

A YEAR'S PROGRAM on MASONIC PHILOSOPHY

This is a true story. It is the report of a Masonic educational program carried out in 1964 by John C. Ayers Lodge No. 437 in Lake Charles, Louisiana, under the leadership of its Worshipful Master, William E. Holloway. Because of his interest and cooperation, the details of this report were made available to the Masonic Service Association.

Three features of this experience have prompted its dissemination as good and wholesome instruction to the Craft in general: (1) the size and location of the lodge; (2) the sharply focused objective of the program; and (3) its outcomes.

John C. Ayers Lodge No. 437 meets in a southwestern Louisiana city of approximately 65,000 people. It is far from a large metropolis like New Orleans with its extensive sources for Masonic materials and speakers. There are five Masonic lodges in Lake Charles, with three more close by. These lodges have a total of approximately 2 100 members. It was on this Masonic population that the Lodge depended for its program. It could not enlist "big names" for speakers. It had to draw upon "home town talent" almost entirely.

Five of these lodges are "young", having been founded in the last fifteen years. Their membership averages about 150. John C. Ayers Lodge No. 437 is the second smallest, numbering 137 in 1964. Obviously, it did not have the traditions and numbers of some of its sister lodges in Calcasieu Parish (County).

In 1964, however, it had a young and energetic Master, who seems to have had unusual loyalty to his Masonic mentors, sincere reverence for the ideals of our Fraternity, and considerable "missionary zeal" and charm in persuading others to undertake a yearlong adventure in Masonic education.

Worshipful Brother Holloway writes: "My father was the first Master of the Lodge when it was chartered back in 1952. He was a true Mason. As Master he had a wonderful year. I had some big shoes to fill."

Brother Holloway also seems to have been a realist. In looking ahead to his year in the East, he was apparently aware that he wasn't going to have a lot of degree work to do. Furthermore, the chartering of a new lodge in Lake Charles early in 1964 was going to cause a small loss in membership in John C. Ayers Lodge, for some of its members were going to be charter members of the new group.

His opportunity, he believed, was to improve the Masonic knowledge and understanding of his brethren. 1964 was to be a year of growth in Masonic wisdom and understanding, not in mere numbers of Masons. To that end he planned his program of activities for the entire year.

"I felt that the best thing I could do was to try and teach the philosophy of Freemasonry. Our nation was founded on the ideals of the Craft, and in recent years these ideals seem to be slipping away. This is what prompted such a program."

There will be those who find it difficult to believe that a yearlong program of instruction in Masonic philosophy is either desirable or practicable.

Worshipful Master Holloway, however, knew the brethren with whom he would be working, and it speaks volumes for their desire for Masonic Light that they "bought" it readily.

Having envisioned the program, Brother Holloway went to work. "Where was I to get material that would best teach the philosophy of Freemasonry?" He began a personal program of research which took him through such books as the Bible, Mackey's Encyclopedia, Pike's Morals and Dogma, etc.

"After much reading, I tried writing speeches that could convey some of the ideals of Freemasonry to my Brethren. After writing two or three, I talked with our Secretary about them. This is when I learned that he had a lot of helpful material from the Masonic Service Committee. Among them were a lot of Short Talk Bulletins of the Masonic Service Association. I stopped writing speeches; they were all done for me already!"

The next step was to select the subjects to be presented in lodge, and to arrange them in a meaningful pattern for the yearlong program. For this, the Worshipful Master called a meeting of all the officers of the lodge, during which the scheduled talks were selected and arranged. Out of this discussion also came the decision to print the entire year's program in advance, the only item of expense which this undertaking caused for the lodge.

The next (and probably the most difficult) step was to enlist the speakers and instructors who would present the talks on Masonic philosophy. Worshipful Master Holloway, however, was confident that it could be done. He had long been making notes of brethren in all walks of life, in all Masonic rites and bodies, who had the sincerity and Masonic zeal to help in such 'a program. He needed twenty-two such speakers, plus one who would be willing to conduct three quiz programs during the year, "to check on what the brethren were learning."

"I was surprised to find so many Masons willing to promote Freemasonry. We have an abundance of men willing to work only for the asking. I found out that we need to put more programs in service to utilize our great wealth of manpower.

"I selected twenty-two men who I felt would cooperate with me in presenting my program. I visited with each one of them. All were willing to do what they could for Freemasonry. Each one accepted the assignment of a talk I wanted him to give on a certain date. This necessary so that the program could be printed well in advance."

Jan. 6 Appointment of Committees / Announcing Program of the year

Jan. 20 Subject: "Masonic Education and Culture"

Speaker: Brother W. L. Chronister

Subject: "Why the Three Scriptures in Masonry?"

Speaker: Brother Emile J. George

Feb. 3 Grand Lodge Session

Feb. 17 Report of Grand Lodge / Subject: "Some of the Birthplaces of Freemasonry"

Speaker: Brother K. L. Hurlbut

Mar. 2 Subject: "The Nature of Symbols"

Speaker: Brother Matthew A. Grantham

Mar. 16 Subject: "Masonic Backgrounds"

Speaker: Brother W. S. Guillory

Apr. 6 Subject: "Light"

Speaker: Brother Mid Gibson

Quiz Program

Brother Mads L. Christensen

Apr. 20 Subject: "Hoodwink"

Speaker: Brother Billy Zeigler

May 4 Subject: "The Widow and the Craft"

Speaker: Brother E. R. Kaufman

Dinner: Covered Dish Supper - 6:30 p.m.

May 18 Subject: "A Living Perpendicular"

Speaker: Brother James Leithead

June 1 Subject: "The Significance of Numbers"

Speaker : Brother Joe Barbour

June 15 Subject: "The Five Senses"

Speaker: Brother K. Khoury

July 6 Subject: "The Broken Column"

Speaker: Brother Travis E. Galbraith

Quiz Program: Brother Mads L. Christensen

July 20 Subject: "Symbol of Industry"

Speaker: Brother U. E. Hackett

Aug. 3 Subject: "Moon Lodges"

Speaker: Brother Gorden Dey

Aug. 17 Subject: "Uniformity of Ritual"

Speaker: Brother E. Frank Keller

Sept. 7 Subject: "The First American Lodge"

Speaker: Brother H. H. Young

Sept. 21 Subject: "Our Attitudes"

Speaker: Brother Bob House

Oct. 5 Subject: "The Masonic Rod"

Speaker: Brother Walter Jessen

Quiz Program:

Brother Mads L. Christensen

Oct. 19 Past Masters' Nite and Re-obligation Nite

Speaker: M.W. Brother Howard Sigler, Grand Master of Masons of the State of Louisiana

Nov. 2 Subject: "The Church and Freemasonry"

Speaker: Dr. (Brother) T. V. Owens

Nov. 16 Subject: "Whither Are We Traveling?"

Speaker: Brother C. M. Moss

Dec. 7 Election of Officers / Review of the Year

Dec. 21 Annual Banquet and Installation of Officers

Installing Officer: Brother Caton Langston

One of the remarkable developments of this program was the very small number of speakers who had "to cancel out." It happened only twice during the entire year. On the first occasion, when the speaker was called away because of a death in the family, Worshipful Master Holloway had a "back up speaker" ready in the form of a tape-recording of Brother Emmett McLaughlin's address, "Freemasonry - America's Sleeping Giant." On the occasion of the second disappointment, the speaker who first had to "cancel out" was standing by, and gave the talk he had promised to give earlier in the year.

Naturally enthusiastic about their program, Worshipful Master Holloway and some of his officers made it a point to invite the members of other lodges to share in their educational experience. At District Meetings as well as at other lodge communications, members of John C. Ayers Lodge distributed copies of the program and gave brief talks about its features and purpose. Letters to other lodges were sent out

regularly, and an Attendance Committee worked hard to keep lodge members informed of the scheduled meetings. Such intra-fraternal "advertising" seems to have paid good dividends in attendance.

The community was also informed about the program. The Public Relations Committee chairman arranged with the local newspaper to run a short news article about each speaker two or three days before the meeting at which he was to appear. A photograph of the speaker was furnished whenever possible. The regular publication of pictures of so many Masonic speakers made a real "impact" on the community.

Appreciation to each speaker was expressed by the Worshipful Master through the presentation of a small ceramic emblem, the square and compasses, handcrafted by Brother Holloway's mother from materials he himself had purchased. These little items have become a highly prized rarity in the Masonic community of Lake Charles, Louisiana.

The highlights of this program, according to the Worshipful Master, were the Family Night on May 4 and the Re-obligation Night on October 19.

The covered dish supper on May 4 attracted the largest crowd the lodge ever had. Not only was the speaker's subject tailored to the occasion (he spoke on "The Widow and the Craft"); the Master and the Attendance Committee personally contacted as many of the members' wives as possible, to give them a special invitation. "Being a shift worker" says Brother Holloway, "I had time to call them during the day. I didn't depend on the brethren to tell their wives." DeMolay Boys and Rainbow Girls were invited to do the serving.

The most inspiring meeting was Past Masters' and Re-obligation Night, which also included the official visit of the Grand Master, M.W. Brother Howard M. Sigler.

"This presented something of a problem because we had so much on one night. But before hand, I talked the matter over with the Grand Master and found that we didn't have a problem at all. He made some wonderful suggestions which really made the meeting go. The Grand Lecturer was also there that night. He re-obligated the brethren, and that was very impressive."

In evaluating his year-long program, Worshipful Brother Holloway came to these conclusions: (1) Attendance at meetings was up 50% in 1964; (2) the program created interest by bringing more members together to discuss the ideals of Freemasonry; (3) it attracted other Masons because the number of visitors from other lodges increased markedly, and requests were made for tape-recordings of six of the speeches to be played in other lodges; (4) it seems to have given the brethren something they wanted - the philosophy of Freemasonry.

A year's program on Masonic philosophy in John C. Ayers Lodge definitely made an impact on the Masons of Lake Charles, Louisiana. Its success can be measured by the fact that the Grand Lodge Committee on Masonic Education valued it so highly, that Worshipful Brother Holloway was asked to make a full report of his program to the delegates at the Grand Lodge sessions in New Orleans in 1966. It was offered as "good and wholesome instruction" for lodge programming, as an example of what can be done when a specific goal is set and when lodge leaders have the determination and zeal to carry it out completely.