

A Tour of Main Street: #3698 – The K.O.T.M. Building - Part 1 By Gordon Youngman

Editor's Note Our west-side tour crosses Main Street to spotlight the stores and homes located on the east side of the road. The building at #3698 was home to many groups and businesses, including the K.O.T.M. (Knights of the Maccabees), Charles Buckley's General Store, Wick's Hardware, Walworth Hardware, and currently NYS Sitepower Corp. Part 1 features the K.O.T.M., a fraternal organization. Thank you to Gordon Youngman and his grandson, Aaron Fernaays, for sharing their memories and for the time they spent researching and documenting the information about the stores located at 3698 and 3700 Main Street.



Left: Undated photo from the collection of Mrs. Elton (Anna) May. The signs over the door read: "Leroy Plows, Lowe Bros. Paint, I. Petty and Co., General Store." The initials K.O.T.M. and the year 1902 are visible at the top of the building. Photo courtesy of Gordon Youngman.



Above: Photo circa 1910, showing the K.O.T.M. building on the right and the J. W. Baker General Store on the left. Many years later Gordon Youngman purchased both properties and they became known as Walworth Hardware. Photo courtesy of Gordon Youngman.

The following are excerpts from information documented by Gordon in March 2000:

This building was built in 1902 on a lot located south of the J. W. Baker General Store. The K.O.T.M. (Knights of the Maccabees) needed a meeting hall and contracted with Allison and Carrie Franks to buy a lot of 125 feet by 35 feet off the northern part of their property; this information is taken from the organization's minutes dated November 1, 1901. Price of the lot was \$225.00.

A cistern was located in the basement and the water was used for fire-fighting purposes. At the April 2016 Walworth Memories program, I mentioned that the cistern water was needed in 1932 when the K.O.T.M. building was on fire. Using pumps, the firemen hosed the cistern water over the building and the water runoff went back into the basement to be recycled until the fire was put out.

According to research done by my grandson, Aaron Fernaays, the property was sold to Albert Yeomans, Frederick D. Ralph, and Dewitt P. Foskett, trustees of Walworth K.O.T.M. An assessment of \$3.00 was requested from each member to pay for this building lot. I have always wondered what the origin of the Maccabees was and have had little success in finding out. On April 16, 1902, the bids were opened and John Sienor was awarded the contract for constructing the wall under the building for \$78.25. The contract for the building was awarded to George Atwood, a member of the organization. Ground breaking took place May 26, 1902.

The first meeting of the Walworth Tent #318 was held in the new building on December 10, 1902. It was agreed the upper floor would be used for meetings and social gatherings and the lower floor would be rented for a retail store. It was noted in the minutes that other organizations, including the Baptist and Methodist Churches, used the upper floor for some of their social functions. The K.O.T.M. also held dances to earn extra money to financially support the building. After reviewing the minutes of the K.O.T.M. from 1902 until 1916 I could not find who was renting the first floor or how much rent was being paid.

As early as November 1905 the Tent members talked about selling the building as membership was dwindling and they were headed for financial problems. As of December 1906 there was a membership of 36 Knights. Members were called "Sir Knights" and addressed as such at meetings.

Right: 1923 receipt from hardware store operated by Allison Franks. Source: WHS museum



Some names of early first-floor tenants are unknown. Sometime prior to 1910 Dan Lee operated a hardware store there. Due to financial problems, he sold the business to Lo Bassage who operated it for one year and then sold it to George Lee, Dan's father, who in turn sold it to Dan's brother. A 1927 newspaper article stated that the Ontario Hardware purchased the stock of Allison Franks' Hardware and was to continue the business with Harry Conant in charge. The K.O.T.M. organization disbanded, and the members sold their property in June 1945 to Charles and Vivian Buckley, who had been renting the first floor area for some time. **(To Be Continued: Part 2 – Buckley's Store)**

Editor's Note #1: Our museum archives contain an original signed 1898 memo sent to George Atwood, Tent #318, from the Offices of the Supreme Tent of the Knights of the Maccabees and the World, referencing the possibility of a member enlisting in the United States Army. The national organization was located in Port Huron, Michigan.

Editor's Note #2: In our September 2016 newsletter issue, Gordon wrote about the history of the Walworth Post Office. Prior to 1902, there was a small building at #3698 that was used as a post office. The structure was torn down and replaced by the K.O.T.M. building.