

# Theodore Roosevelt the Master Mason



**The Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Ohio**  
**Committee on Education and Information**  
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## Introduction

The following brief biography of President Theodore Roosevelt and the story about his view on the value of Masonry are intended to provide the Brethren with food for thought. The questions at the end should be put to them as an opportunity for an educational discussion.

## **Theodore Roosevelt the Master Mason**

Theodore Roosevelt was the twenty sixth president of the United States and a Master Mason, raised in Matinecock Lodge No. 806 in Oyster Bay, New York. There are many stories about his involvement with the Masonic fraternity. The following story can be found on pages 275-277 of John J. Leary's book Talks with T.R., from the Diaries of John J. Leary, Jr., published in Boston by the Houghton Mifflin Company in 1920.

### "The Value of Masonry"

"Colonel Roosevelt was a Mason, and in a quiet way an enthusiastic one. He was a frequent attendant at Matinecock Lodge in Oyster Bay in which he was raised, and when in foreign parts, particularly in out-of-the-way places, made it a rule, when possible, to visit the local lodges. He was as thorough in his Masonry as he was in other things, as witness Harry Russell, well known in the craft, who assisted in his initiation.

"When," says Russell, "the Colonel came up for examination he was letter perfect – hanged if he did not have the work better than his conductor, for he corrected him in an error."

Talking of Oyster Bay affairs at his home one afternoon the Colonel touched on this phase of his activities.

"As you know," he said, turning to me, "I am a member of the local lodge of Masons. You also know, brother, I violate no secret when I say that one of the greatest values

in Masonry is that it affords an opportunity for men in all walks of life to meet on common ground, where for the time all men are equal and have one common interest.

“For example, when I was President, the master was Worshipful Brother Doughty, gardener on the estate of one of my neighbors, and a most excellent public-spirited citizen, with whom I liked to maintain contact. Clearly I could not call upon him when I came home. It would have embarrassed him. Neither could he, without embarrassment, call on me. IN the lodge it was different. He was over me, though I was President, and it was good for him and good for me.

“I go to the lodge, and even the folks who do not belong to or believe in the order, rather like it that I should go. They seem to feel it’s part of the eternal fitness of things. Whenever I return from one of my journeys I always go there to tell of the lodges I have visited, in Nairobi in Africa, in Trinidad, or the quaint little lodge I found away up on the Ascension River. They sort of feel I am their representative to these lodges, and they like it. There’s a real community of interest.

“It’s the same way with Mrs. Roosevelt. She is an Episcopalian, you know, and belongs to a guild named after a saint – Saint Hilda, I believe. She frequently has the members here. She had them at the White House on several occasions. There’s no social rank in the guild, no distinction – the brakeman’s wife or the butcher’s wife, the equal of her neighbor, and all are comfortable. You see, they have a common interest.

“That is the way to make people work together. Get them on common ground, get them together through some interest in common. There social lines fade out and you get results.”

#### Questions for Discussion:

1. It could be argued that American society has changed to the point that social standing and economic class no longer present the kind of social barrier among people as was the norm in Roosevelt’s day. Is the *common ground* offered in a local lodge of Masons no longer as valuable as it once was? Is it just as valuable or more so today?
2. Can you recall a time that Masonic membership made a difference in the interaction between men, who may have had nothing else in common?
3. Is Masonic equality valuable today? If yes, in what ways?