

Landmark will be razed for parking lot

Miller's Hall, the granddaddy of the Highland Park business district, will be demolished within 30 days.

Tattered and creaking with age, the two-story wood frame building at 6307-11 York Blvd. was condemned last Wednesday by the city building and safety department.

Built in 1885 by William Miller, just 20 years after the end of the Civil War, the structure was the scene of countless civic gatherings and lodge meetings. The hall been witness to the growth of a community from open fields and watering holes to a thriving business and residential district.

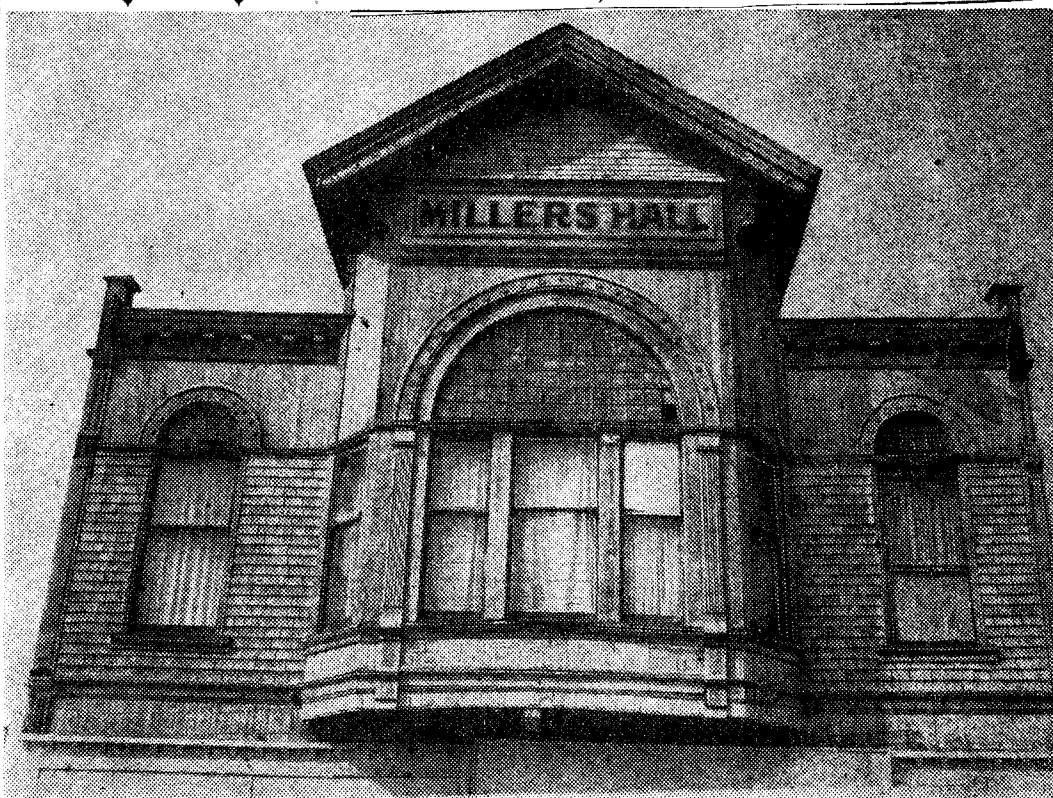
Passersby looking up at the weatherbeaten structure can see where the woodpeckers have feasted on the molding of the big gable that juts out from the center of the second floor. At the side of the hall the rain spout has crumpled and fallen to the ground; nails on the wood siding are falling out and some of the boards have buckled.

A LOOK INSIDE

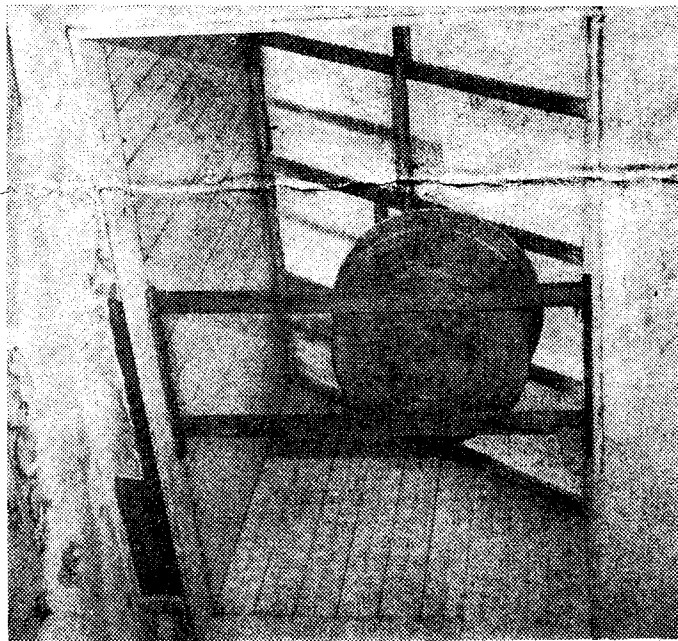
Thousands of hands have turned the same weathered front door knob that Mrs. Martha Watt used to open the building Friday for a reporter-photographer team who wanted one last look. Mrs. Watt is president of the Rebekah Lodge, auxiliary to the Oddfellows who own the building and plan to use the grounds for a paved parking lot.

Up 24 wide steps from the front door a broken skylight illuminates the landing. Beneath the skylight and resting on rafters is a metal wash tub to catch the rain. Plaster has long since fallen away from sections of walls and ceilings near the skylight, baring the wood laths.

A turn to the left from the landing is the large hall, now dusty and musty from being closed for the past two years. The windows facing York Blvd. are covered with yellowed drapery that filters light into the room.



MILLER'S HALL—Highland Park's oldest business building, Miller's Hall, constructed in 1885, will be demolished soon following a city order condemning the two-story woodframe landmark last Wednesday. Located at 6307-11 York Blvd., the hall will make way for a parking lot owned by the Oddfellows Lodge.



WASH TUB CATCHES RAIN—Wash tub was placed under broken skylight in Miller's Hall to catch rain. Wallpaper is peeling off and plaster has fallen away in many places near top of stairs that lead up to the hall from York Blvd.



WHERE THOUSANDS MET—Thousands of people have gathered during the past 74 years for meetings and dances in the large hall, now creaking with age soon to disappear: Mrs. Martha E. Watt, president of the Rebekah Lodge, looks at 110-year-old Oddfellow's Noble Grand collar.

(Green Sheet Photos)

SUNDAY, AUGUST 30, 1959

Creaking Miller's Hall, its foundation crumbling, second story shored up by huge wooden beams, and shingles falling off, officially ended its 74 year reign as Highland Park's oldest business building Friday when demolition crews went to work with hammers and crowbars.

Once the pride and joy of the Highlands, the two story lodge which Miller's Hall was a witness to included:

1886—Opening of the Garvanza Tract which was named after the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. "Town of Garvanza."

RAVAGES OF OLD AGE 1886—Formation of the Highland Park Water Company.

Before the wrecking crews went to work, passersby looking up at the weatherbeaten structure could see where woodpeckers over the years had feasted on the molding of the big gable that jutted out from the center of the wooden floor. Wood siding was beginning to buckle as nails popped out; the rain spout was crumbling.

The lower portion of the building was used for stores over the years, while the top floor was

the scene of countless lodge meetings and dances. But when the city condemned the building for further use last May, Miller's Hall had just about turned up its toes. Plaster was falling off the inside walls and an exposed gas pipe system snaked its ways along the kitchen walls, a wash tub had been placed under the broken skylight in case of rain.

WITNESS TO GROWTH The hall was built by William Miller in 1885, when the garbanzo flowers still blanketed the hills of the highlands and sheep grazed at Johnson's Lake. Early-day community progress to

1890—Terminal Railroad (now Union Pacific) built through the Highlands.

1893—Establishment of Los Angeles (later Pacific) Electric.

1895—Annexation of Highland Park to Los Angeles.

1898 — First electricity for Highland Park.

1903—Formation of Highland Park Ebell Club.

1905 — Founding of Highland Park Herald.

Miller's Hall saw it all. At one time the only business building in Highland Park, the landmark will soon disappear in the midst of a community of 800 business and professional firms and 35,000 residents.

"The lights still work fine," commented Mrs. Watt as she flicked a switch in the hall, bringing into view an old upright piano, pictures along the wall of former lodge officers, a silver trophy in a glass case, a framed collar worn by a Noble Grand more than 100 years ago, spindle-backed chairs, and some half filled ash trays.

Footsteps echo and the hardwood floor creaks as you walk across the room and enter the old dining room north of the hall where meals of bygone days were served on long banquet tables. At the back of the room another door leads to the kitchen.

"Two coffee pots, three coffee pitchers, four coffee pourers—must be returned" reads the sign on the kitchen wall. Exposed water pipes lead to the wooden sink, cylinder shaped Hoyt gas heater hanging from the wall.

ONCE A TRADING POST

The two story rooms that comprise the first floor of Miller's Hall once served the community as a trading post, where residents with handlebar moustaches could come in and get a new supply of wax to control their upper lip decorations, or great grandmothers could buy the latest bustle just in from the East.

In 1890 a section of the hall was given over to bookworms, and Highland Park started its first library. The reading room had 50 books, a stereopticon viewer with a handful of stereo (3-D) and somebody donated a subscription to "Harpers Young People" magazine. Several years later when Mr. and Mrs. Hugo Zuber contributed a collection of 800 volumes the library was moved to Ave. 64 and Garvanza.

Mrs. Watt said that the contract to raze Miller's Hall will be awarded in a few days. The ground will be blacktopped and extensive work will then begin on completing the Odd Fellows Hall adjoining the parking lot.

Miller's Hall, its foundation crumbling, its second floor shored up by huge wooden beams, and its roof scarred by numerous holes will soon be only a memory in the area once known as the Five Friendly Valleys—the Highland Park of today.