



Supplying Fraternalism: DeMoulin Bros. & Co. and Side Degree Paraphernalia

BY ADAM STROUD

Early in DeMoulin's history, costumes for fraternal organizations were sewn by women at the Greenville factory, pictured here. (Image: DeMoulin Museum)



Imagine for a minute that it is 1900, and you have just been admitted into the fraternal organization, the Modern Woodmen of America (MWA). You have been a member for almost a week, and you already know some of the secrets and rituals that MWA members hold close to their hearts. You approach the meeting hall to attend the next assembly of members. After knocking on the door in a secret rhythm, just as you were instructed, you begin to recite the secret password. But, just before you can say the word, four men open the door and drag you into the dark interior of the building. They bind your hands and lower you into a guillotine, and they begin to question you about your organization's secret rituals and passwords. After you are interrogated for several minutes, your fellow Woodmen burst into the room and chase off the imposters.

In all the commotion, you failed to notice the impossibly bright red blood stain on the blade, the ridiculous costumes the men were wearing, and the stopper that would have inhibited the path of the blade...It's just a joke. You passed the test! The men around you shout their approval of your accomplishment by saying, "Grand Officer, we present you this candidate, whom we found a captive of outlaws, and he was going to permit them to take his life rather than reveal to them the secrets of this Order. We recommend him to you as a worthy person for adoption into our Order!"¹

The fake guillotine was part of the hazing process by some lodges, whereby cloaked men threatened inductees with beheading unless they reveal organizational secrets. The actual guillotine (pictured on page 20) even has red paint to simulate blood on the "blade." (Image: DeMoulin Museum)





The fake guillotine was a favorite side-degree tool for prankish ceremonies—right down to the bright red “blood” on the “blade.” (Image: DeMoulin Museum)

There is a good chance that DeMoulin Bros. & Company in Greenville, Illinois, supplied the prank guillotine and other similar devices all over America.

Starting in 1892, DeMoulin Bros. pioneered and dictated an industry that has since faded away from American popular culture—fraternal lodge side-degree paraphernalia. Things that were considered “side-degree” were any ceremonies or rituals that were not sanctioned by the governing bodies of fraternal organizations. Some side-degree rituals were aimed at spicing up initiation ceremonies in order to bolster the lodge’s membership and improve meeting attendance. DeMoulin Bros. took on the challenge of inventing and supplying devices such as trick chairs and prank guillotines for these side-degree rituals and ceremonies.

Side-degree paraphernalia is a unique and interesting subject in its own right; however, studying DeMoulin

Bros. reveals much more about American popular culture than just guillotines and trick chairs. It is revealed that side-degree paraphernalia and fraternal lodge expenses consumed a significant portion of late-Victorian household income. Males were the largest contributors to this industry, which challenges assumptions about male consumption patterns and exposes a movement away from a moderate Victorian lifestyle.

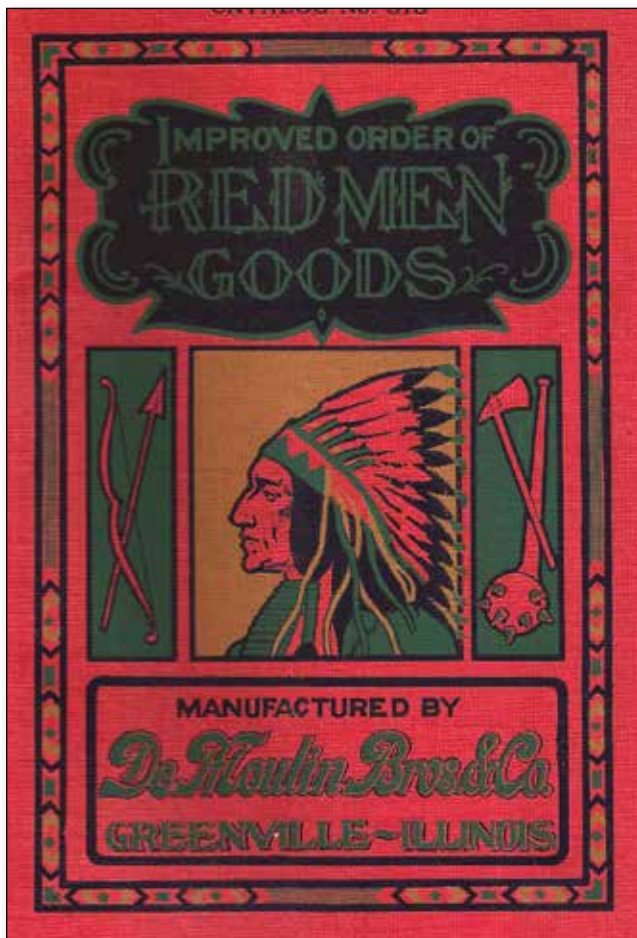
DeMoulin Bros. and Fraternalism

DeMoulin Bros., located in the town of Greenville, used many of the same manufacturing and advertising strategies as bigger companies. It sold unique and highly specialized products, and the owners of DeMoulin made millions doing it. The most accurate story about the conception of DeMoulin Bros. goes something like this:

In 1890, William A. Northcott, officer of the Venerable Counsel of the Modern Woodmen of America (MWA), approached Greenville businessman Ed DeMoulin with a business proposition. Northcott sought to increase the membership of the organization by employing DeMoulin to dream up and construct devices that made lodge initiation ceremonies more eventful. Northcott helped fund the operation from the start until Ed DeMoulin's brother, Ulysses, purchased his shares. When this transaction took place, Ulysses demanded that Northcott throw in the contact names and addresses for the MWA camps as part of the deal. Ulysses suggested that if the list was gone when Northcott returned from lunch, nobody would blame him for its disappearance. The story ends with Northcott returning from lunch to find that Ulysses was gone, along with the list of MWA camps.²

In its early years, the company was helped off the ground by local investors, but within a few years it was selling to multiple fraternal organizations all over the United States. The first large contract that DeMoulin

Some fraternal and benevolent orders were such large customers that DeMoulin Bros. even provided catalogues with special covers for them, like this one for the Improved Order of Red Men. (Image: DeMoulin Museum)



Bros. received was in 1893, for 600 drill team axes for the Southern Illinois Modern Woodmen of America. In 1896, the company expanded its market nationally when it ordered 6,000 80-page catalogs and mailed them to each of the 4,500 MWA camps in America. Business was booming and the creative instincts of the DeMoulin brothers were supplying America's obsession with fraternalism.

During the Golden Age of Fraternity, roughly 1870-1920, an astounding one in five Americans belonged to fraternal organizations.³ This range of years has been assigned the title "Golden Age" because it represents the height of fraternal membership; and after this period, there was a sharp decline in the number of organizations and members. There are several sociological explanations for the growth of fraternalism in the United States. Walter Nichols' 1917 study attributed this unification of men into organizations to the human instinct for family and common welfare.⁴ Arthur Schlesinger posited the notion that Americans sought to form fraternal groups in an effort to create institutions apart from state and federal governments.⁵ Other scholars attribute their popularity with Americans to the cheap life insurance that many fraternal groups offered. More than likely, it was a combination of many factors that pushed Americans to join fraternal organizations in the nineteenth century.

Their purposes varied between reading poetry, singing, or providing safe havens for ethnic groups. Mostly, they formed a social environment for their members and provided financial aid to those in need. In 1999, Robert Putnam and Gerald Gamm conducted a study that incorporated 224 city directories from 26 cities and towns.⁶ They created a list of 65,761 voluntary associations, of which 30 percent were fraternal or sororal, 28 percent religious, and the rest were strictly social, cultural, or political.⁷ The creation of these associations was a phenomenon encompassing both immigrants and nativists, and they existed within most belief systems, including Jews, Christians, and freethinkers, among others. Tocqueville's view that "Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations" accurately defines fraternalism throughout the nineteenth century.⁸

Insurance was a major element of many fraternal organizations and certainly pushed Americans to jump on the fraternal bandwagon. The notion of common welfare was entrenched in fraternal societies since their creation. The most prominent mutual aid organizations by 1907 were groups such as the Ancient Order of United Workmen, Royal Arcanum, the Knights of Honor, and the Knights of Maccabees.⁹

The social class component of fraternalism is one that has drawn several historians and sociologists to the subject. The impact that the Golden Age of Fraternity had on class structure and social mobility can be narrowed to two broad avenues. In one way, many fraternal groups were egalitarian in that they did accept men and women from various social classes and professions. However, the second avenue for fraternal groups is that they often excluded certain races, ethnicities, professions, and age

groups. It is completely appropriate to call fraternalism both egalitarian and socially exclusive. Some groups practiced a greater degree of exclusion than others.

An impressive and colorful array of fraternal organizations was created in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Freemasons and Odd Fellows were formed long before the creation of most other organizations, but many more sprouted up all over the United States: groups like Modern Woodmen of America (1883), Improved Order of Red Men (1834), Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks (1868), and many other groups with names associated with various types of wildlife, Biblical, and historical figures.¹⁰

Fraternalism grew unimpeded in the latter half of the nineteenth century in urban and rural regions. Several companies were created for the sole purpose of supplying fraternal organizations with all that they needed to be fully equipped at meetings or out in public. Uniforms, badges,

banners, and pins were an integral part of fraternal culture and appearance. These items were a source of pride for the organizations and a way of advertising their lodge during parades and celebrations. Dr. William D. Moore wrote that there were businesses located in eastern states, but the largest supply firms devoted to the fraternal industry were located in the Midwest. In Gamm and Putnam's massive fraternal study, they discovered that in 1910, small towns (average of 8,000 people) had 6.8 groups per 1,000 people and big cities had around 3.2 groups per 1,000 people.¹¹ Gamm and Putnam extolled the importance of studying rural fraternalism when they wrote, "After all, many more Americans at the turn of the century lived in Boises (1890 population, 2,311) than in Bostons (1890 population, 448,477)".

It is no surprise that the small town that raised the DeMoulin brothers undertook the task of spicing up fraternal lodge meetings. The location of these businesses

By 1907, Ed DeMoulin owned and operated this factory in Greenville, Illinois, to service a national market for lodge paraphernalia. (Image: DeMoulin Museum)



is evidence of the popularity of fraternalism among rural Americans. M.C. Lilley in Ohio, Pettibone Brothers in Ohio, Henderson-Ames in Michigan, and Ward-Stilson in Indiana were a few of the biggest companies. DeMoulin Bros. was a minor participant in the fraternal supply industry overall, but its side-degree paraphernalia was unmatched in quality and inventiveness.¹²

Side-Degree Paraphernalia and Male Consumption

“Side degree,” in *The International Encyclopedia of Secret Societies & Fraternal Orders*, is defined as an unofficial group existing within a fraternal organization.¹³ Side degree practices simply existed next to or beside the regular degrees of a given fraternal group. Tests of courage and dedication, just like the one described earlier, certainly qualified as side degree behavior. Special interest groups involved in charitable or activist happenings that were not established by organization laws were also included in the side degree designation. Buying devices for testing bravery and pranking materials added to the expenses of organizations and their members.

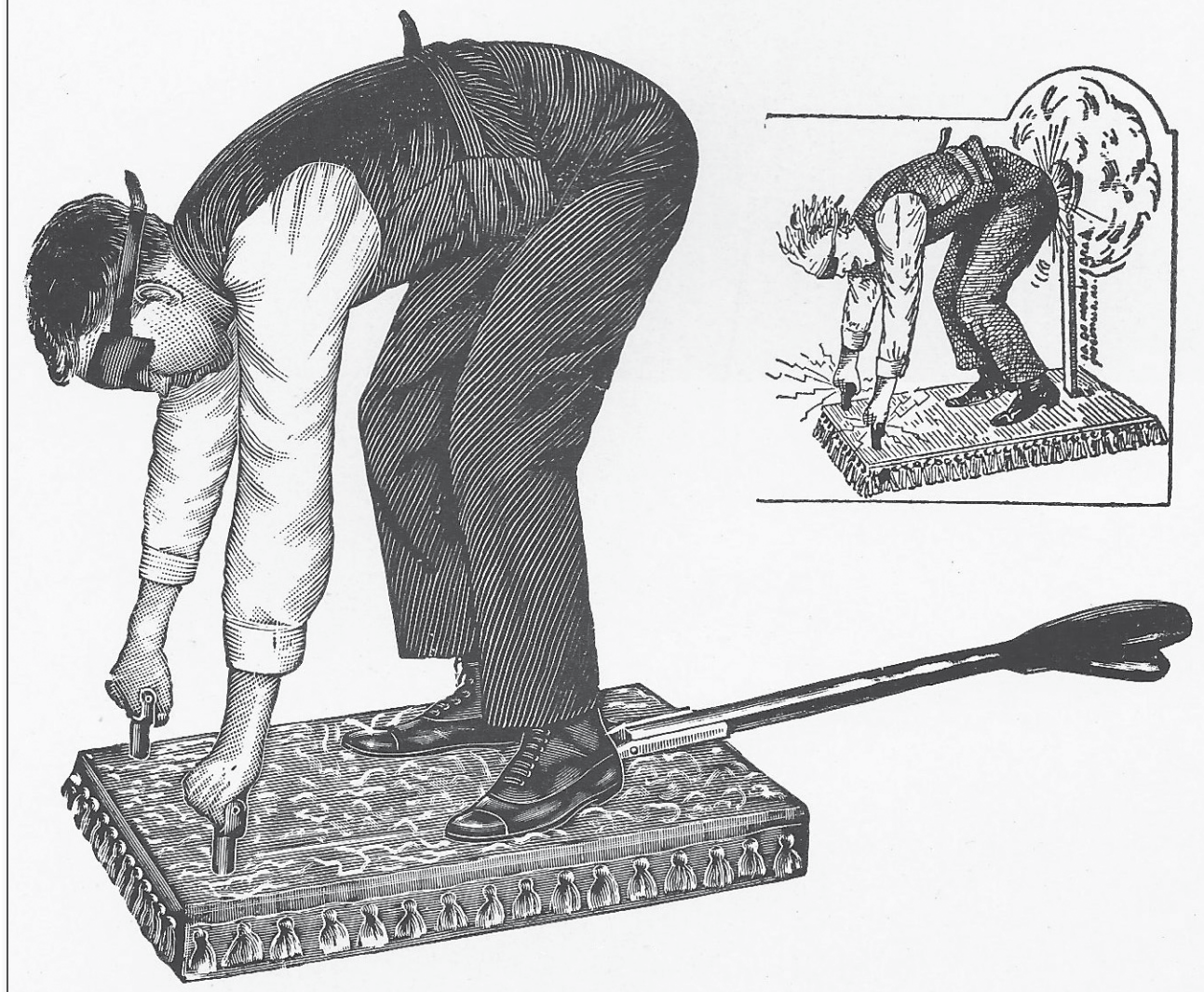
Male consumers in the late nineteenth century were generally overlooked, while their female counterparts were placed in the spotlight by advertisements. However, Mark A. Swiencicki wrote that a higher percent of late-nineteenth-century working-class household income went toward male rather than female consumption.¹⁴ In consumer reports from that time period, items like lodge paraphernalia, uniforms, workout gear, haircuts, shaves, and theater and saloon spending were not recorded as “consumer goods.”¹⁵ Swiencicki also looked at the percentage of ready-made clothing that was consumed by males in the late 1800s. In 1890, males consumed 71 percent of all ready-made clothing, and that does not include lodge uniforms or ceremonial costumes. He claimed that nearly 27 percent of working-class household disposable income went toward the husband’s social expenses.¹⁶ These findings show that working-class white men made up a larger percentage of consumer culture than their female counterparts, and a significant part of their expenses was attributed to lodge dues, the purchase of uniforms, and insurance premiums.

Working-class men made up nearly 35 percent of fraternal members, leaving nearly 65 percent of members to other social groups. These other groups also paid lodge dues, bought uniforms, and purchased lodge regalia. By the early 1900s, DeMoulin Bros. had a workforce that consisted mostly of women; the workers made a product that was almost entirely consumed by male lodge members. So much for the notion that women consumed goods while men created them.¹⁷ Fraternalism undoubtedly made up a large portion of total male consumption during the Golden Age of Fraternity. Lodge regalia and side-degree paraphernalia was a large industry that was supported by American men of various social classes, and DeMoulin Bros. was at the forefront of one of the most intriguing divisions of that industry.

As this image from a DeMoulin catalogue suggests, the Order of Red Men had highly romanticized views of Native Americans. (Image: DeMoulin Museum)



LIFTING AND SPANKING MACHINE



The premise behind the Lifting and Spanking Machine, as pictured in a DeMoulin catalogue here, was that a blindfolded inductee lifted the levers and unwittingly "spanked himself." (Image: DeMoulin Museum)

DeMoulin Bros.' Side-Degree Paraphernalia

DeMoulin Bros. exploded onto the scene of the fraternal supply industry in the late 1890s with its successful advertising methods and inventive lodge paraphernalia. As William Moore points out, most of the fraternal supply companies offered basically the same products to a wide variety of organizations.¹⁸ Likewise, DeMoulin created specialized catalogs that were aimed at particular fraternal organizations in the United States. This allowed it to offer similar products to multiple organizations with only a few unique items in each catalog.

Items that were unique to each organization included badges, banners, and uniforms. Typically, there was a

uniform for every event an organization attended. For example, the MWA catalog from 1917 contained parade caps, gloves, leggings, buttons, and drill uniforms.¹⁹ The Woodmen were seen in their parade uniforms at fairs and Fourth of July celebrations all over the country in urban and rural settings. The Improved Order of Red Men catalog from 1911 enclosed several different varieties of stereotypical costumes such as Mohawk, Huron, Mohican, and Sioux. Also, unique to the Red Men catalog were tomahawks, war clubs, totems, and wampum belts.

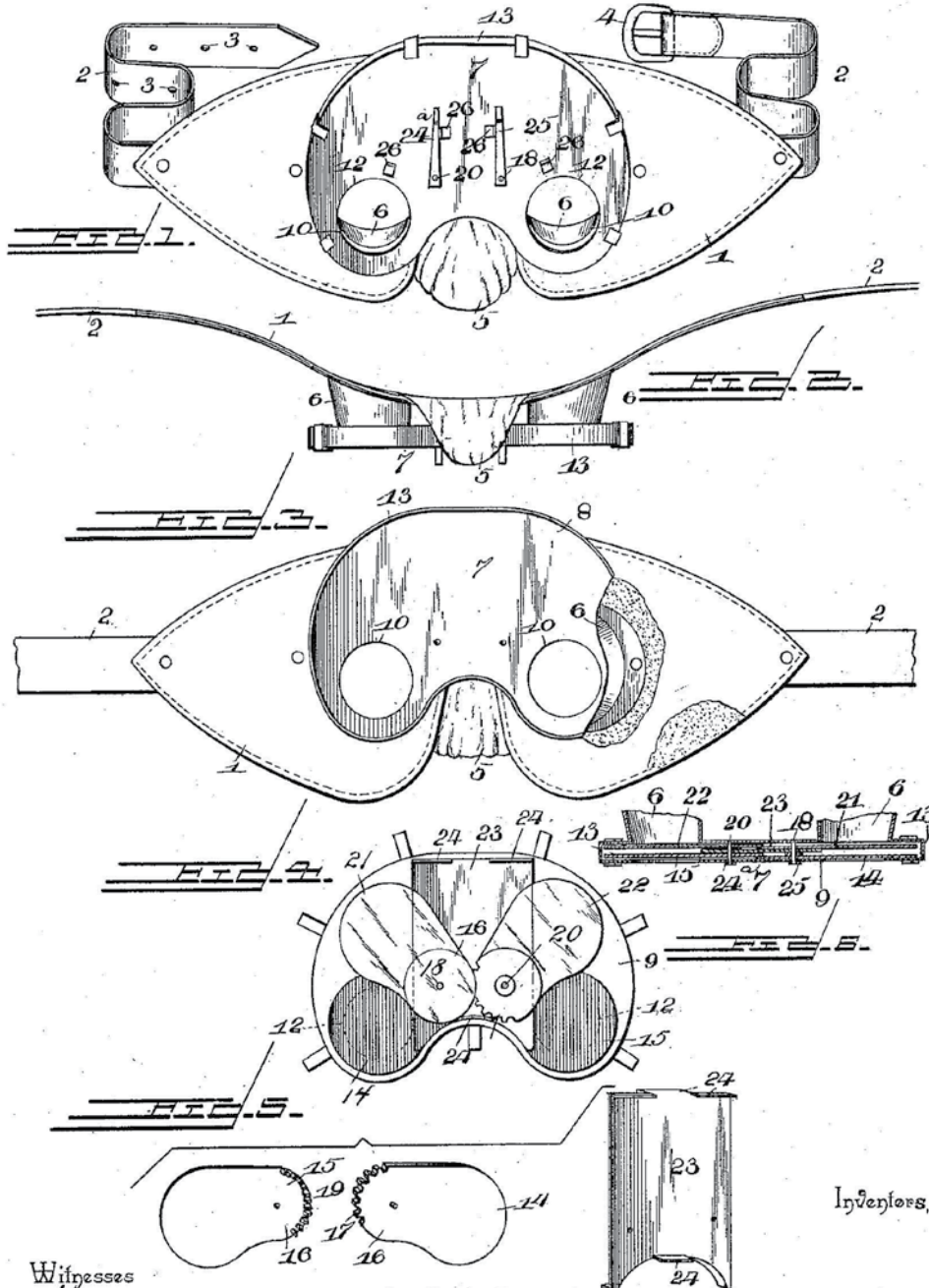
In addition to the uniforms and regalia that were unique to each organization, side-degree paraphernalia was placed toward the back of each catalog. This is where DeMoulin Bros. excelled in the fraternal supply industry.

(No Model.)

E. & U. S. DE MOULIN.
HOODWINK.

No. 562,071.

Patented June 16, 1896.



Inventors,

Witnesses

W. H. Doyle
G. H. Maxwell

By their Attorneys, *Edmund DeMoulin, Inc.*
Ulysses S. DeMoulin,

C. Snow & Co.

Edmund and Ulysses DeMoulin patented their famous "hoodwink" in 1896 with this patent drawing. It was used to alter an inductee's vision, first plunging him into total darkness, then allowing him to see a series of screens to change his perceptions of his surroundings through deception—to "hoodwink" him. (Image: DeMoulin Museum)

In a Woodman's catalog from 1910, the side-degree items made up nearly one-third of DeMoulins' advertised products. Among the items listed were bucking goats, which was a must-have in lodge side-degree ceremonies. These goats came in several varieties including the Rollicking Mustang Goat, the Ferris Wheel Goat, the Practical Goat (the economical option), and the Humpy Dump, which was a camel-shaped version with the same basic premise. The initiates were rolled around the meeting hall on these goats and then forced to hold on as the operator bucked the false animal back and forth. It was a simple and relatively harmless device that was used to give initiates a ride to remember, and gave the other members some much-needed entertainment after a long day of work.

Some of the devices had self-explanatory names such as Trick Chairs, The Guillotine, and the Superb Lifting and Spanking Machine. The Lifting and Spanking Machine is exactly what the name describes. As mentioned previously, the insurance aspect of many fraternal organizations was a major draw for members, but it also had the potential to be detrimental to the organization's financial well-

The Improved Order of Red Men was one of several benevolent societies created in the nineteenth century; while it claims origins in the Boston Tea Party, the Improved Order dates to 1834. Its rituals, regalia, and costumes derived from what they thought was a Native American motif, such as this costume created by DeMoulin Bros. & Company for the Order. (Image: DeMoulin Museum)



being. Therefore, physicians often performed physical inspections in order to detect particularly unhealthy and uninsurable recruits. Much to the delight of the DeMoulin brothers, the tedious physical examinations were a perfect opportunity to incorporate prank devices. The Lifting and Spanking Machine appeared to be an ordinary strength test. However, the recruits got a nasty surprise when they were hit with a paddle, stunned by the explosion of a blank cartridge, and occasionally hit with jolts of electricity from the handles on these devices.²⁰

A simple but effective device that added to the mystery of the side-degree ceremonies was the hoodwink. Hoodwinks were basically blindfolds with mechanical attachments that altered the recruit's view of the ceremony. The device could be adjusted so that the participant was distracted by extreme brightness or darkness. The DeMoulin brothers were inventors in addition to being manufacturers and business owners. Ed and Ulysses DeMoulin obtained a patent for their unique mechanical hoodwink in 1896. They obtained a total of 32 patents for mechanical initiation devices including several variations of the Lifting and Spanking Machine, hoodwinks, and prank collapsing chairs.²¹

Another of their creations was a device designed to simulate the popular and life-threatening circus stunt of knife throwing. The DeMoulins catalog states that in order to make this stunt work, a spotlight must be placed behind the knife thrower so the initiate was convinced his life was in danger. While the recruit was writhing on the platform, it appeared and sounded as if knives were burying themselves into the wood only inches from his body. Actually, the knives were spring loaded and harmlessly slid out of carefully placed slits in the platform behind the initiate. The convincing sound of metal striking wood was the result of another cunningly placed mechanism. Side-degree items were the foundation for the success of DeMoulin Bros. & Co. They made lodge meetings a form of entertainment and not just another dull responsibility for their members.

Side-Degree Paraphernalia and Victorian Values

Whether the ceremony participants were factory workers or major politicians, dressing up in silly costumes and rolling grown men around on fake goats were not activities that men wanted to be made public. These activities were performed by men who were "hardly the stridently ascetic beings" that late-Victorian men were supposed to embody.²² Side-degree activities were manifestations of the gradual shift away from Victorian culture and notions of disciplined masculinity. The change was also taking place in the arena of sports, with the ever-increasing popularity of baseball, and it could be seen in the clothing that men wore during lodge meetings and initiations.²³

On one hand, some military-style lodge uniforms represented a tough, masculine lifestyle, while lavish costumes, jewelry, banners, and other ornamental items suggested a movement away from male Victorian culture.

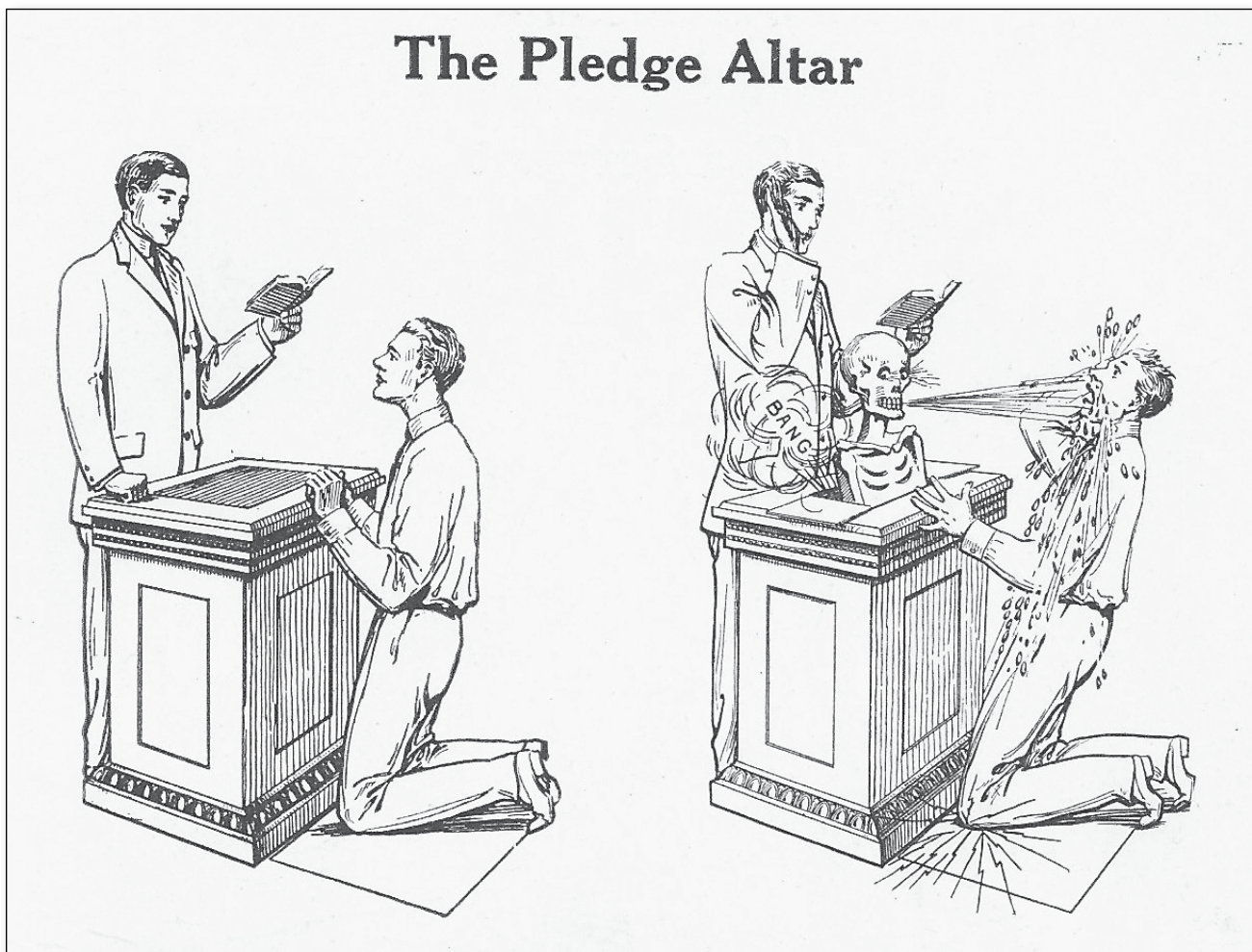
Moore looked at this transformation of male behavior and expectations in an article on side-degree paraphernalia. He attributed the popularity of side-degree ceremonies to a desire among industrialized men to shrug off the respectable behavior and serious rituals of the old order. He referenced the old rituals of the Masonic lodges, where notions of death and moral obligations were often present.

Side-degree devices such as the Pledge Altar literally spat in the face of any notions of death or moral obligations. On the outside, it appeared to be an ordinary altar where an initiate could kneel and take an oath. However, in the midst of the recruit's oath, a skeleton would spring out of the altar and squirt water into his face. Moore posits that these silly pranks and tests were hints of a shift away from responsible Victorian behavior. Many American men found that self-restraint and moderation were not suited to the new industrial order. Moore pointed out, "In the new economy of the twentieth century, men [felt the need to] laugh at themselves and their troubles. They had to be able to get up off the ground and chuckle

when thrown from a goat."²⁴

It makes sense, doesn't it? According to muckraking journalists, this was the age when the working-class man was being trampled on by the robber barons. These were times when many occupations were extremely hazardous, the safe arrival of newborns was not a foregone conclusion, and the best-case scenario for most Americans was to stick around long enough to see their grandchildren. The uncertainty about tomorrow and the cruelty of the industrial age is every bit as good an explanation for the popularity of fraternalism and side-degree behavior as humanity's family instinct or a desire to form a group identity apart from the government. Trick chairs, fake guillotines, and creative ceremonies were expressions of the men who created and used them, and the devices create a pathway into the minds of these industrial age beings. The goats and skeletons begin to make more sense when the information about the time in which they were used is revealed.

The Pledge Altar was a version of the squirting boutonniere used by clowns. In this version, a pledge solemnly kneels, only to be sprayed by water when the official lifts his hand. (Image: DeMoulin Museum)



The Decline of Fraternalism and the Transformation of DeMoulin Bros.

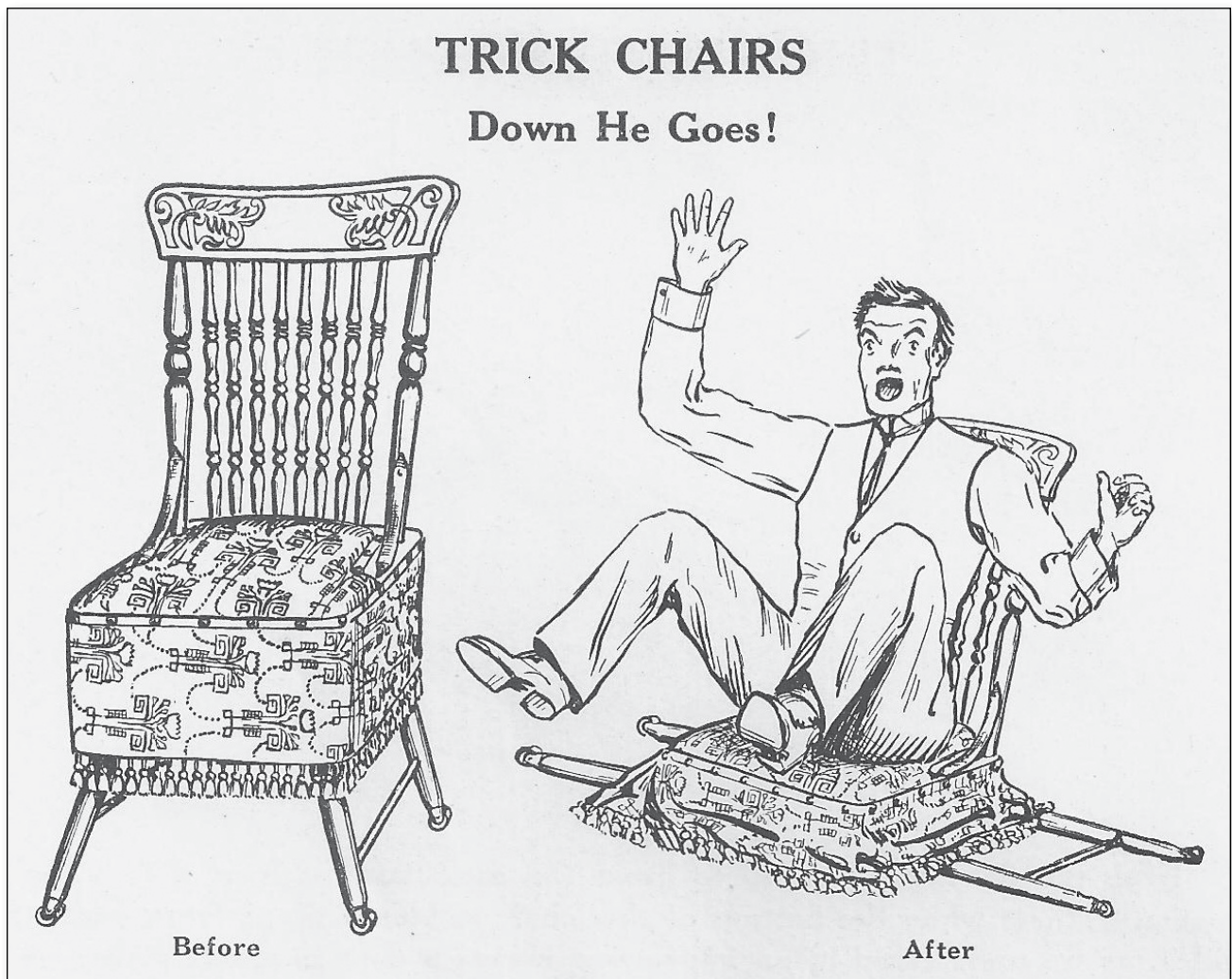
The end of the Golden Age of Fraternity was not marked by the destruction of organizations, but rather the redistribution of services that were at one time provided by fraternal groups. For example, one of the biggest labor-oriented fraternal organizations, The Ancient Order of United Workmen (AOUW) saw the vast majority of its state grand lodges merge with other AOUW lodges or reinsured by regular life insurance companies by the 1930s.²⁵

Likewise, DeMoulin Bros. shifted the majority of its business away from side-degree paraphernalia, and entered the marching band and military uniform industries. Ed DeMoulin died in 1935, and his death ironically coincided with the sharp decline of fraternalism in America. DeMoulin Bros. & Co. officially withdrew from the side-degree paraphernalia industry in 1955. It was the biggest

producer in the industry for the better part of four decades, and the impressive wealth it accumulated is evidence of the popularity of side-degree items and fraternalism overall.

The popularity of DeMoulin Bros.'s products speaks to the willingness of male lodge members to spend their hard-earned cash on luxury items such as goats and costumes. Costs associated with fraternal lodges formed a large part of working-class male expenses, and this challenges ideas held at the time about male consumption patterns. Also, the ridiculousness and popularity of side-degree ceremonies in America suggests that fraternalism created an environment where men could escape common notions of masculinity and Victorian values. DeMoulin Bros. & Co. in Greenville reveals much about a fragment of American popular culture that has been forgotten.

What initiation or hazing would be complete without this? It appears to be normal side chair until an inductee sits down, only to have it collapse beneath his weight—and not much was required. (Image: DeMoulin Museum)





Another hazing device used involved enacting a bogus knife-throwing stunt. The idea was for the knife-thrower to simulate throwing a knife by palming it, followed by a sound and a knife protruding from the back of the frame, as seen here. (Image: DeMoulin Museum)

ENDNOTES

- ¹ “Catalog No. 163: Woodmen of the World Supplies,” from DeMoulin Bros. & Co., Greenville, Illinois, 1910, XXXIV.
- ² John Goldsmith, *Three Frenchmen and a Goat* (Tri-State Litho, 2004), 12.
- ³ W. S. Harwood, “Secret Societies in America,” *North American Review* 164 (1897), 617 and 620. As seen in Gerald Gamm and Robert D. Putnam, “The Growth of Voluntary Association in America, 1840-1940,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 39 (Spring, 1999), 511-57.
- ⁴ Walter S. Nichols, “Fraternal Insurance in the United States: Its Origin, Development, Character and Existing Status,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 70 (March 1917), 110.
- ⁵ Arthur M. Schlesinger, “Biography of a Nation of Joiners,” *The American Historical Review* 50 (October 1944), 16.
- ⁶ Gamm and Putnam, “The Growth of Voluntary Associations in America,” 515.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ Tocqueville, quoted in Putnam and Gamm, 513.
- ⁹ “Great Times for Insurance Fraternities,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, June 9 1907.
- ¹⁰ Alan Axelrod, *The International Encyclopedia of Secret Societies & Fraternal Orders* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1997) see entries for Elks, Red Men, Freemasons, Odd Fellows, and MWA for founding dates.
- ¹¹ Putnam and Gamm, “The Growth of Voluntary Associations in America” 539.
- ¹² William Moore, “Canned Snakes, Mechanical Goats, and Spitting Skeletons: Making Sense of the 1930s DeMoulin Bros. & Co. Catalog,” in *Burlesque Paraphernalia and Side Degree Specialities and Costumes*, ed. Charles Schneider (Seattle: Fantagraphics Books, 2010), 29.
- ¹³ Axelrod, *The International Encyclopedia of Secret Societies & Fraternal Orders*, 225.
- ¹⁴ Mark A. Swiencicki, “Consuming Brotherhood: Men’s Culture, Style and Recreation as Consumer Culture, 1880-1930.” *Journal of Social History* 31 (1998): 773ff; *U.S. History in Context*, accessed February 23, 2014.
- ¹⁵ Swiencicki, “Consuming Brotherhood,” 5.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.
- ¹⁷ *Printer’s Ink* (November 2, 1933): 42; *Advertising Age* (July 12, 1937): 14-15. The 1937 ad in *Advertising Age* stated that man was the producer, and woman the consumer.
- ¹⁸ Moore, “Canned Snakes, Mechanical Goats, and Spitting Skeletons,” 26.
- ¹⁹ “Catalog No. 265: MWA Supplies,” from DeMoulin Bros. & Co., Greenville, Illinois, 1917, 7-15.
- ²⁰ “Catalog No. 163,” 165.
- ²¹ The DeMoulin Bros. Museum has a notebook of all the patents the DeMoulin brothers were granted. Patents were granted for various initiation devices.
- ²² Swiencicki, “Consuming Brotherhood,” 8.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, 13.
- ²⁴ Moore, “Canned Snakes, Mechanical Goats, and Spitting Skeletons,” 24.
- ²⁵ “Name and Status Changes of Fraternal Benefit Societies,” a very informative list of organizations that have gone out of business or merged with other entities, located at the American Fraternal Alliance webpage. <http://fraternalalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/NAME-AND-STATUS-CHANGES-OF-FRATERNAL-BENEFIT-SOCIETIES-2012.pdf>