

Knights of Pythias Once Active in Century and Flomaton

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I got a phone call a couple of weeks ago from Mrs. Jean Findley, who offered me the picture accompanying this column. It is a remarkable photo of a baseball game that her late husband, "Shorty" Findley had in his collection. The caption reads "K.of P. - W.O.W. Picnic, Century, Florida July 4, 1913." We know the Alger-Sullivan Lumber Company sometimes had July 4th picnics at what's now Century's Little League Park next to the Baptist and Methodist churches. We believe that's the location of the event in this photo.

In case you're wondering what the abbreviations mean, K. of P. means Knights of Pythias, and W.O.W. means Woodmen of the World. Since many

folks I've talked with know about the Woodmen of the World but aren't familiar with the K. of P., a short lesson is useful here.

Most fraternal organizations (often called "friendly" societies, for reasons explained below) such as these two have a noble purpose, are often limited to males, are secret and often closed societies, and emphasis of the concept of "brotherhood" of its members is basic. Before today's advent of life and hospitalization insurance and welfare, groups such as the K. of P. filled that need of society by providing assistance to those down and out, to the needy, and to widows and orphans; hence they were also called by the term "Friendly Societies." Quite often, there are religious overtones to the structure of societies like this but some were formed out of political concerns (often, these groups are mistakenly called "guilds," but guilds are generally formed as a result of trade, professional, or occupational affiliations). In some areas, they have been incorporated into the social system and become like insurance companies. These have lost much of their ceremonial characteristics but others have taken on a more charitable or social aspect.

The Knights of Pythias organized in Century almost as soon as the town was built. Accounts in the Pine Belt News and the Standard Gauge from the early 1900s tell of meetings of the K. of P. in both Century and Flomaton. The name comes from Greek mythology, and is taken from the legend of Damon and Pythias, a tale illustrating the bond of true friends. The story originated around the 4th century BC. Wikipedia.com gives an explanation paraphrased here:

Pythias and his friend Damon, who were both followers of the philosopher Pythagoras, traveled to Syracuse. Pythias was accused of plotting against Dionysius I, the tyrannical ruler of Syracuse. Pythias was sentenced to death as punishment for this crime.,

As he accepted his sentence, Pythias asked to be allowed to go back home one last time, to settle his affairs and tell his family goodbye. Dionysius refused because he believed Pythias would run away and never return, once he was freed. That would make Dionysius look like a fool.

But Damon had an idea that might help his friend. Even though he knew it was risky and he might lose his own freedom, Damon suggested that Dionysius hold him hostage until Pythias returned. Dionysius agreed to this on the condition that if Pythias didn't come back when he said he would, Damon would be put to death in his place. Damon agreed, and Pythias was released.

Dionysius just knew that Pythias would never return, and as the day Pythias promised to return came and



went, Dionysius got ready to execute Damon. But just as the executioner was about to kill Damon, Pythias returned.

Apologizing to his friend for his delay, Pythias told of how pirates had captured his ship on the passage back to Syracuse and thrown him overboard. Dionysius listened to Pythias as he described how he swam to shore and made his way back to Syracuse as quickly as possible, arriving just in the nick of time to save his friend's life.

Dionysius was so impressed with the friends' trust and loyalty, that he let both Damon and Pythias free.

The Knights of Pythias was founded at Washington, DC in 1864 by Justus H. Rathbone, who had been inspired by a play about the legend of Damon and Pythias. The legend illustrates the ideals of loyalty, honor and friendship that are foundations of the order. Still an active organization, there are over two thousand lodges in the United States and around the world, with a total membership of over 50,000 in 2003.

The order's ladies' auxiliary is called the Pythian Sisters. An associated organization is the less-serious Dramatic Order Knights of Khorassan. The Knights of Pythias sponsors two youth organizations, the Pythian Sunshine Girls and the Junior Order, Knights of Pythias for boys. According to the Wikipedia web site, membership requires "belief in a personal Supreme Being."

Several U.S. presidents and other prominent politicians were members of the Knights: Hugo Black, U.S. Supreme Court Justice; William Jennings Bryan - U.S. Senator from Nebraska; Warren G. Harding - U.S. President; Hubert Horatio Humphrey - U.S. Vice President; William McKinley - U.S. President; Nelson A. Rockefeller - U.S. Vice President; and Franklin D. Roosevelt - U.S. President.

So there you have it. Now class, I hope you learned the lesson. Next time we meet there may be a test. Have a safe and happy 4th of July.

Ya'll come.