

The Vermonter Who Was Cofounder of The Skull and Bones Society

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I realize every state in the Union has individuals in its history who have contributed to the culture, and technology of our nation. However, I never stop feeling proud, and impressed, with the number of people from our small state of Vermont who have made significant contributions to what has made our nation great.

The person that I am writing about might be well known to some of you, but I am going to copy a style from Paul Harvey and just give my readers a sketch of the subject of this essay. and call him A.T., to only reveal who he is at the end.

A.T. was born in Townshend, Vermont in 1810, and entered Yale University in 1829 graduating in 1833. In 1832 A.T, with his classmate, William Huntington Russell founded the famous Yale fraternity known as the Order of the Skull and Bones.

Founding of Skull & Bones

After a dispute between the Yale debating societies of Linonia, Brothers in Unity, and the Calliopean Society over who would be the season's Phil Beta Kappa recipients, William Huntington Russell and A.T. chose to create a new and secret society of Yale students. They were to be picked from among the Junior Class for not just their academic abilities, but also for their potential as leaders. It is speculated that this dispute may have existed since 1831 when members of Phi Beta Kappa at Yale divulged some of the secret rituals of the society as a protest against fraternities in general that was generated during the anti-masonic period of that time.

Incidentally, Phi Beta Kappa was founded in 1776 at the college of William & Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. It is the nation's oldest and preeminent collegiate academic honor society with chapters at 280 of the nation's colleges and universities. It was also the first collegiate society to establish its name in Greek. Legend has it that the society would meet at the Raleigh Tavern where the local lodge of Freemasons met, and influenced by the lodge ten of the Society's first members became Freemasons.

A great deal of lore has evolved about Skull and Bones. Outside of the Russell Trust that manages the Tomb headquarters on the Yale campus, and the Deer Island facility on the St. Lawrence River, that Skull and Bones owns,

many believe that Skull and Bones is a conspiratorial, and networking society devoted to putting its members in positions of power in government and business to benefit them, and their ambitions, including world domination. That should sound familiar to all Freemasons.

Another myth is that Skull and Bones is actually a front for the Illuminati. Of course, what people don't realize is that the Central Intelligence agency is actually under the control of Skull and Bones to help in their quest for secret world control.

Amazingly enough the Russell Trust has become somewhat depleted and although the Tomb is maintained, the Deer Island facility has deteriorated considerably. It is doubtful that William Huntington Russell and A.T. anticipated that Skull and Bones would acquire the reputation it has. However, if the membership of Skull and Bones is so powerful how come they haven't taken time since 1911 to up grade and improve their facilities and reconstitute the Russell Trust?

A.T.'s Career After Yale

After graduation from Yale AT attended Yale Law School and was then admitted to the Connecticut Bar in 1838. The following year he moved to Cincinnati, Ohio.

Following his arrival in Ohio, he petitioned Miami Lodge No. 46 to join the Masons in 1840, receiving his EA Degree March 3rd, Fellow Craft Degree April 4th, and was raised to the sublime degree of a Master Mason May 5th, 1840.

AT proved to be a strong family man he married his childhood sweetheart in 1841. Fanny Phelps was the daughter of Judge Charles Phelps of Townshend, VT. They had five children, two of whom died in infancy. Fanny died in 1851 and in 1853 AT married Louisa Maria Torrey of Millbury, MA. They also had five children, of which only one died in infancy.

During his time in Ohio AT served on the Cincinnati City Council and the board of Trustees of the University of Cincinnati, while also serving as a trustee of Yale University.

He served as judge of the Superior Court of Cincinnati from 1866 to 1872 when he resigned to practice law with two of his sons. At that time he was the first president of the Cincinnati Bar Association, serving in 1872.

In 1866 he demitted from Miami Lodge and affiliated with Kilwinning Lodge #356, eventually serving as Master of that lodge.

It was as Judge of the Superior Court of Cincinnati that AT became particularly famous or more than likely notorious among his adversaries. It was in regard to a dissenting opinion he made in 1870 regarding the case of the Board of Education of Cincinnati vs. Minor.

The case was whether the Holy Bible could be read in Cincinnati's schools along with the singing of Protestant hymns, as it had been the custom since that city's school system was founded in 1829. As a result of a combined protest made by the Bishop of the Catholic Church and Rabbis from the Jewish Reform community, the Cincinnati school board, in 1869 ruled to have the practice discontinued. In reaction to this prominent Protestants in the community went to Judge Bellamy Storer and filed an injunction to keep the ruling from being implemented pending a further hearing.

A hearing was convened before a three judge panel of the Superior Court that included A.T. The hearing became a major story for the nation's newspapers. The final ruling of two of the judges vs. A.T.'s dissent was to make the injunction permanent allowing for the continued reading of the Protestant Bible and singing of hymns in the schools.

It was A.T.'s judicial assertion in his dissent that the board had previously over stepped its authority to allow for the continued reading of the Bible in the public schools. He declared that the Constitution did not give Protestants the right to control religion in the public schools, as the students served in these schools come from homes representing different religions and it is there that religious influence should be practiced, which he felt was protected by the Bill of Rights. He argued that it was inappropriate to believe that the Bill of Rights only reflected Protestant values, because the Constitution extended liberty to all religions. This is an interesting opinion as it seems to have foreshadowed the Supreme Court Case a hundred years later in regard to prayer in the schools of America. In 1873 the Ohio Supreme Court upheld A.T.'s dissent and ruled in favor of the School Board's decision to discontinue the Protestant services of Bible reading and hymn singing in the Cincinnati schools.

This ruling proved controversial enough that A.T. lost the Republican nomination for the Governorship of Ohio in 1875 to Rutherford B. Hayes who was soon to become President of the United States. Incidentally, Mr. Hayes' father came west to Ohio in 1817 after owning a tavern and inn in Brattleboro, VT.

Although his court decision seemed to stymie his political ambitions there were those who entertained a great deal of respect for him for having the courage and independence to render such a decision. President Grant was one of those people and appointed him Secretary of War in 1876 and three months later appointed him Attorney General. Unfortunately, these Presidential appointments did not enhance his opportunities for elective office. After

-serving in the Grant administration he returned to Ohio to continue practicing law and was an unsuccessful candidate for Governor against Charles Foster in 1879.

A.T. would later be appointed Minister to Austria-Hungary from 1882 to 1884 by another Vermont ex-patriot President Chester A. Arthur, who following that appointed him Minister to Imperial Russia for the year 1884 to 85 the last year of Arthur's term as President.

He later demitted from Kilwinning Lodge on January 11, 1888. Of course no one knows the reasons for it. However, prior to that three of A.T.'s sons became Freemasons in which he participated. One of those three, who would later become President of the United States, was made a Mason on sight.

Now, have you figured out who this son of Vermont is?

Legacy

His son William became the 27th President of the United States and the 10th Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, as well as a member of the Skull and bones. Son Charles founded the Wolf's Head Society at Yale in 1884 and today boasts of its own prominent alumni. Both grandson and great-grandson Robert I and II were US Senators with the latter serving recently as Governor of Ohio from 1999 to 2007. William III served as Ambassador to Ireland, while William IV has served several Republican administrations including that of George W. Bush.

This son of Vermont of whom I am speaking is Alphonso Taft, and "now you know the rest of the story."