

The Demise of a Famous Local Elk That Was Respected By The Brothers and Treated Badly By Others

How many of you, since you joined Madison Lodge, have been questioned about whatever happened to the big Elk that used to be on the front lawn? Well, here's the answer, as best as can be reconstructed in a reasonable amount of time, from the Lodge records and from recollections of a few of our members who provided some details. Thanks to PER Hank Adamczyk, Vince Carey, PER Ray Browne, and E.R. Paul Allocco.

Madison B.P.O. Elks Lodge #1465 was instituted on May 9, 1923 and held their first 18 meetings in Brittin Hall, which was on Main Street in the center of town, on the third floor over where Woolworth's and more recently a CVS drugstore used to be. The Lodge soon leased our current building at 192 Main Street with the option to buy, and after making extensive alterations, held their first Lodge meeting in their new home on March 11, 1924.

At the regular Lodge meeting on May 12, 1925, it is recorded that "Bro[ther] [Harry J.] Hall explained the movement on foot to purchase by popular subscription a bronze Elk for our grounds. The movement was fostered by Bro [Raymond L.] Patterson and the Elk will be presented to the Lodge by the Comm[ittee]." At the May 26, 1925 Lodge meeting Bro. Harry R. Miller spoke on the subscriptions to the Bronze Elk. At the June 23, 1925 Lodge meeting, upon motion of Bro. Adolph J. Hoffmann, seconded by Bro. Samuel A. Gruver, the House Committee was appointed by E.R. Harry J. Hall as a committee to take care of all arrangements regarding the Bronze Elk.

At the July 28th Lodge meeting Bro. Miller again spoke on the Elk Statue. At the September 22nd 1925 Lodge meeting, Bro. Miller mentioned that the Elk would be unveiled on October 10th, a Saturday. Charter Member John R. Mitchell, Jr., who became Exalted Ruler in 1928-1929 and who was our last active living charter member when he passed away in 1993, in his History of the Lodge that he revised for our 50th Anniversary in 1973, wrote that the Elk statue "was dedicated on October 10, 192[5], with appropriate ceremony, including a parade of our members and distinguished guests, with dinner following at our club." Bro. Hall spoke on the unveiling of the Elk at the October 13th 1925 Lodge meeting, and "It was moved by Bro [William L.] Thebault, seconded and passed that a vote of thanx be extended to Bro Miller on the way the Bronze Elk affair was handled." At the December 22, 1925 Lodge meeting a new light for the bronze elk was suggested and the E.R. informed the Lodge that one was ordered. At the January 12, 1926 meeting it was moved by Bro. Waters, seconded by Bro. John J. Redding, and passed that the balance remaining in the Elks Statue fund be turned over to the Crippled Kiddies fund. An exhaustive search of the Lodge, House Committee, and Crippled Kiddies Committee financial records, reports, bills and check stubs (yes, it appears that we still have every scrap of paperwork which was generated in the Lodge during this time period) has failed to produce any information on the cost of the bronze elk or where it was purchased. All of the money must have been raised by the members "by subscription" as stated above and the purchase handled privately. On December 27, 1928, the Lodge was billed \$3.00 for refinishing of the elk statue on the grounds.

Now let's jump ahead. The Elk was pretty much left alone for about its first 20 years or so. Then, because the Elk statue was so easily accessible from Main Street, it became a regular target for vandalism, beginning after the war, maybe around 1948 or so. The High School, now the Junior School, was just up the street and kids passed by the statue all the time. A popular prank by local kids was to paint its testicles red or some other color, frequently on "Mischief Night", the night before Halloween. At the April 22, 1958 Lodge meeting Brother Al Collins asked what is being done about removing the paint on the Elk. This matter was referred to the Corporation. Within a few years the vandalism became more destructive, when some older kids damaged the antlers. At the July 24, 1962 Lodge meeting Brother Andy Polite suggested that a letter of thanks be forwarded to Mr. William R. Reynolds thanking him for repairing the antlers on the Elk. This ill treatment of the statue occurred now and then throughout the decade of the '60's.

At the annual meeting of the Madison Elks Club, Inc., on May 11, 1971, it is recorded that "Ex. Ruler Howard Kriner reported that vandals were at the Elk again. This time by a group of Fairleigh Dickenson University students who came fully equipt one night to remove it completely. The police were called and the job was interrupted. The question then arose - what do we need the Elk for anyway. It has no antlers, bits and pieces have been removed and various colors of paint adorn the body. After some discussion it was resolved that [Corporation] Trustee John Apgar would determine what it might be worth and then destroy it accordingly or Elk Howard Kriner would check into the possibility of mounting it on top of the porch roof facing on Main St."

At the regular Lodge meeting two weeks later on May 25th 1971 it was moved by Bro. Richard Kelley Sr., seconded and approved that the Elk statue in front of the building be kept and repaired. In spite of this, the poor abused Elk was doomed. During this time period the Lodge was having financial difficulties and may not have been able to afford to have it restored. Some have said that it was beyond repair. At the June 22nd 1971 Lodge meeting it is recorded that the Elk statue was thought to be pewter. Bro. Harry T. Hanson was asked to check into this, and Bro. John Apgar was asked to put the Elk on the side for safety. As related to me some years ago by our most senior Past Exalted Ruler, Hank Adamczyk, the Brothers fought tooth and nail over who was going to buy the statue from the Lodge because they thought that it contained a gold mine in scrap metal. At the July 27th 1971 Lodge meeting it was moved by Bro. H.T. Hanson, seconded by Bro. Elmer H. Totten and approved that the Secretary be instructed to write Bro. John Apgar and the Corporation, informing them that it is the will of the Lodge that the Elk statue in front be sold and said fund be turned over to the Lodge. And finally, at the annual Madison Elks Club Corporation meeting on May 23rd, 1972, a year after the final attempt at vandalism of the Elk was recorded, Bro. Les Veader reported that "John Apgar reported to him that the old Elk on the front of the building was not pewter but just iron junk and sold as such for thirty dollars." Monies from the sale were turned over to the Lodge Treasurer.

The Elk statue was possibly made of "white metal", a zinc alloy, with a bronze finish on the outside, and not iron. That could explain the belief that it might be pewter, which has a similar color. The concrete slab that it stood on can still be seen on the front lawn, very close to the sidewalk, near the southwest corner of the building. If you look there and use your imagination, maybe you can picture the Elk in your mind, standing proudly, with his face turned eastward, as Bro. Mitchell wrote in his History, "as a reminder to those passing by that this was an Elks Home."