

# The Colorado History Gazette

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## ODD FELLOWS INITIATION RIDING THE GOAT

THE SOCIETY OF ODD FELLOWS OPENED ITS PEAK LODGE IN DENVER ON DECEMBER 24, 1860. MANY GOOD MEN HAVE JOINED THE ASSOCIATION, ALTHOUGH NON-MEMBERS HAVE LONG SPECULATED ABOUT THE SECRET INITIATION CEREMONY. RUMORS OF SECRET SIGNS, SALUTATIONS, AND PASSWORDS HAVE LONG EXISTED, BUT THE REAL CURIOSITY IS THE MUMBLING ABOUT INITIATES "RIDING THE GOAT." THIS YEAR, DENVER GOT TO SEE ITS OWN VERSION OF THIS MOST SECRET ODD FELLOW RITUAL.

### DAILY EVENING NEWS.

W. N. BYERS, } EDITORS. { EDW'D BLISS,

OFFICIAL PAPER OF THE CITY.

Denver, J. T. +

Tuesday Evening, December 26, 1860.

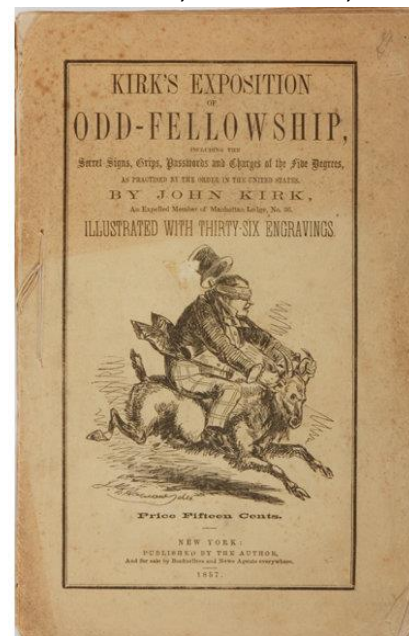
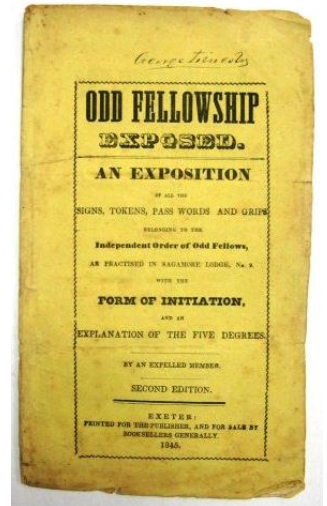
—PEAK LODGE, No. 12, I. O. O. F., was duly instituted in our city last Monday evening. The Lodge will hereafter hold regular meetings on Monday evening of each week. Due notice will be given through the papers of the place of meeting.

IN 1845, A SUPPOSED EXPELLED (AND ANONYMOUS) ODD FELLOW PUBLISHED A BOOKLET CALLED "ODD FELLOWSHIP EXPOSED" WHERE THE WRITER DESCRIBES A HORRIFIC (AND PROBABLY INACCURATE) INITIATION CEREMONY. IN THIS CEREMONY, A VOICE CRIES OUT "PREPARE THE GOAT!" AND WHEN A LARGE BLACK AND WHITE GOAT STEPS INTO THE HALL, THE NEW INITIATE IS TOLD TO MOUNT IT. AFTER DOING THIS

AND GRABBING THE ANIMAL'S LARGE HORNS, THE NEW INITIATE IS THROWN FROM THE GOAT AND LANDS ON THE FLOOR ON HIS BACK, HEARING LAUGHTER ALL AROUND.

AS HARD AS IT IS TO IMAGINE THIS INITIATION BEING TRUE, IT WAS ASSERTED ONCE AGAIN BY JAMES MADISON IN HIS 1848 PUBLICATION *AN EXPOSITION OF THE FORMS AND USAGES OBSERVED IN THE VARIOUS LODGES OF THE INDEPENDENT ORDER OF ODD FELLOWS*. LATER, *KIRK'S EXPOSITION OF ODD-FELLOWSHIP* NOT ONLY REPEATED THE ACCUSATION BUT ALSO INCLUDED AN AMUSING SKETCH OF THE DARING FEAT.

NEVER THOUGH, DEAR READER, DID WE EXPECT ACTUALLY SEE



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THIS STRANGE RITUAL EXHIBITED ON THE STREETS OF DENVER.

AFTER THE ODD FELLOWS PEAK LODGE WAS ESTABLISHED, IT ANNOUNCED MEETINGS WOULD BE HELD IN THE MASONIC LODGE LOCATED OVER J. B. DOYLE & CO. ON THE CORNER OF FERRY AND FIFTH STREETS. IN ORDER

TO ACCESS THIS HALL, MEMBERS WERE REQUIRED TO CLIMB UP A FLIGHT OF RICKETY STAIRS.

ACCORDING TO ONE GEORGE CLARK, THE NEW ODD FELLOWS FRATERNITY WAS HAVING TROUBLE ATTRACTING NEW MEMBERS SO TWO OLDER MEMBERS BEGAN SOLICITING LOCAL BUSINESS LEADERS. WOLFE LONDONER DECIDED TO JOIN THE GROUP BUT WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THE INITIATION CEREMONY. HE TOO HAD HEARD RUMORS ABOUT "RIDING THE GOAT."

NEAR THE J.B. DOYLE & CO. STORE WAS A LIVERY THAT OWNED A RATHER ODOROUS LARGE GOAT. BECAUSE THE LIVERY PREFERRED THE GOAT STAY OUTSIDE, THE ANIMAL HAD BEGUN TAKING UP RESIDENCE IN THE SHADE OF THE LANDING AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS LEADING INTO THE PEAK LODGE. THE GOAT WAS SLEEPING ON THIS LANDING WHEN MR. LONDONER WAS LED TO THE LODGE FOR HIS INITIATION.

AS THEY CLIMBED THE RICKETY STAIRWAY, THE GOAT AWOKE AND CHARGED DOWN THE STAIRS, USING ITS HORNS TO BUTT THE PEOPLE OUT OF THE WAY. AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT, MR. LONDONER WAS BUTTED INTO THE AIR AND LANDED ON THE GOAT'S BACK. ASSUMING HE WAS "RIDING THE GOAT," MR. LONDONER CRIED OUT, "BY CHAOS! THIS IS GALLANT SPORT. A LEAGUE AT EVERY BREATH. METHINKS IF E'ER I HAVE TO DIE, I'LL RIDE THIS RATE TO DEATH."

A PARADE OF YOUNG BOYS CHASED AFTER THE GOAT AND RIDER UNTIL THE GOAT FAILED TO MAKE A TURN AND PLOWED INTO THE SHOW WINDOW OF A LOCAL DRUG STORE. THE RIDER WAS PITCHED FROM HIS MOUNT, SOMERSAULTED THROUGH THE AIR, AND LANDED IN A HEAP.

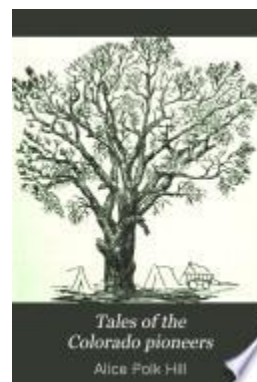
THE CLERK LOOKED DOWN AND ASKED, "WHY ALL THIS CELEBRATION?"

"IT'S IN HONOR OF MY BEING MADE AN ODD FELLOW. IT WAS WORSE THAN GILPIN'S RACE. I WOULD PREFER TAKING MY INITIATION IN INSTALLMENTS IF IT WAS NOT SO ODOROUS."

THE GOOD MAN PAID FOR DAMAGES AND PURCHASED ROSE WATER AND LINIMENT, BEFORE HE HEADED HOME. IF HE WILL EVER BE INITIATED INTO THE ODD FELLOW LODGE, IT IS UNKNOWN, BUT MR. LONDONER HAS CERTAINLY "RIDDEN THE GOAT!"



NOTE, THE LAST HALF OF THIS BLOG COMES FROM *TALES OF THE COLORADO PIONEERS*, WRITTEN BY ALICE POLK HILL IN 1884. I'VE NOT BEEN ABLE TO CONFIRM THE VALIDITY OF THE STORY, BUT I WAS ABLE TO VERIFY THE DATES AND LOCATION OF THE LODGE AND THAT GEORGE CLARK LIVED IN DENVER DURING THIS TIMEFRAME. I COULD NOT FIND INFORMATION ABOUT WOLFE LONDONER. THE STORY MAY BE A COLORADO YARN, BUT THERE MIGHT BE TRUTH TO THE TALE.



#### REFERENCES:

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