

# Orleans group sought to ban booze

OVERLOOKED ORLEANS: I.O.G.T. aimed for total abstinence while also supporting women's rights

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ALBION — October is American Archives Month and is a wonderful opportunity to feature some of the collections within the Department of History.

Although the county historian maintains an extensive collection of published works, documents, photographs, ephemera, and other paper materials, a number of textile and 3D artifacts exist within the office. Among them, a "prize banner," awarded to the Orleans District Lodge of the I.O.G.T. recognizes the organization's membership growth during the 1908-09 year.

Established in 1850 as the Knights of Jericho by Daniel Cady, the organization merged the following year with a similar lodge from Oriskany Falls to form the Order of Good Templars. A schism in the organization in 1852 caused a number of members to form the Independent Order of Good Templars, renumbering Excelsior Lodge of Syracuse from Lodge No. 14 to Lodge No. 1.

Although it started as a fraternal organization, the I.O.G.T. mission spanned beyond abstinence from alcohol. The Good Templars fought for equal rights, "admit[ting] women on equal terms with men."

The Good Templar platform consisted of six points:

1. "Total abstinence from all intoxicating liquors as a beverage."

2. "No license in any form under any circumstances for the sale of liquors to be used as a beverage."

3. "The absolute prohibition of the manufacture, importation and sale of intoxicating liquors for such purposes."

4. "The creation of a healthy public opinion upon the subject; by active dissemination of truth in all the modes known to enlightened philanthropy."

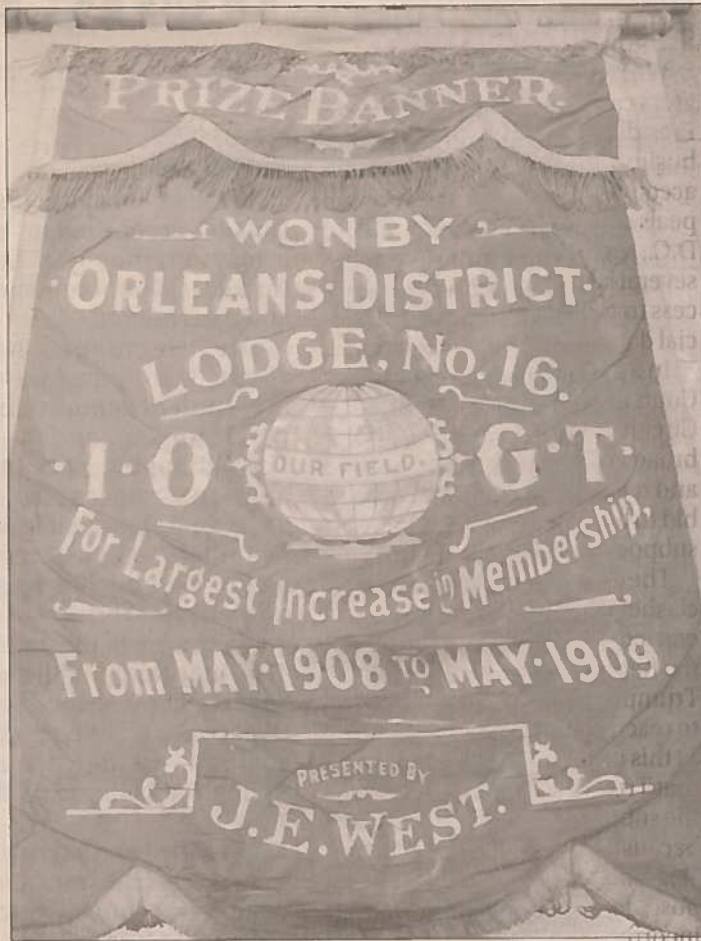
5. "The election of good, honest men to administer the laws."

6. "Persistence in efforts to save individuals and communities from so dreadful a scourge; against all forms of opposition and difficulties until our success is complete and universal."

According to a booklet published by Kendall Lodge No. 538 in 1899 entitled "31 Years of Good Templary," "We aim to save the young, pure and virtuous from falling into the snares of the tempter as well as helping those who have sunk low in the scale of human degradation to rise again." Welcoming men, women, and children alike, the I.O.G.T. believed that ridding the world of the wretched drink was a community affair. Drunkards posed concerns for local communities, unable to hold down a job, engaging in violence, and abandoning wives and children.

On one particular occasion, James O'Connell of Fletcher Chapel, a violence-prone farmer, went on a week-long drinking binge much to the chagrin of his wife. On Jan. 16, 1896, he told his wife he would visit the priest at Medina and "sign the pledge," turning his back on the alcohol. Instead he visited a gun store in the village and purchased a .22 revolver, returned home, and shot his wife in the head.

Although she survived the incident, she lived the remainder



SUBMITTED PHOTO

**An I.O.G.T. banner celebrates increased membership in Orleans County. The organization fought hard, but with dubious success, to stop alcohol consumption.**

of her life with the bullet in her skull. O'Connell spent eight years in Auburn Prison.

The particular banner in Orleans County's collection was awarded to Orleans District Lodge No. 16 on Sept. 11, 1909, just over 110 years ago. A joint meeting with Holley's Fountain Lodge No. 840 included the conferral of the organization's secret degree on 20 new members by Grand Chief Templar Ben Wright of Lockport.

J. E. West of Poughkeepsie was in attendance to present banners to three lodges with the largest net membership gain between May of 1908 and May of 1909. Holley's membership increased by 28 members, Kendall by 17 members, and Jeddo by eight members. This "beautiful new prize banner was presented...to Orleans District for making the largest net gain in membership for the year ending May 31, 1909.