

1-1-2004

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Recommended Citation

Stewart, Jim '76 (2004) "A Few Good Men," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 46 : Iss. 4 , Article 9.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol46/iss4/9>

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A Few Good Men

By Jim Stewart

QUATERNION, FURMAN'S MOST SELECT HONORARY SOCIETY, CELEBRATES ITS CENTENNIAL.

SCHOLARSHIP. LEADERSHIP. CHARACTER. LOYALTY. These qualities, worthy of recognition in any individual, serve as the main criteria for election to Quaternion, the university's select honorary society for men.

Since Quaternion was founded by four students on November 27, 1903, 577 Furman men have been elected to the organization. An additional nine — professors, administrators and friends who have made lasting contributions to university life — have been awarded honorary membership.

Little is known as to why the four members of the Class of 1904 — Clement Furman Haynsworth, James Crawford Keys, Robert McHardy Mauldin and Ibzan Rex Rice — decided to establish Quaternion. But through the years its prestige has grown to the point that election to the society is now considered the highest honor a Furman man can receive.

On November 15, 2003, 68 members of Quaternion, representing classes from 1932 to 2004, were joined by 58 guests at a banquet commemorating the 100th anniversary of their august organization. Together they laughed, shared stories and celebrated both their common bonds and the history, purpose and sense of tradition that is Quaternion.

Indeed, only the *Bonhomie*, the yearbook first published in 1900, and the *Echo*, the literary magazine started in the 1890s, predate Quaternion as ongoing Furman groups. Senior Order, the corresponding organization for women, began in the mid-1930s.

The name Quaternion is derived from the Latin word “quattuor,” meaning four, which signifies both the number of original members and the qualities those selected are deemed to exemplify. According to a history compiled by Meredith Crowell '02, the founding members, all of whom were from South Carolina, were student leaders who were “members of the Adelpian Literary Society, involved with the Furman *Echo*, the university's literary magazine, and participated in Furman athletics.” They were “very active members of the Furman community, both while attending the university and as alumni.” In later years they would often invite members past and present into their homes for dinner and conversation.

The club they founded, however, had a fitful start, as it was inactive for four years after they graduated. In 1907, believing that the organization could, according to Crowell, “provide an important connection between alumni, current students, and the university,” they reactivated the group by selecting new members from the Class of 1908.

As Quaternion became more established, its existence became threatened by the board of trustees' concern about its “secrecy” and similarity to a fraternity. During negotiations with the board about the group's status, which lasted from 1915 to 1920, Quaternion continued to elect new members for each class except 1920.

Eventually it was reorganized, with board approval, as “a strictly graduate honor club in which members would be admitted only after final examinations in their senior year.”

From 1921 to 1932, Quaternion was officially an alumni group. But the board's concerns about campus societies soon abated, and Crowell says that “On June 1, 1932, Quaternion adopted a constitution that allowed the club to exist as two organizations, one graduate and the other undergraduate. The latter organization would be composed of no more than four men from both the junior and senior classes. In addition to these two groups, the club also selects honorary members who display significant loyalty and service to Furman.”

Election procedures have been modified several times since, but in recent years Quaternion has adhered closely to the guidelines established in 1932.

Each spring the incumbent Quaternions — four seniors — gather to choose the new class. The deliberations can be grueling; members have been known to agonize for hours over their choices. In the end, they elect four students from the graduating class and four from the rising senior class.

The process helps to ensure that Quaternion is not simply an old boy's club or a group of friends electing other friends. More accurately, it is a diverse, loosely organized group of men who are chosen by their peers on the basis, first and foremost, of their love for alma mater and selfless contributions to university life.

As James C. Edwards '65, Quaternion member and longtime Furman philosophy professor, has said, “The organization represents more of a bond to Furman than it does a bond between other members.”

Perhaps the most public role Quaternion has played in the university's storied past is in the preservation of Old College. Three times in the last 100 years, Quaternion has stepped forward to save the building, which was the first facility constructed on the downtown campus after Furman moved to Greenville in 1851.

According to Crowell's history, much of which was culled from Quaternion records and from the minutes of trustee meetings, “On June 7, 1910, President [Edwin McNeill] Poteat proposed to the Furman Board of Trustees that the then unused [Old College] be torn down. The next day, Quaternion founder and Board member C.F. Haynsworth proposed that Quaternion take over the building as its meeting place. Trustees passed this resolution with the condition that the club would repair the building and care for the premises surrounding it. Quaternion members immediately spent \$500 redecorating the interior, while leaving the outside unchanged, intending to preserve the building ‘as a relic.’”



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Current members of Quaternion from the Class of 2004 are, front from left, Brandon Inabinet and Ben Davis; back from left, David McGill and Patrick Kerley. They are charged with electing new members for induction this spring. Opposite: Quaternion has stepped forward three times to ensure the preservation of Old College.



FOUNDING FATHERS

What do we know about the founders of Quaternion, those far-sighted gentlemen from the Class of 1904? Steve McKinney '82, the organization's president, researched their post-Furman lives and provides these tidbits:

■ **Clement Furman Haynsworth** (bottom) attended law school at Harvard before returning to Greenville, where he joined his father's law firm and enjoyed a distinguished career.

■ **James Crawford Keys** (second from top) was a business and civic leader in Greenville and was founder of Keys Printing Company, which remains a highly successful local enterprise.

■ **Robert McHardy Mauldin** (second from bottom) worked for the J.E. Serrine engineering company in Greenville before moving to Charlotte, N.C., where he was affiliated with Saco-Lowell Shops. He served as chair of the Charlotte School Board.

■ **Ibzan Rex Rice** (top) was a captain in the artillery in World War I and later founded Rice-Cleveland & Company, a chain of general merchandise stores that served mill communities in and around Greenville.

Not long thereafter, in 1919, Furman once again considered demolishing Old College, this time to make room for a new residence hall. But Quaternion pushed successfully for the building to be moved to another location on the downtown campus.

In 1958, as Furman prepared to move to its new campus on the outskirts of Greenville, Crowell reports that "Quaternion was responsible for deciding the fate of its Old College headquarters. After deliberating on the issue, Quaternion decided to move the building . . . taking responsibility for all aspects of the second move, including funding and selecting a site . . . which they did with help from campus architects. The cost of the move was \$2,687.28, not including landscaping and parking for the building."

Today Old College stands near the Bell Tower on the north side of campus. New members receive a key at their induction — although they are no longer required to whitewash the building, as was the custom in earlier days.

Through the years members of the society have been among the university's most distinguished alumni and generous supporters, and the club has donated time and resources to various university projects. Its current emphasis is tied to one of Furman's greatest needs: scholarship support.

Quaternion has a long history of providing scholarship aid to Furman students, and as part of its 100th anniversary celebration it has worked diligently to boost the Quaternion Scholarship Fund, which was established in 1979. The group's efforts are paying off; thanks to the generosity of more than 90 percent of the club's members, the fund has surpassed \$300,000 in cash on hand and, counting deferred gifts and estate plans, has more than \$1 million

pledged. While continuing to raise funds toward its cash goal of \$500,000, Quaternion has also amended its scholarship agreement to state that the future purpose of the award will be to support first-generation college students.

Since its establishment 100 years ago, Quaternion has stood for such standards as service, involvement and commitment to Furman. Not surprisingly, its roster is dotted with names that read like a Who's Who of Furman history: Plyler. Blackwell. Johns. Riley. Selvy. Floyd. Shi.

This spring, the names of eight more young men will be added to the select list. They will wear the traditional red bandana, receive their key to Old College, and sign the roster that contains the name of every member elected since 1903. And they will know that, in the eyes of their peers, they embody the finest traditions of scholarship, leadership, character and loyalty to Furman.

As for the rising seniors in the group, they will have the pleasure of representing the start of a new era for Quaternion — the second hundred years. ●

To make a donation to the Quaternion Scholarship Fund, call Betsy Moseley '74, director of planned giving, at (864) 294-3491 or e-mail her at betsy.moseley@furman.edu.

In addition to Meredith Crowell, Steve McKinney '82, Si Pearman '87 and John Roberts contributed to this article.