FRATERNAL ORDER HISTORY

Visitors to the Plainview Area History Center will find it hard to miss the eye-catching regalia and artifacts of former fraternal orders: Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF), Rebekahs women’s branch, and Masonic Lodges. Though all of these groups were closed in the early 2000s, we are fortunate to read about their rich history from a former member of the Rebekahs, Diane Lutke.

Check out page two for the information she shared about this unique slice of Plainview’s History!

UPCOMING EVENTS
Dec 3rd, 2022
Plainview’s Olde Fashioned Christmas
Open 1 pm to 8 pm

PHS 50th CLASS REUNION
On August 27th, a group of visitors from the Plainview High School Class of 1972 stopped in to visit the History Center. Many stories were shared about the Bates Candy Counter, and the Gem Theater. The group enjoyed the Plainview High School scrapbooks, uniforms, and memorabilia; then they reminisced about former teachers found in Plainview and Elgin yearbooks. The History Center volunteers were delighted by their visit and stories.
ODD FELLOWS, REBEKAHS, & MASON

By Diane Lutzke

The cover photo features the display of pictures and regalia from a rich history of Plainview's Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) and Masonic Lodges. The Odd Fellows is a working-class fraternal organization, including their woman's branch, the Rebekahs. The Masons are separate and mostly a businessman's fraternal organization and their woman's branch is Eastern Star. The original Odd Fellows and Masonic buildings (with a common stairwell) still stand at the center of town on West Broadway, between 3rd and 4th Streets. My narrative will focus on the Odd Fellows and Rebekahs, as I was a member and know it best.

The Odd Fellows Group originated in England in the early 1700s, as an assistance program for English miners. The first American lodge was founded in Baltimore in 1819 by Thomas Widley.

These groups generally offered person-to-person benevolence—kindness by offering whatever is within your means to assist others. Good deeds are performed without the expectation of recognition or remuneration. Prior to the beginning of governmental social programs in the 1930s, these organizations offered the only safety nets for homelessness, hunger, unemployment, abuse, and disaster.

IOOF lodges were always located near the center of communities. If you look carefully, you can still see an original town square building with "IOOF" or the three links embedded in the structure. A traveling member was aware that he or she could go to the center of the next town and find the IOOF to get food, water, shelter, or other assistance.

The Rebekah Degree, offering a branch for women, was written in 1851 by Schuyler Colfax (who later served as Vice President to Abraham Lincoln.) It was founded upon the principles of faithfulness, hospitality, purity, and dedication to the principles of the order, as portrayed by women characters of the Bible. The name Rebekah represents "Rebekah at the Well." It was an honorary degree for Odd Fellows to confer on their wives and daughters. Odd Fellows could also join.

The use of "secret" symbols and gestures was a form of communication between members, i.e. a white hankie laid upon the wrist of a Rebekah may indicate to the initiated eye of an Odd Fellow that she was in distress—being harassed or pursued or another predicament. After appropriate signs were exchanged, he would offer assistance. "Secret" hand signs and passwords were also used to prove membership for entering the lodge hall and meeting room. (Doors have sliding "peep holes")

Minnesota's first IOOF Lodge was formally opened in Stillwater in 1849. By 1917, Minnesota had 253 IOOF lodges consisting of 24,833 members.

Plainview's Odd Fellow Lodge was instituted in 1852 (six years before Minnesota was granted statehood). The Rebekah Lodge was instituted in 1897. Originally they met in the upper level of the Flrizzlaff Building at the corner of Broadway and Fourth Street. In 1901 they constructed their own building at a cost of $3,170.82. Membership topped out at 145 in 1920/21. It was very unusual for this working class in a small town to construct their own lodge building. Their original main floor tenant was Dickman's, a men's upscale clothing shop.

There were three globes on the exterior of the building painted with symbols of the three lodge groups that met there—the Odd Fellows, the Rebekahs and the Masons. Each globe would be lit corresponding to the group that was meeting that evening.
ODD FELLOWS, REBEKAHS, & MASON'S (CONT)

INSIDE THE MEETING ROOM

An open Bible was placed on the altar in the center of the lodge and the meeting opened with blessings for the widow, the orphan, the sick, and the grieving; followed by the Lord’s prayer. Other than this, religion and politics were never discussed during meetings. Members wore collars, sashes, or necklaces with metal “jewels” identifying the officeholder or regular member status. Initiation nights for new Rebekah members were formalized with members wearing white gowns or dresses.

The History Center display includes many of these items and the Masons’ altar.

Attention was called to needs within, and outside, of the community and members offered plans to address such needs. The local Odd Fellows once sponsored the Order’s “Pilgrimage For Youth” and sent a local student, Lucas Therneau, to a meeting of the United Nations in New York. In early years and into the mid 1900s, IOOF lodges built orphanages across the Country, including in Minnesota. Brian Young, formerly of Plainview, grew up in an orphanage. He recalls the loving kindness and goodies given to them by Rebekah volunteers. Plainview's lodge offered support and made cash donations to Minnesota’s orphanage. On a smaller scale, I once overheard Dallas Olson musing how often they had sewn Carnival Jim’s Britches, describing “patches over patches!”

During scheduled meetings, re-enactments were offered, with costuming and props, to remind members to live their lives as exemplified in the Biblical stories; that is with friendship, love, and truth towards others. To quell longstanding rumors, one such re-enactment involved the display of a casket and/or skeletal icons. This served as a reminder that man is mortal and, not material possessions, but good deeds towards others will live beyond the grave.

Grand Encampment is a higher degree of the IOOF for senior members who can pass their knowledge and expertise onto younger members. Its watchwords are faith, hope, and charity. They constructed and operate a youth camp for children who would not otherwise have an opportunity for a camp experience. The camp is called Fa-Ho-Cha, symbolizing faith, hope, and charity, and features typical camp amenities and activities. It is located on an island in German Lake near Mankato and is still in operation.

The highest branch of the IOOF is the Patriarch Militants. It was formed by a group of Odd Fellow Civil War veterans who donned their uniforms and marched as a unit in a grand parade. They were thereafter recognized as an official branch of IOOF in 1885. They provide a military-style display for local parades and honor guards. They were one of the few groups, other than the US military, who were allowed to place a wreath at the National Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Their watchwords are peace and valor. Their emblematic colors are purple and gold. The Rebekahs later formed the Ladies Auxiliary Patriarch Militants for women. Kenneth Stocker achieved this highest honorary degree and his uniform is on display.

Be sure to stop by to enjoy the relics of the Plainview fraternal orders!
CORN ON THE COB DAYS

The History Center opened its doors to visitors on Friday, August 19th and Saturday, August 20th from 9:00 a.m. until noon. Approximately 30 visitors stopped by to visit the many displays and requested help finding information about their ancestors. One particular visitor was passing through on his way back to Calgary, Alberta, Canada. He sought information on his great-great-grandfather, Mr. Levi Emery (5/18/1834 - 8/18/1895.) Mr. Emery’s parents settled in Highland township in Wabasha after arriving from New York. On May 26, 1861, he was the first man from Highland township to enlist in the Union Army. In April 1862, he was wounded, captured, then discharged for his wound at the Battle of Bull Run. Upon his return, he got married and farmed. Levi Emery is buried in Plainview's Greenwood Cemetery.

UNDERGROUND RAILROAD STORY PROJECT

The Underground Railroad Story Project is a collaboration between Whitewater State Park (Sara Holger, DNR,) the St. Charles Public Library, and the Plainview Area History Center. Its intent is to gather information from the public regarding the secret network of people and routes assisting runaway enslaved people to freedom, prior to the American Civil War. To date, no information has been compiled.

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