

Muskegon's Secret & Benevolent Societies and Fraternal Organizations

By Frances Harrington

I'll admit, I never really knew what "secret and benevolent societies" or "fraternal organizations" were all about. I used to think they were old men dressing up in strange costumes and riding in parades with silly looking hats, or men's organizations that they used as an excuse to get away from home and have a few drinks with the fellows. We were told that my great grandfather, who was a master cabinet maker for the Pullman Company out of Chicago, was a 32nd Degree Mason. I didn't know what that meant and didn't really care. I know my dad had a gold ring with a big diamond in it, that I always wanted. We were told the diamond was from my great grandfather Willard Harrington's Masonic ring. I remember being told that the diamond had to be reset in another ring because you weren't allowed to wear a Masonic ring unless you belonged to the Masons. I don't know if the 32nd Degree Mason and the ring story was even real. I tried contacting the Mason's Organization in Chicago but they couldn't find any record of Willard. It wasn't until I started doing research on some of Muskegon's residents from the late 1800s and early 1900s that I even started to wonder what these societies were really all about. I knew these initials/abbreviations in the obituaries of these people meant they belonged to some kind of organization, but I didn't know what they stood for. Sometimes I see these abbreviations and symbols on headstones in the cemetery too. I got to thinking that maybe I wasn't the only one who was curious about them. I decided to investigate some of the organizations I found in Muskegon's early history and write a little bit about them. I've chosen 7 of the of earliest organizations I could find in Muskegon. Almost all of them limited their membership to adult white males during the late 1800s through most of the 1900's and required members to take an oath. Most were organized to provide monetary benefits to its members, fellowship, self-improvement education, social aid, and charitable contributions. "Secret" didn't mean they kept their membership secret, it meant they kept their rituals and activities within their meeting places secret. What goes on in the "society" stays in the "society".

A. F. & A. M – Ancient Free & Accepted Mason

It is the world's oldest and largest fraternity. According to "The Advantages & Surroundings of Muskegon", the Muskegon Lodge No. 14 was chartered in Muskegon in 1868, Lovell Moore No. 182 was chartered in 1866, Muskegon Chapter No. 47 was chartered in 1867, Muskegon Council No. 54 (Royal & Select Masters) was chartered in 1882, and Muskegon Commandery No. 22 (Knights Templars) was chartered in 1868. The book was published in 1892 and suggested a combined total membership of approximately 700 men in Muskegon. Many of the men belong to one or more of these lodges or branches at the same time and were members of other organizations also. World-wide, for the same period, their membership was estimated at 3,000,000. In 2020 there is an estimated 2,000,000 Masons in the US alone. In the 1800s – early 1900s, because the government didn't provide social aid programs, Freemasonry stepped in to help with aid to widows, orphanages, homes for the aged, etc. Freemasonry is built upon three basic tenets or principles – Brotherly Love, Relief and Truth. Brotherly Love is the practice of the Golden Rule. Relief embodies charity for all mankind. Truth is honesty, fair play, and adherence to the cardinal virtues of Temperance, Fortitude, Prudence, and Justice. The Shriners are a spinoff of the Masons. Today in America, they give almost \$2 million each day for medical research, children's hospitals, local community services and providing care to Masons and their families at the Masonic Homes. Some Muskegon pioneers who were Masons: Wm. McComb, Thomas Munroe, P. P. Misner, C. C. Billinghamurst, James Gow, H. D. Baker, C. H. Hackley, Fred Nims, and A. V. Mann, For more information on the Masons, their symbols and their abbreviations, go to: <https://www.freemasoninformation.com>

I. O. O. F. – Independent order of Odd Fellows

According to "The Advantages & Surroundings of Muskegon", the Muskegon Lodge No. 92 was organized in 1865, Germania No. 179 was organized in 1872, Canton Muskegon No. 6 (Patriarch Militants) was organized on 1885, Davis Encampment No. 47 was organized in 1869, and Daughters of Rebeka Gem No. 124 was

organized in 1889. Muskegon membership in 1892 was approximately 400 and US membership over 650,000. Early members included Peter McEachern, Wm Potter, Peter Lansiff, Narzia Steiner, C. McCrea, Mrs. Peter McEachern, Mrs. R. G. Walker, O. Rasmussen, and G. T. McComb. The IOOF is a non-profit charitable association. They provided their members with sick benefits, widows' and orphans' benefits, and burial insurance. The IOOF is a non-political, non-sectarian international fraternal order of Odd Fellowship. It was the first fraternity in the US to include (white) women in 1851. The IOOF promotes the ethic of reciprocity and charity, by implied inspiration of Judeo-Christian ethics. In 1896, it was said to be the largest of all fraternal organizations. Membership usually consisted of lower middle class and skilled workers and not so much the wealthy and white-collar workers that were found among the Masons. They are more service oriented believing in actually doing the work themselves and not just donating to a cause. The command of the IOOF is to "visit the sick, relieve the distressed, bury the dead and educate the orphan". Current membership is said to be approximately 600,000 world-wide. For more about the IOOF go to <https://www.odd-fellows.org/about/our-mission/>

R. A. - Royal Arcanum

A fraternal benefit society that had all the popular features of modern society insurance and offered death benefits, sick & disability benefits and was founded in 1877. It requires a lengthy oath or obligation by its members. Its motto is Mercy, Virtue, Charity. In 1970 the benefit categories were listed as Death, Disability, Old Age Benefits, Educational Loans, Retirement Income Annuities and Weekly Hospital Indemnity Benefits. They have also given out scholarships to RA orphans and student loans. According to "The Advantages & Surroundings of Muskegon" in 1892, "this society now has about 1,500 Councils with an aggregate membership of over 140,000. Its present annual payments to beneficiaries is over \$3,000,000". The Muskegon City Council No. 114 was organized in 1878, and its Muskegon membership in 1892 was 92. Early Muskegon members were James P. Fallon, John W. Yates, Howard Shaw, W. W. Owen, O. C. Williams, H. L. Patrick. One of its current objectives is teaching morality without religious distinction, patriotism without partisanship, and brotherhood without creed or class. Current membership is 25,000. For more information, visit <https://www.royalarcanum.com/about.html>

G. A. R. – Grand Army of the Republic

It was a fraternal organization composed of veterans of the Union Army and it included hundreds of posts across the North & West. It was dissolved in 1956 when its last member died. It was the largest of all Union Army veteran's organizations and the most powerful political lobbying group of the 19th century, securing massive pensions for its vets. It was a source of charity, a provider of entertainment, and a patriotic organization. It was the first organized advocacy groups supporting voting rights for black veterans. It helped to make Memorial Day a national holiday. Six Civil War veterans were elected US Presidents from its members (Grant, Hayes, Garfield, Arthur, Harrison, and McKinley). At its peak in 1890, it had a membership of 410,000. It was founded on April 6, 1866 on the principles of Fraternity, Charity and Loyalty. The first female known to be admitted to the GAR in 1870 was Kady Brownell who served the Union Army with her husband Robert. in 1897, they admitted Sarah Emma Edmonds of the 2nd Michigan Infantry, who served while disguised, as a man named Franklin Thompson from May 1861 to April 1863. Muskegon had the Phil Kearney Post, No. 7, chartered in 1879, with 215 members in 1892. The Women's Relief Corps No. 105, organized in 1887 had 32 members. Some of those members were: Louis Kanitz, E. P. Watson, Moses Huddleston, Wm Reynolds, Ezra Tyler, James Cavanaugh, A. C. Majo, Jacob Bauknecht, Thomas Murphy, and H. D. Baker. For the history of the GAR, visit Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War at https://www.suvcw.org/?page_id=167

A. O. U. W. – Ancient Order of United Workmen

A fraternal benefit society organized in 1868 by John J. Upchurch a Mason, whose ideology was to "bring together then conflicting social interest, capitol and labor, to provide a means of arbitration with which to settle difficulties that were constantly arising". The A. O. U. W. would also provide financial protection to its members, a collective voice, and a fraternal brotherhood. Each member would pay \$1 into the insurance fund

to cover the sum of not less than a \$500 benefit, paid to a member's dependents when he died. Each time a member died, \$1 was due from the surviving members to keep the fund going. The insurance benefit offered by the A.O.U.W. was the first of its kind in the United States by a fraternal organization, as there was no discretion by the members, on who would receive the generosity of the lodge.

Its motto was "Charity, Hope and Protection". In 1895, its members exceeded 318,000. In 1952, the national was dissolved leaving each state affiliate to decide, on their own, how to proceed. The first mention I found in Muskegon was Lodge No. 133, in 1889 (the number of members was unavailable). Some members were: Jacob Jesson, Henry Patrick, Amos Bell, Anthon Holthe, H. R. Fox, and C. E. Woodard. For more on the AOOW go to: http://www.stichtingargus.nl/vrijmetselarij/aouw_en.html

M. W. A. – Modern Woodmen of America

It is a member owned, fraternal financial service organization. It is one of the largest fraternal benefit societies in the US based on their assets. In 2016, their assets reached \$15.4 billion and a membership of 750,000. Its expenditures for member benefits and community programs totaled \$21.7 Million. It was founded in 1883 in Iowa. Until the mid 1900s the membership was restricted to white males between the ages of 18-45 from the 12 "healthiest" states: Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Missouri, the Dakotas, Nebraska and Kansas, with residents from large cities being disqualified. Also disqualified were railway workers, underground miners, liquor wholesalers, gunpowder factory employees, saloon keepers, sailors on the lakes and seas, and professional baseball players. At that time, they had 6 million members. They built and operated the Modern Woodmen Tuberculosis Sanatorium in Colorado Springs and from 1909 to 1947 they provided free treatment to more than 12,000 members. They come together to provide money, donations, hands-on labor, and other resources to improve the lives in their communities. I found the MWA listed in the Muskegon City Directories starting in 1893. Their membership numbers weren't given but some of the members were: John Kuppenheimer, J. W. Morpeth, Henry Ball, G. H. Armstrong, J. E. Edwards, and A. Dowd. They had two Camps: New Camp No. 4917 and Muskegon Camp No. 2075. Their website is: <https://www.modernwoodmen.org>

L. O. T. M. – Ladies of the Maccabees

The LOTM originated as a local club by nine women in Muskegon at the home of Mrs. Adelpia G. (Westbrook) Ward, at 11 Myrtle St. Mrs. Ward, known as Mother Ward, was the first LOTM Commander. It was the only insurance beneficiary order in the country organized and conducted exclusively by women. It was considered an auxiliary of the K. O. T. M. (Knights of the Maccabees) but was actually its own institution and governed completely by its own membership. It was started in 1886, and a Great Hive was organized for the State of Michigan in 1890. Other Great Hives were founded in Ohio and New York with the Supreme Hive being established in 1892. That year, because of disagreements, a new group was formed called Ladies of the Modern Maccabees (L. O. T. M. M). By 1896, the LOTMM became the Women's Benefit Association and in 1966, it became the North American Benefit Association. By 1913, it had paid out over \$50 million in endowment benefits. In 1915, the LOTM had 179,719 members and merged into the KOTM in 1926, to be known simply as the Maccabees. In 1994, it still had 80,000 members. By 1893, Muskegon had 5 Hives: Muskegon Hive No. 1, American Hive No. 4, Davis Hive No. 5, Scandinavian Hive No. 7, Germania Hive No. 27. Some early Muskegon members were: Mrs. Emma Lafayette, Mrs. Ives Payne, Mrs. Emma Andrus, Mrs. Mathilda Kreiling, Mrs. Helen Carpenter, Mrs. Alice Estes, and Mrs. L. J. Parker. Mother Ward was born June 21, 1844, and died at Butterworth Hospital in Grand Rapids, July 6, 1913. She is buried in Evergreen Cemetery.

In 1883, the Muskegon City Directory listed 7 different societies or organizations. In 1922, it listed 20. By 1940, there were more than 40 societies, clubs, veteran organizations, etc. I obviously couldn't write on each one, so if you come across an abbreviation for a society/organization/fraternity and want to know what they stand for, you can go to <http://richhartzog.com/art/society.htm> For symbols the VA will put on headstones: <https://www.wearethemighty.com/mighty-trending/va-tombstone-religions-icons/> For gravestone symbols of

clubs, societies, or fraternal organizations check out: <https://blog.billiongraves.com/club-and-fraternity-symbols-at-the-cemetery/>

Sources: Hackley Public Library Local History & Genealogy Dept (Muskegon City Directories and photo of Adelpia Ward), Wikipedia.com (LOTMM, MWA, RA, GAR, IOOF), The Advantages & Surrounds of Muskegon by the Muskegon Board of Trade 1892, Britannica.com (online encyclopedia), masonic-oregon.com (Tenents of Freemasonry), massfreemanonry.org (History of Freemasonry), Ancestry.com, Phoenixmasonry.org/masonicmuseum/fraternalism/aouw.htm (Ancient Order of United Workmen), <https://quod.lib.umich.edu> (Portraits & Biographical Record of Muskegon & Ottawa Co), funding.universe.com (Modern Woodmen of American History, Cyndislist.com (Societies & Fraternal Organizations), Nkytribune.com (IOOF benefits)



Masonic



Independent Order of Odd Fellows



Royal Arcanum



Grand Army of the Republic



Ancient Order of United Workman



Modern Woodmen of America



Aldelphia G Ward (Mother Ward)
Ladies Of The Maccabees