat, for that matter) has Eyes, Ears, sense of Taste and Smell; plus they have an intuitive nature which often excels that of the same attributes found in a human-being.

The cat comes from the feline family ---as does The Lion, Leopard, Tiger, Cougar/Jaguar, Cheetah, Wildcat, Bobcat, and other feline variants. According to the noted Masonic scholar, Albert G. Mackey, 33° and a Knight Templar; who stated the following: "The Lion was regarded as a symbol of strength and sovereignty". Mackey further states: "The connection of (King) Solomon, as the Chief of the Tribe of Judah, with the Lion, which was the achievement of the Tribe,



has caused this expression, to be referred, in the Third Degree, to Him who brought life and immortality to light". (Meaning a reference to the Sovereignty of Almighty God). Mackey goes on to describe the colloquial sayings such as "the Lion's Paw," and "the Lion's Grip," as unique "Masonic Symbols" in Ancient Craft Masonry.

Even with the Imperial Council of the Mystic Shrine of North America (A.A.O.N.M.S.) when it was founded in New York City in 1872 by Dr. Walter M. Fleming, 33° and a Past Commander of his Knight Templar Commandery (Columbian #1 at NYC) along with his friend, the famous actor: William J. "Billy" Florence, 33° and a member of Pittsburgh Commandery #1 of Knights Templar of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) who assisted Fleming in co-founding "The Shrine" -- they jointly agreed that the Emblem of the Order shall be a Crescent composed of two Claws of a Royal Bengal Tiger (united together by 'the Keystone' of Royal Arch Masonry), with the face of a Sphinx super-imposed on the 'face' of the keystone. Beneath the keystone ---and within the Crescent, was to hang the 5-Pointed "Star of Bethlehem" (denoting the York Rite's Christian influence upon the Order); and above the Crescent was to be a Scimitar (denoting the Scottish Rite's multi-Faith influence upon the order). Membership in one Rite (or the other) (and/or both Rites) was a prerequisite to become a Shriner until the year 2000. Sadly....as prerequisites fade ---the knowledge of the historical basis of the Emblem begins to fade from peoples' memories, as well. The "Official Motto on the jewel" of The Shrine was: "Robur et Furor", which translates to "Strength and Fury". Today, the jewels are made from artificial materials and not real tiger claws (out of respect for the Animals) ...but the original jewels were real tiger claws. They usually were derived from already pre-deceased animals...so no animals were harmed or 'harvested' merely to manufacture a jewel/emblem. The jewels (especially old 'Past Potentate jewels' were highly prized, and they reflected the historical connotation of Sovereignty.

Therefore, feline virtues have been seen in Antiquity, and gradually adapted in our modern-era. Back when my Great Grandfather, George White was a Mason, in the late 1800s and early 1900s...some Masonic Lodges gave out Souvenir Cards such as that of "The Masonic Cat" (pictured above). At first blush: it looks cute to see a cat wearing a collar with the Square and Compasses and the letter "G" about its neck. While the main purpose of the card was to generate a 'smile' --- it also had another purpose: to remind a Mason to exhibit (as much as humanly possible) the more nobler characteristics of a cat:

- A Cat walks carefully; and has an excellent balance of muscle and bone, to support a stout skeleton.
- A Cat's ears are decorative as well as functional. The upper-limit of a cat's hearing is higher than a dog's....and almost two (2) Octaves higher than a human's



hearing. There is no mistaking the intent of a cat's ears when they are pinned-back.

- The Eyes. The eyes of a Cat are perhaps the most vital of a cat's features, which can go from round to almost almond-shaped. To us, as Masons and as Masonic Rosicrucians ---- We might pay special attention to this next statement: CATS' EYES ARE EXCELLENT GLEANERS OF LIGHT. Their pupils can dilate to a soulful 1/2 inch width or as narrow as a tiny slit. Their depth-of-field is in sharper-focus between seven and twenty feet. This should remind us of our Masonic Cable-Tow which encourages us to be alert, attentive, vigilant, and helpful to those worthy persons within a reasonably close proximity to ourselves.

- Sensory perception: Cats (like many other animals) are acutely aware of their surroundings as well as approaching dangers ----even drastic changes in weather. While we humans cannot (and do not) have such inherent attributes...we can (and should) use our God-given senses we DO possess to the utmost of our own ability. Promptness is more favorable than lateness. Attending to one's Obligations is better than procrastination.

- Landing on one's feet. This virtue should motivate us as Masonic Rosicrucians to follow conventional norms/plans/procedures when doing or daily tasks ----- or 'improvise where needed' in order to work-through every crisis and strive hard to achieve the Goal ; or in cases of 'failure' strive for soft-landings in the hope of a subsequent attempt at future Success or Improvement. We should also strive to ameliorate 'sorrow' and attempt to offer cheer and well-wishes to those who have suffered losses. Turning negatives into positives and thus, turning losses' into gains' is always a noble aspiration, and is the moral-equivalent of landing upright on one's own feet.

Some dubious groups, purporting to be Rosicrucians, attempt to correlate "the cat" to such things as Ancient Egyptian Mysteries. Would-be scholars draw conclusions from meticulously adorned "cat-mummies", even going so far as to describe such offbeat things as "Cat worship". I would emphatically state that such is NOT within the province of my presentation here. Quite the contrary: I wish to focus on the ordinary characteristics of a cat --- which are often overlooked. Some humans love cats; while others hate cats.

My aim is to point out that Almighty God created Man in HIS own Image. Furthermore, Almighty God charged Man with having dominion over all of the animals of the Earth. Every person has a duty to "protect" animals from harm. Various, municipalities, States, and even our Federal Government have laws designed to prevent "animal cruelty".

For some home-bound individuals: their pet -----whether it be a cat, a dog, a parrot ....or something else --- maybe the ONLY living-creature that person sees regularly on any given slate of days. Animals, such as a cat can be a helper to



a Man. For instance: a cat may be a "mouser" who does the helpful task of catching mice; or just being a trusted companion.

In any event, let us appreciate the good and unique characteristics of any cat we see. Let us not be superstitious as to things such as "a black-cat crossing our path". I have to admit that I once had that failing; but I improved my attitude when I later read where a cat of any other color crossing one's path was a "Sign of good luck". In a way, it is all a matter of PERSPECTIVE.

In the 1970's, (and perhaps earlier), The American Heritage Dictionary, included among its various definitions of the word "cat"----Definition 3: Slang : A person, especially a Man. (Example: 'He is one cool cat'. ---Definition 4: A player or devotee of Jazz. This illustrates that cats and the word 'cat' itself, are gaining a more highly improved image and reputation. So, the souvenir photo-card from circa year 1910, may come back into vogue once again.

Can each of us point to some dedicated person or person(s)---- (perhaps ourselves / perhaps others) and honestly say: "He is a 'MASONIC CAT'???? Let us hope so. May we all be discerning "Gleaners of Light" as bestowed by Almighty God.

#### Sources / Recommended Readings:

- Mackey's Encyclopedia of Freemasonry by Dr. Albert G. Mackey, M.D., 33<sup>o</sup> and a Knight Templar.
- Exhibit: "The Masonic Cat" souvenir card ....issued circa 1910.
- The American Heritage Dictionary, 1978 Edition.
- "Parade to Glory" by Fred Van Deventer. And, "The Official History of the Mystic Shrine" by George M. Saunders.
- "Writings of Charles T. McClenachan." It should be noted that Bro. McClenachan was a well-known Attorney. He was born 13 April 1829. Raised to the Sublime Degree of a Master Mason in 1854. He was a member of Munn Lodge #190 in New York City; Walworth Lodge #271; Master of Howard Lodge #35. Metropolitan Chapter #140 R.A.M.; Ancient Chapter # 1 R.A.M.; Union Council #1 R. & S.M.; Palestine Commandery #18 of Knights Templar (joined 1859). He held various offices in Cosmopolitan Consistory; Aurora Grata Consistory; and also the New York Consistory which resulted as a merger of the aforementioned two Consistories. He was honored with the 33<sup>o</sup> by The Supreme Council, 33<sup>o</sup> of Northern Masonic Jurisdiction of the Scottish Rite of the USA. He was a Charter Member of Mecca Shrine Center #1 of New York City and --- via his knowledge and efforts ---greatly assisted Nobles Fleming and Florence with the



final revisions of the Ritual. He died December 19, 1896. Bro. McClenachan's great-uncle, Charles Thompson was long-time private confidential secretary to General George Washington.

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