

THE ROYAL ORDER OF BARROW WHEELERS

By Woody Bentley, National Historian

Members attending their first National Convention or those who carefully read the schedule note a breakfast titled "Barrow Wheelers." Many of those and most members who have not attended a National Convention but have seen the schedule, wonder about the "Barrow Wheelers" also known as ROBW. The purpose of this article is to explain the ROBW and how a few members created an Order to promote recognition of National Sojourner members who go above and beyond in their commitment to the order. The information in this article is attributable to our deceased Brother John Cole, PNP/PNC Jack M. Marden, and PNP Brother Joe Ryland. However, I am responsible for any substantive errors.

The ROBW consists of 100 Sojourners elected by current members of the ROBW who determine that the member has contributed above and beyond the call of duty to our national organization. Each year, only enough members to fill the current vacancies are elected. Current members who no longer consider themselves to be active can elect Emeritus status and open up their position for a new electee. The symbol of ROBW depicts all that could be desired of a member; it depicts a man pushing a wheel barrow with an American Flag and a Sojourner Flag together with a load of material. The award consists of a pin, a wallet card, and a certificate. The initiation and presentation of the award is performed with a special ritual at the annual National Convention. The nomination and election process is carried out in the Spring of each year by the current directors.

The three founding Sojourners were: PNP LaVonn P. Lynn, PNP H. Edward May, and PNP Melvin W. Byers. Brother May was the 1973-74 National President and he proposed to Brother Byers who would be the NP in 1974-75 and to Bro. Linn who would be NP in 1975-76 that the Order be established. By letter dated June 21, 1974, signed by the three Sojourners, the Order was established. The award was to be made to members who had done outstanding work for the National Sojourners. Membership would not exceed 100 at any one time. Brother May selected the first member and each of the three, during his term as National President selected 33 more to be Charter Members. The award is based on Matthew Chapter 17: Verse 20, "And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief; for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you."

The Founding Directors are deceased. One Director, Daniel G. Cook, is now Emeritus. The Current Directors are Brother Jack M. Marden (Charter Member), PNP William G. Sizemore (Charter Member), and PNC George W. Allen.

Today, there are only six of the original 100 appointees that remain active: Gene Sizemore, Jack Marden, Chuck Folsom, Joe Ryland, Chuck Wallens, and Bill Koeckert.

In the beginning, the Directors choose the new individual Barrow Wheelers. That has evolved to the present system where the members submit nominations and all active Barrow Wheelers vote on them.

The Directors run the ROBW and pay all the expenses from their own pockets. Thus the order exists at no cost to NSI except the mailings. The directors choose their successors.

The ceremony is held only at National Conventions and there is a firm policy not to release copies of the ritual (written by Bro. George Cowan) to keep it that way.