

Masonic Temple: long-time community hub

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By Davo Litogot special writer

When fire swept through several main street buildings in 1872, Farmington witnessed its worst catastrophe. Without this fire, however, we might not have had one of the area's finest historical buildings.

Today, the Masonic Temple occu-

ples the corner of Farmington Road and Grand River. It has been at the hub of township and city life for over 100 years. Built in 1876 to house the township offices and the Masonic Lodge, the mansard-style structure represents a combination of Victorian and French architecture.

Its builder, J.S. Prall, would still be proud of its improvements and alterations. The only thing that would disturb him today is the fact that a pillar porch covers one of the original cornerstones.

The Farmington Lodge of Freemasons was officially chartered in January 1865. The 12 original members met over the drygoods store of Oliver B. Smith.



RAINDY DORST/staff photographer

The Masonic Temple has been at the hub of township and city life for over 100 years.

footprints in history

This stone building was gutted in that 1872 fire, destroying the Lodge charter, records, furniture and clothing. The belongings were insured but a new meeting place was necessary.

UNTIL A new Lodge could be built, pastmaster Norman Lee provided a building. Then P. Dean Warner, father of the future governor of Michigan, offered the upper floor of the new Warner Building (now called Warner Block). The Lodge used these facilities for about three years.

The lot where the new combination Town Hall-Lodge was to be built was purchased from Cynthia M. Collins for \$500. The price for the building was budgeted at \$4,100, but, like most endeavors of this sort, the final price was more, costing \$4,300, of which the Masons paid \$1,150. In return, the Masons hold a perpetual lease for 99 years.

The new building was ready for occupancy on Dec. 27, 1876. Wings were added in 1915. The structure was remodeled in 1938, 1951 and again in 1965. The upstairs meeting room was renovated and a new stairway added. The original entrance to the second level was placed in the "steep" tower. Later, another stairway was added when the south wing was built; today, this is used as a fire escape.

Throughout its history, the building was used for dances, lectures, musicals, political meetings, basketball games, spelling bees, church services, school plays, club meetings and the township library. A bandshell was even built near the Town Hall for outdoor concerts. The township tax machine was housed in a small mezzanine room.

WHEN the township municipal offices moved across the street in 1963, the Lodge paid \$6,150 for its

tions that maintain the structure: the Eastern Star, the White Shrine, the Job's Daughters, the Demolay and the Masons.

In combination, these sororities and fraternities focus tremendous volunteer efforts, especially during the Farmington Founders' Festival. They host dinners, provide craft sale space, and run a concession stand at the center of town.

Steeped in tradition, the Masonic Lodge has had over 90 worshipful masters. Its membership list has included township officials, doctors, lawyers and blue and white collar workers alike who meet to enhance

their charities, retirement homes, and other civic activities.

The building the group calls home has seen several changes and improvements — but it still remains a focal point in Farmington history and architecture.

Sources: "Farmington: A Pictorial History," Lee S. Peck, 1971; "If Walls Could Talk—Heritage Homes of Farmington," Ruth R. Mochman, 1980; "One Hundred Years of Masonry—History of Farmington Lodge No. 151 F & AM," George Dorset P.M., 1965; Interview, Howard Legg-Secretary, Farmington Lodge No. 151.

part of the building. Partitions were torn out, the dining room enlarged and a new interior stairway added.

The exterior of the building is decorated with symbols and "tools" of the Freemasons. The interior meeting room is the traditional blue with seating for over 100 people. This room is shared by the five organiza-

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