

The Cable Tow  
by I.R. "Bud" Putman

Freemasonry has been defined as "A system of morality, veiled in allegory and taught by symbols." The "Cable Tow" is a symbol that should excite serious reflections in our profession as Freemasons.

The Dictionary defines "cable" as: "as strong, thick rope, now usually made of wires twisted together: The truck used a cable to tow the automobile." Another definition states "the rope or chain by which an anchor is raised and lowered, sometimes alluded to as a cable's length."

The Dictionary defines "tow" as "the act of towing or condition of being pulled along by a rope or chain: We had to tow a car from a ditch to a garage."

In the "Encyclopedia of Freemasonry" by Albert G. Mackey, the word "cable tow" is called a "purely Masonic word." In its first inception, the cable tow seems to have been used only as a physical means of controlling the candidate, and such an interpretation is still given in the Entered Apprentice Degree. In the Second and Third Degrees a more modern symbolism has been introduced, and the cable tow is supposed to symbolize the "covenant" by which all Masons are tied.

We are all familiar with the reference to the "length of our cable tow." The Dictionary defines "cable's length" as: "a unit of measurement frequently used in sailing directions (720 feet in the United States Navy and about 100 fathoms or 607.56 feet in the British Navy)." Mackey says, according to the Ancient Laws of Freemasonry, every brother must attend his Lodge if he is within the "length of his cable tow." The old writers define the length of a cable tow to be three miles for an Entered Apprentice. But the expression is really symbolic, and a more modern definition of a cable's length refers to the scope of a man's reasonable ability.

Our forefathers have given to us the oldest, largest and greatest Fraternity in the world! But, as stockbrokers like to say, history doesn't always reflect future performance. Are we going to perpetuate Freemasonry for future generations to enjoy? I sincerely believe that the future of Freemasonry will be in direct proportion to the "length of our cable tow!"