REMEmBERING
ALEX R. JERNIGAN

An Involved Freemason

By Major Burrell D. Parmer

Alex R. Jernigan, born in Shreveport, La. in 1888, was a mechanical boilermaker with the Southern Pacific Railroad.

He graduated from high school in Shreveport where his father, Rev. Samuel Jernigan Sr. was principal and completed an apprenticeship course in steam fitting fundamentals at Tuskegee Institute.

For four years, he was a boilermaker apprentice at the former Lockport Naval Yard in Louisiana. Afterwards, Southern Pacific Railroad offered him employment as a mechanical boilermaker in Algiers, La.

In 1912, he was transferred to Houston and became the first Black to serve as a mechanical boilermaker of a round house, moving to San Antonio at short while later.

During WWI, he served in the U.S. Army attaining the rank of master sergeant and served as the non-commission officer-in-charge of American locomotives (boilermaker section) while in France. After the war, he returned to the railroad.

In 1922, the Masonic Hall located at 220 Chestnut St, now the headquarters of San Antonio for Growth on the Eastside (SAGE), was declared by the San Antonio Building and Zoning Commission to be in such disrepair it would have to be demolished or repaired within the next 10 years.

The hall was the home of the Beacon Light Hall Association and meeting place for Beacon Light Lodge No. 50, Lone Star Consistory No. 113, Moussa Temple No. 106 (Prince Hall Shriners) and many other Masonic organizations.
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Jernigan purchased the property and renovated the structure to meet building code standards and sold shares to Masonic organizations.

“This lodge hall is perhaps the only building in the area built by Blacks and continuously occupied as a lodge hall from 1908 to present,” said Jernigan’s daughter, Lena Jernigan Smith of San Diego. “The building stands on land deeded to a mulatto from Louisiana by the Spanish governor in the early 1800s.”

Jernigan’s long career in Freemasonry began because of his father who served as the Deputy Grand Master of Prince Hall Masons in Louisiana. Through his father’s urging, Jernigan petitioned and was made a Mason in Keystone Lodge No. 639 of New Orleans in 1908, further serving as Master of the Lodge.

When Jernigan relocated to San Antonio, he joined H.M. Turner Lodge No. 303 of the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Texas where he served as Master of the Lodge for 53 years. A 33rd Degree Scottish Rite Mason, Jernigan was a member of Lone Star Consistory No. 113 and served as District Deputy Grand Master of the 19th Masonic District for 20 years.

In May 1981, Jernigan decided to step down as Master of H.M. Turner Lodge No. 303 at the age of 92.

On Jan. 28, 1984, Jernigan was given a testimonial dinner by 33rd Degree Masons of John Griggs Commanders of the Rite.

Jernigan was a member of Antioch Baptist Church, senior deacon of the trustee board and a Sunday school teacher for more than 35 years.

After Jernigan’s first wife, Mary, died, he married the former Mattie Taylor of Giddings, Texas.

Jernigan died at the age of 97 on March 21, 1985.

He was survived by his wife; another daughter, Lena Belle McMillan; sister, Rachel Jernigan; three grandchildren; and one great-grandchild.
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“I decided to accept the fact that a man must be what he is, and life must be lived as it is. You cannot live at all if you do not learn to adapt yourself to your life as it happens to be.” - Alex Jernigan

Jernigan’s funeral services were held at Antioch Baptist Church with Rev. Claude W. Black of San Antonio Lodge No. 1 on program and Rev. J.J. Rector delivering the eulogy. He was buried with full Masonic honors in Southern Memorial Park. The arrangements were made by Lewis Funeral Home then located on 1207 South Hackberry Street.

According to Honorary Past Grand Master William Woods of San Antonio Lodge No. 1, Jernigan was a very influential figure in San Antonio and a Masonic legend.

“He was the lead on numerous Masonic ceremonies, laying many cornerstones throughout the city. He also served as the president of the District Past Master’s Council,” said Woods, who served as Deputy Grand Master of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Texas. “Nothing happened masonically in San Antonio without him being involved. He was quite a Mason.”

H.M. Turner Lodge No. 303 was consolidated with San Antonio Lodge No. 1 on April 26, 2002.

Maj. Burrell D. Parmer was born in Monroe, L.A., and enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps in August 1991. In 1997, he was commissioned a second lieutenant and entered the Field Artillery. In 2000, he began a career in Public Relations as the Public Affairs Officer for the Marine Corps Systems Command in Quantico, Va. During his tour, he graduated from the United States Defense Information School at Fort Mead, M.D and earned a Bachelor’s of Science Degree in Criminal Justice Administration from Park University. Maj. Parmer retired from active duty in September 2012 and began a career as the Public Affairs Officer for Navy Recruiting District San Antonio which area includes more than 34 Navy Recruiting Stations and Navy Officer Recruiting Stations spread throughout 144,000 square miles of Central and South Texas territory.

He is a Past Master of San Antonio Lodge No. 1 (Prince Hall Freemasons) and a Past Potentate of Moussa Temple No. 106 (Prince Hall Shriners). He is also the co-founder of the Noble Gentlemen of San Antonio, the Judge Advocate of the Fred Brock American Legion Post No. 828, President of the Claude W. Black Center Advisory Board, and a Board Member of healing souls, Inc., World LOLEI, Inc., San Antonio Black History Month Commission, and a member of Big Brothers/Big Sisters’ Military Mentoring Advisory Council.

Additionally, Maj. Parmer is the Public Relations Director for the Desert (State) of Texas (Prince Hall Shriners), Editor of the Texas Desert Traveler and Past Editor of the Texas Prince Hall Freemason for the M.W. Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Texas, Free & Accepted Masons.

He is a Gold Life Member of the NAACP, Life Member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and Life Member of the Disabled American Veterans.

In support of Military City USA, Maj. Parmer serves as a committee member of Our Community Salutes-San Antonio which hosts “A Night in Your Honor” on the campus of the University of the Incarnate Word to honor high school senior who will be serving in the U.S. Armed Forces. And he serves on the Celebrate America’s Military Week Committee and Military Affairs Committee sponsored by the San Antonio Chamber of Commerce.