

Tomb of Unknown Soldier – Arlington, VA

The IOOF pilgrimage is a solemn ceremony that we have named “The Pilgrimage to the Tomb”. It is the result of a privilege that was afforded to the Odd Fellows and Rebekahs by our thirty-second President of the United States and an Odd Fellow, Franklin D. Roosevelt who was in the White House from 1933-1945.

June 17, 1934 was the first date for the Odd Fellow Pilgrimage. The purpose of this Pilgrimage was not only to honor the Unknown Soldier and the Nation’s War Dead, but also the members of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows who had made the supreme sacrifice in World War I. Lodges from Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia participated in this first Pilgrimage. One year later, New Jersey and Delaware joined; almost 1,000 members of the Order were present. Credit for the Pilgrimage idea goes to Charles Lampe, who was Grand Master of the District of Columbia.

On July 7, 1940, the Grand Sire, on behalf of IOOF presented to the Unknown Soldier the Grand Decoration of Chivalry, the highest decoration bestowed upon an Odd Fellow. This Jewel, received by the Department of Army, is prominently displayed in the Hall of Trophies. On May 3, 1959 the Sovereign Grand Master presented two more Grand Decoration of Chivalry Jewels to the Army – one for the Unknown Soldier of World War II and the other for the Unknown Soldier of the Korean Conflict. Both Jewels were placed in the Hall of Trophies.

Growth of this tradition was tremendous. Finally, a resolution was adopted at the 1954 Sovereign Grand Lodge Session that sponsorship be assumed by The Sovereign Grand Lodge and that each Sovereign Grand Master appoint the General Chairman. Previously, it had been the custom for the Department Commander of the Patriarchs Militant of the District of Columbia to serve as chairman of the Pilgrimage.

This ceremony of Remembrance for those who have given their lives to preserve the “American way of life” enshrines the principles of Odd Fellowship – Friendship, Love and Truth. It is indeed an honor to be a part of this pilgrimage.