

THE NATIONAL SOJOURNER HISTORIAN'S CORNER

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National Historian 2011-2014

INTRODUCTION TO THE NATIONAL HISTORIAN'S CORNER

There is no position description for the NSI National Historian, so one of my first tasks after my election in June 2011 was to consult several of the past National Historians to gain their perspective on the position. PP and Past National Historian Clarence Nelson was most helpful in giving me insight into the opportunities and problems in undertaking this job as well as the names and locations of some documents. After more research, I realized that the most important first step was to create a Master Inventory of Historical NSI Documents; as such a document did not exist. Visits to our National Headquarters and consultations with the National Secretary were of great assistance. There do exist two histories, one of the first 50 years of National Sojourners by Lavon Linn of which there are only a limited number of copies and one of the history of The Heroes of '76 by Clarence Nelson, now in its second edition and still sold by the National Headquarters. There are several compilations of various documents, one by John Cole on a number of topics and one on the Heroes of '76 by. There are two volumes by Basin on the first two hundred Masons, which includes many Sojourners.

The administrative documents at the National Headquarters are filed in various ways which are not always conducive to research. The best documents available to study a particular Sojourner year include the National Sojourner Magazine issues for that year, the Convention yearend report, and the Convention Souvenir Book. The Report provides the summary reports of the officers and committees for that year, as well as data on membership and chapter openings or closings. The Sojourner Magazine provides updates from some of the officers, reports on chapter and camp activities, and other information. The first issue of the Sojourner Magazine after the annual convention provides the only summary report on each convention and the election/appointment of officers to various positions. There are copies of the charters of all chapters, but these are in some disarray and may not be complete. The size of the Headquarters staff does not allow for the most careful filing of historical documents. There are copies of Chapter and Camp reports, but since all Chapters and Camps do not file on a timely basis or at all, these files are not complete. The most complete files are on current members and on deceased MIPs. The best current source for the names of all current and "in Memoriam" chapters and camps as well as past Presidents and Commanders and Award winners is the 2011 Membership manual.

The first task that I did complete which is posted in this section is the Master Inventory of NSI Documents. This document will assist both NSI members who are seeking more knowledge of

the history of the organization as well as giving any future National Historians a starting place for their own research. If anyone knows of any other relevant books or compilations of documents that should be added to this list, I ask them to pass the information on to me. I would also be interested to receive for placement into the National Historian files, any chapter histories that are in the hands of any chapter or member.

My next question of myself was “what can I do to provide timely and interesting information to our members for which they otherwise would not have easy access?” So my efforts this year will focus on two major areas: one is to prepare interesting summaries of activities and events in the history of National Sojourners and for publication in the Sojourner Magazine and/or place them into the web site Historian’s Corner. Because there is always limited space in our National Sojourner Magazine, longer articles will be placed onto the web site. Second, using the just completed year 2010-2011 of Past President Harry Sanders, I will attempt to complete a sample annual history that will utilize both the documents described above as well as the personal memories of those who were active officers during that year. If this sample history proves successful, it will at least give us a start toward carrying our history forward as well as a path to researching past years for a more complete history. All of my efforts will be focused on providing members with information which will make their current membership more interesting and relevant. I welcome any suggestions, information or assistance which will help me in these tasks.

I can be contacted by email at nationalsoj@juno.com.

PUBLICATIONS ON NATIONAL SOJOURNER HISTORY

Prepared by S. Woodruff Bentley, Sr. National Historian

This page contains a master list of previously published documents that contain a wealth of information about National Sojourners. Some of the items are out of print and some were only issued in limited copies. If anyone has a copy of any of the items except the two currently in print and would like to contribute them to our National Library, please send them to me. I am also interested in copies of any chapter or Heroes Camp history published by a chapter and would appreciate a copy of any such document being sent to me. Attached to this document is the current updated summary which was started by Col. Beny Rosaler. If anyone has any information on other such compilations to add to this inventory, please contact the National Historian at nationalsoj@juno.com.

Fifty Years of National Sojourners by LaVon Parker Linn, published about 1970. It has been out of print for many years. There is no master copy at NSI Hqs. If anyone is willing to donate a copy, it would be appreciated.

History of the Order of Heroes of '76, Vol. I – From the Beginning – Through 1995, Prepared by Clarence M. Nelson 32 Degree, National Historian, Copyright 1995 by National Sojourners, Inc, Library of Congress Catalog Card 95-071534. Reprinted 2nd Edition.

Heroes of '76 Miscellany, Edited by George S.M. Cowan, Jr. M.D., National Commander, Heroes of '76, 1990—1991. Private publication of about 20 copies in June, 1991. This is a collection of material on the Heroes of '76 from a variety of sources including information about the origins of the organization, early rituals, and a great deal of interesting information.

Sojourner Tales by John Cole, a loose-leaf book, published in 2008 by Walter Reed Chapter #303. Contact Lew Numkin. They may still have a few copies left. This is an excellent source of reference material on a number of items of Sojourner history.

Military Masonic Hall of Fame 1975 – First One Hundred, Edited by Capt. R. E. Bassler, USN, Ret. Capt. Bassler is in the picture of the initiation of President Harding. Contains information on the first 50 years of Sojourners and then the brief biographies of the 100 selected individuals.

Military Masonic Hall of Fame 1980 – Second One Hundred, Edited by Capt. Robert E. Bassler, USN, Ret. Contains listing of National Presidents and Commanders, and the brief biographies of the second one hundred individuals.

National Sojourners Membership Directory 2011, Printed by Harris Connect, LLC. Contains information on NSI, Award Winners, National Officers, and a listing of Chapters (active and In Memoriam as well as the current membership and a deceased member section. Available from NSI Hqs.

Summary of National Sojourners History, original dated 1967/68., Compiled by Col. Beny Rosaler, Chairman Training and Education Committee, coordinated with Col. Lavon P. Linn, National Historian. Updated 2012 by S. Woodruff Bentley, Sr. National Historian.

Jan. 12, 2012

SUMMARY OF THE HISTORY OF NATIONAL SOJOURNERS, INC.

The original writer of this document was Col. Beny Rosaler, then Chairman of the Training and Education Committee with the assistance of Col. LaVon P. Linn, then National Historian. It was approved by Col Ray J. Cunningham. A copy was provided to the current National Historian Woody Bentley by the late Joe Illes, former Trustee and President of NASOCOCO. All significant changes or additions made by me are marked with an asterisk and a reference to a source. For the list of source documents referenced by the name of the author, refer to the Master Inventory of NSI Documents found on the NSI web site.

THE NATIONAL SOJOURNERS INC. has a military Masonic history unequalled by any other fraternal organization in existence today. For half a century, it has provided an organization where travelling commissioned officers and warrant officers of the Armed Forces can maintain friendly relations with their Masonic brethren in the United States as well as overseas.

BORN OF THE REQUIREMENTS OF WARTIME, the current organization originated after a series of meetings in 1917 of officers in Chicago during WWI. The organization dates its

official continuous existence from its first formal meeting on February 28, 1918. At this meeting officers were elected and the organization was named the “Sojourners Club composed of officers and former officers of the various uniformed services of the United States. While some have claimed the origin dates back to another war, the Spanish-American War, two decades earlier, there is no formal proof of that link *(Linn).

AT THE CLOSE OF THE WAR WITH SPAIN, our troops in the Philippines, supplemented by reserves and replacements, became an occupation force. The military Masons began to seek each other’s company for common counsel, aid, and advice, and for the deep satisfaction stemming there from.

A GROUP OF THESE MASONIC COMMISSIONED OFFICERS, as early as 1900, organized an informal club and gave it the name of “SOJOURNERS.” This is a term commonly used in Masonry to describe a Mason who is away from his home lodge. This group provided the interest and impetus as well as the funds and paraphernalia, for the establishment of a Masonic Lodge in the Philippines. It was created under a charter granted by the Grand Lodge of California on 10 October 1901. (Nelson)*

THE LODGE THUS CREATED BECAME in 1913, Manila Lodge No. 1, under the newly established Grand Lodge of the Philippine Islands. Dr Eugene Stafford, 33 of Rome Lodge No. 746 in New York City, one of the original “Sojourners” and wartime Army Captain (surgeon) became the first Master of the Manila Lodge and the first Grand Master of Masons in the Philippine Islands.

WHILE THERE ARE SOME WHO CLAIM THESE AS OUR SOJOURNER ANCESTORS, PNP and Past National Historian Clarence M. Nelson has advised that after careful research these early Sojourners have no connection to the body created in 1917. He carefully reviewed the complete roster of all of the members of the Philippine Sojourners and found no connection. (Nelson)*

AFTER THE U.S ENTERED WORLD WAR I in 1917, the American Expeditionary Force was formed and dispatched to Europe. Additional Sojourner Clubs were quickly organized at Army posts and military bases. The name was created by adding the word “National” to the name taken by the Manila club at the turn of the century.

AT WAR’S END, IT WAS MANDATORY that the National Sojourners sharply delineate its character and purposes in order to justify its continued existence as a national organization, useful to Freemasonry. That it was able to do so was a tribute, not only to its sound beginnings and excellent wartime record, but also to the ability and dedication of such early leaders as Major General Amos A. Fries, USA, Admiral R.E. Coontz, USN, Major General John A. LeJeune, USMC, Surgeon General M.W. Ireland and Colonel George Unmacht, National Secretary for over 35 years.

THE FIRST CONSTITUTION WAS ADOPTED ON 11 JUNE 1919 and has, of course, been altered considerably. Important changes include those providing for better accomplishment of the Annual National Program and for the appointment by the President of the Chairman of National Committees and Area and Regional Representatives.

THE NATIONAL EMBLEM OF THE SOJOURNERS was designed in the early 1920s by the officers on the staff of General Wood, Major Lee and Colonel Wildman. It clearly reflects the nature of our organization. The eagle suggests the military, the square and compass symbolize our Masonic ideals, and the 13 stars recall our original colonies and our glorious history and heritage. The words “Ex Oriente Lux” tell us very clearly that “Light comes from the East.”

THE WORD “CLUB” WAS DROPPED FROM OUR NAME by the Convention of 1927. We became “National Sojourners,” and have used that name ever since. It was also at the 1927 Convention that General Fries delivered his splendid statement of our spirit and purposes.

IN SHORT, YOU HAVE JOINED AN ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO Masonic ideals, proper reverence to Deity, and proper respect to the emblem of our country, and to the promotion of patriotism, strong national defense, and fellowship and good will among officers and warrant officers who are Masons. As a new member, you have a wonderful opportunity to improve your chapter and yourself through participation in Sojourner activities. We hope you will do your best. Your record will be what you make it.

THE COMMITTEE OF 33 was first appointed by General Fries who served as National Sojourner President from 1922 to 1930. As General Fries recommended, 11 members of this committee are selected each year. The committee serves in an advisory capacity to National Officers, represents the chapters, and helps to insure continuity of policy and to guard against hasty or ill-considered action. In its first report, the Committee stated that “as Sojourners, we are pledged to the ideals of patriotism and to the security of the nation.” Forty-one years later, that statement still stands as a clear summery of the spirit and purposes of our organization. (John Cole).

THE SOJOURNER, the official publication of the organization first appeared in November 1924, and has been continuously published ever since. It furnishes, on a bi-monthly basis, instructive articles and information on the chapters and National Officers.

THE HEROES MEDAL appears to have been created by the approval of the National Convention in 1929. There appears to be some question as to the original intent that it may have been to identify the Past National Commander. However, sometime after that, the medal came to be worn by all Heroes. There is one version of the badge that exists with a “blunderbuss” rather than flintlocks; it is currently on display in the Collingwood Museum. (Clarence M. Nelson).*

THE ROYAL ORDER OF BARROW WHEELERS was established on June 21, 1974 by then NP H. Edward May, future NP Melvin W. Byers, and future NP LaVon P. Linn (All deceased).

The award was to be made to members who had done outstanding work for the order and membership would not exceed 100 at any time. Bro. May selected the first member and each of the three, during their term as National President selected 33 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.”* In other words, no matter how large the problem, even a mountain can be moved one barrow load at a time. The award consists of a pin, a wallet card, and a certificate. The insignia of the Order depicts a man pushing a wheel barrow with an American Flan and a Sojourner Flag together with a load of material. Each year, members are asked to nominate new members whose names are sent to the current members. Enough are elected to retain an active membership of 100. Members may elect to move to emeritus status when they are no longer active to open up slots for new recognition. Recognition is given to the new selectees each year at a breakfast at the National Convention. (John Cole)* The current directors are Daniel G. Cook, PNP Jack M. Marden, and PNP William G. Sizemore.

THE OLD GOATS recognition tradition was started at the National Convention in 2000 at Norfolk, VA. Lady Joan McNoldy recognized Brother Bill Hodges as the first member of this select group of Sojourners. One is selected each year as a Sojourner unlike any other. Angela Stonebraker took over this responsibility in later years and the tradition continues. (John Cole)*

NATIONAL PRESIDENTS are currently elected annually. This has not always been the case. The first National President was BG Samuel C. Stanton 1921-22. Presidents after him served terms of varying lengths. The longest serving National President was MG Amos A. Fries, LOH who served from 1922 to 1930. It appears that the current practice on one year terms began with BG Henry G. Mathewson 1947-1948. (2011 Directory)*

THE ONLY US PRESIDENT TO BE A NATIONAL SOJOURNER was President Warren G. Harding who was made a Sojourner on May 28, 1923 by then National President Major General Fries. (2011 Directory)*

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