

THE SPRIG

MAY 2013

ACACIA LODGE #94 ANCIENT FREE MASONS, COLUMBIA, SC.

Volume 18 Issue 5

2011 OFFICERS

David P. Stuard Jr. WM
Douglas Hall SW
Jeffery Hall JW
Art Ford Treas.
Jack Coker Sec.
Eric Crowe SD
Art Nebiker JD
Eddie Hill Stew
Howard Wood Stew
Wayne C Smith Jr Chaplain
Thomas Baker Tyler



DATES TO REMEMBER

Regular Business
Communication 5/2
Proposed Entered
Apprentice Degree 5/9
Proposed Master
Mason Degree 5/23

MAY BRITHDAYS

6 - Sinan Meric
11 - A. Christopher Austin
12 - Patrick Crowe
16 - Thomas Baker
16 - Alfred James
17 - James R. Turkaly
23 - John E. Benson
26 - Gary R. Baker
26 - Joseph Wallace
27 - Alan K. Dean
30 - Robert C. Wilson

TENDING THE WATCH FIRES by DAVID P. STUARD, JR. WM

Throughout its long and glorious history, the world's oldest and most revered fraternity has found itself threatened time and again by those who would see its elegant pillars toppled. From the violent assault upon our Grand Master Hiram Abiff, to the damning Papal Bulls of Clement V in 1312, and the terrible Friday the 13th that followed, to the rise of the Anti-Masonic Party in early 19th century New England, there have always been those who, driven by motivations as varied as their methods, sought to bring about the destruction of Ancient Freemasonry's symbolic temple. Some were desirous of our Order's secrets, others, perhaps fearful of losing influence, whether political or religious, sought to disparage or even destroy Masonry altogether. Philip IV, who championed the persecution of the Knights Templar in the early 14th century, may himself have been driven as much by his anger at having been rejected by the order as by his lust for their wealth.

Through it all, however, the Great Light of Ancient Freemasonry has ever been nurtured, kindled by such brave souls as would not suffer to see it extinguished. Though oftentimes driven into hiding by inquisitors and persecutors, even unto threats of torture and death, there remained always those who proudly stood together as brothers, and thus has our craft survived, albeit sometimes in secret. Now it seems that once again we Masons find ourselves under attack. Yet, unlike the storms we've weathered in the past, this time the enemy comes from within our own ranks. He is to be found in every lodge wherein rows of empty chairs now brood voicelessly where once crowded halls echoed with the sounds of joyous fellowship. Despite the best efforts of both Grand Lodge and local chapter, attendance to Masonic meetings is deteriorating, presenting a threat perhaps greater than any we have ever faced.

One can only speculate as to the causes behind this diminished showing. Family and work obligations notwithstanding, infirmity and poor health have taken their toll, preventing many from appearing who would otherwise gladly stand beside their brothers in lodge. Indeed, in recent years we at Acacia have seen several of our best carried forth into that undiscovered country, never to return, including such revered Past Masters as Worshipful Brother Wayne McKee, and the Right Worshipful Art Datnoff, who were my own instructors and who were largely responsible for the high quality of work for which our Lodge was once renown. Such men could be counted upon at every communication, leading by example and setting a standard for attendance and participation to which only our staunchest brethren still adhere. What might they say, if they could but see us in our present state?

As long as I am speculating I must give some thought to the possibility that perhaps I am partly to blame for the apparent unwillingness of many brothers to attend, brothers who, under previous masters were constant fixtures, regularly to be seen at each and every lodge assembly, however routine, but who now shun even our most special communications. In a recent conversation with a well-informed brother, I was reminded that during our 2008 elections, several brothers spoke out against my candidacy, brothers who are now conspicuously absent. At the time, I elected not to run, citing that among Masons there should be no contention, save that noble contention of who can best work. To be certain, I still feel this way. I would much rather sit in the South in a full Lodge, than preside in the East over a vacant one. I cannot, however be certain of the feelings of those brothers for whom only silent chairs now speak. For the good of Masonry and of this lodge in particular, I invite them to return, if only to make their feelings known.

More certain is it to speak of what is not the cause of our currently fading attendance. Recently some have blamed the quality of the work being performed in lodge for our failing numbers. This, however, is to place effect before cause, and to those who feel thusly

SICK AND DISTRESS:

W/B Don Michie
 Bro Roger Doyon
 W/B Hugh Bickley
 W/B James Neal



Don't forget to buy your tickets for our annual Fish Fry to be held at Acacia on Saturday, June 22 from 11 to 3. Tickets are just \$7 and include All-you-can-eat Catfish fillets, French Fries, Hushpuppies and Cole slaw. Contact our Junior Warden, WB Jeff Hall for tickets or more information. Bring the whole Family!

On April 30, Acacia will for the first time welcome the Square and Compass Club of the Midlands to our Lodge. Dinner starts at 6:30 PM and the opening gavel falls at 7:30. As always, all Master Masons in good standing are invited to attend.

I must ask, "Would it not be better to light a candle than to curse the encroaching darkness?" When a few true and noble Worshipful Brothers like Jack Coker, Art Ford, Richard Miner and Jim Neal must of needs find themselves cast in three and four different speaking roles, just to fill out a degree roster, it is a sign that something is truly amiss. These few, steadfast gentlemen have long manned the balustrades while their brothers fell around them. The fires dwindle. They call out for reinforcements.

Likewise not to be blamed is the fare. I have personally been to several of our local lodges and in this respect, I assure you, we stand better than most. Meals at Acacia functions are prepared by another true and faithful ally, Mrs. Carol Coker, who employs her own subtle method of "swelling our ranks". Those of you who have been in attendance know this; to those who have not, you are missing out! Come and see for yourself. Wear your stretch pants. (To Carol, as always, you have our undying gratitude.)

It seems dispiriting now to conclude that simple truancy is more likely the culprit, cutting us down as effectively as might a plague running through our ranks. So many, having earned the right to call themselves Freemasons, may have attained all that they desired when petitioning for admission, and thus are simply not compelled to devote any of their time or efforts to the fraternity. It is hoped that these are in the minority.

The book of Isaiah admonishes us to be repairers of the breach. Likewise, those who have studied Qaballah know that the light has not abandoned us, it is we who have turned away from it, even to our own detriment. Once, so many yearned for more light in Masonry that no brother ever found himself compelled by circumstances to repeat his term as Worshipful Master. There were to be found any number of brethren who were both qualified and eager to ascend to the East. Sadly, however, this is no longer the case. Attendance at Acacia has been steadily receding in recent years, such that, in just the past decade comprising my own membership, no less than four of our lodge's leaders have found themselves forced to reprise their roles as Worshipful Master. Beginning with Worshipful Brother Vernon W. Mahaffey and Worshipful Brother Ivan Wells, who each returned to the east after an interim, then to Worshipful Brother Rick Smarr, the first in nearly 100 years to be forced by necessity to serve two consecutive terms, and most recently with Worshipful Brother Jeffrey Hall who, upon standing down after only just completing two years in the east, finds himself yet again thrust to the forefront to bear our standard as Junior Warden. (Once more into the breach, dear friend.)

Now, I'm sure that you grow weary of my long-winded preaching, (perhaps one more possible reason for truancy?) so let me just remind you of the words of another brother whom I hold in the highest esteem, the illustrious Manly Palmer Hall, who, in his "Lost Keys of Freemasonry" written over 80 years ago, instructed his brethren;

"Yours is the glorious opportunity, yours is the divine responsibility. Accept your task and follow in the footsteps of the Master Masons of the past, who with the flaming spirit of the craft have illumined the world. You have a great privilege – the privilege of illumined labor. You may know the ends to which you work, while others must struggle in darkness."

In like manner, so do I appeal, nay, I beseech you to accept your task, and join us in lodge once more. Come and stand with some old friends who have so tirelessly kept the watch fires burning in your absence. Come and take up arms with the new guard, including Brothers Eric Crowe and Art Nebiker, your Senior and Junior Deacons, and Brother Eddie Hill, your Senior Steward, who even now hold their torches high and seek to rekindle Acacia's flame. They are studying hard and I know that they will both welcome and benefit from your wisdom and experience. Come and greet your recently raised Brother Randy Edwards, and our newest recruit, Brother Giff Carpenter who only this last Thursday was passed to the degree of a Fellowcraft, both of whom seem eager to take up their working tools. They'll be easy to spot. They're the ones holding the tinderbox and flint.

With sincere and earnest concern,
 David P. Stuard, Jr. W.M.

Life is just a candle and a dream must give it flame.