

The Orange Lodge in the Southwest Corner

The Orange Lodge was a predominantly Irish-Protestant fraternal organization created in the last years of the 18th Century in Northern Ireland

It supported the cause of the Protestant minority in Ireland, namely in the northern Ulster counties, against Catholics and Republicans, and was a strong supporter of a United Britain.

Irish immigrants brought the organization to Canada in 1830 and it was very influential on the prairies. As times changed, the lodge evolved into a more mainstream service club, but its anti-Catholic roots could still be seen in some of its members.

The annual parade on July 12th to commemorate the Battle of the Boyne in Ireland remained a tradition, and a defining feature of the Lodge, but the fact of the victory of Protestant William of Orange over Catholic King James perhaps received less emphasis.

The celebration usually featured banners, bagpipes and drums - a real lively parade led by the Master riding a white horse. Members of the Society often wore orange sashes.

A survey of activities in the region offers us a representative look at its activities.

The Goodlands Orange Lodge was opened in 1905, and the village hall, built in 1914 and known as the Orange

Hall, was owned and operated by the Goodlands Orange and True Blue Lodges. The True Blue was the sister lodge of the Orange Lodge, for wives of members, and other women.

The Goodlands Orange closed in 1952 and turned the hall over to the Goodlands Legion for a sum of five dollars.

In Waskada, the Orange Lodge met in the original Moira School, which had been moved to Waskada town site in 1900.

In Medora, the Orange Lodge purchased the former Burns School in 1907. The Lodge dissolved in 1968, and the remaining members joined at Melita and Brandon.

Gatherings on July 12th often

involved visitors from other Lodges. Pierson held their Orange Celebration July 12, 1932, on a field leveled and raked to make it suitable for the event. Four thousand people passed through the gates that day making the largest total to date at any social gathering.

In 1914, the July 12th celebrations held in Melita, featured lodges from all over southwestern Manitoba and southeastern Saskatchewan.

The Lodge moved with the times. The focus was increasingly on pro-British patriotism. The anti-Catholic sentiment that it sometimes fostered became distinctly out of fashion in a time when Canada was becoming more tolerant, and ongoing immigration from all over the world was making us less British.

A daughter remembers that her father: "belonged to the Orange Lodge, Forresters, Oddfellows and the Rebekah Lodge. He also enjoyed cards and sports and was very interested in curling." It was just one of the things a person did, for many it didn't necessarily have any political implications.

That said, at a time when lodge membership in general was declining, the Orange Lodge seemed to be the first to go.

The lodge evolved into a more mainstream service club.



▲ Melita Orangemen's Walk – July 12, 1910

Sources:

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