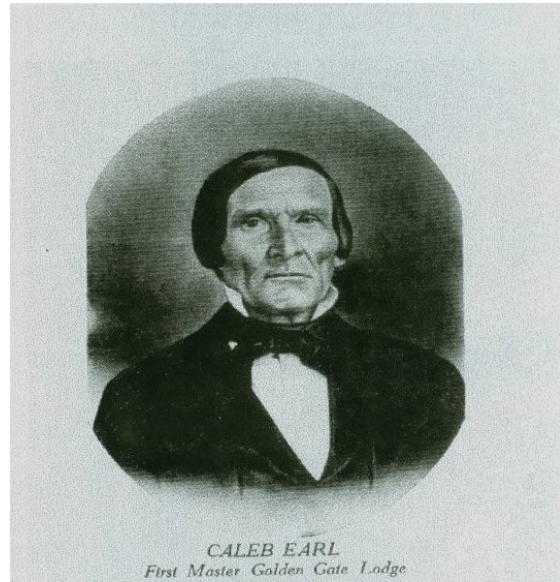


# Fraternal Organizations of Chagrin Falls

## The Freemasons

As Chagrin Falls has grown, the fraternal organizations that call it home have followed suit. One of which, the Freemasons, have been a staple in the community for over a century and a half. Back when the town was in a fledgling state, neighboring communities possessed their own Masonic branches. Seeing Chagrin as the next venture in their expansion, they ingrained themselves into village society. Two decades after the founding of the town in 1853, they officially cemented themselves into the village's framework. The Grand Master of the Ohio Masons, Lucius B. Bierce, granted them the opportunity to create a dispensation in Chagrin. In 1854, the Masons successfully secured a charter, and soon organized officially in a small building near the waterfall in the heart of town, naming their temple the Golden Gate Lodge and Caleb Earl their first Master.



The Chagrin chapter promptly gathered momentum in town. Only a few years after initiating their operations here they concluded that they needed a larger building for meetings. They relocated to the top two floors of what is now the Chagrin Hardware building in early 1857. In 1884, they were granted status as a Royal Arch chapter in the Masonic order. They grew very quickly, and today claim hundreds of Chagrin residents amongst their past or current members. To sustain their growth, they once more needed a new building. During World War I the chapter obtained more funding, and purchased the property on the corner of Franklin and Pearl Street from the Church family. As the United States economy was undergoing wartime stress, they waited until after the resolution of the conflict to construct a new building. On June 4th, 1924, the chapter moved into the new Golden Gate Lodge, the location they still call home to this day.

Being a mason often comes with an impressive amount of societal expectation and respect; entertainers like Harry Houdini and politicians like George Washington alike have represented the organization. Values like structure, faith, camaraderie, benevolence, and generosity have helped them serve as a guiding light within the communities they serve. Regardless of where in Chagrin the Masons have operated, they have always been committed to these values. They have laid the cornerstones of the Chagrin Falls Federated Church, an

Episcopal Church in Bentleyville, a Chagrin school building, and their own temple. They have also consistently offered their philanthropy to the town. When they are not hosting banquets and other social events, Masonic chapters are known to reach beyond their own communities. The Chagrin Falls chapter has proved no different, and notably aided Chicagoans after the Chicago Fire of 1871. Although this kind of selflessness is expected, since 1984, members of the Chagrin chapter who outdo their required duties have been rewarded with the Meritorious Service Award. Much mystery surrounds the Masons worldwide, and admittedly they have not done much to clarify it, however the Chagrin chapter has undoubtedly been beneficial for the community since its initiation.



*Golden Gate Masonic Lodge*

## The Independent Order of Odd Fellows (I.O.O.F.)

Another fraternal organization that once existed in Chagrin Falls is the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. As a group, the I.O.O.F. consists of humble men who seek self-fulfillment. Indeed, their primary values are “Friendship, Love, and Truth.” They believe in a supreme being, and engage in acts of unconditional kindness frequently. The order itself gained its footing in the United States in 1819, and still exists today. Structurally, they share similarities with other fraternal organizations whereby every brother has a specific set of labors and responsibilities. The I.O.O.F. called Chagrin Falls home for around 100 years.

The organization’s history in Chagrin dates back to 1855, when I.O.O.F. lodge number 290 was chartered. Not as much is known about the I.O.O.F. as with their Freemason counterparts. I.O.O.F. members were upstanding citizens in the public eye. The organization itself valued this preservation of a positive public image as well. An interesting note about the

I.O.O.F is that when a well-regarded member died, the Order itself would draft up a death resolution for him. Since the organization places friendship in such a high regard, the death of a member demands the utmost reverence from their living brothers. They also held a semi-annual Installation of Officers ceremony every year after their establishment in the village. This public ceremony, though not specifically detailed in historical records, probably served as a way to connect the Order to the residents of Chagrin Falls. At some point in their history, they relocated into the building where Verizon Wireless and Main Street Diner are now located. In 1894, the Order sold their ownership of this lodge building to the town itself for \$2,500 and conserved operations to its third floor.

After many years in the Main Street Diner building, the I.O.O.F. relocated once more to the second floor of the Golden Gate Masonic Temple building. This move served as a fitting conclusion to their time in Chagrin, as they both started and ended in the company of the Freemasons. As noted earlier, the Freemasons still use the site for meetings today, but the I.O.O.F. departed in the early 1950s. They now have scattered lodges in Northeast Ohio, having consolidated organizational operations. Their literal mark on the town still exists on their old lodge building; the letters “I.O.O.F.” are engraved at the top crest of the structure for any observant onlookers to examine.



*The IOOF lodge building(background) with “I.O.O.F.” engraved at its top.*

## Women's Auxiliaries

Chagrin Falls has hosted numerous fraternal organizations throughout the years. These organizations often contained women's auxiliary groups, which eventually made their mark on the village. Although they became established after their male counterparts, they upheld the foundation of their orders through their consistent efforts in the community. For example, the Rebekahs, the auxiliary to the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, only obtained their charter in 1894—nearly 40 years after the I.O.O.F.. Though this proved to be an initial setback, it failed to stop them from spreading positivity throughout Chagrin with their benevolent service. They faithfully upheld the principles of their organization, and unquestionably served as a boon for good. The Order of the Eastern Star, the women's branch of the Freemasons, has also had a profound impact on Chagrin. Having acquired a charter in 1921, the Chagrin Falls branch of this order continues to operate today, where they meet on the second and fourth Thursdays of each month. Their continued outreach only heightens the importance of the women's auxiliary groups in Chagrin. In collective review, the women's organizations Chagrin has hosted have been incredibly active in the community.

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