

NEBRASKA MASONIC LODGES, BANKS, and POST OFFICES: Pillars of Communities

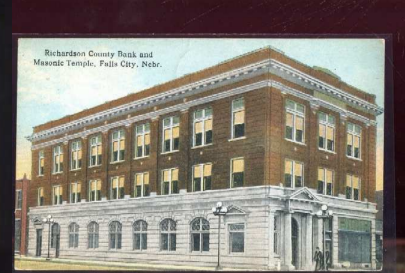
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McCook Masonic Temple



Long Pine Masonic Temple



Falls City Masonic Temple

Nearly every community in Nebraska (as well as those in other States) began with the 'essentials' that almost every village, town or city needed to exist or survive: A general store, a school, a bank, a Church, a post office, and a Masonic Lodge.

In many instances: the Masonic Lodge was started first, since Masons were often the leading-men who had the knowledge, resources, and inclination to pool their efforts mutually to make a town prosper and thrive. Masons know that there is "strength in numbers". And, our Masonic Fraternity teaches the importance of Unity in achieving common-goals.

Throughout America, in the 1800s and 1900s, and even today --- it was not usual to find a Masonic Lodge which met above a hardware-store, furniture-store. Some Masonic Halls supplemented their income to maintain their facilities by having 'tenants' such as those or other 'renters' such as Law Offices. Larger Masonic Halls could afford more lavish accommodations. Yet, all accommodations (whether large or small) cost money to maintain. Larger Masonic Centers sometimes rent-out their facilities for weddings, receptions, or theater-like events. Quite often a Masonic Lodge's location was either near the courthouse along the "Town Square" and/or on the main highway, road or thoroughfare. In Indianapolis, Indiana is the largest Shrine Center in North America (in terms of numerical membership totals): Murat Shrine Center, was built in 1909. I have seen this magnificent building, and it has a theater, which was added-on in 1910, which boasts a 1,800 seat concert-hall and 2,500 seat performing-arts theater. Its large 'Egyptian Room' can hold 2,000 people at receptions. Surprisingly, many people in Indianapolis "know" or associate the name "Murat" with the Theater, rather than it being a Shriners' Center. One noteworthy event happened in the year 1932 at Murat Shrine Center: it was the venue for a speech given by Sir Winston Churchill (himself a British Royal Arch Mason). Similarly, Al Malaikah Shrine Center in Los Angeles has previously hosted "the Oscar's" or "Academy Awards" as well as other red-carpet events.

Years ago, many cities and towns created "Masonic Temple Associations" whereby the various Masonic Bodies (such as Blue Lodges, Royal Arch Chapters, Councils of Cryptic Masons, and Knight Templar Commanderies which met therein....were deemed "stakeholders" or "shareholders". Each Body might have had a pro-rata share of the "Decision-Making" and inversely: each Body may have been charged a pro-rata share of costs for Utilities and Upkeep of the building. That is generally why Masonic Centers usually are grateful at having outside commercial tenants to fill-up space which would otherwise be vacant or unused. Maximizing utility and making wise use of existing resources is generally always a good arrangement: especially when it generates a little bit of much needed extra-Revenue to enable the Masonic Hall to continue to exist and prosper.



Although many people, today, (especially in rural communities) may commute elsewhere to attend a Church or they may no longer have children attending a school ---- the remaining items which are almost the 'staples' or 'mainstays' or 'Pillars of a Community' are quite often a Bank, a Post Office, and a Masonic Lodge.

For brevity's sake: I would like to call attention to three just prime examples in Nebraska:

- The McCook Masonic Temple Theater in McCook, Nebraska. I found it interesting that the building was occupied in the year 1909. The building cost \$65,000 to build (a considerable sum in those days) and the city's population was 4,800 people. That Building served the McCook-area well.

the second example:

- The LONG PINE MASONIC LODGE, in Brown County, Nebraskahad "The Brown County Bank" and "The U.S. Post Office" serving Long Pine, located in the same building.

another example:

- The FALLS CITY MASONIC LODGE, in Richardson Countyhad "The Richardson County Bank", located together in the same building.

In today's world where small-town post offices are either closing or merging; and where hometown banks are likewise closing or combining to become 'Mega-Banks': I think it is important to reflect upon the future survival of some communities. Granted, we are living in the era where the telephone and the Internet have revolutionized communications and financial transactions. Although we enjoy the seeming comfort and ease of these advancements: new technology has severely curtailed the "face-to-face" interactions that were often sealed-with-a-handshake ---whether it was an encounter with someone at a real-estate office, law-office, store, post office or at a Lodge Hall.

Will Lodge Halls eventually become the "last Pillar standing" in some Communities? Sadly, in some communities: various Lodges (Odd Fellow Lodges, Knights of Pythias Lodges, Elks Lodges, and even some Masonic Lodges) have already folded-up and closed, or consolidated/merged elsewhere. Masonic Lodges and Halls are "meant to be used and utilized". Just like the human-body, an 'exercise' once or-twice-a-month isn't quite enough. Activity builds muscles. A strong human body (or a strong Masonic Body) goes a long way toward enhancing & improving overall HEALTH....of both the individual....and of the Community-at-large.

As Masons, and as Masonic Rosicrucians: we must strive to be human "Pillars of the Community." People will flock to whatever is simple, easy and convenient. By the same token, People will flock to what they can't find elsewhere. We must give them what they cannot get at home...and what we offer is MASONRY; and more specifically: FRATERNAL INTERACTION.

Fraternal Interaction must involve more than events on a social calendar. Non-Masons must see the genuine friendships and genuinely, heartfelt benefits of 'The Mystic Tie' of Masonic Brotherhood. The voluntary helping of those people genuinely in-need....with no-strings-attached --- has great appeal, especially as our "Baby-Boomer populace" ages. Decades ago, when the Baby-Boomers came-of-age, there was a widespread spurning of what they considered 'being part of the establishment.' Their logic of being 'non-joiners' --- was erroneous. As I see it, the ONLY way, that we can lure them and their younger sons, grandsons/nephews, etc., etc., into joining fraternal organizations again, in greater numbers, is to demonstrate that Masonic Lodges are part of the underpinning or FOUNDATIONS of communities; even more importantly, the in the underpinning or Historic Foundation of America, itself. It isn't the Masonic 'label' or 'pin' or 'fez' anymore that attracts interest --- but rather the virtuous Masonic Principles taught in the Lodges, which many men seldom see promoted nowadays. The thirst for these attributes cannot be found in 'Facebook,' social networking, nor by impersonal e-mails. The "virtual world" cannot completely replace the "real-world"... composed of brick & mortar, as well as flesh & bone.

There seems, today, to be a great yearning for the 'AMERICA' that our nation's "FOUNDING FATHERS" set-up. As a Fraternal Order, we must re-ignite those sparks of enthusiasm in today's generation. We must openly, actively promote the notion in that sentiment which makes it clear: "There is no substitute for Fraternalism."



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Sources:

- Archives: The M.W. Grand Lodge of A.F & A.M. of Nebraska.

- Archives: Murat Shrine Center of Indianapolis, Indiana.

- Personal tour emphasizing exterior of Murat Shrine Building . Year 2002. Tour given by the late Brother George J. Riedl, Jr, 32^o to James A. Marples, 32^o and VII^o. (George J. Riedl, Jr., was a Mason for 48 years and George Riedl was a cousin to Frater Marples' late mother Gloria (Riedl) Marples.

- Archives: Al Malaikah Shrine Center, Los Angeles, California.

About the Author:

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