

(The article below appeared in the *Groton Times* weekly newspaper. It was written by Jim Streeter, a local historian).

### **GROTON'S 'FAIRVIEW'**

A few weeks ago, I was asked about the large stone building that overlooks the Thames River from a hill on the west side of the Military Highway leading to the submarine base. The person who was asking thought it was some type of private school.

I explained that the building was called "Fairview" or the "Odd Fellows Home" and that it was a non-profit elder care and independent living facility. Of course the words "Odd Fellows" produced further inquiry about the inhabitants of Fairview. Any possible suspicions about the residents being strange or out of the ordinary were quickly dispelled after I provided some background about the highly respected fraternal organization called the Independent Order of Odd Fellows that established the home.

The history of the "Fairview" and the "Odd Fellows Home" is quite interesting. In 1833, Belton A. Copp, who had been postmaster in St. Mary's, GA, moved to Groton. In 1837 he purchased a 200-acre farm on the banks of the Thames River from Latham Avery. The present Odd Fellows Home property is located in the southwest corner of the original farm.

In the early 1840s, Colonel Robert Stafford, an extremely rich Southern cotton farmer, began spending his summers in Groton with Mr. Copp. Stafford had six children whom he sent north to be educated. In 1853, he decided to build a home in Groton where he could spend his summers with his family. He subsequently purchased 33 acres of the Copp farm on which he had a Southern-style mansion built for \$25,000. The house had 19 rooms and a cottage annex contained six additional rooms. A barn, carriage house, and an ice house were built at the same time as the mansion. In 1886, Stafford purchased an additional 12 acres of land from Copp.

Up until the beginning of the Civil War, Stafford spent several weeks every summer at his mansion. When the Civil War began, he returned south and never came back to Groton. His daughter, Mary, continued to live in the house with her husband, Charles Gaylord, M.D., and their son. Mary died in 1879 and in 1886 the house was sold to Mary A. Hoadley, who reportedly named the property "Fairview" for its magnificent river views.

Hoadley subsequently married William Flemming, and in 1892 the Fairview property was sold to the Connecticut Grand Lodge of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows for \$13,000.

The Odd Fellows Fairview Home was officially dedicated in April of 1883. Throughout the years many additions and improvements have been made at Fairview. A 31-room wooden dormitory was added in 1904 and in 1926 a 50-room granite infirmary was built to offer complete medical services. An auditorium was constructed in 1959 and a 120-bed nursing home wing was added in 1978. In 2007 a 16,000-square-foot addition to the nursing care facility was added.

The beginning of Independent Order of Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F.) can be traced back to approximately the second quarter of the 18th century when a "secret fraternal, benefit society" was founded in England. A Grand Lodge of the organization formed in London

in 1803, and the first official American lodge is believed to have been established in Baltimore, MD, in 1819. The Connecticut Lodge was established in 1840.

Initially the principal mission of the Connecticut Odd Fellows Home was to care for the aged and indigent Odd Fellows, their wives, and orphans. The principals practiced by I.O.O.F. members are friendship, love, and truth.

Although the true reason for the name “Odd Fellows” is not known, an interesting and plausible explanation provided by many members of the organization is when common laborers originally associated themselves together and formed a fraternity for social unity, fellowship, and for mutual help, it was against all trends of the times (England 1700). Thus they became known as “peculiar” or “odd” and subsequently derived the name “Odd Fellows.”

Today Groton’s Odd Fellows Home is considered one of the most advanced and comprehensive eldercare facilities in Connecticut. No longer is membership in the Independent Order of Odd Fellows required for admission; it is open to the public who are age 55 and older. Not only has “Fairview” remained true to its original purpose but it has also grown to include what is called Fellowship Manor, an independent living retirement community.