

The American Block / 5–11 East Main Street  
By Douglas H. Shepard, 2012

On 28 April 1868, fire destroyed a row of old wooden buildings on East Main Street just east of Water Street. The loss included the furniture and undertaking store of the **Barmore** Brothers. They moved their business to a temporary location and by January 1869, L. A. **Barmore** bought out his brother, A. L. **Barmore's**, interest in that store and in the East Main Street property as well.

That gave L. A. **Barmore** a ¼ acre lot on East Main Street with a 53½ foot frontage. Forming a partnership with G. W. **Porter** and C. M. **Ball**, the three hired E. A. **Curtis** to design their brick, 3-story, 4-building block at today's *5-11 East Main Street*.

**Porter's** building at *5 East Main Street* was put up first, going up by August 1869; **Ball's** was the second, at *7 East Main Street*; **Barmore's** the third, at *9 East Main Street*; and all three shared in the cost of the fourth, *11 East Main Street*.

A May 25, 1870 *Censor* item suggested the block be named the Petroleum Block “in view of the source from which the funds were largely derived.”

Over the two central buildings, **Barmore** and **Ball** built the “Union Hall,” not to be confused with “the Union Block” at *1-3 East Main Street*. The *Censor* of 3 January 1872 allowed as how they had provided the village “with the best public hall, aside from the Opera House at Dunkirk, in the county.” The hall was 50 by 100 feet, 26 feet high. It had a “comfortable 1,000 floor seating capacity (no galleries), and a platform 25 by 30.” The visiting public seems not to have agreed with the *Censor's* evaluation because, some two years later, significant changes were made.

From the *Censor* of 3 January 1873: *The public will be glad to learn that Union Hall is hereafter to be entirely comfortable. The east stairway now goes straight through the wall into the room over Barmore's store [9 East Main Street], then turns and rises to a hallway in the third story from which the audience room is entered about the center. With self shutting doors at the foot of the stairs and at the entrance to the hall, consumption seed [dust?] will not be scattered there as it used to be through the front entrance now closed. The third story hallway is eight feet wide and a door by the head of the stairs leads from it into a commodious dressing room in front which also communicates with the stage. The new entering hall also communicates with a third stairway to the street so that with the west stairway which remains in front as before but will not be opened except for egress, there will be three ways of getting out. There will also be an extra dressing room or cooking room for festivals when required, and altogether Union Hall is now perfect. . . .”*

Over the years there were a variety of businesses and offices in the four buildings as well as many performances and meetings at Union Hall. By 1923 the Odd Fellows had a half-interest in the American Block purchased from the Frank **Ball** estate. However, on 16 September 1923 a fire badly damaged “the third floor of the American Block, known to all older Fredonians as Union Hall. . . . The flames had eaten through to a net work of wooden girders supporting the roof” and “weakened the roof structure. . . . The roof started to collapse at the rear and then the entire roof fell.”

The Odd Fellows then bought up the other half interest and began to repair the damage. The building was virtually gutted and rebuilt. What had been Union Hall was “divided into a

lodge room, banquet room, ante-room, coat room, and kitchen. The lodge room is the largest of the rooms, occupying the Main street end of the building, the old stage having been removed. Back of the lodge room is the banquet room, which will seat 150 persons. The kitchen is commodious. . . . The ceiling of the lodge room is seventeen feet from the floor, the rooms in the rear being lower, which allows the construction of a fourth floor in the rear half of the building. This will be made into quarters designed for the use of the Rebekah Lodge, with other rooms for storage purposes. A balcony in the lodge rooms provides a point of vantage for musicians or for speakers on special occasions.”

“No changes have been made in the arrangement of the second floor, the front being used as offices by the **Tremaine** Insurance Agency and the offices formerly occupied by Dr. **Lodico** having been leased to Dr. **Tenant**. The large east room in the rear will be used as lodge rooms by the **Maccabees**, it having been their quarters for many years past. The west room will house the Odd Fellows Club.”

The Odd Fellow’s rooms were opened for public display on 8 May 1924.