

# Now & Then in Ripon ... Looking back with the Ripon Historical Society

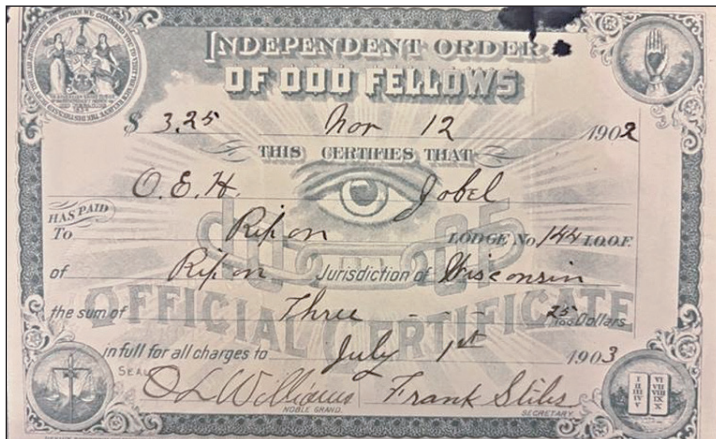
## Local lodge offered aid, fellowship in early days

By Pat Grahn

Fraternal organizations were popular in early Ripon. These organizations were comprised of people who came together to help others and for their own mutual benefit. Fraternal organizations provided their members with social support, networking and a sense of belonging. Many of them offered insurance or other benefits to members.

One of the early fraternal organizations in Ripon was the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF). The Ripon IOOF Lodge No. 144 was chartered in 1869. Like all early fraternal organizations, the Odd Fellows was open to men only. Wives and daughters of Odd Fellow members could join the Rebekah Lodge, a "separate-but-equal" auxiliary branch which was named after a Biblical figure. The Odd Fellows began allowing women to join the organization in 2000, however the Rebekah's still exists as a separate organization and currently allows both women and men to join. Ripon had the Pilgrim Rebekah Lodge No. 195.

The Odd Fellows is an international organization founded



**THIS 1903 MEMBERSHIP** certificate belonged to O.E. Herman Zobel (1847-1911). Zobel came to Ripon from Germany in 1860 and owned a grocery store with his brother. The certificate shows the two symbols of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows: a three-link chain with the initials "FLT" which stand for Friendship, Love and Truth and the all-seeing eye of God. The \$3 membership fee equals approximately \$100 today.

Its core mission is to provide mutual aid and community support through activities like "visiting the sick, relieving the distressed, burying the dead and educating the orphan."

It is likely that the name "Odd Fellows" came from the fact that the early members held "odd jobs," which did not belong to traditional guilds. It also could be because the organization's promotion of social interaction and mutual

help which crossed social lines was considered unusual at the time it was founded.

One of the symbols of the Odd Fellows is a three-link chain with the initials, "FLT," which stand for its principals of Friendship, Love and Truth. This symbol may be found on the graves of Odd Fellows members in Ripon-area cemeteries. Another symbol used by the Odd Fellows is the all-seeing eye of God.

The Odd Fellows called the buildings that served as their meeting place a "temple." Each Odd Fellows temple served as a local meeting hall, administrative center, as well as the social hub for not only the members, but also area community activities.

The Ripon Odd Fellows was first located in the National Bank building in the 100 block of Watson Street on the west side of Rotary Square. This building and the Ripon lodges' early records were destroyed by a fire in March 1882. Many later records of the Ripon Odd Fellows Lodge and Rebekah Lodge are housed in the archives of the Ripon Historical Society.



**THIS UNDATED CIRCA 1970s'** photo shows the Ripon lodge of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF), which purchased the 1870s-era building at 102 W. Jackson Street in 1920. IOOF utilized the second story for its organization's meetings and rented out the first floor for commercial use. The Odd Fellows remained in the building for 67 years. It now is occupied by Traded Treasures Thrift Store and Community Food Pantry.

After the fire, lodge meetings were held in several retail store buildings until the organization moved above the Barlow & Seelig hardware store at 214 Watson St. (This building burned in 1922 and was replaced with the Kohl Hardware Company store in the same location. Currently Farrell's Fine Furnishings is found in the building).

In 1920, the lodge purchased the building at 102 W. Jackson Street, built around 1870 for Byron Kingsbury (1835-1919), who ran a grocery store.

Kingsbury left Ripon in the late 1870s and the store was taken over by one of his employees, Alfred Bishop (1838-1906). Sometime around 1885, the building was remodeled into a cream brick Victorian Italianate style. Bishop ran the grocery until around 1910. The first floor of the building also had other uses, including a car dealership.

When the Odd Fellows took over the building, the first floor continued to be rented to various commercial businesses and the lodge utilized the second floor. This was a common practice across America and al-

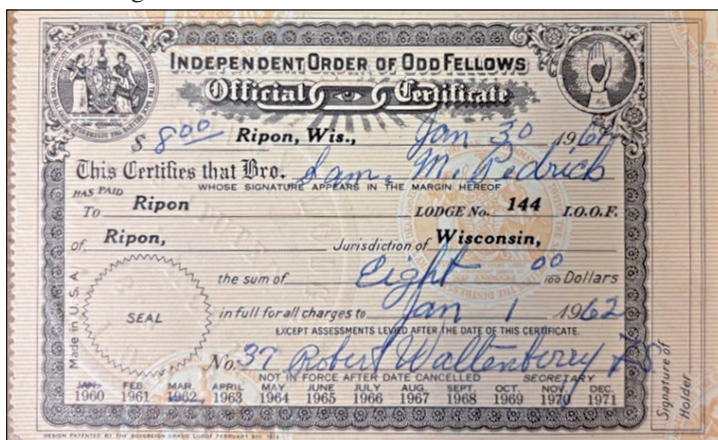
lowed fraternal organizations a steady income to help maintain the building and fund charitable activities.

The Ripon lodge continued to own the building and the last reference to the organization being active in Ripon was in a 1987 *Commonwealth*. Today, 12 Odd Fellows lodges remain in Wisconsin.

The Sept. 15, 1988 issue of the *Commonwealth Press* featured an article about Bill and Cari Hutton purchasing the Odd Fellows building at 102 W. Jackson Street and renovating it for commercial use. The building currently is occupied by Traded Treasures Thrift Store and Community Food Pantry. It is in the Watson Street Commercial Historic District and is on the National Register of Historic Places.

*The Ripon Historical Society is the oldest continually operating historical society in Wisconsin. It is open Fridays and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.*

For more information, visit [www.riponhistory.org](http://www.riponhistory.org), [facebook.com/riponhistoricalsociety](https://www.facebook.com/riponhistoricalsociety) or [instagram.com/riponhistoricalsociety/](https://www.instagram.com/riponhistoricalsociety/).



**THIS SMALL, WALLET-sized** 1961 Odd Fellows membership card belonged to Sam Pedrick (1868-1963). It shows membership cost \$8 per year (approximately \$89 today). Pedrick was an attorney in Ripon and well known as a local historian, helping to found the Ripon Historical Society in 1899. Most of the prominent citizens of Ripon belonged to at least one fraternal organization, such as the Odd Fellows.

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