

Independent Order of Odd Fellows Hall
Third and Brown Streets
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1771

HABS
PA,
PHILA,
353 -

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HABS
PA
51-PHILA
353-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

INDEPENDENT ORDER OF ODD FELLOWS HALL

HABS No. PA-1771

LOCATION: Third and Brown Streets, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania.

The following architectural report of the building was written in January, 1963 by D.B. Myer, a staff member of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). The entire structure was destroyed by fire in 1976.

The Independent Order of Odd Fellows Hall on the northwest corner of Third and Brown Streets in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, is one of the few surviving examples of Egyptian Revival architecture in the country. The Hall was built as a meeting or club house with specialized ceremonial rooms in 1846. Although the architect is unknown, it is possible that John Haviland designed the structure.

The building is masonry covered with plaster and has applied Egyptian decoration. The roof is flat and all exterior elements are geometric and simple, but on quite a large scale. The building is seven bays and about one hundred feet on the Brown Street side and is three bays and about fifty feet on the Third Street side. It is surrounded on all sides by small commercial structures, most of them about four stories high. Directly to the north of the structure is a parking lot. To the west is a small alleyway. The Hall is now used as a warehouse for fruit and produce packages-- bags and crates. The exterior of the structure is in poor condition, without much paint left. Some of the plaster is falling and parts of the wooden trim have come loose and some pieces are missing. The first floor has some alteration for shop type fronts. The interior of the building is in poor

condition, but much of the original decoration and architectural ornament are still intact. The first floor is the only area of the structure that has been substantially gutted.

The exterior of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows Hall is simply rectangular. The two street facades, the east and the south, are ornamented. Those of the west and the north are plain and utilitarian. There are no windows on the north wall, which is one smooth plastered surface. The west side is red brick and has some windows. The finish sides of the building have the first floor set off by a large curved cornice-type molding at its top, and the first floor walls are broken up with shop fronts, doors and windows of several different types. Above, the upper three floors have a smooth plaster finish broken only by the window treatment. At the top of the building is a large cornice which is concave, carved and polychromed. Even though this is richly ornamented, it is geometrically simple. The window treatment is quite interesting. In essence there are continuous vertical bands of windows which are quadruple-hung wooden sash, and run for three stories. The masonry trim around the buildings is treated to make each window unit seem like a large battered pilaster with a capital, then surmounted by a small triangle or ziggurat shaped window. The main vertical windows run through the center of the pilasters and give the effect of a slit in the pilasters. There are seven such window strips on the south side of the building and there are three on the east side. The center of these on the east side is more elaborate than the rest, however. This is a triple window consisting of three vertical strips of window within one wide pilaster. This wide pilaster is then topped by a winged ball design. The main entrances were on the Brown Street side. There are three pairs of heavy double doors here

now. These are high and of heavy wood. The design is a simple series of four vertical square panels on each half of the double doors. One of these entrances, at the west end of this side, is a stairway which runs directly up to the 2 1/2 floor. The next entrance, going east, goes into a formal foyer and entrance hall. The next entrance lets into a large first floor room, which seems to have been altered. There are some other and more subordinate doors throughout the remainder of the first floor, and these are used in connection with the current fruit and produce package business.

The colors of the exterior are presently a light off-white on the first floor, with brown trim. The upper floors have the plaster painted a medium tan. The pilasters are painted a dull red. The cornice molding at the top of the building is mainly brown now, but traces of polychromy can be seen. A grey color can be seen in places where the tan has come off. Some of the trim on the exterior is wooden; the cornice at the top of the building and the tops or capitals of the pilasters, for example.

Each of the four floor plans is slightly different. The first floor, which is the most greatly altered of all, is essentially divided in half by a line running north and south. To the east is a large warehouse room which retains none of its original character. On the west half there are three sections running north and south through the depth of the building. The easternmost of these is a simple room, which contains only a service elevator and warehouse activities. The next room going west is the former main entry, and contains two original stairways. The west section contains only one stairway which goes to the 2 1/2 floor level. The second floor contains one large meeting room on the east half and a series of irregular small rooms on the west half. Some of west half does not appear to be original. On the third floor there

are two large meeting rooms on the east half, and one large meeting room on the west half. The fourth floor is much similar to the third, save for a much more complicated hall, which has changes of level and unusual partitions that may be more ceremonial than practical. There is also a level between the second and third floors on the west half of the building. This level seems to be original and is broken up into small rooms, some without windows, some in odd shapes. This area looks to have been a council and ceremonial area. The basement is divided in half by a north-south wall. The basement is deep and has been divided horizontally by a wooden structure and floor to give two basement levels. There are some interesting brick arches supported on metal columns here.

The stairs to the upper floors all appear to be original. The main stair to the second floor is from what was the main entry and hall. This is a semi-circular stair going up only one floor. The stair is made of wood with wooden treads, risers, newel posts and balusters. Also in this section of the building is another stair, which is L-shaped and of wood. The railing is supported by panels that have ornamental piercings in a heart-and-harp pattern. The stair at the west wall which goes directly to the 2 1/2 floor is also of wood, without many characterizing features. All of the other stairs are of wood with similar details to the main stairs, but in general there are not continuous runs for the entire height of the building.

Most of the doors in the Hall have four panels, usually two-over-two, or in the case of the double entrance doors, four in a vertical line. The windows have very simple trim on the interior.

The finish of the building is primarily plaster on the ceilings and walls and wood on the floors. There is some use of tongue-and-groove paneling and

wainscoting. This is always the narrow plank type.

On the east half of the first floor are plaster walls and ceiling; the floor is asphalt tiled. On the extreme eastern portion of this area is a modern partition enclosing a small office for the firm which now occupies the structure. The entry and foyer to the building have like finish, save for their wainscoting. The double door between the foyer and the hall has a transom with four side-by-side lights, each with an arched head. The hall still has a plaster rosette in the ceiling, where a chandelier must have hung. In the large meeting room on the east half of the second floor there is a plaster ceiling, and walls with a molded plaster cornice molding. At the west end of this room there is an architectural canopy which curves over the area where there was a platform. To the left of this is a door which is about twelve feet high, but only the lower portion of it opens. There may have been such a door flanking the platform on the other side as well, but this detail was removed by the modern freight elevator. There is a chair rail in the room, which is not original because of the wallpaper under it. The colors in this room are faded now, but must have been very bright at one time, judging from those areas that have been concealed. On the 2 1/2 floor level the walls and ceilings are plaster and the floor, wood. These walls seem to have been painted, at a time that some stenciling was done here. The room in the southwest on this level is painted black in a crinkle finish. Off of this room is a small unusual room with a wooden barred door and no other windows or doors. This looks as if it may have been a ceremonial cell. On the third and fourth floors the meeting rooms have plaster walls and ceilings. They have

traces of gas fixtures and stove pipes. The floors are of wood. Most of the rooms are with some type of ornamental cornice molding. The third floor northeast room has wooden blinds which fold over the interior of the windows. These are unusual in that they are three sections across-- when folded, two sections go to one side and one to the other. This room has typical wallpaper which has floral, vegetable and geometric designs. In the southeast room on the third floor there are painted murals on all of the walls. These have faded a good bit, but some of the subject matter can be seen. They are made up of draperies and figures in unique costumes-- flowing robes. There are some feathers and trees and some landscape visible. On the east wall there is a pair of brass gavels imbedded into the wall as part of the mural. The paintings on the walls are broken into panels. The ceiling seems to have had one large painting in an oval covering much of the room. The platform at the east end of the room has been removed, but small pieces of the carpeting remain on their nails. The carpet was multi-colored with black, red, and white visible. On the southern end of the west room on the third floor is an unusual pierced wooden box fastened to the ceiling, with about an eight-inch depth. This box contains a red roller shade, similar to a window shade, which pulls down over the area that once seems to have contained a platform. In the southeast room on the fourth floor there are traces of canvas wall coverings of some type. The fittings and wooden strips which held these in place can still be seen. These must have been murals or paintings of some type. There are some brass trim pieces, which made the cornice trim, still in place. The ceiling in this room was wallpapered. In this room on the west wall is a niche with pierced trim at the top and a door to the rear hall at the back. Also in this section is another pull shade in front of the platform area, with a brass box.

The building has no heat at the present time and never seems to have had central heating. There is evidence of stoves in many of the rooms. There were gas lights originally and only a few of these are intact at the present time. There are some of these on the fourth floor. Some of the small wall brackets have pressed brass rosettes about two inches in diameter; from these extend arms which hold glass tubes up by wire springs. These tubes are about one-and-a-half inches in diameter and about seven inches high. In the center of the southeast room ceiling is a recessed gas fixture which is surrounded by a plaster molding. The fixture is metal and has a hanging light which has a glass globe and four gas jets. Another feature which occurs throughout the building is a small bolt over some of the windows and a few links of chain hanging down. These may have been used for the draperies once. Many of the doors on the upper floors have peep holes in their top panels. These have bolts at the tops and hang down. They are egg shaped. There is even a peep hole into the low unfinished attic.

The pervading atmosphere of the Odd Fellows Hall is one of exotic and mysterious ceremony. The use of the Egyptian Revival style on the exterior and the unique discontinuity of the floor plans and stairways as well as unusual decor on the interior, manufacture this effect.