

A Letter from the President

For a number of years a group of us who study the early confraternities--mostly in England and Italy--had been meeting at various conferences to exchange ideas. We invariably expressed the need to keep in touch more efficiently with each other, and to reach out to others who have similar or related interests, especially in geographic and linguistic areas different from our own. We had come to realize that the history of cultural, social, and political institutions in Europe from at least the Middle Ages to Early Modern Times is inextricably bound up with the developments we study in confraternal life. Further, we saw that what we do bears comparison with the work of others who deal with the rise of military orders at the time of the Crusades, the evolution of legal and penal institutions, the transformation of European dramatic traditions in the New World, the processions and plays of the Iranian Shiites, to name but a few topics.

Then, a most welcome event took place. In the spring of 1989, through the good and gracious efforts of William Bowen and Konrad Eisenbichler of Victoria College (University of Toronto), a conference dedicated to confraternity studies was held for the first time ever in North America. Under the title "Ritual and Recreation in Renaissance Confraternities," an international gathering of social, art, and political historians; musicologists; and literary scholars discussed their work with groups in England, Italy, Germany, France, Spain, and Belgium. The sessions were intense and congenial, and we found that we had more to say to each other than time allowed. Our informal discussions led to the foundation of the Society for Confraternity Studies.

The Society aims at facilitating communication among its members. It maintains a central archive (see below), publishes a newsletter, arranges special sessions at already established conferences (see below under News). It also plans to develop an electronic bulletin board, and keep in contact with other groups studying confraternities (such as the researchers at the Centro Ricerche di Storia Religiosa in Puglia, see below). New endeavours will be added in future and announced in this newsletter.

On behalf of the founding members of the Society I invite you to join with us and keep in touch so as to share our interests and work on confraternities. The 1990 membership in the Society has been set at a mere \$6. Subscription to the newsletter, *Confraternitas*, is included with the membership. To help us build up a comprehensive mailing list of scholars from all fields of research and from all geographical areas, I ask you to send in the names and addresses of colleagues and friends whom you think would be interested in the Society and its activities.

Best wishes to all for a rewarding and exciting year of research and work on confraternities.

Kathleen Falvey, President, SCS