

A LOOK AT RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES FOR THE LOUISIANA LODGE OF RESEARCH

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The dictionary defines research as a diligent and systematic inquiry or investigation into a subject in order to discover or revise facts, theories, applications, and to make an extensive investigation into a matter thoroughly.

Masonic research is no different from any other, be it scientific, cultural, literary, academic, or culinary. Our Masonic brother, Charles H. Copestake, wrote a letter many years ago that was printed in "Miscellanea," a publication of the Grand Council of The Allied Masonic Degrees of the United States of America in 1958. Since this is one of the first talks to be given in our Lodge, I think it proper to give these four points in their entirety.

(1) It is the researcher's first task to find out all that has been published about his proposed topic. He does this by making a careful personal search of available library catalogues, indexes, and files of newspapers and magazines. It is also important to look for Masonic material that has not been published. I have underlined the words "personal search" to indicate that you don't throw this work at some already overworked librarian - who has far more important duties to attend. After you have compiled your bibliography of all books, etc. that you can locate, you may then circulate it among selected librarians and see if they have anything to add.

(2) Always keep in mind that research does not consist of reading several books, files of magazines and newspapers, and then copying material to make a paper. To most average Masons, anything of this nature would be news, but you are writing material that will be read by Masonic students and it would be trite stuff for them, and they would quickly label it for what it is - copying. The object of your trying to find out all that has been previously written and published about a topic is to give you an opportunity to find out if there is any phase of your proposed topic that has not been tackled before, or if there has been incorrect material published that needs correcting.

(3) Always remember citations from other writers' publications are used for the express purpose of supporting or explaining what you are writing about. They are not the material of your paper.

(4) Before trying to write a research paper, you need to make a study of how it should be done; you need to acquire at least a working knowledge of basic reference books, and where they are most easily available to you for reference; i.e., your public library, the state library, university libraries, etc. You will find that the subject of research has been handled in good shape by some of the state colleges. Masonic research is not much different from any other type of research. You use the same methods and tools only the subject matter is different. I have endeavoured to keep these suggestions down to simple terms - don't get discouraged. Remember it has taken several of us some thirty years of close study and research to get to where we are, and none of us are ever in a hurry to break into print.

Research projects have no end of possibilities.

This is the advice of Brother Copestake. These instructions point out the level to which we must aspire in order to be a real Research Lodge. Those of us who wish to write correctly, it may take several years before we start to produce worthy papers. I may be incorrect, however, because we are in the middle of the most fertile field of material anywhere in the country. Our Louisiana heritage is derived from the West Indies, the Grand Orient of France, Pennsylvania, New York, and probably others. We have lodges that spoke French, English, Italian, German, Spanish, and other languages. Dominique You, Lafitte's gunner, was a Mason and is buried in New Orleans with a Masonic emblem on his grave. P. Francois Dubourg, brother of Archbishop Dubourg of the Roman Catholic Church at New Orleans was Grand Master. Lafayette visited Louisiana as well as Andrew Jackson. Oral tradition has it that Jackson rode a horse from New Orleans to Bayou Manchac to attend a lodge meeting. For years a building was called Old Hickory Lodge. It was claimed that it was erected on the spot of the lodge of Jackson's visit. I was in it many times.

The West Florida Republic was founded at St. Francisville on Sept. 26, 1810, which is the date of the Independence of the part of Louisiana on East of the Mississippi River except for New Orleans. It is said that a lodge was opened, much like the Boston Tea Party, and then the members proceeded to form the Republic. The table upon which the documents were signed is here in Baton Rouge. It has inscribed on its top a lone star that was the symbol of the Republic, predating Texas lone star by 26 years. These events should be researched and authenticated as much as possible to preserve them.

There are a lot of things I'd like to know. Was Lafitte a Mason? Was General Claiborne? Was there Masonic music from the early lodges from other countries? Were the Indians ever Masons? What is the history of Roman Catholics so far as Masonry in Louisiana is concerned? What were the early lodge meetings like? Did they eat, drink wine? How large were the lodges? All of the early minutes, probably in foreign languages, should be read and catalogued. Who can say how old they are? A study of all these minutes would be a treasure strove of material.

Where were the locations of the early Lodges? How did Masonry come to north Louisiana? The Civil War is filled with many documented accounts of Masonry right here. Are there more? I think all of us could compile hundreds of research projects. There is no end of possibilities.

Research Lodges are located in many states. Among the early ones were New York, Missouri, North Carolina, Oregon, California, Colorado, South Dakota, and others. Harry Truman was Master of the Missouri Lodge of Research while President.

Some things come to mind as a starting point that would help Masons acquire good research material. A bibliography of all material in the Grand Lodge library should be made. Every library in the state should be searched for Masonic material, books, and catalogued documents. This is not as big as it sounds if we get everyone involved. A report should be made of the available minutes of the early lodges. Later on a summary could be made of interesting facts found. Personal libraries of Masons could be listed. For instance, I probably have several dozen old books on Masonry as well as publications and writings of some individuals. Most of you have the same thing. Then all of this could be published and sold to those of us who want them. It would be good for all of us.

Perhaps we should find out what other Research Lodges have available. There are organizations we can join. I've already mentioned the Allied Masonic Degrees. There is also the Grand College of Rites. Both of these have publications that would interest us. They both hold dominion over many degrees so that they cannot be performed without authority, probably because we have enough degrees to keep us busy.

I've been excited by the prospect of this Lodge. I wish it had been started years ago. But here it is now. There are many closets to be opened, stones to move, dreams to make reality, and all our lives to search and enjoy. There is no end to this venture. It seems there are three stars in the sky for us to follow: Scholarship, Unselfishness, and Loyalty. There are many adventures waiting for us. The horn has sounded. The fox is in the woods. The horses are mounted. TALLY HO!