

As we anticipate 'Phantoms of the Opera Hall' ...

Submitted by the Phantom ...

The benevolent work of the Sacarissa Lodge #307, Independent Order of Odd Fellows

The mid- to late-19th century was a unique period in American history. Americans were actively seeking an identity, as millions were washing up on our shores. It was a time of great hardship – yet it was also a time in which a national psyche was born – one of compassion and brotherhood.

On Nov. 19, 1846, the Sacarissa Lodge of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows was founded in Lewiston. A special meeting was called for the transaction of uniforms.

“On motion an Indian with the letters IO of OF overhead and three links underneath was adopted as the device of the seal of the Lodge.”

It is likely that this choice was made to honor either Sacarissa, the Tuscarora Turtle clan chief at the time; William Chew (also known as Sacarissa); or an earlier Sacarissa, “the venerable chief” who had been respected and beloved by many – a founding member of the Tuscarora Congregational Church in 1806 and the legendary chief who, along with Solomon Longboard, led the last exodus from the Carolina country.

Sacarissa Lodge held their meetings in the Historic Lewiston



In the photo: Mortimer Bacon (1807-74) was the first to sign the membership book of the Sacarissa Lodge on Nov. 16, 1846, in Lewiston. (Submitted image)

Opera Hall at 732 Center St.

The Odd Fellows were an early altruistic society that had been organized in England during the 1600s to “improve and elevate the character of mankind.” Members not only provided assistance to their own members, but they reached out to the less-fortunate and even to the stranger. Throughout the meeting notes of the Sacarissa Lodge, money was often collected for the “Widows and Orphans Fund.” In fact, the very first meeting of this group included a special donation for the “Widows and Orphans Fund.”

They also provided assistance to members in need, and buried and honored their dead members.

On Sept. 18, 1848, an entry was made in the meeting minutes stating that “on motion of Brother Bell, the secretary was authorized to make out a draft in favor of J.E. Ways for two dollars for the relief of a stranger and distressed brother.”

Is it possible that the early members were involved in the local activities of the Underground Railroad? The term “stranger” was said to have been used in other records in Lewiston during this time period and it is believed by some to be another word for “fugitive slave.”

Sacarissa Lodge was an active organization for many years. However, the lodge surrendered its charter in 2022 and ceased to exist when the Historic Lewiston Opera Hall was sold. The building is now owned by Opera Hall Events LLC and has become the most talked about venue in Lewiston, hosting wonderful musical events such as a folk festival, a masquerade ball, a theatrical reading of an original play, “A Moment in December,” a fundraiser for Indigenous children ... and now, “Phantoms of the Opera Hall,” which will be held April 5-7 – the weekend before the solar eclipse!

Tickets can be purchased on-

line at <https://business.upwardniagara.com/ap/Events/Register/WpMXJE9r>. Visit on Facebook (“Phantoms of the Opera Hall”).

We extend our sincere thanks to Michelle Kratts, local history research specialist at the Lewiston Public Library, for the days, weeks and months she spent recording, writing and preserving the precious history of Lewiston’s Sacarissa Lodge and the Lewiston Opera Hall.

For more information: New York Heritage/Early Records of the Sacarissa Lodge Independent Order of Odd Fellows.

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'Circle of Honor' best place for veteran banners

Desmond Tutu, recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, once said, “Reconciliation is not about forgetting the past, but about moving forward together.”

That summarizes the current situation regarding the VFW’s push to put veteran banners on Center Street. Of course, it’s a noble and worthy cause, but it conflicts with recent efforts to limit the number of signs, poles and other elements that detract from the historical and clean streetscape. In other words, we’d like to see fewer things on Center Street, not more.

We think the banners would be better suited in another location. The Lewiston VFW can proudly say it has one of the best small-town veteran memorials in the nation that includes an eternal flame on the corner of Portage and Center Street. It is an honored and sacred site that will stand for hundreds of years as a testament of the admiration and gratitude the community has for the local men and women who have served this great nation.

We think this would be an excellent venue to display individual banners highlighting the service

of our local men and women who have proudly worn America’s uniforms throughout the ages.

Putting the banners in the historic district on Center Street sets a precedent that will make it difficult for future decision makers. Will we allow veteran banners, but then deny other deserving recognitions such as first responders and others? Where do you draw the line?

As recent events have shown, everyone wants a piece of Center Street. It’s totally understandable. Lewiston’s reputation as the cultural centerpiece of Western New York shines brightly, not to mention being a culinary destination. But we don’t want to kill the golden goose.

We should be talking about what we can take down, not what we can put up. We should be discussing how we can preserve our “secret sauce” that makes Lewiston so exceptional and the envy of other communities – how we can preserve our quaint and historic streetscape for the benefit of future generations.

The veterans banners can be

both educational and inspirational. And if we want to honor our service people, the best place to put the banners is around the existing “Circle of Honor.” That special corner, in the center of village activity, is the best and most dignified location to commemorate the valor and courage of our men and woman who have served.

If we can do that, we can accomplish two things at once. We can “move forward together” by honoring our veterans and, at the same time, preserve and protect the historical character of Center Street that makes Lewiston so special.

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