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## That History Column: Danish Brotherhood lodge continues to thrive

DIANE GILES Jan 31, 2015



Danish Brotherhood Lodge 14 Agent Paul McVey looks through old photographs of the Danish Royals coming to the area.

KEVIN POIRIER

Brick by brick. That's the way the Danish Brotherhood Lodge 14 at 2206 63rd St. was built in the Danish enclave that was known as Uptown Kenosha.

The Danes constructed their lodge during their lunch hours, evenings and weekends over a seven-month period in 1910.

Designed by local architect Joseph Lindl, to see the defining essence of the building, you have to look up. Way up.

“There are no rafters in this building. All the support is on the roof. They are all wrapped and are like brand new,” said Paul McVey, lodge agent (manager). “You can take every wall in this building down; there’s no bearing wall in this building. That’s the way they built them in Denmark back in the day.”

Because it reflects the city's historically important and diverse ethnic and cultural heritage, the Danish Brotherhood Lodge 14 is a Kenosha Designated Historic Site.

The lodge was originally formed in 1884 and was rechartered in 1892. In 1899, the group purchased a lot in downtown Kenosha for a lodge building, but never constructed on that site.

Instead, the lodge members purchased the lot on 63rd Street on what was then the western edge of the city. They erected the lodge, which featured club rooms, a library, ladies parlor, pool room, meeting rooms, a bowling alley, dance hall and commercial space.

The first tenants in the lower storefronts were Schend Confectionery and Paul Larsen Dry Goods, but many people today remember Bernacchi’s Pharmacy, which was located on the corner for over 40 years.

Second floor recently updated

Much has changed inside and out on the building since it was built. And a recent remodeling project on the second floor has updated the space, which seats 225 people.

Gone is the old dark wood paneling, replaced with paint that has really brightened up the place. The old floor, too, has been replaced.

At 123 years old, the non-profit fraternal Kenosha lodge is the third or fourth oldest in the country.

Oddly enough, Racine — which has a much larger Danish population than Kenosha — had the Danish Brotherhood Lodge 14, but it closed within the last five years, according to McVey.

“Most of them came here to join our lodge,” he said.



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With 292 members, Kenosha's is the largest lodge in the country today and the only one to own its own building.

The lodge is also home of the Danish Sisterhood Society 20.

Ibsen knighted

The efforts of two longtime members deserve mentioning:

n Sir Robert Ibsen, 85, was the lodge's agent for 30 years. He was knighted in Racine by Queen of Denmark Margrethe II in 1988 for his role in preserving Danish history in Kenosha,

n Ken Hansen, 100, restored the historic murals in the basement Rathskeller in the late 1980s. These seven scenes painted directly on the wall depict a "Fiskshun" in Denmark and the Castle Kronborg in Copenhagen.

Males of Danish descent are encouraged to join the lodge; today most of the members are not Danish, but have joined by sponsorship. Only about 40 percent of the present 292 members is Danish.

For more information on membership or hall rental, call the lodge office at 262-657-9781 Monday through Friday 9 a.m. to noon.

