

Did you know.....?

At one time, Hammonton was a hot bed of fraternalism.

In the late 19th and early twentieth centuries, there were a thousands of patriotic, fraternal and benevolent societies existing in the United States. Some of them were around for only a short time, and others are still with us today. Most of these societies can trace their origin to the mid 1600's in England when an Act of Parliament authorizing "Friendly " societies was enacted. These had as their main purpose the protection of the members through death and sick benefits. These, in turn, can trace their origin to the burial societies of the Greeks and Romans. Over time, some of these evolved into more political, social and special interest organizations. The origin of some of the special interest groups may be traced back to the purpose of the Medieval Guilds which was the safeguarding of a trade or craft. Some of the Guilds did have a benevolent side.

We do not intend to give a history of all the fraternal, patriotic, military and other societies that existed in the United States. That effort would, and has, filled many volumes. Rather, we will attempt to cover some of the Orders that were in Hammonton. These were, in no particular order, Artisans Order of Mutual Protection, Independent Order Of Odd Fellows, Improved Order of Redmen, M.B. Taylor Lodge, Junior Order of American Mechanics, D.A Russell Post GAR, Women's Relief Corps, Sons of Veterans, Iron Hall of Baltimore, Shield of Honor, Modern Woodmen of America. This does not take into account the Civic Club, Board of Trade, book discussion groups, and religious organizations. Perhaps the most telling difference between fraternal and business or civic organizations is a system of rituals for initiation and advancement. Most of these rituals were closely guarded and restricted to the membership.

Freemasonry is perhaps the most ancient society in existence today. A secret society rather than a "Friendly" society, it has given rise to several benevolent and protective societies. While not a fraternal order, in the strict sense of the word, it also promotes care for the sick and needy. We have included it here because of the profound effect it has on the rise of fraternalism. Freemasonry was introduced into the United States in 1749 in Rhode Island and Massachusetts. M.B. Taylor Lodge was founded in 1875 shortly after the incorporation of Hammonton. There is an excellent history of the Lodge written by one of the members so we will not re-cover that information.

The first notable offshoot of Freemasonry is the Independent Order of Odd Fellows in 1739. The use of odd in this context is that they were different than Masons not strange. As with most revolutionary efforts, there were growing pains. After many splits, schisms, joinings, dissolvings, unions, disunions, there emerged the Union (United, Grand United) Order of Odd Fellows from which most of the modern Odd Fellows Lodges depend. The founding of the American branch dates to 1819 in Baltimore where five

members of English lodges met and established Washington Lodge #1. All American Lodges can, with exceptions, trace their origin to this primary Lodge. There are a few who are directly chartered by Grand United Order of Odd Fellows.

The Order aims to inculcate truth, visit the sick, relieve the distressed, bury the dead, and educate the orphan. Its cornerstone is fraternity, and the motto on its banner is "Friendship, Love, and Truth."

Artisans Order of Mutual Protection was just as it sounds, a society founded to provide sick and death benefits to its members. The Hammonton Assembly was chartered on Oct. 9, 1890. Some of the leading lights of Hammonton were members such as Dr. J.A. Waas, D.S. Cunningham, Wayland DePuy and H.C. Pressey.

The Improved Order of Redmen can trace its origins back to the Sons of Liberty, founded c. 1763 as a protest against "taxation without representation". It was the Massachusetts branch of the Sons of Liberty which performed the famous Boston Tea Party. It also draws inspiration from the St. Tamina and St. Tammany societies. These were based on European understanding of aboriginal American traditions. Tamina was a chief of the Delaware Tribe and was one of the signers of the original Penn Treaty. Like the Sons of Liberty, St. Tamina and St. Tammany societies were primarily political organizations. The St. Tamina society was in existence in 1813 when at Fort Mifflin, several soldiers organized the Order of Redmen, drawing on the traditions of the St. Tamina Society. It wasn't until 1834, that the present form of the Improved Order of Redmen was established as a benevolent, protective society. It has as its motto "Freedom, Friendship and Charity". The Redmen Hall on Bellevue Avenue was the site of many meetings and socials. The commemorative stone may still be seen on the front of the building where Advocare has its offices.

The Daughters of Pocahontas was established as an auxiliary but in 1887 was incorporated as a separate Order, apparently named after the historical personage. Any woman of 18 years of age and of good character is eligible for membership.

Junior Order, United American Mechanics was originally established as a subordinate and feeding organization to the parent, the Order of American Mechanics. In 1885, it withdrew from the subordinate position to occupy a place of its own. The organization is primarily political, believing in education, separation of church and state, flying of the flag and the limiting of immigration. The word mechanics in the title have little to do with the occupations of the members, since any free, white "native" (meaning born in the US) American male between 18 and 50 may join as long as he is not involved in the liquor trade. Sick and death benefits are provided to all under 50.

Sisterhood Branch, Iron Hall of Baltimore was established in 1882 in Baltimore, MD on the foundation of an earlier Order of Iron Hall which went into receivership. It is strictly an insurance society with membership open to anyone who is white, over the age of 16, who believes in an Supreme Being and is able to earn a living. The sick and death benefits were ample and consistent with the times. There were also programs for saving and pension accounts. Women were accepted on the same basis as men and were eligible

for any office in the society. It seems, that in Hammonton, the majority of the members were women, hence the name.

Shield of Honor was established in Baltimore in 1877 as an insurance society through which the usual sick and death benefits were paid. Membership was open to any acceptable white man. The Doric Lodge in Hammonton had one of the early basketball teams and was quite successful and won most of its contests. There is one account that when playing a team from Egg Harbor, Hammonton refused to continue the game because of rough play. The contest was later scheduled and came to a useful conclusion (for Hammonton).

Modern Woodmen of America, established in 1883, was perhaps the most successful of any of the mutual protection societies. It gained and maintained this position by strictly regulating membership to men under 45 years of age and barring those in hazardous occupations from membership. This is not to say that there were not social and fraternal benefits to be realized by membership in the society. Later, there was established an auxiliary, Royal Neighbors of America, in which Woodmen and female relatives are enrolled as beneficiary or fraternal members.

Patriotic Order, Sons of America is primarily an organization promoting support for the Constitution, separation of Church and State, education, liberty and free elections. In these sentiments, it may trace its origins to some of the earliest patriotic societies dating to before 1770. Indeed, its sentiments parallel those of the Order of United Mechanics, Improved Order of Redmen, and others. The origins of the Order may be traced to 1847 as the United Sons of America. After a disastrous merger with the Sons of '76 (Know Nothings) it disappeared. Later in 1868, the order was revived in Philadelphia. It also has a fraternal side in that mutual assessments are made for sick and death benefits. Anyone who has seen the mural on the wall of TD Bank and wondered what it is may now be informed that it is indeed a representation of a photograph of a P.O.S.A. float in a Fourth of July parade around 1906.

D.A. Russell Post, GAR (Grand Army of the Republic) was established to honor those veterans of the Civil War from the Union side. The Post was quite active in Hammonton until the inevitable occurred. The aging of the membership started to take its toll. The last member of the Post, Casper C. Craig, died Jan. 29, 1935.

During its life, the Post played many roles in the celebration of the Fourth of July, various civic celebrations and last, but certainly not least, the activities of Memorial Day. These were elaborate affairs involving parades, speeches and visits to the several cemeteries. The imposing GAR Monument, located on the highest point in Greenmount Cemetery, was dedicated on September 28, 1895. It is worth a close inspection. The Women's Relief Corps was an auxiliary to the GAR and performed many social and civic duties.

The Sons of Veterans was formed as an adjunct to the Post and offered a way for the sons to further honor their fathers and to share in the celebratory functions. Both of these organization seemed to have ceased with the demise of the Post.

Many of these Societies and Orders ceased to exist because of changing lifestyles and political climates. Some of their ideals and functions were absorbed by political parties, business and civic clubs.

We trust that you have enjoyed a look into the past of our grand; great and great-great grand, parents in which fraternal organizations offered a way of protection and social life. It is interesting to note that from a reading of the membership of some of these organization, many men belonged to more than one. One could speculate how much business and "horse trading" took place at some of the meetings. Sort of predates our "Power Lunches" and rounds of golf. If you would like to know more about some of these organizations, there are several histories, cyclopedias, newspaper and magazine articles available.

From the files of the Historical Society of Hammonton.

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