

THE STORY OF LOUISIANA LODGE OF RESEARCH

By

William Jules Mollere, P.M.

Baton Rouge Lodge No. 372

September 2, 1989

Baton Rouge, LA

It was a hot summer day in July 1982, at the Baton Rouge High Twelve luncheon where I finally had the courage to ask R:W: Ray W. Burgess, Grand Junior Warden of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of the State of Louisiana, Free and Accepted Masons, the questions that had been whirling around in my mind for two weeks. "Brother Burgess, why doesn't Louisiana have a Research Lodge and why don't we allow Class Lodges?" Bro. Burgess looked over at me, took a deep breath and pointed that expressive finger at my chest and replied, "You obviously know the answer to those questions already, why don't you tell me."

The question of Class Lodges and groups such as Table Lodges were reserved for another period of discussion and debate, but the idea of a Research Lodge became a quest for answers.

Thus began a three-year discussion on the merits of developing a forum where Masons could have a point of focus for scholarly talks on philosophy, esoteric doctrine, history, and heritage. Whenever we could get together and talk about the need and worth of a Research Lodge, Bro. Burgess guided and moulded my thoughts on such an organization. When the time came for him to be elevated to Grand Master in 1985, and lead the Grand Lodge, Bro. Burgess appointed a "Committee to Study the Feasibility of Organizing a Lodge of Research" and named me Chairman, and my long-time friend, Brother Ballard Lee Smith, Vice-Chairman. Bro. Smith had long shared a love of Masonic research and Masonic book collecting. His library and Masonic jewelry collections are very select and probably priceless. Bro. Smith, who is an accountant and CPA by training and vocation, worked to draft the first set of by-laws while, I had the pleasant task of writing to all of the other Research Lodges in the country requesting information. The Southern California and the Southern Arizona Lodges initially supplied a great deal of information. The Texas Lodge of Research supplied the most helpful material. It was almost as if Texas wanted to repay Louisiana in forming our Research Lodge as Louisiana had helped Texas organize its Masonry. It was a rewarding experience contacting Masonic research organizations throughout the country. All were helpful and encouraging. "Whatever you need" and "How we can help" were the two most frequent replies. Masonry in action - extending that helping hand of assistance.

The first year the Committee asked the Grand Lodge for acceptance of a structure - a lodge without the rights of conferral of degrees or duty to pay assessments to the Grand Lodge. The second year saw the report of by-laws and officer arrangement. The third year saw the report to organize and charter. Each year the Grand Lodge enthusiastically supported the concept of a Research Lodge, so no opposition was expected. The third year something incredible happened - the vote of the Grand Lodge was "NO" on formation.

Bro. Smith and I could not believe what we had heard. A "no vote" for a Research Lodge was a vote against motherhood, apple pie, the American way. It was Bro. Burgess who again came over with the steady, seasoned hand. Although he was shaking his head in disbelief, too, he said that some bad information had been circulated. Many of the delegates had been led to believe that the Research Lodge would be an "Inspector General" office for the Grand Lodge. People would come around to check on things and report back to the Grand Master. There was the idea, too, that such a Research Lodge would cost the Grand Lodge money - at a time when there was a budget crisis in every aspect of Louisiana Masonry. Brother Ray's advice was just like the song, "pick yourself up, dust yourself off and start all over again." We did. We went back to the trestleboard and studied our design.

At the next Grand Lodge session, 1989 in Baton Rouge, the Committee was ready. It had done its homework - talked to the District Deputy Grand Masters, Lodge officers, general membership, as many as we could talk to and explain the purposes. The vote was taken on the formation and chartering - unanimous! The new Grand Master, Most Worshipful Eugene Love, was a Masonic researcher in his own right and he wanted the Research Lodge chartered as soon as possible.

He allowed the newly created Research Lodge to solicit members from across the state. At one Grand Lodge Workshop in Baton Rouge in April 1989, the Grand Master announced that he was going to be the first to pay his dues in the new Research Lodge. Immediately 78 people stepped forward and gave their ten dollars for charter membership. The rush was so fast and furious that only 70 names were recorded that day - but there was money for 78! We did not find out who the other eight were!

The Installation of Officers in September, 1989 on Labor Day weekend is a shining day. To realize an idea that began in July, 1982 finally become a Lodge of Research was a magic moment. To have my brother Ballard Lee Smith in the West was a great pleasure. To have Most Worshipful Ray W. Burgess as the Installing Officer was a great honor. Something had been accomplished. It was not always easy, it was measured and studied. It was the Masonic way. So mote it be.