



Victoria and Albert Lodge

No. 1027 G.U.O. of O.F., 84 Somerset Road



The building, then Kingdom Hall, was in pristine condition in 1998 when it was photographed for the Sandys Parish book.

BUILT HERITAGE | AUGUST 2022

By Linda Abend and Margie Lloyd, Bermuda National Trust

This is part of a series of architectural articles by the Bermuda National Trust that will highlight some of Bermuda's endangered historic buildings.

The Grand United Order of Oddfellows was founded in Bermuda in 1848 when a lodge building was built in St George's called Somers Pride of India Lodge No. 899. Brother lodges, Alexandrina Lodge No. 1026 in Hamilton and Victoria and Albert Lodge No. 1027 in Somerset, were formed in 1852. The members of Victoria and Albert Lodge met on the first and third Fridays of each month at an unknown Ely's Harbour location.

In 1896 William Alexander Swan, Henry Thomas Cann, Henry Anderson Simmons, John Saunders Wilson and Albert Smith Gilbert, as Trustees of Victoria and Albert Lodge No. 1027 Grand United Order of Oddfellows, purchased land near St James Church for £160 from tavern keeper Albert James Williamson. On 24th May 1899 the steamer *Syren* was chartered to convey passengers to Somerset for the laying of the corner stone of the new lodge building.



What was called 'The Great Hurricane' hit Bermuda on September 12th/13th, 1899. *The Royal Gazette* reported on the island-wide damage. "The premier wreck is that of the new Lodge of Oddfellows, the corner stone of which was laid with so much éclat on 24th May last. The building was right up to the wall plate, and is a structure of 69 ft x 34 ft. The whole has been razed to the ground and presents a sad, sad picture. We found a few workmen around the building, completely down-hearted over the loss, and who can refrain from sympathizing with them in this rude put-back to their hard endeavours? It is estimated at £500 to place the building in its former stage. The work had progressed very rapidly; "too rapidly", as a very prominent official informed us, and perhaps the rawness of the as-yet unplastered stones had much to do with the slight resistance against the hurricane. The work is likely to come to an indefinite standstill, as the society's funds are not proof against so serious a loss."

Although there are no further mentions in the newspaper, and contrary to its prediction, rebuilding must have started almost immediately. An entry in the Sun Insurance ledger for Policy 5567722 taken out in 1900 by the Trustees covers a two-storey building then being built near the parish church. It shows in the Sandys Parish assessments as 'new building valued £600'.

The building is heavily decorated with elaborate moulded gable ends, a string course between floors and a short tower. The windows are adorned with keystones and an unusual quoining pattern.

When the Lodge's 50th anniversary was celebrated in July 1902, Alexander Swan of the Victoria and Albert Lodge told those gathered that, besides carrying on the good work of the Order, their property in Sandys had risen in value to £2,500. 'Fancy fairs' were held annually in aid of the building fund.

According to *Mind the Onion Seed* by Nellie E Musson, the first Sandys High School was opened around 1901 under the auspices of the Grand United Order of Oddfellows. Although it could not be confirmed, the school is thought to have been held in this building. John Alexander Braithwaite came from Barbados to be the school's principal. He married a Bermudian Nettie Alvina Swan in 1903. Ancestry.com records indicate the couple soon afterwards emigrated to Cambridge, Massachusetts.

A *Ficus Elastica* or rubber tree was planted in 1959 to celebrate Bermuda's 350th anniversary and the 61st anniversary of the laying of the cornerstone. Algernon Harford, one of the trustees, remembered that for many years the building was the mainstay for the Somerset Cricket Club. It was Mr Harford who built the large stage to accommodate plays and



other entertainment. The last meeting of the Oddfellows was held in 1971 when the building was rented to the Jehovah's Witnesses and became known as Kingdom Hall.



Kingdom Hall in 1991 before the rubber tree was cut down.

The Jehovah's Witnesses applied to build a new Kingdom Hall on Cambridge Road in 2004 and, when that was refused, purchased the old Southampton Beneficial Club. Victoria and Albert Lodge No 1027 was later rented to the New Testament Church of God Healing Centre. The building has suffered from hurricane damage and is empty and becoming increasingly derelict.

It is a great shame that the history of the lodges in Bermuda and the role they played in the community has been forgotten. These magnificent buildings were built by highly skilled masons, carpenters and mechanics who gave their time voluntarily so that they were mostly debt-free when completed. It is unfortunate that younger people are not interested and memberships have declined to the extent that new uses must be found for these buildings. (See previous articles on Loyal Irresistible Lodge No 6587 on the corner of Cambridge and Somerset Roads and Somers Pride of India Lodge No 899 in St George's.)



The Victoria and Albert Lodge in 2022.



The east side of Victoria and Albert Lodge in 2022. With some community involvement and government support the damage could be repaired.



The striking decorative stonework on Victoria and Albert Lodge.