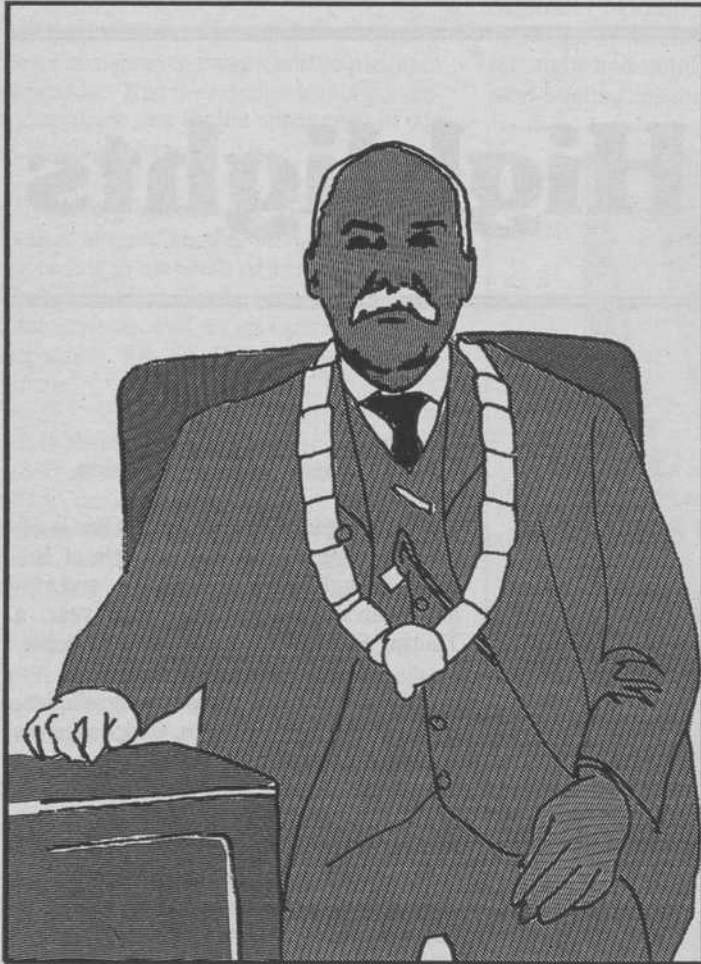


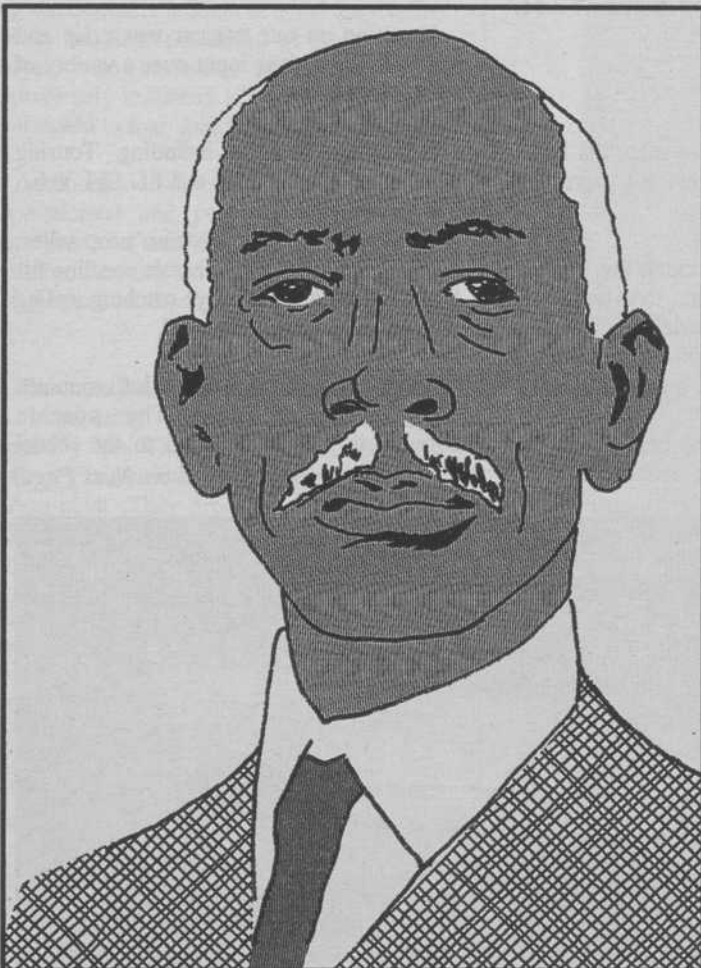
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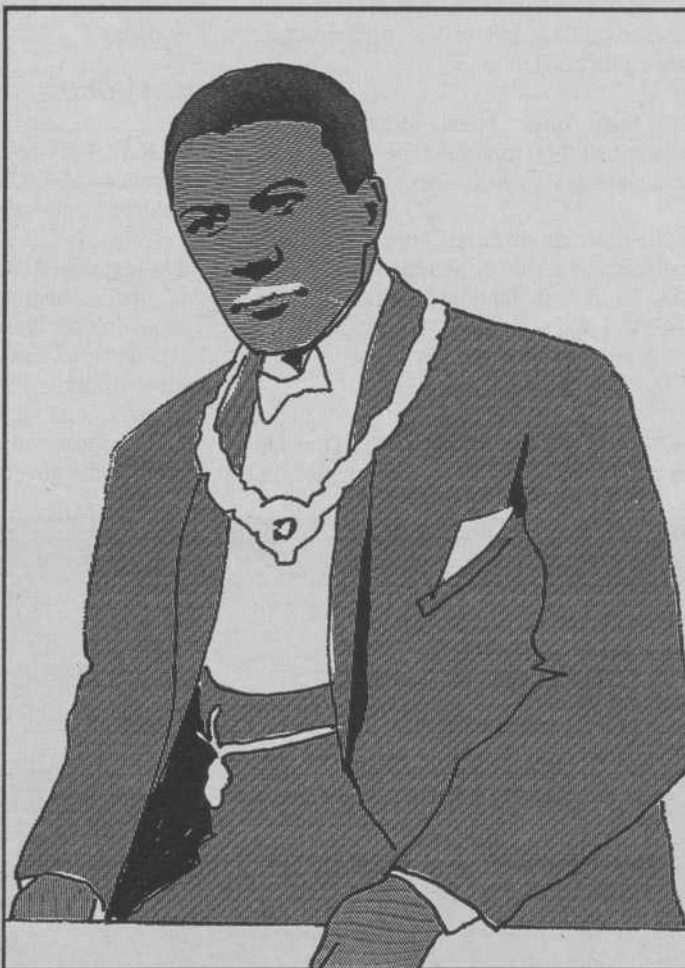
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN HOWARD, First Grand Exalted Ruler, 1899-1909, Founder of the Order



DAUGHTER EMMA V. KELLEY, Founder and Organizer of the Daughter Elks, First Grand Daughter Secretary.



ARTHUR J. RIGGS, Founder, Honorary Past Grand Exalted Ruler



J. FINLEY WILSON, Tenth Grand Exalted Ruler, 1922-1952

Whoopee! How the whites did howl! Threats of all kinds were made against the members of the colored Elks Lodge. They assembled their artillery and attempted to march in, take our rituals and put the whole bunch in jail. We demanded to know what right they had to stop a Negro Elk Lodge from existing. We also demanded that the Exalted white Ruler show us his copyright for his ritual. He said we were here first, and you Negroes have no right to use the B.P.O.E. Ritual. I said, look at this, and I produced my copyright signed by Uncle Sam and said, if I hear another word about a Negro Elk Lodge I will put the entire white Lodge in jail for infringing on my copyright. After they found out that they could not put the lodge out of business, they turned their guns on [him] and they shot from every angle.

Riggs was taken from the train on which he was serving as Pullman porter between Cincinnati and New Orleans, when it reached Birmingham, Alabama. He was threatened with lynching unless he told where he had secured the copy of the Elk Ritual. He agreed to bring the ritual back on his next trip; instead he changed places with another porter and never went on that trip again. He left Cincinnati in 1899 and moved to Springfield, Ohio under an assumed name. He gave all of the rituals, papers and printed matter pertaining to the Elks to B.F. Howard, and Covington, Kentucky became the headquarters of the lodge.

Early Troubles

The first charter for the incorporation of a Black Elk Lodge was issued by the state of Ohio on June 16, 1899. The Cincinnati Lodge was reorganized under the title of "Improved Order of Elks of the World," with B.F. Howard as Exalted Ruler. Later, Riggs reported that Howard and Alpha Lodge "got into trouble after he had styled himself Grand Exalted Ruler.... The members of Alpha Lodge No. 1, later named, would not stand for his ruling and dictation so the lodge disbanded."

With the help of Dr. E.A. Williams, head of the Knights of Pythias, Howard kept Black Elksdom alive. The ritual was revised and the words "Improved" and "of the World" were inserted in the official title. He obtained a copyright for the *Ritual of the Subordinate Lodges Under the Jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World* on June 12, 1902.

The potential for division was present within Black Elksdom from the very beginning. It became a reality when B.F. Howard organized a lodge in Covington, Kentucky.

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