

Bethinking of Old Orleans

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SPOOFING



Although we're just past April Fool's, that is the real essence of this picture which we might even say is odd. Yes readers, this is a spoof based on even and odd. Not odd, so much as peculiar, but odd as in uneven. So what's the spoof? Notice the flagon standing on the table. Lettered on the side of it, it states: "Even Fellows". You may think, so what! After all, there are four fellows in this 1890's photo and that's an even number. But let us remember the Odd Fellows. At the time this picture was taken, there were Independent Order of Odd Fellows Lodge in Holley, Albion, Medina, Lyndonville, and Kendall. Some of these lodges boasted several hundred members each, not to mention the Rebekahs which are the female counterpart.

Unlike the Elks, another benevolent and fraternal organization, the Odd Fellows were temperate in their orientation. In other words, there were no bar-rooms to be found in an Odd Fellows Lodge Hall.

The Random House Dictionary of the English Language 2nd Edition describes spoof as follows: 1. a mocking imitation of someone or something, usually

light and good-humored, lampoon or parody; 2. a hoax; prank 3. to mock (something or someone) lightly and good-humoredly; kid. 4. to fool by a hoax; play a trick on, esp. one intended to deceive. 5. to scoff at something lightly and good-humoredly, kid; (1852-90; after a game invented and named by Arthur Roberts (1852-1933), British comedian)

It is plain that these even good-humored fellows are kidding their Odd Fellow bretheren through this prank photo. Could they be Masons? Three of them are obviously wearing big rings which look rather suspiciously like Masonic fraternal jewelry, although the photo isn't quite clear enough to be sure. Note also, the abundance of front or head on each stein.

This picture from the Orleans County Dep't. of History archives was filed under Albion photos. Perhaps Joe Achilles, one of my predecessors, knew who these fellows were, but no one thought to write down their names, date or any information on the photo. Hence, all we have is the visual content which, although it is even, really seems odd. Truly, it is a wonderful piece of whimsical Americana.