

The Vidocq Society

“Cuisine & Crime-Solving,” the description on the Vidocq Society’s website, can be misleading to the casual web surfer. Rather than a group of gourmets with a casual interest in unsolved crimes, the Vidocq Society is comprised of some of the world’s foremost criminologists with an intense passion for their profession. What started twenty years ago as three colleagues meeting over lunch to discuss case details and exchange anecdotes of past investigations has blossomed into a full-fledged member organization dedicated to assisting investigators across the country. The society is named after Eugène François Vidocq (July 24, 1775 – May 11, 1857), a French former-criminal who is credited as being the first private detective and the father of modern criminology.

With 84 full members and more than 100 associated volunteers, the Vidocq Society is a voluntary brain trust of retired and working criminologists that meet the third Thursday of every month to assist in the investigation of cold-case murders from all over the country. Meetings take place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. As of 2008, the society consisted of members from 17 U.S. states and 11 other countries. Membership is limited to 84 full members, one member for every year Vidocq was alive. However, the society also relies on the assistance of volunteers with particular skills that could help in the investigative process. Additionally, the society also relies on volunteers to manage their website and assist in the publication of the *Vidocq Journal*, published at least four times a year. Membership in the society is closed when there are 84 members. When a Vidocq Society position becomes vacant, existing members must sponsor a membership candidate. Furthermore, prospective new members must come from a pool of volunteers who have previously provided crime-solving skills that the society used to advance an investigation.

The Vidocq Society restricts the cases it investigates to cold-case murders, meaning that the murder must be unsolved and at least two years old. Only law enforcement officials are permitted to present cases to the Vidocq Society, and before a case is presented at a monthly meeting, it must be submitted and pass through a two stage review process. When a case is presented at a meeting, it is presented to all the members present. Case presentations conclude with a call for members interested in jointly assisting the investigation. In some instances a “working group” will assemble to conduct a more intense investigation.

The Vidocq Society has 501(c)(3) status, its members do not receive compensation for any of the services they provide, and all services are provided pro bono. Furthermore, the Society pays the travel expenses of the visiting law enforcement officials that present their cases at monthly meetings. Additionally, to the extent they are able to, the society provides finances and resources to these law enforcement officials in order to further their investigations. The society relies on donations from public and private entities for funding. Additionally, each member pays annual membership dues. In 2008, membership dues were \$100 per member. Furthermore, the society is reportedly funded in part by a \$1.3 million film development deal signed with Danny DeVito’s Jersey Films. In its 2012 Form 990, the society reported revenue of \$79,257 and expenses of \$68,637. \$40,495 of its reported revenue came from contributions and grants, and the bulk of remaining revenue is attributed to program service revenue.

References:

<http://www.vidocq.org/support.html>

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https://bulk.resource.org/irs.gov/eo/2013_07_EO/23-2662036_990_201212.pdf