

## Atomic Elks Lodge 1301 Roberta Bohanon Temple 1381

(As published in The Oak Ridger's Historically Speaking column the week of January 1, 2024)

This history is brought to us by Rose Weaver, a dedicated historian and supporter of Oak Ridge history in ways that continue to amaze me. I am proud she chose to use Historically Speaking to bring this history to you readers. Enjoy learning more of our unique Oak Ridge history:

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It is amazing the history that surrounds Oak Ridge and even in the community I grew up in. I share with you information on an unknown Temple that ventured to improve the quality of life in the Scarboro community through socio-economic programs, youth enrichment programs as well as serving as a social club.

Like other's migrating to Oak Ridge during the late 1940's and 1950's, Negroes brought with them several organizations such as the Elks that improved the quality of life in the Scarboro community.

"The Atomic Lodge 1301 Roberta Bohanon Temple 1381 is one of the oldest organizations in the Scarboro Community and maybe Oak Ridge," said Doc Stewart in an interview in 1976. Stewart was among the many workers that migrated to the Oak Ridge during the early days of the Manhattan Project.

Through the organization's archived reports, the Atomic Elks Lodge received its charter around 1949 and the property was vested in the United States District Court on October 6, 1942, and property deeded October 15, 1958, with Trustees J.H. Bohanon (Exalted Ruler), Clarence Buckley, David Washington, George Phipps, Trustees of Atomic Lodge No. 1301. The building was designated the 15<sup>th</sup> day of October 1955. (See photo from The Oak Ridger 1977 article of some of the chartering members).

Although 31 members were required to be chartered, the Lodge opened with 80 members. The first lodge meetings we held in a small shack located on what is now Carver Avenue in Scarboro. Stewart went on to say that Mose Say was the first Exalted Ruler and in 1955 the Exalted Ruler was Jerome Taylor, 108 Spellman Avenue.

The Lodge is one of the last surviving economic buildings owned by African Americans in the Scarboro Community.

The Lodges mission is: To provide a safe space for members of the Scarboro Community, and that the welfare of our members, their families, and the community, be uplifted through fraternal principles of charity, justice, with brotherly and sisterly love.

According to Stewart the lodge was moved to the old cafeteria where Spurgeon Chapel Church now sits and then to an old building on Tuskegee Avenue. In 1957 the members purchased one of the dormitories on Wilberforce Avenue which has become the permanent place of the Lodge.

Along with the Mason's the Elks contributed toward the building of several commercial and residential buildings in the Scarboro Community such as the Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church. The Lodge was also instrumental in providing educational scholarships and continues to sponsor youth participation in state oratorical contest and a yearly Parents Christmas Night Out.

The Lodge was known for collaborating with other organizations throughout the city to assist bereaved families, aid assisted living facilities, provide scholarships to youth, as well as sponsor athletic sports, and oratorical contests.

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The meetings are held the second and fourth Sunday of the month and are open to any interested party. The Elks Lodge currently serves as a social venue and provides educational enrichment programs for youth.

In 2021, the Lodge sponsored a vaccine clinic in partnership with HealthCare Solutions Inc., of Knoxville providing COVID vaccines.

"This is a historic building, and we are striving to redevelop the current building to make it more accessible for ongoing youth enrichment collaborations and social programs in the Oak Ridge/East Tennessee community." said Ernest Comer, Atomic Elks Lodge member.

The club has a rich history and desires to continue the legacy fostered by the chartered members along with the Block Area in Scarboro that provides dances, food, and serves as part of the economic district.

Today's vision according to Mabrey Duff, secretary of the Atomic Lodge 1301 and State Education Director of the State Elks Lodge is to broaden the usage of the current building by renovating and making the building more accessible for business and educational meetings, serving as a future social venue for the Oak Ridge/East Tennessee community.

The club has a rich history and desires to continue the legacy fostered by the chartered members in 1948. As I research more about this Club, I will share it so we all will know of this history.

Let us support them in their future endeavors to become an economic investment not only in the lives of the Scarboro Community, the Oak Ridge Community but the state of Tennessee.

In May 2024, some 1,000 people will come to Oak Ridge for the State Elks Convention hosted by the Atomic Lodge 1301. This could be an economic return for all of us. Roger Williamson is the present Exalted Ruler and invites everyone who is interested in the future efforts of the Atomic Elks Lodge 1301 and Roberta Bohanon Temple 1381 to attend an Information Meeting on January 11, 2024, at 6:30pm, at 262 Wilberforce Avenue, in Scarboro."

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Thanks, Rose, for sharing this history with us.

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The Atomic Lodge 1301 and Roberta Bohanon Temple 1381 was named after the Jim Bohanon Exalted Ruler's wife Roberta Bohanon,



Elks Lodge State Meeting in the 1960's at the old Oak Ridge High School.

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The original Atomic City Elks Lodge Charter Members – Jerome Taylor, exalted ruler; “Doc” Stewart, charter member; Willie Pettus, secretary, and John William Smith, charter member



At the Tennessee State Elks of the World Convention held during the summer of 2016 in Oak Ridge, Atomic Elks Lodge 1301 sponsored the winning Oratorical Contest contestant, Darryl Bonner. Pictured are: Mabrey Duff, State Education Director; Laverne Grigsby, Regional Directress of Education; Darryl Bonner; Mr. Darryl Bonner, Sr.; and Mrs. Jeanne Bonner