

Elk's Home Has Been a Social Center of Community for Half a Century

Local Lodge Has Made Many Valuable Contributions Toward Town's Progress

By Bernard E. Esters

It is an interesting coincidence in this Sesquicentennial year of Houlton's history that the Houlton Lodge of Elks, although it was first organized here in 1903, marks exactly half a century of occupancy of its home on Main street. For all that time this spacious and well appointed building has been a social center within the community.

The inauguration of the Elks Lodge, No. 835, in Houlton, came about, it can be assumed, through the need of socially minded men to have a means and a place to mingle together for sociability and good fellowship.

EIGHT FOUNDERS

Soon after the turn of the century there were eight men in Houlton who had become members of the Bangor Lodge of Elks. The trip to the Queen City was a somewhat more arduous journey than it is today and not one to be indulged in too frequently. Gradually finding it more and more inconvenient to take advantage of the facilities of the Bangor lodge, these men conceived the idea of forming a lodge in Houlton.

George A. Russell is generally given credit for being the principal instigator of the idea. Associated with him were S. H. Hanson, then editor of the Aroostook Times, J. B. Buzzell, proprietor of the Exchange Hotel, George T. Holyoke,

in the insurance business, Martin Lawlis, later to be High Sheriff, J. A. McLean, associated with the Snell House but later to move to Eugene, Ore. to amass a comfortable fortune, Don O. Pool, about whom little is known and C. Harry Wheeler who for several years was steward of the club.

PETITION FOR CHARTER

This group of founders managed to interest many prominent Houlton business men of their day and finally a group of seven submitted a petition to the proper authorities which was favorably received. The petitioners were: Don A. H. Powers, R. W. Shaw, J. A. Browne, R. L. Turney, George T. Holyoke, F. E. Gray and S. H. Hanson.

The Grand Exalted Ruler of the order that year was J. T. Fanning and it was he who granted the petition for a charter making it possible for Houlton Lodge No. 835 to be officially instituted on March 10, 1903 in the Odd Fellows hall. There were 29 charter members who made up the first membership and the evening was concluded with a sumptuous banquet at the Exchange Hotel.

The charter members were: Frank Blethen, J. A. Browne, O. B. Buzzell, William F. Buzzell, Charles Carroll, R. J. Cochran, Dr. T. S. Dickison, W. F. French, L. B. French, F. E. Gray, S. H. Hanson,



This well appointed home of the Houlton Lodge of Elks is still one of the finest in New England, after over 50 years of service to the local lodge.

H. J. Hathaway, G. T. Holyoke, J. W. Inman, F. F. Innis, Harry Kinney, Martin Lawlis, L. O. Ludwig, F. W. Mann, J. A. McLean, D. O. Pool, D. A. H. Powers, G. A. Russell, R. W. Shaw, W. F. Titcomb, F. L. Turney, F. R. Wilson, C. H. Wheeler, W. R. Yerxa.

It is sad to note that not one of these charter members is alive today.

MEETINGS IN PERKS HALL

The first meetings of the order were held in Perks Hall, the third

floor of what is now the Feeley block. Proceeds of the first session are reported to have been \$550 and Harry B. Sharp, Monticello lumberman, was the first applicant for membership.

The second floor of the Times block on Court street, where the Salvation Army is now located, became the second home for the order and continued to house the lodge until the construction of the present home in 1906.

The institution service was con-

ducted by District Deputy G.E.R. Harry Stewart of Bangor and District Deputy Brooks of Lewiston assisted by members from the lodges of Lewiston, Portland, and Bangor.

Hon. Don A. H. Powers was chosen to be the first Exalted Ruler of Houlton Lodge and saw the order started toward a healthy growth at the conclusion of his year in office. He was succeeded by J. A. Browne who threw his whole soul into the work, according to the stories of

that day and continued to force the lodge to the front. The third, exalted ruler in the chair was R. W. Shaw and he, too, kept affairs moving forward during his administration.

When Charles Carroll succeeded to the chair as the fourth ruler of the lodge, in 1906, the membership numbered 120 with 25 more candidates waiting to get in if they could be found acceptable. It was estimated that the rolls would soon exceed 200.

BUILDING MOVEMENT GROWS

With its membership growing and the likelihood of finding quarters large enough becoming more and more unlikely, the movement to have a home of their own grew stronger among the members. Accordingly, at a meeting held on April 13, 1906 the lodge took official action to proceed with their plan.

The idea fired the lodge with enthusiasm. They responded to the appeal with a zeal that would not be denied. In just the short space of one single week, \$30,000 had become available for the undertaking.

With the money in sight, the Flag and Powers lots on Main street were purchased and, on May 8th, ground was broken for the building. Twenty-two days later the cornerstone was laid.

The newspaper appropriately commented: "That's hustling some. When it comes to a hustle, the Elks are past masters." As one who has been a member of the order for 35 years the writer would be the first to agree that that statement is just as true today as it was 50 years ago and has been typical of this lodge over the past half a century in Houlton.

CORNERSTONE LAID

Significant and epochal in the history of the Houlton Lodge of Elks was the event on May 30, 1906 when solemn exercises of laying the cornerstone of their magnificent new building took place on the site of the structure on Main street facing what is now known as Broadway.

Sixty of the brothers had gathered in their already overcrowded quarters in the Times block on Court street to participate in the ceremonies. Promptly as the hour of four sounded from the Court House clock across the way, the assembled membership of the lodge filed to the street and, headed by the Houlton Band and with Capt. Black Hawk Putnam as marshal astride his familiar white horse, proceeded to the building site.

About the procession the Aroostook Pioneer of June 6 comments: "There were about sixty Elks in line and it must be admitted that on this their first appearance in Houlton they made a most favorable impression. They were certainly a lot of noble and substantial looking men deserving the complimentary remarks that were made about them along the line."

Arrived at the scene the impressive ritualistic service prepared by the Grand Lodge of the United States was conducted by Exalted Ruler Charles Carroll. After the stone had been placed in position and the Exalted Ruler had troweled in the cement which united it to the foundation, it was appropriately christened in the name of Fidelity, Charity, Justice and Brotherly Love.

R. W. SHAW SPEAKS

Hon. R. W. Shaw, who was the

third Exalted Ruler of Houlton Lodge, had been selected to make the official oration of the occasion. The selection was an excellent one. As the reports of the occasion put it, "Mr. Shaw is an Elk and he is a good one. He is also a Past Exalted Ruler and is therefore thoroughly conversant with the principles on which this glorious order is founded."

The report continued, "Whenever Shaw talks everybody expects to hear something bright, original and to the point. On Wednesday he was at his best and talked right from the shoulder. He did not mince matters in the least."

It is fortunate indeed for the success of this section of documented Houlton history that the newspapers of that day took the event with the seriousness it merited insofar as the history of the community was concerned. Here was a building being built for the sole purpose, apparently, of the entertainment of a group of men whose future interests would be allied strongly with the charitable needs of their town and who would write, over the years, a record of aid and assistance to their less fortunate fellow men to be equaled by no other like group in the town.

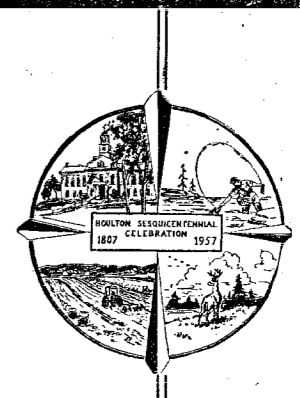
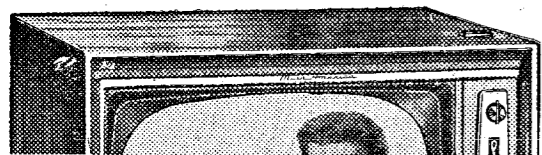
The town sensed the importance and the solemnity of the occasion. It wasn't every day in the life of this community, in that year exactly 100 years old, that a building was built at a cost of \$50,000.

So, the reporter of that day, probably Charles A. Lyons who, with A. W. Hall as a partner, had the week before just acquired ownership of the Aroostook Pioneer from the estate of the late George H. Gilman, was responsible for the

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