

THE MASONIC TEMPLE



This is a view of the front entrance of the temple. The inscription above the doors is the emblem of Freemasonry, the letter "G" stands for God.

Many people in Kirksville don't know the location of the Masonic Temple, let alone its purpose. The Masonic Temple is the meeting place for the different orders of Freemasonry in Adair County. There are over 3,000 members if you combine all the different orders.

The temple was designed by the Bonsack and Pearce architectural firms. The erection of the four-story building was supervised by Leonard Poehlman, a local member of the lodge. Mr. Bruce Hunt said, "I would call the type of architecture a contemporary-Grecian, Egyptian-type style." Mr. Hunt has been a member of Adair Lodge No. 366 for 49 years. He is a past Master and a past Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Missouri.

A Masonic Temple Board was set up with three members from Kirksville Lodge No. 105, three from Adair

Lodge No. 366, three from the Caldwell Chapter, and three from Ely Commandery. This group made the decisions about the temple, such as the amount that would be paid on the debt each year. Mr. Hunt said, "The board was considered to be fair since the members were evenly distributed from each lodge."

The location of the temple, 217 East Harrison, was chosen by the temple board because it was close to the downtown area. Since the Masonic Temple has been built, many buildings have been erected in the area, and finding a parking space today is sometimes a problem.

The temple was originally to be constructed of yellow bricks on the exterior, but Mr. Poehlman had connections with a stone company in Carthage, Missouri. Mr. Hunt recalled, "Mr. Poehlman was able to get some Carthage



The Masonic Temple, located at 217 East Harrison Street, was built in 1930. Leonard Poehlman, a local member, supervised the construction of the building.

stone, which was left from the construction of another building at a very reasonable price." For this reason the north and west sides were made of yellow brick and the other two of Carthage stone.

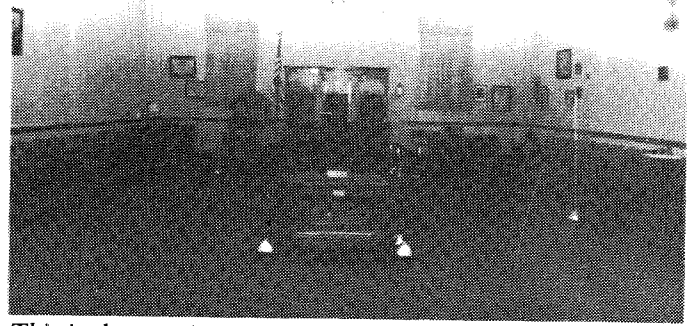
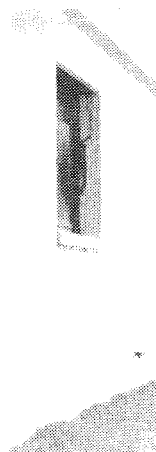
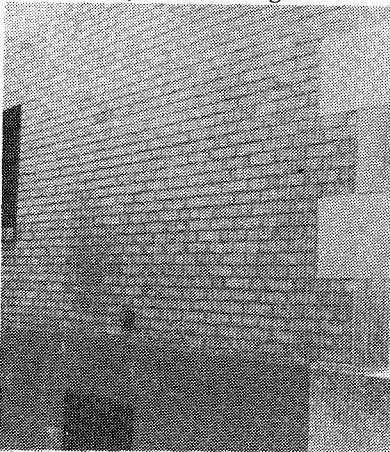
The cornerstone of the temple was laid on April 2, 1930, by Samuel L. Freet, Grand Master of the Grand Lodge of Missouri. According to the *Kirksville Daily Express*, the contents of the cornerstone consisted of a Bible, a Masonic apron, a chapter penny, a petition, the 1929 Grand Lodge proceedings, a directory of all members in Adair County, a copy of the by-laws for the different Masonic orders, copies of the *Kirksville Daily Express* and the *Kirksville Weekly Graphic*, and a book containing the names of all the men from Adair County who died in World War I. A special ceremony was held with all the lodge members present and the Kirksville High School band performed.

Two lodge members, Dr. George M. Laughlin and Dr. Harry M. Still, loaned \$30,000 for the construction of the temple. The temple was completed in the fall of 1930 at a cost of just under \$70,000. A ceremony was held and Grand Master Van Freemont Boar dedicated the temple. The lodges had an indebtedness of \$20,000 or more. The board paid on the debt every year except one, when the boilers had to be replaced. In 1949 the debt was paid and the notes were burned. They never received a single contribution towards the construction of the building.

The temple consists of four floors. On the first floor is the kitchen and the dining room. The kitchen has been kept up-to-date with remodeled cabinets and new appliances, such as two new electric ranges. In the early years of the temple, the dining room was the only place in Kirksville that could accommodate up to 250 people. The colleges and other organizations held their dinners in the temple's dining room, but now many buildings in Kirksville can accommodate large groups, so the temple's dining room is used for Masonic purposes only.

On the second floor there is one meeting room. Kirksville Lodge No. 105 and Adair Lodge No. 366 hold their meetings here. The Kirksville Chapter No. 184 Order of the Eastern Star, which includes men and women, and the Job's Daughters, which is for young women, also meet in this room.

The north and west sides of the temple are made of yellow brick with the south and east sides made of Carthage stone. The reason the building is half-and-half is because Mr. Poehlman made a business transaction during the construction of the building.



This is the meeting room for the Kirksville Lodge No. 105, Adair Lodge No. 366, Kirksville Chapter No. 184 Order of the Eastern Star, and the Job's Daughters. The chairs along the walls were bought by the lodge members and their names are engraved on the front of the chairs.

Offices and a recreation room with pool tables are on the third floor. The offices are for the secretaries of the different lodges. All the records for the different organizations are kept on this floor.

The fourth floor of the temple is where the York Rite bodies of Freemasonry hold their meetings. The York Rite is a higher form of Freemasonry. The York Rite bodies consist of Caldwell Chapter No. 53 Royal Arch Masons, named after James D. Caldwell of Ohio, and the Kirksville Council No. 44 Royal and Select Masters. The Cryptic section of the York Rite and Ely Commandery also conduct their meetings here. The Ely Commandery, chartered on October 7, 1872, is named for David A. Ely of Kirksville. He was quite active in the early formation of the Ely Commandery in Kirksville. The White Shrine for women also held their meetings in this room until their charter was surrendered on March 7, 1985.

"The building is in first-class condition in every way, but maintenance is expensive," said Mr. Hunt. A lot of things have to be done to keep a building in good shape, an example would be the new roof put on the temple in 1984. A caretaker is hired to keep up the maintenance. "There are no plans to renovate nor plans to open the cornerstone, unless the building should be sold," said Mr. Hunt.

The temple has been visited by many Grand Masters of the Grand Lodge of Missouri. One of the more memorable Grand Masters to visit was Harry S. Truman in the early 1940's, when he was also a U.S. Senator. He gave a speech about freemasonry. As Grand Master, he tried to visit as many temples as he could during his term.

"Men from every walk of life are in the lodge," said Mr. Hunt. If membership in the lodge continues to be as high as it is now, the Masonic Temple will be around for a long, long time.

**By Mike Truitt
and
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