

John Josiah Robinette

Toronto '26

Oxford Cup Roll N° 011

General acknowledgement that John J. Robinette has been Canada's premier legal authority may be the reason a rigid rule was broken, or at least significantly bent, when his Oxford Cup was presented at the 149th General Convention at Toronto's Inn on the Park, August 4, 1988.

From the inauguration of this award, there was a policy that the Cup can be presented only if the recipient is present to receive it. A few times, the Cup has been taken to some site other than a General Convention; and for various reasons some dignitary other than Beta's President has been authorized to make the presentation. But acceptance by proxy? Never! Well, so far, only this once.

J.J. had agreed to be present to receive the Cup. On the evening of the banquet his daughter Dale was there in his place reporting that much as it disappointed him, he was too ill to attend. She regretted this, too, for she agreed that he met the spirit of the award, having won much acclaim, that he had received other awards of prestige and that he was considered Canada's best-known lawyer. Too, this was Canadian ground, and this famed Canadian barrister seemed to be the logical guest of honor, only the third Canadian selected out of seven. So law was circumvented for the sake of homage to the law.

Born in 1906 and raised in Toronto, J.J. entered University of Toronto and was initiated into Theta Zeta chapter the same year. He was selected as the Gold Medalist in political science on graduation in 1926. On to Osgoode Hall Law School, and at graduation in 1929, he was recognized with the Chancellor Van Koughnet Scholarship. He remained at Osgoode and was a full professor of law until 1932. But he determined to build a law career second to none.

He argued so many cases before the Canadian Supreme Court that on retirement he was presented a set of printed case reports of the cases he had argued. *Six large volumes!* He was appointed King's Counsel in 1944; elected Bencher of the Law Society of Upper Canada in 1946 and in 1958 appointed treasurer of the same society, the highest office in the legal profession in Ontario.

Honorary degrees were conferred by Queens University and the Universities of Western Ontario, British Columbia and Toronto. In 1973 he received the Companion of the Order of Canada medal from the Governor General. He founded the Advocate's Society and was its first president. He represented Canada in one of the nation's most important constitutional decisions: approving the repatriation of the Constitution from the Parliament of Great Britain. And he continued as a loyal and enthusiastic Beta.

When the Beta Board of Trustees notified him that he had been selected to receive the Oxford Cup, he had replied quickly in grateful thanks and was looking forward to receiving it before such an international gathering of Betas. And so no matter what constitutional rulings in those six fat volumes might have applied in the matter of a proxy in this case, his daughter came to express his regrets and to speak eloquently on his life and work.

Robert T. Howard, DePauw '37, Historian