

# Bethinking of Old Orleans

C.W.Lattin County Historian

Vol. XVIII

6-12-96

No. 24

## ODD FELLOWSHIP



The rare photo shown here, taken around 1915, is truly a unique piece of local Americana. It depicts a number of Odd Fellows dressed in ceremonial robes and hats for a ritualistic pageant. Although this was a secret ceremony, none of the symbology or secrets are divulged through this picture. However, at the time it was taken, the photographer who took it was probably an Odd Fellow. Note that many of the robes are heavily embroidered velvet. As you scan this picture, you'll notice a live donkey to the far left. The same man who is holding the donkey is also holding a goat, the head of which is barely visible in front of him.

I'm told that the Sovereign Grand Lodge of Odd Fellows never sanctioned the use of live animals in ceremonial pageants. However, they never disapproved either. In other words, the ceremony could have been adapted without animals. The lodge room where this took place was located on the second floor of the Odd Fellows Temple on Main Street in Albion next to the Swan Library. When such animals as a goat or a donkey were used in the ritual, they had to be led up the stairway.

Notice also the wall paper border above the picture molding. It appears to be a continuous landscape of trees along a lake's edge. The doorway to the far left led into the scene room where garments, props, and ceremonial accouterments were kept. The door to the far right was the main entrance to the lodge room. The lodge room was surrounded on four sides with a low dais upon which the furniture was arranged with stations of ceremonial chairs on each wall. Such a chair appears behind the man sitting in the center. An electric panel box of innumerable switches to control a series of lights mounted on the ceiling's beams, also appears on the back wall near the entrance door.

A picture like this is certainly indicative of a different perspective on life. It goes without saying that many people's expectations, interests and values have changed. Remember, these gentlemen are spending what we would call quality time together for leisure or entertainment purposes. In our computerized age, we think how bazaar! But to the men in the picture it was a way of life. The picture is one of brotherhood, acceptance, congeniality, community spiritedness, focused direction, orderliness and friendship, all values we can consider virtues.

Although Independent Order of Odd Fellows Lodges have waned drastically in our region, they

certainly have left their signature with us. Just visit an old cemetery and you are sure to see many headstones with the three interlocking links of chains and the letter F L T, standing for Friendship, Love and Truth. Architecturally, they have also left us with some very imposing buildings generally found in old business districts. This usually allowed for income property off the main floor level with lodge rooms above which helped safeguard the secrets of the order club rooms, social halls and dining rooms were often a part of such facilities.

The Independent Order of Odd Fellows was one of the country's leading fraternal organizations. It was founded by Thomas Wildey and others in Baltimore on April 26, 1819 with the benevolent purpose of rendering assistance to every brother in sickness or distress. The Rebekah degree for widows, wives, sisters and daughters was organized by Schuyler Colfax in 1851. He later became Vice-President under U.S. Grant.

The Albion Lodge IOOF was instituted in March of 1846 one-hundred-fifty years ago. Their first lodge hall was located in the Swan Block in downtown Albion and was fitted up for \$700.00 A fire destroyed the building in 1882 but when it was rebuilt, the Lodge took very commodious quarters there on the third floor where the Town Club is now located, in the Marine Bank building. In 1907 the Lodge built its own Temple next to the Library at 6 North Main Street.

As a benevolent Order, they have maintained old folk' homes throughout the country. In a booklet of IOOF By-Laws printed over sixty years ago for Lodge No. 58, we find this information:

"The order is democratic in its government, but not in a political sense, and the majority rules. It is a fine school of oratory, and a good place to learn parliamentary law, and presents a broad field for usefulness and improvement to young men. All move upon a common level, and social and fraternal ties bind them into a common brotherhood.....None are rejected because they are poor, or admitted because they are rich. All honorable trades and professions are represented---farmers, laborers, mechanics, merchants, lawyers, doctors, clergymen, and members of all religious and political creeds. The Order teaches the highest morality, is the friend of religion, but is not sectarian. It teaches patriotism, but not politics. It is the foe of vice, the friend of virtue and the protector of the innocent and helpless."