

A History of Hoo-Hoo International

January 21, 1892, in Gurdon, Arkansas, was much like any other Arkansas winter day - cool and brisk. The citizens of Gurdon went about their daily activities. The merchants conducted business, the children laughed and played in the streets, and the horses tied to the hitching posts stepped lightly in a circle to keep warm. The whine of the nearby sawmills was overcome only by the piercing scream of the train whistles and the shrill screech of the locomotives trying desperately to gain momentum from a dead stop. Travelers awaiting a coming train gathered around the potbellied stove in the depot and made small talk while frequently checking their pocket watch for the correct time.

Other visitors in Gurdon on this day gathered in the lobby of the Hotel Hall just across Front Street from the railroad track. Among the visitors of this particular day were five men who had traveled to Gurdon to catch a train to their next destination. The group had attended a meeting of the Arkansas Yellow Pine Manufacturer's Association in Camden some 50 miles south of Gurdon, and, being business travelers of the well-seasoned sort, their itineraries required they board a train in Gurdon bound for yet another convention in yet another city. The men had boarded a "bus" in Camden at 9 o'clock on that day each bearing his luggage and a cup of black coffee. Somewhere along the way the entourage encountered a spread rail or some other obstacle which demanded the attention of someone experienced at remedying such road problems. While the problem was being corrected the travelers enjoyed a breakfast of fried chicken and ponies cooked by an old lady near the site of their delay. Shortly, the bus again departed for Gurdon, arriving at about 11 a.m.

Upon their arrival they discovered that the through train had been delayed and would not arrive until about 6 p.m. So, with seven hours to kill, the men set about to make themselves comfortable until their departure. Now these men were obviously the founders of our revered Order, and we can only suggest that perhaps the delays came about at the hand of Divine instigation. For if the train had not been delayed, then two of these men, namely Bolling Arthur Johnson and George K. Smith, would not have sat upon a lumber pile and discussed the hardships of travelling, nor perhaps might one man have shared his thoughts of a unified lumber fraternity, called the Ancient Order of Camp Followers, whereby all lumbermen and trade associations would join together and hold their various meetings and conventions in one place at one given time in one great "carnival" of activity, rather than holding them at different times in different cities. Now Johnson, age 30, was a journalist for the TIMBERMAN trade newspaper of Chicago, and Smith, age 40, was the secretary of the Southern Lumber Manufacturers Association of St. Louis, and together atop that lumber pile did they combine their intellect and imagination in one impromptu brainstorming session in which the most basic foundation of a new Order took shape.

Johnson and Smith soon found the other three men, William E. Barns of the St. Louis LUMBERMAN, George W. Schwartz of the Vandalia Railroad St. Louis, and William Starr Mitchell, business manager of the ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT in Little Rock, and at 3:09 p.m.

embarked upon an extended discussion of the proposed order and whether it was feasible and worthwhile. Ludolph O.E.A. Strauss of the Malvern Lumber Company in Gurdon later entered the hotel and was invited to join the discussion. One of the men remarked that it seemed a pity that the business interests of lumbermen were so diversified that no one organization could obtain the various memberships of the popular organizations then in existence. It was agreed that only one common interest existed within the complex web of industry concerns, that being goodwill and fellowship upon which lumbermen could come together in single mindedness and unity.

The group agreed that lumbermen meeting on the grounds of good fellowship could receive intangible benefits that might eventually trickle down into all aspects of business and social relationships and, in the ultimate, bear the fruit of service to the industry. Bearing this thought in mind, the discussion led to what manner of organization might be developed to embrace this simple doctrine of promoting goodwill among lumbermen, and knowing that it would be unique, how it could be arranged so as to not resemble the other fraternities of the day.

Full of this idea, the group set about to mold the initial tenets of the new order; it was to be a war on conventionality; there would be no lodge rooms with forced attendance; no marching in the streets in protest; no "bothering" anybody; no uniforms or flashy regalia. There would be one single aim: to foster the health, happiness, and long life of its members.

It was further proposed that this new order should devise a secret means of communication so that any member could correspond with any other member on matters of interest to one another without revealing their identity to those persons outside the fraternity. It was also determined that only those individuals who by virtue of their avocations were naturally fraternal would be recruited.

Once the basic nature of the new order and its eligibility requirements had been determined, the men set about considering a name that would convey the proper "personality" for an organization such as this. The name would have to be friendly to represent the fraternal nature of the order, but also contain a certain degree of mystique to represent the exclusivity of its membership. Recognizing that the name "Ancient Order of Camp Followers" did not accomplish either objective, the group wasted no time agreeing with the suggestion by Johnson that "Concatenated Order of Hoo-Hoo" was the perfect name.

The word "Hoo-Hoo" had been coined by Johnson himself only one month earlier at Kansas City in describing a most peculiar tuft of hair, greased and twisted to a point, atop the otherwise bald head of Charles McCarer, of Northwestern "Lumberman", Chicago. The name Hoo-Hoo became a catch phrase among the lumbermen in various areas to describe anything unusual or out of the ordinary. A good poker hand was a "Hoo-Hoo hand." A strange hat was a "Hoo-Hoo hat". The breakfast which was prepared by the old lady mentioned above was a "Hoo-Hoo breakfast" because the lady's fingerprints remained on both sides of the ponies even after they were cooked. Thus, Hoo-Hoo well described this new order, and since the word "concatenate" means "to unite", it was decided the two words made a perfect marriage.

Being a war upon conventionality, Hoo-Hoo was to be non-superstitious from the beginning. Therefore, when the discussion lent itself to adopting a mascot it seemed the black cat would be the critter extraordinaire due to its general association with bad luck. Also, having no history of its own, Hoo-Hoo would assume some other history, decidedly that of ancient Egyptians who worshipped the black cat as a deity. (Other Egyptian religious symbols and lore found its way into Hoo-Hoo in later years through the Osirian Cloister, an "upper chamber" of Hoo-Hoo consisting of the order's most dedicated workers.) In honor of the legendary nine lives of the cat, Johnson suggested that the number nine assume a high and lofty position within the makeup of Hoo-Hoo. There would be nine men on the Board of Directors. The order would hold its annual meeting on the ninth day of the ninth month beginning at nine minutes after nine. Annual dues would be 99 cents, and the initiation fee would be \$9.99. The membership would never consist of more than 9,999 men.

W. E. Barns had just completed reading Lewis Carroll's "Hunting of the Snark" and suggested that the directors be given names of an "eerie and peculiar" nature like those used in the book. Hence, the names "snark", "bojum", "Sr. High Hoo-Hoo", "Jr. High Hoo-Hoo", and "bandersnatch" were chosen, although "jabberwock" later replaced "bandersnatch". The other names which are now affixed to officers (e.g. Scrivenoter, Arcanoper, Custocatian, and Gurdon) were the products of Johnson's imagination some days or weeks later.

Johnson commented in later years that on that day the group could not get away from words like "grand" and "sublime", and things that were "high". Therefore, the Grand Snark was born that day, but he later assumed the "universe" as his kingdom. The bojum became the Holy Bojum to serve in the capacity as chaplain. The name "scrivenoter" sounded like a "note scribe" and was assigned the duties of secretary. Smith filled the scrivenoter's position until 1896 from the Hoo-Hoo office on the fourth floor of the Equitable Building in St. Louis. The "arcanoper" was to stand within the garden and be the "opener" of the gates to those requesting admittance into the realm of Hoo-Hoo. The name "Gurdon" had the faraway hint of "guard" to it and was therefore assigned to the sergeant-at-arms, and was also an obvious compliment to the place of the order's birth.

It was decided at Gurdon that the board of directors would consist of nine men to be called the "Supreme Nine". It was also decided that the Snark would be one of these nine along with other elected persons who would bear the titles mentioned above.

The first Grand Snark was an appointed position being awarded to Charles McCarer whose tuft of hair inspired the name of Hoo-Hoo as mentioned above. McCarer was not present at that meeting but was still honored with the title and given the number 1. Johnson became member number 2. The remaining numbers were assigned as follows: W.E. Barns 3, George W. Schwartz 4, George K. Smith 5, James E. Defebaugh 6 of Chicago, Ludolph A.O.E. Strauss 7, Robert E. Kelley 8 of the BEAUMONT JOURNAL (Texas), and Thomas K. Edwards 9, Lumber Agent I.C.R.R., Chicago. No mention is made as to why William S. Mitchell was not given a number that day. He was later given the number 56, but his concat is shown in the record book as having occurred on that day in Gurdon.

We note with interest that, like McCarer, Defebaugh 6 was not present at the initial meeting, nor was Kelley 8 or Edwards 9. We can only assume that the group chose to bestow honors on men they knew to be worthy of membership in Hoo-Hoo. Defebaugh later became Snark in 1895.

After deciding that the official colors of Hoo-Hoo would be white, black and gold, the group knew they had made great strides toward developing a concept that might actually be welcomed within the lumber industry.

We can imagine that as they finished their discussion they heard in the distance the approach whistle of their 6 o'clock train that would take them to their next destination.

Upon leaving Gurdon, Johnson travelled north to Minneapolis, Minnesota, where the first Hoo-Hoo banquet was held with only two men in attendance, Willard G. Hollis, secretary of the Northwestern Lumbermen's Association, and Johnson. Brimming with enthusiasm for the new organization, Johnson shared the story with Hollis who immediately caught the spirit. Hollis invited Johnson to lunch at the West Hotel where the two ordered a dinner "by nines" in honor of the occasion.

The first public announcement of Hoo-Hoo came a few days later at a meeting of the Northwestern Lumbermen's Association in Duluth, Minnesota. A banquet was held at the Hotel Spalding in Duluth with about 400 visiting retail lumbermen in attendance.

A Few Weeks Later...*

....February 18, 1892, in the St. Charles Hotel in New Orleans, Louisiana, the first regular initiation was held.

During the next twenty-eight years, there were no local clubs, only a national organization which met "in one grand carnival" once a year. But in that year, 1920, Atlanta, Georgia, became the first Hoo-Hoo Club. A year later, 1921, Hoo-Hoo adopted a Code of Ethics written by C.D. LeMaster, our 30th Snark and who later held the position of Seer of the House of Ancients for many years. That code, not surprisingly, consists of nine sentences. The first man from outside the United States became a member in 1903, but Hoo-Hoo didn't become truly international until 1924 when his club, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, became the 24th club and, incidentally, concat #883 was conducted at that occasion.

Hoo-Hoo prospered during the twenties, but with the Great Depression, Hoo-Hoo fell upon hard times. Unable to meet the financial obligations of its insurance program, its membership dropping and burdened with apparent embezzlement, the International Concatenated Order of Hoo-Hoo almost slipped into obscurity as only one club, Spokane, continued to meet on a regular basis during the time.

During the "Dark Ages" of the thirties, one man, Ben Springer, assumed the dubious honor of being the custodian of our archives and concomitantly the steward of our affairs. Finally, in 1938, he pursued six other men to enter the life of Hoo-Hoo. They were: Ormie C. Lance

36511, Harry T. Kendall 12284, Sam L. Boyd 12042, T. T. Jones L-31233, T. M. Partridge 250, and W. M. Wattson 32720. During the next year or so, they reorganized Hoo-Hoo, incorporating it under the state laws of Minnesota, paid off the debts and returned it as a viable organization to a grateful membership which bestowed upon these six men the title of “Hoo-Hoo Immortals”.

The membership grew to a peak of over 13,000 during the fifties. The promotion of wood became one of the objectives of Hoo-Hoo. The next decade saw expansion into Australia and later into other areas of South Pacific.

Today....

More than 100,000 individuals have availed themselves of membership in our great order. Dedicated primarily to the principles of true fraternalism and fellowship, the International Order of Hoo-Hoo continues to make many serious, effective contributions to the industry and to the communities from which its members come.

The Hoo-Hoo International office and Hoo-Hoo Museum share a log cabin which was built by the WPA in the early 1930's. The building is located on Main Street in Gurdon, Arkansas, one block from the site where Hoo-Hoo was founded in 1892.

The Hoo-Hoo Museum which was formally dedicated on April 11, 1981, is a tax exempt organization and all contributions to the Museum are tax deductible. The Hoo-Hoo Museum was the brainchild of Jimmy Jones L-72703 who has been the main fund raiser, project coordinator, public relations director and overseer of operations of the Museum since its inception, but Jimmy was assisted by many others who were dedicated to seeing the project through to completion and continue to do so to this day.

*This portion of the History of Hoo-Hoo International was compiled by Rameses 67 David Marteney L-65075.