THE PYTHIAN CASTLE

Castle Hall of Newman Lodge No. 139

David Patrick Keller 12-05-12 ©

Friendship, Charity, Benevolence

Pythian Castle Lodge No. 139 Newman California 1910¹

¹ Photo Newman Historical Society
A CALIFORNIA CASTLE

Nine years before the completion of the Hearst Castle in San Simeon California, a more modest castle was built in Newman California. Ornate in its own right, The Pythian Castle Lodge No. 139 was designed by renowned California architect, William H. Weeks.

Based in Watsonville, and with offices in San Francisco and Salinas, William H. Weeks, (1864-1936) was hired by the Hills Ferry chapter of The Knights of Pythias to build a meeting hall in the town Newman. The Hills Ferry chapter was established in December 1886 with 26 members.

The Pythian Castle was constructed by Hoyt Brothers (Frank L. Hoyt and Henry A. Hoyt) Construction & Engineering Company based in San Francisco and Santa Rose in a contract let June 11, 1910. Sturdy redwood timbers were brought in from the Sierras and bricks for the building were made on the site of St. Joachim Catholic Church located about 250 yards north of the site.

The building project was completed for a sum of $17,742. Construction superintendent was F.J. Beaty, carpenters, C.A. True, J. and Lee Ross, assistant and Gasdacia was the brick contractor with 10 men. The Castle Hall was the fourth new brick building started in Newman in 1910. The Odd Fellows Hall, (Newman City Hall) The Bank of Newman and the First National Bank buildings were also started that year. It was a year of great progress in the developing town. Newman’s old wooden sidewalks were replaced with concrete.

William H. Weeks was a prolific and enduring architect, designing approximately 1500 buildings in over 161 cities during his career. His works include Carnegie libraries, schools, churches and personal residences. Much of his work survives and can still be seen throughout the greater San Francisco Bay Area and beyond. He is especially well known for his Neoclassical and Greek revival designs.

Modestans have been favored with a fine example of Weeks work with the former McHenry library built in 1912. The library became the McHenry Museum July 1972. The funds to build the original library were provided for in the will of Oramil McHenry. Another lasting example of William H. Weeks work is Turlock High School, built in 1926.

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2 Barbara Powell
3 Time Capsule
4 Donna Crow 1969
5 Betty Lewis 1985
6 Betty Lewis 1985
7 Betty Smith 1985
8 Modesto Historical Society
9 Betty Smith 1985
Weeks also designed Modesto Junior College North Hall, opened in 1923 at a cost of $90,000, later demolished in the 1970’s.\(^{10}\)

William H. Weeks is perhaps best known as the architect hired by businessman, Fred Swanton (1862-1940) in the summer of 1906 to design the Santa Cruz Beach Boardwalk Casino and Natatorium. The original Neptune Casino burned down June 22 1906.\(^ {11}\) Two months earlier, April 18, 1906, Weeks had survived a crumbling hotel room during the Great San Francisco earthquake. He was immediately engaged in the rebuilding efforts of the city in addition to taking on new work elsewhere.

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\(^{10}\) Carl P. Baggese & The McHenry Museum  
\(^{11}\) Seaside Co. History 2012  
\(^{12}\) Betty Lewis 1985
In the course of history, California is still a youth. The history of our valley is younger still. As California continues to change and grow, an appreciation of what is left of its earliest days will become more important, serving as sentinels of our history and reminders of a bygone era. The transition between California’s pioneer age and the computer age is a period when downtowns served as gathering places, strengthening family and community ties, building communities out of whole cloth. They were places for parades, movies, cruising, shopping and doing business.

There are still places where small town values and aesthetics remain strong and where there is a stubborn resistance against the restlessness of progress. Some downtowns have thrived or have been rebuilt as centers and focal points of communities. The City of Newman is a prime example of a place where local leaders have planned and implemented policies that serve the purpose of preserving and enhancing its history.
Newman California is the 2012 recipient of California’s APA award “recognizing outstanding achievement in land use planning and the planning profession,” The City of Newman has been recognized by the Central Section of the American Planning Association California Chapter with its “Planning Implementation” Award\textsuperscript{14} for its efforts in preserving and enhancing its Historical Downtown District.

\textit{PYTHIAN CASTLE BUILDING 2012}

The Pythian Castle Building has served the city of Newman in many ways over the past century. Designed as a meeting and dining hall for the Knights of Pythias fraternal organization, it has also served many other purposes. In the early years, Kirby’s Harness Shop shared the street level with city of Newman offices. Later, it housed the Newman library, fire and police departments\textsuperscript{15} as well as the telephone exchange.\textsuperscript{16} Many dances, parties and events were held in the ballroom upstairs. The Boy Scouts met upstairs for many years.

The building was described the following way shortly after it was built. \textit{“It is really a three story building, although most of the space above the ground floor is devoted to the main lodge room which, of course, has a very high ceiling occupying the space ordinarily devoted to two stories. In connection with this is an elegant banquet room for the use of lodges.\textsuperscript{17}”}

\textsuperscript{14} American Planning Association California Chapter Central Section
\textsuperscript{15} Barbara Powell
\textsuperscript{16} DPK
occupying the hall, with a modern kitchen and every modern convenience for serving meals and the upper floor also contain a suite of rooms suitable for the use of a social club.”

Today, Rabobank and a popular salon occupy the street level. There are apartments upstairs and a vacant ballroom with 24’ ceilings.

The building itself is 12,300 square feet, ornate and fortified like a castle. A level placed in the 2nd floor is still perfectly in balance today. Special architectural features of the building include turrets, stained glass windows, nautical window features, two thrones and decorative woodwork.

A small brick building was added sometime after original construction and housed the Newman fire station.

It is called the Pythian Castle and was funded and built by the local chapter of the Knights of Pythias. The Knights of Pythias was the first fraternal order chartered by an act of congress, sponsored by Justice H. Rathbone February 19, 1864. The purpose of the organization is friendship, charity and benevolence. Its members are dedicated to the cause of universal peace. One of the primary requirements for consideration of membership was “A member must be at least 18 years of age. And must take the oath to: “that I am not a professional gambler, or unlawfully engaged in the wholesale or retail sale of intoxicating liquors”

PRESIDENT ABRAHAM LINCOLN ENDORSES PYTHIANS

Established during the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln is quoted as commenting on the establishment of the Knights of Pythias order “The purposes of your organization is most wonderful. If we could but bring its spirit to all our citizenry, what a wonderful thing it would be. It breathes the spirit of friendship, charity and benevolence.”

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17 Donna Crow 1969
18 K of P website
19 K of P website
20 K of P website
21 K of P website
LETTER IN TIME CAPSULE AUGUST 2010

“To whom it may concern

The White Front General Merchandise A. Levy Proprietor

Newman Cal. July 18, 1910

“Newman Lodge 139 was instituted at Hills Ferry in December 1886 with 26 charter members. Hills Ferry is on the San Joaquin River about 4 miles East of Newman. In 1889 the railroad was opened and the town of Newman was established. In 1890, the Lodge was moved to Newman and afterward called the Newman Lodge. It has today a membership of eighty and has $3,000.00 in the treasury. In March 1910 the Pythias Hall Association was formed with a capital stock of $20,000.00. The officers and directors are H. V. Armstead, J.S. Cardoza and J.D. Blackwell, Directors. We had arranged with the K of R S Shaffner to call the grand lodge to lay the corner stone but they failed to appear and so we had no public celebration, but a few of the boys got together and we did it private. Whoever opens this box remember that a few of the old knights held up the lodge. We have a sister Pythian Lodge of 40 members.”

A. Levy.

Officers and Directors of the Pythian Hall Association
H.V. Armistead President
W.W. Giddings Vice President
A. Levy Secretary
E.S. Shergeneim. S. Blackwell22

Knights of Pythias Member list 1910

Castle Hall of Newman Lodge No. 139, Knights of Pythias Membership list to date, organized December 1886 Newman Cal., July 18, 1910

- H.G. Armstead P.C.
- Ed Alders
- A.F. Adamina O. Guard
- W.F. Buttons
- A.J. Baker P.C. M.A.
- J.D. Blackwell P.C. I. guard
- M.J. Blackwell P.C. M of W
- H.E. Berry
- J. Blum
- Jno Cardoza

22 AJ Levy Handwritten notes time capsule
L.D. Russ
Geo W. Smith
Jos. Sparks
Geo. Sparks
J.A. Stratton P.C.
W.G. Shornick
C.W. Shanks
Geo. Steele
W.S. Simpson
W.R. Sherman P.C.
Floyd R. Stevenson
C.E. Trefts P.C.
Ralph Van Gundy
Thos. Virgo
Jno. White
E.S. Wangenheim P.C.
Geo. Wallace K of R. H.
H.H. Woodside

23 Membership list Time Handwritten Time Capsule