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# The history of the Elks Lodge

Part two of two

Last March, Willimantic's Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks No. 1311 celebrated its 90th birthday. Lodge members are researching the association's



Tom Beardsley

history and are

taking steps to record and preserve details of their architecturally striking home that sits atop the hill on Pleasant Street. Details of its construction are featured in a fascinating brochure published in 1954 to celebrate the lodge's 40th birthday.

Construction of the lodge home commenced on April 2, 1925, and Exalted Ruler Albert Fournier laid the cornerstone on June 10,

1925. The Elks placed a time capsule beneath the cornerstone, which contained a copy of the *Chronicle*, Hartford Times, Hartford Courant and Norwich Bulletin, along with a picture and short biography of building committee chairman Patrick Donahue, a clerk at the J. F. Carr Clothing Co.

The clubhouse was built in 11 months and the lodge held its first

meeting in the building on May 17, 1926. However, this vast project had caused divisions in the Elks ranks. Construction costs had drained the Elks' funds and

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the situation became more serious when the lodge expended a further \$10,000 to landscape the grounds around the new building. Moreover, although the lodge had spent \$8,000 to install a bowling alley, no funds remained to furnish the new home.

Divisions among the members dated back to the decision to build a new home and the decision on where to locate it.

Many believed that it would have been more accessible and less expensive if the Elks had

constructed its home on Main Street.

When no funds were forthcoming to furnish the home, critics called it a "white elephant" that had cost in excess of \$100,000.

The Willimantic Trust Co. refused to extend the Elks' mortgage, but a local business came to the rescue, and offered the lodge a \$20,000 mortgage on the condition that it purchased the majority of its furnishings from his store. Aime J. Martineau was the senior partner of the Martineau-Bacon furniture Co. and shortly afterwards he became a lodge member

in recognition of his contributions.

The Elks officially opened their new Willimantic home on May 11, 1927, and organized a grand celebration.

However, the lodge's indebtedness had risen to \$70,000, so members undertook fund-raising drives to reduce the deficit.

The annual county fair and raffle was a major source of financing and on April 1, 1937, the chairman of the building and furnishing committees, Patrick Donahue, ceremoniously burned the mortgage.



Patrick D. Donahue, past exalted ruler, and chairman of the building committee

A charter member of the lodge looked back over the previous 40 years and reviewed the lodge's many activities, which had included baseball, 10-pin bowling and pool tournaments, nationality nights for immigrant members, and suppers, and banquets.

The athletics, activities and nationality committees arranged these activities, with the assistance of the lodge stewards, who up to 1954 included Tom Murray, Dan Cremin and Vince Luciani.

The 40th anniversary pamphlet also includes photographs and short biographies of several exalt-

ed rulers, including Danny Dunn, George W. Hickey, T. Frank Cunningham, Alexis Caisse and Arthur J. Roy. Roy had been particularly influential as he had introduced the nationality nights, the lodge suppers and had led a drive to fund the purchase of an organ used in the lodge room.

For over 90 years, it has played an important role in Willimantic's social and civic life. Furthermore, its grand home with its Elizabethan architectural styling has provided the Thread City with an enduring landmark.