



JAMES W. WHEELER
Founder of Minneapolis Lodge

"Should Auld Acquaintance Be Forgot"

THE human need of fellowship, the craving for sociability, as much as any cause, led to the foundation of Minneapolis lodge of Elks, No. 44, just as it did to the creation of the order itself in 1867, when a small group of actors met in a boarding house in New York to while away the hours of a dull Sunday with song and story. In 1886, when the population of Minneapolis did not much exceed 100,000, the popular form of amusement, now classed as vaudeville, was supplied by the Theatre Comique, located on First avenue south. What were known as "variety shows," were given by a stock company which put on a first part performance and a burlesque or farce as the closing act, traveling performers, singers and dancers and similar entertainers supplying the olio. The stage manager of the little theatre was known as James Wheeler, whose real name was Schulz, a fun-loving chap, whose chief characteristic, as I remember him, was amiability. He had come here as a boy club swinger and the proprietor of the theatre, Captain W. W. Brown, put him to work at one job and another until he became stage manager, framing up the shows, rehearsing the acts and taking part in them himself. He was a member of the Baltimore lodge of Elks. There were only about thirty-five lodges of the order in existence, the nearest to Minneapolis being Chicago, Louisville, Kansas City and St. Louis, although lodges at Omaha and St. Joseph, Mo., were about to be instituted. He talked among his friends and acquaintances about the order of Elks, its social and benevolent features. Finally, he arranged for a social session on the stage of the Theatre Comique, one Sunday evening. There being no Sunday performances in those days, there were about a dozen actors present belonging to companies that were playing at the Grand Opera house, the People's theatre, Pence Opera House, and the Theatre Comique. Among these were Brother Gus Hall, a professional singer of considerable reputation who belonged to the Detroit lodge; Brother Walter Dennis, a clever actor who had taken up his residence here; Brother Lew Catlett, of Baltimore lodge; Frank Lawton, the whistler, of Hartford lodge and Oliver M. Batcheller, now tyler of No. 44, then a ticket taker at the old Academy of Music located where Temple Court now stands, to whom I am indebted for these recollections of events leading to the institution of our lodge.

At this first meeting, the eleven o'clock toast to the absent brothers was the only approach to any ritualistic feature of the order—it was simply a social gathering of congenial fellows who entertained themselves and had a lunch together. But as such, the occasion made such a pleasant impression that Brother Wheeler was encouraged to circulate a petition to the grand lodge of Elks for a charter for a lodge to be organized at Minneapolis.

Brother Wheeler probably did not consult the society blue book, if such a thing were in existence in those days, nor did he

attempt to start the lodge off on a high social plane. He simply invited those to join as charter members, whom he knew to be good fellows, socially. Among them was Mayor A. A. Ames, whose personal following was quite well represented when a meeting was held probably in February, at 125 Nicollet avenue which had once been an Odd Fellows hall; was then used by a temperance society, was afterwards a socialistic headquarters and has since been a cheap lodging house.

The chairman of the meeting was a variety actor who was an Elk and who gave an intelligent outline of the purposes of the order. A set of officers for the proposed lodge was named and application for a charter was sent on to the grand secretary. Other meetings were held at 106 Washington avenue south over Warner's undertaking rooms, when arrangements were made for the institution of the lodge, which occurred on the morning of Easter Sunday, April 25, 1886, at the hall of Society Norden on third floor of 100-102 Washington avenue south. Dr. Simon Quinlan, of Chicago, district deputy of Illinois, arrived that morning and the institution team, which was largely composed of Chicago Elks who came with him, was as follows:

Grand Exalted Ruler, Simon Quinlan, Chicago Lodge No. 4; Grand Exalted Leading Knight, Ernest Vliet, Chicago Lodge No. 4; Grand Exalted Loyal Knight, E. H. Wilson, Chicago Lodge No. 4; Grand Exalted Lecturing Knight, C. D. Hess, St. Louis Lodge No. 9; Grand Secretary, Oscar Vanderbilt, Indianapolis Lodge No. 13; Grand Treasurer, James W. Wheeler, Baltimore Lodge No. 7; Grand Chaplain, E. W. Durrant, Chicago Lodge No. 4; Grand Esquire, W. E. Horton, Chicago Lodge No. 4; Grand Inner Guard, F. L. Buck, Chicago Lodge No. 4; Grand Tyler, Albert N. Fox, Chicago Lodge No. 4.

The ritual at that time provided for two degrees to be conferred a month apart, but dispensation having been granted, these were both given to the prospective Elks who had been selected as officers: A. A. Ames, James R. Freeman, W. B. Wheeler, E. P. Hilton, L. A. Merrick, Lac Stafford and O. M. Batcheller.

Just at this point, a delegation of eighteen visiting brothers from Omaha Lodge No. 39, which had been recently instituted, arrived and were admitted. These were J. W. Miner, J. A. Campbell, L. A. Cotter, W. E. Annin, Frank R. Morrissey, A. R. Fenwick, G. D. Hull, A. Borden, T. H. Cotter, Wm. Styger, Thos. F. Boyd, E. E. Whitmore, G. T. Miles, W. J. Parton, Charles McCormick, Edwin Larkin, D. K. Rogers and E. W. Van Cott.

The initiation of the balance of the signers of the application for the charter who were on hand, was then resumed and degrees were conferred upon A. L. Lampher, F. H. Anson, J. R. Shibley, F. W. Ames, J. W. Doran, J. G. Skaro, A. K. Skaro, J. N. Gannon, N. F. Warner, A. N. Jordan, W. W. Dunn, Thomas Moore, W. H. Brown, W. H. Lawler, Michael Breslauer, H. E. Sholes, Harvey Robinson, W. H. Cooper, C. R. Kimball, W. H. Lytle, L. H. Lucker, Weed