



Independent Order of Odd Fellows  
Dedicated Members for Change

August 18, 2012

Dear Dedicated Members for Change,

Since Odd Fellowship was founded in Merry Olde England in the 1700's, it appears to me to have undergone at least nine dramatic changes in its history. We learn about our future by understanding our past, and so I think it would be useful to travel down the historical path of this great Order.

1. Odd Fellows started when working men of different trades met in the pubs of England. The earliest printed record stems from 1748 where "Odd Fellows" met in the Globe Tavern in England. I'm reasonably confident that drinking ale was a major part of these social gatherings. There is also evidence that our fraternal Order was linked to the "Ancient Order of Bucks", and its symbol of three bucks with antlers intertwined. These men were led by a "Most Noble Grand" and also met in taverns.
2. Odd Fellows were not the only fraternal order in England - in fact, there were dozens of them. And most of them evolved into what was known as "friendly societies". Before social security and unemployment insurance and health care subsidized by employers, folks in England were pretty much on their own. It stepped Odd Fellows (and other fraternal orders) to help members who were sick or in distress, to educate orphans of members who died, and to bury members in Odd Fellows cemeteries. Odd Fellows Lodges were the social fabric (in lieu of government) which helped members and their families. In large measure, this is why Odd Fellows developed secret grips, signs and passwords - only by such secrets could one Odd Fellows Lodge know that it was helping a true Odd Fellow, as opposed to someone who was passing himself off as an Odd Fellow simply to receive financial or other assistance.
3. And then for a time, Odd Fellows and other friendly societies were suppressed by government in England.
4. But eventually, these fraternal organization became prevalent, and the suppression ceased. Odd Fellowship was revived in 1803 by an organization called "London Union of Odd Fellows" which, in turn, morphed into "The Grand Lodge of England" which assumed control over all Odd Fellows Lodges in England.
5. But not all Odd Fellows Lodges in England were happy with that. In 1809 Victory Lodge in



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Manchester declared itself independent of the Grand Lodge of England. And in 1814 the six Lodges in Manchester met and joined together as the "Manchester Unity of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows" and proceeded to elect officers and "standardize" the degree work.

6. Odd Fellowship came to the United States in 1806, but it wasn't until 1819 that Odd Fellowship in America took off like a rocket with the work of Thomas Wildey. He and a handful of others "self-instituted" an Odd Fellows Lodge called Washington Lodge #1 in Baltimore, Maryland. In 1820, they received a charter through an English Lodge, and then Odd Fellowship - through the work of Wildey - rapidly expanded across the country.

7. In 1834, Odd Fellowship in America became independent of the Order in England.

8. In the middle of the 1800's, Odd Fellowship became the first fraternal order to open its doors to women with the formation of the Rebekah Lodge; and in the late 20th Century, membership in Odd Fellows Lodges were opened to women and in Rebekah Lodges were opened to men.

9. And in 1869, a California Lodge (Templar Lodge #15 in San Francisco) helped to establish a Lodge in Germany (Wuerttemberg Lodge #1 in Stuttgart), and from there Odd Fellowship traveled world-wide.

Frankly, the history of Odd Fellowship is a history of change. Why should it be any different today? In fact, I suggest that Odd Fellowship is in the midst of another historical change in its personality - the tenth change, if you will. Sometimes it is difficult to discern change when you are in the midst of it. And I assure you that change (evolution) is happening right now. Both Grand Lodge and Sovereign Grand Lodge recognize that Odd Fellowship - to survive in the 21st Century - must evolve. This evolution must open Lodges up to the public. We have simply got to be more visible in our communities. This means more community outreach, involvement and support. This means inviting the public into our Lodges in social meetings and social events. This does not mean revealing the secrets of the Lodge. But it does mean becoming an active part of the communities in which we live. If we do so, we will attract the young blood of new members which we need so that the Order can flourish.

If we fail to leave the four walls of our Lodges, those walls will become the coffins of our Order.

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Dave Rosenberg