

Origins of the " Loyal Order Of Moose "

Though the Moose fraternal organization was founded in the late 1800s with the modest goal of offering men an opportunity to gather socially, it was reinvented during the first decade of the 20th century into an organizational dynamo of men and women who set out to build a city that would brighten the futures of thousands of children in need all across North America.

When Dr. John Henry Wilson, a Louisville, Ky., physician, organized a handful of men into the Loyal Order of Moose in the parlor of his home in the spring of 1888, he and his compatriots did so apparently for no other reason than to form a string of men's social clubs. Lodges were instituted in Cincinnati, St. Louis, and the smaller Indiana towns of Crawfordsville and Frankfort by the early 1890s, but Dr. Wilson himself became dissatisfied and left the infant order well before the turn of the century.

It was just the two remaining Indiana Lodges that kept the Moose from disappearing altogether, until the fall of 1906, when an outgoing young government clerk from Elwood, Ind., was invited to enroll into the Crawfordsville Lodge. It was on James J. Davis' 33rd birthday, October 27, that he became just the 247th member of the Loyal Order of Moose.

Davis, a native of Wales who had worked from boyhood as an "iron puddler" in the steel mills of Pennsylvania, had also been a labor organizer and immediately saw potential to build the tiny Moose fraternity into a force to provide protection and security for a largely working-class membership. At the time little or no government "safety net" existed to provide benefits to the wife and children of a breadwinner who died or became disabled. Davis proposed to "pitch" Moose membership as a way to provide such protection at a bargain price; annual dues of \$5 to \$10. Given a green light and the title of "Supreme Organizer," Davis and a few other colleagues set out to solicit members and organize Moose Lodges across the U.S. and southern Canada. (In 1926, the Moose fraternity's presence extended across the Atlantic, with the founding of the Grand Lodge of Great Britain.)

Davis' marketing instincts were on-target: By 1912, the order had grown from 247 members in two Lodges, to a colossus of nearly 500,000 in more than 1,000 Lodges. Davis, appointed the organization's first chief executive with the new title of Director General, realized it was time to make good on the promise. The Moose began a program of paying "sick benefits" to members too ill to work--and, more ambitiously, Davis and the organization's other officers made plans for a "Moose Institute," to be centrally located somewhere in the Midwest that would provide a home, schooling and vocational training to children of deceased Moose members.