

A Chapter from Masonic History...
MASONRY IN NEW ORLEANS
by Martin E. Kranz

It was Brother H. L. Haywood who wrote in his book, *Wellsprings of American Freemasonry*: "To all full time students of Masonic history, Louisiana has in it more satisfactions for the intellect than most of the forty-nine American Grand Jurisdictions. From 1791 until the present, it has been a laboratory in which the questions which a Masonic historian is compelled to study have been submitted to all manner of test. You can see them actually at work, and how they work out; elsewhere he must study them more or less as abstractions."

Freemasonry in New Orleans came from two directions, one from the French and the other American. However, both had a common source-England.

Freemasonry was introduced in France about 1726 by Englishmen. From France it quickly spread to the French Colonies, especially in the West Indies, and from there to Louisiana.

The two oldest French speaking Lodges in New Orleans were Parfaite Union (Perfect Union) and Etoile Polaire (Polar Star.) The Masonic work is now being done in English. Of course, there were other Lodges that had been formed early during the French regime, but most of them were merged with other Lodges.

Freemasonry came to colonial America from England and, of course, from colonial America into Louisiana, but it was only after the Louisiana Purchase that Freemasonry began to flourish and become widespread.

The old city of New Orleans was what we commonly refer to as the French Quarter. The correct identification is the Vieux Carre, which means the "Old Square."

The oldest Lodge in Louisiana is Perfect Union No. 1 in New Orleans. It was originally a French speaking Lodge and was named "Parfaite Union." It was the successor Lodge of the following Lodges: La Parfaite-Union No. 29, Reunion des Coeurs No. 68, Concorde No. 83, Concorde No. 177, Concorde No. 3, Bienfaisance No. 1, Louisiana No. 1, Harmony No. 122, Harmony No. 26, Louisiana No. 170, Orient No. 173, Dudley No. 66, Orleans No. 73, and Orleans No. 76.

The records indicate that on April 28, 1793, Laurant Sigur presided over a meeting of fourteen Masons in the city of New Orleans for the purpose of organizing a Masonic Lodge. Many of these Masons had fled from the islands of Santo Domingo and Guadeloupe in the West Indies from whence they were driven by the Negroes who revolted against the French Government.

An organizational meeting was held May 19, 1793, and the officers were elected. Two petitions were received, and at the next meeting, June 9, 1793, the petitioners were initiated.

A charter was received from the Grand Lodge of South Carolina, and on March 30, 1794, Jason Laurence constituted the Lodge as Parfaite Union No. 29. After the Louisiana Purchase, a Grand Lodge was formed and a charter was granted to the Lodge. It became La Reguliere Lodge Parfaite Union No. 1; when it changed its work to English it became Perfect Union No. 1. Out of this Lodge Ionic No. 374 and Euclid No. 394 were formed.

In 1794 several Masons held a meeting and formed a Lodge which they called Etoile Polaire (Polar Star.) These Masons applied to the Grand Orient of France for a charter. However, the Grand Orient of France was suffering from the political upheaval occurring in France, and it had suspended its labors. They then applied to La Parfaite Sincerite, the Provincial Lodge at Marseilles, France. A provincial charter or dispensation was granted in 1796.

Dominique Mayronne was authorized to deliver it, constitute the new Lodge, and install its

officers. On December 27, 1798, Polar Star Lodge was formally constituted. Later, the Grand Orient of France resumed its functions, and acting on the petition it received in 1794, it granted a charter to Polar Star Lodge in 1804.

These two Lodges did their work in French, which was a common language and was used in keeping the records of the Lodges. This factor developed fraternal relations and good will.

Another factor that forced them to work together was the clerical and civil opposition to Freemasonry. Masons were looked upon as heretics and devils.

Spanish and French Rule

Louisiana was governed by the French or the Spanish. Both countries were subordinate to the Pope of Rome, and all of their laws were subservient to, and could not conflict with, the Canon Law of the Roman Hierarchy or the Vatican State.

Therefore, under the French or Spanish rule, Freemasonry had to exist underground. In order to have Lodge meetings, the Freemasons went outside the ramparts of the city to meet. Their first meeting place was located on the site now occupied by Etoile Polaire (Polar Star) Lodge on Kerlerec Street, about one block from what was the corner of the old city proper.

Louisiana Purchase

In the beginning, Robert Livingston, the first Grand Master of New York State, was instructed (by President Jefferson) to buy the Floridas and, if possible, the city of New Orleans.

It must be remembered the Floridas extended from what is now the state of Florida all the way to Mississippi Valley. (It is for that reason that the Parishes of Louisiana east of the Mississippi River to the boundary of the State of Mississippi are referred to as the "Florida Parishes.")

Benjamin Franklin, active and able Freemason, rendered valuable assistance to Robert Livingston in accomplishing the purchase of Louisiana. Brother Franklin was well liked by the French, particularly the Freemasons. He served as Worshipful Master of a French Lodge. It was Franklin's influence that finally closed the deal whereby the United States purchased the Louisiana Territory.

The Louisiana Territory was purchased in 1803. Therefore, all the people came under the laws of the United States Constitution. This brought with it freedom of religion and, of course, freedom for the Masons to meet within the city of New Orleans itself. The Canon Law of the Vatican State and the Roman Hierarchy was no longer effective in Louisiana, and the Grand Lodge was organized on June 20, 1812.

It must be remembered that the people of the Old City of New Orleans spoke either Spanish or French or a gumbo composed of both. Those people who came here from the Colonies or from other English speaking places could not understand the French, and the French could not understand them. Antagonisms developed, and as a result, the English speaking people lived above Canal Street, while the French and Spanish lived below in what is commonly referred to as the French Quarter. By that time the population was increasing, and people were living outside the old city of New Orleans.

The city grew, both in population and area. As the population increased, the city limits expanded and took in plantation after plantation which became part of New Orleans. Most of the newcomers spoke English. As the population increased so did the number of Masonic Lodges.

The

history of Freemasonry in New Orleans is the history of the city itself.

Foreign Language Lodges

As immigrants came to the city from foreign lands, they brought with them their foreign

language. Many of them were Masons in the old countries and looked for a Masonic Lodge with which to affiliate in Louisiana. As a result, many foreign speaking Lodges were formed. Germania Lodge formerly did its work in the German language but changed to English because of the two World Wars with Germany. Etoile Polaire Polar Star) and Perservance Lodges did their work in French but have now changed to English. Cervantes Lodge still does its work in the Spanish language. (Editor's note: This history was printed in 1976.) Dante Lodge formerly did its work in the Italian language but has changed to the English.

Masons as Leaders

Freemasonry is proud of its many, many sons. They may be found in every profession, trade, or vocation. Invariably they are the leaders in their particular field of endeavor. Freemasonry is proud of her sons, and her sons are proud of Freemasonry for the lessons inculcated serve as an incentive for them to be better men tomorrow than they are today and to sincerely and earnestly endeavor to elevate mankind to a higher and nobler sphere of existence.

Reprinted from Masonic Americana-1976, pages 141-143...