



Haverford Township Historical Society



THE ODD FELLOWS LODGE IN HAVERFORD TOWNSHIP

By Richard D. Kerr

The Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF), a fraternal and service organization, was founded in America in 1819 by Thomas Wildey in Baltimore, Maryland. Wildey, a recent immigrant from Great Britain, had been a member of the Independent Order of Oddfellows Manchester Unity. America's "Lodge 1" affiliated itself with this British organization and was granted the authority to institute new lodges in America. The American lodges seceded from the British organization in 1842, and in 1843 changed their name slightly to use the American two-word form of "Odd Fellows." The IOOF spread rapidly through the country. In 1851, IOOF became the first national fraternity to accept both men and women when it formed the Daughters of Rebekah. The era between the Civil War and World War I was the "golden age of fraternalism" in America for organizations like the IOOF, which also spread worldwide. The Odd Fellows, with lodges in every state by 1889, became the largest fraternal organization in America by 1896, with its guiding principles being embodied in its "triple links" symbol of Friendship, Love and Truth.

On January 3, 1848, a special meeting was held in Humane Hall in Haverford Township. (I believe this is the "Temperance Hall" shown in the 1848 Smith-Ash map of Delaware County, on the south side of present-day West Chester Pike, east of Darby Creek and west of Eagle Road.)



1848 map detail, showing location of the old Temperance Hall on the south side of the West Chester road.

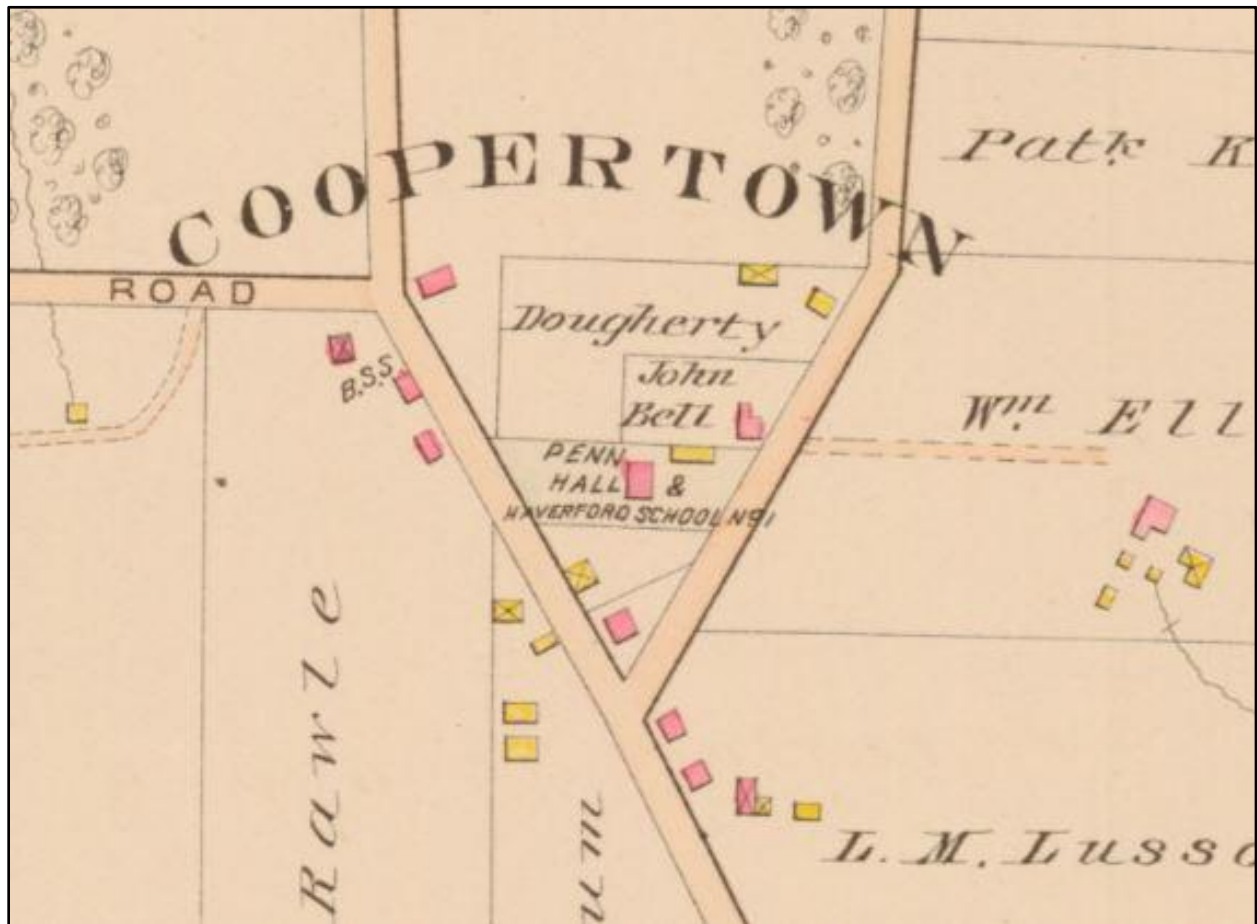
At this meeting, Edward Crabtree, Jonathan Richards, John Williamson, William Hunter Jr. and Lewis Taylor, members of other IOOF lodges, organized a new lodge, William Penn Lodge No. 273, with approval from the Grand Lodge. Crabtree was elected Noble Grand, with Richards as Vice-Grand, Williamson as Secretary, and Taylor as Treasurer. They were “instructed in the mysteries of the order” by officers of the Orphans’ Rest Lodge of Darby. At a lodge meeting in the evening of that same day, 36 new members were received and initiated, and Haverford Township’s lodge was underway.

From its beginnings in 1848, the new lodge grew for about ten years. The chartering members were “temperance men” who wanted to keep the lodge “free from the evils of rum drinking.” The Lodge issued a “remonstrance” against the license of the nearby Black Bear Hotel and Eagle Hotel, both being neighbors along the West Chester road. The owner of the Black Bear, William Stackhouse, himself a member of the IOOF’s Protection Lodge of Hestonville, entered a charge in that lodge against the William Penn Lodge, seeking to have the participating members of the Penn lodge expelled by the Order. Both lodges appointed committees, and the case was examined and the members acquitted.

Subsequent to this excitement, the William Penn Lodge was beset by a gradual collapse of membership, activity and finance. As a fraternal organization, the IOOF offered financial support to members suffering hardship. These outlays, coupled with member dissatisfaction and discouragement, resulted in a decline in membership and necessitated the borrowing of funds. By 1860 there were only 15 members, but the lodge continued under a core of dues-paying, report-making members, four of whom (C. H. Lamar, William Callahan, William Smith and C. Smith) took turns as Noble Grand.

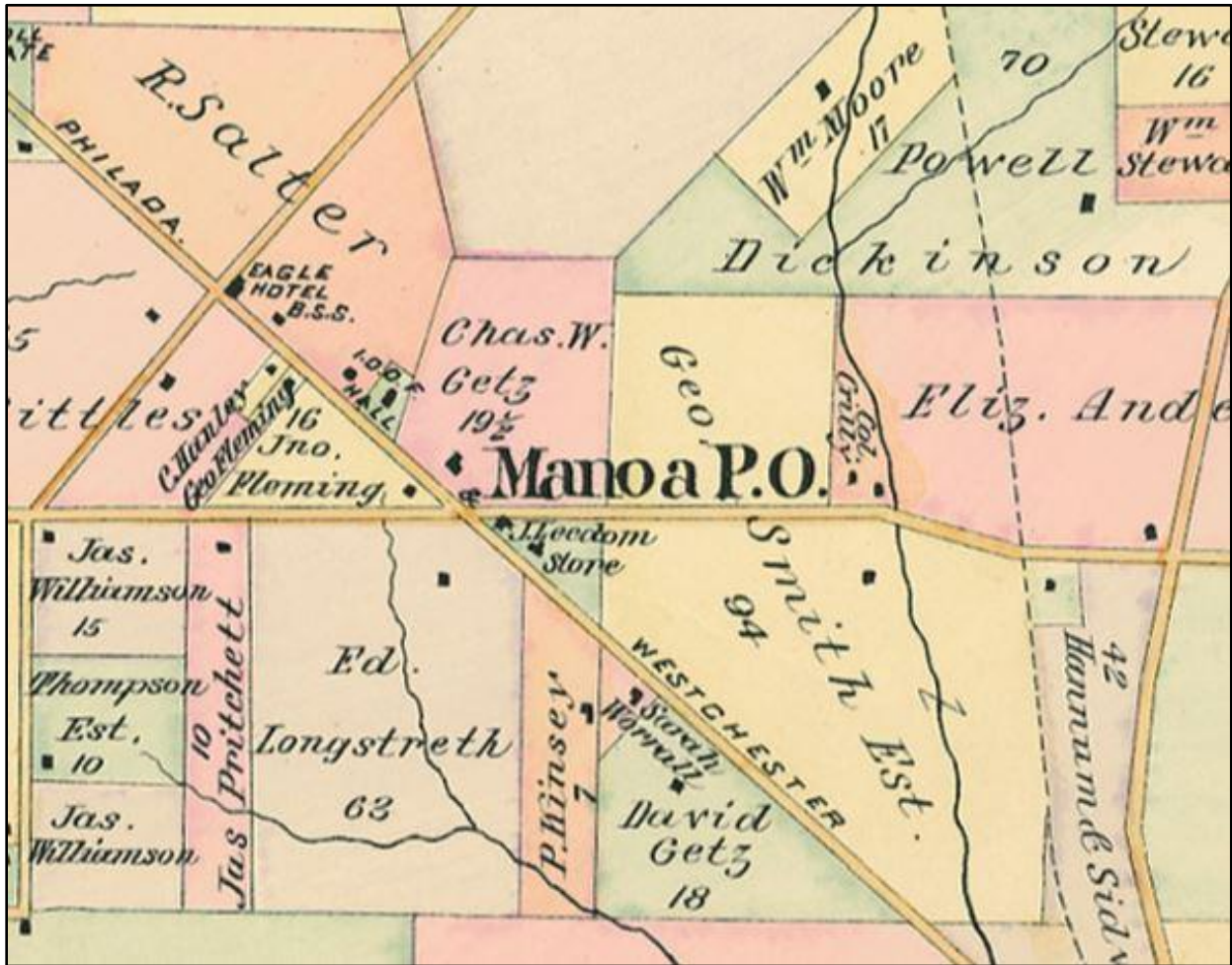
In 1868 a remarkable turnaround began. Three men who had just turned 21 years old (E. W. Wilds, Isaac Richards and George R. Dicker) were induced to become candidates for membership and a quorum was convened. The three were initiated on February 22nd with officiating help from the Banyan Tree Lodge of Ardmore. In quick order, on March 11th, officers of the Grand Lodge visited and granted a special dispensation to allow these newest, youngest members to assume the leadership of the lodge. A revival of membership, activity and finances followed. However, this momentum was countered by a succession of unfortunate investments, and losses, of lodge funds. These setbacks were sustained and overcome. In 1878 the William Penn Lodge initiated ten persons from Newtown Square, to aid them in launching their own lodge.

In time the lodge membership dwindled again. The officers of the Grand Lodge were invited to visit and offer suggestions to remedy the situation. They found the meeting hall to be dingy and stained, and suggested sprucing it up and brightening it. The lodge was only a renter at the Temperance Hall, but a past Grand, William Callahan, had been part of the committee that erected the Penn Hall school and Lyceum up in Coopertown in 1872. He agreed to procure use of that hall for the group. The William Penn Lodge finally moved its meetings to Penn Hall, the first occurring on March 3, 1882. The old Temperance Hall survived as tenements (downstairs) and a meeting room (upstairs) until it was finally torn down in 1936.

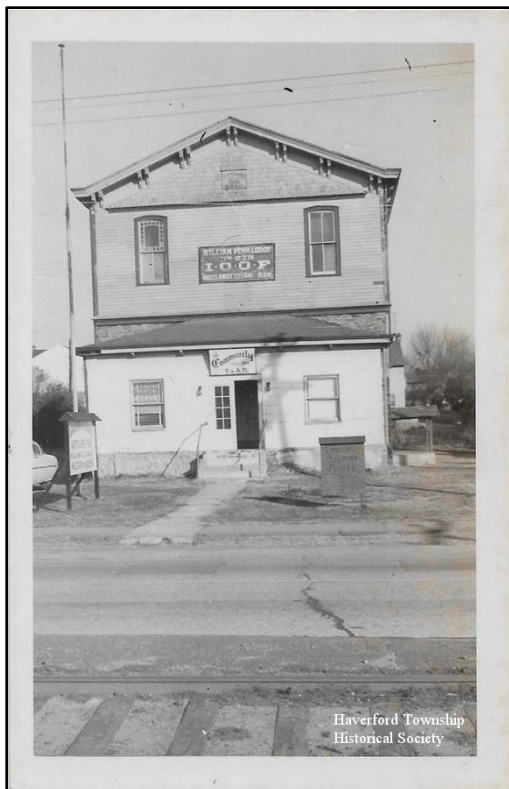


Penn Hall on 1887 map detail, near the fork of present-day Darby and Coopertown roads.

The fortunes of the group improved, and its membership rebounded to 80 members. Eventually some members tired of the difficult trip on bad roads up to Penn Hall. Since many of them hailed from the vicinity of the West Chester road, it was proposed to build a new hall building back in that area. The group bought a piece of ground from Mr. Saulter. The land and the building, built by "Brother" Broomall, cost about \$4000 and the "shedding" (sheds for parking wagons and buggies) cost another \$2000. The lodge had \$2500 in its coffers to put toward the total cost, and raised another \$1100 in a week-long fair held at the new building. William Bittle, who had bought the Black Bear Inn between 1867 and 1870, ending its use as a public tavern, agreed to loan the association \$2500. Subsequent fairs and fundraising paid off Bittle's loan by 1895, giving the lodge a home of its own, with no indebtedness.



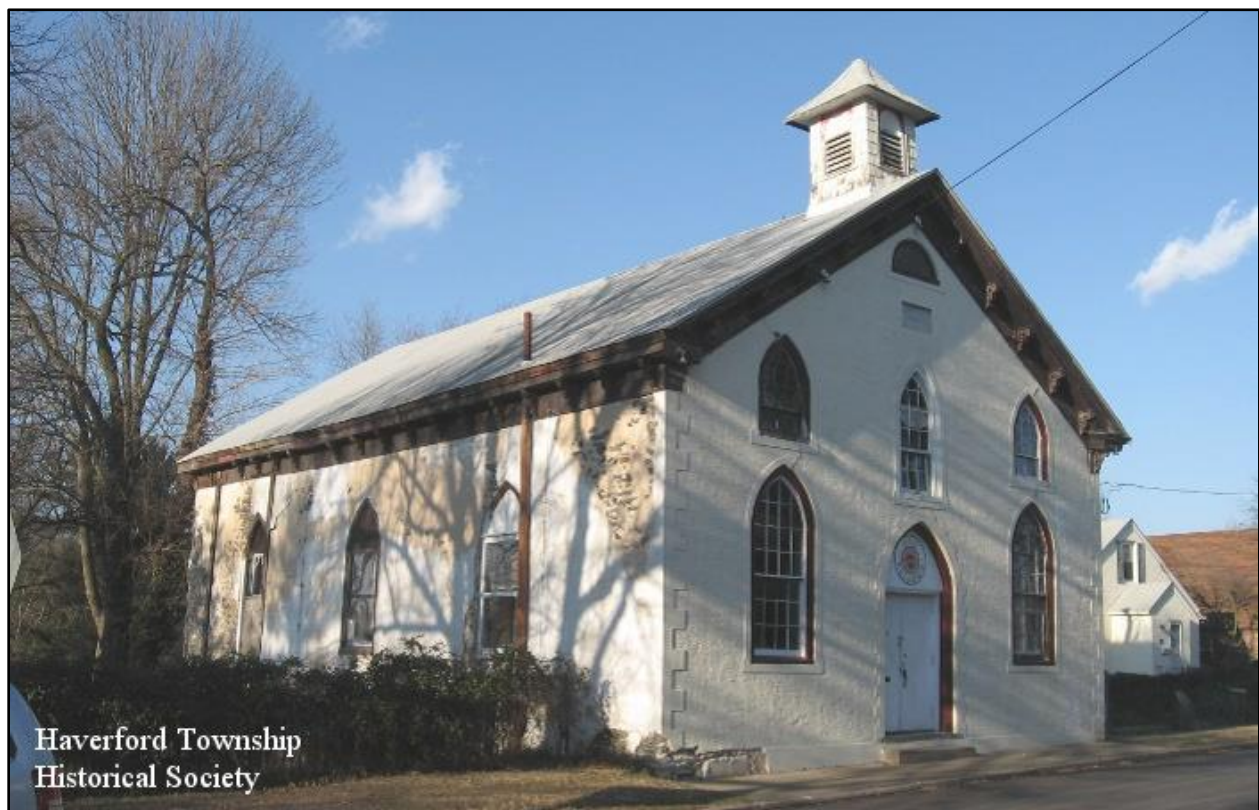
(above) The I.O.O.F. Hall is shown on an 1892 Mueller atlas map, on the north side of West Chester Turnpike, between present-day Manoa and Eagle roads.



(left) This postcard view shows the 1890 building built by William Penn Lodge No. 273, I. O. O. F. The sign at the top adds that it meets every Tuesday at 8 P.M. The other signs show how the building was used to generate supporting income. The meeting room was also the meeting place for a Community Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons, as well as a Baptist church, while the ground floor housed an insurance agency. Note the Philadelphia and West Chester Traction Co. trolley track in the foreground, on the south side of a narrow West Chester Pike. This building no longer exists, and the land is part of the enlarged Trinity Lutheran Church property, which was built just to the east (the right, in this view). Prior to the Lutheran church building being erected, its early congregation met in this I.O.O.F. hall.

A 1919 "Souvenir History and Program" published by the Delaware County, Pa. IOOF on the centennial anniversary of the Odd Fellows, from which much of this information was gleaned, is in the collection of the Aston Historical Society. Its section on the Manoa lodge ends with the following: "We . . . are making improvements which will make us one of the most cozy homes in the state. Since we moved into the new hall the lodge has gone along, sometimes up and sometimes down. The membership at one time went down to thirty-eight members, but the last report showed seventy-seven members in good standing. The present officers of the lodge are: Noble Grand, Harry I. Smouse; Vice Grand, J. Howard Kirk; Treasurer, G. Melvin Young; Secretary, A. W. Sloan."

In 1942 the congregation of the Bethesda Methodist Church on S. Manoa Road outgrew its original, early church building, built in 1832 and enlarged in 1871. It merged with the Ebenezer Methodist Church, moving to a new, even larger church building at Eagle and Steel roads (now Hope Church). The William Penn Lodge of the Odd Fellows bought the old Bethesda church building, making it their new meeting hall. The "up and down" existence of Lodge No. 273 from 1848 onward finally ended on January 3, 1966, when it was consolidated with Banyan Tree Lodge No. 378 in Ardmore. In 1990 Lodge No. 378 was consolidated with Lansdowne Lodge #282, which later closed its doors in 2011 as the last Odd Fellows Lodge in Delaware County. The 1832 Bethesda / Odd Fellows building is now privately owned.



The last meeting hall for the Manoa lodge was the former Bethesda Methodist Church building of 1832. Today, the small rectangular stone near the top center of the front still bears the initials "I.O.O.F."

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