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Blacks were ready to fight. They were too proud to fight to be members where they were not wanted. But they were resolute in the decision to continue their own organizations. The Elks were among the most determined of these groups.

Suggestions came from various parts of the country that the name of the Order be changed to eliminate further trouble and opposition. Dr. Atkins ridiculed the idea saying,

"The idea of a strong and powerful organization like this showing fright and desiring to change its name simply because we have lost one lodge in Tennessee is more than strange.... Luther persisted and the reformation arose. Washington persisted and America was set free.... Might we not take fresh hope and try on?... There is no occasion for weakness and less excuse for fear. If the foes of our Order, in ignorance of its purpose, have opposed its progress and sought its downfall, be yours the part to convince them of their error by furnishing in your lives and conduct a practical resistance to the grounds of their opposition, well knowing that the stability of any institution depends upon the faithfulness and fidelity of its members."



MATTHEW M. VAUGHN, New Jersey State Association President

Division Healed

The realization of the dream of union was reached in a summit meeting of the two Grand Lodges in Washington, D.C. on July 28, 1910 in True Reformers Hall, 12th and U Streets, N.W. A new Grand Exalted Ruler headed the Howard faction. He was Dr. James E. Mills of Norfolk, Virginia. When Grand Exalted Ruler Mills and Grand Exalted Ruler Atkins clasped each other's hand, the applause was thunderous.

The parade which followed was unusual and attracted considerable attention. A Washington daily newspaper reported,

Washington, as the Capital of the nation, is accustomed to seeing processions, pageants and something of unusual interest in this line must be produced to attract the attention of the average Washingtonian. The parade of the colored Elks today was a parade that deserved all the attention that it attracted from the throngs that lined the streets during the entire length. It was orderly and showed skill in assembling and management, and in every respect reflected credit on the organization.

Cessation of White Opposition

Since continued difficulties between Black and White Elks centered more and more upon the simple issue of the wearing of the B.P.O.E. badge or pin by Black Elks and not upon the existence of Black Elks per se, Grand Exalted Ruler Armand W. Scott ordered Black Elks to wear only their own pin, which had been cast in the form of a star with raised letters on each point, I.B.P.O.E.W., with an Elk head in the center. He also chose the propitious moment to approach the leadership of the White Elks and put an end to the opposition. The correspondence between Grand Exalted Ruler Scott and Grand Exalted Ruler Fred Harper of the White Elks was the first breach in the solid wall of opposition and antagonism between White and Black Elks. At the B.P.O.E. Convention in Atlantic City, New Jersey in 1918, Harper made the following recommendation:

In my opinion the most dignified and effective course for our Order to pursue in the premises is to refrain from further litigation and to pay no further attention to the Negro Elks, except to show them such consideration as may properly be due an organization which claims to be engaged in benevolent and charitable work among a race which both needs and deserves such service. At my request the Committee on the Good of the Order has made a careful study of this whole question and have embodied their views in a report which will be made at this session of the Grand Lodge.

This recommendation was adopted by the White Grand Lodge. When this news reached the Black Grand Lodge, many wept with joy "at the dawn of fraternal freedom for the Order after years of strife." For all intents and purposes, the grand fight was over. Suits sprang up here and there, but it was the opinion of the Grand Officers of the I.B.P.O.E. of W. that there was no reason to believe that the officers of the White Elks would change the expressed opinion of Past Grand Master Harper or the adopted resolution of the Grand Lodge.

The Master Builder

The Master Builder of Elksdom was J. Finley Wilson who was elected Grand Exalted Ruler by the Grand Lodge on August 28, 1922, his 41st birthday. Under his leadership, which spanned a period of almost 30 years, the greatest number of lodges and members and the most significant development of Elk achievements took place.

Grand Exalted Ruler Wilson, called "The Grand" made the Elks the largest Black

Social welfare and fraternal society. The I.B.P.O.E. of W. had about 30,000 members at the time of Wilson's election. At the time of his death on February 18, 1952, there were over 500,000 members in some 900 lodges.

During Wilson's administration, the Order gave in excess of \$700,000 in scholarships to young Black men and women. Many of these became leaders in their professions and communities. He expanded the Elks home from a relatively unpretentious house to a spacious accommodation on the corner of 2nd Street and Rhode Island Avenue, N.W. in Washington, D.C.

Wilson's favorite word was "forward." Men of every station in life moved forward with him. Secretary Bates said that "college presidents, grand officers of kindred organizations, business men, and last, but not least, the thorny-handed sons of toil have vied with each other in their eagerness to taste of the munificent benefits to be derived from membership in the Order."

Wilson wanted the Elks to expand to all available territories and to increase membership in the lodges. When he heard that Chu John, a wealthy Chinese hotel owner, had applied for membership in Imperial Lodge No. 127 in Harlem, he advised the District Deputy to admit Chu John, who gave the lodge \$500 to make the first payment on its home. He defended his decision saying,

...Remembering always that the Chinese represent a century-old civilization, number more than four hundred million people, control billions of wealth, were the discoverers of gunpowder, and further, that in these days of war and pestilence, it behooved the black man to make friends with all the sons of men—and still further, that in view of the fact that our organization is based upon the Christian religion, it should be our slogan, "whosoever will, let him come."

The Kingdom of Elksdom

With more than 500,000 members in some 1,500 lodges worldwide, the Improved Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks of the World remains the largest Black fraternal organization in the world. As such, this massive community-building force deserves serious consideration not only for its fraternal strength of numbers, but also for its racial consciousness as well. The Elks have dedicated themselves "...to make the world a better place to live because equal opportunity is guaranteed, irrespective of race, creed or color."

Since 1920, along with the Grand
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