

“Mason to Fellows to Mason”

Robert Smith, Guest Speaker 25th Annual Fellows Luncheon November 6, 2001

Good afternoon and welcome. Although we are celebrating the 25th Anniversary of the Annual Fellow Awards Luncheon, the Fellow membership grade has been in the Society's procedures for the past 70 years and has gone through many different changes, which I will speak of later.

Years ago there was a famous baseball routine, “Tinker to Evers to Chance.” It related to three players in the Chicago Cubs' infield, who established records back in the first decade of the 20th century that still stand. Today I will be changing that saying from “Tinker to Evers to Chance” to “Mason to Fellows to Mason,” the play of events that has brought us together.

I imagine that John Mason, our President, was somewhat surprised that I accepted his invitation to be the Fellow Luncheon speaker so fast, but there was a little history behind that acceptance.

Mason

In February of this year, I received a call from another Mason, John's father Ken. There was a discussion concerning SMPTE, and Ken went on to say how pleased he was about his son being the new President, since he had concerns about the lack of growth and participation in the Society by the motion picture industry and felt it was important that the history and purpose of the Society be preserved and understood.

As he spoke, I recalled Ken's involvement in the Society, especially in establishing the Fellows Luncheon, and I spoke to him about what a won-

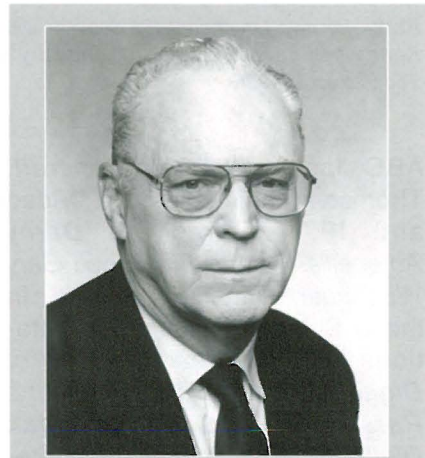
derful opportunity it would be if he would speak at the upcoming Fall Conference. He informed me that he was experiencing medical problems and couldn't be sure of his plans so far in advance. In late May, we received word of Ken's sudden passing. This was a shock to all of us. When John called I felt it was an opportunity to pay tribute to the person who was basically responsible for our being here today at this 25th Fellow Awards Luncheon. I have not informed John of the theme or subject matter of my remarks today, and what I say today will be as new to him as it is to you.

Ken Mason was a member of the Board of Governors for nearly three decades, and held just about every position within the Society. He was well known and respected internationally and really laid the foundation for me and every other Society President following him in their efforts to expand SMPTE into an international engineering organization.

The Beginning of a Separate Event

During the 60s, 70s, and 80s many SMPTE members attended the BKSTS Conference, which was held every other year in England. Since 1946 BKSTS had also presented Fellow awards, but did so in an informal style, in an effort to make the ceremonies warm and personal. A luncheon was created not only to announce the new Fellows but to honor them.

SMPTE Fellows were presented at the end of the Honors and Awards Luncheon held on the first day of the



Robert Smith, president of DuArt Film and Video in New York City, was SMPTE President in 1979 and 1980. He joined the Society in 1954 and became involved in the New York Section in 1959, serving as Section Manager, Secretary, Treasurer, and Chairman. In the late 1960s, he served on the Board of Governors and various officer positions until 1983. He received his Fellow Award from the Society in 1974 and became an Honorary Member in 1997.

Smith is a Fellow of the BKSTS and a member of the Royal Television Society, AMPAS, and NATAS, where he served as chair of the Technical Awards Committee for 14 years.

Fall Conference. There were numerous introductions, a keynote speaker, and an address by the President of the Society. All of the Society's medal awards were presented as well, so the



luncheon often ran late, with many of the guests leaving before the new Fellows were announced, in order to attend the afternoon technical sessions.

Ken felt this was inappropriate and that more time and respect should be shown to this Honor Membership Grade. He mentioned to the Executive Committee how it was handled by the BKSTS; however, nothing was changed at the time. When Ken became President in 1975, he requested that the L.A. local arrangements committee for the Fall Conference consider having a separate luncheon for the Fellow Awards.

It happened that 1975 was the year the Society went from two major conferences a year to one. Word came back that the local committee and the conference hotel could not handle another event, and Ken had to go ahead with the same procedure where the Fellow awards for that conference were given at the end of the Honors and Awards Luncheon.

Ken informed me that for the next conference, scheduled for New York City, the responsibility for reserving space and time for a separate event be given to the Headquarter's staff instead of the local committee. The decision was made to have the luncheon moved outside of the conference hotel.

Executive Director Dennis Courtney arranged to have the first Fellows Luncheon at the New York

Engineering Club, because it was within walking distance of the conference hotel. That morning Ken asked Dennis and me to make sure the luncheon and presentations had been shortened to a little over an hour, but it was obvious that we were going to run very late. We knew that we could not get back for the technical sessions scheduled to start at 2:15.

The individuals involved in the afternoon sessions had to leave before lunch was served. They went back to the hotel and posted a notice stating that the session would be starting late. Buses finally returned to the hotel a little after 3:00—the afternoon session started at 3:30 p.m. There were a lot of upset members and it was decided that in the future the Fellows Luncheon would have to be held in the same hotel or conference center. So, the first two events did not go as planned, but Ken felt strongly that this award presentation should be treated separately, since it is such a high honor for a member.

The main subject of the 1976 conference was the federal government requirement that the U.S. convert to the metric system. We know that didn't survive, but thanks to Ken's leadership and insistence, the Fellows Luncheon has. Also, in 1976, Ken received from the BKSTS, a very impressive President's Medal of Honor that has been passed down to SMPTE Presidents. That medal is here today.

Ken Mason Remembered

When Ken retired from Eastman Kodak in 1982 an article in the *Journal* stated, "Among Ken's outstanding characteristics, are his warmth and his kindness. It is unusual for a man of Ken's stature and strong convictions to have had the respect and affection of everyone he came in contact with. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to find an exception to the universal esteem in which he is held. It has been said, that he brings out the best in those that are associated with him." I can personally attest to that.

At the memorial service held for Ken Mason in early June, each of his sons spoke about the closeness of their family and about the important role sports and competition played in that family. Each son included a sports event relating to their father in their remarks. Ken was a starting member of the basketball and baseball teams in his high school, college, at Kodak, and while in the service. If it had a ball in it, Ken played or supported it with a passion.

We are here today at this luncheon due to Ken's insistence of having a separate function, keeping Fellows together as a group in a fellowship. That is what the fellowship means to me and I know it meant a lot to Ken Mason; a true friend, a great Society President, a natural born leader, and supporter of competitive play.

To Fellows

I feel it would be appropriate to bring to light the somewhat stormy and confusing history behind the grade of Fellow in our Society. "A Fellow is an individual who has, by proficiency and contributions, attained an outstanding rank among engineers or executives in the motion picture, television, or related industries."

In a reference book, referring to the word fellow, are quotations from Moses, Caesar, Patton, and Harry Truman. But Shakespeare probably gave the best definition. He said, "being amongst one's fellows is like finding one's other favorite shoe."

From the beginning of the Society in 1916, there were four membership grades, i.e., Pioneer, Honorary, Active, and Associate. An individual could apply for Pioneer Membership if he was in the industry for at least 15 years and paid a full lifetime membership fee of \$250. One could also apply for Honorary Membership if he had at least 10 years experience in our industry and paid a membership fee of \$100, both fees represented a lot of money in 1916.

In the late 1920s, the Pioneer and Honorary membership grades were done away with, and those members were automatically made Fellows. Honorary became a grade that one would have to be nominated for by

the Board of Governors, as it is today. But in 1934, an individual could personally apply directly for membership as a Fellow. In 1938, the by-laws were changed forbidding any individual to apply directly for Fellow Grade Membership.

An article in the *Journal* in 1943 stated that an 11-man Fellows Committee was being appointed by the President. In reviewing the minutes of the 1943 and 1944 Board of Governors' meetings, there seems to have been an oversight of the 1938 by-law change, causing concern and confusion about who might be appointed a Fellow. In July 1944, another change was made stating, "Nominations for Fellow shall be made only from the Active Membership of the Society."

At the 1944 Fall Conference, seven members were recommended to the Board of Governors for elevation to Fellows grade. Basically, the rules that were established in 1938 and 1944 concerning Fellow Grade Membership are still in effect today.

With all the comments and information I read and reviewed about the Fellows award, I think this is the best: In 1981 I received a thank-you letter from a new Fellow who said that he did not understand its meaning nor how he had been selected for this honor.

I replied by explaining how the selection committee worked, and he asked who the members were. I sent him the names, and a short time later received another letter from him stating he was now even more impressed because he knew many of the members and some were his competitors, with whom he didn't always agree. He wrote that he was now rearranging the plaques in his den, moving the Fellow Certificate slightly below his birth certificate and slightly above his marriage certificate. I guess this is probably as good an example as can be given about the importance one can place on being made a Fellow in our Society.

I would like to congratulate each of the 12 new Fellows being honored here today, and I would have to agree with Mr. Shakespeare, that being here with so many of you is like finding one's other favorite shoe.

To Mason

I started with Mason, went to Fellow and now it's time to give it back to Mason. Ken Mason was a sportsman all his life, and he hit a home run in 1943 in helping to bring us his son John, our 42nd President, and creating the first father/son team in SMPTE's history.

Notes and Comments in Reference to the WTC Tragedy

As a New Yorker, I would like to thank each of you for showing your support to our country, our city, and our Society in being here at this conference. It has been somewhat of a custom by many of the former Fellow Luncheon speakers to use quotes made by previous speakers and today I will do the same. I am sorry to say that it is for a different reason and meaning.

Our friend and former Society President Maurice French made the following statement at the 1992 Fellows Luncheon, referring to the

changes and concerns facing our industry concerning computers and digital technology at that time: "Only history will show how much we have accomplished." He then quoted General McArthur, "There is no security on this earth, there is only opportunity." I do not know under what circumstances General McArthur originally made that statement, but I assure you that it applies today in relation to the tragedy that occurred in the U.S. on September 11th.

I would also like to refer to the

message written by our SMPTE President and the Executive Director, which appeared in the October 2001 *SMPTE Journal*. "A Greeting From New York," ended with a quote from the philosopher and poet Viktor Frankl, "Everything can be taken from a person but one thing: the last of human freedoms—to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way."

Today, thank you for being here.

—Robert M. Smith