

"Semi-centennial of the Salem Lodge, I.O.O.F., 1898"

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By Jay A. Graybeal

Prior to the availability of health, life and disability insurance policies, and Federal government programs, local government and civic organizations provided some assistance to the needy members of society. One such organization was the Improved Order of Odd Fellows which had numerous lodges throughout Maryland and the nation. Westminster's Salem Lodge, No. 60, I.O.O.F. built their hall at 140 E. Main St., also known as the Opera House. The organization celebrated its semi-centennial a century ago, as reported in the May 14, 1898 issue of the Westminster Democratic Advocate newspaper:

"FIFTY YEARS OLD

Salem Lodge, I.O.O.F. Celebrates Its Semi-Centennial With An Interesting Program

Salem Lodge, No. 60, Independent Order of Odd Fellows, this city, celebrated its semicentennial on Wednesday evening in their hall. The audience included some members of other lodges, and a number of ladies and other guests.

The exercises of the evening were held in the lodge room, in the third story. The visitors were received by George A. Miller, Ivan L. Hoff, C. H. Manning, James S. Baer, Jr., Basil Crawmer and Dohnea Nygren. B. F. Crouse was master of ceremonies, and at 8:15 he rapped for attention, and announced that the program would open with singing of the Opening Ode, inviting the audience to join the members. And they did, and the Ode was perhaps never sang louder and better in that room. Rev. P. H. Miller, pastor of Grace Lutheran Church, offered prayer, and Dr. J. W. Hering, who has been a member of the lodge for the past forty-three years, delivered an address on the principles and practices of Odd Fellowship. The address was entertaining and instructive to those not of the order, and he was given close attention. The Doctor, as usual on such occasions, threw in a little humor, which was much enjoyed.

Following Dr. Hering came a part not on the program, but was none the less enjoyed. It was a recitation by Jimmy Stoner, aged seven years, son of Mr. James M. Stoner. The little orator spoke distinctly, gracefully and well, and was enthusiastically applauded. His performance was very remarkable for one so young.

A very interesting part of the program was a history of the organization and progress of Salem Lodge, made by a committee consisting of Rev. Wm. A. Crouse, John Bernstein and Washington L. Brown, and read by Mr. Crouse.

Following is the chief part of the report:

First, we note that on the memorable 12th day of May, in the year of our Lord, 1848, the dispensation of a charter having been granted by the R. W. Grand Lodge of Maryland, a deputation of members from that honorable body, consisting of B. F. Zimmerman, R. W. G. Warden; G. W. Tewksbury, G. Secretary; William Bailey, R. W. G. Treasurer and John W. Walker, R. W. G. Marshal, met in the room of the Sons of Temperance, at the corner of Main and Court streets, in Westminster, when the following named brothers who had previously been initiated into the Order, by other Lodges, were organized into a body to be known as Salem Lodge, No. 60, I.O.O.F., C. W. Webster, Joshua Yingling, John W. Durbin, Richard A. Manning, C. A. Pool, C. A. Smelser and Josiah L. Baugher.

Then an election was held which resulted in the choice of Joshua Yingling, for N. G.; Josiah L. Baugher, V. G.; John W. Durbin, R. S. and Richard A. Manning, T., where upon the ceremony of installation was performed by which the elected brothers were inducted into their respective offices for the ensuing term, which-in those days - was three months. Thus the organization was completed, and the good work begun.

Then, the names of fifteen persons were proposed to become members of the Order, where upon the Lodge resolved itself into a committee of the whole, and reported favorably on the application of William Wolf, John M. Yingling, John Mathias and F. A. Sharrer. The Noble Grand ordered a ballot to be taken which resulted in the election of the before named candidates, all of whom presented themselves, and we regularly initiated, and thus gained the right to be hailed as Odd Fellows.

Thus the work auspiciously begun progressed, and other names were rapidly added to the roll until up to the present time we can count 525 names which by initiation, and depositing of cards have been connected with Salem Lodge. Of these, 70 have died as beneficiaries, and a number that we are unable to state accurately have withdrawn to connect themselves with other Lodges more convenient to their place of residence. At the present time there are 101 members, in good standing on the roll of the Lodge.

Finding the place in which the meetings were being held too circumscribed and inconvenient to accommodate the large number of members who regularly attended the meetings of the Lodge, it was determined to provide more commodious quarters, which determination resulted in the erection of the capacious and imposing structure which it is now our pleasure to own and occupy.

The Records do not furnish data from which we can give a report of the date when the foundation was laid nor of how much time was consumed in the erection of the house. From brothers who were connected with the Lodge at the time we learn that the whole cost including ground, building, and furniture was about \$9,000. In reference to the completion of the work of building, we find ourselves able to give a more satisfactory report, since in this matter the Records show a definite and full account of the event. From these we learn that on the 9th day of November, 1858, Joshua Vansant, G. M.; W. H. Young, D. G. M.; Richard Marley, G. T.; Jas. B. Eseaville, G. S.; William G. Sharrer, G. W.; James Johnson, Master of Ceremonies; A. Bossennan, G. Herald, A. Burdett, G. Chap; Benjamin Daffin, Assistant G. Herald, did dedicate the hall of Salem Lodge, No. 60, I.O.O.F., to the purpose of Odd Fellowship, and the diffusion of the principles of Benevolence and Charity. The expenses attending the dedication amounted to the sum of \$174.30, which amount was covered less \$9.50 by the proceeds of two concerts given by the Independent Blue's Band, of Baltimore city, of which Captain Holland was the leader.

We find nothing else of a historical character that we deem necessary to present here until we come down to the night of April 20, 1894, at which time a tornado swept over the Hall, carrying away the roof and demolishing a part of the wall. This occurred just about the time the Knights of Pythias, who occupied the hall on that night, had closed their session, four of the officers however, were still at their desk who were saved, as we believe, by Divine interposition from being crushed to death by the falling wall.

To these was gladness joined with sorrow, and now we look upon, what then, we regarded as a calamity as not altogether an unmixed evil, for without doubt some good had resulted from it, for in repairing the damage a number of desirable improvements were made so that we regard the building as more

convenient, and also more lasting. Thus the Lodge feels they received substantial value for the \$1,300 expended for repairs and improvements of the house.

Now we come to give a statement of the receipts and disbursements of the Lodge from the date of its organization to the close of the first quarter of the year 1898. In this paper we give only the gross amounts in each case, referring any brother who so desires to examine our itemized accounts.

The gross receipts have been \$73,957,023. Of this amount \$2,940.50 have been received from other Lodges to reimburse Salem Lodge for benefits paid to sick and needy members of these Lodges, placed under our care. For our own sick and disabled brothers there has been paid in weekly benefits the sum of \$21,079.24. Death and funeral benefits paid \$11, 558.67. Paid to brothers whose wives have died \$1200.00. Paid as capitation tax to the Grand Lodge of Maryland, \$3,424.62 1/2.

At the close of the exercises, which ended with the Closing Ode, ice cream, cake and other refreshments were served in the main hall. During the evening music was discoursed by the Westminster Orchestra, which added much to the enjoyment of the evening."

The report on expenditures clearly shows that the lodge made a significant contribution to the welfare of the brothers and their families.

Photo caption: The meeting hall of Salem Lodge No. 60, I.O.O.F. was built in 1854 at 140 E. Main St. in Westminster. This illustration was published in Vanderford's business directory in 1887. Historical Society of Carroll County collection.