

## ***The Seven Liberal Arts & Sciences*** by Donald L. McAndrews. PM, PHP, MPS

In the Fellowcraft Degree, the Senior Deacon delivers an extensive lecture on our craft. He particularly points out the importance of the seven liberal arts and sciences, to wit: Grammar, Rhetoric, Logic, Arithmetic, Geometry, Music and Astronomy. In spite of this, most Masons make little effort to study these arts. So the natural questions are, “why are they included in our ritual and what makes them important enough to warrant their recommended study?”

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century when our modern ritual was developing, the Seven Liberal Arts & Sciences were known as the "artes liberales." This was knowledge reserved for free men, men of importance, and were considered to be the sum of all higher learning. The name “Liberal” comes from the Latin "liber" meaning Free. This is in contrast to the "artes illiberales" which was the knowledge necessary simply to earn a living. These were the crafts of the workmen and tended to bind them to their particular trade. The seven liberal arts and sciences trace their origins back to the era of Pythagoras and even earlier.

These arts and sciences are broken into two groups. The first is the "Trivium," Latin for “three ways or paths.” It deals with the language arts and includes grammar, rhetoric and logic. The study of Grammar refines our speech just as the craftsman smoothes the rough ashlar into a perfect ashlar. Rhetoric combines words and thoughts into a pleasing whole, just as the craftsman places ashlar upon ashlar to erect a pleasing edifice. But most important is the creative art of logic. Logic is the Master’s art which brings us the power of reason and deduction, just as the architect creates and develops the design to be executed by the craftsmen.

The second group is the "Quadrivium," or four paths. It deals with the numerical sciences: arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. The fifth science, Geometry, is so fundamentally a part of Freemasonry that our ritual tells us these two terms were originally synonymous. Geometry goes far beyond the simple weights and measurements of arithmetic and deals with relationships from the minute to the astronomical. By Geometry we may “discover how the planets move in their orbits and demonstrate their various revolutions.” By it we may “discover the power, the wisdom, and goodness of the Grand Artificer of the Universe.” It is no wonder Masons revere Geometry.

Music has a natural relationship with numbers. Our ancient friend and brother Pythagoras was the first to record the mathematical relationships between the lengths of strings and the sounds made by their vibrations. He was first to record the concepts of harmonic intervals and the eight tone division of the musical octave. For this, he is revered by many musicians as the father of musical notation and theory.

Our ancient brethren recognized the value of a balanced education to create a whole, complete and free man. The Trivium to better understand our inner workings and the Quadrivium to understand the greater universe around us. This lesson is still a good one my brethren, to constantly seek greater light, that is greater knowledge, both of ourselves and of the universe around us. To constantly seek to improve ourselves by education is the concealed lesson. And, that’s how Masonry takes a good man and makes him better.