

Sandon, the "King of Clubs" Lodges, societies and organizations in the Silver City

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Not surprisingly, clubs, lodges and other community organizations played an important role in Sandon's early years. As the city held such a disproportionate ratio of males to females, men were forced to rely on each other for much of their socializing and companionship. For many of the miners, this was simply a natural extension of their daily lives, as they routinely depended on each other for their safety in a dangerous job, often far from medical aid. In many respects, the Sandon branch of the Western Federation of Miners grew from this sense of common cause and deep mutual trust. As well as union activities, many social functions were organized at the WFM's Miners Union Block, which featured an gymnasium, library, stage and dance hall.

However, even before the formation of the union in December of 1898, Sandon was already a hotbed of lodges and clubs, catering to both miners and the business class.

Independent Order of Oddfellows

One of the earliest of these organizations was the IOOF, which was formed December 30, 1896. The formal ceremonies marking the official opening of Silver City Lodge No. 39 did not take place until over two months later, however, on March 3, 1897, at Crawford Hall. The instituting officer was Brother Hodson, DDGS of Nelson's Kootenay Lodge No. 16, and the order's first officers were H. Douglas (NG), Fred Hopkins (VG), W. Furnival (RS), Bolderson (PS), and H.C. Holder (Treasurer).

Twenty-five new members were accepted into the Silver City Lodge that evening, and within a

month the membership had almost doubled. Regular meetings were conducted Friday evenings at Crawford Hall, and by the time the popular lodge held its first annual ball in April of 1897, an astonishing 80 couples were in attendance.

Knights of Pythias

By March of 1897, steps were being taken to organize a local branch of the Knights of Pythias, and on May 18, 1897, Sandon Lodge No. 24 was chartered, with a membership of 30. The first lodge executive included jeweller G.W. Grimmett, broker S.B. Hendee, Dr. Gomm and Byron Sharp. New members were charged a \$15 initiation fee, while membership could be transferred from another lodge for only \$5. Wednesday evenings at Crawford Hall were given over to regular meetings of this lodge.

Orange Lodge

A virulently pro-Protestant Irish organization that celebrated the past battles of the English monarch, William of Orange, the Orange Lodge already existed in Sandon by June of 1897. It had 40 members, and was the first Orange Lodge in the Slocan district. Brinsley Walton, manager of the Slocan Queen mine, was the first lodge secretary. The Sandon museum today holds several pieces of this lodge's regalia, including a large banner that hangs high above the main floor.

Sandon Club

Established in July of 1897, the Sandon Club was designed to be a "gentlemen's club" for the city's upper crust, somewhere the discriminating capitalist could go to unwind, away from the riff-raff who frequented the many downtown saloons and gambling dens. Member of Parliament Hewitt Bostock was the club's patron, and presented it with a medal, to be presented as a trophy in the Sandon rink.

Occupying the entire upper floor of the Harris Block, the club featured a large billiard room with two tables, a card room, a "general lounging room", two large reading rooms "with the best

papers and magazines of the English-speaking world", a writing room complete with desks and stationery, an unfurnished general-purpose room, a steward's room and a lavatory. Sofas, rockers and lounges proliferated, the walls were covered with tasteful oil paintings, and thick brocade carpets covered the floors.

Aiming to be "on a footing for dignity and comfort with any clubs in the East", the Sandon Club bragged that its quarters boasted "every comfort which good taste could suggest, or money could buy". It was, the club maintained, the classy sort of place to which "any visiting capitalist or tourist would feel it an honour to be invited".

Not surprisingly, the original officers reflected the club's aspirations to high-tone plumminess, and included the city's financial elite. The first president was Scott McDonald, and the Bank of British Columbia's manager Henry F. Mytton was vice-president. The executive committee was comprised of lawyer M.L. Grimmett, broker D.S. Wallbridge, Bank of British North America manager George Kydd, E.M. Sandilands, R.W. Thomas, John Daly, and C.D. Hunter.

Sadly, less than three years later, all these opulent furnishings were consumed in the fire of 1900.

Lodge of the Oriental Degree

Established in Sandon in October of 1897, this lodge called a meeting of the Princes of the Orient the following month to confer the "Oriental Degree O. of H." Exactly what the functions and objectives of this lodge were seem destined to remain shrouded in mystery, however, as nothing else is known of it. It is ironic, nevertheless, that any so-called "oriental" lodge existed in Sandon, a community that for many years was to remain openly hostile to any Chinese or Asian labourers who appeared on the scene.

Virginia Coterie

Also formed in October of 1897, this group seems to have formed largely to cater to the non-dancing crowd. It advertised itself as providing "a series of high class social parties during

the season, in which amusements of different kinds are furnished, to enable those who do not dance or who wish to vary the evening with other forms of social games to find entertainment".

Exactly what other forms this entertainment took is uncertain, although it appears dancing was still a mainstay for members of the Coterie- they held the Sandon Orchestra on a long-term retainer, and were known to host periodic dances. It also seems a safe assumption that the name did not reflect any geographic or family history requirements. Rather, the name seems to be taken from the Coterie's choice of venue, as regular meetings were held every second Thursday in J.M. Harris' Virginia Hall.

Order of Forresters

The Forresters began to organize in January of 1897, but the order was not officially instituted until November 29, 1897, with an initial roll call of 54. It is possible this group took longer to organize because its principle purpose more than simply a social function; primarily the organization's purpose was to provide affordable insurance for its members.

The extra time appears to have paid off, however, as over one 30-day period the following year, the Forresters wrote up \$43,000 worth of insurance. Premiums were \$30 per member, and the Forresters had \$3,000,000 in its reserve fund to pay death claims, sickness benefits and funeral costs. It was said to be the cheapest, best and safest insurance of the day, and that every death claim was paid within two weeks of the death.

Masonic Lodge

One of the longest-lasting of all of Sandon's lodges, the Freemasons held their first organizational meeting on January 5, 1899. Five months later, a charter was granted, and Alta Lodge (AF & AM) No. 29 was formally constituted on August 3, 1899. The name "Alta" was reportedly chosen for the lodge because of the high altitude of the city.

Magistrate W.H. Lilley, lawyer M.L. Grimmett, Sandon's second mayor H.H. Pitts and Thomas Brown were the first officers, and meetings were held in the Masonic Hall on the first Thursday

of every month. The original Masonic Hall was located above Alexander Crawford's blacksmith shop on Sunnyside Hill, but this building was destroyed in the disastrous fire of 1900. After that, the lodge moved its hall to upstairs rooms in the Miners Union Block. Meetings of the Masonic Lodge were still being conducted in Sandon as late as 1938.

Other clubs

Several other clubs also existed in Sandon over the years, including the Epworth League, organized by the Methodist church, the Catholic Ladies League, the Sandon Whist Club and the Sandon Consolidated Bachelors Association. No doubt there was no shortage of potential members for this last club, which was organized as a means of making as many of them as possible former bachelors. No record survives, however, of this club's level of success.