

Lodge life important to Bloomingtonians in 1900s

"Knights of Pythias and Red Men, Bloomington's two strongest fraternal organizations, united Sunday afternoon in a celebration of the laying of the corner stone of their new building. From every point of view the exercises were very successfully carried out."

— *Bloomington Evening World*, Oct. 26, 1903.

On the east side of the Bloomington square there is an imposing doorway flanked by two columns. Above the entrance is a stained glass window with the initials "IORM" and "KP."

The *Bloomington Evening World* of Oct. 26, 1903, considered the corner stone laying important enough to warrant a front page article with a wealth of detail. Perhaps that was because it was a period when lodges were extremely popular, because they gave their members a sense of purpose and belonging.

The 1900-1910 City Directory indicates just how popular lodges were. It lists the following: GAR (Grand Order of the Republic), Masonic, Odd Fellows, Knights of Pythias, Red Men, Eagles, Modern Woodmen, Elks, Maccabees, Court of Honor, Woodmen of the World, Knights of Columbus and Knights and Ladies of Honor.



LOOKING BACK

By Rose McIlveen

Essential to the lodge was a lodge hall, and the two groups — Improved Order of Red Men and the Knights of Pythias — had joined together in building a new one.

Their efforts culminated in a grand ceremony that attracted a lot of public attention.

The *Evening World* described the festivities. "The Red Men, two hundred and sixty-four strong, left their wigwam at three o'clock and marched south on College avenue to Third street and there formed in open order.

The Knights of Pythias left Castle Hall on Kirkwood avenue and marched through the line of Red Men, preceded by a platoon of police, the Bloomington band and speakers in carriages."

The most important people in the ceremony got to sit on a platform — building committee members, officers of both lodges and persons on the program.

According to the newspaper, there was an

invocation by the Rev. C.W. Whitman, who was a member of both lodges, and the musical number, "Joy to the World," was played by the band.

Then the program got down to specifics. Ross W. Davis, master of ceremonies, said, "Ladies and Gentlemen, my brother Red Men and my brother Knights of Pythias, we have gathered here today to lay the corner stone of this, to be, Fraternity Building. We come in the strength of the union of the two organizations, all intent upon the uplifting of mankind."

Davis explained that the Knights of Pythias was founded upon "the beautiful story of Damon and Pythias, a story most Christ-like in its conception and who have for our motto, Friendship, Charity and Benevolence, come as one of the strong, substantial fraternal organizations of our town.

There are enrolled under our banner, working for the elevation of mankind, 250 members."

Love of country was one of the principles cited by Davis. Referring to the American Civil War, he continued, "There is no North — there is no South, because of the strength in union. United as we are we can know nothing but success in our every undertaking." Davis

went on to say, "The secret in American life and prosperity is the close alliance between the citizen and the government under which we live and the interdependence and confidence such a relationship imposes." The Honorable J.E. Sedgwick of Martinsville, Great Sachem of the Red Men in Indiana, talked about the aims of that organization.

Said the *Evening World*, "He referred to the primitive Aborigines of the Western hemisphere who always remembered a kindness, who never forgot their friends and who always spoke the truth. He touched on their kindness to the early settlers of the country and of the treaty of William Penn."

Continuing, Sedgwick said, "The basic principles of the order today are to teach good citizenship, brotherly love and to eliminate selfishness from the world. The true Red Man will know and love his brother."

The crowd for the corner stone laying was estimated by the *Evening World* to be about 3,000.

The three-story building was to have a business room on the first floor and lodge halls on the other two.

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4/22/96