

# Renaissance

## Hewitt spurs Masonic Lodge restoration

By LOUISE OKRUTSKY

When Fred Hewitt returned to Farmington in 1971, he was expecting to see the Masonic Temple that he remembered from his childhood. To his surprise, he saw a structure that was sorely in need of repair.

Instead of just shaking his head over the missing ceiling tiles, rotting plaster and shabby southside exterior of the 112-year-old building, Hewitt decided to organize the members into a clean-up, fix-up brigade.

A Mason since 1949, he was motivated by loyalty to the organization and a sentimental attachment to the lodge. His great-grandfather Horace Green was its Worshipful Master 100 years ago.

"I lived in Farmington in the '40s. I've known Farmington since I was knee high to a grasshopper," he said.

He remembers Green as an old man and not the vigorous young leader depicted in the yellowing photograph that hangs in the lodge room.

"I told one of the men that I knew Horace Green and he said, 'Why Fred, we didn't know that you were that old.'" Hewitt said with a laugh.

WHEN HE GREW OLDER, Hewitt, an engineer, moved to New Jersey

and Illinois. Upon his return six years ago, he discovered that his home town had changed. There was less elbow room in the town where he had skied down the ravines in the winter. The temple had changed, too.

"I was horrified by the shape of the lodge inside and outside. I thought that since I was retired, it would be no problem for me to get going," he said, holding his brown pipe between his teeth as he sat in the old townhall section of the lodge.

A tour of the building revealed that water had ruined some of the wall plaster, ceiling tiles over the stairwell built in 1963 were missing and the women's restrooms needed painting and cleaning. Hewitt and fellow lodge member George McFarquhar compiled a list of 100 projects that should be completed to preserve the Farmington landmark. So far, 83 of those projects have been completed.

"There were fireplaces downstairs when the place was first built. When they blocked them off, they didn't block off the flues. So rain and snow were still coming in and that water had no place to go, so it went through the walls and the plaster," he said, pointing to a corner of the blue lodge room where the weather had rotted away the plaster and where the wall boards are visible.

"WE CAPPED OFF the chimneys. But that should have been done 40 or 50 years ago," he said.

Volunteers replaced ceiling tiles and painted the women's restrooms. Wives volunteered to sew curtains for their powder rooms.

Retired members, who are the nucleus of the weekly clean-up crew, volunteered to fix up the lower floor hall, which was used as a township meeting place when the building was first constructed.

Stained wooden strips are attached to the paneled walls at the point that members' chairs and tables were scraping against the woodwork.

"The paneling was getting shabby before we put these strips up," said McFarquhar. "I'm retired, so I have time to stain all those strips. It took us about three hours one Saturday," he said.

Saturday brings out other volunteers. The project continues throughout the entire week. On Saturday, members' wives turn out at noon to make sure that the workers have a good meal.

"It's like an old fashioned barn raising," explained Hewitt. MOST NOTICABLE OF THE work that the volunteers are undertaking is the attempt

at salvaging the southside exterior. Scaffolding encases that side of the building as workers replace broken dormer windows with galvanized sheet steel painted black. The windows once opened into the second floor lodge room but have long since been closed off.

Volunteers will cover the dormer's timbers with aluminum. Originally they had hoped to replace the three-foot-by-six-inch timbers but found that those dimensions had become out-

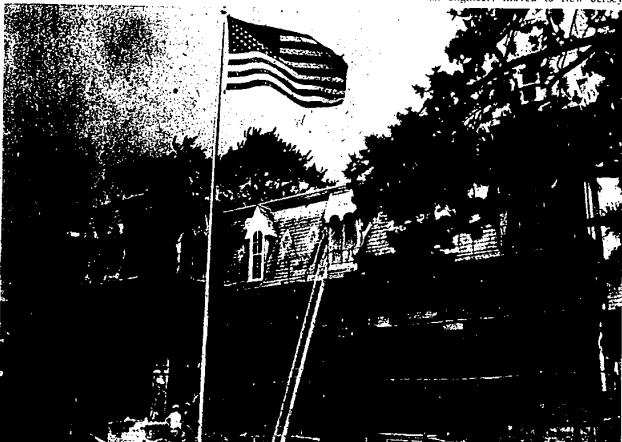
"You can order the stuff out of the tree but you have to wait two years for the wood to cure. We can't get the timbers, so we're using the aluminum. We want to remain as close to the original appearance as possible," Hewitt said.

Repairs to the dormers and the roof should be done as soon as possible, according to Hewitt. The original slate roof is showing signs of wear. Last fall, members discovered two to three

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George McFarquhar carefully trims a new dormer window with white paint. There are 23 separate operations involved in restoring one of the old panes, according to McFarquhar.



Covered against the weather with plastic sheets, the old dormers await their new panes on the scaffold-covered south side of the building.



Although the ravages of time and weather are almost invisible from the ground, the temple's dormer windows need a fresh coat of paint and new panes. The slate roof eventually will be repaired also.

## Lodge growth parallels city

From its inception, the Masonic Lodge has a history interwoven with the progress of Farmington.

In 1863, lodge members met in the second story of Oliver B. Smith's store, on the northeast corner of the Grand River-Farmington Road intersection. Smith was the worshipful master who headed lodge 151's 14 members.

Nine years later, members found themselves without a congregating place when a fire leveled the business section which included Smith's store and Dean Warner's building.

Records, Masonic clothing and the precious original charter were destroyed by the fire. Undaunted, the Masons began to plan for a new hall as the town began to rebuild. Warner reconstructed the building that he had lost and invited the Masons to use the second floor as a lodge hall in 1874.

Warner's building served the lodge for four years. By that time, the township's growth demanded a municipal hall. As the township and village fathers conferred about the financing of the building, the lodge proposed that the Masons would help pay for the construction if they were allowed to use the second floor.

HORACE GREEN, who was the Mason's worshipful master after the move to the township building recalled the negotiations years afterward for Fred Hewitt.

"I remember that Horace Green told me that the Masons asked the township officials for a place in the hall. The Masons said that they would pay to put a roof over the building in exchange for using the second floor. And that's what they did," remembered Hewitt, who is a member of the lodge.

Lodge members paid \$1,150 for their part in the construction while township officials came up with an additional \$3,150. Originally 30 feet by 60 feet, the town hall was designed by Johnson Prall of Pontiac. Prall combined Victorian and French Renaissance architecture in his design for the town hall.

As the township grew, it was forced to enlarge its hall. In 1915, the western wing was added. It cost the town-

ship and the Masons \$6,200.

By 1963, the city and the township had grown large enough to demand a larger municipal building. When the township moved out of the hall, the lodge purchased its interest in the building and used the additional space for dining rooms and a kitchen area. That area was renovated in 1965.

PART OF THE 1963 renovation include bricking up the original Masonic Temple entrance, which was around the corner from the township hall door. A cornerstone still marks the space.



Fred Hewitt ends another excursion near the top of the Masonic Temple scaffolding.

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