

ODD FELLOWS HALL, 165-171 Grand Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1847-1848; Architects Trench & Snook/roof addition - 1881-1882; architect John Buckingham.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 235, Lot 13.

On April 13, 1982, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Odd Fellows Hall and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 17). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were three speakers in opposition to designation.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Located on a prominent site on Grand Street, between Centre and Baxter Streets, the Odd Fellows Hall was designed by the architectural firm of Joseph Trench and John Butler Snook. Built in 1847-48, it is an early and particularly fine example of the Anglo-Italianate style of architecture that both Trench and Snook helped introduce to New York. Moreover, it is one of the few surviving institutional buildings of any style from the 1840s, an important period in the architectural history of the city. John Butler Snook, the younger partner in the firm, later became one of New York's most famous and prolific architects of the nineteenth century; the Odd Fellows Hall stands as one of his most striking and important buildings. Trench and Snook's client, the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, was one of the many mutual aid societies and fraternal organizations established in New York in the nineteenth century to contribute to the welfare of the city's populace. The eventual move of the Odd Fellows from the Grand Street site by the early 1880s to one further uptown reflected the northward development that characterized the growth of Manhattan from the middle of the nineteenth century onward.

#### The Odd Fellows and the Grand Street Building

The Independent Order of Odd Fellows, a secret society, was founded in Manchester, England, in 1812, although it traced its origins back to the seventeenth century. Odd Fellowship was organized in the United States in 1819 in Baltimore; that city was also the site of the first Odd Fellows Hall in this country, dedicated in 1831.<sup>2</sup> The Odd Fellows was a fraternal organization that had as its purpose: "To Visit the Sick, Relieve the Distressed, to Bury the Dead, and to Educate the Orphan," and in addition to be the "Guardian of the Widow, and Father of the Fatherless."<sup>3</sup> Throughout the nineteenth century the Odd Fellows became progressively more popular; by the 1890s there were over 150 lodges in New York City alone.<sup>4</sup>

On April 9, 1844, the legislature of New York incorporated the "Odd Fellows Hall Association of the city of New-York" and defined its object as "...to provide suitable premises by the erection of a conveniently sized edifice, for the accommodation of library and reading-rooms, apartments for natural history, science, and the arts, school, lecture and meeting rooms, and to provide for the education of orphan children."<sup>5</sup> However, as late as 1848, the Grand Lodge of the Odd Fellows was still meeting at National Hall on Canal Street.<sup>6</sup> The building on Grand Street, erected by Trench and Snook, was apparently the first such hall in New York City specifically built for the Odd Fellows and replaced National Hall as the home of the Grand Lodge. In March 1847 payments to the architects began;

they were probably responsible for the supervision of the building's construction.<sup>7</sup> Final payments were made in March 1848,<sup>8</sup> at which time the Odd Fellows Hall was either finished or very close to completion.

In the Odd Fellows publication, The Manhattan, of 1883, the author of an article on the various homes of the Odd Fellows throughout the United States writes:

(...) it (the Odd Fellows Hall) was one of the ornaments of the city at that time (i.e. late 1840s), and is a credible piece of architecture even now. (...) It was always regarded as the headquarters of the Odd Fellows in the State of New York and to it most visiting Odd Fellows from other States and countries usually found their way. Many a hospitable reception has been held within its walls, and there must be many persons in the United States and elsewhere, who have pleasant memories of it.<sup>9</sup>

The Odd Fellows Hall also received recognition in various guidebooks of the day, such as Miller's New York As It Is... of 1862 which included the following entry:

The Independent Order of Odd Fellows number, in New York City, about 90 lodges, and about 12 encampments, including many thousand members; many of the lodges have fine halls, in various parts of this city and the neighboring cities of Brooklyn, Williamsburg, Jersey City, &c.; but the grand rendezvous of the order, is the large brown-stone building at the corner of Grand and Centre Streets, erected at a cost of \$125,000. This imposing edifice presents a noble appearance, being substantially built, lofty, and surmounted by a dome. It contains a series of highly ornamented lodge-rooms, richly furnished and in different styles of architecture: some Egyptian, Grecian, Elizabethan, &c. These elegant apartments are well worth a visit.<sup>10</sup>

It was clearly an attraction for any visitor to New York, as is remarked by the author of the Guide to New York: Its Public Buildings, Places of Amusements, Churches, Hotels, &c. (...) in 1867:

The most imposing Hall of the "Order" is located on the corner of Centre and Grand Streets. (...) It is well worthy a visit. Stangers admitted second Tuesday each month.<sup>11</sup>

Such recognition reflected the architectural importance of the building and its symbolic importance as the home of this increasingly prominent fraternal organization. The importance of the design was affirmed in the choice of architects, the firm of Joseph Trench and John Butler Snook.

#### John Butler Snook and the Firm of Trench & Snook

John Butler Snook was born in London in 1815 and moved to New York with his family two years later.<sup>12</sup> Snook entered the building trade in c. 1837 and worked as a builder until he entered the architectural office of Joseph Trench (1810-1879), sometime in 1842 or 1843. Very little is known about Trench, and even his name has been the subject of dispute (it is sometimes taken to be "French"). He may have come from England, but there is no way to prove this; Trench remains essentially a mystery figure. Snook worked with Trench for at least eight years up until the latter left for California sometime in 1850 or

1851, perhaps in the hope of striking it rich in the gold rush. After Trench's departure, Snook continued the work of the office and eventually formed his own firm.

It is uncertain in what capacity Snook entered Trench's office; he may have started as a junior partner or he may have entered simply as an employee. In any event, Snook was most certainly a junior partner, receiving one third of the firm's profits, by 1846.<sup>13</sup> This arrangement continued through 1849.<sup>14</sup>

Snook had a long and varied career, covering two-thirds of the nineteenth century, from 1837, when he first started as a builder, to 1901, the year of his death. During this period, which saw the transformation of New York into the country's major metropolis, as well as the rapid development of many new styles of architecture, Snook designed over 500 structures, including commercial buildings -- by far the largest representative type in his oeuvre -- houses, apartment buildings, schools, and churches, and worked in a variety of styles, including the Classical Revival, Gothic Revival, Italianate, Second Empire, neo-Grec, Queen Anne, and Romanesque Revival.<sup>15</sup> Among his most notable designs are those for: the A.T. Stewart Store, 1845-46 (with Trench; extant); the Metropolitan Hotel, 1850-52 (with Trench; demolished); Grand Central Station, 1869-71 (replaced); the Turner Building, 1865-66 (demolished); and the Manhattan Life Insurance Building, 1865-66 (demolished). Snook continued to design notable buildings throughout his career, and his designs in cast iron are of special interest.

Snook was particularly involved with the development of the Italianate style in New York, starting with the A.T. Stewart Store. The Stewart Store was the first New York building to be designed in the Italianate style; it was inspired in large part (perhaps at the suggestion of the client) by the work of the English architect, Charles Barry, especially his Travellers' Club (1830-32) and Reform Club (1838-40),<sup>16</sup> both of which display the English fascination with the architecture of the Italian Renaissance. Trench & Snook's A.T. Stewart Store was one of the earliest examples of the Anglo-Italianate style and served as a model for other buildings in the city. It should be noted that Trench & Snook also worked in the Italianate mode in 1846-47 when they designed the Herman Thorn House (at 22 West 16th Street), an early, if not the very first, use of this style for a residence in New York.<sup>17</sup> The Italianate style became the "overwhelming favorite for New York mansions and row houses" by the late 1840s and continued into the early 1870s.<sup>18</sup> This mode became quite popular for commercial and institutional structures as well. One can imagine that clients of Trench & Snook would have asked for building designs that emulated the overwhelmingly successful A.T. Stewart Store.<sup>19</sup>

A conservative and dignified air pervades most of Snook's buildings.<sup>20</sup> His interest in planar surfaces and volume as opposed to surface detail and complex exterior arrangements are entirely in keeping with the Italianate mode; his concern with austerity and mass was often carried over to other buildings where he employed a different style. The simplicity and restraint that he and Trench achieved in the designs of the 1840s and early 1850s was continued by Snook in his later individual work and stand as the hallmark of his architecture.

### The Odd Fellows Hall

It is not known if the Odd Fellows specifically requested a design based on the A.T. Stewart Store, but, nonetheless, Trench & Snook designed the hall in the progressive, up-to-date Anglo-Italianate style. It is interesting to note that

Snook was himself an Odd Fellow for most of his adult life and presumably sought to design a building that would reflect the importance of the society.<sup>21</sup> As with the A.T. Stewart Store there is a sense of restraint and solidity in the Odd Fellows Hall that follows English precedents. The contrast between the rusticated base and the smooth-faced stone on the upper stories are features common to Barry's English buildings and the Odd Fellows Hall. As with two other notable early Italianate buildings, the Brooklyn Savings Bank (1846-47) by Minard LaFever, and the Richard K. Haight Residence (1848-49), the Odd Fellows Hall typifies the Italianate style as it was transported to this country.<sup>22</sup> In all of these buildings there is a subtle handling of the classical vocabulary compounded with a profound concern for the geometry and sense of proportion that was intrinsic to the architecture of the Italian Renaissance.

The Odd Fellows Hall is not only one of the first Anglo-Italianate institutional buildings in New York, it is also of interest for its brownstone facing. Prior to the 1840s, most buildings in the city were faced with brick and, on occasion, marble. The brick walls of institutional and public buildings were often covered with stucco and scored to imitate stone. When the use of brownstone became popular, it transformed the appearance of the city, providing a distinctive character which persisted to the end of the nineteenth century. The Odd Fellows Hall is an early example of the use of brownstone for an institutional building (as opposed to residential or ecclesiastical use). In fact, Trench & Snook's building is one of the city's few surviving institutional buildings from the 1840s.

#### The Firm of R. Hoe & Company and the 1880s Addition

By the third quarter of the nineteenth century the rapid northward growth of New York placed the Odd Fellows inconveniently far downtown. Most of the lodges that assembled there began to have meeting rooms in the upper part of Manhattan and the remaining lodges were seriously considering such a move. This led to the sale of the building to the firm of R. Hoe & Company, the well-known manufacturer of printing presses, who converted the hall in the early 1880s for business and manufacturing purposes.

The two uppermost floors were added by the architect, John Buckingham (1847-1918), for the Hoe printing firm. Buckingham employed the Queen Anne style in a reserved manner, maintaining the tone of Trench & Snook's building. The brick chimneys with their vertical patterns of indented brick, characteristic of the Queen Anne style, complements the colossal pilasters below them and serve to link the upper with the lower part of the building. The two uppermost floors successfully illustrate the effort to tailor the qualities of an architectural style to the functional needs of the client's building; the Queen Anne style lent itself well to the brick chimneys required for the building's new industrial use. This addition of 1881-82 necessitated the removal of the dome and pediments that surmounted Trench & Snook's building.

The client of this later addition, R. Hoe and Company, holds a prominent place in the commercial history of New York.<sup>23</sup> This firm became one of the most important and innovative manufacturers of printing presses in the country. Robert Hoe (1784-1833), founder of the firm, introduced the cylinder press to America in the late 1820s. His eldest son, Richard, continued the business after his father's death in 1833 and proceeded to revolutionize the printing industry with a series of inventions, including the double cylinder press (1837) and the rotary press (1846). Shortly after the Civil War the Hoe firm built a plant covering the entire



block between Grand, Sheriff, Broome and Columbia Streets (moving from the original Hoe building on Gold Street); two other buildings were located on Broome Street and an iron foundry was situated on the East River water front. The conversion of the Odd Fellows Hall for a printing plant reflects its neighborhood's change to a more commercial area and the adaptability and solidity of the structure. No doubt its proximity to the company's headquarters further east on Grand Street made the site of the Odd Fellows Hall particularly attractive.

### Description

The portion of the Odd Fellows Hall designed by Trench & Snook is a four-story structure, faced with brownstone, and is located on a trapezoidal site which allows for three fully-exposed facades. The two major facades, which front onto Grand and Centre Streets, are each defined by five bays with the three central ones projecting slightly; the bays are united by four reeded colossal pilasters with Corinthian capitals. On each of these two facades, the pilasters, set on bases, extend from the rusticated podium-like ground floor to a wide entablature. (When built, the central bays were further emphasized by triangular pediments, now removed). Nine bays make up the Baxter Street facade. On this front there are no pilasters, although the middle five bays project slightly as do the central sections on the other two fronts. The rusticated ground floor (which survives largely intact despite some changes for storefronts) forms a substantial base for the upper stories. Except for the pilasters and central projections, a characteristic feature of the Italianate style, the walls of the upper stories are severely planar and punctuated by rectangular window openings. The windows at the second and third floors are linked by paneled spandrels, while the fourth floor windows are accented by molded sills. The wide entablature with dentilled and modillioned cornice extends around all three facades of the building. Balustrades once crowned the cornice at the outer corners. This overall composition reflects the skill of the architects in handling the Anglo-Italianate mode and sets the building apart as a major early example of the style.

The Odd Fellows Hall was originally capped by a dome, which was probably visible from the street. It was removed when John Buckingham incorporated two more stories into a mansard roof addition. As opposed to the smooth-faced stone used by Trench & Snook in their original building, brick was employed in the lower floor of the addition, the upper being sheathed in slate. The dormer windows which are incorporated into the slate roof are capped with triangular pediments. Brick chimneys with incised Queen Anne details extend from projecting bases with vertical incised strips on the lower level of the addition. These chimneys visually carry on the vertical line of the pilasters from the main portion of the building. The south wall of the building, which is only partially visible, is of plain brick.

### Conclusion

The Odd Fellows Hall stands today as one of the early essays in the Anglo-Italianate style by Trench & Snook who introduced this style to the United States. The use of the progressive Anglo-Italianate style symbolically reflected the importance of the increasingly prominent Odd Fellows organization in the 1840s. Snook went on to become one of the most successful New York architects in the nineteenth century. He worked in a variety of styles, although he seemed to have preferred the style of the Odd Fellows Hall;<sup>24</sup> the austerity and restraint of this building best embody the approach he took to architecture throughout his career.

Moreover, the Odd Fellows Hall is also significant as one of the few surviving institutional buildings erected in the 1840s, which gains further interest for its brownstone facing. The changes that occurred in the 1880s reflected the northward move of so many residences and institutions at that time and demonstrates the continued usefulness of the building after its original patrons had relocated. While the condition of the Odd Fellows Hall has deteriorated from that when it was erected, it stands, nonetheless, as a fine and important monument in the cultural and architectural history of the city.

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#### Footnotes

1. For the history of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, see J. Blanchard, Revised Odd-Fellowship Illustrated. The Complete Revised Ritual of the Lodge Encampment, Patriarchs Militant and the Rebekah Degrees (Chicago: Cook, 1904), esp. p. 21, and James L. Ridgely, History of American Odd Fellowship: the First Decade (Baltimore: James L. Ridgely, 1878), esp. pp. 6, 142, and 390-392.
2. Ridgely, p. 142.
3. This is recorded by Mary Ann Cleeg Smith in The Commercial Architecture of John Butler Snook (Ph. D. dissertation, Pennsylvania State University, 1974), p. 43.
4. Moses King in King's Handbook of New York City (Boston: Moses King, 1892), p. 532, states this number.
5. Isaac Newton Phelps Stokes, The Iconography of Manhattan Island 1498-1909 (New York: R.H. Dodd, 1915-28), Vol. V, p. 1784 (April 8, 1844).
6. The Great Metropolis; or Guide to New-York, For 1848 (4th pub.) (New York, 1848), p. 111.
7. Smith, p. 43.
8. Ibid.
9. "Home of the Societies," The Manhattan, 1 (Jan - June 1883), 32-35.
10. Miller's New York As It Is, or Stranger's Guide-Book to the Cities of New York, Brooklyn and Adjacent Places.... (New York: James Miller, 1862), p. 42. An illustration of the Odd Fellows Hall is also included by Miller.

11. Guide to New York: Its Public Buildings, Places of Amusement, Churches, Hotels &c.... (New York: John Dainty, 1867), p. 57. The Odd Fellows Hall is illustrated in Guide of the City of New-York with Views of the most Interesting Points of the City (New York: J.H. Kleefish, 1859(?)).
12. See Smith, pp. 5-20, for this and the following outline of Trench & Snook's partnership.
13. Ibid., p. 9.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., p. x.
16. Ibid., pp. 26-27 and 46.
17. Ibid., p. 191.
18. This is discussed by Charles Lockwood in "The Italianate Dwelling House in New York City," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, 31 (May 1972), 145.
19. Smith, p. 37.
20. Ibid., pp. 195-197.
21. Concerning Snook's membership in the Odd Fellows, Smith writes, "He seems to have become a member shortly after their hall was built." (p. 43). Also, Snook owned Odd Fellows stock, Ibid., p. 44.
22. These buildings are illustrated by Charles Lockwood, pp. 147-148. The architect of the Richard K. Haight Residence is uncertain. Smith, however, sees the Odd Fellows Hall as an example of what she calls the Roman Revival style as opposed to the Anglo-Italianate style (see pp. 44 and 46).
23. For more on R. Hoe & Company, see John F. McCabe, "A Visit to R. Hoe & Co.'s Great New York Plant," The Printing Trade News, February 1910; Stephen D. Tucker, "History of R. Hoe & Co., 1834-1885," Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society, 82 (1973), 351-453; Frank E. Comparato, Chronicles of Genius and Folly: R. Hoe & Company and the Printing Press as a Service to Democracy (Culver City: Labyrinthos, 1979); and Landmarks Preservation Commission, Sunnyslope Designation Report (LP-1079), report prepared by Anthony W. Robins (New York: City of New York, July 28, 1981).
24. See Smith, pp. 195-197.

## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Odd Fellows Hall has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest, and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Odd Fellows Hall, one of the first Anglo-Italianate buildings in New York City, was designed in a style which its architects, Trench & Snook, helped introduce to the city; that the building is one of the most striking and important works by the prominent architect John Butler Snook, providing major design precedents for his later career; that the design with its emphasis on planar surfaces accented by a rusticated base, central projections, and colossal pilasters is characteristic of the style and takes full advantage of the building's prominent site; that it was built in 1847-48 as the first permanent home of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows in New York City and served as that organization's major headquarters; that the use of the progressive Anglo-Italianate style symbolically reflected the importance of the increasingly prominent Odd Fellows organization; that it is one of the city's few surviving institutional buildings from the 1840s; that the second owner of the building, R. Hoe and Company, holds an important place in the city's commercial history as one of the most innovative manufacturers of printing presses in the country; that with this change in ownership the building was successfully adapted to a new use; and that the building survives as an important monument in the cultural and architectural history of New York City.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21 (formerly Chapter 63) of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Odd Fellows Hall, 165-171 Grand Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 235, Lot 13, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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Photo: Carl Forster

ODD FELLOWS HALL  
165-171 Grand Street  
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Built 1847-48;  
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Architects:  
Trench & Snook