

Finding aid for the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, Grand Rapids Lodge 48, obituary cards Collection 506

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Grand Rapids History and Special Collections

111 Library Street NE
Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503

localhis@grpl.org

URL: <https://www.grpl.org/research/history/>

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Summary Information

Repository:	Grand Rapids History and Special Collections
Title:	Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, Grand Rapids Lodge 48, obituary cards
ID:	Collection 506
Date [inclusive]:	1888-1975
Physical Description:	1.3 Linear Feet Two boxes
Language of the Material:	English .
Abstract:	The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, Lodge 48, was founded in 1886 as the Grand Rapids, Michigan branch of the national fraternal order. The collection consists of about 2,500 obituaries written for deceased members. Each obituary contains information about the subject's membership in this and other organizations, vital statistics, employment, religious affiliations, and more. These cards will be of interest to genealogists, historians interested in the changing membership composition of fraternal organizations over time, and other researchers seeking information about Grand Rapids' social and cultural context.

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Biographical / Historical

The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks (BPOE) was founded in 1868 by a group of actors and theatre-workers in New York City. It began as a social club, but over time added benevolent activities, and the promotion of American patriotism and the "four virtues" (Charity, Justice, Brotherly Love and Fidelity) to its mission. In 1871, a national organization capable of establishing local branches was founded. It soon expanded beyond the entertainment industry to other professions. However members were expected to believe in God and meet other specifications. A "white's only" clause was removed from membership requirements in 1973; women were allowed to join after 1995.

The Grand Rapids Lodge, Number 48, was chartered in 1886. Over the years, it added offices, a meeting space, and cafeteria to its downtown facilities. In the early 1960s it purchased and operated the Highlands Golf Course, which hosted national tournaments. They sold the

Finding aid for the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks, Grand Rapids Lodge 48, obituary cards Collection 506 property in 2011. Members also hosted conventions, engaged in fundraising for charitable causes, and held parades and other civic events.

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Scope and Contents

The collection consists of about 2,500 obituaries for club members who died between 1888 and 1975. Each is typed on a 5x8 card and includes the date of birth and death, date of initiation into the Elks including offices they held, and a brief narrative. The narrative describes the highlights of the member's life, including where they were born and (if applicable) when they moved to Grand Rapids, their employment and length of service, their hobbies and interests, who conducted the funeral services (including religious affiliation), and where they were buried.

The cards are in alphabetical order by last name. They include cards for many prominent citizens of Grand Rapids, including Gerald R. Ford, Sr., the father of President Gerald R. Ford, Jr.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Immediate Source of Acquisition

A gift from Tom Poll, accession 2021.091.

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Related Materials

Related Materials

The obituary cards were scanned and indexed by a volunteer from the Western Michigan Genealogical Society before they were donated.

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Controlled Access Headings

- card files
- Obituaries
- Elks (Fraternal order). Lodge no. 48 (Grand Rapids, Mich.)
- Grand Rapids (Mich.) -- History

Collection Inventory

Title/Description	Instances
Obituary cards, A-La	Box 1
Obituary cards, Le-z	Box 2