

**THE HALF CENTURY
OF CALIFORNIA
ODD FELLOWSHIP**

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The half century of California Odd fellowship by Geo. H. Tinkham

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GEO. H. TINKHAM

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OF
California Odd Fellowship

ILLUSTRATED

BY
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Stockton I. O. O. F. Lodges."

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INTRODUCTION.

* * *

To-day we are living in a commercial, a money-making age, the pessimist tells us, and in the footsteps of the Perfect Man we are making no progress.

Never was there a more unreliable statement made, for the dawn of this century saw in existence more charitable and benevolent organizations than in any previous period of time. Organizations in which men and women have bound themselves together under various social names, each institution striving to accomplish the most in helpful assistance.

In this grand work for humanity, Odd Fellowship leads, and beneath its white three-linked banner a million and a half Odd Fellows and a half million Rebekahs march, Faith, Hope and Charity their watch-word—Friendship, Truth and Love, their battle cry. This army, like the Crusaders of old, gathers increasing numbers, power and enthusiasm as it moves through the century, and before I pen its record on this western shore, let us learn something of its God-ordained American origin.

Five years after the close of the war between England and the United States, an Englishman by the name of Thomas Wildey had the courage to emigrate to the enemies' country. The Americans then had no love for the Britons, and yet Thomas Wildey, with his wife, landed at Baltimore looking for work. In his veins there flowed no royal blood; no kingly heritage had he. He was of the lowly class—a common mechanic—a coach-spring maker; and yet, within his heart there was the ring of true manhood, and his name was destined to rest among the immortals.

On his arrival in the Monumental City he found a pestilence raging. Did he flee from the plague, or sit idly by, looking on? Could a man do that who had for twenty years been

an active worker in the ranks of the English Odd Fellows. Certainly not. "He was made of sterner stuff," and although and who had not only been a worker but a lodge organizer? we have no record—for he was a silent man regarding his American life—no doubt he was among the foremost to "visit the sick, relieve the distressed and bury the dead." The fever was soon stamped out, and Wildey found employment.

Over in England they had their taverns or ale houses, where the commoners assembled for sociability, a drink, a song or a smoke, and Wildey, of a strong social nature, was there also a leader. Here, he was a stranger in the new country of his adoption, and naturally seeking friends and companions, one of his first acquaintances was John Welch, another Briton.

Two years have passed; it is our anniversary year, 1819. Wildey and Welch are still in Baltimore, for traveling then was very expensive and very slow; and one day, while they were conversing of society and events in Old England, Wildey exclaimed: "I know of a society you want in this country, the Odd Fellows." Immediately, Welch replied: "I am an Odd Fellow, a Past Grand of Birmingham Lodge; but I have never met an Odd Fellow in this country, nor have I heard of such a society in America." This remark was a surprise, for Wildey thought that in Baltimore, with its 60,000 people, there would be many Odd Fellows.

The desire that was afterward implanted in the California Odd Fellows took possession of Wildey, and he resolved to institute a lodge of his beloved Order in Baltimore. Five, according to English law, were enough to institute a lodge, but they failed to find another brother, although they made diligent inquiry for several weeks.

Not in the least discouraged, Wildey now resolved to seek the assistance of the press in his search for brothers, and February 13th, in the Baltimore American, this announcement appeared:

"A few members of the society of Odd Fellows would be glad to meet their brethren for consultation upon the subject of forming a lodge. The meeting will be held on Tuesday evening, the 2d of March."

The call was answered by the two Odd Fellows, Richard Rushford and John Duncan, and a subsequent advertisement found Richard Cheatham.

As the brothers were all poor men, they held their preliminary meetings in a tavern, one of these being the "Three Loggerheads," such places being selected because the "host" anticipating the fact that the persons assembled would patronize his bar, gave them, free of cost, the room, lights and fire. We do not know just how many preliminary meetings were held, but when they assembled April 2d they adjourned to meet April 26th, in the "Seven Stars," kept by Thomas Lupton.

Thus it is that the "Seven Stars" comes down in history as a most important place, because it is the birth-spot of American Odd Fellowship.

That night, April 26th, 1819, the little band of five assembled and instituted a lodge. We have but the merest outline of their most important proceedings, for they were men of no influence in the community, and being Englishmen, their secret meetings were regarded with suspicion. All we know is that Thomas Wildey, first taking the obligation, then gave it to the other brothers. They named their little lodge Washington, No. 1, and elected Thomas Wildey Noble Grand and John Welch Vice Grand.

The lodge was instituted as a purely social institution—a fact which now we have lost sight of in our endeavors "to put money in our purse"—and the relief of sick and needy brothers was a side issue. They were a social, jolly band, and to assist them in their good times and also increase their lodge funds, they had a bar in a corner of the room, and there wines, beer and liquor was dispensed by a bar-tender who was known as the "host." "This bar," said Brother Pryor, "was one of the lodge incomes, for the receipts for the sale of liquor became a part of the lodge funds. This fund was also increased by a penny a week tax from each brother, and if a brother, traveling, was in need of assistance, they passed around the ax for contributions."

The liquor drinking habit in those days was common with all classes, and in the lodge room, as the money spent was for

a good purpose, it had a tendency to cause the most generous brothers to imbibe too freely; and it was on one of these occasions to which Thomas Kennedy, afterwards a Grand Sire, referred when he said that in walking the streets of Baltimore one evening in 1822, he stopped to listen to a "jolly good party" in the second story of a tavern. First he heard a tenor singing

"Old King Cole was a merry old soul,
A merry old soul was he."

The song was encored by a loud clapping of hands. Then came a recitation from "Richard III," and following this came a song, "The Little Chimney Sweep." The program concluded with a chorus in which all the brothers joined:

"Then let us throw all care aside,
Let's merry be and mellow;
May Friendship, Love and Truth abide
With every true Odd Fellow."

Their liquor drinking habits, however, were very severely reprimanded by the Masonic lodge of Baltimore, and they took heed of the lesson. Ridgely tells us that Augustus Mathiot, a very prominent Odd Fellow, applied for membership in the Masonic Order. He was black-balled because he belonged to the "bacchanalian club of Odd Fellows." The rejection cut Mathiot to the quick, and he resolved if possible to blot out the stigma. He succeeded for a time, and Washington Lodge, No. 1, through Mathiot's labors, passed the first temperance law: "That hereafter this lodge, No. 1, will abolish the use of every kind of liquor in the lodge room." This was known as the Maryland reform, and it was unfortunate that the Grand Lodge of the United States, organized in 1823, did not adopt this reform until 1865.

Washington Lodge at first struggled hard for life, but in 1821 it had grown so rapidly it became necessary to separate the legislative from the operative part of the Order. The Past Grands assembled, Washington Lodge surrendered to them her charter granted by the Duke of York Lodge, England, and February 22d the Grand Lodge of Maryland was organized with the following Grand officers, all mechanics, "the bone and sinew" of the land:

M. W. G. M., Thomas Wildey, coach-spring maker.
D. G. M., John P. Entwisle, printer.
G. S., John Welch, house and ship carpenter.
G. T., John Boyd, mahogany sawyer.
Grand Guard, Wm. Larkin, cabinet maker.

Five years later, 1826, the Grand Lodge of the United States was organized, and they retained this name until 1879, at which time the name was changed to Sovereign Grand Lodge, because their authority then extended to lands beyond the United States.

In the early forties, from various causes, secession from the Manchester Unity was freely discussed, and in 1843 they

"Resolved that all communication between the Manchester Unity and the Grand Lodge be and hereby is forthwith severed." * * *

The causes which led to the secession were many in number, but the principal cause was the refusal of the Unity to permit the American lodge to abolish the bar from the lodge room. The Americans desired to adopt the two beautiful degrees written by John Entwisle, the printer. The Unity refused to adopt the degrees or sanction their use in the American work; while the encampment branch, born on this side of the Atlantic, the Unity would not even recognize. So it was with many less important changes, the Unity would permit none of them.

It was with deep regret that Father Wildey separated from the Unity, for he had many warm friends in England; but his heart rejoiced four years later, 1846, when he learned that Gilbert Watson had instituted a lodge of Odd Fellows in the far-off Pacific, at Honolulu, Sandwich Islands. This brings us up to the half century of California Odd Fellowship.



SAN FRANCISCO, 1849.
The Birthplace of California Odd Fellowship.