

Old Masonic Calling Cards Timeless Fraternal Greetings

by **Sir Knight James A. Marples**

Only in recent years have I fully appreciated the beauty and significance of older Masonic calling cards or "introduction cards." I especially like those of the Victorian era. They command a person's attention, they intrinsically promote Masonic education, and they are often impressive works of art.

Masonic calling cards should not be referred to as "Masonic business cards," since most Grand Lodges discourage and even forbid the use of one's fraternal membership for undue advantage in the workplace. All Masons, when we were mere candidates, petitioned a Lodge without fear, prejudice, or hope for selfish financial gain. Our motives were pure. We all want to elevate our own character and thus improve ourselves in Masonry. Therefore, all Masons, where so ever dispersed, are encouraged to remember their obligations, all which instill honorable virtues and actions without the slightest hint of impropriety. As a result, Masonic calling cards were confined basically to introducing one member to another. For many people, including me, it takes time to learn to associate a name with a face. Masonic calling cards bridged that gap by helping to jog one's memory.

Despite honorable intentions, it may be fair to say that not all Masons have utilized such calling cards in such an unbiased manner. However, most Masons do try to abide by Masonic landmarks, edicts, rules, and regulations. A century ago, the word "networking," as we know it in today's business world, didn't even exist. Once a friendship was started, a Mason might know, via verbal conversations or by casual social interaction, that his fellow member was a plumber, farmer, doctor, lawyer, or college professor. If he had a need for such areas of expertise, a man might call upon his fellow Mason who specialized in that sphere of activity; however, the calling card itself was not to be used for shameless self promotion of a person's trade or vocation or for campaigning for office. It was designed primarily for initial Introduction and for possible future reference.

On the other side of the coin, the very best use of Masonic calling cards was for sojourning or traveling Masons who visited Lodges or other Masonic bodies in distant areas. The Masonic calling card generally listed the name of the bearer and normally his town of residence along with the names of the various Masonic bodies with which he was affiliated. The calling card introduced the visitor during his visit, and it was a nice keepsake for later reference. Quite often, lasting friendships were rekindled due to Masons having been reunited with each other via their calling cards.



John McCullagh calling card ca. 1886

The very first Masonic calling-card I ever purchased was that of Sir John A. McCullagh. His card describes him as being Senior Warden of the Grand Commandery of Kansas in the year 1886. The card was printed in St. Louis that year, so it is genuinely of the Victorian era. It bears the logo of St. Bernard Commandery No. 10 of Knights Templar at Independence, Kansas.

I contacted the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Kansas and was informed that Brother John McCullagh was admitted to Erie Lodge No. 76 on May 26, 1870. He demitted in 1872 to Fortitude Lodge No. 107 in Independence, Kansas, and later served as Master of that Lodge in 1874 and 1875. Furthermore, he was Grand Senior Deacon of the Kansas Grand Lodge in 1874. Companion McCullagh was Exalted as a Royal Arch Mason in 1873 in Keystone Chapter No. 22 Royal Arch Masons; he was dubbed a Knight Templar in St. Bernard Commandery No. 10 in Independence, Kansas. Sir Knight McCullagh served as Eminent Commander in 1884 and as Recorder in 1886 and 1887.

As mentioned previously, his Masonic calling card describes him as Grand Senior Warden of the Grand Commandery of Kansas in 1886. He continued up the officer line until his untimely and sudden death on February 9, 1888. I am thankful that I obtained his Masonic calling card which was handed out so close (within two years) of his death.



A. G. Humphrey calling card ca. 1880s

The second Masonic calling card I obtained was for Brother A. G. Humphrey who resided in Chesterton, Indiana. It has the unique feature of the old-time Mystic Shriners logo. That logo has the Rosicrucian influenced "winged heart" on the scimitar. However, this emblem has a slight variation. This Masonic calling card shows the Knight Templar cross and crown dangling beneath the crescent instead of the Christian star of Bethlehem as most Shrine emblems depict. The calling card features Brother A. G. Humphrey's affiliations as Calumet Lodge, Valparaiso Chapter and Commandery, and Orak Shriners in Hammond, Indiana. This brother was undoubtedly proud of his York Rite and Shrine memberships.



Samuel Briggs calling card ca. 1890s

Most recently I obtained a Masonic calling card for Brother Samuel Briggs. He belonged to Mount Moriah Lodge, Western Sun Chapter of Royal Arch Masons, and Jamestown Commandery No. 61 of Knights Templar in Jamestown, New York, and it bears his signature. My eyes literally lit-up at the sight of that card, because there was a famous Mason also named Samuel "Sam" Briggs, also born in New York, whose signature was remarkably similar. Quite likely, the two men were related. The "famous" Sam Briggs was the second Imperial Potentate of the Shrine of North America. Briggs succeeded Dr. Walter M. Fleming, M.D., 33o, Past Commander of Columbian Commandery No. 1 in New York City, who was the very first Imperial Potentate. Fleming co-founded the Mystic Shriners in North America along with his friend; the famous actor William J. "Billy" Florence, 33o, and a Knight Templar of Pittsburgh Commandery No. 1 in Pennsylvania.

The cycle comes full-circle when Billy Florence communicated the Shrine ritual to Samuel Briggs who eventually moved to Cleveland, Ohio. William J. Florence suggested that the new Shrine Temple in Cleveland be named "Al Koran Shrine Temple," and it was. Sam Briggs served as the local Potentate from 1876 to 1901. The gentleman I refer to as "the famous Samuel Briggs" died on December 22, 1904. Ironically, the other Samuel Briggs listed on the Masonic calling card died in 1908. Both men had the same first and last names, both had lived in New York State, both were Freemasons, and both men died within a comparatively few years of each other. Remarkable indeed.

The man who served as Imperial Potentate of the Shrine was born in the city of New York on April 12, 1841, the son of Isaac Varian Briggs and Elizabeth Barker. Sam Briggs was prominently connected with various railroads. He was admitted to Weber Chapter of Royal Arch Masons in Cleveland, Ohio, in 1868. He became a Knight Templar in Oriental Commandery and later became Eminent Commander of Holyrood Commandery in Cleveland. He was made a 32o Mason in 1873, and in the year 1885 was honored with receiving the 33o from the Northern Masonic Jurisdiction of the United States of America. He and his wife had one daughter, Mrs. Arthur Seaton. He was also a member of the Sons of the American Revolution.

The Sam Briggs listed on the Masonic calling card has been described in biographies as "a man of strict integrity and upright life, devoted to home and family, winning the friendship of all who knew him." Somehow, I sense that some of the same traits were also characteristic of Past Imperial Potentate Sam Briggs. However, I was told two funny stories about Imperial Potentate Sam Briggs. It seems that during early Shrine ceremonials and other Shrine festivities, when the laughter, levity, and noise reached such a din as to prevent his voice from

being heard by the audience, he slammed china plates or dinnerware onto the floor or threw fine crystal glassware into the fireplace. Needless to say, the startling sound of breaking chinaware or glassware quelled the boisterous activity. Briggs knew how to get an audience to quiet down to the point where he "regained the floor" and resumed the regular order of business.

With regard to the Samuel Briggs of the Masonic calling card, I wish to draw everyone's attention to the elaborate and highly symbolic attributes of his card. It is composed of a hybrid Templar cross forming a traditional red passion cross, with "The all seeing eye of Almighty God" at the top arm of the cross. On the left arm is a tiny passion cross. On the right arm is the Craft Degrees' Masonic square and compasses emblem. On the bottom extremity of the cross appears the Masonic five pointed star. Atop the entire cross is an armored knight's head, signifying the whole superstructure from the Blue Lodge to the chivalric and Christian orders of Masonic knighthood.

Masonic calling cards had a distinctive flair in their day. They also serve as a reminder for us in the modern era to "Let our light shine" before our fellow members as well as before the public at large. The image we project is liable to be the image that we are remembered for.

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Update: July 12, 2014

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