

293 KENNEDY STREET – I.O.O.F. TEMPLE
J. Chisholm and Son, 1909-10



The Independent Order of Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F.) is a fraternal organization that was formed in early 18th century England. The precepts of the I.O.O.F. go back to medieval times when the guild system offered fellowship and protection for various craftsmen. Bringing these ideals with them, working men of pre-industrial England formed a fraternity of mutual benefit calling themselves “Odd Fellows” as a jibe at the craft guilds that excluded the common labourer or the young artisan. Each member paid weekly dues that were pooled and dispersed to other fellows in need: family men suddenly out of work, heads of families disabled by ill health or accident, widows, the orphaned families of deceased brothers.

The first Winnipeg lodge of Odd Fellowship was established in the summer of 1873. A membership count, published thirteen years later, showed thirteen subordinate lodges with 1,000 members for all of Manitoba, comprised of working-class people and small businessmen.

The many Odd Fellow lodges met in various rented facilities throughout the city and in Odd-fellows Hall on Princess Street before plans were made for a central temple in 1907. Under the leadership of Captain Harper Wilson, an Irish-born retired officer from the American Civil War, Minnehaha Lodge No. 7 purchased a lot on Kennedy Street, just north of Portage Avenue and presented it to the I.O.O.F. Association.

The firm of J. Chisholm and Son were hired to draw up plans for the building. James Chisholm had come to Winnipeg in 1877 and became identified with local architectural interests. He was appointed architect for the City of Winnipeg in 1885 and supervised the completion of the City Hall (1886). Buildings by Chisholm and Son include the Hochman (formerly Harris) building on Princess Street, Young Methodist (now United) church on Broadway Avenue, and the original section of the Marlborough Hotel on Smith Street.

Built by prominent contractor S.B. Ritchie at a cost of \$43,000, the cornerstone was laid in 1909 with the formal opening in the spring of 1910. As an adaptation of the neoclassical style, the building tries to emulate the atmosphere of a luxurious London club of Georgian England. The ornamentation of the façade is inspired by the urban palaces of the Italian renaissance.

Red brick with stone trim was used on the main façade, while less expensive buff-coloured brick was used on the side walls as a typical Winnipeg method of keeping construction costs down.

An elaborate entranceway is articulated by a projecting stone cornice supported by large brackets. Egg and dart motif molding emphasizes the main doorway. Six colossal pilasters with stylized capitals support a full entablature and a balustrade. Rectangular panels with the letters F, L and T on the façade, represent the golden rule of the order: friendship, love and truth. Over the entranceway, now hidden behind glass brick, is a stained-glass window depicting the Good Samaritan and the beaten wayfarer, typifying the aim of the I.O.O.F.

The new temple, with its numerous halls, served as a meeting place for many lodges, such as the Eureka Encampment, Hiawatha Lodge, Florence Nightingale Rebekah Lodge and the Olive Branch Rebekah Lodge, all of whom shared the space on a regular basis. Numerous other organizations, such as the airline Mechanics' Union, the Ladies Brotherhood of Engineers and the Manitoba Telephone Workers' Union also rented hall space for meetings.

A fire, in January 1946, gutted the interior of the building, destroying the records and regalia of many lodges and organizations. No structural damage occurred and new meeting rooms and halls were quickly rebuilt.

The Independent Organization of Odd Fellows is still very active and continues its traditional philanthropic role.