

EXHIBIT A
BACKGROUND INFORMATION

(adapted from the Nomination Form for Historic Designation 6/10/2005)

https://www.dhr.virginia.gov/VLR_to_transfer/PDFNoms/150-0087_OddFellowsHall_2005_NR_final.pdf

In May 1905, six trustees for the Order of Odd Fellows and six trustees for the Order of St. Luke purchased a 30-ft by 45-ft west of the town of Blacksburg “for the purpose of organizing a mutual Society to be known as the Odd Fellows and St. Luke Union.” Records for the Blacksburg Odd Fellows Lodge, known as Tadmore Light Lodge #6184, indicate that the Odd Fellows trustees had decided to purchase the lot by March 1905 and that they had voted to form a joint-stock company with St. Luke to share equally in the cost of purchase. The lodge initially paid rent for an alternate facility, but by August 1905 they had collected \$220 cash. The lodge soon established a building committee and by February 1907 the Blacksburg Odd Fellows Lodge Hall was constructed and ready for painting. Thus began the Blacksburg Odd Fellows Lodge, which would serve for six decades as a focal point of social identity and service for the African American community in and around Blacksburg.

The Blacksburg Odd Fellows Hall drew upon the tradition of the secret fraternal Order of Odd Fellows, which had established an African American Lodge in Alexandria, Virginia, in the mid-1840s. The mutual aid society of the Independent Order of St. Luke was founded in Baltimore in 1867 and subsequently led by Maggie Walker in Richmond, who assumed control of the organization by 1899. Walker and St. Luke appealed specifically to women, sold insurance to members, and opened the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank in Richmond in 1903.

Once founded, the Blacksburg Odd Fellows Hall in 1905 met twice a month, fined members 75 cents for getting drunk and 6 cents for laughing and talking, and studied how to conduct a lodge. In 1906 the lodge buried a member, purchased lodge regalia, and paid the well-known Rev. L. L. Downing of Roanoke to preach a sermon before a lodge supper that featured “chickens, bread, three cakes, and two freezers of cream.” The following year the Blacksburg Odd Fellows Hall invited lodges from elsewhere to attend a rally. Suppers, sermons, and rallies continued, as did discussion of social behavior, such as smoking and chewing in the lodge room. In 1910 the Odd Fellows discussed a joint meeting with St. Luke and held a joint supper. The Odd Fellows Lodge and the Household of Ruth, a sister organization to the Odd Fellows Lodge, kept a membership book that listed five of the original trustees as laborers, one as a farmer, and one as a barber.

By 1927 the Blacksburg Odd Fellows Hall had a checking account with the National Bank of Blacksburg with an account balance that ranged from \$160 in 1930, to \$150 in 1948, to \$210 in 1950. The Household of Ruth had its own National Bank of Blacksburg account of \$115 in 1922, and almost \$500 in 1927. The Household of Ruth continued to hold annual banquets. It paid Rev. Caldwell \$3 to preach and had a grand turnout at the Baptist Church. In 1949 it paid brother Owen \$50 for his wife’s funeral arrangements.

Blacksburg and Montgomery County residents have recently recounted memories of the Blacksburg Odd Fellows Hall as an important gathering point for their African American community. Aubrey Mills

remembered from the mid-1950s that the Blacksburg Odd Fellows Hall was a very sacred organization and that to join was a step up for a young person. Membership included an insurance policy for each member and provided the only place Mills and colleagues could go for entertainment. Beatrice Walker discussed her membership in St. Luke at the Hall. She remembered that St. Luke sold insurance to Blacks and that members wore special outfits with white on their heads when they attended funerals. St. Luke, like the Odd Fellows, was a special organization that members had to be invited to join. The Odd Fellows and St. Luke joined in hosting social events, dinners, fashion shows, bingo parties, mock weddings, and dances. Square dances were held with string music and sometimes a drum. When good bands played, the crowd would overflow the hall. Membership provided a close-knit organization for Blacks in Blacksburg, frequently joined by Blacks from Christiansburg and Wake Forest; all members were like one big family.

By the late 1960s, when desegregation came to Blacksburg and Montgomery County, the Blacksburg Odd Fellows Hall ceased to function as a center for African American organizations. For the next four decades the hall was used for storage and woodworking. The Town of Blacksburg was given title to the Blacksburg Odd Fellows Hall (2004) by court appointed trustees upon its designation in the Virginia Landmarks Register. Currently, the property is dedicated to collecting, preserving, educating, and exhibiting the contributions of Black citizens in Blacksburg.