

History of Charleston Lodge No. 44

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At the time of the original capture of Guam by the American Forces in 1898, there was at least one Mason on the island in the person of an officer of the Spanish army who had been Master of one of the lodges in the Philippines.

There must have been members of the Fraternity among the first Americans who came to the island, but it was not until 1903 that any Masonic meetings were held, and that was when five Masons met at the home of one of them for dinner. In 1906 there was another meeting at which time the possibility of instituting a Blue Lodge was discussed for the first time. Brother Morris O'Brien communicated with the Grand Lodge of California regarding this question but the reply he received was far from encouraging; the Grand Lodge felt that due to the limited number of Masons on the island a lodge could not be properly supported. The matter was dropped for the time being and no further steps were taken toward organizing a lodge until 1917, when Brother Charles S. Lobingier, 33^o, Deputy of the Supreme Council of the Scottish Rite, passed through Guam en route to his duty station in China. Brother H. E. Marchant, who was stationed on Guam at that time, entertained Brother Lobingier during his brief stay, and matters regarding Masonry were thoroughly discussed, particularly the matter of bringing Masonry to the island. Due to the almost unheard of Protestant leanings of the natives,

it was realized that most of the work would have to be done by transient military personnel. Brother Lobingier exhibited great interest in the problem confronting the brethren in Guam and suggested the first steps to be taken should be the organization of a Sojourners' Association, and promised to use his influence with the Grand Lodge of the Philippines toward securing a dispensation to organize a regular lodge on the island.

The idea of organizing a lodge on Guam was received with enthusiasm by members of the craft then on the island, and a number of informal meetings were held at the homes of several of the brethren. At one of these meetings there were twenty-six sojourners present and it was then and there decided to formally organize a Sojourners' Association and petition the Grand Lodge of the Philippine Islands for the dispensation to organize a Blue Lodge. The name Charleston was requested in remembrance of the U.S.S. Charleston that brought about the surrender of the island during the Spanish-American War.

Acting under the authority provided by dispensation issued by the Grand Lodge of the Philippine Islands, the first meeting of the new Charleston Lodge was held on Monday evening, March 4, 1918.

The manner in which Charleston Lodge was constituted proves to be very interesting . . . on February 25, 1919, a cablegram was received from the Grand Lodge stating that

the Deputy Grand Master would arrive in Guam on the U.S. Army Transport "Sherman" to constitute Charleston Lodge No. 44. It was assumed that on March 1, 1919, Deputy Grand Master Ralael Palma would arrive and that everything would be conducted in the normal manner. Such, however, was not the case! The day before the ship arrived a radio message was received stating that because of the extremely short stay of the vessel in port, no passengers would be allowed ashore. The one alternative was taken, the Master and members met in the Captain's cabin aboard the Sherman, and there Charleston Lodge No. 44 was formally constituted, the only lodge, to the writer's knowledge, that has the distinction of having been constituted aboard an ocean going vessel.

Between the years of 1918 and 1944, Charleston Lodge No. 44 progressed steadily although not at a spectacular rate. It was during this period that the Lodge acquired a lot and a building in the city of Agaña which was to be Charleston's home until December 8, 1941 at which time, due to the invasion of Guam by enemy forces, the Lodge was forced into darkness until the island was again re-occupied by American Forces in 1944. The majority of the lodge furnishings and its building were destroyed as a result of the bombardment which preceded the re-invasion. Due to the critical shortage of essential building materials and other factors, Charleston Lodge was required to hold meetings in various temporary homes during the decade following its re-activation.

Through the combined efforts of all the Masonic Bodies in Guam, a

permanent concrete block two-story Scottish Rite Temple was completed in January 1955. This structure is now the permanent home of Charleston Lodge No. 44, as well as other active Masonic Bodies.

The main lodge room of this building is completely air conditioned and provides a seating capacity for approximately ninety (90) people with facilities for seating more on special occasions. The furnishings consist of upholstered theater-type seats that were bought through the donations of many of the brethren; the altar, is made of stained Narra wood and was imported from the Philippines and paid for by the Cecil Knepp Dieltenderfer Spring Reunion Class of 1955. This altar is beautifully ornamented emblematic of Blue Lodge as well as Scottish Rite degrees. The floor of the lodge room is completely tiled and the portion representing the pavement is laid in a mosaic pattern. The lobby of this edifice is ornamented with three large murals: The first mural depicts the front elevation of King Solomon's Temple, the second symbolize the Tabernacle erected by Moses and his people after their exodus from Egypt, and the third graphically represents a view of the Sanctum Sanctorum or Holy of Holies within the Temple.

The future of Charleston Lodge No. 44 looks bright, brethren, it ranks among the largest of subordinate Lodges, in total membership, and is in exceedingly sound financial ground; proving that fruitful dividends can be realized by the implementation of conservative policies which have governed this Lodge since its establishment.